Being a Swedish Expatriate in Spain

A Study of Cultural Collisions

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ABSTRACT

Background Expatriate failure can be a devastating consequence for both an enterprise and the expatriate himself. An expatriate is a person who resides outside his native country for working purposes. Moving to a foreign country implies many challenges and problems. One of the challenges is the new culture. Culture shock and problems with the acculturation process can jeopardize the international assignment: adaptation problem for expatriates is one of the reasons for expatriate failure. Nevertheless, culture shocks can be provided against by preparing the expatriate for the new culture. Knowledge about the other culture will increase the expatriate’s cultural competence, and hence facilitate the adaptation process, which will provide against expatriate failure.

Purpose The thrust of this Bachelor Thesis was to analyze which important cultural differences a Swedish expatriate can encounter in Spain on an international assignment. The aim was to establish a check-list for future Swedish expatriates who are going to Spain, in order increase their cultural competence. We approached the cultural differences from a Swedish expatriate’s point of view.

Methodology A qualitative study was conducted. The empirical data was collected through five semi-structured interviews with Swedish expatriates that are, or have been, working in Spain. All the interviewees work at companies who operate within the high-tech business trade. A frame of reference was elaborated in order to interpret and analyze the results obtained from the empirical data.

Conclusions We found relevant cultural differences for Swedish expatriates going to Spain within four cultural aspects.

- **Organization**: organizations in Spain are more hierarchical and the manager more authoritarian compared to Sweden. The purpose of meetings is to inform or make decisions, rather than discuss and decide by consensus. Long working days are normal, and efficiency is not highly prioritized. Small talk before meetings is used more extensively than in Sweden.
- **Time**: Spaniards perceive time as fluid, which leads to less rigid agendas and schedules. Punctuality is a minor issue since time is approximate.
- **Communication**: The culture is expressive. Spaniards are emotional in their way of communicating, which is classified as an expressive culture. Moreover, frequent interruptions are seen as commitment to, and engagement in, the conversation. Indirect language is preferred over the direct, the context is more important than the words used.
- **Social life**: Spaniards prefer to meet up outside. The Spaniard’s private zone is bigger and includes more persons, compared to the Swede’s. Furthermore, respect is only shown people the Spaniard knows and cares about.

Keywords Expatriate, culture, Spain, Sweden, cultural competence, cultural differences, culture shock
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1. INTRODUCTION

In this first chapter we will start with an introduction to the subject; the cultural differences a Swedish expatriate can encounter in Spain. It will then be continued by an explanation of what expatriation is and why companies choose use expatriation, followed by a description of the acculturation process, discussions about expatriate failure, and a distinction of intercultural skills and competence. This will result in the purpose and research question, together with delimitations, target group, and disposition of the thesis.

1.1. BACKGROUND

The last three years, an average of one million Swedish passengers embarked direct flights to Spain from Sweden, each year! For Swedish travelers, Spain is the third most popular destination after Germany and the UK (Trafikanalys, 2010). Many Swedes are attracted by its Mediterranean climate, well-known food culture, good wines, great golf courses, lovely beaches, both rural and urban tourism possibilities, and so forth.

However, Spain is not only interesting from a touristic perspective. It is also a popular destination for Swedes who would like to work there. Nevertheless, we claim that to work and reside in another country is not as easy as being a tourist. One of the challenges is to cope with the cultural differences that exist. As all countries have their own specific culture, Sweden and Spain also have their peculiar cultural characteristics. Even though one might think that the globalization has decreased the distance between countries, the cultural contrasts still remain (Ghemawat, 2007). In addition, Pla-Barber, Camps-Torres, and Madhok (2009), illustrate that cultural differences exist between Sweden and Spain, and that they are approximately three times bigger than compared to the differences between Spain and France.

A Swede who is moving to Spain for working purposes, whether as au pair, volunteer, bartender or manager, will probably encounter sharp cultural differences in the new country. Some job opportunities consist in working for your company abroad. The opportunity has its origin in that in some cases, companies prefer to send employees in key positions abroad instead of contracting locals. This phenomenon is called expatriation and the individuals sent out are called expatriates. An expatriate is a person who works for his or her\(^1\) company outside his country of origin (Edström and Galbraith, 1977).

The starting point in this thesis will be on Swedish expatriates who move to Spain in order to work, and the focus will be the cultural differences between Sweden and Spain, which the expatriate can expect to encounter on his international assignment. Next, we will examine what expatriation is. We do this in order to obtain a better understanding for the expatriate’s situation abroad, and why cultural differences are of importance to the mission: cultural differences can give rise to expatriation failure.

\(^1\) From now on, for convenience reasons, expatriates will be referred to as a male.
1.2. **What is an Expatriate Assignment?**

Even though globalization is a relatively new phenomenon, expatriation is not. The use of expatriate management is very old; empires in ancient times sent trustworthy subordinates to faraway regions to govern them (Selmer, 1995).

Today, multinational companies have realized that international human resource management in the global market gives them competitive advantages that are critical for their success (e.g. Caligiuri, Phillips, Lazarova, Tarique, & Bürgi, 2001). Expatriate assignment is one way of using international human resource management. An expatriate is a person who is employed outside his native country, i.e. the employee is transferred outside his native country to another country specifically for employment purposes (Edström & Galbraith, 1977).

Nevertheless, the assignment does not only consist in going abroad, as depicted in figure 1. It is an extensive procedure that could be divided into five steps. The expatriate assignment starts with a selection and recruitment process where the assignment profile is stipulated. This can be made internally within the company, or externally. During the second step the contract and practical preparations are taken care of, e.g. remuneration, pension, taxation, leave, bonus, and family support. In the third stage, preparations connected to the work such as phasing-out previous job, information, advices and training are conducted. The fourth step is the expatriation step, and it is defined as the time the individual spends abroad on the mission. It consists in adjustment, performance appraisal, development, mentoring and reward. The international assignment does not end until the fifth step is completed. The fifth step consists in process – evaluation, reassignment and readjustment to the home country of the expatriate (Harzing & Christensen, 2004).

![Diagram of the expatriate assignment process](image)

**FIGURE 1 – THE EXPATRIATE ASSIGNMENT, AND OUR FOCUS**

**SOURCE:** OWN ELABORATION, BASED ON HARZING AND CHRISTENSEN, (2004)
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Every step of the expatriate assignment is interesting and important. Nevertheless, it is during the expatriation (the fourth step, illustrated with a red frame in figure 1) the cultural differences between the home and the host country become evident, since it is the time when the expatriate is abroad. Therefore, in our thesis, we will only focus on the expatriation step and what happens during the staying abroad in the context of cultural adjustment. Before exploring the cultural adjustment process, we will have a closer look at why companies use expatriate assignments.

1.3. Why Expatriate?

In general, expatriates are strategic key persons in multinational organizations, sent out to control and coordinate a subsidiary, and often also to transfer tacit knowledge and know-how within the firm (Kamoche, 1997). Many authors (e.g. Edström & Galbraith, 1977; Kamoche, 1997; Hocking, Brown & Harzing, 2004) describe the three main functions of an expatriate:

- To fill positions, for instance because there is no qualified local manager available in the host country, or to train a suitable local person with the objective to replace the expatriate manager, or in start-up processes of international business.
- To develop organization, by contributing to the socialization and networking process, e.g. coordination, culture transfer and policy transfer.
- To develop managers, by giving the manager an international experience which is considered essential for a career in top management.

Even though there are several reasons for expatriating as described above, it can be complicated to motivate and send an employee to a foreign country – especially if the employee already has a family. Therefore, expatriates are offered compensation packages which typically include salary, bonus, tax equalization, housing cost supplement, educational costs for children living with the parents, car or car leasing, and other benefits (Peterson, Napier & Shim, 2007).

Peterson et al. (2007) conducted a study with 29 multinational companies and found that the average cost for an expat is between $150,000 and $300,000, (1,200,000 to 2,400,000 SEK (Forex, 2010)). Multinational companies estimate the expatriation costs to be two to three times more than the employee costs prior the international assignment. In addition, the cost ratio of contracting a local manager versus having an expatriate is the same, i.e. the expatriate costs more than double (Peterson et al., 2007). This shows the importance of the expatriate; the company finds it worth paying all the extra expenses for the employee in exchange for having the expatriate in the strategic position.

Moreover, an international assignment is normally time limited. There are both short term (up to a year) and long term (one to five years) expatriate contracts. Normally, expatriates represent only 1-2 percent of a company’s total work force (Peterson et al., 2007).
In the next section, we will use the U-curve in order to provide a better understanding for when the cultural differences become apparent and challenging for the expatriate, since cultural differences are the focus of the thesis. Cultural differences can imply adaptation problems for the expatriate. It is therefore important to know about those differences because it is one of the reasons for expatriate failure. Expatriation failure will be discussed thoroughly in section 1.5.

### 1.4. The Acculturation Process – The U-Curve

The U-curve framework is not an explanatory theory but rather a process which expatriates has reported they went through in the host country. Authors like Hofstede (2001) and Pires, Stanton, and Ostanfeld (2006) have made a compilation of the acculturation process. The diagram (see in figure 2) describes the adjustment process for people moving abroad and how their well-being evolves over time. Feelings are plotted on the vertical axis (positive and negative), and time is plotted on the horizontal. The different phases will be described in detail below.

![Figure 2 – The Acculturation Process – The U-Curve](image_url)

*Source: Drawn by the authors of the thesis, based on Hofstede (2001) and Pires et al. (2006)*
The first phase is called *honey moon*. Arriving to a new country is exciting in the beginning. This phase is usually associated with euphoria, but does not tend to last long.

Secondly comes the *culture shock* phase. It sets in when coping with the daily life in the new environment becomes necessary. This is when the individual realizes that his behavior and norms are not congruent with the host country’s culture – they are no longer appropriate.

Thirdly, the *acculturation phase* sets in when the individual starts to revalue his behavior and acquire knowledge of the conditions of the new environment. This is reflected by increasing satisfaction of being able to cope with the cultural differences in the foreign country.

Lastly comes the *mastering phase*; it is when the expatriate reaches a stable state of mind and the need of additional learning and adaptation diminish.

In this thesis we will focus on the culture shock phase only because this is, as we shall see in 1.5, one of the determinant factors for whether the expatriate will succeed or not, on his assignment in the new country. Before developing this further, we need to explain the concept “culture shock” a bit further.

“Culture shock” is normally a word with negative connotations and it may sound very harsh. However, the cultural differences a Swedish expatriate will encounter in Spain are not likely to be nowhere near lethal. The definition of culture shock which we found most appropriate is *experience of feelings of discomfort and ill-being*. Moreover, the word culture shock describes the general adaptation process to the new culture, in which you feel unfamiliar – you do not feel “at home” (Anderzén, 2004). When the term “culture shocks” is used in this thesis, we refer to this definition.

Furthermore, culture shocks are individual experiences; some experience them stronger and others have easier to cope with the cultural contrasts. The impact of the culture shock is conditioned by many possible factors; earlier experiences of expatriation, background and personality of the expatriate, knowledge before departure, organizational support, language skills, etc (Pires et al., 2006). What this may imply for the expatriate is described in the next section (1.5).

1.5. **Expatriate Failure**

There are many reasons for expatriate failure. One reason is *cultural adaptation problems* (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985). In order to delimit the scope of this thesis, we will only focus on this reason for expatriate failure. The cultural differences between Sweden and Spain can cause adaptation problems, which in turn could lead to expatriate failure. We will in this section give an explanation of what expatriate failure is and what it implies for both the employee and the employer if the expatriate fails in his mission. We do this so that the reader can understand why it is important that the expatriate is able to adapt to the new culture.
To begin with, expatriate failure is often referred to as low performance and premature return (Harzing & Christensen, 2004). Complications in adjusting to the host country’s culture and business environment can be costly for the company in terms of management performance, lost opportunities in creating or penetrating new markets, client relations and productivity and efficiency operations (Puck, Kittler & Wright, 2008). Moreover, there are also “invisible” costs for the expatriate, which are loss of self-esteem and self-confidence in the managerial ability (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985). Thus, expatriate failure affects both the employer and the employee negatively.

Furthermore, Sims and Schraeder (2004, rendered in Pires et al., 2006) reported expatriation assignment failures estimated to 16-70 %, depending on how developed the host country is. The rate is much higher in developing countries. On the other hand, some authors claim these numbers are exaggerated (e.g. Puck et al., 2008). Keeping in mind that expatriate failure rates are relatively high, it would be in the companies’ highest concern to prevent it, since it is crucial for the company that the expatriate succeeds. The assignments are usually strategic and indispensable to multinationals, both for developmental and functional reasons (Tung, 1981, rendered in Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985).

According to Sims and Schraeder (2004, rendered in Pires et al., 2006), pre-departure cross-cultural training reduces culturally related stress for the expatriate, and this in turn decreases the culture shock which he experiences abroad. By decreasing the impact of the culture shock, the acculturation process will be facilitated and it is likely that this phase becomes shorter too. This, in turn, reduces the risk of expatriation failure.

1.6. INTERCULTURAL SKILLS AND COMPETENCE

Moreover, Puck et al. (2008) argue that cross-cultural training does not aim at training the expatriate in how to behave, but rather to make him aware of the prevailing cultural differences between two countries. This allows for a faster learning process and will hence increase the adaptation rate for the expatriate, once he is abroad.

Similarly, Hofstede (2001) holds the idea that the effectiveness of expatriates can be improved through pre-departure training in intercultural competence (which is his name of cross-cultural training as described by e.g. Sims & Schraeder, 2004; Puck, et al., 2008). Hofstede (2001) makes a distinction between cultural competence and skills:

“Acculturation and the effectiveness of the expatriates can be improved through training in intercultural competence. Such training can [...] provide them with knowledge about other cultures, but it cannot develop intercultural skills – these can be acquired only on the spot.” (Hofstede, 2001, page 423).

The statement above suggests that having cultural competence will facilitate the process of acquiring cultural skills once you are in the other country. Cultural skills are an important part of being able to
adjust to the new culture, i.e. the third phase in the U-curve. Cultural competence increases the expatriates’ knowledge about the foreign culture before going abroad, and is thus a favorable prerequisite for decreasing the impact of the culture shock once he gets there.

As the authors above argue, having cultural competence can diminish the decline of U-curve. It can also facilitate the acquisition of cultural skills, and may therefore prevent expatriate failure. Hence, it is important for expatriates to know more about the cultural differences before going on an international assignment. This takes us to the purpose of the thesis.

1.7. PURPOSE

The purpose of this bachelor thesis is to compile important and relevant differences between the Swedish and Spanish culture which will increase a Swedish expatriates’ cultural competence before going to Spain.

We will do this by identifying relevant cultural differences between Sweden and Spain with the objective to come up with a summarizing check-list that will increase the expatriates’ cultural competence. By relevant we refer to cultural differences that are important for the expatriate to know about, cultural differences that will be prevailing for him on his assignment in Spain.

1.8. RESEARCH QUESTION

As we have seen in the introduction (in section 1.1), there are cultural differences between Sweden and Spain. Our research question is therefore:

Which are the relevant cultural differences a Swedish expatriate can encounter in Spain on an expatriate assignment?

1.9. DELIMITATIONS

We have chosen to focus on expatriates as the group of study. Furthermore, we have delimited this group to expatriates within the high-tech business trade. We have done this because what we want to achieve is conclusions about how the national culture can affect the expatriate. This delimitation is made in order to decrease the risk of influence of business trade cultures in the results. We argue that within the same industry, the business culture is relatively similar.

Furthermore, we will study expatriates’ experiences and it is preferable that these are recent and still fresh in their minds. Therefore, another demarcation is that our empirical study will consist of expatriates who are, or have been, working in Spain within the last five years.
Moreover, the next natural delimitation is expatriates in **multinational, foremost Swedish, companies** with activity in both Sweden and Spain. We do this because our aim is to examine which culture shocks a Swede will experience going to the Iberian Peninsula, and we are most likely to find Swedish employees who are, or have been, expatriates in Spain within these companies.

A further demarcation is to have a sample group consisting of the **largest** Swedish multinationals with activity in Spain, measured in total annual turn-over, since we assume that the bigger the company, the more likely it is that they send employees on expatriate assignments.

As a final delimitation, we will only consider **relevant cultural differences** from the expatriates’ point of view. The main focus will be on cultural differences that the expatriate will encounter at his working place. Therefore, our empirical study will consist of data collected from expatriates’ experiences of the Spanish culture. There are many interesting aspects of culture, but not all of them are crucial for the expatriate assignment (for example the food culture).

### 1.10. **Target Group**

We have two main target groups in mind when writing this thesis. The first one is Swedish expatriates who are going to Spain and also Swedish companies that are sending expatriates to Spain. Reading our thesis or check-list will increase the expatriates’ cultural competence and facilitate acquisition of the cultural skills once they get to Spain. This will in turn diminish the risk of expatriate failure. As we have seen in this introductory chapter, it is equally important for the company as for the expatriate that the international assignment succeeds. As stated earlier, expatriates often have strategic key positions, and the assignment is a costly operation. Preventing expatriate failure should therefore be in the company’s biggest concern. Our thesis could provide the employees with pre-departure cultural competence that will make their culture shock less striking and intriguing.

The second target group is the persons, who are interested in cultures in general, and the Spanish and Swedish in particular. It is one of the reasons why we have explained what expatriation is and why companies use it.

### 1.11. **Disposition**

Before moving on to the next chapter, we will shortly outline the structure of the thesis. The disposition is also summarized in figure 3 in order to provide the reader a visual outline. The red arrows represent the main thread throughout the thesis, and the green arrows represent the interrelation between the chapters.

Firstly, we will describe and justify the research method of our study. We find the methodology suitable to be the next chapter because it will include both theoretical and empirical procedure. Then, the frame of reference follows, where we will explore and emphasize the most important theories of relevant
cultural dimensions for our work. The theoretical part comes before the empirical, because it will provide the reader with a better understanding for the interviewees’ responses. After this, the results of the empirical study will be presented. Next, the following chapter will be the analysis, where the aim is to create check-list of the relevant cultural differences that will help increase the expatriates’ intercultural competence. Lastly, conclusions of our findings will be presented.
Which are the relevant cultural differences that a Swedish expatriate can encounter in Spain on an expatriate assignment?

METHODOLOGY
Explanation and motivation of the research design and choices made in the thesis.

FRAME OF REFERENCE
Elaboration of a theoretical toolbox that will be used in the analysis to interpret and understand the empirical data.

EMPIRICAL DATA
An academic and correct compilation of the results obtained in the empirical study.

ANALYSIS
An analysis of the empirical data will be elaborated by using the theoretical tools presented earlier. The aim is to create a check-list of cultural differences that will increase the expatriates’ cultural competence.

CONCLUSION
Conclusions of findings and suggestions for further research will be presented, and the research question will be answered.

FIGURE 3 – DISPOSITION OF THE THESIS
2. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter we will discuss and evaluate our methodology and motivate the choices made. Firstly, a brief explanation of the research approach we have used will be presented. Secondly, we will provide a detailed description and justification of how we designed the investigation. Thirdly, the research methodology will be evaluated. Lastly, the theoretical framework will be discussed and assessed.

2.1. RESEARCH APPROACH

A business research can be conducted in two ways; by a quantitative or a qualitative method. A quantitative method aims at objectively examine a phenomenon by collecting and analyzing numerical data (Bryman & Bell, 2007). In this thesis, however, we will use a qualitative research method. This is a method which is suitable for the social sciences and we consider it best fitted for the purpose of this thesis. The greatest advantage of the qualitative method is that it allows a deeper understanding of the phenomena studied. It also gives the opportunity to obtain data which is rich in detail, especially applicable for sampling personal experiences. A third advantage is that the method is economical and efficient, which is appropriate for our thesis due to our time and money constraints (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Alegre, 2003).

However, one should be careful in using the qualitative method. The major disadvantage in our case is a subjective interpretation of the results (Alegre, 2003), since the authors are both Swedish and have been living in Spain during a limited period of time. On the other hand, these characteristics of the authors, can contribute to a better understanding of the expatriates’ experiences and reflections. This discussion will be further elaborated in section Confirmability, 2.4.4.

2.2. DEDUCTIVE AND INDUCTIVE METHOD

In order to explain the relation between theory and empirical data, researchers distinguish two main types of methods; deductive and inductive. Generally speaking, the deductive theory has its starting-point in theoretical considerations. A researcher who follows this strategy begins with formulating a hypothesis (based on the theory available) and then tests it in an empirical study. The inductive method however, has it starting-point in empirical findings. The collected data will then be explained by theory, aiming at finding new connections or patterns that can contribute to a new model or a new theoretical tool.

Even though the method we use in this thesis to a greater extent reminds of the inductive, we will not define further which method we have used. We assert that when choosing either the deductive or the inductive method, a categorization is made which is neither justifiable nor relevant for the purpose of
this thesis. By not defining further which of the two we have chosen, we avoid unnecessary compartmentalizing, because we believe it would have affected our thesis negatively.

2.3. **Research Design and Procedure**

In order to obtain results that are relevant and reliable, we have aimed at conducting an academic research which follows an appropriate procedure. We have based our course of action on a model for how a qualitative business can be designed, described in Bryman and Bell (2007). A summary of how the thesis was elaborated can be seen in figure 4.

As seen in figure 4, these were the main steps used in this thesis. To begin with, we formulated the research question and purpose of the thesis. Thereafter we did a literature review, where we selected relevant subjects and cultural aspects. Thirdly, the empirical data was collected, and then compiled and interpreted. Afterwards, the theoretical framework was constructed. Lastly, the frame of reference and the empirical data was analyzed and conclusions were made. Below, each step will be described in detail. Also, the methodological considerations and choices made in the different parts of this thesis will be explained and motivated.
2.3.1. Elaborating a Research Question

The first thing we did was to construct a research question and formulate the purpose of the thesis. There were several reasons for choosing to do a research about the cultural differences between Sweden and Spain. To begin with, we are both interested in cultures and in cultural differences. Moreover, we have a special link to Spain, since we both have lived and studied there, for six months and one year respectively. Also, at the University we study International Business Administration, with a concentration in Spanish. Further on, we found a lack of literature that compares the Swedish and the Spanish culture, as we shall see in the next subheading, the literature review.

2.3.2. Literature Review

In the next step, before designing and conducting the empirical investigation, we reviewed the theoretical literature within the field of national cultures and expatriation. We did this for two main reasons. The first was to find out what had already been written about Sweden and Spain and their cultures. We found that there was plenty of literature written about the Swedish and the Spanish cultures respectively. However, we found that there was a lack of literature on the cultural differences that a Swede can experience in Spain, i.e. a thoroughly elaborated comparison between the Swedish and the Spanish cultures. Moreover, within the field of expatriation, many academic articles treat expatriates in both emerging countries, like China, and strong, developed nations, like Japan and the United States. Not much is written about Spain or Sweden.

The second main reason for doing a literature review was to acquire basic knowledge about which aspects of culture that can be studied. In addition, the literature review functioned as a base for constructing the interview guide, as we shall see in the next section.

2.3.3. Collection of Empirical Data

To be able to attain the purpose of this thesis, we need to examine which cultural aspects are important and relevant for a Swedish expatriate who is going to Spain. Therefore, the thrust of the empirical study was to find out how the Swedish expatriates experienced the Spanish culture. In this passage we will explain how the empirical data was collected.

Choice of Research Method

Among the possible ways of conducting a qualitative research we found interviews to be the most adequate way of conducting the empirical study in our thesis. Interviews are often used in qualitative studies, and they are often considered the best way to collect this kind of data (Ghauri and Gronhaug, 2005).

Ghauri and Gronhaug (2005) explain that the advantages of interviews are that they allow assessing a complex and perceptual phenomena in a very comprehensive way, such as the cultural differences’ impact on expatriates. Furthermore, it is the flexibility that makes interviews attractive and adequate; it gives the interviewee a great deal of freedom in responding. He is not restricted to respond to just a few
alternatives (as in a survey); rather he is free to speak unrestrictedly about his reflections (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

The disadvantages of interviews on the other hand, are that they are more time consuming than for instance surveys. In addition, the objectivity may be influenced negatively by the interviewers’ backgrounds and previous experiences, since it can affect the interpretation of the results (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2005).

Moreover, there are two major types of conducting interviews in a qualitative study: unstructured and semi-structured interviews. An unstructured interview has the shape of a conversation where the questions are asked as they come up (Björklund & Paulsson, 2003).

We have chosen to conduct semi-structured interviews, because we find this method appropriate for our purpose. Normally, for the semi-structured interviews, a list of questions is made before the interview as a guideline, commonly referred to as an “interview guide”. Nevertheless, the questions do not necessarily have to be asked in exactly the order they are written, because in the end, all the questions will be asked anyway. Moreover, this type of interview gives the interviewer the possibility to ask for further explanation if some answers are vague, and to bring up un-planned questions (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

The semi-structured interviews are appropriate for our study since it allows us to prevent misunderstandings by asking for further explanations, and to pick up interesting things mentioned by the interviewee by asking him to develop his thoughts further. In addition, the semi-structured interview allows some degree of standardization since they make sure that questions within the same areas are asked in each interview. The standardization of questions is not at all possible in unstructured interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Moreover, interviews can be conducted by e-mail, telephone or in person (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2005). Of the three alternatives, interviews by e-mail would have provided us with the least deep and rich information. E-mails are also impersonal. There is a high risk of misinterpretations and of the e-mails not being returned. The most preferable would have been interviews in person since it allows for studying body language, facial expressions, etc. However, due to time restrictions and scarce economical resources, we did not have the possibility to conduct the interviews face-to-face. We therefore chose to make the interviews by telephone. Even though we are aware of that by choosing type we might miss details such as body language, we argue that the telephone interviews provided us with information-rich data, sufficient for our study.

To conclude, semi-structured interviews were conducted by telephone for all the interviews. We claim that using the same technique and the same set of open-ended questions in all the interviews, increases the quality of the results obtained.
Interview guide
Before conducting the interviews, we made an interview guide, taking into consideration the basic elements Bryman and Bell (2007) suggested for preparing an interview guide. For instance we formulated open-ended questions, and used a comprehensible language, avoiding technical terms. The questions used for the interviews were based on the literature review and therefore had theoretical support. The same interview guide was used for all interviews and the questions are to be found in Appendix I.

Sample
Having the questions prepared, we contacted the Swedish Trade Council in Madrid and asked for established Swedish companies in Spain. We received a list with almost three hundred Swedish multinationals with subsidiaries in Spain, listed and sorted by their annual turn-over (even though the actual turn-over was not written in this list). Our assumption was that the bigger company, the higher is the possibility that the company uses expatriation as one of their internationalization strategies. With this assumption we started contacting the companies from the top of the list by phone. The companies that could not put us in contact with a Swedish expatriate who is in Spain now, or had been an expatriate in Spain before, were sorted out.

The aim was to have only primary sources in the empirical part. Therefore, we conducted personal semi-structured interviews. When we reached five interviews we considered that we had enough information-rich data to make a profound analysis.

Language
We chose to conduct the interviews in Swedish even though we are writing the thesis in English, since it is the common language for both the interviewees and interviewers (see Appendix II for the interview guide in the original language). We claim the best results are obtained in this way, since it avoids having the language as an obstacle during the interviews. The intension was that the interviewee should be able to talk relaxed and unforced about his experiences and reflections. The transcription was then made in English. We are aware of that in the translation some expressions can lose their original meaning. When translating, we therefore put emphasis on getting the context right instead of translating word-by-word.

Recording and anonymity
All interviews were made by phone and lasted approximately thirty minutes. The interviewees approved recording at the start. Recording was made for mainly two reasons. Firstly, we wanted to be able to focus on the interview without having to frenetically write everything down. Secondly, recording enabled us to listen through the interviews again, something which increased the quality of interpretations of the results. All of the interviewees approved of recording.
Moreover, the interviewees were offered anonymity (both to them and/or to their company) in the beginning of the interview (see Appendix I). Anonymity was offered with the purpose that the interviewees would not feel exposed. However, none of them wanted to be anonymous. In the empirical part of this thesis we have chosen only refer to them by their first name.

Conducting the Interview
When conducting the interviews, both of us were participating since the conversation was on loudspeaker (something which all the interviewees had approved of in the beginning of the interview). However, only one of us asked the questions. We claim this made it less confusing for the interviewee. Since both of us could hear the interview, the one not asking questions could hint new questions by writing them down so that the interviewer could see. This made sure that we did not leave out any important attendant questions.

In the interview, we started by a brief presentation of ourselves and of our study. We then moved on to general questions about the interviewee (e.g. about his or her background and company). Then we asked more specific questions about how he or she perceived the Spanish culture. We then rounded off the interview by asking some general, summarizing questions. The interview guide with the questions used can be seen in Appendix I and II.

Each interview lasted for about thirty minutes. The results were transcribed and translated into English immediately after the interview, while the interviews were still fresh in our minds.

2.3.4. Interpretation of Data
Once all the interviews had been conducted, we found that the answers could be divided into four major groups of cultural differences; organization, time, communication, and social. From here on, we refer to each group as dimension. We compiled the transcribed results into one fluent text, where the answers were grouped according to each cultural dimension. Our aim was to make the structure of the results easy to grasp, and to provide the reader an interesting compilation. The results of the interviews are to be found in the fourth chapter.

2.3.5. Creating a Theoretical Framework
The aim of the theoretical part is to provide a framework for interpreting the empirical data. Accordingly, in the frame of reference we have consciously compiled and combined theories about cultural dimensions that could function as a tool for understanding the empirical results obtained. By doing this, we also made sure that the theoretical framework would be relevant for the research question; to find relevant cultural differences that a Swedish expatriate can encounter in Spain on an expatriate assignment.

The frame of reference was constructed by studying cultural aspects from famous and authentic authors within this field. Then forming our own (for the purpose and empirical data relevant) theoretical framework based upon some of their theories for. To the greatest possible extent we avoided internet
sources. We argue that this increased the trustworthiness of the thesis since consider books and articles, written by well-known and often cited authors, to be more reliable.

2.3.6. Analysis of Findings and Conclusions

The final step in conducting this qualitative thesis was to analyze the results obtained in the interviews, by using the frame of reference. The thrust of the analysis was to conclude which relevant cultural differences a Swedish expatriate can encounter on his international assignment in Spain. We aimed at creating a check-list, which future expatriates can use as preparation for the Spanish culture in order to increase their cultural competence. By having this cultural competence the culture shock will be less impactful and thereby also diminish the risk of expatriate failure.

2.4. Evaluation of the Research Method

In this section we will evaluate the chosen methodology. Traditionally, the concepts reliability and validity have been important criteria for assessing the quality of the study. However, these concepts have been criticized for being criteria for the quality of quantitative research and therefore not suitable for the qualitative studies. (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Golafshani, 2003).

Bryman and Bell (2007), based on the work of Guba (1995) and Guba and Lincoln (1994), therefore explains alternative business research criteria which are more suitable for qualitative studies; authenticity and trustworthiness. Authenticity has not been influential or impactful in social studies and is even considered provoking (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Therefore we will not use authenticity as criteria when assessing the quality of this thesis. Trustworthiness however, consists of four main criteria (credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability) which will be described in detail in this section.

2.4.1. Credibility

One thing that affects the thesis’s credibility is whether the research is conducted in a good practice or not. We have taken this into consideration and we consider this thesis to be carried out by the means of good practice. For instance the same procedure was used for collecting all the data in every interview, and the interviewees were offered anonymity at the start of the interviews. Another thing that could have increased the credibility of our thesis would have been to have the material obtained from the semi-structured interviews controlled and confirmed by the interviewees (Yin, 2003). After having conducted the interviews we argued that all the information obtained was clear and explicit. Also, since all the interviews were recorded, we could go back and listen to the information again and therefore avoid misunderstandings.
2.4.2. Transferability

The *transferability* of the research refers to if the results can be generalized beyond the specific case study (Bryman & Bell, 2007). We argue that to some extent the conclusions might be generalized to other lines of business, if the Swedish expatriates are in a high position. We mean that the findings in this thesis will be possible to apply to other business trades since the national culture – and not the business culture – is what determines what major cultural differences a Swedish expatriate can encounter when going to Spain. Nevertheless, if the results are to be generalized, it is important to keep some variables controlled. Firstly, the expatriate need to be in a *high position*, since we argue that the results obtained are dependent on this factor. Secondly, it is necessary that the expatriates are *Swedish* because the thesis is written from a Swedish perspective, focusing on what cultural differences a Swedish expatriate can encounter in Spain.

In addition, the results of our study could also be generalized to a Swedish manager who is visiting a larger Spanish or multinational company in Spain. We argue that even though he is just visiting the company for a shorter period of time, it is likely that he will encounter similar cultural differences as the one explained in this thesis.

However, except for the above examples, we consider the results of this thesis difficult to generalize further. For instance, the results are not probable to be applicable to small or middle-sized companies in Spain. We believe that the Spanish culture is more apparent in the small and local Spanish companies. If a Swede starts working at a small company, we believe his experiences will differ from an expatriate’s working at a multinational company. We argue that the contrasts are sharper in smaller enterprises, since they are not influenced by an international working atmosphere. Therefore, the result of this study is not applicable on small and mid-size companies.

2.4.3. Dependability

The dependability of the thesis refers to if the results obtained can be reproduced (Golafshani, 2003). This criterion could be difficult to achieve in qualitative research since the results are dependent upon the interviewee’s personal thoughts and experiences (Bryman & Bell, 2007). However, many authors describe different ways of increasing the dependability (see e.g. Bryman & Bell, 2007; Golafshani, 2003; Yin, 2003). We will now describe what we have done to increase the dependability of this thesis.

To begin with, we have described in detail how we have conducted our study (see 2.3.3). Moreover, the interview guide used when conducting the interviews is attached in Appendix I. We did record all the interviews to be able to make correct transcriptions of the data obtained. Furthermore, the two of us listened to and participated in every interview (even though only one was asking the questions) both during the actual interviews, and on the recorded tape after the interviews were carried out. Thus we could avoid misinterpretations and transcriptional errors. Also, this indicates that we have been able to discuss the interviewees’ responses and agree upon what we heard, and hence increase the dependability by inter-observer consistency (Bryman & Bell, 2007).
We are aware of that culture is an abstract phenomenon that sometimes can be difficult to put words to. Also, the experiences of the expatriates are subjective. This affects the reliability negatively since it can be difficult to obtain exactly the same results by interviewing other Swedish expatriates. We are aware of that the reliability could have been increased by having a larger sample selection (more interviewees). Then we could have obtained a more general result where the specific answers given by the expatriates would not have been as prominent. However, due to time constraints we were not able to increase the number of interviews. We also consider the information obtained from the five semi-structured interviews to be sufficient for the thesis purpose.

2.4.4. CONfirmability

Confirmability refers to the objectivity of the study. Bryman and Bell (2007) argue that it is impossible to attain complete objectivity in a qualitative business study. However, in order to increase the objectivity it is important that the authors of the thesis do not include personal values or beliefs. We have actively tried to avoid bias in the results obtained by supporting every part of the analysis with the theoretical framework and the empirical data. Moreover, when conducting the interviews we were careful in not asking questions that would sway the answers of the expatriates. Thus, the questions were all open-ended (see Appendix I).

Even though it is not possible to accomplish full objectivity in a qualitative study (Bryman & Bell, 2007), the confirmability of this thesis can be discussed. Firstly, we are from Sweden and hence already “know” the Swedish culture, which could affect the confirmability negatively. However, as stated earlier, this thesis is written from a Swedish perspective since the purpose is to identify what cultural differences a Swedish expatriate could encounter when going to Spain. Therefore, our nationality could provide a better understanding for the expatriate’s answers.

Secondly, we have both lived in Spain for a certain amount of time, which contributes to an already established perception of the Spanish culture. This may also affect the objective interpretation negatively. Even so, our previous experience of the Spanish culture can also be positive because it allows us a deeper understanding of what the expatriates have experienced. We are aware of that our background may influence the objectivity of the thesis, but in being conscious and critical about this, we have actively tried to be as subjective as possible in interpreting and analyzing the data.

Thirdly, everyone has prejudices which may affect the way we comprehend reality. The opinions and experiences the interviewees express are subjective, and there is a risk they exaggerate or use stereotypes to be able to explain their feelings about the Spanish culture. Nevertheless, without using stereotypes or compartmentalizing, the different cultural values and behaviors, it may be difficult for the interviewee to describe his or her personal experiences and values.

Moreover, compartmentalizing cultural values is something which we have tried to actively avoid when composing this thesis. However, we are aware of that we, to some extent, may have stereotyped the results. It would be almost impossible to come up with a check-list for how Swedish expatriates could
increase their cultural competence if we could not generalize the expatriates’ answers. Although it is something which may affect the objectivity of the thesis negatively, we argue it was inevitable in order to be able to fulfill the purpose of the thesis.

2.5. Evaluation of the Theoretical Framework

In this section we will evaluate the theoretical sources used in this study. By having a critical approach to the literature used, and showing that we are aware of the shortcomings of our frame of reference, we argue that the result of this thesis will be more reliable.

To begin with, we have used theories from the famous organizational sociologist, Geert Hofstede, when constructing our theoretical framework. Jackson (2002) explain that Hofstede was one of the first, and throughout time one of the most influent, researchers who aimed at creating a universal frame of reference that would make it possible to compare cultures. In the seventies he conducted a mayor study where he, by a global survey, examined managers’ and employees’ cultural values in seventy-four different countries. However, his study has been criticized, due to the fact that he only studied people from the same company, IBM, although Hofstede explain that this diminished the influence of differences in organizational cultures since the aim was to measure differences in national cultures (Jackson, 2002). We are aware of the criticism towards Hofstede, yet we argue that his theories are a reliable source. After all, Hofstede is still one of the most impactful authors within this field and no one else has made an equally extensive study to compare national cultures since then.

Another author whose theories we have used in our frame of reference is Fons Trompenaars. He has been criticized for methodological and academic limitations. However, his theories have been widely used in the cross-cultural field when it comes to understanding cultural differences (Jackson, 2002). Due to the extensive use of his theories, we have chosen to include them in our thesis. However, when studying his theories, we have actively tried to think about its limitations.

Moreover, some literature and articles used in this thesis are rather old. As mentioned earlier, Hofstede conducted his study in the 1970’s. In addition, an article by Edström and Galbraith which have defined the concept expatriation was written in 1977. Despite the fact that these are old, we have chosen to use them since the theories are still influential and relevant.

In addition, when it comes to finding applicable theories and articles, we have chosen articles that have been cited many times by other authors. We believe that this is a way of making sure the articles are impactful and cogent.
3. Frame of Reference

In the frame of reference, we have chosen to focus on four major groups of cultural differences, which Swedish expatriates may experience and find relevant in Spain. We have named each group *dimension*. Knowing about the differences in the most important cultural aspects will help the expatriate in the acculturation process, since he will be able to acquire cultural skills faster. This will provide for expatriate failure due to adaptation problems.

In the frame of reference we will firstly highlight cultural differences in organizations and what this implies in terms of power inequalities, decision making, small talk, working time and efficiency. Secondly, we will explain cultural differences in time perception, how schedules and agendas are used, and how important it is to be punctual. Thirdly, theories of communication will be presented: tone of voice, interruptions, and direct and indirect language. Fourthly, we will provide theories for how the social life is in Spain in comparison to in Sweden, and how respect is shown in the different cultures. Each dimension will be summarized in a comparative table.

Lastly, a subchapter with a brief outline of the Spanish history will be presented. We argue that the history have had a great impact on the national culture and can therefore provide a deeper understanding of the Spanish culture.

3.1. Organization Dimension

“[M]anagers have experienced frustration when working with or in Swedish companies, with the constant consulting going on at all levels, the endless meetings, habitual deferment of decisions, obsession with people-orientation, ultra-cautiousness, woolly personnel policies and unclear guidelines from managers.” (Lewis, 2006, page 340)

The aim of this passage is to get a theoretical framework for the cultural differences in hierarchies and power distance that exist, according to theory, in Sweden and Spain. This part consists in: organizational structure, power distance, decision making, small talk, and efficiency and working time. This is the most extensive dimension. It is the most relevant dimension for the expatriate the cultural differences he will encounter in the organization are strongly connected to the success of the expatriate assignment.
3.1.1. Hierarchical or Egalitarian Organization

Gesteland (2002) argues that problems may arise when business people from informal cultures travel to more formal nations, and vice versa. He explains that formal cultures often have a very hierarchical structure and that differences in power are apparent, not least between the bosses and their subordinates in business organizations. Spain is an example of a formal culture. Therefore hierarchies are common in Spanish organizations.

The opposite of this is what Gesteland (2002) addresses as informal cultures. He describes Sweden as a “very informal culture”, where the organizations tend to be flat and where there is little tradition of showing a lot of respect to the persons of higher status.

Nevertheless, according to Hofstede & Hofstede (2005) there is no evidence that either hierarchical or egalitarian organizations are more efficient than the other. Instead, they both have their own advantages: the egalitarian organizations are good at doing tasks that demand subordinate initiative, while the more hierarchical organizations are good at performing tasks which demand discipline.

3.1.2. Power Distance

The concept power distance described by Hofstede (2001), it is a measurement of the distribution of power in organizations. What he tried to measure and classify in his major study conducted in the 1970’s was to what extent power inequalities in organizations are acceptable in each country. Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) argue that power distance to a great extent is influenced by the country’s culture and that nations can be sorted by how power distance is dealt with. In the study, a ranking list in power distance was created. Spain was ranked 45-46 (out of 74 countries) together with the Czech Republic, while Sweden was ranked 67-68 (of 74) together with Finland. All the Nordic Countries scored low points in this index.

In organizations with a small power distance decentralization tends to be popular, which implies flatter organizational structures. Another aspect that comes along with small power distance is the managerial style. In cultures with lower power distance, like the Swedish, Hofstede (2001) and Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) found that subordinates are not very afraid of expressing disagreement with their superior. In addition, the bosses in these cultures often use a more consultative in their managerial style. It is also common that the subordinates take the initiative to participate.

Moreover, Hofstede (2001) and Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) claim that in countries that have a higher rank in the power distance scale, like Spain, it is likely that the subordinates prefer a boss who uses a managerial style based on autocratic or paternalistic values. Organizations tend to be centralized so that the hierarchical structure can be maintained and the subordinates expect to be told what to do by their boss.
3.1.3. **Decision Making**

Further on, in the same study of the seventy-four countries, Hofstede intended to examine another cultural aspect; *feminine or masculine*. In these two cultural aspects the managerial and decision making style will be different. For instance, in a feminine society, managers tend to use intuition and consensus in their decision making. In masculine societies, on the other hand, managers have an aggressive and decisive managerial style (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

Out of all countries, Sweden has the least masculine culture, i.e. the most feminine. The Swedish culture scored only 5 points (the most masculine country, Slovakia, scored 110) on the Masculinity Index, created by Hofstede. Spain, on the other hand, scored 42 points and was ranked 51-53, together with Peru and Romania (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

The results show that Spain has a culture based on more masculine values compared to Sweden, which might be seen for instance in how decision making is made within the organization. Jackson (2002) argue that the masculine values may imply that there is little subordinate participation in the decision making in the company and that there generally is a lack of discussion between the boss and its subordinates before taking a decision.

Moreover, Gannon and Associates (1994) suggest that the feminine Swedish culture is reflected in that organizations tend to be flatter and that the employees are able to participate in the decision making. This implies a tendency to seek consensus within the organization when it comes to reaching a solution.

3.1.4. **Efficiency and Working Time**

Gannon and Associates (1994) explain that Swedish managers often complain about that their employees are unwilling to do overtime. They argue that this may be a result of that in Sweden, each employee has the possibility to decide over his own time and is thus able to structure it the way he wants. This, however, is not a problem in more hierarchical cultures, like the Spanish.

Moreover, Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) explain that in cultures that are feminine, like the Swedish, more leisure time tend to be preferred over more money. In masculine countries, however, the situation tends to be the reverse: more money is preferred over more leisure time. Since Spain is more masculine than Sweden, this might indicate, as Gannon and Associates (1994) suggest that the Spaniards may be more interested in doing overtime in order to gain more money, compared to the Swedes.

3.1.5. **Small Talk Before Meetings**

In most cultures, when you attend a meeting, people often use small talk before getting down to business. However, depending on how task-oriented or people-oriented the culture tends to, more or less small-talk will be used. Gesteland (2002) describes that most of the world’s cultures are *relationship-focused*, while only a handful of countries are *deal-focused*. Sweden is an example of a deal-focused country and thus, Swedes tend to be relatively more task-related in comparison to the more relationship-focused Spaniards.
Gesteland (2002) explains that in deal-focused cultures, only a few minutes of small talk is being used before moving on to doing business. In the Swedish culture, which Gesteland (2002) describes as *deal-focused*, business meetings often start with a couple of minutes of chit-chat and are then followed by the points that are written in the meeting agenda.

In relationship-focused countries, on the other hand, small talk is seen as necessary before starting to do business. In Spain, Gesteland (2002) explains that the chit-chat before meetings tend to last longer than it does in Sweden. Moreover, he explains that this small talk may serve as a warm-up time which helps the businessmen to get on the “same wave length”. To Swedes, however, this might be really frustrating since they perceive it as an unnecessary waste of time. As Gesteland puts it; Swedes even have a word for this unnecessary small-talk which has very negative connotations, namely “dead talk”.

### 3.1.6. Summarizing Table

Table 1 is a summarizing table of the theoretical differences found in the organizational dimension.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
<th>Spain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Egalitarian</td>
<td>Hierarchical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Distance</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Higher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial Style</td>
<td>Delegating</td>
<td>Authoritarian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Making</td>
<td>Consensus</td>
<td>Managers Decide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overtime</td>
<td>Unwilling</td>
<td>More Willing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Talk</td>
<td>Deal-focused</td>
<td>Relationship-focused</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 1 – SUMMARIZING THE ORGANIZATIONAL DIFFERENCES**

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3 The Swedish word is “dödprat” (Gesteland, 2002).
3.2. **TIME DIMENSION**

“For whatever reason, the closer you get to the equator the slower the clock seems to run” (Gesteland, 2002, page 59)

As the quotation above suggests, time is something which is interpreted and valued differently in Northern and Southern Europe. In this section we will discuss theories that explain how time perception differs in Sweden and Spain. The theories will explain how Spaniards and Swedes use schedules and agendas. Further on, punctuality will be examined. We argue that being aware of the differences in how time is perceived in the two countries will increase the expatriate’s cultural competence and therefore diminish the impact of the cultural shock.

3.2.1. **PERCEPTION OF TIME**

In the Greek mythology, Chronus was the God of time (e.g. Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2000). This God of time later influenced the anthropologist Edward T. Hall in his work about different cultures' ways of relating to time, where he founded the concepts *monochronic* and *polychronic* cultures (Hall, 1981). Monochronic cultures are characterized by a rigid perception of time, where punctuality is critical, the agendas are fixed, schedules are fully planned (Gesteland, 2002).

Gesteland (2002) compartmentalize the Swedish culture as “very monochronic”. Sweden is thus being placed on the very extreme of this scale. Monochronic societies are also called clock-obsessed and schedule-worshiping cultures.

On the contrary, polychronic cultures stand in great contrast to this. In this kind of culture, time is of less matter; loose agendas and schedules are appreciated. Meetings-within-meetings that take place simultaneously are perceived as something positive. Spain is classified as a polychronic culture, i.e. the perception of time is fluid. Moreover, Spain is often referred to as a “mañana culture”. Although there might be prejudice in the expression, it refers to the Spaniards perception of time. Literally, the word “mañana” means “tomorrow”, but practically it is used to refer to sometime in the indefinite future (Gesteland, 2002).

3.2.2. **SCHEDULES AND AGENDAS**

Also Trompenaars (1994) uses the same concepts, and explains that in a monochronic culture, the people tend to schedule their activities very tightly, due to their way of looking at time. Since they expect their fellowmen live by these values, it is possible to schedule the day without leaving much space for unexpected events. In other words, they schedule their agendas so that only small slots are left unbooked, and they are able to do this because they have defined starting and ending points to their events. This implies that the Swedes tend to carefully schedule the day, using every slot in their calendar. They like to stick to their schedule and are thus not open for unplanned activities.
In polychronic cultures, on the contrary, people do not fill the slots in the agenda to the same extent as monochronic people do. They know that appointment times are approximate and therefore leave some time unbooked for possible unplanned events (Trompenaars, 1994). Spaniards are less inclined to scheduling their entire day. The Spaniard is much less time-focused compared to a Swede, which can, among other things, be manifested in that his schedules are more fluid than the Swedes’. Spaniards do not schedule very tightly in respect of spontaneity and unplanned events (Trompenaars, 1994).

3.2.3. Punctuality

Punctuality is very important in the monochronic cultures. As concluded, Swedes are very monochronic, and highly value punctuality. They consider it very rude if their fellow businessmen arrive late to a meeting (Gesteland, 2002). In general, the Swede reasons that if you have an appointment with someone and he arrives late, this will imply a displacement of the rest of the day’s events. Trompenaars (1994) describes monochronics’ relation to time in the following way: “Time is viewed as a commodity to be used up, and lateness deprives the other of precious minutes in a world where time is money” (page 123).

In polychronic cultures, on the other hand, it is acceptable to be late. Things do not have fixed starting and ending times, as they have in the monochronic cultures (Trompenaars, 1994). Time is not the important factor in the context; instead, friends and relationships are prioritized. For instance, even if you are running late for a meeting, it would be seen as very rude if you, on your way, pass by a friend and do not stop to talk for a while. Hence, it is understandable, and acceptable, if a businessman arrives late to a meeting in a polychronic culture (Gesteland, 2002; Trompenaars, 1994). Moreover, the ending times of the appointments are only approximate and it could be considered really rude if you leave an ongoing meeting just because you have another one scheduled (Gesteland, 2002).

The Spanish culture is less time-obsessed than the very monochronic Swedish. When it comes to punctuality in Spain, meeting times may be approximate to about fifteen minutes (Trompenaars, 1994). One thing to bear in mind, however, is that if Swedes consider it rude that Spaniards arrive late, Spaniards consider it equally rude if the Swede would have any complaints about his late arrival (Gesteland, 2002).

3.2.4. Summarizing Table

In table 2 we have summarized the theoretical cultural differences identified within the time dimension.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
<th>Spain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Very monochronic</td>
<td>Polychronic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schedules</td>
<td>Rigidness</td>
<td>Spontaneity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punctuality</td>
<td>Rigid time perspective</td>
<td>Fluid time perspective</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 2 – SUMMARIZING THE TIME DIFFERENCES
3.3. **COMMUNICATION DIMENSION**

“Business visitors from relationship-focused cultures [...] may also be shocked by Swedish bluntness, which may be perceived as rudeness by negotiators used to polite evasions and circumlocution.” (Gesteland, 2002, page 300)

In this passage we will explain how communication styles differ in the Swedish and the Spanish culture. We will do this by first compile theories of how the tone of voice differs in emotionally expressive and emotionally reserved cultures. We will continue with how these cultures use and perceive communicational overlaps, i.e. interruptions. Finally, we will describe how direct and indirect language is used in Sweden and Spain, and see if it is really as the quotation above suggests – that being too explicit in a conversation could be interpreted as rude by people from more relationship-focused countries. We mean that being aware of the cultural differences when it comes to the communication dimension will increase the expatriates’ cultural competence and hence make their acculturation process smoother.

3.3.1. **TONE OF VOICE**

Trompenaars (1994) explains that in emotionally expressive countries, it is common to exaggerate your tone of voice. This is a sign of that you are involved and committed in the subject. This also means that people tend to be very affective in their way of communicating (Gesteland, 2002). Spain is one of the countries with an emotionally expressive culture. Thus, Spaniards often reveal thoughts and emotions verbally and nonverbally and without inhibition. They are often passionate and vehement when it comes to expressing their matter and feelings. This way of communicating is admired, since it shows that the person is committed and involved in the matter. Gesteland (2002) also describes Spaniards as “spirited communicators” that tend to speak loudly in comparison to the more reserved northern Europeans.

On the contrary, in emotionally reserved countries like Sweden, raising and lowering your voice is a sign of that the speaker is not serious. Swedes tend not to reveal their thoughts or feelings, since coolness and a self-restrained approach is admired in this type of culture (Trompenaars, 1994; Gesteland, 2002). Trompenaars (1994) further explains that when an emotionally expressive person meets an emotionally reserved, the latter is often perceived as “icecold”.

Moreover, Swedes tend to perceive persons from emotionally expressive cultures as “out of control” and “inconsistent” due to their enthusiastic emotions and exaggerated and way of speaking. Thus, the tone of voice may be a source of conflict when people from neutral and expressive societies meet (Trompenaars, 1994; Gesteland, 2002).
3.3.2. **INTERRUPTIONS**

When two people communicate with each other, the use of interruptions is interpreted differently depending on which culture you come from. Trompenaars (1994) argue that in emotionally reserved cultures, person B is allowed to start talking when person A has stopped. This is important since it is very impolite to interrupt. Gesteland (2002) explains that Sweden is an example of a reserved culture. In addition, he describes that Swedes are “relatively soft-spoken” in comparison to the more expressive Spaniards. If a Swede and a Spaniard were to sit in a meeting and the Spanish counterpart interrupts, raises his voice or in some other way expresses his thoughts, the Swede may be startled. Swedes tend to find frequent conversational overlaps irritating, and even insulting.

On the contrary, in emotionally expressive cultures, Trompenaars (1994) and Gesteland (2002) argues that people tend to interrupt each other more frequently. Interrupting shows that you listen to, and are interested in, what the other person is saying.

Gesteland (2002) exemplifies that in an international negotiation, Spaniards interrupt their Swedish counterparts about five times as often as the reserved Swedes interrupt the Spaniards. He also argues that since Swedes tend to find these conversational overlaps very rude, it is fully understandable that conflicts arise in meetings where both Spaniards and Swedes are involved. On top of that, the voluble Spaniards tend to interpret the neutral Swedes as ignorant and completely uninterested in the conversation, since they never interrupt.

3.3.3. **DIRECT AND INDIRECT LANGUAGE**

Moreover, people from relationship-focused cultures, like the Spanish, tend to use a more indirect language to be able to avoid conflicts (Gesteland, 2002). Hall (1989) explains that this indirect language is used so that the actual meaning of what the people are saying is found in the context of the conversation. He called this high-context culture, due to its nature of that you need to interpret and understand the context in a conversation in order to understand the meaning of it. Gesteland (2002), also describes that “compared to northern Europeans, Spaniards often prefer high-context, roundabout language, and tend to avoid responding with a blunt ‘no’” (page 259).

Cultures that are more deal-focused, like the Swedish, tend to be more low-context when it comes to communicating. This means that the meaning lies in the words; it is explicit (Gesteland 2002; Hall, 1989). People from these countries are more direct in their way of speaking. This is also something which is perceived as a sign of the person being honest and trustworthy (Gesteland, 2002).
3.3.4. Summarizing Table

Below, we present a table where the findings within the communication dimension. It summarizes the theoretical cultural differences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
<th>Spain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Emotionally Reserved</td>
<td>Emotionally Expressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tone of Voice</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Higher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interruptions</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Frequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Indirect</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 – Summarizing the Communication Differences

3.4. Social Dimension

“You must work hard at making a Spaniard like you. If you succeed in this, the business will follow automatically. You must show that you have a heart and do not take everything seriously. Northerners have big hearts, but some are often experts at hiding them.” (Lewis, 2006, page 271)

How is it to be new in Spain? Do people “hang out” in a similar way as in Sweden? To whom do I show respect? In this section, we will outline and compile different theories about how Swedish and Spanish social lives differ, and about how respect is shown in different ways depending on the culture.

3.4.1. Social Life

As stated earlier, Sweden is an example of a deal-focused country (Gesteland, 2002). This implies that the task itself is in focus, and that the relationships are dependent on the assignment. Spain, on the other hand is an example of the opposite; a relationship-focused culture. This may have an effect on how the social life is different in Sweden and in Spain.

Bodin and Fant (1997) describe the difference between isolated and integrated cultures. The authors suggest that in isolated cultures, like the Swedish, people tend to have a small private zone. This implies that only a few individuals (often family and maybe a few good friends) will constitute the inner circle of really close friends. These are people who the person can fully trust and rely on. Moreover, the Swedish culture is deal-oriented. For example, this implies that outside of the private zone, for instance at work, the person also have friends and acquaintances. These friendships are strongly dependent on the task or activity which they have in common. This implies that the colleagues at work tend to be your friends (in your public zone, probably) only as long as you have the task in common, i.e. as long as you stay in the organization.

On the contrary, in integrated cultures, like the Spanish, the private zone is much more extensive. Family, friends, and acquaintances are all considered friends, and constitute the inner circle. Since Spain is a relationship-focused culture, it is fully possible to hang out with your colleagues after work and even
Being a Swedish Expatriate in Spain

after some have left the organization. The public zone, however, tend to be a bit frightening to an integrated person, i.e. it is a situation the Spaniard feels uncomfortable in. Therefore it could be difficult for a new-comer to integrate into the Spaniards’ already existing social life (Bodin & Fant, 1997).

3.4.2. RESPECT

Trompenaars (1994) discusses the difference between universalist and particularist cultures. He explains that in the a universalist culture, people think that rules and regulations is something which applies to everyone, while in a particularist one, people tend to value relationships higher than applying rules that should be same to everyone.

Moreover, Trompenaars (1994) has through a study concluded that Sweden is an example of a universalist culture. One example that illustrates how people in this culture reason is when people cross the street. If the light is red, it is very likely that Swedes will wait for the green light, even though there is no traffic, just because this is the rule.

Spain, on the other hand, is a more particularist culture in comparison to Sweden. This means that people tend to judge the specific situation based on the present circumstances. This, in turn may imply that the Spaniards cross the street if there is no traffic – even though the light is red, or, that he helps a friend in every situation despite of what the rules say – just because he is your friend (Trompenaars, 1994).

3.4.3. SUMMARIZING TABLE

Table 4 is a summarizing table of the theoretical cultural differences found in the social dimension.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
<th>Spain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Life</td>
<td>Isolated</td>
<td>Integrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>Universalist</td>
<td>Particularist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 4 – SUMMARIZING THE SOCIAL DIFFERENCES**
3.5. **SPANISH HISTORY**

The year was 1936 when Spanish civil war started. Three years later, in 1939, the republicans won and Franco became the head of government. He succeeded in uniting fascistic and conservative opinions in one party. His vision was to create an auto-sufficient Spain under his dictatorship. Conservative and traditional values had a big influence on the society. The Catholic Church was also very influent during Franco’s time, which lasted almost thirty six years (1939-75). After his dead in 1975, the successor, King Juan Carlos I, decided to democratize Spain.

The new, democratic Spain has experienced a prospering economical growth since then, and the country has been developing towards a stable economy and can now be compared to other countries in the Western World. Nevertheless, the Spanish society is still *patriarchal*. Not until very recently have women entered the labor market, and represent today only 30 % of the total working force in Spain (Nationalencyklopedin, 2010). This may help explaining some of the Spanish culture, as we will see in the analysis in chapter four.

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4 A patriarchal society refers to that men tend to have more power than women, both at home and in the society as a whole (Nationalencyklopedin, 2010).
4. **EMPIRICAL DATA**

In this section, we will present our empirical data, obtained by interviews. We will start by, in part 4.1, providing a short presentation of the five interviewees, in order to make a clear picture of their background. Then, in part 4.2, we will compile the results of the interviews. We will keep the overall structure used in the frame of reference (organization, time, communication, and social dimension). We think that maintaining this order will make it easier for the reader to follow. It will also make a more natural transition for the reader when going from the theoretical and empirical parts to the analysis.

### 4.1. PRESENTATION OF THE INTERVIEWEES

In this passage, we will present our five interviewees. They are all Swedes who are, or have been, expatriates in Madrid, Spain. They work at four different companies and within the high-tech industry. All of the interviewees have managerial responsibilities.
4.1.1. **Anders**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Date of interview</strong></th>
<th>2010-04-21</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name</strong></td>
<td>Anders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employer</strong></td>
<td>Atlas Copco AB</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Before departure**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Title</strong></th>
<th>Area Manager Latin America for Atlas Copco Customer Finance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spanish skills</strong></td>
<td>Fluent in Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural preparations</strong></td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other preparations</strong></td>
<td>Atlas Copco organized short seminars before departure where the family also was invited to participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other connections with Spain</strong></td>
<td>Anders has earlier worked in Spain and Chile, thus this is his second time living in Spain. In total he has spent more than seven years living in Spain. Anders has also studied Spanish at the University and moreover has a wife from Spain.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**In Spain**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Title</strong></th>
<th>Regional Sales Manager, Southern Europe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contract</strong></td>
<td>Expatriate contract since 2008 for three years, Madrid.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The company**

Atlas Copco is a world leading provider of industrial productivity solutions. It produces for instance compressed air and gas equipment and industrial tools and assembly systems. It has around 30 000 employees around the world (Atlas Copco, 2010). The corporate language is English, but Spanish is used locally, for internal documents, etc.
4.1.2. Arne

Date of interview 2010-04-23

Name Arne

Employer TeliaSonera AB

Before departure

Title Chief Operating Officer, COO (Halebop)

Spanish skills Fluent in Spanish

Cultural preparations None

Other preparations None

Other connections Earlier projects with several countries in South America. His wife has worked in Spain.

In Spain

Title Director General Commercial, (Yoigo)

Contract Expatriate contract from 2006 for two years, Madrid.

The company

Yoigo is a telecommunication company that provides network access and telecommunication services in Spain. TeliaSonera owns 76.6 % of Yoigo’s shares. Yoigo is the fourth biggest mobile operator in Spain, with headquarters in Madrid. (Yoigo, 2010). There are 89 employees from 10 different countries working at Yoigo at the moment. The culture at Yoigo was consciously created to be international; they have chosen to employ Spaniards that have worked abroad and people from different countries that now live in Madrid. The corporate language at Yoigo is English and Spanish.
4.1.3. **Jesper**

**Date of interview**  
2010-04-20

**Name**  
Jesper

**Employer**  
Amadeus Scandinavia AB

**Before departure**

**Title**  
Director, Product Division

**Spanish skills**  
None

**Cultural preparations**  
None

**Other preparations**  
Seminar of psychological preparations arranged by Amadeus

**Other connections with Spain**  
None

**In Spain**

**Title**  
Director, Marketing Division

**Contract**  
Local contract, for three and a half year, Madrid

**The company**

Amadeus is a multinational company which provides IT solutions for the travel and tourism industry. It has over 8 000 employees. The head quarter is located in Madrid. (Amadeus Scandinavia, 2010). There are 47 nationalities represented within the company, and Jesper was working with clients across the world. The corporate language is English, even between Spaniards.
4.1.4. Ove

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Date of interview</strong></th>
<th>2010-04-21</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name</strong></td>
<td>Ove</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employer</strong></td>
<td>TeliaSonera AB</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Before departure**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Title</strong></th>
<th>Director of fiber LAN business</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spanish skills</strong></td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural preparations</strong></td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other preparations</strong></td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other connections</strong></td>
<td>Tourism in Southern Spain</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**In Spain**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Title</strong></th>
<th>Chief Operating Officer, COO (Yoigo)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contract</strong></td>
<td>Expatriate contract from 2006 for two years, in Madrid, which has been prolonged with one year at time. Ove is still in Spain, and will end his assignment summer 2010.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The company**

Yoigo is a telecommunication company that provides network access and telecommunication services in Spain. TeliaSonera owns 76.6 % of Yoigo’s shares. Yoigo is the fourth biggest mobile operator in Spain, with headquarters in Madrid. (Yoigo, 2010). In 2006, Ove was sent to Spain to participate in the start-up process of Yoigo. The corporate language is English and Spanish.
4.1.5. **Tanja**

**Date of interview** 2010-04-23

**Name** Tanja

**Employer** Telefonaktiebolaget LM Ericsson

**Before departure**

**Title** Project Manager

**Spanish skills** Basic Spanish

**Cultural preparations** None

**Other preparations** Ericsson offered preparation courses, both psychological and practical. Ericsson provides its expatriates with private lessons in Spanish, before departure and during the time in Spain.

**Other connections with Spain** None

**In Spain**

**Title** Project Manager

**Contract** Expatriate contract from 2008 for six months, Madrid

**The company**

Ericsson is a world-leading provider of telecommunication equipment and related services to mobile and fixed network operators. Ericsson is active in more than 175 countries (Ericsson, 2010). The corporate language at Ericsson is English, but Spanish is used at the Madrid office.
4.2. **RESULTS OF THE INTERVIEWS**

The interviewees’ answers have been compiled and summarized. We will have same structure as in the theoretical part. The order will thus be the following; organization, time, communication, and social dimension. Furthermore, in order to make this part even more straight-forward for the reader, we have brought together the interviewees’ answers into groups. These will be presented under a question which summarizes all the questions related to that specific cultural dimension.

Moreover, examples which are accentuated in the text will be used to illustrate the differences that exist in the Swedish and Spanish organization. The interviewees are all Swedish and it is therefore crucial to keep in mind that everything said by the expatriates in the interviews will be from a Swedish perspective.

4.2.1. **ORGANIZATION DIMENSION**

In this section we will compile the interviewees’ answers that are connected to the organizational structure, power distance, decision making, efficiency and working time, and small talk. The questions asked in the interviews are based on theories by Hofstede (2001), Gesteland (2002), and Gannon and Associates (1994).

**How did you experience the organizational structure in Spain?**

Four out of five interviewees emphasize that the organizational structure is much more hierarchical in Spain, than in Sweden. Only one interviewee, Tanja, experienced that the organizational structure of Ericsson is quite similar in Sweden and in Spain. Thus she did not experience any major differences in the hierarchical structure, power distance, etc. in Spain. Moreover, the expatriates’ companies in Spain are often Swedish subsidiaries. In some cases, this leads to an organizational structure similar to the Swedish, i.e. flat and decentralized, like the case of Yoigo.

According to the interviewees, an important role of the Swedish manager is to delegate, which contributes to making the organizations decentralized. With a flatter organization, each employee is, to a greater extent, allowed to make his own decisions and to take initiatives. The following example illustrates why and how one company tried to create a more Nordic management style in the subsidiary in Spain:

*In the start-up process of Yoigo, it was important to make fast decisions, and therefore it was convenient to have a flatter organization. In Spain, the organizations tend to be more hierarchical. Therefore, the intension was to create a working culture, aiming at having a Nordic managerial style. Thus, many expatriates from the Nordic countries were working at Yoigo, Madrid, at the start-up process.* – Arne
How would you describe the relation to your boss?

Some of the interviewees explain that you cannot argue against, or question, the Spanish boss and his decisions. The norm is to use an indirect language when you talk to him and you should never say “no”. Instead it is more respectful to say “this may be difficult”, “it will be a challenge”.

In Spain it is lack of respect to go to your boss with a problem. Instead you are supposed to inform your boss only when you have a solution. In Spain there are no problems. There are “issues” or “challenges”, but never problems – since “problems” is a word with negative connotations. – Jesper

Further on, Anders explains that in Spain you strictly respect the hierarchy and talk only to your nearest boss. Some of the interviewees tell us that in Sweden the relation to your boss is more laid-back and friendly than in Spain.

In Sweden your boss is more of an equal, whom you could tease in a friendly way. You could tell him something like “did you play stupid on that meeting or did you just not get the message?”. In Spain you would never even dream of telling your boss something like that. – Jesper

The example above explains that the Swedish organizations tend to be flat, and that thus the distance between the boss and his subordinates is not as large as it may be in Spain. The fact that you are not allowed to talk to your boss’s boss in Spain, as Anders also explained, is something which may be difficult for a Swede to get used to when going on an expat mission to Madrid.

How is the decision making process in Spain compared to in Sweden?

The expatriates’ answers about Swedish and Spanish decision making processes tell us that they do differ. For example, the interviewees describe that meetings in Swedish companies are often arranged for discussion or problem solving. The aim is to reach a solution by consensus. In Spain you meet in order to inform and make decisions, but not to discuss the matter thoroughly.

In Sweden you gather around a specific problem and let everyone have a look at it, before solving it together. – Jesper

The fact that Spanish organizations tend to be more centralized than Swedish ones is also reflected in the managerial style and in how much the boss is delegating work. This indicates that the boss is the one who is supposed to make the final decisions. This is explained by Anders in the following way:

The Spanish manager is not good at delegating. Instead, everything is directed from him and all ideas and decisions must pass his table. Moreover, the employees’ initiatives are neither encouraged, nor rewarded. It is common that the boss rearranges and rewrites the subordinates’ ideas and later takes credit for them. – Anders
What does a normal working day in Spain look like?

When it comes to differences in working hours in Sweden and Spain, the expatriates have different experiences. Arne’s working day starts at 9 AM but ends late in the evening. A working day ending at 8 PM in the evening is not unusual in Spain. For a start-up company like Yoigo, working time can be much longer than to 8 PM, in particular during the initial period. “There is a displacement in the whole day”, he says.

The other interviewees started about the same time like in Sweden, between 8 and 9 AM. All of the interviewees agreed that you have much longer working days in Spain compared to Sweden. Often you work about eleven hours per day in Spain, some of the interviewees say.

Two of the expatriates interviewed believe that the long working day has to do with the Spanish history. Earlier, most women were housewives and the men had to work all day to be able to provide for the family. This, in turn, has created a tradition of long working days. Arne thinks that Spain at the moment is divided. Some historical values still remain, while a new culture is taking shape in Spain. A part of the old culture is that is more relationship-focused, which for instance is seen in the typical long lunches.

Another contributing factor to the long working days is that it is less important to work as efficiently as in Sweden, as some of the expatriates describe. The important thing is to be at your job, and to take care of your relations, which you do by coffee-breaks and chit-chatting. The Spaniards do not value the efficiency like the Swedes do. One of the interviewees explains this in the following way:

\[
\text{Time is not something you measure in Spain and therefore the Spaniards do not consider it important to be efficient. This, of course is a huge problem in the Spanish industry. Spain is the third most inefficient country in Europe! The thing is that they value relationships higher than time and their work is just a way of earning money. – Jesper}
\]

Moreover, most of the interviewees agree upon that in Spain it is important to work many hours per day in order to show your boss that you are interested in your job. You do not leave your job and go home before he does. Not going home before your boss is way of showing respect. This is something that might be difficult for a Swede to get used to, since in Sweden it is common that the employees go home at 5 PM, whether the boss stays or has already gone for the day.
How were meetings conducted?
The interviewees have told us about how they have experienced the use of small talk before meetings. Some of the interviewees found the situation similar to the one in Sweden, i.e. that before the meetings it is common to small talk about football and politics, and then move over to business. “Pretty much like in Sweden”, Anders says. Other interviewees experienced it differently. Jesper, for instance, describes the use of small talk in the following way:

The Spaniards value the relationships high and consider them more important than the work. Coffee breaks and meeting start-ups are always about “how are you”, “how is the family”, etc. First after you are done with the small talk, which normally takes longer time than is Sweden, you begin with business. If you start talking about business right away, the Spaniard will find you really boring. – Jesper

4.2.2. Time Dimension
In this section, we have gathered the expatriates’ responses to how Swedes and Spaniards perceive time. The questions are based upon Hall’s, Trompenaars’s and Gesteland’s theories about monochronic and polychronic cultures.

How did you experience the Spaniards’ perception of time and how important is it with punctuality in Spain?
The interviewees agree on that punctuality is of great importance in Sweden. They also explain that the Spaniards perceive time as something fluid. For instance, one interviewee told us that in Spain time is not something you measure. This is also why punctuality is not as important. This can be explained with an example from one of the interviews:

If you have a lunch booked with a Swede, he gives you a certain amount of time, a “slot” in his calendar. A Spaniard on the other hand, would never book or plan anything after the lunch because he does not know for how long time the lunch will last or what will happen afterwards. He has the whole day to spend! And therefore, being on time for the lunch will not be that important. – Jesper

Some of the expatriates also say that to Swedes, being on time comes hand in hand with respect. If you are late to an appointment in Sweden, the Swedes will interpret this as disrespectful. They explain that Swedes are rather five or ten minutes early just to be sure not being late, something a Spaniard never would do. Time and punctuality in Spain are not connected to respect – not at all.

Further on, Ove explains how the fluid time perception in Spain affects the Spaniard’s attitude towards punctuality by saying that “if you decide to meet at 11 o’clock with a Spaniard, this to him means sometime after 11 o’clock”. This also shows that respect is not connected to being in time. In addition, Anders explains Spain’s fluid time culture in the following way:
Spanish people are actually relatively punctual; the only difference in comparison to Sweden is that the acceptable time range of delay is wider in Spain. – Anders

Moreover, Tanja has noticed that there is less orderliness and fixed agendas compared to Sweden. One of the expatriates describes this by saying that in Spain, you get the impression that the busses often come and go without a clear schedule to follow. In Sweden we are used to that the bus arrives just at the minute the schedule says it will. If you ask a Spaniard when the bus will arrive, he will most likely answer you “soon”. The interviewees explained that time is not seen as a vital component in everyday life.

4.2.3. Communication Dimension

In this section, we will bring together the interviewees’ answers that are connected to how the Spaniards and Swedes express themselves. The corresponding questions are based upon both Gesteland’s (2002) theory that describes the differences between deal and relationship-focused cultures, and on Gesteland’s (2002) and Trompenaars’s (1994) theories about expressive and reserved cultures.

What is a conversation with a Spaniard like and how do Spaniards express themselves?
The interviewees have more or less the same perception of the Spanish way of communicating. In general, they told us it is typical that the Spaniards talk loudly, use more body language, and stand close to you in the elevator, etc. Specifically in conversations; in Sweden you are used to wait for your counterpart to stop talking before you start speaking. In Spain it is the other way around. Anders tells us the following example:

In Spain you do not wait for the person to finish his sentence. If you want to say something you need to be attentive and say what you want to say! Because of this, interruptions are not unusual. But no offense is intended, and there is nothing to be offended by. – Anders

This explains that in Spain, you are not being disrespectful by interrupting, as you would be if you did the same thing in Sweden. On the contrary, as another of our interviewees says, in Spain interruptions are seen as signs of engagement and you are expected to interrupt! If you are quiet during a conversation with Spaniards, you show him that you are not interested in the conversation. By this, it is not said that the interruptions are not annoying for Swedes. Jesper told us one example of this which was frustrating for him:

The really successful meetings are the ones when everybody is talking at the same time, and not necessarily about the same things. Then you sum up what every small conversation has concluded and continue the meeting. From the Spaniards point of view it is positive, it is dynamic and shows engagement. For a Swede it is frustrating and provoking since in Sweden we are quiet and listen to the presentation, it is a way of showing respect. – Jesper
4.2.4. **SOCIAL DIMENSION**

In this passage, we will put together the interviewees’ answers that are connected to social values and respect. The question relates to how easy the expatriates found it to integrate into the Spanish culture. The interview questions were based on theories by Bodin and Fant (1995), and Trompenaars (1994).

**Did you find it easy to connect with the Spanish people?**

All the interviewees found Spanish people friendly, open and social. They explain that the Spaniards like to socialize and to hang out, and they prefer to do it in the street, having a “copa”, or eating dinner in a bar. It is not common that the Spaniard will invite you to his home, rather he will suggest meeting in a restaurant or at a pub. The Spaniard lives much of his social life “outside”.

Moreover, there were different perceptions of the Spanish culture and the social life in general. Here follows a more detailed description of the different experiences and reflections made by the interviewees:

- **Spanish people are friendly and open. The Spanish culture is easy to take in and acclimatize to. It is easy to socialize with the Spaniards.** – Anders

- **The definition of family for Swedes is the traditional mother-father-child picture, and everything is centered to this nuclear family. In Spain, the definition of family is much wider; it includes not only the nuclear family, but also friends, grandma, uncle, neighbor etc. When you gather around, the whole “family” is invited.** – Jesper

- **The Spaniards do not spend as much time as a Swede at home. Swedes like to take care of the house, renovating it or fixing other details in the house. The Spaniards like to hang out and enjoy each other’s company. Long lunches on Sundays are important.** – Arne

- **In Sweden one is often associated with the work or company. An interesting example is when you get to know a Swede, the second question use to be “where do you work?”, while in Spain this specific question might not pop up until weeks after the first encounter.** – Jesper

- **Spaniards are very polite and friendly. At first sight, they might seem easy to approach, but it was difficult to integrate into their social groups. The Spaniards have their private circle of family and friends that was not easy to penetrate for an outsider.** – Tanja

- **The Swedish and the Spanish cultures are not as different as everyone says. However, it is especially difficult to integrate in the Spanish culture if you do not know the language.** – Ove
The importance of the language has been discussed by three of the expatriates. It is a huge advantage if you know Spanish, and you should take the language seriously, irrespectively of the level of Spanish you have, because, in general, the Spaniard’s level in English is normally inferior to the Scandinavian’s level in Spanish, as some of the interviewees have pointed out.

Moreover, an interesting reflection on how Spaniards interpret “respect” has been made by some of the interviewees. There is a major difference between the cultures in the interpretation of what respect is, and therefore also in the behavior. For instance, in Sweden respect is something you show to everyone, for instance you care about where you park your car, if you listen to loud music etc. You show respect by not bothering others around you. In Spain it is different, according to the interviewees. Respect is only shown to the people you know and care about. It is not important to be respectful to strangers; it has no value. This can explain why the Spanish people are known for parking everywhere and their crazy driving, they do not know the people whom they are bothering by their actions.
5. **Analysis**

In this chapter we will analyze the results obtained from the empirical data by the means of the frame of reference. We will conduct an analytical discussion about the cultural dimensions that are relevant for the Swedish expatriate, with the aim to create a short and concise check-list of the significant differences. This check-list will function as a tool to increase the expatriates’ cultural competence before going on an international assignment to Spain. To begin with, we will present a comparative diagram of the cultural dimensions. Secondly, for each dimension, we will start by discussing how Spain’s and Sweden’s cultures differ, and then analyze how and why this is important for the expatriates that are going to Spain to know about the dissimilarities.

5.1. **Comparative Diagram of the Dimensions**

Below follows a comprehensive table (see Table 5) of the cultural differences we have found throughout the thesis. In the first two columns of the table, the frame of reference is summarized, with the aim to provide the reader with a clear comparison of Sweden and Spain. In the third column, it is shown whether the empirical data (the expatriates’ experiences of Spain) corresponds to the theoretical framework about the Spanish culture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
<th>Spain</th>
<th>Correspondence?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Egalitarian</td>
<td>Hierarchical</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Distance</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial Style</td>
<td>Delegating</td>
<td>Authoritarian</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Making</td>
<td>Consensus</td>
<td>Managers Decide</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overtime</td>
<td>Unwilling</td>
<td>More Willing</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Talk</td>
<td>Deal-focused</td>
<td>Relationship-focused</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Very monochronic</td>
<td>Polychronic</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schedules</td>
<td>Rigid</td>
<td>Spontaneity</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punctuality</td>
<td>Rigid time perspective</td>
<td>Fluid time perspective</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Emotionally Reserved</td>
<td>Emotionally Expressive</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tone of Voice</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interruptions</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Frequent</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Life</td>
<td>Isolated</td>
<td>Integrated</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>Universalist</td>
<td>Particularist</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5 – Comparative Diagram of the Dimensions**
Table 5 shows that Spain and Sweden differ in all the studied cultural aspects. Theory corresponds well to the expatriates’ experiences. In one aspect, small talk, the theory does not correspond to the interviewee’s responses. Theory states that the use of small talk is common in Spain, while the expatriates’ experiences tell us differently. This, together with the other cultural aspects, will be analyzed more thoroughly in the following subchapters.

5.2. ORGANIZATION DIMENSION

The stereotype of the Spanish organization is that the employees work the entire day without getting much done. “Mañana, mañana”, siesta and many coffee breaks also contribute to the stereotype. But how is it really? What should the expatriate expect when moving to Spain to work?

5.2.1. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

According to the theory and in the interviewees’ opinions, differences in Spanish and Swedish organizational structures are apparent. Sweden has a very informal culture with egalitarian organizational structures whilst Spain is more hierarchical. The fact that the organizations in Spain tend to be more hierarchical than in Sweden could be demonstrated by three points of views which will be analyzed below.

Firstly, power inequalities are apparently different in Sweden and Spain. As the interviewees said, the Spanish manager is not good at delegating. Everything is directed from him and all ideas and decisions must pass his table. You cannot argue against the boss, or question him and his decisions. He is the one that decides and he is always right. The subordinates’ initiatives in Spain are neither encouraged, nor rewarded. It is common that the boss rearranges employees’ ideas and later takes credit for them. In other words, as Hofstede (2001) concluded, the power distance is larger in Spain than in Sweden. In Spain you strictly respect the hierarchy and talk only to your nearest boss. Coming from Sweden you are used to the Swedish managerial style, which has other characteristics than the Spanish. An important role of the Swedish manager is to delegate. In Sweden it is acceptable to talk directly to your boss’s boss. Besides, the relation to your boss is more laid-back and friendly. This is also a characteristic of the power distance.

Why is it important for the expatriate to know about the prevailing power inequalities? The structure of the organizations tends to be flatter and less bureaucratic in Sweden than in Spain. If one is used to that the boss delegates and that it is possible to discuss matters with him, it might come as a shock to the Swede that he must “line up” in the hierarchy. It is therefore likely that the Swedish expatriate will feel disregarded and less important in the Spanish organization, at least in the beginning of his assignment, before getting used to the new culture. The characteristics of the flat organization which he is used to in Sweden are no longer present. This indicates that the traits of the decentralized organization decrease, and accordingly, among other things, freedom to make his own decisions and to come up with new ideas
diminishes. The expatriate has to count on that his initiatives will not be as appreciated as in Sweden. This can be frustrating and he will not be able to do anything about his situation, since power inequalities are a part of the Spanish culture.

✓ *Prepare yourself mentally for the hierarchical and authoritarian Spanish manager. It is probable that you will experience a greater power distance between you and him.*

**Secondly**, the purpose of having *meetings* is different in Sweden and Spain. In Swedish companies, meetings are often arranged with the aim to solve problems through discussion. It is always preferable to reach solutions by consensus. Everyone wants to participate and to be part of finding the solution. In Spain, on the other hand, you arrange meetings in order to inform or make decisions, but not to discuss. This is explained and confirmed by Hofstede (2001) and his dimension of masculinity and femininity. In the feminine societies consensus is used as a tool in the decision making process, which is the case in Sweden. In Spain the manager is the one who decides, and he is always right. One should not question or argue against him.

Why is it important for the expatriate to know about the differences in meeting purposes? The reasons are similar to the discussion above about power inequalities. If you attend a meeting in Spain with the Swedish idea of meetings (that the aim is to discuss a subject and then come up with a solution by consensus), it is again probable that the expatriate will feel disregarded and not participative. Therefore it is important that he is conscious of the nature of Spanish meetings.

✓ *Be aware of that Spanish meetings are being held to inform and make decisions, not to discuss the subjects. Consensus is not widely recognized as a decision making tool.*

**Thirdly**, the *language* used when addressing your boss is different. In Spain, one should never say “no” to the manager. Instead you should use indirect language and say “this may be difficult”, “it will be a challenge”, etc. as a substitute for saying “no” or “this will be a problem”. These examples stand in accordance with two theories. The first one is power distance; the reluctance to contradict your boss and that the subordinates expect to be told what to do by their boss. The second is Hall’s (1989) and Gesteland’s (2002) theories about high- and low-context communication. It is clear that in Spain you use high-context communication; you do not communicate the meaning explicitly, but rather use indirect language.

Why is this matter important for the expatriate? To begin with, the Spanish manager may be offended if you use a direct language with him, for instance by responding with a solely “no”. He will feel offended because he will think you are disrespectful. He expects you to respect him due to his higher position in the hierarchical structure.

Furthermore, another theoretical approach can explain his reaction. The manager expects you to be indirect and convey your message implicitly. This is the theory about high and low context, where you
use an indirect or direct language respectively. The use of different contexts implies a great risk of misunderstandings. Spaniards use indirect language and takes for granted that you do the same. Similarly, the Swedes use a direct language and expect the counterpart to do the same. In addition, this is something which is applicable to all kinds of conversations, not only at work.

- Pay attention to the context rather than to the words the Spaniard uses. You will have to “read between the lines” in a conversation with Spaniards, due to their use of indirect language.
- Be careful in how you express yourself. Try to embed the words in the context and use less direct language, in order to avoid offending your Spanish counterpart.

The three differences within the organizational dimension discussed above were confirmed by both theory and the expatriates’ experiences. They show that the Swedish and Spanish ways of structuring their organizations are not the same. Two things are important to keep in mind. The first thing is that neither the hierarchical nor the egalitarian organizational structure is preferable over the other. Both have their strengths, as Hofstede (2001) pointed out, and the expatriate should be careful in being judgmental in this sense. The second thing is that we are only studying expatriates in multinational companies. One of the interviewees did not experience any differences in the organizational structure between the countries. Also, two of the interviewees’ company (Yoigo) intended to create a Nordic organizational culture in Spain. We interpret this as an indication of that multinational companies tend to have an international atmosphere. At all the interviewees’ working places, there were several different nationalities, which is a contributing factor to the international milieu.

On the other hand, how could it be a pure Spanish working culture if the company is multinational and the employees come from different countries? The Spanish (national) culture will of course influence the organization since it is situated in Spain; the organization becomes a part of the society. We believe that the contrasts for an expatriate are sharper in local organizations in Spain than in multinationals in Spain. Hence, there are differences for expatriates in multinationals, but the cultural shock could have been worse if the expatriate would have started to work for a local company.

International companies that have similar organizational structures in different countries will make it easier for expatriates to adapt - they will not have to cope with sharp contrasts within the company, as was the case for Tanja. Or, providing the Swedish expatriate with this knowledge about cultural organizational differences before departure will increase his cultural competence. This will facilitate the acquisition of cultural skills and the adaptation process, and therefore also diminish the culture shock.
5.2.2. SMALL TALK BEFORE MEETINGS

There are different perceptions about small talk before meetings. On one hand, the theory claims that the Spanish people have longer small talks before meeting, as a warming up. As seen in the frame of reference, Spain is more relationship-focused than Sweden. Oppositely, as one of the few deal-focused countries, the Swedish culture does not put much emphasis on small talk before meetings. On the other hand, the interviewees’ experiences differ; some experienced small talk was more frequently used in Spain. Others found it “pretty much the same as in Sweden”.

This is the only aspect where the theory differs from the empirical data. One reason for this incoherence can be that the frame of reference is getting old and does not reflect reality adequately. Spain has changed in the last decades. The different experiences of the expatriates can be interpreted as indications of this change due to the Spanish history. Earlier, the Spaniards were even more relationship-focused compared to today. This is shown in the appraisal of for instance long lunches and small talk. The change in the Spanish society, the convergence towards Western values and customs make the old ways diminish, while the new ways gain more importance. Since the changing process is ongoing, the old way has not yet completely disappeared, and may therefore have influenced the interviewees’ answers.

Why then, is it important for the expatriate to be familiar with the use of small talk before meetings in Spain? Nevertheless, apart from being the only aspect that lacks coherence between theoretical and empirical data, this might be the least important aspect of the relevant differences we have found, since it is not crucial for the adaptation process. Yet, it can still imply annoyance for the Swede. Furthermore, small talk before meetings can also be connected to the time dimension; the Swede will feel unnecessary time is spent on small talk since he counts every minute and has the whole day scheduled. This may stress and annoy him.

✓ Small talk before meetings is used more extensively than in Sweden.

5.2.3. EFFICIENCY AND WORKING TIME

As we have seen in the theoretical and empirical parts, Spaniards have longer working days than Swedes. Why is it so? We can connect this to several cultural aspects: time perception, deal- and relationship-focus, masculine values, and the Spanish history. These will be analyzed below. Then, the implications for the expatriate in this respect will be examined.

To begin with, as we have seen in the empirical part, employees in the very monochronic Sweden expect to go home when the clock strikes five (when their day is supposed to end, according to their agenda). The polychronic Spaniard does not count the worked hours. This can be explained by that the Spaniard does not value time in the same way as Swedes do – working eleven hours a day instead of eight does not make a very big difference to him.
Another contributing factor to long working days is that it is less important to work as efficiently as in Sweden. In Spain, it is important to be at your job, and to take care of your relations, which you do by coffee-breaks and chit-chatting. This is also reflected in literature by the theories about deal- and relationship-focused cultures. Since relationships – and not time – are in focus, cultivating them is pivotal, while the productivity comes in second hand.

A further connection to the working time and efficiency can be made with feminine and masculine values. As concluded, the Spaniards do not value the efficiency like the Swedes do. It is not important to be efficient, since the job often is only seen as a way to get money, which is a typical characteristic of the masculine culture. In Sweden, on the other hand, you want to work efficiently, i.e. do as much as possible, as good as possible, as quickly as possible. You want to make a good impression by making a display of your accomplishments, especially if you are new at work. You want to show that you are ambitious and effective. You do the best at your job so that you can go home with a clean conscious when the clock strikes five. This is because the Swede highly appraises his spare time. These characteristics have been explored in the frame of reference, and are some of the feminine cultural values. You work in order to live, which indicates that people in feminine cultures, like the Swedish, emphasize the importance of their leisure time. Swedes want to finish their working day quickly so they have time to work out, paint the house, see their family, etc.

Besides, in Sweden, you are often associated to your job. What you do for a living is important, because for many Swedes the job is a central part of their identities. This is what Jesper, one of the three interviewees, meant by that the second question you ask a Swede is where he works or what he does for a living. The work is an important part of your identity and much emphasis is put on making a career. In Spain, on the contrary, the job is basically seen as a function to get money. Importance is not given to where you work or for which company.

Furthermore, we mean that to some extent efficiency and working time can be explained by the Spanish history. Just a few decades ago, Spain was self-sufficient dictatorship, with values dissimilar to the capitalistic ones. Back in these times the women stayed home, taking care of the house and children while the men had to provide for the household. In order to earn enough money, it was necessary to work many hours. We believe that some of these values still are apparent in the today’s Spain. This might be a reason for the eleven-hour working day.

Moreover, as one of the interviewee experienced that Spain is divided into a new and an old culture. We see this as an indicator of that the eleven-hour working day will decrease over time for two reasons. Firstly, after the death of Franco, Spain has been converging towards the Western standards. More efficient working days have become more important in the society. Secondly, this has also led to that women in Spain have started to integrate in the labor market instead of being housewives. If a couple decides to have a family, it will be difficult to take care of the infant if both parents are working eleven hours a day.
Then, how will the fact that Spaniards work more hours and are generally less efficient affect the Swedish expatriate? When going to Spain, the expatriate will need to re-estimate his values of the work, i.e. efficiency at the work is not everything. It is important to take care of the relationships, more than it is in Sweden. It can be frustrating for a Swede to experience inefficiency within the Spanish organization. Normally, for a Swede who has moved to Spain in order to work for his company, the job is important. But working eleven efficient hours will eventually burn him out. Moreover, the identity will have to be anchored in other ways than in the job, since the Spaniard will not judge you based on your career.

- To some extent, the expatriate has to accept and learn to cope with the concepts of “mañana, mañana”, siesta and coffee breaks. Relationships are more important than efficiency.
- In Spain, the job is not a central part of your identity.

5.3. **TIME DIMENSION**

In this section we will analyze how the Swedish expatriates experienced Spaniards’ time perception and compare it to existing theory. Are Spaniards actually late? How and why is it important with schedules, agendas and punctuality for both Swedish and Spanish people? Then we will see what implications this have for the expatriate.

5.3.1. **TIME PERCEPTION**

According to the frame of reference, Swedes are very monochronic. They like to schedule their days and activities tightly and do not leave much space for unexpected occasions. To the monochronic Swedes, schedules and carefully planned agendas are part of everyday life. This was supported by the interviews. Just as one interviewee described it; Swedes divide their day in slots. This is accordance with Gesteland’s (2002) theory about the monochronic Swedes and slots in their plans. Moreover, punctuality is highly valued in the Swedish culture. In Sweden there is a direct connection between punctuality and respect. Being late is often equal to being disrespectful. Swedes are rather five or ten minutes early just to be sure not being late.

Spaniards, on the other hand, are polychronic and leave agendas open for spontaneity and unexpected occurrences. This is also confirmed by the interviewees. They share the perception that the Spaniards apprehend time as fluid. The Spaniards do not schedule their day in the same way as Swedes do since they see time as something approximate. There is no connection between punctuality and respect in Spain.

What difference does it make for a Swedish expatriate if the Spaniards have a polychronic time perception? Well, it can lead to a great culture shock if he is not well prepared. Behaving according to the monochronic values in Spain will probably lead to frustration. Moreover, if the Swede is not aware of his monochronic frame of reference, there is a risk of assuming that the Spaniards will share his values and behave similarly. An exemplification: the Swede will be in time (or even early) for an appointment
and is most likely to expect the same from the Spaniard. Since the Spaniard has a fluid time perspective, he will probably not show up in time. Thus, the Swede will be annoyed and feel disrespected. This is confirmed in both the theoretical and empirical part. “In time”; here it is crucial to be aware of the Swedish point of view. Because notice, it is “in time” for the Swede. But what does “in time” mean to the Spaniard?

We find two ways of analyzing this. On the one hand, it is indeed only a matter of acceptable range of delay. Starting from this point of view, with a wider acceptable range of delay, the Spaniard is actually in time, being fifteen minutes “late”. On the other hand, it can be interpreted as in the theory; the Spaniard is late, but since time is approximate for him, it is not his concern. It does not bother him to be late since he does not measure time that accurately.

Irrespective of the reason, the Swede perceives the Spaniard’s delay as disrespectful. Moreover, if the Swede mentions something about the delay, the Spaniard on the contrary will find this rude and offending. Hence one should aim for a deeper understanding of the Spaniards’ time perception in order to avoid this typical culture shock. This will help the expatriate in adapting to the Spanish culture.

✓ Do not waste time and energy in getting upset with the Spaniards “delay”. It is nothing personal; rather try to understand his fluid time perception.
✓ A tip: bring a book or some unfinished work to the next appointment if you are not able to adapt to the fluid time culture.

5.3.2. CONNECTION BETWEEN SCHEDULES AND PUNCTUALITY

Further on, we are able to distinguish a close connection between scheduling and punctuality. If you, as a Swede, are used to scheduling your entire day – and expect the people around you to do the same – of course you will be frustrated if someone arrives late to the morning meeting, since this will affect and delay the rest of your day. In Sweden you can schedule the whole day since you count on that everyone else will do the same.

On the other hand, as long as the polychronic values are the cultural norm it is possible to live accordingly, since it is acceptable by everyone in the society to arrive late. You will not delay another person’s schedule. It is important to remember that in polychronic cultures, focus is not on time, but rather on relationships. Thus, being late is a minor issue. When going to Spain on an expatriate mission, it is important to keep this in mind, just to avoid unnecessary confusion and frustration.

✓ There is a close connection between schedules and punctuality. Since there are no rigid agendas, it is not important to be punctual.
5.4. **COMMUNICATION DIMENSION**

Communication and language is a central part of a culture. But they are not equal to the culture. Hence, even if you can speak Spanish, it does not automatically mean that you know and understand the Spanish culture. Moreover, as the interviewees agreed, knowing Spanish is a prerequisite to integrate in the society. What else, within the dimension of communication (except for knowing Spanish), could affect the possibility to enhance the expatriates’ acculturation process?

5.4.1. **TONE OF VOICE**

Theory and reality are congruent in the matter of communication. The typical Spaniard is expressive, i.e. talks loudly, uses body language, stands close to you and so forth. The Swedes tend to interpret this behavior as exaggerated and out of control, while the Spaniard perceives the reserved Swede as uninterested and cold.

What implications will the Spaniard’s emotionally expressive behavior have for the expatriate? If a Swede raises his voice it is probable that he is angry. No wonder that a Swede can be startled when the Spaniard behaves like this. An unprepared Swede will interpret the Spaniard’s behavior as exaggerated and inconsistent. But this is not the case in Spain. Seeing it from a Spanish point of view, this behavior shows interest. A high tone of voice is used in the daily language; it is a natural part of the communication and emphasizes engagement.

✓ Do not be offended by the emotionally expressive Spaniard’s raised tone of voice – he is only committed to the conversation.

5.4.2. **INTERRUPTIONS**

Further on, as we have seen in theory and from the interviews, interruptions are interpreted differently in the two countries. Interruptions in Spain are also seen as signs of engagement and interest. You have to interrupt to participate in the conversation. A scenario could be that the Spaniard continues talking, while waiting for the Swede to interrupt, and the Swede continues waiting for the Spaniard to stop talking so that he can start. If you remain quiet the Spaniard will think he is boring you and that you are ignorant to what he has to say.

Why is it important for the expatriate to know about these cultural differences in the use of conversational overlaps? To begin with, in Spain, interruptions are indications of interest. The Spaniard expects the counterpart to interrupt if he is interested in the conversation, while the Swede feels he cannot “get a word in edgeways” unless the Spaniard stops talking. The other way around; the Swede will find the Spaniard rude since he frequently interrupts and will feel insulted. The Spaniard wants to show that he is interested, while the Swede feels insulted by the interruptions. As said earlier, cultural skills can only be acquired at place, i.e. you learn when and how to interrupt in Spain, but having
competence, i.e. knowing the Spanish way of communicating will make it a lot easier and eliminate frustrations that arise due to lack of knowledge of the differences in communication.

✔️ Remember that in Spain, interruptions have nothing to do with. In fact, by conversational overlaps you show interest and engagement.

5.5. **Social Dimension**

How easy is it to integrate into the Spanish society and why do people act as if they have no respect for others in the traffic? In this section, we will analyze the cultural differences in how people socialize and show respect.

5.5.1. **Social Life**

The general opinion of the interviewees is that Spanish culture is easy to acclimatize to and that there are not so many differences that are hard to handle. Moreover, the social life for a Spaniard includes many persons with the philosophy “the more the merrier”. This is what has been explained by the theory about integrated and isolated cultures and was confirmed by one of the interviewees. The integrated person has a bigger private zone with a lot of friends included, while in the private zone of the isolated person is much smaller and includes just a handful of trusted individuals.

The interviewees have realized that in Spain you meet up and hang out in the street. In Sweden you spend much time at home, inviting friends to come over, or renovating and improving the house. In our opinion, this could to some extent be explained by the characteristics of the different climates in Sweden and Spain; it is more pleasant to be outside when the weather is good, and vice versa, when the weather is bad people prefer to stay inside.

How will the integrated Spanish culture affect the Swedish expatriate? To begin with, to a Swede it might feel awkward and impersonal to always gather around in the street. Secondly, it can be difficult to integrate with Spaniards in the beginning, since they are not comfortable outside their private zone. But once you gain their trust and get inside the private zone, you can count on them as your friends, according to theory. However, the fact that the Spaniards socialize in the streets and in big groups could lead to, just as some of the interviewees confirmed, that they are open and easily approachable.

✔️ The Spaniard lives much of his social life outside and has a big private zone, which you will enter when you gain his trust.
5.5.2. Respect

Respect is a recurrent theme in almost all the cultural dimensions, for instance when it comes to punctuality (time dimension), and respect to your boss by not leaving the job before him (organization dimension). Apparently, in the interviewees’ opinion, you show respect in different ways in Sweden compared to Spain. In Sweden you show respect by not bothering others around you. Everyone is shown an equal amount of respect. You care about where you park your car, what the neighbors will think if you play loud music, etc. In Spain, respect is only shown to the people you know and care about, those who are within the private zone. It is not important to be respectful to strangers.

We can relate this to Trompenaars’s (1994) theory of universalist and particularist cultures. As his study concluded: Swedes are universalists and believe that the same rules apply to everyone. Therefore, the Swedes show everyone equal respect, whether they know the person or not. Particularist people, like the Spanish, tend to value relationships higher and do not apply the same regulations in all situations, they judge the specific situation based on the present circumstances.

In what way is the difference in respect important to a Swedish expatriate? He needs to learn not to feel disrespected by strangers in Spain. Showing respect in a “Swedish way” will not be appreciated in Spain since they do not have the same definition of how to show and what respect is. Nevertheless, of course the most fundamental respect, moral values and norms among us humans (for instance that stealing is not accepted or that you cannot take another person’s life) are equal in both countries.

In the cultural perspectives described and analyzed in this thesis, the interpretation of “being respectful” differ in Sweden and Spain. Therefore, as a Swedish expatriate in Spain, it is important not to be offended by some behavior that you would have been in Sweden.

✓ Respect is not always defined in the same way in Spain as in Sweden. Do not feel disrespected if for instance a stranger seems indifferent.

5.6. Discussion of the Results

In this section, we will discuss the results obtained. We do this in order to show that we are aware of which variables have influenced our results. We are aware of that using other variables could have changed the results obtained. Variables that may have influenced the results will be analyzed in this section.

To begin with, as stated in chapter one, culture shocks and adaptation processes are individual experiences. Each person has his specific background and characteristics. The interviewed expatriates have different previous experiences of Spain. For instance, one of the interviewees has been there for touristic purposes and one has a Spanish wife. We mean that this affects the expatriates’ possibilities to acculturate to the Spanish culture, and the way the culture is perceived. Of course, different backgrounds give different prerequisites for adapting to the new culture.
We know that this study is built on personal experiences and reflections (full objectivity could not have been accomplished in this qualitative study, as explained in the methodology). Therefore, if other expatriates would have been interviewed, the results could have been slightly different, due to their subjective reflections.

Another aspect to be aware of is the fact that the interviewees’ expatriate assignments had different lengths. They have thus been in Spain for different amounts of time. One of the interviewees worked for half a year, while the others have been on an expatriate mission for up to four years. Moreover, two of them have already returned to Sweden. This might imply they have processed their experiences in a different way compared to those who are still in Spain.

Moreover, another influential variable that may have affected the result we believe is gender. Four of our five interviewees are men. We believe men and women perceive specific situations differently. For example, women might be more sensitive to rigid authoritarian managers. Therefore, we believe if interviewing only women, the results could have been different within the dimensions of organization, communication, and social. We believe that within the time dimension, the results are not dependent on gender.

Furthermore, we have interviewed expatriates within the high-tech business only. As explained in the methodology, we do not consider the results too dependent on the line of business. Rather, the position within the organization is what may influence the results. We mean that the results obtained would have been similar interviewing Swedish expatriates in other trades as long as the expatriate has a high position. We assert that since expatriates often have key positions, they have another influence and power compared to other persons lower in the hierarchy. Therefore they will perceive for instance the cultural aspects within the organization dimension in a certain way. It is not sure that an employee in a lower position would have experienced these in the same way.

Another variable to keep in mind is the corporate culture which is most likely to influence the expatriates’ experiences. For instance, we interviewed two persons from Yoigo. At their working place the aim was to create a Scandinavian business culture. We believe this is a factor that might have influenced the results obtained.

As a final reflection, we have only interviewed persons working in Madrid. Many large, multinational companies are located there, which is reasonable since it is the capital city of Spain. We believe that if we had interviewed expatriates who work in other regions than Madrid, the results could have been different due to cultural contrasts between different regions in Spain.
5.7. **Check-List**

In this final chapter in the thesis analysis, we will present a summarizing check-list of the cultural differences discovered in previous sections. The thrust of this check-list is to increase the expatriates’ cultural competence in order to facilitate the acquisition of cultural skills in Spain and thus make the cultural adjustment process smoother.

**Check-List**

**Organization**

- Prepare yourself mentally for the hierarchical and authoritarian Spanish manager. It is probable that you will experience a greater power distance between you and him.

- Be aware of that Spanish meetings are being held to inform and make decisions, not to discuss the subjects. Consensus is not widely recognized as a decision making tool.

- Pay attention to the context rather than to the words the Spaniard uses. You will have to “read between the lines” in a conversation with Spaniards, due to their use of indirect language.

- Be careful in how you express yourself. Try to embed the words in the context and use less direct language, in order to avoid offending your Spanish counterpart.

- Small talk before meetings is used more extensively than in Sweden.

- To some extent, the expatriate has to accept and learn to cope with the concepts of “mañana, mañana”, siesta and coffee breaks. Relationships are more important than efficiency.

- In Spain, the job is not a central part of your identity.
Time

✓ Do not waste time and energy in getting upset with the Spaniards “delay”. It is nothing personal; rather try to understand his fluid time perception.

✓ A tip: bring a book or some unfinished work to the next appointment if you are not able to adapt to the fluid time culture.

✓ There is a close connection between schedules and punctuality. Since there are no rigid agendas, it is not important to be punctual.

Communication

✓ Do not be offended by the emotionally expressive Spaniard’s raised tone of voice – he is only committed to the conversation.

✓ Remember that in Spain, interruptions have nothing to do with. In fact, by conversational overlaps you show interest and engagement.

Social

✓ The Spaniard lives much of his social life outside and has a big private zone, which you will enter when you gain his trust.

✓ Respect is not always defined in the same way in Spain as in Sweden. Do not feel disrespected if for instance a stranger seems indifferent.
6. **CONCLUSIONS**

In this chapter we will answer the research question and conclude our findings. To make it easier for the reader, we will once again return to the question that was presented in the first chapter. The conclusions below will consist of relevant cultural differences for the Swedish expatriate in the four dimensions we have studied.

**Which are the relevant cultural differences a Swedish expatriate can encounter in Spain on an expatriate assignment?**

Even though the differences between Sweden and Spain are not huge, they still exist and one should not underestimate them. Culture shocks set in due to ignorance of the new culture and of how to behave in it. By preparing and increasing the cultural competence before departure, one can reduce the shock and fasten the acquisition of cultural skills. This will in turn lead to a faster and smoother acculturation process for the Swedish expatriate in Spain. The relevant cultural differences that a Swedish expatriate can encounter in Spain on an expatriate assignment are divided into four dimensions (organization, time, communication, and social) and will hereafter be presented accordingly.

Within the *organization dimension* we can conclude that Spanish organizations are more hierarchical than the Swedish. Thus, the expatriate can experience problems with having an authoritarian manager because it stands in contrast to the Swedish managerial style. Moreover, the Spanish idea of meetings is to inform the employees or make decisions, instead of discussing and agreeing upon a solution by consensus, like is the case in Sweden. Also, indirect language is being used. In a conversation with Spaniards, the expatriate has to pay attention to the context and read between the lines, rather than listen to the words used explicitly, in order to avoid misunderstandings. It is equally important for the expatriate to be careful in using a direct language when speaking, since the Spanish counterpart may interpret this as offending. Furthermore, small talk before meetings is used more extensively in Spain than in Sweden. Moreover, efficiency is not highly prioritized and long working days are normal.

In the *time dimension*, the main cultural differences are to be found in perception of time, schedules and punctuality. The major difference within this dimension is the way time is perceived in Spain. For the Spaniard time is something fluid or approximate which is not measured as accurately as in Sweden. Therefore, a Spaniard is often late from a Swedish point of view. The fluid time perception results in less rigid schedules and agendas, and the importance of punctuality is minor compared to in Sweden.

In the *communication dimension* we found that the Spaniard is emotionally expressive in conversations. He uses a high tone of voice and is passionate in his way of speaking. Another characteristic of the expressive culture is that conversational overlaps (interruptions) are frequently used. For the Swedish expatriate these interruptions are seen as rude and disrespectful but in Spain it is a way of showing engagement and commitment to the subject.
Within the *social dimension* we can firstly conclude that Spaniards socialize outside, preferably in big companies with persons who are included in their extensive private zone. The Spaniard cares only about showing respect to the ones within his private zone i.e. the ones he know and cherish.

By knowing about these relevant cultural differences, the Swedish expatriate will have pivotal cultural competence. This will facilitate his acquisition of cultural skills in Spain and hence make the culture shock less impactful. This, in turn, will make the process of acculturation more smooth, and hence provide against expatriate failure.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX I – TRANSLATED INTERVIEW GUIDE

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Make this clear before the interview starts:

Inform about:

- Short introduction of us and our thesis
- Purpose: investigate how the Spanish culture was perceived
- Anonymity is provided if the person/company wants?
- Ask for approval of recording the interview
- We will ask open-ended questions, which the person can to tell us more about
- We will start by some general questions about the individual and his time in Spain, and then move on to more specific questions about the Spanish culture
- If there is something which the interviewee is reluctant to answer, it is acceptable to say no

Interview Questions:

1. Can you please tell us shortly about your background – where are you from and where have you worked before?
2. Could you tell us shortly about your company?
3. Title/position at home and abroad?
4. For how long time have you been in Spain and for how long will you stay? Type of contract?
5. Did you or your company do anything to prepare yourself for moving abroad and/or for the new culture?
6. Which is the corporate language? Did you take any language classes before moving there or did you already know Spanish?
7. In general, what do you think of the Spanish/Swedish culture?
8. What do you think about Spaniards/Swedes? How do you think they are? At the working place?
9. Do/did you perceive any differences in the way people work/the culture/in general in comparison to at home?
We will now move on to more specific questions about the culture

- How did you experience the Spanish organization?
  o In comparison to the Swedish?
  o Hierarchical/formal?
- How would you describe the relation to your colleagues or managers in Spain?
  o Different from at home?
- What does a normal working day look like in Spain?
- How are meetings conducted?
  o Small talk?
- How do you perceive Spaniards at meetings?
  o Difference from at home?
- How important are rules and relations in Spain?
  o Difference from at home?
- How do/did you interpret the Spaniard’s perception of time?
- How important did you interpret punctuality was/is in Spain?
- How do the Spaniards express themselves?
- In general, what is the communication like?
- How do you hang out and socialize in Spain?
- Did you find it easy to connect with the Spanish people?
  o Easy to make friends and “be one of them”?

Finally:

1. Which are the biggest/most important differences between the Spanish and the Swedish cultures?
2. Is there anything you would like to add?
3. Would it be OK to call you back in case of more questions?
4. Would you like a copy of the thesis?
Appendix II – Original Interview Guide

Semistrukturerade intervjufrågor

Att klargöra innan intervjun börjar:

Informera om:

- Kort information om oss och uppsatsen
- Syftet: att ta reda på hur den Spanska kulturen upplevs
- Anonymitet kan ges om personen/företaget vill?
- Be om tillåtelse att spela in intervjun
- Vi ställer öppna frågor som personen gärna kan berätta lite mer utöver, runtomkring
- Vi kommer att börja med lite allmänna frågor om personen och dennes tid i Spanien, för att sedan komma in på mer specifika frågor om den spanska kulturen
- Är det någon fråga som personen inte vill svara på så går det bra

Intervjufrågorna:

1. Kan du berätta lite kort om din bakgrund – var kommer du ifrån och var har du jobbat tidigare?
2. Kan du berätta lite kort om ditt företag?
3. Arbetstitel i hemlandet och utlandet?
4. Hur länge har du varit i Spanien och hur länge ska du vara? Typ av kontrakt?
5. Gjorde du eller ditt företag något för att förbereda dig inför utlandsvistelsen eller kulturen?
7. Vad tycker du om den spanska/svenska kulturen?
9. Upplever eller upplevde du några olikheter i arbetssätt/kultur/över lag jämfört med hemma?
Nu kommer vi att komma in på lite mer specifika frågor om kultur

- Hur upplevde du den spanska organisationsstukturen?
  - Jämfört med den svenska?
  - Hierarkisk/formell?
- Hur skulle du beskriva relationen till dina kollegor och chefer i Spanien?
  - Skillnad från hemma?
- Hur ser en vanlig arbetsdag ut i Spanien?
- Hur går det till vid möten?
  - Småprat?
- Hur upplever du att spanjorer är på möten?
  - Skillnad från hemma?
- Hur viktigt är det med regler och relationer i Spanien?
  - Skillnad från hemma?
- Hur upplever du att spanjoren ser på tid?
- Hur viktigt upplevde du att det var med punklighet i Spanien?
- Hur tycker du att spanjorerna uttrycker sig?
- Hur är kommunikationen generellt sett?
- Hur umgås man i Spanien?
- Upplevde du att det var lätt att skaffa vänner i Spanien?
  - Lätt att ”komma in i gänget”?

Avslutningsvis:

1. Vilka är de största/viktigaste skillnaderna mellan spanska o svenska kulturerna?
2. Finns det något som du skulle vilja tillägga?
3. Är det ok att ringa tillbaka vid ytterligare frågor?
4. Vill du ta del av resultatet?