Cultural differences in international projects

A research study at Ericsson

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Abstract

This report is about the employers at Ericsson Microwave Systems' experience in international projects; what they have had difficulties with and how to improve the collaboration. Culture is something that one is not aware of, but is visible for someone outside that culture. Emphasize have been on Hofstede's cultural dimensions *power distance*, how power is distributed, *individualism*, how people feel they are on their own, *masculinity*, how gender roles are distributed, and *uncertainty avoidance* how threatened people feel to uncertain situations. Hall's high- and low context distinction and monochronic- and polychronic time have been used together with the individualism dimension. Data have been collected with face-to-face interviews. The interviews have showed that the more differences there were among the dimensions, the more difficulties and frustration the interviewees have experienced. The most important factor in international collaboration is to be aware of the cultural differences without judging them. To be more effective and efficient, it is important to establish trust already at the beginning of the project and have clear goal-, purpose-, task- and role-descriptions. To reduce misunderstandings, it is also important to be clear on what is said and make sure that one understands each other.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Multinational collaborations can bring together professionals with very different views of the world. Worldviews influence how people react to uncertainty and make decisions. Worldviews shape anticipations and coordinate actions. When multinational groups differ in their view, it can lead to conflict and be counterproductive during complex, structured, and high-stakes decision making.

Ericsson Microwave Systems, EMW, have had an increasing content of international collaborations within project the recent years, with both success and failure in handling cultural diversity. The collaboration will increase the coming years, and it is important to be aware of these diversities to be able to handle them in a successful manner.

1.2. Problem discussion

There can be many reasons for failure in international collaboration. The focus has been on to find out what these barriers have been; in what areas people from EMW in Sweden have experienced difficulties.

1.3. Purpose

The aim with the assignment was to give an answer on *what* goes wrong in international collaborations and *how* to eliminate these failures. The purpose is, by recognizing the differences, be prepared for cultural diversities and act upon that.

The goal with the assignment is to give an understanding on what barriers there are in fulfilment of effective and efficient international collaborations, and what might facilitate that kind of work. Focus is on collaborations among colleagues in Sweden and colleagues, partners, customers and suppliers in respective countries: Italy, France and Greece.

2. Theoretical frame of reference

Geographically distributed teams have more difficulties than collocated teams (Hinds & Mortensen, 2005). Different worldviews, values, beliefs, and goal priorities and behavioral norms, lead people to define situations differently, see issues differently, and have different ideologies and political interests. Differences in physical context or locale can result in members having different information, assumptions, preferences and constraints. Both personal attributes and physical location impact preferences and behavior (Cramton & Hinds, 2005). By understanding team members' different interaction styles and perspectives, team members are more able to interact more effectively and better leverage their respective skills (DiStefano & Maznevski, 2000, cited in Cramton & Hinds, 2005, p. 239). All these are barriers in intercultural communication and must be overcome for a successful collaboration. This can be possible by understanding the background and culture of the other person.

2.1. Culture

> "We interact most effective with people when we can see the world as they do.
> This allows communication and effective coordinated action. Problems arise when
> we assume that others interpret and react as we do" (Klein, 2005, p. 245).

Culture is about how people are expected to act in social context; it is something learned and derives from one's social environment (Hofstede 1997; Hofstede *et al.*, 2002) and includes traditions that tell "what has worked" (Triandis, 1994). Culture can be defined as "*that which distinguishes on group of people from another*" (Hofstede *et al.*, 2002, p. 34).

When we communicate, we attach meaning to messages we construct and transmit to others and we interpret the messages we receive from others (Gudykunst & Nishida, 2001). Different cultures present ideas in different sequences and solves problems in different ways and that can lead to the messages to be misinterpreted (Loosemore & Lee, 2002). The problem in intercultural communication is intensified since the people involved do not speak the same language, have been socialized into their respective cultures in different ways, value different ways, value different ideals, regard different everyday behaviours as perfectly appropriate, and have different loyalties to groups, communities, and nations (Brislin, 1980).

We often think that a person from a different culture is more similar to us than he or she actually is and that leads to misunderstandings. To be effective in cross-cultural interaction is it important to recognize the cultural diversity without judging it (Adler, 1986). One can be prepared for intercultural meetings (Brislin, 1980). When

meeting someone from a different culture, it is good if one can make a "first-best-guess" on that person's cultural background to eliminate the misunderstandings that might occur and make the interaction more effective (Triandis & Singelis, 1998). *Judging* cultural differences as good or bad can lead to inappropriate, offensive, racist, sexist, ethnocentric attitudes and behaviours, but *recognizing* differences does not (Adler, 1986). It is important not to create stereotypes and stuck up on these, because it would create a barrier in the communication process. Stereotyping influence how we process information; we select information that fits the stereotype and reject information that is inconsistent with it and by that selectively perceive the messages in a predetermined negative way (Triandis, 1994; Loosemore & Lee, 2002). People rely on stereotypes when the anxiety is very high and can therefore not communicate effectively (Gudykunst & Nishida, 2001).

There are differences between national culture and organizational culture (Hofstede, 1997). Organizational culture clearly relate to characteristics of national cultures (Brock, 2005; Deshpandé & Farley, 2004). People's behaviour in the work situation is strongly affected by their previous experiences in family and in school. Expectations and fears about the boss are the projections of the experiences with the father or mother and the teachers (Hofstede, 1994). It is therefore important to know background information on schools and families to have a greater understanding on ones culture. Understanding national culture helps to understand the preferences that employees may express, the position taken by management and the way these differences may be resolved (Shore & Cross, 2005). Below is an extract from Shore & Cross (2005, p. 59), which describes how different cultures have different preferences on how to work and how to be managed.

> Research groups in Japan tended to favor a strong central team that would work closely with its Home Team. This was expressed as a strong need for interdependence. In contrast, research groups in the US expressed a preference to work more independently of the Joint Central Team. These groups did not feel the need to confer with the Joint Central Team on a routine basis. The French preferred to have top people involved. They expressed a preference for strong leadership that would place the home team in regular contact with the Joint Central Team.

A membership of an organization is usually partial and voluntary, whereas a membership of a nation is something more permanent and not always voluntary (Hofstede, 1997). The national culture, one's *values*, is not something written down; it is profound and often unconscious, they are rules on how we should behave and interact with others (Hofstede, 1989; Hope, 2004). It deals with things such as good/evil, dangerous/safe, natural/unnatural (Hofstede, 1989). It is an integrated whole and therefore difficult to see and change (Klein, 2005). We are often not aware of our own culture unless we come in contact with another one (Triandis, 1994). The organization's culture, one's *practices*, are visible to an outside observer and recognized by all, also themselves. They are the collective habits expressed in visible

things as dress, language and jargon, tea and coffee rituals, symbols and communication style (Hofstede 1989; 1997).

2.2. *Cultural dimensions*

Geert Hofstede's cross-national study is one of the most widely accepted and cited. When reading articles about cross-cultural research (e.g., Groschl & Doherty, 2005; Huff & Kelley, 2005; Swigger *et al*., 2004), national culture values (e.g., Bearden *et al*., 2006; Shore & Cross, 2005) or international/global issues (e.g., Flynn & Saladin, 2005; Hope, 2004) there are often cites to Hofstede's work and/or his dimensions. According to Sondergaard (1994, cited by Groschl & Doherty, 2005, p. 3), Hofstede's dimensions have been replicated and tested in many studies and projects and their validity and reliability have been confirmed in many cases (e.g., Merkin, 2006).

The research was made on the multinational company IBM during the years 1968-1972, involving 72 countries and 116 000 respondents from employers and employees. By comparing a large number of national cultures he discovered that they all had the same five basic problems in social life. He first came up with four dimensions: *power distance*, *individualism*, *masculinity* and *uncertainty avoidance*. Later he added the fifth dimension *long-term orientation*.

Emphasize will be on the first four dimensions, power distance, individualism, masculinity and uncertainty avoidance. The fifth dimension, long-term orientation, has been excluded since it is more valid and mostly found in East Asian countries (Hofstede *et al*., 2002; Hofstede, 1994) and there is too little, if none, data and information that describe the differences among countries in Western Europe. Also anthropologist Edward T. Hall's cultural distinction *high- and low context* cultures and *monochronic and polychronic time* assumptions, will be described, since these cultural distinctions have connection with individualism/collectivism (Triandis, 1994; Tubbs & Moss, 2000).

Power distance

Power distance is about how power is distributed. The core value for high power distance culture is *status* and for low power distance culture *equality between people* (Hofstede *et al*., 2002).

Power distance has roots in the family. In high power distance societies children are expected to be obedient toward their parents. Showing respect for parents and older is seen as a basic virtue and this remains through adulthood. In low power distance cultures, children are treated more or less as equals as soon as they are able to act. A child from a low power distance culture is allowed to say "no" to its parents. Formal respect is seldom shown. The goal of parental education is to let children take control of their own affairs as soon as they can (Hofstede, 1997).

Differences in power distance can also be seen in school. In societies high in power distance the educational process is teacher-centred; with the teacher initiating all communication. Students in classes only speak when they are invited to and the teacher is never contradicted or criticized. In low power distance societies, the teachers are expected to threat student as basic equals and expect to be treated as equals by the students. Students are expected to ask questions when they do not understand something, they argue with teachers and, express disagreement and criticisms in front of the teacher (Hofstede, 1997).

In countries with low power distance, such as USA, Sweden and Denmark, there is less dependence between less and more powerful people and the organization structure is more decentralized. In high power distance cultures, such as Mediterranean countries, less powerful people are dependent on more powerful ones and a more centralized organization structure exists (Hofstede, 1989). Employees of low power distance cultures prefer for a consultative style of decision making and the boss consults with the subordinates before reaching a decision. Employees of high power distance cultures are afraid of disagreeing with the boss and do not want a consultative boss, rather one that decides autocratically (Hofstede, 1997).

When making decisions, centralized organizations has the potential to isolate top management from the rest of the organization, which results in organizations failing to take advantage of capabilities at lower level (Krachenberg *et al.*, 1993, cited by Brock, 2005, p. 282). The lower ranking technical staffs might have the expertise to make the best decision, but differences in power distance might interfere with the use of expertise (Klein, 2005).

Managers from low power distance cultures meet with higher power distance abroad, but it is quite easy for them to adapt their style to the subordinates' greater need for dependency. A manager from a high power distance culture that comes to a culture were the power distance is extremely low, such as Sweden and Denmark, will feel uncomfortable and might feel they have lack of respect for their managerial privileges (Hofstede, 1989). A more decentralized organization structure increases the burden of making key decisions. A subordinate manager from a high power distance culture might associate making key decisions with role ambiguity stress and work overload stress (Joiner, 2000). People from high power distance cultures might therefore perform better in disempowered conditions where tasks are structured, information is more limited and responsibilities are explicit and few (Eylon & Au, 1999).

Powerful people from high power distance culture try to *look as impressive as possible* and have *a more authoritarian style* of communication (Hofstede, 1997). Powerful people from low power distance try to look less powerful than they are; hierarchy, power and status are downplayed, they emphasize and assume equality (Hofstede, 1997; Schneider & Barsoux, 1997).

The list below show the key differences between low and high power distance societies (Hofstede, 1997, p. 37).

Low power distance	High power distance
There should be and there is to some extent interdependence between less and more powerful people	Less powerful people should be dependent on the more powerful polarize people
Decentralization is popular	Centralization is popular
Subordinates expect to be consulted	Subordinated expect to be told what to do
The ideal boss is a resourceful democrat	The ideal boss is a benevolent autocrat or good father
Privileges and status symbols are frowned upon	Privileges and status symbols for managers are both expected and popular

Formality is all about status, hierarchies, power and respect (Gesteland, 2002, p. 46). Low power distance cultures are more informal and high power distance cultures more formal (Gesteland, 2002). According to Joiner (2000), an increase in formalization among high power distance managers is associated with reduced job stress, since an increase in formalization is related to reduced role conflict and reduced co-worker conflict.

Table 1 shows the power distance index for France, Greece, Italy and Sweden. France is high on power distance, Greece and Italy in the middle and Sweden low. The higher the differences are, the more risk is there for cultural misunderstandings.

Table 1. Power Distance Index values (Hofstede, 1997)

Power Distance Index, PDI		
	Score (of 100)	Rank (of 53)
Sweden	31	47/48
Italy	50	34
Greece	60	27/28
France	68	15/16

Power Distance Index, PDI
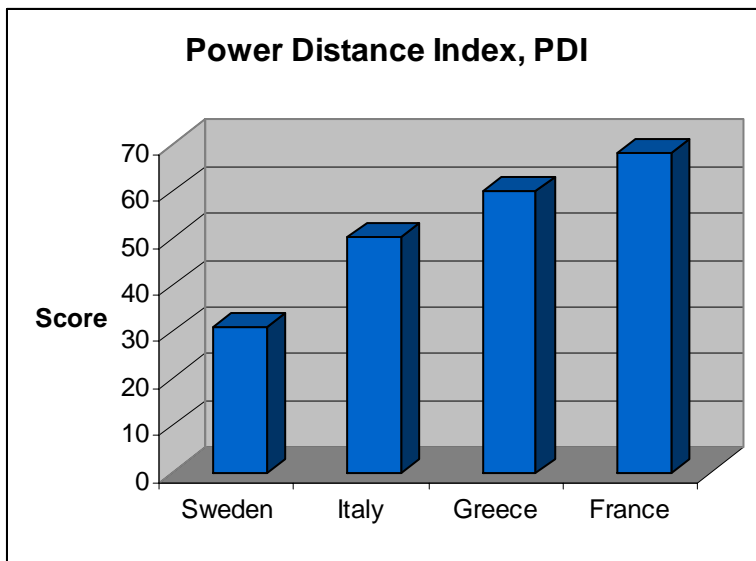
Individualism

Individualism is the degree on how people feel that they are "on their own", *individualism*, or belongs to a group, *collectivism.* Differences in individualism cause problems because they fundamentally affect the nature of relationships with employees and customers (Hofstede, 1989).

Collectivists think in terms of "we". The self, for a collectivist, is defined in terms of in-groups and personal opinions do not exist, they are predetermined by the group (Hofstede 1997; Triandis, 1994). People from collectivist societies feel *difficult to trust* and *communicate* with someone outside their in-group[1] (Hofstede, 1997). Individualists think in terms of "I". The self, for an individualist, is defined as an independent entity and give priority to their own personal goal (Triandis, 1994).

The in-group for a collectivist can consist of extended family, including parents, relatives, and sometimes even the whole country (Hofstede 1997; Triandis, 1994). The in-group for an individualist may consist only of nuclear family and very close friends (Hofstede 1997; Triandis, 1994). If there is no strong shared group identity, we create in-groups and out-groups within a team. Team members then, think in terms of "us-versus-them" and likely to evaluate other team members' (out-group) behaviours negatively (Cramton & Hinds, 2005; Hinds & Mortensen, 2005), since we process very easily information that is positive about the in-group and negative about the out-group (Triandis, 1994). Spontaneous communication contributes to shared identity (Hinds & Mortensen, 2005).

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[1]) Hofstede (1997, p. 261) have defined *in-group* as "A cohesive group which offers protection in exchange for loyalty and provides its members with a sense of identity".

In a collectivist society the personal relationship prevails over the task and should be established first (Hofstede, 1997), these cultures are *relationship-focused* (Gesteland, 2002). When a person from a collectivist society does business, he or she does not do it with a company, he or she does it with that person whom he or she has learned to know and trust (Hofstede, 1997). Collectivist may therefore require *more time and effort to develop trusting relationships* since they take that person to their in-group (Huff & Kelley, 2005). Individualists are more *deal-focused* and have a *higher initial trust for a wider range of partners* than collectivists (Gesteland, 2002; Huff & Kelley, 2005). Individualists tend to be friendly, but non-intimate toward a wide range of people outside the family (Triandis, 1997) and by that more able to develop trust for a wider range of partners than collectivists (Huff & Kelley, 2005).

The list below shows the key differences between collectivist and individualist societies (Hofstede, 1997, p. 67).

Collectivist	Individualist
People are born into extended families or other ingroups which continue to protect them in exchange for loyalty	Everyone grows up to look after him/herself and his/her immediate family only
Children learn to think in terms of "we"	Children learn to think in terms of "I"
Trespassing leads to shame and loss of face for self and group	Trespassing leads to guilt and loss of self-respect
Management is management of groups	Management is management of individuals
High-context communication	Low-context communication

Collectivist cultures, that also are high in power distance, make a greater use of centralization and autocratic leadership. This will result in companies less likely to foster sharing and open communication (Brock, 2005). Therefore, resource sharing will be more difficult when there are big differences in collectivism/individualism and power distance between companies.

Collectivists are more dependent on shame for social control than individualists. That means that "honour" and "loss of face" are more serious matter in the collectivist cultures. People in these cultures want to find out a lot about their opponent's need so as to satisfy as many of them as possible and will go to great lengths to avoid situations that may result in loss of face by their opponent (Triandis, 1994, p. 192). This can be seen in the negotiation. A research made by Gelfand & Christakopoulou (1999) about judgement biases in negotiations among Greek students (highly collectivist culture) and American students (highly individualist culture[2]), showed that even if the negotiations outcomes were the same for both parties, there were variations on how they interpreted the negotiation. The Americans were more focused to their own needs and interests. This made the Greek participants feel that their counterparts were not attentive to their concerns in the

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[2] USA scores 91 and ranks top on the individualist scale.

negotiations and by that was less satisfied with the outcome than their counterparts. The Greek participants were more satisfied in the negotiation when their counterpart had more understanding of their interest.

Individualism prevails in developed and Western countries and collectivism in less developed and Eastern countries (Hofstede, 1994). Table 2 shows the individualism index for France, Greece, Italy and Sweden. Sweden and France scores equal; both are high in individualism. Italy has also scored high on individualism, but according to Triandis (1997), the southern Italy is collectivist. Greece is low on individualism, that is, is a highly collectivistic culture.

Table 2. Individualism index values (Hofstede, 1997)

Individualism, IDV		
	Score (of 100)	Rank (of 53)
Italy	76	7
Sweden	71	10/11
France	71	10/11
Greece	35	30
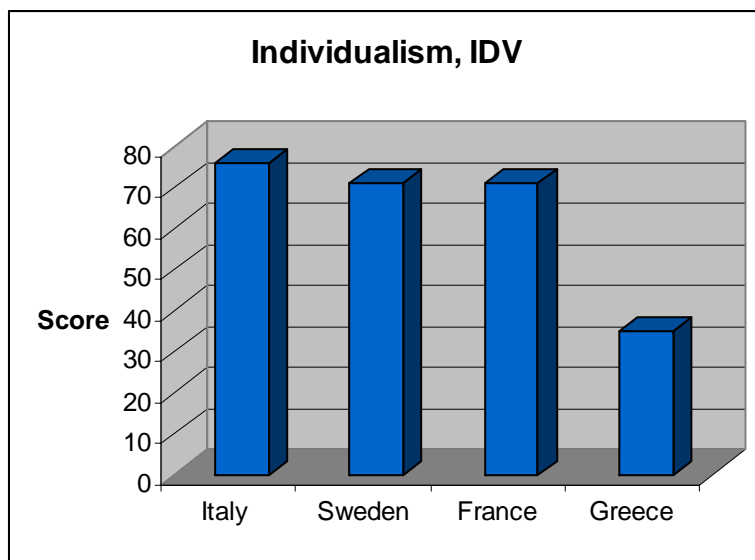
France is highly individualistic, but they are also more relationship-focused (Gesteland, 2002). This view is also supported by Hall & Hall (1990) where they are pointing out that it takes time to do business in France, but once the relationship is maintained then it could last for generations.

High- and low context. Different cultures have different sensitivities to the silent messages contained within a conversation (Loosemore & Lee, 2002). Hall (1981) distinguishes cultures being high-context or low-context. Sweden, France and Italy scored quite equal on the individualism index, but there are differences in the

"context-index". Scandinavian countries, as Sweden, are low-context cultures and Mediterranean cultures such as France, Italy and Greece are high-context cultures.

In low-context cultures emphasis is on *what* is said, in high-context cultures on *how* it is said (Triandis, 1994). Members from low-context cultures have *a more explicit communication style*; they emphasize verbal messages and the shared information (Tubbs & Moss, 2000) and distrust what is not said clearly (Triandis, 1994). High-context cultures are not as explicit, direct or clear as low-context cultures; the communication style in high-context cultures is implicit, they *do not like to express themselves* (Hope, 2004; Triandis, 1994). Little has to be said or written because most of the information is either in the physical environment or within the person, such as facial expressions. Lots of things that are obvious in the collectivist cultures must be said explicitly in individualist cultures. People from high-context culture are more skilled in reading nonverbal behaviours and assume that other people will also be able to do so (Tubbs & Moss, 2000). A person from a high-context culture may talk around and around a point, without being specific and expect the other person to know what is bothering him (Hall, 1981).

Monochronic and polychronic time. One's concept of time is always culture based (Cotte & Ratneshwar, 1998). Hall & Hall (1990) is mentioning that there are many kind of time systems, but that two are most important in international business; *monochronic time* and *polychronic time*. Monochronic time is to pay attention and only do *one thing at a time* and polychronic time to being involved in *many things at one time*. The interaction between monochronic people and polychronic people can be stressful unless both parties know and can decode the meanings behind each other's language of time (p. 21). Western cultures, including Scandinavians, are dominated by monochronic time, while polychronic time reflects time-flexible Mediterranean people (p. 14).

Monochronic people view time as linear and separable, capable of being divided into units and therefore emphasize doing one thing at a time (Nonis *et al.*, 2005). Monochronic time is mentioned as something tangible; people talk about it as thought it were money, as something that can be spent, saved, wasted and lost (Hall & Hall, 1990). Monochronic people emphasize deadlines; they priority the schedule above all else and treats as sacred and unalterable (Nonis *et al.*, 2005; Hall & Hall, 1990).

Polychronic people view time as naturally reoccurring and therefore emphasize doing many things at one time (Nonis *et al.*, 2005). Polychronic people are characterized by a great involvement with people; there is more emphasize on completing human transactions than on holding to schedules (Hall & Hall, 1990). Business meetings interrupted by phone calls and visitors, as well as several discussions going on at once, is something common in a relationship-oriented

polychronic culture (Schneider & Barsoux, 1997). A task-oriented monochronic person may find these kinds of interruptions irritating (Schneider & Barsoux, 1997).

The list below shows a pattern of monochronic people and polychronic people (Hall & Hall, 1990).

Monochronic people	Polychronic people
Do one thing at a time	Do many things at once
Concentrate on the job	Are highly distractible and subject to interruptions
Are low-context	Are high-context
Are committed to the job	Are committed to people and human relationships
Adhere religiously to plans	Change plans often and easily
Emphasize promptness	Base promptness on the relationship
Are accustomed to short term relationships	Have strong tendency to build lifetime relationships

Hall & Hall (1990) describes the French as high on polychronic scale; they do many things at once, can tolerate interruptions and are totally involved with people. They also think it is difficult to plan long-term, since they expect interruption and changes in their schedules.

Masculinity

Masculinity is about how gender roles are distributed. An unequal role distribution between men and women demonstrate a tougher society in which there is more emphasize on *achievement and fighting,* i.e. masculine society, than on *caring and compromise*, i.e. feminine society (Hofstede, 1997; Hofstede *et al.*, 2002).

Children, both boys and girls, in masculine societies learn to be ambitious and competitive and to admire the strong, popular fictional heroes, such as Batman. Children in feminine cultures learn to be non-ambitious and modest and to have sympathy for the underdog and the anti-hero (Hofstede, 1997).

The masculinity/femininity dimensions have important implications for motivation in the workplace (Adler, 1986). People from masculine cultures emphasize to have an opportunity for high *earnings*, get *recognition* when doing a good job, have an opportunity for *advancement* to higher level jobs, and have *challenging* work to do. People from feminine cultures emphasize to have a *good working relationship* with ones direct superior, work with people who *cooperate* well with another, live in an area that are desirable for one and one's family, and have a *employment security* (Hofstede, 1997). The different motivation factors make people from masculine cultures more willing to work evenings and weekends, than people from feminine cultures where there is more emphasize to quality of life. The concern of quality of life, nurturing and social well-being can be seen into initiatives such as Quality of Work Life and extensive social welfare programs in the highly feminine Nordic countries (Schneider & Barsoux, 1997).

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Conflicts in masculine cultures are resolved by fighting them out, "let the best man win". In feminine cultures, fighting or aggressive behaviour is not acceptable; conflicts are solved by compromise and negotiation (Hofstede, 1997). Leaders from feminine cultures tend to have strong facilitative skills (Flynn & Saladin, 2005).

In masculine cultures material success and progress dominant are values and exceptional achievements or people are to admire. In feminine cultures, caring for the weak and preservation, for example for the environment, are dominant values. Powerful people try to appear less powerful than they are in feminine cultures (Hofstede *et al.*, 2002.).

The list below shows the key differences between feminine and masculine societies (Hofstede, 1997, p. 67).

Feminine	Masculine
People and warm relationships are important	Money and things are important
In the family, both fathers and mothers deal with facts and feelings	In the family, fathers deal with facts and mothers with feelings
Sympathy for the weak	Sympathy for the strong
Failing in school is a minor accident	Failing in school is a disaster
Stress on equality, solidarity and quality of work life	Stress on equity, competition among colleagues, and performance
Resolution of conflict by compromise and negotiation	Resolution of conflict by fighting them out

Scandinavian countries score highest on the feminine pole and Japan, Austria and Italy highest on the masculine pole. Table 3 shows masculinity index for France, Greece, Italy and Sweden. Sweden is the most feminine country and ranks 53 of 53. France is moderately feminine. Greece is moderately masculine and Italy is highly masculine.

Table 3 Masculinity index values (Hofstede, 1997)

Masculinity, MAS		
	Score (of 100)	Rank (of 53)
Sweden	5	53
France	43	35/36
Greece	57	18/19
Italy	70	4/5

Masculinity, MAS
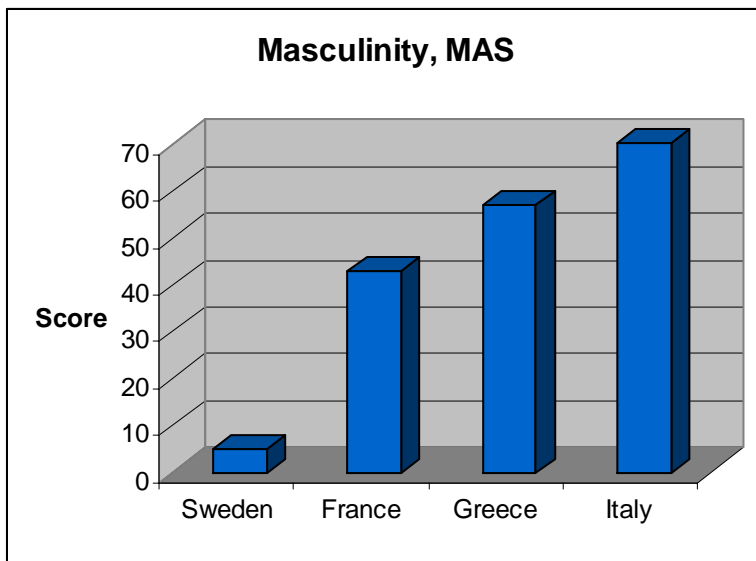
Uncertainty Avoidance

Some cultures are more anxious than other; they believe that what is different is dangerous (Hofstede *et al.*, 2002). Uncertainty avoidance is the extend people feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations (Hofstede, 1997). This dimension determines the cultural need for structure (Hofstede, 1989).

Students from strong uncertainty avoidance cultures expect their teachers to be experts, who have all the answers. Teachers use cryptic academic language and students will not confess to intellectual disagreement with their teachers. Students from weak uncertainty avoidance cultures accept teachers who say "I don't know". Students respect teachers that use plan language and disagreement in academic matter is seen as stimulating exercise (Hofstede, 1997).

A French researcher, André Laurent, has studied philosophies and behaviours of managers in nine Western European countries, the United States and two Indonesian countries (cited in Adler, 1986). On the statement "In order to have efficient work relationships, it is often necessary to bypass the hierarchical line", 22% of Swedes, 42% of French and 75% of Italians did disagree. This result shows in Sweden, the value is on getting the work done, meaning that one can go to the person that have the needed information and expertise, and not necessarily to one's boss. According to Laurent's study, most Swedish managers believe that a perfect hierarchy in which one's boss knows everything is impossible, they therefore see bypassing as a natural, logical and appropriate way for employees to work in complex and changing situations (p. 33). Most Italian managers believe that frequent bypassing indicates a poorly designed organisation. Adler (1986) describes the differences in power distance between a Swede and an Italian as following:

Imagine the frustration when Swedish employees attempt to work in a typically Italian organization. The Swedes, attempting to responsibly accomplish their work goals, continually bypass hierarchical lines and to the people in the organization who have the necessary information and expertise. The Swede's Italian boss, not having been consulted on a question, thinks the Swedes are insubordinate and a threat to the organization and the project. In the reverse situation, the Swedish boss, frustrated with an Italian subordinate's constant requests for permission and information, thinks the workers lacks initiative and is unwilling wither to use personal judgement or to take risks. (p. 33-34)

French generally see the manager as an expert and most managers believe that they should give precise answers to subordinates' questions in order to maintain their credibility as experts and as managers (Adler, 1986). This, knowing all the answers, might be necessity in France, with one person at the top making critical decisions (Hall & Hall, 1990). The French believe that a person should not have a managerial position unless he or she has precise answers to most work-related questions. Laurent (1983, cited in Boyacigiller & Adler, 1991, p. 271) describes the difficulty explaining the matrix management to a French manager, used to have one manager making decisions: "The idea of reporting to two bosses was so alien to these managers that mere consideration of such organization principles was in impossible, useless exercise".

In strong uncertainty avoidance cultures there is an emotional need for laws and/or informal rules and detailed instructions, controlling the right and duties of employers and employees (Hofstede, 1997; Hope, 2004). People from strong uncertainty avoidance cultures feel uncomfortable without the structure of a system of rules, even if many of these rules are not practical and not practicable (Hofstede, 1989). To clarify complex situations and tasks, they want detailed job-descriptions, and well-defined roles and functions. Lack of these creates overlap and inefficiency (Schneider & Barsoux, 1997). In weak uncertainty avoidance cultures rules are only established in case of absolute necessity. Systems of rigid rules, especially if it is evident that many of them are never followed, will make people from weak uncertainty avoidance cultures feel uncomfortable (Hofstede, 1989). They think detailed descriptions interfere with maintaining flexibility and achieving coordination; they want to improvise and negotiate (Hofstede, 1997; Schneider & Barsoux, 1997). This situation, rules or not, responds to deep psychological need, related to the control of aggression and to feelings of basic security in face of the unknown (Hofstede, 1989).

The list below show the key differences between weak and strong uncertainty avoidance societies (Hofstede, 1997, p. 125).

| Weak uncertainty avoidance	Strong uncertainty avoidance
Low stress; subjective feeling of well-being	High stress; subjective feeling of anxiety
Aggression and emotions should not be shown	Aggression and emotions may at proper times and places be ventilated
What is different, is curious	What is different, is dangerous
Teachers may say "I don't know"	Teachers supposed to have all the answers
There should not be more rules than is strictly necessary	Emotional need for rules, even if these will never work

People from high uncertainty avoidance cultures can sometimes expect the worst of themselves and others, which makes them suspicious of everyone (Hall & Hall, 1990). It is important to understand the cultures and norms of high uncertainty avoidance members before starting the communication process. The communication will then be more understood and accepted, and greater trust developed. Otherwise will members of high uncertainty avoidance filter out the senders' messages and focus on reducing uncertainty instead of listening to the messages (Merkin, 2006).

The decision-making style is also affected by how people feel about uncertain situations. People from weak uncertainty cultures can make quicker decisions, while people from high uncertainty cultures want to value the situation before making decision. It is hard for one who value flexibility, spontaneity and last-minute decisions to work with those who need firm, committed plans of actions (Klein, 2005).

The more anxious culture, the more expressive becomes the culture. People from high uncertainty avoidance cultures are more verbal and well organized, somewhat loud and emotional. In weak uncertainty avoidance cultures anxiety levels are relatively low. Aggression and emotions are not supposed to be shown; people who behave emotionally or noisily are socially disapproved (Hofstede, 1997). According to Gesteland (2002), the Mediterranean area and the Latin Europe are among the world's most expressive culture, which can also be supported by Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance index, where there are more Latin and Mediterranean countries at the top of the uncertainty avoidance index. Anglo and Nordic countries scores low on the uncertainty avoidance index. Table 4 shows the uncertainty avoidance index for France, Greece, Italy and Sweden. Sweden is low in uncertainty avoidance, whereas France and Greece is strong in uncertainty avoidance and Italy in the middle.

Table 4 Uncertainty avoidance index values. Some countries were added after the formula had been developed which produced scores over 100 (Hofstede, 1997, p.114).

Uncertainty Avoidance Index		
	Score (of 100)	**Rank (of 53)**
Sweden	29	49/50
Italy	77	23
France	86	10/15
Greece	112	1
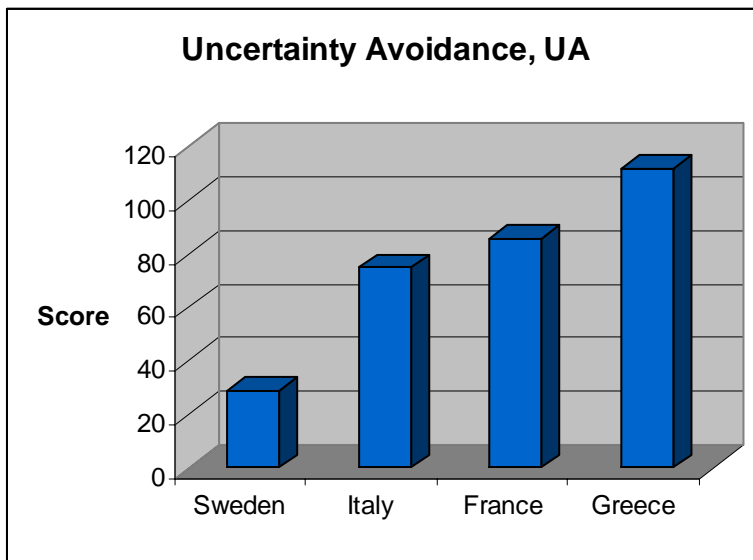
According to Joiner (2000), fear of making decisions or fear of responsibility among Greek subordinate managers' has been documented in the literature. Bartholomew (1995, cited in Joiner 2000, p. 233) is stating that many Greek senior and middle managers are terrified of making decisions and that there is even a Greek word *efthynofovia* meaning "fear of making decisions". Joiner (2000) is further stating that subordinate managers from strong uncertainty and high in power distance cultures would most likely prefer to defer to the certainty of rules, procedures and leader directives, rather than make key decisions themselves and accept responsibility for the decision consequences. Rules and standardized procedures specifying work/task roles and responsibilities, also reduces the potential for conflict with the superiors and subordinates.

3. Method

Ericsson Microwave Systems AB, EMW, is a subsidiary company of Ericsson AB. It is established year 1956 and has about 1,600 employees. EMW is a provider of Defense Systems and National Security & Public Safety (NSPS) solutions to defense-, government- and security agencies worldwide. They provide, among other things, advanced radar sensors and tailor made networks. Of the sales, *65%* are export sales and their products are operational in more than 30 countries. (Contact, 2006; Defense systems and national security & public safety solutions, 2006).

3.1. Participants

There was an opportunity to interview people from Ericsson in Italy and get their point of views and what they have experienced by working with people from Sweden. Since emphasize were on what people from Ericsson in Sweden had experienced in international project, the interviewee amount has been bigger for Sweden than for Italy.

Names have been collected from people in Ericsson Sweden that to some extent how knew people that have been involved in projects with Italy, France and Greece. Names of people that work in Ericsson in Italy have been collected from people in Sweden and Italy. Total, 42 e-mails were sent out and asked if they were willing to participate; 37 of these were sent to people in Ericsson Sweden and 5 in Ericsson Italy. Thirty-two persons from Sweden and 4 from Italy responded and were willing to participate. This will give a respond rate of total 86%. Due to different circumstances, not all have been able to participate. Twenty-two persons from Sweden and 2 persons from Italy have been interviewed. Table 5 shows a summary of the sample.

Table 5. The sample

	Sweden	Italy	Total
Mailed	37	5	42
Responded	32 (86%)	4 (90%)	36 (86%)
Interviewed	22 (59%)	2 (40%)	24 (57%)

The participants form Sweden, located in Molndal, were, among others, project managers, managers, upper level managers and technicians from different product areas within EMW. All were males, between the ages 29-62. The participants from Italy, one located in Rom and one in Milan, were project managers and males between the ages 41-44.

Table 6 shows the countries the interviewees from Sweden and Italy have been involved in. Since one person might be involved in more than one country, the country amount is bigger than the interviewee sample.

Table 6 Countries the interviewees have been involved with

Swedes		Italians	
France	10	Sweden	2
Greece	10		
Italy	12		

3.2. Instruments

There has been a mixture of open-ended and closed questions. The open-ended questions have given an understanding and explained what they have experienced in the collaboration. The closed questions were based on a 5-point Likert-scale, so the data could be compared. The exact degree was not of importance, it was used to see if the interviewees' thoughts were on the positive or negative side of the scale.

The questionnaire was divided into four parts. The first part was background information about the interviewee, such as age, gender, position and product area. The second part was generally about the project; how many years the interviewee has worked with the specific country, in what purpose (partners, customers, suppliers or colleagues), what point he/she would give to the project in general. The questions on the third part were based on Hofstede's dimensions power distance, individualism, masculinity and uncertainty avoidance, and other problems such as language and communication tools. The fourth part was completing questions; how much the interviewee knew about the country before he/she started the project, if he/she had any course in intercultural communication, what things the interviewee would do different in the project if he/she had the opportunity and other general things that could have gone better.

3.3. Procedure

The interview questions have been based on theory, but depending on the interviewee's answers questions have been added and in some cases have some questions not been valid for the interviewee and therefore excluded.

The interviews in Sweden were face-to-face interviews on Swedish and took place at EMW in Molndal. They took 20-55 minutes each and were tape recorded. One of the interviews with the Italians was made by telephone and the other by e-mail and telephone; the questionnaire was e-mailed to the interviewee, were he completed it and later it was followed up by a telephone call. The interviews with the Italians were on English.

4. Result

The interview results will be presented with reflection to the theoretical framework. The country name in square brackets "[ ]" written before the quotations, are the countries the interviewee have been involved with. One comment may be valid on more than country, but since it is the country name or names the interviewee have been involved with, will it not mentioned. When it is written "[Sweden]" it is one of the Italian managers that have pointed out something and the other country names what the Swedish interviewees have said.

Quantitative data will be presented. For Italy it is three numbers written; the first number is the average for the whole interviews involved in Italy, then this number is followed by brackets. The first number in the brackets is an average of project managers, managers and upper level manager and the second number in the brackets is an average of technical specialist, part-time project managers and technical project manager. It was necessary to do this, because they have not been involved in same kind of persons, and might therefore have experienced different difficulties. This dividing was not applicable for France and Greece and therefore a total average is presented.

Emphasize is on cultural differences, therefore it will not be mentioned if it is supplier, customer, partner or colleagues that the interviewee has been dealt with.

4.1.   Power distance

Dependency on the management. Swedes are low on power distance and by that not dependant on their managers as much as in high power distance countries. As shown in list below, the Swedish interviewees have thought that the dependence on the management in the other countries have been more on the dependent side than the independent.

How dependent was your contact person on the management, on a scale 1-5?
1=Very dependent; 5=Little dependent

   France 2,22   *Greece 2,1*   *Italy: 2 (2; 2)*

This dependency situation has caused irritation among some of the interviewees. To the question above, some have answered:

> [Italy]: A lot. It's very frustrated when it happens. We have tried to handle it by going to the management hierarchy here also, but in a Swedish manner you do not want to act like that. It feels uncomfortable to do so. It does not feel right…

[Greece]: They are very dependent. They do not dare to make own decisions.

[Greece]: It is a slow process. For the most part, it has to go formal ways. We have work meetings and so on and can we make decision, but then it is often on lower level.

[France]: When making a decision, there must be a person from the management. Then, unfortunately, it could be that, that person has mandate to talk about something specific and we can sit here and talk without getting anywhere and finally that person has to go home to talk to his manager, just because his manager has told him "You can do this and this, but not that and that". It is like that quite high up; you can almost say that the level under CEO is like that.

Centralized vs. decentralized organization structure. Sweden rates lowest on the power distance index and that could be noticed in the interviews where the word *hierarchy* was used a lot to describe the management and decision making style in Italy, France and Greece. The decentralized organization structure in Sweden makes everyone responsible for its own task and by that can make decisions. The centralized organization structure in these countries make sometimes that decisions can not be made on place, but must be backed up by the management. Many of the interviewees have felt frustrated about this. Some have stated it as:

[France, Greece & Italy]: The problem in all these countries is that they have difficulties to make decisions. They can make a decision, but it must be anchored with the manager, which takes time. I think, we Swedes can sit at a table and just decide "We are doing this now". I think they have difficulties with that, sometimes at least.

[France, Greece & Italy]: They [the French] are steered by their top-managers. […] We have a decentralized decision making style, while it is very hierarchical in France.

[Italy]: It is a lot more hierarchical and you have to do what your boss tells you. We on the other side have more… It feels like we dare more.

[Greece]: On the paper, he has also been a project manager, but it feels like he has not have that power to make the decisions he should do. He had to go higher up in management, for example to get resources, to do his job.

[Greece]: …we want to negotiate and are allowed to negotiate about the contract's content. […] …and in most cases, they are not allowed to negotiate.

Swedish subordinates expect to be consulted when making decisions, while the decision making in Italy is more centralised. Below are two different views; the first comment is an Italian project manager's comment on the decision making style in Sweden and the second a Swedish project manager's comment on the decision making style in Italy.

[Sweden]: Our [Italians] decision is quite short. We have very few times to discuss the decision, usually it takes one meeting. […] It's a longer process in Sweden. They [Swedes] think it's important that all the people are along and decides. They try to share decision among all the people.

[Italy]: We [as Swedes] want to have consensus, we want to have wide support when we make decisions. They are quite quick when it's one person that makes the decisions.

The words *hierarchy* and *strong management hierarchy* was used a lot specially to describe the French organization and decision making style. One interviewee has described the need of the French manager being at top and decides as: "Their bosses try to be involved and decide, even if he doesn't know, he has to decide, it's important". Swedes are used to take advantage of the lower technicians and ask them. Due to the strong hierarchy in France, they have not been able to do this and meet the right persons. Two project managers have told:

[France & Greece]: Those who are project managers and those who are in steering positions, we did have a lot of contact with those [in France]. But to get to those who makes the work… To get a direct contact with them have been considerably more difficult. There has always been a managing person between…. They [the French project managers] want to control everything.

[France, Greece & Italy]: We met people who did not have the competence [in France], they were not operative; they were more desk people. It became better when we were able to meet the lower technicians. Many times, they were not allowed to speak. […] We in Sweden have a flat organization; it is very top managed there.

These problems, not be able to take advantage of the technicians and the decision making style, also have been valid for Greece. One project manager has described it as:

We have different decisions structures. If we say something, we can make it right on. […] They [the Greeks] have to communicate all the way up and all the way down again. One can't ask the technicians directly, but have to call in their bosses.

Swedes have a more delegated system. When attending on meetings abroad, Swedes might send a team instead of one manager. This can confuse the other part, which is use to one person making the critical decisions. This has sometimes caused difficulties:

[Italy]: …right boss weren't among and decided, that can lead to distrust.

[France]: It could be easier if it came up… They have stronger leading persons, if we had worked in the same way, they would meet a similar person. Now they may not see such a person, but a bigger team and then they wonder if it is someone who has control… […] This, to show that we have control; a gathered overall picture… […] show that we are structured and that we have the situation and the organization under control, in one or another way show that we know this, this is how we are organized and we have the situation under control […] You have to show them in a way they understand, for getting away the suspiciousness. Their starting point is that there is no one else than they that know something; everybody else are disorganized and incompetent.

Manager's role. The management style and the manager's role differ in low and high power distance cultures. In Sweden, the manager is someone that you seek advice from. Some of the Swedish interviewees have expressed it as:

> [Italy]: I think the most important [difference] is the manager's role. It is a big difference in Sweden. The manager in Italy he makes the decisions and he directs and you have to follow him. In Sweden is the manager more of a coach, one of the gang.

> [Italy]: I feel that the difference is that you are very dependant on your manager's standpoint. Just the manager makes a decision, you adjust to it quickly in an other way than in Sweden. You can say, in the Swedish environment, if the manager makes a decision, the acceptance of it is limited. In Italy, the manager's decision is leading.

> [Italy]: In a Swedish manner, you question your boss, I don't think that's an Italian manner.

> [France & Italy]: I think, in general, they [French and Italians] have more respect for their bosses.

Formality. Swedes are less formal, which can be supported by an Italian project manager that pointed out "Work relations in Sweden appear as being less formal and more direct". Formality can make it difficult to come in contact with those persons one wants. But, as seen at the table below, that have been on the easy-side of the scale and not caused that much difficulties.

How was it to come in contact with the person you wanted, on a scale 1-5?
1=Very difficult; 5=Very easy

France 3,27	*Greece 3,09*	*Italy: 3,68 (3.75; 3.65)*

The formalization in Greece makes that one have to ask for permission before one can meet someone. An interviewee, used to the informality in Sweden, said that most things have to go formal ways in Greece and that led to that everything took a lot more time. Another Swedish interviewee told that even if they had a domestic agent it took time to arrange a meeting. One interviewee pointed out that in Greece he missed the daily informal contact:

> [France & Greece]: I mean, I can call the defense department [in Sweden] and we can talk on and of, it is the daily informal contact. […] It doesn't exist there [in Greece], one has to ask for permission to talk to people. […] …this daily informal contact, we have it with a lot of customers. It is just that, in this country it has not come natural. I have worked with East Asia, Africa and I have never felt that the margins have been as strong as here.

4.2.   *Individualism*

Shared group identity. Shared group identity is more difficult when one does not see each other and sit together and work. Without a shared group identity it is easier to think in terms of "us" versus "them". Without a shared group identity it is easier to think of one's own best, instead of what is best for the team and the common goal. There was a possibility for the Italians to come to Sweden and work. The Swedish interviewee had noticed the difference it made for the shared group identity and sorting out "us-versus-them" thinking.

> You don't have to go to meetings. It's about seeing each other at the coffee machine. […] So you stop thinking "We are Swedes", "They are Italian", "We are Ericsson AB Sweden", they are "Ericsson Italy". Rather that, we are those that are going to do this together and then telephone meetings and so on will work… You can hear it on the jokes… You understand each others' jokes and don't notice the differences.

Spontaneous communication is important for establish trust and develop shared group identity. One of the Swedish interviewee has said:

> [France]: If you don't ask them [the French], they won't tell. You have to take initiative and take contact. You can't wait for them to take contact, then you won't find out something. Just by calling them and talk socially how it is, about the weather and so on, then one can get a lot of spontaneous information.

Getting-to-know phase. People from collectivist societies require more time to get to know you before making business. Sweden, France and Italy were relatively equal on the individualist scale, even if French is known for taking time before making business. Depending on the business character, that it is military, this kind of business does take time. There were different views on how long the getting-to-know phase did take. As the list below shows, it took little longer in France. It Italy, it were depending who it concerned; it went faster for the managers than for the technicians.

Some cultures require more time before starting the business; they want time to get to know you. How long do you think the getting-to-know phase have lasted, on a scale 1-5?
1=Very long time; 5=Very fast

France 2.67	*Greece 3*	*Italy: 2.9 (3.25; 2.8)*

Even if it is a long process, some of the Swedish interviewees have expressed that it takes little bit more time than what they are used to in Sweden. The Italian interviewees thought the get-to-know phase went rather quick with Swedes. The interviewees have expressed the length of the get-to-know phase as:

> [France, Greece & Italy]: Generally with this type of business we do, it takes time. […] I think it is like this everywhere. Sweden, Denmark or Italy, it is in fact a personal contact you have. I can't see the big difference. If you don't know the

> same language and doesn't have the same cultural quality, then it is more difficult to get the personal contact.
>
> [Italy]: It is like here. You do not have to sit down and get to know each other as in the Arabic world. […] I think that it is document and contract and that kind of things that control the whole. I think you can do business rather fast.
>
> [Greece]: It took a long time. It is the suspicion that has to be delaminated. […] The starting point is that they take for granted that they are going to be deceived and then you have to try to reduce that. It is probably like that generally in Greece, especially in defence projects.
>
> [Italy]: It can be a little bit difficult. They can be a little chilly, show distance at the first contact, not open arms as the Americans. More chilly is the first impression.
>
> [Sweden]: Quite quick. Really quick. Italians are not as direct as Swedes. […] Swedes are more direct than Italians.

It is important to get to know each other and establish trust. Many of the interviewees pointed out that the best way of getting to know each other and establish trust were to spend time together. One interviewee mentioned that there have been noticeable differences between two companies; one which they spent time with and the other where they did not. With the company they did spend time with, it was much easier to talk about difficult issues and was easier to communicate.

Resource sharing. Cultural differences affect also the resource sharing. Sweden is higher in individualism (except Italy) and lower in power distance than all the three countries. That has created some difficulties in those projects that require resource sharing. Some of the interviewees have mentioned it as following:

> [Italy & France]: I feel that [Italians and French] they are more scheming than us, when it is about open up. We are naive and say "But yes, they have told us that this is the way it is and now you are going to open up" and then we open up pretty much. […] I think they are more cautious with this. […] They keep on to their information that they eventually have to let go, but that happens later on.
>
> [Italy]: That is something obvious, they [Italians] want to know a lot about us, but tell just a little about themselves.

High- and low context. Sweden is a low-context culture and by that has a more direct communication style than the other countries, which is high-context and has a more indirect style and sometimes talks around a point. Differences in the communication style may affect how the communication is interpreted. As shown in the list below the communication in France has been on the good side, while it was more on the bad side for Greece. Again for Italy, it was depending who it concerned; the managers thought it was on the good side and the technicians on the bad side.

How has the communication in France/Greece/Italy been?		
1=Very bad; 5=Very good		
France 3,62	*Greece 2,1*	*Italy: 2,93 (3.4; 2.5)*

Some of the Swedish interviewees have mentioned that the other countries are indirect and talk around a point, and it's difficult to understand what they really want. The Italian managers have mentioned that Swedes are very clear in their communication style, but use little emotions and soft voices, which sometimes can make it difficult to understand.

> [France, Greece & Italy]: We say exactly as it is; this is the problem and we want to have the solution in this way. You don't do that in either of these countries, you are going around it in a way.

> [France]: If you compare [the French environment] with the Swedish environment, it's more indirect, not straight on the problem presentation or what is bothering one. It can be wrapped, so you have to listen carefully.

> [Sweden]: The main differences in Italian [communication] style are that we [Italians] use most non-verbal things; we use a lot of our hands to communicate. On meetings we use non-verbal things and change our style through meetings. The Swedes do not use non-verbal things. They are quite open; they use mostly words. And there are differences in eye-contact, Swedes don't use eye contact. There is a no non-verbal communication, which can make it difficult to understand.

There have been some difficulties due to the indirect communication style, especially with French, which uses more words and stronger shadings of words. The interviewees have pointed it out as:

> [Italy & France]: Some are relatively direct without ramble, but some people hold long triads. I think they [Italians and French] are more different than we. We are quite, all Swedes, relatively direct, some are nagging, but relatively direct. Among them, some are direct and many are verbose and can hold enormous expositions, and afterwards without really understand what they have told.

> [France]: They are into this with using a lot of words and text. We might say double as much, with half the text.

> [France]: It's the shades of meaning in the language that makes deadlocks; it becomes either too strong or too weak. I don't think we use the same shade of meaning, not that strong.

> [France]: It's more shade of meanings, it's a lot of words. […] It's lot of words, one talks and talks, over and over again. […] We don't write as much introductory phrases and drivel, but are straight on. As a recipient, it can feel like an attack.

Monochronic and polychronic time. Sweden is a monochronic culture and France, Greece and Italy polychronic. Polychronic people change plans often and easily. This caused irritation and frustration among monochronic Swedes:

> [Italy & France]: If one say "Ok, now we agree on this" and everybody agrees and think it's good. But they [the Italians and French] don't think that deal is as important as we do. […] They can brake a deal. "But, we have new conditions now, we came up with this tonight, that's why we don't think as we thought yesterday".

> [Italy]: We have not been able to make a real decision; they are broken up all the time.

> [Italy]: They had no difficulties to make decisions, but that doesn't mean… Decisions by them mean that you can break it the day after, so what is a decision?

> [Greece]: They are promising things they can hold.

> [Greece]: Greeks are expert on negotiate and change… […] We are not used to that.

Polychronic people are more flexible with time. In all the cases, as the list below shows, the Swedes have thought that the time understanding in the other countries were on the bad side. The technicians thought the time understanding in Italy, such as keeping deadlines, were worse, than what the managers thought.

How do you think their time understanding is?
1=Very bad; 5=Very good

France 2,89   *Greece 2,2*   *Italy: 2.59 (2.83; 2.3)*

Some have experienced the other countries keeping up to schedules and deadlines "as good and bad as Swedes". Two persons have described Greeks' motto as "maybe tomorrow" and "it's another day tomorrow", which reflects that Greeks are polychronic and very flexible. But not keep up to schedules can be something tactical, in all these countries, because some have mentioned that they can keep up to schedules when they really wants. The Swedish interviewees have also mentioned that people in the other countries are expecting the Swedes to keep up to schedules, but remain flexible themselves. Below is some interviewees' thinking on time understanding and keeping deadlines:

> [France & Greece]: For us time plan is critical. I don't think it is like that either in Greece or France. I remember that when I first began this project I said "Now we are going to keep the time planes we have decided". "We have never done that before" said the French to me. It was like news for me. Dame right you are supposed to keep time.

> [France]: We Swedes are more fixed with time, they aren't. […] We are very aware of time.

> [France]: If you order a telephone conference with the French, the only thing that you do know is that it will not begin on time. It looks like it is ok to be little late.

> [Italy]: We have an extreme time understanding. We almost only think about time and when they don't and we don't get that they don't, then it gets really weird.

One project manager mentioned how he worked for making them keep deadlines:

> [France]: I put up, at an early stage, a general view, a time plan, for everything, to get a conception of "If we don't do this and this now, then it will affect things that are almost two years away". When they say the overall picture and we could work with that, it made it so much easier.

Some of the Swedes have described themselves as long-term oriented and the Italians, Greeks and/or French as short-term oriented. Swedes like to make up long-term plans. People from high-context and polychronic countries expect interrupts and problems to arise and therefore do not think in long-terms. Brainstorming is a natural event in Sweden, but it seems like it is not like that in the other countries.

> [France]: You feel that the French are more short-term oriented. […] I think they want to secure what they have for the moment, try to delaminate risks, yeah short-term oriented. We can sit and philosophise and brainstorm and think big and long and build up something. That, they do think is too muddled and looks like lack of control. Brainstorming, that is not something they spend time on, […] brainstorming, it is almost like they are forbidding their co-workers to go to that kind of meetings.

Task-focused vs. personal-focused. Individualists and low-context people are more task-focused and it can cause difficulties and misunderstandings in the interaction process when the counterpart is relationship-focus. A Swedish interviewee have noticed it and said that they started with the technical questions immediately and that caused some difficulties. He mentioned that he would have it in mind and in coming projects, he would not be so much task-focused; rather try to focus on people. Another Swedish interviewee mentioned that they had to stop trying being so effective and calm down. Relationship focused or task focused can also be seen in the negotiation process. One Italian manager has mentioned it as "Swedes appear to be cooler, rational approach focused on problem. Italians start focusing on personal relations".

Polychronic cultures are person-oriented and more tolerable to interrupts. Swedes, that are monochronic and task-oriented, have complained on meetings being interrupted by telephone calls and "meeting going on during meetings", that is, several discussions going on at once. But that is something common in person oriented cultures.

4.3.   Masculinity

Masculine cultures are more competitive and there is more emphasize on achievements. Some of the interviews have complained that in some cases there were to much focus on achievement and earning money. People from masculine cultures are more engaged in their jobs and think it is acceptable to work over late and on weekends. One Swedish manager has formulated working over in Sweden as:

> [Italy]: One is more emotionally engaged in its job in Italy than we are in Sweden. In Sweden, time off is a big part of the work, you distribute work and time off in a more obvious way, in Italy it's going on in one. You can, under very intensive periods, work a lot on weekends, without any problem. […] It's a lot more difficult in Sweden to explain to someone why they have to work overtime and miss one weekend. It's easier and more understandable in Italy and not loaded as in Sweden to ask someone to work overtime.

Motivation factors. Masculine cultures and feminine cultures have different motivation factors. The motivation factors in masculine cultures are, among others, earnings and getting recognition when doing a good job. That have caused some irritation among the interviewees when a person work for their own best, instead of what's best for the project.

> [France]: …and then there is some project managers that want to be super project managers, and is that person that know everything, does everything and is everywhere. We have had that kind of persons and that sabotage a lot.

> [France]: The need of "what can we win", egoism in some sort of way. Maybe it's the elite society that rule, it's about to come home to ones boss and say "Look what I won".

> [Greece]: People don't' always act what is best for the project, but in some reason, what is best for themselves.

> [Greece]: What ever you put forward to a Greek, they won't say ok immediately, but they have to think, they have to change, they have to show that they have contributed with something, or changed.

Negotiation style. Sweden being highly feminine can be seen in the negotiation style; by trying to reach win-win solutions, but that is not something that always works in the other countries:

> [Italy]: There is a lot of negotiation and we have a… We have learned this win-win situation, we think that's smart, because then both parts are satisfied. I don't think they thought like that, only they win themselves.

> [Italy]: They aren't used to have a win-win consensus discussion. […] more focused on the negotiation and the roles than the goal. There is a characteristic of it, but there isn't such a big difference [between Swedish and Italian negotiations], but a certain characteristic exists.

> [Greece]: I feel a win-win solution is unique for Sweden.

> [France]: …again, the tactic and the politic. Swedes aren't like that. It's possible that we Swedes are naïve or I don't know how to express it, but we don't have that way of working. We are used to stand for it and we are used to say when we do something wrong. We are used to, even if it won't be hundred per cent, that it is a win-win situation. But that is not how it is in France.

Pride. Another issue that was raised a lot for projects with France, was that they are throwing the blame on someone else.

> [France]: They sometimes want to use dictatorial language in France with ability to throw the blame on someone else. It's always someone else that is the reason for problem, it's never them and then one often raises the tone of voice.

> [France]: I experienced that they can never accept that they are doing wrong, but they have to convince. I think it's some kind of pride.

> [France]: They are quite good in handling their obligations. If they have obstacles… They don't pass a deadline without having a good argument. If that doesn't work, instead of admitting that it was they who were late, they try find someone else to blame and make them responsible for the lateness.

4.4. Uncertainty avoidance

Laws and rules. There is more emotional need for laws in high uncertainty avoidance cultures. Two examples were given by two interviewees on how the Italian and Greek subordinates, even if they had done a similar work before, wanted a list on what to do. One interviewee mentioned that in Sweden you hire that person that knows the work, in Greece you hire someone and then teach that person how to do the work. That might be one of the reasons they want it written down. A Swede that know how to do the work and has the opportunity to do his/hers work in a way he/she finds it be the best and appropriate, will be irritated if it is listed item for item how to do the work he/she knows.

> [Italy]: They want everything listed, otherwise they can't work. A great example; we were going to have our first joint-test of the software, we told them, more or less, "You can do some of the tests you have done in your basic test" […] Then we had to list ten points and do this, then it became more serious. Then they could say "We can do this and this". It feels like they want to be more directed in that kind of cases.

> [Greece]: In Greece it has to be written item for item, exactly what one are supposed to do. If you don't, then you know that it won't be done or will be done in a wrong way.

Large uncertainty avoidance cultures want more rules, even if it is obvious that they are not being followed. Swedes, low in uncertainty avoidance, want rules only if they are possible to follow and then; the set rules must be followed:

> [Italy]: …it's easier in Italy to accept that they are not being followed [comparing to Sweden]. I don't think it's the same questions of issue if you skip something, because it's easier for them [Italians] to do it [than for us Swedes].

> [Sweden]: Swedes set up a set of rules and don't go outside them. They follow the rules much stronger than [we do] in Italy.

> [France, Greece & Italy]: Their [the French's] methods are quite good; they are accepting setting up rules and then they don't follow it, and do the best out of the

situation. We Swedes have little difficulties with that. If we have decided and set up rules, then one has to follow it exactly.

Responsibilities and task definitions. Another difference noticed in the interviews, especially among Swedes and Italians, and French, was that in France and Italy one wants to know its responsibilities as soon as the project starts. It is vaguer in Sweden; it is something that comes in afterwards.

> [Italy]: It's very important with clear delimitations, "what are you doing, what I am doing". […] a definition of the task is more important than what one might think at the beginning. When one comes from a Swedish environment one thinks "Yeah, but we can talk about it later and adapt to it later". That doesn't work in an Italian environment, because there one wants to know "what's my task", "who is the boss" and "who decides".

> [Italy]: As a Swede, I'm not used to negotiate about that kind of stuff. Here, you decide that you are going to do something together and then you act upon that, in a Swedish manner. Later on, you get information on who is responsible for what. But that doesn't work. I think that an Italian first wants to know what he is responsible of and then he performs very well.

> [Italy]: One wants to know ones responsibilities and doesn't go outside it.

> [France]: …they always finish a meeting by summing up and "Does everybody know what their tasks are?". We can end a meeting just because the time is over and everybody walk away and no one has a clue on what to do. We have easy to "I suppose they understood what we meant" and try not to confirm that.

> [France, Greece & Italy]: One has to know what it's all about; the purpose of the meeting, what to do and then action. That isn't something bad and we can be better on that. Both parts have to know what to do and then we can have a concrete discussion. Then, when one goes from the meeting, everyone knows exactly who does what.

An Italian project manager has pointed out that without any clear task definitions, the cultural differences will increase. That view has been supported by some of the Swedish interviews, which have said that their way of working, with clearer task definitions at the beginning, is much better.

> [Sweden]: When it's not clear, ones responsibilities etc., that's a phenomenon that maximise the cultural differences. It's very important to know your responsibilities, way of working. When it's not well defined, the cultural differences will be amplified.

Trust. High uncertainty avoidance cultures feel difficult to trust and expect the worse of themselves and others, which can create a barrier in the interaction process.

> [France]: The suspiciousness, that you are on the alert, that you are going to fool them, is the starting point. They are afraid that others will think as they do.

> [Italy]: Both parts think the other part is trying to take advantage of something, try to win own benefits as fast as the other one opens his or her mouth, so it takes time, because you have to be on alert all the time.

Decision making. People from low uncertainty avoidance cultures make quicker decisions. Swedes look at the big picture instead of details and by that have in some cases, made a quicker decision.

> [Italy]: They [Italians] are maybe more picky, want to look on details and that makes it take longer time. […] They are very picky, it's details… They have another way of precision, trifle on details, why, I don't know. […] much more accurate to check on details. […] "Have you done this, have you done that?".

> [France]: It's very hard to have others than management to make decisions. It's almost management issues on everything, high level on the answer. It takes very long time, terrible long time. We meet, we talk, we almost write to death. We can have meetings there [in France] lasting a whole day, while that could be dealt over a cup of coffee in Sweden.

The quick decision making is not always an advantage and some of the Swedish interviewees have pointed out that they should be more prepared and make research before making decisions, than what they do now.

Greek managers' fear of making decisions came up in the interviews. That has caused difficulties, because processes have been taken much longer time than it should. Some have pointed out the difficulties in decision making as:

> [France, Greece & Italy]: No one in the hierarchy [in Greece] that want to say "OK, lets do it this way", because they are afraid, they want someone else that says it. They are trying to shift away responsibilities in all levels. […] …which makes them very insecure and that makes them to have difficulties to make decisions. They want a higher boss to make that decision, and that boss an even higher boss, and finally the prime minister has to say something.

> [Greece]: They had to ask their superiors. It wasn't easy for the superiors to make decisions either.

> [Greece]: Everyone want unconditionally avoid exposing oneself to risks, in some way. If it's difficult issues, then they have told "Sure, we fix this" and not done it and blamed everyone around.

> [France & Greece]: They [the Greeks] feel very insecure of unknown situations. They want to be backed up. If they are there by their own, then it's very uncomfortable.

Emotions. There are more emotions involved and one is allowed to show it in high uncertainty cultures, such as in Italy, France and Greece. As the list below shows the Swedish interviewees have felt that they were more emotional involved comparing to Sweden, but now such a big difference in France and Italy. The Italian interviewees felt the Swedes were on the calm side of the scale.

How have their way of communication been?
1=Very calm; 5=Very emotional

France 3,11   *Greece 4*   *Italy: 3.33 (3.3; 68)*

On the question how they handle when meetings get to loud and expressive mostly of the Swedish interviewees had said that it is not so much to do, wait for them to calm down and not go in to the discussions. One interviewee expressed the differences in communication style between a Greek and a Swede as "If you have Lulea and Greece in one discussion, then you have one that talks constantly and one that is absolutely silent". But that was at the beginning of the project, as time went on and they got to know how the other works, the other ones culture and communication style, it became better. Another Swedish interviewee expressed it as:

> [France]: They talk a lot, they say something three, four times. We Swedes are maybe not so much talkative, so they wonder "Did they really understand?", but we did it already at the first time. We think time is being spent on talking around, but they love this in France, because it should be like that.

In those countries they have easier to get upset and get angry, but they also get over it more quickly. It takes more time for a Swede to get upset, but once he is upset he does not get over it quickly and calms down. One Swedish interviewee said:

> [France, Italy & Greece]: I think it is a big difference between Sweden and all these countries. If I should get upset, I mean really upset, then it stuck on for a longer time, I don't forget it quickly. But for instance with the Greeks, then it's a part of it, they get upset and then it draw off and then it's not so dangerous. You are friends again and then you get upset again.

In France, Greece and Italy, they separate personal life and business. Meetings can be very expressive and emotional, but once a meeting is over or when it is time for lunch, also the expressive feelings are over. This can be difficult for a Swede o handle:

> [France]: We are very even in our temper. They [the French] get upset more than us and use it in advantage to their own situation. I can feel that we have difficulties, we have no for means, because we are quite even in…[…] Meeting them in the same way, then you are lost. Normally, we don't have that skill; still being rational as being upset, that doesn't work for us Swedes, I don't think so. It have been times it has not been little difficult, then you go out and eat lunch and then it's like you are sitting there and talking and are happy. That can be difficult to handle. […] Not the same way to get upset, they get over their anger quickly, which can be difficult to handle.

> [France]: We Swede are very resentful. […] they are totally relaxed, they are really good at that, can recharge. We get disappointed and keep being disappointed.

5. Discussion

There has been a mix of deductive and inductive research approaches and a phenomenological research design has been used since it describes experiences (Creswell, 1994). As the problem stood clear, that there were difficulties in inter-national project, a theoretical research of intercultural collaborations, cross-cultural research and national cultures began. Among the cultural research, Hofstede's dimensions seemed to be most appropriate for this study. The interview questions were based on Hofstede's four dimensions; power distance, individualism, masculinity and uncertainty avoidance and Hall's high- and low-context cultures dimension. The long-term dimension was excluded since it was more valid in East Asia. But, as the interviews took place, other problem aroused concerning time and how one hold on to truth. Investigation in theory went on. Hofstede's fifth dimension long-term orientation was considered to be used, but after a long consideration Hall's monochronic and polychronic time seemed to most appropriate and more valid for Western countries.

The goal has been to find out the difficulties the employees at EMW in Sweden experienced in international projects. The interviewees' experiences seem to support the theoretical framework; differences in the dimensions made the interviewees experience more difficulties.

Cultural differences exist and it is important to be aware of them for being able to handle them. The first thing to do is to be aware of that the other person has another culture and might think in different ways and have different priorities. It will be easier to handle the cultural differences if one accepts that differences exist. If one does not, how can one handle something that does not exist?

It is important to understand that the other person has a different background, different view of seeing things and works in a different organizational culture. All these are part of ones culture. To get a better understanding, it is important to get to know the other part. It seems that the most important thing is to build trust at the beginning of a project. It is the base for good collaboration. If trust does not exist, it will cause so many difficulties, such as resource sharing and shared group identity. For keeping up the good relationship it is important with spontaneous communication among the team members in the different countries. It might be difficult at the beginning, but once it is gained it will bring so many benefits for the project and the team.

There is more dependence on the management in France, Greece and Italy than it is in Sweden. That have in some cases caused difficulties. Being aware of this, that it is their way of working and accepting the differences, reduce the frustration one might experience, because everyone think their way, the way they are used to work, is the

best way. Differences in power distance made the Swedish participants feel frustrated when decisions have not been taken on place and when one has not been able to meet the right person, such as for the manager to meet the lower technicians, without having a leading person between.

Swedes being task-focused have also caused some difficulties. All these countries are relationship-focused and as some of the Swedish interviewees have told, it would benefit them if they were less task-focused and more personal-focused. Then they would not feel so frustrated and irritated when things take more time than expected. Being more personal focused might also speed up the trust developing and shared group identity.

Different communication styles have also caused misunderstandings. Swedes have a direct communication style and the other countries an indirect style. The Swedes think it is difficult when the other part do not talk direct about the problem and talks around it. The other countries might feel it is like a slap in the face, when Swedes are direct. Swedes being quiet and talk without non-verbal expressions may make it difficult for the other part to understand if he/she understood what he/she was telling. The Swedes can on that point be clearer and tell them when they understand, so time is not spent on talking on the same issues over and over again.

Polychronic people changes easier decisions and are more flexible with deadlines, even if they are aware that Swedes hold on to deadlines and keep decisions. By at an earlier time show in a clear way the time plan, with realistic goals, the other part might be better keeping deadlines.

Differences in masculinity/femininity have also been supported by the interviews, that there are different motivational factors and priorities. Misunderstandings and unexpected situation that might occur later on the project due to different motivational factors and priorities can be reduced to some extent, by being clearer at the beginning of the project in goal formulation and what everyone wants out of the project.

Swedes being tolerant to uncertain situations make them make quicker decisions and in some cases not having clear task and role descriptions. Making quicker decision without analysing it, leads sometimes to more work afterwards, if it is the wrong decision. Clearer task and role definition might decrease the misunderstandings that can occur and make the work more effective.

All the above mentioned suggestions on how to handle the cultural differences, can lead to more effective and efficient collaboration in cultural diverse environments.

6. Conclusion

The conclusion is that cultural differences do exist and it affects how people act and view the world. The best way of handling cultural differences is to be aware of them without judging them.

It is important to be aware that the decision-making process and the dependency on the management differ from culture to culture and that things can take longer time than one is used to. To have an effective and efficient collaboration in international projects it is important to establish trust already at the beginning of the project. For projects that are going to build up something together it is important with a shared group identity to sort out the "us" versus "them" thinking and to work towards a shared goal. Different communication styles and shadings of words can create misunderstandings. It is important to be clear on what is said and make sure that one understands each other. Different priorities, motivation factors and purposes with the project can make one to work toward different goals. It is therefore important with clear goal- and purpose-description at the beginning of the project. It is also important, already at the beginning of the project, to be clear on what one expects from the other part and have clear task- and role-definitions, both the organizations' roles and peoples' roles, which might reduce misunderstandings that can occur later on the project.

By recognizing the differences and managing them in an appropriate way, the interaction in cultural diverse assemblies will be more effective and efficient.

6.1. Future research

This study has presented the Swedes' and some Italians' experiences in international projects with emphasize on cultural differences. Future research can be on how communication tools and shared group identity, including spontaneous communication, can make the collaboration in international projects more effective.

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