Cultural adaptation in cross-national business relationships: The Netherlands-Sweden

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Abstract

Title: Cultural adaptation in a cross-national business relationship

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Aim: The aim of this work is to study the role that culture plays in business relationships between the Netherlands and Sweden. Further, the effects of time and trust on the business relationships are also investigated. The investigation entails whether there are cultural differences between the two countries and how those differences are managed.

Method: The research is conducted by a qualitative approach with the use of primary and secondary data. The empirical study is conducted through semi-structured interviews participated by seven Dutch and six Swedish employees from an organization with business operation in the Netherlands and Sweden. Interviews involve one face-to-face meeting and all others are done through Skype due to time, location and cost constraint. Scientific theory is compared against the empirical findings and the coded themes are discussed in analysis.

Results and conclusions: The national culture dimensions of Hofstede are compared with the empirical findings and this study supports that the four national culture dimensions of Hofstede’s; Power Distance, Individualism, Femininity and low and middle Uncertainty Avoidance correspond with the description of the Dutch and Swedish interviewees behavior. These national characteristics are observed to have influence in the cross cultural business relationship between the employees in the Netherlands and the employees in Sweden. The two largest cultural difference are in the way the Dutch communicate compared with the Swedes and the perception on pace of work. Although both parties work in different countries, they interact with each other frequently by phone, Skype and face to face meetings due to the fact that they share
common customers. The common customers are managed through the local country operation such as Sweden and also at the headquarters level in the Netherlands. As such, the frequent communication results in the development of a working relationship between the Dutch and Swedish colleagues. The efforts to adapt to each other’s cultural differences further increases the trust level in each other’s working method in order to serve their customers better.

**Suggestions for future research:** The limitation of the research is that it focuses on one company which belongs to one specific industry. Therefore integrating participants from different companies within the same industry or across industries could result in a dissimilar result. The shortcoming is addressed by suggesting that for future research, this study should be replicated in different industries in the Netherlands and Sweden.

**Contribution of the thesis:** This research contributes to the improvement of business relationships in multinational companies and managers can implement these improvements.

**Keywords:** Culture, Time, Trust, Adaptation, Business Relationship
# Table of Contents

List of Tables ........................................................................................................ii  
List of Figures ........................................................................................................ii  

1.0 Introduction ......................................................................................................1  
  1.1 Background of the study ..............................................................................1  
  1.2 Research gap and motivation ......................................................................2  
  1.3 Aim and research questions .........................................................................3  
  1.4 Disposition ....................................................................................................5  

2.0 Theoretical discussion ..................................................................................6  
  2.1 Culture .........................................................................................................6  
  2.2 Cultural dimensions .....................................................................................7  
  2.3 Time .............................................................................................................12  
  2.4 Trust ............................................................................................................14  
  2.5 Adaptation ....................................................................................................16  

3.0 Methodology ..................................................................................................18  
  3.1 Research strategy .........................................................................................18  
  3.2 Research design ..........................................................................................18  
  3.3 Operationalization .......................................................................................19  
  3.4 Data collection .............................................................................................20  
  3.5 Data presentation and analysis ....................................................................28  
  3.6 Validity and reliability of the study ...............................................................28  
  3.7 Ethical considerations ..................................................................................29  

4.0 Empirical study ...............................................................................................30  
  4.1 Empirical data of the Smurfit Kappa interviewees ......................................30  
  4.2 Observation and summary ..........................................................................44  

5.0 Analysis/Discussion ......................................................................................48  
  5.1 Introduction...................................................................................................48  
  5.2 Hofstede’s dimensions ................................................................................48  
  5.3 The Dutch and Swedish perception of time ................................................53  
  5.4 The Dutch and the Swedish culture related to trust in a business relationship...55  
  5.5 Who is adapting to whom? .........................................................................56  

6.0 Conclusions ....................................................................................................59  
  6.1 Findings .......................................................................................................59  
  6.2 Implications ..................................................................................................61  
  6.3 Limitations ...................................................................................................63  
  6.4 Suggestions for further research .................................................................63  

References ...........................................................................................................65  
Appendices .........................................................................................................73
List of Tables

Table 1 Interview questions ........................................................................................................... 25
Table 2 Information of the interviewees ......................................................................................... 27
Table 3 Empirical findings from Dutch participants ................................................................. 46
Table 4 Empirical findings of Swedish participants ................................................................. 47
Table 5 Comparison or resemblance of the primary and secondary data .............................. 58

List of Figures

Figure 1 Disposition overview .................................................................................................... 5
Figure 2 Culture dimensions of the Netherlands and Sweden .............................................. 7
Figure 3 Theoretical Framework .............................................................................................. 17
1.0 Introduction

This chapter contains the background information about this study. The first part is about the overview of the four most important topics; culture, time, trust and adaptation. Furthermore the gap, motivation, aim and research questions are explained and finally the disposition of this study is discussed at the end.

1.1 Background of the study

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2012) observe that in international business, managers have it tough as they have several premises of culture to work with; the culture of origin, the culture in their environment and the culture of the organization they are employed. Although it is theorized that internationalization leads to common culture worldwide and standardization (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2012), yet at the same time managers need to be sensitive and adapt to local cultures (Garvin et al., 2008). Due to that, the balance between consistency and adaptation is essential to the alignment with the corporate goals and policies and procedures. Hofstede et al. (2010) aptly named the need for the balance as culture change. He believes new practices can be learned particularly in the environment of organizations. Managers must understand why the universal application of western management theory may not work and instead adapt to what management means across different cultures thus managing the cultural differences (Cox Jr., 1991). As Greif (1994) explains, cultural beliefs form an integral part of institutions and affect the persistent evolution of a diverse organization. Further, it is the common ideas and thoughts shared by individuals that govern their interaction and capture individuals’ expectations with respect to actions that others will take in various situations (Greif, 1994).

National culture is investigated by various authors such as Hofstede et al. (2010), Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2012) and Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961). This study follows Hofstede’s dimensions and his interpretation of the term national culture; a set of values, behavior and beliefs that stereotype a population. The theory from Hofstede et al. (2010) is used in this research because of the clear description of the behaviors and characteristics inherent to specific national cultures and the theory is widely recognized, accepted and used in the academic context. Four of Hofstede’s dimensions are used to get an overview of the national cultures of Sweden and the Netherlands. The dimensions are Power Distance, Individualism-Collectivism,
Uncertainty Avoidance and Masculinity-Femininity. By Hofstede’s own admission, he “stumbled” on the opportunity to research a large amount of survey data of the value of people from more than 50 countries. This was the start of his research and until today he is one of the most well-known authors of how culture influences people’s values in workplaces. The latest version of his book on cultures and organizations, updated in 2010, includes a ranking of 76 countries (Hofstede et al., 2010).

To strengthen the research, the effect of time, trust and adaptation are also investigated as these elements have close ties with culture. As this study focus on business relationships, it is deemed equally important to discuss about trust. The role of trust in relationships has become more crucial in cross border businesses and relationships which imply increasing uncertainties and risks (Weck and Ivanova, 2013). Relationships are formed between partners for a long-term business and in order to achieve this, partners need to acquire knowledge about each other to build trust (da Rocha et al., 2012). According to the following studies, trust depends on culture. People think differently in business relationships and this influences how they respond and resolve problems, and in how they think and trust (Weck and Ivanova, 2013). The importance of trust and the process to develop a trustworthy relationship could be different for each culture (Hyder and Fregidou-Malama, 2016). Time interpretation is also a concept that is different for each culture (Davies and Omer, 1996). According to Macduff (2006), the value and meaning that is placed on time orientation can be different across different cultures. The last concept in this research is adaptation. The adaptation of parties in a relationship can be both ways (Hallen et al., 1991). However, Voldnes and Grønhaug (2015) and Weck and Ivanova (2013) illustrate that a cross-culture relationship can work just as well if only one party adapts to the other.

1.2 Research gap and motivation

The culture of the Netherlands and Sweden, the concept of time and trust are all well investigated topics as illustrated by the following examples. These topics are searched in connection with various other topics as illustrated in the following examples. Morgan and Hunt’s (1994) study is well known in the relationship marketing. They analyze if trust and commitment are key variables for relationship marketing. Other researchers such as Hofstede et al. (2010) and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2012) research cross cultural relationships and the latter discuss in detail about the association between
culture and time. This study examines the business relationship within a multinational company that interacts in different cultures. The perspective of internal business relationships in a multinational company is less investigated and this study focuses on the influence of national culture in the business relationships between the Dutch and the Swedes within the same company. This study is based on the company Smurfit Kappa which is an Irish-Dutch firm with operations in different countries and cultures around the world. This research focuses on two countries only: The Netherlands and Sweden. Moreover, the company has not conducted such a study before independently.

Due to the globalization phenomena, the key to conducting successful cross national business is by understanding cross cultural differences (Voldnes and Grønhaug, 2015). Phan et al. (2005) finds cultural sensitivity to be one of the determinants for the sustainability in business partnerships. We endeavor to undertake our thesis on culture and cultural differences from a business relationship perspective. We apply the four cultural dimensions of Hofstede et al. (2010) which are identified as Power Distance, Individualism-Collectivism, Masculinity-Femininity and Uncertainty Avoidance to highlight the level of cultural difference between the two cultures. It goes without saying that cultural differences need to be managed in order to maintain a good relationship (Voldnes and Grønhaug, 2015). We theorize that therefore, adaptation by either one or both parties is expected. From this study, we are interested to know who is adapting to whom. To the best of our knowledge, no other study has been undertaken to examine how culture influences cross national business relationships and the cultural adaptation behaviors between the Dutch and the Swedes. This study is motivated by the onset of globalization which means multinational organizations expand their borders worldwide. As a result, this affects communication and business relationships between colleagues in the same organization that operate in different cultures and locations. Subsequently, this awakened the interest to research the influence of culture on the business relationships between the Netherlands and Sweden.

1.3 Aim and research questions
The aim of this research is to investigate how culture influences business relationships. Further, the effects of time and trust on the business relationships are also investigated due to their close affiliation with culture. The investigation entails whether there are cultural differences between the two countries and how the differences are managed.
We will focus on the culture differences related to the national characteristics of both countries, in addition to the effect of time and trust. Furthermore, we would like to find out if adaptation in behavior takes place in the relationship. To fulfill the aim of the study, we formulated the following research questions:

1. How does culture influence business relationships?
2. Do time and trust affect business relationships?
3. Does adaptation take place in cross cultural business relationships?

This study may be used as a guideline for other multinationals to improve their communication strategy and business relationships among their employees in different locations. This work is based on a company named Smurfit Kappa and this is the first time that such a research is done for the company. The national dimensions of Hofstede illustrate that the Netherlands and Sweden are not so different from each other. However, our casual conversation with some Smurfit Kappa employees reveal a different opinion and hence our interest to investigate further.

Smurfit Kappa is a renowned multinational company in the paper-based packaging industry with a presence in 33 countries and 350 locations. They are one of the world leaders in manufacturing packaging products in an innovative and sustainable manner for various sectors (for example: food products, furniture or industrial products). The company Smurfit started in 1938 in Ireland and expanded to the United States. In 2005, the company merged with the European packaging leader Kappa. This firm has its headquarters in the Netherlands. Today Smurfit Kappa is one of the world leaders in Europe and America, and their headquarters are based in the Netherlands as well as in Ireland. (Smurfit Kappa, 2018)
1.4 Disposition

This section provides the structure of the thesis by presenting a small overview of each chapter. This study consists of six chapters and Figure 1 explains the chapters presented in this study.

**Introduction**

This part explains the motivation and the purpose of the study. The aim is to investigate how culture influences business relationships.

**Literature**

This part contains the theory of the four main subjects: culture differences, time, trust and adaptation, which constitute the model used for this study.

**Methodology**

This part explains the methods used for conducting this study. The reliability and validity are discussed to highlight the quality of the report.

**Empirical Study**

The research questions are answered from the empirical data gathered through the interviews. This part is divided into four research topics to give a clear overview.

**Analysis**

The analysis is developed from the combination of the most important findings in the literature review and the empirical findings.

**Conclusion**

This part gives the answers to the research questions and addresses the aim. Furthermore it presents the contribution and suggestions for future research.

*Figure 1 Disposition overview, Source: Own (2018)*
2.0 Theoretical discussion

This chapter will delve into the four topics that will define this research and answer its aim. The four topics are; culture, time, trust and adaptation. These topics will illustrate the influence of national culture and who is adapting to whom in a business relationship between the Swedish and Dutch operation offices of Smurfit Kappa. In this chapter the theoretical framework will be explained and will form the basis of this research.

2.1 Culture

There are as many definitions of cultures as there are cultures itself by the various researchers of culture study. Culture as defined by Hofstede et al. (2010) is a set of mental programs which is free from rigidity the way computer programs are, rather there is a possibility for each individual to deviate from their mental programs and react in unexpected ways. Adler and Jelinek (1986) define culture as a set of taken-for-granted assumptions, expectations, or rules for being in the world. Although the versions are aplenty, they all seem to converge on the notion that culture reflects group-based patterns of human thought and interaction (Legohérel et al., 2009). In an effort to show cultural differences, a number of researchers have attempted to identify aspects in which cultures are similar or can differ (Oetzel, 1998). These aspects are labeled as dimensions of cultural variability (Hofstede et al., 2010) and can be measured relative to other cultures (Triandis, 1995). Four of the dimensions used in this study are Power Distance, Individualism-Collectivism, Masculinity-Femininity and Uncertainty Avoidance (Hofstede et al., 2010).

The world is occupied by people belonging to different groups and nations, who think, feel and act differently. These differences are the cause for many resulting conflicts from the exposure to common problems that demand cooperation between people to solve those problems. The path to cooperation is often hampered as it requires understanding the differences in thinking, feeling and acting by the different parties facing the common problems. This dilemma exists because every person carries a pattern in themselves that were learned throughout the person’s lifetime. (Hofstede et al., 2010)

On the other hand, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2012) believe the study of culture is about having the awareness of cultural differences and how they affect the
process of doing business and managing. In as many ways as the cultural experts differ in their interpretations, one thing they agree upon is that culture is shared by the collective in relation to their views of the world.

Figure 2 demonstrates the culture index according to Hofstede’s dimensions for the Netherlands and Sweden. The following section explains the four dimensions and what is means for the national culture of the Netherlands and Sweden.

2.2 Cultural dimensions

Power Distance

Power distance is the individual perception of the hierarchical gap between authorities and subordinates as substantial but also legitimate and acceptable (Hofstede et al., 2010). According to Hofstede et al. (2010), power distance orientation is the extent to which individuals believe superiors are entitled to status and privilege, and the extent to which individuals should accept and support the views of superiors. Schwartz (1992) considers high power distance as ‘hierarchy’ and lower power distance as ‘egalitarian’. Power distance shapes individual’s relationship with authorities (Begley et al., 2002). Although Hofstede’s power distance dimension is derived at a societal level, social and organizational psychologists have begun to use them as a variable at the individual level (Bochner and Hesketh, 1994). High power distance individuals expect superiors to act...
autocratically (Botero and Van Dyne, 2009) and the latter have the prerogative to make decisions without consulting subordinates (Begley et al., 2002). In contrast, low power distance individuals expect to be consulted by superiors (Lam et al., 2002) and speak up their opinion regarding matters of importance (Botero and Van Dyne, 2009).

Khatri (2009) examines of the implications of power distance on a variety of organizational behavior issues that shows a similar pattern of characteristics with Hofstede’s research. His study finds that in a high power distance context society, the characteristics are as follows, 1) employees are unwilling to participate in decisions and are content for their superiors to make decisions and giving instructions that they follow passively; 2) jobs descriptions are tight and narrow which does not allow room for individual discretion; 3) hierarchy follows a vertically downward path with little or no lateral communication; 4) a large gap exists in the superior-subordinate relationship, unlimited power and control of superior over subordinates; 5) decisions are made by the few at the top autocratically which lead to faster decision making process and implementation in the organization; 6) managers tend to micromanage as even small decisions are taken to the top. In addition, Rao and Pearce (2016) find that ethnic Indian managers in the USA and local managers in India with low interpersonal power distance had better team collaboration, innovation and future performance regardless of their subordinates’ individual power distance orientation and despite the different power distance cultures that the managers were exposed to.

Based on Hofstede’s research, Sweden have a low score on the power distance index. Likewise, the Netherlands scored somewhat low on the same index. According to Hofstede, the typical characteristics of countries having low power distance are described as being independent or have limited dependence on superiors, belief in equal rights, hierarchy is meant for convenience purposes only, ease of approach with superiors to express opinion or voice out important matters, interdependent relationships, small emotional distance between subordinates and superiors, management facilitates and empowers. (Hofstede et al., 2010)

**Individualism versus Collectivism**
The individualism-collectivism dimension perceives how much a culture reinforces individual achievement and interpersonal relationships (Barkai, 2008). Triandis (1996)
regards the individualism-collectivism syndrome as the most prominent facet of cultural differences. Greenfield (2000) agrees with this view and calls it the “deep structure” of cultural variation. Individualism is defined as individuals in societies that are autonomous and independent from their in-groups who behave primarily on the basis of their own attitudes rather than the group (Triandis, 2001). Hofstede et al. (2010) add that the ties between individuals are loose indicating that focus is only onto one’s self and the immediate family. Children from this society grow up to think in terms of “I”, which is their personal identity and classified not according to their group membership but individual characteristics (Hofstede et al., 2010). Collectivism is defined as inter-dependency within the in-groups (Triandis, 2001) and behavior is shaped primarily on the basis of in-group norms in a communal way (Clark and Mills, 1979). As children grow up, they are conditioned to have the “we” mentality in relation to their in-group which results in mutual dependency (Hofstede et al., 2010).

The study by Singelis et al. (1995) reveals that the individualism-collectivism dimension contains vertical and horizontal aspects within the dimension. Individualism is the dimension that includes the conception of an autonomous individual. On the other hand, collectivism is the dimension that includes the perception of one’s self as part of the collective. The vertical and horizontal axis exists in both dimensions. The vertical axis accepts inequality whereas the horizontal axis accepts equality regardless of whether it is the individualism or collectivism dimension. That is to say, that if the society is individualist, whether or not members of the society accept inequality or equality depends on the axis they belong to, either vertical or horizontal. And vice versa, if the society is collectivist, whether or not members of the society accept inequality or equality, depends on the axis.

In collectivist cultures, people are especially concerned about relationships (Triandis, 2001). In a conflict situation, collectivists are primarily concerned about maintaining relationships whereas individualists are more interested in pursuing justice (Ohbuchi et al., 1999). Thus, collectivists prefer to solve conflicts or misunderstandings by methods of resolution such as mediation whereas individualists are prepared to use the law (Leung, 1987). Individualistic cultures value self-sufficiency and extrinsic motivators such as rewards, honesty, transparency, privacy and individual rights (Barkai, 2008). Further, Barkai (2008) suggests that collectivists view themselves as members
representing a group or organization and accordingly emphasize obligation to the group which includes taking responsibility for fellow members of the group. Collectivistic cultures value harmony more than honesty, working to maintain face and governance may invade private life and regulate opinions (Barkai, 2008).

Based on the research by Hofstede et al. (2010), Sweden has a high score on the individualism-collectivism index. Likewise, the Netherlands also scored high on the same index. This means that both countries are individualistic societies. The typical characteristics of such societies are described as everyone only looks after themselves and their immediate family, the same value standards is applicable to all, speaking one’s mind reflects an honest person, friendships (relationships) are voluntary and should be fostered, individual ownership of resources, low-context communication style, offense causes guilt and loss of self-esteem, employer/employee relationship is a contract based on mutual advantage, hiring and promotion decisions are based on merit only and management is the management of individuals.

**Masculinity versus Femininity**

The dimension masculinity versus femininity does not refer to gender. Rather, it refers to the stereotype of gender (Hofstede et al., 2010). A feminine society has more characteristics of a female and the opposite for a masculine society (Hofstede et al., 2010). A feminine society could be described as caring, modest and solidarity and the masculine society is described as competitive, assertive and focused on achievements (Hofstede, 1994). According to Newman and Nollen (1996), is a masculine workplace/management style focuses on achieving high earnings, rewards and acknowledgement and the opposite is a workplace that find the quality of the personal relationship and work life more important. These feminine workplaces and management styles are commonly linked with Scandinavian countries, such as Sweden, Norway or Denmark (Newman and Nollen, 1996).

The dimension masculinity versus femininity is not only mentioned in Hofstede’s work but also in the study Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (Newman and Nollen, 1996). According to Newman and Nollen (1996), the dimension orientation towards activity by Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck is similar with masculinity versus femininity of Hofstede’s work. Maznevski et al. (2002) see an overlap with the dimension activity and
Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner’s (2012) sequential and synchronized time dimension. This illustrates that the dimension masculinity versus femininity is described in various culture frameworks.

Figure 2 illustrates that the Netherlands and Sweden are both feminine societies. Sweden scored 5 on the index of Hofstede and is the most feminine country of the world. The top 5 consist out of number 1 Sweden followed by Norway, Latvia, Netherlands (index 14) and Denmark. This score means that in the society and in the workplace, everyone is treated equally and managers make decisions through involvement. The Dutch and the Swedes are known for their long discussions, compromises and consensus during conflicts or negotiations. Furthermore a moderate lifestyle is applicable for the Swedish people. Everyone has enough and no one too little. They will not be better than others and will stay humble and similar with the others in the society. (Hofstede et al., 2010)

Research by Newman and Nollen (1996) illustrate the above description of an equal workspace in a feminine society. Their study focused on the effect of merit-based rewards in a masculine and feminine society. The results demonstrated that work performance improved if merit-based rewards were used in a masculine society and the opposite applies for a feminine culture where the performance increased when they made less use of earnings-based rewards.

**Uncertainty Avoidance**

Uncertainty avoidance is the fourth cultural dimension (Hofstede et al., 2010). It stands for the anxiety of the unknown future in a society and how a society deals with these uncertainty and ambiguity (Hofstede, 1994). It illustrates the need for rules to set behavior (Soares et al., 2007). A weak society could be described as less scared for the future, open to taking risks, live day by day and are more tolerant about different opinions (Hofstede, 1994). The opposite is a high uncertainty avoidance society that has a need for rules and that avoids risks (Dawar et al., 1996). This society tries to minimize surprising or unpredictable situations and the people are characterize as more emotional, anxious and nervous (Hofstede, 1994). In a work environment, unpredictable situations are reduced through clear plans, strategies, systems and procedures (Newman and Nollen, 1996).
On the index of Hofstede, the Netherlands scored 53 and Sweden 29. This means that the Netherlands have a small preference for avoiding uncertainty. They prefer rules, security and a similar way of behavior. The people in this culture feel busy, that time is money and they are insecure about innovations. Sweden has low uncertainty avoidance and this means that the people are more tolerant for unknown situations, no anxiety for innovations or mistakes, rules are flexible and will be changed or removed if the rule does not work. The culture is more relaxed, schedules could be flexible and work could be stopped if that is necessary. (Hofstede et al., 2010)

In the previous paragraph, we quoted Hofstede et al. (2010) about the perception of time. It was discussed that high uncertainty avoidance countries feel busy and low avoidance countries are more relaxed. According to Hofstede (1983), low uncertainty avoidance societies are not scared of the influence of time but the opposite society always feels in a hurry. He describes that high uncertainty cultures feel the time pressure; that time is money and should be regulated. He makes the distinction that in a country like Sweden time is more flexible and is less rushed. Another point highlighted previously is the difference in behavior on innovations. According to Shane (1995), low uncertainty avoidance societies are more innovative than high uncertainty avoidance societies and this has an influence on the choice of multinationals to expand their operation. In view of globalization, there is a need for multinational companies to be highly innovative. Therefore as part of their expansion strategy, managers are looking at countries with low uncertainty avoidance that are more open for innovations (Shane, 1995).

2.3 Time
People across cultures construct and perceive time differently (Fuhrman and Boroditsky, 2010). Each culture has its own way of perceiving the construct of time that influences the value each individual places upon it and how they use it accordingly (Kaynak et al., 2013). Goodenough (1971) explains culture as a set of beliefs or standards shared by a group of people that have an impact on the behavior of an individual. Hofstede et al. (2010) echoes this view and goes on to posit that culture is to humans collectively what personality is to the individual. Further, Goodenough (1971) argues that behaviors are different in different cultures because of the divergent values of each cultural group and he assumes that an individual can choose which culture to
interact in at any given moment or in any given situation. Usunier (2000) agrees on that view and reflects upon the multicultural nature of many individuals in today’s societies. Research on communication suggests that conflicts can be resolved by altering one’s approach to communication (Kaufert and Putsch, 1997). From a cultural context, communication barrier can be overcome by adopting a communication style that is culturally appropriate (Kaufert et al., 1984).

At an individual level, Legohérel et al. (2009) find that cultural differences highlight the relationship between culture, time orientation and attitude towards certain behavior. Although time orientation varies across individuals within culture (Hill et al., 2000), an individual’s time orientation is believed to be mostly a product of his or her cultural background (Graham, 1981). Although many models are used to advocate time orientation and human behaviors (Lee et al., 2017), this study adopts the model of Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2012). According to them, if people were to coordinate their business activities, they require some kind of shared expectations of time (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2012).

Using the concept of sequentially or synchronically organized activities, the authors explain that people are either achievement-oriented or relationship-oriented and how we think of time have an effect on how we plan, strategize and coordinate our activities with others. To a sequential thinker, everything has its time and place and any changes in sequence will make them uncertain. Everyone and everything wait for their turn and people prefer to do things right. Doing things sequentially is regarded being efficient as it requires minimal effort for maximum impact. However, the flaw in this thinking is that going in ‘straight lines’ ignores the effectiveness of shared activities and cross-collaborations. (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2012)

Synchronic people on the other hand prefer to juggle a number of activities in parallel. This means that although there is a common end goal, the number of ways to get to that point is infinite. In contrast, sequential people are careful planners for whom each milestone is dependent upon the completion of the prior established steps, sequentially. Unanticipated disruptions to the schedule are disliked. Schedules are arranged tightly with only a small margin in between the time slots. Lateness or being ‘slow’ is considered rude and unacceptable behavior. Synchronic people are less insistent on
punctuality or being ‘slow’. This does not mean that the synchronic culture does not value time, rather they make allowance for people with whom they have a relation with and ‘give time’. Cultures that think synchronically have the view of ‘making time’ and are flexible with the unexpected. For cultures with sequential orientation, the approach is more towards ‘business as usual’ and does not deal well with unexpected circumstances. (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2012)

To summarize, the typical characteristics of the sequential culture are described as only doing one activity at a time, time is sizeable and measurable, keep appointments strictly scheduled in advance and do not run late, relationships are generally subordinate to schedule and strong preference for following initial plans. On the other hand, the typical characteristics of the synchronic culture are described as do more than one activity at a time, appointments are approximate and subject to ‘giving time’ to significant others, schedules are generally subordinate to relationships and strong preference for following where relationships lead. When managing and being managed, the sequential culture people feel rewarded and fulfilled by achieving planned goals and the corporate ideal is the straight line and the most direct, efficient and rapid route to objectives. In contrast, the synchronic culture people feel rewarded and fulfilled by achieving improved relationships and the corporate ideal is the interacting circle in which past experience, present opportunities and future possibilities influence each other. (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2012)

2.4 Trust

Voldnes and Grønhaug (2015) explain in their study that trust is a factor that has influence on the conducting of a relationship and on the maintaining of the quality of an existing business relationship. The definition of trust is according to Rotter (1967) the expectancy of an individual that the promise of someone else could be committed. According to Morgan and Hunt (1994), trust exists when one person has confidence in their partners’ dependability and integrity. Further, they add that the concept of trust is studied in various parts of social literature; for example in communication, service marketing, strategic alliances or retailing.

Businesses are working worldwide together and trust in relationships for business across borders is important because these connections insinuate a higher unpredictability and
risk (Weck and Ivanova, 2013). During the last decades the interest of deep and open relationship extended in business markets has grown (Ulaga and Eggert, 2006). In China trust is included in ‘Guanxi’ which is a relationship with a deep trust level (Kriz and Keating, 2010). They observe that there is still much more to learn in cross cultural business relationship and the influence of trust. According to them, in China, emotional bonding is important to be able to create a deep trust level. They stressed that without trust, it is not possible to do business there. The authors also mention that there is no same description of trust in different cultures. This is highlighted as well by Hyder and Fregidou-Malama (2016) when they suggest that the evaluation of trust could diversify from culture to culture.

Beccerra and Gupta (1999) demonstrate in their study the key negative and key positive points for lack of trust and high amount of trust in relationships. They found the result of lack of trust is higher transaction and agency costs, because a manager must invest more time in a low-trust relationship than in a high-trust relationship. According to them, the positive results of high trust are the openness of information sharing, communication and the higher willingness to take risks than in a low trust relationship. These positive views are also coming back in Morgan and Hunt’s (1994) study in which they mention that businesses are looking for partners they can trust because it decreases the risk connected with business operations.

In business, there are two types of relationships. The first one is based on economic exchanges whereby these relationships are building on contracts and the exchange is made in advance where it has been agreed how much will be exchanged. The second type of relationship is the social exchange. These are more vague arrangements that are made for future commitments and happen for without a specified time frame. Trust is a concept of the second type of relationship. Without the arrangement of a contract, the partners takes a risk in trusting each other and there is a possibility that one partner is not able to fulfill the future commitments. This type of relationship is not able to develop without trust. (Blau, 2017)

Weck and Ivanova investigate about the influence of culture knowledge on the adaptability in a business relationship. When businesses are creating cross national relationships, acquiring knowledge about the counterparty’s culture is important in
order to adapt and ensure a smooth relationship. This part is essential for the evaluation of trust. The cultural knowledge could be learned when both parties are in the ‘get-to-know-each-other’ phase. During this phase, the partners are creating a personal relationship. The ability to adapt to the partners culture and ways of doing things will influence the growth of trust in the relationship. (Weck and Ivanova, 2013)

2.5 Adaptation

The topic adaptation can focus on marketing or product adaptation. In marketing this means that the company adapts their marketing to the local market and that it is made specific to the wishes of the local customers (Fregidou-Malama and Hyder, 2014). Our study is about the influence of culture, time and trust on business relationships and if these factors lead to behavior adaptation between the Dutch and the Swedes. According to Wilson (1995), adaptation does happen if one person in the relationship changes his/her processes or changes something so that it meets the other's wishes in the relationship. In the Voldnes and Grønhaug (2015) as well as Week and Ivanova (2013) studies, they illustrate the business behavior in relationships. The researchers focus on the influences of culture for the possibility of adaptation. In both studies, the balance of adaptation was unequal. The Finnish and Norwegian sellers were found to be the ones who adapt more to the Russian’s culture doing business. The benefits of adaptation could be for one party or for both so that the investment of the relationship decrease costs, raise income or create dependence (Cannon and Perreault Jr., 1999).

In a relationship, it is possible that both parties adapt to each other. Researchers Hallen et al. (1991) found that adaptation is different depending on the stage of the relationship. They observe that at the beginning of the relationship, adapting is important for the development of trust and in the later stage, it will extend and coagulate the relationship. They concluded that through adaptation the relationship strengthens and this will prevent the relationship from ending.

As Wilson discuss in his research, relationships are without a clear legal structure that clarify the boundaries of each party. The opposite is a joint venture which is an entry mode with a plain legal structure. The parties need to make informal rules for payment, legal systems and production agreements and in this part the adaptation process starts in the relationship. Changes in the relationship demand implementations in corporate
organization culture and reward system to strengthen the behaviors that influence the trust building, common goal and adaptation to create a powerful hybrid relationship. (Wilson 1995)

Figure 3 illustrates the framework for this research. The issues of culture from the context of culture dimensions, time and trust will be separately investigated and will determine if they influence cross cultural business relationships. If there are differences that influence the business relationship, the adaptation in the relationship will be investigated. By adaptation, we mean who is adapting to whom.

*Figure 3 Theoretical Framework, Source: Own (2018)*
3.0 Methodology

This chapter explains the methods that are used to answer the aim of the study and research questions. The process of the interviews and details of participants will be clarified. Further, the base of the empirical study and the analysis is described. Finally, the reliability and validity of the study is discussed to justify the quality of the work.

3.1 Research strategy

This is a qualitative research using the deductive theory. Qualitative research is a type of research that is usually associated with qualifying rather than quantifying (Bryman, 2012). The emphasis is more on words and although it is commonly considered inductive in approach, however the study by Adler and Adler (1985) is an example in which qualitative research has been done to test the theory rather than developing one. Our approach being deductive reflects that the theory used in our study guides our research instead of the theory being the outcome of it. Based on what is already known in the theoretical domain about culture, we deduce that the cultural differences between the Dutch and the Swedes affect their business relationship and trust which later drives our data gathering process.

This is consistent with Bryman (2012) who explains that theory is important because it provides the basis and rationale for the research that is being conducted in addition to providing the framework within which social phenomena can be understood and the research findings can be interpreted. Further, he stresses that based on what is already known from the theoretical background related to a particular domain will be later on subjected to empirical scrutiny. As a final step in the deduction approach, empirical findings are fed back into the theory as a means of validation and associated with our domain of enquiry which is the research question of this study. A similar approach can be seen in Butler and Robson’s (2001) study in which they justify the deductive process.

3.2 Research design

We adopt the case study design for our research. According to Bryman (2012), basic case study entails the detailed and rigorous analysis of a single case. As Stake (1995) observes, case study research is concerned with the complexity and specific nature of the case in question. Particularly for this study, the case under exploration is the cross-national business relationship between the employees of Smurfit Kappa in the
Netherlands and Smurfit Kappa Sweden. Feagin et al. (1991), claim that case study is ideal when researchers are interested in doing an in-depth, holistic investigation. Specifically, we will use the exploratory method as suggested by Yin (2014) for case studies. The purpose of conducting this exploratory research is for the authors to understand the influence of culture as explained by Hofstede’s culture dimensions, time and trust on business relationships, and whether these factors influence adaptation in an international business relationship between employees of the same organization. According to Singh (2007), this study qualifies as an exploratory research as we will explore the various levels of depth about the concepts of cultural differences, time, trust and adaptation which are contributing factors of a successful international business relationship.

Singh (2007) explains that exploratory research acts as the basis for researchers to explore issues in detail to familiarize themselves with the defined concepts. It is usually undertaken when the study is quite new and alternative options have not been clearly defined or when researchers are curious about a topic. Consistent with the purpose of case studies, the exploratory method is designed to bring out details from the viewpoint of the participants (Tellis, 1997). Further, exploratory research can help determine the research design and data collection method (Singh, 2007). Moreover, the methodology used for an exploratory study may not be as rigorous as a conclusive study although it helps to do the methodology as methodically as possible (Nargundkar, 2003). Therefore, the choice of our research design involves “the search for patterns from observation and the development of explanations for those patterns” (Bernard, 2011, p.7) for the possibility to draw conclusions against theory and research query.

3.3 Operationalization

We operationalize our research through semi-structured interviews with the employees representing companies from The Netherlands and Sweden that provide the context of an international business relationship. Initially, seven employees from Smurfit Kappa in the Netherlands were selected based on the recommendation from one of the account managers we are acquainted with. Six other employees from Smurfit Kappa in Sweden were also selected in the same way. When it became clear that some of the recommended people could not participate in the study, those we have interviewed made further recommendations of who they know have the experience in a Dutch-
Swedish working relationship. The purpose of choosing the interview participants from the two different countries is to gain insights and details pertaining to the concepts discussed through the perspectives of the participants. The participants hold the positions of managing director, account directors, account managers and analysts. In addition, the selected participants will have at least one year’s experience. The interviews are conducted through face to face and Skype voice calls depending on what best suits the participants. Moreover, due to time, location and cost constraint, it was not possible to make more face to face interviews at each local office. On average, the interviews lasted between 50-60 minutes and are recorded. The interview questions are open-ended and were conducted in English because it was the common language that the researchers and participants speak and the fact that the research is written in English.

Prior to conducting our interviews, the following activities were undertaken; 1) cross check with our thesis supervisor regarding the appropriateness and relevance of the interview questions; 2) emailing the target participants before interview to introduce the topic, gauge their interest in the study and willingness to participate; 3) emailing the interview questions to the selected potential participants who fulfill the research criteria to facilitate the understanding of the interview purpose and to familiarize them with what to expect during the actual interview session.

3.4 Data collection
This research is conducted through collecting data from various sources. The following two types of data have been used; secondary data and primary data. Secondary data is obtained from other research publications and primary data is conducted to answer a specific problem (Hox and Boeije, 2005). They give examples such as primary data could be open interviews, observations or focus groups and secondary data could be published articles, books or company annual reports. Furthermore, the data collection which consist out of an in depth section of the primary data and secondary data, the influence on our study and the information of the participants will be explained.

According to Hox and Boeije (2005), secondary data is useful for answering the research questions but there are three issues that need attention. They explain the first problem is that researchers must find data that is useful for their research. The second problem is that they must be able to collect applicable data. The third is they need to
check the quality of the data with the contemporary research quality and methodology. The secondary data that are collected for the theory part of this study is conducted with course books from the library of the University of Gävle and with articles that are published in reliable journals. The scientific articles are found through the online database of the University of Gävle and through the online databases of Google Scholar, Emerald, JSTOR and ScienceDirect.

Primary data could be used to collect information that will answer the aim question of a study. When data is published and accessible to the public, it is defined as secondary data (Hox and Boeije, 2005). Primary data is conducted in the form of open interviews to research the effect of culture, time and trust on a cross cultural business relationship. The interviews are compared against the theory and this information is used to make the connections in the analysis. The interviews are a qualitative way of collecting field information and asking more in depth questions.

The participants are from different offices and functions in the Netherlands and Sweden. The face-to-face interview and Skype interviews consist of 30 questions and as the interview progresses, follow up questions were asked. The questions are based on the themes related to power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty avoidance, time, trust and the last theme is adaptation. For every theme, there are between two to three questions asked to identify the characteristics and behaviors of the participants. The first four themes are to identify the national culture and business relationships of the participants and the last three themes are about the business relationship. All the questions are placed in appendix 1. Table 1 shows the most important questions and the links with the theory. Table 2 describes information related to the participants.

**The participants**

The selection of the participants is important for the validity of the research. The interviewees need to be selected by their work experience, their experience of working with the Dutch or Swedish colleagues and their values. The sample size is correct when data has reached the point of saturation. This can be different for every research field. According to Francis et al. (2010), the saturation level is reached for interview based research at a minimum of ten interviews.
In total, thirteen people were interviewed from Smurfit Kappa. The participants came from the Netherlands (seven participants) and from Sweden (six participants) who have collaborated with their counterparts. The purpose is to research the role that culture plays in business relationships at Smurfit Kappa between the offices in the Netherlands and Sweden. Further, the effect of time and trust on the business relationships is also investigated. One of the interviews was face-to-face and the other twelve interviews were conducted via Skype due to time, location and cost constraints. The selected participants have more than one year of work experience and hold the positions of analyst, manager or director.

This study omits the names of the participants in the empirical data section to safeguard their privacy and preserve confidentiality. In addition, the main goal of the study is to investigate the cultural differences between the Dutch and Swedish participants and therefore identifying individual names are deemed not necessary.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Link to Theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Background Info</strong></td>
<td>1. Could you introduce yourself, explain your position, location and tasks in the company?</td>
<td>This illustrates the value and suitability of the participants (Francis et al., 2010).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Power Distance</strong></td>
<td>2. During a meeting, in what way do the Dutch express their opinion? Do they accept the opinion of others?</td>
<td>Low power distance individuals expect to be consulted by superiors (Lam et al., 2002) and speak up their opinion regarding matters of importance (Botero and Van Dyne, 2009).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. How are decisions made? Who are involved in the decision making process?</td>
<td>Higher power distance individuals have the tendency to make decisions despite the low context power distance characteristic of their society in general (Botero and Van Dyne, 2009).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Is there a hierarchical structure in your department?</td>
<td>Schwartz (1992) considers high power distance as ‘hierarchy’ and lower power distance as ‘egalitarian’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individualism versus</strong></td>
<td>5. Do you rely on your coworkers to perform your job function? (i.e. do you need input from others to complete your work) If yes, how often do you rely on yourself and how often do you rely on others?</td>
<td>Using the term ‘individualist’, Hofstede refers to the society in which the interest of the individual prevails over the interest group and the term ‘collectivist’, vice versa (Hofstede et al., 2010).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collectivism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Masculinity versus</strong></td>
<td>6. If you work together, is everyone in the team involved or do you only involve members</td>
<td>This score means that in the society and in the workplace, everyone is treated equally and managers make decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Femininity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>with experience?</td>
<td>through involvement (Hofstede et al., 2010).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>In this organization, are people generally tough or caring?</td>
<td>A feminine society could be described as caring, modest and solidarity and the masculinity society is more described as competitive, assertive and focused on achievements (Hofstede, 1994).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Uncertainty Avoidance</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Do you have to strictly follow company rules when carrying out your task?</td>
<td>It illustrates the need for rules to set behavior (Soares et al., 2007). The opposite is a high uncertainty avoidance society that has a need for rules and that avoids risks (Dawar et al., 1996).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Does the organization encourage you to be very tolerant or intolerant of mistakes? Are there consequences?</td>
<td>In Sweden is a low uncertainty avoidance and this means that the people are more tolerant for Unknown situations, no anxiety for innovations or mistakes (Hofstede et al., 2010).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>How do you think about the term ‘time is money’?</td>
<td>The high uncertainty cultures feel a time pressure and that time is money and should be regulated (Hofstede, 1983). In a country like Sweden, time is more flexible and is less rushed (Hofstede, 1983).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Do you also notice something in their (the Dutch or the Swedes) speed of work? Do they work as fast as the Dutch or the Swedes?</td>
<td>Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2012) explain that time horizon has a significant effect on how people do business.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Trust 12. Do you believe that word of mouth is enough or do you prefer a contract to close a deal? The second type of relationship is the social exchange, this are more vague arrangements that are made for future commitments and happen for a not specified time frame. Trust is a concept of the second type of relationships (Blau, 2017).

13. Do you share private information with your Swedish/Dutch coworker? The positive results of high trust are the openness of information sharing, communication and the higher willingness to take risks than in a low trust relationship (Beccerra and Gupta, 1999).

14. Do you think that knowledge of the culture of the Swedish/Dutch coworker is necessary to create more trust in the relationship? When businesses are creating cross national relationships is acquiring knowledge about the culture business important for their possibility to adapt, this part is essential for the evaluation of trust (Weck and Ivanova, 2013).

Adaptation 15. Do you think that you adapt to the Swedish/Dutch behavior? And how? According to Wilson (1995) adaptation happens if one person in the relationship change it processes or changed an item so that it meets the other's wishes in the relationship.

Table 1 Interview questions, Source: Own (2018)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Name of Participant</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Worked at the company</th>
<th>Worked with counterpart</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gävle, Sweden</td>
<td>Eva Eriksson</td>
<td>Business Manager</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>19 years</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>23/11/2018</td>
<td>Face to face</td>
<td>00:55:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eslöv, Sweden</td>
<td>Tibor Pinter</td>
<td>Business Development Manager</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>31 years</td>
<td>+/- 13 years</td>
<td>27/11/2018</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>00:50:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nynäshamns, Sweden</td>
<td>Jan Höglund</td>
<td>Account Manager</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>18 years</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>30/11/2018</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>00:46:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eslöv, Sweden</td>
<td>Igor Nasteski</td>
<td>Business Development Analyst</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>18 years</td>
<td>4-5 years</td>
<td>05/12/2018</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>01:03:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eslöv, Sweden</td>
<td>Lenelise Ekstrand</td>
<td>Business Development Analyst</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>05/12/2018</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>01:03:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eslöv, Sweden</td>
<td>Kristina Lundin</td>
<td>Marketing manager</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>25-30 years</td>
<td>23 years</td>
<td>10/12/2018</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>00:57:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagamill, Sweden</td>
<td>Paul Bol</td>
<td>Managing Director</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>28 years</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>29/11/2018</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>01:40:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schiphol, the Netherlands</td>
<td>Johan Struiksma</td>
<td>European Technical Account Manager</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>3-4 years</td>
<td>30/11/2018</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>01:04:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>Interview Date</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Duration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
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<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Oosterhout, the Netherlands</td>
<td>Wim Oosterveld</td>
<td>Operational Development Director</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>16 years</td>
<td>30/11/2018</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>01:14:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Schiphol, the Netherlands</td>
<td>Erik Hoonhorst</td>
<td>Account Director</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>06/12/2018</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>01:15:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Oosterhout, the Netherlands</td>
<td>Esther Saris</td>
<td>Key Account Manager</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>06/12/2018</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>00:48:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Oosterhout, the Netherlands</td>
<td>Pieter van der Linden</td>
<td>Retail and Business Development Manager</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>18 years</td>
<td>07/12/2018</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>01:00:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Various locations in the Netherlands and Sweden</td>
<td>Roel Noten (left SK in 2012)</td>
<td>Information Systems Director (last position held)</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>07/12/2018</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>00:54:00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2 Information of the interviewees. Source: Own (2018)*
3.5 Data presentation and analysis

The interview data will be presented in the empirical findings and discussed in analysis. The literature and the interview data are coded to find the most important keywords for the study. The findings from the research are coded into seven themes; Power Distance, Individualism/Collectivism, Masculinity/Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance, time, trust and who adapts to whom. By coding it is possible to find the link between the empirical findings and the literature which will strengthen the analysis (Yin, 2014).

The thematic analysis method of Braun and Clarke (2006) is applied to identify, analyze and find themes in the data of this study. The researchers Braun and Clarke (2006) explain a six step plan that is applicable for qualitative studies and is used in our study. The first step of this method is to make the data familiar to the researcher (re-read what is already written and try to find patterns). The next step is to identify the codes and after this, the codes will be combined in themes. Making tables or figures will help to make the themes more visible. The fourth step is to refine the themes and find the most important themes for the study. After this step, the themes that will be used for the analysis will be more defined and named. The last step is to write the analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). With the six step plan suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), the theory and empirical findings of this study are coded according to the culture dimensions of Power Distance, Individualism/Collectivism, Masculinity/Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance as well as the perception of time, trust and who adapts to whom and these codes are used to strengthen the analyses.

3.6 Validity and reliability of the study

The most important quality factors are the validity and reliability of the study (Bryman and Bell, 2015). According to Easterby-Smith et al. (2012), the reliability of a research is that it should be possible for someone else to conduct the same or similar outcome as the previous research. The reliability of a study makes the work more transparent which will mean that the study could be similarly conducted and ensure that the outcomes are valid (Greener, 2008). The validity of study means that the conclusion that is established from the literature and empirical findings are complete, consequent and clear (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). In appendix 1, the interview questions are presented to make this study reliable. Furthermore in Table 1 and 2, data about the participants and the process of interview are presented to make the data transparent.
According to Yin (2014) is there internal and external validity. The internal validity is not applicable for this exploratory study, because internal validity is for explanatory or causal studies. The external validity is about the possibility of generalizing the obtained data. This study is focused on one multinational company in the paper-based packaging industry and the national culture of the Netherlands and Sweden. The data is an analytical generation and the national culture data of the countries can be valid for another scientific study. The findings of the relationship between the offices of the company is specialized and for the external validity is further research necessary to be able to generalize.

The participants of this study are from different countries and have various work experiences that cover a broad field of knowledge. There is a possibility that we may have a tendency through our own believes into a certain direction. The help of our supervisor, the answer of the interviewees and the mix of the authors will limit our pre-judgment. The study is designed such that if the research would be reproduced, the outcome would be the same.

3.7 Ethical considerations
To ensure the quality of the research it is necessary to understand ethical considerations. The researcher needs to inform the participants through explaining the research and giving the questions in advance. This will prepare the interviewees for the interviews. It is advisable to record the interview to obtain true and qualitative information. It is important to get the permission of the participants to record the interview. Another advice is to offer the possibility to stay anonymous because sometimes the interviewees may provide sensitive information about the firm and prefer to stay anonymous. (Driscoll, 2011)

According to Babbie (2013), it is the responsibility of the researcher to protect the privacy, well-doing and confidentiality of the interviewees. To ensure this, all interviewees were asked if they agree with using their individual names and the organization name in the research. The possibility to stay anonymous was proposed to the participants and before each interview, the approval to record the interview was asked. The last step to ensure an ethical correct report is to send the transcriptions of the interview to the participants and ask for their approval.
4.0 Empirical study

This chapter demonstrates all the primary data of the interviews with the participants of Smurfit Kappa. The primary data consist out of seven interviewees of Smurfit Kappa Netherlands and six interviewees of Smurfit Kappa Sweden. During the interviews, the links and motives are found and are categorized into themes. At the end of this part, the themes are summarized in a table.

4.1 Empirical data of the Smurfit Kappa interviewees

The Dutch and Swedish culture related to Power Distance

Sweden and the Netherlands are low power distance countries as theory suggests (Hofstede et al., 2010). As such the characteristics are independent or have limited dependence on superiors, hierarchy is meant for convenience purposes only, ease of approach with superiors to express opinion or voice out important matters and management facilitates and empowers (Hofstede et al., 2010). These characteristics are apparent in their communication with each other, their approach to decision making, the organization structure in reality and practice, and the way they relate to superior. The questions are based on three topics on how they express their opinion, how are decisions made and who are involved and the last question is focused on the hierarchical structure of the organization.

How the Dutch and the Swedes communicate in their business relationship

With regards to how the Dutch and Swedes express their opinions, our findings suggest that the Dutch are not shy people. They interrupt frequently during a discussion because they want an answer or clarification to their question right away rather than waiting for the end of the discussion. They are opinionated as they almost always have an opinion about everything, regardless of whether they are the experts of the subject or otherwise. They are confident, express their opinions freely and are not afraid of being in the spotlight. According to a Swedish manager, “the Dutch are more direct. They say what they want. It is easier to communicate with Dutch people than Swedish people I would say”. Most Swedes are not like that. The Swedish manager further added that “in Sweden everyone takes more regards to everyone else’s feelings, we do not want to hurt anyone. We have to put everything in cotton, everything you say you have to be careful”.

The Swedes are perceived to be more passive and try to determine their status first among the group before saying anything. A Swede would only speak after a while has passed and they feel more comfortable. One participant observed that “it is normal behavior. You first want to know where people stand, what believes they have, you are going to be more political about it. But once you get to know each other, those boundaries become less and less”. The Swedes would speak up only if they feel strongly about something and that depends on the personality of the Swede. A Dutch technical manager mentioned “before they (Swedes) say something back, they want to make sure that they have thought about it and maybe I (Dutch) speak my thoughts more straight away”. The personality factors depend on whether they have been in the company a long time or whether they have significant experience and know the subject well before the Swede would express their opinion. On the contrary, a Dutch is ready to jump in on the spot right away. The Swedes could be “snowed under a little bit with the loud people from other cultures”. Loud in this context refers to everyone talking simultaneously over others or interrupting a lot.

In general, some Dutch participants agree that the Swedes are mostly silent. Interestingly, one Swedish participant said that “people (Swedes) in the north (of Sweden) use fewer words than people in the south”. Some of the Dutch interviewees agree that it would be a good idea for the Swedes to express their opinions more because their contribution could be the best, but they tend to hold back. However, they also observe that if the subject is close to the Swede’s heart and important to them, they will speak up and deliver their point across, but they will wait until the communication ‘storm’ is over and then take their turn to speak. Although the Dutch always have an opinion on everything, they are not good at asking the opinion of others. This point was made by one Dutch participant who said, “that is also something the Dutch have to be very careful about because we are not very good at asking the opinion”. As the Swedes are more introverted, this is where the Dutch need to be careful as the Swedes do not necessarily share their opinion unless asked. Even though the Swedes have very good opinions, they are not good at expressing them “especially not when there is a very well-spoken person in front of them who does not really show that he is interested in the opinion; then most Swedes will be relatively quiet”.

31
The many facets of decision making process within Smurfit Kappa in the Netherlands and Sweden

With regards decision making at the individual level, our findings suggest some parties among the interviewees tend to agree that the question “who makes decisions?” depends on what the decisions are about and the complexity as well as the risk element of the decisions. Every individual in the organization, whether they are Dutch or Swedish are empowered to make their own decisions based on their own judgment up to a certain level as specified within the limits of authority of their position. The risk arising from a decision outcome defines how decisions are made and depending on complexity and impact affects the involvement of other people. As one Dutch manager mentioned, “there is no one answer to that, the risk element of what a decision outcome could bring really defines how decisions are made and obviously the more complex or the more impact a decision can have, the more people are involved”. Certain important decisions need to be brought up to the senior management level in order to reach alignment. The Dutch need to make unanimous decisions as do the Swedes but both sides agree that their opinion and suggestions could be overruled by a higher authority when decisions are made. This is reflected by a Dutch participant who said, “I think the Dutch for sure also need that, unanimous and then of course we can also be overruled because the Swedes can also be overruled by our HQ department but in general, I think alignment here is very important and I think the Swedes as well”.

On how decisions are made at the team level, there have been contradicting findings among the interviewees. Some say decisions are made together. For example, when the person responsible from headquarters need to make a decision related to a customer, he or she first checks with the production team in Sweden and if there are disagreements, they discuss the issue together and try to find a solution together. Everyone’s agreement is important because the view is that if a decision is taken despite some disagreements, problems could be brewing as one participant puts it, “if I take a decision that nobody agrees with, it could be some problems”. Some Swedish perspectives explain that decisions are made unanimously in order for things to go smoothly. Furthermore, it is especially important to the Swedes that they do things correctly on the first attempt rather than getting it wrong and doing things many times over. As one Swedish participant puts it, “The Swedes want it to be correct from the beginning, more safety. If it goes wrong, it will give a bad reputation. They do not want to rush it. We need to
make it clear and get everyone on the train so that everything will go smoothly”. On the other hand, there are times when a decision is enforced from a higher authority. As one Dutch participant said, “I am not going to ask all team members if they think that this is a good idea, they can have their say for sure but at the end we will say this is it and here we go”. On these occasions, a Swedish participant thoughtfully remarked “maybe someone makes a decision that you do not like but you have to accept it. You cannot agree on everything”.

Some participants have also made the observation that the Swedes are very careful and one Dutch manager observed “my experience is that the Swedish are not very good in taking decisions on their own”. Another manager stressed that for the Dutch, at committee meetings the chairman will listen to everybody’s opinions, weigh his options and make a decision regardless of whether the thoughts or suggestions of others are included or not. He added that “some people may disagree with the decision but at the end of the day, a decision is made”. For the Swedes, “if there is no agreement from everyone in the meeting, it will be postponed to the next meeting and the next meeting until a consensus is achieved”. According to him, this process takes a long time before a decision is reached but according to another Dutch participant, this also results in “alignment with all parties at the end”. One Dutch participant said, “Swedish people think because they have everybody’s agreement, it will go much faster in the end”. Unfortunately, in the interviewees’ experience this is not always the case and the process can sometimes stall.

Structure of the organization and relationship with superior

All our participants admit that there is a formal organization structure within Smurfit Kappa but that the structure in practice operates more on a flat level. This means that it is only a small distance between the subordinates and their superiors. They have also mentioned that it is not a problem to reach the senior management if they feel the need to do so. For example, a Swede participant said, “I would say flat (the organization structure). We have a manager of course but I would say it is flat”. Her Dutch counterpart said, “I think it is quite flat to a certain extent. I mean I have a lot of freedom when it comes to managing my customers’ demands and needs and I need to make sure that those needs are filled. I have a lot of freedom in doing that. But if there are very big negotiations going on, then I really have to keep senior management close”.

33
The Dutch interviewees added that even though there is a hierarchical structure, people are allowed to have their own opinion and be involved in discussions supported by good arguments. As one Dutch participant noted that there is a boss but the behavior is not as in “I am the boss and you have to do exactly what I am telling you”. All of the participants acknowledge that they have a good relationship with their superiors. Generally, most of them share an informal relationship where the subordinates are free to speak up their minds and the superiors are approachable. As one participant said, “Our relationship is quite good and relaxed. I think he is the best boss I have ever had here”.

**The Dutch and Swedish culture related to Individualism**

Sweden and the Netherlands are both individualist countries as Hofstede’s theory suggests (Hofstede et al., 2010). As such everyone only looks after themselves and their immediate family or in this context the team, the same value standards is applicable to all, speaking one’s mind reflects an honest person, friendships (relationships) are voluntary and should be fostered, individual ownership of resources, management is the management of individuals (Hofstede et al., 2010). The ‘I’ and ‘we’ mentality are apparent in their perspective on working together and how performance is rewarded and success is celebrated. The first question relates to reliance on co-workers, the second question is about having individual or team goals and the last question is whether the bonus system is focused on team or individual performance.

**The Dutch and Swedish perspective on working together**

On working as a team, the results from our findings show that both the Dutch and the Swedes work as a team. Although each member within a team is assigned specific tasks in which they are responsible for, working as a team requires that they receive input from others who may or may not be members of their team in order to get their job done. For example, one Dutch key account manager relies on the support from other people and confirmed, “yes I really rely a lot. They are not directly my team members. it is basically the people in the factories, so production but also customer support and technical support for a factory”. She relies on them for day to day progressions like forecasting, production, planning and customer support among others. Working in a team provides access to colleagues from different areas to collaborate. According to a Swedish account manager, “I think for the best results, you have to work in a team
because I am dependent of my colleagues in the technical or graphics (department) so we could discuss how we could do the products best for the customers. That is not a decision I can take by myself because I need the expertise of others. I like to work in a team because you have to have colleagues that are best in what they do and together we could do good”. Coming from an organization perspective, a Dutch participant added his view that “if you look at the company, everything you do is always teamwork. If you do not have your local team with you, nothing happens. If you do not understand your local team then nothing will happen either”.

A Dutch participant claimed that although the Dutch are ‘team players’ in the way they rely on the input of others to perform their tasks, he thinks “we are more often directive leaders”, not too dissimilar to the leaders in the Smurfit Kappa operation in the United States. In his opinion, this leadership characteristic is unlike most European countries and “the Swedish would be the complete opposite of that”. According to him, a Swedish leader is not expected to take their own decision; that the decision should always be in a complete communication with the collective. He further states that one of the reasons that some Dutch managers have been placed in the operation in Sweden to have an influence at the senior management level. According to him, these selected few are sent there because the headquarters in the Netherlands is keen to improve the momentum of the whole organization. A Swedish business development manager thinks the Swedes behave more as a team. On the contrary, he believes “Dutch are like Americans, more self-centered”. He further added “they (the Dutch) are more able in general to work on their part of a project as do it quickly and professionally and drive the project forward. A Swede in general is more dependent on a team to drive the project forward”.

The Dutch and Swede perspective on performance reward and celebration of success

In terms of compensation and rewards, in the Netherlands, all the participants confirm there is a bonus system that is based on individual performance as well as company result. It is a system that applies from the middle management level and above. The general workers level has a collective labor agreement which is not individual based. A Dutch participant explained, “if you are within the collective labor agreement then you will get a collective bonus scheme, it is not so much personalized. If you go above the collective agreement then you can have it personalized (above general worker level)”.
This is not the case for the Swedish operations whereby there is no individually based
bonus except at the top management level. One Dutch interviewee who is based in Sweden said in his own personal experience, issues can arise when a selected few is rewarded but not all are given the same treatment. He thinks it is a national characteristic that in Sweden everyone must receive the same benefit. However, all Swedish participants agree that in Smurfit Kappa Sweden, there is no bonus system. As remarked by a Swedish participant, “Here in Sweden we do not have an individual bonus system only a company bonus system, so it is important that the team does well”.

One of the follow up questions relate to the celebration of achieving targets and important milestones. The Swedes said that they do not celebrate their achieved targets and that they wish to celebrate it more. One of the Swedish participants mentioned that if a behavior does not reflect the Swedish culture, the Swedish mentality is to refrain from showing off or being boastful and more about being equal with each other and staying calm without being extreme. However, he thinks that it would be a good idea to have more celebrations for successes. In his opinion, celebrations indicate that something good has been done which will set a precedent for more success. He said, “I think that we do it the wrong way. With celebrations you show that you are doing good and you can be a role model”. Similarly, the Dutch participants also echo that they celebrate achieved targets or successes too little. One of the participants said that the Dutch people are very down to earth and that it is more American to celebrate it. He said, “we do not do that (celebrate) enough because six months ago we extended the contract for a year but it was never really celebrated”. Two out of the seven Dutch participants said that they celebrate their milestones and that it is good to have a “time out” and appreciate what has been realized before starting on the next milestone. One of them added that it provides a moment of rest, peace and reflection.

The Dutch and Swedish culture related to Masculinity and Femininity

For this part, three questions were asked. The questions focus with respect to the interviewees involving all their team members, whether they are working together, if the senior members guide the junior members and if the company is in generally tough or caring.

According to a Dutch interviewee who has the opinion that although the Dutch work individually and not as a team per se, at the same time they depend on others to perform
their tasks. He does not think that there is enough time to help others but does not rule out that despite the time constraint, the effect is positive for the company performance. He explained that “in the end it is more positive than negative because by helping another colleague who delivers another project, it would add to the total number of projects delivered and gives the company a good result”. He sees a bigger benefit in helping other people in the company even though they have individual roles and are not directly working together in a team. The only negative effect that could come out of helping others is that it consumes time and would mean there is less time for their own individual tasks.

The Swedish interviewees said that the senior managers try to guide the junior members. One of the interviewees said that in a perfect world, the senior members would guide the junior members but that depends on the person. All the Swedes think that they are caring. The Dutch interviewees said as well that the senior managers try to guide the junior members. In the Netherlands there trainees and graduates and the interviewees have said that they support wherever they can to make sure that they do well and to make sure that they get the information they need to perform the project. One of the interviewees said, “I would like to have more or any feedback from the highest level (CEO) when we are closing a large contract deal”. The interviewees have shared that new colleagues feel very welcome in their team and that they feel that they are supported by their team. The Dutch and the Swedish find the people in their organization to be caring in general.

The Dutch and Swedish culture related to Uncertainty Avoidance

For the theme Uncertainty Avoidance there are three questions asked. The first question is if they strictly had to follow company rules when carrying out their task? The second question is, “Does the organization encourage you to be very tolerant or intolerant of mistakes? And are there consequences?” And the last question is how they thought about the term ‘time is money’. These questions are asked to investigate if the Swedish and the Dutch interviewees correspond with high or low uncertainty avoidance characteristics.
Rules
According to the Swedish participants there are rules you need to follow regarding health and safety but that the informal rules are more flexible. This applies as well for the Dutch participants. They said that there are company rules where you have to stay within the boundary but they feel that they have enough freedom to perform their job in their way. The rules within their tasks are open for their interpretation as long as they stay within the boundaries.

Tolerant about mistakes
The Swedish participants think that they are tolerant about mistakes; even more tolerant than the Dutch. In Sweden they will not point a finger to the person who made the mistakes. One of the participants said that “conflicts are not solved on a direct way, if a person makes a mistake five times, the department will send an email to everyone that this is not the way to work”. It is said as well that nobody will come and say that it was wrong, because you know you made a mistake. They prefer to solve the problem together and that it is human to make mistakes. It is said as well that “if you do not make mistakes, then you have not tried it”. One of the Swedish interviewees said that “repeated mistakes are cost for the company and he thinks that the Dutch will act quicker on this than the Swedes”.

The Dutch interviewees are more divided about the answer on how tolerant the company is when it comes to making mistakes. Some of the interviewees are saying that they could be more tolerant about the mistakes, others are in the middle and even one of the participants said that the company is too tolerant. The interviewees are saying in general that all people make mistakes, but it is more important how you solve the mistakes or if you learned from your mistake and two other interviewees said that you need to make the time to reflect on the mistakes because this is the moment you learn from your mistakes. Five out of the eight participants said that if you make mistakes you will be called by the boss or placed to another division. One of the participants told that the CEO is recently fired and the main reason for this was that he did not implement enough because it is not the failures that count but the changes you make. This is said as well by two other participants that if you never make mistakes, it means that you stay so far away from the edge that you will also probably not be so successful.
because you are not taking any risks and you will just stay put. The Dutch interviewees are more divided in their opinion how tolerant they are about mistakes.

‘Time is money’
The participants were asked what they thought about the term ‘time is money’. The Swedes all agreed that this term does not apply to them. They added that if they would think like this, they would be more stressed and some of the participants find it offensive and would reply, “do you want a good job or a fast job?”. This is said by one other participant as well who said, “I like to get it right from the beginning, so do not rush it”. The Swedish participants find it more important to do it good and correct than do it to quick. One of the participants thinks that this term relates more with the Dutch mindset. Two of the Dutch interviewees said that this definitely counts for them. The company is on the stock exchange and this means that they have to show results again and again and that they need to show it to their stockholders and performance is very important. They need to make money. One participant thinks that it is more the mentality of the Dutch than the Swedes. However he thinks that this phrase is much more appropriate for the American mindset. The other Dutch participants do not think that this saying applies for their working method and mindset.

The Dutch and Swedish perception of time
In this study, the time perspective as seen by the Dutch and Swedish culture is apparent in their pace of work and attitude towards it. The questions asked are expected to reflect whether they perceive their counterpart to be working faster or more efficient and/or if they need to continuously remind their colleagues to get the required information.

Pace of work of the Dutch and the Swedes
The perception of time taken to perform their tasks is different for the Dutch and the Swedish participants. According to one Swedish participant, her factory spends more time at the start of a project. They want to do it correct from the beginning instead of having to do it twice if a mistake was made the first time. She said that “the Dutch want their answers quick. They want responses instantly. Not discussing, just do it” and that the Swedes communicate more and ensure that everyone is on the same ‘train’. Another Swedish participant explained that if you do not receive your information, it is common to send a maximum of two emails in Sweden. On the other hand, in the Netherlands
they are used to sending more reminders to each other to receive input. But in Sweden, if the same behavior is applied in work, the Swedes will think “I will do it, you do not have to keep sending me emails”. One Swedish participant said that she is used to the way the Dutch communicate and in turn does the same. However, some Swedes are not as experienced with the way of communication of the Dutch and could be offended. She explained that some less experienced Swedes tend to wait instead of sending reminders which result in missed deadlines and in the end had to perform the work themselves.

Six of the seven Dutch participants said that the Swedes are taking a longer time at the start of a project. One of the participants said that Swedish people think that it will go much faster in the end process because they have everybody’s agreement on the beginning. The participant does not agree and thinks that their decision process makes them a bit slower. As one Dutch participants said, “There was always a reason why it needed to be discussed a bit more. That is the typical answer you tend to get and it can drive you crazy”. Another participant explained that the Swedes are more modest and “sometimes you need to speed up the process by putting your fist on the table to escalate the project”. This is not something the Swedes would do. They did not feel that they had to chase their Swedish colleagues more.

Some participants noticed a difference in the importance of family and leisure time. One of the participants said that it is more difficult to reach Swedish colleagues after 16:00. One solution he suggested was to work around it and to ask questions earlier. A particular Dutch participant was not too happy with the attitude regarding going on holidays and remarked “we had problems to deliver our product to a big customer in the summer because the Swedish take their holiday and leave everything behind”. Another Dutch participant observed that the Swedish people have a better balance with work and leisure time. In one job function, a Swede business analyst remarks that she would like to have more people involved in her job as part of a team because working independently does not leave much room for her to organize her time for a better work-life balance.

**The Swedes and the Dutch perception of trust in a business relationship**

To identify if the countries trust each other, three questions were asked. The first question is if word of mouth is enough or that they prefer an email (contract). The
second question is if they share private information with each other and the last question is if they think that they need culture information about the counterpart to increase the trust level in their relationship.

Contract (email) or word of mouth

The majority of the participants said that they prefer a contract or that it is written down in an email. One of the Dutch participants said that “he prefers an email because than are people able to check the agreement and also with the language difference is it a double check”. A Swedish participant said that “he prefers to have it in writing because if he needs the information in future, he can go back and find it again”. Only two of the participants said that they prefer to make agreements on the phone, they think that this is faster. They as well said that they have a good memory and that they do not need to write everything down to remember.

Sharing personal life

According to our findings, both the Dutch and the Swedes do share private information regarding themselves and their private life. They have more personal relation with some of their colleagues in the other country than with some others. Some prefer to talk more about business and have less time to make small talks about private information while others are more open. Some are even friendlier and start with sharing about their own life first. The tendency with most of the interviewees is that the working relationship is always easier if you know the person closer about their lives and what they are interested in. Furthermore, it reduces the risk of missing deadlines or no responses on emails when they have a closer relationship. Some interviewees admit to having developed real friendships with their Swede or Dutch counterpart over the course of their working relationship.

Some interviewees have also confessed that they do share private information to a certain degree only to be pleasant but not necessarily share anything deeper beyond the pleasantries and very limited information about themselves. According to them, this is due to their own personality rather than it being a cultural thing. It also depends on the situation as well. For example, when they have business meetings in the Netherlands or Sweden, they are often together in the evening and even if they do not share private information before the meeting, nevertheless the informal setting often encourages them
to share information. All of the interviewees agree that if they interact with and meet the same people over and over, naturally a relationship tend to develop.

The interviewees described building a personal relationship as talking about things outside of work which they claim will indirectly gravitate towards the discussion about work eventually. In their opinion and judging by the way they are doing things, it is important to have small talks aside from business talk. Both the Dutch and the Swedish interviewees agree that having a good personal relationship helps in their professional relationship with their counterparts. They say getting to know their Dutch or Swedish colleagues personally help them to understand why their colleagues react in a certain way in certain situations and this helps avoid any conflicts.

Knowledge about the culture
The participants said that it was not necessary to have knowledge about the culture from the start. Four of the participants said that it could help but that you learn it during the process anyway. Two of the Swedish participants said that the cultures are quite similar and that they never had any problems with the Dutch culture. One Dutch interviewee said that “you need to be aware that there could be differences with people from other cultures at the beginning and that you need to be careful and considerate”. Another Dutch interviewee said that “he tried to be respectful and ask people the question why do they do things and this also shows interest”.

Who is adapting to whom?
The questions about culture differences and adaptation were asked to investigate if the Swedish and/or the Dutch adapt their behavior to each other at work. Firstly we asked if there were culture differences and eleven out of the thirteen interviewees said that there are differences. Further, it was asked if the participants adapted to the differences and what the influence was on the business relationship with their colleagues from across the border.

The empirical findings illustrate that the Swedish participants think that the largest culture difference is the way of communication. One of the participants said that the Dutch are very straightforward and clear in their communication while two others find the direct approach of the Dutch not an unpleasant difference. The data illustrate that the
Dutch have a different approach on the performance of a task. If a Dutch person will fulfill a task, he/she expects to send or receive a couple of reminder emails. In Sweden this is the opposite. A Swedish person sends one or two emails about a task and expects their colleague to fulfill the task. If the colleague does not, then they will work around it instead of sending another email. One of the interviewees said that she adapted to the Dutch way of working and she too sends five emails to get the information that she wants. Another participant feels that the Swedes and the Dutch are similar and therefore he did not have to adapt.

The Dutch participants mentioned that the largest culture differences are the way they take decisions, pace of work and that they are more direct. Six out of the seven participants said that they adapted to improve the business relationship. The section about Power Distance mentioned about the way the Swedes make decisions and the participants said that the Swedes do not always appreciate doing things fast with the possibility of getting things done wrong. They adapt to show mutual respect and maintain a good working relationship. They have to anticipate their pace and arrange for follow up meetings in order to speed up the process. Another participant said that he tries to be slower and more following the pace of the Swedes by giving extra space and time. One of the participants said that he tried to be aware of his directness and tried to avoid it. In ‘Swedish fika’ this difference can be explained. One advice of an interviewee was “try to adapt, try to understand, try to respect and this makes it easier to be accepted”. In general, the participants say that the Dutch and the Swedish cultures are more similar than they are different.

**Swedish ‘fika’**

In Sweden and especially at Smurfit Kappa, the word ‘fika’ is not just limited to having coffee and cake. Many business discussions happen during ‘fika’. In one factory in Sweden, the whole department has breakfast together every morning and the managing director terms this as ‘sort of fika’. Most of the time in Sweden, ‘fika’ is the time during which information is shared and everybody is kept updated on the most recent developments of the business. However, the moment of ‘fika’ is not only related to business and work. Some information related to times personal life is also exchanged. Most of our Swedish interviewees have the same understanding of the ‘fika’ concept but some Dutch interviewees are completely unaware of it. The Dutch people who have
heard of the word only know it as a moment in the day for coffee and eating something sweet, while others have responded that the word is completely unheard of to them.

One of the interviewees gave a comment that the most important place in Sweden is the coffee machine. That is where all the Swedes ask their questions or speak up their thoughts rather than in the meetings. Having realized this, the interviewee would instruct his aid to linger around the coffee machine and listen to the questions and discussions happening there. The aid’s duty is not to respond but to only listen carefully and report what he has heard. The issues heard at the coffee machine are then discussed again or addressed through a memo. The strategy worked very well that the interviewee has shared this important tip with presenters from other parts of the world when the meetings involve Swedish people. The interviewee suggests that if coffee breaks are not built into the meetings, the presenters will go too far, too fast and run the risk of losing the Swedes. According to him, coffee breaks are important because that is where the conversation about what the Swedes understand and do not understand takes place.

4.2 Observation and summary

This section presents the observations and tables that illustrate an overview of the most important empirical findings. The data is demonstrated in two tables (Table 3 and Table 4). Table 3 illustrates the findings from the Dutch participants and Table 4 illustrates the findings of the Swedish participants.

During the interviews some observations were made. The two observations are about openness and the way the Dutch talk. The Dutch interviewees are open and willing to share more on the topic without being prompted to do so. In contrast the Swedish interviewees tend to stick to the questions asked without elaborating further unless prompted. The second observation is that the Dutch interviewees are more comfortable and converse at a faster pace than the Swedish interviewees who tend to speak carefully and slower.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Empirical findings of the Dutch participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Culture related to     | - Interrupt frequently during a discussion.                                                                                           
| Power distance         | - Dutch always have an opinion on everything.                                                                                   
|                        | - No consensus from everyone needed to make a decision.                                                                             
|                        | - Flat organization rather than hierarchical in practice.                                                                       
| Culture related to     | - The Dutch participants work more individualistic than the Swedes.                                                              
| Individualism          | - The Dutch are directive leaders.                                                                                                   
|                        | - There is an individualistic bonus system.                                                                                       
| Culture related to     | - The Dutch try to include members regardless of their seniority level when they work together.                                                                                     
| Femininity             | - Senior members always try to guide junior members.                                                                                   
|                        | - Members of the organization are caring of each other.                                                                            
| Culture related to     | - Staying within the boundary of company rules but with enough freedom to perform the job function in their own way.                                                              
| Uncertainty Avoidance  | - The Dutch are divided about their opinion on how tolerant the company is about mistakes.                                                                                           
|                        | - 4 out of 7 of the Dutch participants think that the term ‘time is money’ corresponds with how they work.                                                                            
| Perception of time     | - Faster at decision making.                                                                                                       
|                        | - More used to sending out reminder emails.                                                                                       
| Trust                  | - Prefer emails or contracts to confirm an agreement.                                                                                  
|                        | - Share private information with the Swedes.                                                                                       
|                        | - They do not think that culture knowledge is necessary at the beginning, it can be learned during the process.                                                                    
| Adaptation             | - Give the Swedes more time to express their opinion during a meeting.                                                            
|                        | - The Dutch try to be aware of their directness and try to avoid it.                                                               

45
More following the pace of the Swedes.

Table 3 Empirical findings from Dutch participants, Source: Own (2018)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Empirical findings of the Swedish participants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culture related to Power distance</td>
<td>Quiet, silent and shy people.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Only speak up after some time has passed and they feel more comfortable.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Make individual decisions in own tasks with consultation and inputs from others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unanimous decisions can sometimes slow down response time and may stall the project entirely.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture related to Individualism</td>
<td>Work as a team on the whole although each individual has his/her own tasks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rely on input from others.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not directive leaders, decisions are in communication with the collective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No bonus system for individual performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture related to Femininity</td>
<td>Being inclusive with all members of the team regardless of seniority level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Senior members always try to guide junior members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Members of the organization are caring of each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture related to Uncertainty Avoidance</td>
<td>Health and safety rules are examples of rules that have to be strictly followed but informal rules related to tasks are flexible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Swedes are tolerant of mistakes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The term ‘time is money’ does not apply to the Swedes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of time</td>
<td>Take more time at the beginning of the project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Getting it right the first time.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not too many reminder emails.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Prefer emails or contracts to confirm an agreement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Adaptation | • Develop good personal relationship that leads to easier and smoother working relationship.  
• Share personal information.  
• Tries to respond faster to requests from Dutch colleagues where possible.  
• Speaks English when dealing with Dutch colleagues. |

*Table 4 Empirical findings of Swedish participants, Source: Own (2018)*
5.0 Analysis

This chapter combines the information of the literature review and the empirical data. This section will follow the themes that are described in the empirical findings and investigate if there are links or differences with the theoretical data.

5.1 Introduction

The theory that substantiated our theoretical framework is analyzed with the information from the interviews. The pillars of the framework are culture, time and trust. With the acquired theoretical knowledge, the questions for the interviews are constructed. The participants are experienced in the work field and with this direct information the analysis of the framework is made.

5.2 Hofstede’s dimensions

The Dutch and Swedish culture related to Power Distance

In the framework of Hofstede et al. (2010), power distance is a cultural dimension related to how a society handles inequality (Hofstede et al., 2010). Likewise, Khatri (2009) believes it is the behavioral implications in the organization related to status differences. The typical behaviors related to countries with low power distance are independent or have limited dependence on superiors, belief in equal rights, hierarchy is meant for convenience purposes only, ease of approach with superiors to express opinion or voice out important matters, interdependent relationships, small emotional distance between subordinates and superiors, management facilitates and empowers (Hofstede et al., 2010). Our study confirms that the Dutch and Swedes subscribe to being a low power distance society and having the characteristics as discussed in the theory.

How the Dutch and the Swedes communicate in their business relationship

Theory shows that low power distance individuals expect to be consulted by superiors (Lam et al., 2002) and speak up their opinion regarding matters of importance (Botero and Van Dyne, 2009). The empirical result shows that there are differences of communication styles in the business relationship between the Dutch and the Swedes. The Dutch are under the impression that their Swedish colleagues think they go way too fast and are way too loud. An illustration of this is when they come together in meetings or discussions, the Dutch are already talking about the next topic when the Swedes have
not even responded to the first. The Swedes on the other hand are a calmer in communication than the Dutch are. However, when the Dutch make a comparison between themselves with countries from the south like Spain for example, they believe that the Spanish take the lead more and are louder than them.

An interesting observation that can be made is that some participants have the opinion that their behavior in communication tend to follow a certain geographical location. There were several discussions during the interviews which centered around the topic that although the Swedes are perceived as introverts, the people in the south of Sweden are more lively and are a bit more open than their northern countrymen. They said that the further north one goes, generally the people use fewer words to communicate with each other and in fact have the culture of using as little words as possible when communicating. The difference in mannerisms and communication styles explain that some of the difficulties experienced by the Dutch in communication with the Swedes are a product of their cultural tendencies.

*The many facets of decision making process within Smurfit Kappa in the Netherlands and Sweden*

Generally according to the Dutch perception, although individuals are given the flexibility to make their own decisions within their own scope of work, the Swedes are perceived as being slow when it comes to making decisions. Therefore, sometimes the Dutch leaders from headquarter office are forced to make unpopular decisions according to what they as leaders feel is the best course of action for the company and execute their decision autocratically. This behavior corresponds with the finding by Khatri (2009) that in a high power distance society, decisions are made by the few at the top autocratically which lead to less time taken to come to a decision and faster implementation. Our thoughts on this leads us to believe that although the Netherlands is deemed as low power distance country, there is an exception to the autocratic ways of making decision under some circumstances with some individuals. This particular exception in behavior is consistent with the theory proposed by Botero and Van Dyne (2009) that a higher power distance individuals have the tendency to make decisions despite the low context power distance characteristic of their society in general.
Our thoughts lead us to believe that although the Netherlands is deemed as low power distance country, there is an exception to the autocratic ways of making decision under some circumstances with certain individuals. This particular divergence in behavior is consistent with the theory proposed by Botero and Van Dyne (2009) that higher power distance individuals have the tendency to make decisions despite the low context power distance characteristic of their society in general. Perhaps this could be explained by the multicultural experiences and exposure of the said individual which leaves a profound cognitive impact on them that their actions and behaviors are governed by this preference despite the conditioning of their national culture. Another possible explanation for the deviation could be the result of the invisible Smurfit Kappa organizational culture rather than the individuals’ non-conformance to their own cultures.

Structure of the organization and relationship with superior

Schwartz (1992) considers high power distance as ‘hierarchy’ and low power distance as ‘egalitarian’. The empirical results identified behaviors of being independent or limited dependence on superiors. All of our participants speak highly about their superiors and how they have a good working relationship and trust established with the superiors. Although there is a formal structure within the organization, the actual application of the structure is relaxed and flexible making it appear as if the organization were a ‘flat’ or horizontal instead of a hierarchical, top-down setup. As subordinates, they are able to voice out their thoughts and concerns directly to their reporting line without any reservations or limitations. All of them also voted unanimously with regards decision making. As individuals responsible for their own tasks and responsibilities, they are empowered to take decisions directly related within their own parameter. If a consultation is needed, they are free to approach their superiors or even the senior management at any given time.

The Dutch and Swedish culture related to Individualism

Hofstede sees individualism and collectivism as the fundamental issue in human societies related to the role of an individual against the role of the collective. He explains that people understand the role of personal relationships in business differently and attach different concepts according to the interpretation of their society. Using the term ‘individualist’, he refers to the society in which the interest of the individual
prevails over the interest group and vice versa for the term ‘collectivist’. Barkai (2008) explains in individualist culture, the society reinforces individual achievement and interpersonal relationships, and value self-sufficiency and extrinsic motivators such as rewards. According to Hofstede et al., (2010), both the Dutch and the Swedes belong to the individualist societies.

*The Dutch and Swedish perspective on working together*

Against our empirical data, the results of our interviews show that the Dutch and the Swedes are very much ‘team players’ despite being regarded as an individualist society. Although each individual in the company are given specific roles and responsibilities to perform, they rely on their colleagues to receive input regardless of whether the colleagues are from the same or different teams and areas. Sometimes the reliance goes above merely receiving input. It could even extend to going out of their way and help colleagues with tasks that are not related to their own to ensure the success of the whole team. In other examples, both the Dutch and Swede participants have mentioned that often, they had to consult the opinion of others in areas outside of their own expertise before they could make any decisions. With regards team work, in both Smurfit Kappa operations in the Netherlands and Sweden, the emphasis is on the concept of ‘we’ even though as a society, they have the perspective of ‘I’ or ‘me’.

*The Dutch and Swede perspective on performance reward and celebration of success*

In terms of performance reward, the Dutch structure suggests an individualist culture as the bonus system is designed around individual appraisal and performance. This system is only applicable to the level above that of the general factory workers. In contrast to the Swedish system, there are no individual bonus systems implemented either at the general factory worker level or above. There is however a bonus system applied to the senior management level both in the Netherlands and Sweden but this practice is no different from the bonus system implemented in other countries within the Smurfit Kappa organization. From the empirical results, it can be analyzed that with regards compensation and rewards related to individual performance, the Dutch fit into the individualist category and although the Swedes are also individualists, this is not reflected from our findings which may suggest that this could have something to do with the law in the country or a decision made by the parent company related to the subsidiary in Sweden.
With regards celebration of success after important deliverables or milestones are achieved, both the Dutch and the Swedes share the similarity that they either do not celebrate success or that they celebrate it too little. Generally, the opinion for both sides is that it is better to celebrate successes as it provides a basis to reflect on what has been done, what could be improved on going forward in addition to providing a moment of rest and peace.

**The Dutch and Swedish culture related to Masculinity versus Femininity**

In this section we can see the dimensions coming together. The literature describes that a feminine society has the characteristics that everyone is treated equally, are involved in decisions and that the decisions take a long time (Hofstede et al., 2010). The opposite or the masculine society is a society that is competitive and is focused on achievements (Hofstede, 1994). The theory illustrates that both countries are feminine societies. This corresponds with the answers of the participants.

The dimension Power Distance shows that decisions are made together in Sweden and that it takes a longer time before decisions are made. The Swedish and the Dutch participants said that senior members and junior members are involved in decision making. This corresponds with Hofstede’s characteristic of a feminine society. In the previous section, the individualistic versus collectivistic bonus system was mentioned. The follow up question was if people would like to celebrate their goals. One of the Swedish participants mentioned that the Swedish mentality is not to show off and one of the Dutch interviewee said that the Dutch are very down to earth. Hofstede et al. (2010) confirm that this behavior belongs to a feminine society and gives the example that the Swedes would not like to be better than others and stay humble. During the interviews, more feminine characteristics were mentioned. Two Dutch participants said that they find the Swedes modest and both countries find it important to share private information to improve their business relationship (Newman and Nollen, 1996). The characteristics of the feminine national culture are almost totally similar for both countries. All the participants say they are caring, working as a team and involve all the members of the group.
The Dutch and Swedish culture related to Uncertainty Avoidance

The fourth dimension discussed in the study is about the uncertainty of the unknown future (Hofstede, 1994). According to Saores et al. (2007) and Dawar et al. (1996), a society with high uncertainty avoidance is more inclined towards rules and avoids risk. Another characteristic is that the people in the society feel busy and that time is money. In contrast, for the people in a society that feels relaxed, rules are flexible and there are no anxieties for innovation or mistakes (Hofstede et al., 2010). The study of Hofstede (1983) illustrates that time is more flexible and that there is less rush in a country like Sweden. On Hofstede’s index, the Netherlands is ranked in the middle with a slight preference for high uncertainty avoidance and Sweden is a low uncertainty avoidance society.

The study showed that the Swedish participants are tolerant about mistakes. Their task rules are flexible and that they could not identify themselves with the term ‘time is money’. The participants said that this sentence would stress them and some have even confessed that they would be offended by the term. They prefer to do it good in once and not rush it. The Dutch participants’ results illustrate that the informal rules are flexible as well. Their opinion about the tolerance of mistakes and about the term ‘time is money’ is more divided.

The characteristic of this national culture dimension shows that the participants of the Netherlands and Sweden have similarities with the theoretical data. The Swedish participants agreed with flexible rules, they are tolerant about mistakes and the term time is money is not corresponding with their culture. These resemblances correspond with the characteristics of a low uncertainty avoidance society. The Dutch are ranked by Hofstede in the middle and this accord with their division on the answers on the questions about the characteristics of mistakes and time is money.

5.3 The Dutch and Swedish perception of time

Our conception of time is strongly influenced by culture as it is an approach conceived from assumptions made by different cultures (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2012). Legohérel et al. (2009) explain that cultural differences mediate time orientation and attitudes toward certain behaviors. Graham (1981) points out that cultural background affects an individual’s perception of time. How people think of time is
closely related to how they plan, strategize, coordinate activities with others and form relationships (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2012).

**Pace of work of the Dutch and the Swedes**

With regards pace of work, in one aspect the Swedes tend to spend a lot of time communicating to make sure that they arrive at a decision everybody agrees on and to get everybody ‘on board’. When prompted further about why their decision making is perceived as being ‘slow’, the Swedes are unanimous in their view that they are determined to ‘get things right’ the first time rather than getting it wrong and having to do the job twice. For the Swedes, relationships are not subordinate to schedules. Unanimity and togetherness are important to them. They are very much a group that places great importance in the effort of the collective and collaborations.

On the contrary, the Dutch are perceived by their Swedish colleagues to be fast-paced and expect quick reactions. When questioned about why they think they are perceived in that way, they generally respond that the mentality of the Dutch is that it is better to make a decision fast and if it turns out wrong, a corrective action can be taken just as quickly rather than taking a long time to arrive at a decision and run the risk of stalling the project entirely. Although the Dutch have a strong preference for keeping to timelines, they regard the relationship with their Swedish colleagues as important and they tend to accommodate by ‘giving time’ if they need certain inputs from the Swedes. When it comes to work and leisure time, the Dutch perceive the Swedes to have a better balance than them.

Additionally, we found an interesting observation that can be made from a topic of discussion that came up with one of the Dutch participants. He believes the reason for the Swedes taking a long time to arrive at a decision is a characteristic inherent in the Swedish culture that is directly related to the weather. A theory that could give credibility to the claim is the aspect of time horizon. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2012) explain that time horizon has a significant effect on how people do business. They replicate the test developed by Cottle in 1969 to identify whether people have a short-term or long-term time horizon. In the test, they find that the Swedes have a long-term horizon which they explain is connected to the long winters. As a result of the unfavorable weather, there are only a few months in which to plan for the whole year.
This finding corresponds with the fact that the Swedes think long-term in their effort to find the perfect solution to any given task or project which comes at the cost of time spent on finding the solution in the first place.

5.4 The Dutch and the Swedish culture related to trust in a business relationship

The concept trust means that the co-workers have confident in each other’s reliability and integrity (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). The participants work with each other in projects and need to collect information for each other or work for the same client. In this cooperation, eleven participants prefer that every agreement is done in writing (email) or a contract. Only two participants found word of mouth to be sufficient. According to Blau (2017), there are two types of relationships. Trust belongs to the social exchange relationship where arrangements are built on trust and there are no contracts. The participants have said that they trust each other. However they belong to the economic exchange group where they close deals with a contract. The participants said that an agreement in writing is preferred because it is a double check and it can be looked up again later.

There is a resemblance with a high amount of trust and the answers of the participants. There is a high amount of trust in a relationship if there is openness of information sharing, communication and the higher willingness to take risks. The participants said that they share private information with their co-workers. The benefit of a personal relationship is that they can better understand each other way they do things. The participants need to trust each other to receive the information they need on the time they need it. Partners (colleagues) are searching for people they can trust, because this reduced the risk that projects have (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Most of the participants agreed with this theory, that the business relationship improve and that risk reduce when you have a personal relationship.

The authors Weck and Ivanova (2013) did a research to the importance of culture knowledge on the adaptability in a relationship. The participants said that they obtained the information at the start of the relationship. None of the participants did anything before the relationship to get any information about the culture of the counterpart. They said that they learned it during the process. The literature agreed that the culture knowledge is obtained during the get to know each other phase. This knowledge is
necessary to be able to adapt and built a trustworthy relationship (Weck and Ivanova, 2013). The participants said that the cultures are more similar than different. The interviewees said that they have not experienced any difficulties if they act carefully about the differences and showed respect.

To summarize, the theory and the empirical findings about trust with or without a contract is contradictory. Both the literature and the participants are saying that private information sharing improves the relationship and knowledge about the counterparts’ culture is learned during the process.

5.5 Who is adapting to whom?
The section adaptation focuses on who is adapting in a relationship. According to Wilson (1995) adaptation does take place when some changes are made in the process to meet the others’ wishes in a relationship. The relationship could be beneficial for both parties or for one party (Cannon and Perreault Jr., 1999). The researchers Hallen et al. (1999) explain that adaptation is important at the beginning stage to build trust and later is it important for maintaining the relationship. The participants said that there are culture differences and the largest differences according to the Swedes is the communication difference of the Dutch and the Dutch find the largest difference the pace of work. The colleagues need to adapt to each other for a good work relationship and they are depending on each other for obtaining information or are cooperating in the same project.

Not all the participants are aware that they adapt to their counterpart. Small changes such as giving them more time during a decision or keep notice of your directness are considered as adaptation. The participants said that there are more similarities than there are differences. However, the small differences that they made for a better cooperation could be very beneficial. One of the Swedish interviewees and one of the Dutch interviewees said that they did not adapt at all and that they behave exactly the same with their colleagues of their office. The other participants said that they are both adapting to each other. If you show mutual respect and explain why you do things the way you do it does the counterpart accept it more. Table 5 illustrates the comparison or resemblance of the most important primary data and the secondary data.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>About</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Link with primary data</th>
<th>Similarities or differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power Distance</td>
<td>How the society views inequality that has behavioral implications</td>
<td>Hofstede et al., 2010, Khatri, 2009, Botero and Van Dyne, 2009, Lam et al., 2002</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Both countries are low power distance societies. The Dutch and the Swedes show cultural differences in their business communication, decision making process but similarities in organizational hierarchy and relationship with superior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualism/Collectivism</td>
<td>Role of the individual against the role of the collective</td>
<td>Hofstede et al., 2010, Barkai, 2008</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Both countries are individualists. They show cultural similarities on working together and celebration of success but differences in the way individual performance is rewarded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculinity/Femininity</td>
<td>Does the society have more stereotype characteristic of a male or a female</td>
<td>Hofstede et al., 2010, Hofstede, 1994, Newman and Nollen, 1996</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Both countries are feminine societies. This means that private relationship, involving everyone in a project and caring behavior are high standard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty Avoidance</td>
<td>How important are rules in a society and how tolerant is a society about</td>
<td>Hofstede et al., 2010, Hofstede, 1994, Soares et al., 2007, Newman and</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>The Swedes are tolerant about mistakes and rules are flexible and this is the same for the Dutch except that there are more consequences for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of Time</td>
<td>How different cultures perceive time</td>
<td>Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2012, Legohérel et al., 2009, Graham 1981</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>The Dutch and Swedes fit into the description of synchronic and sequential time orientation. The cultural difference between them is seen in their pace of work.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>To identify the effect of trust on a business relationship is the importance asked of a contract, private information sharing and knowledge about the culture</td>
<td>Morgan and Hunt, 1994, Beccerra and Gupta, 1999, Blau, 2017, Weck and Ivanova, 2013</td>
<td>Partly</td>
<td>Sharing private information increased the trust level and obtaining culture knowledge on the beginning of a relationship increase trust and the possibility to adapt. Using contracts does not correspond with trust.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptation</td>
<td>Who adapts to whom in a business relationship</td>
<td>Wilson 1995, Cannon and Perreault Jr., 1999, Hallen et al. 1999</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>The research shows that some or not adapting and others are.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 Comparison or resemblance of the primary and secondary data, Source: Own (2018)
6.0 Conclusions

The final chapter concludes the most important findings and answers the research questions. Further, the theoretical and managerial implications are outlined. Lastly, the limitations of the study are discussed and suggestions mentioned for further research.

6.1 Findings

Data from this study are compiled from academic literatures and from conducting interviews. The approach used for this study is based on qualitative research. The findings were compared against theory to prove conformity in order to establish connection in the analysis. The data gathered provided the information needed to answer the research questions. At the start of this study, three research questions were asked that would fulfill the aim of this study. The first one is, “How does culture influence business relationships?”.

Culture exists internally, is intangible and manifests itself externally through patterns of behavior. The perspective of culture taken by this study is examined according to Hofstede’s cultural dimensions of Power Distance, Individualism-Collectivism, Uncertainty Avoidance, and Masculinity-Femininity. The purpose of relying on the dimensions of culture is in the hopes to describe the national characteristics and behaviors of the Dutch and the Swedish employees from the Smurfit Kappa organization operating in their respective countries of the Netherlands and Sweden.

Theory explains that the Dutch and the Swedes belong to the low power distance category. They are individualists and feminist in characteristic. The Dutch have a slight preference for avoiding uncertainties whereas the Swedes have a low preference for the same. The empirical evidence discussed and arranged according to themes related to the cultural dimensions points to the fact that culture appear in all aspects of measurement of this study. The employees carry along within them traits that explain their national cultures in their working lives. Moreover, the cultural differences and/or similarities of both the Dutch and Swedish employees of Smurfit Kappa influence how they behave towards and work together with their colleagues from across the border in a business relationship.
The second research question is, “Do time and trust affect business relationships?”. Yes, they do. Time orientation is a concept that is closely related to culture and differs from one culture to another. Profound cultural differences may arise as a result of how people think about, measure and use their time to conduct activities and form relationships. The theory we adopted about time differentiates people’s association of time into sequential and synchronic orientation. The behaviors shown by the Dutch and the Swedes suggest both cultures have a sequential and synchronic time orientation under different circumstances. The conclusion that can be made is that the Dutch and the Swedes are different in the way they see time, place the importance on time and organize business activities. As such, differences in behavior between the Dutch and the Swedes imply that indeed culture plays a big role in the perception of time. Despite the different perception of time, the Dutch and the Swedes appreciate relationships highly. In the business relationship and interaction context, both parties make an effort to understand as well as accommodate their colleagues from the other culture.

Trust influence behaviors in business relationships just as time does. The theory on trust explains that in cross border business relationships, trust is an important aspect as it involves the elements of unpredictability and risk. To trust is to expect that the other party in the relationship would stick to their end of their bargain. It is the extent to which parties in a relationship show commitment and offer confidence that their actions are motivated for the mutual benefit of both parties in the relationship. In the same way that the approach to time varies, the evaluation of trust also varies from culture to culture. That is to say, the definition and development of trust is different from one culture to another. The empirical findings point to the fact that there is a strong level of trust between the Dutch and the Swedes. The trust between them has developed over time during the course of their business relationship from having frequent interactions via phone or personal meetings. As time goes by, they understand and accept each other’s way of working that allows business to be conducted in an efficient and effective way with minimal complains or disruptions.
The third research question is, “Does adaptation take place in cross cultural business relationships?”. The answer without a doubt is a resounding yes. The cultural differences that exist in the business relationships between the Dutch and the Swedes have made room for adaptation to happen because they operate in different countries, the Netherlands and Sweden. By adaptation, we mean that people have had to change their normal behavior or their way of being; for example in communicating, working, or thinking in order to come to a middle ground or be more accepting. The changes in behavior are an important part of the adapting process and show the other party that they are valued. During the course of their business relationship, the Dutch and the Swedes had to develop an understanding of each other’s culture in various situations. The cultural differences have made it necessary for them to find a solution to cooperate in their interaction with each other and their customers. It goes without saying that the solution entails changing some of their ways to compromise and suit the ways of their colleagues from another culture. Without learning to adapt their behavior to each other, they could risk not achieving common goals which would have a severe impact on job performance and eventually company results.

6.2 Implications

On a theoretical level, this study suggests that the four national culture dimensions of Hofstede’s; Power Distance, Individualism, Femininity and low and middle Uncertainty Avoidance accurately describe the culture of the Dutch and Swedish participants. The characteristics of the dimensions fit with the answers of the participants and this illustrate that Hofstede’s theory is applicable for the Swedish and Dutch national culture. This research gives implications about the business relationships between the Netherlands and Sweden that has not been researched before and therefore this study fulfills a theoretical gap. This research could be the basis for further research about business relationships between cross culture organizations of multinationals within the same industry or perhaps from a different industry. This research contributes to the improvement of business relationships in multinational companies and managers can implement these improvements.
The implication of this study on managerial level is that this study can improve cross cultural business relationships between the Dutch and the Swedes. This study could be used as a guideline for multinational organizations that are based in the Netherlands and Sweden whose employees have a direct working relationship and interaction with each other on a regular basis that would impact company performance. However, users of this guideline need to keep in mind that this study is undertaken with only one specific company that operates in the Netherlands and in Sweden. The majority participants of this study and in this particular organization have indicated that there are more similarities between the Dutch and the Swedes than there are differences. The cultural differences between the Dutch and the Swedes in this study are found to be very little, the changes in behavior and adaptation has a big influence. Nevertheless, small adjustments can have a large impact on business relationships and ultimately company performance.

The implication for a Dutch manager is that inserting a short break during a discussion or meeting gives the Swedes the opportunity to speak their arguments in a less heated environment. It is said that at the coffee break the Swedes are more opening up and share their good and important arguments. Another implication is to ask their opinion during a meeting and be aware of the directness in approach. The implication for a Swedish manager is for the manager to be aware of the different communication style by the Dutch and to not be offended. In addition, if the Dutch do not send the information requested after the second reminder, it would be better to call them or send more emails instead of doing the job themselves because the Dutch are used to receiving more reminders and would probably be grateful for the extra reminder.

For both parties, celebrating their achieved goals is an implementation that could improve their reflection on the project, team building and being a role model for other departments. For the Swedes and the Dutch coworkers, sharing private information has a good implication because this helps them better to understand each other’s working method and subsequently improve the business relationship. The word ‘respect’ is used by the participants and they hinted that if one shows respect and interest towards the other party, this ensures trust and the possibility to adapt to each other. This is also relevant to the difference in pace of work. The approach to a project is different for both
parties. Therefore, it is important to listen to each other and ask questions to increase the trust level in each other’s working style and adapt to each other.

6.3 Limitations
Research limitations related to this study are as follows:
1. Research is focused on one company belonging to a specific industry. Therefore including participants from different companies within the same industry or across industries could result in dissimilar results.
2. Participants’ own opinion of a particular culture risk generalizing the people in that culture and could be incorrect.
3. Questions formulated for data collection are sometimes too broad that compromises the quality of participants’ response.
4. The number of participants is not in proportion to the number of employees with Dutch-Swedish relationship experience to represent the majority.
5. The scope and depth of this paper could be compromised on many levels due to the researchers’ lack of experience in conducting researches and producing academic papers of this magnitude.
6. The researchers’ lack of extensive experience in primary data collection could have resulted in flawed implementation.

6.4 Suggestions for further research
This research illustrates that national culture has an influence on cross cultural business relationships. This study is conducted at one company and to investigate whether this research relates with other companies, the study should be replicated with other multinationals that have business relationships in the Netherlands and Sweden. We make this suggestion based on the premise that the Smurfit Kappa operations in this research could possibly have their own strong culture that incidentally corresponds with the respective national cultures. Therefore, replicating the study on other multinationals could have the possibility of yielding a different finding.

We suggest researching other Smurfit Kappa country operations and analyzing the differences and similarities of the cooperation. This broader research can identify who adapts to whom and who works better together with whom. This also applies to comparative research with other multinational companies.
Further research can also investigate if geographical location in Sweden has an influence on the business relationship with the Dutch. During the interviews it was mentioned that there is a culture difference between the north and the south of Sweden. The interviewees said that the people in the south are more similar with Europe and have less cultural differences with the Netherlands than the people in the north of Sweden.

Additionally, this research does not investigate the influence of age on national culture. It could potentially be that the younger generation in Sweden or the Netherlands has a different mentality when it comes to decision making. Further research can investigate if a mix of age changes the dynamic of a company. Therefore we suggest that future research investigate the influence of age on national culture and business relationships in an organization.
References


Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview questions

<table>
<thead>
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<th>QUESTIONS FOR THE PARTICIPANTS</th>
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<tr>
<td>DETAILS of INTERVIEW</td>
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<td>Position:</td>
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<td>Date of the interview:</td>
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<td>Skype or face to face interview:</td>
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<td>Length of the interview:</td>
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<td>Allowed to record:</td>
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<td>Allowed to use names:</td>
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<tr>
<td>BACKGROUND OF PARTICIPANT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Could you tell us your name, position title and which Smurfit Kappa office you are located at? Could you also explain briefly what you do in the company?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Who is your superior? Where is he/she located?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How long have you worked at the company?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How much experience do you have with cooperation between Sweden or the Netherlands?</td>
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<tr>
<td>CULTURE DIMENSIONS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you think that culture influence the working relationship?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Working with your Swedish/Dutch coworker, what are the largest culture differences?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you notice other cultural differences?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Power Distance**

During a meeting, in what way do the Dutch express their opinion? Do they accept the opinion of others?

How are decisions made? Who are involved in the decision making process? And the people under you are also empowered to make their own decisions in their own limits of authority? Did you notice any difference with decision making with the Dutch and the Swedes?

Is there a hierarchical structure in your department?

How is your relationship with your superior?

**Individualistic & Collectivistic**

Do the Swedes or the Dutch think more as a team?

Do you rely on your coworkers to perform your job function? (i.e. do you need input from others to complete your work) If yes, how often do you rely on yourself and how often do you rely on others?

Are there instances when your superior pursues team goal and as a result the individual goals suffer? When a project succeeds, did you also celebrate?

How is success measured in a team project? (i.e. does everyone get the same reward or is it individually based?)

The pay and bonus system in this organization is designed to maximize individual or team performance?

**Masculinity and Femininity**

If you work together, is everyone in the team involved or do you only involve members with experience?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do the senior members of the team give guidance or try to help the junior members in the team?</td>
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<tr>
<td>In this organization, people are generally tough or caring?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Uncertainty Avoidance</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you have to strictly follow company rules when carrying out your task?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does the organization encourage you to be very tolerant or intolerant of mistakes? Are there consequences?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TIME &amp; COMMUNICATION</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Would you say language (English) is a barrier for the Swedes in communication with other non-Swedish speakers?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you also notice something in their (the Swedes) speed of work? Do they work as fast as the Dutch?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do they chase you a lot (demanding with time)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do the Dutch interrupt in the middle of a discussion or do they wait and allow the other person to finish with their point?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How do you think about the term; ‘time is money’?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TRUST</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you believe that word of mouth is enough or do you prefer a contract to close a deal?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you share private information with your Dutch coworker?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you think that knowledge of the culture of the Dutch coworker is necessary to create more trust in the relationship?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ADAPTATION in THE WORKING RELATIONSHIP</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you notice that you do anything different in your relationship with the Swedish compared to your Dutch coworkers?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Do you think that you adapt to the Swedish behavior? And how?

What are the benefits of these changes? And what are the disadvantages?

Would you like to add something to the interview?

Appendix 2: Letter to the company

Hi (Contact Person),

Thank you for the possibility of the interviews. I will tell you a bit more about the project. We are Inge and Shakila and we are writing our Master of Business Administration thesis at the University of Gävle. We are investigating the effect of culture differences in a business relationship between The Netherlands and Sweden and how the differences are managed. We will focus on the culture differences related to time and communication and trust. Furthermore, we would like to research if adaptation finds place in the relationship?

We have not finalized the questions yet but when we have, we will send them to you and see if they are clear and applicable. We would like to interview 5 Swedish people and 5 Dutch people of Smurfit Kappa who communicate and cooperate with each other. We leave it to you to help us decide the people that best suits our purpose of research. The interview could be face to face, telephone or Skype or any way that the interviewees prefer.

We are very enthusiastic about the research and curious about the results. We are hoping that we could already do some interviews next week.

We hope to hear from you soon and thank you in advance.

Regards,

Shakila and Inge