Cultural challenges in Thailand - An unchanged fact?

A minor field study about cultural challenges among Swedish executives in Thailand

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Abstract

Today, all companies face a challenge to cope with the globalized market, where organizations continuously establish on new markets in new countries. Different cultures meet and must be able to collaborate in an organization. The increased economic growth as well as the explosive Swedish tourism in Thailand today attracts more and more Swedish companies to the Thai market. It is likely that this can lead to different cultural challenges where people from different cultures meet and are forced to adapt to each other's established norms and behaviors. Our study aims to investigate the cultural challenges experienced by Swedish executives in Thailand. Our purpose is to identify the largest cultural challenges experienced by Swedish executives and to understand why this may be perceived as a cultural challenge among the Swedish executives. A qualitative method and a semi-structured interview form have been used in the conduct of the survey. The result showed that the main cultural challenges experienced by the Swedish executives were hierarchy, view of a leader, cross-cultural leadership and collectivism. The Buddhist religion, the strongly established norms of Thai culture and the executives own positive and adaptable attitude towards cultural challenges proved to be the reason why these cultural challenges were experienced by the Swedish executives.

Key words

Culture, Cross-culture leadership, Thailand, Cross-culture, Buddhism, Thai culture, Leadership, Management, Cultural challenges
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1 Introduction

The introduction includes a discussion around the subject’s problem background, previous research and our problematization within the research area. We will also present our purpose, research questions, delimitations and our disposition regarding our study.

1.1 Background

Globalization affects more countries and companies to a greater extent today than ever before. Companies establish themselves on new markets and are constantly looking for new customer segments. The hope for work opportunities bring people across national borders and continents. As a result, various cultures are constantly encountered in different situations, such as at a workplace. It is not hard to imagine that this could lead to certain challenges, for a company were different cultures meet. At the same time Javidan, Dorfman, De Luque and House (2006) argues that a key factor for the success of a multinational company with employees from different cultures is a successful cross-cultural leadership (Javidan et al., 2006).

One of many countries where multinational companies have found a new market, and where foreign companies are constantly establishing themselves, is Thailand. Thailand is the largest economy in Southeast Asia after Indonesia. Since the beginning of 1980 Thailand has shown an impressive economic growth, which has converted the country from an agricultural society to today's industrial society. The forecasts for Thailand’s continuing growth looks positive (Business Sweden, n.d.). The country’s large manufacturing industry, well-developed infrastructure as well as a growing consumer market and middle class make Thailand an interesting market for Swedish companies. These are factors which have contributed to the growing number of Swedish companies, or multinational companies where Swedes are employed, who chooses to establish themselves in Thailand. It is stated by the Swedish Export Council that there is a marked increase of the establishments of Swedish companies, since the Swedish tourism has increased significantly in Thailand (Hillbom & Holmström, 2006). The increased Swedish tourism in Thailand could then also be an additional reason why the number of Swedish companies on the Thai market are growing. According to Business Sweden, approximately 70 Swedish or Sweden-related companies is present in Thailand (Business Sweden, n.d.).
Moving on to Thailand as a country, and the Thai culture, most Thailand's residents are Thai, but a large part of the population also originates from Malaysia, China, India, Laos and Burma. The Thai culture and its history are strongly linked to the Buddhist religion. There are many distinctive directions of Buddhism and these consist of different meanings and interpretations. Buddhism affects most of the Thai culture and lifestyle. A few examples are generally that Thai people are often said to avoid saying no, because, according to the Buddhist faith, it is considered unpleasant. Another example is that in general, Thai people consider their reputation as a very important aspect, which also originates from Buddhist religion. Thai culture is also characterized to a large extent by village routines that have been around for centuries. However, the religions in Thailand are very varied, which contributes to a fascinating culture within the country. Thailand distinguishes itself from the rest of Southeast Asia since Thailand never became a colony, and never lost its independence in that sense (Vailati, 2014). Furthermore, Thai culture is complex and consists of many different influences, which makes it particularly interesting to investigate. The fact that Thai culture and norms appears to be strong also makes the subject particularly interesting to investigate, as it seems obvious that the culture and norms in Thailand are very deeply rooted.

In 2015, Business Sweden issued a survey on the business climate in Thailand. The purpose with the survey was to do a study of Swedish companies in Thailand in order to gain insight regarding how the companies experience the business climate in Thailand. 16 Swedish companies with presence in Thailand participated in the survey. The survey found that 37,5 percent of the respondents perceived the business climate as unfavorable (Business Sweden, 2015). Why? One part of the answering Swedish organizations describes that the political situation creates a disadvantageous climate. Bureaucracy, political situation and corruption were three of the main aspects behind the answers, while others could not point out a specific cause. (Business Sweden, 2015). In summary, even though the Thai market is increasingly attracting Swedish organizations to establish themselves, the result shows that one third of Swedish organizations describe that they experience the Thai business climate as unfavorable.

When Swedish organizations choose to establish themselves in the Thai market, it is obvious that the organization eventually may hire Thai employees. A situation then arises were the Swedish leaders are forced to take the Thai employees' culture into consideration. Since 37 percent of the Swedish companies operating in Thailand experience the business climate as
unfavorable according to Business Sweden (2015), it is therefore obvious that cultural differences occur, and that it may have adverse consequences for the leadership itself and also for the organization.

1.2 Problem discussion
There are a lot of existing research regarding cultural differences and leadership challenges. We will discuss different studies in more detail and their limitations linked the chosen research subject. The first study about cultural differences that we chose to discuss is Hofstede's classical model which divides culture into five contrasting dimensions. The dimensions are; power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity and long-term orientation. Hofstede’s study was conducted on hundreds of thousands of IBM employees in different countries. The study shows that the Thai culture is highly collectivistic, Thai culture is considered more feminine than masculine and that Thailand has a rather low score on the parameter which measures long-term orientation. Hofstede also points out Thailand as a high-power distance society, which means a strong hierarchy often occurs in different contexts (Hofstede, 1980).

Criticism directed towards Hofstede's study is, among other things, that the study often is outdated since it was conducted in the 1970s, although a number of updates has been made (Smith, 2002; Tang & Koveos, 2008). Further criticism of Hofstede's study is that Hofstede argues for culture as a permanent phenomenon, while some researchers argue that culture is constantly changing. Furthermore, some researchers argue that culture should have changed even more in terms of global development over the past decade (Tang & Koveos, 2008). Considering the criticisms of the study regarding the relevance of the study today, we consider that there is a need for further studies within the research subject, which is based on new collections of materials that are relevant today. Another limitation in the study is that it is conducted exclusively on employees in the civil servant sector (IBM employees). This contributes to a unequal picture. In this study, we have chosen to use executives in both the civil servants sector and executives with low-skilled staff to contribute with different perspectives on the existing research, which will extend the existing research.

The second study is Zander (1997) who is a well-known researcher who focuses on cultural differences. Zander (1997) studied different leadership expectations based on 25 different dimensions, from 18 different countries. Zander’s (1997) conclusion is that expectations on
leadership differ between countries, depending on national culture. Zander (1997) can distinguish a link between national culture and leadership expectations. Zander's study resulted in a model which divides countries into different areas, depending on the expectations of the leadership of each national culture (Zander, 1997). We consider that Zander’s (1997) study is interesting and a good example of a way to understand cultural differences associated with national culture. The study can also be more up to date compared to Hofstede’s model. However, the Thai culture is not investigated in Zander's (1997) study. We consider this as a limitation with the study because, in similarity to, Stehle and Erwee’s study (2007) we argue that there is a need for research on the subject associated with Thai culture. That is because Thailand is as previously mentioned, a growing economy that Swedish companies are interested in. We are interested in what way the Thai culture matters to a Swedish executive to lead and we will in our study pay attention to Swedish executive’s experiences of the cultural challenges when leading Thai employees.

The third study connected to the research subject is done by Stehle and Erwee (2007). They investigate cultural differences between Germany and three Asian countries in their study. The Asian countries are Thailand, Indonesia and Singapore. The focus of the study is on international German companies, all of which are rooted in Asian countries. They describe how cultural differences particularly affects HR work in companies which operates in Asia. Stehle and Erwee (2007) argue that most of the studies in this area focuses mainly on the establishment of American companies in China or Japan. We argue that one limitation with Stehle and Erwee’s (2007) study is, as the authors points out Asia as an increasing and globalized market, it therefore would have been relevant to include more European companies, than just German companies. Another limitation with the study is, in similarity with Hofstede (1980) that their study only includes respondents within the civil servant sector.

The fourth study is made by Kamoche (2000). In similarity to Stehle and Erwee (2007), they are explaining that since Thailand is an attractive target for foreign investment, relations between the local culture and foreign managers is considered an enduring question. We want to contribute with a following study about the executive’s experiences of the cultural challenges and handling of these. According to Nakata and Sivakumar (1996) moving the business to a new environment also inevitably results in the organization being forced to meet a new culture.
The fifth research is by Niffenegger, Kulviwat and Engchanil (2006) which has investigated cultural imperatives in modern Thailand with focus on global perspectives. The authors show a result of a world economy that are increasing, which result in globalization and more integrated organizations, where new norms and cultural aspects are consequences. The study is based upon Hofstede’s cultural dimensions and connected to the religious aspects of Thailand. According to the authors, the economic crisis in Asian which started in 1997 and its recovery, has a strong connection to the deeply rooted national culture. Furthermore, the national culture in Thailand is according to the authors clearly different from west European countries. We experience a limitation with the study by Niffenegger et al (2006) since it is based on theories from Hofstede’s cultural dimensions. We consider this is as limitation since the cross-cultural is complex and need to be based from various theories, and theories which are more up to date. The authors also explains a need for a future research where cultural challenges and differences is explained in a deeper level. The study was reflected on norms and cultural aspects between Thailand and western countries, especially the USA. We can distinguish another limitation with Niffenegger et al (2006) study, since we state that further research which focus on the cultural challenge between Thailand and European countries, and especially Sweden is needed.

The sixth research is Selmer (1996). Selmer (1996) has conducted a study among Swedish executives in Thailand. The research compared the actual values of Thai employees with the values that the Swedish executives perceived that the Thai employees had. The result shows a number of differences between the Swedish executives’ perceptions and the Thai employees' actual values. Selmer (1996) states that even though Swedish leaders aims to adjust their leadership in relation to the Thai culture, it is clear that several cultural challenges occur which can result in inappropriate acting among the Swedish managers. An example of misjudgments done by the Swedish executives, is that they underestimated the Thai workers' need for family time, their fear of opposing a superior and their desire to help other people. According to Selmer (1996) is it clear that it exist challenges for Swedish managers working with Thai employees. We are interested in examining which specific cultural challenges there are.

The seventh research is Javidan et al. (2006). Javidan et al. (2006) argues that most people do not understand the impact that national culture has on people's values and thoughts, in all situations (Javidan et al., 2006). Because culture is with us in all parts of life, also in working
life, it is important to take this factor into account in order to succeed with a company where different national cultures occurs, according to (Javidan et al., 2006). The authors argues that leaders need to embrace a cross-cultural leadership in multinational companies in order to succeed in the business. There are a multitude of different studies that describe key factors for success with globalized leadership. The majority generally describes similar factors or general advices on how a leader should act in another culture (Javidan et al., 2006). Javidan et al. (2006) claims that research regarding cross-cultural leadership in a multinational company need to be more specific, linked to the particular context, culture and country. There is a lack of research on how cross-cultural leadership in a certain context should look (Javidan et al., 2006). This statements also argue that our study is a necessary contribution to the existing research question.

The GLOBE Study done by House et al., (2004) is the eighth study. In this study nine cultural dimensions was established with the purpose of identifying differences and similarities among beliefs, norms, practices and values in different national cultures. Eight of the nine dimensions regarding the results of Thailand have been used in our study, and the dimensions is found in our empirical analysis as well as in our conclusion. The GLOBE study (2004) shows which values and practices that occurs within the Thai culture. This is highly relevant for our study. In the GLOBE study (2004) a preferred leadership style in Thailand is also stated, which is a charismatic leadership style. We find it interesting to investigate if our respondents perceive that the preferred leadership style is charismatic, which the GLOBE study (2004) states.

Many aspects within the GLOBE study (2004) are contradictory to each other, such as the hierarchy dimension which is stated to occur in practice within the Thai culture, even though the study states that Thai people prefer a non-hierarchical environment. We found these contradictions interesting, and wanted to further investigate these in our study. We have used The GLOBE study (2004) to a large extent in our work, since we found it more up to date then Hofstede’s (1980) study. Also, we found that the different dimensions were relevant for our investigation because of the interesting contradictions between preferred values and practices within the Thai culture.

In summary, many studies of cultural differences exist, but we can also conclude that there is a lack of previous research on specifically the Swedish leadership in Thailand. This study is
necessary since more and more Swedish companies are choosing to establish themselves on the Thai market. Furthermore, we also have seen a lack of research which is not only based on Hofstede’s model. We can also identify a need for a contribution to the research question, where the study is not only focused on the civil servant sector. Therefore, we have chosen to investigate Swedish executives with both low-educated Thai employees and Swedish executives with high-educated Thai employees in our study. Finally, there is a clear need for further research on cross-cultural leadership linked to a specific context, in contrast to this, many of the current studies consist of general advice on cross-cultural leadership. We argue that the above shortcomings in previous research are three strong reasons why our research is a necessary contribution to the existing research field. Our ambition is to contribute to the current research debate and to provide information about cultural challenges for Swedish executives with Thai employees, but from new perspectives, which is not based on Hofstede's theories and not only includes civil servants.

1.3 Definition of the problem
The discussion above contributes to our definition of the problem, which is:

*Which cultural challenges do Swedish executives experience when leading Thai employees?*

1.4 Purpose
The purpose of our study is to identify and understand cultural challenges experienced by Swedish executives who lead Thai employees in Thailand.

1.5 Disposition
Chapter 1: In the first chapter, we give the reader an introduction to the chosen subject. Furthermore, the problem formulation, purpose, questions and limitations are presented.
Chapter 2: In the second chapter we present the chosen method of study.
Chapter 3: This chapter describes the theoretical perspectives which we use in our study.
Chapter 4: The fourth chapter presents an analysis where empirical results are linked together with our theoretical perspectives.
Chapter 5: In the final chapter, a conclusion is presented. The conclusion answers the initial purpose we presented. Furthermore, proposals for future research and limitations with the study is also presented.
1.6 Delimitations
Since we conducted our field study in Bangkok, we have mainly used companies which operates in Bangkok, and not in other parts of Thailand. We are aware that this contributes to a difference in empirical findings, since there is a significant difference between the lifestyles in the Thai countryside and metropolitan areas, such as Bangkok.

1.7 Minor Field Study (MFS)
This study has been supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) which finances the scholarship Minor Field Studies (MFS). The scholarship gave us the opportunity to study our research subject in field and gather empirical material. This helped us to come closer the findings of our purpose and find new approaches and unique questions. The time of studies in the field is according to SIDA’s requirements between eight to ten weeks. Our study was conducted in Thailand between 15th of March and 15th of May 2018.
2 Method

In the method the configuration and implementation are described step by step through transparency. The authors will motivate the chosen research method and the chapter also include critic to method and points to the advantages and disadvantages of the study.

2.1 Research approach

There are three different research approaches which helps the researcher to understand and explain the research subject; induction, deduction and abduction (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Bryman & Bell, 2011). According to Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009) is the empirical data the point of departure in the induction approach, and the theoretical base is the point of departure in the deduction approach. Furthermore, the authors means that the abductive research strategy has characteristics from both deductive and inductive strategy which means an interaction between these two approaches. Bryman and Bell (2011) gives the explanation that an inductive approach means focusing on empirical material, generalizing it and then make an analysis and conclusion. On the contrary, a deductive approach is focused on theory, and the chosen theory support the analysis.

Considering the definition of the problem in our study, we did consider that it was most interesting and suitable to first examine and investigate the executive’s point of view and then use relevant theory to then interact with our empirical data. This method led to an inductive research approach. Patel and Davidsson (2011) describes an inductive approach as when the field first shows the researcher one side of the story, and then it is compared to earlier statements, which in our case is our theoretical framework. We first wanted to get a perception of the Swedish executive’s point of view, in line with the definition of problem in this research. Then we connected it to relevant theories, which later on was analyzed together with empirics.

Our definition of the problem for this study is that we want to identify and understand which cultural challenges occurs as a Swedish executive with Thai staff in Thailand. To maximize the chance to get as good response as possible, we wanted to have an impartial setting when we started to do the interviews and carefully listen to what the respondents had to say. After the empirical material was collected we did research to find relevant theoretical framework
that could help us to reach the answer of the definition of the study. We believe that if we had started to collect the theoretical framework, and then listened to the executive’s experiences, as in a deductive approach, we might have been affected from the theories and not been impartial during the interviews.

We consider that induction was a suitable research approach since we could direct our theoretical framework from our empirical findings. This means that we could connect the empirical findings together with relevant theories, which we later found, and that facilitated our own reasoning for the analysis. Our point of departure was that we wanted to make the interviews as unconditionally as possible and not risk to lead the interviews in the direction that we thought would be interesting. This was important for us because we wanted genuine and real answers from the Respondents. Patel and Davidsson (2011) means that the problem when using induction as research approach is that it can be difficult for the researcher to know if the theories can be adapted to all of the empirical situations, or if it is suitable only to one specific situation. We had six different persons which we interviewed, and the theories was adaptable to all these situation, but we are also aware that it might be needed more respondents to ensure that the theories are suitable for all situations in general.

2.2 Choice of design

According to Bryman and Bell (2011) there are two different research methods which can be used, qualitative or quantitative method. Some studies can also be made by both qualitative and quantitative methods, called “mixed methods” (Silverman, 2008). According Bryman and Bell (2011) both methods are a way to describe and understand the chosen subject where the qualitative method points to the importance of words, interpretation and understanding. This method strategy is used to collect a deeper understanding of a respondent's point of view, and to get a clearer perception of reality (Eneroth, 1987). Silverman (2008) means that qualitative research tends to deal with small scales, this is because qualitative methods are made to work with details. The author concerns that the details in the qualitative methods are found in the answers of the interviews, through the interactions between the interviewer and the Respondent. The qualitative research method is therefore an appropriate method this study, to connect our empirical findings from the interviews to the theoretical basis, to better understand the Respondents experiences.
We chose a qualitative research method to our study because our study is not measurable in numbers, and we were in need of deeper personal interviews and the answers from the Swedish executives, and their point of view, to collect a deeper understanding. Silverman (2008) defines the qualitative method as a method where you get close to the people and situations that you are studying, and points to the fact of not being judgmental as a key to get the most important information in the study. The benefits of conducting interviews was that we could adapt the questions during the process and that we got better contact with the respondents. In this way, we got deeper information and had a more open dialogue with the people we interviewed, and collected relevant answers to our study.

One of the critical aspects with the qualitative method regarding our study, is that personal interviews takes time and that the collection of data are in lower scales than with e.g surveys. A quantitative study is often used on wider population, and could give the researcher a bigger perspective of the subject (Silverman, 2008). But since our purpose is to understand the executive’s point of view and their experiences, a fewer, but more informative and deeper interviews are more relevant in this study.

2.3 Selection of respondents
We have chosen our respondents after availability, which Bryman and Bell (2011) means is a comfort selection. The choice of respondents is partly based on which companies who had the opportunity and willingness to participate in our study. We met all our respondents in Bangkok, which also required the companies to be in Bangkok. We chose not to limit ourselves to one particular type of industry or size of the company, as we found it interesting to see how cultural challenges differs from different industries and different types of companies. We had a contact at the Swedish Chamber of Commerce in Bangkok, who helped us get a list of Swedish executives at companies in Bangkok. We chose to contact fifty Swedish executives in Thailand, to see if they would like to be a part of our study. Finally, there were six people who were willing to participate in the study, and meet for a physical interview. As there were requests from respondents to be anonymous, the information about respondents is very brief in our empirical statement.
2.4 Qualitative data collection

One of the biggest differences between qualitative and quantitative research method is according to Silverman (2008) the data collection. The qualitative method gives the researcher a non-limited data to e.g. a survey or set of variables. The data collection in qualitative methods, in specific the answers of interviews, can emphasize the information to the whole topic (Silverman, 2008). Since our study focuses on cultural challenges for Swedish executives, we have chosen to only interview executives and have therefore excluded employees' perspectives in the study.

The empirical material in a research is defined as; 
"Empiric is the information gathered in the context of an investigation to analyze” (Alvehus, 2013, p.31). The empirical material should always be connected to the research question and have a relation to it. The author discuss what kind of source that is categorized as empirical material and mean that not only material from interviews or surveys is empirical material. What constitute the empiric is depending on the asked question in the study (Alvehus, 2013).

Our study required different types of empirical material to be discussed and analyzed. Therefore, we used some of the relevant theories taken from scientific articles and books in Chapter 4 Empirical findings and analysis. We saw these theories as a complement to the rest of the empirical material and connected them together to get a better insight in the Thai culture and a coherent text. The theories are presented in form of descriptions of important aspects within the Thai culture which we think gives the reader a background knowledge of aspects in the Thai culture, which we will discuss through the chapter. We see the descriptions of Thai culture and the other empirical material as in relation to each other, which is explained by Alvehus (2013), who states that theory and empirics stand in relation to each other. The relation can according to Alvehus (2013) be explained as “what should be explained”, which in our study is the interviews and “what is explained with help of” which in our study is the books and articles about Thailand as empirical material.

2.5 Semi structured interviews

Qualitative semi-structured interviews are focusing on the respondent’s point of view, i.e. in what way the respondent experience a certain phenomenon (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The advantage with semi-structured interviews is that the questions can vary in sequence, and are
general and flexible allowing supplementary questions to be asked (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This can be hard to manage along with focusing on asking the questions and to take notes.

In comparison to structured interviews, semi structured interviews can sometimes make better use of the knowledge potential among the interviewees, since semi structured interviews allows the respondents to contribute with a more open dialogue. A semi structured interview also gives the interviewer more flexibility to focus on important angles which shows during the interview and is specific for the respondent (Leavy, 2014). By using the qualitative interview as method, this study got a profound insight of the personnel’s experience regarding the cultural and social challenges in the respondent’s business environment.

We thought that semi-structured interviews fitted our study, because it gave us space for supplementary questions during the interviews, which was necessary for us to collect deeper answers. When the interviews were performed, we decided that both of us should take part of the interviews and both should be present and ask the questions. At the same time we wrote notes. According to Trost (2010) is it optimally to have two interviewers at an interview, this to get greater amount of information and wider understanding. We experienced that it helped us to be two interviewers, so we could easily summary and reflect about the answers together after each interview. We recorded all of the interviews to also have the possibility to listen to the answers again. Trost (2010) points that the advantage of recording the interviews is to listen to the tone and choice of words from the interviews and make it easier to analyze the empirical material. We asked all the respondent of their permission to record, and told them about our purpose of the recording, to not make the respondents uncomfortable. To our advantage did all of the respondents understand the importance of recording and gave us their permission to do it.

The interviews were based on an interview guide with open questions. The interview guide was to help both us as interviewers and the respondents to stay within the research area, this to get the most rewarding material and result. We designed the interview guide to take about an hour, because that’s the time the respondents could give us, including space for supplementary questions. All the respondent got access to the interview questions before the meetings. This to make them well prepared and make the interviews more effective. We designed opened questions to get developing answers and a more floating conversation.
Silverman (2008) points out some specific problems when researcher uses only interviews as a data collection. The first problem he defines is that the researchers of the qualitative study is about to reach to the respondent’s perception and experiences, and the author means that this could take time, or not be shown at all. During some of our interviews, the conversation sometimes went over to more general assumptions, than the interviews perspective of the question. To counteract this, we have directed our interview questions to the respondent’s point of view and have given the respondent’s a clear overview of the purpose of the study.

2.6 Data analyzing and interpretation

Rennstam and Wästerfors (2015) describes the steps in the research process where the empirical material is analyzed in a way that makes the researcher come closer to the research question. The authors assume from three basic actions. The first is about to sort which means that the empirical material is necessary to organize and sort, to make an organized analyze. The next step is to reduce, where the authors means that there are in many reasons impossible to show everything from the empirical material, and the researcher must reduce it and crop to the most essential for the study. To crop the empirical finding also make the researcher’s main research question clearer. The third action is to argument, where the authors points to argument for the thesis of the study by using the empirical material. The argumentation also gives the research space to create an independence in the research area (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2015).

The analysis and interpretation are according to us a way to transform our empirical findings into useful information, which in turn can relate to the theoretical framework. We worked in line with Rennstam & Wästerfors’s (2015) three steps in the collection of empirical material. The empirical data were collected through six recorded interviews and to facilitate the work, parts of the interviews were transcribed after the interviews. We choose to transcribe parts of the interviews, those parts where we used quotes from the respondent, in order to make the work more time efficient. Furthermore, we picked out the most essential parts of the interviews, and the unnecessary parts were reduced. This is to come closer to the research questions and peel of the material in to a narrower scale. According to Rennstam and Wästerfors (2015) reducing is a way to create good representation of the material. By our empirical selection we could contribute to the research discussion within our research area. Rennstam and Wästerfors (2015) means that it is important to create an overview of the collected empirical data, to get a sense of control of the material. From here, the empirical
findings were transformed into information that we could connect with the chosen theoretical framework, which Svensson (2015) describes to raise your eyes and phrase your empirical findings using the theories. To create a better flow in the study for the reader and get a clearer overview of the subject, we choose to mix our empirical findings together with the theory and the analysis in chapter 4 Empirical findings and analysis.

2.7 Quality of research
Reliability and validity is usually concepts that describes the quality and credibility in a quantitative study, but since the purpose of qualitative studies is not measuring, it is a discussed subject if these concepts are inapplicable in this type of research methods (Eneroth, 1987). The author means that the qualitative research method has other aspects concerning the quality of research, such as to regain exact same natural situation many times as possible in the collection of empiric. Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009) means that it is important to not see the empirical data as the whole truth or a decisive way to knowledge. The authors mean that interpretation of a subject or a phenomenon requires more than empirical material because the answers of interviews could be ambiguous and it do not cover up the whole context.

Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009) points out richness in point regarding the quality in the qualitative research, as an important aspect. The richness in point is according to the authors linked between the empirical conditions and the preliminary interpretation that the empirical material can say. The authors means that the collected empirical material can provide arguments and inspiration in line with the interpretations in the study. An important aspect of quality of research is to create an “aha”-reaction from the reader, because the point is to stir up problems and creativity, which sustain balance between empirical data and interpretations (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). In our study we have been taken this into consideration, and therefore done a meticulous work to find relevant theoretical framework based on our empirical data to use in the analysis. Another important aspect according to the authors is that the researcher acquire an understanding in the research subject’s context, and then by dint of the theoretical framework, can steer the empirical material to a certain focus. To increase the quality in our study, we have, considering Alvesson and Sköldberg’s (2009) thoughts about the quality of research, used a wide theoretical base that includes different research from a wide spectra to our empirical material which gives the result a trustworthy analysis.
2.8 Ethics in qualitative research

Silverman (2008) explains two different themes regarding ethical issues in qualitative research. Firstly, a qualitative research strategy involves personal contact with the researchers' respondents. The consequences of this may be that the researcher unknowingly attacks the respondents' privacy. The second difficulty according to the author is that since the qualitative research strategy provides space for much flexibility and a lot of different interests, it can create new issues and considerations over time. This ultimately results in new unexpected ethical dilemmas, if the respondent does not perceive the purpose of the study this is more likely to happen. To avoid these problems, it is important to formulate a clear purpose and not deviate from it during the study, as well as to discuss and analyze how respondents will be influenced by the subject of the study, and what difficulties it may lead to (Silverman, 2008).

We placed great emphasis on presenting our subject to the respondents on a variety of occasions before and during the interviews. This was an action we took in consideration since we thought it was important that our respondents understood the purpose of the study, and to make them aware of what they was participating in.

Since we understood we were going to explore a culture that we ourselves not share, it has also been an important ethical aspect for us to show our respect for Thai culture. We also considered it important that in contact with our respondents always try to keep a professional approach and not ask questions which may be perceived as intimate to respondents.
3 Theory

The theory is intended to account for parts of the existing research within the chosen area. Relevant concepts will be defined, such as; culture, intercultural meetings and difficulties and dilemmas regarding cultural differences.

3.1 Definition of the term culture

Fornäs (2012) describes that the term culture often is described as one of the most complicated terms. Originally the term culture was first heard during the 1400 century, which then had an agriculture meaning. The word derives from the Latin word “cultura”. During the 1800 century the term was used as a word for describing people's spiritual and intellectual views. During the later half of the 1800 century, culture became the concept of a collective word to describe people's common habits. Culture has been a hard-defined word since the beginning of time. Despite the difficulties with identifying what the term really means, it is a term that is constantly present in our society, in politics and in debates, according to Fornäs (2012). Fornäs (2012) divides the utilization of the term into four different groups. These groups all presents a different perspective on culture. The first one is the ontological view, culture as culture. The second one is the anthropological view, culture as a way of life. The third one is the aesthetic view, culture as art. The last perspective is the hermeneutic view, culture as meaningful production. The author argues that that the different views on culture live in symbiosis with each other (Fornäs, 2012).

Fornäs (2012) explains that the term culture is something we have around us all the time. The author continues with describing that culture helps us clarify how we act, and why we do it. It is a tool for understanding how other human beings act, and why, according to Fornäs (2012). Peterson (2004) describes the definition of culture as firstly a way of grouping people with common factors together. For example people geographically living on the same place. In accordance to Fornäs (2012), Peterson (2004) argues that there is elements of psychology, sociology and anthropology in the meaning of culture. Petersons (2004) definition of culture is “Culture is the relatively stable set of inner value and beliefs generally held by groups of people in countries or regions and the noticeable impact those values and beliefs have on the people’s outward behaviors and environment” (Peterson, 2004, p.17). Moran, Harris and Moran (2011) are describing the word culture in a personal level in the business context. According to the authors, the culture is affecting things like behaviors, morale, productivity to
one person and it is also coloring a person’s values. “Peoples and countries with similar culture are coming together. Peoples and countries with different cultures are coming apart” (Moran et al., 2001, p.11).

Furthermore, Bjerke (1999) describes culture as something that you can not steer, but at the best, you can influence it. The author states that different nations has variant cultural heritage which are invisible. The visible ones are these values and assumptions that has passed to everyday standards in the specific countries. These are underlying to behaviors and determines the political, economical and organizational solutions in the nation (Bjerke, 1999).

3.1.1 Our choice of the term culture

We have chosen to present our own perception and choice of the term culture, which exclusively is based on the different ways of describing culture which were presented above. We want to present our own choice of description since we will use the term continuously through the whole study, and as previously mentioned, culture is a hard-defined term. Alvehus (2013) states that the term culture is an example of a term which has a lot of meanings that is important for a researcher to be aware of, and present in a study. It is also important to present in which way the study aims to use the term culture in the specific study since it has many different meanings (Alvehus, 2013).

Our own perception of culture which will be used in the study is as Peterson (2004) and Bjerke (1999) describes, as a way of grouping people together with common factors, for example people geographically living at the same place. This can also be found in the GLOBE study (2004), that will present later in this chapter, which defines culture as “Shared motives, values, beliefs, identities, and interpretations or meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives that are transmitted across generations” (GLOBE, 2004, p.15). The reason behind our definition is primarily that we will conduct a general study focusing on people living in Thailand, which is a part of the Thai culture, which includes that we presume that people living in Thailand has common cultural factors and shares beliefs and values because of their geographically placement.

3.2 National culture

Bjerke (1999) has conducted a study of how different national cultures affects business leaderships, by concentrating on a few larger categories. Those are class structure, power
distance, problem solving, modes of thinking, decision making style, concepts of achieving, interpretations of communication, personal orientation, social status of managers and kinship. Bjerke (1999) compares those categories within the two different cultures in a way that shows how the two cultures differs in all categories. The different categories consists of basic norms, values, assumptions which occurs in national cultures. Bjerkes (1999) purpose with the study is to understand business leadership behavior by understanding those norms, values and assumptions, within a specific national culture. Bjerke (1999) focus on five national cultures in his study. Those are Japanese, Americans, Arab, Chinese and Scandinavian. Previously managers had the choice to choose to not work in international markets if they did not feel comfortable meeting different cultural challenges. At present, no leaders have that choice to completely avoid all kinds of cultural differences. Cultural challenges today is a given dilemma for many leaders worldwide, according to Bjerke (1999).

3.2.1 Examine culture as a national culture

The difficulty of examine culture using the concept of national culture according to Bjerke (1999) is the assuming that all individuals in a national culture, are identifying with the same culture. The use of national culture as a measuring instrument largely implies a serious generalization of human culture. It also means if all national cultures are equally strong and integrated (Bjerke, 1999). Like the concept of culture, national culture is a very complex and subject which is hard to define. It is therefore easier and more meaningful to choose a particular group from a national culture and focus on the specific group in a study, for example focusing on business people as a group (Bjerke, 1999). We are aware of the difficulties with study a national group and that it is important to keep in mind that all assumptions about the Thai people are generalizations. On the other hand, we have not been able to do our studies without doing these generalizations.

3.3 Cross-cultural leadership and culture in a business context

Lakshman (2013) defines the concept cross-cultural as an organizational contribution of the rapid globalisation where the competence and understanding for cultural differences is more important today than ever before. Cross-culture stands for a context where different cultures are connected. The author defines the cross-cultural leadership as “ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others (in cross-cultural settings) to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organizations in which they are members” (Laksham, 2013, p. 930). Hooker (2008) describes that the best solution when working in a cross-cultural
business climate, is to build up relations in the organizations that involves a open dialogue. Moran et al. (2011) divide the business culture concept into ten categories to make culture more understandable to study in the business context. Culture is a complex subject and these 10 categories is not the only way to understand culture, but one of many ways to analyze it and study a group of people within the same culture, and a tool when operating in cross-cultural leadership environment. The categories below can also be found in our chapter with empirics and analysis, where we are using the categories in order to better understand our empirical material. A selection of the categories are presented below:

- **Communication and Language:** This category can be distinguish by verbal or nonverbal communication. Different cultures is using i.e. body language, gestures and jargons in various ways. The different verbal language is a big part of the culture.

- **Time and Time consciousness:** The respect of time is something that could matter in which culture you belong to. It could be perceived as a nonchalant attitude in some cultures where it may belong to the commonality to be one or two hours late to a meeting, and in others it is the norm.

- **Relationships:** From the view of relationships, the culture is really matters. It could be about family relationships or relations between people in general. The authors is taking the example of the relation among women and men where in some cultures the women could be equal to the men and other cultures it is the straight opposite.

- **Values and Norms:** This is depending on what different welfare status development the country and culture have, for example is the countries that is on a survival level more conscious to focus on the basic things as food, safety covering while countries in Western are prioritizing material stuff, economic growth and prestigious job titles. According to the authors, the culture sets norms of behavior. These values and norms is also being shared around the world because of the globalization.

- **Beliefs and Attitudes:** This points to the culture and religion traditions which often influence their attitudes toward themselves, others and their world. According to the authors, the religion is influenced by the culture and vice versa. The authors means that the western culture is influenced by the Juden-Christian-Islamic traditions and the Thai culture is influenced by the Buddhism.

- **Work Habits and Practices:** This points to the different attitude to work from the different cultures. Some cultures include a high work morale where all members are expected to be engaged, than others where the view of the work is just a way to an
income. The use of incitements and punishment in the business context differ from culture to culture.

3.3.1 Collectivism and individualism

Shavitt, Lalwani, Zhang and Torelli (2006) are in contrary to Moran et al. (2011) dividing cultural classifications into only two different directions, the individualistic and the collectivistic approach. According to the authors, the different directions can also be defined as the independent (individualism) and the interdependent (collectivism) classification. The individualistic cultural points to approach where individual goals and independent relationships is preferred, and the collectivistic is the straight opposite, where sociability and interdependence with other people within the same hierarchical level is important. According to the authors is Sweden one of the example of countries which are individualistic societies. The collectivistic societies and cultures points to the respect for authority and the constantly ongoing conflict avoidance to people around, this to keep harmony around (Shavit et al., 2006). Mikucka (2013) means that collectivistic cultures are more family and relation oriented than people in the individualistic culture where individual success and goals are priority.

3.4 The GLOBE Study

In 1991, House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman and Gupta initiated the GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness) research program. The purpose of the research program was to investigate the interrelationships between societal culture, societal effectiveness and organizational leadership. The findings from the research program can be found in the GLOBE study (House et al., 2004). The study and research program has its background in, among other researchers, Schwartz's (1994) and Hofstede's (1980) studies. With the GLOBE study, nine cultural dimensions were established with the purpose of identifying differences and similarities among beliefs, norms, practices and values. Eight of the nine dimensions have been used in our study, and the terms is found in our empirical analysis. The GLOBE study was conducted in the form of surveys conducted in 62 different countries, with over 17,000 respondents from 951 different organizations. All respondents have a position as middle-manager. The GLOBE study places Thailand in the Southeast Asian cluster, among other countries within Southeast Asia (House et al., 2004).

The study is based on cultural values and practices. The GLOBE study defines culture as “Shared motives, values, beliefs, identities, and interpretations or meanings of significant
events that result from common experiences of members of collectives that are transmitted across generations” (GLOBE, 2004, p. 15). With practice, the study aims to show "how it actually is", and with values, the study aims at show "how it should be”. In the survey, respondents could fill in a score after both the actual reality (practice) and how they think it should be (values). Each dimension thus has a result in relation to a national culture, based on both values and practices (House et al., 2004).

3.4.1 Leadership according to the GLOBE study

The GLOBE study defines leadership in different categories based on national culture. The purpose is to connect people's expectations of leadership to which national culture people belong. House et al. (2004) believes that leadership expectations differ according to cultural values. The study of leadership styles was initially based on 21 different leadership dimensions, which were then divided into six dimensions. According to the GLOBE study, the leadership style which best suits the cultural values in Thailand is the charismatic leadership style. The following dimensions are related to the charismatic leadership style, based on the first 21 attributes; Charismatic/Visionary, Charismatic/Inspirational, Charismatic/Self-sacrificing, Integrity, Decisive and Performance Oriented. Charismatic leadership is defined as “The ability to inspire, to motivate, and to expect high performance outcomes from others based on firmly held core values” (House et al., 2004, p. 272). House et al. (2004) describes that within the charismatic leadership style, performance orientation, in group-collectivism and gender egalitarianism are the highest value drivers. The value which was negatively related to the charismatic leadership style was one of the nine dimensions, “power distance”. The results of the survey regarding the nine dimensions showed which cultural values and practices could be best linked to the Thai culture.

3.5 Nine cultural dimensions according to the GLOBE study in Thailand

The cultural dimensions in the GLOBE study has its origin from for example Hofstede (1980), Schwartz (1994), Smith (1995), Inglehart (1997) previous cultural studies. The GLOBE study resulted in nine different cultural dimensions. The dimensions in the result in relation to the Thai culture are; Uncertainty Avoidance, Power Distance, Institutional Collectivism, In-Group Collectivism, Gender Egalitarianism, Assertiveness, Future Orientation, Performance Orientation, and Humane Orientation (House et al., 2004). The different dimensions are shown in Model 1. Below are eight of the total nine cultural
dimensions described, which we will use in our thesis, as well as Thailand’s result in relation to the dimensions;

**Power Distance:**

The lowest score has the dimension power distance in values, but in practice do Thailand score high in this dimension. This dimension is defined as the extent to which individuals in an organization consider that power is to be distributed end to higher levels in an organization. Thus, to what extent the people of an organization consider that power should be distributed equally or not (House et al., 2004). The scores regarding Thailand is very low regarding cultural values. In contrast, the result of cultural practices are very high. The result shows that Thai people dislike power distance, but that it occurs in practice (House et al., 2004). A possible cause of the hierarchical society can be the strong military as well as a long political history of monarchy in the country (Gupta, Surie, Javidan & Chhokar, 2002).

**Uncertainty avoidance:**

This dimension explains House et al. (2004) to what extent people working in an organization strive to avoid uncertainty by seeking and relying on established norms, in order to ease the unpredictability of future events. Thailand scored medium on cultural practice regarding uncertainty avoidance, but high on values. The results shows that Thai people strive for more uncertainty avoidance. House et al. (2004) describes that in practice, the Thai culture generally is known for low long-term planning and to “take it easy”.

**Human orientation:**

House et al. (2004) describes human orientations as in which extent individuals within an organizations encourages individuals in their surroundings, because of their friendliness or kindness. Thailand has a high score both regarding values and practices in this dimension. The result shows that Thai people prefer kindness and helpfulness, and they experience that their values are well-matched to how it actual is (House et al., 2004).

**Future orientation:**

Future orientation is defined by House et al. (2004) as in which extent individuals within an organization strives to be a part of planning future activities such as investments. The findings regarding Thailand’s values within future orientation is described as the country has a very high score in this dimension. In contrast, Thailand has a low score regarding future orientation in practices. It is therefore clear that future orientation is something Thai people want, but not
have in today’s society. House et al. (2004) explains that high values within future orientation often occurs within societies with low welfare and democracy.

**Performance Orientation:**

House et al. (2004) describes performance orientation as in which extent an organization strives to encourage performances among the employees within the organization (House et al., 2004). The scores regarding practices within performance orientation, the study shows that the Thai cultures in a high extent has strong family and relations values. The result shows that they have a high level of sympathy and that an indirect language is common. The result regarding values is very contradictory since they show that the Thai’s prefer a direct communication and to be more result oriented (House et al., 2004).

**Collectivism I (Institutional):**

The dimension is explained by House et al. (2004) as followed: “Collectivism I, Institutional Collectivism, is the degree to which organizational and societal institutional practices encourage and reward collective distribution of resources and collective action.” (House et al., p.41). Thailand scored relatively high on institutional collectivism regarding practices. A high score on practices within institutional collectivism is described as a society where shared goals tend to be more prioritized than individual goals. Communication tends to be indirect. Thailand is considered to practice this dimensions and are likely to integrate in large groups (House et al., 2004).

**Collectivism II (In-Group):**

The dimension in group collectivism has a high score and are over the average for all countries. Collectivism II is defined as to what extent individuals express loyalty, pride and cohesiveness a context. The context can be for example an organization or family (House et al., 2004). Thailand scored a high result both regarding cultural practices and cultural values within in-group collectivism. The result shows that family, friends, relations are very high valued by Thai people. The result shows that it is not only a value, this is also shown in practice. The values within in group collectivism are related to the charismatic leadership style (House et al., 2004). Thailand is divided into the South Asia cluster, were all countries received a high score in the dimensions human orientation and in group collectivism.

According to Northouse (2013) the result for the South Asian cluster shows that the culture in those countries in high extend have high values on social and community support and that
they are very much likely to be family-oriented. The countries within the South Asia cluster shows a strong loyalty for their families and relations (Northouse, 2013).

**Assertiveness:**
The dimensional assertiveness has the second lowest score and House et al. (2004) describes assertiveness as in which extent individuals tends to act aggressive and defensive in relation to other people in their surroundings. Countries who scored low on assertiveness values do not prefer a dominant and tough behaviour in the society. Thailand scores is low regarding their values, lower than the practice score and it is therefore clear that Thai’s do not prefer their relations to be assertive and dominant (House et al., 2004). Gupta et al. (2002) explains Thailand’s result regarding assertiveness as logic, since it fits in the Buddhism mentality were a direct communication is seen as aggressive. In Thai culture, assertive and aggressive are synonymous according to Gupta et al. (2002).

Model 1: Own model of House et.al (2004)’s description of the result regarding eight of the nine dimensions, which are described above.

3.6 Selmer’s six work values dimensions

Selmer (1996) published a study regarding how well Swedish executives in Thailand are aware of the expectations their employees have on them, focusing in terms of the work values
the employees hold. The study resulted in six different dimensions within work values. Those are following: job content and learning, rewards, interpersonal relations, security, comfort, and company of employment. We think these are valuable dimension which is relevant for our studies, therefore a selection of the categories will be used in our empirical analysis in the next chapter.

Selmer (1996) states that Swedish manager’s awareness of their employees' work values is relatively low, however, not as low as Selmer (1996) assumed. Selmer (1996) uses the six different elements of work values in his investigation. The study was conducted on Thai middle managers and Swedish executives, all operating in Thailand. Selmer’s (1996) hypothesis was that the Swedish executives would make high misjudgments regarding the Thai employee’s preferred work values.

In summary, the result of Selmer’s (1996) study were a clear difference between the Swedish executives thoughts and the Thai middle managers actual values were shown, is firstly that the Swedish executives underestimated the sufficient time for personal or family life of the Thai employees. The Swedish executives also overestimated the importance of little tension and stress. According to Selmer (1996) this result indicates that the Thai middle managers has a higher tolerance of stress then the Swedish executives, but it is also important to take into consideration the possible level of prestige within the answer. Regarding the dimension “company of employment” the Thai middle managers clearly addressed desirability of working in a large corporation as very strong value, which was not perceived in the same extent by the Swedish executives.

Regarding interpersonal relations the biggest misjudgment from the Swedish executives was the Thai middle managers fear of disagreeing with superiors. The result shows that the Thai employees experience a big fear of, as a subordinate, disagree with superiors. In contrast, the Swedish executives had thought that the Thai employees were more likely to express contrary opinions. Another great misjudgment in this dimensions, made by the Swedish executives was that they did not perceive the Thai middle managers high value for the opportunity to help others. Selmer (1996) describes this misjudgment as surprising, since helpfulness is a well-known part of the Buddhist religion. In the reward dimension, Swedish executives highly overestimated the Thai employee’s values of reaching higher job opportunities. Selmer (1996)
explains one possible reason for misjudgments is that Thai culture and traditions are deeply rooted in humans and can be difficult for a person from outside to understand.

In summary, the study showed some values being most important for the Thai middle managers. Firstly, having personal time for family and friends were highly valued. Secondly, “intended duration of work for the present company” were highly valued by the Thai middle managers, which described the importance of being loyal to your workplace. Thirdly, being a part of a large corporation was highly valued. The opportunity of helping others was another value which the Thai middle managers scored high. Another dimension which were highly valued was “serve your country”. According to Selmer (1996) this is not surprising since Thailand is very well-known for being a patriotic country, especially because of their revered monarch.
4 Empirical findings and analysis

In the chapter for empirical findings will the result from the six interviews be presented, which will be analyzed with the theoretical framework presented in the theory chapter. In the beginning of the chapter the disposition, theoretical gathered empirical material and the different themes will be presented, as well as a short presentation of the respondents.

4.1 A short description of the Thai culture and some unique factors

Firstly, we will start the chapter by presenting a short description of different parts within the Thai culture, to increase the understanding for the Thai culture and to show possibly challenges within the Thai culture. The following headings is descriptions which deepens the understanding of the subject.

4.1.1 The role of religion and important expressions in Thai culture

Unlike all other countries within Southeast Asia, Thailand never became colonized, which can be a result of the traditional culture still being very present in Thailand (Selmer, 1996). 95 percent of Thai citizens are Buddhists and the religion is clearly reflected in the rest of the Thai culture (Daleke, 2016). Below we have some examples of Buddhist expressions that are collected in the Thai culture;

Kreng Jai can be explained as having a polite attitude towards people in your surrounding and in a very high extent avoiding to offend anyone. The concept Kreng Jai is an important part of the Thai culture. Kreng Jai often results in avoiding conflicts and confrontation. Kreng Jai often leads to Thai people not expressing their opinions, when they can perceive as contrary to one other, to maintain a good relationship towards people in their surroundings. (Kitiyadisai, 2005).

Thailand as a country is well-known for being “The country of smiles”, which often is described as the Thai people always being friendly and kind to each other. This expression also has its origin within the Buddhist religion and the concept Nam-Jai. Nam-Jai can be explained as a guideline within the religion which say that you always should be kind and helpful to others, without expecting anything in return (Kitiyadisai, 2005).
Sam ruam is another concept within the Buddhist religion, which means that you should be restrained with your feelings. According to sam ruam, one should never show anger or sadness in a high context. To express those kind of feelings could lead to embarrassment and an uncomfortable situation to people in your surroundings, according to the concept of Sam Ruam (Kitiyadisai, 2005).

Another well-known term in the Thai culture is “sabai sabai”. It can be described as a mentality which means “take it easy”, “do not stress” and “laid back”. Sabai sabai often describes as a characteristic personality trait among Thai people, which contributes to the impression of Thai people being trouble-free and contended (Pornpitakpan, 2000).

### 4.1.2 The role of corruption in the Thai culture

One aspect of the Thai culture that emerged during our interviews was corruption, which our respondents experienced as a challenge in Thai culture. Below is a brief description of corruption as part of the Thai culture, to create an understanding and show how this could be a challenge for Swedish executives in Thailand. Corruption is defined as a phenomenon by the expression “which by its very definition takes place out of sight” (Branco & Delgado, 2012, p. 365). The authors discuss that companies operating in developing countries are often worried about being associated with corruption, because it creates a bad reputation about the company. The article describes that in countries where corruption is a common phenomenon, companies are almost forced to act in accordance with the norms, including corruption. In such situations corruption can be considered a must to be able to cope with competitors (Branco & Delgado, 2012).

The authors are continuing by describing that the risks of business corruption are many. Among other things, it obviously entails legal risks, but also operational costs and competitive risks are included. Competitive risks mean that companies that do not pay bribes risk being outsourced by bribes. The consequences of business corruption are many. Among other things, it results in reduced revenues to the state, i.e., worse government services. The consequences include, among other things, reduced confidence in the state and poorer economic growth (Branco & Delgado 2012). Branco and Delgado (2012) believes that at present, an anti-corruption policy is integrated into almost all major CSR policies, even if it is insufficient. Zhou & Peng (2012) argues that smaller companies are more likely to end up in situations where corruption is used, than larger companies are. Larger companies have a
greater opportunity to avoid corruption, with for example strategic solutions (Zhou & Peng, 2012).

Thai culture generally has a tolerance mentality regarding corruption in practice. As long as the consequences with corruption do not cause trouble, corruption is considered to be accepted within the Thai culture practices. Furthermore, the Thai culture implies that one should never humiliate prominent or superior people, which contributes to actions against corruption are hampered (Quah, 2003). “The closest Thai word for corruption is choo rat bang luang, which means to defraud the state or to steal from the king. This is not viewed as an erosion of the public interest” (Quah, 2003, p. 177).

4.2 Presentation of the Swedish executives

Moving on to the presentation of our respondents, all of our six respondents are Swedish executives active in Bangkok, Thailand. They have different kinds of work experiences and have been active in Thailand for various many years. To increase the understanding of our study, we will give the readers a short introduction of the respondents and their roles.

4.2.1 Respondent 1

The first interview we had was with a person who has been operative as a executive in Thailand in 18 years, since 2000. The company were operative in Sweden for 9 years and then the company grew and stretched in to the international markets, which led the Respondent to move to their biggest market Asia, Thailand. Today the company has a number of 350 employees in Thailand, with various backgrounds.

4.2.2 Respondent 2

Our second Respondent works in a small company which has recently been established on the Thai market. Respondent 2 is today the head of three Thai employees, and have the ambitious to increase to five employees during 2018. The company operates in the food industry and sells different beverages primarily to a Thai target group. Respondent two has lived in Thailand for one year and has previous experience of leadership from Sweden.

4.2.3 Respondent 3

Respondent 3 is the head of a company which is a global provider of technology repair equipment for the automotive industry. Respondent 3 has about thirty employees at the company’s office in Bangkok, and the majority of them have a cultural Thai background.
Respondent three is also involved in some HR functions, which means that the Respondent has a good idea of how the staff work in the company.

4.2.4 Respondent 4
Respondent 4 has almost 20 years’ experience of leadership in Thailand, both as a consultant at different universities in Bangkok and also as executive director at Swedish Chamber of Commerce and European Chamber of Commerce. He is today active as a business executive at a company that works with business change and development in Bangkok. The Respondent has experience both of working with Swedish executives in Thailand, but also from own leadership experiences with Thai employees.

4.2.5 Respondent 5
Respondent 5 has long experience from working in Thailand, since the Respondent graduated from university in Bangkok 1992 and has lived there ever since. Respondent 5 is the head of a small company which works with offering software solutions to customers. The company has about five employees with Thai background, which Respondent 5 is head of. We started by asking what expectations the Respondent 5 is experiencing that the Thai employees have on a leader.

4.2.6 Respondent 6
The last Respondent is Founder and Manager Director of a boat company in Bangkok. She has 23 years of work experience in Thailand but started this company in 2006. Before the boat company was founded, the Respondent ran a restaurant in the eastern Thailand. The Respondent has all of the responsibility of the company and work both operational and strategic. The Respondent is today executive of 8-12 employees (depends of the season, 12 in the peak season and 8 in the summer season). The company consist of two Swedish employees and the rest is Thai.

4.3 Cultural challenges experienced by Swedish executives: Five themes
During the gathering of the empirical material, many different cultural challenges were expressed by the Swedish executives. We have identified the challenges and have chosen to cluster together them into five different themes. This was also done in order to more easily present the empirical result in our study. The themes are; hierarchy, view of a leader, corruption, cross-cultural leadership and collectivism. Below, the themes are presented
individually under a single heading. Under each theme we present the Respondents’ answers as well as relevant theories.

4.3.1 Hierarchy
The first theme which will be discussed and analyzed is the view of hierarchy. All of the Respondents point out the view of hierarchical levels as probably the greatest cultural challenge in the job context. Respondent 2 think that Thai workplaces are penetrated by a strong hierarchical system which the employees are used to, where the executive is expected to be strict and a person who controls with an iron hand. Respondent 2 and Respondent 3 describe that their definition of hierarchy is based on their experiences in Thailand, which in general is that people consider the executive to have all the power in an organization, and make all the decision. We can understand the Respondent’s definition of hierarchy through the GLOBE study (2004), where hierarchy is defined as to in which extent people of an organization consider that power should be distributed equally, according to House et al. (2004). Thailand has a hierarchical view of organizations and that power almost exclusively stays in higher levels of the hierarchy (House et al., 2004). This is something we also viewed from our empirical material, which is described in detail below.

“In terms of hierarchy, I try to avoid a personal relationship or contact with the staff, because that is what is expected of me as a leader.” Respondent 4. All of the Respondents agree that the Thai cultural background are influencing the employee’s views on what an executive is and that it is clear that the Thai staff are used to a hierarchical society, for example the respect of people with higher titles, more money and higher social status. This can be understand through House et al. (2004), which explains that a possible reason for the hierarchical society in Thailand could be a strong military force within the country, and the country’s political history of strong present monarchy. Furthermore, Selmer (1996) explains that Thai culture is old but still very present on the ground of that the country never became colonized, and that is why Thailand still have a very traditional culture and view of life, which include the aspect of the hierarchical society.

The empirical result shows that all of our Respondents perceived that their Thai employees actually prefer a hierarchical workplace. This can be understand through Selmer (1996), who claims that the Thai people prefer a hierarchical arrangement. The opposite of our empirical result can be found in the GLOBE study (2004), where it is explained that Thailand in
practice has a distinct hierarchical culture, but Thai people dislike power distance and they in practice want flatter power control (House et al., 2004).

Another possible way of understanding what causes that our Respondents experience hierarchy as a cultural challenge could be that explained by using The GLOBE study (2004). House et al. (2004) explains Thai people general has high uncertainty avoidance. This is described by House et al. (2004) as that the high uncertainty avoidance in the Thai culture means that they in general are seeking and relying on established norms, in order to ease the unpredictability of future events (House et.al, 2004).

4.3.1.1 Power of initiative

Moving on to one other subject within the area of hierarchy, Respondent 6 points to the employee's lack of taking own initiatives as one of the cultural challenges when leading Thai staff. Respondent 4 has experienced the same challenges and points to the Thai employee’s almost non-existent ability to take initiatives, the fear of conflicts and that they are not solution oriented. In addition, Respondent 2 believes that the Thai employees takes very few initiatives, and rarely express their own opinion. Respondent 2 thinks that the Thai employees does not dare to take initiatives, since they look up to their executive because of the title, and therefore do not dare to come up with his or her own initiative. “It goes hand in hand with the employees' views on hierarchy, and their views on how to communicate with a leader. One should not take own initiatives, only obey orders from the leader” Respondent 2. This is explained in Selmer's study (1996) where it is described that Thai employees has a strong view of themselves as subordinate and therefore fear to disagree with superior, which in fact could have a connection with the challenge our Respondents experience when their Thai employees does not take initiatives.

In similarity with Respondent 2, Respondent 3 thinks that the Thai people has much respect for older people, people who is higher in hierarchy and people who has an education and much money. Respondent 3 thinks that this is is visible in the business context in Thailand and tells us that he believe it has its base in the Buddhism religion. He means that people who are in the lower part of the hierarchy do not dare to speak up, especially not in the business context. Respondent 3 means that this cultural aspect comes from the Buddhist mindset where one should not contradict the ones who are in the higher hierarchical levels. We can understand this challenge through Selmer (1996) who states that Thai employees fear of
disagree with superiors, since they are in the lower hierarchical level, and have the fully respect for the superiors. Selmer (1996) study also shows that the Thai people’s view of hierarchical levels is difficult for a person from outside to understand, which we perceive that our Respondents also thinks, even though they all seem to have accepted the hierarchical norm and has adapted to it.

Respondent 1, Respondent 3, Respondent 4 and Respondent 5 also points to the difficulties in the beginning of their time as an executive in a Thai context considering the different views of hierarchical levels. These Respondents notices a cultural challenge from the employee’s perspective as well. The Respondents perceived that their employees were sceptical of their way of working, where the employees were told to take a bigger part regarding decisions in the organization, and taking own initiatives. By time this has changed and all of the Respondents, except Respondent 2, perceives that their employees are satisfied with being able to take more own initiatives. Respondent 2’s experiences that his employees actually are satisfied with taking more own initiative, can be explained by House et al. (2004), which states that the Thai people dislike power distance and would like to have flatter organizations.

4.3.2 View of a leader
A second theme is the view of a leader, which was shown as a clear cultural challenge for the Swedish executives. Respondent 1 means that it is common to hire people for specific roles in Thailand, and this person then has the responsibility of a specific area in the company. He explains that he has experience from working in Sweden, were it is more common to hire people for a much more general role with broader areas of responsibility, especially for smaller companies. He believes that this leads to the executives and employees being separated from each other in Thailand, and that the executive just become a executive who decides and makes decisions. Respondent 1 says; “In Sweden, leaders are often both bosses, colleagues and at the same time friends with their employees. It does not look like that in Thailand, since the manager is only a manager and is highly respected by the employees” Respondent 1. Respondent 1 continues and means that he is experiencing that the Thai employees just sees the executive as a superior and gives the fully respect to her or him. Respondent 1 mentions that this separates employees from executives in an organization. We can understand this cultural challenge through the study of House et al. (2004) who states that power distance is common in the business context in Thailand.
Furthermore, Respondent 5 and Respondent 2 are experiencing that the Thai employees has an expectation on the executive as authoritarian, who controls with an iron hand. Respondent 2 describes that it is inevitable to live up to the expectations of an executive from the employees, to a certain extent for the workplace to function. "Actually, it would be easier for Thai employees if I was more as an authoritarian leader" Respondent 5. In contrary to this statement has research regarding which kind of leadership that is preferred within the Thai culture been presented in the GLOBE study. House et al. (2004) found that a charismatic leadership style is preferred when operating a Thai culture context. The charismatic leadership style is explained as characterized by collectivism, gender egalitarianism and performance orientation. The value which is most negatively related to a charismatic leadership style is power distance (House et al., 2004). Our interpretation of this contradiction is that Respondent 5 may believe that it would be easier if he followed the norm and was a "typical" hierarchical executive.

Respondent 4 and Respondent 6 are experiencing that the Thai employees takes for granted that the leader has all the answers and takes all decisions. Respondent 4 is also experiencing that the Thai employees should not involve too much in the organization, and neither should bother you as an executive, because that could cause confusion. The Respondent also notice a guilty of constantly thankfulness from the employee’s perspective towards a leader. Respondent 6 also points to the view of a leader as a challenge; “Sometimes I think it is heavy to have all the decision-making on my shoulders, and it can often cause feelings of loneliness” Respondent 6. Furthermore, Respondent 6 points to the deep cultural and hierarchical levels regarding the employee’s view of a leader, and that it is a norm to listen to the executive and not to oppose to that. We can understand this through Selmer (1996) who means that a common misjudgment done by Swedish leaders, is to believe that Thai employees would oppose to something a leader says, in a higher extent than they actually do. Research has found that Thai employees in general is experiencing a big fear to disagree with superiors and therefore do not dare to take own decisions. According to Selmer’s six dimensions, this derives from the Thai people cherish their interpersonal relationships, together with their view of hierarchy. (Selmer, 1996).

In similarity to Respondent 6, Respondent 3 finds the Thai employees sometime expecting a manager to have an answer to everything. Respondent 6 also experience hierarchy as uncomfortable, as he means that the executives always are being treated with respect because
they are in the higher levels of the hierarchy, which often feels uncomfortable for the leader himself.

4.3.2.1 Lose face

In addition, regarding the Thai employee’s view of a leader Respondent 6, Respondent 4 and Respondent 2 pointed to the ability to “not lose face” to or in front of the employees as one of the hardest cultural challenges of being a leader to Thai employees. According to Respondent 6, the most important is to keep calm and never raise the tone against or in front of the Thai employees, and he thinks that it is a hard challenge, because one misstep can make the leader lose all of the respect from the employees. Respondent 6 means that “losing face” plays a big role in the Thai culture and is deeply rooted. Respondent 6 experience that it is hard to be forgiven if she actually lose face in front of the employees, compared to the culture in Sweden where it is accepted do make mistakes. Respondent 4 means that it is important to show the Thai employees all respect by keeping a positive attitude. It is important to not flame up and “lose face”, otherwise you lose your respect to the employees, according to the Respondent 4. Respondent 2 agreed and described that you are not expected to show emotions in a Thai workplace. He continues and mentions that "lose your face" and especially as a leader in a Thai environment is completely against the norms. Respondent 4 explains that in Thai culture, it is seen as a weakness to show feelings and become angry, annoyed, sad or too happy. This can be understood through House et al. (2004) who states that Thai people sees the direct communication as aggressive which includes showing feelings direct to another person (House et al., 2004).

We can also understand this through Kitiyadisai’s (2005) Buddhist expressions “Sam ruan”, which means that it is important for the Thai people to not show feelings because that could lead to uncomfortable situations and is disrespectful. Nam-Jai is another Buddhist expression and stands for the friendliness that Thailand is known for the “country of smile” and that Thai people rarely rush up, this to keep harmony and show respect (Kitiyadisai, 2005). Through these two expressions, we can see a link between the Respondents' perceptions that their employees are gladly not surrounded by people who show strong feelings. Showing feelings and flame up, can make the executive lose the respect from the Thai employees, according to Respondent 4.
4.3.3 Corruption

When asking all our Respondents of their view of the corruption in Thailand, the answers differed. Respondent 2 states that corruption creates both opportunities and creates problems in the business context. In contrast to Respondent 2, Respondent 3 and Respondent 1 states corruption as a part of the Thai society only as a problem, and do not experience any opportunities with corruption.

Respondent 1, Respondent 2 and Respondent 3 do all experience corruption as a cultural challenge when operating as a Swedish leader with Thai employees in Thailand. "Corruption is still inevitable in some way here. You can use corruption to get anything you want". Respondent 2. We can understand this through Branco and Delgado (2012) who states that corruption is defined as phenomenon “which by its very definition takes place out of sight” (Branco and Delgado, 2012, p. 359). Respondent 3 believes that the situation regarding corruption has become better over time, but that it still exists in a rather large extent. Respondent 3 argue that it is very shocking to a person from a culture where corruption is completely unthinkable, to encounter corruption as a relatively normalized way of acting. “It is an obvious part of Thai culture, which can be very difficult to understand and accept when coming as a leader from another culture” Respondent 3. Values and norms within a national culture determines political, economical and organizational solutions in the nation (Bjerke, 1999; Zhou & Peng, 2012). Through this theory, we can understand the answers of the Respondents together and see that the current corruption in Thailand is an obvious cultural challenge to the Swedish leaders. All of the Respondents has no tolerance to corruption, but since it is a norm in the Thai culture, the corruption also is hard to avoid. We can understand this challenge through the study of Bjerke (1999), where it is described that it is clear that corruption in the Thai business context is something that has an influence on the values and norms.

Respondent 2 describes that corruption is everywhere in Thailand, and can not be avoided. “Within the industry I am operating in, corruption is impossible to avoid. It is a part of the Thai culture” Respondent 2. He continues with explaining that there is an internal conflict within one self, when forced to deal with corruption. For example, for food industry companies, it is a matter of having to use corruption against the police to have a shop where they want to place it, explains Respondent 2. The Respondent explains corruption as a part of the practice of leadership in Thailand, which sometime is necessary for the company to
function. Through the answers of the Respondents, we see a connection to the research made by Zhou & Peng (2012), which explains that corruption in some contexts almost is a must for companies, and is not possible to avoid, for example in order to cope with competitive companies. Since the corruption not can be avoided in the Thai society, because it is a part of Thai norms, it becomes a clear cultural challenge for the Swedish executives operating in Thailand.

Respondent 1 and 3 has in contrast to Respondent 2 never been forced to use corruption, but has often been in situations where the people in the surrounding has proposed corruption as a way to resolve conflicts or get as they wish. Respondent 2 is more often in situations where corruption appears. This is also stated in Zhou & Peng´s (2012) study, which shows that smaller companies are more likely to be forced into using corruption, than bigger companies with more employees.

4.3.4 Cross-cultural leadership

Moving on to operating in a cross-cultural environment, where a cross-cultural leadership is required. Cross-culture is defined as “ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others (in cross-cultural settings) to contribute towards the effectiveness and success of the organizations in which they are members” (Lakshman, 2013, p. 930). The majority of our Respondents expresses that they think that the most important aspect when operating in a cross-cultural context, is to show respect and understanding towards different cultures. Furthermore, Lakshman (2013) means that cross-cultural leadership is a requirement in organizations with different cultures, which occurs as a result of the rapid globalization, where, as our Respondents also said, understanding for cultural differences is very important. All our Respondents declares that if a leader is performing a good cross-cultural leadership, where a big understanding for different cultures occurs, this is also a key for success within the company. All the Respondents also points to the positive aspects when operating in a cross-cultural context, and means that it is advantageous for the company to have employees with various nationalities. Respondent 1 also explains that he believes that it is a leader’s responsibility to take advantage of all different cultures in a cross-cultural organization, since this really could benefit the company. This is a general challenge, which is not specific for leaders who operate in a Thai context, this is rather a challenge all leaders experience who are working in an organization where different cultural backgrounds exist. Working in a cross-cultural organization is therefore not a challenge in itself for our Respondents, because it is
not specific to Swedish leaders in a Thai context, which is our purpose to investigate. However, we consider that there are many aspects of cross-cultural leadership that are specific to our research question, and therefore we will present them in the headings below.

4.3.4.1 Time and time consciousness

Another cultural challenge that was shown in our empirical result was that the Respondents experiences it like their employees often focuses on “right now” instead of planning their future time, nor has the same respect of time and deadlines. We can understand this identification through Moran et al. (2011) who states that one of the category in the cultural context is consciousness, which also is a theme which we have seen when collecting empirical material from our Respondents. Respondent 3 explains in the Thai culture, time is generally not very important, respected or prioritized. In similar, Respondent 3 explains the different views of time often leads to frustration when the Respondent feels that the Thai staff not prioritize deadlines in the same way as the Respondent does. Respondent 4 means that Thai’s relation to time could be a cultural crash in the business context where time and punctuality is is very important for Swedes, according to Respondent 5. “Thai people has another view of time and hurry, and get on time could destroy relationships instead of improving it, it is forgiving to be late here” Respondent 5. The empirical findings regarding time as an important aspect can be understood in the study by Moran et al. (2011) were time and time consciousness is considered as one of ten categories to understand culture. Moran et al. (2011) argues that the respect of time can differ depending on culture, for instance Europeans are known for having a large amount respect for time. "The most important thing is that it happens, not when it happens" Respondent 3. As Moran et al. (2011) describes, the time aspect is an important aspect for understanding different cultures, which for our Respondents, is an obvious challenge.

As a leader in Sweden, Respondent 2 is used to the employees always trying to work as quickly as possible, and respects deadlines. It can often contribute to misunderstandings and conflicts, as the Respondent 2 believes that a certain task must be completed at a certain time while Thai staff perceive that the task must be completed, but that the time is not particularly relevant. Respondent 5 explains that Thai people generally have a much more relaxed attitude towards time than Respondent 5 is used to from Sweden. Respondent 5 finds that time is not as important for Thai employees, and it is important to be aware of the differences when working in an organization with people from another cultural background. We can understand
the time aspect in the cultural challenge through the expression “sabai sabai” which is a well-known term in the Thai culture, which means “do not stress” and “take it easy” (Pornpitakpan, 2000). In agreement with Pornpitakpan (2000), House et al., (2004) describes the Thai culture being known for low-term planning and to “take it easy”.

Respondent 6 means that the Thai employees has another view of prioritizing work than Swedes and that could be very frustrating and often create problem with new employees. “In Sweden we always start the day to arrange things to be done before, for example, the store opens in the morning. In Thailand, it is the opposite, where Thai staff always start the day with sitting down and chat before they take care of everything that has to be done” Respondent 6. Research has shown that Thai people generally may have a high tolerance for work related stress (House et al., 2004), which all of the Respondents agree upon when discussing cultural challenges among Thai employees.

4.3.4.2 Communication and language

Another theme which was shown as a cultural challenge among our Respondent is communication and language, which is defined as a category that includes both verbal and nonverbal communication (Moran et al., 2011). According to all our Respondents, the type of communication which suits best with the Thai culture in a business context, is a non-direct communication. Common to all Respondents is that they feel that their employees prefer a very friendly tone in their language, and if one as a leader uses a too direct language, it can be perceived as unpleasant by the employees. Respondent 4 explains that it is an important aspect of the Thai culture, which he always has in mind while communicating with his employees. We can understand this identification through the GLOBE study which shows that Thailand scores low in the values regarding assertiveness. House et al. (2004) describes the results as Thai people do not prefer a dominant, aggressive and tough behavior in their relations. This is explained by Gupta et al. (2002) who states that the result from the GLOBE study regarding assertiveness is logic, since it has its background in the Buddhism mentality, where a direct communication is not seen as positive. We can understand this cultural challenge since a non-direct communication could be contradictory with sustaining a strong hierarchy in a company, which we earlier discussed is a clear norm and a challenge in a Thai business context. Furthermore, the Respondents means that it is as a hard balance to both being a part of a hierarchy and also have a friendly, leisure and non-direct communication towards their staff. We also think that it is an interesting opposite as the leaders both perceive
that they should be authoritarian and hierarchical leaders, but at the same time should be personal in their communication. This paradox can be explained through the GLOBE study where House et al. (2004) describes that Thai employees prefer a non-hierarchical arrangement, but in practice organizations are highly hierarchical. This contradiction indicates that, as described in the GLOBE study, Thai employees in practice prefer a more non-hierarchical jargon (House et al., 2004).

4.3.5 Collectivism
Moving on to the theme collectivism, Respondent 6 means that Thailand has a collectivistic culture which is mirrored in the work environment. Respondent 6 is experiencing that it is important for the Thai employees to work together as a family and to be welded together in the company, and not harm any relationship. Respondent 5 means that it is important as a leader to act determined but friendly in the way of leading the Thai employees. Furthermore, Respondent 4 is experiencing that the general norm in Thailand is to retain relationships and relate to the people around, which include leaders, colleagues and the subordinates in the business context. The Respondents thoughts supports the previous research that has found that “It is clear that the Thai employees are relation oriented, since all of my employees attaches great importance to maintaining relations, both in the company but also outside” Respondent 4. We can understand this cultural challenge by Shavit et al. (2006), which states that Thailand is a collectivistic country where respect to people in higher hierarchical levels and respect for the authority are important. The theory also points to the collectivistic cultures with relation-oriented people. The respect for other people is high and the avoidance for conflicts to keep harmony. To have a clear leader who decides and takes the decisions is therefore a matter of course for the Thai employees, which all of the Respondent have experienced as a important aspect when leading Thai staff. House et al. (2004) also states that the collectivism in Thailand may be shown in practice as shared goals being more prioritized than individual goals and in form of Thai employees being more likely to integrate in larger groups.

We can understand this cultural challenge through theory that have stated that Thailand is a collectivistic society where the Thai people has high values to remain relationships with people around them and value to being a part of a corporation (House et al., 2004; Selmer, 1996). This is connected to Mikucka (2013) who points to the collectivistic society as a culture where the people are relation oriented and the relations to friends and family is
priority. People in a collectivistic society is often avoiding conflicts to sustain a harmonious mood (Shavit et al., 2006). Most Respondents mentioned collectivistic values as a cultural challenge when leading Thai staff, and since they come from an individualistic society, it is extra hard to adapt in to a culture where relationships are the first priority. Shavit et al. (2006) means that the collectivism has its base in sociability and interdependence and the respect of other human beings, especially to the ones who are higher in the hierarchy. It is clear that Thailand in a high extent is a collectivistic society, where different relationships are highly prioritized.

4.3.5.1 Relations
Respondent 4 describes the Thai culture as a collectivistic society where groups and family is a very important base. The relationships is important to relate to and Respondent 4 experience that all of his Thai employees is relationship-oriented and in all different situations they are afraid to destroy the relationship. Respondent 3 means that “Within the Thai culture, the family is high valued and always comes first” Respondent 3. Respondent 4 has noticed that it is very important to the Thai people to create and remain relationships, because it is a big part of the Thai culture. He describes that this is an aspect of the culture which you must take in consideration as a Swedish leader working with Thai employees. He means that a leader with Thai employees has to adjust to the employee’s values, and has a lot of respect of their strong family and relations values. He thinks that it is obvious because it sometimes exceeds the work. He describes that his employees sometimes prioritize meeting their families over completing a task, which he believes may be frustrating as an executive but also means that he has to accept it. “One must remember that it is me who have entered a new culture, and not the other way round. It is therefore important to adapt and accept that there are cultural standards that I am not used to here” Respondent 4. House et al. (2004) states that Thailand is a human-oriented country, where kindness and friendliness is preferred and practiced in a high extent within the country. The result in the GLOBE study (2004) shows that Thailand has a high score both regarding values and practice in the human-orientation category. We can understand the relations as a part of the cultural challenge of the collectivistic society since Thai people in general are human-oriented, which also includes that they valuing relationships high.

Respondent 5 also points out that he is experiencing that the Thai employees prioritize the family above all else, which is a big difference compared to the Respondents own personal
values. Selmer’s (1996) study shows that family and relations is highly prioritized by the Thai employees which took part of the survey. Selmer (1996) also states that the Swedish managers underestimated how important this aspects was for their employees (Selmer, 1996).

Respondent 5 thinks that it sometimes affect the employees in the way that they do not accept an offer or some kind of tasks, because it does not coincide with their family situation. “Family always comes first here. My employee’s relations to their families is the most important thing they have” Respondent 5. Moran et al. (2011) also describes relationships as an aspect within the business culture which is highly influenced by the existing culture in the country it’s operating in. Through the study by Moran et al (2011), we can understand relations as a part of a cultural challenge since it is an important aspect in life for the Thai people, which also affect their work life.

4.3.5.2 Avoidance of conflicts
Respondent 4 describes that the employee’s strong view of relationships is not always advantageously, he is experiencing that this sometimes leads to situations where the employees avoid conflicts that could damage relationships. He means that the Thai people put the relationships first in all situations, and they think that they will destroy the relationship when a conflict appear. This is, as previously mentioned, supported by theory where House et al. (2004) states Thailand is country where family and other relationships is high valued, and showed in practice. Respondent 4 states to the Buddhist background and is experiencing that the Thai’s “non confrontative” behavior has its base in the religion. Respondent 4 also thinks that the religion and view of life also influences many other things in the business context, for example their view of hierarchical levels. Respondent 4 thinks it is about to find their place in the hierarchy and it is all about respect to the people higher in the hierarchy and about retain relationships. Previous research means that since 95 percent of Thai people are Buddhists and the religion is an important base of the Thai culture (Kitiyadisai, 2005). Moran et al. (2011) continues to explain the view of Buddhism as an important source of how the Thai people being influenced towards themselves and others.

4.3.5.3 Response to directives
Respondent 4 tells us that it often occurs that Thai people says “yes” to different directives, but then not completing the task which they signed up for. He explains that this behavior has its base in importance of relationship, where the Thai’s thinks that they destroys a relationship to e.g. the leader if he or she says no to an instruction because the lack of time or knowledge, instead of saying yes and then in the end not complete the order. The Respondent gives us a
lot of example in his work life when the Thai employees says yes to orders, but he means that they says “no in their head”, because they are afraid of damage the relationship.

Respondent 6 also experience the employee’s avoidance of conflicts and means that Swedes often say what they think when a conflict arises, and the Thai people often just becoming silent and may stay silent in a week without saying a word. Respondent 6 think this way of acting has its background in the employees being afraid of destroying relationships, because they prioritize relations very high. Respondent 6 thinks this is incredibly hard to handle and an obvious cultural shock arises. These experiences can be understood by the research stating that collectivistic cultures strives for keep harmony and avoid conflicts with people around them and the expression “Kreng Jai” (Shavit et al. 2006; Kitiyadisai, 2005). “Kreng Jai” is explained by Kitiyadisai (2005) as a reason why Thai people avoid to express their opinion, because they see it as a way to maintain relationships.
5 Conclusion

In the last chapter the defined problem of the study is answered, based on the empirical findings and theoretical framework. We connect the findings with our own view of the subject. The chapter ends with our proposal for further research within the research area.

5.1 Conclusions and findings from previous research

In order to answer our research question, themes were presented in the chapter above. We will use the same themes in our conclusion, which will be presented below together with earlier research presented in the introduction, in order to make the study easier to read and create a red thread through the study. The conclusion follows our purpose, which is to identify and understand the cultural challenges experienced by Swedish executives in Thailand.

5.1.1 Hierarchy

Our study shows that one of the greatest cultural challenge for the Swedish executives leading Thai staff is the view of hierarchy. It is clear that the norms of hierarchical levels is mirrored in the organizational environment where the respect for the leader become very high. Our study indicates that the Thai employee’s view of hierarchical levels in organizations depends on deeply rooted norms in the society where the respect for persons higher in the hierarchy is clearly shown from Thai people, which is something all our Respondents described. Selmer (1996) and House et al, (2004) states that the fact that Thailand never was colonized could be a possible reason why the deeply rooted norms is still active in Thailand. House et al. (2004) also describes that the strong military force within the country could influence the Thai culture views on hierarchy, which we agree on. Previous research made by Hofstede (1980) states that Thai people shows high loyalty and respect for the superiors which leads to a formal and hierarchical management with controlled information flow. Our empirical findings correspond with Hofstede (1980), and we believe that this hierarchical norm is deeply rooted in the Thai culture, which gives the executive a high position from the Thai employee’s perspective.

A difference between findings within the GLOBE study (2004) and our study, is that the GLOBE study (2004) shows that Thai people dislike the power distance and want flatter organizations, but our empirical findings showed that the Thai employees are satisfied with the hierarchical levels in the organizations. According to Selmer (1996), his study showed the
same result as our study, as his Respondents also experienced that their employees actually preferred a hierarchical organization. We see a possible link between the results of the GLOBE study, which found that Thai employees do not prefer hierarchy and the results of Selmer’s (1996) study and our own study, where leaders perceived that the Respondents prefers hierarchy. This could be that the Swedish leaders perceive that hierarchy is a part of Thai culture, and therefore, it is something that Thai employees prefer. In such cases, it could be a possible explanation as to why, like Selmer’s (1996) study, our Respondents also feel that their employees prefer a hierarchical order. As mentioned above, our Respondents find that the hierarchical view originates or is influenced to the highest extent by Thai culture, which also can be found in Selmer (1996) and the GLOBE (2004) study.

According to the GLOBE study (2004) Thai culture is characterized by a high uncertainty avoidance, which in practice could mean that Thai people are seeking themselves towards established norms, to feel secure. This could also be a cause why the Thai employees are sustaining a hierarchical order in organizations, which our Respondents perceive. This does not have to mean that the Thai employees prefer a hierarchical order in terms of which kind of organization or management they like, it could be that way that the employees just are seeking themselves towards established norms which they are used to. Possibly, the Thai employees may prefer to be more involved in the organization, and appreciate having the opportunity to take their own initiative, but that the existing hierarchical norm within organizations stops them from acting in that way.

5.1.2 View of a leader
Our empirical view of the theme "view of a leader" shows that Respondents find that employees prefer and expect a hierarchical leadership style, which they all believe is a hard challenge or something which is uncomfortable. Therefore, we can constellate this as a clear cultural challenge which is experienced by our Respondents. Our study shows that an explanation for this is closely linked to the hierarchy as a norm, as our Respondents experience. Our study shows that the hierarchical norm is associated with a certain type of leadership style, which is often authoritarian, that our respondents feel they are expected to be. Our empirical material contradicts the GLOBE study (2004), which demonstrates that employees prefer a non-hierarchical, charismatic leadership style. Like in Selmer (1996), study, our leaders also perceive that employees prefer a hierarchical or authoritative leadership style. The difference between Selmer’s (1996) and our findings is that Selmer’s
study (1996) also contained answers from Thai employees, which showed that they did not actually prefer a hierarchical leadership style.

Therefore, we believe that a reason why our empirical material differs from the GLOBE study (2004), is the lack of employees' opinion. It is therefore not possible to determine or understand which leadership style the Thai employees actually prefer, but a possible thought might be like in Selmer’s (1996) study, that our leaders perceive that a hierarchical leadership style is appreciated by the employees, even though it is not the case. An explanation why our Respondents believe that this is the preferred leadership style among the employees is likely that there is a strong hierarchical norm in the Thai business context which all our Respondents experiences.

A possible reason why our Respondents feel they have certain expectations of their employees to act in certain ways, such as being an authoritarian leader, could depend on the hierarchical norm of the Thai business context. A hierarchical person is generally associated with a certain behavior, which often could be authoritative. The GLOBE study (2004), as mentioned above, describes that the leadership style that is preferred in the Thai context is a charismatic leadership, which is not in line with a hierarchy. We a cause, as we mentioned under the hierarchy headline, may be that the Thai employees prefer a flatter organization, but that the existing norms prevents this in practice. A consequence of this could then be the expectations our Respondents feel they have, that they should be a typical hierarchical leader. Our interpretation is that this necessarily does not mean that it is the leadership style that Thai workers prefer, but that it is the leadership style they associate with the hierarchical norm that already exists.

However, we can clearly identify that our Respondents perceive their employees expectations on them as an authoritarian and hierarchical leader as a cultural challenge, which in practice can be expressed as they should not lose their face. This is also found in Hofstede’s (1980) study, who argue that lose the face is synonymous with expressing strong feelings, which is not accepted in front of a group within the Thai business culture. Lose face could also be associated with a direct communication, and therefore it may be as House et al. (2004) argue, that Thai people in general does not prefer direct communication, which then includes “losing your face”.
Furthermore, it is also impossible to exclude that strong the collectivism in the Thai culture is a reason why leaders should not lose their face, since this could mean risking to harm a relationship. In summary, the cultural challenge which we have identified is the expectation on our Respondents to be an authoritarian and hierarchical leader. We try to understand the cultural challenge by searching for a possible reason why this cultural challenge appears, which we think may be because of the strong hierarchical norm within the society, which brings certain expectations on how a leader should be.

5.1.3 Corruption
Moving on to the third theme which we brought up in our empirical analysis, we could constellate that corruption is a cultural challenge for the majority of our Respondents. Corruption as a cultural challenge takes shape in form of different situations where our Respondents have been offered or told to use corruption as a way of dealing with different problems. It is clear that the Respondent who operates in a smaller company is the one who has largest experience of corruption. We can see a clear link between the size of the company and the large scale of corruption which he is used to. In similarity to our findings, Zhou & Peng (2012) explains that it is more likely for smaller companies to be forced in to using corruption, then it is for bigger companies. We believe this could depend on that bigger companies has larger opportunities to say no in situations where corruption is "offered" because, they have more resources and then perhaps the opportunity to turn to someone else instead. Smaller companies have less resources and therefore less opportunity to say no or risk losing for example financial capital.

None of the previous research which we have included in our study has brought up corruption as a cultural challenge, which we think depends on that corruption is something which originates from the political situation in the country, and not necessarily the Thai culture. Even though, it is not possible to exclude the fact that the political situation likely is influenced by the Thai culture, which indirect makes this a cultural challenge. It is also clear that the existing political situation also influences the values and norms within a culture, which is also stated by Bjerke (1999). Corruption as a cultural challenge may be seen as an external factor instead of an intern cultural challenge. We still considered it very interesting and relevant to include this in our study, since the interviews showed that this actually was a
clear cultural challenge for the majority of our Respondents, and after all our purpose is to identify cultural challenges.

5.1.4 Cross-cultural leadership

The result of the study also shows that it is obvious that a cross cultural leaderships is required for the Swedish executives operating in Thailand. In similarity to the GLOBE study (2004) has our finding led to knowledge of the importance of the cross-cultural leadership in the rapid globalization. The cross-cultural leadership is a part of the study’s purpose and our result shows that it is some specific parts of the cross-culture leadership that is challenging for the Swedish executives, such as the aspect of time and communication and language.

Result connected to the cross-cultural leadership was that the view of time and the respect for it is an obvious challenge for the Swedish executives operating in Thailand. The empirical results shows that Thai employees have a relaxed setting to the time, which contradicts with what the Swedish executives are used to. We can see that this cultural challenge has proved to induce frustration at work, because it affects deadlines and punctuality. We can understand this identification as a cultural challenge through House et al. (2004) who describe that Thai people in general has low long-term planning, which can affect their view of time. Our study also shows that the Buddhist religion is a consequence of Thai’s low respect of the time.

Our study shows that Thai people’s general high tolerance of stress also could affect the employees view of time, since stress often is a motivator for people to work faster or works as an incentive for employees to reach deadlines. If there is a lack of stress among the Thai employees, this can make them more relaxed and do not take deadlines or punctuality so seriously. This could also be a reason why the Swedish executives and the employees has different views regarding time.

This study shows that communication is a great part in the cross-cultural leadership that the Swedish executives have to take in consideration in their daily work with the Thai employees. The identified challenge for the executives is shown that the Thai people do not prefer direct communication, and we can understand this since it is a mentality within the Buddhist religion, which means that too direct communication is wrong or unpleasant. This challenge interact with the findings from the GLOBE study (2004), and we think that is connected with the charismatic leadership style that suits Thai organizations the most. According to our
theoretical framework and empirical material, a non-direct communication generally seems to be preferred as a leader in the Thai context.

5.1.5 Collectivism
Our study shows that Thailand is a highly collectivistic society, which we have identified as a cultural challenge for our respondents. The challenge takes form in for example that the employees are prioritizing their families over work and that the fear of harming a relationship in a group prevents the employees from performing their job as they should. We have also stated that this cultural challenge includes conflict avoidance and that they employees sometimes says “yes” when they mean “no”, to not harm a relationship. This also gain support in research within the Thai culture and the Buddhist mindset (Shavit et al. 2006; Kitiyadisai, 2005). In accordance with previous research regarding collectivism in the GLOBE study (2004), our respondents perceive that the Thai employees have strong family and relationship values, which also is shown in practice. Previous research done by Hofstede (1980) shows that Thailand in a high extent is a high collectivistic society, which we state in our study as well. Our study indicates that a combination of Thailand as a collectivistic society and the Buddhist mentality, are likely to be reasons behind our Respondents experiences, which also can be found in previous research by Mikucka (2013) and Niffenegger et al (2006).

We can understand the challenge of collectivism since all of the Respondents originate from a Swedish society, which is known for a being an individualistic society. As all the other challenges mentioned in this chapter, this is something our Respondents has to accept and adjust to, but we believe this could be hard for our Respondents to understand since there is such a clear contrast from the Swedish society and mentality. This result interact with Niffenegger et al. (2006) who states that the most important aspect of doing business in Thailand as a foreigner is to understand the Thai business practices, and develop personal trust to the Thai employees, otherwise the organization will suffer. Our study shows that the main reason behind collectivism as a cultural challenge for our Respondents, is that it this aspect is strongly influenced by Buddhism.

5.2 Main point of the study
In accordance with our purpose, we have identified five different cultural challenges which are experienced by Swedish executives. The cultural challenges were identified through
interviews and the challenges presented in our study is the largest challenges which were experienced by our Respondents. Those are themed up in the following categories; hierarchy, corruption, view of a leader, cross-cultural leadership and collectivism. Following our purpose, we understand the challenges by searching for possible reasons why the challenges occurs and therefore are experienced by the Swedish executives. Based on our study we argue that the Buddhist religion together with strongly established norms in the Thai culture creates cultural aspects which our Respondents perceive as challenges. Our study also indicates that the Swedish executive’s positive attitude towards the cultural challenges, and their willing to adapt to them, may contribute to maintenance of the challenges. We state that the cultural aspects within the Thai culture perceives as highly difficult challenges for Swedish executives. There are many aspects in the Thai business culture that are the opposite of the norms and cultural aspects which our Respondents are used to from Sweden. Being a Swedish executive who is forced into a situation where for example corruption and hierarchy are an established norm, clearly is a very difficult task for someone who is used to opposite norms and culture.

As we described in our introduction, we wanted to do a study which is not based on Hofstede’s theories, in order to search for new findings to an existing gap in the research questions. Our finding, which is different from Hofstede’s studies, is that we can distinguish an aspiration among Thai employees to work in non-hierarchical organizations, where they are given more freedom to take initiatives. We see that the strong established norms, together with a strong collectivist society and high uncertainty avoidance, in practice means that Thai people are seeking themselves towards security and established norms, contributes to that Thai people to perceives to prefer hierarchy - though that may not be true. This also complies with findings from the GLOBE study (2004). We argue that this is a complex challenge which we can distinguish in our study, where we see as an increasingly challenging aspect for Swedish leaders in Thailand in the future.

Our study shows that Swedish leaders perceive that their Thai employees prefer a hierarchical order, which the Swedish executives consider to be a difficult cultural challenge. At the same time, there are several Swedish leaders who distinguish a willingness among their Thai employees to take more initiatives and work in less hierarchical organization. We consider this to be another cultural challenge for executives. This because they must balance between
adapting to Thai culture and what many Thai employees prefer while seeing that a non-hierarchical organization somewhere is appreciated by a part of the employees. Why our finding is not presented in Hofstede’s studies can be explained by the fact that our study is done approximately 40 years later then Hofstede’s studies was presented, which make our study more up to date, that means that the surroundings likely have changed. The globalization has created a lot more of a cross-cultural environment in the Thai business context, which are likely to influence Thai people preferences regarding their work environment. This can also explain why this finding also can be found in the GLOBE study, since it was conducted in 2004 and also can be considered to be more up to date.

We see this as a difficult balance for Swedish executives who operate in the Thai business context, which we argue will be a challenge that grows as more and more as Western companies establish themselves in the Thai market. We state that the quest for Thai employees to leave the hierarchical norm originates from cross-cultural organizations. In cross-cultural organizations different cultures meet, and the hierarchical norm which is deeply established in Thai culture is likely to be challenged. The fact that the Thai market attracts more and more companies from other parts of the world will most likely affect the other aspects which we have identified as cultural challenges. Most likely will the increasing cross-cultural organizations on the Thai market contribute to that the cultural challenges reduces, since different cultures has to be taken in consideration and be adjusted to. Through our study we can see a tendency in the Thai business culture to challenge the existing norms, with the example of hierarchy, which is a change that we can find by comparing our study and the GLOBE study’s result with Hofstede’s (1980) result. It is also remarkable that the aspect of hierarchy is the only aspect where we can distinguish a difference compared to previous research, which is based on Hofstede’s (1980) studies.

A paradox regarding the statement above is that we also see a clear willing among the Swedish executives to adapt to the Thai culture, although they feel that several cultural challenges occur, which we have identified in our study. This could in fact lead to that the cultural challenges remains, since the Swedish executives are willing to accept and adjust to the challenges. Beside corruption as a cultural challenge, all our Respondents are willing to adapt to the other cultural challenges, and do not see all the challenges as actual issues, more as possibilities. Our study shows that the Swedish leaders have a desire to adapt to the Thai
culture and, like previous research, they consider that an ability to adapt to different cultures in a cross-cultural organization and take care of different cultures is a decisive factor in order to success in a cross-cultural organization.

Even though we can distinguish a willing or a tendency in the hierarchy aspect, which could mean that the Thai business culture will change, that could lead to that the cultural challenges are reducing, it is nothing which is shown in practice neither in our study or the GLOBE study. In fact, all our findings besides the willing among the Thai employees to have flatter organizations, can also be found in earlier studies based on Hofstede or done by Hofstede, which theories were presented in the 1980’s. Corruption as a cultural challenge is nothing which earlier research has presented, which we think can be explained by that it is not a direct cultural challenge, it is more of a political influence, even though we found it interesting and relevant for our study.

Therefore, we argue that it is remarkable that is obviously exists several clear cultural challenges which all in some way originates from a strong religious faith and strong established norms within the Thai culture. Our study indicates that the globalization which has been going on for decades, has not affected the norms and cultural aspects in the Thai culture business context in a way that would have been likely. Our study shows that all the cultural challenges we have identified can be deduced to the Thai culture, which in turn can be derived from Buddhism. The challenges can be understood by linking them to different Buddhist expressions, as well as trying to create an understanding of the Buddhist mindset, which is a very large part of Thai culture. It is neither not possible to exclude that the Swedish executives positive attitude towards adapting and adjusting themselves in accordance with the cultural challenges contributes to remaining the cultural challenges.

In conclusion our study shows that, the strong established norms in the Thai culture, which in turn derives from the Buddhist religion, together with the Swedish executives willing to adapt and adjust is what affects the business context the most. This creates the cultural challenges that the Swedish executive’s experiences. Together with explaining the understanding of why Swedish executives experience cultural challenges, we have identified five different cultural challenges which are experienced by Swedish executives. Those are hierarchy, corruption, view of a leader, cross-cultural leadership and collectivism.
5.3 Limitations

During the work of this study, we have found some aspects that limited the work. The first limitation arose when we contacted the persons that we wanted to take part in the study, and did not get the response that we first expected. We asked around fifty persons, but only got a yes from six persons, which we see as a limitation. We believe that the study’s result would have been wider and deeper if we had more executives to interview.

A second limitation for the study is that we did not choose one specific industry, just because of the previous mentioned limitation. If we have focused on one specific industry, and not a mixed selection, we believe that the result could be more unitary and niche, than a wider and general result that we got. The third limitations in this study is the earlier mentioned fact that we do a large generalization regarding Thai people in this study. The study is also made from an assumption that all the Thai people are Buddhists, even though we understand the religion is the majority in the country and that there are several minority religions in Thailand. Lastly, this study is focused on the Swedish executive’s experiences and perceptions. We find it interesting to include the Thai employees in the study as well, to see if they are experience the same cultural challenges or if they are experiencing any new aspect in the subject. This aspect was limited because of the time aspect.

5.4 Suggestions for further research

Our recommendations and suggestions for further research is in general that there is a clear need for further research within this research questions which is not only based on Hofstede’s (1980) study, since we find it interesting with more studies which is more up to date. It is also clear that further research regarding specifically Swedish executives operating in Thailand is needed, since there is a clear lack of research at the same time as more and more Swedish companies establish on the Thai market.

We can also identify shortcomings within our own study, which we suggest for further research to include. Those are for example that it would be interesting to delimit research in a particular industry or at only a certain size of companies. Our study includes different industries and the company where the Respondents are operating in are at different sizes. As previously mentioned our study includes both low-educated and highly educated industries, which is something we think provided our study with a nuanced image and interesting
perspectives, but suggestions for further research could be a study which more compares the answers from both highly educated and low-educated industries, to measure the differences in between.
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Interview participants:
1. Respondent 1. Face-to-face interview 2018-03-21
2. Respondent 2. Face-to-face interview 2018-03-22
3. Respondent 3. Face-to-face interview 2018-03-23
5. Respondent 5. Face-to-face interview 2018-03-30
Appendices

Appendix 1 - Interview guide

- Describe your position at *company name* and tell us about the company. Amount of employees.
- For how long have you been operating in Thailand?
- How long have you worked in the company and in this position?
- What is your earlier experience of the role as an executive?
- How do the nationalities among your employees look? How many are Thai and how many has other nationalities?
- What does the decision-making look like in your company? To what extent are the employees involved?
- What is your picture of an employee?
- How do you experience your relationship with the current Thai staff?
- What expectations do you think the Thai employees have on you as a manager?
- In general, how do you experience that the Thai employees' views on a managerial role are?

- What Thai cultural norms do you think differ most from Sweden in business context?
- How does cultural differences affect communication and collaboration in the business? Has it contributed to any problems?
- What difficulties/opportunities do you experience in communicating with people with a Thai cultural backgrounds in working life?
- Is there anything special you feel that you should keep in mind when communicating with your Thai staff?
- How do you consider that the organization in the big picture are influenced by the employees' cultural backgrounds?
- Are there any special codes that may be important to know when working with Thailand (in job context)?
- Have you experienced any misunderstandings due to cultural clashes in working situations? If yes, exemplify.
- What role do you think you as a leader has is in situations with cultural misunderstandings and conflicts?
• What factors are important in understanding/misunderstanding when communicating with staff / managers with different cultures?
• How do you handle cultural dilemmas or conflicts / disagreements arising from the different cultural backgrounds of the employees?
• Which benefits can the employees' cultural background have to the organization?

Is it something that you want to add?