Factors Influencing Cross-Cultural Adjustment

Swedish Expatriates in East Asia Pacific

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AUTHOR: Rebecca Mannebratt Mabro, Vilma-Ida Soininen
TUTOR: Imran Nazir
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Rebecca Mannebratt Mabro

Vilma-Ida Soininen

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Abstract

Title: Factors Influencing Cross-Cultural Adjustment: Swedish Expatriates in East Asia Pacific

Background: Today the world is getting more globalized, which has led to multinational companies sending out expatriates on foreign assignments. Mostly expatriates’ responsibilities are to transfer knowledge from the headquarters to the subsidiary and to improve the communication between the headquarters and the subsidiary. Expatriate assignments have a high failure rate and are costly. Nordic companies are sending out a growing number of expatriates today. Furthermore, Swedish people are argued to be comfortable acting in a global context.

Problem: When the expatriate moves to a new country, it is crucial for him or her to adjust in order for the expatriate assignment to become successful. Good expatriate adjustment is likely to lead to completing the assignment as well as performing well during the assignment. Existing research in the field states that there is need for more research about expatriate adjustment. Furthermore, few researches have been conducted about Swedish expatriates, and research conducted about expatriates from other nations might not apply to Swedish expatriates.

Purpose: Considering the increased globalization and the growing number of expatriates, along with the research gap and the complex adjustment process, the purpose of this thesis is to examine which factors influence the adjustment process of Swedish expatriates going to East Asia Pacific.

Method: Exploratory research was used to explore the factors influencing the adjustment process of Swedish expatriates who went to East Asia Pacific. With an abductive approach deeper knowledge about the adjustment process was gained. Empirical data was collected through a qualitative research consisting of eight in-depth interviews, which was analyzed by making use of qualitative content analysis method.

Conclusion: The major conclusion of this research is that factors influencing Swedish expatriates’ work, general, and interaction adjustment in East Asia Pacific are cross-cultural training, language ability, adjustment of the spouse, and role clarity.

Key terms: Asia Pacific, Cross-Cultural Adjustment, Expatriate Management, Swedish Expatriates
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1. Introduction

The chapter starts by introducing the background to expatriate management and expatriate adjustment. Later on, the chapter continues with the problem formulation of this research, and the research purpose.

1.1 Background

Expatriates are people moving abroad as part of their career (López-Duarte, Vidal-Suárez & González-Díaz, 2017). The main responsibilities of expatriates are to make the communication clearer between the headquarters and the subsidiary, to transfer characteristics from the headquarters’ organizational culture to the subsidiary, and to ensure the headquarters having control over the subsidiary (Harvey, Novicevic & Speier, 1999).

According to Ritzer (2015) we are living the “global age”. Ritzer (2015, p.2) defines globalization broadly as “transplanetary process(es) involving increasing liquidity and growing multidirectional flows as well as the structures they encounter and create.” Furthermore, Ritzer (2015) argues that in the human history globalization might even be the most important change experienced.

This increased globalization has led to different cultures interacting with each other more and more, and a lot of people are moving between countries. This is called cross-cultural interaction and it has made expatriation an important topic (Guðmundsdóttir, 2015). Since the globalization has a significant effect on business, many multinational corporations (MNCs) are sending out expatriates to transfer knowledge to foreign subsidiaries (Huff, Song & Gresch, 2014). In addition to this, research has stated that the globalization will as well increase in the future (Lansbury, 2018).

The first research articles about expatriates started to be published between the years 1960-1970 (Dabic, González-Loureiro & Harvey, 2013). However, expatriates have
already existed in ancient times. Back then, people acting like expatriates trusted by the ruler ruled places located far away (McNulty & Selmer, 2017). In research context expatriate management is a subfield of research that combines characteristics from two research fields: human resource management and international business (López-Duarte et al., 2017).

According to López-Duarte et al. (2017) national cultural influences the expatriate management process significantly. Earlier studies about expatriate management have been focusing mostly on US expatriates, and a little number of research has been done about European expatriates (Peterson, Napier and Shul-Shim, 2000).

The Swedish management style has been argued to be striven for also in the global context, for one of the reasons being that Swedish people are more comfortable in being in a global environment compared to many other nations (Birkinshaw, 2002). The main characteristics for the Swedish management style are efficiency, being punctual, respecting deadlines, appreciating teamwork and making decisions together (Birkinshaw, 2002; Brewster, 1993; Tixier, 1996).

In order for the expatriate assignment to be successful, the expatriate needs to adjust to the host country and the new culture faced. Previous research has shown that some expatriates fail at adjusting to the new country and the topic needs to be researched (Huff et al., 2014). Good adjustment of the expatriate benefits the MNC, since good adjustment is likely to lead to good expatriate performance and task completion (Osman-Gani & Rockstuhl, 2009).

The majority of expatriate adjustment research has been built on a three-stage model, resulting in three cross-cultural adjustment facets introduced by Black, Mendenhall, and Oddou in 1991 (Froese & Peltokorpi, 2011). These cross-cultural adjustment facets are called general, work, and interaction adjustment (Froese & Peltokorpi, 2011).
1.2 Problem

There has been a lot of research about expatriate management done previously, but still the existing research states that it is necessary to conduct more research in the field, since it is stated that the need for expatriates is increasing. One of the major factors behind this is the globalization, and also the increase of it (Lansbury, 2018).

According to Shi and Franklin (2013) one of the factors influencing expatriate adjustment might be the country of origin. In their research, Shi and Franklin (2013) state that future research should examine this relationship between the expatriates’ home country and their adjustment. Furthermore, Guðmundsdóttir (2015) states that the number of expatriates from Nordic countries is increasing nowadays, and therefore expatriates from Nordic countries should be researched more. Additionally, majority of the expatriate research has focused on US expatriates and it cannot necessarily be assumed that the results from these studies also apply to Swedish expatriates (Peterson et al., 2000).

Expatriate assignments are very costly to conduct (Brewster, 1988; Nowak & Linder, 2015). According to Andreason (2003) during the first year of the expatriate assignment, the cost for the expatriate is approximately three times the cost compared to if the expatriate would have stayed in the home country. These high costs are one of the reasons that still more research is needed in the field (Kobrin, 1988). Additionally, existing research shows a high failure rate of expatriates. This causes big losses to corporations in which expatriate assignments fail (Abdul Malek & Budhwar, 2013). In research it has been found that between 16 to 40 % of expatriates fail and return prematurely from their assignments. The most common reasons behind the failure are poor performance or problems in adjusting to the new culture (Osman-Gani & Rockstuhl, 2009).

Existing research shows that the influence of how the expatriate adjusts to his or her new home country is significant (Waxin, 2004). Good adjustment has been proven to be likely to lead to good and successful expatriate job performance as well as to completion of the expatriate assignment (Waxin, 2004). According to Okpara and Kabongo (2011) expatriate adjustment should be researched more because of its vitally important role in the expatriate management process as well as the possible outcomes of good expatriate adjustment.
One of the most commonly used theories in researching cross-cultural adjustment is the Framework of International Adjustment created by Black et al. in 1991 (Froese & Peltokorpi, 2011). The framework sees adjustment as an ongoing process in which several factors affect the outcome. The framework consists of three stages. The first stage is called Anticipatory Adjustment which refers to the preparations done prior to the expatriate assignment. The second stage is In-Country Adjustment consisting of factors categorized in Individual, Job, Organization Culture, and Non-Work factors. The last stage in the framework consists of the degree of work, general, and interaction adjustment (Black et al., 1991).

Research states that the greater the culture novelty between the home and host country of the expatriate, the more difficult it is to adjust to the new country (Farooq & Bagul, 2015; Maertz, Takeuchi & Chen, 2016). The culture novelty between Sweden and Asia Pacific is high. This can be seen when comparing the different dimensions of the Hofstede’s culture dimensions. Examples of this are the power distance dimension as well as the masculinity versus femininity dimension, where it is shown that Sweden differs from Singapore and China (Hofstede, 1984).

For the reasons mentioned, there is a research gap in the expatriate management field to examine Swedish expatriates together with expatriate adjustment.
1.3 Purpose

Considering the ongoing and complex nature of cross-cultural adjustment process, along with the research gap about Swedish expatriates and the cultural differences between Sweden and Asia Pacific, this paper will examine the adjustment process of Swedish expatriates in East Asia Pacific. Since the Framework of International Adjustment is one of the most commonly used models in cross-cultural adjustment, this model is used in this research focusing on individual, job, and non-work factors of the model. For the reasons mentioned, the purpose of this thesis is to investigate which factors influence the adjustment process of Swedish expatriates. Hence, the research question is:

Research question: “Which a) individual, b) job, and c) non-work factors influence the work, general, and interaction adjustment of Swedish expatriates in East Asia Pacific?”
2. Literature Review

The chapter discusses the existing research about expatriate adjustment and different factors whose influence on expatriate adjustment has been examined.

2.1 Expatriates

Oxford Dictionaries (2018) defines an expatriate as a person who lives outside his or her native country. In the research the concept of expatriation has existed for more than 60 years (McNulty & Selmer, 2017). In the 1950s the formal study of expatriates began (McNulty & Selmer, 2017).

When an expatriate moves abroad, the situation contains a high degree of uncertainty. Because of this, expatriates will be “sensitive to any feelings of misplaced trust” (Haslberger & Brewster, 2009, p. 381). Salgado and Bastida (2017) define expatriates as employees that have been sent abroad by an organization to a business unit located in another country, commonly for a period longer than three months.

The purpose with the usage of expatriates is mainly argued to be needed for companies to be able to internationalize faster. Internationalization refers to when a firm expands to an international market (Knight, 2004). Internationalization is important for companies because it might give them a competitive advantage. Expatriates with international experience are an asset, especially when companies are participating in the global market. Furthermore, it is stated in the research that companies gain advantages when having a diverse workforce, and this the companies receive through the usage of expatriates (Awais Bhatti, Mohamed Battour, Rageh Ismail & Pandiyan Sundram, 2014; Haslberger & Brewster, 2009).

Harrison & Shaffer (2005) define a successful expatriate assignment in terms of the expatriate completing the tasks assigned to him or her during the assignment, how the expatriate builds and maintains relationships in the new host country, and how the expatriate’s overall performance during the assignment is. According to Shi and Franklin
(2014), the majority of studies makes an assumption about a link between the cross-cultural adjustment of expatriates and their job performance. Furthermore, in their own research Shi and Franklin (2014) found that the expatriates adapting well to the new host country both psychologically and socioculturally are more likely to perform better in their job. For this reason, also Shi and Franklin’s own research (2014) conducted shows the existence of this link between the cross-cultural expatriate adjustment and job performance, especially when the home and host country working environments have a significant cultural distance (Shi & Franklin, 2013).

The most commonly used definition of expatriate failure in the research is the expatriate returning home before the expatriate contract expiring (Harzing, 1995). Because the failure rate of expatriate assignments is so high and the costs of sending an expatriate abroad are significant, expatriate failure affects the performance of the home company sending out the expatriate (Osman-Gani & Rockstuhl, 2009). According to Shi and Franklin (2014), not all costs associated with expatriate failure can be even measured easily. Expatriate failure can for instance harm the relationships between local business partners and additionally damage the reputation of the headquarters. Ashmalla and Crocitto (1997) have stated the same and additionally have argued that expatriate assignment failure can lead to possible business opportunities lost as well as time lost.

2.1.1 Expatriate Adjustment

Scholars define adjustment in different ways. Strubler, Park, and Agarwal (2011) define adjustment as the increased satisfaction of when the expatriate understands the ways of acting in the host country and is able to cope with the situations occurring in the new culture. However, the definition of adjustment that is mostly accepted, is the one from Black (1988). He defines adjustment as the ”psychological discomfort which can be categorized as work, general and interaction adjustments” (Awais Bhatti et al., 2014, p. 78).

Existing research has discovered factors that have an effect on expatriate adjustment and therefore have an influence on expatriate job performance. Often these factors are categorized in the literature as individual factors, organizational-level factors, and social
level factors. Awais Bhatti et al. (2014) state that few researches have been done about the influence of individual factors on expatriate adjustment.

When the expatriate, in his or her own mind as well as in the minds of the local people in the host country, is seen effective in dealing with the new environment, the expatriate can be said to be adjusted. In addition to this, the expatriate should have knowledge about the local environment, and lastly their overall emotion should be neutral or positive (Haslberger & Brewster, 2009).

2.2 Framework of International Adjustment

The advantage of using the Framework of International Adjustment is that it does not see adjustment as a linear process just improving along time. Instead, the framework sees adjustment as a process in which multiple different factors influence the outcome. This is stated to be more accurate since every individual adjusts in their own pace (Strubler et al., 2011). The framework starts with anticipatory adjustment which consists of elements taking place before the departure. Anticipatory adjustment is followed by in-country adjustment, which, in turn, refers to elements taking place during the expatriate assignment (Black et al., 1991). These elements lead to three facets of international adjustment which are work, general, and interaction adjustment. Work adjustment refers to how the expatriate adjusts to the new working environment. General adjustment consists of how the expatriate adjusts to the local daily life, for instance local food and local laws. Finally, interaction adjustment refers to how the expatriate interacts with people in the new host country (Black et al., 1991).

2.2.1 Anticipatory Adjustment

The anticipatory adjustment consists of three elements: testing, training, and previous experience. Testing refers to when the candidates for the expatriate assignment are tested about their openness for diversity, and language skills among others. This can play an important role in the preparation for the expatriate before the departure (Ayoko & Härtel, 2000; Strubler et al., 2011).
Expatriates are most often selected for the assignments based on either their technical or managerial skills. Before they are sent on their assignment they can be given technical training as well as cultural training, according to Strubler et al. (2011). The expatriates may also have had previous experience in either working in another culture or travelling on business trips (Strubler et al., 2011).

2.2.1.1 Training

One of the most effective ways to make the expatriate likely to adjust to the new host country well is to provide him or her with information about the common behaviors in the host country (Wang & Tran, 2012). This is mostly done by providing the expatriate cross-cultural training (Wang & Tran, 2012). The purpose of cross-cultural training is to teach people from one culture to interact effectively with people from another culture (Okpara & Kabongo, 2011) and its purpose is to change the expatriate’s attitudes instead of just providing knowledge (Wang & Tran, 2012). It is difficult for companies to find employees qualified to be expatriates, and therefore cross-cultural training plays an important role (Waxin & Panaccio, 2005). Additionally, according to Okpara and Kabongo (2017) one of the reasons mentioned for expatriates returning prematurely from their assignments is the lacking cross-cultural training.

The dominant view in the cross-cultural adjustment field has been that prior cross-cultural training helps the expatriate receiving prior training adjust faster than their counterparts who do not receive any training (Eschbach, Parker & Stoeberl; Kaye & Taylor, 1997, 2001; Osman-Gani & Rockstuhl, 2009; Waxin & Panaccio, 2005). Qin and Baruch (2010) as well as Okpara and Kabongo (2011) add that existing research has seen cross-cultural training as one of the most important activities of international human resource management.

According to Eschbach et al. (2001) as well as Sims and Schraeder (2004) cross-cultural training makes the expatriate adjust faster in the host country and reduces the seriousness of the culture shock that the expatriate faces. Waxin (2004) found out that the expatriates receiving cross-cultural training had a higher level of interaction adjustment. Research done by Eschbach et al. (2001) had the same outcome. Osman-Gani and Rockstuhl (2009)
in turn found out that cross-cultural training had a positive influence on interaction adjustment and work adjustment, but no influence on general adjustment. Waxin and Panaccio (2005) as well as Okpara and Kabongo (2011) found in their research that all types of cross-cultural training ease all three facets of adjustment of the expatriate: general adjustment, work adjustment, and interaction adjustment. Osman-Gani and Rockstuhl (2009) argue that cross-cultural training increases the level of the expatriate’s self-efficacy. This way the expatriate experiences less uncertainty when interacting cross-culturally, and this way the expatriate also adjusts better to the host country (Osman-Gani & Rockstuhl, 2009). Regardless of these findings, Waxin and Panaccio (2005) as well as Osman-Gani and Rockstuhl (2009) state that most companies still do not see the value of cross-cultural training and do not offer it to expatriates.

In addition to cross-cultural training expatriates can receive language training (Wang & Tran, 2012). According to Wang and Tran (2012), language training provided to the expatriate is supposed to enhance the expatriate’s possibilities to interact effectively with local people in the host country. Zhang and Peltokorpi (2015) state that a little amount of the existing research has examined the relationship between the proficiency of host country language that the expatriate has and how the expatriate adjusts to the new host country. However, language barriers are often an issue for expatriates (Zhang & Peltokorpi, 2015). Furthermore, Zhang and Peltokorpi (2015) argue that language has a significant role in the foreign subsidiary as it influences many daily actions.

According to Peltokorpi (2008) people have a tendency to speak their mother tongue when interacting with others, and therefore an expatriate incapable to speak the local language might be excluded from the communication networks, even if the locals do not necessarily do it on purpose. Additionally, Ashamalla and Crocitto (1997) argue that knowing the language of the expatriate’s host country expresses interest in the country as well as helps building trust and better relationships in the new country.

Existing research states that host country language proficiency has a positive effect on adjustment in the host country (Salgado & Bastida, 2017; Zhang & Peltokorpi, 2015). In their research Zhang and Peltokorpi (2015) examined Nordic expatriates in China and took into consideration the local level of English which was measured by the average
score in the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). Additionally, they considered the similarity or difference of the home and host country languages. In their research, Zhang and Peltokorpi (2015) found that the individual expatriates knowing Chinese language were better adjusted in the Chinese workplace as well as outside the workplace in interaction with the locals. However, Zhang and Peltokorpi (2015) note that the results found through their research might have been influenced by the fact that the research was conducted in China, a country with its own unique language and relatively low English skills among the locals.

2.2.1.2 Previous Experience

The relationship between the level of expatriate adjustment and previous expatriate experience has been researched, and the general belief in the field has been that previous expatriate experience helps the expatriate to adjust better to the next host country (Black et al., 1991; Guðmundsdóttir, 2015; Lee & Kartika, 2014). According to Black (1988) previous expatriate experience influences expatriate work adjustment positively but has no influence on expatriate’s general adjustment. Waxin (2004) examined the relationship between previous international experience and expatriate interaction adjustment but did not find a clear relationship. However, Okpara and Kabongo (2011) found in their research that previous professional international experience had a positive and significant influence on all three different facets of cross-cultural adjustment: general adjustment, work adjustment, and interaction adjustment.

The capabilities that most expatriates have developed through prior expatriate experience include the ability to decrease their stress level in an earlier phase during the assignment compared to expatriates with no previous professional international experience (Maertz et al., 2016). In addition to this, research has found that prior international experience increases the level of the expatriate’s cultural intelligence which makes adjusting to new cultures easier (Maertz et al., 2016). Furthermore, Zhu, Wanberg, Harrison and Diehn (2016) argue that previous international experience helps the expatriate to have realistic expectations about the expatriate assignment and helps to prepare for it.
Some studies did not find a significant relationship between expatriates’ previous international work experience and neither their work adjustment or non-work adjustment (Peltokorpi, 2008). Shi and Franklin (2013), however, point out that the term “international experience” is very broad and vague, and therefore their research measured prior expatriation experience. However, they did not find a relationship between previous expatriation experience and expatriate adjustment (Shi & Franklin, 2013). However, still most research in the field relies on the assumption that previous professional international experience helps the expatriate to adjust better to the new host country.

2.2.1.3 Organizational Elements

The purpose with sending an expatriate abroad includes factors that benefit the headquarters to improve the communication with their subsidiaries, as well as help the headquarters to better understand the local environment in the subsidiary’s country. Another purpose with sending out an expatriate mentioned in the existing research is the effective control the headquarters can achieve in their subsidiaries through sending there an expatriate from the headquarters (Kühlmann & Hutchings, 2010).

Huang, Chi & Lawler (2005) state that one critical factor for successful expatriate assignments is a well-designed system for selecting potential expatriates who are to be sent on international assignments. Previously when companies chose who to select for the expatriate assignment, the managers’ technical skills and their ability to deal with problems as they arise, was the main focus in the selection. However, nowadays because of the global competition the expatriate selection criteria have changed. Awais Bhatti et al. (2014) suggested a three stages selection process for expatriates. The first stage focuses on the strategy of the company, the second stage focuses on a range of factors about the expatriate, as gender, age and previous international experience. Finally, the last stage focuses on the individual characteristics.

The demand for expatriates has increased since businesses expand abroad, and since the expenses are so high for the companies to send an expatriate abroad, it is crucial to have the right person for the expatriate assignment. In addition to this, the massive investments that are needed to make international operations successful are dependent on the
performance of the expatriate, highlighting the importance of choosing the right person for the job (Awais Bhatti et al., 2014). According to Lee and Kartika (2014) the personal factors significantly influence the expatriate’s adjustment to the new culture. Furthermore, they state that a well-adjusted expatriate is more likely to complete his assignment at the foreign subsidiary and therefore benefit the company. Additionally, since one of the main tasks of the expatriate is to transfer knowledge between the headquarters and the subsidiary, a well-adjusted expatriate is also more likely to manage this task better (Lee & Kartika, 2014). Furthermore, the expatriate’s motivation to go on an expatriate assignment has found to have a positive influence on their work adjustment (Chen, Kirkman, Kim, Farh & Tangirala, 2010). Research has thought this to be because expatriates who have high cross-cultural motivation are more likely to solve challenges that they face on the expatriate assignment. Furthermore, these expatriates are more likely to complete their assignment. In addition to this, these expatriates are more willing to adjust to the local ways of working when it comes to for instance working hours or what local managers are like (Chen et al., 2010).

One of the major competitive advantages for the MNCs is their competence to transfer knowledge between the different departments of the company (Minbaeva, Pedersen, Björkman, Fey & Park, 2003; Tortoriello, Reagans & McEvily, 2012). When knowledge is transferred from outside of the department, this can lead to increased creativity and innovation. This can be of high value for the MNCs. However, when MNCs are using the knowledge transfer between different countries, more difficulties can occur, compared to if the knowledge transfer is within the same country (Tortoriello et al., 2012). One of the responsibilities the expatriate has is to transfer the knowledge from the headquarters to the subsidiary, especially tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge is defined as the skills and ideas people have, and tacit knowledge is difficult to transfer since it is hard to be transferred through for example writing. This is one of the main reasons why expatriate assignments are important for the MNCs (Tamer Cavusgil, Calantone & Zhao, 2003).

2.3 In-Country Adjustment

In the Framework of International Adjustment, Black et al. (1991) introduce five major in-country categories influencing international adjustment. The first category is the individual factors, where different levels of self-efficacy, relational skills and perceptions
are explained. The second category is labeled as job factors, which contains the degree of clarity, discretion, novelty, and conflict in the job itself. The third category is the organizational culture and it describes how the subsidiary’s culture is different from the headquarters’ culture. The degree of support from the headquarters is an important factor when it comes to how good the adjustment will be. The fourth category, organizational socialization, consists of socialization tactics, where the subsidiaries help the expatriates structure their early experiences, since in the beginning of the assignment there is often uncertainty for the new expatriate (Klein & Heuser, 2008; Strubler et al., 2011). The last major category includes the non-work factors, which include how different the culture of the host country is compared to the expatriate’s home country, and how well the spouse adjusts. All of these five categories contribute to the overall adjustment for the expatriate (Black et al., 1991; Strubler et al., 2011).

2.3.1 Individual Factors

2.3.1.1 Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to the individual’s belief in him- or herself and to the belief in his or her own ability to survive well in a new foreign environment (Andreason, 2003; Harrison, Chadwick & Scales, 1996). The results shown by the existing research about expatriates’ self-efficacy vary. Andreason (2003) states that individuals who believe in themselves and have high self-efficacy are more likely to be able to take advantage of feedback given to them as well as change their behavior to better match the feedback given. Additionally, Awais Bhatti, Kaur and Mohamed Battour (2013) add that an expatriate with a high level of self-efficacy is likely to be better at taking actions to solve problems and at dealing effectively with critical situations. According to the initial research done by Black et al. (1991) self-efficacy had a positive influence on all three facets of cross-cultural adjustment. However, as an exception about this research issue, Shaffer, Harrison, and Gilley (1999) found no relationship with self-efficacy and any of the three facets of cross-cultural adjustment. Later on, in 2005 Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, and Luk found in their research that self-efficacy had a positive influence on work and interaction adjustment but no influence on general adjustment.
2.3.1.2 Relation Skills

Relation skills are defined as the tools and techniques that the expatriate can use in order to build relationships in the new host country (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). Relation skills give the expatriate a chance to become familiar with what is seen acceptable and unacceptable in the new host country (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). The initial research done by Black et al. (1991) argues that relation skills have a positive influence on all three facets of cross-cultural adjustment. Furthermore, research conducted by Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2005) agreed with the initial findings of Black et al. (1991) and found a strong relationship between relation skills and the three cross-cultural adjustment facets. For this reason, Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2005) argue high relation skills being very important to successful expatriate adjustment.

2.3.1.3 Perception Skills

Perception skills refer to skills with which one can correctly understand reasons for and causes of other people’s behavior and the ability then to make correct attributions (Shin, Morgeson & Campion, 2006). Shin et al. (2006) defined in their research perception skills as three distinctive skills: active listening, monitoring, and social perceptiveness. The dominant view in the already existing research is that the stronger the expatriate’s perception skills, the easier it is for the expatriate to understand what is considered appropriate and inappropriate in his or her new host country (Ramsey, 2005). This understanding might help the expatriate to reduce the uncertainty experienced (Ramsey, 2005). Existing research has not researched the relationship between perception skills and three different facets of cross-cultural adjustment (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005).

2.3.2 Job Factors

2.3.2.1 Role Clarity

Role clarity measures how well the expatriate knows what is expected from him or her during the expatriate assignment (Andreason, 2003; Shaffer, Harrison & Gilley, 1999). Out of the four job factors role clarity has been found to have the most significant influence on work adjustment (Shaffer et al., 1999). The less clarity the expatriate
experiences in the job, the worse the expatriate is able to predict the outcomes of his or her behaviors (Selmer & Lauring, 2011). In addition to this, research has shown that expatriates who experience their job to have high role clarity, adjust better to the working environment in the new host country (Selmer & Lauring, 2011). In addition to this, Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2005) have found out in their research that role clarity has a positive influence on general and interaction adjustment.

2.3.2.2 Role Discretion

Role discretion allows the expatriate to adjust their work role to themselves instead of having to adapt themselves to the new working environment (Andreason, 2003; Shaffer et al., 1999) and the decision-making autonomy that the expatriate has on his or her assignment (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). Therefore, this factor is also known as job freedom (Selmer & Lauring, 2011). Shaffer et al. (1999) found that role discretion had a positive influence on the expatriate’s work adjustment. It has been argued that if the expatriate experiences high role discretion on his or her assignment, the expatriate is likely to adjust better to the new working environment because of being able to use familiar behavioral mechanisms (Selmer & Lauring, 2011). Additionally, Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2005) found that role discretion had a positive influence on general and interaction adjustment.

2.3.2.3 Role Novelty

Role novelty refers to the degree of how different the expatriate’s work role is during the expatriate assignment compared to the work roles that the expatriate has had back in his or her home country (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). Shaffer et al. (1999) state that all other three job factors have been found to have a positive influence on expatriate work adjustment, but research concerning role novelty is inconsistent. Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2005) did not find any relationship between role novelty and any of the three cross-cultural adjustment facets. Andreason (2003) states that the new working environment in the host country includes for instance different legal, economic, and societal demands. For this reason, the job requirements experienced in the new host country might be very
different from the ones back in the home country and adjustment to the new working environment can be surprisingly difficult (Andreason, 2003). As a solution to this Andreason (2003) suggests that the companies sending out expatriates should define the expatriate positions more clearly.

2.3.2.4 Role Conflict

The concept of role conflict refers to the expatriate receiving conflicting information about the work requirements in the new host country (Andreason, 2008; Selmer & Lauring, 2011). For this reason, the expatriate has to decide which information to ignore and which to believe as well as what actions to take (Selmer & Lauring, 2011). This might increase the uncertainty that the expatriate experiences during his or her assignment and might make the process of work adjustment more difficult (Selmer & Lauring, 2011). Previous studies have shown that role conflict has a negative influence on expatriates’ work adjustment (Selmer & Lauring, 2011). Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2005) found that role conflict had a negative impact on work adjustment as well as interaction adjustment.

2.3.3 Non-Work Factors

2.3.3.1 Culture Novelty

Research about expatriate management states that the greater the culture novelty of the host country, the more challenging it will be for the expatriate to adjust to the new country. More researchers argue that the reason behind this is that it is more difficult for an individual to adjust to a culture that is very different from his or her own culture than to one that is more familiar (Farooq & Bagul, 2015; Maertz et al., 2016). Reasons for more problems occurring when an expatriate moves to a culture with higher novelty is that the expatriate will use the same behavioral acts that he or she has used in the home culture and has been successful while using these acts. However, the same behavior does not necessarily work in the new culture. For this reason, more problems might occur, and especially when the culture novelty is higher (Selmer, 2002, 2006). On the contrary to some researchers arguing that adjusting to a culture with high culture novelty is more difficult, some researchers, in turn, state that if the culture novelty is
lower, and therefore the host culture is more similar to the home culture, adjustment is actually more difficult to achieve. This is due to if the culture is similar, the expatriate might assume that the local people behave in the same way as people in the expatriate’s home country. Therefore, the expatriate might not be looking for cultural differences in the new host country. If a local person then does not behave in the same way as people in the expatriate’s home country, this might result in the expatriate blaming the problem on the local person’s behavior, instead of the actual reason being a culture clash (Selmer, 2002, 2006).

2.3.3.2 Culture Shock

When an expatriate moves abroad, differences in language, food, and the concept of personal space change compared to how they are in the home country. When these differences occur, they can cause stress for the expatriate, since the differences in the new host country can be difficult to understand. This stress causes a culture shock for the expatriate. Most research in the field states that the expatriate will feel anxious, confused, and even sometimes angry before he or she has developed a set of tools that will help the expatriate to understand the social behavior of the local people (Kaye & Taylor, 1997; Naeem, Nadeem & Ullah Khan, 2015; Neuliep, 2017). Furthermore, it is emphasized a lot in the expatriate research that nearly everyone who is an expatriate will experience a culture shock of some kind. In addition to this, some research states that expatriates that have been on their assignments for several years experience the culture shock for a year or more before the adjustment process starts (Naeem et al., 2015; Neuliep, 2017).

2.3.3.2.1 U-Curve

The U-curve as a theoretical framework has been one of the most commonly used in research about cultural adjustment (Black & Mendenhall, 1991). The framework explains the different stages that occur when one moves to a new country. In the first stage, the honeymoon stage, the person is excited about everything that is new in the new culture. After this the culture shock stage occurs, where frustration with the new culture can be experienced on a daily basis. The adjustment stage covers the stage where the individual
is starting to get a grip of the new culture and is starting to be able to cope with the norms in the new country. The last stage in the U-curve is the mastery stage, where only small changes occur for the individual and he or she is still able to function in the new culture, since most of the adjustment process has already occurred (Black & Mendenhall, 1991; Haslberger & Brewster, 2009).

![U-Curve](source: Black & Mendenhall, 1991)

**2.3.3.3 Spouse Adjustment**

Nowadays more dual-career couples exist, and the adjustment of the expatriate’s spouse has become an important factor to consider when an expatriate is to be sent on an assignment. Many times, the spouse needs to give up his or her job when going together with the expatriate on the assignment. Mostly due to the work permit restrictions varying country by country it is difficult for the spouse to continue his or her career abroad. Furthermore, since the spouse most often does not have a job in the new country, this leads to the spouse being more generally involved in the local environment. Together with this and that the spouse is isolated from friends and family in a new environment often result in the adjustment process for the spouse to be stressful (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001).
Around 80 percent of expatriates going abroad have a spouse with them (Chen & Shaffer, 2018; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). Considering this high number, research states that it is important to investigate the impact for the expatriate concerning the spouse (Chen & Shaffer, 2018). Furthermore, research states that one of the major reasons for an expatriate to fail the expatriate assignment and return early is that the adjustment process does not work out for the spouse (Black & Stevens, 1989; Chen & Shaffer, 2018). In addition to this, the negative adjustment for the spouse reflects to the expatriate’s works as well, resulting in for example reduced performance (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). However, few research states that the high number of spouse maladjustments as a reason for early return for expatriates, might be because this can be an easy and handy excuse to use if the expatriate is the one wanting to return home early (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001).

2.4 Asia Pacific

Asia Pacific’s economic growth and development has been referred to as a “miracle”. This so-called miracle was not only because of the wealth increased but also the quality of life improved. Research states that during the years 1987-1993 the amount of people living in poverty decreased in Asia, whereas meanwhile in the rest of the world, for example in Europe and Latin America, the poverty increased (Marcotullio, 2001). Furthermore, the globalization continues to transform the economy in Asia Pacific, this has resulted in high rates of economic growth, and as well new patterns in consumption. Asia Pacific’s urban development is the most intensive in the world (Douglass, 2002). In addition to this, countries in Asia Pacific have some of the world’s fastest growing economies in the world. Research states that the economies of Asia Pacific will maintain to grow more rapidly compared to the world economy (Jorgenson & Vu, 2017).

To narrow down the region for this research, focus is put to East Asia Pacific. Out of the countries located in East Asia Pacific this research focuses on China and Singapore.

Geert Hofstede’s cultural dimensions can be used to compare the differences between different countries (Hofstede, 1984). The scores in each dimension range from 0 being the lowest possible score, and 100 being the highest possible score (Hofstede, 1984). The cultural dimensions of Hofstede have been criticized to some extent, mainly because of
them too much presenting all members of one country as being similar to each other instead of being individuals (Eringa, Caudron, Rieck, Xie & Gerhardt, 2015; Williamson, 2002). However, according to Williamson (2002) research has not found more relevant and accurate ways to measure cultural differences and Hofstede’s cultural dimensions should not be rejected regardless of the critique. The four Hofstede’s initial cultural dimensions are used in this research in order to illustrate the cultural differences between Sweden, and two countries in East Asia Pacific, China and Singapore.

The individualism versus collectivism dimension measures if people in the culture are seen as individuals or a group (Hofstede, 1984). In a country scoring high in individualism people are seen as individuals who are expected to take care of only themselves and their own families. In turn, a country scoring low in the individualism dimension is a collectivistic one. In a collectivistic culture people know that they can trust the people around them to take care of each other, and social groups in the culture are close and tight. Furthermore, in individualistic countries the members of society see themselves as “I”, and in collectivistic countries as “we” (Hofstede, 1984). Sweden scores high in the individualism dimension with a score of 71. In turn, Singapore and China both have a score of 20, which implies that both of these countries are very collectivistic (Hofstede, 1984).

The power distance dimension refers to which extent people in the country accept that power is distributed unequally (Hofstede, 1984). In countries that score high in the power distance dimension hierarchy is strong and power is distributed in relation to the hierarchical position of the member of society. In countries with low power distance, instead, people strive for power being distributed more equally, the rights of all members of society being equal, and the hierarchy in the country being low (Hofstede, 1984). In the power distance dimension Sweden scores low with a score of 31, whereas Singapore has a high score of 74 as well as China’s score being 80 (Hofstede, 1984).

The dimension of uncertainty avoidance examines the extent to which people in the country feel uncomfortable not knowing what the future will be like (Hofstede, 1984). Countries with a high score in this dimension prefer having strict rules and they want to feel certainty in life. Countries with a low score, instead, have a more relaxed attitude
towards the future and less rules. All of the three countries score moderately low in this dimension. Sweden has a score of 29, Singapore 8, and China 30, and there is no big difference between these countries when it comes to the uncertainty avoidance dimension (Hofstede, 1984).

When it comes to the masculinity dimension, masculine countries are associated with preferring achievement, success, and heroism (Hofstede, 1984). Feminine countries, instead, prefer having good relationships, caring for others, and having good quality in life. When Sweden, China, and Singapore are compared, there is a big difference between the scores of the countries in East Asia Pacific and Sweden. Sweden scores very low in the masculinity dimension. With a score of only 5, Sweden is a very feminine country. In turn, Singapore has a score of 48, and China 66, which makes these two countries more masculine than Sweden (Hofstede, 1984).

### 2.5 Swedish Expatriates

According to Guðmundsdóttir (2015) foreigners might find Nordic people cold and reserved, and only talking with real purpose. Therefore, small talk is not often used among Nordic people. Furthermore, in the working life many Nordic managers might stay silent rather than raising their voice when disagreeing with someone (Guðmundsdóttir, 2015). Looking at Swedish people specifically, they are considered to have a high level of tolerance of uncertainty (Birkinshaw, 2002). One characteristic of Swedish working life is that the majority of women work (Samuelsson, Houkes, Verdonk & Hammarström, 2012).

Research states that Swedish people make decisions with cautions and that the decisions as well take a long time for them to make. Decisions are rather made in groups than by individuals (Brewster, 1993) and employees are part of the decision making (Birkinshaw, 2002; Tixier, 1996). Often Swedish people work in groups and appreciate teamwork (Tixier, 1996). For these reasons, it can take time for expatriates to get answers from the headquarters (Brewster, 1993). The management style of Swedes is known for being decentralized and democratic, and having a flat hierarchy. An example of this is that people call each other with their first name (Guðmundsdóttir, 2015).
Swedish people are efficient; they for instance respect deadlines and are punctual (Tixier, 1996). Furthermore, the Swedish management style has been said in some research to be rare and difficult for non-Swede to understand (Brewster, 1993).

The researches conducted about Swedish expatriates in the past are from 1982, 1984, and 1990 (Brewster, 1993). One of these researches made by Hedlund and Åman from 1984 focuses on the Swedish management style and that it seems to be changing in some ways. The more recent research focuses on UK and Swedish expatriates in Sweden and the UK (Brewster, 1993). One research has been made about Swedish CEOs in Swedish companies in Southeast Asia, however this research was from 1992 (Selmer & Luk, 1995).
3. Methodology & Method

The chapter starts by introducing the methodology of this research, being research philosophy, research approach, and research strategy. Furthermore, the method of this research is discussed, including the primary data collection, which consists of presenting the interviews, the interview type, and the interview design, as well as the literature used. Lastly, the method of data analysis is discussed.

3.1 Methodology

Figure 2 Overview of Methodology and Method

3.1.1 Research Philosophy

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012) name four research philosophies commonly used in business and management research: pragmatism, positivism, realism, and interpretivism. These four different research philosophies are used to achieve different outcomes and none of them is simply better than the rest (Saunders et al., 2012). In research using the interpretivist philosophy, research is conducted among people instead of objects. Additionally, interpretivist philosophy sees people in their role as social actors and examines their differences (Saunders et al., 2012). An interpretivist perspective is
argued to be suitable in business and management research, especially one of the most suitable fields being human resource management (Saunders et al., 2012). Since this research is focused on expatriate management, which is a subfield between international business and human resource management, the interpretivist perspective can be seen appropriate for this research. Characteristics of data collection methods that are most commonly used when conducting research with an interpretivist perspective, are to conduct a qualitative study gaining in-depth information with small samples used and the researcher being close to his or her data (Saunders et al., 2012). This research used data collection methods that fulfill this criterion as will be presented later.

The subjective nature of interpretivism can be seen both as an advantage and disadvantage of this research philosophy. However, the subjective nature of the interpretivist research philosophy allows the researcher to gain in-depth information, and for this reason this philosophy is appropriate for this research and can be seen having more advantages than disadvantages.

3.1.2 Research Approach

In addition to the research philosophy, the researchers should decide on the research approach used in order to achieve the goal of the research. The three major research approaches are called deductive, inductive, and abductive (Saunders et al., 2012). These approaches differ in terms of the extent to which they are testing existing theory or creating new theories (Saunders et al., 2012). The deductive approach starts with theory and then testing the theory. The inductive approach, in turn, starts by data collection and then building theory. In the abductive approach the researcher collects data in order to identify themes and explain patterns. In the abductive approach the researcher aims to build a new theory or make changes to an existing one (Saunders et al., 2012). Additionally, the abductive approach does not just move from theory to data or from data to theory, like deductive and inductive approach, but instead combines these two approaches (Saunders et al., 2012). In this research the abductive approach was seen as the most appropriate research approach.
3.1.3 Research Strategy

In a qualitative research, the data collected is non-numeric and may be gained from questionnaires or interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2011). A qualitative research is more flexible than a quantitative one and gives a chance for the researcher to gain more in-depth information (Bryman & Bell, 2011). According to Birkinshaw, Brannen and Tung (2011) there is a need for more qualitative research in the fields related to international business. Furthermore, Birkinshaw et al. (2011) argue that qualitative research can help to understand complex issues and can provide more valuable data in the field than quantitative studies. For these advantages mentioned for qualitative research, in order to answer the research question of this research, a qualitative research was conducted because of its suitable nature for this topic.

An exploratory research can be used when there is little knowledge about the topic of the research question and the researcher aims to understand the topic well (Saunders et al., 2012). An explanatory research, in turn, asks “why” questions and aims to explain the reasons behind something happening. Furthermore, an explanatory research aims to explain previous research conducted about the topic (Saunders et al., 2012). A descriptive research, in turn, aims to describe the facts instead of explaining, and it is used when there is already basic knowledge about the topic in the field (Saunders et al., 2012).

This research is an exploratory research since by combining an existing theoretical framework and empirical research in the form of interviews aims to explore more about the research field. As mentioned earlier, this research aims to explore more about the adjustment factors of Swedish expatriates in East Asia Pacific and the research field lacks research about this topic. Therefore, this research explores the topic and aims to define new ideas that can be tested in the future.
3.2 Method

3.2.1 Primary Data

3.2.1.1 Data Collection Method: Interviews

The research method used to collect data in this qualitative research was chosen to be conducting interviews. As a research tool interviews have a flexible nature and they can provide the researcher with a lot of information (Wilson, 2012). These were the reasons why interviews were chosen to be conducted for collecting data for this qualitative research. According to Brewerton and Millward (2001) the most significant possible disadvantage with using interviews is that it might be difficult to achieve reliable results that are also valid for the research. However, the people interviewed for this research were chosen carefully in order to ensure the validity and reliability of the data gained.

3.2.1.1.1 Interview Type

In structured interviews the researcher has formed the interview questions beforehand and sticks to them throughout the interview (Wilson, 2012). In unstructured interviews, in turn, questions the researcher uses are open-ended questions and the order of the questions is not fixed (Brewerton & Millward, 2001). In turn, semi-structured interviews are a combination of structured and unstructured interviews. Semi-structured interviews include questions with an open end as well as more precise ones (Wilson, 2012). The interview type chosen for this research was semi-structured interviews. This approach combines the easiness of analyzing and comparing data, as well as gives the interviewee a chance to explain themselves more and provide the researcher with more in-depth information. However, possible disadvantages of the approach are that the interview becomes too unstructured and ends up in side-tracks, as well as the possible reliability issue when interviewing different people (Brewerton & Millward, 2001). However, the reason to conduct semi-structured interviews for this research was to gain a lot of information but to still keep the questions asked and information provided relevant to the initial research question. This way the interviews did not become too unstructured and conducting semi-structured interviews was the best possible approach in order to collect data that is valid and answers the research question in the best way possible.
The people chosen to be interviewed for this research had several requirements in order for the research result in valuable and reliable data, and in order to answer the initial research question in the best way possible. This sampling method in which the researchers choose from the population individuals that fulfill the criteria of the research is called purposive sampling (Brewerton & Millward, 2001). All the interviewees were Swedish people who had worked as expatriates. The expatriate assignments of all interviewees had ended before this research was conducted and the minimum length of the expatriate assignments was required to have been two years in order to ensure that the time spent in the new host country was long enough to need adjustment. Furthermore, the expatriates chosen had to have been successful on their expatriate assignments in terms of not quitting the assignment earlier as planned. In addition to the requirements already listed, all the expatriate assignments had to have taken place in China or Singapore. Lastly, the expatriates interviewed had been sent abroad as expatriates by Swedish companies instead of the interviewees being self-initiated expatriates, in other words the interviewees were not people who had found their job in another country by themselves. Instead, the expatriates interviewed for this research were organizational expatriates by definition. One disadvantage of purposive sampling is that it might not be representative (Brewerton & Millward, 2001). However, it is still likely to provide a lot of useful and relevant information (Brewerton & Millward, 2001), and this is why this sampling method was used in order for this research to answer the research question in the best way possible.

Often in research anonymity is an important issue to consider (Brewerton & Millward, 2001). The interviews in this research were conducted in Jönköping, Huskvarna, and Gothenburg in places where the interviewees felt comfortable talking about their expatriate assignment without outsiders hearing. These places were for instance the office of the interviewee or a silent project room booked. Additionally, in this paper the interviewees are referred to without names in order to build trust and make the interviewees be open about the topic, also without their personal opinions being linked with the opinions of the company that sent them abroad.

Furthermore, in order to maintain access to all information received from the interviews throughout the research process, every interview was recorded, and a word-by-word transcript was created. The language used in the interviews was chosen to be English.
because of the professional international working experience of every interviewee and the interviewees feeling comfortable expressing themselves in English. Additionally, translation mistakes wanted to be avoided.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of respondents</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Cross-cultural training received</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Spouse with on the expatriate assignment</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expatriate assignment successful</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Previous international experience: Living abroad</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Expatriate experience</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Professional international experience</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expatriate assignment located in:</td>
<td></td>
<td>Knew the local language:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1 Background Information about the Interviewees*
3.2.1.1.2 Interview Design

The interviews conducted for this research started by introducing the topic of the thesis to the interviewee. After this the interviewee was asked for a permission for the authors to record the interview for transcribing it and for further analysis. The interviews started with background questions about the interviewee’s expatriate assignment, concerning the country where the assignment took place, the length of the assignment, and for which company the expatriate worked when being on his assignment. After the background questions, the expatriates were asked broad questions about their overall impression about the expatriate assignment and the biggest challenges that they encountered. These broad questions were asked in order to get in-depth information through spontaneous answers about what comes to the interviewee’s mind as the first thing when thinking back to his expatriate assignment. The interviewees were let speak about their feelings freely to start the interview in a good way. After these broad questions, more specific but brief questions were asked about the anticipatory adjustment concerning possible training provided and possible previous expatriate experience of the interviewee. Additionally, questions about the family situation of the expatriate during the assignment and the interviewee’s motivation to go abroad as an expatriate were asked. After this, the interview questions moved to the in-country adjustment. Information concerning all the factors that this research examines was desired to be gained. Questions were asked about each factor to find out how the expatriate experienced them and if they had an influence on the expatriate experience. Additionally, questions related more specifically to general, work, and interaction adjustment were asked. All questions asked were indirect and no previous knowledge about the theories was needed for the interviewees to answer the questions. The interviews were finished with questions about how each expatriate personally would try to solve issues appearing during the expatriate assignment, and if the expatriate thinks that his personal traits had a major influence on how successful the expatriate assignment ended up being. As the very last interview question the interviewee was asked if he wanted to add something about the topic.

3.2.2 Literature

In addition to primary data, literature was used in this research. According to Saunders et al. (2012) using literature can provide benefits for the research conducted since the
researcher can compare the existing literature with his or her own primary data collected. However, as a possible disadvantage for using existing literature in addition to the researcher’s own primary data, Saunders et al. (2012) state that the researcher might not be sure about the quality of the literature that is available for him or her. However, this disadvantage has been avoided in this research by selecting the databases and articles used carefully. Literature used was gained through Jönköping University’s Library online database Primo as well as through Google Scholar. These online databases were used in order to get access to peer-reviewed articles and ensure the trustworthiness of the articles used. Relevant articles were found using appropriate and relevant keywords, such as for instance “expatriate adjustment”, “expatriate management”, “cross-cultural adjustment”. Additionally, research about Swedish expatriates was searched for but very few researches were found. Furthermore, new searches were conducted with the same keywords also later in this research process in order to ensure getting access to possible recent research in the field. Sources used for this research aimed to be the most commonly cited in the field as well as the most recent findings in order to ensure their relevance and reliability for this research. In addition to peer-reviewed articles, relevant books from Jönköping University Library were used.

3.2.3 Data Analysis

3.2.3.1 Qualitative Content Analysis Method

A content analysis can be used to analyze written data in a systematic way (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Furthermore, through this systematic approach replicable and valid inferences can be made (Cohen et al., 2011).

The qualitative content analysis in this research started by defining the sample of the research: who were the interviewees and how this sample was chosen for the research. According to Cohen et al. (2011) the next step of a qualitative content analysis is to define how the material was generated. This includes how the material was recorded and if the data was reported correctly (Cohen et al., 2011). As mentioned earlier, all interviews conducted for this research were recorded. A transcript of each interview was written during the same day as the interview was conducted in order to secure the data. After transcribing each interview, the transcripts were carefully read and discussed.
Additionally, some new questions were added to the interview guide after receiving relevant information from the interviews. Furthermore, these new questions were asked from the previous interviewees afterwards in order to get answers from all interviewees to same questions and ensure the relevance of the data collected. After this, the next step was to code the data received. In this stage all the important data was marked and data that was unnecessary for answering the research question of this research was reduced. After the coding stage in a qualitative content analysis the next step is to categorize the data achieved (Cohen et al., 2011). Through the collection of data in qualitative research the data received is not standardized, and it therefore needs to be classified into different categories (Saunders et al., 2012). Categories refer to groupings of the main points in the written text created from the data collection of the research (Cohen et al., 2011). The categories in this content analysis were created around the different factors that this research aims to examine and patterns among the data were searched. Some of the data was categorized in more than one category, and according to Cohen et al. (2011) this should be aimed for. After the categorization of the data comes analyzing the data (Cohen et al., 2011). The data received from the interviews was analyzed together with the theoretical framework of this research in order to draw patterns, look for relationships, and see if the existing research in the field and the research conducted for this thesis were in line.
4. Empirical Findings

This chapter presents the findings achieved through the primary data collection of in-depth interviews. The chapter discusses each of the factors examined individually.

4.1. Anticipatory Adjustment Factors

4.1.1. Training

When interviewing the eight expatriates for this research, it was found out that none of them had any training before their expatriate assignment or during it. However, every one of the interviewees stated that it would have been helpful if the company had provided some cultural training about the new host culture before the start of the expatriate assignment. One expatriate stated: “What actually helps you the most, what the company doesn’t offer, is that you have a really good introduction to the country. Since you meet people from the country, you need to have something to talk about, and history is really good to talk about because all countries have some sort of a history. So, the more you know about the history of the country, the more you have something to say on a dinner or talk about some sort of a hero, or a statue. It is really good to have that knowledge.” Furthermore, all of the expatriates researched their new host countries before going on the assignment. One expatriate stated: “And the companies that send you out don’t really have this knowledge about the people, so you really need to dig into that to find the information yourself.” However, the extent to which the interviewees research the host country varied. Most of the expatriates bought books about the new culture and searched the internet for cultural information and previous expatriate experiences in the host country. One of the interviewees mentioned that contacting Business Sweden in Singapore was of great help to him in order to learn more from other Swedes about the culture in Singapore. Lastly, one expatriate went further with his own research than the others. This expatriate researched the new host culture by visiting the embassy and
meeting with the ambassador in the new host country at the beginning of his expatriate assignment.

4.1.2 Previous Experience

When it comes to the previous experience of the interviewees, none of them was completely new to interacting internationally. However, the degree of international experience that they had varied. Four of the interviewees had previous experience of being expatriates. One of these expatriates stated: “Since I had already been on expatriate assignments even though they hadn’t been in Asia, I knew that there will be challenges to tackle, but I was prepared for that because of my previous experience.” Two of the interviewees had experience of living abroad before but not being on expatriate assignments. Lastly, two of the interviewees had lived their whole life in Sweden but were used to working internationally, travelling a lot for work, and interacting in international environments.

4.1.3 Language

Out of the eight interviewees three knew the local language of the host country when starting the expatriate assignment. The rest five interviewees did not know the local language at a communication level. However, during the expatriate assignment one of these five expatriates learned the local language through working with local workers in the assembly line. Through this hands-on language learning he learned to survive the daily working life with the local language. In the interview the expatriate put this into words: “I know how to say words like supplier, or manufacturing tool, but I don’t know how to say tomato. I still don’t know how to say tomato.”

4.1.4 Organizational Elements

When asked about the selection process for the expatriates in the company, all of the eight expatriates told that they were asked to go on the expatriate assignments by the employer instead of them applying to go. Furthermore, all the interviewees reported that they were
motivated to go on the expatriate assignment and they did not feel pressured to go. One of the interviewees said: “*If you are not motivated to go, don’t go.*” Furthermore, this expatriate stated that in addition to being motivated to go abroad as an expatriate, one has to be motivated and curious about going to that specific country.

One of the interviewees mentioned that he and his spouse had been thinking about and looking for an opportunity like an expatriate assignment for some time before the interviewee got asked to go abroad. Additionally, all of the interviewees stated that their personal traits were a key factor to a successful expatriate assignment. Personal traits mentioned by most of the interviewees were to be a person open for new experiences and other cultures, as well being used to and good at talking to people.

4.2 In-Country Adjustment Factors

4.2.1 Individual Factors

4.2.1.1 Self-Efficacy

In this research all of the eight interviewees reported a high level of self-efficacy. In other words, every one of them had the belief that he will perform well in the expatriate assignment and will complete it successfully. Furthermore, all expatriates that were interviewed reported that this belief did not change during the expatriate assignment. One interviewee said that if the headquarters sends you abroad as an expatriate, the company thinks that you have the ability to perform well and complete this assignment successfully. This thought strengthened the interviewee’s belief in himself and he was not scared of going on the assignment. Another interviewee pointed out that many times the expatriate is sent abroad by the company because the processes are not already well set up in the host country and the expatriate is the one responsible for setting them up. Furthermore, the local people recruited are not likely to be familiar with the products and the brand of the company. For this reason, according to the interviewee, the expatriate has a lot of freedom but also responsibility and must therefore believe in his or her own skills before and during the assignment in order to be able to deliver good results eventually. The interviewee also put this into different words: “*I think you have to have a little bit of an ego to be successful*.”
4.2.1.2 Relation Skills

The interviewees used different tools and techniques in their new host countries to build relationships. The most common technique used by the expatriates interviewed was researching the new host country by themselves before the assignment. One of the interviewees pointed out the importance of being familiar with for instance the history and economy of the new host country from the very beginning in order to find suitable and appropriate discussion topics. The expatriate argued that this is very important when forming relationships in the host country in order to avoid insulting people. This expatriate stated: “You also need to have knowledge about the political environment, so you don’t put your feet into the wrong place in the discussion. What are the preferred feelings of the people in the country, so you suddenly don’t say something that is rude.” According to the interviewee, if the expatriate does not have this knowledge, building and maintaining good relationships becomes very challenging. Some of the interviewees also pointed out the importance of doing things in the new home country and trying to have fun instead of staying alone at home. One expatriate stated about this: “The best way is to deep dive into the new culture, make friends, and try to have fun. Do things in the evenings, play some sports, go to restaurants, and there’s also something called meetup.com.” What varied between the different interviewees was the degree of having local friends and having Swedish or other expatriate friends. Six of the expatriates reported mostly spending time with other expatriates outside work but two of the expatriates also succeeded in building a big circle of friends consisting of local people.

4.2.1.3 Perception Skills

When it comes to perception skills, the answers given by the interviewees varied. Three of the interviewees did not feel that understanding the local ways of doing things was too difficult. This was because of the international atmosphere of the host country of their expatriate assignments. One of these expatriates put this into words: “It was hard to even say who was considered to be a local and who was considered to be a foreigner in the country”. Other five expatriates interviewed, in turn, experienced the local ways of acting very different compared to the Swedish ones. As examples the expatriates mentioned the great amount of hierarchy in the working life of the host country and the importance of
giving face and not losing one’s face. One expatriate stated: “But if you make someone lose face in public, you might not be able recover from it, and the relationship will be hurt.”

4.3.2 Job Factors

4.3.2.1 Role Clarity

About role clarity all of the expatriates interviewed reported that they knew what was expected from them during the assignment and the goals were clear from the very beginning. One of the expatriates followed up on a previous expatriate’s work in the new host country and contacts which the company had had for around 10 years. This made the goals clear for this expatriate but some of the interviewees had a completely new position, new tasks and new goals on their expatriate assignment. Regardless of this, none of the interviewees reported experiencing any problems with role clarity in the host country. In other words, all the expatriates interviewed had been informed well about the goals of their expatriate assignment before the very beginning of the assignment. Many of the interviewed expatriates stated that the reason for the company to send them abroad was to achieve something big. For example, one of the interviewees was supposed to establish a brand-new subsidiary in the host country, and therefore he had a clear goal in mind about what is expected from him. One of the expatriates interviewed said that the adjustment to the new work role was easy, and additionally he stated that “work is work”. According to this interviewee work was the clearest part of his adjustment process because of the goals set and guidelines given by the Swedish headquarters.

4.3.2.2 Role Discretion

About role discretion all the interviewees mentioned having experienced a relatively high level of freedom at work during their expatriate assignment which allowed them to also make the work adjust to the expatriate instead of only the other way around. However, the degree of experiencing role discretion varied between the interviewees. Six expatriates told that they did not have managers above them during their assignments and for this reason they had all the freedom to plan their work the way they wanted, as long
as they reported to Sweden and delivered good results. One expatriate stated: “I planned my weeks and what I will do. So the whole expatriate assignment was built on freedom, which I liked.” Furthermore, seven of the eight interviewees told that in addition to them adjusting to the local ways of working and doing business, their subordinates adjusted to their Swedish working and management style. Examples of subordinates adjusting to the expatriates’ Swedish way of doing were mentioned to be mostly about how punctual the employees had to be at work, how to address the Swedish manager, and how to dress at the office. These expatriates mentioned that the Western and Swedish management style was known to be efficient and effective among the local employees in the host country and the Swedish management style made sense to them. “And all the six people I hired, they told me they will never ever have a Chinese boss after having a Swedish boss, because it’s a huge difference.” Therefore, the workers were even happy to partly adjust to the Swedish management style.

4.3.2.3 Role Novelty

When it comes to role novelty, the results achieved varied between the interviewees. Two of the expatriates reported that they had the same tasks and position during their expatriate assignment than back in Sweden, only the working environment, their contacts, and colleagues were different due to being in a new country. The rest, six expatriates, however, did not have experience of the position that they had on the expatriate assignment before they moved to the new host country. However, despite not having experience of the position, all of the expatriates interviewed were satisfied with the tasks and the responsibility expected from them during the expatriate assignment. Furthermore, five of the expatriates stated that the expatriate assignment was the best decision that they have made career wise. One expatriate explained this as: “It’s probably the best job I will ever have because I had full responsibility as well as full mandate.” In addition to this, all of the eight interviewees ended up extending the initial length of their expatriate assignment.
4.3.2.4 Role Conflict

Six expatriates interviewed did not experience role conflict during their assignment since they had no managers above them in the host country, and the tasks were given from Sweden and the results reported back to Sweden. For this reason, these expatriates did not receive conflicting information about what was required from them. However, two other interviewees reported that they received conflicting information. One expatriate explained this by saying that this also happens in Sweden when one has managers above him or her and the managers have different goals and tasks in their positions. Furthermore, the expatriate gave an example of having in the corporation a supply chain manager whose job is to maximize the cash flow and having a sales person who aims to sell as much as possible. The goals of the supply chain manager require the company having low inventory, and the goals of the sales person having high inventory. Therefore, the goals of these employees are in conflict and the expatriate may receive conflicting information from different people in the company about what is expected from him or her. Furthermore, one expatriate stated: “You need to have clear directions from home, otherwise you are just wondering to a different direction. It’s good to have someone from Sweden to interact with.”

4.3.3 Non-Work Factors

4.3.3.1 Culture Novelty & Culture Shock

All of the expatriates interviewed were well aware of the different cultures between Sweden and their host country before moving to the new country. Nevertheless, culture difficulties occurred often for all of them. The main reason for the difficulties according to five of the interviewees were the language barriers. Because of the this the daily life was difficult to cope with. One interviewee stated that the language barriers contributed to the challenges with how to deal with the transportation, medical issues and the housing situation. The same interviewee said that “in the beginning one sees a small amount of the cultural things but after one has been to the place for a few months, one sees the rest of the iceberg and what is hidden underneath it”.

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Furthermore, another interviewee said that it is important to overcome the language barriers in some way, even if you have to train yourself in the local language. In addition to this all of them said that it is important to be aware of the culture in the host country, so that one does not act in a way that will insult the local people or unintentionally do something illegal in the country.

The interviewees with the least amount of issues concerning the cultural part during their expatriate assignments were the three with basic knowledge of the host country language before departure.

4.3.3.1 U-Curve
Every one of the interviewees experienced the U-curve, however they experienced it on various levels. In the beginning all of them experienced all the new things in the country, but after a few months they started to miss different things from Sweden. It could be simple things like Swedish bread. At the same time the daily life in the new country became a routine. The interviewees overcame this and reached the adjustment and mastery stage after this, however on different levels. Some of the interviewees thought that one never fully master the culture in the new country. One of the interviewees felt that during his expatriate assignment he adjusted to the host country and learned to understand the local ways of acting, but still stated: “Once a foreigner, always a foreigner”.

4.3.3.2 Spouse Adjustment
During the expatriates’ assignments, one of the spouses worked. Only one of the non-working spouses received retirement payment from the company that the expatriate worked for. The reasons stated from the interviewees why the spouses did not work was that it is difficult to find a job abroad as well as to get a working visa, and at the same time the interviewees had a high salary, so the spouse did not necessarily have to work. Many of the interviewees thought it was good that the spouse did not have to work, since then they could take care of all the things related to the family and the children. The interviewees stated this since there is a lot of things that need to be fixed in the new
country. Because the spouse could put all the focus on the family situation, the interviewees could put all their time to focus on their job situation.

The overall experience for the spouses was good for five of the interviewees, one reason for this was that when they were abroad the whole family was able to travel a lot, especially because the salary of the expatriate was high.

All the spouses wanted to move abroad before the start of the assignment, and no one of the interviewees would have started their expatriate assignment, if the spouse did not want to go as well. As one of the interviewees said: “Happy wife, happy life”.

All of the interviewees thought it was important that the spouse had a positive attitude towards the whole experience, for the assignment to be successful. One expatriate said that it is needed for yourself and your spouse to be on the same level about the assignment, and in addition to this it is important that both have a positive attitude towards the experience.

Three of the expatriates’ spouses did not fully adjust to the new culture. Furthermore, the expatriates stated that this was finally the reason why they moved back to Sweden. The rest five of the spouses were adjusted, and the expat stated that they both were ready to move back to Sweden in the end. Furthermore, the expatriates whose spouses did not fully accept the new culture and did not adjust, stated that they would have extended the assignment even more if it was not for the spouse. One expatriate stated: “But my wife, she rejected the Chinese culture. She never really fell in love with China. So for her it was a big struggle.”

Of the spouses two of them that interacted with the local people in the country. The rest of the spouses did only spend time with others expatriate spouses during their time abroad. Furthermore, three of the spouses knew the local language. However, not knowing the local language was of less problems for one of the interviewees and his spouse, since they could always call a local contact person when they needed help interacting with the local people.
5. Analysis

In this chapter the empirical findings achieved through the research are analyzed and connected to the existing research in the field. The chapter discusses each of the factors examined individually.

In order to answer the research question of this research, eight Swedish expatriates were interviewed about their adjustment process on their expatriate assignment, and this empirical data is connected to the existing expatriate adjustment research already conducted in the field.

5.1 Research Question

RQ: “Which a) individual, b) job, and c) non-work factors influence the work, general, and interaction adjustment of Swedish expatriates in East Asia Pacific?”

5.2 Anticipatory Adjustment Factors

5.2.1 Training

According to the most dominant view in the existing research cross-cultural training provided to the expatriate helps him or her adjust faster to the new host country (Eschbach et al., 2001; Kaye & Taylor, 1997; Osman-Gani & Rockstuhl, 2009; Waxin & Panaccio, 2005). Furthermore, existing research states that one of the reasons why expatriates end their assignment earlier than planned, is not being provided cross-cultural training (Okpara and Kabongo, 2017). However, most companies still do not provide this training for the expatriates (Osman-Gani and Rockstuhl, 2009; Waxin and Panaccio, 2005).

The results from this research show that none of the expatriates interviewed received any cross-cultural training before going on their assignments. However, all of the eight interviewees stated that it would have been helpful to receive cross-cultural training
before the start of the assignment. Examples of the cultural knowledge that the expatriates interviewed mentioned were mainly having knowledge about the history of the host country and the local working culture. The expatriates explained that having knowledge about these topics would have been useful during their assignments in order to especially avoid insulting local people when discussing and working together. One of the interviewees went further with his own research about the host country by visiting the embassy and gaining knowledge this way. This expatriate had been on two assignments before the one in Asia Pacific. The reason why this expatriate did such careful research about the new host country is believed to be because through his earlier assignments he has learned the importance of having this knowledge. Furthermore, through the interview with him it was found out that this expatriate felt adjusted to the host country faster than all the other interviewees. Since all of the expatriates interviewed did research about the host country to some extent, it is believed that with cross-cultural training provided before the start of the assignment the expatriates could have spent this time on work and would have felt less uncertainty when starting to work in the host country. This is seen crucial since the culture of the Asia Pacific host countries is different from the Swedish culture.

5.2.2 Previous Experience

According to most of the existing research previous expatriate experience helps the expatriate to adjust better during the next expatriate assignment (Black et al., 1991; Guðmundsdóttir, 2015). The four of the expatriates interviewed in this research who had previous expatriate experience all thought that the previous experience helped them during the new assignment. It was found out through the interviews that the previous experience made the beginning of the adjustment process less stressful compared to their feelings at the beginning of their very first expatriate assignment. The expatriates thought that they could benefit from the previous expatriate experience on their latest assignment in Asia Pacific even though their previous expatriate assignments had not taken place in Asia. This was because they thought that they were able to cope with new experiences and situations more easily as they came along.

Existing research states that previous international experience increases the level of the expatriate’s cultural intelligence. Furthermore, this cultural intelligence achieved makes
the adjustment process in the new host country easier (Maertz et al., 2016). As can be seen from the findings of this research, two of the interviewees had previous experience of living abroad but not being expatriates. Furthermore, two other interviewees had gained prior professional international experience before their expatriate assignment by working internationally throughout their careers. These four interviewees thought that this international experience helped them during their expatriate assignment in Asia Pacific. The interviewees were found out to be more open to new cultures and interacting with foreign people, and they also were familiar with meeting people from different cultures.

It can be seen from the interviews that when one has lived abroad before, he is familiar with the process of moving to another country, leaving family and friends back home, and missing one’s home country.

Through analyzing the findings of this research, any type of previous international experience helps expatriates to adjust better to the new host country.

5.2.3 Organizational Elements

According to Awais Bhatti et al. (2014) the selection process for expatriates consists of three different stages which focus on the strategy of the company, the previous international experience, and the expatriate’s individual characteristics. Through the interviews in this research it was found out that all of the eight expatriates were asked to go abroad by the company. During the interviews it was shown that the companies followed these three stages when selecting these expatriates for the assignments. This was due to all the expatriates having prior international experience, that the expatriates described themselves as open-minded and extroverted, and because the tasks and responsibilities of the expatriates required a lot of knowledge about the strategy and goals of the headquarters. An example of this was that one expatriate was responsible for setting up a whole new subsidiary in the host country which required being familiar with what the company aims for.
5.3 In-Country Adjustment

5.3.1 Individual Factors

5.3.1.1 Self-Efficacy

Previous research about expatriates’ self-efficacy, the individual’s belief in him- or herself that he or she is able to complete the expatriate assignment successfully, has mostly agreed on that expatriates with a high level of self-efficacy have higher possibilities to succeed in their expatriate assignments (Andreason, 2003). This is said to be because expatriates with a high level of self-efficacy are more likely to respond to feedback given to them in a more effective way and act in the way the feedback given requires (Awais Bhatti et al., 2013).

Results from the interviews conducted for this research showed that each one of the expatriates interviewed reported having a high level of self-efficacy during their assignments. Some expatriates even stressed the importance of having a strong belief in themselves during the expatriate assignment. These interviewees argued that an expatriate faces such big challenges during the assignment in a foreign country that he or she must have a very strong belief in his or her own skills and abilities. Additionally, the expatriates stated that this strong belief is crucial in order to complete the assignment in the way desired. According to some of these interviewees, without the expatriate’s belief in him- or herself the great challenges faced during the expatriate assignment combined with a new unknown environment are too big to overcome if the expatriate does not possess a high level of self-efficacy. As the benefits of having a high level of self-efficacy during the assignment one expatriate mentioned that because of his belief in himself, feedback given at the foreign subsidiary did not make him feel that his work had been unsuccessful or make him feel down. Instead, because of the strong belief in himself, the expatriate said that he was willing to receive feedback, improve his work, and gain more responsibility.

Some expatriates interviewed, in turn, trusted that they were suitable for the assignment because of the fact that their employer had chosen them for the expatriate assignment. This strengthened their self-efficacy and these expatriates did their best during the assignment, improved their work when needed, and trusted that they would not be have been sent to the new host country if they had not been successful in their work.
Results in the research field about the relationship between self-efficacy and the three facets of cross-cultural adjustment differ. Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2005) state that self-efficacy has a positive effect on work and interaction adjustment. However, Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2015) did not find any relationship between self-efficacy and general adjustment.

In this research all of the eight interviewees believed strongly in themselves that they are going to be able to manage the expatriate assignment well. Previous experience was seen as one of the reasons why the expatriates believed in themselves since they felt comfortable with how to manage to succeed on the assignment. It was found out that the expatriates with previous expatriate experience, not just professional international experience, had higher self-efficacy since they knew how things worked during the assignment. Furthermore, one of the expatriates stated that because of his previous expatriate experience, he was able to focus just on work since he knew that his spouse was going to take care of the household. For these reasons, this research found that self-efficacy had a positive influence on work adjustment.

About interaction adjustment, the expatriates interviewed never worried that they would not be able to make friends in the new host country. They believed that they are able to build relationships and interact effectively in the host country because of considering themselves open-minded and willing to interact with people. However, when it comes to the expatriates’ self-efficacy and interaction adjustment, the level of self-efficacy was found out to be lower than when it came to work adjustment since most of the expatriates interviewed did not have local friends during the assignment.

About general adjustment, this research saw some signs of a relationship. This was due to the expatriates interviewed never doubting that they would not learn the local ways of acting at a sufficient level to survive in the country.

Through the findings of this research, this research mostly agrees with the results of Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2005), finding a positive influence between self-efficacy and work adjustment, as well as a to some extent weaker relationship between self-efficacy and interaction adjustment. Some weaker signs of a relationship between self-efficacy and general adjustment were found.
5.3.1.2 Relation Skills

The existing research conducted in the field shows a relationship between relation skills, and work, interaction, and general adjustment (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Black et al., 1991). When it comes to work adjustment, all of the interviewees can be seen having strong relation skills. This is because every one of them adjusted well to the working environment and had good relationships with the colleagues. This is believed to be because, referring to previous research that states that Swedish people appreciate teamwork (Tixier, 1996). Through the interviews it was shown that all of the expatriates used teamwork as part of their management style, which could be why the expatriates had a good relationship with the colleagues because teamwork was not a common way of act in the work life in the host countries. Furthermore, the expatriates brought the Swedish flat hierarchy (Guðmundsdóttir, 2015), to the host country, as well as including the subordinates in the decision-making, which is a typical Swedish way of acting (Birkinshaw, 2002; Tixier, 1996). These could be reasons for the good relationships with the local colleagues. An example of this was how some of the interviewees mentioned how their local subordinates told them that in case they ever need a worker again, they want to work for them.

When it comes to interaction adjustment, in turn, the interviewees had no problems with building relationships with other international people in the host country. However, the interviewees mostly spend their time with other Europeans instead of local people. This was due to that they could get help from other Europeans in order to better understand the local culture and since they felt more like-minded with them. This is why it was found out that the interviewees did not have such good relation skills when it comes to local people. What is believed through the interviews to be also a reason for this, is that the local people worked even more than the expatriates in the host country, and therefore the international people had more time to build relationships with each other. Another reason for the expatriate not having local friends could be because Nordic people can be seen sometimes as reserved and cold (Guðmundsdóttir, 2015).

Through the interviews it is believed that the expatriates had strong relation skills when it comes to general adjustment. Some of the expatriates for instance looked for and found housing by themselves in the host country. Furthermore, one example of benefiting from good relation skills was when one expatriate wanted to move to another part of the city
and wanted to organize this with a moving company. This was a difficult task for a foreigner, but the expatriate managed this task through a lot of contact with the moving company. Hence, the expatriate used his relation skills to fulfill the task, since this was not something usual for foreign people to manage in the host country.

For the reasons mentioned, this research found a relationship between relation skills and all three facets of cross-cultural adjustment, and therefore agrees with the existing results from Black et al. (1991) and Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2005).

5.3.1.3 Perception Skills

According to existing research about perception skills, the stronger perception skills the expatriate possesses, the easier it is for him or her to understand what is appropriate and inappropriate in the host country (Ramsey, 2005). Furthermore, understanding this might decrease the level of uncertainty that the expatriate experiences during the assignment. However, there is nearly any research in the field about the relationship between perception skills and three different facets of cross-cultural adjustment (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005).

The results from this research show that most of the expatriates had moderate perception skills because of them telling a lot of examples of the different working culture in the host country. However, the expatriates had difficulties to understand the ways of acting in the beginning. Therefore, it is believed that training provided prior to the assignment could have helped the expatriates to have higher perception skills since they might have understood better through cultural training what is appropriate and what inappropriate in the country. It can be seen that the one expatriate who did the most research about the host country before the start of the assignment, had higher perception skills than the rest, since in the beginning of the assignment he already expected the local people acting the way that he had found out through his research.

This research showed some signs of a relationship between perception skills and work, interaction, and general adjustment but more research about this will be needed.
5.3.2 Job Factors

5.3.2.1 Role Clarity

The dominant view in the existing research about the relationship between role clarity and the three facets of cross-cultural adjustment is that role clarity positively influences work adjustment (Selmer & Lauring, 2011; Shaffer et al., 1999). However, Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2005) found a positive relationship between role clarity and all three facets of cross-cultural adjustment.

All of the eight interviewees in this research reported having a high level of role clarity on their assignment. The expatriates knew what was expected from them during the assignment. However, it was found out during the interview with one expatriate that his level of role clarity changed during the expatriate assignment. This was because the manager above him to whom he reported back to Sweden, changed during the expatriate assignment. Before it had been clear what is expected from this expatriate but after the change of the manager, the expatriate was on his own and experienced more stressful situations in his work. This resulted in the expatriate experiencing less role clarity. These stressful situations and a lower level of role clarity lead to this expatriate experiencing also a lower level of work adjustment. For this reason, this research supports the dominant view that states a positive relationship between role clarity and work adjustment.

When it comes to the possible relationship between role clarity and interaction adjustment, the expatriate who experienced a lower level of role clarity after the change of the manager above him, spent more time on work and less time with his friends in the host country. Therefore, this research found a positive relationship between role clarity and interaction adjustment. Furthermore, having to spend more time on work resulted in the expatriate not being willing to spend time on learning the local ways of acting outside of work. Therefore, this research found a positive relationship also between role clarity and general adjustment. However, these two relationships were not found out to be as strong as the one between role clarity and work adjustment.
5.3.2.2 Role Discretion

The existing research about the relationship between role discretion and the three facets of cross-cultural adjustment has shown that role discretion has a positive effect on work adjustment (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Shaffer et al., 1999). However, Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2005) found that in addition to the influence on work adjustment, role discretion has a positive influence on general and interaction adjustment.

The results received through the eight interviews for this research show that all the interviewees experienced a high level of role discretion during their expatriate assignments. This was found out to be due to the interviewees having a lot of freedom when it came to their work during the expatriate assignment. Furthermore, the subordinates of the expatriates also adjusted to their Swedish way of working in addition to the expatriate adjusting to the local way. This disagrees with previous research stating that the Swedish management style can be difficult for non-Swedes to understand (Brewster, 1993). From the interviews it could be seen that the local people appreciated the Swedish management style. The expatriates interviewed mentioned that without this adjusting from the local people, it would have been more difficult to work during the stay in a foreign country. One of the expatriates gave an example of how different the perception of time between Sweden and the host country was. The expatriate stressed the importance of being on time for the meetings. This punctuality lead to more productive work and the employees meeting the deadlines better. Previous research has argued Swedish people to be efficient, respect deadlines, and be punctual (Tixier, 1996). Through the interviews it was found out that this applied also to the Swedish expatriates interviewed. Furthermore, the expatriate chose to have the Swedish way of addressing everyone in the subsidiary with their first name. All of this together resulted in the expatriate experiencing less stress about his work during the assignment. For this reason, this research shows that role discretion has a positive influence on work adjustment.

When it comes to interaction adjustment, a high level of role discretion can be seen having a positive influence on interaction adjustment since the local people adjusting to the expatriate’s way of working can help the expatriate understand cultural differences better even in the daily life outside the office. One expatriate told an example of understanding through the working life that the local people experience time differently than Swedish people. For this reason, he was not surprised if for instance a coffee shop opened later
than the opening hours showed. This made his general adjustment easier, and also resulted in less conflicts with local people when he understood the local way. Therefore, this research also sees a relationship between role discretion and general and interaction adjustment. However, the relationship between role discretion and work adjustment was found to be stronger.

5.3.2.3 Role Novelty

The existing research results of the relationship between role novelty and the three facets of cross-cultural adjustment are inconsistent and the research has not found a clear relationship with any of the three adjustment facets (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Shaffer et al., 1999).

The results from this research did not show any clear pattern between the different interviewees when it comes to role novelty. Some of the expatriates had the exact job on their expatriate assignment compared to their role back in Sweden. Some expatriates, in turn, had completely different tasks during the expatriate assignment and they had not worked with these tasks ever before. This research did not show that the expatriates with lower levels of role novelty adjusted better to the host country than the ones with completely different roles. Furthermore, through the interviews it was found out that some expatriates with less role novelty even felt more adjusted than some of their counterparts with more role novelty did. For this reason, this research does not show any relationship between role novelty and any of the three facets of cross-cultural adjustment.

5.3.2.4 Role Conflict

The dominant view in the research field about the relationship between role conflict and the three facets of cross-cultural adjustment is that role conflict has a negative influence on the expatriate’s work adjustment (Selmer & Lauring, 2011). However, Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2005) found that in addition to role conflict having a negative influence on work adjustment, it has a negative influence on interaction adjustment as well.

Only two of the interviewees in this research experienced role conflict. The reason behind these two expatriates experiencing role conflict was the headquarters of the company.
being located in Sweden, and their way of making decisions took long time. This agrees with the previous research about the Swedish way of making decisions (Brewster, 1993). This made decision-making slow and the expatriates not receiving information fast enough. This led to some problems for the expatriates since they needed to make fast decisions in the host country. However, it was not possible to see any difference between the ones experiencing low role conflict to the ones experiencing high role conflict in the way they adjusted to the new culture. Furthermore, this research did not find enough evidence to support any of the findings of existing research. Therefore, data from this research did not show any clear pattern to find a significant relationship between role conflict and the three facets of cross-cultural adjustments.

5.3.3 Non-Work Factors

5.3.3.1 Culture Novelty & Culture Shock

The dominant view in the existing research is that the greater the culture novelty of the expatriate’s host country, the more difficult it will be for the expatriate to adjust since it is argued to be more difficult to adjust to a very different culture compared to one that is more similar (Farooq & Bagul, 2015; Maertz et al., 2016). However, some researchers argue that it is actually more difficult to adjust to a country that is more similar to one’s own. This is because one is likely to assume that the local people act in the same way as him or her, but when they do not, one blames this on the specific person. Instead, there is a cultural clash (Selmer, 2002, 2006).

Results from this research show that all the eight expatriates interviewed thought that there was a big cultural difference between Sweden and the host country of their assignment. Furthermore, all of them faced difficulties to adjust and understand the local culture during their assignments. The interviewees who had been living abroad before, thought that it was more difficult to adjust to their expatriate assignment in Asia Pacific compared to their previous assignments located outside of Asia Pacific.

Most of the research in the field argues that before the expatriate learns to understand the local ways of acting in the new host country, the expatriate is likely to face a culture shock.
Every one of the expatriates interviewed for this research experienced a culture shock to some extent. One expatriate told an example about the difficulty of buying a sim card in the host country. This took a lot of time and effort, whereas in Sweden this would be a simple and quick thing to do. Situations like this made him frustrated. Through the interviews it was found out that many of the expatriates interviewed saw it as a coping method to talk to their expatriate friends about the situation. These friends were mostly other Europeans and the expatriates found them like-minded. Most of the expatriates thought it was easier to spend time with other Europeans, and therefore the interviewees mostly had European friends.

Regardless of the challenges faced, the expatriates could cope with them. This is believed to be because the expatriates interviewed described themselves as open-minded and curious to new experiences. This agrees with previous research arguing that Swedish people typically have a high level of tolerance of uncertainty (Birkinshaw, 2002).

The language barrier was one of the biggest reasons for the culture difficulties for the expatriates. Examples brought up by the expatriates during the interviews were that they felt frustrated when they for example could not understand the transportation information in the host country.

The three expatriates that did know the language before moving to the new host country, did not experience that big of a culture shock compared to the others. This could be because they could ask the local people for help, and better understand the situations in the country.

5.3.3.1.1 U-Curve

The framework explains the different stages that occur when one moves to a new country. The stages are the honeymoon, culture shock, adjustment and mastery. This framework
is one of the most used ones in research about cultural adjustment (Black & Mendenhall, 1991; Haslberger & Brewster, 2009).

All of the interviewees experienced the U-curve, where in the beginning they appreciated the new things in country. But after a while they started to experience the culture shock where they missed for example Swedish food, and at the same time the daily life started to become a routine. Furthermore, it was shown that the ones knowing the language before moving to the host country, did not experience the U-curve so strongly.

Because all the eight expatriates interviewed for this research experienced the U-curve during their assignment, this research supports the theory of the U-curve.

5.3.3.2 Spouse Adjustment

Considering the expatriate’s spouse in the expatriate management research has become important. This is due to the fact that most of the expatriate spouses do not work in the host country because of the difficulty of getting a working visa and finding a job (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). Furthermore, many times the spouse interacts more in the host country because of not having a job to go to. The adjustment of the spouse has been found out to be stressful because of these reasons, and therefore research states that this should be considered as one of the factors influencing expatriate adjustment (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). Furthermore, existing research argues that one of the main reasons for an expatriate to fail their assignment and return home early is the adjustment process not working out for the spouse (Black & Stevens, 1989; Chen & Shaffer, 2018).

Only one of the spouses of the interviewees worked during the expatriate assignment. This was mostly due to the expatriate assignments being located in Asia Pacific and therefore the difficulty of getting a working visa. However, many of the expatriates thought that since there are so many different things to take care of and organize in the new country, it was good that their spouse did not work. Therefore, the expatriate could focus completely on the work and the spouse took care of the rest.

As the existing research states, most of the time the spouse of the expatriate interacts more with the general environment in the host country than the expatriate who works (Shaffer
& Harrison, 2001). This was found out to be true through this research, which resulted in that the spouses did not adjust as well as the expatriates.

Furthermore, all of the eight spouses, who were female, worked in Sweden before moving to the new host country, therefore the adjustment process got more difficult for them, since they did not have their regular routine with work. Because of the high rate of Swedish women working (Samuelsson et al., 2012), this could be seen as a bigger issue for Swedish expatriate wives compared to countries where women are less likely to work.

As mentioned earlier, the existing research argues that one of the main reasons for the expatriate to return home early is that the spouse does not adjust to the new host country (Black & Stevens, 1989; Chen & Shaffer, 2018). This was proven to be true in this research as well, since three of the expatriates ended up not extending their assignment more because of the spouse not adjusting to the new country. Therefore, this research supports the research stating that the adjustment of the spouse is one of the main factors to consider when sending expatriates abroad.
6. Conclusion

This chapter links the main outputs of the analysis to the purpose of this research.

**RQ:** “Which a) individual, b) job, and c) non-work factors influence the work, general, and interaction adjustment of Swedish expatriates in East Asia Pacific?”

The major conclusion of this research is that the main factors influencing Swedish expatriates’ work, general, and interaction adjustment in East Asia Pacific are cross-cultural training, language ability, self-efficacy, role clarity, and adjustment of the spouse.

Regardless of being sent abroad by large companies, none of the expatriates in this research received any cultural training. However, the expatriates thought that cultural training would have been beneficial and would have helped them adjust better in the host country. Furthermore, the expatriate who went further with his cultural learning, was seen to adjust faster to the host country. Therefore, this research concludes that it would be beneficial for the companies to provide expatriates with cultural training in order for the expatriates to adjust faster and better.

Furthermore, this research showed that the expatriates knowing the local language had fewer problems in adjusting to the new host country. Language ability was seen to influence work, general, and interaction adjustment of the expatriates. For this reason, this research concludes that knowing the local language might make the adjustment process easier for the expatriates.

Self-efficacy was found out to be an important factor in the expatriates’ adjustment process. This was due to this research finding a relationship between self-efficacy and work, general, and interaction adjustment.

Out of the job factors role clarity was found out to be the one influencing the expatriates’ adjustment the most. This research found a positive relationship between role clarity and
work, interaction, and general adjustment, and can therefore be seen as an important factor.

One of the main reasons for expatriates to return home early from their assignments has found out to be the spouse not adjusting to the host country (Black & Stevens, 1989; Chen & Shaffer, 2018). This research supports this finding since in this research the spouses that did not adjust to the host country were the main reason to leave the country eventually.

The purpose of this research was to examine which individual, job, and non-work factors influence Swedish expatriates’ adjustment process in East Asia Pacific. The number of expatriates sent abroad by companies is increasing (Awais Bhatti et al., 2014). Additionally, there was a gap for research about Swedish expatriates. Furthermore, East Asia Pacific was chosen to be the region for this research since Asia Pacific’s economic growth has been fast and impressive and is likely to continue growing (Jorgenson & Vu, 2017).
7. Discussion

This chapter starts with a method discussion, followed by the limitations of this research. Later on, the theoretical and empirical contributions of this research as well as managerial implications will be discussed. Lastly, topics for future research are suggested.

7.1 Method Discussion

This thesis can be seen as successful since it provides relevant and sufficient data to be able to analyze and make conclusions. A strength of this thesis is that all of the interviewees had a good knowledge in their work, and the interviews conducted with them provided in-depth information.

To analyze the data a qualitative content analysis was used which was considered suitable due to categorizing the data into appropriate categories around the factors examined in this research. However, this data analyze method might have led to some important data not ending up in any of the categories. Nevertheless, this risk can be considered as small, since the categories were built around the factors that this research examined and all the interviewees were asked the same questions.

7.1.1 Limitations

This research focused on Swedish expatriates and their adjustment process, and therefore the findings of this research might not be applicable to expatriates from other countries than Sweden. Furthermore, since all the interviewees in this research were male expatriates, the findings of the research could have been different if interviewing also female expatriates. However, this research contributed in filling the research gap about the adjustment process of Swedish expatriates. In order to make the findings more reliable and applicable, the sample size could be increased. However, this research still found patterns between the different interviewees’ answers.
7.2 Theoretical and Empirical Contributions

The theory of the U-curve has been one of the most commonly used theoretical frameworks when researching cultural adjustment (Black & Mendenhall, 1991). This research showed that this theoretical framework applies to Swedish expatriates and seems to be practically valid.

The Framework of International Adjustment sees adjustment as an ongoing process in which different factors affect the outcome (Strubler et al., 2011). This research supports this since different factors were found to influence the adjustment of the expatriates in different ways and to a different extent.

7.3 Managerial Implications

Since this research found that these five factors influenced the adjustment process of Swedish expatriates, suggestions for companies sending abroad Swedish expatriates are provided. This research showed that it would be beneficial if the companies provided to the expatriates cultural training and language training before the start of the expatriate assignment. Additionally, companies might consider selecting expatriates who already know the local language of the host country to some extent. Furthermore, it can be seen that it is important that the company defines the expatriate’s goals clearly and communicates them well to the expatriate. Lastly, the companies might want to consider putting focus also on helping the spouse of the expatriate to adjust to the new host country.

7.4 Future Research

In order to broaden the existing research about expatriate management and especially Swedish expatriates, future research might consider examining the possible reverse culture shock when Swedish expatriates come back to Sweden from their expatriate assignments since this research only chose to focus on the adjustment process that Swedish expatriates experience in the new host country. Furthermore, research could be conducted about Swedish expatriates who went to their assignments to different continents or regions than East Asia Pacific that this research focused on. Focusing still
on Swedish expatriates but different regions could lead to outcomes that differ from the ones achieved through this research and different factors might be found out to be more important and valuable when it comes to Swedish expatriates’ adjustment in other regions. Finally, since this research chose the qualitative research strategy, future research might want to consider a quantitative approach.
8. References


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9. Appendix

Appendix A – Overview of the Interviews

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