



INTERNATIONELLA HANDELSHÖGSKOLAN
HÖGSKOLAN I JÖNKÖPING

First Impression Lasts

The First Meeting

Filosofie magisteruppsats inom företagsekonomi

Författare: Björkgren, Andreas
Brodin, Henrik

Handledare: Professor Hertz, Susanne

Framlägningsdatum 2005-06-02

Jönköping Juni 2005



JÖNKÖPING INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS SCHOOL
Jönköping University

First Impression Lasts

The First Meeting

Master's thesis within Business Administration

Authors: Björkgren, Andreas
Brodin, Henrik

Tutor: Professor Hertz, Susanne

Jönköping Juni 2005

Magisteruppsats inom Företagsekonomi

Titel:	First Impression Lasts
Författare:	Björkgren, Andreas Brodin, Henrik
Handledare:	Professor Hertz, Susanne
Datum:	2005-06-02
Ämnesord	Första intrycket, Affärsrelationer, Relationsmarknadsföring

Sammanfattning

När ett företag gör affärer är det viktigt att möta den (presumtiva) kundens förväntningar. Det är ofta vid det första intrycket, det vill säga första gången parterna möts, som säljaren misslyckas med just det. Detta kan innebära att kunden redan innan någon relation ens är etablerad väljer att inte fortsätta, vilket innebär att 'säljaren' förlorar hela möjligheten att göra en affär. Första intrycket är den bild som kunden skapar sig utifrån sitt första möte med säljaren. Under detta första möte, innan parterna känner varandra, ska säljaren snabbt ge en bild av vilka värderingar som råder inom hans/hennes organisation, vilket förtroende organisationen åtnjuter. Hon eller han ska visa vilken kvalitet produkterna har. Varje nytt möte innebär en möjlighet att etablera ett förtroende hos en kund men innebär även en risk att förlora en framtida kund.

Syftet med uppsatsen är att beskriva och analysera vikten av det första intrycket när man bygger upp en affärsrelation och även beskriva de faktorer som påverkar den här processen.

Referensramen bygger på teorier om det första intrycket och svårigheter i kommunikationsprocessen under det första mötet. Det handlar om en säljares förberedelse före ett möte likaväl som hur en säljare kategoriserar kunder. Andra moment inom det första intrycket handlar om verbal och icke verbal kommunikation men även vad generaliseringar såväl som kulturella skillnader kan ha för effekt och till sist när ett misslyckande, dvs. en nackdel, innebär en fördel.

Uppsatsens metod är en kvalitativ studie baserad på intervjuer med fem personer med lång erfarenhet av affärsrelationer. Respondenterna valdes i samråd med Walter Carvajal ägare och VD av City Guest Service.

Resultatet visade att första intrycket har en mycket stor betydelse vid skapande av affärsrelationer. Några av de undersökta variablerna, såsom kön, hade dock mindre betydelse än andra. Allmänt visade resultatet på att första intrycket handlar om alla olika små saker som en mötande personen uppfattar och tolkar under första intrycket påverkar om kunden vill göra affär eller inte. Som resultatet visade är alla aspekter av verbal och icke verbal kommunikation av stor betydelse för bedömningen, dock visade resultat på att kulturella skillnader påverkade acceptansnivån för olika "fel" positivt, det vill säga att acceptansnivån steg vid möten med personer från andra länder än Sverige.

Master's Thesis in Business Administration

Title:	First Impression Lasts
Author:	Björkgren, Andreas Brodin, Henrik
Tutor:	Professor Hertz, Susanne
Date:	2005-06-02
Subject terms:	First Impression, Business Relations, Relationship Marketing

Abstract

When firms are doing business it is important to meet the customer's expectations. It is often in the first impression (the first time the parties meet in a sales encounter) that the seller fails to do this, sometimes resulting in the prospective customer dropping the whole thought of a business deal and no further relationship is established. The first impression results from the first image and understanding a seller creates in a potential customer: here the latter gets a brief insight into the former's organization, credibility and overall quality. Each encounter or meeting is an opportunity to achieve trust and build a relationship, but also contains the risk of reducing credibility and losing all chances of a relationship.

The purpose of this thesis is to describe and analyse the importance of the first impression when creating and building a business to business relationship and to describe the factors which influence this process.

The theoretical framework is based on theories regarding the concept of first impression and the implications of two-way communication during the first encounter. These include the seller's preparation and categorisation of the customer before each encounter. Other variations of communication concerns verbal and non-verbal communication, generalizations, cultural differences and circumstances where a failure can turn into an advantage.

The present qualitative case study is based on interviews with five highly competent respondents with long experience of business relationships. They were chosen after discussions with Walter Carvajal, owner and MD of City Guest Service.

The results showed that the first impression was very important in creating a business relationship. Some variables, e.g. gender, had less significance. Generally, the first impression included the small things a person perceived and interpreted during the first encounter. Combined, they determined whether a person chose to do business with the counterpart in question. All aspects of verbal and non-verbal communication formed a basis for judging the other person. Cultural differences increased the acceptance level, reducing the risk of failure, when the parties were from different cultures.

Contents

1	Introduction.....	1
1.1	Background	1
1.2	Problem Discussion.....	2
1.3	Purpose.....	2
1.4	Delimitations.....	2
1.5	Thesis outline	3
2	Theoretical Framework	4
2.1	First impression.....	4
2.1.1	The Relationship Creation	5
2.1.2	Communication Process.....	6
2.2	Categorization Process	7
2.2.1	Attitude and knowledge	7
2.2.2	Q1 – Q4 Personality Types.....	8
2.2.3	Andersson, Svensson and Hansson.....	9
2.3	The First Meeting	10
2.3.1	Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication	10
2.3.2	Gender and Stereotypical Behaviour	11
2.3.3	Cultural differences.....	11
2.3.4	Time.....	12
2.3.5	Is failure always a failure?	12
2.4	Summary.....	14
2.5	Research Questions.....	15
3	Methodology	16
3.1	Research Approach.....	16
3.1.1	Ontology	16
3.1.2	Research Perspectives.....	16
3.1.3	Qualitative Method.....	18
3.2	The Study.....	18
3.2.1	The Pre-Study.....	18
3.2.2	Case Study	19
3.2.3	The Respondents	19
3.2.4	Interview Guide.....	19
3.2.5	The Interviews	20
3.2.6	Data and Analysis of Data	20
3.3	Methodology Criticism.....	21
3.3.1	Validity	21
3.3.2	Limitations with the study.....	22
4	Empirical findings	23
4.1	Respondents	23
4.2	First Impression.....	24
4.3	Categorization Process	26
4.4	The First Meeting	27
5	Analysis.....	33
5.1	First impression.....	33

5.2	Categorisation Process	34
5.3	The First Meeting	35
5.4	Summary	39
6	Discussion	40
7	Conclusion	43
7.1	Conclusion	43
7.2	Recommendations by the authors.....	44
7.3	Future Research.....	44
	References.....	45
	Other sources.....	49

Figures

Figur 2.1	8
Figur 2.2	9
Figur 3.1	17

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Interview Guide in Swedish	50
Appendix 2 – Interview Guide translated.....	52

1 Introduction

This chapter presents some background information, which leads to a problem discussion. Out of this, the purpose is developed. The chapter will also present the outline of the thesis.

1.1 Background

When firms are making business it is important for them to meet the customer's requirements. The supplier rarely get more than one chance to introduce himself, his company and his product and therefore the first impression is of utter importance for his future success in building a fruitful business relationship. It is not unusual that the sales person of a supplier firm fails when it comes to making a good first impression at the initial contact which lead to an abrupt end of the business deal and no further business relationship is established (discussions with Walter Carvajal on the 20th of January 2004).

The different aspects of the difficulties that could occur within the context of the initial meeting will be explained later on. By the term "customer" the authors intend a customer in a Business to Business context and the term "supplier" will be used for the salesperson. The authors are also using only the word he for a supplier instead of he or she to make it easier.

Each time a supplier has a contact with a customer they have an encounter, no matter if it is a phone call, an e-mail or a personal meeting. Seen from the customer's perspective, the relationship is built on those meetings. During the meetings the customer will get a brief insight into the supplier's organization, their trustworthiness and overall quality. Each encounter is a possible chance to achieve trust and build a relationship, but it is also a risk to reduce trust and the chances of achieving a gainful relationship (Bitner, 1995).

A person makes their judgment of the counterpart during the first five seconds of the encounter, which is why it is called "the first impression". 93 per cent of the overall impact a person has on another person is based on the personal appearance, body language and voice quality (Making an impact, 2002). Evans, Kleine, Landry and Crosby (2000) claim that the supplier's first impression is the starting point for a future relationship, they declare that the first impression influence both content and outcome of the interpersonal encounters. It is a starting point for penetrating the customer's needs and understand and adapt to those needs and further on adapt the sales strategy to face those needs. This suggests that the supplier's effectiveness in the first meeting is linked to the way he is acting towards the customers. The link between the supplier's first impression of the customer and the outcomes of the initial sales meeting is important for at least two reasons; the first concerns how the approach of the sales person is made and the second concerns the outcome of the first impression, does it result in a possible future relationship? For a successful first impression Gunnarsson and Blohm (2002) emphasize the behaviour of the supplier towards the prospect customer, which basically means "how" the customer is being treated, for example you can treat the customer as if he was a dinner guest to your home.

The creation of customer relations is about satisfying each customer's special needs, which means to act so that each customer feels unique and chosen. There are many ways this could be done, one is to know the customer's interests another is to know his or hers religion (Chen & Popovich, 2003). Case studies made by consultancy firms points out the importance of understanding and satisfying the customer's basic needs (McLachlin 2000). Walker, Ferguson and Denvir (1998) mentions that it is also necessary to know the cus-

customer's wishes, to realize what they really request although what they want is not always what they need. Another vital issue is to gain the customer's trust, let them feel that the supplier is a trustful person and works for a trustful company. Galbreath and Rogers (1999 page 162) summarize the discussion by saying:

“No enterprise can any longer succeed in distinguishing itself through operational excellence, client intimacy, or product innovation without understanding the needs and desires of its clients.”

There are occasions however, when an unsuccessful first impression could turn into an advantage. Solving the problem in a proper way could make the customer remember the supplier rather as a positive experience than a negative (Gunnarsson & Blohm, 2002; Ivancevich and Duening, 2001; Mitchell and Corr 1998).

1.2 Problem Discussion

The research on how the first meeting will influence the possible relationship between the parties is not fully completed. According to Veloutsou, Saren and Tzokas (2002) present research is focused on the entire relationship process, rather than the actors in the relationship development process. Studies regarding the first encounter between supplier and the future customer are also current areas for research. Evans et al. (2000) emphasize research by the supplier situation and interpersonal interaction characteristics that contribute to successful sales meetings. They further claim that there has not yet been made any research exploring the empirical link between the prospect customer's first impression by the supplier and the individual selling effectiveness.

The focus of this thesis is to find out the importance of the first impression between the supplier and the customer. Which factors influence the first impression and how? Are there any specific characteristics of the first encounter which are causing it, such as different cultures, inappropriate dressing or bad language? Will importance of the first meeting diminish over time?

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to describe and analyse the importance of the first impression when creating and building a business to business relationship and to describe the factors which influence this process.

1.4 Delimitations

We will delimit the study to the supplier firm perspective. We have also limited to respondents based in Sweden and finally the first impression will only concern a personal face-to-face meeting.

1.5 Thesis outline

- **Chapter one** describes the background of the topic, which ends up in a problem discussion and out of this the purpose is developed. The chapter also describes the outline of the thesis.
- **Chapter two** describes the theoretical framework, which forms the base of the empirical research. It starts with an explanation of the concept “the first impression”, continues with the pre-relation phase and follows up with a discussion of factors that may influence the first impression. To get better overview this chapter ends in a summary and research questions.
- **Chapter three** presents the method used for the empirical research. It also includes a description of how the empirical research has been conducted starting with a discussion of the choice of research approach and the choice of method. It continues with a description of how the data have been collected and analysed and the chapter ends with some criticism of the chosen method.
- **Chapter four** presents information of the respondents and the empirical findings from the interviews.
- **Chapter five** presents an analysis of the empirical findings. The chapter will connect the theories presented in chapter two with the empirical findings in chapter four, and answer the research questions in the summary.
- **Chapter six** presents a discussion about some aspects of importance that came up during the work with this thesis.
- **Chapter seven** presents conclusions drawn from the analysis and answers the purpose of this thesis. It ends in a discussion of possible future research in this area.

2 Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents the theoretical framework, which forms the base for the empirical research. It starts with an explanation of the concept “the first impression”, continues with the pre-relation phase and follows up with a discussion of factors that may influence the first impression. To get a better overview this chapter ends in a summary and research questions.

2.1 First impression

Research on the topic of *first impression* can be found in psychological literature as well as in business literature; hence in many various types of exchanges an interpersonal relationship is required (Henthorne, La Tour & Williams, 1992). Evans (1963) argues that a general conclusion could be drawn from prior research; it is more likely that a transaction will be successful if the similarity or attraction is positive between the customer and the supplier (cited in Henthorne et al. 1992).

“...*the relationship with another person starts with the first impression*” (Ivancevich and Duenning 2001, p.148)

Psychological literature describes impressions in a general context, which mainly focuses of the various emotions of humans that derives through their impressions (Clark, Fitness & Brissette, 2001). Clark, et al. (2001) argues that expressions of emotions will be more positive when one of the actors is oriented toward meeting the other person’s need than one who is not. That is, the supplier’s willingness to meet the customer’s need explains the customer’s emotions towards the supplier. Nevertheless, emotions are not central when it comes to interacting with another person on an economical basis. In reality though, emotions play an important role when revealing our weaknesses and neediness (Clark, et al. 2001).

In business literature the first impression is described through various ways. In the article *Making an impact* (2002), mentioned in the introduction, people make up to 93 per cent of their judgment within the first five seconds of the encounter between supplier and customer. Other more comprehensive explanations around the concept can be found in models describing the relationship building process between a supplier and a customer. The process comprises several phases; from the *pre-relationship* phase up until *the termination* phase of the relationship, where each phase represents a stage in the relationship development process (Andersen, 2001; Gummesson 1998). The first impression represents the pre-relationship phase according to Andersen’s (2001) description.

Several authors (Hultman & Shaw 2003, Grönroos 2000, Bejou, Ennew & Palmer 1998, Gummesson 1994) describe the value of good business relationships. Several suppliers have not yet understood the importance of the first sales encounter and how a good first impression can lead to a positive environment that gives the supplier a favour. Every author realizes the importance of a good introduction, but unfortunately not all salesmen have done the same (DeCormier & Jackson, 1999). Shonka and Kosch (2002, p.12) have a clear understanding of the importance of the first impression and states:

“You only get one chance to make a good first impression”

2.1.1 The Relationship Creation

Andersen (2001) argues for a compound relationship model based on several earlier models (Heide 1994, Dwyer et al. 1987, Frazier 1983, Ford 1980 all cited in Andersen 2001). The purpose of the model was, instead of choosing one model at the expense of another, to capture the relationship development process, from initial phase to dissolution phase in one single model (Andersen, 2001). The *pre-relationship or initial phase*, the first phase involves the formation of the business relationship. The key issue of this phase is to build awareness and create an interest to the prospect customer. The use of rhetorical philosophy is a valuable tool in order to reach objective. The elements of rhetorical philosophy *ethos, pathos and logos* are initially presented by the former Greek philosopher Aristotle, 330 BC (Walker et al. 1998) which concerns the talents to persuade and to influence people through language in a specific subject matter. Not only the supplier's ability to present his argument to the customer but also how the prospect customer evaluates the supplier's ability to present the arguments is important. Often the presentation is of greater significance than the actual arguments (Andersen, 2001). These persuading techniques may also be considered as components of the first impression, which show how the supplier builds or creates a positive first impression at the initial meeting (Andersen, 2001).

The phase is characterized by both one-way and two-way communication process between the supplier and the customer (Andersen, 2001). One-way communication, involves common advertising tools such as advertising and events etc. while two-way communication involves the mentioned persuading techniques (Andersen, 2001). The communication process is necessary to increase the awareness and learn more about the two different ways of working both on an individual and an organizational level (Ford, 1980).

Bitner's (1995) research about *Building Service Relations* she argues that an encounter occurs every time a customer interacts with a supplier either by phone, email, in person or word by mouth and that every such encounter is to be seen as a first impression (Shostack 1984 cited in Bitner 1995). It is during these encounters the customer receive a first impression by the supplier, which contributes to the customers overall satisfaction and willingness to do business with the supplier in the future (Bitner 1995). According to Evans et al. (2000) these encounters are the starting point for a continued exchange. In addition Bitner (1995) mentions that four of the five most important relationship creating moments, such as a well prepared supplier, a good introduction, keeping the customers' expectations and making and keeping promises take place in the first ten minutes of a meeting. Ivancevich and Duenning (2001) claim that the first impression during a meeting sets the rules for the rest of the relationship e.g. the first handshake set the tone for the rest of the meeting.

From the supplier's perspective, each meeting represents an opportunity to prove his potential to build trust and increase the customer's loyalty and willingness to build a relationship (Bitner 1995). However, there are some drawbacks in the sense that every meeting also represents a risk of reducing the quality perception and destroy trust and the customer's loyalty (Bitner 1995). There are also occasions when only a small number of meetings represent the entire experience for the customer and therefore each meeting has a value when creating a relationship (Bitner 1995). This means a series of positive meetings will create a stronger base to build a relationship and form a base of trust and growing commitment (Morgan and Hunt 1994). Bitner (1995) claims that promises are the main drivers when creating and keeping a relationship. Making promises includes preparing what types of expectations the customer could expect by the supplier. Similar to Andersen (2001) Bitner (1995) suggests a one- and two-way communication to learn about the customer expecta-

tions in order to decrease the social distance. However, if there are promises which cannot be fulfilled it could influence the first impression in a negative way.

Both Andersen (2001) and Bitner (1995) describe the pre-relationship as the phase during which the large social distance between the two parties are being reduced. It includes several meetings over the phone and by e-mail for example and the manner in which those meetings are handled affects the first impression and the outcome of the future relationship.

2.1.2 Communication Process

The dialogue with customers is context bound and is dependent on the intentions and prior beliefs of those engaging in conversations (Usunier, 1996). The main object of communication process, according to Walker et al., (1998) and Andersen (2001) is to develop awareness and to extend the understanding from the customer. It concerns the customer's *needs* which imply to understand the customer's problem and how he can be helped, which also Evans et al, (2000) emphasizes but in addition they argue for the importance to adapt to those needs. The second step is to find out what the customer *wants*; this can be difficult since the customer may not even be aware of this himself. The third and final step is to build *trust* and this may take some time. Those three aspects of influence can be gained with the help of three classical elements from the rhetorical philosophy; ethos, pathos and logos (mentioned earlier).

The communication process between the supplier and the customer consists of mainly two components; *social compliance* and *risk reduction*. Social compliance is described as the individual emotions towards the information source, for example the customer's feelings for the supplier which comprise the customer's power and likeability towards the supplier. Risk reduction concerns the skills a customer poses of the suppliers product and services, for example if the customer has high expertise they will reduce the risk in a specific purchase situation (Wilding & Bauer 1968 cited in Henthorne, et al., 1992).

According to Webster (1971, cited in Henthorne et al., 1992) the source of credibility is by the receiver's perspective. He further argues that the receiver's criteria not necessarily have to be based on an objective point of view. Thus, there is a high value in infusing credibility in order to reach an effective communication, especially to receive a high level of impact/acceptance of the sales message (Sharma 1990). If the sales message is presented by a top manager instead of someone in a lower position in the hierarchy the message will have a higher credibility. The total outcome of the initial impression is also dependent on whether the prior expectations are positive or negative, i.e. if the former expectation is negative, the supplier will be forced to put an extra effort to change that opinion, or in other words, to prove the opposite (Henthorne, et al., 1992).

The source of credibility could also be affected by the customer's image of the prospect supplier. Thompson, Knox and Mitchell (1998) argue that brand development plays a major role in the identity development. This means, if the supplier represents a famous brand the awareness will be higher and therefore, preferable, the customer will also be more attracted to the supplier as well (Andersen, 2001).

2.2 Categorization Process

The categorization process considers the supplier's categorization of his customers both deliberately i.e. the strategy, and unconsciously i.e. the norms and standards. This implies how the supplier judges and later adapts to the customer.

According to Wise (1981); Taylor, Fiske, Etcoff and Ruderman (1978) a large amount of research has confirmed that individuals initially categorizes their perceptions of the other part by simply observed characteristics such as gender or other easy observed features. Additionally Zajonc (1982) argues that these easily observed characteristics are based on a minimal observation and perceived information. These observed characteristics during the first impression are based on a perceived similarity or dissimilarity from the individual's perspective (Bruner, Goodnow & Austin, 1956; cited in Henthorne, et al., 1992).

The categorization process suggests how the supplier could organize his knowledge of the prospect customer's different personalities. These categories usually evolve from repeated contacts with different customer types, which the supplier has learned to identify. This information is used to understand each customer's personality and adapt the sales strategy to them. The process facilitates the interaction and makes it more effective (Wise, 1981). During the actual meeting, the exchange process is usually the initial information adapted to the present, but the initial categorization works as a framework before the meeting (Snyder and Swann, 1978).

Evans et al. (2000) claims that the supplier's performance is depending on the first impression, as mentioned earlier and that the supplier must distinguish and fulfil the customer's needs immediately, and use different charts and experience to categorize the customer as soon as possible. Taylor et al., (1978) argues that individuals use physical and social discriminators to categorize people and the information regarding them. Suppliers who categorize their customers in different groups are more effective than those who do not (Sujan, Sujan & Bettman, 1988).

2.2.1 Attitude and knowledge

Gunnarsson and Blohm (2002) mention some features that are to be found in a good supplier. However, the two main concepts a good supplier should consider are attitude and knowledge. A considerate supplier consider not only the business or the best of the company, he also tries to eliminate any possible misunderstandings and is aware of the effect they may have (Gunnarsson & Blohm, 2002). A lack of honesty may take some time to discover, but nothing destroys credibility as much as a dishonest behavior (Walker et. al., 1995). Trumfio (1994) states that it is important to be positive, to wear a smile and to be confident. A negative attitude will lead to a negative atmosphere during the entire encounter.

Several authors such as Gunnarsson and Blohm (2002), Sjodin (1995), Trumfio, (1994), Merlini and Iorio (1990), Sujan, Sujan and Bettman (1988) discuss the importance of knowledge. Regardless how understanding or considerate a supplier may be, it may all be in vain if the supplier lack the necessary knowledge. The whole meeting can turn into a failure due to the supplier's lacking knowledge. Hence, it is important to be well prepared and to be able to present solid facts otherwise the supplier's trust and credibility could be affected. Also, knowledge is important when judging and managing customers. Shonka and Kosch (2002) argue that a customer is more interested in what the supplier knows about him, than what the customer himself knows about the supplier's product.

A human being acts at his best when he is in harmony with himself (Merlini & Iorio, 1990). The most important characteristic of a good supplier is to know and be to feel safe about his values, prejudices and limits. A high self awareness will make the supplier more comfortable with the customer’s faults and judge them without any preconceived notions (Gunnarsson & Blohm, 2002). Rosenbluth (1994, cited in Gunnarsson & Blohm 2002) has the same thoughts, in his book *The customer comes second*, when right supplier has a satisfying working environment he will also have a positive attitude, i.e., he need confidence to create and has to feel good to be confident. People which has control and show confidence will also give a more trustworthy impression than people that are hesitant and uncertain (Walker et. al., 1995). Knowing yourself makes it easier to play a role, which is important to give a good first impression (Gunnarsson & Blohm, 2002). A good supplier adapts its behaviour to each customer, which means to know what the customer need and what their expectations are, and are able to adapt and act after conditions. However, a supplier which do not adapt to the customers will have difficulties to be persuasive, and become trustworthy (Walker et. al., 1995).

Understanding personality types is crucial in the process of building a business relationship (DeCormier & Jackson, 1998). There seems to be a common understanding among several authors, e.g. Buzzotta, Lefton and Sherberg (1972, cited in DeCormier & Jackson 1998) and Gunnarsson and Blohm (2002). They suggest that the categorization of people starts with dividing the customers into different personality types. Buzzotta et al. (1972, cited in DeCormier & Jackson 1998) with the Q1-Q4 model and Gunnarsson and Blohm (2002) with the old Swedish survey called *Andersson, Svensson and Hansson*.

2.2.2 Q1 – Q4 Personality Types

Buzzotta et al. (1972 cited in DeCormier & Jackson 1998) have constructed the Q1 – Q4 personality type model. The matrix have two intersecting axes; “dominance” and “regard for others” to categorize prospect customers in the four different squares. Dominance ranges from “dominant” to “submissive”, regard for others ranges from “Hostile” (distrusting and indifferent) to “warm” (trusting and caring).

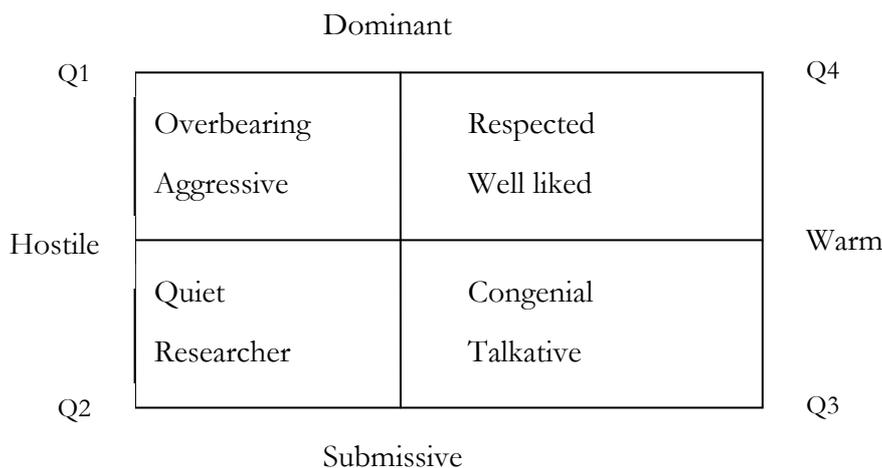


Figure 2.1

Q1 – Q4 Personality model. Adapted from DeCormier and Jackson (1998, p. 257)

Buzzotta et. al. (1972, cited in DeCormier & Jackson 1998) has named them:

- Q1 Dominant – Hostile
- Q2 Submissive – Hostile
- Q3 Submissive – Warm
- Q4 Dominant – Warm

It is useful for the supplier to be aware of in which square the customer exists in to construct a effective categorization of the customers and, as mentioned earlier, try to adjust one’s own attitude towards the customer. During the first meeting the customer tends to try to play a role of a warm, friendly and confident person as in square Q4. After a while, however, the true personality will appear and the supplier should therefore always remain flexible in the presence of the customer. A successful supplier should be located at the right side (Q3 and Q4) of the matrix, which is the warm side, and match the dominance factor towards the customer. If the supplier is a Q1-personality the customer will act antagonistically and both will challenge each other. This will affect the communication and even the chances to get a future relationship (DeCormier & Jackson, 1998).

2.2.3 Andersson, Svensson and Hansson

“Andersson, Svensson and Hansson” is a Swedish survey from the 70’s presented in Gunnarsson and Blohm (2002). The purpose of this survey was to understand the various needs of information to different customers. They argue that all Swedes can be divided in to three categories: Andersson, Svensson and Hansson. They assume that everyone have one of these three personalities as a dominating personality (Gunnarsson & Blohm 2002).

	As Customer	As Supplier
Andersson	Wants to know everything. Ask everybody about everything.	Give all information that he can come up with.
Svensson	Wants to know all the facts which are easy to get and trust all facts given.	Give all relevant information.
Hansson	Take everything as it appears. Do not care about facts in advance.	Only gives a brief answer.

Figure 2.2 Gunnarsson and Blohm (2002) pp 34-38

It is valuable to know which type of personality the customer represents for the supplier to change and adapt the strategy towards the specific type of personality. After understanding the personality type of the customer the next natural step is to adapt to that personality. If the customer is *an Andersson* and the supplier *a Hansson* there will be a huge gap in what information the customer expects to have and what he actually will receive, this might make the customer get frustrated because he does not gain any helpful information from his

point of view. In the opposite, when the supplier is *an Andersson* and the customer *a Hansson*, the problem will be the inverse. The supplier presents all information he possibly could think of, which is much more than the customer can understand and can work with. Consequently, this could result in important information gets lost on the way. However, most people have all three personalities, or at least two of them, but one is always more dominant (Gunnarsson & Blohm, 2002).

2.3 The First Meeting

The first meeting is the first actual meeting face-to-face between the two parties. During this first meeting the basis of your opinion and impression of the other person is laid. As will be discussed further on there are several criteria which form your first impression such as verbal and non-verbal communication, preconceived notions and cultural aspects.

2.3.1 Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication

Sjodin (1995) emphasizes the importance of the verbal and non-verbal ability of the communication process. DeCormier and Jackson (1998) and Sjodin (1995) all claim that the lack in the verbal communication may lead to a dropped business deal. Sjodin (1995) mentions that moving forward too slowly or telling old anecdotes or stories, which are not of any interest to the customer, are common mistakes. This could result in that the customer loses interests and, as a consequence, the essence gets lost and the customer misses the important information as well.

The supplier's language can also affect the customer's judgment. A hasty presentation gives the impression of not being concerned to give a good first impression as well as a poor vocabulary gives the impression of not being too intelligent (DeCormier & Jackson, 1998). It is not only important to be informative, it is equally important to be persuasive as well (Sjodin, 1995) or as Walker et al. (1998 p. 65) address it "*to sell is to persuade others to accept.*" A common mistake many people make is to listen and answer all questions straight on, but they do not listen to the actual meaning and try to see the problem behind the questions. Listening to the customer will avoid many problems (Gunnarsson & Blohm, 2002). Effective communication begins with active listening, let the other person speak and understand his position, then it will be easier to understand and satisfy the customer's needs (Merlini & Iorio, 1990)

Several authors as Ivancevich and Duenning (2001), Sjodin (1995), and Urbaniak (1998) write about the importance of non-verbal communication, such as dressing and grooming, at the first meeting. One should neither judge a book by its cover nor a person by his dressing and grooming but that is exactly what we do. Even before a single word has been spoken the other person will be judged. The handshake, the introduction and the dressing and grooming will tell a lot about a person and therefore the appearance is an important part in the game of making a successful first impression.

Within the first five seconds the customer will determine if they like the supplier or not based on the dressing only. Hence, before the supplier has started to talk about his product or company the customer have already begun thinking whether they want to do business or not. Consequently, the clothes should always be well prepared and adapted for each sales meeting (Sjodin, 1995). If the company does not have a dress code policy common sense should decide the dressing and outlook at the first meeting. As Ivancevich and Duenning

(2001) puts it: There is no right way of how to act in the first meeting, 20 per cent is rules and the last 80 per cent is common sense.

It is also essential to be aware of your body language; the body may say a completely different thing than the mouth does (DeCormier and Jackson, 1998). Many people make odd gestures or facial expressions without realizing it (Sjodin, 1995). When the prospective customer is talking it is important, as a supplier, to use body languages that show interest of the prospect customer's words (Walker et. al., 1995).

The handshake is often a good way of judging the customer. A firm and long handshake often means that the customer is of the dominant type and the best way to match a dominant customer is to act in the same way. A weak handshake means that the customer is more submissive and the best response is to be a bit more dominant than the customer but still submissive. According to DeCormier and Jackson (1998) the supplier shall not settle with listening and placing the customer in a category, he shall also read his body language if he wish to be successful.

2.3.2 Gender and Stereotypical Behaviour

To define a "stereotype" the authors of this thesis used Encyclopædia Britannica:

"A standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude or uncritical judgment"

Gender and stereotypical behaviour could also have an impact of the first impression in the communication process. Crane and Lane (2002) conclude that women are traditionally better at "softer" relationship such as emotions or feelings, while men are better at "harder" aspects of sales such as closing deals. Even if the study showed empirical evidence that women were more skilful in relationship building are often generalizations made which could be viewed as stereotypical behaviour. It is very difficult, not to say impossible, to change the stereotype image of what women or men are good at or are suppose to do (Crane & Lane 2002). McElroy, Morrow and Eroglu (1990) claim that individuals have a more positive attitude towards persons of the same gender as themselves. Hence, a person categorizes another person after their own values and perceptions.

2.3.3 Cultural differences

Cultural differences also need to be taken into consideration when the counterpart is from another country. D'Souza (2003) exemplifies the cultural differences with the gift process between western and Asian firms. In an Asian firm it is an act of reciprocity to give a gift but this is usually seen as a bribe in western firms. Thus, sometimes the difference is subtle between pleasing and offending the customer. This illustrates the importance of knowing the dissimilar ethical codes in the different countries. Hence, always be aware of the other person's norms and standards which have to be taken into consideration when creating a business relationship. Thus, the interaction process also need to consider the large amount of research which have been made about the effect national culture have on the way people in different cultures interact (Trompenaars 1993 cited in Fisher & Härtel 2003; Hofstede, 1991).

Gunnarsson and Blohm (2002) mention the issue of norms and standards in the context of the first impression. They claim Swedes often perceive Swedish norms and standards as normal behaviour and that Swedes also believe that other cultures consider the Swedish

norms and standard as “normal”. Instead, the Swedish norms and standards are in the extreme end of the range by comparison with other cultures, which Hofstede (1991) confirm. Hofstede (1991) made a study on different variables explaining the different variations in a cultural context between countries. One of the studied variables illustrates small versus large power distance in a feminine versus masculine culture. A small power distance implies the role of equal employees, which suggests that the manager prefers to be a friend and colleague instead of being the “all mighty boss”, which means a large power distance. Feminine cultures are related to welfare states while masculine cultures are connected to performance based societies. Two countries that might be perceived as similar to Sweden are Germany and Great Britain. They are considered to be quite similar in the power distance as Sweden (small) but have on the contrary a very masculine culture while Sweden is a very feminine culture.

2.3.4 Time

The concept of time is an important part of the first impression. The first impression may take a turn for the worse even before it has taken place. The importance of being on time to a meeting is obvious to most people, in Northern Europe, USA and Japan at least, but unfortunately not everybody are. It may even be the most important part of the first meeting but it is inevitable that a delay or two may appear. If the supplier is running late for a meeting it is of the utter importance to let the waiting counterpart know what is happening and apologize for the inconvenience (Trumfio, 1994). According to Walker et al. (1998) lateness has become habitual in internal meetings. Internal meetings never start on time, thus they will never finish on time either and as a consequence people will be behind their schedules. However, a problem appears when the delays occur in meeting with customers. Some people may think that 10 or 15 minutes delay is ok but a meeting set out to take place at ten o'clock starts at ten, not a quarter past. If someone does not manage such an easy thing as to get himself to the right place at the right time, then his credibility is at the bottom before any meeting even has taken place (Walker et. al., 1998).

2.3.5 Is failure always a failure?

Gibbons (1987) indicates that a negative first impression will reduce the chances of attaining any significant relationship (cited in DeCormier & Jackson 1998). However, several authors such as Gunnarsson and Blohm (2002); Ivancevich and Duenning (2001) Mitchell and Corr (1998) claim that it is possible to gain advantages of a bad first impression. It is not impossible to turn it in to something positive, even if the first impression has been terrible due to an error. If the supplier fast and easy repairs his mistake and offer the customer a proper excuse for the inconveniences and, if it is necessary, offer them special service further on it can turn into something very positive. This process will help the customer to remember this specific supplier for his excellent way of handling problems and may even be more interested than he would have been if the mistake had never occurred. It is alright to forget a guest's name once or twice, it can happen to the best, but with a sincere apology to the other person you will most often be forgiven and the counterpart may even remember the incident in a positive way. Most of the time, however, an early error could make the whole relationship fail.

It is important for the supplier to know if and what the customer does not appreciate by the meeting, this is when criticism from the customer plays an important role. A good supplier is responsible to find criticism and it is also very important that the criticism, good or

bad, reach the right person. Otherwise the supplier will not know where he is failing (Gunnarsson & Blohm, 2002).

2.4 Summary

Research on the first impression can be found both in psychological and business literature. In the psychological literature there are a wide focus on individuals' perceptions and emotions. Business literature, on the other side, in a relationship development context where the first impression is the first aspect of establishing business to business relationships. To describe the creation and keeping of relationships several authors (e.g. Andersen, 2001; Gummesson, 1998) have constructed models and divided the process into different phases. The first phase, the pre-relationship phase, describes the process of decreasing the social distance between the parties, which consist of several encounters (phone, email, in person) which all will present a first impression to the customer.

For the customers, special moments that occur early in the relationship building process are the most important. Four of the five most important relationship development moments take place in the first ten minutes of a meeting (Bitner, 1995). The first encounter is the most important to create and also to sustain a relationship. Thus, an encounter resulting in a negative experience reduces the chances to attract the customer, and it may also be the last meeting. The first impression is important since it could set the stage for the rest of the relationship (Urbaniak, 1994). After a few seconds the customer has already put a label on the supplier. Additionally, the first meeting could take a turn for the worse if the supplier is not feeling emotionally or physically well (Merlini & Iorio, 1990).

From the supplier's perspective all the pre-observed impressions, together with pre-collected facts about the customer, will be of help to categorize the customer after previous experiences. To categorize customers after previous experiences and group them in different models may be a helpful tool in knowing what the customer wants and how he wish to be treated (Wise, 1981).

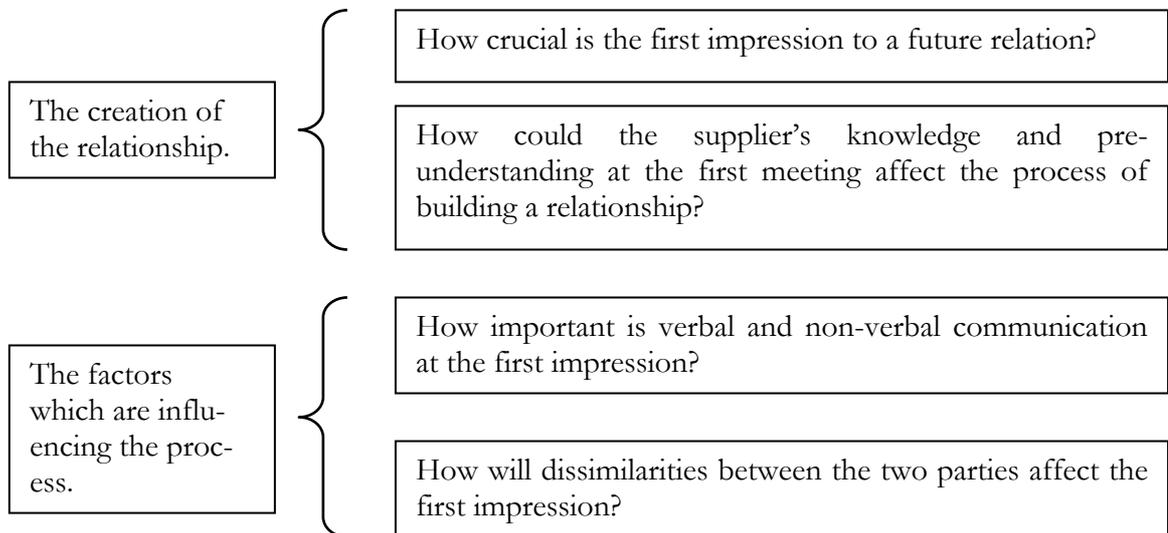
Dressing, grooming and personal appearance are as valuable to infuse a superior first impression as are attitude and knowledge (Urbaniak, 1994.) Knowledge is not only about informing the customer of the facts but also to convince him. The attitude is, together with knowledge, part of the persuasion techniques. It is vital to be open and listen actively to have a chance to persuade the customer (Walker et. al., 1995). Zajonc (1982) claims that both similarities and dissimilarities affect the first impression with the customer, mentioned similarities and dissimilarities are in the behavioral aspects of the parties.

Earlier research also states that gender influence the first meeting since most people prefers to do business with persons in the same category as themselves (McElroy et. al., 1990). This also involves the issue of cultural differences. Gunnarsson and Blohm (1995) claim that there are a common thought in Sweden that the Swedes are normal compared to other countries, due to the fact that Swedes regard themselves and their culture as normal compared to other countries, which Hofstede (1991) states not to be the case. Hofstede (1991) indicates that Sweden is an extreme culture in many ways, such as power distance and masculinity/femininity, which could lead to misunderstandings at the first meeting.

Still, Gunnarsson and Blohm (1995) mention the first impression as crucial to a future relationship, but they also emphasize, it is always possible to repair a mistake made at the beginning of the meeting.

2.5 Research Questions

To get a better structure of the analysis the authors of this thesis has put together some research question based on the summary of the theoretical framework.



3 Methodology

This chapter presents the methods used for the empirical research. It also includes a description of how the empirical research has been conducted starting with a discussion of the choice of research approach and the choice of method. It continues with a description of how the data have been collected and analysed and the chapter ends with some criticism of the chosen method.

3.1 Research Approach

It is important to understand why researchers choose to view and evaluate the research objects in a certain way but also what the research objects perceptions and interpretations are in their own environment in a philosophical view of a study (Arbnor and Bjerke 1996). The authors therefore believe it is an important issue to explain the concept of ontology to reach a higher understanding of our chosen methodology but also to show the critical aspect of our methodological approach.

3.1.1 Ontology

Ontology is the study of “...*the basic characteristics of all reality*” (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2004). Ontology has also been synonymous with the first philosophy, and it is the philosophy that tries to explain a world view, specifically the essence of being, which mean how the researcher chooses to observe and interpret the environment (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2004). Ontologism observes the world from either an objective or subjective perspective. The **objective** perspective, also called realism, states that the researcher evaluates the world independently from the human awareness upon which he puts his subjective point of view and then present the reality. In a **subjective** view the researcher assumes that the actors are constructing their own reality, in other words, individuals perceives their surrounding in their own special way and the truth does not exist since everyone has their own perception of the reality. Implications which could occur in this view is if the actors are going too far in their subjective view, which means that the researcher are assuming that there are nothing outside the actors view and only evaluate the object from their own point of view (Norén 1995).

The answers of the research objects will differ between the individuals depending on their own perceptions. The authors of the thesis therefore believe it is important, in an interpreting approach, to enlighten how and why people interpret their surroundings differently. This concerns the critical aspect of the researcher’s perception and interpretations and later on the research objects. It is simply not done to divide the world into two extremes, and choose between the objective and the subjective philosophical views. Nevertheless it is important in that it provide a greater understanding of the implications which are shown when interpreting the answers of individuals. When there are a great number of nuances and views in a person’s answer and when there cannot be a right or wrong answer, then naturally the authors view is a combination of both objective and subjective view.

3.1.2 Research Perspectives

The literature mainly describes two scientific perspectives, **hermeneutics** and **positivism**. Both perspectives consider how the researcher chooses to interpret the data. The hermeneutic perspective is usually used in qualitative studies (Lundahl & Skärvad, 1999). In addition, Eriksson and Wiedersheim-Paul (2001) state that the base for hermeneutic perspective

implies that the interpreting process is made through communication between the researcher and the research objects and the positivism perspective, on the other hand, is related to quantitative studies where the interpretation process is based on a belief, which means there is a truth to be found or discovered with the use of mathematic models (Lundahl & Skärvad, 1999). However, since the aim of this thesis is to analyze how people interpret and perceive a specific situation without mathematic models the method will have a hermeneutic perspective.

The hermeneutics spiral (figure 3.1), describes the work process from a hermeneutic point of view. The model is a useful tool for explaining the work process with this thesis.

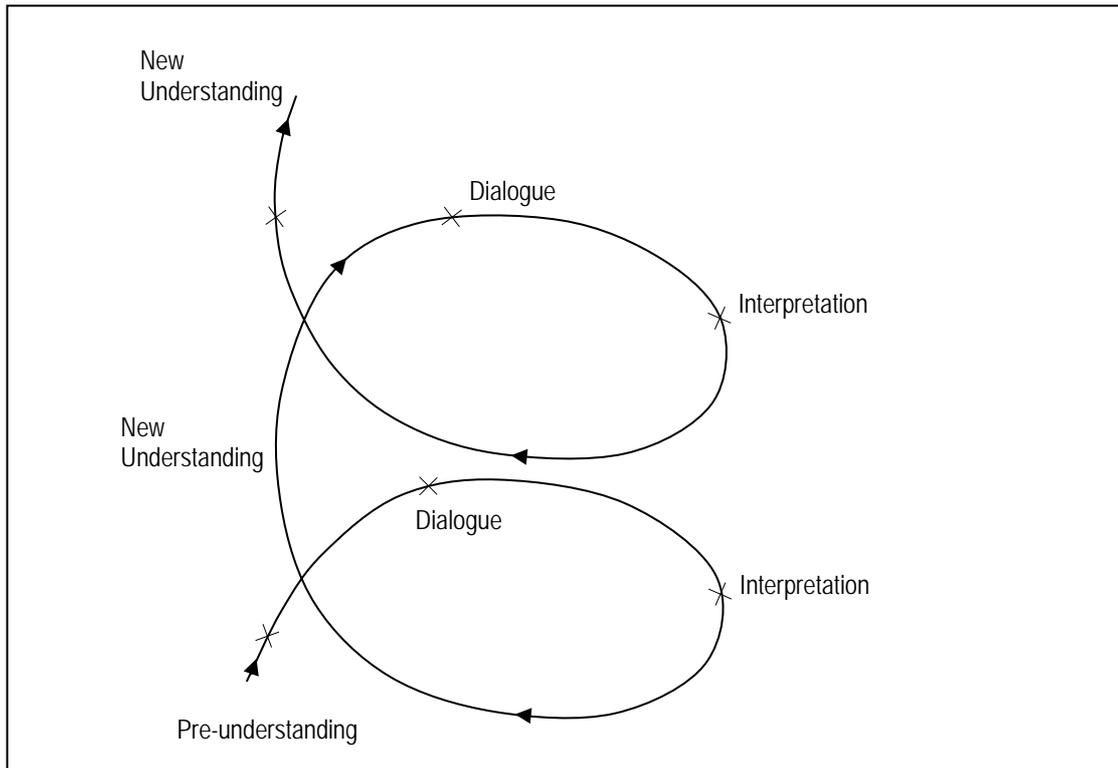


Figure 3.1 Eriksson and Wiedersheim-Paul 2001, p. 222

The first turn of the spiral is the pre-understanding phase and it is about gaining an understanding of the topic and the possible ways to assess it but also if it is an interesting topic to study in the context of a master's thesis. Within this phase a pre-study on City Guest Service (CGS) was made to establish a research problem which was made through searching for secondary sources, theoretical studies on the topic. The latter source the theoretical studies indicated that it was an established and interesting area to study.

Next phase of the spiral is the framing of the collected information, drawing up a research plan, creating a research problem, building the frame of reference and formulating research questions.

The last phase of the spiral is a two-way communication process between the researcher and the respondent. This includes the researcher posing questions by interviewing the research objects and receiving information and impressions from those answers (Eriksson and Wiedersheim-Paul 2001). The problem of gaining the "right" information in the communication and interpreting process are subject of criticism to this model or approach. That is, when the interviewer poses a question to the respondent and receives an answer

the respondent interprets the questions from his perceptions and experience. Additionally, the interviewer interprets the respondents answer based on his knowledge and in order to correspond to his research problem (Eriksson and Wiedersheim-Paul 2001).

To reduce this phenomenon Eriksson and Wiedersheim-Paul (2001) suggest that the interviewer could try to place himself in an observing perspective to find explanations to why the respondent replies in a certain way. However, Arbnor and Bjerke (1996) question if it is possible to act objective or not which they claim is connected to how the researcher is linked to his research objects. As the authors mentioned earlier their view are somewhere between a subjective and an objective approach. Since the research follows a scientific methodology, were the concepts are developed from former research papers and explicit defined, it is subsequently to some extent possible to be objective and decrease bias of the research (Arbnor and Bjerke 1996).

3.1.3 Qualitative Method

A qualitative research tends to focus on exploring a smaller number of examples in order to create a depth in the research (Chandler & Owen, 2002). A quantitative approach, on the other hand, is more appropriate when the purpose is to study a large population in a broad sense to be able to draw statistical conclusions of the population (Holme & Solvang, 1997). The aim of this study is not to perform a broad study but to focus on chosen examples and do an in-depth research on them.

Qualitative market research was first used in psychological theory which concerned information about the subconscious and unconscious mind (Chandler & Owen, 2002). Organization theory has in recent time been interested of stories that people are telling in and about the organization. By listening to stories in or about a specific organisation we will also acquire a deeper understanding of the organization (Gabriel, 1998). Qualitative research is of particular importance when studying social relationships (Flick, 2002). The aim of the qualitative method is to get behind the public, to look into emotions, private thoughts and feelings along with routine and cultural behaviors. A qualitative research has its focus on exploring a few examples to obtain a depth in the research (Chandler & Owen, 2002).

According to the purpose, which is to describe and analyse the importance of the first impression when creating and building a business to business relationship and to describe the factors which influence this process, it is suitable with the qualitative method to reach a depth in the analysis. Also a qualitative approach will be more fruitful than a quantitative since it is very hard to measure our research in numbers.

3.2 The Study

The empirical study took the form of a case study, which contains of total 5 interviews.

3.2.1 The Pre-Study

A pre-study was conducted on CGS as mentioned earlier. A part of their field of business is, as a third party, to help other companies making a successful first impression. This study was made to strengthen the link between theory and the actual business environment. The pre-study were made in two stages.

The first phase was an open discussion with Walter Carvajal, MD of CGS. No questions were prepared before this initial meeting and it is more to be seen as an introduction to the actual problems that can occur during the first meeting between a supplier and a presumptive customer. The discussion evolved around Carvajal's experiences from his job and with his clients, and further on, descriptions of problems that he had experienced in his area of work. The discussion led to the second phase, which resulted in an e-mail contact consisting of totally two e-mails from each side. The information drawn from the e-mails were based on questions from the initial open discussion, but also some clarifications. The pre-study resulted in the construction of the theoretical approach which led to the establishment of the research problem, as Thietart (2001) suggests as one method for creating a research topic.

3.2.2 Case Study

Eriksson and Wiedersheim-Paul (2001) describe *the case study* as a one of several methods for conducting social science research. The method implies that the researcher examine a few objects in multiple situations, where the core of the method is not to measure but to create a new language with new concepts. Yin (2003) states that the method specifically is characterized by the respondents own expressions about the specific situations. It suggests questions such as "how" or "why" which mainly are used in explanatory studies, where the key idea is to attain various different perceptions to form a full image of the subject matter. When designing the case study, the main focus in the initial stage was the research questions, which originated from the frame of reference. The study had further on the nature of a descriptive approach; it implies a study which aims to describe and evaluate an actual first impression (Yin 2003).

3.2.3 The Respondents

The selection of respondents was made after discussions with Carvajal. His knowledge of the sector and his business network was a valuable source in order to find the key persons with the right knowledge that the authors was looking for. The authors chose to make use of Carvajal's knowledge when they realized that it was an effective method to reach top managers with long experience in the subject.

One of the requirements for the respondents was that it should be a mix between male and female to broaden the answers. The different respondents were chosen mainly because of their long documented experience and since they all have a leading position in their company.

The authors are aware of that the trustworthiness could be affected when only using Carvajal as coordinator for selection of the respondents. However, the option would be to search for the respondents by ourselves, which would reduce the chances of speaking to the key persons within the area of interest.

3.2.4 Interview Guide

The empirical research in this thesis has been conducted in forms of interviews. Chandler and Owen (2002) claim that interviews can be divided into two categories, group interviews or a one-to-one interview, i.e. depth interviews. Group interviews use several respondents who are questioned together by one or several interviewers. Depth interviews are conducted on one respondent who is questioned alone. Compared to a group interview, this

kind of interview makes it possible to focus on the individual respondent and to get deeper understanding about his attitudes, feelings and experiences (Chandler & Owen, 2002). As this is important when studying impressions, depth interviews are the technique used in this research. The natural choice was to use a problem-centered interview guide which is a kind of semi-structured interview where the interviewer asks open-ended questions. The positive side is that the interviewer only has to prepare a brief interview guide (Flick, 2002). A drawback with the method is that the respondents' answers could be difficult to compare when the answers differ.

3.2.5 The Interviews

The interviews were made with an open-ended approach that, according to May (1993), allows the interviewers to give their definition of a situation, which in turn gives a greater understanding of the topic. Since issues concerning first impression are highly subjective, it is appropriate to use an open-ended method to be able to explain and to have discussions about some of these specific issues, such as, first meeting and first impression.

The interviews were made with one interviewer present. However, during the interviews both tape-recording and note-taking were used, the latter in that extent it was possible, in order to minimize the risk of misinterpretations. A tape-recorder is giving the interviewer the advantage of being able to focus on the respondent as well as having a non-verbal communication, such as eye contact, with the respondent (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight 1997). It is, however, not always easy to ask questions, listen to the respondent and take notes all at the same time. For those occasions when the respondents were not able to be present for a face-to-face interview a phone interview was the only option. The authors are aware of that the risk of misinterpretation increases with this method. It should also be mentioned that, since all the companies are Swedish, the interviews were held in Swedish. The interviews took around one to one and a half hour each to conduct.

To reduce the level of misinterpretations the respondents were given a short presentation of the topic before the time of the interview and they was also given the opportunity to read the interview questions and the answers they had given after the interview occasion to minimize the risk of any misunderstandings.

3.2.6 Data and Analysis of Data

Primary data have been collected in forms of interview. *Secondary* data were used to retain former knowledge in the field of research, such as research papers, data which have been collected for another purpose than this thesis. The empirical material is based on the interview material.

The first step when analyzing the interviews was to make transcripts of the tape-records. The transcripts, together with the notes, were then written down in the empirical findings presented in chapter four. The respondents have also been named with letters instead of their names in the empiric chapter to decrease the focus on a specific respondent and their answer.

First, some general information about each respondent was picked out from the notes and the transcripts, to be able to see a pattern of how the different respondents answer the different questions. The focus was, however, on the impact of the first impression, which creates the base for the analysis. The empirical findings were analyzed using the theories in

chapter two. The aim of the analysis was to connect the empirical findings to the theory, to answer the research questions, and finally to derive a basis for the conclusions.

A drawback concerning the secondary data was that the literature regarding the first impression in a sales encounter in business to business was quite limited. Most of the literature concerned business to consumer or the entire relationship building process in business to business. Other problems concerning the secondary sources is that some of the used literature was quite old and consequently could not be found in the library databases, which forces the authors to use business to consumer literature more often than they would have wished to do in the theoretical chapter. Regarding the primary data the respondents gave a different amount of data during the interviews, which has been reflected in the empirical chapter.

3.3 Methodology Criticism

Svenning (1997) claims that there are many factors that affect the trustworthiness, but there is two more important and often used than the others; validity and reliability. Reliability is more applicable at a quantitative approach than a qualitative, since a qualitative is more exemplified than generalizing (Svenning, 1997). For that reason, the authors will concentrate their criticism at the validity of the research.

3.3.1 Validity

There are many factors to consider if the result of the survey should be as close to the “reality” as possible. Svenning (1997) mentions two types of validity; Internal and external validity. The internal validity on the one hand concerns the connection between theory and empirical findings, it is important to ask the right questions to the right person. The external validity on the other hand describes to what extent one can make generalisations based on the findings (Svenning, 1997).

The interview guide has been used to strengthen the link between the theory and the empirical findings. The risk lays within the formation of the interview guide and how well it was used such as, for example, the variations of the answers between the respondents within the same question. As mentioned earlier in this chapter there are also benefits with this method such as the focus on the individual respondent to get a deeper understanding of his attitudes, feelings and experiences which is the main focus of this study.

It is of course difficult, however, to know if the respondents have interpreted the questions as the authors have intended and due to this it is important as a researcher to be critical to the respondent’s story and be aware of the emotions behind it due to the subjective nature of the qualitative data. It is also common that the answers tend to be more of a story than real facts so the researcher must then establish the narrative needs and through them finds out the physiological and organizational needs (Gabriel, 1998).

A critical aspect of the hermeneutic perspective is that, as mentioned earlier, there are many interpretations along the way of performing the empirical studies. The researcher asks a question which the respondent will interpret before he answering and then the answer will again be interpreted by the researcher. This is only said to show how easy some faults may occur during the interpretation even if the researcher is aware of the risk.

In order to make convincing conclusions and to fulfil the purpose it is important to interview the right persons (Svenning, 1997). The respondents were not selected by the authors,

which may be a validity issue due to the fact that they were not chosen directly by the authors. Carvajal, who led the selection process of the respondents, is established on the market and consequently has a valuable business network and further more, he has nothing to gain by recommending uninteresting respondents to influence the result. Therefore, the authors believed that the validity could be even higher by the use of Carvajal's advice and recommendations.

Svenning (1997) is also discussing the complexity of making general conclusions when it concerns qualitative data such as human attitudes or feelings. He suggests, however, with an explicit structure and method and with relevant theories the validity is sharpened and therefore makes it possible to generalise the findings. With the explicit structure of the thesis the authors believe, based on Svennings (1997) suggestions that it to some extent is possible to generalise the findings in the study.

3.3.2 Limitations with the study

This thesis have only examined the first impression in the personal face-to-face meeting context and not to what extent factors such as phone or e-mail could influence the personal face-to-face meeting. E-mail and phone were, however, used as factors to establish when the actual first meeting occurred in the process of creating a relationship and lays within the concept of the first impression.

Another limitation was that the study was made within a limited timeframe of 10 weeks and due to this the number of respondents was restricted to five persons. A higher number of respondents could have given the study a larger variation of the empirical data which could have increased the validity of the study. Also all of the respondents had there businesses located in Stockholm and there businesses were only involved in services and not products which could have produced other empirical findings.

4 Empirical findings

This chapter presents information of the respondents and the empirical findings from the interviews.

4.1 Respondents

As mentioned in the methodology, the male and female respondents will be named with a letter, from A to E. A and B are males and C to E are females respondents.

Respondent A

Respondent A has a long history as entrepreneur and as consultant within the IT-industry. Among other things he was co-founder of Parallell Consulting Group and the venture capital company Springboard Capital. He has worked as Chairman of the board at MySpace, a security company and has been a board member of ICON Medialab. Respondent A has also worked as advisor in various investment companies and as a project manager at some of the large portal investments, for example Torget.se.

Respondent B

Respondent B is currently working as a project manager at Nordic Web Radio where he, among other things, is in charge of the sales training. Additionally he works for his own firm.

Respondent C - phone interview

Respondent C has worked with service and support since 1991 when she started at Transcom, today the leading call centre in Sweden, and stayed there for six years. She is now the MD of CallCenter Institute, a company which provides sales training to call centres.

Respondent D

Respondent D is a true entrepreneur in the telecom- and IT-sector and she has been within the sector for eleven years. Today she owns and runs the telecom company Digital Actions together with Anna Caracolias. She has also worked as a saleswoman and adviser within the bank & insurance sector (<http://www.digitalaction.se>, collected the 14th of May 2004).

Respondent E - phone interview

Respondent E started her career at IKEA where she met Ingvar Kamprad several times. The mentality of IKEA and Kamprad's way of business has served as model for her own businesses. In 1997 she changed to SEB and their sub company "Sesam Telefon Bank" (phone bank). She now owns and runs her own consulting firm, Essential Consulting which she started in January 2003. Essential Consulting facilitates the link between other small firms where her job consists of working as a project manager at several industries.

4.2 First Impression

Respondent A

It is natural to get a more neutral opinion when speaking on the phone compared to meeting the person face to face, argues A. Thus it is of utter importance to be well prepared before making the phone call especially if it is a “cold call”, i.e. a phone call which only aims to give a short introduction of the own company and the purpose of a meeting. A golden rule when speaking on the phone is to “smile when you talk” since this reflects on the voice and by consequence the voice sounds more positive. According to A about 50 per cent of the opinion about the counterpart is founded during the first impression and throughout the meeting the knowledge of the counterpart is growing deeper. Respondent A does subsequently not agree with the recognized statement that 90 per cent of the opinion about another person is established during the first five seconds of the initial meeting.

When a person are getting more experience he can rely more on his routine and he do not have to prepare as much before a meeting as he had to when he was younger. Also, the person who have the upper hand, the customer, may not have to prepare as much as the supplier. The supplier has to be very well prepared and appropriately dressed. He is very careful in his choice of persuasion technique and tries to work professionally to gain trust and satisfy the customer.

A well-known brand simplifies the process a lot since it is a reference to base arguments on. If it is a brand with less good perceptions it will take much more effort of the supplier to get a deal.

Respondent B

The first impression usually appears on the phone according to respondent B. He fully agrees with the statement that 90 percent of the total opinion about another person will be received within the first five seconds.

You can never chance at the first meeting, you have to make it a success.

Each and every contact with the customer is important. However, a successful first meeting might be risky since both parts may be too comfortable and lack in attendance as a result of feeling safe after their first successful meeting. It is important to always be alert.

The key issue is to always have an agenda and an aim for every first meeting and he is emphasizing the importance of having a strategy and an action plan for every meeting. Customers want to be led to the “right” decision and the supplier can use the agenda to control the customer and also make use of his small agreements during the process to lead him to agreeing to the whole deal. Before the first meeting he collects facts, makes research, look at possible scenarios and analyze them. To convince the customer the best way to act is to be friendly, objective, correct, motivating and businesslike.

It goes without saying that a well-known brand has a great advantage since the supplier does not have to sell the brand but only the need for the product.

Respondent C

The first encounter that actually counts is the first personal meeting i.e. she does not consider initial phone call as such to be meetings were you get a first impression. She does not

Empirical findings

agree with the statement that 90 percent of the opinion of another person will be received in the first five seconds. Instead she is more careful and believes that it is only 50 per cent and states that it differs from time to time.

The first impression is not everything i.e. the person who seems plain at the first impression may be a nice person in the end and the one who gave a nice first impression may turn out be plain.

She thinks that she judges the customer in an objective way and the first impression is not a conclusive factor if there is going to be a relationship or not. The customer's value is already defined before the meeting so the first meeting is most of all a way to know the customer and their expectations.

Usually she is prepared before the meeting, and she emphasize the importance of knowing what the customer need before the parties meet to give a solid impression.

The brand is important, but it is more thrilling with an unknown brand since it lead to a need of making an own judgement of the brand and not rely on the public opinion.

Respondent D

The first meeting of value is the first personal meeting and she therefore always wants to meet the customer in person. Since it is hard to measure a prospect customer's value by a phone call she believes that every customer has to get a chance and not be judged after just a phone call. She fully agrees with the statement that 90 percent of the total opinion about another person will be received in the first five seconds. To see the first impression as an important moment is a vital factor to the first impression. Further she claims that it is important to know the person before making the final decision of your opinion and it is also possible to change the view of a customer after the first impression. It is more important for the supplier to make a good first impression than it is for the customer and the product is more important than the person, but she claims that it is important to first give a good impression as a person.

D claims that it is vital to know the purpose and the aim of the meeting already before the meeting. She sometimes wants more of a challenge and do not do any preparations at all which may lead to failures. She asks a lot of open-ended questions during the meeting which she listens very carefully at and she further points out the importance of listening to the customer. It is crucial to understand the customer's needs and then try to gain trust by fulfilling these needs.

A well-known brand is an advantage for the supplier since the customer is more welcome to a well-known company than an unknown. A well-known brand often makes the customer more comfortable and the customer is more willing to take a decision of buying when he is feeling secure with the product.

Respondent E

Even though she thinks a phone call is to be seen as a meeting, the real meeting is when you meet eye to eye since that is when he gets a chance to judge the other person not only by the verbal language but also by the body language. The body language is very important since it tells a lot about the person and respondent E totally agrees with the statement that 90 percent of the total opinion about another person will be formed within the first five seconds. The first impression is crucial for a future relationship and she trusts her intuition and she is not often proved wrong.

I am fast in making my judgement of the other person and I am right almost every time.

It is important to have the purpose of the meeting well defined already before the meeting since all business meetings have a purpose. It is very frustrating and unprofessional when someone shows up for a meeting and does not seem to know what they are doing there. A meeting shall be evaluated afterwards to pinpoint the mistakes and the good points to improve to the next meeting in the same way as the research before the meeting. If something has gone wrong during the meeting she tries to see a pattern in her behaviour to improve her and it can be useful when judging potential customers. She claims that silence is underestimated since it is important to be able to be quiet and let the customer talk. If both parties are well prepared the meeting will be more efficient and the exchange of information will be higher. Additionally, those who asks the same question twice, not because they do not understand but simply because they do not pay attention, appears to be distinctly uninterested of what the other person is saying.

The brand is a factor to take into consideration. A well-known brand is on the one hand safer than an unknown, but on the other hand an unknown brand has more potential.

4.3 Categorization Process

Respondent A

When meeting someone with a lower level of experience and education it is vital to be careful to show off the own knowledge since it may affect the situation in a negative way.

You prefer making business with a person who is nice and gives a lot of himself. It is as easy as that! It is not a coincidence that successful salesmen are professionally nice and social all the time.

According to A, it is an advantage to apply previously gained experiences to form an opinion of new customers. It is important to learn about the potential customer, to get the basics and be able to find similar interests to bond with the person. The strategy may be changed to adapt to the customer, even during the meeting.

Respondent B

At the first impression similarities and dissimilarities is not a key factor, instead it is fundamental to be friendly, objective, correct, motivating and businesslike. The strategy has to be changed during the meeting depending on the customer's response. It is important not to have any preconceived notions of the customer. When contacting a potential customer the seller all too often turn to one of the employees instead of going straight to the Managing Director due to the preconceived notion that the MD is too busy for a meeting. To learn why one salesperson is selling more than another, and how they should change their strategy to be better, it can be good to use earlier gained experiences.

Respondent C

A person is giving a more professional impression if he has good knowledge of his counterpart, both the person and the company. If the supplier shows that he is interested in the customer and has made the effort of doing some research before the meeting it could increase the interest for the supplier and his product.

Dissimilarities between the two parties are a positive thing according to respondent C and it is making the meeting more interesting. She uses her knowledge and experience to categorize customers and she is acting according to earlier experiences with new customers.

Respondent D

The chance to make a commendable first impression increases if the two parties have similar personalities and by consequence the business deal could be won with less effort. A combination of dissimilarities and an expectant customer may lead to a lost business deal but at the same time, she argues, every meeting is a challenge hence the dissimilarities make it more interesting. She judges the customer after earlier experiences and adjusts her sale strategy according to the personality of the customer. Additionally, basing the strategy on old experiences only could be a disadvantage since it can become a problem if the opinion of the customer is formed by a stereotypical image. The supplier shall always listen to the customer and give him a chance in order to minimize the risk of generalisations.

Respondent E

The respondent values the knowledge and the experience which derives from a long life and she is fond of visiting elderly persons such as retired chairmen as she find it gainful for both her understanding of the business world and for her as a private person. In contrast, she often finds that young businessmen do not see the value of the collected knowledge and experience and therefore also miss the good source of knowledge which the elderly are.

Honesty is a quality which she values highly and she exemplifies by telling of one occasion when she helped a friend by working as a cashier at a Seven Eleven store when a business acquaintance came by. He did not show her any respect but were instead very rude. Later when they met each other at an event where the respondent was master of ceremonies the business acquaintance all of a sudden acted as if they were the best of friends. After this she ended their relationship.

It goes without saying that knowledge of the counterpart and the own product is important. In order to gain sufficient knowledge of the counterpart it is necessary to always do thorough research and be clear with the aim of the meeting.

Respondent E argues that it is easier to make a commendable first impression of someone with similar personality since both parties thinks and acts in the same way. However, dissimilarities are more giving since it is more of a challenge and it also increases the exchange between the parties. Dissimilarities make her play a role with an adapting strategy which is in compliance with the customer's way of being, to understand and to get closer to the customer. She judges the customer's value all the time throughout the process.

4.4 The First Meeting

Respondent A

Intelligent smooth talk is always successful in gaining appreciation from the other person although one should be cautious since an artificial dark vocal pitch is easily revealed and makes the person look ridicules. Respondent A, however, points out that both the talking and judgment should come naturally; if the counterpart starts to analyze the other person's tone of voice things have gone out of proportion. It is very important to nuance the language when the meeting is held in Swedish between two Swedish native whilst when a Swede speak English, the world business language, it is enough to speak distinctly to make

Empirical findings

the point stated. Neither dress better nor worse than the customer, the optimal is to be dressed the same way as the counterpart. However, in some situations it can be an advantage to be dressed slightly more casual than the customer to make him feel more comfortable. It is always possible to call the company in advance to hear what their dress code are to make sure that the dressing will be in the right way. During the meeting it is important to be aware of one's own body language. It is important to make eye contact and give a firm handshake at the first meeting, the handshake should neither be too hard nor too loose, continuously always remember to stretch the back and take notes and also to nod in agreement when listening.

Even scents can affect the opinion and judgement of the counterpart. For example a strong smell of sweat could have a negative impact but it is not often the smell of sweat have any larger effect unless the smell is extremely penetrating. In comparison, a perfume scent that is very pleasant to one person could have the opposite effect on another, even a pleasant perfume could be overwhelming if it is too much and it can then make the other party loose focus.

After 60 you are out.

There are some tendencies to age fascism in Sweden says respondent A. He himself has experienced how he has been treated differently during his career only because of his age; when he was young he did not always receive the respect as he deserved. It was not until his thirties it became better and he now has a few golden years to look forward to before he is considered "too old" i.e. around 60 years old, which is a waste of both competences and recourses.

Women are superior men, it is a fact!

A woman who has made a career in the business world is in almost every case more skilled on all levels than a man in a similar position. Women have the advantage of playing on two fields at same time both the men's perspective thinking and the women's empathy thinking. It is always more tricky to negotiate with a woman than a man. Women would, however, gain a lot if they were more straight forward and did not make excuses for themselves all the time, he claims that it is almost like a mantra to some competent women to excuse themselves.

It can be easier to meet someone from another culture than the own because it is then possible to blame the cultural differences and both can be excused due to their origin. For example the Germans have their own characteristics and it is difficult to judge a German during the 5 to 20 seconds in the way you can do with a Swede. Before any connection with the foreign party both parties will have to jostle through the cultural façade. It may take a few meetings just to get to know the Germans. Another example is the issue of eye-contact which is considered to be important in Sweden whiles in other parts of the world, not at least the Anglo-Saxon, can be seen as uncomfortable.

Time is vital to make a good first impression. An academic quarter, however, is accepted in some cultures such as for example the Latin countries, whereas in Sweden the general opinion is that the late person are spending the other parties time. It is necessary to always call well in advance if there will be any delays of the scheduled meeting and give a reasonable explanation, this will minimize the risk of a negative first impression. If the supplier are late and do not call in advance he will has to work a lot harder to win the customer. There are good times and less good times to have a meeting. Mondays is the day to get started and on Fridays most people start planning the week-end and therefore the best time is between

Tuesday and Thursday. Since the customer expects a certain standard on the premises based on the product the location for the meeting is of importance, especially when working with foreigners the premises and the address is of major importance for the credibility. For example an office on the well known *Strandvägen*¹ in Stockholm could be a booster for the credibility of the company since a foreigner who knows even so little about Stockholm usually knows about *Strandvägen*. Even the weather could have an effect on the impression; on a sunny day people is usually happier.

It is more common than you think that a failure with in the first impression destroys the entire relationship.

The details mentioned above are of great importance when the supplier are selling exclusive products or services and the investment banks, for example, have been forerunners in this area although it is never good to exaggerate.

Respondent B

In verbal communication some dialects could be an advantage such as *gotländska*² and *värmländska*³ which are perceived as honest. The main idea, however, is to adapt the language to the customer and avoid technical terms since the customer usually do not understand them. It is a good idea during the conversation to always try to use the answers to the questions when making a new question or in other words be a keen listener.

It is important to be aware of your body language in the nonverbal communication and to adapt it according to the counterpart, remember to make eye contact and give a firm handshake at the first meeting. Clothes do also effect the impression and it is better to be overdressed compared to being too casual. If the meeting is held at the own office it is important that it looks neat and tidy but it is preferred if the meeting is held at the customer's place.

Generally, women are more cautious in their approach. However, women use the situation to their advantage by playing on the gender roles such as their charms and looks and men often instinctively hold the door for women which many women make use of. It could though become a disadvantage to the woman if she overdoes it by being too flirty and she because of that have to prove her competence. Thus, when women and men come together the situation could become more of a boy and girl situation in a sense, i.e. less business like.

If the customer is from another culture it is important to know the cultural differences and doing research before the meeting to find out what kind of expectations the customer has, this will avoid making unnecessary blunders. In a meeting with a Swede it is crucial to always be on time since it is considered very rude to be late without a good reason or give a call well in advance.

Respondent C

The language plays an important part and as an example she mentions several occasions when the other part's language is so poor. Either is the person using a too technical lan-

¹ An exclusive street in Stockholm

² The dialect spoken on Gotland, an island outside Sweden's east coast.

³ The dialect spoken in Värmland, in the mid-west part of Sweden.

guage or he simply cannot master the language of communication, by consequence you can hardly understand what they say which also makes it difficult to deepen the relationship. The vocal pitch, i.e. the tone of voice, is important since it is giving a hint of the other person's trustworthiness and it is a tool for creating a bigger interest of the message. To make a good first impression the supplier have to be aware of his appearance such as dressing and grooming and also the way he smell since to much perfume or smell of sweat could be disturbing and give an unprofessional impression. Additionally it is a good idea to consider the body posture, give a firm and confident handshake and remember to make eye-contact.

She does not believe in any difference in making contact with men or women but she thinks that women being a bit more cautious and listen more compared to the men who do their "business talk". It can, however, be problems in other cultures such as in the Mediterranean parts of Europe where business people often are pushier in their approach and the view on the sexes differs from the Scandinavian view which by consequence could effect the respondent's impression in a negative way. Preconceived ideas and stereotype images of people are something which affects everybody subconsciously, but professionals has to look beyond the stereotype.

The day of the week may influence the meeting in the sense that it is often more productive to have a meeting at the beginning of the week than towards the end. The meeting is preferably held at the customer's office since it is then easier to get the full picture of the customer and perhaps adapt the strategy accordingly.

Respondent D

It is important to use proper language in the verbal communication and not use foul language but also bear in mind not to use too technical language. Especially engineers have a tendency to use too many technical terms and by consequence sometimes miss out on explaining the purpose with their product. The vocal pitch, however, does not have any significance for the way that the presentation is perceived.

The non-verbal communication is of great importance during the meeting e.g. the handshake, dressing, fixed eyes, and to step towards the counterpart to welcome him, which all aims at making the counterpart feel welcomed and trusting. A good start will increase the chances for a successful and easy communication process greatly. The respondent mention one occasion when they wore suits and their customer had jeans and t-shirt and due to this the communication did not run as smoothly as it could have done if they had been dressed the same way as the customer, which they also did at the meetings following.

Regarding the differences between the sexes in terms of performing a business meeting women are generally more direct while men are better at making small talk before getting to the key issue. This is a weakness of women since making small talk is a good way to get a grip of the other person, however, women are catching up and are adopting more and more of men's way of doing business. Men are also generally better in creating professional networks which is essential for being successful in the role as businessman or businesswoman. For some reason women tend to stress their competence something that men never does which does not serve any purpose but emphasising the women's insecurity of the situation at hand. In addition women more often than men ask directly if they do not understand which leads to a better understanding and a more effective meeting.

Preparation is the key to a successful meeting and the supplier shall always do research on the potential customer to know his preferences and to be able to categorise him correctly. This is especially important when dealing with customers from a different cultural back-

ground than the own. It is enough to visit our neighbours Norway or Finland to notice the different ways of negotiating. As an example of a very different business culture she mentions Italy where it is nearly impossible to make any decisions before several meetings and before both parties has got to know each other. Very often Swedish businessmen are of the opinion that his way of doing business is the “normal” way and consequently he often barge right into the core issue and therefore miss out entirely on the social small talk which is essential in many other cultures when doing business. Instead of seeing it as a hindrance when meeting businessmen from other cultures respondent C rather sees it as a challenge.

When in Rome do as the Romans! It is the visitor’s responsibility to know the ways of the country he is visiting. On the one hand Swedes in general better accept different cultures when we are within Sweden than we do when going abroad i.e. Swedes find it easier to accept a different culture from a foreigner who is visiting Sweden than it is to accept different cultures when we ourselves are travelling to other countries. Americans, on the other hand, have a very poor level of acceptance for other cultures and in the most cases they maintain there own behaviour and expect everyone else to behave accordingly.

In Sweden everybody is always on time to a meeting. If the supplier by any chance is late he should always let the other part know as soon as possible but. However, being late means he will has to work a lot harder to gain the customer’s trust. The day of the week for the meeting does also have effect on the efficiency and the result of the meeting and she therefore prefers to have the meetings on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays and preferably before noon. Additionally the place of the meeting could affect the image of the supplier and a pleasant environment can boost the image. She used to hold her meetings at a members club in Stockholm called *The Lobby* which has several rooms all with there own specific décor and atmosphere. It was very successful and the location made the customers feel chosen and important.

A bad first impression is almost always a result of the human factor such as bad attitude or poor preparations. If the customer is being a bit off or not really interested in the meeting the supplier should pose many questions to get to know the reasons for the customers behaviour since he may just have a bad day. If it is not just a bad day but this is the way he is then it is no reason to bother but just walk away.

Respondent E

The use of the language, or the use of bad language to be precise, could have a negative effect on the impression. The language reflects the social background. Cultural differences however, can have an impact on the way of using the language which could affect the interpretation of the counterpart. The vocal pitch does have some effect on the overall impression even though she tries not to be influenced by it.

You can judge the customers mood by studying his body language. Playing with a pen could for example be a sign of stress. If the customer is nervous or stressed the supplier should start with some small talk until the customer is relaxed before moving on to the actual business talk. If the customer on the other hand is calm already from the start the business talk may start right away.

Dressing is another important factor to the first impression. Even though jeans and t-shirt may be normal dressing at the office it is not proper at a business meeting. If it is a business meeting both shall wear business attire. For obvious reasons no one should ever attend a business meeting with a hang-over and the supplier shall always look smart. Scents also have an effect on the unconscious which is hard to do anything about since nobody

Empirical findings

are really aware of it. The handshake is an essential part of the judgement of the first impression in the same sense that a hug should be a real hug and not just a pat on the back. In fact, she usually bet with her self on her counterpart's handshake and she is right most of the time, by this she says that it is possible to judge a persons character by his appearance only.

She tries not to have any preconceived notions but it is easier said than done not to be influenced by them. It can make it hard to form an opinion of herself which is something she always strives to do. From her first impression she is deriving the process of categorising the customers which she uses to adjust her behaviour to fit with the customer.

According to her understanding there are great differences between men and women. Women have to prove there competence to a larger extent then men especially when it concerns technology companies although it varies between the different occupational groups. She continues by saying that men have a more direct way of expressing themselves than women have. By consequence it can sometimes be long before women come to the core of their message. Some people in her age have no respect for older persons and due to this they miss a lot of information since many of the elder have valuable knowledge. Also she finds that many people judge others by there job title, which by consequence could give the wrong impression of the counterpart.

Even though they are hardly noticeably the cultural differences influence every meeting between two persons from different cultures. For a successful meeting it is crucial to be attentive and to know in advance how to greet, the religion, when there are holidays and codes of the social life and she emphasises the importance of showing an interest for the counterpart's culture even if it is only business that are interesting. For example she mention an incident in morocco when she was looking into the eyes of the counterpart which was perceived as she was staring and hostile, luckily he was understanding and explained to her that her behaviour was wrong. She did not know of this difference before the meeting but has learned her lesson to the next time.

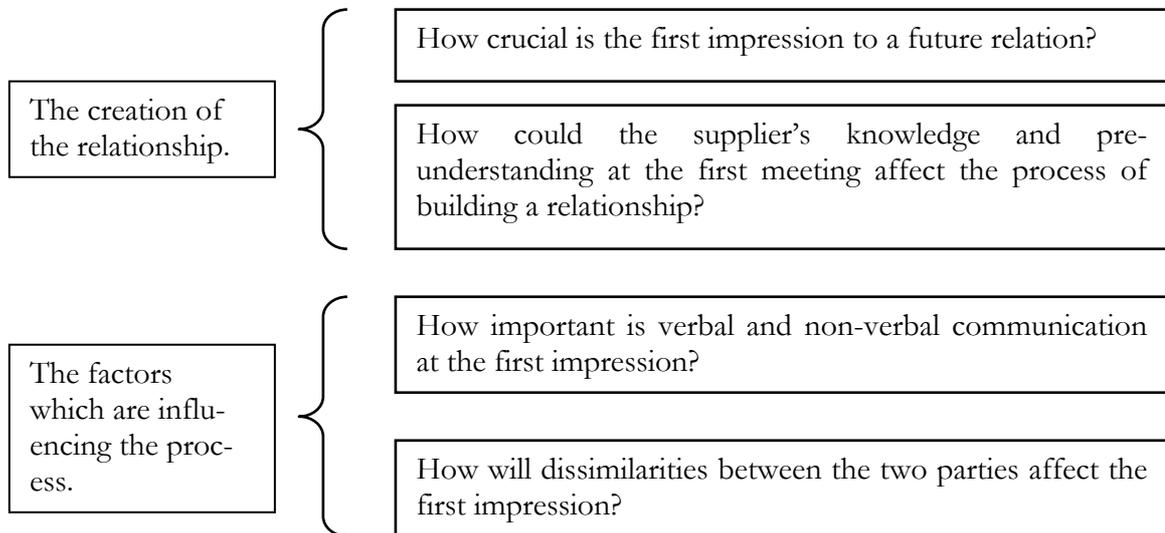
Being on time is a vital aspect of the first impression according to the respondent. She points out that it shows a lack of respect for the counterpart if one person is late for a meeting. The importance of being on time for a meeting differs from country to country; in Spain for example it is more of a rule to be late to a meeting. The day of the week could also affect the outcome in the way that Monday to Thursday are good days for meetings while Fridays are less good since most people have there mind on week-end already. Mondays are especially good for the respondent since she is alert and ready while most other people are still somewhat indolent after the weekend.

Even though it started in the wrong way it is still possible to turn a negative first impression into an advantage but it take much more to build a relationship.

5 Analysis

This chapter presents an analysis of the empirical findings. The chapter will connect the theories presented in chapter two with the empirical findings in chapter four, and answer the research questions in the summary.

The research questions:



5.1 First impression

The concept of the “first impression” in the creation of a business to business relation was not fully clear to all of the respondents. When the interviews started they all agreed that the first impression is during the first five seconds in accordance with the theories of Sjodin (1995). However, during the interviews all of the respondents changed their understanding of the first impression, to involve a process of several meetings such as phone, email, and personal contact instead of just a few seconds. Andersen (2001) and Grönroos (1991) describe this process as the pre-relationship phase when creating and building a business relationship. The change of opinion among the respondents during the interviews is probably depending of the problem to definite when a moment like the first impression is. Hence, the first impression is of course the first five seconds but there are several meetings when a business relation is created which all together will form the first impression. This was expressed by all of the respondents, yet all of the respondent's answers indicate as Bitner (1995) also claims that the most important moments occur in the first ten minutes of an encounter.

Four out of five respondents believed the first impression to be of the same importance, as Shonka and Kosch (2002) see it, when creating a business relationship and it is the starting point for a relationship as Ivancevich and Duenning (2001) mean. They claimed that they form their overall opinion of the counterpart by the first meeting and by this they draw the conclusion if they want to form a future business relationship or not. Only respondent C is of a different opinion when she states that to her the first impression has never been a deciding factor to start a new business relationship. Instead she emphasizes the importance of giving the other person a chance and a possibility to get to know each other better before making a judgment. All the respondents, however, pay attention to a successful first impression but they in addition mention that not everyone puts enough effort into making a good first impression which also is agreed with the opinion of DeCormier and Jackson

(1999). An interesting fact mentioned by respondent B, is the importance of always be understanding and alert to the customer, thus you should never be too comfortable in your own situation just because of a successful first impression. This is also stated by Bitner (1995) when she mentions that every encounter is an opportunity to build trust and increase the customer's loyalty to build a relationship but in the same time a risk of destroying trust and reducing the customer's loyalty.

The opinion about the preparation phase before a meeting differed a bit among the respondents, even though all of the respondents stated the importance on being well prepared. Respondent A, however, claims that he does not prepare as much as he used to but instead he rely on his experience while Respondent E in contrast states that the preparation for the meeting is just as important as the meeting it self. According to Andersen (2001) the key issue for building awareness and creating an understanding for the prospect customers lays within the pre-relationship phase. All respondents claim that it is important to make research about the prospect customer already before the first meeting in order to know the customer's expectations and needs, something that also is supported by Bitner (1995) who argues for the importance of knowing the customer's expectations. The preparations can be made in different ways such as analysing fictive scenarios and collecting information on the company. Respondent C, however, finds it challenging not to be fully prepared at the first meeting presupposed she has some background information on the person she is meeting.

Andersen (2001) and Walker et al. (1998) argue that the aim of all communication is to create awareness and get a better understanding of the customer. All the respondents do research to find out about the customers needs and wants. The female respondents though emphasise the importance of asking open-ended questions and be attentive to be able to read between the lines and by this finding out the customer's true expectations with the meeting.

Thompson, Knox and Mitchell (1998) suppose that brand development plays a major role in the identity development. The opinion among the respondents is a bit varying, however, all of them believes that the supplier company's brand is of some importance at the first meeting since a well-known brand make the customer more comfortable i.e. a well-known brand gives the customer a feeling of trust and perceived value. However, respondent C and E said that an unknown brand is more exciting and offers more possibilities, which suggests that the brand importance is less vital.

5.2 Categorisation Process

It is important to judge the customer without any influence of preconceived notions according to all of the respondents and they all want to form their own opinion about their customer. The judgment is based on experience and knowledge of the prospect customer and by the judgment they can also categorise the customers. The categorisation process starts already at the very first meeting which is based on minimal observations and this is a continuing process just as Evans et al. (2000) suggests.

Respondent A mentions the importance of finding the similarities with the prospect customer in order to get a good start. This view is supported by both respondents D and E who claims that it is easier to make a good first impression with someone who is similar to themselves, which is also stated by Zajonc (1982), Wise (1981) and Bruner et al. (1956, cited in Henthorne et al. 1992). However, the female respondents (C, D and E) find it chal-

lenging and the discussions tend to be more fruitful if there are some dissimilarities between themselves and their counterparts while respondent A on the other hand prefer to only do business with people who are similar to himself. Respondent B does not see any difference in the potential outcome of the meeting whether or not there are similarities or dissimilarities between the parties.

As mentioned in 5.1 the preparation before a meeting is important, one of the reasons is to be able to judge the customer in a correct way, which is supported by Snyder and Swann (1978). All respondents claim that they are changing their strategy depending on their counterpart. Respondent B says that the most important thing is not to find similarities but the main point is always to be friendly, objective, correct, motivating and businesslike and it goes with respondent A who mentions that it is obvious that everyone prefer to make business with a nice person. To transform this in to the Q1 – Q4 personality model by Buz-zotta et al. (1972) mentioned in DeCormier and Jackson (1998) this is a person who appear at the right side of the model. None of the respondents mentions hostile behaviour as a good strategy in meetings, maybe of obvious reasons.

Respondent D says that a submissive customer, who is categorised as a *Hansson* in the matrix *Andersson, Svensson and Hansson*, can result in a missed business deal since respondent D as a supplier is very talkative and want to know about everything, a typical *Andersson*. This problem is caused by their dissimilarities. This problem is something Gunnarsson and Blohm (2002) mention, which can be expressed both by suppliers who talk more than the customer do and customers who wish to get more information than the supplier is giving. Respondent D and E have experienced both sides of the problem.

5.3 The First Meeting

The respondents as well as Trumfio (1994) comment the importance to always smile and have a positive attitude towards the counterpart. As respondent A states it is no coincidence that the best salespersons are always professional and gives the counterpart the feeling of being friends since everybody prefers to make business with a nice person. All of the respondents say that it is not acceptable with an attitude where someone judge a person by his experience or profession. Walker et al. (1995) emphasise the importance of honesty and so does the respondents and dishonesty could make them choose not to continue the relationship.

All of Gunnarsson and Blohm (2002), Sjodin (1995), Trumfio (1994), Merlini and Iorio (1990), Sujan, Sujan and Bettman (1988) write about the importance of knowledge and being prepared to be able to know your counterpart's needs and expectations. In the same way the respondents speak about the importance of knowledge and a good knowledge used in the right way will create an interest in the product, i.e. why it is so important to make adequate and thorough research before the first meeting. Respondent C support Shonka and Kosch's (2002) theory which suggests that it is important that the counterpart has some knowledge about her as well. In addition some dissimilarity in the knowledge of the two parties will give a better exchange at the meeting which is stated by the answers of the female respondents.

The supplier's opinion of the counterpart should be based on facts and not on preconceived notions which is stated by Merlini and Iorio (1990). Several of the respondents (B, D and E) also mention the importance of being aware of the own personal values and preconceived notions to not jump to conclusions when judging the counterpart. A person

who is aware of his preconceived notions can easier disregard from them and instead base his judgement on facts. During the process of forming the opinion of the customer the respondents are adopting their style and behaviour according to the counterpart. In the course of the meeting the procedure of adapting to the counterpart serves the purpose of gaining trust and appears to be equals which is in line with Gunnarsson and Blohm (2002) and Walker et al. (1995) arguments. The Q1-Q4 matrix is also interesting here since the behaviour of changing the style depending of the counterpart is just like Buzzotta et. al. (1972, cited in DeCormier & Jackson 1998) suggested to get a good relationship towards the other person.

Sjodin (1995) claims that both the verbal and the non-verbal communication are important parts of the first impression and all of the respondents agree with his theory. A common mistake made by many suppliers, according to the female respondents, is to use too technical language which only results in confusing the customer and sometimes even miss the purpose of the meeting. If the customer does not understand what the supplier is saying it is of course hard to get the message through. This is a problem that both Sjodin (1995) and Walker et. al. (1998) stress when they are discussion the importance of being persuasive instead of informative. Respondent E says that it does not matter how much knowledge (the needs, the expectations etc.) a supplier has if he does not know how to express himself properly, which is supported by the other female respondents. They believe as well as DeCormier and Jackson (1998) that a proper language is of great importance since a poor language implies it is a less intelligent person. Respondent B and E claim that it is more important to listen carefully to the other part than to talk a lot in order to fulfil the customer's needs, just as Gunnarsson and Blohm (2002) as well as Merlini and Iorio (1990) stated in their theory. They all agree on the importance active listening to gain trust though the men also mention the importance of acting professional i.e. to be objective and businesslike.

Respondent B and E claim that during a business meeting the dress code shall be business like where respondent A and D are of the opinion that the main aspect is that both parties are dressed in the same manner, i.e. if both parties wear jeans, t-shirt and sneakers it is just as good as if both wear suits. Sjodin (1995) support Respondent B and E's opinion when it comes to clothing and they both mention that the clothes that someone wear at night-clubs and those he wear at business meetings shall not be the same. Respondent B claims that it is better to be overdressed instead of being underdressed while Respondent A as supplier believes it is better to be slightly less smart dressed than the customer. The different opinions here is interesting, both respondent A and D, the two that do not thinks that formal clothes is important have made their career in the IT-sector, a sector that is known of being less formal than the classical assumption about the dress code at meetings.

All of the respondents mention the importance of eye contact and a correct handshake. They all make clear that a handshake tell a lot about a person and a correct handshake at a business meeting shall be firm, which is precisely what DeCormier and Jackson (1998) states in their theory. All of them further talk about the importance of body language and how important it is to read the signals from the customer's body language.

Respondent A states that a common stereotype or generalisation in Sweden is made based on age solely and due to this people are often judged by their age with no consideration to their competence, i.e. young persons are often being treated with less respect than they deserve even if they do an excellent job. The same phenomenon occurs when a person is around sixty and is not being counted for any longer simply because he is considered to be too old. By this he suggests that a person is only seen as productive and a source of knowl-

edge when he is between the years 30 and 60. In accordance with the previous respondent, respondent E also mentions that many people lack in respect of older people. The remaining respondents, however, do not think that age matter in a business relationship.

A very interesting pattern in the respondents' answers is that all respondents, both male and female, when mentioning differences between men and women always relate to the men's behaviour as the norm. It is quite obviously indicating that they have a stereotypical view of men and women. Both of the male and one of the female respondents (E) claim that women have to prove their competence much more than what men have to do whilst one of the female respondent (D) are at the opinion that women more often tend to prove their competence more than what men are doing. This is an interesting difference in the answers which could indicate that both of the opinions can be right and this further suggests that the reason behind the differences is caused by negative stereotypes of women as Crane and Lane (2002) discuss. Those stereotypes make men more restrictive towards women who consequently could make her prove her competence even if she does not have to, but based on prior experiences she is under the impression of that she has to prove herself.

All respondents except respondent D believed that businesswomen are more cautious during a business meeting compared to businessmen who instead has a more direct approach towards the counterpart. This difference was regardless of whether the counterpart was a man or a woman. According to respondent D's point of view women had a more direct approach and the men were on the other hand fonder of making small talk before getting to the core issue. Most of the respondents agree upon that the women's approach during business meetings in general differs from the men's which is then considered to be a less successful approach.

The overall opinion of the respondents are not corresponding with the theory of Crane and Lane (2002) who argue that women are more skilled in social talk concerning the more general situations. However, in a negotiation situation businesswomen are always better than men according to both of the male respondents. The reasons for that are diverged. Respondent A claims that a woman who make her success in the business world are far more competent than a comparable man who are in the same position while respondent B claims that it is because the women can play on the boy-girl roles which they quite often take advantage of, however, both respondent A and B claim that this is made possible because of the existing stereotypes of men and women. McElroy et al. (1990) argues that individuals have a more positive attitude towards persons of the same gender as themselves, a theory which is not supported by the respondents. None of the respondents think that they have a more positive attitude towards a person simply because he or she is of the same gender as themselves.

To be aware of cultural differences is important when meeting someone from another culture. Still it is easy to forget the cultural differences when dealing with our closest neighbours such as Norway and Finland but even their culture differs from the Swedish in some aspects. Respondent B mentions as an example of culture differences his experience of the cultural differences when meeting Germans where the Germans are a bit tricky to judge since they have a different approach, this has been thoroughly analysed by Hofstede (1991) who thinks that there are big differences between Swedes and Germans.

At a meeting with someone from another culture the preparations are fundamental for a future success, and this is emphasised by all the respondents. If the supplier do not know about the culture or the traditions of the country you will not even get the counterpart's in-

terest long enough to make a good first impression. In addition, respondent E in particular mentions the importance of showing an interest in the other culture, even though it is not interesting at all. All of the respondents find it interesting with other cultures since it gives a greater interchange but at the same time it is also more of a challenge.

The respondents exemplify the cultural differences with a few self experienced situations and respondent D believes that Americans the worst when it comes to showing respect for other cultures. Gunnarsson and Blohm (2002) are discussing the way Swedes look upon themselves and quite often we tend to see our own culture as the “normal” and by consequence we sometimes do not put enough effort into understanding other cultures. However, the respondents claim that they are much more tolerant of people from other cultures than they are with someone from Sweden. This is shown in that they are often more accepting if a person from southern Europe is late for a meeting than if it had been a Swede i.e. you expect a Swede to be on time while, based on our preconceived notions, Swedes expects a Mediterranean to be late. Respondent C claims that nothing is as important as to be on time for a meeting. This is also supported by theory where one of the most important factors for making a successful first impression is to be on time for the meeting (Triumfio 1994) a theory which all of the respondents agreed with in the empery. As mentioned above, being on time for a meeting is of far greater significance when it is a meeting between two Swedes than if a Swede is meeting with a person from another country and this is because we generally have a higher level of tolerance towards foreigners as far as time goes. Respondent A goes as far as saying that cultural variations can be an advantage since all problems can be excused by blaming the cultural differences and according to all respondents answer it seems to be the truth.

The respondents though feels that when someone are late for a meeting it is not he who is losing time but you are spending the other persons time by keeping him waiting, which is a sign of lack in respect and the reason why it is so important to be on time. All respondents state that if the supplier knows that he is running late he should always call the counterpart in ample time to allow him to reschedule. However, if he is making the call only minutes before the meeting taking place the counterpart will not get a chance to do anything else but wait, consequently the meeting will have a rougher start than it otherwise would have. Even though it is possible to make up for the lost trust the mountain to climb is higher to regain the trust, which is in accordance with the opinion of Walker et. al. (1998) who claims that the supplier’s credibility will be in bottom before any meeting even has taken place.

All of the respondents agree with Gibbon’s (1987) ideas mentioned in DeCormier and Jackson (1998) saying that a bad first impression will significantly reduce the chances of attaining a relationship. However, the female respondents also agree with Gunnarsson and Blohm (2002), Ivancevich and Duenning (2001) and Mitchell and Corr’s (1998) theories that it is possible to turn a bad first impression in to something good. Respondent D states that an early error is almost every time caused by the human factor, such as a bad attitude or poor preparations, two factors mentioned earlier in this thesis. She continues by arguing for the importance of asking questions during the meeting to solve any issues that may occur to have an effective and fruitful meeting.

5.4 Summary

To summarize the analysis the authors of this thesis will answer the research questions:

- *How crucial is the first impression to a future relation?*

All relationships begin with a first impression and all failures of creating a relationship begin also with the first impression. Since no relationship exists the first impression is very important for the start of a potential relationship. The first impression will tell a lot about the other person and how the relationship might be. Because of this it is importance to succeed in making a good first impression. However, it is impossible to give an exact answer to how important the first impression is, but all of the respondents except C say that a bad first impression may destroy all plans for a future relationship.

- *How could the supplier's knowledge and pre-understanding at the first meeting affect the process of building a relationship?*

The supplier's knowledge and pre-understanding affects the first meeting significantly. If the supplier has good knowledge and pre-understanding of the customer the mistakes will be fewer and even though there might be some mistakes the chance of putting the blunder right and build a relationship will be higher. The supplier will also better understand the needs and wants of the customer and know how to fulfil them in order to gain trust. This is something of the most important to do at the first phase in the creation of a relationship.

- *How important is verbal and non-verbal communication at the first impression?*

Both verbal and non-verbal communication is of utter importance at the first impression. No matter how much knowledge the supplier may have it is to no use if he is not able to make his case in a proper and understandable way. The non-verbal communication, such as dressing, grooming and body language, may be even more important since it reveals a lot about the values and trustfulness of a person. People judge other people by their look and how they act instead of what they really say.

- *How will dissimilarities between the two parties affect the first impression?*

Dissimilarities have both advantages and disadvantages since it increase the risk of misunderstandings and the risk of a bad first impression but there are at the same time possibilities for a gainful exchange between the two parties since both can learn a lot from each other. Also the cultural differences have to be taken into consideration since it may affect the first impression. Cultural differences might be an advantage at an encounter as an excuse of misunderstandings, while the gender of the parties does not have any major role in the first impression.

6 Discussion

This chapter presents a discussion about some aspects of importance that came up during the work with this thesis.

Most of the prior studies regarding the first impression in business to business literature emphasises the entire relationship building process which also Saren et al. (2002) state while Andersen (2001) and Grönroos (1991) instead emphasises the importance of each phase of the relationship building models in the relationship development process. Another problem is that business to business literature only focus on the firm's performance and lack in theory about the behaviour of the sales person. Literature based on individual basis was mainly on business to consumer marketing studies, which were one of the reasons for the chosen area of study. The authors of the thesis therefore had to use a mix of business-to-business and business-to-consumer marketing articles to find relevant theories within the topic, even if it only concerned business to business context many consumer marketing articles were useful in the sense of discussing the dynamic between the individuals within the company.

Further empirical findings show that there are many other factors than those discussed in the theoretical framework. Aspects such as time of the day, day of the week, the location of the meeting and even the weather may affect the outcome of the meeting.

When the respondents brought up the question of what time at the day is the best to hold the meeting the preferable times varied between the respondents as did the opinions of what day of the week. Respondents A, D and E believe Wednesdays and Thursdays are the best days for meetings while respondent C mention Thursdays as a less good day. All respondents agree on that Fridays is less good since most people have already start thinking of the week-end while Mondays are considered to be a good day by respondents C and E compared to the thoughts of A and D which believes Mondays to be a less good day. An interesting point was that all respondents except B believed that the day of the week could have some influence of the first impression or the outcome of the meeting.

Respondent B suggests that some Swedish dialects could have an advantage since they are perceived as more honest which also gives the impression that the person is more trustworthy. Another aspect of languages is the differences between Swedish and English where respondent A mention an interesting aspect; in Sweden, when Swedes are making business with each other, nuances in the spoken language have great importance in comparison to English where the main objective is to make yourself understood or in other words to use a more basic language with less depth in language. He further claims that it is common in other countries that business people is, among other things, analyzing the vocal pitch as a tool for creating an opinion of the other part. He, however, believes this type of analysing is to go over the top.

Neither respondent D nor respondent A attaches any weight to the vocal pitch while respondent C in contrast thinks that the vocal pitch has importance since it gives an idea of how trustworthy the counterpart is. Respondent E, however, is a bit ambivalent and thinks the vocal pitch should not matter but at the same time it may do so unconsciously.

Scent is another factor that might have an impact of the first impression, even though respondents B, D and E says that it should not have any impact at all. Respondent E continues by saying that it may have significance anyhow. Both respondents A and C says that sweat odour or too much perfume have a negative effect on their opinion of the counter-

part and respondent E claims that scent no matter if it is a sweet smell of perfume or unpleasant odour have a subconscious impact on your judgement.

Three of the respondents (A, C and D) mentioned the location as another factor and both A and D described it as a tool for building an image around the company and the product and they both mentioned the correlation between the product and the location i.e. where it is marketed, hence if the product is expensive the location have to be chosen carefully in order to reflect the value of the product. Respondent C stated that she always visit the customer at their office to get a better picture of the company as a whole. Also the weather can make a difference since most people are happier on a sunny day.

The study showed that none of the respondents consider gender as an important factor at the first impression. On some questions, though, all the female respondents agreed on one opinion while the male respondents were of another opinion. For example, the female's approach at meetings differ somewhat from the men's in the way that all female respondents are keen on asking open-ended questions and are aware of the information read between the lines. Further on are the female respondents more positive to dissimilarities of the counterpart than the male respondents are. All of the female respondents mention to a larger extent than the men does that a too technical language could have a negative effect on the first impression. Looking at this survey only the female respondents appear to be more willing to take risks than the male respondents, which is shown in several examples. The differences in opinion between the sexes may well be coincidental since the number of respondents who participated in the survey was low, but none the less the authors find it to be interesting due to the large research made before which shows that there are differences in how males and females interpret the same situation.

The reason for it could also be due to our society today, in that extent that the respondent should not consider men and women differently only because the social rules says so, but when it comes to action we may well do so anyway, which is not, however, shown in this thesis.

It is vital for all companies and their employees, not only the salespeople and the MD, to be aware of the importance of the first impression. Everybody within the organisation has to be aware of that they represent the company in every external contact. The receptionist or a technician may well be the first contact a potential customer make with a company and it is therefore of great importance that they as well as the sales people realizes the significance of the impression they make to the potential customer.

Nevertheless, the study does not provide a full coverage of what is influencing the first impression. It may well be other variables not shown in this study due to the limitations of the nature of the study since it was conducted for ten weeks only and was based on five interviews. The study's focus was also only to services, the answers may have looked differently if the focus would be on products but it could also differ between the sort of product or service which the supplier are selling. These facts have not been examined in this thesis and could have given us other nuances in our results.

Since the respondents do not consider the contacts before the first face-to-face meeting to be the actual meeting they believe that they form the first impression during the first face-to-face meeting. This is not to say that when the first face-to-face meeting occur the impression made during the initial contact is also counted in when making there judgment. By consequence the authors have not considered the factors within an e-mail or a phone made

Discussion

before the first face to face meeting instead the focus is on the actual first face-to-face meeting and the factors which influence the judgment there and then.

7 Conclusion

This chapter presents conclusions drawn from the analysis and answers the purpose of this thesis. It ends in a discussion of possible future research in this area.

The purpose of this thesis is to describe and analyse the importance of the first impression when creating and building a business to business relationship and to describe the factors which influence this process.

7.1 Conclusion

The first five seconds of the first meeting is important, but “the first impression” is the sum of all of the impressions that the supplier brings to the customer, from the first contact to the end of the first personal meeting. There are several factors that affect the first impression in order to create and build a business to business relationship, where the most important are appearance and posture. However, since the supplier and the customer do not know each other, every possible aspect and angle of the counterpart will be analysed during the first impression to be able to judge the other part and the chances of a forthcoming relationship.

To be able to make a correct evaluation of the situation and the customer the supplier needs both his knowledge and previous experiences. In order to make the correct preparation before the meeting and to be able to fulfil the customers wants and needs the supplier have to make use of his previously gained knowledge and by this the supplier gains the customers trust.

Still the most important aspect may be whether or not the supplier connects with the customer or at least gives the customer the impression of being on the same level. This combined with the attitude is a vital aspect in order to gain the customers trust. All of the respondents state they are willing to do business with someone who appears to be nice and honest. It goes without saying that the supplier also has to be competent.

In general a person very quickly make a judgement by making observations of small details such as walking, greeting, being on time et cetera and due to this there are more factors than being nice which determine if the supplier attain the customers trust or not. For example, being late for a meeting is something that would weaken the trustworthiness noticeably. The observations made by the supplier also help him categorise the customer and the judgment are based on his previous experiences. The supplier’s stereotypes of his customers, which could be either positive or negative, help him to plan and implement a strategy to win the customer and close the deal. The drawback of a strategy based on a stereotype image only is that the conclusion may be made too fast and by consequence the supplier could then have miscalculated the character of the customer, which in a worst case scenario may lead to a missed business deal.

The two main aspects which affect the first impression at the personal meeting are verbal and non-verbal communication. Verbal communication is what the supplier says and how he says it. The supplier should not only inform the customer about the product, but also listen to the customer carefully to find the arguments to persuade him. Non-verbal communication is the signals the supplier sends out by his dressing, grooming, handshake and body language, four aspects which says a lot about the supplier’s personality.

In the public discussions today gender is one of the most important aspects in business relations, but according to the findings in this thesis it is not of any significance. Cultural differences though have a greater impact and may affect the other factors as well; it is all right to be late in some other cultures and Swedes' level of acceptance is therefore higher when having sales meetings with people from other cultures. The cultural differences could also be helpful since it is possible to blame the cultural differences for the problems which may arise in all contacts with cross-border relationships.

7.2 Recommendations by the authors

The study have showed that the first impression is crucial when creating a relationship and in some cases, if not the variables of the first impression, such as the suppliers attitude, knowledge, verbal and non-verbal communication, generalizations and culture differences are taken into consideration it could be devastating for the prospect relationship and it could lead to a failure. However, one or two mistakes does not have to lead to a failure, it is more about the accumulated impression of several meetings which forms the overall judgment of the counterpart and are decisive of if the customer wants to do business or not. The theory stated that there are differences in behaviour between males and females but according to the research objects in this thesis it does not matter which gender the supplier or customer have as the theories in literature implied.

7.3 Future Research

The empirical research was conducted in the form of in-depth interviews with five respondents. Even though the topic "the first impression" is appropriate to research by using a qualitative method, it would also have been interesting to make a quantitative research where you for example could study the topic and get a ranking on how important the different variables are. This would also make it possible to see if there are any apparent differences between males/females, older/younger and experienced/less experienced individuals.

Another suggestion is to make a longitudinal research where you follow a person through the pre-relation phase, i.e. the preparations and the first meeting. By this the author may get a deeper understanding of the moments during the first contact and how the meeting develops. By this type of study it is also possible to study whether or not it will be a relationship and the reasons why it develops into a relationship or not.

A third suggestion is to research the situation with Swedes having sales meetings with people from other countries. How does the first impression affect the good or bad word-by-mouth to other businessmen from that country? I.e. how is the foreigner's willingness to do business with Swedish companies affected after hearing of their friends' or colleagues' impression of Sweden?

References

- Andersen, P.H. (2001). Relationship development and marketing communication: an integrative model. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 16 (3), 167-182.
- Arbnor, I., & Bjerke, B. (1996). *Företagsekonomisk metodlära* (3 ed.) Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Bejou, D., Ennew, C.T., & Palmer, A. (1998). Trust, ethics and relationship satisfaction. *International Journal of Bank Marketing*, 16 (4), 170–175.
- Bitner, M.J. (1995). Building Service Relationships: It's All About Promises, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*. 23(4), 246-251.
- Blaxter, L., Hughes, C., & Tight, M. (1997). *How to research*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Chen, I. J., & Popovich, K. (2003). Understanding customer relationship management (CRM) people, process and technology. *Business Process Management Journal*, 9, 672-688.
- Chandler, J., & Owen, M. (2002). *Developing Brands with Qualitative Market Research*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Clark, M.S., Fitness, J., & Brissette, I. (2001). Understanding People's Perceptions of Relationships Is Crucial to Understanding their Emotional Lives. In G. Fletcher & M. Clark (Eds.), *Blackwell Handbook of Social Psychology: Interpersonal Processes* (p. 253-278). Oxford, Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- Crane, A., & Lane, N. (2002). *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Revisiting gender role stereotyping in the sales profession*, 2(40), 121-133.
- DeCormier, R.A., & Jackson, A. (1998). Anatomy of a good sales introduction - part I, *Industrial and Commercial Training*. 30(1), 255-262.
- DeCormier, R.A., & Jackson, A. (1999). Anatomy of a good sales introduction - part II, *Industrial and Commercial Training*. 31(1), 24-29.
- D'Souza, C. (2003). An inference of gift-giving within Asian business culture, *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*. 15(1), 27-38.
- Eriksson, L., & Wiedersheim-Paul, F. (2001). *Att utreda forska och rapportera*. Malmö: Liber Ekonomi.
- Evans, K.R., Kleine, R.E., Landry, T.D. & Crosbym L.A. (2000). How first impressions of a customer impact effectiveness in an initial sales encounter, *Academy of Marketing Science Journal*. 28(4), 512-526.
- Fisher, G.B., & Hartel, C.E.J. (2003), Cross-cultural effectiveness of Western expatriate-Thai client interactions: Lessons learned for IHRM research and theory, *Cross Cultural Management*. 10(4), 4-28.
- Flick, U. (2002). *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

References

- Ford, D. (1980). Buyer/Seller Relationships in International Industrial Markets, *European Journal of Marketing*. 15(5), 339-354.
- Gabriel, Y. (1998). The Use of Stories In G Symmon and C Cassel (Eds.) *Qualitative Methods and Analysis in Organizational Research* (p. 135-160). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Galbreath, J., & Rogers, T. (1999). Customer relationship leadership: a leadership and motivation model for the twenty-first century business, *The TQM Magazine*. 11(3), 161-171.
- Gibbons, J. (1987). How to impress a prospective principal *Agency Sales*. 17(11), 21-26.
- Grönroos, C. (2000). *Service Management and Marketing – A customer relationship approach*, Baf-fins Lane, Chichester, John Wiley & Sons.
- Gummesson, E. (1998). *Relationsmarknadsföring: Från 4P till 30R*, Malmö: Liber Ekonomi.
- Gummesson, E. (1994). Making Relationship Marketing Operational, *International Journal of Science Industry Management*. 5(5), 5-20.
- Gunnarsson, J., & Blohm, O. (2002). *Det goda värdskapet* Stockholm: Dialog Förlag.
- Henthorne, T.L., LaTour, M.S., & Williams, A.J. (1992). Initial impressions in the Organizational Buyer-Seller Dyad: Sales Management Implications, *The Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*. 12(3), 57-65.
- Hofstede, G.H. (1991). *Cultures and organizations: software of the mind*, London: McGraw-Hill.
- Holme, I.M., & Solvang, B.K. (1997). *Forskningsmetodik – om Kvalitativa och Kvantitativa Metoder*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Hultman, C.M., & Shaw, E (2003). The interface between transactional and relational orientation in small service firm's marketing behaviour: A study of Scottish and Swedish small firm's in the service sector, *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*. 11(1), 36-51.
- Ivancevich, J., & Duenning, T. (2001). *Managing Einsteins*, New York: McGraw-Hill Professional.
- Lundahl, U., & Skärvad, P.H. (1999). *Utrednings metodik för samhällsvetare och ekonomer*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Making an impact: The importance of first impression (2002) (Anonymous), *Career Development International*. 7(4), 252.
- May, T. (1993). *Social Research: Issues, Methods and Process*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- McElroy, J.C., Morrow, P.C., & Eroglu, S. (1990). The Atmospherics of Personal Selling, *The Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*. 10(4), 31-42

References

- McLachlin, R. (2000). Service quality in consulting: what is engagement success?, *Managing Service Quality*. 10(3), 141-150.
- Merlini, W.J. & Iorio, S. (1990). Make a good first impression, *Agency Sales*. 20(11), 15-18.
- Mitchell, M. & Corr, J. (1998). *The first Five Minutes: How to make a great first impression in any business situation*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Morgan, R.M., & Shelby, D.H. (1994). The Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing, *Journal of Marketing*. 58(3), 20-38.
- Norén, L. (1995). *Tolkande företagsekonomisk forskning*, Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Sharma, A. (1990). The Persuasive Effect of Salesperson Credibility: Conceptual and Empirical Examination, *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*. 10(4), 71-80.
- Shonka, M., & Kosch, D. (2002). *Beyond selling value: A proven process to avoid the vendor trap* Chicago: Dearborn Trade.
- Sjodin, T. (1995). 9 tips to polishing your presentation, *Agency Sales*. 25(2), 34-35.
- Snyder, M., & Swann, W.B. (1978). Behavioral Confirmation in Social Interaction: From Social Perception to Social Reality, *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*. 14, 148-162.
- Svenning, C. (1996). *Metodboken*. Eslöv: Lorentz Förlag.
- Sujan, H., Sujan, M., & Bettman, J.R. (1988). Knowledge Structures Differences Between Effective and Less Effective Salespeople, *JMR, Journal of Marketing Research*. 2(25), 81-86.
- Taylor, S.E., Fiske, S.T., Etcoff, N.L., & Ruderman, A.J. (1978). Categorical and contextual bases of person memory and stereotyping, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 36(7), 778-793.
- Thietart, R.A. (2001). *Doing management research: a comprehensive guide*, London: SAGE.
- Thompson, K.E., Knox S.D., & Mitchell H.G. (1998). Business to business brand attributes in a changing purchasing environment, *Irish Marketing Review*. 10(2), 25-32.
- Trumfio, G. (1994) Be prepared, *Sales and Marketing Management*. 146(1), 94.
- Urbaniak, A.J. (1998). Beginning your salespresentation, *The American Salesman*. 39(1), 3-6.
- Usunier, J.C. (1996). *Marketing Across Cultures* (2nd ed.). New Jersey: Prentice-Hall International.
- Veloutsou, C., Saren, M., & Tzokas, N. (2002). Relationship Marketing: What if ... ? *European Journal of Marketing*. 36(4), 433-451.
- Walker, K., Fergusson, C., & Denvir, P. (1998). *Creating new clients – marketing and selling professional services* London: Cassel.

References

- Wise, G. (1981). The effect of Customer Demographics on Initial Price Quotation by New Car Salesmen, *In Buyer-Seller Interactions: Empirical Research and Normative Issues*, Eds. P.H. Reingen and A.G Woodside. Chicago, American Marketing Association, p. 63-74.
- Yin, R.K. (2003). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Zajonc, R.B. (1982). Affective and Cognitive Factors in Preferences, *Journal of Consumer Research*. 9, 123-131.

Other sources

Encyclopædia Britannica. (2004). Key word; ontology. Retrieved April, 24, 2004, from www.eb.com

Encyclopædia Britannica. (2004). Key word; stereotype. Retrieved May, 27, 2004, from www.eb.com

Digital Action. (2004). Retrieved May, 14, 2004 from www.digitalaction.se

.

Appendix 1 – Interview Guide in Swedish

Intervjuguide

”Man brukar säga att 90 procent av ens uppfattning om en annan person får man under de första fem sekunderna man möts”

- (1) Hur tolkar du det påståendet?
- (2) Hur viktigt är första intrycket mellan en kund och säljare för den fortsatta relationen?
- (3) När inträffar det ”viktiga” första mötet anser du?
- (4) Hur förbereder man sig inför första kontakten respektive personliga möte?
- (5) Hur tror du man kan använda sina erfarenheter från tidigare första möten med kunder vid ett möte med en ny kund?
T.ex. genom bedöma kunden efter tidigare kunder
- (6) På vilket sätt kategoriserar man kunder för att anpassa säljstrategin mot dem?
- (7) Hur arbetar en säljare för att vinna förtroende och trovärdighet hos kunden?
- (8) Hur mycket, tror du att en säljare har vetskap och kunskap om kundens förväntningar? Och på vilket sätt förbereder sig en säljare till dessa förväntningar?
- (9) Om det varit likheter respektive olikheter mellan parterna, Hur har det påverkat mötet dvs. mötesprocessen? Har någon av parterna gått in i en roll för att mötet ska flyta lättare?
- (10) När bedöms kundens värde, dvs. hur lönsam denna kund kan vara, före/under/efter första mötet?
- (11) Hur mycket anser du att ett känt varumärke spelar in, och påverkar andra variabler, dvs. blir kunden mer ”tålig” om det är ett känt varumärke?
- (12) Hur viktig är attityden hos den andra parten?

Bilagor

- (13) Hur påverkas första mötet av den kunskap bra/dålig som andra parten (verkar) besitta? (Kunskap i den mening, hur påläst personen är)
- (14) Hur påverkar kommunikationsgraden (verbal och icke verbal kommunikation) mötet?
- (15) På vilket sätt påverkar språket och rösläget bedömningen av andra parten?
- (16) Hur bedömer du en potentiell kund för att bygga ett samarbete med utifrån dess verbala och icke verbala kommunikation?
- (17) Hur påverkas det första intrycket av en förutfattad mening?
- (18) Om mötet sker med mellan *två män* eller *två kvinnor* eller *en man och en kvinna*, vad upplever du för skillnader? (Positivt såsom negativt)
- (19) Hur tror du kulturella skillnader påverkar första intrycket och första mötet?
- (20) Har du erfarenhet från om kulturella skillnader lett till missförstånd? Varför?
- (21) Hur viktigt är det att vara i tid till mötet?
- (22) Är det något mer som du anser är viktigt vid första mötet för att en affär ska gå i hamn, men även också för byggandet av den framtida relationen?

Appendix 2 – Interview Guide translated

Interview guide

“90 per cent of the total judgment of another person will be formed within the first five seconds”

- (1) What do you think about this statement?
- (2) How important is the first impression between supplier and customer to the future relationship?
- (3) When does the first impression occur?
- (4) How do you prepare before the first impression and later on the first meeting?
- (5) How do you think that you can use your earlier gained experiences to judge new customers from old ones?
- (6) How do you think you should categorize your knowledge of the prospect customers to fit the sales strategy to them?
- (7) How does a salesman work to create an awareness to gain trust and satisfaction to the customer?
- (8) In what extent do you think that the supplier know about his customer's expectations? And in which way is he preparing to fulfil these expectations?
- (9) How do think similarities respectively dissimilarities affect the first meeting? Will any of the two parts change their behavior to be more similar to the other?
- (10) When will the customer's value be calculated? Before/during/after the first encounter?
- (11) How do you think that a famous brand affects the impression?
- (12) How important is the other person's attitude?
- (13) How will the first encounter be affected by the other person's knowledge?

- (14) How do you think the communication affects the first impression and first meeting (verbal and non-verbal)?
- (15) How do you judge a prospect customer by their verbal and non-verbal communication?
- (16) Do you think the language and the vocal pitch affects the first impression?
- (17) How do you think the first impression is affected of a preconceived notion?
- (18) How do you perceive differences between genders? If the meeting are between two men, two women or one of each?
- (19) How do you think that cultural differences affects first impression and first meeting?
- (20) Any experiences of cultural differences that had caused a misunderstanding?
- (21) How and why is it important to be on time to the first encounter?
- (22) Is their anything else that you want to add?