ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

**LEADERSHIP
IN AN INTERCULTURAL
ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT
-
A QUALITATIVE STUDY
OF SWEDISH LEADERS
IN DUBAI, U.A.E.**

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<u>ABSTRACT</u>

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LEADERSHIP IN AN INTERCULTURAL ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT -
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF SWEDISH LEADERS IN DUBAI, U.A.E.

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This dissertation explores how Swedish leaders in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, approach leadership in an intercultural organisational context. People in different cultures have different views on how leaders should interact with employees, how leaders should delegate tasks and how leaders should make decisions. The leadership literature and intercultural competence research generally suggests that leaders must be sensitive to the situation and take into consideration the characteristics of the employees. The issue of intercultural leadership in this study is addressed through in-depth qualitative interviews with nine Swedish individuals working as leaders in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, where they lead employees from different parts of the world. The Swedish individuals working in leadership positions at different companies were asked how they practically deal with leading culturally different employees, and how they generally think about leadership in an intercultural context. While cultural differences between the Swedish individuals and their employees are also investigated, the main focus of the study is to explore how these differences are handled by the Swedish leaders as well as the impact these differences have on their approach to leadership. Results show that interviewees do in practice adapt their leadership approach to their employees, in the sense that they adjust and control their communication and behaviour. However, interviewees also attempt to implement their own ways and values into the organisation in which they work and try to change their employees. As a general approach, interviewees believe in a flexible leadership approach, where they are prepared to adjust communicational and behavioural style to their employees. At the same time interviewees emphasise the importance of staying true to personal values regarding leadership and maintaining their own style. Overall, it is clear from the results that interviewees are active agents in their environment, adjusting to it as well as attempting to change it.

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INTRODUCTION

In a world where contact between different cultures is continuously growing, more and more individuals live and work across national borders and geographical boundaries. In the international work environment individuals face differing ways of doing business, different ways of working and different ways of leading. Working with people from different cultural backgrounds, leaders need to have the ability to traverse cross cultural boundaries to motivate, support and lead their employees.

Cross-cultural research has shown that employees' perceptions and expectations of a leader differ between cultures. In different cultures there are different views on how a leader should interact with employees, how a leader should delegate tasks and how a leader should make decisions. The leadership literature generally suggests that leaders must be sensitive to the situation and take into consideration the characteristics of the employees in their leadership approach. Research on intercultural competence in the internationalised work environment demonstrates that leaders who are able to adapt their behaviour and communication to the context and their employees are most likely to emerge as successful leaders.

This research study aims to investigate a situation where leaders lead employees from various cultural backgrounds. The issue of the study is addressed by means of in-depth qualitative interviews with nine Swedish individuals working as leaders in managerial positions in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Exploring how these individuals approach their job as leaders of employees from different cultural backgrounds, the study aims to understand if and how the Swedish leaders adapt their leadership approach to their culturally different employees and how this is carried out in practice. While cultural differences between the Swedish individuals and their employees are investigated, the main focus of the study is to explore how these differences are dealt with by the Swedish leaders as well as the impact these differences have on their approach to leadership.

Consequently, this paper seeks to explore the following main questions:

(How) do Swedish leaders in practice adapt their leadership approach to the culturally different employees?

On what thoughts and attitudes do the Swedish leaders base their approach to leading culturally different employees?

Before these two questions are addressed, it is necessary to examine the literature relating to leadership in general and intercultural leadership in particular. Consequently, chapter 1 includes a

thorough literature review and deals with leadership theories, cultural differences related to leadership and discusses intercultural leadership competences. In chapter 2, the study is introduced with detailed information about methodology and interviewees. Finally, the presentation and analysis of the findings, as well as a comprehensive discussion of the results is found in chapter 3.

Context of Study

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) consist of seven emirates: Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharja, Ajman, Fujairah, Ras al Khaimah and Umm-al-Qaiwain (CIA – The World Factbook online, 2008). Formerly known as the Trucial States, the UAE is a group of Arabic-speaking sheikhdoms bordered by Qatar on the northwest, Saudi Arabia on the west and south and Oman on the east and the northeast. Upon formation of the UAE in 1971, when Britain relinquished responsibility for defence and foreign policy, the town of Abu Dhabi was chosen as the national capital. UAE is a traditional tribal Islamic society that has seen rapid development due to its possession of large reserves of oil. In the 21st Century the U.A.E. is now well established and is considered a peaceful haven within an increasingly volatile region. The economy of the emirate of Dubai experienced a transformation and the traditional way of life altered forever with the detection of oil deposits in the mid 1900s. From a small settlement relying on fishing and trade for its survival, Dubai launched a development of its infrastructure, transport systems, healthcare systems and educational system. The city continued with the growth and has additionally encouraged movement away from reliance on oil revenues. This has culminated in a strong emphasis on both tourism and industry. Today Dubai sees itself as the pearl of the Gulf with major focus on international business and the encouragement of new enterprise (Mendoza, 2007).

The population of the UAE is overwhelmingly made up of immigrants. The country has a population of approximately 4.5 million, of whom less than 20% are native Emiratis (CIA – The World Factbook online, 2008). The remainder are a mix of some 150 nationalities with different cultures and languages. The largest group of expatriates is from South- and Southeast- Asia, followed by expatriate Arabs and Westerners. Dubai and the UAE at large are unique in the sense that the local population are in minority. Because of this, the economy is dependent on expatriate workers. The reliance on importing other nationalities to maintain its growth is accepted as a vital and continuing aspect of business life within the UAE. While inclusive of other countries, Dubai and the UAE, is a segregated society where power is distributed unequally, with Emiratis at the top of the work hierarchy and Indian Sub-continental construction workers at the bottom (Mendoza, 2007). An individual's nationality

determines to some extent what job one will be able to get in the Emirati society. Work conditions for those at the bottom of the work hierarchy are not always favourable and the circulation of low-level workers is high. However, with one of most rapidly growing economies in the world, Dubai offers work possibilities for a large number of foreign workers.

Currently, more than 2500 Swedes reside in the United Arab Emirates, 75 % of them in the emirate of Dubai (Swedish Trade Council in U.A.E. online, 2008). The UAE is since 2006 Sweden's second largest trading partner in the Middle East, with the Swedish export including vehicles, telecommunication equipment and paper while the import is mostly made up by fuel. Apart from the role of trading partner, the UAE is also an important regional centre for Swedish business organisations. A significant share of the trade with Swedish product happens via UAE to the neighbouring countries and many regional business deals are generated in the UAE. The majority of the larger and middle-large Swedish companies exists or are represented in the country, mainly in Dubai. Around 200 Swedish business organisations are active in the country, either through own companies or through agents or distributors (Swedish Trade Council in U.A.E. online, 2008).

Among the Swedes working in Dubai, many of them came to the city on an international assignment contracts established by their Swedish employer. These so called expatriate deals normally include housing allowance and other benefits for the employee and his or her accompanying family. In recent years, however, an increasing number of Swedes come to Dubai on their own and find work once on location. Many Swedes work in leadership positions within Swedish, Emirati as well as international business organisations where they lead employees from many different cultural backgrounds.

Research on Swedish leadership show that elements commonly perceived as typical Swedish are participative decision-making, conflict-aversion, strong focus on interrelations, a certain formality and change-orientation (Homberg and Åkerblom, 2006). Employees are usually treated by leaders as equals and given much freedom and responsibility, an approach that characterises a high trust-society (Fukuyama, 1995) with small power distance (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). Swedish leadership mainly concerns coaching and guiding employees rather than commanding and giving orders with precise instructions and leaders tend to down-play their position of power (Lewis, 2006). With a flat and horizontal organisation structure, Swedish management is normally decentralised and democratic. The notion of Swedish leadership generally differs largely from the perceptions and expectations of the culturally different employees of the Swedish leaders in Dubai. The enquiry in this research study is how the Swedish leaders in Dubai take into account these differences and how they approach leadership when working in an intercultural organisational context such as Dubai.

The research questions investigated in this study are: (How) do Swedish leaders in practice adapt their leadership approach to the culturally different employees? And: On what thoughts and attitudes do the Swedish leaders base their approach to leading culturally different employees?

CHAPTER 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

To investigate how Swedish leaders approach leadership in the intercultural context of Dubai it is important to explore different theories and approaches to the study of leadership. In this section, after an initial discussion on the definition of leadership, the traditional ways of looking at leadership are briefly presented. Next, implicit theories of leadership are introduced and cultural differences relevant to leadership are dealt with. Following this, theories concerned with situational and relational factors are described. Theories are discussed and analysed with regards to their applicability to the intercultural context of the research study.

1. Defining Leadership

Despite the thousands of research articles and books written on the subject of leadership, no generally accepted definition of leadership exists (Bass, 1990). There are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept. Leadership has throughout time been defined in terms of traits, behaviour, influence, interactional patterns as well as role relationships (Yukl, 2006). However, most definitions of leadership reflect the assumption that the concept involves a process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person over other people in order to guide, structure, and facilitate activities and relationships in a group or an organisation (Yukl, 2006). Leadership in this study refers to: 'the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute towards the effectiveness and success of the organisations of which they are members' (House et al., 2002). This definition was developed in 1994 at the first project GLOBE[1] research conference where fifty-four researchers from 38 countries gathered to develop a collective understanding of the project and its concept of leadership. The definition refers to the phenomenon of organisational leadership, not leadership in general.

There is a continuing controversy about the difference between leadership and management (Yukl, 2006). A person can be a leader without being a manager, and a person can be a manager

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[1] Project GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness) is both a research program and a social entity. The GLOBE social entity is a network of 170 social scientists and management scholars from 61 cultures throughout the world, working in a coordinated long-term effort to examine the interrelationships between societal culture, organisational culture and practices, and organisational leadership (House et al., 2002). The meta-goal of the GLOBE Research Program is to develop an empirically based theory to describe, understand, and predict the impact of cultural variables on leadership and organisational processes and the effectiveness of these processes.

without leading. Managing and leading are not equivalent but the degree of overlap is a point of sharp disagreement (Yukl, 2006). How to integrate the two processes has emerged as a complex and important issue in the organisational literature. However, in this research paper, the question will not be given further attention. Hereafter the focus of this research will for simplifying reasons solely be referred to as leadership. This is a choice partially based on Birch's (in Yukl, 2006) argument regarding the distinction between leadership and management. He observes that, as a broad generalisation, managers concern themselves with tasks while leaders concern themselves with people. Since the main interest in this study is the interaction between individuals as well as individuals' behaviour and thoughts, the term leadership is considered appropriate.

Leadership theories can be featured generally as being concerned with who leads, how they lead, under what circumstances they lead, as well as who follows the leader. The discussion of leadership below follows this division, with trait theories, behavioural theories, situational theories, and relational theories presented in this order.

2. Leadership Theories

2.1. Trait Approach

One of the earliest approaches to studying leadership is the trait approach. This approach emphasises leaders' attributes such as personality, motives, values and skills. Underlying the trait approach is the assumption that some people are natural leaders, endowed with certain traits not possessed by other people (Yukl, 2006). Moreover, some researchers claim that the traits which distinguish great leaders from others are inherited (French, 2007). However, these so-called great man theories of the early 1900s failed to stand up to scientific tests because of the inability to consistently identify traits that are necessary and sufficient for leadership success (Jackson, 1995). Doubts about the usefulness of trait theories of leadership relate both to the difficulty of assembling meaningful traits which go beyond the much generalised idea as well as the predictive validity of such traits in explaining leadership success (French, 2007). The idea that leaders are born with inherited characteristics is routinely rejected in most modern writings of leadership and its usefulness in explaining leadership across cultures is limited. Research shows that traits associated with a good leader are not necessarily universal (French, 2007). However, the term leadership continues to evoke the person occupying such a role and his or her attempts to carry out leadership tasks (French, 2007).

2.2. Behavioural Approach

Deficiencies in trait theories led researchers in the early 1950s to begin studying the specific behaviours exhibited by leaders (French, 2007). The behavioural approach focuses on what leaders do rather than what traits they possess. This indicated a change from the assumption that leaders are born to the notion that leaders could be developed (Yukl, 2006). Research into behavioural styles of leadership has been dominated for several decades by an attempt to distinguish different types of leader behaviour (Thomas, 2002). Several large studies have attempted to categorise different dimensions of leadership styles that underlie leaders' behaviour (French, 2007). The most enduring typology has been that provided by the Ohio State University researchers who found a distinction between *consideration* and *initiating structure* (Jackson, 1995; Thomas, 2002). Consideration behaviour were those behaviours that showed concern for employees, such as showing regard for their feelings, respecting their ideas, and being friendly and supportive (Jackson, 1995). Initiating structure on the other hand included such leader behaviours as assigning tasks to employees, coordinating activities, emphasising deadlines, and evaluating employees' work. Similarly, the University of Michigan studies identified two dimensions of leader behaviour labelled *employee oriented* and *production oriented* (Jackson, 1995). The aspects of consideration and employee orientation are in the leadership literature generally referred to as *relationship orientation* whereas initiating structure and production orientation are referred to as *task orientation*. It is believed that leaders can possess both attributes simultaneously; they can be either high or low on each dimension (French, 2007). As will be further discussed in connection to situational approaches to leadership below, a leader may need to be more task-oriented with employees in a certain situation and more relational-oriented in other situations.

The attractiveness of the concept of leadership style clearly lies in the possibility of labelling and objectifying an otherwise confusing diversity of behaviours (Thomas, 2002). However, the limitation of behavioural theories lies in the fact that the theories ignore the influence of employees and other situational factors such as societal culture, and organisational context. This makes the behavioural approach too simplistic on its own to explain leader behaviour in an intercultural context (Yukl, 2006). Nonetheless, leadership style continues to figure largely in the various conceptualisations of person-situation interaction which, as will be seen below, are seen as providing a more adequate model of the influence processes surrounding leaders in an intercultural setting.

2.3. Implicit Leadership Theory

Some writers in leadership theory have sought to retain the central message that style is an important factor by identifying leadership styles implicit in different contexts (French, 2007). Implicit within these theories mean cognitive representations, schemas and images that influence expectations, attitudes and thoughts regarding a certain issue. According to implicit leadership theory, followers develop mental representations or prototypes of leaders through exposure to social situations and interactions with others (French, 2007). The implicit leader prototype is also influenced by individual beliefs and values, as well as personality traits (Yukl, 2006). These theories define leadership as the process of being perceived as a leader (Jackson, 1995). Individuals are perceived as leaders by the extent to which their behaviour and characteristics match those expected of a prototypical leader.

The idea of implicit leadership has been extended across cultures to show that individuals from different cultures have different leader prototypes (Jackson, 1995; House et al., 2002). Researchers in Project GLOBE argue that the structure and content of the belief systems related to leadership will be shared among individuals in the same culture (House et al., 2002). Implicit leadership prototypes are thought to constrain, moderate, and guide the exercise of leadership, the acceptance of leaders, the perception of leaders as influential, acceptable, and effective, as well as the degree to which leaders are granted status or privileges (Jackson, 1995; House et al., 2002; Guirdham, 2005). The cross-cultural literature has generally stressed a strong connection between culture and leadership styles. There has been a wide range of country-specific and cross-cultural comparative studies to examine the relationship between the two (House et al., 2002; Thomas, 2002). Substantial empirical evidence indicates that leader attributes, behaviour, status and influence vary considerably as a result of culturally unique forces in the countries or regions in which the leaders function (Mansour et al., 2006). Kakabadse et al (1995) conducted a study examining European countries and the conclusion of their research was that different leadership styles were linked to particular countries and that leaders held contrasting views regarding appropriate styles. In other words, there were culturally derived variations in implicit views of leadership. The authors categorised leadership behaviours into four different styles: *leading from the front, consensus style, common-goal leadership, managing from a distance*. Leading from the front was found to be preferred by the British, Irish and Spanish. This style rests heavily on a form of pragmatic 'learn by doing' where rules and regulations are minimised and theoretical approaches are not given much attention. Consensus styles were found to be characteristics of Finland and Sweden where it was shown that leaders stress the importance of communication and consensus to foster effective management. In this style attention to detail was also found to be important. Common-goal leadership was associated particularly with Germanic societies where

technical expertise, clarity and effective systems were considered important. Managing from a distance was found to be the predominant style in France, where leaders were ideally regarded as distant thinkers absorbed with strategic concerns. In other studies attention has also been directed towards identifying an Asian view of implicit leadership. Westwood (1992) brought forward the *paternal model* of leadership concluding that this is the characteristic form of leadership present in South-East Asia. The key characteristics of this model are social distance between leaders and followers, leaders' concern with maintaining harmony, leaders' concern for their followers' well-being as well as personal authority of leaders.

Another categorisation of implicit leadership styles across the world is provided by the Project GLOBE where researchers identified six global leadership dimensions that differentiate cultural profiles of desired leadership qualities and behaviour. These leadership styles were*: charismatic/value-based, self-protective, autonomous, humane-oriented, participative and team-oriented* (House et al., 2002). Charismatic/value-based leaders are defined as performance-oriented and decisive. They posses high integrity, are inspirational and demonstrate altruistic behaviour when necessary within the organisation. Self-protective leaders are status conscious and self-centred. They display face-saving behaviours and are concerned with procedures. Autonomous leaders are viewed as independent and individualistic. Humane leaders have a humane orientation of leadership and display behaviours of modesty. Participative leaders are very willing to delegate tasks and foster participation among employees. Team-oriented leaders have a collaborative style and are seen as benevolent and highly competent. Within the GLOBE research it has been found that some of these leadership styles were subject to culturally contingent endorsement while others had partial universal values such as charismatic/value-based and team-oriented leadership styles. Swedish leaders have been found to adhere predominantly to the leadership styles of charismatic/value-based, team-oriented and participative leadership (Holmberg and Åkerblom, 2006). Leadership in Sweden, according to Holmberg and Åkerblom (2006), involves common problem-solving activities, finding solutions by way of discussion, active participation and dialogue with employees. Swedish leadership is usually described by whom? as vague and imprecise where leaders allow employees to retain a certain degree of autonomy and freedom-under-responsibility in relation to the work organisation.

2.4. Cultural Differences in Leadership

It has been argued that many of the cultural differences in leadership behaviour are related to cultural value and dimensions (Thomas, 2002; Guirdham, 2005). Researchers in the area of

intercultural management have argued that people' perceptions of authority, an aspect closely linked with leadership, are a dimension likely to vary according across cultures (French, 2007). Authority is a significant aspect of cultural dimensions such as power distance (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005) and verticality (Triandis, 2004). These dimensions have an influence on interpersonal relationships, organisational structure and leadership (Guirdham, 2005). Power distance is put forward by Project GLOBE as one of the cultural dimensions that have important managerial implications by means of influencing the concept of leadership in different cultures (House et al., 2002). Hofstede (2005) defines power distance as the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations accept that power is distributed unequally. Individuals from high power distance cultures accept power as part of society and superiors consider their employees to be different from themselves and vice versa. In these cultures employees are expected to be told what to do, leaders rely more on formal rules and hierarchy in the organisation reflects the inequality between higher and lower levels of employees. In cultures with low power distance employees expect to be consulted, superior-employee relations are pragmatic, hierarchy is only assumed when necessary and power positions are played down. Hofstede (2005) rates Sweden as a low power distance cultures whereas many Asian and Arab-speaking countries are seen as high power distance cultures. Triandis (2004) divide cultures into vertical and horizontal cultures. Vertical cultures accept hierarchy as a given and people are seen as different from each other. Hierarchy in vertical cultures is considered a natural state. Those at the top have more power and privileges than those at the bottom of the hierarchy. In horizontal cultures, on the other hand, equality is expected and seen as a given. People are perceived as basically similar, and if one is to divide any resource it should be done equally. Leaders in vertical cultures with large power distance are authoritarian and the relationship between leader and employees is characterised by formality and distance. Both leaders and employees know their role in the hierarchy and behave accordingly. In horizontal cultures with small power distance, the distance between leaders and employees is generally not very large. Leaders see employees as equals and leading is more about coaching and supporting as than commanding.

Another aspect of culture which has been found to affect the notion of leadership and leader-follower interactions is the way human nature is perceived (McGregor, 1960; Fukuyama, 1995; Thomas, 2002). In some cultures people are seen as responsible and trustworthy individuals who will work without supervision. In other cultures people are seen as irresponsible individuals who constantly have to be supervised in order to work (Thomas, 2002). According to Thomas (2002), it is clear that how human nature is perceived influences the degree of flexibility exhibited in managerial communication and leadership behaviour. Theory X and Y, developed by Douglas McGregor (1960),

are theories that relate to the different ways of looking at human nature. Theory X describes a negative view of human nature and assumes that people require external control whereas theory Y assumes that man is self-directed and responsible. The leader/employee relationship is, according to McGregor (1960), generally more flexible in the typical Western enterprise than it is in an Asian one, suggesting that the Western perception favours theory Y, whereas the Asian perception is closer to theory X. These theories relate to the notion of trust in that depending on how a leader views his employees he will trust them to various degrees. Fukuyama (1995) analyses the relationship between trust, social capital and the development of organisation and management. He identifies and compares low trust and high trust societies. According to Fukuyama (1995), a high trust society can organise its workplace on a more flexible and group-oriented basis, with more responsibility delegated to lower levels of the organisation. Low trust societies, by contrast, must fence in and isolate their workers with a series of bureaucratic rules. Fukuyama (1995) argues that employees usually find their workplaces more satisfying if they are treated like individuals who can be trusted to contribute to their community. Leaders in high trust societies trust their employees, expect them to work independently and give them personal responsibility. In low trust societies, on the other hand, employees are controlled and supervised by their leaders to a larger extent. Fukuyama (1995) suggests a correlation between hierarchy and the absence of trust that characterises low-trust societies. Hierarchies, as seen by Fukuyama (1995), are necessary because not all people within a community can be relied upon to live by tacit ethical rules alone. Instead, they must ultimately be coerced by explicit rules and sanctions in the event that they do not live up to these ethical codes. In a vertical society (Triandis, 2004), one can then assume, trust between people in general and between leaders and employees specifically, is large.

The cultural values and dimensions related to power and trust can influence the attitudes and behaviours of leaders in a number of different ways. Much of the cross-cultural leadership literature takes as its primary focus the sense that cultural influence takes place at the level of individual preferences in terms of norms, values and practices (Yukl, 2006). It is assumed that individuals are socialised into their own culture and that this socialisation results in their internalising attitudes and values, e.g. of authority, which then influence patterns of behaviour when or if they come to take on leadership roles (Mansour et al., 2006). Crucially, the same attitudes and beliefs are held by followers coming from the same culture, resulting in a reflective process of selecting leadership behaviours that are likely to be accepted by followers. This reciprocal logic reinforces the particular norms and values related to the notion of leadership in each culture (Mansour et al., 2006). Cultural norms and values may in some cases be formalised as societal laws limiting the use of power to influence the decisions and actions of others (Yukl, 2006).

2.5. Situational Approach

As a response to the findings that leadership styles differ across contexts, theories taking into account situational factors have lately gained popularity (Yukl, 2006). This body of theory was developed to reconcile the differences among the findings within behavioural approaches to leadership. Situational approaches emphasise the importance of contextual factors' influence on leadership processes. These theories that explain leadership effectiveness in terms of situational moderator variables are also called contingency theories of leadership (Yukl, 2006). The contingency approach to leadership has as its central message the suggestion that leadership styles and effectiveness will all depend on situational factors, external conditions faced by the leader (French, 2007). The contingency approach to leadership holds as its basic premise that leaders need to adapt their styles, even to the extent of exhibiting different styles and behaviours concurrently (French, 2007). Consequently, contingency theories contend that there is not one best way of leadership. A leadership style which is effective in certain situations may not be successful in others (Yukl, 2006). Leaders must be flexible and able to behave according to the requirements of a situation (French, 2007). An implication within these situational theories is that effective leaders will be those who are able to choose and exhibit behaviours and styles appropriate for the situation (French, 2007).

The first and most widely researched contingency model of leadership is Fiedler's *contingency model* (Jackson, 1995). This model was one of the earliest contingency theories of leadership, and its major contribution has been to encourage greater interest in situational factors. According to the theory, the quality of the leader-member relationship, the task structure, and the amount of position power influence the effectiveness of the leader (Jackson, 1995). For example, the theory claims that task-oriented leaders perform best in situations in which they have very high or very low position power, and relationship-oriented leaders perform best in situations in which they have moderate position power. Considerable criticism has been aimed at this theory both for how it is conceptualised and for inconsistent findings (Jackson, 1995). Although Fiedler's theory has made an important contribution toward understanding leader effectiveness, its use as a cross-cultural theory awaits additional development.

Another significant theory developed in response to conflicting results from behavioural approaches was House's *path-goal theory* (House, 1997). This theory identifies four generic types of leader behaviour; *directive leadership, supportive leadership, participative leadership* and *achievement-oriented leadership* (House, 1997). Directive leadership is when leaders give precise and

unambiguous directions to employees who are expected to adhere to these. Directive leaders make employees aware of what is required by them and how they should achieve relevant goals and results. Supportive leadership involves the leader's convincing employees that he or she has a genuine concern for their needs and aspirations. This is done by behaving in a friendly and supportive way towards employees and by promoting a supportive work environment. Participative leadership entails leaders' consulting with employees and evaluating their views and suggestions before making a decision. Achievement-oriented leadership concerns setting challenging goals for employees, maintaining continuous improvements by employees and believing in employees' ability to perform at a high level. In addition to these four leadership styles, the theory specifies a number of situational and follower characteristic moderators of the relationship between leader style and follower satisfaction and performance such as formal authority system and locus of control of the employees (House, 1997). House's model is located within the contingency approach to leadership in that the different styles could profitably be practised by any individual leader in different settings; the crucial message being that it all depends (French, 2007). An idea related to the path-goal theory is that the attributes of situations and the characteristics of employees could enhance, neutralise, or substitute for some leadership behaviours. So-called *leadership substitute theory* suggests that characteristics of employees, e.g. their professionalism, can act as substitutes for such leader behaviour as being directive while enhancing the effect of other types of leader behaviour such as being supportive (Jackson, 1995). Research has generally shown good support for the predictability of House's path-goal theory, but some predictions have not been supported (Jackson, 1995). Regardless, it provides a good basis for considering a number of moderators in the study of leadership.

Within the various situational theories of leadership culture is often recognised as a key situational moderator. The notion that leaders may have to consider their behaviour and style in view of their culturally different followers can also be found as a strongly developed theme within cross-cultural ideas and research (French, 2007). As emphasised in the discussion about implicit leadership theories, employees' expectations of a leader differ across cultures. In order to be effective in various cultural contexts, leaders must be able to take into consideration the cultural differences of their employees. Leaders are always under pressure to conform to the social situation in which they operate, something that may at times contradict their own cultural values. Smith et al. (1995) argued that *sources of guidance* serve as an intermediate variable between a leader's cultural values and actual leadership behaviours. A strong source of guidance has been found to be the expectations of employees (Guirdham, 2005). Other sources of guidance include formal rules, unwritten rules, as well as own experience. Characteristics of the organisation and characteristics of the managerial position can also

have an influence on how a leader acts and reasons (Yukl, 2006). Other factors found to explain variations in leadership behaviour is region, the leader's age, functional tasks and line of business (Guirdham, 2005).

2.6. Global Aspects of Leadership

The situational approach to leadership also takes an interest in discovering the extent to which leadership processes are actually the same across different cultures (Yukl, 2006). The literature on this topic points to a major divergence of views regarding the universality of leadership patterns (Yukl, 2006). Many researchers have argued for a direct impact of culture on leadership styles suggesting that culture directly shapes the leader. On the other side of the debate are those who believe that at least some aspects of leadership may transcend cultural boundaries and hence are universally accepted. Cross-cultural research has found both similarities and differences among cultures with regard to beliefs about effective leadership, patterns of leadership behaviour, and use of specific managerial practices (Guirdham, 2005; Yukl, 2006). Preliminary results from the GLOBE project indicate that some leadership attributes, such as *inspirational* and *decisive*, are important in all cultures, while other attributes, such as compassionate and domineering, have been found to vary widely in relevance across the cultures (House et al., 2002). Charismatic or transformational theories of leadership are another example of the possibility of universally endorsed leadership attributes (Bass, 1998). Charismatic or transformational leaders are those leaders who are able to inspire their followers to transcend their own self-interest for the good of the organisation. These leaders have self-confidence, an idealised vision, are very committed to their goal. They are perceived as unconventional and agents of radical change. Proponents of charismatic theories argue that charismatic leaders are more effective than non-charismatic leaders regardless of culture (Bass, 1998).

2.7. Relational-Focused Approach

Another proposed model for understanding interaction between superiors and employees can be found in the dyad tradition within which relational-based theories of leadership have developed (Yrle et al., 2003). This line of research examines the distinctive supervisor-employee relationship as a pairing between two individuals. The dyad tradition represents a contrast to the group tradition, where the supervisor is understood to use the same style with all employees. Most of the early theory and research on leadership behaviour did not consider how leaders vary their behaviour with different

employees. Rather, traditional theories of leadership assumed that leaders behaved the same with all employees. Relational-based theories with focus on leader-follower dyad are the more recent development of leadership theories (Yukl, 2006). While the concept of relationship-oriented behaviour has been around since the earliest formal studies of leadership in organisations, the term relational leadership is surprisingly new (Uhl-Bien, 2006). This approach to leadership views leadership as a social process. Contrary to other studies of leadership, which have focused primarily on the study of leadership effectiveness, relational leadership theory focuses on the relational process by which leadership is produced and enabled (Uhl-Bien, 2006). The most prominent relationship-based approach to leadership is the leader-member exchange theory. This theory suggests that the quality of interaction between a leader and employee varies across different employees in the work group, an assumption which has been supported by empirical research (Bhal and Ansari, 2007). How a leader acts toward an employee varies depending on whether the employee is perceived as competent and loyal, or incompetent and untrustworthy (Yukl, 2006). The nature of exchange relationship between leader and employee impacts on employee outcomes like satisfaction with work, commitment, supervisory ratings of job performance, and frequency of promotions (Bahl and Ansari, 2007). However, leader-member exchange is mostly a universal theory, with minimal effort to explain how situational variables such as culture may affect the exchange process (Yukl, 2006).

Another theory that deals with the relationship between leader and follower was developed by Hersey and Blanchard (1977) and is called situational leadership (SL). This theory specifies the appropriate type of leadership behaviour for different levels of employee maturity in relation to work. A high-maturity employee has both the ability and confidence to do a task, whereas a low-maturity employee lacks ability and self-confidence. According to SL theory, the level of employee maturity determines the appropriate mix of task- and relation-oriented behaviour for the leader (Yukl, 2006). When an employee is very immature in relation to the task, the leader should use substantial task-oriented behaviour and be directive in defining roles, clarifying standards and procedures, and monitoring progress on attainment of objectives. As employee maturity increases, the leader can decrease the amount of task-oriented behaviour and provide more relations-oriented behaviour. Effective SL managers then, provide individual followers with differing amounts of direction and support on different tasks and goals, depending on the follower's developmental and maturity level (Avery and Ryan, 2002).

Empirical studies of leadership in an intercultural context that use relational-based theories are rather limited. However, Chen and Tjosvold (2005) predict that developing quality relationships between managers and employees who are culturally diverse may be particularly difficult. Differences

between leaders and employees, especially those related to demographics, attitudes, and/or values, have been shown to increase the potential for distortion of communication (Yrle et al., 2003). Understanding communication, say Scollon and Scollon (2003), is done by inferring meaning into what is being said. The meanings exchanged by speaking and writing are not given in the words and sentences alone but are also constructed partly out of what the listeners or readers interpret them to be. This makes language always, inherently and necessarily, ambiguous and culturally determined (Scollon and Scollon, 2003). Inference of meaning in communication is, according to Scollon and Scollon (2003) drawn from what we know about the world and our previous experiences. Shared knowledge, experience and worldview is the base on which speakers can understand each other during a conversation (Scollon and Scollon, 2003). Consequently, communication between a leader and employee who do not share the same cultural bases on which they infer meaning in language run the risk of being prone to misunderstandings.

2.8. Summary of Leadership Theories

Theories of leadership have gone through different faces with different theories focussing on different aspects of leadership. It is clear that leadership is a contextual process, where the effective leadership style depends on situational factors, such as organisation environment and characteristics of employees. It is also clear that leadership is culturally contingent. People in different cultures have different thoughts and beliefs about how a leader should be and behave and the concept of leadership reflects the underlying values of a culture. It is also clear that leadership is a dynamic process based on the leader-employee interaction. Used as complements to each other the different leadership theories are useful in explaining leadership in an intercultural context. In the following section, the necessary competencies for an intercultural leader are discussed.

3. Leadership Competences in an Intercultural Context

A great deal of focus has lately been put on exploring leadership competencies needed for succeeding in the rapidly changing global environment (Connerly and Pedersen, 2005). Individual leaders moving across national boundaries are faced with differing cultural values and behaviours as well as different organisational cultures and norms (Cassiday, 2005). Leaders are faced with different ways of organising staff as well as different expectations from employees on how they wish to be lead. Rather than operating exclusively within the cultural setting in which they were born and raised,

individuals must in today's world be capable of functioning appropriately in a wide variety of foreign cultural situations. Many of these situations have different cultural norms for appropriate behaviour that may conflict with individuals' core values and beliefs (Molinsky, 2007). The way individuals react to foreign situations and navigate cultural differences influences their own leader effectiveness, as well as the organisation's performance (Molinsky, 2007). One of the most documented types of interactions that involve culturally different norms is that between superior and employee.

Research on intercultural competence and effectiveness has existed for several decades in the various disciplines of sociology, psychology, communication and anthropology. Intercultural competences refer to characteristics that an individual possesses which facilitate competent intercultural interaction (Graf, 2004). A review of intercultural competence research suggests that a wide array of predictors of effectiveness has been examined. Intercultural competences can be clustered into three components: cognitive, affective and behavioural (Chen, 1995; Bennett, 2001). Individuals must possess the cognitive dimension (e.g. knowledge about other cultures), the affective dimension (e.g. intercultural sensitivity) as well as the behavioural dimension (e.g. skills to manage intercultural situations) in order to interact effectively and appropriately with culturally different others (Graf, 2004). The majority of literature on intercultural competence derives from studies on expatriates, individuals working abroad on international assignments, usually for a limited amount of time. Current thinking about expatriate-related cross-cultural adjustment gives a lot of suggestions about what international leaders must do (Jassawalla et al., 2004). For instance, scholars agree that expatriates and others working in an intercultural context must become comfortable with differing values, attitudes and behavioural practices as well as being able to adapt to the differences that exist in the physical, psychological and communication environments (Jassawalla et al., 2004). In addition, leaders must be aware of important aspects of their own culture and understand how these can influence their working relationship with others from dissimilar culture (Connerly and Pedersen, 2005). Further, flexibility in thinking and behaviour, openness, ability to tolerance uncertainty, and empathy are characteristics reported by various researchers and authors to be positively correlated with successful intercultural leadership (Stahl, 2001; Adler, 2002; McCall and Hollenbeck, 2002; Earley & Ang, 2003; Jassawalla et al., 2004; Connerly and Pedersen, 2005; Gudykunst, 2005; Cassiday, 2005 etc.). Expatriate leaders, in a study undertaken by Cassiday (2005), were found to be able to grasp cognitively complex concepts and tolerate ambiguous situations. At the same time, the leaders in the study expressed the importance of staying true to personal and organisational values. Global leaders must, according to Rosen et al. (2000), be *culturally literate*, which refers to culturally self-aware; understanding and valuing one's own culture. Culturally literate leaders look beyond their own culture

to expand their ideas, taking the best practices from different cultures and combining this in their leadership approach. Earley and Ang (2003) suggest that individuals working interculturally must possess *cultural intelligence*, a concept defined as an individual's ability to adapt effectively across cultures. Cultural intelligence is a construct that reflects an individual's capability to adapt across cultural contexts that can be developed and enhanced through training. Cultural intelligence also includes behavioural competency, which refers to having a broad repertoire of verbal and non-verbal behaviours that may be exhibited appropriately according to the cultural context. Also Gudykunst (2005) assumes that to be culturally competent in a foreign situation, one must have the ability to tolerate ambiguity and to accommodate behaviour and communication.

3.1. Changing Behaviour

It is shown that the degree of intercultural competencies determines the choice and quality of behaviour shown in a specific intercultural interaction. Guirdham (2005) notes the importance of leaders' ability to match the verbal and non-verbal communication styles of other cultures. Intercultural competence increases the likelihood that an individual will produce these behaviours that are culturally appropriate (Graf, 2004). Scholars have found that individuals working internationally do try to adapt their style in leading people from other cultures (Fu and Yukl, 2000; Roa and Hashimoto, 1996). For example, Japanese expatriates in Canada were found to seek to influence their Japanese employees through a subtle, low-pressure bargaining style (Roa and Hashimoto, 1996). In contrast, the same expatriates sought to influence their Canadian employees through logic and sanctions, each influencing style suitable for the specific culture. Similarly, another study found that Nordic expatriates in Japan were likely to use tactics with Japanese employees that they would not use with Nordic employees (Pascale and Athos, 1981). In contrast to often-used direct consultation with employees in Nordic countries, these expatriates relied on coalition building and behind-the-scenes manoeuvring when seeking to influence their Japanese employees (Pascale and Athos, 1981).

These research findings relate to the concept of *self-monitoring*, an ability to consciously observe and regulate behaviours (Snyder, 1979) which has been found to be useful when dealing with culturally differing ways and values. This ability to control self-presentational behaviours varies considerably among individuals. Some, known as high self-monitors, are able to change their attitudes and behaviours according to the environment in which they find themselves. Others, who are less attentive to situational cues and who behave more consistently with their actual feelings and beliefs, are known as low self-monitors. High self-monitoring may provide good indicators of those

individuals who are effective in intercultural work settings because of their ability to make the 'correct' impressions on their foreign co-workers and employees (Giacalone and Beard, 1994).

Similar to self-monitoring, Molinsky (2007) proposes the concept of *cross-cultural code-switching*, the act of purposefully modifying one's behaviour, in a specific interaction in a foreign setting that has different cultural norm for appropriate behaviour. Molinsky (2007) explains that through socialisation into the native cultural setting, individuals internalise norms for appropriate behaviour in specific interactions. Encoded in the forms of scripts or event-based schemas, these norms are then primed when an individual steps into a particular role in a particular interaction, such as leading employees. Cross-cultural code-switching, according to Molinsky (2007), forces an individual to consciously override this dominant, culturally ingrained response. It entails deviating from accustomed behaviour in one's native culture in order to engage in behaviour appropriate to a foreign culture. However, changing one's behaviour when interacting with employees can be a challenging act. The required behaviour in the foreign setting may conflict with an individual's deeply ingrained values and beliefs from the native cultural setting, resulting in psychological stress. The challenges to cross-cultural code-switching, Molinsky (2007) argues, are related to the performance of the act and to identity challenge of behaving in a way that is potentially in conflict with one's personal values. An experienced identity conflict occurs when the norms for a particular interaction in the new culture make it impossible for an individual to act both in a culturally appropriate manner and in a manner that honours his or her internalised system of values shaped by one's cultural background (Molinsky, 2007). Experienced identity conflict is an eliciting condition for negative emotions such as personal distress and anxiety. Research suggests that behaving in a manner discrepant from one's self-beliefs or from core aspects of one's identity or personality elicits internal dissonance and personal distress (Molinsky, 2007).

4. Approaches to Studying Leadership

Studying intercultural leadership can be undertaken in various ways with different approaches to research and to culture. In the section below the main approaches to the concept of culture and cultural differences and how they can be studied are brought forward. There are three general approaches to intercultural communication that all view culture differently. These approaches are based on different fundamental assumptions about reality, human nature, human behaviour, and the nature of knowledge (Martin and Nakayama, 2000). There is the functionalist approach which takes an

outside overall view of culture, concentrating on differences and measurable factors. Further, there is the interpretive approach which claims that culture is more nuanced and must be experienced personally since it is a dynamic concept defined by the individuals interpreting it. There is also a third approach called the critical approach (Samovar and Porter, 2003), perhaps the least explored of the three approaches. In this approach culture is seen as site of power struggles. Studies within the critical approach often use discourse analysis of media texts and take into account historical and economic contexts.

The conventional approach to studying the role of culture in intercultural leadership is characterised by a functionalist approach (e.g. Hall, 1966; Trompenaars, 1993; Schwartz, 1999; Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). The functionalist approach is a way of distinguishing cultural aspects in a measurable way through learning the values, rules, behaviour etc of a culture (Samovar and Porter, 2003). This means taking different cultures and comparing them, placing them in frames and boxes aimed at comparison. Culture, according to the functionalist approach, can be understood objectively, and individuals are seen as controlled by their culture. Researchers following this approach generally view culture's consequences at the collective level of analysis, by identifying sets of preferences, priorities, and motivations common to most members of a given society, region, or, most often, nation. Its focus is on being able to identify differences and similarities between countries. The collective-level approach results in the construction of cultural dimensions or value types categorised in some contextual form, such as collectivism-individualism or high and low power distance (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). In line with this approach, cultural dimensions are interpreted as structural in form and consequence. Culture is seen as providing a frame of reference for interpreting individual experiences and establishing norms for defining what is considered legitimate or desirable. Culture is perceived to be a set of more or less fixed and exogenous constraints, which influence, either directly or indirectly, the performance of organisational behaviours and structures in a variety of areas, such as international leadership, expatriate assignments, and international work teams. A culture-as-structure approach presumes a high degree of stability in the orientation and motivations of individuals (Molinsky, 2007). Cross cultural studies informed by structuralist thinking tend to use quantitative research designs based on positivistic thinking that are static and side-by-side comparisons of cultural configurations in different contexts, often using multiple-item rating scales and factor analysis. The stucturalist argument assumes a rigid casual determinism in management practice and tends to reify organisational behaviour. In sum, researchers working in the field of cross cultural management are generally concerned with explaining different organisational behaviour with reference to the influence of cultural dimensions and comparing them across managerial and organisational contexts. While this

functionalist approach that views culture-as-structure may offer a useful analysis reference in certain studies, it is insufficient in others because it ignores the underlying social processes and individual agency (Molinsky, 2007). Straber (2006) argues that the view is of limited practical value for leaders because it treats culture as a set of exogenous and mostly unchangeable resource parameters and ignores the underlying processes and interactional dynamics. He believes that actors, such as leaders working in an intercultural context, do not simply conform to external cultural structures; they also resist, change and manipulate these structures. An exclusively structuralist analysis of relations and practices, so common in research in the field of intercultural communication, risks losing sight of the human agents who interpret meanings, modify rules, change behaviour, and articulate preferences (Straber, 2006). Seeing individuals as passive beings controlled by culture and ignoring individuals' active interpretations of a social context makes it difficult to explain for example why people from the same culture do not always respond in the same way in a common context. Many scholars realise that human communication and behaviour is more creative than predictive and that reality is not just external but also internally constructed (Martin and Nakayama, 2000)

Partly in response to the limitations of the stucturalist paradigm, some researchers have called for greater attention to social processes in cross cultural and intercultural studies of leadership (see e.g. Söderberg and Holden, 2002). An alternative to the functionalist approach to intercultural understanding is the interpretive approach, which focuses on the importance of individual interpretations of cultural differences.

> *The concept of culture I espouse . . . is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning. It is explication I am after. . . . (Geertz, 1993, pp. 4-5)*

In the interpretive approach, culture is considered to be a symbolic construction of shared meaning, an on-going, changeable, social construction, a meaning system which members use to interpret the world around them (Samovar and Porter, 2003). Unlike the functionalistic approach, the interpretive, in line with constructivism, believes that reality is socially constructed and can therefore not be observed objectively. Thus, studies are not conducted to predict behaviour as does the functionalist approach, but rather to comprehend and describe human behaviour, which is not seen as being deterministic. A process-oriented perspective, it is argued, would lead to a better understanding of culture's effect in international management and leadership by exploring the interactional dynamics that underlie managerial practices (Straber, 2006). Martin and Nakayama (2000) propose a dialectic

approach to understanding culture which also emphasises the processual and relational nature of intercultural communication. This focus is less on the existence of differences in cultural values and interpretations per se than on the ways in which individuals enact their interpretations and how their behaviour is influenced by their values (Straber, 2006). What is of most significance for managerial effectiveness is not only the awareness of cultural differences, but also the processes that underpin and stimulate interaction based on these differences. Straber (2006) believes that cross cultural management studies would benefit from moving toward a deeper exploration of such analytical themes by focusing more on social processes, interrelated actions and individual interpretations. There are fewer interpretivist studies done in the field of intercultural communication than functionalistic studies (Samovar and Porter, 2003). Rather than being predictive and assign general patterns of behaviour to certain nationalities, the interpretive approach focuses on how patterns of behaviour are interpreted and shaped by individuals of a given culture.

5. Summary of Literature Review and Previous Research

Research into intercultural leadership and competence suggests that individuals who are flexible in adjusting their behaviour to the situation are more likely to emerge as leaders in an intercultural context. Leaders in an intercultural context should ideally be high self-monitors (Snyder, 1979) and have the ability of what Molinsky (2007) refers to as cross-cultural code-switching. As a leader this means being able to respond appropriately to the culturally implicit leadership prototype of the employees. Contingent theories of leadership contend that leaders must take into consideration factors of the situation and have the flexibility to adapt their leadership style to these. Relational-based theories argue that leaders must adjust their approach depending on their employees' capabilities and expectations. It is apparent that leaders working in intercultural contexts need to be active actors in their environment, through adapting their ways and behaviours to become optimally effective. Research studies show that leaders do at times attempt to change their leadership style to fit culturally different employees. Intercultural leaders are required to go beyond their own culture, embrace differing cultural values and behave in ways foreign to them. This clearly demonstrates that an individual leader is not fully constrained by his or her culture, but needs to be able to change his or her behaviour by actively using the knowledge of cultural differences and benefit from them. This view of people as active agents in their environment goes in line with constructivism, according to which people do not come to know the world in a passive stimulus-response interaction with the environment

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(Lyddon, 1995). Rather, constructivism sees reality and knowledge as socially constructed in the interactions between people. People are not determined by their culture, but are able to actively use and interpret their social surroundings and alter them. This research study is concerned with how all this is done in practice. How do leaders behave when leading culturally diverse employees and what are their thoughts and attitudes on intercultural leadership? These questions form the base of the empirical investigation of this study which involves Swedish leaders working in and intercultural context in Dubai, UAE. Before presenting the results of the study, research approach and methodology are described.

CHAPTER 2

THE RESEARCH STUDY

1. Methodology

The current research study adheres to process-oriented interpretative approach to intercultural communication because it is based on the assumption that individuals are active agents, interpreting their social environment while also influencing it. The main aim of this study is not to explore and describe cultural differences, but rather, how the individual reacts to these differences and how they manage them as a leader. The interpretative approach to intercultural communication most often uses a research method of a qualitative nature. Qualitative research emerges from phenomenological and interpretive paradigms and is widely used in the fields of anthropology and sociology (Casell and Symon, 2004). Typically, the emphasis of qualitative research is on constructivist approaches where there is no clear-cut objectivity or reality. Instead, social life is seen as emerging from the shared creativity of individuals (Casell and Symon, 2004). Worldviews of a socially constructed reality are acknowledged as primary to data analysis in qualitative research (Cassiday, 2005). The researcher's underlying ontological assumption in qualitative research is that reality is subjective – not scientifically objective and not absolute (Cassiday, 2005). As a result of the underlying epistemology, research is less driven by very specific hypothesis and categorical frameworks and more concerned with emergent themes and idiographic descriptions (Casell and Symon, 2004). Qualitative research usually emphasises an inductive approach to the relationship between theory and research. The main purpose with qualitative research is to understand the world and its meaning as the research object sees and understands it.

Quantitative and qualitative research are each appropriate for different kinds of research problems. This implies that the research issue should determine which style of research is employed (Casell and Symon, 2004). Qualitative research methods are commonly used when the research is designed to provide a thorough description of a specific subject. Since the aim of the research study presented in this paper was to explore and describe the individual experiences of approaching leadership in an intercultural setting, the choice of method was qualitative. Collection of information was through semi-structured in-depth interviews, the most widely used qualitative method in organisational research (Casell and Symon, 2004). An interview guide, which should consist of an

overview of the themes that should be covered during the interview as well as proposed open-ended questions on each theme (Casell and Symon, 2004), was developed prior to the interviews (see appendix). However, semi-structured interviews are also open for changes in regards to how the questions are asked and the order of the covered themes is adjustable. The interviewer should be flexible and let the interviewee play an active role in shaping the interview, while at the same time making sure that all themes are covered at one point.

2. Interviews

Having decided the research focus and methodology, recruitment for interview participants was initiated in Dubai, UAE during October 2007. Potential interviewees that fulfilled the requirements of being Swedish and working in managerial positions in Dubai were contacted. Participants were identified by means of networking, through online forums and through direct contact with companies. Nine participants were ultimately included in the research study, a size recognised as adequate for qualitative enquires (Casell and Symon, 2004). All nine participants that agreed to be interviewed were sent a document describing the aim of the study. Subsequently, a time and date was set for the interview. Participants decided where they wanted the interview to take place. All but two interviews were held at the interviewee's work place, one was held in a hotel lobby and one was held at the interviewee's home. At the time of the interview participants were asked to sign a consent form stating that the researcher was allowed to use the interview content for the purpose of this study. Participants were told that the interview would last approximately 45 minutes, and in the end these varied between 30 and 70 min per interviewee. Each interview was recorded on tape, allowing the researcher to be completely focused on the participant during the interview. Not having to focus on taking notes, the researcher was able to follow the interviewee's discourse and pose relevant follow-up questions. Apart from questions directly related to the specific research focus of this study, other questions regarding interviewees' work and organisations were asked in order to gain knowledge of the wider context. All interviews were conducted in Swedish, the mother tongue of the researcher as well as all participants.

3. Method of Analysis

Recorded interviews were transcribed and text was aimed at reflecting as much as possible the oral speech of the interviewee. Since the interview material does not speak for itself, the researcher has

to assess, analyse and interpret the empirical materials that have been collected (Casell and Symon, 2004). After having read through the interviews several times, various themes within the focus of the research emerged. These themes were identified by the fact that more or less all interviewees spoke about them, in similar or different ways. Once the themes were identified, interview data was separated from its original source and categorised into the different themes. Each interviewee's specific answer related to a specific theme was put in relation with other interviewees' answers on the same theme. A summary of the themes was made and these are presented in the results part of this study.

4. Interviewees

Out of the nine interviewees two were female and seven were male. Their age ranged from 27 to 51 with an average of 40. Some people had a vast experience of working internationally while others had less. The nine interviewees all work in different types of organisations. Three interviewees work in Swedish or part-Swedish organisations, two work in Emirati organisations, and the remaining four interviewees work in organisations run and owned by various other nationalities. The field of business of the organisations vary between tourism, finance, property, consultancy, manufacture and government office. Time in current organisation, which includes working within the same organisation in different geographical locations, vary between four months and 23 years. The number of staff at interviewees' current workplace varied between 10 and 500. Most common was approximately 50 employees. Nationality of staff was predominately South and South-East Asian and Arab. Other nationalities such as Eastern and Western Europe and North American were also involved. Some interviewees reported being the only Swede in the organisation, while others were one of few. Only the Swedish organisations had several other Swedish individuals working there. Despite working in Dubai, only three out of the nine interviewees reported having Emirati staff in their company, reflecting the fact that Emiratis are in minority in their own country. The multiculturality of Dubai is mirrored in the amount of different cultures among employees. Studies of intercultural leadership tend to include only cultural differences between the leaders and the employees, e.g. Swedish managers working in Japan, U.S. managers working in China, etc. The uniqueness of this current study is the fact that the cultural differences do not only exist between the leaders and his or her employees, but also amongst the employees.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Presentation of the Results

There are two different stages in the data presentation (Casell and Symon, 2004). The first one involves presenting the way the interview persons understand their own reality, i.e. describing how they see and interpret their world. The second stage involves discussing the results in connection with theories and previous research, as well as in connection with the researcher's interpretations. The results are presented within different themes related to the research questions on intercultural leadership. These themes emerged after the collection of interview data, and reflect aspects brought up by interviewees. The results do not necessarily follow the structure of the interview guide which was developed prior to the undertaking of interviews. Rather, the structure of the results reflects aspects of intercultural leadership discussed by interviewees. In the presentation of results, interview data is presented and described. The discussion of the results, their relation to previous research and theories, are examined in a thorough discussion subsequent to the results presentation.

As the focus of interest is how Swedish individuals approach leadership in an intercultural context and how they manage the differences encountered, it is appropriate to initially present a summary of the various differences mentioned by interviewees.

2. Perceived differences

Many interviewees note that the work environment in Dubai is much more hierarchical than what they are used to. Status differences are very apparent and one is expected to play certain roles depending on one's position in the hierarchy. Employees hold much respect for authorities and titles. According to interviewees, there exist not only large differences between superiors and employees, but also between employees themselves, where there is different status depending on their position and work role.

All interviewees experience that their employees have different expectations of them as leaders compared to what they are used to in Sweden. Leaders are expected to be experts, to know everything

and to be able to answer questions on the spot despite not having all the facts. Employees rely much more one the leader according to some interviewees. Employees also expect the leaders to check and control everything they do and, as one interviewee notices, this may lead to employees not doing things thoroughly because they expect the managers to control and go through it anyway. One interviewee sums it up by saying that in Dubai you are simply more a boss compared to at home. Many of the interviewees feel that they are expected to be much clearer and more exact when delegating tasks and assignments to their employees compared to what they are used to with Swedish employees. One interviewee explains that he feels he is expected to delegate tasks in an almost military way. With Swedish employees, another interviewee describes, you did not have to be as harsh when assignments were described, it happened more in agreement. In their current job position, many interviewees note that they have to spend much more time on follow-up and making sure that tasks are carried out and issues are solved. One interviewee describes it as a need to constantly nag about things to your employees.

Almost all interviewees bring up the fact that their employees are not comfortable with taking own initiatives. Being active and taking initiative is something that is very common, and expected, among Swedish employees. Interviewees perceive their employees as being insecure in e.g. approaching a problem or issue in a new way or trying to come up with alternative solutions. They rarely question anything and are not comfortable with having a differing opinion than the boss. One interviewee explains:

> *so when I say something they don't dare to question it, that is, they don't dare to think*
> *for themselves…* (I4)

Another interviewee notes that this sense of having own ideas, questioning, and taking initiatives, is just not present in the school system; rather, following orders is ingrained in the culture. As a consequence, interviewees remark, there is always a need for employees to ask the manager for verification and affirmation to what they are doing. One interviewee explains that he is always asked practical questions about work that his employees are supposed to know better because it is their area of expertise. Almost all interviewees talk about the lack of responsibility-taking by employees. Employees are described by interviewees as immature because they are not prepared to take personal responsibility for a work task, especially when the work task is diffuse by nature, such as a manager position. Another says that there is a pure unwillingness by employees to take responsibility. This interviewee says he has even started to wonder whether people in general actually want to have responsibility. Swedish employees, on the other hand, are described by interviewees as more

independent and not in   need of as much controlling. One interviewee expresses that he feels much calmer with Swedes because then you know that something will get done, and in reasonable time as well.

Another difference related to employees' work roles that a few interviewees bring forward is the fact that work roles are expected to be very clearly defined. One's job description, according to an interviewee, is practically one's work schedule listing all tasks that should be performed. Another interviewee describes it as employees seeing their job roles as a box and they do what is within the box but will not carry out tasks which are outside the box. If a manager wants them to do different tasks, they just have to move the box to the place to where they want them to be. According to interviewees, employees do what they are told but nothing more.

Several interviewees talk about differences in general attitudes toward employees in Dubai and how they are treated. There is, according to interviewees, very little interest in investing in staff and developing their abilities. The constant changing of employees in a company and the possibility to always get hold of new people means that both companies and individuals are constantly looking for something or someone better. Companies are not concerned with investing in their staff or caring about their well-being and personal development. Employers in the region are more interested in expanding and earning more money rather than spending time looking after their employees. However, two interviewees paint a rather different picture. One says that people in Dubai work much more, they are more task-focused, meaning that they will stay at work until the job has been done. This is in contrast with Swedish people who are more focused on working during specific hours and then going home when work-hours are over, despite having unfinished tasks. Another interviewee notes that employees in Dubai can be extremely loyal, if treated in a good way by their superiors.

3. Approaching Leadership in an Intercultural Context

An overall view of the results shows clearly that interviewees state that they change their behaviour and communication styles when working with culturally different employees. However, it is also apparent that interviewees simultaneously maintain their beliefs and values concerning leadership on an abstract level. These findings as well as others are elaborated below. This part of the results is presented together with referrals to specific interviewees.

3.1. Adapting Communication and Behaviour

All study participants agree that they adjust their behaviour and way of communicating when working with culturally different employees.

> *You compromise with yourself, I would like to say ... how I am, how I behave and what I say, how I communicate...* (I1)

Most frequently brought up is the fact that interviewees feel a need to communicate with different amounts of clarity depending on employees. With people from certain nationalities they need to speak more clearly and be very precise whilst with others they need to be less clear. It may be the same message that is communicated but it is communicated in different ways. I5 notes that it is especially important to be clearer in one's communication style when speaking to lower-level employees. This interviewee's experience is that lower-level employees tend to say yes without actually understanding what they have been told. To avoid misunderstanding I5 usually asks his employees to repeat what was said so that it is clear that they have understood. Another interviewee, I7, also stresses the importance of using different amounts of clarity and precision when communicating decisions to different people. This interviewee also mentions how communicating criticism or praise is another example of where you need to adjust your communication style to the person you are talking to. With some you need to be very direct and to the point whereas with others you may need to put things in an indirect way and be rather implicit. This is agreed by I4 who says that it is like walking on glass because you have to be very careful about what you say, especially when giving criticism, so that it is not perceived badly by the other person. Criticism, according to this interviewee, needs to be communicated in a way so that the employee does not feel that he has done any major faults, but that an improvement is required. It is clear that interviewees feel the need to at times restrain and control what they say and how they say it, and that they cannot just express themselves without taking into consideration who they are talking to. I3 stresses the importance of the situation, saying that you learn how you need to communicate with certain people in certain situations and then you use that as a point of reference to how you should adapt your communication behaviour.

Apart from communication, interviewees also feel that their behaviour as a leader must be different from what they are used to. Most commonly felt among interviewees is a greater need for follow-up and control of employees, compared to when working with Swedish employees. I4 says that she adapts her behaviour to what her employees are capable of doing and what works and what

doesn't. Different people may need more follow-up and others can work more independently, interviewees say. Different employees need to be lead to different extents.

You treat people differently because you know their buttons and signals" (I1)

I2 explains that if an employee needs to receive a lot of praise in order to be productive, then you need to pat his shoulder every day.

You adapt your behaviour to who you work with, and at times you can generalise a little with nationalities, that some nationalities need to be handled in a certain way and others in another way. (I9)

This is agreed by I3 who says that 'in reality you take into consideration what you know about your employees' culture, not to discriminate, the interviewee stresses, but just to make it work'. Adapting to employees in order to get things done is a reoccurring statement amongs interviewees. I1 and I2 mention that they consciously adjust their behaviour to their culturally different employees to obtain a goal and to reach results. Adjusting their behaviour and communication to suit their employees is for them motivated by the fact that in the end of the day they have to achieve a certain result. They have to show results in front of their own superior managers and cannot come and say that things didn't work because some specific nationality caused problems, as expressed by one interviewee. If you can't work in the way you are used to then you just have to work in another way if that enables you to reach your goals. I4 explains that, in order to get things done, she ends up taking care of many more things on her own than what she normally would in a Swedish organisation:

If you ask your employees to do it you know that you will have to follow-up and control it later and therefore you end up doing it quicker by yourself. (I4)

The same interviewee speaks of her difficulty and reluctance to adjust her behaviour towards her employees to suit the organisational culture in which she works. She continues to want their organisation to be flat, like the Swedish one, and tries to treat bottom-level workers in the same way as she behaves with the senior managers.

Adjusting your behaviour as a leader and what you expect from them depends, according to some interviewees, on the level or seniority of the employees. It is not acceptable, I1 says, for senior persons and middle managers in the company to not take   initiative and expect to be instructed very

clearly what to do. With lower-level workers in a company, however, it is more understandable by interviewees to adjust their communicating style and behaviour to suit employees' expectations.

Instead of adjusting yourself to the cultural differences, I2 explains that he tries to adjust the organisation so that cultural differences will be of less significance, and consequently the cultural differences will not need any adjusting to. Mixing many different nationalities within one work team and breaking up cultural groupings or communities within the organisation, allows I2 to focus more on the individual differences as opposed to cultural ones. Groupings with people from the same culture can according to I2 create conflicts and he has to adapt to their cultural characteristics to a large extent. Because of this reason I2 tries to minimize the groupings and create intercultural work teams. I1, in an effort to avoid having to adjust to cultural differences, tends to explain to all his employees what his leadership style is and what he expects from them. He believes that one should not make such a big deal about employees being culturally different, but instead one should just get on with things as usual.

3.2. Emphasising Individuality

Many of the interviewees emphasise the need to have as a point of departure not so much the cultural belonging of a person but rather the personal characteristics and abilities of an individual. As a leader, I1 notes, you have to start on an individual level and try to understand how different individuals work and develop and what it takes to make them do well at work.

> *I would like to say that it goes for people in general … I also lead Kalle and Lisa differently… on the individual level there is not a big difference because there you try to understand Mohammad or Lisa, what makes them develop and do well, it is there that is starts…* (I1)

These interviewees stress that differences have more to do with individuals than what culture they belong to. A leader needs to learn how a certain person works and how you need to communicate and behave with them specifically. Individuals with the same cultural belonging are also different, interviewees say, and you need to adapt to these differences as much as you do to cultural differences.

I1 notes that when groups consisting of individuals from the same nationality form in the work place, he feels a greater need to adjust to their cultural background and their expectations on him as a leader. Because of wanting to work with individuals instead of cultures, this interviewee tries to avoid that these cultural groupings arise in the workplace by mixing different nationalities as much as possible.

3.3. Equal Treatment

Despite acknowledging the need for flexibility and the need to take into account both cultural and individual differences, a few interviewees feel that people should ideally all be treated the same way. It is seen as important to have integrity and treat everyone consistently.

> *Theoretically I think it is a bad thing, that you don't treat everyone the same, it...where to draw the line, it is very difficult to, I think it is acceptable to do so, here no one will criticise you, no one talks behind your back if you treat her or him...that there is a difference, you have much more focus on those things in Europe or North America.*
> (I3)

Other interviewees are of the same opinion and state that they try treating their employees all the same but are not always successful in practice.

3.4. To Change Employees

Nearly all interviewees speak about wanting to change their employees' work behaviour and the way things are done in their organisation. Many of them actively try to implement their way of thinking about leadership and how employees and managers should relate to each other. I6, who as the only Swedish person came into an Arab company, wanted to radically change the hierarchical organisational model to the Swedish flat model where a lot of responsibility is given to employees.

> *When I saw this hierarchical model and saw how people in their boxes sat…I felt that this is completely wrong, this is going to be changed and we will build it like the Swedish model, it means that you give away responsibility and expect something back, and I did that and it turned out to be a disaster…* (I6)

However, as the interviewee describes, this did not work very well, as employees were not comfortable in working so independently and did not manage to deliver as was expected. The change was to extreme and employees, it seemed, were not personally ready for the structural changes that were made. I6 then had to go back and start from the beginning, and this time tried changing things slowly, bit by bit. He explains that change needs to be undertaken while making sure that employees understand the aims and goals of what is being done. A few other interviewees agree on the fact that changing the attitude of employees and the organisational culture at large is a very slow and lengthy

process, which requires hard and continuous work. I4, who works as a middle manager, speaks about wanting to change the hierarchical levels in her company and diminishing the distance between herself and the employees below her. She continues to treat them as equals, something that regarded as unusual by the South-East Asian employees as well as by the Iranian superiors. A couple of interviewees mention the importance of changing the ways of working by trying to build employees' confidence so that they will feel more comfortable taking responsibility. I2 speaks of the importance of   leaders bringing their own ideas and ways to an organisation. He emphasises that to educate employees in another way of thinking and behaving takes a lot of time, since their experiences and values are very different from the Swedish way.

> *I must in a way try to introduce my ideas on how I want the management to work and I must introduce these by educating them, and it takes time…* (I6)

All in all, it seems as if it is the top-level managers of the study who implement their own ways and values in the organisation to a larger extent than the middle-level managers. Being at the top, these managers have more power to actually undertake structural changes and are able to implement these from the top-down. They express that it is important to bring their own values to the organisation since they are the one leading it. The middle-level managers of the study, on the other hand, try changing things from within, or from below, by starting with those people immediately around them. Making changes on the small scale with your immediate employees is an attempt to add your ownway of thinking to the organisation.

While trying to implement one's own ways and values as a leader, some participants speak of things they have had to compromise on. I4 says she has had to give up her wish that employees take an active part in the organisation and come up with their initiatives and suggestions. This, she says, is just not possible in the organisation where she works and she alone is not able to change this fact. I8 speaks of sometimes having to give up the consistency of delegating task and responsibility to employees.

3.5. Employees' Reaction to Swedish Leadership

Half of the interviewees describe their employees' reaction and attitude towards their Swedish kind of leadership. Reactions, as reported by interviewees, are both positive and negative. I1 and I7 emphasise that employees really appreciate working under a leadership which involves more personal responsibility and independence. Employees seem to appreciate being treated with reliability and trustworthiness. I9 talks about how under the leadership of the previous Swedish manager at her

organisation the employees really came to life. Being trusted and having responsibility without being treated suspiciously were experienced very positively by her employees. I7 explains that the Swede's uncomplicated and open approach to culture, race and gender is experienced as a positive thing. It leads to a very consistent way of behaving which, according to the interviewee, is appreciated by employees in the long run.

On the other hand, some interviewees talk about negative experiences in regards to employees' reaction to Swedish leadership style. The Swedish style is at time perceived as too loose and Swedish managers are generally considered less strict than local ones. There is a risk that culturally different employees experience the Swedish style as almost stupid, I1 says. Employees may feel that they can take advantage of this and fool their manager. I6, who tried to implement an organisational change in his company by giving employees much more responsibility than they were used to, experienced such a situation. I6 explains that, upon being given more responsibility, instead of working more, the majority of his employees expected that they would work less and instead have other people doing their work. I1 has also had bad experiences when giving his employees a lot of personal responsibility. He says that it is not uncommon to have to let people go because they have not been able to handle the freedom under responsibility given to them. It is probable, I1 guesses, that the change of going from being excessively controlled to having more freedom is not an easy transition for many. It sometimes happens that the freedom ends up being abused. Another reaction by employees relates to how a decision is made by the leader. Some employees have, according to I2, difficulties dealing with the fact that rather than making decisions on his own, a leader is active in a debate with others that leads up to a jointly-made decision. I3 tells about some of his employees' difficulty to move away from a hierarchical pyramid of work relationships and interact on an equal level. Trying to be on the same level as employees, as is so common in the Swedish leadership approach, will often lead to confusion or misunderstandings with culturally different employees.

3.6. Need for Flexibility

Generally, all interviewees agree that the need to be flexible and sensitive to the situation is imperative when working with culturally different employees. As I2 put is:

> *there are so many different expectations on you as a boss in this kind of environment and then, then you cannot always just follow your own inner compass and say that now we do things like this, instead you have to be a little musical, you must deal with different situations in different ways and that required very much self-discipline, it is*

not easy to lead like that, instead often you just want to move on and feel that this is right and then you just go for it, but it does not work in that way here… (I2)

I4 also expresses it in musical terms and says that working with culturally different employees is a bit like playing the piano. You need to be able to be flexible in how you act in different situations and with different people. The ability to change your leadership style to suit the environment and the people in it is seen as key factor in succeeding as leader in an intercultural context. A leader needs to be sensitive to the situation and understand that there are many different ways of reaching the same goal. I9 describes how the one thing that she maintains as important is that you must understand that the different ways of reaching a goal are equally good. I7 explains that being flexible for him means having the ability to pick and choose from personal traits and experiences to suit the requirements of the situation. Also important, according to interviewees, is the ability to really understand the other and to see things from others' perspectives rather than seeing everything from your own point of view.

3.7. Maintaining Core Values and Beliefs

At the same time as understanding the significance of being flexible and able to change their leadership approach and behaviour, interviewees emphasise greatly the importance of keeping your own personal style and ways as well as maintaining your values and beliefs about how a good leader should be. Trying to keep a straight line, maintaining your leadership philosophy and values are seen as equally significant as being flexible when it comes to being a good leader. Employees need to see a consistency, says I7, in a leader's style. One cannot change all the time but one needs to have quite a clear and consistent approach to how you handle things. Interviewees recognise the need for consistency in behaviour in order to be a good and effective leader. There are several things that interviewees say they would never compromise on in regard to their ways and values as a leader. I1 and I6 both say that keeping promises is something they would never be able to compromise on regardless of employees' culture or education. Putting high demands on his employees is something one I2 would never give up on.

> *I try to maintain my core philosophy, it is that that I believe in, in a way, but then comes the situation adaptation… but the essence I try to maintain the same, definitely… my ways and my style and what I believe in as a leader it is still the same* (I1)

The majority of interviewees express that they still feel very much Swedish in their values and ways of approaching leadership. They still prefer to be a coaching rather than a commanding leader, and have independent employees to whom they can delegate responsibility. I7 says that he has maintained much of his *Swedishness* as he perceives it. Interviewees hold on to their personal values and beliefs about how things should be done and what principles work should be based on. There exists an emphasis on maintaining the core person of yourself in order to be a good leader and being able to feel good about how you lead.

However, almost all interviewees state that they and their leadership approach have changed to some extent since working abroad and with culturally different employees. Naivety and impatience are according to interviewees characteristics that defined them prior to working in an intercultural setting. Patience in particular is mentioned by several interviewees when asked what traits they have developed since working with culturally different employees. Patience, says I3, also goes hand in hand with flexibility and your expectations.

Several interviewees recognise that internal change is something that happens slowly and is difficult to define. You continuously learn things, perhaps not consciously, from people you work with and encounter in your leadership role as well as situation that you learn how to handle. Many interviewees prefer to talk about learning new things and adding to your knowledge as opposed to actually changing yourself. I3 says that you become much more open to other things and ways of reasoning. The *Swedishness* is then mixed with influences from other people and places. I7 notes that change is something that comes with the years and learning from your mistakes.

4. Discussion

4.1. Perceived Differences

A number of differences related to working with culturally different employees are noted by interviewees. A very noticeable difference, interviewees describe, is the prominence of very clear status differences within an organisation. Great respect and sometimes fear is showed to those occupying high positions of power. This reality is radically different from the Swedish one where the power distance is low (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005) and equality is emphasised. Both Arab countries as well as sub continental Asia, where many of interviewees' employees are from, are thought to be societies of high power distance (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). A leader in this culture is expected to

be authoritarian and employees accept and expect the distance between them and the leader to be very large. Clearly, expectations on a leader in Sweden are very different from the expectations on a leader in the study context. In their current work place interviewees feel that they have to know everything and give very precise directions to their employees, whereas in Sweden knowledge and information is seen more as belonging to everyone, leaders are not considered to be the sole possessors of it. Information is in Sweden considered a property and a right of all people, not solely leaders or other people at high positions. Leaders in Sweden are seen as being specialists at managing, just as others in the company are seen as specialists in their own roles. Consequently, Swedish leaders do not command so much as discuss with their employees and reach a joint decision based on everybody's opinions and knowledge. This way of leading can often be perceived as unusual by foreign employees.

Interviewees experience their employees' work roles in their current work place as very inflexible. In Sweden, work roles are usually defined less clearly and the boundaries between what one does and what one does not do are many times blurred. Swedes tend to be at ease with this way of working, something that could be explained by the description of Swedish society as being comfortable with uncertain situations (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). Many other cultures, however, tend to prefer a more strict way of organising work roles in an attempt to avoid and reduce uncertainty. Job roles are clearly defined and an employee knows exactly what he or she should do and never does anything else unless told. Individuals who are used to very strict role definitions may have a difficult time dealing with the uncertainties a more fluid role entails. The majority of employees come from Asian and Arabic countries where people are not so used to unclear situations in the work place as are Swedish people (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). Many interviewees also note that their employees' are not accustomed to or comfortable with taking personal responsibility for a task and working independently. In Sweden, a society where trust in the individual is high (Fukuyama, 1995), employees are usually given their own area of responsibility and working independently without much supervision is expected. The view of human nature is positive and people are assumed to be self-directed and responsible (Douglas, 1960). In countries that are low in trust employees are much more controlled and given very precise orders, as it is assumed that they will not work unless supervised (Fukuyama, 1995). The perception of human nature in many Asian countries is close to theory X which involves low trust and assumes that people require external control (Douglas, 1960) as people are not believed to be trusted. The different cultural values related to uncertainty, responsibility and trust contribute to the development of implicit leadership prototypes which differ from culture to culture (French, 2007). The leadership prototypes are further related to how people experience leadership, what they expect from a leader and how they expect to be treated as a employee. The

differences in trust and view of people in general between the Swedish leaders and their culturally different employees contribute to explaining the reactions to the other's behaviour. Many of the employees in this study are not used to being trusted and given responsibility and are therefore not comfortable with it. Swedish leaders, on the other hand, take it for granted that employees should take personal responsibility and work without supervision because this is how things are done in Sweden. It is clear that the employees' implicit leadership prototypes differ from those of the Swedish leader. This leads to perceived differences in work styles and may cause frustrations and misunderstandings amongst both leaders and employees.

4.2. Dealing with the Differences

All interviewees reportedly change or modify their behaviour and communication in their interaction with culturally different employees. This finding corresponds to previous research findings on intercultural leadership (Rao and Hashimoto, 1996; Fu and Yukl, 2000). Interviewees experience changes in their leadership approach in the intercultural work context of Dubai compared to what they are used to in Sweden. This finding goes in line with the contingency approaches to leadership which contend that leaders are always under the pressure to conform to the social situation in which they operate (Yukl, 2006). As its basic premise the contingency approach holds that leaders need to adapt their styles, even to the extent of exhibiting different styles and behaviours concurrently (French, 2007). Changing leadership style according to the situation, as interviewees report doing, agrees with the contingent path-goal theory. This theory states that different leadership styles should be practised by any individual leader in different settings depending on what the situation requires (Jackson, 1995). Interviewees seem to experience the need to use a more directive leadership style (French, 2007) with culturally different employee as opposed to supportive or participative style as they would be more likely to do when working with Swedish employees. Swedish leaders have generally been described as using a consensus style (Kakabadse et al., 1995) being team-oriented and involving employees in their decisions (Holmberg and Åkerblom, 2006). In Dubai the Swedish leaders feel the need and expectation to focus much more on the task rather than relations, and they practically change their leadership style to be commanding and instructive. Their employees often expect clear instructions and orders and consequently interviewees do adapt their communication and behavioural style to match this. This is often done by using a low-context style (Hall, 1966) clearly stating what employees should do and how. On the other hand, interviewees also mention the need to sometimes be more indirect and implicit

when communicating with employees. One interviewee mentions her caution of not using an explicit and direct style when she gives criticism to her Filipino employees, in an attempt to avoid their loss of face. Face is described as the negotiated public image, mutually granted each other by participants in a communicative event (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Scollon and Scollon, 2003;). Using high context communication (Hall, 1966) is often a speaker's attempt to save face of the interlocutor. Summed up, it appears as if interviewees are able to use any communication style appropriate for the situation or for the employees in question. Communication between people with different cultural backgrounds has a higher risk of failing than communication between people with the same cultural background (Scollon and Scollon, 2003). The meaning of a communication runs the risk of being misunderstood or distorted when the people communicating do not share the same frame of reference. To try to avoid these mishaps interviewees seem to try using the communication style appropriate for every situation. Often when communicating with their employees interviewees use a very precise and clear communication style to avoid any misunderstandings or distortions of meanings of their intentions.

Interviewees' proneness to change their leadership style goes in line with previous research studies which found that leaders working internationally try consciously to change their behaviour and adapt their style when leading people from other cultures (Thomas, 2002). Interviewees' act of changing their communication and behaviour to suit their employees is referred to as cross-cultural code-switching by Molinsky (2007). Cross-cultural code-switching is the act of purposefully modifying one's behaviour to accommodate different cultural norm for appropriate behaviour, an act that interviewees reportedly perform. Among other things, interviewees use their employees as a source of guidance (Smith et al., 1995) which serves as an intermediate variable between the interviewees' cultural values and their actual leadership behaviour. Using employees as guidance sources for leadership behaviour is according to Smith et al. (1995) most employed in nations characterised by e.g. high individualism, egalitarianism and low power distance, a societal portrayal that describes Sweden rather accurately. The motivation behind adapting to employees seems to be mainly a consideration for achieving goals. If one does not change to match employees expectations or habits, employees will be less effective and one will not achieve the work that needs to be done..

Several interviewees emphasise the importance of approaching employees as individuals. Employees are seen as individuals with different needs and capabilities and these have to be taken into consideration by the leader in his or her approach. This focus on the individuality in the relationship between leader and employee can be found in the dyad-tradition of leadership theories (Yukl, 2006). Relational-based theories based on the leader-follower dyad focus on the interaction and relationship between the leader and individual employees (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Several interviewees mention that they

adjust their leadership to what they know about an individual, his or her needs and capabilities as well as his or her background and culture. Many experience that employees need more follow-up and control. Although one interviewee reporting difficulties with adjusting to suit employees' expectations, many other interviewees report that they adjust their leadership behaviour to employees' expectations. A few interviewees say that they will not compromise their leadership style so much to an employee on a more senior level as they would to employees on lower levels. On lower levels they see the need to speak more clearly and delegate more specifically. This approach to leading can be seen in the Situational Leadership (SL) theory (Hersey and Blanchard, 1977) where appropriate styles of leadership are specified for different levels of employee maturity in relation to work. According to SL theory, the level of employee maturity determines the appropriate mix of task- and relation-oriented behaviour. Interviewees' approach to lower level employees,   being more defining in orders and clarifying standards, mirrors the approach SL Theory recommends for low-maturity employees. With more high-level and more senior employee, several interviewees report that they avoid being commanding and giving detailed instructions. Instead, they expect these employees to think more freely and come up their own suggestions. This attitude which is more about coaching then commanding corresponds to SL theory's approach to high-maturity employees which is providing more relations-oriented behaviour as opposed to task-oriented behaviour.

Results show that interviewees emphasise individual differences and needs and consequently recognise the importance of behaving differently with different people. At the same time, several interviewees mention that they believe it to be important to treat all individuals equally and the same. Equality is a significant aspect of the Swedish culture where all individuals should have the same right and opportunities and treated with the same respect (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). This characteristic of the Swedish culture could explain interviewees' aspiration of treating everyone equally. Behaving differently towards individuals based on their background or abilities can in   Swedish society be seen as discriminatory. There seems to be an opposition in interviewees' aim to treat everyone equally while also behaving differently depending on an individual's need and expectations. However, it is not uncommon, according to Kvale (1996), for interviewees' statements to be ambiguous or contradictory. These contradictions are not necessarily due to shortfall in the communication between interviewer and interviewee, but can actually in an adequate way mirror the contradictions within world in which the interviewee lives (Kvale, 1996).

4.3. Changing Employees

Nearly all interviewees express the wish to change employees' behaviour and the leader-employee relation. Many of them actively try to put into practice their own way of thinking and acting based on their personal values regarding leadership. This appears to be undertaken in different ways depending on what manager position the interviewee holds. Top-managers try implementing changes from the top, by changing the structure of the organisation, whereas middle-managers attempt from within to change the attitudes of their immediate employees. While some interviewees recognise the value of another culture's management practices, most interviewees believe their current workplace would be more effective if the 'Swedish way' would be implemented. However, they do realise that changing people's behaviours and thinking regarding how to work is a very slow process, because ultimately it requires changing their ingrained value systems. Interviewees express not only a wish to influence and change the organisation in which they work, but they also wish to change the way their employees work and think about work. As the way interviewee's employees think about work is strongly entrenched in their cultural backgrounds and beliefs, the question arises whether it is possible to change them, and, more important, whether it is right for interviewees to try and change the employees' cultural beliefs about work and leadership. This is a highly relevant question, because it relates to respect for cultural relativity and the right each and everyone has to believe and think what they want. However, in an organisational context cultural differences must be managed in a way in order to make the organisation work. Leaders and employees from different cultures working differently based on their cultural values pose a challenge to the multicultural workplace.

Both positive and negative employee responses to a more Swedish way of management are reported by interviewees. On the whole, the Swedish way of leading is very different from what most employees are used to. One interviewee mentions that employees were much more inclined to accept her leadership style because of the previous manager also being Swedish. Ritter and Lord (2007) undertook a study on the impact of previous leaders on the response and evaluation of new leaders. They demonstrated the existence of leader transference, a cognitive process whereby mental representations of previous leaders are activated and used for evaluation when new, similar leaders are encountered. This leader transference would then, according to Ritter and Lord (2007) play a more important part than culturally implicit leader prototypes. The interviewee mentioned that employees responded very well to her leadership style. This may have been due to leader transference where employees' positive representations of the previous Swedish leader were activated. Since this study

only investigated intercultural leadership from the perspective of the leaders, not much is known about how employees react to the Swedish leaders' approach to leading.

4.4. General Approach

The general approach of the interviewees seems to be a combination of being flexible in their acting and communication and of maintaining their own personal leadership approach as well as their fundamental beliefs of how a leader should be.

Interviewees recognise the need for behavioural and communicational flexibility when interacting with culturally different employees. These skills are very often acknowledged as necessary in effective global leadership research (Stahl, 2001; Adler, 2002; McCall amd Hollenbeck, 2002; Jassawalla et al., 2005; Conney and Pedersen, 2005; Gudykunst, 2005; Cassiday, 2005 etc.). One interviewee states that Swedes are particularly good at being flexible and adjustable to situations. According to this interviewee, Swedes do not possess a very dominating cultural identity and can therefore adapt themselves easily. However, changing one's behaviour to suit culturally different others can according to Monlinsky (2007) be challenging. Identity conflict can be experienced when one's behaviour is in conflict with one's personal values. One interviewee experiences this and says that you don't feel as good about yourself when your behaviour in incongruent with your beliefs. None of the other interviewees mention explicitly the negative effects of incongruent behaviour. However, several other interviewees emphasise the importance of being the leader that you are and maintaining your core beliefs and principles. Having a consistent leadership style and maintaining a clear a straight approach is seen by interviewees as fundamental in being effective as a leader in an intercultural context. While being flexible when working with culturally different employees, interviewees make it clear that losing yourself and your own beliefs in the process should definitely be avoided. Interviewees appear to maintain their worldview while concurrently holding several schemes of behaviour. This aspect of intercultural and global leadership, a leader's integrity, has been the subject of a limited amount of research and not often implemented in leadership theories, especially those dealing with contextual and relational factors.

Despite feeling that their leadership has changed to some extent from working in an intercultural context, most interviewees say that they have maintained their personal values and beliefs about how a leader should be. Change is seen as a rather slow process of learning and adding to your knowledge and abilities while maintaining the core self. This finding corresponds to what Cassiday

(2005) found in her study on expatriate leaders. At the same time as being flexible and tolerant of ambiguous situations, the expatriate leaders in the study expressed the importance of staying true to personal and organisational values. The attitude of interviewees toward facing cultural differences matches what Bennett (2001) refers to as *integration* as opposed to *assimilation*. Assimilation, according to Bennett (2001), is the process of re-socialisation that seeks to replace one's original worldview with that of another culture, which is clearly not the case with the interviewees. Adaptation, on the other hand, is the process whereby one's worldview is expanded to include behaviours and attitudes appropriate to   other cultures. Integration is additive rather than substitutive. The assumed end result of assimilation is becoming a new person while the assumed end result of adaptation is becoming a bicultural or multicultural person. The latter kind of person has new aspects, but not at the cost of his or her original culture and the fundamental values on which it is based. The interviewees' core values, as seen in the results, are not easily changed or modified. Through socialisation into a culture from a very early age, an individual's fundamental values are well entrenched in the self and usually not altered by external circumstances (Guirdham, 2005). This is clear in the interviewees as the Swedish leaders express a feeling of not losing the core self and remaining Swedish inside.

Concluding the discussion, it is worth mentioning that the fact that interviewees work in Dubai seems to have a rather unique influence on how they work as leaders. Interviewees all expressed that the culture of Dubai or the UAE at large had no influence on how they approached their roles as leaders. Rather, being in Dubai gives them a larger freedom to behave as they want, to work in any way they pleased. Since the local population is in minority in Dubai, there is no strong cultural group that has an impact on how things should be done in the organisational world. Dubai is a city that belongs to everyone and no one at the same time. There are no formal or informal social rules on how people should work. With this comes a great freedom to make your multicultural organisation and your work whatever you want it to be.

CONCLUSIONS

This research has explored how nine Swedish individuals approach leadership in an intercultural context. Not only did the study context involve cultural differences between the leaders and the employees but also between the different employees. The Swedish individuals working in leadership positions at different companies were asked how they practically deal with leading culturally different employees, and how they generally think about leadership in an intercultural context.

The first research question concerned if, and how, Swedish managers in practice adapt their leadership when working with culturally different employees. From the results it can be seen that interviewees do in practice adapt their leadership approach to their employees, in the sense that they adjust and control their communication and behaviour. However, interviewees also explain how they attempt to implement their own ways and values into the organisation and change their employees. Regarding the second research question about interviewees' approach leading culturally different employees; it is apparent that interviewees believe in a very flexible leadership approach. They are prepared to adjust their communicational and behavioural style in their interaction with employees. Interviewees express the wish in their approach to employees to emphasise employees' individuality rather than their cultural belonging. Although interviewees recognise the need for flexibility, they also emphasise the importance of maintaining the personal style of leadership and staying true to their core values related to leadership. In regards to change, interviewees have reportedly learned several things from their own experiences as well as from other people. Change is by the majority of interviewees seen as a process by which you add knowledge and abilities to your leadership, not a process where your values or core principles are substituted for others.

Overall, it is clear from the results that interviewees are active agents in their surroundings, adjusting to it as well as attempting to change it. Straber (2006) believes that actors, such as leaders working in an intercultural context, do not simply conform to external cultural structures; they also resist, change and manipulate these structures. This viewpoint has been illustrated in the results of this research study. Interviewees have been found to consciously and actively respond to their external environment, learning from it as well as attempting to modify it. This result seems to be in opposition to the functionalist approach to intercultural communication which uses a concept of culture-as-structure, in which individuals are thought to be more or less 'passively controlled' by their culture.

Working as a leader in an intercultural context is not an easy task. Differences between leader and the employee regarding their attitudes, habits and experiences can constitute a challenge to

communication and interaction between the two.   Based on interviewees' own recommendations, it appears as if the best way of leading in an intercultural context involves communicative and behavioural flexibility, having a strong vision, and being the leader you are by staying true to personal values.

Further Research

This study looks at intercultural leadership from the perspective of the leader. Including also employees' perspective in this current research was not possible due to time, size and resource limitations. Although the current study provides an in-depth description and analysis of leaders' perspective of working with culturally different employee, including also employees' perspective would naturally have provider an even fuller picture of the context. However, for future research it is recommended to take into consideration both sides of the leader-employee interaction. This would enable the researcher to gain an understanding of the mutual adaptation and influence between leaders and employees in an intercultural organisational setting. Further, the interaction between various employees with different cultural backgrounds could be explored and its influence on work effectiveness and leader-interaction could be determined.

In future research it would also be interesting look in-depth at various factors that could influence leader's approach in an intercultural context. In this study, the individuals' level of management seemed to influence their approach to implement change in the organisation. Age, gender and previous experience are other factors that could be investigated further in future research on intercultural leadership.

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