

International Management

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**CULTURES' IMPACT UPON CO-WORKERS'
PERCEPTIONS AND BEHAVIOUR**

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ABSTRACT

The overall subject for this thesis is to enlarge our understanding of co-workers' behaviour while working in a multicultural setting. An understanding of co-workers' behaviour is essential, since human resources should be regarded as competitive strengths for organisations competing in an international market. This research focuses upon how members of different cultural groups construct perceptions about themselves and others. Furthermore, why members of different cultural groups have these particular perceptions and why they behave in this particular way are discussed. The empirical study was conducted in a Swedish multinational organisation among Swedish and Danish co-workers. The study showed that thoughts about stereotyping could be used in order to explain how co-workers construct perceptions. Moreover, the membership of both national cultures and an organisational culture, could have an impact upon why co-workers have particular perceptions and why they behave in a particular way. The Danish and the Swedish culture might be regarded as similar, but this thesis emphasises that there exist some perceived differences between Danish and Swedish co-workers that could affect co-operation between co-workers.

Key Words: perceptions, construction, membership, national culture, organisational culture

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1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we will firstly present a short background of the problem area. A problem analysis is thereafter introduced in order to state the research questions, followed by the purpose and limitations of this research. Finally, a disposition of the thesis is presented.

1.1 BACKGROUND

The world economy is becoming globalised; new blocs and relationships emerge, which affect the business environment (Morosini, 1998). New market conditions, such as the integration of the European Union (EU) and the establishment of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), creates opportunities for organisations to expand their international operations. This means that co-workers from different parts of the world are given the possibility to meet and interact more frequently than before. (Cray & Mallory, 1998) Additionally, new communication technology has brought people closer together, since contact can more easily be accomplished by the new innovations (Hickson & Pugh, 1995; Cray & Mallory, 1998; Hall & Hall, 1990).

Enhanced contact between co-workers from different cultures has brought about new challenges for multinational organisations¹ (Cray & Mallory, 1998; Morosini, 1998). Culture is shared systems (Hall & Hall, 1990); it is the shared ways that people understand and interpret the world (Trompenaars, 1993). People with varying cultural background, have different ways of seeing and doing things, based upon unstated rules. These hidden differences can make co-operation between co-workers difficult. (Hall & Hall, 1990) One of the new challenges for

¹ We have chosen to use Hofstede's (1984, p.271) definition, which is "...organizations active in several countries but in which there is one dominant "home" national culture to which most key decision makers of the organisation belong."

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multinational organisations is to understand these differences among co-workers, since co-operation is vital in order to reach the overall goals of the organisation. (see Cray & Mallory, 1998)

Furthermore, co-workers are essential resources for organisations that compete in an international market. There has been a shift from mainly industrial, manufacturing economy to a service- and knowledge-based market. Providing service, knowledge, skills and know-how implies a focus on immaterial resources, core competencies, commitment and other features related to individuals in organisations. The competitive strength of an organisation is determined by its ability to attract and develop human resources rather than optimising the use of raw material, machinery and financial resources.(Brewster & Holt-Larsen, 2000)

1.2 PROBLEM ANALYSIS

We believe that hidden differences that might exist between co-workers with varying cultural background can be brought up to the surface, by understanding co-workers' perceptions about themselves and others. People are members of different groups and they construct perceptions about others that exist in contexts quite different from their own. Perceptions about others depend upon how people identify themselves, for instance as members of a particular culture. Members of groups might differ in goal setting and have different expectations of the other parts' behaviour when interacting. (see Cray & Mallory, 1998) When expectations do not match with behaviour, uncertainty between members could arise. (Oakes et al, 1994) We believe that co-workers need to feel comfortable in the relationships with each other in order to co-operate well. When people are given the opportunity to learn from each other, they can develop and grow as co-workers.

In this thesis, we have been given the opportunity to conduct a study at a Swedish multinational company, which we will refer to as Kengao Management Centre. The organisation is responsible for the management and the executive functions for the Kengao group.

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Through Kengao Management Centre information and guidelines are spread throughout the Kengao world and different offices in the Kengao world report to Kenago Management Centre through their market units. Kengao Management Centre is located in Denmark. Most of the key decision-makers at the office are Swedish, however, there are about 25% Danes working at the office.

Denmark and Sweden are geographically close and many macro-level factors, such as political systems and religious beliefs, are similar (Lewis, 2000). When researchers (e.g. Hofstede, 1984), investigated work related values, the two cultures scored similar results. Some authors have, however, acknowledged that there are actually some differences in work related values between Danish and Swedish co-workers. Guidelines have therefore been written for how co-workers should behave in the two countries (e.g. Lewis, 2000). Cray & Mallory (1998) argue, however, that guidelines like these seem to be based upon the assumption that co-workers in multicultural setting only interact with other cultural groups in the other parts' home country. In multinational organisations people can meet in other cultural settings, which makes the assumption questionable. Furthermore, Cray & Mallory (1998) argue, that these kinds of guidelines often assume that if people behave in a certain way towards other members of the same group, they would probably act the same way towards foreigners. This is questionable since when people with varying cultural background interact, they might behave differently compared to when interacting with members of the same cultural group.

We believe that much can be learnt from investigating how co-workers construct perceptions and why co-workers have these particular perceptions about themselves and others and behave in a certain way, since we then can overcome some of the limitations that previous research and guidelines have been accused of. According to Trompenaars, (1993), co-workers' perceptions are, however, a fairly undeveloped area in management literature, though they have become more emphasised in the last couple of years. This means that we are challenged in this thesis to investigate the area from a rather new perspective.

1.3 PURPOSE

With the previous discussion in mind we have chosen the following research questions to guide us in our study:

How do members of different cultural groups construct perceptions about themselves and others, while working? And why have members of different cultural groups these particular perceptions and why do they behave in this particular way?

We firstly aim to describe and explain the concept of culture and how members of cultural groups construct perceptions about themselves and others.

Secondly, we aim to analyse some aspects that might have an impact upon how members of groups, Danes and Swedes at Kengao Management Centre, construct perceptions about themselves and others.

Thirdly, we aim to analyse how the perceptions were manifested in the co-workers' everyday work.

Fourthly, we aim to analyse and discuss some aspects of why these members of groups have these particular perceptions and why they behave in this particular way.

Fifthly, we aim to give some suggestions for how Kengao Management Centre can benefit from this research.

We have been given the opportunity to investigate Kengao Management Centre in our case study. This means that we have conducted a study in one organisation and no other companies have been involved during the research.

Furthermore, our intention is to investigate two cultural groups, Swedish and Danish co-workers, which implies that other national cultural groups that exist at Kengao Management Centre will not be

taken into consideration. There exist about 5% co-workers with other national cultural backgrounds.

1.4 DISPOSITION OF THE THESIS

In this chapter we have presented a short background of the problem area. A problem analysis has been introduced and research questions, purpose and limitations have been stated. In chapter 2, we will present our theoretical framework. Social construction will be presented, which will serve as a guide when explaining the concept of culture. Furthermore, in order to explain some aspects of how members of cultural groups construct perceptions, we will introduce thoughts about stereotypes and stereotyping. In chapter 3 we will present our research procedures and in chapter 4 we will present our results and analysis that we have gained from our empirical study. Finally, in chapter 5 we will present a summary of the conclusions that we have drawn in the previous analysis and discuss how Kengao Management Centre can benefit from our research.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter social construction will be presented, which will serve as a guide when explaining the concept of culture. Furthermore, in order to explain some aspects of how members of cultural groups construct perceptions, we will introduce thoughts about stereotypes and stereotyping.

2.1 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

In order to explain social construction we have chosen Berger and Luckmann's (1966) thoughts that they present in their book, *The Social Construction of Reality, A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*.

Sociology of knowledge is built on the assumption that the reality² is socially constructed. It aims to analyse the processes that make human beings take the reality for granted in their everyday life. Everyday reality appears as already objectified, since objects exist before human beings enter the scene.

Symbolism and the symbolic language are essential constituents in the reality. The language that we use in our everyday life provides us with necessary and meaningful objectifications, which guide us in reality. The language cannot only construct symbols that are extremely abstract from everyday experiences, it can also bring back these symbols and make them present as objectively real elements.

Everyday life is an inter-subjective world, which means that we share this with other people. We are aware that other people have a different perspective of the mutual world, which does not accord with our own.

² Reality can be defined as "...a quality appertaining to phenomena that we recognise as having a being independent of our own volition..." (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p.13)

Essential is, however, that our meanings continuously match other people's meanings and we have a mutual agreement upon that.

The most important perception of others occurs in the face-to-face situations, which are prototypes for social interaction. In these kinds of situations we can experience the other person's subjective feelings and thoughts. Face-to-face interaction will follow a pattern, which is built upon typification. Human beings apprehend others by the means of typificatory schemas, which means how others are perceived and treated in face-to-face situations. The typificatory is reciprocal, which means that each person will have typifications schemas about others. If the schemas become problematic, through interference from the other part, they have to be modified.

The further away from the face-to-face situation the more the typifications will become anonymous. Therefore the indirect or direct interaction, and the degree of interest and intimacy of others will affect the anonymity. This implies that even if we interact with other persons they can still be anonymous to us since they might not be meaningful.

The social stock of knowledge supplies human beings with the schemas required for the major routines in everyday life. The knowledge is structured in terms of what is relevant, that it makes sense of the world. The social stock of knowledge can be explained as the knowledge human beings have about a specific situation and the boundaries of this knowledge. We know what to do when we interact with other people and in different situations. When human beings share some parts of the social stock of knowledge, then there is a possibility to locate and handle other individuals in a proper manner. When this is not shared, the boundaries become clear. The validity of the knowledge is taken for granted until there is a problem that cannot be solved by the terms of this knowledge.

2.1.1 Institutions

Institutionalisation can occur "...whenever there is a reciprocal

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typification of habitulised actions by types of actors” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 72). In other words, any of these typifications can be seen as institutions. These are accessible to all members of a social group involved and the institution both typifies the individual actors and the individual actions. All human actions can become habitualisations.

Institutions involve historicity and control. Historicity refers to the fact that institutions always have a history in which they are the products. Institutions control human action since it predefines the action of the human being by its action patterns. This implies that the institution directs how the human being acts, against numerous other ways.

Institutions normally appear in collectivities, which contain numerous numbers of people. To exemplify this, when two people, A and B interact, typification will be produced immediately. If we for a moment regard A and B as the original creators of the social world, they will reconstruct the circumstances under which their world was established by exercising their power of recollection. Their children, however, are in a different situation. The reality for them is historical, which becomes a tradition. The children cannot recall their memory in the same way as their parents, since they only know the tradition by hearsay.

This can be further explained by the legitimisation, which is the process of defending and explaining the institutional tradition. The legitimisation of the institutional order³ will not only consist of values but also knowledge. The individual does not only get a notion about how he/she should act but it also explains why certain things are the way they are. The same body of knowledge is learnt as objective truths in the process of socialisation, and it is internalised as a subjective reality. This reality can affect individuals’ identity since it has the power to shape individuals. The primary socialisation can be explained

³“ The origins of institutional order lie in the typification of one’s own and other’s performance” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p.89)

as “...the first socialisation an individual undergoes in childhood, through which he becomes a member of society”. Secondary socialisation can be explained as “... any subsequent process that inducts an already socialised individual into new sectors of the objective world of his society”. (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 150) The socialisation has an overall impact upon how we see the world.

2.2 THE CONCEPT OF CULTURE

We have previously explained social construction and this will serve as a guide when explaining the concept of culture. In this part we will first do a presentation of some aspects, which can be connected to the concept of culture. We will thereafter present the relation between national and organisational culture, which is relevant for proceeding the study.

2.2.1 *Mental Programs*

People develop mental programs and these are partly unique to the individual and partly shared by others. Mental programming can be explained as patterns of thinking, feeling and acting. (Hofstede, 1991) These programs are so called constructs, which means that they do not “exist” in an absolute sense, since we define them into existence. Three different levels of human mental programming can be distinguished and these can be inherited and/or they can be learned from birth. (Hofstede, 1984) See figure 1.

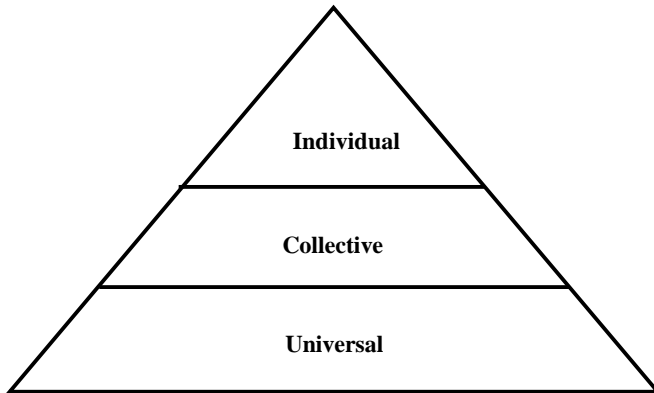


Figure 1: *Three levels of Uniqueness in Human Mental Programming (Hofstede, 1984)*

Firstly, the universal level of mental programming is the least unique one, since it is shared by all human beings. This refers to the operating systems of the human body, for instance, human beings can laugh and weep. This level can be seen as the most likely inherited one, since it is a part of our genetic information. Secondly, the collective level means that some people in a particular group share some of the mental programming but not by all people. This refers, for instance, to the language we speak, how we keep our distance to other people in order to feel comfortable. This programming is mostly learned, we can share it with people who have gone through the same learning process as oneself. Thirdly, the individual level is the most unique one of the three. This refers to the fact that there are numerous different behaviour patterns in a particular group that is specifically unique to a member. Parts of this level can be seen as inherited. (Hofstede, 1984)

2.2.2 Values and Norms

Mental programs can be linked to values and norms. A value can be defined as “a broad tendency to prefer certain states of affairs over others” (Hofstede, 1984, p. 18). Values are not only the attributes for individuals, but also for collectivities. When dealing with collectivity

the values can be seen as norms, in this sense norms have to be shared by the majority of people.(Hofstede, 1984) Norms can develop on an informal level in terms of social control but also on a formal level as written laws.(Trompenaars, 1993)

Culture can be seen as shared systems of meanings and these systems guide what human beings pay attention to, how they behave and what they value. Mental programs can be seen as the way culture organises such values. (Trompenaars, 1993) Cultural values can be regarded as stable over time within a society but differ between societies. (Hofstede, 1999)

2.2.3 Culture and Social Construction

Culture is according to Hofstede (1984, p. 21),“the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another.” In other words, it presupposes collectively; culture can determine the identity of a human group in the same way as personality determines the identity of an individual. (Hofstede, 1984)

When connecting these statements to the previous discussion about social construction we find Hofstede’s (1984), definition suitable for our study. Hofstede does not explicitly refer to social construction, however, one could interpret that the mental programs could be seen as such. We believe that people could belong to a particular cultural group without actually meeting the different members in a face-to-face interaction and people can have a shared knowledge about other cultural groups. The collective programming could be connected to the shared social stock of knowledge, which is learned by socialisation. Culture has a meaning for people and people can be seen as culture makers.

2.2.4 National and Organisational Culture

We believe that Hofstede's (1984) definition could be applied both to organisational culture and national culture, however, there needs to be some clarification about the relationship between the two.

There is an interplay between organisational culture and national culture in the production of cultural manifestations (Hofstede, 1985). Organisations can be seen as products of macro-level phenomena, such as society. Organisations can be similar, since variations within organisations are much deeper than unitary patterns because of the different groups that exist within them. Values, beliefs and norms about work and social relations are to a degree contingent upon national culture. (Alvesson, 1995) In other words, organisational culture will influence behaviour directly by, for instance, group norms. The organisational culture will be influenced by a larger culture, national culture and the national culture affects the individual. This implies that there are cross-level influences that work in the relationship between the organisational culture and the national culture. (Cray & Mallory, 1998)

We have discussed the concept of culture by exploring Hofstedes thoughts about mental programs. Furthermore, we have addressed the issue of the relation between the organisational culture and national culture. Henceforth, we will present thoughts about how members of cultural groups construct perceptions about themselves and others.

2.3 PERCEPTIONS

Human beings have the ability to construct perceptions. Perceptions can be seen as selective processes, since human beings do not passively record every detail of the world presented to their senses. Selection is accomplished by active engagement with the environment and the perceiver constructs it in the most suitable informative manner. The perceiver construct a meaningful representation, by encoding some stimulus features but not all. (Oakes et al, 1994) Other people are

explained by social perception and this explanation leads to further perceptions and actions (Leyens et al, 1994). All perceptions are the end product of a categorisation process (Bruner, 1957).

Categorisation serves to guide, order and simplify the reality for the perceiver. It produces an accurate and valid representation of reality since it steers representations away from currently, irrelevant details. Furthermore, it steers the perceiver towards what is relevant and important for the present purpose. Reality can be seen as too complex to be known completely and categorisation can help since it assures us that we know what we need to know. The interaction between the fit between the input and stored category specifications and the relative accessibility of a perceiver's repertoire will determine the capture of stimuli by a category. Accessibility can be explained as "the relative readiness of a given category to become activated". (Bruner, 1957)

2.3.1 Stereotypes and Stereotyping

Categorisation is the core of stereotyping, since without the recognition of differential perceptions of groups, stereotyping would not occur (Hamilton & Troiler, 1986). Categorisation implies homogenisation and this is partly what stereotyping is about. Homogeneity can be seen as helpful to the extent that it highlights distinction between groups. (Leyens et al, 1994) Categorisation assigns people to the contextually relevant category (Hogg, 1992).

Categorisation can be further explained by accentuation. The accentuation, which is commonly used in stereotyping research, can be seen as "...the exaggerations of both *differences between* and *similarities within* categories", (Tajfel & Wilkes 1963 in Oakes et al 1994 p. 6). This implies that categorisation involves accentuation in order to clarify the different boundaries between ingroups and outgroups. People will have a membership in a group, ingroup, and according to this membership see other groups as outgroups. Categorisation provides a fundamental basis of our social orientation

towards others. (Oakes et al, 1994)

With this in mind we find that Oakes et al's, (1994, p. 1) definitions of stereotyping and stereotypes are suitable. They define stereotyping as "...the process of ascribing characteristics to people on the basis of their group memberships". Furthermore, they define stereotypes as "the collection of attributes believed to define or characterize the members of a social group...". This implies that it is important to distinguish between stereotypes and stereotyping. Stereotypes are the social content while stereotyping is the individual process that takes place in a social context and is moulded by it (Leyens et al, 1994). Stereotyping is a cognitive process common to all individuals (Oakes et al, 1994) and stereotypes are the end products of stereotyping (Leyens et al, 1994).

2.3.1.1 Levels of Abstraction

Categorisation exists at different levels of abstraction (Oakes et al, 1994). By applying some of Turner et al's (1987) thoughts one can distinguish three different levels of abstraction. These are a) the superordinate level of the self, which means one's identity as a human being b) the intermediate level of ingroup-outgroup, which means one's identity as a member of a certain group c) the subordinate level of the person, which means one's identity as an individual person. These are defined by the level at which people are compared and categorised and not by specific attributes (Oakes et al, 1994).

The personal identity could be defined as the "self-descriptions in terms of personal and idiosyncratic attributes" (Brown & Turner, 1981, p. 38) and this is as previously stated clarified on the subordinate level. In other words, an individual can categorise her/himself according to the personal identity, which implies personal categorisation. At the intermediate level, however, the social identity is clarified. The social identity can be defined as "...that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63). In other words, people can

categorise ingroups and outgroups according to their social identity, which implies social categorisation. Stereotypes can be seen as the outcome of social categorisation and the perceptual accentuation of intragroup similarities and intergroup differences. (Oakes et al, 1994)

The perception of an increased identity between the self and ingroup members and increased differences to the outgroup members causes self-stereotyping. This shift towards a social identity means that there is a depersonalisation of the self-perception and behaviour. (Oakes et al, 1994) The depersonalisation does not mean a loss of the identity, it should rather be regarded as a *change* from the personal to the social level of identity (Turner et al, 1987; Hogg, 1992). It is the process of depersonalisation, which makes it possible for a group to function and behave and it produces emergent properties of the group (Oakes et al, 1994).

2.3.1.2 The Salience of Categories

Categorisation is a dynamic and context-dependent process (Turner et al, 1987; Oakes et al, 1994; Hogg, 1992). Which level becomes salient when categorising depends upon the comparative context. This implies that a person can be categorised as similar in one particular context, however, the same person can be categorised and perceived as different in another context, without any actual change in their own position. (Oakes et al, 1994)

Furthermore, this means that social identities become more salient when intergroup comparisons are made while the personal identities become salient when intragroup comparisons are made (Turner et al, 1987; Oakes et al, 1994). It must first be an implicit recognition of shared ingroup membership, which means that intragroup comparisons are made, then it is possible to compare to other individuals and establish differences within them. This means that there is no point in referring to one level of abstraction as more basic than the other. Both personal- and social categorisations are essential since they are both representations of social life. Human beings are both individuals and social group members but to which extent they are one or another will

vary. The social contexts, within which the comparisons are made, will affect what level of abstraction that is used and to which extent a person categorise her/himself and other people. (Oakes et al, 1994)

2.4 PERCEPTIONS AND CULTURE

Categories provided by one's own past experiences, ideas, theories and knowledge acquired from one's culture will have an impact on the stereotypical judgements made. Knowledge and theories are embodied in the meanings of categories and these are collectively produced. This can be further explained by social validated knowledge, which are the shared beliefs about ways of perceiving, thinking and doing which we assume to be appropriate in terms of objective reality. It is the depersonalisation of the self, which makes it possible to produce socially validated knowledge. (Oakes et al, 1994)

Stereotypes are social norms that arise from the process of social influence and their characterisation is shared, consensual beliefs. These social norms are held in common by the members of one group about others and are anchored in a particular group membership. Members of a group seek consensus about stereotypes, which implies that one expects to agree with people categorised as similar to oneself. Furthermore, members of a particular group expect to disagree with members of an outgroup, since we are members of different groups that have different interests, values and beliefs. Disagreements are a part of the social process of correcting information and limitations of perspectives. (Oakes et al, 1994)

Rather than to see stereotypes as stored constructs that wait to become activated, we can describe stereotypes as the varying outcomes of a dynamic process of social judgements⁴. The stability of stereotypic

⁴ Stereotypical judgements are produced by categorisation at a given time to represent certain intergroup realities in interaction of background knowledge and perceiver's readiness. (Oakes et al, 1994)

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judgement arises from the stability of intergroup relationship. The social groups, subcultures and social institutions will have an impact on the stability, since these provide the perceiver with long term norms, values and motives. Furthermore, social influences and communication processes translate particular ideas of groups into social norms, which also has an impact on the stability. (Oakes et al, 1994)

To summarise, we believe that thoughts about stereotypes and stereotyping enable us to further explain how members of cultural groups construct perceptions about themselves and others. Categorisation serves to guide, order and simplify the reality and it steers the perceiver to what is relevant (see Oakes et al, 1994). Social construction explains that human beings make sense of the world by structuring the knowledge which is relevant to them (see Berger & Luckmann, 1966). With this in mind, we believe that the process of the categorisation can be closely related to construction.

We have further introduced the link between cultures and perceptions by applying thoughts about socially validated knowledge. We believe that this knowledge is closely related to what Berger and Luckmann (1966) refer to as shared social stock of knowledge and Hofstede's (1984) collective programming. These all have an impact upon how we think, act etc. Furthermore, these all have to be shared by people and these enable human beings to distinguish groups from each other. Moreover, we would like to argue that these are learnt by socialisation. For this particular study we therefore consider that the socially validated knowledge, the shared social stock of knowledge and the collective programming are basically the same. We will not make any distinction between the three terms and from here onwards we will refer to the collective programming in terms of all three.

3. RESEARCH PROCEDURES

In this chapter we will present our research procedures. We will firstly present our choice of method. Thereafter, brainstorming meetings and research interviews will be discussed. Finally, we will present our personal frame of reference and discuss alternative methods that could have been used.

3.1 CHOICE OF METHOD

When we started the process of choosing a method we realised that we had to clarify our personal and fundamental views about research. “How do I view research and what does this mean to me?” were questions we discussed. We have a strong belief in the essence of interpretation and we are interested in understanding human beings. We realised that theories and practices that have a hermeneutic approach are relevant for our research. (see Patel & Davidson, 1991)

After designing the research questions we decided that a case study was an appropriate strategy for our research, since we needed to go into the depth of limited aspects of the problem area (see Yin, 1984).

We have used a qualitative method, since we believe that the identification of human beings’ perceptions about themselves and others will be clarified by verbal expressions. Furthermore, we do not have the intention of making any generalised conclusions or measuring any phenomena, rather we are interested in understanding situations. (see Patel & Davidson, 1991)

We decided to do our empirical study in 2 steps. In the first step, we used brainstorming technique⁵ in order to understand how co-workers

⁵ We have chosen Forsyth’s (1999, p.295) English definition: “A method for enhancing creativity in groups for heightened expressiveness, inhibited evaluation, quantity rather than quality, and deliberate attempts to build on earlier ideas.”

construct perceptions about themselves and others. In the second step, we tried to understand how perceptions were manifested in the co-workers everyday work in order to understand why the co-workers have these perceptions and why they behave in this particular way. We therefore used research interviews⁶ in the second step.

We will henceforth present the two different steps further by discussing the collection of data and treatment of data⁷. We will also evaluate our research procedures.

3.2 BRAINSTORMING MEETINGS

3.2.1 *Collection of Data*

Brainstorming is a technique that enhances the creativity and can be used in problem-solving procedures (Osborn, 1967; Forsyth, 1999; Napier & Gershenfeld, 1993). We found this technique suitable to use since it gave us a general picture of the participants' perceptions. The choice of using groups instead of individuals was partly due to the social facilitation⁸. Additionally, by using groups we were able to get a

⁶ We have chosen Cannell and Kahn's (1968, p.530) definition: " ...a two person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information and focused by him on content specified by research objectives."

⁷ The reader should be aware that the secondary data is not further discussed in our methodology. In short the search for literature was mostly done at different libraries. Databases and the Internet were used in order to find additional secondary sources. Furthermore, the case company provided general information about the organisation.

⁸ We have chosen Forsyth's (1999, p 269) definition of social facilitation: "Improvement in task performance that occurs when people work in the presence of other people."

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first impression of the situation in a shorter time, compared to if we had used individual interviews at this stage.

Brainstorming technique does not limit the individual's creativity and it enables one to alter the atmosphere in a problem-solving meeting (Osborn, 1967; Napier & Gershenfeld 1993). This was important for us, since our problem area was to understand how co-workers constructed perceptions about themselves and others⁹. Cultural differences between co-workers or friends could be a sensitive topic to address. To use a technique that facilitated the process, to get the participants to open up, was essential when choosing this approach.

Our intention was to use some of Osborn's (1967) ideas about brainstorming meetings. For instance, we used Osborn's four rules¹⁰ when conducting the brainstorming meetings. We have only focused on the idea generating stage, Osborn's first stage, when using the brainstorming technique. We therefore conducted only one session for each group.

When preparing for the brainstorming meetings we composed a list of our own ideas about the problem area that was going to be discussed. The problem questions were "What are the perceived characteristics of Swedes/Danes? What are the perceived culture differences between Swedish and Danish co-workers at the office?"

As "the group leaders" we were also prepared to address some idea-generating questions to the group. This enabled the group leader to facilitate the group when it stopped generating ideas (see Osborn, 1967). We had to keep in mind, however, that the group leader should not interrupt the meeting (see Osborn, 1967).

⁹ For information about the carrying out of the brainstorming meetings see Appendix 1

¹⁰ For information about the four rules see Appendix 2

Additionally a general question was designed; “What is your perception of culture in general?” This was used before actually addressing the problem questions. The purpose of doing this was to get the participants to think about general aspects of the problem area (see Osborn, 1967).

Our contact person at the case company informed the participants in advance about the issue, cultural differences between Swedes and Danes, that was going to be discussed during the brainstorming meeting. This enabled the participants to think and reflect about the subject before attending the meeting (see Osborn 1967).

We decided to conduct our brainstorming meetings in the participants’ native language as categories and words available to us in our own language affect our thinking (see Hofstede, 1984). It was important for the study to get the participants’ personal interpretations of the problem area and the use of a second language could affect the participants’ ability to express their thoughts in a natural and a genuine way.

3.2.1.1 Sampling

Osborn (1967) states that the selection of participants depends on the problem stated. We selected participants according to the variable of language. Language is the most clearly recognisable part of culture (Hofstede, 1984) and this was easily recognised at the office, where the dominating nationalities are Swedes and Danes.

By dividing up three groups depending on the variable of language, we were able to get the different groups’ perceptions during the brainstorming meeting. The selection was randomly done by our contact person at Kengao Management Centre. Group A consisted of 3 Swedes, who also speak Danish. Group B consisted of 4 Swedes that have limited knowledge of the Danish language. Group C consisted of 4 Danish participants.

3.2.2 The Treatment of Data Collected

We have concentrated on the shift between our own pre-understanding and the participants' perceptions in order to understand the problem area and this implies that different perspectives have developed during the research process. (see Patel & Davidson, 1991) In order to understand how these perspectives evolved we will henceforth present the treatment of the data collected.

The native language of the participants was used and this meant that one of the researchers did not understand what was discussed during the brainstorming meeting. This researcher took notes about the atmosphere and body language. Important aspects identified by the researcher, who was not a member of any of the two cultures, was essential. Both researchers had to individually first write down what they thought were important observations before starting the mutual treatment of the data collected.

The participants' answers during the brainstorming meeting were written down on a white board. The written documentation was translated into English¹¹. Columns¹² were made for each question that was discussed during the meeting. The columns were separately presented for each brainstorming group, since this facilitated us to identify similarities and differences between the three groups.

Furthermore, one of the rules during the brainstorming meeting was that the participants had to build upon each other's ideas. Each issue was categorised according to their relation to each other. A tape recorder was used during the brainstorming meetings and the tapes helped us to recall the discussion that was held when the participants related to different issues that had previously been presented. The tapes also gave us leads for how the participants reasoned during the meeting,

¹¹ Swedish to English and Danish to Swedish and in turn English

¹² See chapter 4 Results and Analysis for a presentation of these columns

which were important in the process of explaining how the participants constructed perceptions about themselves and others.

3.2.3 Evaluation

A researcher has to keep in mind that all stages of a study have their own sources of bias (Vijver & Leung, 1997). We will henceforth discuss some aspects of the difficulties that arose when conducting this study.

We have chosen to have a bilingual approach when using the brainstorming technique. This means that the meetings were conducted in two different languages and the translations that needed to be done are sources of error. The translator will have her/his own understanding of the participants' ideas, which might be different from the original meaning (see Hofstede, 1984). Furthermore, the researcher and the respondents may hold different normative expectations concerning the use of language (Cray & Mallory, 1998). Moreover, the actual translation of the recorded documentation from the brainstorming meetings had to be translated from Swedish/Danish into English. The nuances of meaning might have become lost during the translation (see Hofstede, 1984) which could have affected the context of the interpretations that were analysed.

Language is, however, only one aspect of the difficulties that could arise. As previously stated social facilitation was one of the reasons for using groups instead of the individuals. However, social loafing¹³ will affect the group performance. There are numerous reasons for this, for instance, blocking might occur, which means that the participants had to wait to state their ideas. While waiting they might have forgotten their ideas or decided not to express them. (see Forsyth, 1999)

¹³ Forsyth (1999, p 288) defines social loafing as "the reduction of individual effort when people work in groups compared with when they work alone".

The stratified random sampling of the brainstorming groups might also have had an impact on the validity of the data collected (see Yin, 1984). According to Brown & Tumeo (1998), the cognitive styles of the group members might affect the group performance. Some individuals might be convergent thinkers, which means they tend to stick to a topic. These individuals seek depth before breadth. Some individuals might, however, be divergent thinkers, which means that they do more free association and jump between topics. These individuals seek breadth with less depth. In our study the brainstorming groups might have consisted of individuals with different cognitive styles. We had to take this into consideration when leading the group meetings. This could lead to “the group leader” indirectly affecting the participants’ ideas, which in turn affected the results.

3.3 RESEARCH INTERVIEWS

3.3.1 Collection of Data

We found that research interview was an appropriate method to use in the second step, since this enabled us to further investigate the problem area. Our research objectives were at this stage to understand how the perceptions were manifested in the co-workers’ everyday work in order to understand why the co-workers have these perceptions and why they behave in this particular way¹⁴.

The conversation approach of research interviews was an essential tool since this enabled the interviewee to talk freely. We created some general areas, before the interview in order to serve as a guide¹⁵. These areas were addressed in the context of a conversational style. This meant that we had to prepare and practice our questioning skills.

¹⁴ For information about the carrying out of the research interviews see Appendix 3

¹⁵ For information about the interview guide see Appendix 4

Furthermore, we had to reflect upon how to listen and follow up leads that the interviewees might present. (see Millar et al, 1992)

3.3.1.1 Sampling

We conducted 6 interviews and the respondents were selected according to 3 variables, which were language, department and personnel responsibility. It was not enough to only sample according to the variable of language in this step, since we wanted to see how the perceptions were manifested in the co-workers' everyday work. We needed to find a variable that could be more specifically related to work situations. The variable of personnel responsibility¹⁶ was chosen. This enabled us to see from both the managers' perspective and the fellow colleagues' perspective. We also needed to interview respondents from different departments, since some departments have Swedish managers and some have Danish managers.

Our contact person at Kengao Management Centre did the selection. We interviewed two respondents that matched the requirements for each brainstorming group, which means 2 Swedes that speak Danish, 2 Swedes, 2 Danes. The pair of Swedes and Danes differentiated in terms of all 3 variables. The pair consisting of Swedes that speak Danish did not, however, differentiate in terms of the variable of personnel responsibility. The variables of department and responsibility meant that respondents that did not attend the brainstorming meeting had to be interviewed. This means that there was a mix of respondents that had/had not attended the brainstorming meeting.

¹⁶ Personnel responsibility was seen in terms of manager and fellow colleagues. In this study we will use co-workers in terms of both managers and fellow colleagues.

3.3.2 The Treatment of Data Collected

One of the first steps in the treatment of the collected data was to individually reflect upon the interviews and write down general impressions. A tape recorder was used during the interviews and the recordings were analysed and discussed. This enabled us to further understand and recall how the respondents reasoned. General categories were identified in order to link important aspects. This helped us to forward and interpret the respondents' perceptions. The analysis of the data collected was seen as an exemplification of the present situation. This meant that there were only some aspects, of the data collected, which we thought were essential for this study, that were treated and analysed. We decided not to present the results from the individual interviews in the thesis because the respondents were assured anonymity.

Furthermore, notes taken during the interviews were compared and discussed. Moreover, our contact person at Kengao Management Centre helped us to explain how certain terms and issues were used in the company context, which was not clearly explained during the interviews as this was an ingroup language.

3.3.3 Evaluation

The sampling was done by our contact person at Kengao Management Centre, which could be seen as a source of error. This person's individual preference and thoughts could have an impact upon who was chosen, which in turn could have affected the results from the interviews.

During the interviews certain aspects had to be considered. It was vital that the respondent answered the questions without being subjected to the interviewer bias. Our age, gender and cultural background might influence how the different interviewees answered. (see Millar et al, 1992) We had to take this into consideration while conducting the interviews. The interviewees might have been, however, trying to

please the interviewer.

The interviews enabled us to get some deeper understanding for the problem area, however, formal interviews have certain limitations. Shared assumptions, contextual understanding and common knowledge of the speaker's everyday life is not presented (Lazarsfeld, 1935). This implies that our interpretations are crucial in this study. We believe that our interpretations should be regarded as a resource. We have reflected and discussed this in depth in order to avoid misinterpretations.

Both researchers' interpretations of what was discussed during the interviews were especially important in this step. Therefore the interviews were conducted in English. This implies, however, that some aspects might have been lost, since the respondents might have had difficulties in expressing themselves in a second language.

We have presented and discussed some aspects of the two steps, brainstorming meetings and research interviews, used in this study. We will henceforth discuss our frame of reference and reflect upon alternative methods that could have been used.

3.4 PERSONAL FRAME OF REFERENCE

Our previous and present experiences from studying and working abroad have widened our pre-understanding for the problem area. Additionally, we are a multicultural research team, which means that we are able to use personal experiences to understand the different aspects of working in a multicultural setting.

Despite our multicultural background the Swedish culture might dominate this research. For instance, one of the researchers is Swedish and the case company's identity is Swedish¹⁷. One consequence of this

¹⁷ This assumption is based upon previous research at Kengao. For further information about the study see 4.2.2 A Typical Co-worker at Kengao Management Centre.

is the influence of ethnocentrism. Hofstede (1984) uses Drever's (1952, p.86) definition of ethnocentrism, which states that it is an "exaggerated tendency to think the characteristics of one's own group or race superior to those of other groups or races". This implies in our research that Swedish and Danish culture might not be regarded as mutually different (see Cray & Mallory, 1998). The Swedish culture might be treated as the superior culture of the two. Hence, our multicultural research team is an advantage when dealing with this dilemma.

3.5 ALTERNATIVE METHOD

In this study, we have as previously stated, chosen a qualitative method. It would, however, have been suitable to use a quantitative method. By using, for instance, a questionnaire one could follow up the results presented in the brainstorming groups. One could have sent out a questionnaire to the personnel working at the office by e-mail. This could have led to a more general picture of how the majority of the personnel perceived the cultural differences. With the method we have chosen, we cannot draw any general conclusions about all Swedish and Danish co-workers at the office. We can only give some leads for how it could be done and how some co-workers perceive it. By using a questionnaire, other conclusions could have been drawn. This might have been more appropriate if one had a solid knowledge base of the situation.

Furthermore, we cannot draw any conclusions about if the two different groupings, Danes and Swedes, are the most important ones in this particular situation. There could be different constellations of groups that might have a larger impact on the co-workers' everyday work. By not stating the two groupings, Danes and Swedes, in the brainstorming meetings, the participants might have stated other groupings relevant. Then, however, one might have done the sampling differently.

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter we will present the results and the analysis of the empirical study. The analysis is based upon our interpretations. Of course, impressions and experiences that we have gained during the visits to the office will have an impact when interpreting the material gathered in the empirical study.

Firstly, we will analyse the construction of perceptions. Thereafter perceived differences in work behaviour will be analysed. Finally, we will analyse the determinants of particular perceptions and behaviour.

4.1 CONSTRUCTION OF PERCEPTIONS

How did the members of the brainstorming groups construct perceptions about themselves and others?

The use of brainstorming meetings enabled us to get a first impression of the perceptions that the different members of groups had. The presented characteristics revealed what the participants perceived as important for being members of ingroup/outgroup, Swedes/Danes or Danes/Swedes. Additionally, the cultural differences at the office were clarified.

The reader should keep in mind that during the brainstorming meetings the outgroup were explicitly stated from the beginning. We as “the group leaders” had to clarify what the study was about; which was at this stage, cultural differences between Swedes and Danes. This means that the participants directly became aware of what we, as researchers, considered to be an ingroup/outgroup. This implies that it was primarily the social identity that got clarified, since intergroup comparisons between Swedes and Danes were dominating the

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discussions. We therefore cannot discuss any particular differences that might exist within the groups of Swedes or Danes.¹⁸

Henceforth, we will separately present and analyse the different brainstorming groups' perceptions. The reader should be aware that the analysis consists of certain pieces of the presented material that we regard as important for this particular section. We will also connect some parts later on in other sections of the analysis. Hence, there might exist other links and connections for the reader that are presented but not discussed.

¹⁸ For further information about social identity and personal identity see also 2.3.1.1 Levels of Abstraction.

4.1.1 Group A

Group A consisted of Swedes who speak Danish. The three columns show the results from group A's brainstorming meeting. We asked the participants to state which characteristics were the most evident ones. The bold text in the columns represents these.

<p><i>What are the perceived characteristics of Danes?</i> Hygge - not being effective, have it cosy Humour Self-irony Grassroots organisations Nationalistic Danes are very much Danish Individualistic The Dane is his own Beer, food Eating Danish food Jantelaw - they are a small minority They want to keep their identity Islands surrounded by water Foreigners- should not take over Conservative Danes own their own houses Larger class differences in Denmark Design/form Architecture Little brother complex Royalist Small companies Business entrepreneurs The Danes spend a lot of money on traditions-weddings Danes are more spontaneous</p>	<p><i>What are the perceived characteristics of Swedes?</i> Love the nature Serious Stiff More international Swedes admire the foreign/different Fashion/Foreign food Different kind of curiosity Swedes are not so proud of the Swedish Self criticism Softer More diplomatic Shy Do not touch me-more on the side Difficult body language The Swedes shut Danes out The Swedes are more dutiful Authorities Collectivists Curious about news</p>	<p><i>What are the perceived cultural differences between Swedish and Danish co-workers at the office?</i> Difficult to see At lunch the Danes sit by themselves The Danes are a minority They work at different departments Some departments more Danes The language is important Distance since there is an insecurity when it comes down to language There are nuances in the Danish language New employees do not understand the Danish language You can not take a language course, one has to live in the culture The differences in humour essential More pictures in the Danish language Ruff misunderstandings of the Danes' jokes The Danish humour is ruff Jokes about each other Jokes from Danes are direct and Swedes misunderstands</p>
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The atmosphere during the brainstorming meeting was relaxed and the members seemed to be conscientious and genuinely interested in the topic discussed. These participants all live in Denmark, which could imply that they might be personally interested in the issues discussed.

In order to explain how the group categorised others, we need to define their membership of a particular group. The social identity of this group is not obvious, which implies that it might be difficult for us to explain how they categorised ingroups contra outgroups. This group did not use the term *we*, neither when referring to the Danish group nor the Swedish group. The membership either to the group of Danes or Swedes was, from this perspective, not evident during the brainstorming meeting.

The group characterised Danes as “persons with a good sense of humour” and Swedes as “serious”. When we link the two statements we can interpret that serious does not have the same negative meaning as referring to Swedes as persons that do not have a good sense of humour. A study conducted by, Howard & Rothbart (1980) shows that it is easier to give negative traits to the outgroup than the ingroup. This means that the characteristics such as having no sense of humour might be threatening to their social identity as Swedes and therefore not stated. On the other hand, the positive trait of having a good sense of humour might indicate that the members of the group also could identify themselves with the Danish group. These aspects also made it difficult to define the group’s membership.

The group agreed that the cultural differences between the Danes and the Swedes at the office were mainly visible during the lunch break. “At lunch the Danes sit by themselves”. It should be noticed that it was the Danes and not the Swedes that were sitting by themselves. From this aspect one might interpret that they viewed themselves as members of the ingroup of Swedes. They had noticed, however, that “the Swedes exclude the Danes”, which could indicate that they viewed themselves as an ingroup to the outgroup of both Swedes and Danes. Their social identity could be signified by a membership to the group of Swedes that speak Danish and live in Denmark. This means

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that they might regard both Swedes and Danes sometimes as an outgroup. The group might, however, have a different distance to the Swedes and the Danes as they are brought up in Sweden. This could indicate that they might have a closer relationship to the Swedes than the Danes.

The participants' opinions of why the Swedes and the Danes sit separately at lunch were the language difficulties. Some of the Swedes do not understand the Danish language. The group emphasised that "the Danes' jokes are often misunderstood by the Swedes". This could be linked to Lewis (2000), who states that Danes are known for making jokes with a clever irony and cutting frankness. The groups perceived that the jokes had an impact on the relationship between the Swedes and the Danes. "The Swedes sometimes get offended". It was not, however, clear during the brainstorming meeting how this affected their own relationship to the Swedes or the Danes.

4.1.2 Group B

Group B consisted of Swedes, who live in Sweden and have limited knowledge of the Danish language. The three columns show the results from group B’s brainstorming meeting. We asked the participants to state which characteristics were the most evident ones. The bold text in the columns represents these.

<p><i>What are the perceived characteristics of Danes?</i> Northern dry Cannot be trusted when doing business Can be trusted when doing business Hygge-everything that we think is unhealthy Temperament-allows themselves to show feelings, they argue Easygoing They booze Zealous- they are like small policemen They believe that we have more taxes in Sweden, this is wrong Nationalistic They are different when it comes to clothes They are different on the surface They smoke all the time They do not love Swedes Danish design Danish leadership has more authority than Swedes</p>	<p><i>What are the perceived characteristics of Swedes?</i> Totally the opposite The Swedes have many images about the Danes Shy Reserved and Controlled- do not shout, do not get angry except when we are drunk Lagom - equal, do not stick out, do not say that we are good Naïve, believe good things about everyone Blue-eyed. eg when it come to the government Honest Decent Snusar-snuffing Nature lovers Pay our bills on time The Swedish is not the same as it was some years ago Healthy, eat healthy food Jantelaw Jealousy Compromises, diplomatic Swedes get things done Build companies Innovative</p>	<p><i>What are the perceived cultural differences between Swedish and Danish co-workers at the office?</i> The Danes do not laugh when we make jokes The Danes are a minority We have different assignments in the company The Danes stick to themselves The Swedes are much more open In the dining room the Danes sit by themselves Language is a barrier Not so many differences We are all individuals There is nothing here at the office that reminds you of that you are in Denmark This is a Swedish colony The Swedes are more international</p>
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The atmosphere was a little bit tense during the meeting; however, there were a lot of jokes and laughs, which could indicate a way to ease the tension. This could mean that cultural differences between the Swedes and the Danes at the office were a sensitive topic to discuss.

During the brainstorming meeting, the membership of the group of Swedes was easy to identify. The group used terms like “we Swedes” which indicates their social identity. For example; the participants had constructed knowledge about the term “hygge” by comparing themselves with the Danish habits, for instance, “smoking”. “We Swedes are healthy” and “the Danes are unhealthy, they smoke all the time”, which indicates an intergroup comparison. The implicit recognition of membership to the ingroup of Swedes was evident.

Furthermore, the group perceived Swedes as “reserved and controlled”. When comparing this to how they viewed Danes, one could interpret that the Danes were characterised by negative traits. “Danes tend to show feelings”. This was exemplified by stating that “they tend to argue”. This might be linked to a protection of their social identity as Swedes. The term “lagom” could be seen as deeply rooted in the social identity of being Swedes, and this does not easily coexist with arguing. The group seemed to categorise Danes based upon their social identity as Swedes.

The participants exemplified the cultural differences at the office by stating “in the dining room the Danes sit by themselves during lunch”. “The Danes mix inside their own group but do not include Swedes”. The group explained this by stating that “we have different assignments at the company” and “the Swedes and the Danes do not meet so often”. This implies that there is not much face-to-face interaction between the Danes and the Swedes at the office.

4.1.3 Group C

Group C consisted of Danes. The three columns show the results from group C's brainstorming meeting. We asked the participants to state which characteristics were the most evident ones. The bold text in the columns represents these.

<p><i>What are the perceived characteristics of Swedes?</i> Humbleness Swedes are very Swedish Tend to dance Tend to sing Different relation to liquor Serious, they tend to take their tasks and assignments very seriously, they tend to stay after working hours Stiff Very suspicious at the first contact Effective, always stick to their work Loud Take a lot of space They raise their children differently More international More professional</p>	<p><i>What are the perceived characteristics of Danes?</i> Pleasant Likeable Sympathetic Egoistic More humour Untraditional, we can solve a task in a new way Shallow We dress more casual Anarchistic Take nothing for granted Hospitable Hospitable when it is needed</p>	<p><i>What are the perceived cultural differences between Swedish and Danish co-workers at the office?</i> Efficiency There is a relaxed atmosphere between Danes and Swedes It has changed over the years though There is not much contact between the different departments The Swedes never talk about their private life The Swedes do not share so much about themselves Swedes often go to Denmark, we never go to Sweden really It is a democratic atmosphere at the office We Danes, we care much more about each other</p>
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The atmosphere was warm during the brainstorming meeting. It seemed that the participants took the discussions seriously and there was a lot of thinking and quiet moments for individual reflections.

The group categorised the Danes as “likeable”, “pleasant” and “having a good sense of humour”. This could be connected to Lewis (2000), who states that Danes are known for having a good sense of humour. This is a characteristic that is closely linked to the easy-going attitude that Danes are known to have. Swedes, however, are also known to have a good sense of humour, but compared to Danes, they could get apprehended as having less sense of humour. The outgroup was characterised as “serious”. One could interpret this as that the group gave themselves, the ingroup, positive traits. When intergroup comparisons are made certain attributes might get changed or enhanced, which could affect the categorisation of others and themselves.

The “dutiful Swedes” could be interpreted as a positive trait since they were seen as “effective”. The group, however, perceived themselves as “being able to select new solutions while working”. This means that the participants do not believe that being effective implies creativity. This could be further connected to the fact that they perceived themselves as “anarchistic” which might explain why the participants come up with new solutions for how to solve their task. The group categorised themselves according to their social identity as Danes, which could affect how they categorise others.

According to the participants, the cultural differences were not that visible at the office. There is a “democratic atmosphere at the office”. It was, however, stated that “the Swedes they do not share so much about themselves”. Some of the participants stressed the fact that they worked with people that they did not really know. “I do not really know the Swedish woman that I work with”. “Swedes never talk about their private lives”.

4.1.4 Comparison of perceptions

It seems that there are some similarities among the characteristics the groups stated. For instance, group B, who are Swedes, characterised themselves as reserved and controlled. Group A, who are Swedes and speak Danish, stated that Swedes are serious and stiff, which is similar to group C's statement. Furthermore, both groups A and B perceived Danes as nationalistic. Group C characterised the Swedes as more international, than Danes. These examples indicate that the groups share some stereotypical judgements about Swedes and Danes.

From the brainstorming meetings we are able to identify some perceived differences between Swedes and Danes from two general dimensions, national and organisational factors. In figure 2 the national factors, such as being cosmopolitan contra local and the organisation factors, such as being task-oriented contra social-oriented at work, are illustrated. The national and the organisational factors might support each other and be dependent upon the assignments the co-workers have in the organisation. The Danes might behave more in a social manner at work and be more nationalistic in their views. The perceptions of the Danes as being nationalistic might get enhanced by the fact that many Danes work in support positions in the organisation, which means that they do not work as much in the international arena. The Swedes, on the other hand, were perceived as more effective and international than the Danes. The perceptions of Swedes as being international might get enhanced by the fact that there are more Swedes in manager positions. Managers at Kengao Management Centre work frequently in the international arena.

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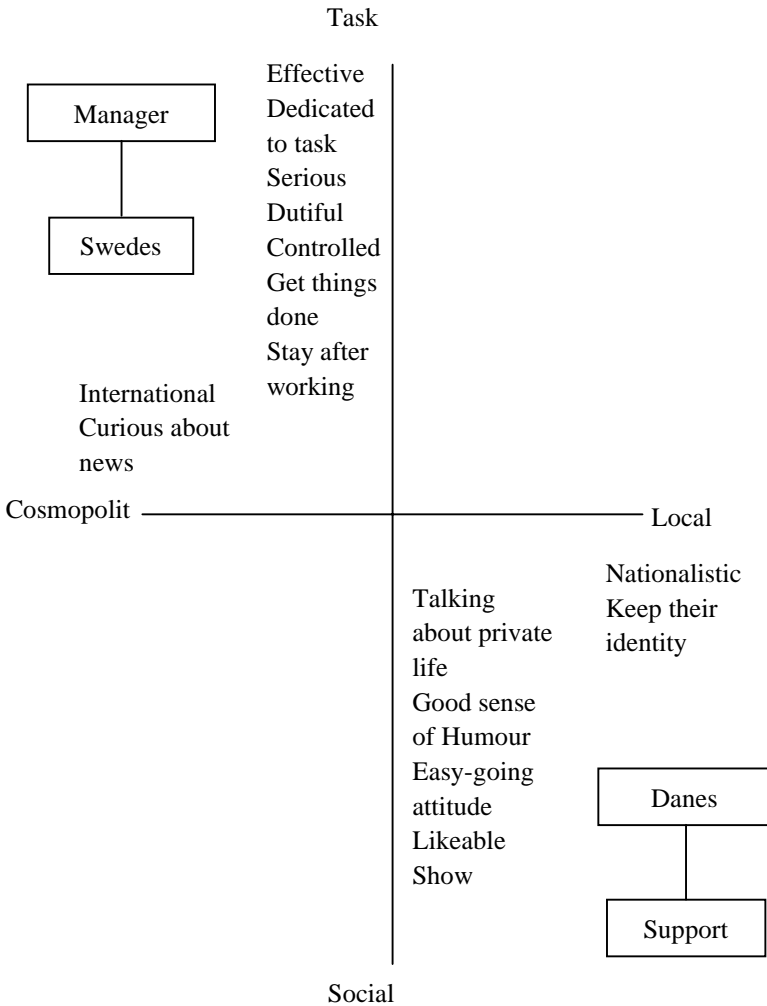


Figure 2: Perceived differences from two dimensions: National and Organisational factors. (Own model, developed after an inspiring discussion with our tutor)

We will now further compare the results from the brainstorming meetings. This enables us to develop a deeper understanding of how the members of the groups construct perceptions about themselves and others. The reader should keep in mind that categorisation is context-dependent, which implies that it is not fixed¹⁹. We cannot give an exact explanation for how the participants categorised themselves and others, however, we will henceforth explain some aspects that might have had an impact.

4.1.4.1 Perceived differences between the Swedes and the Danes

Categorisations might become salient to the extent that differences within categories in a given context are less than differences between categories (Oakes et al, 1994). For example; the salient category in a given context might be Scandinavian cultures. One might then argue that the differences within various Scandinavian groups are less than the differences between Scandinavian and non-Scandinavian groups. This is based upon the idea of intraclass similarities and interclass differences (see Oakes et al, 1994).

All groups stated, in one way or another that there are differences between Danes and Swedes. “Swedes are very Swedish”. “Danes are very Danish” and “We are totally the opposite”. The categorisation of Danes and Swedes become salient to the extent that differences within categories, Danes or Swedes, are less than between categories, Danes and Swedes, in the comparative context. These statements could be interpreted as that there exist perceived differences between Danes and Swedes in general.

As previously stated culture could be seen as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another” (Hofstede, 1984, p. 21), which in this context means the collective programming which distinguishes the

¹⁹ For further information about the context dependency see also 2.3.1.2 The Salience of Categories.

members of Danes or Swedes. This could mean that the social meaning of comparative differences and similarities between Danes and Swedes is something that is determined by the collective programming members of national cultures have. The participants, in the brainstorming groups, had the collective programming about the two groups, Danes and Swedes, before actually starting working at the office. The stereotypes developed about themselves and other groups can be seen as shared consensual beliefs.

4.1.4.2 The Majority/Minority Perspective

The perceptions of varying group homogeneity could be seen as a product of a dynamic process of comparison and categorisation. With this in mind one might want to claim that it does not matter how many people might be involved in the process. (Oakes et al, 1994) Simon & Brown (1987), conducted a study, however, to see if homogeneity effects were generally obtained because people assumed that they were a part of a majority. The study showed that minorities are seen as more homogenous than majorities, especially ingroup minorities. If people were not part of the majority, their ingroup belonging could be threatened by the outgroup. They would therefore perceive themselves as an ingroup more homogenous compared to an outgroup. This does not mean, however, that homogeneity is restricted to minorities.

When transferring these conclusions to the situation at the office, group A could be regarded as a minority since about 4% of the personnel at the office are Swedes that speak Danish. Swedes that speak Danish or other groups did not, however, explicitly state this. This might be due to the fact that Swedes that speak Danish and live in Denmark might be regarded by others as members of the group of Swedes.

Both group A and B, however, mentioned that Danes are a minority. About 25% of the personnel working at the office are Danes. The Danes might perceive themselves as more homogenous than the Swedish outgroup, which could lead to that the “groupness” of being Danes gets enhanced. (see Simon & Brown, 1987) This could mean

that Swedish co-workers might easier perceive Danish co-workers as an outgroup.

Group C did not, however, explicitly state that they look upon themselves as a minority at the office. Outside the office they are the majority compared to Swedes. This could also be the reason for the Danes not mentioning the division of nationalities in the dining room. They might not perceive the minority/majority relationship in the same way as Swedes. Group C, however, states that Swedes take a lot of space, which could be interpreted that they might be bothered about being a minority at the office.

Furthermore, both groups A and B mentioned that Danes are a minority group at the office, which could have an impact on why they perceive that the Danes sit by themselves during the lunch break. Group B stated: “the office is a Swedish colony, since there is nothing here at the office that reminds you that you are in Denmark”. The Danes might easier be perceived as outsiders in the Swedish colony and thus become extra visible as a minority.

Group A perceived that the Swedes are dutiful to their task and group B states that Swedes get things done. Group C expressed that the Swedes tend to stay at the office after working hours. These statements could be connected to the fact that some Swedes, that live in Sweden, travel every day back and forth to the ferry by bus. The reason for this is that they live in their native country. This bus leaves at a certain time every day and is arranged by Kengao Management Centre. This implies that Swedes might have to work efficiently in order to catch the bus. Furthermore, when some Swedes have to stay after working hours it might become extra visible, since some Swedes otherwise tend to leave in a group.

To summarise, we have tried to answer the question how the members of the brainstorming groups constructed perceptions about themselves and others. From the brainstorming groups we can identify some general perceptions about Danes and Swedes. These characteristics can be seen as stereotypes. These perceptions could be based upon their

social identities of being Danes, Swedes or Swedes that speak Danish and live in Denmark. There could be some perceived differences of Danes and Swedes, which could have an impact on how the members of groups construct perceptions about themselves and others. Furthermore, the collective programming, members of national cultures have, could have an impact upon how co-workers construct perceptions. Moreover, the Danish co-workers are in a minority position, which means that they might perceive themselves as homogenous, which in turn could increase the groupness. This could mean that Swedish co-workers more easily perceive Danish co-workers as an outgroup. By applying thoughts about stereotyping we believe that we have been able to show some aspects of how the co-workers constructed their perceptions.

4.2 PERCEIVED DIFFERENCES IN WORK BEHAVIOUR

How were the perceptions manifested in the co-workers' everyday work?

By using the technique of brainstorming we were able to get some first leads for how perceptions were manifested at the office. By using research interviews we can develop a deeper understanding for how the perceptions were manifested in the co-workers daily work.

We interviewed two participants that matched the requirements for each brainstorming group.²⁰ Respondents A1 and A2 are Swedes who speak Danish. Respondents B1 and B2 are Swedes. Respondents C1 and C2 are Danes. The interviews started with a short presentation of the objectives of the study, which implies that social identities were also clarified in this step.

²⁰ For further information, see also 3.3.1.1 Sampling

4.2.1 Perceived differences in behaviour between Swedish and Danish co-workers

As previously stated, one could interpret that there exist some perceived differences between Danes and Swedes in general. With this in mind one could assume that there might exist some perceived differences between Swedish and Danish co-workers at Kengao Management Centre.

For example; Respondents A1, A2, who are Swedes and speak Danish, B1 who is a Swede and C1, who is a Dane stated that they perceived some differences between Danish and Swedish co-workers. All of them mentioned that “Danish co-workers tend to socialise more with each other compared to Swedish co-workers”. This was exemplified by the fact that “Danish co-workers tend to give each other gifts at Christmas and celebrate each other’s birthdays”. Respondent B1 stated: “The Danes seem to have it cosy. When I walk through the office I can hear when I pass a group of Danes. They laugh and have a good atmosphere.” Furthermore, respondents A1, C1 stated: “Swedish co-workers try to be efficient while working and dutiful to their tasks”. This is closely related to respondent B1’s statements: “We stick to what is said. We tend to follow what is decided and fulfil our task. A Dane says yes but you do not really know the outcome. I do not really understand that.”

These aspects distinguish Swedish and Danish co-workers from each other. The categorisation of Danish and Swedish co-workers become salient to the extent that differences within categories, Danish co-workers or Swedish co-workers, are less than between categories, Swedish and Danish co-workers, in the comparative context. (see Oakes et al, 1994)

All respondents stated, however, that Swedish and Danish co-workers are in general similar. “The Swedish culture and the Danish culture are alike. There are not so many differences.” Furthermore, all respondents stated that it was difficult to see particular differences, since there is not much contact between the different departments. Both respondent

B2 who is a Swedish manager, and C2 who is a Danish manager, stated that they could not see any particular cultural differences between the co-workers at the office. Instead they stated: “Co-workers differ primarily because of different assignments.”

Moreover, the co-workers sit in different sections of the building at the office and only meet during lunch. Respondent A1, who is a Swede and speak Danish, explicitly stated, however, that during lunch there is a division between the Swedish and Danish co-workers. “The Danes have a Danish table. I sometimes sit there. The Danes seem to have much more fun at work and they are more like good friends. I like that...They often talk about their private life. The family is important in Denmark.” Additionally, respondent B2, acknowledged: “There are no meeting points at the office. I think this is sad because I think that we should be able to meet more informally. We only meet during lunch.” This indicates that there is not much contact between Swedish and Danish co-workers. Interaction occurs probably between co-workers that work at the same department.

4.2.2 A Typical Co-worker at Kengao Management Centre

Co-workers at Kengao Management Centre are both members of national cultures and an organisational culture. A Kengaorian meant for us, before conducting the interviews, a co-worker at Kengao Management Centre. By using the term Kengaorian we tried to investigate if the national identity has an impact upon how co-workers categorise themselves and others as members of Kengao Management Centre. This helped us to further explain how Danish and Swedish co-workers’ perceptions, about themselves and others, were manifested while working.

The results from our study indicated that Swedish identity might be more contingent to the Kengaorian identity than the Danish identity. For example; respondent C1 stated that her Danish identity was characterised by “helpfulness” and this was important in her role at work. “I always try to help others, especially newcomers so they feel

welcome.” This was, however, not co-existent with her thoughts about what it means to be a Kengaorian. She thought that: “For me a Kengaorian could be very Swedish and work oriented. The Swedes are very serious and always focus on the deadlines. I always keep deadlines, but I do not need to stay and work after office hours. I do not get fussy over deadlines.” The Danish co-workers’ social identity might not, from this perspective, be co-existent to the Kengaorian identity. Respondent B1 who is a Swede, regarded himself as a typical Kengaorian. A Kengaorian, was for the respondent, signified by “being humble and informal”.

This indicates that the national identity could have an impact upon the co-workers’ perceptions about what it means to be a Kengaorian. This could also mean that this has an impact upon how co-workers categorise themselves and others. Danish co-workers might more easily perceive Swedish co-workers as Kengaorians than Swedish co-workers perceive Danish co-workers.

In order to further explain this we will use a study, which previously has been conducted at Kengao. We will henceforth refer to this study as Study 1. The study showed that the organisational identity was signified by Swedishness. With this in mind, without going too deep in the discussion about the relation between organisational identity and organisational culture, one could assume that the organisational culture at Kengao Management Centre is in some sense influenced by the organisational identity of Swedishness. As previously stated, beliefs and norms about work and social relations are in a way contingent upon national culture (Alvesson, 1995). Study 1 showed, however, that the organisation has been able to keep its Swedishness across national borders. This could mean that even if Kengao Management Centre is situated in Denmark, the Danish culture might marginally affect the organisational culture. There might be a dominance of Swedishness, which influences the norms that are legitimised in the organisation. This could support the previous statement that Danish co-workers might more easily perceive Swedish co-workers as Kengaorians than Swedish co-workers perceive Danish co-workers.

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What it means to be a Kengaorian might, however, also depend on how long the co-workers have been working at the company. For example; even if respondent A1 regarded herself as a Swede, she did not regard herself as a Kengaorian. She stated: “To be a Kengaorian one has to spend a longer time at Kengao. I do not regard myself as one. I mean I have worked at other companies most of my working life. Kengaorians are persons who go from school straight into Kengao.” The respondent has worked at Kengao Management Centre for only a couple of years. Furthermore, respondent B1, who is a Swede, has worked at Kengao Management Centre and other offices at Kengao, most of his working life. The respondent regarded himself as a typical Kengaorian.

The two respondents differ in time, in terms of years working at Kengao and in space, in terms of Kengao Management Centre and other offices at Kengao. (see Berger & Luckmann, 1966) This could affect why they perceive themselves as either Kengaorians or not. The collective programming distinguishes those who are part of the inside world and those who belong to the outside world. This could mean that Swedish co-workers, who have worked in the organisation for a longer time, might easier be perceived, by themselves and others, as Kengaorians. This implies that these Swedish co-workers might differ more than other Swedish co-workers, compared to Danish co-workers, since Danish identity might not so easily co-exist with the Kengaorian identity.

Danish and Swedish co-workers might, however, have similar perceptions about what is significant in general for co-workers at Kengao Management Centre. The lack of more dramatic differences, between Swedish and Danish co-workers, may be explained by a homogenisation effect of the organisational culture. Equality was a common topic that frequently was mentioned during the interviews in one way or the other. For example; both respondent A2, who is a Swede and speaks Danish, and C2, who is a Dane, stated: “Co-workers do not travel in business class.” Furthermore, respondent B1, who is a Swede, explained: “Co-workers do not get extra treatment because of their position. We have informal roles and co-workers are treated and

seen equally...The dress-code, for instance, no one wear ties or suits.”

The tendency not to travel in business class and not to wear ties and suits could be seen as artefacts that exist inside the organisation culture. The respondents, as insiders of the organisational culture, might not always be aware of the artefacts that exist. (see Schein, 1992) The way to travel and the dress code could be seen as tools, symbols, to maintain the culture and these symbols carry the values and norms that exist in the organisational culture. These might enhance the collectivity; every co-worker should be viewed and treated the same, regardless of position. Being equal seems to be important in the organisation and this might reduce differences between Swedish and Danish co-workers. The collective programming that the members of the organisation culture have, will distinguish co-workers of the organisation from other people working in other organisations. It is important to notice that, Study 1 showed similar characteristics among co-workers at Kengao. Not travelling in business class and not wearing ties and suits could be norms that exist at Kengao and not specifically at Kengao Management Centre.

4.2.3 Perceptions of Swedish and Danish managers

The national identity might, as previously stated, influence how co-workers perceive themselves and others. This can be further explained by exemplifying that a manager is not only a manager; he/she could be seen as a Swedish or Danish manager. Both respondent B2 and C2 are managers. They stated, however, that they do not perceive that the Danish and the Swedish management styles differ at the office. Comparing the different respondents' perceptions, about what signifies relationships between fellow colleagues and managers, can further develop this.

Respondent A2 is a Swede who speaks Danish. Her manager is a Dane and she perceived that “humour”, “openness”, “mutual respect”, “honesty” and “confidentiality” signified the relationship between them. This is similar to respondent C2, who is a Danish manager. He

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stated that “being respectful”, “having an open dialogue”, “behaving in a professional way” and “having fun together” are important aspects in the relationship with his fellow colleagues. These two respondents work at different departments but their perceptions about what signifies the relationships, having fun, sense of humour, respect etc, between manager and fellow colleagues seem to match. The perceptions that the Danish manager has about how he should behave might match the expectations that other co-workers have about managers in general.

Furthermore, respondent C1, who is a Dane, works with a Swedish manager. She stated, based upon her present relationship, that a manager should “be there” and “ready to discuss” when needed. This could be compared to respondent B2 who is a Swede. She states that she “tries to be a coach” in her role as a manager. The two respondents work at different departments but their perceptions about what signifies the relationship between manager and fellow colleagues seem to match. The perceptions that the Swedish manager has about how she should behave might match the expectations that other co-workers have about managers in general.

There seems to be a match between the Danish and Swedish management styles; the characteristics are closely related to each other. The managers’ perceptions about their management style seem to match the rest of the respondents’ perceptions about management style. From this perspective, the management style visible at the office might not depend upon any specific national identity of the managers.

Swedish fellow colleagues might, however, *expect* Danish managers to behave in a certain way. In the same way, Danish fellow colleagues might expect Swedish managers to behave in a certain way. This could mean that even if the two respondents B2 and C2 might not perceive any differences between Danish and Swedish management styles, their fellow colleagues might expect differences. For example; both respondents A1 and B1, who are Swedes, stated: “Danes are used to managers who act as authorities”. Respondent A1 explained: “I see Danish leadership as strong and determined. Swedish leadership is

more diplomatic and they compromise more. The Danes are much more business minded, kind of ruthless.”

As previously stated, members of groups expect to agree with members of the ingroup. If this is not accomplished, uncertainty arises. To reduce uncertainty members might recategorise themselves and others. Furthermore, members might seek to persuade others to accept the stereotypes held by ingroup and reject the stereotypes held by the outgroup. (Oakes et al, 1994) For example; Swedish fellow colleagues might perceive a Danish manager as part of their group in the context of all co-workers. When the Danish manager does not fulfil the expectations for how a Danish manager should behave, uncertainty among the members might arise. Furthermore, Swedish fellow colleagues might recategorise the Danish manager as a manager in general.

The managers might in general be perceived as an outgroup to both Swedish and Danish fellow colleagues. The expectations of how Danish and Swedish managers should behave might however differ between Danish and Swedish co-workers. A group can be perceived as homogenous when intergroup differences increase and intragroup differences decrease.(see Oakes et al, 1994) Managers in general might be perceived by themselves and others, as homogenous, since they differ from fellow colleagues, an intergroup comparison, in terms of personnel responsibilities. Furthermore, managers might be perceived by themselves as similar, which indicates an intragroup comparison.

Co-workers have been internalised by the socialising process, of what it means to be a manager and fellow colleagues. (see Berger & Luckmann, 1966) These beliefs could have an impact upon how relationships are built between managers and fellow colleagues. Additionally, it could affect how relationships are built within the group of managers or fellow colleagues.

To summarise, we have discussed how the perceptions were manifested in the co-workers’ daily work. There could be some perceived differences between Danish and Swedish co-workers at

Kengao Management Centre. The collective programming, that members of the organisational culture have, could have an impact upon how they construct perceptions. The organisation has a dominance of Swedishness, which influence the norms that are legitimised in the organisation, which could in turn affect how co-workers perceive themselves and others. Danish co-workers might more easily perceive Swedish co-workers as Kengaorians than Swedish co-workers perceive Danish co-workers. Furthermore, Swedish co-workers who have worked in the organisation for a longer time might easier be perceived, by themselves and others, as Kengaorians. This means that some Swedish co-workers might differ more than other Swedish co-workers, compared to Danish co-workers. On the other hand, Danish and Swedish co-workers might have similar perceptions of what is significant in general for co-workers at Kengao Management Centre, which might reduce the perceived differences between Danish and Swedish co-workers. Furthermore, managers might be perceived as homogenous both by themselves and others. The management style visible at the office might not depend upon any specific national identity of the managers. Co-workers might, however, expect different behaviour from Danish and Swedish managers.

4.3 DETERMINANTS OF PERCEPTIONS AND BEHAVIOUR

Why did the co-workers have these particular perceptions and why did they behave in this particular way?

The collective programming that distinguishes members of one group from another could affect why co-workers have certain perceptions about themselves and others and why they behave in a particular way. We have chosen in this study to address both co-workers' membership to national cultures and to an organisational culture.

4.3.1 Membership of a National Culture

In this particular study we have been given the opportunity to investigate two so-called similar cultures. Denmark and Sweden are geographically close and many macro-level factors, such as political and economic situation, religion and social welfare, are similar. Furthermore, national values might be similar in the two cultures. (see Lewis, 2000) These aspects could explain why members of Danish and Swedish culture might perceive that there are more similarities than differences between them.

The Danish and Swedish co-workers at Kengao Management Centre could hold stable stereotypical judgements about themselves and each other before starting work at the office. This implies that they have judgements about ingroup and outgroup members without any face-to-face interaction (see Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The cultural values are as previously stated stable within a particular society (Hofstede, 1984) and this could have an impact upon the stability of stereotypical judgements (see Oakes et al, 1994). The collective programming of what is significant for being a member of the ingroup and the outgroup is something that has been learned mainly by primary socialisation. The stereotypical judgements travel from generation to generation. (see Berger & Luckmann, 1966)

These aspects have an effect upon what values and beliefs Danes and Swedes have about each other and themselves. These values might differ, but this does not mean that there automatically will be a collision between Danes and Swedes. Danes might expect to disagree with Swedes and vice versa and at the same time assume to agree with other members of the same group. (see Oakes et al, 1994)

The Danish and Swedish cultures could be seen as social institutions (see Oakes et al, 1994; Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Cultures are the products of history where they have been produced. The Danish and the Swedish cultures are defended by the legitimisation, which consists of social norms for how members of the groups, Danes or Swedes, should behave. Further, it explains why Danes or Swedes behave in a

certain way. Danes might have the tradition, in their culture, of socialising with co-workers, as a normal part of their everyday work. The action of socialising with co-workers could have become habitulised and this is done subconsciously. (see Berger & Luckmann, 1966) The Swedes might also socialise, however, other things such as being effective, might be more significant for themselves and others. Being effective is something that Swedish co-workers might do subconsciously in their daily work. These aspects could have an impact upon why the co-workers have these perceptions about themselves and others and why they behave in a particular way.

To further develop the discussions about stable stereotypical judgements, one could compare the different respondents' perceptions about Danes and authorities. For instance, respondent A1, who is a Swede and speaks Danish, mentioned that Danes are used to authority in the relationship between managers and fellow colleagues. This was also stated by B1, who is a Swede. This was not, however, acknowledged by respondent A2, who is a Swede, who speaks Danish and lives in Denmark. On the contrary, she stated that Swedish managers might act more as authorities. Respondent C1, who is a Dane, did not acknowledge that Danes are used to authorities at their work place either. She explained that younger Danes are used to less formal relationships with managers.

According to Lewis (2000), Danish leaders are expected to have a low profile and consult co-workers for different opinions. Furthermore, Lewis states that Danes expect horizontal communication and that there are few hierarchical levels that have to be taken into consideration while working in the Danish culture. These aspects might not co-exist with the perceptions about Danish managers as authorities. The Swedish co-workers' perceptions about the relationship between Danish co-workers and Danish managers are different from the Danish co-worker and the Swedish co-worker who lives in Denmark.

There could have been a change in reality, which means that the stereotypical judgements might have changed for the younger Danish

co-workers. There might have been clashes of views between generations. Conflicts over stereotypes are part of the historical process through which societies change stereotypes, intending to replace the false, old with the valid, new (Oakes et al, 1994). Furthermore, culture should be viewed as dynamic and not static in its nature. It is an ongoing process, which consists of constructing and reconstructing meaning and meaningful forms. (Study 1)

The reality, however, might not have changed for some of the Swedish co-workers and this could be the reason why some of the Swedish co-workers still have the perceptions about Danes and authorities. Respondent A1 regards herself as a Swede and she speaks Danish. Her stereotypical judgements are similar to Swedish co-workers who have limited knowledge in Danish. This might be due to the fact that she does not *live* in the Danish culture. This indicates that the collective programming that develops by living in a national culture could have an impact on why co-workers have certain perceptions about themselves and others.

4.3.2 Membership of an Organisational Culture

Furthermore, organisational cultures could, in the same way as national cultures, be seen as institutions. The history, which is connected to the development of Kengao, could have an impact upon the overall organisational culture. The organisational culture controls how the co-workers should behave at work and why co-workers behave in a certain way by legitimisation. These norms distinguish the co-workers from other people who do not work in the organisation. The collective programming of what is significant for being a member of the ingroup and the outgroup is something that has been learnt by secondary socialisation. (see Berger & Luckmann, 1966)

Moreover, Kengao has its origin in Sweden. As previously stated Kengao Management Centre's organisational culture could in one sense be influenced by Swedishness. This could mean that the organisational culture is based upon norms that might match in one

way or the other, both Danish and Swedish co-workers' beliefs. The Kengao Management Centre's organisational culture, which might match the overall organisational culture at Kengao, could match so-called Scandinavian beliefs.

The Danish and Swedish co-workers might subconsciously select certain ideas and thoughts, which match their national values and beliefs in their everyday work. For instance, the Swedish co-workers were perceived, not only by themselves but also by others, as being effective. According to Phillips-Martinsson (1991), being effective could be seen as a typical Swedish national value. This could mean that the national beliefs that are held by Swedish co-workers could have an impact upon the subconscious selection of certain aspects in the organisational culture. The organisational culture might stipulate that it is important that co-workers should use the time effectively. The Swedes might therefore behave according to the organisational norm. The Danish co-workers might expect Swedish co-workers to behave in this particular way, since they might have stable stereotypical judgements about Swedes. When the expectations match the behaviour of Swedish co-workers, there are no clashes of views between the groups. This could explain why Swedish co-workers perceive themselves as effective as the Danish co-workers also do.

On the other hand, the Danish co-workers were perceived, by themselves and others, as social. Lewis (2000) states that Danes are known for having an easygoing attitude and that they differ from Swedes by being uninhibited. The easygoing attitude and the uninhibited behaviour might be significant for how Danes socialise. The national beliefs that are held by Danish co-workers, as for instance being social in an uninhibited manner, might have an impact upon the subconscious selection of certain aspects in the organisational culture. The organisational culture might stipulate that co-workers should take care of each other. The Danish co-workers might behave according to the organisational norm, to take care of each other by asking questions about private life and socialising with each other. The way to show concern for each other might differ from Swedish co-workers. The Swedish co-workers might, however, expect Danish co-workers to

behave in this particular way, since they can have stable stereotypical judgements about Danes. When the expectations match the behaviour of Danish co-workers, there are no clashes of views between the groups. This could explain why Danish co-workers perceive themselves as social, as the Swedish co-workers also do.

With the previous discussion in mind, the minority/majority aspect might have an impact upon which norms dominate at the office. The Swedish co-workers' norms might dominate at the office, since a majority holds these. This could affect the distance between ingroup/outgroup, since it could enhance the perceived differences between the groups. From this perspective, the subconscious selection of certain aspects in the organisational culture could enhance the social identities of being particularly Swedish and Danish co-workers and not co-workers in general.

In other words, both the national cultures and the organisational culture could affect the co-workers' behaviour and have an impact upon why co-workers have particular perceptions. The Kengaorian identity is influenced by particularly the Swedish culture because of the Swedishness that might dominate in the organisational culture. In some sense, the Danish culture could also influence the Kengaorian identity, since the Danish co-workers create their own meaning of the term. See Figure 3. The organisational culture could have the purpose of homogenising the co-workers, which means that it might stipulate that co-workers should have the same values etc. This might create tension between the national values held by co-workers and the values that the organisational culture stipulates. The organisational culture might support the diversity that exists between the co-workers but it can also overemphasise diversity. There needs to be a balance between the organisational culture and the national cultures. When a company grows, getting international, the top management must get an insight that the organisational culture may have to change in order to use diversity. This means that the top management has an obligation to develop the organisational culture in order to draw benefit of diversity so it won't be an obstacle in cross-cultural interpersonal relations.

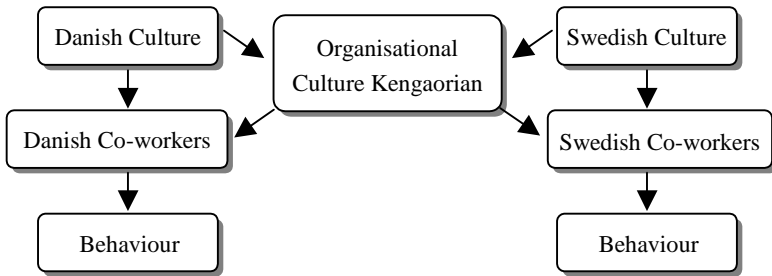


Figure 3. *The impact that the national cultures and the organisational culture have on the co-workers’ behaviour. (Own Model)*

Furthermore, as previously stated the management style visible at the office might not depend upon any specific national identity of managers. Managers could have been socialised into the organisation in a different way compared to other fellow colleagues. The usual career path to become a manager at Kengao is to work in different parts of the Kengao group. Moreover, working in the organisation for a longer time often signifies the career paths. This means that they have developed their collective programming in different spaces and time. During the socialisation process managers might become formed into a group and they could have similar action patterns. Their actions have become routines. (see Berger & Luckmann, 1966) This could be the reason why the fellow colleagues’ perceptions seem to match both the Danish and Swedish manager. The fellow colleagues perceive the managers as a group. This could also be a reason why the two respondents B2 and C2, who both are managers, did not perceive any differences between Danish and Swedish management style.

Furthermore, it appears that there are at least two different kinds of memberships in the organisation. For example; respondents B2 and C2, who both are managers, stated that there are “no cultural differences between Danish and Swedish co-workers visible at the office”. They stated “co-workers differ primarily because of different assignments and not according to their national cultural background”.

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As previously stated, fellow colleagues, however, perceived cultural differences between Swedish and Danish co-workers, in one way or another, in their daily work. The co-workers who work at the office everyday might regard themselves as primarily members of Kengao Management Centre and therefore the perceived differences might be meaningful for these co-workers. On the other hand, some co-workers who travel a lot and have a management position might perceive themselves as primarily members of Kengao. Respondent C2, who is a manager, explicitly stated: “I definitely see myself as a member of Kengao rather than a member of Kengao Management Centre.” The cultural differences between Swedish and Danish co-workers at the office might not be that meaningful since managers’ everyday life at work differ from the other fellow colleagues. That there are no cultural differences visible at the office is the reality for co-workers who perceive themselves as members of Kengao. That there are cultural differences visible at the office is the reality for co-workers who perceive themselves as members of Kengao Management Centre. This could affect why co-workers perceive differences between Swedish and Danish co-workers or not.

5. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We will in this chapter present a summary of the conclusions we have drawn in the previous analysis. This chapter will end in a discussion about how Kengao Management Centre can benefit from this research.

5.1 SUMMARY

By using thoughts about stereotyping, we have been able to explain how members of different cultural groups construct perceptions about themselves and others. In this study we have been given the opportunity to investigate members of Danish and Swedish groups at Kengao Management Centre. We have shown that some co-workers perceive differences between Danes and Swedes in general and between Danish and Swedish co-workers at the office.

In this particular study, Danish co-workers might more easily perceive Swedish co-workers as Kengaorians than Swedish co-workers perceive Danish co-workers, since Kengao Management Centre could have a dominance of Swedishness in the organisational culture. Additionally, Swedish co-workers who have worked in the organisation for a longer time might easier be perceived, by themselves and others, as Kengaorians. This means that some Swedish co-workers might differ more than other Swedish co-workers, compared to Danish co-workers. On the other hand, Danish and Swedish co-workers might have similar perceptions of what is significant in general for co-workers at Kengao Management Centre, which might reduce the perceived differences between Danish and Swedish co-workers. Previous research, however, indicates that these perceptions might not be particularly significant for co-workers at Kengao Management Centre, but characteristics for co-workers in general at Kengao.

Homogeneity could have an impact upon how Danish and Swedish co-workers construct perceptions. Danish co-workers are in a minority position at Kengao Management Centre, and therefore they might

perceive themselves as homogenous, which increases the groupness of being Danish co-workers. This could mean that Swedish co-workers might easier perceive Danish co-workers as an outgroup.

In this study, we have not found that there are any perceived differences between Swedish and Danish management styles at the office. The managers might be perceived as an outgroup/ingroup in terms of their personnel responsibilities but not according to any specific national identity. Moreover, the managers might be perceived, both by themselves and others as homogenous. Co-workers might, however, expect different behaviour from Danish and Swedish managers.

Furthermore, the collective programming that members of national cultures have, and the collective programming that members of the organisational culture have, could have an impact upon how they construct perceptions. It also explains why members of cultural groups have particular perceptions and why they behave in a particular way. The reason why the Swedish and Danish co-workers had particular perceptions about themselves and others might be due to membership of both national cultures and an organisational culture. The national cultures and the organisational cultures affect the co-workers' behaviour and will have an impact upon why co-workers have particular perceptions.

We have in this thesis discussed that it is the non-agreements between members of the ingroup that causes uncertainty. This means that, in certain contexts, co-workers might not find any difficulties with the national differences. Co-workers might expect to disagree with each other due to membership of different national cultures. It is in the context of viewing *all co-workers as one group* towards the outside world, where the differences might cause difficulties. There might from this perspective then be clashes of views between the different co-workers and this could have an impact upon the co-operation between co-workers.

This might occur especially when referring to two so-called similar national cultures, since others and themselves might more easily perceive the co-workers as one homogenous group. From this perspective, particular pressures, for instance that *all* co-workers should behave in a particular way, from different sources, for instance organisational culture, could have an impact upon if the cultural differences will cause difficulties. An *acceptance of diversity*, both by co-workers and by others, might counteract these difficulties.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall co-workers, both Danish and Swedish, seem to be proud of working for Kengao. It is striking, however, that no co-worker that we have met seems to be really proud of working for Kengao Management Centre. On the contrary, we have heard during this research, statements like: “Kengao Management Centre is not really Kengao”. “At the office in the town where Kengao has its origins, that is where it happens. The atmosphere here is quiet. There is no action here really.” “Kengao Management Centre feels like a cocoon compared to other Kengao offices”.

We believe that if co-workers are proud of the organisation that they work for and understand how the organisation contributes to Kengao, the organisation could probably increase its performance. We do not believe that all co-workers can be dedicated to their organisation immediately, but one step forward can be to enhance the goal orientation of Kengao Management Centre.

5.2.1 Management of Objectives and Group Organisation

Overall, *collectivity* seems to be an important term at Kengao Management Centre. We have during our study continuously heard statements that all co-workers should be treated the same regardless of position etc. There seems, however, to be a lack of a collective feeling for the whole office. Many statements reveal that there is not much

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

contact between departments and that departments work independently from each other. This could indicate that collectivity is something that is created for each department, rather than for the whole organisation.

We believe that co-workers do not only need to focus on their specific departments' performance, but they also need to understand the Kengao Management Centre's overall role and performance. This indicates, however, that co-workers have to feel dedicated to their organisation. In order to increase the dedication we suggest that individual co-workers develop their own personal goals that are related to the departmental goals. We would like to define the co-workers' possibility to state their own personal goals, *management of objectives*²¹. Personal goals can especially be related to the fulfilment of the individual's assignment. Personal engagement for how to reach the departmental goals could enhance the motivation in the daily work at the office, which could in turn increase the overall performance of Kengao Management Centre.

The top management at Kengao Management Centre has, of course, an essential task to formulate appropriate overall goals for the organisation. The goals should define the strategy. This means that top management needs to reflect upon the organisation as a whole and also discuss how each function and each department supports the goals of the organisation. The values that signify Kengao Management Centre need to be clarified and the core competence of the organisation needs to be defined. Furthermore, the role of the organisation must be further clarified. The results should be communicated primarily to all co-workers who work at Kengao Management Centre and secondly to those who are customers.

²¹ Note that management of objectives should not be regarded as same as management by objectives. For us management by objectives means that the manager states the goals, which he/she expects fellow colleagues to follow.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Moreover, the personal goals stated by co-workers at Kengao Management Centre should be co-ordinated. Danish and Swedish co-workers might prefer different ways of reaching the departmental goals. Therefore we suggest that *a group organisation is more emphasised*. During our study we have heard that many co-workers feel that they are part of a team in their daily work at their specific departments. We think that this way to work should be further developed and more emphasised in the organisation. The teams at each department should not only focus on their departmental goals but also understand how these goals help to reach the overall goals of Kengao Management Centre.

The teams at each department could meet, for instance 5 times a year, and discuss the structures and the procedures for continuous improvement concerning stated goals, which includes personal and departmental goals. The implementation of these needs to be clarified and agreed upon among all co-workers involved. The managers for each department can lead the meetings and so-called facilitators can participate. A facilitator can serve as a catalyser in order to enhance the professional communication between the co-workers.

The objectives and the most important improvement areas decided in the different teams can be presented in written form and distributed to all co-workers at Kengao Management Centre. These results can serve as a guide for coming team meetings. If co-workers understand different departments' functions, the overall organisational goals might easier be reached.

In the teams, formal communication about value clarification could occur. By meeting in teams, co-workers are able to develop and discuss what Kengao Management Centre's spirit really is and what it should be. This is essential in order to understand and accept the process of how to reach the overall goals stated by top management. This could increase the collective feeling of Kengao Management Centre and not only of the specific departments. We believe that it is important that co-workers are not only "carriers" of the overall

Kengao's spirit but also become "carriers" of Kengao Management Centre's spirit.

The informal communication about value clarification is also important in order to enhance the goal orientation of the organisation. In our study the co-workers emphasised that there are not many social meeting places at the office, where co-workers from different departments meet. Today, the only place where co-workers meet is in the dining room at lunch. We have in our study, however, found that there is a division between Danish and Swedish co-workers during these lunches and that most interaction between Danish and Swedish co-workers probably occurs inside each department.

We would like to suggest that smaller social meeting places, such as coffee-rooms, are arranged. In these coffee-rooms co-workers can meet, having their morning coffee. These breaks should be set at a specific time everyday. One so-called Swedish department and one Danish department could share one coffee room where co-workers mix. This could "break up" the division between Swedish and Danish co-workers that normally occur during lunch. Furthermore, co-workers are given the possibility in an informal way to meet and communicate with each other during these coffee breaks.

It is essential to realise that Danish and Swedish co-workers continuously build the meaning of Kengao Management Centre, which is communicated between themselves and to other co-workers at Kengao. *Walk the talk* can be seen as the informal communication of the values individuals relate to, which do not appear in written documentation. No matter if conversations are about private life or work during the breaks, the values that are revealed in the discussions will have an impact on how co-workers view their present situation at work and upon the organisation as such. If the co-workers are given the opportunity to meet and interact in informal situations, values could be shared and understood. Moreover, co-workers need to meet informally in order to create an acceptance and understanding for the diversity that might exist between the co-workers. An understanding for each other could enhance the collective feeling of being members

of Kengao Management Centre and what makes this group of co-workers unique at Kengao.

5.2.2 Customer Questionnaire

Finally, we believe that one important function for Kengao Management Centre is to provide service. A questionnaire could show how “customers”, of Kengao and inside Kengao Management Centre, view the service provided by the different departments.

A questionnaire could be used in order to investigate if there are any differences between so-called Swedish departments and Danish departments. In our study some co-workers stated that they perceived some differences between how Danish and Swedish co-workers prefer to work. It would be interesting to investigate the consequences of these perceived differences from a customer viewpoint.

Questions that might be asked in the questionnaire could be for instance:

- How do you view the service quality provided by Department A?
- How do you view the service speed?
- How do you view the accessibility, in terms of opening hours and people you need to talk to?
- How does the department solve your problems stated?

There could be a 10-degree scale for each question. 1 could be seen as “not satisfied at all” and 10 can be “excellent” etc. This questionnaire should be sent out once a year to selected customers to Kengao Management Centre. From the results of the questionnaire there should be feedback for how each department fulfils its goals. Necessary conclusions can be drawn for each department and for the Kengao Management Centre as a whole.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Before sending out the questionnaire each departmental team should state some departmental goals. These goals could be formulated as “In 3 years we should improve our perceived service level at this department by 50 % of the differences between maximum value in the questionnaire compared to current state”. This means that if the average scores are 3 for a particular department, the co-workers should discuss how they could improve their departmental performance so the department scores 6.5 in 3 years. Similar procedures can of course be done for the whole organisation.

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APPENDIX 1

THE CARRYING OUT OF THE BRAINSTORMING MEETINGS

The brainstorming meetings lasted for one hour for each group. A tape recorder was used during the meeting to facilitate the documentation. The participants were assured that no one else except the researchers were going to listen to the tape. The participants were assured of their anonymity.

The meeting started with a short presentation of the team and also the purpose of the research. The group leader continued to give brief information about the procedures planned for the meeting. This was followed by an introduction about the concept of brainstorming and four rules of brainstorming were presented on overheads. The participants then asked questions.

The group spent about 30 minutes generating ideas about the problem. 5 minutes were spent on the general question and 25 minutes were spent on the problem questions. During the meetings with groups A and B, the group leader was also assigned to be a secretary. During the meeting with group C, a translator assisted as a secretary. Ideas were written down in Danish. The ideas were presented on a white board. The participants just said their ideas without raising their hands or in any specific speaking order.

After the generating stage the group leader started to summarise the ideas. The participants were asked to give concrete examples of suggested ideas given to the problem questions. Additionally, the participants had to clarify the most evident characteristics for both Danes and Swedes. No evaluation was done during the meeting. The meeting was ended by the group leader who expressed appreciation to all participants for their contribution.

Frågor ställda under brainstorming möten:

Frågor ställda till grupp A och grupp B:

Vad betyder nationell kultur för dig?

Vad anser du vara karakteristiskt för danskar?

Vad anser du vara karakteristiskt för svenskar?

Hur uppfattar ni de kulturella skillnaderna mellan danskarna och svenskarna här på kontoret?

-Kan ni ge konkreta exempel på ovanstående idéer?

-Kan ni rangordna de karateristiska drag ni anser vara mest tydliga hos svenskar/danskar?

Frågor ställda till grupp C:

Vad betyder nationell kultur för dig?

Vad anser du vara karakteristiskt för svenskar?

Vad anser du vara karakteristiskt för danskar?

Hur uppfattar ni de kulturella skillnaderna mellan danskarna och svenskarna här på kontoret?

-Kan ni ge konkreta exempel på ovanstående idéer?

-Kan ni rangordna de karateristiska drag ni anser vara mest tydliga hos svenskar/danskar?

Questions asked during the brainstorming meetings:

Questions asked to group A and group B:

What does national culture mean to you?

What do you think are the characteristics of Danes?

What do you think are the characteristics of Swedes?

How do you perceive the cultural differences between Danes and Swedes here at the office?

-Could you give some concrete examples of what you have previously stated?

-Could you give an order of precedence to the characteristics of Danes and Swedes that you find most evident?

Questions asked to group C:

What does national culture mean to you?

What do you think are the characteristics of Swedes?

What do you think are the characteristics of Danes?

How do you perceive the cultural differences between Danes and Swedes here at the office?

-Could you give some concrete examples of what you have previously stated?

-Could you give an order of precedence to the characteristics of Danes and Swedes that you find most evident?

APPENDIX 2

FYRA GRUNDREGLER

1. KRITIK UTESLUTS. Nedsättande omdöme av idéer måste anstå till längre fram.
2. SNILLEBLIXTAR VÄLKOMNAS. Ju bisarrare och tokigare idén är, desto bättre. Det är lättare att göra en idé mindre bisarr och kanske ändamålsenlig än att hitta på helt nya idéer.
3. MASSOR AV IDÉER ÄR ÖNSKVÄRDA. Ju större antal idéer, desto större är sannolikheten att man erhåller goda idéer.
4. NYA KOMBINATIONER OCH IDÉFÖRBÄTTRINGAR ÄR EFTERSTRÄVANDSVÄRDA. Förutom att bidra med egna idéer bör deltagarna föreslå hur andras idéer kanske kan bli *ännu* bättre idéer, och även hur två eller flera framlagda idéer kan bli *en* kanske verkligt god idé.

(Osborn, A, F, (1967:52) *Tillämpad Fantasi*)

FOUR BASIC RULES

1. **CRITICISM IS RULED OUT.** Adverse judgement of ideas must be withheld until later.
2. **“FREE-WHEELING” IS WELCOMED.** The wilder the idea, the better; it is easier to tame down than to think up.
3. **QUANTITY IS WANTED.** The greater the number of ideas, the more the likelihood of useful ideas.
4. **COMBINATION AND IMPROVEMENT ARE SOUGHT.** In addition to contributing ideas of their own, participants should suggest how ideas of others can be turned into better ideas; or how two or more ideas can be joined into still another idea.

(Osborn, A, F, (1963:156) *Applied imagination*

APPENDIX 3

THE CARRYING OUT OF THE RESEARCH INTERVIEWS

All interviews lasted for one hour. The interview started with a short presentation of the research team, the purpose of the study and the interview. Furthermore, the function of the respondent and the interviewers were clarified. The interviewees were ensured anonymity. A tape recorder was used in order to facilitate the process of the treatment of the data collected. At the end of the interview the interviewers thanked the respondent for his/her participation.

APPENDIX 4

INTERVIEW GUIDE

