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## Trust Across Cultural Borders: a study of the concept of trust between Scandinavian and Asians in Singapore.

### Abstract:

Trust is the foundation upon which business transactions, trade and exchange is built, for without some form of trust, every type of trade relation built on expectations about the consequent and predictable outcome of an agreement will be complicated. This paper aims to show the differing concept of trust between Scandinavians (mostly Swedes) and Asians (mostly Chinese-Singaporeans) who work together in a cross-cultural context in Swedish-owned or Swedish related organizations based in Singapore. The concept of trust between the two groups of respondents will be outlined and analyzed via a discourse analysis framework, in

accordance to Mayer, Davis and Schoorman's (1995) definition of the concept of trust, involving 'ability', 'benevolence' and 'integrity'.

Keywords: trust, cross-cultural, organization, communication, language

*Barbossa:* I must admit, Jack, I thought I had ye figured. But it turns out that you're a hard man to predict.

*Jack:* Me? I'm dishonest. And a dishonest man you can always trust to be dishonest. Honestly. It's the honest ones you want to watch out for, because you can never predict when they're going to do something incredibly... stupid.

~ Conversation exchange, illustrating the importance of expectations in the concept of *trust*, between *Captain Barbossa* and *Captain Jack Sparrow* in the movie, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, 2003.

## 1. Introduction

Trust is the foundation upon which business transactions, trade and exchange is built (Gannon and Newman, 2002), for without some form of trust, every type of trade relation built on expectations about the consequent and predictable outcome of an agreement will be complicated. Financial systems today are growing globally. More and more individuals are taking part in transactions further and

further away outside the group of previously known partners (International Trade Statistics, 2005) This increasing activity shows by itself that individuals have an inherent trust in each other and that this does not immediately have any geographic limitations. But the inclination to trust in us is not something to be taken for granted but rather that it needs to be worked upon. We need to build trust across the differences in culture and thus related values. I will explore in this article, amongst other things, how social cognition theory might provide a method in building trust across cultural borders, specifically between Swedes and Chinese-Singaporeans who work together in top management level in Swedish owned or Swedish related organizations based in Singapore.

### 1.1 Trust and trustworthiness

The concept of *trust* is viewed from the point of view of the field of organizational studies, where most definitions pivot around the idea that trust is a willingness to make oneself vulnerable to another (Williams, 2005; Johnson and Cullen, 2002). For the purposes of this article, I will define trust in accordance to Mayer, Davis and Schoorman, (1995:712) as “the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the

actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor". As such vulnerability, willingness and expectations are important dimensions to consider in a trust relation; all elements are highly related to social cognition in the sense that one's ability to trust will, to a large extent, depends on what one recognizes in the immediate socio-cultural and political surrounding.

## 1.2 Social cognition

Vulnerability, willingness and expectations which are the three components of trustworthiness in accordance to Mayer et. al. (1995) is related to social cognition in that the degree of each factor changes with time, in how much one recognizes in their surrounding. For individuals who work in a foreign country, social cognition for their new environment and the understanding of new organizational cultures develop over time so that they come to know/understand and function in that new environment.

In cross-cultural relations, the parties will inevitably have differing socio-cultural and political values. Social cognition provides a way in which people can build trust through a learning process, where a lack of which can potentially lead to

complications in the building up of trust.

While trust is by and large built on expectations, between two different cultures however, the expected outcome of any action could be two very different things. Social cognition reduces the problem and gives, through increased background knowledge of the other culture, different expectations and thus a better foundation for trust. An idea that we will expand upon in the following sections.

## 2. Discourse Analysis as a Tool in Understanding Trust.

Language and social processes coexist in an internal and dialectical relationship, where events and happenings in our lives are reflected in our language. At the same time, it is language that defines our experiences, so that social phenomena (such as the act of trusting someone) are also partly linguistic phenomena (Fairclough, 1989). Both trusting someone and the use of language are social processes. It is thus not surprising that trust across cultural borders can be illustrated through a linguistic analysis of spoken language or textual analysis of language.

In enabling our experiences to be coded, language serves a functional purpose as a resource for its users who can use it to create and express meaning in socio-cultural contexts. Applying Halliday and Matthiessen's (2004)

metafunctional processes in functional grammar, the word *trust* itself is denoted by a behavioural process. Behavioural process being part material, where you can trust somebody with something and part a mental process, where to trust somebody is also an act that is concerned with our experiences of the world from our own consciousness.

The language analysis in this article aims to illustrate the concept of trust in cross-cultural business relations via a linguistic analysis of selected parts of 33 interviews with Scandinavian (mostly Swedish) and Asian (mostly Chinese-Singaporean) business leaders in Singapore. The extracts will be analyzed in reference to Mayer et. al's components of trustworthiness, including *ability*, *benevolence* and *integrity*. A discourse analysis framework is used to reveal the underlying differences in these three concepts between the Scandinavian and Asian cultures, which in turn demonstrate the problem in arriving at trust in working relations.

### 3. Method and framework

#### *3.1 Participants*

During February and December 2004, 33 long interviews, with an average time of 1 hour 39 minutes were conducted. The targeted organisations were Swedish owned or Swedish related organizations based in Singapore as listed by Svenska Exportrådet in 2003.

Respondents for the interviews were selected predominantly among persons in leading or managerial positions in these organisations. The assumption being that it was the decisions and actions of these persons that determined the future of their organizations.

My research interest was to study their thought processes as reflected in language and their language use. During the course of work it appeared that some individuals was highly successful in adapting to their new surroundings while other individuals was quite unhappy and would most probably soon go back home to their more familiar surroundings.

The targeted participants were mostly working professionals in top-level management positions in Swedish based or Swedish related organisations; both

Asians (mostly Singaporean Chinese) and Scandinavians (mostly Swedes) were interviewed.

### *3.2 The interview process*

The interviews for both the Scandinavian and Asian groups were designed as *qualitative interviews* (Kvale, 1996; Warren, 2002) based on conversation. The aim of the interviews was to gain insight into each respondent's *point of view* and *perspective* and how they put their experiences, thoughts and feelings into words when speaking. The experiences of the respondents were interesting as they spanned several dimensions, since as individuals, each had several roles to fulfil in society from work to family to wider social relations.

There were ten categories of questions that ranged from the personal to the environment, all questions were deliberately broad and “all encompassing” since it was one method in which as much information on the individual and their thoughts/reactions in their various social positions from father/mother to Scandinavian/Asian to colleague to employer/employee etc, could be revealed as they spoke (Holstein and Gubrium, 2002). The questions provided a rough guideline to steer the conversation during the interviews with the respondents

interrupted as little as possible with their more interesting points being followed up in subsequent questions. The aim was to have a relaxed conversation, to let them speak their mind, their perspectives shaping the flow of the interview and for me to listen carefully and pick up on subsequent topics that came up in the course of the interview that interest both of us.

All interviews were recorded with a Sony ICD-ST20 digital audio recorder. Some interviews were recorded on stereo function that facilitates the capturing of better sound quality. The interviews were then downloaded into Mackintosh's Sound Studio program, that enables a smoother, more efficient transcription process since it allowed easy access to specific segments of interview and allowed for me to go back to specific time segments as many times as needed in order to obtain an accurate transcription. The average length of time for each interview was 1 hour 39 minutes, which rendered about 2970 minutes or slightly more than 49 hours of interview time in total with 540 pages of transcription data.

A small number of respondents (3 of 33 respondents) corresponded via email, in which case, the material is treated as a textual resource. These email correspondences are included in the analysis and make up 9% of the total data.

### *3.3 Transcription standard*

All interviews, except emailed correspondences, were transcribed according to the Göteborg Transcription Standard (GTS) version 6.3 (Nivre et al, 2004). The level of detail in the transcriptions featuring spoken language can vary according to the needs of the study (Nivre et al, 2004). For the purposes of this study, standard orthography (SO) was used for all words, with no special features of spoken language rendered in the transcription. The GTS departs from standard orthography in not using capitalized letters for proper names. No acronyms or abbreviations are used and no punctuation is used.

The interviewer is always labelled “\$S” in this study, while the respondent is given the label “\$x”, *x* being any letter of the alphabet from A-Z except letters *O* and *I* which may resemble the numbers *0* and *1* in certain instances. The use of a backslash “/” indicates a pause while the number of backslashes used together show the length of the pause, thus “///” would indicate a longer pause than “/”. Abstracts that appear in the following pages will appear as they have been transcribed.

### *3.4 Data and analysis*

#### *3.4.1 Open coded concepts (OCC)*

Using Strauss and Corbin's (1998) method for coding of interviews, the open coding procedure of the interviews rendered a total of 253 open coded concepts (OCC), of which 124 (49%) instances were non in-vivo (spontaneous) concepts and 129 (51%) instances were in-vivo (prompted) concepts.

*In-vivo* (prompted) and *non in-vivo* (spontaneous) concepts differ in this study in that the former concepts are likely those that were brought up as planned/prompted topics from myself as the interviewer whilst the latter concepts are unplanned/spontaneous topics mentioned by the respondents.

As there were 10 Asian respondents to 23 Scandinavian respondents, a 100 Index was calculated using the formula below:

$$\text{Occurrences} / \text{Population} \times 100$$

The *100 Index* numbers reflect the data as if each group consisted of 100 individuals and makes comparable the numbers between the two groups of respondents, enabling a fair assessment of numbers between the Asian and Scandinavian groups. The indexes were rounded off without the use of decimals.

## DIAGRAM 1

### 3.4.2 Axial coded concepts (ACC)

The relationship between OCCs and ACCs is subtle and complex. It would be inaccurate to state that the ACCs were derived from the OCCs in a linear manner. The process of deriving the ACCs was rather, an iterative one where both groups of concepts are dialectically related, each group helping to define and redefine the other as the analysis in the study progressed. The result of this dialectical relation has led to Diagram 1.

Diagram 1 shows how each of the 253 OCC were axially coded into 6 sub-categories (or axially coded concepts, ACC). These ACC is shown as radiating outwards from an inner-core, beginning with the *individual*, then *family and social; organization; society; national* and *environment*. The ACC group enables a cohesive manner in which to view and further analyze the data.

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Insert Diagram 1 about here  
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i. Individual - All utterances that reflect upon the individual in terms of self-identity or is related to the individual's awareness of themselves and of their immediate surrounding.

ii. Family and Social – This circle follows immediately after *Individual* in terms of proximity of concern to the individual. Within this are all utterances reflecting the awareness of family and immediate/close social considerations.

iii. Organization - Utterances here are those related to the workings in and around the organization in which the respondents are active.

iv. Society – Utterances pertaining to the social / society at large. Society here is seen as a part of the nation where a nation can contain many social groups of people or many societies.

v. National – Where the geographical limitations of national borders seem to have play an identifying role/importance in the respondent's answer. This can be seen when the respondent speaks of his/her National Identity as opposed to his/her social background, where the latter response would fall under (iv).

vi. Environment – This category is seen as encompassing all other previous categories as environmental issues may have socio-cultural and political consequences. A global perspective is also included in this category with responses relating to climate, conservation of buildings, pollution etc.

TABLE 1

For the purposes of this article, I have concentrated on the *Organization* sub-category in which the two concepts of *lack of trust between cultures* and *lack of trust in Asia* are found.

#### 4. Exploring the Concept of Trust in a Cross-cultural Environment: Lack of Trust Between Cultures and Lack of Trust in Asia

The concepts of *lack of trust in Asia* and *lack of trust between cultures* are both spontaneous concepts that reflect a negative absolute difference, indicating that the topic was more often brought up by the Scandinavian respondents, possibly indicating that it was the Scandinavians that felt an existing lack of trust in the new environment, as shown in Table 1.

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Insert Table 1 about here  
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#### *4.1. Ability and Power Distance affecting trust*

According to Mayer et al., *ability* refers to the “group of skills, competencies and characteristics that enable a party to have influence within some specific domain” (1995:717), such as experts and specialists, who are highly trusted in having specific abilities.

As both the regions of Scandinavia and Asia have differing management cultures or styles, the concept of “ability” will be explored together with Hofstede’s (2005, <http://www.geert-hofstede.com/>) cultural dimensions and Power Distance Index (PDI) which concentrates on egalitarianism between individuals in a given society. A high PDI ranking indicates greater power and wealth divisions within that society. Societies that are likely to have a high PDI ranking are those that follow a caste system for example. A low PDI ranking indicates that the society is oriented towards “equal opportunity” for all.

Table 2 shows Hofstede’s cultural indexes between the two regions of Scandinavia and Asia and between the two countries of Sweden and Singapore with their relative differences.

TABLE 2

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Insert Table 2 about here  
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If we were to look at Hofstede's PDI for both Sweden and Singapore, one sees that Sweden has a relatively low PDI at 31, compared to the higher PDI of Singapore at 74, rendering a relative difference of 43.

How each country views *authority* can be used as a point to illustrate the concept of ability and the PDI difference between them. A Swedish run organization for example, has more diffused centres of authority (Jönsson, 1995), with a greater preference for expertise and specialists and where decision power is also delegated from the general manager.

A Swedish respondent, M, who is General Manager for Asia of a Swedish bank based in Singapore spoke of how she saw too many levels of hierarchy in the organization when she first arrived in Singapore and how she effectively changed the organizational structure:

Text example 1.

\$M: ... 1998 i was appointed g m for asia / and at that point in time / there were more or less nine hierarchic title levels in the bank / i mean everything from junior clerk / clerk / senior clerk / junior officer / officer / senior officer / so nine sort of title levels and nine / all levels also had a number of value of annual leave days / as an officer you had one more day than a junior officer / despite the fact that other swedes have / been g ms here / i don't know why they didn't find interest to do something about it / but in the bank back home / we have three / so i changed that to three / which mean i couldn't take away titles / because that would be very sensitive / but i tacked them in three main levels and i took away all links to annual leave days / it doesn't come from your title / it comes from the number of years in the bank / which is the same in sweden / everybody starts from the same level and then you add on due to age and due to position / meaning the responsibility you have / not your title / if you have a big responsibility / you're entitled to two more days / so that i changed / i re-did the entire employment hand book because it was quite singaporean style / it said more or less in every page that everything was uhm / at the discretion of the general manager

From M's abstract, one can sieve out the underlying ideas between herself and her Singaporean colleagues. While M thought it better to diffuse the centres of decision-making and power, the Singaporean management style saw that it was the general manager who was to make all decisions. In the Singapore context, the trusted ability that the General Manager is given in running the organization and

making all decisions for the organization overruns expert and specialist abilities i.e. *everything was...at the discretion of the general manager.*

M had seen the *nine hierarchic title levels in the bank* as a problem area, indicated via the lexical density and semantic nesting of the words referring to the phenomena:

nine hierarchic title levels in the bank...everything...nine...title  
levels...nine...levels...it...that...three...titles...three...levels...title...level...position...respo  
nsibility...title...responsibility...

One can also trace her objective and thought by tracing the information flow the abstract above that she had the goal of shifting the organization's internal structure from title and hierarchy focus to a focus on the individual's work responsibilities, as such, employee perks would also be pegged in accordance to how much responsibility one has in the organization and not one's title at work where in the Singapore context, the larger the title of the person, the more unquestioned decision-making processes allotted to the individual.

That the nine hierarchic levels were problematic was also manifest in M's point of view that she was disturbed that no other Swedish General Manager before

her had taken the initiative to re-work the organizational structure. The words used to convey her sense of unease include, *despite the fact that...i don't know why they didn't find the interest to do something about it*, the word "it" referring anaphorically to *the nine hierarchic title levels in the bank*, her disassociation from the other Swedish General Managers is indicated by her deitic use of *they* instead of *we*. M's reference to *the singaporean style that everything was left to the general manager* has several implications including that both groups had perceived the concept of "ability" in a different light, that it was the general manager who was trusted with all types of organizational information, above and beyond the expertise of singular individuals within the organization.

The view that top management knew everything (or was trusted with everything) is also a point of view that has caused friction for a Norwegian respondent, T who is General Manager of a Scandinavian bank. He expresses his frustration at how much he needs to decide on matters concerning the organization and his preferred method of working:

Text example 2.

\$T:... i want people to come and tell me / these are the problems these are the alternatives / i recommend this or i give you the alternative or i give you a recommendation / do you agree or

what do you think / if someone comes to me about something i don't know anything about  
and just say what's your decision / that's not the way to run a business and that happens a lot  
in singapore / then you have a chinese new year dinner in the bank / i have to decide on the  
menu / why should i decide the menu

T's desire is for his employees to take on a more active role in the decision-making  
process and problem-solving process in the organization as indicated by the  
material and mental processes in italics below:

i want people to *come* and *tell* me  
i *recommend* this or i *give* you the alternative  
i *give* you a recommendation

In this case, T was hoping to be able to entrust his co-workers with more decision-  
making power and abilities, a matter that was not taken up easily by his co-  
workers.

The use of "I" is T's projection of what he hopes to hear from his fellow  
colleagues and employees, he *wants* to hear them say they have something to offer,  
a form of feedback. T's decentralized decision-making ideology within the  
organization is also revealed in, *i give you a recommendation / do you agree or  
what do you think*, where he clearly implicitly states that he views himself as an

adviser and mentor rather than a strict authoritarian figure that makes concrete decisions for others. In T's case, his perception of his own abilities as top manager (i.e. he does not know everything and does not wish to know everything that happens in the organization) is different from his Singaporean co-workers view of his abilities (i.e. that as top management, he *should* know everything and should be trusted to form all decisions). T absolutely draws the line for example, when it comes to company dinners where he is expected by his staff to decide the dinner menu, *why should i decide the menu*, a contrast to M's implications above where the boss is expected to make decisions on most things including social behaviour within the organization.

#### *4.2. Benevolence and Power Distance affecting trust*

T's frustration at having to decide all things from organizational matters to what he considers the more personal, such as dinner menus for the company dinner and dance function is also in keeping with the Southeast-Asian idea that top management of the organization have great influence over the lives of employees at work and influence over their lives in private domain decisions.

With “family” as the implicit model for organization for most Southeast-Asian countries, the concept of “benevolence”, where the trustee has some specific attachment to the trustor (Mayer et. al, 1995) within the organization between the Scandinavians and Asians can differ to a large extent.

According to Hofstede (1984), Southeast-Asian countries have the “family” as the implicit organization model so that with regards to Power Distance cultural dimension, the subordinates are more dependent on the superior not just in terms of organizational decision-making but in terms of the employer looking after the well-being of the employee.

In terms of language use, benevolence in the Asian sense can be seen in the following abstract from a Swedish respondent, G, who was stationed in Taiwan for 3 years helping set up a Taiwanese base for a Swedish company.

Text example 3.

\$G: ...we had a management team / clear roles and responsibilities for people / appraisals / discussions / uhm bonus system based on that the **boss** comes with a secret envelope but clear targets and things like that

...

yeah but that's usually the **boss** going around with red envelope that he gives to people / that's very common in taiwan that the **boss** goes around with a secret red envelopes and gives cash to people and there's no system / so it's the **boss** who gives / at least in the traditional chinese companies they do that

G's narration of how the boss personally takes care of the employees bonuses by going around the office without "a system", distributing "secret red envelopes" is an illustration of Hofstede's idea of how the employees are more dependent on the superiors to be benevolent in act and deed, reflecting the implicit "family" model of the organization. The "giving boss" can be traced by G's use of lexes in the abstract:

the boss comes with...the boss going around with...gives to people...the boss goes around with...gives cash to people...the boss...gives...they do that

The word *usually* in *that's usually the boss going around with...* implies that the procedure is somewhat of a tradition, having been in place for a long time.

In fact, an analysis of the word concordance for the word *boss* reveals that the Scandinavians and Asians use the word in a slightly different manner. Table 3 shows how the two groups of respondents use the word *boss*.

TABLE 3

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Insert Table 3 about here  
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In the above abstract where G relates his experiences in Taiwan is an example of how it is not he who had voiced his personal point of view but had rather narrated an experience he has had in Taiwan. This difference is reflected the first two columns in Table 3. The first column indicates whether the respondents voiced their own opinions or if they had narrated an experience they had, which could in fact be contrary to their own beliefs and definitions of what a boss is.

The numbers in Table 3 reflect that the Scandinavian respondents related stories of their experiences more than the Asian respondents, which implies that the high number on the *Benevolent Factor*, 14, could well be due to them relating how they perceived their Asian counterparts to view the role of bosses, rather than what they themselves perceive on the role of bosses.

The next four columns highlighted in a tan colour represents *how* the word *boss* is used in a paradigmatic construction, for example, co-occurring with specific

determiners or possessive pronouns such as *the, a, this, his, my* or if it was used as a vocative, as in someone calling another person *boss*.

The word *boss* has an inherent meaning or connotation of authority and “power over”. The use of the words *my boss* inherently carries the meaning that the sayer is in a lower organizational hierarchy than the person to which is referred to as *the boss*. With this inherent meaning of “authority” in the word *boss*, the yellow highlighted columns in Table 3 represent the more dominant meanings associated with the word *boss* as used by the two groups of respondents, capturing what they meant / implied by using the word *boss* apart from the meaning of *authority*.

As shown in the above table, while both groups saw the *boss* as a problem-solver, the Asian respondents tended to view the *boss* as someone who was trusted in making all decisions as the boss was a person who was “all-knowing”; bosses were unlikely to be an equal and less likely to be a mentor and the Asian respondents tended to view a hierarchy in bosses as well with the view that one’s *immediate boss* need not necessarily be the *big boss* or even the *top boss*. The Scandinavian respondents tended to view the boss more as an equal and mentor, someone who did not necessarily know everything or was not an expert at everything in the organization. That the Scandinavians do not view the boss as the all-round expert within the organization results in a more decentralized authority in

decision-making (Thygesen-Poulsen, 1978 in Furusten and Kinch, 1996) that is also reflected in the analysis in section 4.1.

In some Asian respondents' point of view, the role of the boss extends beyond organizational matters to include social decisions including the language spoken within the organization, office dress codes and menu choices for a company dinner and dance. One could say that the trust Asians tend to have in their bosses extends to a wider social circle, viewing their bosses as a benevolent patriarch, they trust their bosses to make right, appropriate and favourable decisions on matters even outside organizational boundaries, a point of view that is not shared by the Scandinavians.

Text examples 4 and 5 is from a Singaporean Chinese respondent, M, who was speaking on the topics of language in the office and the organizational dress code. M has been working in a Swedish organization for 25 years at the time of the interview:

Text example 4

\$M: ...we sometimes speak in dialects or even mandarin / and the swedes also tend to speak swedish amongst themselves / and there was one boss who actually didn't like us to do that / so he did tell us / in the company / we should all speak english whether the swedes are around

or not you know / so he made it a point even when another swedish colleague is around and  
i'm around he will speak to that person in english

Text example 5

\$M:... i think a few years ago / the boss said / oh i think we can dress casually / like summer  
throughout the year / just like in headoffice / they call it summer wear / so from then on /  
we've been dressing very casually / before that we were not told that we could wear pants

The *boss* in M's response is given the active role in her clausal constructions. The  
boss from text example 4 for example:

he *didn't like* us to do that  
he did *tell* us in the company  
he *made it* a point even when...  
he will *speak* to that person in english

and from text example 5:

the boss *said* ...

we were *told* [ellipse] that we could wear pants

The various active roles that the boss is sub-consciously given by M suggests the role of the boss as the *sayer* who instructs and the *doer* that implements, that he does not like *x* implies that the rest of the organization should follow his wishes, *we should all speak english and so from then on / we've been dressing very casually*. Even in indirect speech construction, the boss is placed as the active participant by M, advising on how people should speak and what they should wear to work, *we were told [ellipse i.e. by the boss/management] that we could wear pants*.

This difference in point of view on what role the boss plays, how benevolent they are and to the extent of their influence within the organization does result in misunderstandings and frustrations on both sides, in part due to differing cultural values.

#### *4.3. Integrity and the Masculinity Index affecting trust*

The correlation between integrity and trust is that there is a set of socio-cultural values and ideology that the trustor finds acceptable (Mayer et al, 1995), a condition for a relationship of trust that is not easily accessible when working

across cultures since socio-historical circumstances inevitably leads to differing socio-cultural values.

As an illustration of differing cultural values between Sweden and Singapore, one could take Hofstede's Masculinity Index (MAS) which concentrates on whether the society reinforces the traditional masculine role model with regards to success, organization and authority. A high MAS ranking shows a country with high gender differentiation with a patriarchal orientation in terms of authority, rule and organization. A low MAS indicates a more egalitarian rule in society with little gender differentiation and stereotypical gender roles. The MAS show an index difference between the two countries as 43, with Singapore's MAS index at 48 and Sweden's at 5. Singapore's higher MAS as compared to Sweden means that there is generally a greater sex role differentiation within the Singapore society as compared to the Swedish society. Some other characteristics of a higher MAS index country would include greater work centrality, greater job stress, people prefer more salary to shorter working hours, and a wider wage gap between the sexes (Hofstede, 1984: 288).

While the gender wage gap in Singapore sees a narrowing trend with more women entering professional positions in organizations (Singapore Department of Statistics, 1998), gender roles within the Singapore society is still relatively more

differentiated than Sweden, which has one of the lowest MAS indexes amongst the countries studied by Hofstede (1984). Girls in Singapore are socialized towards nurturing, caring and the home whilst boys are socialized towards competition and the public sphere. The differing gender ideology between Sweden and Singapore is noticed by some Scandinavian respondents as these values and ideologies are carried to the organization and reflected in employee behaviour.

A Swedish respondent, C, tells of how he was unhappy with a lady employee whom he had viewed as a “very very talented lady”, when she wanted to leave the organization to look after her two daughters:

Abstract 6

SC: ... it's not really that i see that there's any discrimination against women here / i have women in my management / promoted / ... but i think for women here it's hard to have / i see a lot of people / it's hard for them to be part of the work force when they get children / in that sense / you can say society is not helping them / both in terms of the short maternity leave and how the school system encourages the children to be with their mother / and i had a very very talented lady working for me and she left to take care of her children / i had a very interesting argument with her / because she said that she needed to do this to help her children to have a good career because they were not doing as well in school as she wanted to i guess / and both her children were girls / so i told her / if you want them to do well and have a good career /

what example are you setting yourself / and that way i got her to stay a few more months and then she left / that way you give them all the skills and all the schooling they need / but in the end what you're telling them is that / only use it to a point and then you should dedicate yourself to your family and your children / which is important of course but / i think it would probably be easier with er / if society could make it easier to work for women to have children

While C does not see “any discrimination against women” as such, the information flow in C’s abstract above portrays his point of view that women in the Singapore society are more passive than active. Women for example are controlled by society,

society is not helping them / both in terms of the short maternity leave and how the school system encourages the children to be with their mother

“Society” is cast as the active agent as “society” is expected to help women, who are thus passive and by implication, helpless. The “school system” is also cast as the active agent in the behavioural process that it “*encourages* children to be with their mother” thus perpetuating the passivity of women, the nurturing obligation of women in society and the expectation that it is the woman who takes care of children. While women these days do decide if they want to be a mother, the clause “when they *get* children”, the ellipse in subject as in, *by men* or that women are

impregnated by men, also puts women in the more passive role, all contributing to their difficulties in balancing their career:

but i think for women here it's hard to have / i see a lot of people / it's hard for them to be part of the work force when they get children

Women are also controlled by organizations. On a general level, C mentions “i have women in my management / *promoted*” the material process *promoted* leaves an ellipsed subject where women are promoted by someone else. So even if/when women attain management positions, they do so by someone else's decision. On a specific level, C who is CEO (Chief Executive Officer) is also a great influence within the organization, his authority and hierarchy seen when he brings in a specific example of a woman employee, “i had a very very talented lady *working for me*”. C's active role realized as C being the agent and doer in the material process “that way *i got her to stay* a few more months and then she left” and the woman is seen as subject to C's actions.

In the text example, C moves from the general examples of society and women's roles to a specific example of a woman employee, which in the abstract plays a more active role in her decision to leave the company, “she *left* to take care

of her children”. However, even in a more active role as the *doer* of actions, her activities lean towards the private domain of the home and family:

she *left to take care* of her children  
she *said* that she *needed to do* this  
to *help* her children to have a good career  
and then she *left*

The various material, verbal and behavioural processes while placing the woman in the active role as “doer of actions” also shows how those actions are directed towards the nurturing and care-taking of the family when followed by the words *children* who are the benefactors of her actions.

Due to the differing gender ideologies, C saw her leaving the job as a compromise in her integrity as a role model to her children, as he mentions, *if you want them to do well and have a good career / what example are you setting yourself*, thus potentially affecting his level of trust for women workers in Singapore.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

A look at the illustrations above show that the spontaneous concepts of *lack of trust in Asia* and *lack of trust between cultures* as felt by the Scandinavians is not surprising since it takes time for the Scandinavians who arrive in Asia to understand Asian values, culture and how the concept of trust is defined and enacted in business relations.

Used as a tool, language analysis has been useful in this context since in uncovering more precisely, the existing socio-cultural differences on the concept of trust between the two groups of people. This revelation of differences in turn can help lead to a deeper understanding of the basic building blocks of trust and trustworthiness such as *ability*, *benevolence* and *integrity* against the backdrop of Hofstede's cultural dimensions in order to compare the definitions of trust and trustworthiness across cultures. A deeper understanding is also needed if organizations are to run more efficiently and be more cost productive when stationing expatriates in foreign countries.

The concept of *ability* and what top managers are trusted to do for the organization is perceived differently due to differing management styles, with Singaporeans having a more authoritarian, centralized power styled management and the Swedes having more diffused centres of power. *Benevolence* too takes on

a different concept when the “family” oriented organization model for Singapore means that the employees trust the employers to act, do things in certain ways that is different to what Swedes may define as benevolent within organizational limits. And lastly, *integrity* is seen as compromised, which leads to a lack of trust, when two cultural values collide on gender differentiation and gender social roles for the last example, due to the two countries having a different MAS index.

With the revelation of the various points of differences between the two groups, one can then go ahead and see how working relations continue to progress and where despite some downturns, trust is still built between the two groups.

One way in which trust can slowly be built is through the process of *social cognition*, so that a Swede who has lived and worked in Singapore for a longer period of time would come to understand how the social processes in Singapore works, how people there do business and conduct themselves in business relations. Currently, Swedish expatriates have a 3-year average working contract in Singapore. As social cognition is a process that does not happen overnight, it is important that organizations consider stationing their people for a longer period of time than the average 3 years in a foreign country since what it means of the current situation of Swedish specialists in Singapore is that their foreign stationing contract ends the minute they begin to understand how things work in the new

working environment, thus not having enough time to apply their learning and experiences to further enhance trusting work relationships.

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Diagram 1. Axially coded themes radiating from the Individual.

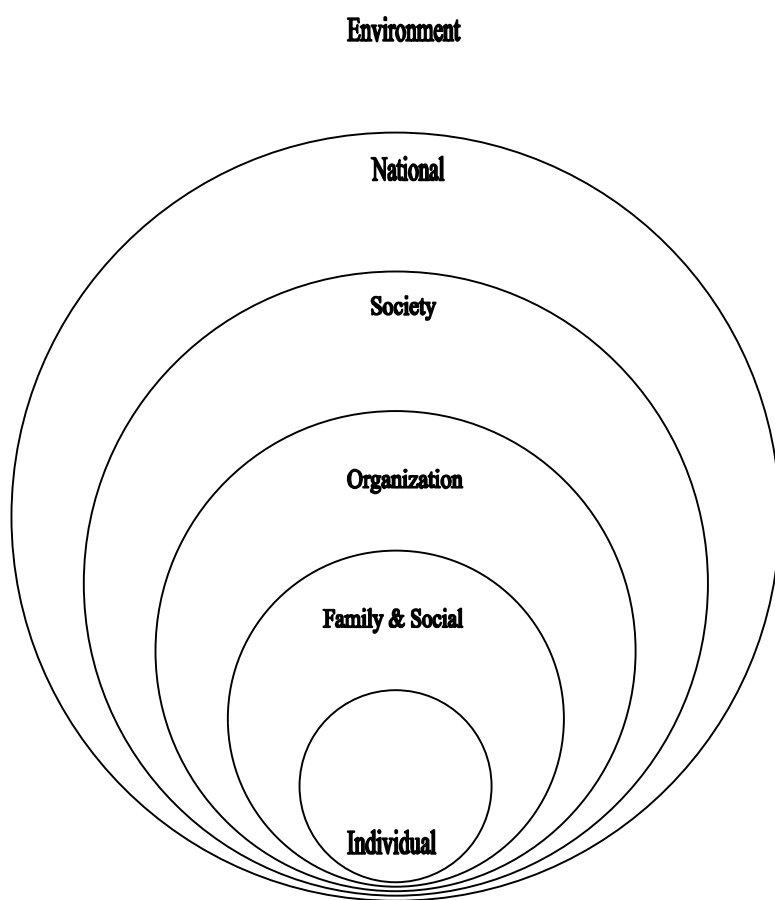


Table 1. The concept of Trust in the Organization Sub-category

Organization Sub- Category	Spont.	Asian	Scand:n	Difference	Difference
		100 Index	100 Index	Rel.	Abs.
Lack of trust in Asia	1	<b>20</b>	<b>26</b>	6	-6
Lack of trust between cultures	1	<b>30</b>	<b>52</b>	22	-22

Table2. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Indexes showing Relative Differences.

	<b>PDI</b>	<b>IDV</b>	<b>MAS</b>	<b>UAI</b>	<b>LTO</b>
<b>Scandinavian Countries</b>	25	68	10	38	
<b>Sweden (SWE)</b>	31	71	5	29	33
<b>Asian Countries</b>	60	20	55	60	85
<b>Singapore (SIN)</b>	74	20	48	8	48
<b>Rel. Diff.. SWE and SIN</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Rel.Diff. Scand. and Asia</b>	35	48	45	22	

Table 3. Total 100 Index of the use of the word *boss* by Asian and Scandinavian Respondents

	View	View	Ref.	Ref.	Vocative	Pronoun	Maker	Factor	Knowing	solver	Equal	of bosses	Mentor
Use of the word <i>boss</i> by Asian Respondents	31	5	43	5	1	12	36	4	20	17	5	7	1
Use of the word <i>boss</i> by Asian Respondents, Total 100 Index	53	8	73	8	2	20	61	7	34	29	8	12	2
Use of the word <i>boss</i> by Scandinavian Respondents	34	18	45	6	4	8	32	10	13	18	17	2	10
Use of the word <i>boss</i> by Scandinavian Respondents,	47	25	62	8	5	11	44	14	18	25	23	3	14

<b>Total 100 Index</b>													
<b>Relative Difference in Total 100 Index</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>