The perceptions of work-related conflicts of Swedish and non-Swedish employees in Volvo X

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This Master Thesis is conducted in cooperation with one company which is part of the Volvo Group. Throughout this Master Thesis it will be referred to as Volvo X.

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the perceptions of work-related conflicts in Volvo X. Through conducting the qualitative research, interviewing 20 employees - 11 Swedish and 9 non-Swedish - we found that there is no significant difference between these two sample groups what concerns to perceptions of conflicts. However many smaller, interesting findings are presented and qualitatively analyzed in this paper. Both Swedish and non-Swedish employees perceive contradicting goals between departments as the main cause of the conflicts in Volvo X. Results show that both Swedish and non-Swedish see intercultural communication as both potential and as a challenge. Moreover, data also shows that the conflicts are perceived in many cases as negative process, however with many possible positive outcomes. Research also shows that employees perceive that Swedish tend to avoid conflicts which is also supported by theoretical framework.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter an overview of the aim of the study together with research questions and goals will be provided. The increasing multiculturalism in a society will be discussed with a focus on Sweden. The company where qualitative research was conducted will be presented. Chapter will be finished with a disposition of the Master Thesis.

1.1. Background of the study

In order to explain why this study is conducted we would like to hereby explain the context of the research and present the main concepts that are interconnected: perceptions, communication, cultural diversity and conflicts. These concepts provide a background of our study and their inseparability from one another has to be analyzed together.

To begin with, some of the cultural factors affecting communication described by Moemeka (1998) are "our world views, past experiences, aspirations and expectations" (p.1) and he continues noting that "these factors are individually specific and almost always culturally based" (p.1). Hence, this scholar suggests that these factors might play a crucial role in causing differences in the interpretation as well as reaction to communication content and these differences can possibly lead to conflicts. However we should stress that cultural diversity is not causing the conflicts, yet cultural differences can lead to the challenges in communication, that in turn, if not managed properly, can lead to a conflict. However, we see conflict as an unavoidable part of both - everyday life and thus, no organization can be conflict free. Kotthoff and Spencer-Oatey (2007) claim that conflict "is often regarded as undesirable, and much attention is typically focused on how to prevent or resolve it. However conflict need not necessarily be undesirable" (p.99). The latter researchers continue with bringing up possible positive outcomes of having a conflict. This leads to implication that deeper understanding of what conflict is could overall be beneficial and therefore one of its elements - perception of conflicts in specific environment is attempted to be researched in this study.

The central focus of this study is on perceptions of conflicts, hence we continue with Pronin's (2007) statement that "people are not always accurate and objective at perceiving themselves, their circumstances and those around them" (p. 37). According to the latter researcher an array of cognitive, motivational and perceptual biases distorts human judgement and decision making. We assume that culture could be also regarded as one of the factors shaping one's perceptions of conflicts and this assumption brings the curiosity to study perceptions of conflicts by people from different cultural backgrounds.

1.2. Volvo X - a diverse workplace in Sweden

Today's world is becoming more and more global and interconnected, and multiculturalism in workplaces is intensely increasing. Researchers Pettersen and Østby (2013) claim that "compared to Denmark and Norway, Sweden has by far most immigrants, both in absolute terms and in relation to the size of the population" (p. 1). Having said that, this Master Thesis' authors believe that Sweden is well known as a country having a really multicultural society, hence having many culturally diverse workplaces.

As previously mentioned, this paper is aiming to examine the perceptions of conflicts in a specific environment. The specific environment in this study is Volvo X - a culturally diverse Swedish company. According to Gesteland (2012) "any culture's business behaviour reflects its societal values" (p.339). Gesteland explains how Swedes business behavior reflects the values of the culture in country as follows: "If you know that Swedes value equality, efficiency and modesty, for example, it helps you to anticipate what will happen across the bargaining table or in a management role in Stockholm or in Gothenburg" (p. 339). Based on the latter claim, we see the importance in understanding the culture where the company is located.

As previously mentioned, many multicultural companies are to be found in Sweden, where the foreign workforce flow is said to be intense. One of these companies is Volvo Group, which presents diversity and inclusion as a part of their values. According to the Volvo Group Headquarters (2014), diversity and inclusion is fundamental to the company's long term success. According to Volvo Group Headquarters (2014) in 2013, 23% of employees at Volvo Group were Swedish, while even 77% of all employees were people from other countries (USA, France, Japan, Brazil, China, Belgium, Poland, India and other). The Volvo Way is a guide for everyone working in Volvo Group and it represents whole group's corporate culture through expressing shared ideas, behaviours and values across the Volvo Group in the world (Volvo Group, 2015).

Volvo X is one part of the Volvo Group and it is culturally diverse company. According to Angouri and Miglbauer (2013) "one of the characteristics of modern business environments is the collaboration across national borders for an increasing number of companies" (p. 225), and the researchers continue with noting that this not only concerns businesses but also people who migrate or work across borders. Like many other modern businesses Volvo X has - besides having headquarters in Sweden and operating in Europe - subsidiaries around the world, for example in North and South America and Asia-Pacific region. As Volvo X is a culturally diverse company, we believe that studying conflict perceptions in this company would be highly beneficial as it brings new understandings how conflicts are perceived in culturally diverse workplace.

1.3. Aim of the study and research question

The aim of this research is to find out how employees in Volvo X perceive work related conflict situations, in Sweden.

The focus is on following research questions:

- How do Swedish and non-Swedish employees perceive cultural differences at workplace influencing communication at Volvo X?
- How are the conflicts within Volvo X perceived by Swedish and non-Swedish employees?
- Is there a difference of conflict perceptions between Swedish and non-Swedish employees?

1.4. Disposition

This thesis consists of 6 parts, divided into several sub-chapters according the topics that are discussed. The first chapter is "Introduction" and it includes a statement of background of the study, description of a company in which the thesis is conducted, as well as origin of the research purpose is described. Moreover introduction covers the research aim as well as research questions. The second chapter provides the in-depth theoretical background which is needed in order to conduct the study. Chapter three covers the methodological framework of this study, including the purpose of the research as well as describing the methods used. What is more ethical consideration, as well as limitations of the study are presented in the latter chapter. Chapter four contains the results in objective way, including categories for the data analyses that emerged from the theoretical framework as well as from collected data. Chapter five covers a discussion of the results, using theoretical assumptions presented in the theoretical framework. The sixth chapter contains conclusions of this study as well as suggestions for the future research.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter we provide a detailed overview of different theoretical aspects that influence conflict perceptions in multicultural organisation. Topics, such as communication, culture, diversity, and crucial aspects that need to be noted about conflicts will be presented among others . Lastly, an overview of Swedish culture and its influence to organisations located there, will be presented.

2.1. Perception

In order to do a study concerning perceptions of conflicts, one needs to have a deeper understanding what perception is. Based on contrasting life experiences, all people have different outlooks on life and these dissimilarities lead to different perceptions and interpretations of situations. According to Pickens (2005), perception is the process of interpreting the stimuli into something meaningful to the individual. It is important to notify, that this process is based on the individual's prior experiences and that these individual perceptions can differ substantially from reality (Pickens, 2005). Having said this, the implication comes, that even if all people are looking at the same thing, they might all have different perceptions of what that object is. These individuals will own their unique perceptions of the object and thus will create their own realities in their minds. Having said that each object or situation is perceived differently by every individual, and keeping in mind that all people are different and they have distinctive life experiences behind them, the inference can be made that conflicts are also perceived differently by all of us.

According to Pronin (2007), "people are not always accurate and objective at perceiving themselves, their circumstances and those around them" (p. 37). According to the latter researcher an array of cognitive, motivational and perceptual biases distorts human judgement and decision making.

2.2. Communication

Conflict is related to communication, or to be more precise, with the lack of communication or with unsuccessful communication. As Moemeka (1998) claimed "if communication is fundamental to an organization, then so is conflict. They have a symbiotic relationship - conflict cannot occur without communication and helps to broaden the context of communication" (p. 1). The authors of this research focus on the perceptions of conflicts at the workplace and having said this, and knowing that conflict is inseparable from the communication process induces a need to explore the notion of communication at the beginning of this thesis.

Communication is a field studied by social scientists, linguists and cultural studies scholars and there are to be found many definitions of the notion of communication. Before providing some of them, it is important to look at the word's *communication* origin. Etymological meaning of the word communication comes from the Latin word *communis*, that means common (Lunenburg, 2010). Lunenburg (2010) suggests to define communication as the "process of transmitting information and common understanding from one person to another" (p.1). A definition provided

by the latter researcher can be interpreted in a way that communication is not established if there is no mutual understanding in interchange of information between interacting individuals.

Another researcher, Allwood (2002), suggests that communication is "transmission of content X from sender Y to a recipient Z using an expression W and medium Q in an environment E with a purpose/function F" (p. 1). The latter definition can be paraphrased into other words that communication is "transmission of anything from anything to anything with the help of anything (expression/medium) in any environment with any purpose/function" (Allwood, 2002). The latter researcher further notes that it is possible to add even more parameters to this definition.

Other researchers, Lustig and Koester (2010) describe communication as "a symbolic, interpretive, transactional, contextual process in which people create shared meanings" (p. 13). This definition suggests that communication is a process of creating shared meanings by individuals involved in it, however this notion also implies that communication is symbolic, interpretive, transactional and contextual.

As it can be noted from the definitions above, all these notions share the same aspect of transmission of a mutually understood information. However we prefer Allwoods' definition, as it is very wide and provides crucial parameters of communication act - environment and medium - that we consider to be very important for our study.

2.2.1. Communication in business

As it was mentioned in previous section, one of the crucial parameters of communication act is environment, hence we need to explain what describes communication in a specific setting. Communication in business is specific type of interaction, taking place in a more formal context and is influenced by many aspects. Business communication is linked to business culture and the latter is defined by Gesteland (2012, p. 21) as "a unique set of expectations and assumptions about how to do business." Martins and Terblanche (2003) continue with noting that a shared system of meanings which are created by the organisational culture provides "the basis of communication and mutual understanding" (p.65).

In Volvo X employees are culturally diverse one could assume they interact interculturally on daily basis - this makes Volvo X a multicultural organisation and hence, aspects influencing multiculturalism, should be taken into consideration. One of the fundamental dimensions of global organisation is multiculturalism, described by Adler and Gundersen (2007, p. 17) as: "people from many countries and/or cultures interact regularly" and continue noting that "multiculturalism adds to the complexity of global firms by increasing the number of perspectives, approaches, and business methods represented within the organization". In the following section we will deeper examine what is diversity in business and what are advantages and disadvantages of having diversity in a workplace.

2.3. Challenges and opportunities of diversity in business

Current demographic trends show that most organizations will have no other way but to become more and more diverse in the future in order to stay demanded in a global marketplace. Many companies are already working towards capitalization of benefits that come from a workplace which is diverse (Miller, 2012). Diversity, according to O'Hair et al. (2004), "is one of terms used to explain how people differ by gender, age, ethnicity, physical abilities, religious affiliation, and sexual orientation" (p. 60). According to Mele and Sanchez-Runde (2013) the "differences in race, sex, language, ethnicity, value systems, religion, and local practices are important aspects of the business environment in both domestic and international business" (p.681). It is important to note that from now on, in order to narrow the scope of the study, we will focus more on cultural diversity.

Diversity could be seen as an asset as well as challenge in today's organization. People who have different backgrounds and experiences can communicate and exchange valuable, unique ideas and insights with their peers and their respective organizations. "In a study by Trefry and Vaillant (2002) multicultural team members reported enhanced capability to deal with unexpected events and increased self-confidence" (in Halverson and Tirmizi, 2008, p.8). Moreover, team members in multicultural teams "also stated that they had re-examined their perspectives when confronted with different perspectives" (ibid. p.8) and "these individual benefits, including flexibility in response to unanticipated events, give multicultural teams a distinct competitive advantage" (ibid. p.8). However, while being different, people can also communicate in very different ways from one another (O'Hair et al., 2004). As the latter researcher continues "during interaction with diverse people, differences in communication and in expectations about communication can sometimes result in cultural conflict" (O'Hair et al, 2004, p.60). And this aspect is crucial to keep in mind because our focus of study is conflicts.

Mele and Sanchez-Runde (2013) suggest the following: "Organizing corporations so that people from different cultures live and work together peacefully is a challenge for management that we cannot ignore" (p.681). We believe it is not possible to understand everything about other cultures, and also it is not possible to eliminate all conflicts, even if parties are similar to each other. However we think that conflict, emerging from challenges caused by cultural differences, can result into something positive and help people to understand each other better and communicate more efficiently in the future. Having said this, it is clear that perceived differences among people have a big impact for work relationships, management and overall organization and therefore it is important to mind these differences and use them as an asset rather than a drawback which would hold back a development of a company and organization members working there.

According to O'Hair et al. (2004) diversity may bring negative impact to an organization if "participants do not analyze their own language culture or the language culture of others to identify the source of conflict" (p.78). What is more, the latter researchers claim, that if both parties involved in a conflict do not identify and discuss the sources of the conflict, the problem can evolve and thus a number and intensity of a conflict can increase. Miller (2012) adds that in order to manage and celebrate diversity it is crucial, that both managers and workers would view diversity as an opportunity and as a challenge to embrace, rather than a problem to deal with.

Lastly, Miller (2012) states that education and knowledge about diversity is important, but not enough, there must be an action done so that educated workforce would be ensured and bias free atmosphere at workplace would be created.

To gain effectiveness as a multicultural organization and manage conflicts in such environment is not an easy task but enhancing the value of a diverse workplace is possible and conflicts can be managed in a way that they provide a base for development for both a company and individuals working there. Thus we believe that better understanding of conflicts is necessity both in general, and in a particular organizational context. Therefore, we aim to research the understanding of conflicts in this study.

2.4. Culture

People across the world are similar to each other but at the same time very different in how they behave, talk, dress, eat etc. According to O'Hair et al. (2004) "culture is broad term that explains why people from various nations and co-cultures (groups different from mainstream populations in those countries) act and speak as they do" (p.60). However, Gesteland (2012) stresses that two people from the same culture are never exactly alike, there are among others "regional, generational, individual differences" (p.21) that influence one's behaviour. Similar is suggested by Hofstede and McCrae (2004) as they highlight Hofstede's operating definition about culture as follows: "The collective programming of the mind that distinguishes one group or category of people from another" (p.58). Hofstede and McCrae (2004) continue arguing with O'Hair et al. (2004) claim regarding to culture explaining the way people talk and act as follows: "[...] culture is (a) a collective, not individual, attribute; (b) not directly visible but manifested in behaviors; and (c) common to some but not all people" (p.58).

Lustig and Koester (2010) claims that "culture is a learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, norms, and social practices, which affect the behaviors of a relatively large group of people" (p. 25). Mead (1990) hereby raises a question "How Large is the Group?" (p.14) and continues giving an example of Switzerland, where there are four major sub-cultures which retain their own identity and have their own language as first. The necessity of acknowledging the importance of subcultures within national cultures is also stressed by Lewis (1999). In this research paper subcultures are set aside.

Now we would like to have a deeper look to elements of culture beliefs, values, norms and social practices as suggested previously by Lustig and Koester (2010). According to Lustig and Koester (2010), "*beliefs* refer to the basic understanding of a group of people about what the world is like or what is true or false" (p.27). The latter scholars continue claiming that "*Values* refer to what a group of people defines good or bad or what it regards as important"(p.27). Adler and Gundersen (2007) see values as "explicitly or implicitly desirable to an individual or group and which influences the selection from available modes, means, and ends of actions" (p. 20). Lustig and Koester (2010) continue with definitions as follows: "*Norms* refers to rules for appropriate behavior, which provide the expectations people have of one another and of themselves" (p.27) and *Social practices* refer to behavioral patterns that are typically followed by representatives of that culture. Finally, we would to conclude with Mead (1990) definition claiming that "culture of the group determines how its members perceive the world and solve their problems, both

individual and shared" (p. 34) and continues with noting that these perceptions and actions may seem irrational for other groups or members of other groups. Having analyzed different definitions of culture, we would like to emphasize that we prefer Mead (1990) explanation, because it includes the crucial element of culture - perceptions, which has central role within this study.

2.4.1. Intercultural Communication

In our paper we are focusing on conflicts in a multicultural workplace, and therefore intercultural communication has a significance for this research. Lustig and Koester (2010) provide second definition regarding intercultural communication claiming that it occurs "when large and important cultural differences create dissimilar interpretations and expectations about how to communicate competently" (p. 52). Similarly, researchers Bjerregaard, et al. (2009) in their article "Critical analysis of intercultural communication research in cross-cultural management: introducing newer developments in anthropology" claimed that intercultural "communication problems arise when receivers interpret a message according to their own cultural frame of reference, which may be different to the intentions of the sender" (p. 210). Further they continue with noting that even if the message is sent in the same language as it is received, there might be interpretation disturbances that emerge from cultural differences. We should keep this notion in mind, since our research concerns people coming from different cultures while using often the same language and striving to create the shared meaning in their working environment.

Allwood (1985) defines intercultural communication "as the sharing of information on different levels of awareness and control between people with different cultural backgrounds, where different cultural backgrounds include both national cultural differences and differences which are connected with participation in the different activities that exist within a national unit" (p. 3). The latter definition is preferred as within this research non-Swedish and Swedish are experiencing intercultural communication on daily basis in their environment - Volvo X.

2.5. Conflict

Globalization contributed to increased interaction between culturally diverse people and conflicts between such individuals might be more complex and more difficult to resolve because of different values, norms, and languages. Kotthoff and Spencer-Oatey (2007) claimed: "In fact, the three concepts of conflict, culture and communication are like a Bermuda Triangle - hazardous conditions will emerge unless the three are simultaneously handled appropriately" (p. 99). As we have already covered two concepts - culture and communication, we would hereby continue with the last concept - conflict, which will be examined through many angles.

Conflict and processes related to it have been studied by many researchers. Scholars such as Wood, Forsyth, Miller, Geist and others, have been trying to find out what are the reasons of why conflicts are emerging, what types of conflicts are prevailing, what influences attitudes people attain towards conflicts, and also which tactics and strategies are used by parties involved in the conflict. In this section, we attempt to provide an overview of what conflict is and what processes surround it.

Forsyth (2014) defines conflict as "disagreement, discord, and friction that occur when the actions or beliefs of one or more members of the group are unacceptable to and resisted by one or more of the other group members" (p. 380). Conflict is an natural part of everyday life in any kind of organization or institution where people work together (Halverson and Tirmizi, 2008). One could see conflict also as an unavoidable part of everyday life, thus, Wood (2012) suggests that people should find ways to deal with these in constructive way.

Miller (2012), in the research of conflicts, emphasizes three most important characteristics of it: incompatible goals, interdependence, and interaction. According to the latter researchers, incompatible goals stand for various matters in the organizational setting; however interdependence must be present too - meaning that parties engaging in a conflict are dependent on each other to some extent; and lastly interaction, stands for expression of existing incompatibility. Miller (2012) states, members in an organization who are communicating with each other create and resolve conflicts in both functional and dysfunctional ways.

Another scholar, Geist (1995), in the research of conflicts, state that "conflicts in the form of disagreements, differences of opinions, divergent interpretations, struggles for control, and multiple perspectives are natural and pervasive in organizing processes" (p. 45). According to Hammer (2005) there are two essential elements regarding to conflicts: perceived substantive disagreements and a strong, negative emotional reactions.

While analyzing conflict definitions, it is important to take into account that there are different types of conflict. Wood (2015) suggests two categories - overt and covert conflicts. According to Wood (2015), overt conflict refers to situation where "people deal with their differences in a direct, straightforward manner" (p. 252) and she continues that the approach can vary between calm discussions, intense arguments and shouting matches, also physical attacks are part of overt conflict scenarios. Covert conflicts, on the other hand, are according to Wood (2015) "when people express their feelings about disagreements indirectly" (p. 252) and one of the common aspects describing covert conflict is passive aggression, which is "acting aggressively while denying feeling or acting aggressive" (p. 252). We emphasize on these conflict categories and further research Volvo X employees' perceptions about them in empirical part of this study.

2.5.1. Levels of organizational conflict

Conflict in an organization can happen at a variation of levels. However Miller (2012) states, that most research done on conflicts focuses on the *interpersonal* level of conflict. At this level, individual organizational members perceive incompatibility of their goals; besides this form, conflict can emerge at intergroup level or interorganizational level (ibid.).

Intergroup conflict regards collections of individuals – different divisions, work teams within an organization as parties engaged in the conflict. Example of this form of conflict could be two departments arguing about how to share limited fiscal resources. This kind of conflict complicates when members within the same group have different views on the issue. (Miller, 2012)

Interorganizational conflict, according to Miller (2012), includes two or more organizations disputing and the example of this conflict could be competition in the marketplace, or

organizations that are working together in joint agreements. However, the interorganizational conflict does not concern our study, because we focus on perceptions of conflicts of employees within one company.

2.5.2. Phases of conflict

Several views of the evolvement, dynamics and phases of conflicts will be presented and discussed in this segment. Mason and Rychard (2005) describe escalation of conflict as an increased tension in conflict. According to the latter researchers, firstly, parties involved in a conflict start by wanting something and after escalation occurs, besides wanting something, one wants to hurt another part. Finally, according to Mason and Rychard (2005), mutual destruction takes places.

Dynamics of conflict can be analyzed through a nine-stage escalation model by Glasl (in Mason and Rychard, 2005):

1. Hardening:	Positions harden and there is a first confrontation. The conviction still exists that the conflict can be solved in discussion. There are no fixed camps.
2. Debate, polemics:	Polarisation of thinking, feeling and will. Black and white thinking. Perception of superiority and inferiority.
3. Actions not words:	"Speaking will not help anymore". Strategy of "fait accompli", presenting the opponent with facts on the ground, physical action. Empathy is lost, there is a danger of false interpretation of the other side.
4. Images, coalitions:	The parties manoeuvre each other into negative roles and fight these roles. Parties seek support from people who have not been involved so far.
5. Loss of face:	Public and direct attack on the moral integrity of the opponent, aiming at the loss of face of him/her. A major escalation step.
6. Strategies of threats:	Threats and counter threats. The conflict accelerates through ultimatums.

7. Limited destructive blows:	The opponent is no longer seen as a human being. As a consequence of dehumanization, limited destructive blows are legitimate. Values are shifted, one's own "small" loss is seen as a benefit.
8. Fragmentation:	Destruction and fragmentation of the opponent's system is one's main aim.
9. Together into the abyss:	Total confrontation without any possibility of stepping back. The destruction of oneself is accepted as the price of the destruction of the opponent.

Table 1. Glasl's nine stage conflict escalation model (in Mason and Rychard, 2005, p.6)

The above presented model pictures how dynamics of a conflict are related to interconnected counterparties fiercely handling their contradictory standpoints. Analyzing each step, from one to nine, it can be noticed that the negative interactions between parties involved in a conflict gradually reaches absolute destruction in the end, where is no way of coming back.

Glasl's escalation model provides a comprehensive theory of possible steps of conflict escalation. This model is focusing on negative progress of conflict. Therefore it is a good tool to identify the stage of any kind of conflict and try to prevent it from further degeneration. However we are keeping an open mind and assume that there might be more models of conflict escalation.

Another scholar, Miller (2012) highlights that conflict can go through several phases before it reaches a peak of communicative manifestation. The latter scholar bases on Pond's (1967) research and presents five phases of conflict development and subsiding:

Latent conflict is the phase where the grounds for a conflict already exists because parties are in interdependent relationships and incompatible goals are possible. The second phase is *perceived conflict* and it takes place when at least one party thinks that interdependency and incompatibilities between parties exist. *Felt conflict* is when parties start thinking about conflict issue and if it is acceptable or not acceptable outcomes and also they formulate strategies of dealing with conflict. During the *manifest conflict* strategies and goals previously formulated by parties are enacted through communication. Cycles of escalation and de-escalation might be involved in interaction between parties. The last phase is *conflict aftermath* and it can have both short-term and long-term consequences for parties engaged in the conflict. It can change individuals, relationship between them and even organization (in Miller, 2012).

To conclude, we see the latter model outweighing Glasl's model, because we believe that some people perceive conflict taking place whilst another party in the same situation do not see any conflict, and we see this is directly relating to the nature of perception. Furthermore, as we think

that some people only feel conflicts but do not enact and may not step into manifest phase, Miller (2012) model is seen applicable for this study.

2.5.3. Causes of conflicts

As previously noted, conflicts are inevitable, hence a more detailed description why conflicts arise, is hereby provided. To begin with, according to O'Hair et al. (2004), the main reason of conflicts arising is communication failure, misunderstanding. The latter researchers further claim that conflicts also stem from diverse values and goals, different economic interests, conflicting roles, changes in environment. Additionally, according to O'Hair et al. (2004), even usage of technology, computer-mediated communication, can be a cause of emerging conflicts. This might be as Schneider and Barsoux (2003) suggest that computer-mediated communication does not capture feelings, context and sensory information

Looking at the conflicts, the notion of incompatible goals needs to be discussed. Wood (2015) highlights that "we experience conflict when we perceive that what we want is incompatible with what is wanted by a person with whom we are interdependent" (p. 251) and conflict is not just a disagreement but rather "tension between goals, preferences, or decisions that we feel we need to reconcile" (p. 251). Previously reviewed researchers Miller (2012) and O'Hair et al. (2004) agree, that competing goals is the major cause of all conflicts. O'Hair et al. (2004) further explain that in most conflict situations there are two types of goals: relational and content.

O'Hair et al. (2004) explain these previously mentioned goals as: *Content goals* which are apparent issues and obvious reasons for a dispute between parties (finite resources, decision making, right, etc.), whereas *relational goals* can be when parties in each conflict situation are trying to pursue goals that are less obvious than content goals (each party's importance to the other party: emotional distance, influence each party wish to maintain to another party)

2.5.3.1. Task versus relational conflicts

Different goals mentioned previously by O'Hair et al. (2004) - relational and content goals - leads to two types of conflicts: task or relationship conflicts (Halverson and Tirmizi, 2008). Task conflicts are related to task issues such as resource distribution, facts, procedures, etc., whereas relationship or emotional conflicts are related to preferences, values, styles and feelings (Halverson and Tirmizi, 2008). The difference between these two types of conflicts is whether conflict is about how to achieve the goal and how to do something versus conflict about personal problems such as negative attitude towards others.

According to some organizational behavior theory (Jehn, 1997, De Dreu and Weingart, 2002), relationship conflicts are more rare, but they tend to have more negative impact on groups, whereas task related conflicts are more usual and can be either constructive or destructive, depending on how they are resolved (in Halverson and Tirmizi, 2008).

However, conflicts can often be intertwined - related both to tasks and relationships, and it may be difficult to distinguish what was the main cause of the conflicts. Halverson and Tirmizi (2008) note that sometimes conflicts may look as mere task conflicts, but there might be deeply hidden personal components that can hinder rational and considerate approach to a conflict

management. The latter researcher continue that "like the 88% of an iceberg that is hidden under water, buried issues, attitudes, histories, wounds, and emotions can dangerously impact negotiation if they are not revealed as an explicit dynamic of the conflict" (p.240). Having said that, implication is clear, that there can be complexity of reasons fostering emergence of conflicts.

2.5.4. Conflict styles

The most complete analysis of conflict styles was developed by Thomas in 1976 (Miller, 2012). Thomas defined two dimensions regarding behavior in a conflict: concern for self and concern for others and then he identified five distinctive conflict styles:

The first conflict style is avoidance – showing little concern for yourself and the other party. This strategy is very seldom effective. The second style is accommodation - this strategy emphasize satisfying other party's needs at the expense of your own needs. Third style is defined as competition - with this strategy one party will get what it wants, but other party's needs will be sacrificed respectively. The fourth strategy is compromising, which means that neither of the party will be satisfied fully, both will have to give up of something. The last style is collaboration, which is reaching a solution which satisfies and benefits both parties engaged in the conflict (in Miller 2012).

The latter explained dual concern model is widely used by scholars to study the conflict styles. It is important to note that in different sources of information, above listed conflict styles introduced by Thomas (avoiding, accommodating, competition, compromise and collaboration) are presented in somewhat different names, while meaning is actually the same. For example, Pruitit and Carnevale (1993), in their dual concern model presents obliging, dominating, avoiding, compromising and integrating (in Cai and Fink, 2002), whereas dominating has the same meaning as competing in Thomas (1976) model. Further, obliging can be aligned to accommodating, and respectively integrating is same as collaboration in Thomas (1976) model.

According to Cai and Fink (2002) "the dual concern model suggests that, regardless of culture, avoiding is the result of low concern for both one's own and the other party's interests" (p.71). However, Cai and Fink (2002) continue with noting that "a few researchers have recently noted that avoiding may be understood differently across cultures (Kim & Leung, 2000; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001)" (p.71).

For example, Ting-Toomey et al. (2000) claims that avoiding and obliging are not interpreted in a same way in all cultures; those from Western cultures views toward obliging and avoiding more negatively compared to those from Asian cultures (in Cai and Fink, 2002). In order to see where Sweden fits within these categories, Schneider and Barsoux (2003) suggest: "In countries like Sweden, where power is supposed to be shared equally and where there is more concern for the quality of relationships and mutual gain, conflict is more likely to be resolved through *collaboration"* (p. 236). In empirical part of this study, we will take a deeper look, where Swedes are perceived to fit with their conflict style.

2.5.5. Aspects influencing conflict management process

Different people engaged in conflicts use variety of diverse styles and strategies to manage them. Miller (2012) attempts to summarize factors that affect strategies people choose when they have to handle a conflict, and she accentuate 3 groups: personal, relational and cultural factors. We see as these factors not only influencing the conflict management behavior but also as influencing the perceptions.

Personal factors. Individual factors such as gender and personal characteristics such as introversion, need of control, aggressiveness might be regarded as determinants influencing tactics that people choose when involved in a conflict, however gender and personality characteristics have relatively weak effect on conflict management strategies chosen. However, Miller (2012) further states that "the way an individual frames a conflict will influence the manner in which the conflict is managed" (p. 172). Framing is further explained to include not only perceptions of self and the other party involved in the conflict, but also the conflict itself. Some individuals involved in conflict tend to frame other party as 'enemy', whereas others frame it through interaction. Furthermore some people frames the conflict itself in the frames of losses and gains. These predetermined frames and perceptions of conflicts and people involved in them undoubtedly influences tactics and strategies used while handling with a conflict (Miller 2012).

Relational factors. Organizational members depend on each other, but at the same time they strive to maintain independence and this is one of the determinants contradiction which can lead to a conflict. Relationships between parties, power, the hierarchical position of individuals involved in the conflict influences conflict resolution to a great extent. Competitive styles are preferred by organizational members when they are involved in a conflict with their subordinates. However, individuals tend to invoke avoiding tactics when involved in the conflict with their peers and respectively they tend to use collaboration or accommodation strategy when they have to deal with superiors. (Miller, 2012)

Cultural factors. The last group of factors which might make an impact in conflict resolution styles is associated with culture. Racial, ethnic, national and organizational culture are said to be playing a role in conflict negotiation, perceptions of conflicts and ways in which conflict is approached and resolved in organizations. Finally, organizational culture can also have an impact on the process of conflict resolution between individuals in a company engaged in a conflict (Miller, 2012).

Later, in the empirical part of this research, we examine collected data and discuss how these - cultural, relational and personal factors - are perceived by Swedish and non-Swedish employees in Volvo X to be affecting individual's conflict behavior.

2.5.6. Possible benefits of conflict

In this section, we explore what are the possible benefits of conflicts, according to theorists. According to Halverson and Tirmizi (2008): "Conflicts can feel dangerous and its potential benefits may not be recognized. Conflicts undermine team goals when disagreements block communication and collaboration" (p.212). Further the same researchers claim, that conflicts lead to the change, because without it, groups do not progress; and what is more, the hidden,

repressed conflict can jeopardize groups sustainment, as much as open and aggressive conflict. The positive characteristics of conflicts are brought by Kotthoff and Spencer-Oatey (2007) who claim that conflict "can contribute to the maintenance and cohesion of groups, and it can stimulate reflection and change. So in these senses, it can be positive" (p. 99).

Halverson and Tirmizi (2008) claim that "productive struggle, rather than destructive attacks, builds team capacity for understanding differences and finding creative solutions" (p. 213). Lastly, Kotthoff and Spencer-Oatey (2007) claim that conflicts in general are often regarded as undesirable, and more energy is put into conflict prevention and resolution.

To sum up this section, we would to conclude that conflicts even though seen as threatening and dangerous for relationships and business, can still have many positive outcomes if handled appropriately.

2.5.7. Swedish culture

Since Volvo X Headquarters is located in Sweden, as well as high percentage of employees are Swedish, within our study we would like to provide more in-depth overview of Swedish culture, and its characteristics in relation to conflict behaviour. Before starting looking at Swedish culture in more detail, it should be noted that culture is seen by Lustig and Koester (2010) as not only influencing behaviour but also shaping attitudes towards conflicts.

One of the ways to analyze cultures can be through dimensions suggested by Hofstede (2015): Power Distance Index, Individualism versus Collectivism, Masculinity versus Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance Index, Long Term Orientation versus Short Term Normative Orientation, Indulgence versus Restraint. The dimension that we see having the great impact on Swedish culture, is Individualism and Collectivism. Individualism is described by Adler and Gundersen (2007) as existing "when people define themselves primarily as separate individuals and make their main commitments to themselves" (p.51). Ting-Toomey and Kurogi (1998) support this argument by claiming that "individualism refers to the broad value tendencies of a culture in emphasizing the importance of "I" identity over "we" identity, individual rights over group rights and personal self-esteem issues over social self-esteem issues" (p. 189). Cullen and Parboteeah (2013) note that in individualistic cultures "people are valued in terms of their own achievements, status, and other unique characteristics" (p. 56). On the other hand, people from collectivistic cultures "hold common goals and objectives" and "believe that the will of the group should determine members' beliefs and behaviour" (Adler and Gundersen, 2007, p. 51). Barinaga (1999) in her paper "Swedishness through *lagom*. Can words tell us anything about a culture?" claims that the search for the consensus, is a Swedish trait, which demonstrates the balance between individualism and collectivism. In the line with this strive for consensus, Swedes have tendency to avoid conflicts, especially in the public place. Therefore, according to Barinaga (1999), aggressive behavior, raising the voice are rarely considered by Swedes and these tactics seldom lead to the desired outcome.

The second dimension which helps us to describe Swedish culture In Hofstede's study, Sweden scores 5 on masculinity dimension and therefore it is ranked as the most feminine society of all. Lustig and Koester (2010) explain that "this dimension indicates the degree to which culture

values 'masculine' behaviours such as assertiveness and the acquisition of wealth, or 'feminine' behaviours, such as caring for others and the quality of life" (p. 118). In feminine societies people strive for consensus, conflicts are resolved by negotiating and seeking for a compromise. Furthermore, Sweden's "culture is based around 'lagom', which means something like not too much, not too little, not too noticeable, everything in moderation" (Hofstede, 2015). Having said this and keeping in mind that Sweden is country where caring for others and reaching consensus are highly encouraged, conclusion can be drawn that in such culture conflict behaviour and is less aggressive and more striving for a decision which satisfies both parties included in the conflict.

The next dimension by Hofstede which we also would like to analyze here, is Power Distance. Pethő and Heidrich (2005) claim that Sweden is low power distance culture which is "characterized by more interdependence, mutual support and shared undertakings" (p.88) and where "decision making in the workplace is decentralized; employee seek involvement and have a desire for a participative management style" (p.88). Therefore we can see that discussion in order to reach consensus could be Swedish trait which might be related to scoring low in Power Distance dimension.

The following dimension we would like to discuss is Uncertainty Avoidance, presented in both GLOBE cultural taxonomies and Hofstede studies and are discussed by Lustig and Koester (2010). This dimension is chosen because Sweden is described by latter researchers as being "relatively high on uncertainty avoidance" (p.127) and in such cultures people "prefer to avoid uncertainty as a cultural value, desire or even demand consensus about societal goals, and do not tolerate dissent or allow deviation in the behaviors of cultural members" (p.127). Certainty as well as security is attempted to be reached by "extensive set of instructions about how one ought to behave" (p.127) resulting in society's desire to control individuals' social behaviours (ibid.).

Dimension which further characterizes Swedish culture is High-Low context language by Hall and "according to Hall, all 'information transaction' can be characterized as high-, low or middle - context" (in Pethő and Heidrich, 2005, p.91). According to Pethő and Heidrich (2005) Scandinavians are said to belong to low context cultures and "these cultures transmit information in explicit code to make up for a lack of shared meanings. Meanings are determined by 'what' is said, rather than 'how' it is said" (p.91), hence people are mainly counting on spoken words and written texts in order to gather information about surrounding behaviour. Low context cultures are also said to avoid uncertainty and ambiguity (Pethő and Heidrich, 2005).

Different cultures can be also described through another set of dimensions suggested by Gesteland (2012) that divides cultures into two - deal-focused and relationship-focused cultures. In relationship-focused cultures "people get things done through relatives, friends, contacts and connections" (Gesteland 2012, p. 28). In comparison, in deal-focused cultures according to Gesteland (2012) "people are relatively open to dealing with strangers" (p.26). Gesteland (2012) suggests that deal-focused countries are among others, USA and Sweden, whereas Japan and China are more relationship-focused. Adler and Gundersen (2007) confirm Sweden's belonging to deal-focused cultures and add Italians as a good example of relationship-focused people. The final characteristic brought up by Gesteland (2012) is that business people from deal-focused

cultures have the tendency to value language which is direct and straightforward. Similarly, Swedes' behaviour is further discussed by Adler and Gundersen (2007), who describe Swedes as people who "are task oriented and value getting things done; to Swedes, solving problems means going directly to the person most likely to have the needed information and expertise, and not necessarily to the boss" (p. 48). Adler and Gundersen (2007) note, that this kind of behaviour in Italy would be a sign of insubordination.

Barinaga (1999) in her research about Swedish culture, is deeper analyzing the Swedish word *lagom* which is mirroring the dilemma "between personal freedom and social responsibility, between formal relations and formally showing respect for the person, between expressing one's emotions and avoiding open conflict through compromising and consensus" (p. 8). The similar has been claimed by Gesteland (2012), who is describing all the Nordic cultures as possessing "strong democratic and egalitarian beliefs, a real concern for the environment and a desire to avoid conflict and confrontation" (p. 356). Barinaga (1999) continues with noting that "in that doing with the others, in that contributing for the narrow or broader group, in that being useful, the Swede looks for agreement and consensus, trait which has made them ideal as mediators in many international peace negotiations, but which can be frustrating for the less diplomat person" (p. 10). The latter researcher further claims that the Swedish trait - constant search for consensus, and not taking thorny issues in front of others is occasionally referred to as avoidance for open conflict in order to save a face. In regard to this, Barinaga (1999) referring to Daun (1989), claims that not in vain Swedes are said to be Japanese of the Europe. Having said this, and keeping in mind that Sweden is a country where caring for others and reaching consensus are highly encouraged, conclusion can be drawn that in such culture conflict behaviour is less aggressive and more striving for a decision which satisfies all parties included in the conflict.

Finalizing the review of Swedish culture and Swedes in relation to conflict behaviour, we would like to refer to Danielsson (2008) who in the paper "Rejected? - immigrants and Swedish labour market" provides an insightful thought about Swedishness: "the fact that the population of Sweden is being increased by an growing number of people of foreign origin affects what is traditionally Swedish and what is traditionally non-Swedish" (p.14). Further the researcher adds that the notion of Swedishness will change in the future. Having said this, it is important to stress that cultural descriptions of Sweden and Swedes, which we have provided previously in this section, might be questioned, because Swedish culture might be constantly changing or it has already changed.

In our research we are studying the perceptions of conflicts of Swedish and non-Swedish employees, thus this section about Swedish culture provides important context to understand what may influence perceptions of employees of Volvo X.

3. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter we will describe what methods we used in order to be able to conduct our research. We will provide the description of participants, description of data collection and description of how data was analyzed. The limitations of this research are looked into and this chapter ends with ethical consideration.

3.1. Research purpose and approach

To begin with, it should be mentioned that the purpose of the research is *exploration* - a curiosity-based research described by Treadwell (2011). The researchers' curiosity manifested throughout the question: whether people with different backgrounds perceive conflict differently - and from that question the possible subjects of research further emerged. What began as *exploration* developed into *description* when the results were presented, Treadwell (2011) notes that "exploratory research typically results in descriptions what you are interested in" (p.27). We end with *interpretation* which by Treadwell (2011) helps "not to impose our own interpretations but capture the interpretations of those involved in the way our readers will get an accurate understanding" (p. 28). These three purposes of our research, namely, to explore, to describe and to interpret are related to our aim of finding out how employees of Volvo X perceive work related conflicts.

In order to conduct this study and to get in-depth understandings of perceptions, we have chosen the qualitative approach - we had a relatively small sample and aimed to get rich answers through interviews. According to Creswell (2007) "qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 44). The initial assumption which encouraged to study this specific topic was that people with different backgrounds perceive conflict differently.

To conclude, the data has been analysed qualitatively, however, some indications of quantitative approach could be found. However, quantitative approach does not possess any significant value in this research paper, as the sample was small. Moreover, it should be stressed that findings regarding perceptions may not be applicable for all Swedish employees and all non-Swedish employees in Volvo X.

3.2. Recruiting process

In order to get a sample for this research, authors of this study contacted Volvo X representative by presenting the research proposal via e-mail. After this initial contact, Human Resources department contacted researchers and proposed a meeting to discuss the plan of the study. During the meeting in Volvo X Headquarters, researchers and representatives of Human Resources department discussed the aim of the study and possible outcomes. In order to conduct a qualitative study of employees' perceptions of conflicts in Volvo X, researchers asked to have approximately 16 employees who are preferably diverse considering age, gender, cultural background and job position. Authors asked Human Resources department to have a balance of 50:50 when it comes to Swedes and people from other cultural backgrounds. Human Resources

department found 20 people who agreed to participate in research and helped researchers to arrange meetings with selected participants of study.

3.3. Sample

The terms "Swedish employee" and "non-Swedish employee" that will be further used in presenting and discussing results stem from the aim of this study which is to examine the perceptions of conflicts of Swedish employees and employees from other cultures in Volvo X. In total, 20 employees of Volvo X participated in interviews, from which 11 were Swedish and 9 had another cultural background, which hereby will not be revealed in order to ensure the anonymity of each participant, due to the fact that the sample is relatively small.

In order to keep identities confidential, while providing the data, each respondent is represented by the special code comprising capital letters SW (to code Swedish origin participants) or NSW (for non-Swedish respondents) together with randomly selected number from respectively 1-11 and 1-9. Confidentiality is further discussed in section 3.6. Ethical consideration.

In order to present our sample, we start describing Swedish respondents. In total 11 Swedish respondents participated in the research. The respondents' age ranged from 34 to 57 years old, time worked in Volvo X and in Volvo Group varied between 1,5 to 37 years. In order to give an overview of Swedish respondents, the table below is presented:

Number	Code	Duration of the interview
1	SW1	0:31:38
2	SW2	0:28:41
3	SW3	0:15:35
4	SW4	0:39:00
5	SW5	0:45:28

6	SW6	0:26:46
7	SW7	0:40:30
8	SW8	0:56:59
9	SW9	0:48:10
10	SW10	0:32:58
11	SW11	0:38:12

Table 2. Swedish respondents

Further, we hereby describe non-Swedish respondents. In total 9 non-Swedish respondents participated in the study. The age of interviewees varied from 32 to 54 years. The time worked in Volvo Group varied from 1,5 years to 14 years, while respectively the time worked in Volvo X ranged from 6 months to 14 years. 7 respondents are living and working in Sweden right now and some of them worked in Volvo Group before coming to Sweden. Among these 7 respondents, the time lived in Sweden varied between 6 months and 12 years. It is also important to note here, that 2 participants of interviews, are not living in Sweden and due to this fact the interviews with them were conducted via phone. Table below summarizes non-Swedish sample:

Number	Code	Duration of the interview
1	NSW1	0:41:18
2	NSW2	0:52:51

3	NSW3	0:27:27
4	NSW4	0:23:49
5	NSW5	0:31:14
6	NSW6	0:30:42
7	NSW7	1:31:00
8	NSW8	0:28:52
9	NSW9	0:48:10

Table 3. Non-Swedish sample

3.4. Data collection and interview procedure

During 6 day period, 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted, with the total length of 772 minutes, hence, the average duration of one interview was about 39 minutes. Semi-structured interview according to Wallimann (2006) "contains structured and unstructured sections with standardized and open-end questions" (p. 92). Wallimann (2006) also notes that, face-to-face interviews allow interviewers to encourage respondent to answer the questions as well as explaining and/or rephrasing the question asked. The latter was important in our study, because during interviews, on many occasions questions needed to be rephrased and respondents were encouraged by researchers.

Hennink et al. (2011) notes the importance of explaining the participants in the beginning of the interview "why is recording necessary, who will listen to the recording or read the transcript and then seeks the participants' permission to record the session" (p.70). Hence, participants were explained all these previously mentioned aspects and then asked whether they allow audio recording of the interview and all 20 participants agreed to recordings. Hereby it is important to note that one of respondents asked to stop recording during the interview, and the pause lasted for 5 minutes. However, interviewee allowed to take notes, hence no important data was lost. All interviews were recorded by using two mobile phones simultaneously and recordings were later transcribed. Wallimann (2006) highlights the advantage of recording as follows: "[...] it makes it

easier to check exactly what was said [...]" (p. 93), however highlighting the importance of transcribing, which is essential part of data analysis. Hereby we would like to note that all interviews were transcribed and resulted in 104 pages of transcriptions. Hereby, it should be stressed that no transcriptions are attached in order to keep the full confidentiality of the participants. Moreover, we would like to note that language of quotations in chapter 5, results, were in few cases corrected in order to keep meaning of the sentence for the reader as clear as possible.

Some of respondents working in Volvo X were not located in Sweden, thus researchers contacted them via phone. 18 interviews were held in 2 different physical locations, and 2 interviews were performed using phone. Two interviewers were in majority cases both present, with the exception of NSW4 and SW9 when interview times overlapped due to rescheduling and researchers conducted these interviews one-on-one.

The initial contact with participants was established with the introduction letter which was sent to them with the help of Human Resources department, introducing the researchers as well as giving the brief overview of the study. After initial contact, researchers met respondents in arranged location in Volvo X. In the first minutes of the initial face-to-face encounter researchers introduced themselves, explained about the objectives of the study and clarified how the data will be used - all these aspects are noted to be important by Hennink et al. (2011). The reason why the interviews needed to be recorded was also explained with highlighting that only researchers themselves and supervisor of Master Thesis has the access to recordings. Moreover, keeping the participants' identities confidential, was assured. After the initial steps, the structure of the interview was provided: (1) Personal information about participant, (2) Questions concerning the perceptions of intercultural communication in Volvo X, (3) Participant's personal perceptions about conflicts in Volvo X. The majority of the questions were designed to be open, regardless of the fact that some questions were designed to be closed, in many cases participants decided to elaborate their answer further. Interview questions are to be found in Appendix 1.

The last question was "Do you have anything to add?", which allowed the participants to bring up any insights they wanted to share. Interviews were finished with researchers communicating their appreciation about participation and when initiated by the participant, a brief conversation about the future results.

3.5. Data analysis

In order to process the collected data, we used qualitative content analysis. According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), "qualitative content analysis is defined as a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (p.1278). Qualitative content analysis is mainly deductive, but it may also generate theory (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009). Hereby it should be noted that both inductive and deductive approaches were used within this Master Thesis. According to Treadwell (2011) "induction is reasoning from observations to a theory that might explain your observations" (p.24) and he continues noting that deduction "moves from a theory to defining the observations you will make to test the theory" (p.25). To move on, we would like to stress the importance of categorizing the data in order to provide credible analysis. Based on

Treadwell (2011) "the basis of all analysis of qualitative data is categorization - that is, identifying each piece of data as belonging to the particular category predetermined by the researcher or generated from the data themselves" (p.169). In this research, data was analyzed with the help of categories. By investigating categories and also the relations between them, "researchers are able to see patterns of behaviour or thinking that shed light on their research interests" (Treadwell, 2011, p. 169). To conclude, qualitative content analysis was used as an efficient method to find insights how Swedish and non-Swedish employees perceive conflicts.

3.6. Ethical consideration

To ensure that no individual could be identified by the quotes provided in this Master Thesis, claim by Hennink et al. (2011) that "all identifiable information is removed from the interview transcript or quotations used from it, so that no individual participant can be identified from these documents" (p.71) was taken under consideration. Hence, in Chapter 4, all sections, where non-Swedish respondents mention their home culture, years worked in Volvo X and any other revealing information about interviewee's identity were removed or replaced. However, it has to be noted, that an exception was made to Swedish participants when they mentioned their home culture, because their identities cannot be detected through mentioning their culture, since sample is big enough. It should be also mentioned that names of the participants are replaced by pseudonyms and identification numbers which is described by Hennink et al. (2011) as a common practice. The last thing that should be hereby noted is that Volvo X Legal and Human Resources departments have been contacted before publishing the results in order to seek advice and approval as topic is considered to be sensitive by researchers.

3.7. Limitations of the study

As mentioned previously, 18 interviews were conducted on face-to-face basis, and 2 interviews were conducted via phone (audio only). Authors of this research experienced some difficulties with interviews conducted via telephone communication. First of all, such communication lacked nonverbal cues, which are important in establishing relational context and secondly, interviewers experienced connection problems which might have influenced the quality of interviews and subsequently - recordings.

As it was pointed out earlier, the focus of this research – perceptions of conflicts in workplace – is a sensitive topic, and therefore possible falsity of respondents must be taken in consideration, since it may not be easy to talk about personal experiences of conflicts at workplace with people one has never met before. However, this limitation can be questioned, as researchers did not know neither respondents nor their colleagues at their workplaces personally and this fact might have facilitated interviewees' openness and willingness to talk about conflicts.

As previously mentioned, the selection of the participants were made by employees of Human Resources department, whom the researchers contacted in order to get access to the sample. Hennink et al. (2011) and Seidman (2012) name these kind of contact persons as the gatekeepers. Seidman (2012) describe the participant selection process as follows: "When interviewers try to contact potential participants whom they do not know, they often face gatekeepers who control access to those people" (p.47). Within this research we also faced such mediators. Hennink et al.

(2011) hence suggest that gatekeepers are therefore relevant mediators between researchers and subject group and gatekeepers are ideally people with whom researchers work together to recruit participants. Thus, researchers met with gatekeepers before data collection and explained who would be the ideal candidates for research and gatekeepers made the decision of participants. This leads to Hennink et al. (2011) notion to drawback of gatekeepers as "they may select participants *they* would like you to include in the study" (p.93). As we, researchers, did not select specific participants of this study, this might be considered as possible limitation.

The last limitation regards the sample groups of this study. Swedish sample group was culturally homogenous, however, non-Swedish group was not. From that, we could say it was relatively complex to compare and analyze these groups with each other, and generalizations about non-Swedish participants were relatively impossible to make. However, the aim of this study was to provide the insights of perceptions of conflicts between Swedish and non-Swedish employees without revealing specific culture backgrounds of participants from non-Swedish group. Furthermore, we are not regarding this limitation as a threat to validity as it emerged from the nature of the company.

3.8. Reliability and validity

According to Treadwell (2011) the perfect method to conduct research has both - reliability and validity, hence "it should measure what it measures well and consistently" (p. 83). Furthermore, regarding to reliability, Treadwell (2011) claims that "the procedures of any content analysis study should be explicit, precise, and replicable, so that other researchers can verify the results of the research" (p.178). In this study, the latter was guaranteed as two researchers analyzed the data, one developing codes and the other verifying the gathered results.

Validity, according to Downe-Wamboldt (1992), concerns the relationship between what and how well phenomenon is measured. Downe-Wamboldt (1992) continues with noting that "validity is confirmed or denied by returning to the original text to find examples of categories and by relating relevant theory to text" (p.319-320). In order to analyze the empirical data, we provided an extensive theoretical framework which helped to deeply investigate the concepts of perception, communication, culture in relation to conflict. Reliable sources such as articles, books and journals were used in order to provide this conceptual framework and further analyze the collected data.

Downe-Wamboldt (1992) provides several aspects that measure validity within content analysis, noting that "content analysis relies heavily on face or content validity that can only be determined by the judgments of experts in the area" (p.320). Treadwell (2011) claims that face validity "means basically that the questions do appear to measure what they measure" (p.81), whereas, "expert validity is preferred because it means that your questions have passed the test of peer approval" (p. 81). Before performing interviews, together with the expert we conducted a pilot interview which helped to improve the quality of questions so that they help us to gain data for answering the research questions. Furthermore, the researchers were constantly guided by an experienced supervisor who was regarded as highly knowledgeable in the research field.

The amount of data retrieved from interviews was very extensive and provided deep insights about perceptions of work-related conflicts of Swedish and non-Swedish employees in Volvo X. Therefore, we can confirm that this research thoroughly provides and analyses perceptions, all findings are presented and thus is regarded as valid and reliable.

4. RESULTS

In this chapter the insights about how Swedish and non-Swedish employees perceive work related conflicts in order to see whether there is a difference between two sample groups will be provided. In every subcategory, compared answers of interview questions of Swedish and non-Swedish employees will be presented.

4.1. How do you experience intercultural communication? How does it work?

In the very beginning of each interview, in order to facilitate trust building between interviewers and interviewees, and to establish a common ground with respondents, the question "Do you work with people from different cultural backgrounds in Volvo X on daily basis?" was asked. Since everyone answered that more or less often they do have interactions with people from different cultural backgrounds, the following questions "How do you experience intercultural communication? How does it work?" were asked. In this section, respondents' provided answers to the these questions will be presented, their insights about this topic will be provided. Two answers were retrieved from other questions as follow ups in different parts of interviews. Additionally, some insights regarding intercultural communication in Volvo X were found in other parts of the interviews and will hereby be presented here.

First of all we would like to present instant responses from respondents when they were asked the question concerning intercultural communication. Four out eleven Swedish and three out of nine respondents immediately answered that intercultural communication **works well** at Volvo X. What is more, it is interesting to note that many respondents described intercultural communication in Volvo X in positive words. NSW6 answered that intercultural communication is very **interesting**, NSW7 strongly expressed that he/she **enjoys** and **loves** intercultural **communication**, SW5 named it as **fun**, while SW7 named intercultural communication as **exciting** as followed below:

> *SW7 Exciting is the first word. [...] I started work at Volvo and then the world opened up, and even if you are not traveling, you feel the globalization in this business, every day. You come to the work, there are e-mails with some questions from Japan, China, Europe, and Middle East, Africa. And then you come back from lunch - and it's from Brazil, USA. And it goes on, day after day and I am absolutely fascinated.*

However, SW7 further pointed out that there **could be a challenge** because of different understandings of the same matters:

> *SW7 I think it* (intercultural communication) *works quite well. Sometimes it's challenging, for those very reasons you* (referring to researchers) *are looking into… Because sometimes, you have different concepts of what are you supposed to do. In my work, for example, I have colleagues, who interpret role, of how is being [...] in a company, very differently than I do. And to bridge those differences can be challenging.*

Even though many interviewees, as it was presented earlier, shared a great number of positive insights regarding intercultural communication, most of them also admitted that some challenges

might arise when diverse people interact. Five of nine non-Swedish respondents emphasized that intercultural communication is **both a potential and a challenge**, because an individual can learn a lot about others and himself/herself while interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds, but at the same time it is demanding to be able to manage these differences in a good way. Some quotes to exemplify this aspect follows below:

> *NSW8 I think of course as we are born in different cultures, you try to learn the new culture. When you react to something or reflect upon something spontaneously, it is often from what you are born with. I see both risk and potential. Because if you steer this to right direction it is just potential, if you reflect from different angles* (people from different culture) *things get much better than if you think upon it from only one angle. But if you are not steering it to right way, then it becomes conflict.*

One employee mentioned specific advantages of intercultural communication and briefly mentioned that challenges could also arise:

> *NSW7 I love it. I think it's the most interesting thing. I really enjoy when you have people with different backgrounds, different ideas, and different ways to actually send the same message... So I like to be in a mixed team. [...] This way you learn about how they live and how they see problems and how I see those same situations and it's very interesting. I enjoy that. And of course there are many challenges at the same time. [...] But I love it.*

It is important to note that three out eleven Swedish respondents answered that the big issue in intercultural communication is distance and **computer mediated communication**. Respondents explained that this issue arises because Volvo X is operating in different locations and employees work with distant projects.

> *SW6 Yeah, we have lots of Lync meetings, so communication is mainly not face to face, it's via Lync, and it's another type of communication, but it's tool itself gives another type of communication not people from different countries.*

Another respondent shared an insight how face to face communication outweighs the usage of communication technology as follows:

> *SW5 Online communication, although it is with audio, that's completely different from having a communication where everybody is in a room. We did that with the first team, where* (people from different cultures) *came here and they worked here for like two weeks and then the communication went easier, quicker, we understood each other, because you can tell from the body language if they understood or not.*

It is interesting to note here, that one of respondents, SW1, said that the great challenge is to start initial communication with colleagues from abroad via communication technologies. He/she explained, that meeting a coworker for a first time in face to face environment makes communication easier in comparison to meeting a colleague in face to face after a half year:

> *SW1 I think one of the major difficulties is that you have to start by using LYNC, mail or phone. You don't get to meet that. So In Sweden, you usually to start that connection by*

having a lunch, you see each other at meeting, so you have like some kind of where you met. And then I have colleagues from abroad, usually it takes a half year before I meet them face to face. So I think that creates some difficulties.

Another challenge mentioned by quite a few respondents from both groups to be presented is related to **language as limitation.** During interviews, four out of eleven Swedish respondents and three out of nine non-Swedish pointed language as a limitation in intercultural communication. Language as limitation was described by one of the non-Swedish respondents as follows:

NSW5 When I came to Sweden I found Swedish very accommodating and very nice and had any conflict. But sometimes people are talking in their own mother tongue (Swedish) *and you are a part of the conversation and you don't understand what's been said to you. So this can make you feel quite isolated.*

The similar is indicated by another non-Swedish employee, NSW7, who said that she would prefer to speak English at workplace as it is the second language for majority of the colleagues, in order to be in the same level.

As it can be seen from the quotes presented above, non-Swedish respondents were mostly referring to the fact, that not being proficient in Swedish (the case company is located in Sweden) contributes to some sort of interpersonal tension, because colleagues might prefer speaking in their mother tongue at times, which in turn can lead to feeling of being excluded or offended.

Meanwhile, Swedish respondents were emphasizing that people in Volvo X do not always have the same proficiency in English, which is often used as working language, or that it is hard to understand accent sometimes which creates some hindrances in intercultural interaction. Some exemplifications of such data are provided as qoutes below:

SW11 Well, of course the limitation is the language. I mean, both from our part, all of us - with few exceptions [...], all of us are struggling to express ourselves as precisely as possible. Maybe, it could be, that you are communicating less because of this, you feel it is not that easy, as in Swedish or what is your first language, very rapidly to write an e-mail.

The second opinion provided an insight regarding the accent some people might have:

SW8 I don't think so much about that as an issue at all, apart from, if I can be a bit funny now, Indians speaking English is a bit hard understand, sometimes. But it is not a big issue.

The last quote is provided by Swedish employee who mentioned proficiency as well as accent:

SW5 It is challenging, I would say but it is also fun. I was just on a meeting before this, with people from [English speaking country] and although they have English as their native language… Because when you speak with Chinese there is another issue and also with Indian, there is an issue with… Their English is not so good, usually or they have way of pronunciation which is strange, hard to understand, it takes a while for you to really

understand. But when you are talking with the [person whose mother tongue is English], it is still hard with the communication, long distance is also hard.

Furthermore, four out nine non-Swedish respondents answered that intercultural communication is about **differences in communication, management styles** and these differences are challenging. Three out nine non-Swedish respondents emphasized that in Sweden they notice significant differences of how things are working out in workplace and it takes time to understand and get used to these contrasts. Some quotes are hereby presented in order to exemplify:

SW10 I don't think that it is a problem when you are talking, but I think sometimes, when you are sending e-mails and so on, there can be some confusion, and how you express yourself in the e-mails and there can be some differences.

One of the non-Swedish respondent saw these challenges similarly:

NSW9 In Volvo [X], intercultural communication works but it requires to understand that if you don't share the cultural frame of the Swedish company, then it will take you a while to understand how things work, how the decisions are taken, how discussions are driven.

Another non-Swedish respondent emphasized the differences in interaction between different parts of Volvo X:

NSW6 Very interesting. It depends on which part of Volvo X you work with and you will have different interactions. [...] So it is not easy to solve problems, but things work out. And the region I work with now, [...] which is very different (from Nordic culture). *With my [...] colleagues it is a bit difference also, yes, you can make some big pictures of how conflict is connected to a culture, I would say.*

The differences in decision-making process regarding time, is indicated by NSW3 as follows:

NSW3 Depends a lot of different cultures of course. Sometimes you can, I mean, when it's related to work for example, in some areas of the world you get results or answers quite quickly and what are you actually asking for. Some are countries you have to be after them, to get the answers back. Sometimes it's easy, sometimes it's hard, you have to insist, sometimes you don't get anything in the end. [...] Here it is more slow, the culture of slow down, everything takes a longer time.

The following quote by non-Swedish employee highlights also the differences within decision-making process:

NSW2 As far as I learned, in different countries we have different ways to make decisions, or process comes to decision, they are quite different. As far as I have learned, especially in Sweden, the discussion before the decision take more time, I would say. It is long compared to other countries.

One Swedish respondent mentioned also that when communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds there might be differences in management and decision-making styles and this statement is exemplified below:

SW8 You learn that different cultures have different management styles and culture in the companies - for example how much to rely on the authority, and how do they take decisions. [Name of the culture] people for example can be a bit puzzled how Swedes take decisions on their own, not asking managers. Apart from small differences, I don't think there are problems.

To sum up, it is important to say that majority of respondents defined intercultural communication in a variety of positive words, which shows that diversity in a workplace is seen positively. However, many respondents from both groups also pointed out that intercultural communication is challenging because diverse people have differences in management styles, different language abilities and different communication styles which can be sometimes hard to understand and get used to it. Furthermore, intercultural communication was described as a potential and as a risk by many non-Swedish respondents. What is interesting, Swedish respondents brought up computer-mediated interaction as challenge in communication with people from different backgrounds. Finally we would like to refer to SW4 who said that intercultural communication is not hard. According to him/her, the challenge is that one has to fight with his/her own prejudices "*about other people, how they are, how they work, how their culture looks like and so on*" and by doing that, it is easy to make intercultural communication work smoothly.

4.2. What is conflict for Volvo X employees?

After interviewers asked interviewees what the intercultural communication is for them. The following questions "What do you think first when you hear the word 'conflict'? What is conflict for you?" were asked next. This question aimed finding a common ground between the interviewers and the interviewees. The answers of this question created different definitions, which are provided in this section.

Three non-Swedish employees and also three Swedish employees mentioned that conflict is a **disagreement,** between two or more people who in various reasons are not able to get an agreement. The following opinions are hereby provided to exemplify this:

NSW7 For me conflict is when people don't get an agreement.

SW11 The first I think, is that you disagree in some decisions you would like to take.

Similar was stated by another Swedish employee, who added that conflicts can also be misunderstandings:

SW10 That you do not agree about things. [...] Conflicts can also be misunderstandings.

One of the non-Swedish employees - NSW9 - noted that disagreement by itself might not be a conflict. However, when disagreement has become problematic and therefore possesses **destructive elements**, then it could be categorized as a conflict.

Two non-Swedish employees and one Swedish employee did not define conflict as something necessarily negative, but rather **part of everyday life** and possibly to have **positive impact**.

> *NSW1 I think it is quite normal word, because in human society have always conflict, and in daily work also, due to the different opinions, personalities and also cultures.*

> *SW4 Conflict for me is not as feeling oriented as it might seem for very many people. I see from a conflict perspective, I can say, I can see two different views - my view is that conflict is good, they are always here and they will bring things forward.*

In contrast, more **negative** aspects of conflict were also implied by two non-Swedish employees and two Swedish employees. All of these four respondents see conflict as problematic situation needing for solution. One of the non-Swedish respondents defined conflict as follows:

> *NSW4* (Conflict is) *A problem that need to be solved.*

Swedish employee, SW8, said that conflict can be anything from small quarrels to physical fights. Defined conflict whilst providing a range of definitions from small quarrels to physical conflicts.

Two non-Swedish employees defined conflict explicitly through the term of **communication**. Communication was highlighted to be an important factor when it comes to finding a **common ground** by NSW3 as follows:

> *NSW3 Conflict could be when you really don't understand each other, I mean not necessarily that you fight, but communication is not there, it's not established.*

NSW2 also emphasized the aspect of communication and added necessity of understanding one's role:

> *NSW2 I would basically say it is more a conflict around your role. It is not anything personal or...It is all about your role.[...] Then each department have their own priorities. And the challenge is how you convince others to prioritize your projects. This is what I see is conflict, no it is not even a conflict, I would say it is prioritizing. And the other things, I would say is about communications. If you do a good communication, I don't think there are any conflicts; I think there is only the matter of the time.*

Interestingly, three out of eleven Swedish employees mentioned **feelings** as part of the conflict as well as conflicts being personal, affecting individual in more personal level. It is important to note that this phenomenon was not mentioned by the non-Swedish employees. The one opinion about this claim is as follows:

SW2 People who don't agree. Of course even if you disagree you don't have to be in conflict. Conflict is more serious, severe, because conflict affects you in one way.

In this sections, many definitions of conflicts were provided by the Volvo X employees and a great number of respondents defined conflict as disagreement. There were four most common aspects of conflicts brought up by the respondents. The first aspect that was mentioned is communication, more specifically communication was seen as a tool for finding a common ground. The next aspects that are important to mention are that employees perceived conflicts either positively or negatively. Advantages and disadvantages of conflicts will be further presented in results. It is interesting to note that quite a few Swedish employees claimed conflicts to be personally affecting individuals and their feelings.

4.3. Does a conflict have to be verbalized (overt) or silent (covert)?

Another section of results presented here concerns employees' perceptions of verbalized versus silent conflicts in a workplace. Participants were asked two questions: "Does a conflict have to be verbalized (overt)? Or can it be silent (covert)? These questions were asked in order to get insights about two different types of conflicts. All respondents in both groups unanimously agreed that conflict can be silent, not verbalized. Having said that, it is interesting to note that one of respondent, NSW6, was convinced that in workplace, **silent conflict is not a conflict**, because it is just a conflict with yourself.

NSW6 Conflict has to be, I would say, something public. Like against something. If it is just you, you are stressing just yourself, but it is just a conflict with yourself and that is different thing at work. For me the work conflict is something that is happening with someone else.

Looking at the quote more closely, it can be seen that, in NSW6 opinion work related conflicts have to be verbalized, whereas personal conflicts can be silent.

Interestingly, another respondent said that **covert conflict are much more often** in a Volvo X:

NSW8 Yes, it could be hidden conflict. That is much more common, I believe. I very seldom hear that people have conflict that is a big fight. But hidden is very often. People don't like each other or don't listen to each other or they don't look at each other, just ignore each other. At least what I experience in Volvo.

Closely looking to the data, it can be seen that NSW8 believes that it is better to have overt conflict rather than covert, to discuss with each other, what the problem is. Similarly, three out eleven Swedish respondents shared their insight that it is much **better when a conflict is verbalized**. One quote is hereby provided to exemplify this:

SW5 I am convinced it doesn't have to be verbalized but I think they are better, because they don't steal that much… they steal energy of course when they happen, the collaboration and productivity decreases. But if it is open and you confront it and talk about or shout at each other, then it usually ends up in something productive.

One non-Swedish employee also noted that it is problematic to have covert conflicts:

> *NSW5 It (*conflict*) can be silent and one sided, yeah. And that's when you get the major issue, if somebody keeps it and doesn't talk about it.*

Even though few Swedish respondents said that it is much better when conflict is overt and verbalized between parties, another Swedish respondent emphasized that it is much easier **to shut the conflict off** and keep it inside without discussing with other side:

> *SW6 It could be anything really, but it's easier to just shut it off and do not discuss it at work.*

Interestingly, two non-Swedish respondents shared their insight about **non-verbal behaviour** in silent conflicts. Firstly, an insight provided by non-Swedish respondent is to exemplify:

> *NSW9 Yes it can be silent, at least you can sense the conflict in body language or how you behave in the group.*

Secondly, interviewee SW8 shared insight about possible non-verbal behaviour between two introverts:

> *SW8 Depends, but if you have two introverted persons, the conflict could be a death silence. There could be signs - silence in conference or lunch table, they ignore each other.*

Similar insight was also shared by NSW7:

> *NSW7 Oh it can be many different ways. I mean you can have conflict and even not to speak in the same language. You can have a conflict even with your body language: because you want something, walking in the same direction and some get in before you. That is a conflict, but there is no talking.*

These results indicate that body language, non-verbal communication can show when a hidden conflict is taking place and that people are aware of them. However quite a few people indicated that the worst conflicts are when they are covert, not verbalized.

To sum up it is important to note that all participants unanimously agreed that conflict can be silent. Another prevalent opinion was that these silent conflicts are more difficult, thus it is better to have them verbalized. This insight was shared by few both Swedish and non-Swedish respondents. However, one Swedish respondent shared that it is easier not to talk about conflict, keep it shut off. Also it is interesting to note that one non-Swedish respondent said that hidden conflicts are happening most often in Volvo X. Few respondents from both groups of interviewees also added that it is easy to notice when a hidden conflict is taking place since non-verbal behaviour reveals a great deal.

4.4. Do you see conflicts in Volvo X?

In this section, we would like to present joint answers to the following question: "Do you see conflicts in Volvo X?"

To begin with, it is important to note that majority of respondents, namely seven Swedish and seven non-Swedish interviewees, claimed that they **do see conflicts in Volvo X.**

SW11 Absolutely. We have all kinds of conflicts. We have conflicts when it comes to resources [...], You will see of course disagreements due to misunderstandings, sometimes. But also people might be feeling hurt by decisions taken, mainly then their colleagues or their boss, which could be a conflict [...].

Another Swedish respondent claimed that he/she sees conflicts in Volvo X every week:

SW8 Now and then. Depending on the level of course. I see few of them (conflicts) *every week.*

Interestingly, many of non-Swedish respondents (five out of nine) were claiming that conflicts **are everywhere** and therefore Volvo X is not an exception. Some quotes to exemplify follow below:

NSW7 Yes, I mean it's not a perfect company. I think there is no such a thing as a perfect company. I believe that we don't have like conflicts in a bad way, I mean it's not common that people are yelling at each other or aggressive kind of thinking. We have challenges every day, we have different things to do and challenges are related to business how can we produce more [...], how we sell [them] - those are challenges. And in the process there are a lot of conflicts.

Another non-Swedish respondent, NSW4, was claiming similar:

NSW4 Yes, I think there are conflicts everywhere. I think there are discussion conflicts about issues we are working on. I think it is because sometimes you want to have diversity of opinion.

NSW3 emphasized that conflicts are all the time everywhere:

NSW3 Well yeah, there are some conflicts. I don't think that any place is free of conflicts. There is always some conflict.

Further, it is also important to present the answer by respondent NSW6:

NSW6 Yes and no. I think it is a very Swedish company and it means that we avoid conflicts a lot. I think it is not only Sweden, it is part of the Volvo way.

Answer "**Yes and no"** can be interpreted so that an interviewee sees **avoidance of conflicts** in Volvo X, meaning that in his/her eyes, some kind of disagreements exist in a company, but people are not talking about them as a conflicts, there might be ignorance of finding solution.

Further, few interviewees, that is two Swedish and one non-Swedish respondent answered that they **do not see conflicts** in Volvo X.

SW9 No, not nowadays. Now it's okay. No, not in my work.

NSW2 answered that he/she has not seen conflicts in Volvo X since he/she started working in this company. In his/her opinion all problems can be fixed and it is just a matter of support and time:

NSW2 To be honest, my point of view [...] it really depends on other people's support. My point of view is I haven't seen any conflict, I think. My thought is, as long as you get support from the others, then you can move forward. But if it is interest of conflict or whatever, it's just a matter of the time. You know, if you cannot fix that immediately, take a little time and look it back and then do it again.

Another Swedish respondent, SW3, said that he/she does not see conflicts in Volvo X by himself/herself but he/she assumes that there might be some conflicts against the mother company.

Further, it is important to note that two Swedish respondents answered that they do see some kind of **disagreements in the company**, but they could not name them as conflicts:

SW6 No, not really. There are different ways of thinking how things should be done, but it's quite rare that we have conflicts.

Another respondent, SW10, said similar:

SW10 Maybe small, more that they are not conflicts, but in different departments we are working on different things. [...] We had a quite a lot of disagreements, then we had [change in a company].

In comparison, one non-Swedish respondent at first answered that he/she **does not see conflicts in Volvo X.** But after contemplating about what the conflict is, he/she agreed that **there are some difficulties,** related to cultural differences that might be called as a conflict:

NSW5 No I don't. I think it works really well. But what the term of conflict really is? Because it's hard sometimes, with people with different nationalities. [...] I think that sometimes it can be a conflict in the way it's culturally acceptable in one country and is not in another - it's not the way that you do things..

To sum up, there is no significant difference between Swedish and non-Swedish in seeing conflicts in their workplace, Volvo X. Majority of them said that they do see conflicts. However, interestingly, many of non-Swedish respondents were emphasizing that conflicts are everywhere and thus Volvo X is not an exception. Few respondents from both groups answered that they do see some sort of disagreements, but they could not name them as conflicts. Finally two Swedish and one non-Swedish respondents claimed that they do not see conflicts in Volvo X. Interestingly, one of the latter respondents, SW3, still assumed that even though he/she does not see any conflicts, there might be some conflicts against mother company. Lastly, it is interesting that one non-Swedish respondent answered "yes and no" to the question "Do you see conflicts in Volvo X". Further he/she explained that, according to him/her, conflict avoidance is a "part of Volvo way".

4.5. The Swedish way of doing business and handling conflicts

To collect insights and provide an overview of how respondents perceive Swedish business culture and conflict handling methods, several questions were analyzed. The two main questions, where participants shared their opinions about this topic were "From you experience, do you see differences in conflict behavior between Swedes and non-Swedes? What kind of differences?". Additionally, Swedish participants were asked an additional question regarding typical Swedish behavior: "Do you think it is typical for Swedes?" To begin with, a broad scope of perceptions about how Swedes act in conflict situation, is provided. Additionally, several participants chose to describe their perceptions of Swedish behavior through comparing it to another culture, either their own national culture or any other culture they freely chose to be appropriate.

One Swedish respondent described Volvo X as a typical Swedish company and as a western organization, where employees from other cultures are adapting to Swedish culture:

> *SW1 Since Volvo X is absolutely operating in China, but its Swedish company, so I think they* (Chinese) *are westernized. So the people who want to work for Volvo are the ones who want to work for western company.*

One of non-Swedish respondents, NSW2, compared differences regarding communication at workplace between his/her home country and Sweden:

> *NSW2 Yes, they* (Swedes) *are more conservative, more nice. Usually Swedes don't use strong words. In [my country], I prefer more straight forward. But sometimes in Sweden, people see straight forwardness as criticism.*

One non-Swedish employee noted that he/she has observed more **hidden conflicts** in Sweden than in his/her home country. He/she expressed himself/ herself as follows:

> *NSW8 [...] I think it is more common with hidden conflicts in here* (Sweden) *than where I come from. Everything is on the table where I come from, there are pros and cons with that because you have all the conflicts even the unnecessary ones.*

The similar is indicated by a Swedish employee, who suggested that in Sweden, even though people disagree upon a task, they still say "yes", but do not actually act in accordance with how it was agreed. The hidden conflict is indicated by him/her as follows:

> *SW1 We are quite bad at having conflicts actually, not because it's fact based, I can deliver my side of facts, but we don't really have big conflicts. Rather than saying yes to things, but not doing it. I think that's also Swedish, we say yes and then…*

Hidden conflicts could be seen as a part of conflict avoidance, in which individuals tend not actively find a solution to problematic situation but rather ignore it. Four non-Swedish employees and four Swedish employees expressed their opinion about Swedes behavior in conflict situation with mentioning that Swedes tend to **avoid conflicts.**

NSW7 The Swedish in general if I have to put everybody – they don't like conflicts, they avoid the conflict no matter what.

One Swedish respondent sees Swedes tending to avoid conflicts as well:

SW10 [...] but in general, Swedes want to discuss, they avoid conflicts. But some are more hot blooded, some cooler.

One non-Swedish respondent claimed similar and also added human nature as a possible factor influencing conflict avoidance:

NSW5 From my experience, Swedish people will avoid the conflict. In [my culture], some people avoid conflicts too but not as much as in Sweden. But I think that it has a lot to do with a human nature.

Interestingly, two Swedish employees elaborated this thought by adding that Swedes not only **avoid conflicts** but also the **person** who they are in conflict with:

SW9 But in here, you think that you don't want to talk to this person anymore, because he is stupid, then you are avoiding him. You are avoiding the problem, this is the Swedish way of doing it. [...] As I said before, we avoid conflicts. And I think it is changing also because we are travelling and moving around the globe, and we have a lot of new people coming to Sweden, immigrants, and I think that affects.

Looking more closely to the latter quote it is seen, that SW9 also believes that tendency of Swedes to avoid conflicts is changing.

Another Swedish employee also said that it might be typical for Swedes to avoid person in a conflict, and added that he/she is not comfortable when people are raising voice at him/her:

SW7 [...] I am not entirely comfortable in situations where people raise their voices, of course I am not. Because it's something what should be avoided, it's something you have been brought up to avoid. And when people lose control, lose tempo ... I am not entirely comfortable in that situation, of course. That is if you interpret national stereotype that would be a very Swedish way of dealing with - back off and wait for that person to calm down.

One non-Swedish employee expressed that he/she does not like how Swedish tend to avoid conflicts.

NSW8 [...] In [my culture] you have all the conflicts and in here [Sweden] you will avoid all the conflicts. [...] [We] are not conflict frightened. Swedes are more. When I started in Volvo I was more in [my culture] way and I have become Swedish. So I am in the middle now and I am afraid that one day I will be like Swedes in that way. Because you will change depending what culture you are in.

Interestingly, one Swedish employee claimed that the Swedish way of handling conflicts is giving an **opportunity for everyone to say their opinions**:

SW5 I think maybe that it is more letting everyone say their opinion, so that is probably the Swedish way of handling a conflict.

There could be many reasons why Swedish people have the tendency to avoid a conflict, one of them might be that they are **afraid of conflicts,** which was noted by one non-Swedish and one Swedish employee.

NSW9 And this cliche of Swedes being afraid of conflicts, I think there lies something behind it.

SW2 share similar insight about Swedes being afraid of conflicts and added that they are also scared of different opinions:

SW2 In one way I think Swedes are afraid of conflicts […]. Swedes are not so eager to discuss, you have different points of views...Swedes are often afraid of different opinions.

Although Swedish people are described by both, Swedish and non-Swedish employees, as conflict avoiding persons, their way of communicating is also described as **polite**, **respectful and not confronting**, which might indicate to communication which is characteristic for either Volvo Group or more specifically, to Volvo X.

NSW2 I would say within X we respect each other. Maybe people get sometimes little bit nervous or upset, but we are not like...Yelling at the meeting. I guess in Sweden, you have different ways to express your anger, in a very polite way, compared to other countries. For example, some very strong words. You might say "I don't think so" or "should we look this in that way?", it is not very strong. Sometimes if you go to other countries they would say "no, I don't agree". So if you use in Sweden "I don't think so" it already equals to "I don't agree", sometimes.

Similar insight was expressed by SW11:

SW11 Yes, I think in sense of sitting in Sweden and in Swedish company makes some kind of code how you express, when you express, you are not so confronting in meetings, you take more behind scenes. And we are trying to have some kind of respect, this is very important, one of the core values in Volvo.

Discussion is mentioned as one of the key concepts describing the Swedish way of decision-making. It is noted by both - Swedish and non-Swedish employees - that **consensus** is an important part of the decision-making and process itself has described as time-consuming:

NSW2 As far as I have learned, in different countries we have different ways to make decisions, or process comes to decision, they are quite different. As far as I have learned, especially in Sweden, the discussion before the decision take more time, I would say.

Another respondent shared a similar claim about how long discussions in Sweden lasts before consensus is reached:

SW10 Because we are famous that we are just sitting down and discussing. It takes a long time for Swede to make an agreement, because everyone has to be on the same level.

NSW3 pointed out that there are possible positive and negative sides of having a discussion:

NSW3 The thing is here in Sweden, that people like to discuss a lot things [...]. So many of ideas are always put on the table, trying to have some kind of discussion and understanding. [...] Sometimes it's good, sometimes it's bad, because it could take a long time before you get any kind of agreement whereas if you need really a result quickly, you don't spend time in a meeting, you just want to do it. But I mean, if it works, it works for them quite fine. And my experience was quite good as well.

From quote above one could notice that long discussions can sometimes be stressful for individual.

The drive towards consensus was also described by SW5 as a part of Swedish, or possibly, Volvo culture:

NSW5 [...] lets take Swedish culture, and this may not even be Swedish, but it's perceived to be Swedish, could be Volvo, where the impression from different cultures and nationalities, that Sweden is very consensus driven.

To summarize this section, both Swedish and non-Swedish employees see Swedish way of doing business and handling conflicts similarly and no strong indicators of different perceptions are therefore to be found. Several both Swedish and non-Swedish respondents expressed that discussion is very important to reach a consensus in Sweden, however one Swedish claimed that Swedes are not so eager to discuss. It is interesting to note that one Swede claimed that in Sweden conflicts are handled through letting others to say their opinions, while another Swedish respondent expressed that Swedes are often afraid of different opinions. Both groups of respondents see the Swedish tendency for conflict avoidance, few respondents added that Swedes are generally afraid to have a conflict. However it is interesting to note that few Swedish respondents indicated that Swedes might avoid not only conflicts, but also the people involved in the conflict.

4.6. What causes the conflicts in general and in Volvo X?

In order to provide more extensive understanding how employees in Volvo X perceive conflicts, the perceived roots of conflicts are hereby analyzed. For the sake of providing these insights, participants were asked "Why do you think people are in conflicts?". Answers provided deeper knowledge of what causes conflicts in general and what might be the reasons in Volvo X for the conflicts to arise.

To begin with, general reasons pointed out by the participants suggested that conflicts might arise due to **communication** problems. The two main aspects of communication problems

perceived by both - Swedish and non-Swedish employees - were related to **receiving and interpreting the information**. One of the non-Swedish respondents exemplified it as follows:

NSW7 In general, I think, we in all levels, we don't listen so much. So people spend a lot of time trying to talk and not to listen, and then you don't listen, then a person is very difficult to understand what the other person is trying to say.

The following two quotes by Swedish respondents also show the importance of communication:

SW8 [...] If I put it short to explain it to someone – it boils down to communication, or lack of communication. Very often are conflicts, because people think (emphasized) *they know something, some things are interpreted by wrong, not as it was meant and it can go on for years.*

SW6 It's often the way how people communicate. It's what is clear for one person is not clear for another. [...]

As seen from the quotes, it is mentioned that both - receiving information - might cause problems. It is important to note that later, respondent SW8 suggested that in order to avoid communication problems escalating into conflicts, the receiver should ask the sender for clarification. He/she also noted that in general, people have two options whilst receiving the message - to interpret it negative or positive way, depending greatly on the environment the receiver is in.

Interestingly, two non-Swedish employees and one Swedish employee clearly mentioned one of the conflict causes the fact that people in general are not able or willing to see upon different things from **opponent's perspective.**

NSW8 There is two aspects – one is that you are stubborn, and the other is that people have difficulties to step aside and look a little bit more open, put yourself on the other side of the table. And one other thing, you take things personally, and difficulty to see holistic view.

Not putting yourself into other party's position was claimed by SW4 to be caused by individuals' strong wish to convince other party about his beliefs:

SW4 [...] I think some people so strongly believe that what they see is the right thing. And therefore think that just by trying to convince someone else and make them see what I see, I can convince them on right or wrongs. [...] And those people might not be, or they have good intentions, but they might be a bit narrow minded from that point of view. Not being interested in putting oneself in another's one shoes looking from reality from that point.

The attempt to find reasons why conflicts arise in a workplace, more specifically in Volvo X, allowed to note that **beliefs** might play a crucial role. Beliefs and strong opinions were mentioned by two non-Swedish employees and two Swedish employees, moreover, one of the Swedish employees mentioned also **values** influencing.

NSW4 I think people have each an opinion how the things should be done and they don't want to compromise.

Interviewee SW1 claimed that conflicts can be caused by different value bases and beliefs:

SW1 The first thing, I think, is that you have a work, where you have to move things forward, and strongly believe in your ideas. The other part, more personal part, I think that can be not only cultural differences but you also have different value base and it's hard to find a common ground, don't really understand each other.

The reasons why people are in conflicts at the workplace are several. Both, Swedish and non-Swedish respondents saw **unclear targets and roles** as possible causes of conflicts. Some examples of respondents' opinions are hereby to exemplify:

NSW8 But from the organisational perspective, I would say it is because the roles are unclear [...], and unclear targets.

SW4 Very often also different goals or targets. If my target does not connect to some other one's targets, then the targets are conflicting. That can definitely create conflicts in further down. Oh that's a lot of things. Roles. Unclarity, when it comes to roles in an organization definitely could create conflicts. [...] The typical conflict in Volvo X is contradicting targets.

As seen from the previous quotes, it is seen that unclear roles was also brought up as possible cause of conflicts at workplace.

SW7 Typical conflict is about, I would say, that because of where you are in organization, what your tasks are, you have different opinions about what is most important and most prioritized thing we should do.

Different **priorities** between different departments are noted by several participants to be possible cause of conflict, interestingly, mostly by non-Swedish employees, but also by one Swedish employee. The following quotation by non-Swedish employee would exemplify this:

NSW9 So not understanding the others, I think. I see difference between salespeople and product development. [...]. So I would say that is the most common origin of conflicts. It is not so much about culture, company culture is quite homogeneous, so it is more between the departments.

Interestingly, three non-Swedish and one Swedish employee suggested that **change** might cause conflicts in organization, it is illustrated by one quotation as follows:

NSW1 I think the typical conflict is about attitude towards change.

Reluctance towards change has brought up by another respondent as follows:

NSW8 [...] From personal perspective, there are people who have worked here for [many years] in the same position and they know very much, they don't want to accept new ideas, the world has changed.

The next factor brought up by the Volvo X employees is personal **pride**. In this current paper, pride is seen as a connection to work experience as well as personal values which result is strong opinions. These previously mentioned points were seen by both - Swedish and non-Swedish employees.

NSW6 I think in a lot of times it is your personal pride. And forgetting sometimes that it is not about ourselves but about the company.

Another respondent, SW9, said that one's wish to keep one's pride can cause conflicts:

SW9 It could be prestige I believe. In some cases you have difficulties to be in consensus. It is difficulties to agree to decisions that are taken, against your opinion. And there are people who have very strong opinion about the topic but they don't have all the knowledge, figures to take a good decision.

Several employees noted that **personality factors** can cause conflicts, all of the respondents were Swedish. Personal factors could be seen connected how people interpret **power** and **power to make decisions**, especially when it was mentioned taken personally. These three factors were interestingly only mentioned by the Swedish employees.

SW6 One person doesn't want to work with another person, because communication is not emplaced in a good way, so expectations what should be done are not clear, and then misunderstandings can arise.

As seen from this quotation, when interpersonal communication is not established, then personal disliking can cause conflicts at workplace.

SW11 [...] You will see of course disagreements due to misunderstandings, sometimes. But also people might be feeling hurt by decisions taken, mainly then by their colleagues or their boss, which could cause a conflict.

Another respondent also explained how personality can cause conflicts and gave an example how power to make decision might cause conflicts:

SW4 [...]But actually I would say ... power. Power in an organization is definitely creating conflict sometimes. People using that power in order just to be the one to make a decision.

In order to draw conclusions about how Swedish and non-Swedish employees see upon causes of conflicts, it could be said that within this question, the causes were seen similarly by both groups of employees. One of the biggest influences could be seen as communication. Several respondents mentioned differences in beliefs and values, as possible causes of conflicts. The last

thing which is noteworthy to take a closer look within this paragraph, is the fact that some of the Swedish employees mention personality factors to possibly cause conflicts, such as individual dislike of the other person or one's will to express power to make decisions. Reluctance to change as well as pride are also pointed out as possible causes of conflicts.

4.7. Does cultural background influence conflict behavior?

This current chapter focuses on whether Volvo X employees perceive culture as influential factor in the conflict behaviour. The insights about it were collected by asking interview question: "Do you think that cultural background influences interpersonal conflict behaviour?", and are hereby provided.

To begin with, four out of nine non-Swedish employees and eight out of eleven Swedish employees admitted that **cultural background** is influencing conflict behaviour. Some quotes to exemplify respondents perceptions are provided below:

> *SW3 For example - example with Indians: you agree upon something, but you remind a person all the time. Swedish culture is – you agree on something and do it, but you don't have to remind.*

In order to exemplify how culture is influencing conflict behaviour, SW6 compared people from Southern Europe and Northern Europe:

> *SW6 Well, I don't have that experience. But I think that's in that way, for instance... That people from south Europe are screaming yelling shouting and its more normal there than here in northern Europe. [...]*

NSW2 and SW9 shared their views on how conflict behavior differs in Asia:

> *NSW2 It depends on the culture. For example, in Asia [there are] some countries, I would not say which ones, there when you talk about things people say "yes, yes" and then "so you agree upon that?" – "no". He is not saying "yes" that he is agreeing, that means he hears what you are saying. You have to understand the cultures behind the languages.*

> *SW9 Yes. If you take Japanese people, for example, it is very difficult to communicate, because most people say "yes" to everything. First you have to say your argument and then they have to say it again to see if they understood. Because they say yes to everything, more or less, they don't want to lose their face. And I believe arabic people are like this as well.*

After being asked whether cultural background influences individuals behaviour in a conflict, two of the non-Swedish employees - NSW9 and NSW6 - strongly agreed that it does influence, and added that the culture is a factor which gives people a **frame of references** through which world around them could be interpreted. They mentioned beliefs, upbringing and environment among other elements being part of the culture:

> *NSW9 Yes. Because your cultural references give you the frames to know what is wrong, what is right, what is accepted. So of course you have a bag with you since you were a child.*

You are formed by your parents, your culture, environment. That gives you frame of references and that will influence how you communicate and interact with others. Other people have different frames of references.

NSW6 Your personal experience, your culture and your background will always influence everything. Conflict is also a lot about misunderstanding, or how you understand a situation. So it will be of course be built on your own beliefs, your own experiences. […]

What is interesting hereby to note is that two Swedish employees - SW2 and SW7 - both mention that culture influences to some extent but fundamentally people are the same. Moreover, there was one non-Swedish employee - NSW1 - who explicitly noted that to think about culture in that way (influencing people to act in certain way in conflict situation) is superficial.

To sum up this section, it has to be mentioned that majority of respondents think that cultural background influences individual's behaviour in a conflict situation, interestingly this was brought up by Swedes more often. However it has to be stressed that one interviewee provided contradictory statement, claiming that is superficial to think about relation between culture and conflict in this way. Moreover, two Swedish respondents suggested that fundamentally people are the same, but culture might influence conflict behavior to some extent.

4.8. Advantages of having a conflict

The next section of results presented concerns respondents' perceptions of possible advantages of having a conflict. Participants were asked to share their opinions of what, according to them, are possible positive sides which come as a side effect of conflict.

To begin with, we would like to start with one Swedish respondent (SW8) who after being asked what the positive sides of conflicts are, answered that if he/she should mention something positive, he/she could not call it a conflict, and according to him/her it could be just differences on how individuals think, what solutions they prefer. The latter respondent (SW8) further emphasized twice that small conflicts bring **increased group dynamics** to a workplace:

SW8 I think small conflicts are not a problem. You can have them every day, in meetings. If they wouldn't be there, I think the meetings would not be as dynamic as it should be.

The most prevailing answer to the question "What are advantages of having a conflict" in both groups of respondents was that it might be a way to move forwards (four out of nine non Swedish and eight out of eleven Swedish respondents). Majority of respondents named that conflict could contribute to development as an individual, team or a company, some quotes to exemplify such insights follow below:

SW7 Conflicts will lead to an opportunity to develop for the future and make a communication more effective for the future. So that matter I think is good.

Another respondent said that if there is no conflict, there is no improvement:

NSW8 When people think not the same and they dare to put what they think on the table and then you often find the best way, which is often in a middle. Because when everybody thinks the same, there is no conflict but there is also no improvement.

Similar was indicated by NSW9, who added that conflicts are beneficial if managed in a good way:

NSW9 They are not easy situations but I think they are needed to evolve. Conflicts are good in general, you have to know how to handle them.

Looking more closely to the data, we can notice, that SW4 and SW7 see conflict as a lesson, as a platform to learn something and improve for the future. All of respondents in this category named conflict as a necessary evil for future progress.

Many of respondents gave their insights explaining deeper what are exact possible positive outcomes of conflicts. It is important to note that also very frequent answers in both groups of respondents (five out of nine non-Swedish and five out of eleven Swedish employees) were that having a conflict in workplace **raises awareness of different opinions, contributes to better understanding of overall picture** and therefore **better decisions are taken.** These consequences are interrelated and highly connected to the way of moving forwards, development.

To exemplify the answers concerning **raised awareness of different opinions and better understanding of overall picture** of an issue, some quotes follow below:

SW9 [...] it is very good because then (in conflict) *you will have lot of different arguments and you get a full picture from small pieces.*

Respondent NSW1 suggested that conflicts can help to see a balanced picture of other people's views:

NSW1 The good side is that we can have a balanced picture of how people see the world. If there would be no conflicts, person would always think that he is right and world should run like this. And sometimes we can come up with very constructive suggestion how to make things better.

Similarly, another non-Swedish interviewee, NSW4, claimed that conflicts make one to understand other opinions about the same matter better:

NSW4 One positive side is that you are clear about the opinion other people have. So more understandings that there are other ways of achieving the goal.

From insights provided by respondents it is notable, that conflict in a form of different opinions and disagreements about the same issue is important because it provides a platform of discussing

issue from a variety of perspectives, thus it helps for individual to see a problem from another angle and to to realize that there a other ways of solving a problem.

Other interesting insight regarding possible advantages of a conflict was provided by SW7:

> *SW7 If you and I have differences of opinion, about something, and we still, both of us, want what is the best for business, then it's good thing that we have an opportunity to discuss our differences of opinion, because the perspective and decision have been discussed and dealt from variety of perspectives. And it is always an advantage.*

It is seen from the quote above that **better decisions are taken** as a positive consequence of conflict because people are able to say out loud their different opinions and thus they can discuss them with each other and bring out many new perspectives of a possible solution.

Better understanding of yourself was another answer according frequency to the question concerning what are the positive consequences of a conflict. This was brought up by two non-Swedish and one Swedish respondent, some examples follow:

> *NSW6 Positive side is when you get over it, when you find solution that meets all the requirements and you can continue work. And then maybe you discover a part of you.*

NSW2 claimed similar emphasizing that conflict can contribute to a better understanding of your own decisions:

> *NSW2 Advantages are that you take time to consider about your decisions or about your initiatives. To make your vision more wide and broad.*

One non-Swedish and two Swedish respondents answered that conflict lets one **understand other people's behaviours and perceptions** better.

> *NSW3 Within a conflict you get to know the person, how they really are working. You kind of test how far you can push or go with that person when requesting things or when dealing with that person.*

Similar insight was shared by SW11:

> *SW11 It could lead to a deeper understanding, the other positive things is if you disagree and then work it through, you will get a deeper understanding maybe not just decisions but also what is important for your co-worker, how he or she looks upon things.*

What is interesting in this section is that two out of eleven Swedish respondents (SW6, SW5) when asked about positive sides of conflicts emphasized that conflict is negative for them. But both still found some positive consequences of a conflict. Their insights are provided below:

> *SW6 Then a conflict is solved, it could be that people have learned about how they behave and learn how to improve for the future. But mostly during the conflict I can't see anything good.*

SW5 It (conflict) *is negative and I tend to avoid it, I don't like conflicts, I usually avoid situations when I can. But it is always not so good thing to do – sometimes you need a conflict to move on.*

To sum up it is important to say that advantages are perceived rather similarly by both Swedish and non-Swedish employees and many of them see side effect of having a conflict as a way to move forwards and develop individually or as an organization. Respondents provided more concrete advantages and they include: increased awareness of existing different points of view, contributing to a better understanding of the whole picture of situation and better decisions made. Also quite a few respondents from both groups answered that conflicts let a person to understand himself/herself or others better. Also it is interesting to note that one Swedish respondent said that if he/she should name any positive sides of a conflict, he/she could not name it as a conflict as such. Later he/she added that small conflicts contribute to increased group dynamics and thus they are very important. Another notification should be provided about two other Swedish respondents who, after being asked what are advantages of a conflict, emphasized that conflicts are only negative for them, but still found some positive consequences to name.

4.9. Disadvantages of having a conflict perceived

Another question is concerning interviewees' perceptions of disadvantages of having a conflict.

To begin with this section, we would like to present that the most frequent answers to the question "What are the disadvantages of a conflict" in both groups of respondents were related to negative impact for an organization. Majority (six out eleven) of Swedish respondents answered that conflicts can be **costly for the organization.** Many interviewees mentioned that because of conflicts, **quality of results** and **the overall productiveness in a company can decrease**. In comparison, three out of nine non-Swedish respondents emphasized the negative impact for organization as such. Some insights shared by respondents follow below:

SW6 The bad thing is of course that people don't like being at work and not doing job very well, and it could be costly for a company also because we are not working in efficient way.

Similarly, SW4 said that conflicts could create cracks in a company:

SW4 The disadvantage of conflict is quite severe for organization, I would say. It could really create cracks in an organization and create an alignment of targets or whatever.

Non-Swedish respondent, NSW7, added that conflicts can result in wasted resources in a company:

NSW7 Well, you don't go forward and you stay in the same conflict for too long, you are wasting your time. I mean if you are in the company and you have a situation that you can do better or you can see different ways to solve the problem and you decide to stay there too long - you are wasting your time, money and resources. That is very negative side of conflict.

Other prevailing answers to the question "What are disadvantages of a conflict?" in both groups of respondents were related to interpersonal problems emerging between people. Three out of

nine non-Swedish and two out of eleven Swedish respondents said that conflicts can create **barriers between people** and **problems in interpersonal communication**:

SW7 They (conflicts) *can reduce the ability to find a solutions, they can create the barriers between people involved in the conflicts to keep on communicating about the finding of solutions.*

NSW1 also said that conflict can affect interpersonal communication in a workplace:

NSW1 Negative side is that people might get very personal. They might forget that in the beginning they talked about some work things.

Another respondent shared insight that conflicts could create groupings in a team:

NSW9 Negative side is that it is quite toxic to have conflict in a small group. Because if you have two people confronted and not agreeing, that is toxic for the rest of the group. It creates groupings and everyone goes to the same direction.

What is also very interesting to note in this section, is that after being asked what are disadvantages of having a conflict, five out of eleven Swedish respondents mentioned that conflicts cause a lot of **negative energy** - they drain it from people involved in conflict situations:

SW10 It's lot of negative energy. It makes you concentrate more on things that are not working.

SW4 claimed that people think that conflicts that a lot of energy from them:

SW4 The disadvantages of conflicts is a thing that a lot of people think that they drain energy [...].

Another Swedish respondent added that conflicts do not take energy only from them but also from people around:

SW1 It takes a lot of energy from not only the ones in the conflict but people around too.

Meanwhile, non-Swedish respondents did not emphasize the negative energy aspect as such. One of non-Swedish respondents said that conflicts can be a bit stressful and another claimed that conflicts can be very destructive. Although we will refrain from drawing any definite conclusions, the respondents' answers in this question may indicate that in Swedish culture outcome of a conflict might be perceived to be related to a negative energy.

To continue the possible negative sides of conflicts section, it is important to bring up **an overall withdrawal from situation** aspect brought up by respondents. Three out of eleven Swedish respondents said that conflicts can cause overall withdrawal from the conflict situation and people included in it, whereas one non-Swedish respondent mentioned that conflict can cause withdrawal from the situation. SW4 claimed the following:

SW4 [...] the fact that conflict is not always so easy to handle also scares some people sometime and then they sort of withdraw.

Similar has been indicated by SW9 who mentioned that in Sweden people tend to avoid the problem as well as people involved in a conflict situation.

Another respondent, NSW4, said that conflict can lead to people withdrawing from the situation:

NSW4 Negative sides are that people might leave the process.

On one hand, the latter results may suggest that Swedish are more likely to withdraw from conflict situations, but on the other hand it might be just respondent's observations of others' behavior.

It is also important to note that one of non-Swedish respondents was also saying that conflicts can lead to **personal struggle to move forwards** and keep his/her own initiatives, opinions alive. Additionally NSW2 added that personal problems and slowed down pace at a workplace can have a **negative impact on team** since they might feel that you are unsure and unconfident with your own decisions:

NSW2 And sometimes it is challenge that you have a team behind you. And if they see that kind of slowing down or obstacle, they feel that you are not 100 percent in control. This will bring people to question about your authority and empowering capability.

What is also interesting to bring it up here, is that one Swedish respondent, SW9, also added that in his/her opinion conflict can become a really **personal and deep problem**.

To summarize, majority of Swedish respondents and few non-Swedish respondents brought up the negative impact on organization as a possible negative side of conflict. Many interviewees claimed that productiveness and results are negatively influenced by conflicts and therefore it can lead to a lot of wasted time, money and resources for a company. Secondly, relatively equal number of respondents in both groups mentioned emergence of interpersonal problems as a severe disadvantage of conflicts. Interestingly, many Swedish interviewees proposed that a lot of negative energy is produced in conflict situations. What is more important to note is that one non-Swedish respondent suggested that conflict may cause the overall withdrawal from the situation and quite a few Swedish respondents said it can cause withdrawal from the situation and from people involved in a conflict. Additionally, personal struggling to move forwards and its' negative impact on one's team was mentioned as a disadvantage of a conflict by on non-Swedish respondent.

4.10. Relationships before and after the conflict

To look more closely how relationships and overall synergy in Volvo X might be affected by possible conflicts, employees were asked the following question: "Do you think relationships can stay like they were before?" The answers provided the opinions about how relationships are change after the conflict has occurred and also on what does the future relationships between two or more conflicting parties depend.

Firstly, it needs to be mentioned that most of the employees noted that relationships between parties involved in the conflict are influenced by several elements. Three non-Swedish and two Swedish employees mentioned that future relationships between conflicted counterparts depend on **people**. It was mentioned for example by NSW7 that even if conflict is work related the relationship depends how people act in this situation. NSW7 continued with noting that if one of the counterparts is perceived to behave rude by the other, there might be so, that unwillingness to work together in the future arises. Another respondent, SW10, answered as follows:

SW10 Yes...I think...Sometimes, sometimes not. It depends on a person, some people are very stubborn. Because you never know what they have in their luggage.

NSW9 added that relationship depends on people and their respect for each other:

NSW9 [...] I am thinking of an encounter I had with a colleague, and I think it helped us to understand each other better. I think we gained respect for each other. It is not always like that, because it depends on the other person too. But I think it is part of the maturity and personality how you can move on after the conflict.

The second element brought up by participants is **the nature of the conflict**. For example, NSW6 sees the difference between work-related conflicts and conflicts that emerge because of personal matters. One of the Swedish employees supported that claim by saying:

SW9 I believe there would be some disturbances after the conflict. If it is about topic which is not personal, then I think there will be no problem in cooperation afterwards. But if it is personal, it is hard to sort it out, and even if you sort it out, you will have some disturbance after.

Two Swedish employees - SW2 and SW7 - further suggested that depending how fundamental conflict is and how deeply it touches the core values of the specific person, the relationships might change for the worse. SW7 exemplified this by saying as follows:

SW7 If it's something very fundamental that touches very core of your personality and your values and you feel that you are very very apart, I don't think that the relationships will remain the same.

Further, two Swedish respondents claimed that the future **relationships after the conflict can change to a better or worse depending on how it is handled**:

SW5 It depends how you handle it. If you have a big argument and you don't talk about it later, then the relationship is not going to be the same. But if you have this discussion, then the relationship can become even better.

Similar was said by SW11:

SW11 [...] Relationships differs. And if you solve it and get a win-win situation, would relationship be something better. If you are not capable to have a win-win situation, it will be probably worse.

Lastly, NSW4 brought up the importance of one of the parties admitting he/she is wrong and correcting his/her methods of working or behavior, causing the relationship to become better.

To summarize this section, many factors possibly influencing future relationships between people involved in a conflict were brought up by respondents such as: the people involved in the conflict, nature of the conflict and the way how conflicts are handled. Many employees shared their insights about how conflicts can affect relationships between parties involved in a conflict depending on the latter factors: to the better, to worse or stay the same. Finally, it is also important to note hereby, that there was no significant difference observed whilst analyzing Swedish and non-Swedish employees perceptions concerning the change of relationships after the conflict.

5. DISCUSSION

In the fifth chapter results will be analyzed while taking into account the theoretical framework covered in the second chapter. Fifth chapter consists of two sub-chapters. In the first sub-chapter we will provide a discussion about how Swedish and non-Swedish employees perceive cultural differences influencing communication at a workplace. In the second sub-chapter the perceptions of conflicts by employees will discussed as well as differences of perceptions by Swedish and non-Swedish will be analyzed.

Before conducting the study of perceptions of conflicts in Volvo X, researchers were informed that Volvo X employees have many different cultural backgrounds (Volvo X Headquarters, 2015), thus the first question in interviews was to find out whether respondents actually face intercultural communication in their working environment. Not surprisingly, all respondents admitted that they interact with people from different cultures on more or less often daily basis. O'Hair et al. (2004) proposes that interaction with people from different cultural backgrounds, can result in differences in communication styles and expectations of outcomes of communication can lead to the conflict. Based on the latter claim, authors of this study had a belief that cultural differences may lead to more conflicts in workplace and thus chose to analyze perceptions of conflicts by people from different backgrounds. In this section the important findings of the study will be presented.

5.1. Organisational communication in multicultural workplace

In this section, we will discuss the findings about how Swedish and non-Swedish employees perceive multiculturality influencing communication in workplace. In Volvo X, the findings show, that many of respondents see cultural diversity positively affecting working environment and defined intercultural communication in variety of positive words. These positive attitudes towards cultural diversity may be related to the fact that "multiculturalism adds to the complexity of global firms by increasing the number of perspectives, approaches, and business methods represented within the organization" (Adler and Gundersen, 2007, p. 17). Interestingly, more than half of non-Swedish respondents reported intercultural environment to be a potential, and they explained that a person can learn a lot about others and himself/herself while communicating with people from different backgrounds. According to Trefry and Vaillant (2002), multiculturality in teams enhances group's self-confidence, ability to deal with unexpected events and what is important, members of such groups re-examines their perspectives when confronting different perspectives of other people (in Halverson and Tirmizi, 2008). Even though multiculturality was seen as a positive aspect by many, both Swedish and non-Swedish respondents, almost all of them named challenges of intercultural communication as well. Many studies also reveal that diversity in a team can be viewed as a challenge and as potential (O'Hair et al., 2004, Halverson and Tirmizi, 2008, Miller 2012, Mele & Sanchez-Runde, 2013). According to Halverson and Tirmizi (2008), "team members of an increasingly diverse workforce must actively cope with cultural differences in order to bridge cultural boundaries" (p.7). The last quote by Halverson and Tirmizi (2008) can be juxtaposed to one respondent's insight that intercultural communication is not difficult, it is easy if a person works

individually with his/her own prejudices about different people and only by doing that intercultural interaction goes smoothly and challenges are managed.

Language was seen as a limitation to intercultural communication by seven respondents in Volvo X. It is important to note here, that Swedish respondents emphasized the lack of proficiency of English language, or accents difficult to understand by others as a problematic area. Two non-Swedish however were notifying that they feel excluded or not equal at times because they are not fluent in Swedish language which is a native language for many employees of Volvo X. According to Lustig and Koester (2010) "cultural mixing implies that people will not always feel completely comfortable as they attempt to communicate in another language or as they try to talk with individuals who are not proficient in theirs" (p.11). Language is a crucial element of communication, thus according to the authors of this study, limitation of language can lead to misunderstandings and respectively it can become a root of conflict in intercultural communication.

In this study, computer mediated interaction tools, such as Lync, e-mail and phone, were claimed to be a challenge while communicating with colleagues located in different countries by quite a few Swedish respondents. As it was presented in theoretical background, usage of technologies, computer-mediated communication, may be a cause of emerging conflicts (O'Hair et al. 2004). Even though the use of technologies such as groupware, teleconferencing, electronic and voice mails facilitate communication between people placed in different locations, it does not have ability to capture the context, feelings and other sensory information (Schneider and Barsoux, 2003). The authors of this study believe that the lack of nonverbal and social context cues can be related to the challenges that respondents experience while communicating via technologies. Specifically in this study it was found that communication in initial working stages via communication technologies may create difficulties in later stages of work-related interaction. From these findings we can conclude that the obstacles, created by computer mediated interaction, could be overcome if face to face interaction is used instead of technologies in initial stages.

To understand different communication and management styles, can be challenging. Both Swedish and non-Swedish respondents claimed that people from different cultural backgrounds use distinctive communication and management styles and it takes time and energy to understand this and get used to. As we discussed in theoretical framework, Swedish culture has many distinctive traits, described by many scholars, such as Hofstede, Barinaga Hall and others. This finding can also be aligned to O'Hair et al. (2004) statement, that while being different, people can communicate in very contrasting ways from one another. In this section, it is also important to highlight that non-Swedish respondents emphasized that they notice significant differences in how things are done in Sweden in comparison to the countries where they were born. For example, the data shows that Swedes are perceived to be polite, respectful and not confronting people. In theoretical framework, we have already noted that according to Hofstede Sweden belongs to feminine cultures, meaning that people are caring about others, hence it could be associated with being respectful and polite. Respondents also indicated that they see long discussions as an important part of decision-making process in Sweden which may indicate that Sweden is low context culture, also suggested by Hall in Theoretical Framework, as long discussions may result in diminishing uncertainty. What is more, the drive towards consensus

was also brought up as part of the perceptions of Swedish culture by both groups of respondents. This could indicate to Swedish culture being feminine (Hofstede, 2015), where caring for others is emphasized as well as managers strive for consensus is notable. These research' respondents' perceptions of Swedish culture also goes in line with Baringa (1999) who also claimed that Swedes drive for consensus.

All in all, the findings show that employees of Volvo X see intercultural communication as both - a risk and a potential, and it is according to many studies done by other researchers, natural aspect of any diverse workplace. Authors of this study believe that cultural diversity can lead to the challenges that if unmanaged, can subsequently result in the conflicts. The findings of this research show that people see multiculturality as a positive factor contributing to better working environment but also perceive that many challenges arise in intercultural communication. According to Brannen and Salk (2000), "cultural differences do not necessarily have a negative impact on team performance (in Halverson and Tirmizi, 2008, p.7)". As it is seen from the data, the latter claim could be supported by the perceptions of Volvo X employees. Halverson and Tirmizi (2008) claim that "differences do not cause team conflicts; [...] (p.7)", however, we can conclude that differences can cause challenges which might lead to the conflicts.

5.2. Perceptions of conflict

In this section we will discuss the findings of the study in order to find out how are the conflicts within Volvo X are perceived by Swedish and non-Swedish employees and if there are any differences of perceptions between these two respondent groups. Different aspects of conflicts will be hereby discussed in analytical way in order to provide a deeper overview of perceptions of conflicts in Volvo X.

According to Halverson and Tirmizi (2008), "conflict is a natural part of social existence and destined to be a reality for human beings working together" (p. 212). As collected data shows, vast majority of respondents see conflicts in Volvo X. It is interesting to note that many of non-Swedish interviewees emphasized also the fact that conflicts are everywhere, hence Volvo X is not an exception. One non-Swedish interviewee after being asked "Do you see conflicts in Volvo X", answered "Yes and no" - meaning that she both sees and does not see conflicts in a workplace. Later she explained that it is not only part of Swedish culture but a part of Volvo way to avoid conflicts. This answer may indicate that respondent does not see overt conflicts, however she still perceives them happening. According to Barinaga (1999) Swedes have tendency to avoid conflicts, thus the insight provided by this non-Swedish respondent, brings interesting aspect about conflicts in Sweden, and more precisely in Volvo X. Sweden scoring high on uncertainty avoidance (GLOBE, Hofstede) also hints why Swedes tend to avoid conflicts, because conflicts situations can bring unclarity in a workplace/relationships. Another interesting finding is that two Swedish respondents answered that they see disagreements in the company, but they did not define them as conflicts. As Kennedy and Pronin (2008) state, "it is almost a truism that disagreement produces conflict" (p. 833), so even these disagreements noted by some respondents may be interpreted as conflicts or roots of them by others in the same workplace. As it was mentioned before, perception is individual processing and interpreting of any kind of information in a way that is meaningful for the person with individual life

experiences. Having said this, perception of occurrence of conflicts is subjectively interpreted notion.

As it is seen from the results, several employees, both Swedish and non-Swedish, suggested that conflict is a disagreement. This definition is in line with Forsyth (2014) and Geist (1995) definitions. There is only one even a remotely significant difference between Swedish and non-Swedish employees whilst taking a closer look to their opinions. That is, looking to conflict perceptions by some of the Swedish employees, we can see that they claimed conflicts affecting individuals or their feelings. Hence we assume that Swedes may take conflicts more personally. However, not all of the Swedish employees mentioned conflicts affecting them deeply, thus we would like to withdraw from making generalizations about all Swedes. The next aspect which was mentioned by several respondents whilst defining a conflict, was not having a common ground because of poor communication. Communication failure has been suggested to be one of the main causes of conflicts also by O'Hair et al. (2004). As seen from the results poor communication can result in wrongly interpreted information which in turn results in conflicts.

Another important finding about conflict perceptions in Volvo X, is that one of the non-Swedish employees claimed that she perceives more hidden conflicts in a workplace. This was claimed by only one respondent, however we as a researchers put a lot of weight on it. Studies about Swedish culture (Barinaga, 1999; Lewis, 1999) as well as majority of interviewees defined Swedes as tending to avoid a conflict, thus we could make an assumption, that there might be overall many hidden conflicts in Volvo X. However, many respondents explicitly note that silent (covert) conflicts are more dangerous than open (overt). Results also show that employees have a significant awareness about silent conflicts and define them similarly to Wood (2015) definition about covert conflicts as "when people express their feelings about disagreements indirectly". Thus, further research regarding approaches to minimize the occurrence of covert conflicts in Volvo X could be done so that the overall work atmosphere would be strengthened.

Results show that most of Swedish and many non-Swedish respondents perceive culture as an influential factor of individual's behaviour in conflict situations. Lustig and Koester (2010) also suggest that culture affects behaviour of people. There were many interesting insights shared by researched employees about how they perceive culture influencing conflict behaviour, however, it should be hereby mentioned that generally respondents were careful to express generalisations, they were reluctant to stereotype. Interestingly two Swedish employees suggested that all people are fundamentally the same, that means they rather tend to perceive other factors than culture to be more important influencing conflict behaviour. One non-Swedish similarly stated that it is superficial to think that culture influences one's conflict behaviour, and this might argue with Lustig and Koester (2010) who claimed, that culture is influencing people's behaviour.

Intergroup conflicts, that is conflicts between departments, are perceived by both Swedish and non-Swedish to be most typical conflict types in Volvo X. This could be seen from results as employees mentioned contradicting goals between divisions. Further, it is seen from the results, that respondents also brought up the possible cause of conflicts to be limited amount of resources, which is also claimed by Miller (2012) to be one of the factors causing intergroup conflicts. Contradicting goals may refer also to content goals, as described by O'Hair et al. (2004) as obvious reasons for a conflict (such as finite resources). Since respondents shared

insights that possible cause of conflicts in Volvo X could be that priorities sometimes differ between departments, implication could be suggested, that there is a need for more cooperation between departments (cross-divisional collaboration) in order to prioritize what is most needed for the company. We can hereby conclude that Volvo X employees state that there are most frequently task related conflict happening.

It is claimed by Halverson and Tirmizi (2008) that relationship conflicts, that are about personal disliking and feelings, occur more rare than task related conflicts in organizations. This statement might be also applied to Volvo X, as just few respondents explicitly indicated relationship conflicts taking place in a workplace and significantly many interviewees stated that the most typical conflicts in Volvo X concerns work tasks, as discussed in paragraph above. However, looking to the overall data and leaving these explicit claims about relationship conflicts aside, it has be noted that employees indicated to relationship conflicts occurring in Volvo X. As some employees provided answers sometimes contradicting themselves, implication can be made, that there might be actually larger number of relationship conflicts in Volvo X, or relationship and task related conflicts are generally intertwined. Hence we cannot actually fully agree to Halversons and Tirmizi (2008) claim that relationship conflicts are more rare. Therefore, our study shows, that conflicts have more complex nature and it means that conflicts are not merely task conflicts or relationship conflicts. The latter is also stated by Halverson and Tirmizi (2008) who claim that there could be deeply hidden personal reasons in task conflicts.

To look more closely to Swedish conflict behaviour, we can observe from this study of conflict perceptions and theoretical framework that Swedes tend to avoid conflicts (Barinaga, 1999, Lewis, 1999). As it is seen from the results, this was expressed repeatedly by many non-Swedish employees seemingly from their own experiences, as well by many Swedish employees who, seem to be largely aware of this stereotype. This stereotype could be related to high uncertainty avoidance which is described to apply to Swedish culture (GLOBE, Hofstede). High uncertainty avoidance accompanies set of rules how one is expected to behave, hence conflict avoidance could be perceived as desired behaviour from stereotype. Few of the Swedish respondents also shared insight that in Sweden there might be tendency to not only avoid conflicts but also people who they are in conflict. This finding indicates that Sweden is individualistic culture, which is also proposed by Hofstede centre (2015) and described by Ting-Toomey and Kurogi (1998) as people who value the "I" rather than "We". Having said that, implication could be made, that breaking relationships is perhaps not seen as an obstacle for Swedes. However, as seen from the theoretical framework, Schneider and Barsoux (2003) suggest that Swedes handle conflicts through collaboration not avoidance, because they value interpersonal relationships highly. The results somewhat affirms the latter description as well, as many both Swedish and non-Swedish Volvo X employees repeatedly mentioned that they see Swedes generally tending to discuss great deal to reach the consensus, which in turn could indeed be seen as collaboration. Furthermore, it may indicate to low power distance (Hofstede, in Pethő and Heidrich, 2005) where people desire participative management style in organization, where discussions and shared decision making are valued and employees are involved. However, as results show, opinions about avoiding people involved in conflicts was communicated only by few Swedish employees, hence making generalizations about perceptions by all Swedes will hereby be avoided. Since our study concerns perceptions about conflict, we could suggest that further research about Swedish employees' conflict behaviour in Volvo X could be beneficial to study.

Many Swedish and non-Swedish employees of Volvo X perceive variety of positive aspects that conflicts can bring, the most mentioned one of them was "the way to move forward". It was especially highlighted that different views and opinions may result in better decisions within business. Halverson and Tirmizi (2008) suggested as well that productive struggles give team the greater understanding of differences and help reaching creative solutions. Results show that respondents perceive that because of the conflicts team becomes more aware of different opinions and understands the whole picture better, which contributes to better decisions. Thus, it can be implied that respondents perceived possible advantage of conflict as helping team to fight against groupthink. Majority of employees mentioned, that conflict gives a platform for learning about themselves and others and therefore we can assume that conflicts can even somewhat improve future relationships. Kotthoff and Spencer-Oatey (2007) also highlight the positive side of conflicts the same way as claimed by respondents as conflict "can stimulate reflection and change" (p. 99). All these factors Volvo X employees have brought up could lead to the implication that conflict might result in better decisions and overall efficiency, hence they should not be avoided.

Together with positive sides, respondents also pointed out quite many possible negative aspects of having a conflict. Even though conflicts are claimed to have many potential benefits, they still are seen to be dangerous by majority of people (Halverson and Tirmizi, 2008). Interestingly, nearly half of the Swedish respondents associated conflicts to negative energy: either to the production of it, or in general to the wasted energy as such. As Hammer (2005) states, one element related to the conflict is negative emotional reaction, thus the association by respondents with negative energy could be seen as natural human reaction. Keeping in mind that many Swedish employees associate conflicts' disadvantages with negative energy, and also seeing from results that few Swedish interviewees see conflicts as negative but outcomes as possibly positive, implication could be done that Swedes in general see conflict situation negatively. Since it is a qualitative study with relatively small sample, making such generalisations would need further qualitative research in this area.

Furthermore, around half of respondents pointed out that conflicts can be costly for the organization. Interviewees explained that conflicts may negatively influence quality of work results and the overall productiveness in a company can decrease. Interestingly, Swedish sample suggested this possible threat to the organization twice more often than non-Swedish respondents. According to the studies (Adler and Gundersen, 2007; Gesteland 2012) and as seen from the results, Sweden belongs to deal-focused culture.

Negative sides of having a conflict further comprise the fact that there might occur withdrawal from the situation. This was mentioned by several Swedish employees as well as by one of the non-Swedish employees. This might be partly explained by Swedes belonging to individualistic culture (Hofstede, 2015,Ting-Toomey and Kurogi, 1998), where one is more concerned about his/herself more than collective. Hereby, withdrawal could be seen as opposite to Glasl's last step of the nine-stage conflict escalation: namely "Together into abyss" (in Theoretical Framework, section "Phases of conflicts") - where one person is actively attempting to destroy the opponent, even with cost of ruining himself/herself. Our presented results show, that some people mentioned withdrawal as negative side of conflicts, and therefore we assume that such

behaviour is not contributing into good future relationship either and could be seen as destructive behaviour. Hence, from data analysis, perhaps it would be appropriate to suggest withdrawal from situation as alternative for one of the last stages of nine-stage escalation in Glasl's model.

Finally, findings of perceptions of conflicts show that employees in Volvo X relate conflicts both to positive and negative outcomes. However, it has to be stressed hereby that even though respondents of this study perceive conflicts possibly possessing disadvantages, it was also expressed by many of them, that conflict may result in stronger relationships. It is seen from this study that respondents see conflicts as possibility to understand themselves, others and their perspectives better, and also majority claimed than conflict can result in developing stronger relationships for the future. Similarly, Kotthoff and Spencer-Oatey (2007) claim that, conflicts are often regarded as unwelcome, and much effort is put in order to prevention and resolution. However the latter scholars highlight that conflicts provides a platform to stimulate reflection and change, and also contribute to the maintenance and cohesion of teams. Having said this, we would like to conclude, that conflicts can facilitate change for a better, thus they should not be avoided, but rather disagreements should be openly discussed in order to understand the situation and prevent the emergence of possible negative outcomes of a conflict.

Volvo X employees indicated that depending on the nature of the conflict, the people who are involved and how conflict is resolved, future relationships can be affected.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter we will draw the conclusions from the theoretical and empirical part of this study. We will also provide the answers for the research questions. This chapter will be finished with suggestions for future research.

In order to sum up this Master Thesis, we would hereby return to the research aim which was to find out how Swedish and non-Swedish employees perceive conflicts in Volvo X. In order to reach this aim, three research questions were raised and the answers to them will be summed up one by one in this section:

- How Swedish and non-Swedish employees perceive cultural differences at workplace influencing communication at Volvo X?
- How are the conflicts within Volvo X perceived by Swedish and non-Swedish employees?
- Is there a difference of conflict perceptions between Swedish and non-Swedish employees

Before moving forward, it should be reminded that in the initial stages of the data analysis, we, the researchers, had an assumption that dissimilarities in communication that emerge from differences in cultures may lead to conflicts.

Moreover, this research regarding perceptions of conflicts of Swedish and non-Swedish employees in Volvo X is a qualitative study, thus we cannot make any generalizations that would be applied to perceptions of conflicts of all Volvo X employees. Also what regards the validity of this study, all limitations of study provided in methodological framework have to be taken into account.

Firstly, we would like to draw attention to how Swedish and non-Swedish employees perceive cultural differences at workplace influencing communication at Volvo X. Both Swedish and non-Swedish employees hold positive attitudes towards intercultural communication were expressed. However it should be also noted that majority of employees also acknowledged the possibility of differences in communication possibly causing some challenges. Respondents also expressed that, risen challenges may in turn result in conflict or in better environment, depending how these challenges are handled. Main challenges in intercultural communication are perceived to be due to language and computer-mediated communication, among others.

Secondly, conflicts are perceived by Swedish and non-Swedish employees as both, positive and negative. As we noted, Swedish employees show a small tendency of perceiving conflicts more negative. Conflicts are perceived to be caused by many factors, poor communication being one of those. It should be stressed here that employees perceive conflicts mostly as task-related and mainly between departments, however, as discussed before, this may be questionable as employees' answers were in many places contradicting and relationship and task conflicts may be generally intertwined. Swedes, in relation to conflicts, are perceived by both respondents' groups as conflict avoidance and one of the respondents hence perceived avoidance as part of the Volvo way. To continue, employees of the Volvo X perceived both negative and positive sides

of conflicts, mentioning that better decisions might be done because of conflicts which bring up new perspectives. Negative sides of conflicts concluded the facts that they take energy (brought up by Swedish only), are costly for the organization and may cause withdrawal. However, if conflicts are handled correctly, they are seen to result in possible better relationships.

Lastly, as previously discussed, there is no major differences to be seen between perceptions of conflicts between Swedish and non-Swedish employees. Some of the minor differences that was brought up in discussion comprised the fact that Swedes may perceive conflicts as more negative and take them more personally whilst non-Swedish employees may see conflicts as part of everyday life. What is more it was brought up more by Swedish respondents, that conflicts can be costly for organization.

All these findings will be further developed into specific, tailored practical implications and forwarded to the company directly. By doing that, it is believed to increase the understanding of conflicts, different perceptions of it between Swedish and non-Swedish employees and hence these implications may contribute to better working environment.

This research is relatively small and focuses only on perceptions of conflicts of Swedish and non-Swedish employees in Volvo X. Therefore, in regards to the future research, the authors of this study would suggest to further analyze the perceptions of conflicts by individuals from specific cultures in order to get deeper understanding of phenomenon of conflict.

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Appendix 1. Interview questions.

Interview, week 12.

<u>Personal information:</u>

1) Name 2) age 3) gender 4) occupation/job position 5) highest achieved degree (major in) /educational background 6) worked in Volvo Group (years/countries) 7) nationality/born in... 8) living in Sweden for … years 8) the first language 10) had intercultural / international experiences (work, education) before working in Volvo X?

<u>General questions:</u>

1. Do you work with people from different cultural backgrounds inVolvo X on daily basis?

2. How do you experience intercultural communication? How does it work?

<u>Regarding conflicts:</u>

1. What do you think first when you hear the word "conflict"?/ What is conflict for you?

1.1. Does it have to be verbalized (open) (or can it be silent (closed))?
1.2. Why do you think people are in conflict?

1.3. What are the advantages/disadvantages of having a conflict?

2. Do you see conflicts at at workplace?

2.1. In general, what are the typical conflicts at workplace? About what?

3. Have you been involved in ICC conflict at your workplace? Can you choose the one you remember the best and tell us more about this conflict?

3.1. Could you please describe this situation, without any names mentioned?

3.2. Who was responsible for that conflict?

3.2. How did that conflict began and developed?

3.4. How was the conflict solved? Who solved it and how?

3.5. If you now think back, would you act differently in this situation?

3.6. Do you think you acted like as in your culture?

3.7. Did the other person act like as people act in their culture in general?

3.8. How is your relationship now with this person?

4. How do you feel about conflicts? Part of everyday life? Necessary?

4.1. Do you think conflicts could be avoided?

4.2. And should they be avoided?

4.3. Do you think relationships can stay like it was before conflict? How would you work with this person in future?

5. In general, do you think that cultural background influences interpersonal conflict behaviour?

5.1. To what extent do you think you are influenced by your culture/Swedish culture when it comes to conflict behavior?

5.2. If you are in conflict situation with people from different cultures do you adapt to other party?

6. From your experience, do you see differences in conflict behavior between Swedes and Non-Swedes? What kind of differences?

Closing questions:

1. Do you think that everyone in Volvo X is treated fairly and equally despite of different backgrounds and experiences?

2. Do you feel a part of a team of others working towards shared goals?

3. Do you have anything to add?