

Learning work-life balance: the experiences of self-initiated Korean expatriates in Sweden

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Abstract

This study focused on the experience of self-initiated Korean expatriated in Sweden. The purpose of this research was to examine and analyse the process of learning and adjustment to the new environment and specifically work-life balance. The theoretical framework was composed by cognitive adjustment theory and Berry's acculturation model. The method that was used was qualitative research build on 9 semi-structured interviews. The data collected was coded and was analysed in accordance to the theoretical framework.

The findings revealed differences in the experience of work-life balance between Korean- and Swedish-/internationally-owned companies. Experiences in the Korean-owned companies were marked by lesser opportunity to learn ad initiate adjustment. In Swedish/Internationally-owned companies signals for the need for change were more present and the expatriates underwent an adjustment process to internalize the new cultural values and norms. The evidence outlined that in cases of conflict between the two cultural patterns, the expatriates used reinterpretation to create a hybrid of the two cultures. Finally, evidence suggests a high level of self-awareness and willingness to trade-off between the two cultures, which resulted in the successful integration of the expatriates.

Keywords: self-initiated expatriates, culture, cognitive adjustment, learning, acculturation, work-life balance

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to extend my gratitude towards the men and women who agreed to share their time and experiences with me. Without your insights, optimism and drive to learn this thesis would have never seen the light of day.

I would like to thank my supervisor Erik Mobernd for this comments and continuous reminders to write and perfect the research. Also, special gratitude towards toward all the researchers and staff at the centre for sharing their knowledge and experience during these years.

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my grandparents. Thank you for raising me, loving me and supporting me every step of the way. To my parents who always encouraged my curiosity and never complained how many books I bought. To my sister – my greatest pride and most amazing person in the universe. Finally, to James Allen for his never-ending support and encouragement.

This is for all of you. Thank you.

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1. Introduction

Recent years have seen a shift in the values and priorities of the younger Korean generation (Chyung 2017). Young professionals in South Korea (*hereto* Korea) are more and more likely to prefer work positions which are less stressful and less paid, than higher paid but more stressful positions (Ibid). In fact, equal involvement in private and professional life, job satisfaction and overall well-being are at the forefront of the new societal demands (Lewis et al. 2007). This ongoing shift in thinking has been the source of continuous debate in Korea in the last years. In fact, the newly invented word ‘woerabel’ meaning work-life balance is one of the keywords dominating Korean social media. Consequently, the younger generation which puts emphasis on work-life balance has been labelled the woerabel generation (the work-life balance generation) (Lee 2018).

In an effort, to meet the demands of the new generation and to provide solution for low productivity, President Moon Jae-in’s government has progressively introduced legislation to pave the way for work-life balance. Most recently a 52-hour maximum work week was introduced – an unprecedented change in a country which encourages long working hours and perceives them as a source of pride (Choon 2017; Song 2018). A campaign has also been launched to help people balance work and life and create more supportive environment in the companies (Choi 2018).

Perhaps expected, this new approach to work (and life) has been met with mixed reviews by the general population and the media. The new legislations are facing opposition from the business community and especially small and mid-sized enterprises (SMEs) (Soon 2018). Critics worry about the cost of enforcing of work-life balance practices and about the potential increase of the wealth gap between workers in large and smaller companies (Ibid).

The notion of work-life balance is still new to Korea with attitudes towards the concept changing and new actions & ideas being continuously discussed and introduced. Some authors argue that the concept of work-life balance is too deeply rooted with the Western narrative and values (Chandra 2012). This implies a potential conflict between the mainstream understanding of work-life balance and Korean working culture and society. Therefore, it merits to discuss what are the differences and how could they be resolved.

Nevertheless, to research the cultural attitudes of the Korean society is too broad of a scope. Considering work-life balance practices seem to be the direction in which the Korean society

is heading, it is of primary interest to be able to understand the learning and adjustment process to work-life balance and evaluate its results. For this purpose, the study would focus on Korean expatriates in Sweden. Sweden has been chosen as a case partly due to the strong commitment to work-life balance, but also due to availability. Further on, in order to understand the natural learning process, the study has chosen to focus on self-initiated expatriates. Self-initiated expatriates have been defined as “internationally mobile individuals, who have moved by their own agency (rather than as an organizational expatriation) to another country for an indeterminable duration” (Al Ariss & Crowley- Henry 2013:79). Self-initiated expatriates often join the company without preparation training (unlike expatriates) and as a result have more challenges in learning and adjusting to the new culture (Ibid).

Finally, as outlined the study will specifically focus on the aspect of work-life balance. Within the scope of this study, Greenhaus et al.’s definition (2003) will be utilized, defining work-life balance as “the extent to which an individual is equally engaged in – and equally satisfied with – his or her work and family role” (2003:513). For Greenhaus et al (2003) work-family balance is a continuum with imbalance in the work role and imbalance in the family roles being the two respective ends, and balance being the absolute middle. This consists of three dimensions: time balance referring to equal time devoted; involvement balance referring to psychological effort and presence invested; and satisfaction balance referring to equal satisfaction in work and family roles.

1.1. Purpose of the thesis:

This thesis aims to provide an in-depth understanding in the experiences of Korean self-initiated expats within the Swedish workforce. As previously stated the purpose of this research is to examine and analyse the process of learning and adjustment of the work values within a new environment. More specifically whether Korean work values are still strongly present within the Swedish working place; have they disappeared; or have they been reinterpreted into a new hybrid version. Recognizing, the potentially broad field of examination, the research utilizes work-life balance as an evaluative space and examines the experiences of Korean self-initiated expatriates in Sweden (Sam 2003).

. The main research question is:

- How self-initiated Korean expats experience work-life balance in Sweden?

Two additional research questions will be also used to help guide the analysis and fulfil the purpose of the study.

- What did the self-initiated expatriates learn in regard to work-life balance in Sweden?
- How successful was their adjustment to work-life balance in Sweden?

1.2. Disposition

Firstly, the study will provide an in-depth information about the culture of both Sweden and Korea by relying on the five cultural dimensions of Hofstede (2009). This will be followed by a presentation of previous research on adjustment and work-life balance and a gap in the existing literature will be outlined. Thirdly, the theoretical framework as built upon cognitive adjustment theory (Schutz 1944; *also* Brandl & Neyer 2009; Osland 2002) and Berry's acculturation model (1997) will be presented. Further on, the research methodology will be highlighted along with rational behind the chosen methods, participant selection, interview guide, data collection and analysis and limitations. The fifth section consists of the empirical findings and analysis. In the final chapter, a summary will be provided along with the limitation and practical implications of the study. Suggestion for future research will also be highlighted.

2. Conceptual framework:

2.1. Culture

Culture as a concept is often over used and underdefined. In order to avoid confusing and increase the validity and reliability of thesis, Terpstra & David's definition of culture will be employed (1985). Thus, culture is "learned, shared, compelling, interrelated set of symbols whose meaning provides a set of orientation for members of society". This definition carries several elements which would be essential to help gain in-depth knowledge of the interlink between the cultural and the international context (Punnet 1998). First, culture is learned and therefore one can learn the rules if they are positioned in a new cultural setting. Second, culture is shared, and the focus is directed towards the similarities in the group, rather than the individual differences. Culture is also compelling in that it influences individuals towards specific behavior without their explicit knowledge. The fourth element that defines culture is interrelation. This refers to the fact that culture should be examined as a complete entity and understood within the context of the whole (Ali 2003). Lastly, culture provides orientation to

people i.e. it dictates how a group will react towards particular stimuli i.e. acceptance, push-back, etc (Ibid; Punnet 1998:11).

2.1.1. Hofstede's cultural dimensions

Inspired by Hofstede (2010;2018), the Swedish and Korean culture will be examined and compared in relation to Hofstede's five cultural dimensions:

The first dimension is the individualism versus collectivism dimension which address the level of interdependence and independence between the members in society (Hofstede 2010). In simpler terms, it concerns whether one's self-image is defined as 'I' or 'we' (Li 2016). In the words of Hofstede (2010), in individualistic cultures relationships are loose in nature and closer ties are established mostly with the direct family. Consequently, in collectivist cultures, relationships between individuals are tighter and not limited to the direct family (Ibid). In regard to this study, Sweden is a country with a high score in individualism, while Korea is an example of a collectivist country. Furthermore, within the Korean context, work and family are perceived as interdependent domains of life. Work is perceived to serve family needs and therefore sacrificing family time for work is viewed positively (Thein et al 2010). One could speculate that this is partially the reason why the amount of working time, and face-time especially, is a major factor during performance evaluations in Korea (Won 2005). Confucians values also play a major role in all domain of life in Korean culture. Confucianism emphasizes a solid work ethic and places strong emphasis on the caregiving in the family and minimal intervention from the government (Lee 2012).

The second aspect of Hofstede's five cultural dimensions refers to whether society embraces the long-term devotion to the traditional versus forward thinking values (Hofstede 1997). Short-term orientation countries like Sweden do not reinforce the traditional values and rather embraces change and progressiveness. On the other hand, Korea is an example of a long-term orientation country which supports the upholding of traditional values (Hofstede 2010). In the business world, this would translate into desire for quick results and change versus long-term commitments and respect for tradition (Ibid 2018). It could be argued that Korea has gradually shifted towards a less form of long-term devotion following the rapid economic growth in the late 20th century (Holliday 2000). In fact Holliday (2000) labeled Korea as an example of 'productivist welfare capitalism' due to the pivotal role the state plays in navigating the economic policies and activities of the country (also Cho & Koh 2015). This is a direct breach of the Confucianist value of minimal government intervention, however as

Tang (2000) argues it is excusable due to the belief that economic growth would ultimately benefit the entirety of the population. Therefore, the economic policy in South Korea is superior to the social policy.

The existence of such strong government intervention and policies to guide the Korean economy serve as a good example to explain the third Hofstede dimension: uncertainty avoidance. Uncertainty avoidance simply refers to the attitude individuals have towards uncertain or unknown situations (Hofstede 2010; 2018). Societies with high scores on uncertainty avoidance as Korea have aversion towards ambiguity and have instituted rules & regulations to diminish the uncertainty. This also means that in an organizational setting, individuals are less comfortable with taking unfamiliar risks, direct conflicts or ambiguous roles (Lee 2012). Here, it is vital to introduce the concepts of Kibun and Inhwa and their central role to the Korea culture. Kibun refers to the feeling of balance and good behaviour (Chaney & Martin 2011). Within the Korean context, people continuously try to maintain a state of kibun in their personal and work environment, while simultaneously working to not hurt others' kibun (Southerton 2008). Within the working life, kibun translates into not losing face i.e. a manager would lose face if their subordinates do not demonstrate proper respect, while a subordinate's kibun will be damaged if they are criticised in public by their manager (Ibid).

Related to the notion of Kibun is the principle of Inhwa, which refers to a state of harmony. This principle draws on the Confucian beliefs on the importance of harmony between people, and especially harmony between those who are not equal. In real life, this term translates into the unwritten requirement for subordinates to be loyal to their superiors and similarly, for the superiors to be concerned and caring towards their subordinates (Lee 2012). Apart from having the responsibility to demonstrate loyalty and respect, Inhwa also involves the responsibility of each party to support other persons/parties and make them happy (maintain their Kibun). As a result, Koreans shy away from delivering bad news and would wait until the late afternoon to share them so the recipient can maintain their Kibun throughout the day (Alston 1989 in Lee 2012).

Contrary to all this Sweden has been classified as a society with weak uncertainty avoidance culture. In other words, the society more readily accepts change and individuals are more comfortable with unclear or unstructured tasks/role and take risks. Within the framework of

this research, the self-initiated expats will step from a strong uncertainty avoidance culture towards a culture embracing uncertainty and ambiguity (Hofstede 2018).

To put all this into perspective, it is vital to discuss the role of power distance and hierarchy in South Korea and Sweden. Hofstede (2010) defines power distance in terms of the degree of equality, or inequality, between people in the society. In other words, whether less powerful members of the society expect and accept the distribution of power to be unequal (Li 2016; Hofstede 2010). In countries with high power distance, power and wealth are concentrated on top of the chain without much possibility to progressing up the proverbial ladder. The opposite is true in low power distance societies as equality and equal opportunity is emphasized (Hofstede 2010). Referring to the comparisons conducted by Hofstede's center, Korea has a high-power distance rate (60) meaning that power and wealth gap are acceptable within the society (Hofstede 2018). In everyday working terms, this translates in the fact that usually it is the eldest person who takes initiatives, while the younger/junior person who demonstrate their respect by serving them (Cho & Yoon 2001; Lee, Brett & Park 2012; Lee 2012). In the cases of negotiations, Chen (2004) demonstrated that senior managers are commonly the decision maker and while junior staff may possess more up to date knowledge, they will not express opinion until the senior member has taken a stance (i.e. working extra hours because the manager said so). On the other hand, Sweden sits in the low ranking of the power distance. Within the organizational setting this would translate into easily accessible contact with the person in power as well as possibility to climb ranks. In these circumstances, communication is often informal and direct.

The fifth aspect of Hofstede's cultural dimensions is masculinity versus femininity. Korea and Sweden are situated in the opposing ends of the masculinity/femininity spectrum (Hofstede 2010). Sweden is an example of a feminine culture as it does not reinforce the traditional masculine work model. Gender differentiation and discrimination in the Swedish context is objectively on the lower end with women being treated equally and granted equal opportunity (Hofstede 2018). On the other hand, Korea is a society scoring high on the masculinity dimension. Males are seen as the dominant figures and wielders of power, while women are considered more suitable for the family domain (Ibid; Li 2016).

As Hofstede's cultural dimensions will play a central role in understanding the rationale behind the adjustment process, it is important to outline some of its major critiques. Nathan (2015) argues that Hofstede's cultural dimensions fall under the umbrella of essentialism and

ignore identity and agency. In simpler terms, these notions of culture lead to increase of stereotyping and constraining individuals (Holiday 2011:4 in Nathan 2015:5). Another critique deals with Hofstede's underlying assumption each national culture reflects an "average tendency" within each dimension of a continuum. Nathan (2015:9) argues that once again this ignored agency and identity and undermines differences in value orientation. Nathan further argues that depending on the context individuals can exhibit behavior and actions on the opposite ends of the spectrum (2015).

2.2. Learning:

As previously outlined, the goal of this study is to examine how self-initiated expatriates adjust and negotiate their cultural mental maps within the new context. The theoretical framework chapter will provide deeper insights into the tools that would be used to examine both the process and the outcome of the adjustment. Nevertheless, in its essence the process of adjustment is about learning and re-learning. For this purpose, it is perhaps best to position a clear definition of "learning". According to Aswathappa learning is basically "the modification of behaviour through practice, training, or experience" (2010:144). This definition recognized the learning as both a process and an outcome. It recognized the need for continuous accumulation of new knowledge and skills as well as adaptation in behaviour (Gold, Thorpe & Munford 2010:263).

3. Literature review

To achieve the goal of the study firstly, the attention will be directed towards existing literature on acculturation and adjustment of self-initiated expatriates. This will be followed by a general overview of literature on work-life balance and its' main criticisms. Thirdly, the focus will be directed towards literature on work-life balance in Korea and its major themes and challenges. Finally, a short summary will be provided of the main conclusions and literature gaps currently existing on the topic.

3.1. Adjustment and acculturation

A review of the existing literature demonstrated that (self-initiated) expatriate adjustment is commonly approached from four aspects: individual factors, job-related factors, organizational factors and non-work factors.

In terms of individual characteristics, Tan et al. (2005) outlined expatriates' emotions as influential to the successful adjustment, especially for individuals from collectivist cultures. Researchers have further built upon that notions contesting that specific personality characteristics such as open-mindedness increase the possibility for adjustment success (Ward & Fischer 2015). Desire to learn and culture novelty have also been linked with successful expatriate adjustment. Van der Zee et al. outlined that expatriates are often faced with drastic changes in terms of work roles and culture, as well as a pressure to perform up to standards and norms which they are not necessarily aware of (2005). Other influential aspects are the preconceived ideas and expectations of the individual. For example, deeply rooted ideas what makes one a good worker and employee could vastly impact the nature and pace adjustment (Wolf-Wendel, Ward & Kulp 2017)

The second aspect that facilitates adjustment is job-related factors. For example, communication, interaction and social network have also been outlined as influential due to their abilities to provide up to date feedback and reduce uncertainty (Li 2016). Pothukuchi et al (2002) demonstrated the positive effect of social network in reducing cultural differences and promoting cultural adjustment. The presence of credible and openminded host country nationals willing to provide advice has been demonstrated to help expatriates mitigate the effects of culture shock and successful adjust to the new culture and role (Mahajan & Toh 2014; Takeuchi 2010). Additionally, time spend in the new position (tenure) has positive impact on work and general adjustment (Takeuchi et al. 2005). The longer the individual stays, the more familiar and comfortable would they become with the new context. Yun (2001) supported these findings by outlining that higher tenure is linked to diminished levels of "hostility" and "homesickness" (also Won 2005). It must be mentioned that the work-life balance stressors can originate in the job-related factors (Shaffer et al. 2001). Examples of these include the expatriates perceived time pressure, the number of working hours and business travels, and work environment (Fischmayr & Kullinger 2010).

Organizational criteria and mechanisms are considered essential for the successful adaptation. As it was explained earlier, self-initiated expatriates do not have the advantage of pre-expatriation preparation as they are not being send by a company in their origin country (Al Ariss & Crowley-Henry 2013). Due to these specific circumstance, self-initiated expats could be considered to have a harder time adjusting to the host culture (Ibid). Additionally, apart from preparation and training post and during expatriation, the organization culture also plays major role in the adjustment process. Selmer & de Leon (2002) bring up the interesting aspect

that organizational culture within its domestic context reflects the national culture due to the shared mentality notion. However, the organizational culture of a subsidiary abroad would be foreign to the local employees and with little impact from the host culture. The phenomenon of reaffirming and upholding the traditional values of the company in foreign subsidiaries is referred to as parental cultural control (Selmer & de Leon 1996; 2002). In these circumstances, expatriates tend to develop stronger attitudes of affinity towards the cultural values of their own culture (Ibid; Selmer & Luring 2015). From these findings, it could be hypothesized, that if the organizational culture in the new context matches the cultural programming of the individual, adjustment would not be initiated as there is no real need.

The last commonly discussed aspect is non-work factors especially in regard to the expatriate's family adjustment. This topic is predominantly discussed due to the potential negative influence that failure or challenges of spousal and/or children adjustment can have on the general adjustment of the expatriate (Shaffer & Harrison 2001). According to Shaffer & Harrison (2001), difficulties in continuing professional development and/or creating a social support circle in the new place, could result in feelings of frustration, loneliness and low self-esteem in both the expats and their partners.

It must be mentioned that there are several issues with the existing literature on self-initiated expatriates and cross-cultural adjustment. For one, the focus is directed towards the highly educated and skilled individuals coming from developed (mostly Western) countries (Begley et al. 2008). Furthermore, research on self-initiated expatriates lacks contextualization especially in understanding the national and host country cultures and how cultural patterns are translated and adapted (Al Ariss & Crowley-Henry 2013).

3.2. Work-life balance: A critique

Review of the existing literature outlined wide-spread agreement for diversification of the work-life balance literature with some authors calling for efforts to challenge the Western "overestimated perspective" (Dabic et al. 2013:18). Recent years have seen rise in the literature directed towards Asian countries, more specifically Japan, India and China (see Chandra 2012; Cooke & Jing 2009). It is worth noting the work of Lewis et al. (2007), who problematized the discourse on work-life balance and its two common underlying assumptions: the assumption of individual choice and the assumption that work-life balance is culture free. The latter perceived WLB as a 'choice' and a personal responsibility, while the organizations role is to enhance the 'choice' and provide flexibility (Caproni 2004; Lewis

2003). This fails to recognise the social embeddedness of ‘choices’ (Lewis & Giullari 2005) as well as the different constraints on individual choice i.e. individual perceptions about ideal worker or different management approaches (White et al. 2003; Lewis et al. 2007). Lewis et al.’s second assumptions (2007) is echoed in Dabic et al.’s warning of the overuse of the Western perspective (2013). According to these researchers, the utilization of the work-life balance framework with disregard to context perpetrates the assumption that work-life balance is culture free (Ibid). This leads to the enhancement of work-life balance ongoing inability to grasp and analyse context specific conflicts i.e. the conflict between new ways of working in the developing economy and aspects of the traditional culture in India (Lewis et al. 2007; for Chinese context see Cooke & Jing 2009).

Further on, Chandra’s efforts in the field assisted to outline the differences between western and eastern perspectives on work-life balance (2012). More specifically, Chandra (2012) outlines the multidimensional symbolism of long work hours in eastern culture as commitment and strength, and shorter working hours as signs of weakness. Additionally, gender roles are perceived differently within the eastern context which significantly influences the meaning and implementation of work-life balance. For example, traditionally career takes precedence over family for men as they are perceived as the breadwinners (Chandra 2012). The opposite can be applied to women as childcare and elderly care are considered primarily female responsibilities. This is despite the fact that majority of women are co-breadwinners and work full-time (Ibid; Cooke & Jing 2009). Grant-Villone & Ensher (2001) point out that conflict between the work and life can be observed on not in families, but also with singles. In their research on work-life balance in China, Cooke & Jing (2009) outlined that single career women face the social pressure of finding a spouse and the contextual fear of giving up their career for a family.

3.3. Work-life balance in Korea

While sub-chapter 2.1.1. provided insights into the Korean working culture, below the focus will be directed towards outlining the major themes and findings regarding work-life balance in Korea. As previously mentioned long working hours and hostile organizational culture are negatively linked to work-life balance (Valcour 2007), which is in direct opposition of the unwritten social norm of late nights and working weekends still prominent in Korea (Jun et al 2006; Kim 2011). The long-hours as well as the paternalistic structure of the Korean organizations indicate the blurring of the family- and work- domain, where work- becomes

another family. It is not surprising that contrary to the Western literature, within the Korean context “family” has an accentuating effect on negative job stress (Lee, Chang & Kim 2011).

The research on work-life balance in Korea deal predominantly with the conflict arising from gender roles (Cho et al. 2015; Cho et al. 2016). Massive efforts in research have been dedicated into understanding the challenges for women to develop professionally (Kang & Rowley 2005) and balance their professional and private roles (Kee 2008; Cho, Kim et al. 2015). In fact, the term glass fence was coined by Kim (2013) to portray the blockades women face when trying to step away from the female domain (inside the home) and into the man’s domain (outside the home). Examples of such “fence” can be found in the traditionally Korean version of networking: exchanging information over afterwork drinks (Cho et al. 2016). Such networking meets crash with the traditional expectations of women as primary care-giver at home (Ibid; also Kim & McLean 2008).

Further on, it must be mentioned that much like in other literature on work-life balance in Asia, work-life balance is considered an individual responsibility (Cooke & Jing 2009; Verma, Chang & Rainboth 2009). Thus work-life balance is often considered by the workers as a fact without feeling the need for an organizational interference (Lee, Chang & Kim 2011). This is further amplified by the organizational culture which stipulates long working hours, loyalty to the company and opposes the enhancement of government regulations (Verma, Chang & Rainboth 2009).

3.4. Literature gap

As outlined previously there are an increasing number of papers that contribute to the greater understanding of work-life balance and expatriation and look to challenge the existing Western paradigm. Nevertheless, there is still a need for further analysis that 1) recognize the work-life balance as based on a Western model; 2) shift the focus towards experiences of work-life balance of non-Westerners; 3) contextualize further the question of work-life balance and examine it from a non-western perspective. Furthermore, no available literature was found on the points of friction between Korean and Western perceptions on work-life balance as well as on the experiences and understandings of Korean expatriates abroad.

This research will aim to address these gaps by recognising self-initiated expatriation and work-life balance as concepts deeply rooted on Western models and culture. It would also fill the gap of none-Western insights in both subjects by focusing exclusively on Korean self-initiated expatriates. Finally, it will address the issue of lack of contextualization by

positioning the subjects within the Swedish working context. This will assist in providing much needed understand on the process of (re-)learning and (re-)interpreting cultural patterns as well give potential insights into the fundamental differences of work-life balance in the two contexts.

4. Theoretical framework:

In line with the purpose of the study, a theoretical framework is needed which would give the possibility to analyse the process of adjustment, while simultaneously give the room to examine outcome(s). To achieve this, a theoretical framework has been built up on two components. First, cognitive adjustment theory (Schutz 1944) as presented by Brandl & Neter (2009) & Osland (2000) to help gain insight into the process adjustment and challenge the existing mental modes. Second, Berry's model of acculturation (1997), which will assist in situating the ultimate strategy and outcome of the examined adjustment. Lastly, alternative approaches to answering the research questions will be discussed and the theoretical framework justified.

4.1. Cognitive adjustment theory

According to Schutz (1944) cognitive adjustment is a general theory of interpretation which aims to study "the typical situation in which a stranger finds himself in his attempt to interpret the cultural pattern of a social group which he approaches and to orient himself within it" (1944:499). Cognitive adjustment is a process in a multicultural setting, which shines lights on the individuals' learning and ability to adjust to new cultures at the same time. Individuals subjected to a new environment and new dynamics of interaction are also referred to as newcomers.

Within the core of the cognitive adjustment theory lies the understanding that group life is consisted of a cultural pattern which design all valuation, institutions, systems of orientation and guidelines (i.e. laws, habits, customs, etiquette, etc.) (Schutz 1944:499). This cultural pattern serves as the mental mode of guidance for the group members on how to understand and make appropriate decisions (Brandl & Neyer 2009). In crude terms it could be described as the unwritten rules of society. As individuals tend to want to act within the bounds of what is appropriate a cultural pattern provides at its minimum guidelines for appropriate behaviour and at best organize the group behaviour.

The validity of a cultural pattern and its ability to provide accurate guidelines to interpret the world around only holds within the framework of the familiar culture. Schutz (1994) contests that within the safety of one’s culture, the individual maintains the “thinking as usual” strategy referring to the lack of need to challenge and/or adapt one’s mental maps. The moment the individual can no longer rely on the existing cultural pattern to make sense of world, they are transformed into a newcomer. To continue performing effectively following the change of culture, the strategy must shift from “thinking as usual” to actively challenging and adapting to the cultural pattern.

According to Brandl & Neyer (2009) to adjust to the new cultural pattern, the newcomer must learn two main things: how to interpret and how to express themselves in accordance to the new context. Part of this process is recognizing whether they can adapt their pre-existing mental modes to what is considered appropriate in the new domain (ibid; also Gudykunst 1998). Inspired by Osland (2000), a third stage of learning would be added: the process of “letting-go and taking-on”. This refers to the process in which the newcomers leave behind their old assumption which are not suitable for the new cultural pattern and embrace the new values and ideas of appropriate behaviour (Osland 2000:235-6). The transformation power of the adjustment process could be observed in a couple of aspects according to Osland (2000:235). They are outlined in table below and will be used continuously throughout the analysis to better highlight the adjustment process of the self-initiated expatriates.

<i>The Expatriate Transformation Process</i>	
LETTING GO	TAKING ON
Cultural certainty	Internalized perception of the other culture; increased patriotism
Unquestioned acceptance of basic assumptions	Internalized values of other culture
Personal frames of reference	New or broader schemas so that differences are accepted without a need to compare them to back home customs or objects
Unexamined life	Constructed life
Accustomed role or status	Role assigned by the other culture or one’s job
Social reinforcement knowledge	Accepting and learning the other culture’s

Accustomed habits and activities	social norms and behaviour
Habitual, known routines	Substituting functional equivalents
	Addiction to novelty and learning

**Table 2. The Expatriate Transformation Process from Osland 2000:235.*

Only after having accomplished the three stages of learning can the newcomer reorganize their mental maps, adjust and recognize different cross-cultural situations. Here, it must be mentioned that the process of cognitive adjustment involves a continuous circle of adaptation and rejection of new information. In crude terms, it resembles a trial-and-error game. In some cases, especially when stepping into vastly different culture, the new culture contains aspects which cannot be easily translated or equalized to the existing mental map of the newcomer. Same could be applied to aspects of the newcomer's original cultural pattern which are non-existent or even considered culturally unappropriated in the new context. This calls for the expansion of the mental maps as well as developing of new concepts. Throughout this process, the newcomer would continuously revise the new information by referring to new interactions and/or activities. This would ultimately result in more accurate interpretation of the new setting as well as heightened abilities to act according to expectations.

4.2. Berry's acculturation model

As portrayed above the theory of cognitive adjustment will help provide insights into the mechanisms of learning and adjustment of the self-initiated. Nevertheless, by itself the theory cannot evaluate the success or lack of such of the adjustment. To achieve this goal, a secondary model will be added to finalize the theoretical framework.

In the words of Hofstede, the culture is the software of the mind and as such it strongly influences the norms and behaviours we adapt (Hofstede 2009). In order to successfully adjust to new cultural norms, the newcomer needs to challenge and expand their existing cultural pattern (Schutz 1944; Brandl & Neyer 2003). The process of infusing cultural values from one culture to another is referred to as acculturation (Hewege 2011). The culture whose values are being infused is seen as the dominant culture, while the culture which is being influenced is called the weak culture (Ibid:3-4).

Berry (1997) defined acculturation as consisted of two dimensions: cultural preservation and partner attractiveness. The first refers to the extent to which members of the smaller group

(i.e. newcomers) feel the need to preserve their cultural norms and transfer them to the new context. Partner attractiveness, on the other hand, refers to the extent to which the newcomers are attracted to the norms of the larger group within which they operate. Berry's acculturation model is essentially built upon these two variables. The interlink between cultural preservation and partner attractiveness creates a two-dimensional matrix of four groups, each of them representing the basic orientations towards cultural relations used by the newcomer (Ali 2003). Based on the newcomers' perception on the value of maintaining their culture as well as the value of creating a relationship with the new culture, they are positioned in one of the four groups (Berry & Sam 1997).

BERRY'S ACCULTURATION MODEL			
Partner	<i>Yes</i>	Assimilation	Integration
Attractiveness	<i>No</i>	Marginalization	Separation
		<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>
Cultural Preservation			

Figure 1. Berry's acculturation model. Adapted from Berry (1997)

As demonstrated in Figure 1, the four basic orientations are integration, assimilation, separation/segregation and marginalization. Integration is often considered the golden zone of the acculturation strategies. It refers to both attraction towards the partner's culture as well as desire to preserve one's own. Integrators find positive value in both directions and integrate themselves into the other's culture while remaining loyal to their own cultural norms (Ali et al. 2003; Shi & Wang 2014). If an individual takes on the strategy of assimilation it means that they have strong attraction towards the values of the dominant culture, but with no concrete desire to preserve their own cultural norms (Berry 1997; Shi & Wang 2014). Assimilators are generally less invested in their own culture and willing to integrate in the dominant society. On the other hand, separation/segregation refers to a strategy of clinging to one's cultural norms, while rejecting the dominant culture (Berry 1997). If integration is considered the optimal form of interaction, marginalization is seen as the most dysfunctional one (Ali et al. 2003). Marginalization as a strategy refers to the non-preservation of one's own culture coupled with the non-attraction to the dominant culture (Berry 1997). Marginalisers are either unable, or uninterested in maintaining their cultural norms, but have failed (or been rejected) by the dominant culture (Ibid). Here It is important to outline that

marginalization is a strategy mostly present in refugees or minority groups, which are commonly subjected to discrimination (Shi & Wang 2014; Sam & Berry 2010).

Additionally, while integration is commonly considered the most optimal form of interaction, in some contexts assimilation or even separation can be seen as viable strategies for the individual. For example, if the newcomer is joining the new culture for a limited time and there is a strong expatriate community available. In these circumstances taking on the separationist role could be suitable as there is little need to interact with the new culture (Shi & Wang 2014; Nguyen & Benet-Martinez 2013). Similarly, if the individual has the intention of staying permanently in the country, assimilation is a viable strategy (Ibid; Sam & Berry 2010; Ward 2008).

4.3. Alternative Approaches

Throughout the process of selecting suitable theoretical framework, numerous different theories were taken under consideration. To emphasize the process of learning and challenging the modes of interpretation, experiential learning theory (ELT) was considered. This theory places experience in the core of learning and development. Kolb & Kolb define it as “a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (2005:194). This definition clearly outlines that within the framework of this theory learning is a process – a result of transactions between an individual and their environment (Ibid). It could be contested that learning is, by its nature, relearning which builds upon pre-existing ideas (Kolb & Kolb 2005). However, implementing this theoretical framework would prove it impossible to examine outcomes of this (re-)learning. As one of the main aims of this study is to analyse the learning and their potential impact on the outcomes, this theory was deemed unappropriated as a theoretical framework.

As this thesis employs work-life balance as an evaluative space for learning and achieving ways of living that are valued (Sam 2003). Therefore, it merits to discuss theories that are commonly associated with the field of work-life/work-family balance and human resource management. Role and border theory are perhaps the most widely used within work-family research (Beigi & Shirmohammadi 2017). What is central to role and border theory is the interest in how individuals negotiate the work and family spheres. ‘Work’ and ‘family’ are considered domains which differ in purpose and culture but influence each other constantly (Clark 2010). As this paper does not examine the interplay between two domains, these two theories were not viable options to pursue.

As it was outlined earlier, the purpose of this thesis is to examine and analyse the process of learning and adjustment of the work values within a new environment. The main interest lies within the process and outcome of adjustment especially in relation to work-life balance. To achieve this, a theoretical framework had to be created that 1) recognizes learning as both a process and an outcome; and 2) provides tools to examine both those aspects. The cognitive adjustment could be perceived as the initial part of the acculturation process, while Berry's model grants insights into the outcomes. As the combination of these two theories satisfied both requirements, cognitive adjustment theory and Berry's acculturation model were determined to be most suitable for the purpose of the study.

5. Methodology

5.1. Rational behind chosen methodology

As the personal experiences of expatriates cannot be examined from a static point of view, the analysis must be developed based on findings rich in personal experiences and thoughts. In this case, qualitative research design is especially suitable as a methodological framework due to its emphasis on description and the power of context (Hakim 2000). In the words of Bryman, the qualitative design stresses the contextualisation of the area of interest by providing descriptive details of social behaviour and values (Bryman 2012:401). In other words, (re-)actions to work-life balance must be understood and analysed within the context in which they were executed i.e. a Korean- or International-owned company in Sweden.

Additionally, qualitative research design permits a longitudinal approach by acknowledging change and flux as integral elements (Bryman 2012). Utilizing this design would allow a more in-depth look in how choices develop and how work-life balance is perceived (and experienced) over time. Finally, it must be recognized that process in qualitative research is often linked to methods such as participant observation (Ibid). Due to time constraints and issues of accessibility, the study will inject the feeling of process and development of patterns by asking the interviewees to reflect back on their work experience in both Korea and Sweden through the entire trajectory of their work-life.

5.2. Participant selection, Interview guide and data collection

The sample of the interviews has been chosen using a purposive sampling strategy. Purposive sampling strategy is based on the assumption that some participants have a specific perspective on a phenomenon and should be integrated in the sample due to their unique

experiences and insights (Mason 2002). Due to the focus and aim of the research, the selection criteria included the following characteristics: professionals, who were raised in Korea; have work experience in Korea and finally, work experience in Sweden. Here it must be recognized that the sample excluded Koreans, who have not been raised in Korea or are a second-generation immigrant. These were excluded because this category was not expected to have rich experiences, information and knowledge to share about Korean working culture having never been immersed in it. The difference between previous and current working culture was a fundamental requirement since the adjustment process is of primary interest in this study. No additional criteria were posed on the years of work experience in either Korea or Sweden. The lack of criteria on tenure could potentially hinder the reflection on past experiences, so interviewees were asked to reflect critically on the experiences of their parents or close friends. Additionally, no criteria were predetermined in regard to the industry the interviewees should work in. While this author recognizes the potential influence of the sector, the difficulties in securing interviews made addition of this criteria impossible.

The table below serves to provide a simple overview of the profiles of the interviewed men and women. To guarantee the anonymity of the participants, their names have been changed to reflect the most common women and men names in South Korea for 2015.

Table 1. Interview Profiles

	Name	Age	Years of experience in Sweden	Nature of company
1.**	Seo-yun	38	11	Currently International company*; prev. Korean-owned
2.	Ji-woo	27	2	Swedish -owned
3.	Ha-yoon	35	7	Swedish owned
4.	Min-seo	34	6	International company
5.	Ha-eun	29	2	Swedish owned
6.	Min-jun	26	2	Swedish-owned
7.	Seo-jun	30	3	International company
8.	Ha-joon	37	10	Korean-owned
9.	Joo-won		8	Korean-owned

**International company refers to companies from Western Europe with a global presence.*

***Participants n.1-5 identify as women and participants n.6-9 identify as male.*

This study is based on discussion with 9 participants, who were ‘recruited’ via LinkedIn and Facebook and by reference of the interviewees or colleagues. Due to difficulties finding suitable time as well as the participants apprehension towards interviewing face-to-face or online, 5 out of the 9 interviews were conducted in written form via email. All interviews were carried out in English.

In both cases, the same interview guide was used. The interview guide was created with consideration of the purpose of the study, the research question and the chosen theoretical framework. The interview guide (see Appendix 9.2) included background questions and the interviewees’ definition on what is(not) work-life balance. Further, the guide examines the participants attitudes towards critical variables such as time, involvement and satisfaction. The respondents were asked to reflect on their (and their colleagues’) experiences with overtime work, sick leave, maternal/paternal leaves, efficiency and critically assess their attitude and behaviour towards work-life balance. All these were essential to gain relevant understanding in the adjustment process of the expatriates and which parts of the pre-existing cultural pattern were kept and which deemed useless in the new environment. In the cases which the ‘interview’ was conducted via email, the interview questions were further developed and made as clear as possible. Additionally, a small introduction was written in the beginning of the interview guide to remind the interviewees to reflect critically on their experiences in Korea and Sweden, and if necessary draw on the experiences of those around them (i.e. family).

In the rest of the cases, the interviews took place via Skype and were arranged depending on the interviewees availability and preference. Similarly, to the process described above the interviews were asked to narrate experiences of work-life balance and cultural confusions. This was inspired by Charmaz (2006) and Hakim (2000) who contest that such descriptive interviewees provide the researcher with a better opportunity to recognize common themes and gain new or unexpected knowledge. The interviews ranged between 30 to 50 minutes. To ensure the validity and reliability of the study, the interviews were recorded and transcribed. In two cases, the participants were approached to clarify their statements. The clarification was executed via email.

5.3. Data analysis

Following the completion of the data collection, the data gathered was grouped under common themes to come up with codes which were used as the basis for analysis. Later, each transcript was examined independently and repeatedly re-read to help identify key themes and examples to create codes. The themes were illustrated in the form of repeated quotes from the interviews. A coding template was developed for each stage of the analytical process. The data from each interview was coded and divided into categories which covered various behaviours and attitudes. Once again this was in the form of quotes from respondents.

The codes and categories were compared between cases. This process continued until no new categories and codes emerged. Overlapping and similar categories were combined to help stick to the core of the essential categories. The lack of a specific theme or category in an interview was also recognized as an information-carrying code. The connections between categories were analysed through the prism of the theoretical framework and in relation to previous academic work on work-life balance and cultural adjustment.

5.4. Ethical consideration

Silverman (2005) has outlined voluntary participation, the right to withdraw, protection of anonymity, obtaining informed consent and not doing harm as the main ethical issues in qualitative research. The Korean expatriate community in Sweden is very small and gaps in confidentiality could have negative effects on the participants. Since the pool of potential correspondents is so limited, there is a high probability that correspondents know (of) each other in the context of the workplace or as part of the Korean community. Additionally, the people interviewed could be identifiable for people working in big companies in Sweden, especially Korean-owned companies. To mitigate the effects of this issues the interviewer sought permission and voluntary participation and provided the participants the right to withdraw during the interview and later. Further on, no names were noted during the interview transcription – neither of the company nor the interviewee themselves. The participants were also asked to use fictional names when describing past experiences.

5.5. Reliability & Reflexivity

Reliability is defined by Bryman as consistency of the findings – whether the information is trustworthy (2008). Here, reliability is linked to the role of the interviewer, how questions were asked (i.e. leading questions), was the data honestly transcribed and categorized. To

address these concerns, all respondents were asked the same questions, no leading questions were put forward and the interviews were offered the opportunity to add, clarify or delete any parts of the interview. This opportunity was used by two interviewees to clarify their statements. Thus, there are no concerns regarding reliability and credibility of the reported experiences.

Reflexivity relates to the “sensitivity to the researcher’s cultural, political and social context” (Bryman 2012:393). All interviewees were informed of the status and origin of the researcher as well as their status as a foreigner to the Korean working culture. Therefore, it is plausible that the interviewees would adapt their answers to not shine negative light on their culture. To tackle this potential hinder, the interviewees were asked to provide extensive narratives and descriptions of situations. Additionally, in cases of misunderstandings they were asked to further clarify. The researcher adapted a neutral position throughout the discussions.

5.6. Limitations

A major limitation of the study can be found in the limited sample. LinkedIn as well as professional network connections were the main sources used to identify potential respondents. It must be recognized that members of the Korean communities, which have not lived or worked in Korea have been excluded from the sample. Altogether 58 people were approached via LinkedIn and other networks for interviews. Unfortunately, only 23 responded to the original email and ultimately only 9 agreed to an interview. Busy schedules, discontinued communication and negative advice from management can be accounted for the small sample.

Additionally, the author strived to provide a heterogeneous sample based on sex. Nevertheless, the female participants are more than the male. Future studies should aim at ensuring a wider sample and potentially examine new linked between sex, ethnicity and work-life balance. It must be mentioned that language barrier served as a limitation during data collection in terms of available literature. This study is inspired and build upon on a limited pool of findings on work-life balance in Korea, which are available in English.

6. Empirical Findings & Analysis

6.1. Defining Work-life balance

At the beginning of the interview, all participants were asked to share their definitions of work-life balance and describe if their definition has changed following their expatriation to

Sweden. The role of this questions was two-fold: First, it provided an initial signal of the current mindset of the interviewee. Second, it shed light on the existence (or lack of) of a learning process and change of values. Relying on the data gathered by this question solely, a distinctive pattern has been discovered. More specifically, all interviewees described a presence of work-life balance now and the lack of such during their previous jobs back in Korea. Perhaps the clearest example comes from Ha-yoon, who described her views on work-life balance like this:

“Before it was work-life balance or life=work. Work-life balance now is to live a life (goal) with this money one earns (method).” – Ha-yoon

This statements clearly demonstrates a reinterpretation of the role of work in one’s life because of the adjustment process. Work was transformed from the main goal to a means to an end. Similar opinions were expressed by all other interviewees, though the descriptions of “life” tended to be more descriptive with some interviewees. For example, both Ji-win and Ha-eun perceived work-life balance as a state in which they had enough time for interests, hobbies and (boy-)friends.

An interesting variable that came up during the discussion was age. According to some work-life balance is not easily obtainable, or even desire in the initial working years.

“I do think it is more a matter of circumstances. Like if you are young and want a career you need to work more. That is the way life is.” – Ha-joon

The idea of work-life balance as a right of the established and deterrent for the young professionals was also supported by Seo-yun. For Seo-yun, the first three years are a time of sacrifice. It merits to acknowledge that none of the interviewed young professionals shared this understanding or demonstrated any intention of putting their career before personal life.

A second influential variable identified in regard to the definition of work-life balance is sex (referring to the biological sex of the interviewees)¹. While females defined work-life balance in terms of “life” side of equation, males tended to use work as the reference point. For example, Seo-jun defined work-life balance in terms of his ability to finish work early enough to spend time with his family. Similarly, constructions such as “do my tasks on time” and “meet deadlines stress free” were commonly used by the male interviewees. Considering this factor is completely missing in the discussion with women, one could draw parallels with the traditionally Korean view on the role of the men in the society/family (Cho et al. 2015; Cho et al. 2016). Men are supposed to be the main breadwinners and often work long-hour to

provide for their family (Li 2016). As such their main concern is their job and thus the work-life balance is perceived primarily through the prism of work.

The findings above clearly outline the existence of a process of learning and adjustment. The examples provided by the participants demonstrate a let-go/take-on process which involves the creation of new schemes of reference and in some cases the internalization of the new values & norms (Osland 2000). They also signalled a potential challenge to adjustment for the men in the form of accustomed role and the corresponding habits/activities (ibid).

Finally, it must be recognized that the Swedish context provides a new environment which is some ways the exact opposite of traditional Korean culture. This would have without a doubt influenced the pace and process of adjustment of the interviewees. In fact, all of the participants outlined that it took them years to even understand work-life balance. This process and its main steps and challenges will be discussed in the following sub-chapter.

6.2. Korean-owned companies

Inspired by cognitive adjustment theory, this thesis hypothesises that with the absence of signals the “thinking as usual” strategy will be maintained. In simpler terms, if the newcomers receive no signals to outline the need for adjustment of their mental modes of work, no change will take place (Brandl & Neyer 2009). Further on, thinking from the perspective of Selmer & de Leon on the topic of parental culture control (2002), this research expects to see differences in the levels of adjustment and nature of signals between Korean-owned and Swedish-owned companies. Starting off the focus will be directed to the experiences of the three interviewees which worked in the Korean-owned companies.

When asked to discuss the working environment and culture in the Korean-owned companies, the interviewees described numerous instances which mimic the traditional Korean work culture. This sub-section will deal explicitly with the aspects of the Korean working culture which have been transferred into the host country and their influence on work-life balance. The first variable of similarity was the relationship with their supervisors and overall communication:

“I had to let him know (the boss) what time I was leaving to check about working hours I guess. I felt like he is watching me all the time” – Seo-yun

“You just have to do what he says because he is the manager. Even if he is wrong or this way will take longer.” Joo-won

Such mechanisms of manager/employee relations strongly correspond with a working life under a high uncertainty avoidance and power-distance hierarchical culture (Hofstede 2009). In Korean culture the senior managers are the decision makers and the employees the implementors (Cho & Yoon 2001; Lee 2012; Chen 2004). This is especially obvious in Ji-won's description of "following" the ideas of the manager and further implies a top-to-bottom communication style. These findings strongly support findings relating to the notions of inhwa and kibun and their importance in Korean culture (Southerton 2008). Concern with the balance as well as hindering the "losing of face" of their manager is integral to the traditional working culture and relationship between employee and manager (Ibid; also Chaney & Martin 2011).

Another influential variable with direct impact on work-life balance was the pressure to work overtime. The practice of working overtime is crucial part of the Korean working culture and is often seen as a demonstration of loyalty to the company (Lee 2012; Nam, Cho & Lee 2014).

"I was working really a lot. The only time I was having my normal life was during the weekend, but sometimes I was also working during the weekend." – Joo-won

The stories of staying after working hours as well as continuous availability outside of office hours are in line with previous research (Fischmayr & Kullinger 2010; Shortland & Cummin 2007). Furthermore, all interviewees shared stories of being contacted after working hours by their managers to ask questions.

Thirdly, the broader category of taking time-off was identified as influential. During the data analysis process, taking time-off was coded as an umbrella term to include instances of vacation, sick leave and maternity/paternity leave. While only one of the interviewees had children and had taken advantage of maternity leave there was a very clear underlying theme: the guilt and difficulty to take time off. All interviewees shared they would often not take sick leaves and work long period while being sick due to pressure from management. While the pressure itself was not reported to always be direct, the participants admitted to feeling guilty to be off work.

"I felt like I was not allowed to be on sick leave" – Seo-yun

"My manager always expected my leave to be as short as possible" – Ha-joon

In one case, Ji-won's manager called upper management to contest Ji-won's leave as the manager felt the time was inappropriate. This demonstrates dynamics of work commonly associated with high power distance cultures (Hofstede 1997; 2010). What is valuable to recognize is that within the framework of this working culture, the notion of time is defined differently. While Hofstede in his definition of work-life balance perceives time as something owned by the individual, in these cases "time" is not an individual property (Ibid). Working overtime, constant availability, inability to take sick leave and/or vacation, maternity leave all point towards an understanding of individual time as owned by the company. The mechanisms used by the management all demonstrate that "time" is a resource controlled by company/supervisor rather than a subject of individual choice. This is a direct opposition of the Western view on time and consequently in opposition of the idea of work-life balance as rooted in the Swedish-working culture.

Thus far the findings have clearly outlined the endurance of the traditional Korean cultural pattern as a main challenge for the adjustment process. The examples provided by the interviewees show a work environment in which the "thinking as usual" strategy continuous to provide adequate guidelines. Rather than challenging the mental mode, the examples clearly demonstrate that the working environment assist in upholding the accustomed status, habits and routines (Osland 2000).

6.2.1. Rationale behind enduring cultural patterns

The three interviewees were asked to identify the reason why traditional Korean values have persisted as the norm even in a new environment. Several explanations were brought up by the participants all of which concerned the role of the managers. One explanation was rooted in patriotism and belief in the traditional Korean working culture.

"My manager took great pride that we were Korean and we created this company.

He really believed the Korean way was better and we had to work more."-Ha-joon

This outlines not only a continuous upheaval of traditional Korean patterns by the manager, but also the process of the signalling out employees. Joo-won provided support for this notion mentioning that he felt that him being Korean and the Korean origins of his managers ultimately lead to higher pressure to perform. While both interviewees admitted that working overtime was common for most in the company, they both felt that their Korean roots enhanced the expectations on them.

“My manager was Korean and he expected me to work in the Korean way even though we were living in Sweden.” - Seo-yun

Earlier it was hypothesized that if the organizational culture in the new context matches the cultural programming of the individual, the adjustment process would not be initiated due to the lack of need (Selmer & de Leon 2002). The findings above demonstrate that the managers transferred the cultural work values of the company in the host country and channelled them unchanged towards the employees. Thus, not only have some Korean cultural patterns of work been transferred in the new environment, there is also a pressure on those employees with Korean roots to comply fully. Additionally, the managers’ belief in the power of the traditional Korean working style as a mean for success clearly outline the existence of traditional, long-term values consistent with Hofstede’s view of Korea (Hofstede 2009).

The second explanation was rooted in the short-term expatriation of the managers. According to the interviewees, many of the managers are being send from headquarters in Korea for a limited amount of time and therefore are more concerned with maintaining good performance than to learn from the new culture. These statements support previous research by Takeuchi et al. (2005) on the positive influence of tenure on the adjustment process i.e. newcomers send into a new environment for a limited amount of time often do not see the need for adjustment. Additionally, the provided narrative on the adjustment process of the managers supports previous findings: in the absence of signals for the need of adjustment the expatriated tent to develop stronger attachment to the cultural values of their own culture (Selmer & de Leon 2002; Selmer & Luring 2015).

Nevertheless, from a cognitive adjustment perspective it must also be recognized that a “thinking as usual” strategy can only be maintained in the absence of opposing signals (Schutz 1944; also Selmer & Luring 2015). For example, Seo-yun mentioned that she had a discussion with her upper management to stop her boss from contacting her after working hours and during weekends. She also admitted that she would continue to pick up calls and answer emails even after that conversation. Therefore, even though an initial signal was sent to the new Korean managers that the currently existing cultural map is inaccurate, the following actions supported the cultural pattern. This provides a sufficient explanation as to the lack of adjustment process of the managers and the continuous transfer of traditional Korean working values. All this begs the question if and how the cultural patterns of the three interviewees changed in the presence of a familiar working culture?

6.2.2. Adjustment process

By relying on the information gathered from the interviews, it could be concluded that the adjustment process was started as result of observation. The participants outlined their colleagues' behaviour and working styles as major signals which challenged the cultural certainty and acceptance of basic assumptions.

"I would see most of my colleagues would leave early and take sick days. In the beginning I thought they were lazy. Later I realized that it is normal. You come early, you leave early."- Joo-won

In this case the management expectations and actions reinforced the existing cultural maps, however the wider external environment and their colleagues signalled the need for adjustment of the mental modes. One such signal was the abovementioned different treatment employees under Korean management and people with Korean roots.

"(...) He would wait for the last Swede to leave and then ask us (the Koreans) to stay" – Ha-joon

Ha-joon's quote as well as similar statements from the other interviewees demonstrate a conscious understanding of the difference in treatment. Simultaneously, the signals emitted from their colleagues though indirect involved leaving work early, taking advantage of sick leave and maternity/paternity leave. Here, the initial response to these signals was negative as the interviewees initially perceived their colleagues as lazy and even "slacking" in their work (Interview with Joo-won). This initial negative perception was expected as it goes in line with the traditional Korean understanding of working and being available for the company (Jun et al 2006; Kim 2011).

Nevertheless, it must be mentioned that earlier it was demonstrated that the interviewees took actions against their managers and working after hours (the example of Seo-yun). While these reactions were not implemented strictly by the participants, they do demonstrate a process of learning. The interviewees were taking steps to let go of the cultural certainty and unquestionable acceptance of basic assumptions (Osland 2000). In simpler terms, they were taking steps to let go of the basic assumption of what is the right way to work and embrace the new value of work-life balance. It could also be argued that the reaction towards their managers, demonstrates a conscious desire to step away from the accustomed role as an employee in a traditional Korean company and take-on a role that is in line with the new culture (Ibid).

Interestingly within this study group, the biggest signal for adjustment which helped the newcomers understand and embrace the new working style was *labour law*. Different aspects of Swedish labour law, especially the 40-hour work week and the right to leave, were strongly emphasized in all the discussions. Therefore, while their colleagues working behaviour served as an initial signal for change, the law provided a clear guideline about how one should interpret and express oneself in the new cultural pattern.

“It was important to me you know that by law you can take vacation. My boss couldn’t just say no. It is the law.” – Ha-joon

It could be argued the fact that the newcomers placed the national law as a corner stone for adjustment carries broader implication for the academic research. More specifically the potential importance of stronger supportive legislation to secure the future and upheaval of work-life balance in Korea.

It is important to acknowledge that two out of three interviewees (Seo-yun & Joo-won) quit their respective companies and have been working in Swedish-based companies for the past couple of years. Ha-joon continued to work in the same company, however transferred into a different department under non-Korean management. This outlines a conscious effort to step away from the habitual and learn and potentially internalize the values of the new culture (Osland 2000).

“I wanted to experience this work-life balance and the Swedish way.” – Joo-won

The newcomers have discovered holes in their cultural maps. From the gathered information, the interviewees have reached to an understanding of the new environment as a culture which should permit shorter working hours, more flexibility, clearer lines between work and private life. What is of interest here is not only the fact that the interviewees have discovered the differences in the cultural patterns and their approach to work-life balance, but rather that the new cultural pattern was ultimately considered more attractive. Having been unable to experience the “Swedish way” in their respective positions, the interviewees opted out for letting-go of the environment all together.

“When I left the company, they were offering that (talking about promotions) but I decided to leave anyway, because work-life balance is very important to me.” Seo-yun

This statement further outlines a sense of letting-go of the unexamined life dedicated to the company, towards a more constructed and self-initiated life (Osland 2000). Seo-yun's words could be seen as arguing for the re-take of "time" and a shift towards a more individual-base view on work-life balance. All in all, the presented narratives demonstrate heightened sense of self-awareness, conscious desire to learn the new norms and overall attraction towards the idea of work-life balance.

6.2.3. Implications for the research

The purpose of this study is to examine the process of learning and adaptation of work values within the framework of the Swedish working culture. The initial analysis demonstrated a transfer of Korean working values into the Swedish-based company, a phenomenon referred to as parental cultural control (Selmer & de Leon 2002). As a product of this, the interviewees had the possibility to maintain the "thinking as usual" strategy for longer period. The process of learning was triggered partially by observations of their colleagues working habits and styles. Here efforts to implement the newly learned values were unsuccessfully expressed (referring to Seo-yun's dialogue with her boss). Nevertheless, the incentive to start a more active adjustment process was rooted in Swedish labour law. As a result of these signals, the expatriates reinterpreted the cultural pattern as one that should allow more flexibility in work and greater freedom to pursue social life. The findings indicated a process of letting-go of the cultural rigidity, unquestionable acceptable and habitual routines and accustomed habits. The interviewees demonstrated a conscious desire to understand (even internalize) the perception of the new culture and its values along with learning new behaviours and adapting their mental modes.

Finally, it must be recognized that this section of the analysis dealt with learning and adjustment in a minimal signal environment. The following section will aim to understand how the adjustment process looks for those expatriates who are subjected to signals from the beginning in Swedish and Internationally-owned companies in Sweden. As Seo-yun and Joo-won continued on to work for Swedish-owned companies their experiences will be part of the analysis below.

6.3. Swedish and internationally-owned companies

In line with cognitive adjustment theory, the newcomers initially implemented the "thinking as usual" strategy in their new environment (Schutz 1994; Brandl & Neyer 2009). This was an expected start of the adjustment process as the interviewees start identifying the gaps

between their interpretations and expressions and the new cultural pattern. This process of learning is seen as a time of trial and error (Osland 2000). Commonly identified variables were *working hours* and *time off* which was expected considering the importance of working time and face-time in Korean culture (Won 2005). Here, the variable *working hours* included examples of working cultures in Sweden and Korea.

“In Korea (...) it showed that you are dedicated to your job. Here when I stayed to wait for my boss the first weeks, my boss got worried.” - Min-seo talking about staying after work hours

As Min-seo behaviour stepped outside of the cultural pattern, her manager provided further training to help her better understand the cultural and working expectations. Similar story was shared by Ha-yoon about her first weeks on the job. Ha-yoon stayed after working hours to signal to her team that she would like to assist them in their work. This was interpreted as a signal that she is overworked, and her colleagues advised her to talk with their manager to minimize her workload. These are clear examples of the clash between working cultural and their accustomed habits and roles.

“It was weird cause my colleagues kept on saying I do not have to stay after work hours if I have no work.” – Ha-joon

Similar initial feelings of weirdness and concern were shared by most of the interviewees in the beginning of their adjustment process. For example, Min-jun shared that to cope with the uncomfortable feeling of leaving before his boss, he used to ask permission in the beginning. He further shared that while he feels more at ease now, he never leaves first from the office. These examples outline a learning process which is based on identifying holes in the personal frames of reference about working culture. Once again, the practice of trial and error was implemented, and errors were the product of remaining accustomed habits and roles (Aswathappa 2010). Here the interviewees, gradually let go of their basic assumptions by relying on direct signals from their colleagues and managers. Simultaneously, they sat out to embrace new broader schemes which included the working culture differences. Interestingly, Osland (2000) contests that the newcomer should ultimately take on new broader schemes so that differences are accepted and not compared to the original customs of the home culture. Nevertheless, the findings indicate that while new personal frames of reference were created by the interviewees, they are ultimately a hybrid of the two cultural patterns. Min-jun

example perfectly illustrates a personal reference which still satisfies the original ideal of the worker and the values of the new environment.

Continuing, towards the second variable *time off*. *Time off* has been coded as an umbrella term for sick leave, vacation and maternity/paternity leave. Once again, the interviewees mentioned that they continue to go to work sick and abstain from taking a vacation in the beginning of their employment. Interestingly, this was also the case with Seo-yun and Joo-won, who previously worked for a Korean-owned company in Sweden and were aware of the differences in cultural pattern. It could be argued that as the new company is a new environment, the interviewees opted out to rely on their default cultural interpretations and their accustomed habits and role. This would be maintained until new patterns emerge to change the existing mental modes (Brandl & Neyer 2009).

As mentioned previously, the main signals for the need of reinterpretation and re-examination of the cultural certainty came from the immediate surrounding i.e. colleagues, managers. Throughout the discussions of time off it became obvious that the interviewees have moved from a place of acceptance towards internalization of the new values.

“Instead of working a lot and being sick for a long period, I just take two days off or one day off and then I go back to work and I can work better”- Ha-eun

According to the interviewees, what ultimately made them feel comfortable with this new cultural pattern was the continuous support of their colleagues and their advice. Min-seo described the process as almost “nagging” her to go home when sick.

What is unique about this subject group in comparison of the participants working in the Korean-owned companies is the overall feeling of positivity and empowerment. The notion of working better (*quote above*) and doing better were present in all the discussions. The interviewees’ reinterpretation of the lesser constraints on work hours and time-off were ultimately understood as tokens of trust and support by their management.

“My boss trusts me to do by job. Even if I am sick, I know I can take a day off. As long as I deliver there is no problem”. – Ji-won

Min-jun outlined that he felt motivated and wanted to perform better because the company treated him well. These statements were mimicked by Seo-jun and Ha-yoon, who felt that being allowed to be sick and take a day off increased their drive to perform. Broadly, these examples clearly demonstrate an internalization of the new values and the creation of the

broader schemes of understanding (Osland 2000). More specifically they outline an adjustment, a reinterpretation of the cultural values that takes a step away from the collectivist towards a more individualistic view. Here, time is no longer a variable to be managed by the company, but rather a resource of the individual. The feelings of guilt by the employees in the Korean-owned companies have shifted towards feelings of empowerment and trust. In the words of the interviewees, time is no longer associated with quality of work or loyalty of the company. Now it is acceptable to balance between the work and the self and ultimately it would lead to better performance.

Interestingly, despite the presence of direct signals for adjustment from their colleagues and managers, law and regulations are once again used as points of reference to reinforce the new culture.

“You are entitled to have your vacation and you are not afraid to say to your manager that you want to take vacation/maternity leave or so on” -Min-seo

All interviewees posed similar stress to their rights as employees to vacation days, leave, etc. This emphasis serves as example of how legal protection has provided the newcomers with the needed signal to fully embrace the new cultural patterns and the its equivalent roles and routines. Thinking back to Hofstede’s cultural dimensions (2009), much like with expatriates in Korean-owned companies, law is the tool which simultaneously feeds into the high uncertainty avoidance and challenges the traditional power distance of Korean working culture. Additionally, it could be argued that these findings are in support of previous research by Al-Ariss & Crowley-Henry (2013) on the difficulties of adjustment of self-initiated expatriates. While expatriates send by headquarters in the home country are provided with training before their expatriation, SIE have to learn on the spot often with little managerial and administrative support. In such scenarios law provides clear guidelines and directions when such is missing.

6.3.1. The difference between men and women

Through the process of analysing the findings, an interesting discrepancy became apparent between the men and women. As previously mentioned women saw work-life balance as a possibility to improve their social and personal life. Similar notion was echoed in the men’s narrative, however it also presented a sense of discomfort even guilt about work-life balance. One of the reasons was rooted in how they are perceived by their peers back home in Korea.

“My friends back in Korea say that my job is too easy” – Min-jun

Here, “easy” is used to describe a working situation with lower demands on the time and involvement. On first look, it could be argued that work-life balance crashes with the traditional basic assumption of what is the ideal worker. However, it could be further specified that work-life balance within this discussion is perhaps unconsciously juxtaposed with the traditional role of the man. For example, Seo-jun describes his childhood experiences like this:

“It was not pleasant when I was young and my father was working a lot. He was away a lot. But that is the situation for many Korea families” – Seo-jun

Joo-woo also states that when he was younger he would spend most of his time with his mother and his father worked. In a highly masculine culture such as Korea the man as the main provider and the one that puts in long hours (Chandra 2012; Kim 2011; Jun et al. 2006). The continuous emphasis on the role their fathers played and reflection on those memories indicates that the traditional Korean model serves as a personal frame of reference for the men.

It merits to outline again that all men provided definitions of work-life balance which crudely boiled down to work first, life second. While highlighting their appreciation that they can spend more time with their family and social circle, the men also saw work as their main responsibility. This demonstrates a level of adjustment towards work-life balance which is much more complex the let-go, take-on narrative. Here, the men have negotiated work as something to be finished “on time” (Seo-jun) and which allows them to be “involved after work” (Ha-joon) with their families. Thus, the men have learned and embraced the aspect of involvement to include higher psychological effort and presence in the home domain as well as the work domain. Simultaneously, “work” has been reinterpreted to fit within the Swedish working culture and satisfy their assumption on the role of the man.

Interestingly enough, no similar patterns of renegotiating expectations of masculinity and femininity were found in the discourse of the women. In fact, all positioned their experiences as female expatriates in terms of empowerment. Perhaps due to the dual role of women (as workers and caregivers), women did not demonstrate the same difficulties in reinterpreting the cultural pattern. In fact, women seemed to demonstrate higher level of satisfaction with their professional and personal life. While the circumstances of the women differ in the domain, common points included satisfaction with their professional roles, the

communication with their supervisors and the possibility for flexible hours. This was often linked to the greater possible involvement in their private lives i.e. hobbies, friends, family and children. It is important to outline that these findings in no way imply that women do not face challenges in achieving work-life balance (Cho et al. 2015). It simply contests that based on the interviews, men demonstrated a higher difficulty in adjusting the traditional Korean culture to encompass the Swedish view of “work-life balance”.

6.3.2. The other side of work-life balance

Through the discussions with the interviewees, unexpected findings were uncovered about the negative aspects of the Swedish work-life balance. While the narrative until now outlined the values learned and embraced by the participants, it also outlined a very strong stance on what is ethically right or wrong in the work environment. For example, on the topic of taking time off Ji-won mentioned:

“My colleague takes days off constantly. I feel like I am a colleague-sitter.” -Ji-won

This is an interesting insight as it highlighted the line that has been drawn in the process of learning and negotiating the new cultural pattern. While being overall positive towards the possibility to take sick leave and vacation, when asked for examples from their professional lives majority of the interviewees provided negative examples. From colleagues to bosses, the participants divulged worse case scenarios of when the system was in their view abused. It could be argued that while being appreciated towards the new work-life balance possibilities, the newcomers are anxious to guard them within the specific borders that they have negotiated. In Ji-won’s case specifically, the interviewee was not afraid to go talk to the boss about her colleague’s behaviour. On one hand, this once again demonstrates the importance of law and guidelines. In a traditionally high-power distance culture, the boss would be the one that addresses issues with the system and other employees (Hofstede 2010). On the other hand, while not specifically stated, these accounts carry the slight undertone of Korean patriotism and perhaps even superiority of work ethic and style. This perhaps is best illustrated in the following statement:

“You just have to meet the deadlines (...) Honestly, work now is a piece of cake”-Ha-yoon

While majority of the interviewees perceived the Swedish working style as more efficient, there seemed to be an overall agreement that working in the Swedish-owned companies is a lot easier. In fact, Seo-jun expressed his bewilderment about some of his colleagues going on

leave due to burn-out stating that they “*don’t really have that much work*”. This idea unsaid idea that they work more and/or better than their non-Korean colleagues seemed to be a continuous source of pride for all interviewees. All this demonstrates an adjustment which combines the internalized perception of the new culture with increased patriotism (Osland 2000).

A second variable which was brought up in relation to the negative aspects of Swedish work-life balance was the lack of organized afterwork socialization. This concern was especially present in the narrative of expatriates who previously worked in Korean-owned companies.

“Back in (name of Korean-owned company) we would go out for drinks and dinner after work. A bit like Korean barbeque. We don’t have this here at (name of Swedish owned company).”- Seo-yun

While Ji-won & Seo-jun outlined their enjoyment of the traditional Swedish fika, they also mentioned difficulties in getting to know people socially in Sweden. Min-jun was perhaps the most direct in his statement that after three years he does not even know where his colleagues live. Ha-joon was the only interviewee who did not attest to having difficulties socializing. Nevertheless, he also added that much of his social interactions afterwork are with his previous (predominantly Korean) working team, rather than his current team.

The perceived negative effect of socialization on work-life balance can be accounted to the differences in relationships between individualistic and collectivist societies. From a western perspective satisfaction of work-life balance refers to equal satisfaction in work and family roles. This implies much looser relationships and a clearer line between private and professional (Hofstede 2009). However, within the Korean culture the working team is seen as “we” implying a much closer relationship between the team members (Li 2006). As work takes a vast portion of one’s time, the broader team and company as a whole are perceived as an extension to the family (Lee, Chang & Kim 2011) Therefore, it is only natural socialization to take place within the space of the working team and for it to play a role in achieving satisfaction of work-life balance. It must be acknowledged that socialization is just one influential variable to work-life balance satisfaction and does not imply overall dissatisfaction of the interviewees.

Additionally, it could be argued that the lack of driven socialization would hinder the full adjustment of the expatriates in the new environment. This argument is especially relevant when recognising the role of host country nationals as signal carriers for change (Mahajan &

Toh 2014; Takeuchi 2010). Ultimately, the participants who have worked in Swedish-owned companies have demonstrated equal levels of adjustment despite shorter tenures to the expatriates who have previously worked in Korean-owned company. Lee (2002) provides an explanation for this in the form of communication, interaction and social network influence (also Li 2016).

6.3.3. Implication for the research

The analysis of expatriation learning in Swedish and Internally-owned companies outlined that the thinking as usual strategy was implemented by all interviewees in the beginning of their employment. Within this new context, the main signals for the need of reinterpretation and re-examination of the cultural certainty came from the immediate surrounding i.e. colleagues, managers. Overall, the findings outlined a learning processes which involved a step away from the collectivist, high power distance and uncertainty avoidance associated with the traditional Korean culture. In fact, the interviewees continuously expressed themselves in forms synonymous with a more flexible work culture and individualistic values. This was especially present in conversations regarding overall understanding of time, expressions of satisfaction and nature of involvement. The expatriates' actions outlined internalization of the new culture especially in their defence of the new habits and routines in cases of perceived abuse by the system.

The findings outlined that new broader schemes of reference were developed based on negotiation of the let-go and take-on process. This was exemplified in the continuous impact of law and regulations as a driving force behind the reinterpretation of *time* as a variable owned by the individual. Similar findings were uncovered in relation to the role of the men in the society. The fusion of elements of Korean and Swedish culture allowed for the creation of a middle ground in work-life balance which satisfied both cultures.

6.4. Berry's acculturation model

As mentioned in the beginning the purpose of this study is dual: to examine the patterns of learning of the expatriates and to evaluate how successfully they adjusted to the new cultural norms. The first part of the analysis outlined adjustments to modes of reinterpretation and expression in similar (Korean-owned) and foreign (Swedish & Internal-owned) environment. This part of the analysis will focus on addressing the levels of acculturation demonstrated by the expatriates. This will be done by relying on Berry & Kailin (1995) two-dimensional matrix of four groups (Ali 2003). Based on the newcomer's perception on the value

maintaining their culture and creating relationship with the new culture, they would be positioned in one of the four groups.

Starting off with the first group the expatriates in Korean-owned companies in Sweden. Taking cue from their interviews, it could be concluded that they were stuck in an atmosphere of segregation/separation (Berry 1997). This was due to the decision of the managers to enforce the Korean working culture and in no way a consequence of the actions of the expatriates. The managers actions go in line with Shi & Wang's findings on short-term expatriation (2014). If a newcomer is joining a new culture for a short period and there is a strong expatriation group available, there will be no incentive to interact with the new culture. Within these circumstances the interviewees could maintain the "thinking as usual" strategy. Nevertheless, the interviewees highlighted desire to learn from the new culture having noted elements of their Swedish co-worker's behaviour which they found attractive. This element of forced acculturation (or lack of such) is not addressed in Berry's work (1997). However, the findings strongly indicate that in the absence of external support the individual will not be able to successfully acculturate.

Another important aspect is the self-awareness of the interviewees. In case of the Korean-owned company, the participants recognized their own desire to learn and its lack of possibility. In the words of the interviewees, the desire to experience work-life balance and the new culture led to them leaving the respective companies/departments.

Overall, all the interviewees demonstrated a conscious desire to learn the new culture and its values. This was coupled with actions to understand, negotiate and internalize the new values and norms. The fact that the lack of organized after-work socialization was a negative factor for the interviewees outlines the desire to gain further social network and understanding. The previous analysis outlined a couple of elements (i.e. time, role of man) which are in opposition of the Swedish view on work-life balance. Nevertheless, through the process of letting-go and taking-on different aspects of the cultures, the interviewees managed to negotiate a new broader understanding and adjust their cultural modes. In line with this reasoning it could be argued that the male interviewees should be situated between assimilation and integration but leaning more towards Integration as a strategy. This strategy provides them the possibility to find the positive value in both cultures and adjust accordingly (Ali et al.2003).

On the other hand, women seemed to be more open towards embracing Assimilation as a strategy. This could be due to the sense of empowerment they experienced throughout the work-life balance practices. It must be noted that women also demonstrated pride in their cultural norms especially in ability to reach deadline. Nevertheless, overall, they seemed less determined to preserve their own cultural norms (Berry 1997; Shi & Wang 2014).

7. Discussion and Conclusion

Initially, the interviewees were divided in two groups based on workplace: Korean versus Swedish & Internationally-owned companies. This helped outlined that Korean expatriates experience work-life balance differently in the two environments. In the presence of traditional values, strong expatriate community and managers who uphold the Korean way, work-life balance is almost non-existent. In these cases, the interviewees were subjected to a separation strategy environment, where little was learned or internalized by the new culture. The learning experience was limited to indirect observation and by relying on law and regulations to gain insight to the new culture. What is important in this stage is the conscious effort and awareness to learning and novelty. Here, “let go” is the letting go of the entire company and taking-on a new environment which allows closer examination and potential adjustment to the new culture.

The experiences of expatriates in Swedish and Internationally-owned companies drastically differ from the ones described above. In these cases, learning comes in the form of direct signals from colleagues and managers. Despite initially defaulting back to the accustomed behaviours and routines, the expatriates took on a trial and error strategy. Aspect such as *time* and *role of the man* are initially difficult to reinterpret as they are opposing some aspects of the traditional culture. Nevertheless, the learning process ultimately leads to an adjustment of the variables themselves to satisfy the needs of both cultures. This interviewee group demonstrated a learning process which involved letting go of the cultural certainty and known basic assumptions, roles and habits. The expatriates have learnt to express themselves within broader schemes of references, which allowed them to experience and embrace the new culture and norms (work-life balance), while simultaneously maintaining their patriotism. Finally, it must be noted that through the process of learning the expatriates essentially reinterpreted the concept of work-life balance. While the variable of time demonstrated was successfully adjusted to mirror an individualistic perspective, satisfaction

and involvement continue to carry some aspects of the collectivist society i.e. the need for after work socialization.

7.1. Limitations

The main limitation of this study is the sample size and its lack of diversity in positions. The author recognizes that these two variables diminishes the possibility to generalise the data on a wider scope. Nevertheless, this study hopes to provide a reference point for further research in the area and open up for a constructive dialogue on the application of western concepts in foreign contexts (and vice versa).

7.2. Suggestions for further research

Further research should focus on long-term project following expatriates from their first days in the company throughout the adjustment process. It would be of interest to expand the research sample to include short-term Korean expatriates and their decisions to adjust or not. Additionally, the study would merit to include a more detailed look into the potential impact of different positions of power to the adjustment process. Finally, the study would benefit from diversifying the research methods as participants observation could provide interesting perspective on the day-to-day learning and adjustment of the expatriates. Finally, it merits to change the directionality of the research and examine the potential adjustment of the environment itself following the joining of the new expatriate.

7.3. Recommendations

The first three recommendations are directed towards companies in Sweden. Firstly, the study provides strong implications of the importance of additional support for self-initiated expatriates in order to guarantee their quicker and smoother adjustment. Secondly, companies would merit to recognize the importance of assisting the further socialization of expatriates, especially expatriates coming from collectivist-oriented societies. Thirdly, the continuous emphasis on the impact of law and regulation demonstrate that training dedicated to the rights of the employee would be beneficial to the more rapid adjustment of the expatriated. Lastly, a recommendation towards policy makers in Korea: the analysis above demonstrated a conflict between the western idea of work-life balance and the Korean working reality. Nevertheless, all of the interviewees outlined work-life balance as something to strived for and law/regulations as a helping tool to embrace the new culture. Therefore, it could be argued

that stronger policies and concrete guidelines would be beneficial to secure the future of work-life balance practices in Korea.

7.4. Conclusion

The study was successful in providing holistic, empirically-based understanding on how self-initiated expatriates experience work-life balance, what they learn and how successful is their adjustment. In conclusion, a simple answer to the posed research question can be found in the statement below: Self-initiated expatriated experience work-life balance differently between Korean- and Swedish-/internationally- owned companies. The culturally similar environment in the former does not provide opportunity to learn and initiate adjustment. In this environment, through observations the expatriates initiated the process of letting-go of basic assumptions, roles, habits and cultural certainty. In the context of the later, the expatriated demonstrate conscious effort to understand and even internalize the new cultural values and norms. In cases where the conflict between the two cultures was evident, the expatriates underwent a process of reinterpretation to create a hybrid of the two cultures. Finally, evidence suggests a high level of self-awareness and willingness to trade-off between the two cultures. This ultimately led to successful acculturation of the expatriates.

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9. Appendix

9.1. Tables and Figures

9.1.1. Profiles of the interviewees

Table 1. Interview Profiles

	Name	Age	Years of experience in Sweden	Nature of company
1.**	Seo-yun	38	11	Currently International company*; prev. Korean-owned
2.	Ji-woo	27	2	Swedish -owned
3.	Ha-yoon	35	7	Swedish owned
4.	Min-seo	34	6	International company
5.	Ha-eun	29	2	Swedish owned
6.	Min-jun	26	2	Swedish-owned
7.	Seo-jun	30	3	International company
8.	Ha-joon	37	10	Korean-owned
9.	Joo-won		8	Korean-owned

**International company refers to companies from Western Europe with a global presence.*

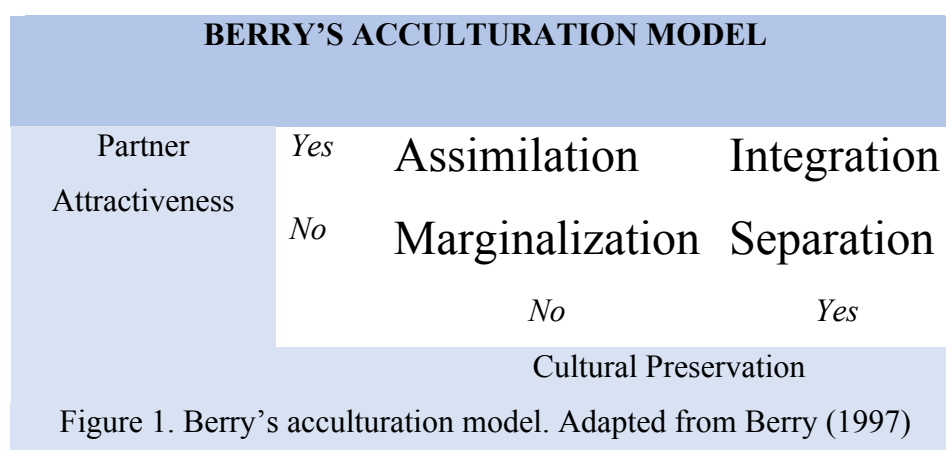
***Participants n.1-5 identify as women and participants n.6-9 identify as male.*

9.1.2. The Expatriate Transformation Process

<i>The Expatriate Transformation Process</i>	
LETTING GO	TAKING ON
Cultural certainty	Internalized perception of the other culture; increased patriotism
Unquestioned acceptance of basic assumptions	Internalized values of other culture
Personal frames of reference	New or broader schemas so that differences are accepted without a need to compare them to back home customs or objects
Unexamined life	Constructed life
Accustomed role or status	Role assigned by the other culture or one's

	job
Social reinforcement knowledge	Accepting and learning the other culture's social norms and behaviour
Accustomed habits and activities	Substituting functional equivalents
Habitual, known routines	Addiction to novelty and learning
<i>*Table 2. The Expatriate Transformation Process from Osland 2000:235.</i>	

9.1.3. Berry's acculturation model



9.2. Interview Guide

Personal Information

- Tell me a bit about yourself (education; marital status; work history in Korea)
- How long have you been in this company?
 - o Why this company?
- Can you tell me a bit more about this place? (number of other Korean expats, etc).

General work life balance

- What is work life balance for you? Please provide a detailed answer.
- How is work life balance achieved in your current workplace?
 - o Previous workplace?
- Have you used any of the work life balance practices that your employer offers and in that case which ones have you used?

Introducing main variables

Work hours – As you know there are certain limits on working hours in Sweden and overtime is not so popular.

- What was your initial impression on the working hours and overtime in Sweden?
 - o Have you experienced direct/indirect pressure to work overtime?

- *In your experience, how easy is to draw lines between the private and working time in Sweden?*
- *Do you think the amount of working hours influences others' perception on you as colleague?*
- How does that compare to your experiences in South Korea?

Medical leave

- Have you ever taken advantage of the possibility to take prolonged leave due to burnout? If not, would you?
- Have any of your colleagues done so?
- Can you remember similar instances during your work experience in South Korea?

Child care (if they have children)

- Have you taken maternal/paternal leave? Would you?
 - Does work life culture in Sweden enable you to develop in your work? .

Overall questions:

- Have using work life balance practices affected you in any way in relation to your family?
- Have using work life balance practices affected you in any way in relation to your professional career?
- Overall do you find the Swedish working culture effective? What about in comparison to South Korean working culture?
- (X) What do you think are the main differences between the work life culture in Sweden in comparison to South Korea?
- What in Sweden has surprised you about work-life balance, or work culture, etc?
- Is there anything else you would like to add about your experiences of work life balance practices?
