

Swedish, Polish or Swolish? Cultural perceptions from a Swedish start-up expanding into Poland

**A qualitative case-study examining cultural differences in a
Swedish firm with a Polish office**

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Abstract:

Through a qualitative case study this thesis aims to answer how cultural differences are *managed* and *interpreted* in a tech start-up operating in two countries, Sweden and Poland. The case study examines the company Astros (fictitious name) and is based on 11 in-depth semi-structured interviews. The study takes on an interpretivist view and an abductive approach where empirics and theory are adapted and tuned as the study proceeds. A theoretical framework built on three theories related to organizational culture and social constructivism is used: Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Schein's cultural levels, and Weick's sensemaking. Our findings indicate that there is a strong sensegiving and sensemaking process involved in expanding a company abroad, and that the process of building a common culture is complicated by factors of inertia among employees, specified as national culture differences, lack of interaction as a result of geographical and hierarchical split, and professional background. While the results of the study are specific to the case company, the authors hope that the results can provide insight into organizational culture practice and be studied further on a larger scale.

Keywords:

Organizational culture, Culture, Perceptions, Cultural Strategy

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The globalization of the economy is a long-lasting trend and a relevant topic for the corporate world, not least in Sweden. Since the late 1990s, Swedish companies have increased their share of employees based abroad. Among Swedish companies with foreign subsidiaries, the number of foreign-based employees has grown from being less than the number of Swedish employees to being three times as many. The reasons for this vary. One explanation is the changing corporate structures of companies where company groups are increasingly active abroad (Torstensson 2021). This trend showing increased internationalization and globalization of companies implies a larger mix of cultures working together under common company values, creating a challenge of uniting these and fostering motivation and innovation.

The academic research area of exploring and explaining cultural differences in national subgroups in Multinational Corporations (MNCs) is widely researched, looking at difficulties faced when moving or expanding operations abroad. The current research on organizational culture in MNCs additionally tends to focus on companies with hundreds of locations, implying a complex cultural scope and organizational structure, limiting these studies' relevance for smaller companies with foreign operations. There is therefore a lack of research on organizational culture in smaller organizations with only a few locations, and cultures working with each other.

1.2 Purpose and Research Question

This paper intends to investigate the culture at a Swedish-founded tech start-up with two offices: one in Sweden, and one in Poland, with an intent to unite the two national workforces under one common culture. The fact that the company is Swedish will add to the paper's relevance, given Sweden's high performing start-up scene (Hammarberg 2020), making organizational culture within these a relevant research topic. Additionally, the Swedish work culture at times has a defined and distinguished culture (Hayden, Edwards 2001). Furthermore, in line with an ever increasing pace of globalization and increased economic collaboration across borders (Torstensson 2021), it is highly relevant to study challenges related to expanding abroad with a focus on smaller firms. With the prior research in mind, as well as the challenges demonstrated by these, we aim to answer the following research question:

How are cultural differences interpreted and managed when merging two national workforces? A case study of a Swedish tech start-up expanding into Poland

1.3 Case setting

We have chosen to conduct a case-study of Astros, a Swedish-founded tech start-up selling a SaaS platform. Astros was founded in 2015 and has two offices, one in Sweden and one in Poland. The Sweden office is smaller, employing 23 people, including senior management and the founding

partners. The Poland office is bigger with around 41 employees, most of whom are more junior and work within Tech (31).

Table of concepts

National culture	National culture defines the proper way to behave within a given country. This culture consists of shared beliefs and values. (Hofstede)
Organizational culture	An organization's culture defines the proper way to behave within a given organization. This culture consists of shared beliefs and values (Schein)
Tech-company	Business that provides a digital technical service/product/platform/hardware, or relies heavily on it as a source of revenue. (Technation)
Start-up	Refers to a company in its first stages of operation (Investopedia)
MNC (multinational corporations)	Corporation that has assets and facilities in at least one country other than the home country of operations. (Investopedia)
SaaS (Software as a Service)	The delivery of applications over the internet as a service. (Investopedia)
Expanding abroad	Expansion of operations to another national territory (Globalexpansion)
Customer Success	Long term strategy business strategy for maximizing customer and company profitability (The customer success association)
Engineering	the study of using scientific principles to design and build machines (Cambridge Dictionary)

2. Literature review

2.1 Organizational Culture

Theoretical discussions around culture in organizations are often grounded in Schein's model of cultural dimensions, and are nuanced by incorporating Hofstede's dimensions of culture. Schein argues that the implementation of culture starts with one or more leaders as initiators of that culture through a task or common goal (2004). Cultivating a functional culture at work is furthermore essential as having an innovation culture has been shown to affect company performance (Mohan, Voss 2017).

The Swedish work culture has been studied in previous case studies, arriving at some conclusions regarding its uniqueness. It is characterized by its lack of hierarchy, including an absence of formal and direct supervision, standing out in an international context. In their case study of Swedco, Hayden and Edwards found that the Swedish MNC was more exposed to foreign cultural influence than comparatives from other countries due to the relatively small size of the Swedish domestic market (2001). Sölvell, Zanders, and Porter further theorize around the concept of a dynamic headquarters, from which Swedish companies that have expanded abroad can profit (1999). Research in this area is vital as the country of origin remains essential for international companies in line with increased globalization of the economy and higher frequency of MCNs, providing a knowledge base for business systems (Ferner 1997). Ferner also approaches merging cultures, writing that home country differences can diminish and coherence increase between different national offices as globalization of processes and homogenization increases with time (1997). Furthermore, international firms can vastly benefit from their home country resource base by establishing it into a competitive advantage (Porter 1990).

2.2 Organizational Culture in MNCs

The organizational culture of MNCs remains a widely theorized subject. Alvesson (2002) deemed culture's role in international business management an undisputed fact. It has been suggested that national cultures and their inherent differences impact the manner in which organizations are managed in different countries, demonstrating the importance of strategizing cultural values and their implementation when operating offices internationally. This is especially relevant when MNCs aim to build bi- or trilateral partnerships, which further increases organizational culture challenges for management (Khan, Law 2018). There is strong evidence showing that MNCs home country's national culture is a deciding factor in forming the overhead culture of the MNC group (Halkos, Tzeremes 2008). Thus there is a clear necessity for MNCs and companies expanding abroad to set cultural standards and actively implement validating values in order to drive efficiency and results.

Another area of research in organizational culture in MNCs discusses the difficulties related to this topic. Hoecklin (1995) holds that MNCs organizational cultures across countries should have similar cultural identifiers. Halkos and Tzeremes (2008) and Mühlbacher (1999) show that the MNCs home country's HQ organizational culture dominates the overhead organizational culture, thus affecting results.

In his case study of Enator, a computer consultancy agency, Alvesson reached several interesting conclusions regarding corporate organizational culture. Three ways of building a culture are mentioned: action, verbal, and material symbolism (2002, p.159). Although use of direct artifacts to promote certain behavior, there are complexities involved. Alvesson meant that a strong culture can be viewed as holding the organization together as a form of social glue (2002). However, it is worthwhile to separate organizational culture between **intention and outcome**. In Enator's case there was a certain culture intended by management, however this vision was not completely aligned with the observed culture (although it was a cohesive culture) (1989, p.193). Whereas Alvesson does believe that a strong culture can contribute to success, he also inferred that it is a favorable parallel to make when business is good, and less so when the business is struggling. Related to this complexity, it can also be difficult to determine the role of culture - structural factors are constantly present (2002). Enator's image as a young, fast-growing, and well-known company influenced the employees' perceptions of their roles within the company (1989, p.190).

Alvesson holds that leadership has a special place in the context of organizational culture, especially regarding company founders. Company founders are to be viewed as founders of the culture to some extent, and the values that came with the founding of the company are adopted by employees and reproduced into actions. However, as the environment changes, leadership adapts, making it an iterative relationship. This is also true regarding the characteristics of the subordinates, implying that leadership adapts on a cultural level as the ingoing cultural dimensions of the staff force changes (2002, p.107). Alvesson does however recognize that there is a limit to the influence a leader can exert on a culture, and that professional and occupational background, as well as nationality and class belonging carry heavy weight in any organizational culture (2002, p. 159).

3. Theoretical framework

3.1 Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Hofstede's model of cultural dimension aims at understanding cultural differences across countries and aids in understanding how business is done across different cultures. (Corporate Finance Institute). The framework uses seven dimensions (Masculinity/Femininity, Power distance, Individualism/collectivism, Uncertainty avoidance, Long term/Short term orientation, indulgence/restraint) (Hofstede 1980). The Hofstede model will, with its descriptive value, define the respective cultures in the two offices and create a basis for comparison on values and cultural dimensions. The standardized framework of the model provides a strong foundation for cultural definitions and is a prerequisite for an analysis of cultural comparisons to be made.

Although the theory has a strong foundation when it comes to understanding culture, some concern can be raised regarding the use of the theory. Trompenaar (1997), disclosed that it lacks relevance due to its age and lacks adaptive ability. Further critique is that Hofstede's model historically has equated culture to nation (Signorini, Wiesemes et al. 2009). While this is a relevant critique, the authors will take this into account by adapting the theory to the case throughout the collection of empirics, in line with the abductive approach.

3.2 Organizational Culture

3.2.1 Schein's cultural dimensions

Edgar Schein developed a model of organizational culture including three levels: artifacts, espoused values, and basic assumptions. Artifacts are visible items that define the culture and are not only internally adopted but also recognized externally. Espoused values are the expressed standards, values and rules that are to be followed. On the most abstract level, basic assumptions are the underlying assumptions of the firm that decide how we really act (Schein 1985). This theory will provide insights into the three levels of the culture, to be interpreted by interview material and observations, thus giving a nuanced picture and analysis of the organization, including comparing the two offices.

Critique to mention is lack of insights for people outside the sphere of the studied object. Portrayal of the basic assumptions is for instance oftentimes difficult to fully depict or find in an accurate manner. Taking this into consideration, the authors will utilize different sources of interpretation, including for example direct observations and interview material.

3.2.2 Sensemaking

Karl Weick's sensemaking, grounded in social constructivism, theorizes that humans make sense of their surroundings using extracted cues from which connections are made. Sensemaking is based on seven properties: based on identity, retrospective, enacting, social, constantly ongoing, based on cues, and striving for plausibility over accuracy and precision. Cues are drawn from frames, extracted and made sensible. Weick furthermore explains the concept of theories of action, which he means is equal

to what cognitive structures are for individuals. This is related to stimuli and the interpretation of it, which is aggregated into rules guiding our behavior (Weick 1995). Another aspect of sensemaking which adds relevance to the model in the organizational context of building a culture is *sensegiving*, where a leader can use tools to build a culture and steer the employees' sensemaking in a certain direction (Blomberg, 2020). Here there is an established connection to Schein's artifacts as the primary level of organizational culture.

Sensemaking will add value to our study as social constructivism is at the core of interpreting and understanding the processes that lie behind a company's culture. By providing two perspectives of the culture, namely how it is created (sensegiving) and perceived (sensemaking), it will create a strong foundation for analysis and an understanding of the culture in question. Whereas sensemaking could be argued to lack value in a practical application, this has been taken into account by combining it with theories providing more practical and explanatory value.

3.3 Framework for Cultural Implementation and Perceptions

Having presented the theoretical framework, a framework for an organizational culture's implementation and perception begins to take shape, combining the theories to interpret difficulties and perceptions involved. The theories complement each other to create a framework including external influencing factors, strategies for implementation, factors of inertia to change, and underlying individual perceptions to change.

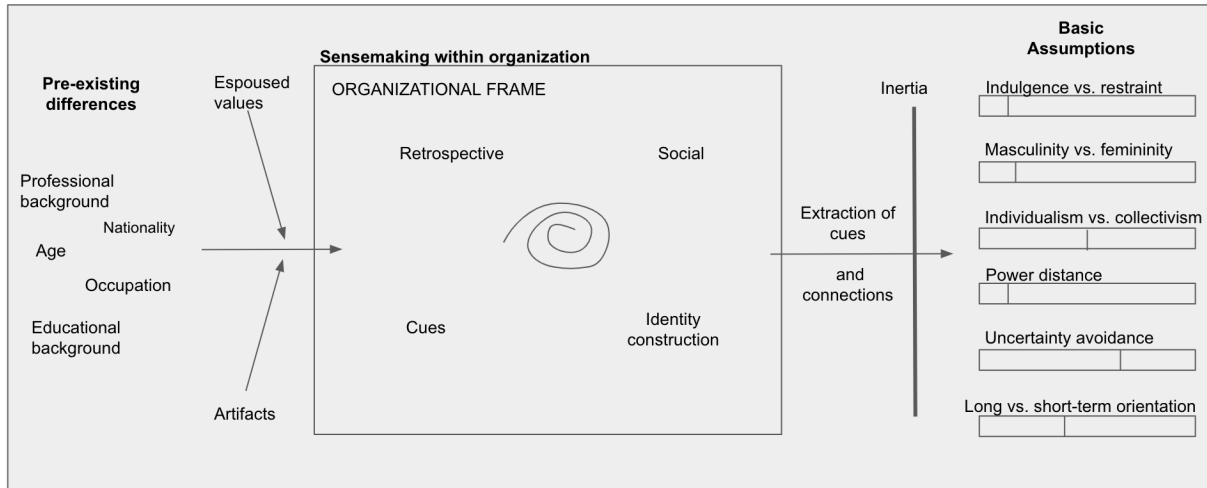
In any social setting there are pre-existing cultural differences, such as values and norms, that must be taken into account in terms of cultural leadership and strategy (Alvesson 2002, p. 107). In the example of Astros with two offices in two different countries, factors such as age, professional background, occupation, and educational background can be assumed to create differences between employees that management must take into account and in line with Alvesson's writings on a flexible leadership (2002, p.107), adapt signals accordingly.

Alvesson's notion that organizational culture should be seen in two lights: intended and resulting culture relates to Weick's sensemaking. One aspect of the framework is sensegiving, namely how managers build frames within organizations from which employees can draw cues and make connections that are in line with the aspired culture. For example, by epitomizing a behavior, establishing rules, and using Schein's artifacts can create a "knowledge bank" for employees where stimuli is aggregated into a map guiding their behavior (Alvesson 1989).

Sensemaking is also present on the employees' side by perceiving and making sense of the sensegiving from the leaders. Here Weick's sensemaking properties are active, and it is essential that the sensemaking process is successful in order to achieve a strong culture. There is thus an organizational frame in which sensegiving is intended to affect the employees' sensemaking of their environment.

This brings us to the last stage of the framework: the resulting culture. This is described by Schein as the company's basic assumptions, and can be understood by interpreters by observing Hofstede's cultural dimensions within an organization (Blomberg 2020, p. 294).

Figure 3.3 Framework for Cultural Implementation and Perceptions by Knutsson & Johansson 2022



This framework will be used to answer the research question and assess the difficulties and perceptions related to uniting two cultures under a common one.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research stance

This thesis follows an interpretivist approach. The purpose is to make sense of the cultural implementation process and create a deeper understanding of how it is perceived by employees and managers. The thesis further adapts subjectivist ontology by grounding itself in the social constructivist view that social interaction leads to the creation of shared meanings and realities, in this case organizational culture (Saunders, Lewis et al. 2019). It was opted for subjectivist rather than objectivist as it is recognized that the formulation of an objective culture is not deemed realistic and would obstruct the research.

4.2 Research methodology

As the goal of the study is to understand perceptions and make sense of a social environment, a qualitative research methodology was chosen. This is because the authors intend to derive meaning from words and observations in light of our research question and interpretivist approach (Saunders, Lewis et al. 2019, p.179).

This paper will further follow an abductive stance on research which is relevant for case-studies. Observations will be used to provide stronger interpretation, and the empirics and theory are iteratively adapted and refined throughout the process. This is well aligned with our theoretical framework as we intend to answer a question of *how*. Opting for a clearly defined inductive or deductive paradigm would limit our research by either engaging in a riskful study by use of induction, or simply creating a limited research space if a deductive method had been chosen (Alvesson, Skoldberg 2009, p.4).

4.3 Research design

The study will be built on qualitative in-depth semi-structured interviews. The project assumes a multi-method qualitative approach where the interviews and subsequent observations build the foundation of the data. A qualitative approach will allow us to gain access to the environment being researched and to be able to study how the participants understand and interact with this environment (Saunders, Lewis et al. 2019). Semi-structured interviews are preferred for their flexibility and allow for the participant to interpret the questions themselves, which is an important aspect of an interpretivist study (Bryman, Bell 2013, p.476).

We will rely on interviews and observations to establish a view of the organizational outlook in terms of culture. Meaning that, dependence on the interview objects and their understanding of culture is high. Further problematization is that our axiological standpoint has the potential to influence the assumptions that have to be made in regards to the interviews and what elements that carry importance (Saunders, Lewis et al. 2019). To reduce assumptions or reliance, observations will be

used as complements to interviews and a large sample is used to widen the scope of empirics, motivated by the fact that empirical saturation was achieved after 9 out of 11 interviews.

4.4 Data Collection

The data collection started by identifying the type of company we saw most appropriate to perform a case study on. Seeing as there is limited current research on organizational culture in start-ups with only two offices in different countries, it was decided that the ideal company would have just this, including around 50 employees, operate within tech, and be driven by its founders. This was deemed fit as more employees and an older organization would imply a more mature culture, not as receptive to change (Hyder).

Interviewees at the company were contacted through email and interviews scheduled. We spoke with five Swedish-based employees and six Poland-based employees. Two of the interviewees have had roles in the cultural strategy of the company, of which one is a co-founder. This means that they have insight into the culture and values that are strived for, and have decided how to implement these. Four sources of empirics were used out of the six mentioned by Yin, namely interviews, direct observations, participant-observation, and physical artifacts (2014, p.105).

4.4.1 Interview Process

In line with the theoretical framework, the authors searched for data in three main areas of interest: cultural differences, sensegiving and sensemaking. For this reason, two interview guides were written, one for the employees involved in the cultural strategy, aimed at distinguishing the sensegiving perspective. The other guide was aimed at understanding the sensemaking perspective, and used for the rest of the employees. Both interview guides included questions aimed at identifying cultural dimensions (see Appendix 9.3-9.5). Furthermore, the authors had an open approach to the interviews, in keeping with the abductive research approach. For example, the first few interviews indicated which questions gave the most relevant answers, and these were prioritized in later stages.

In order to make observations on the casual and physical aspects of the office, physical interviews were conducted with four out of five of the Stockholm-based employees. This was not possible with the Polish office where digital interviews were conducted. The lengths of the interviews ranged from 31 minutes to 59 minutes.

4.5 Data Analysis

With exhaustive permission from interview respondents all (11) interviews were recorded and transcribed. All interviews were cross-analyzed by the authors employing a thematic analysis approach opting to identify elements of *sensemaking*, *sensegiving*, *Hofstede's cultural dimensions*, and *Schein's cultural levels*. After encoding within one given overarching sub-group, empirics were presented as quotes throughout the empirical section, in addition to observations.

4.6 Ethical considerations

Maxwell writes that any research project interferes with the participants' lives to some extent, emphasizing the responsibility of the researchers to make an effort to understand the participants' view on the situation, any potential problems, and adapt accordingly. This is relevant in this study as many of the participants are of a different culture, bringing a cultural aspect into this question where

values and perceptions of the situation may differ (Maxwell 2012, p.92). Such ethical considerations were made in all stages of this research. The participants signed a consent form confirming their participation in the study. Each interview started with the authors explaining the participants' rights, including that the participation was voluntary, that they could stop the interview at any time, and that they did not have to answer all questions. Furthermore, participants were introduced to the aim and scope of the study in advance of each interview, through an information sheet supplied by the authors (Appendix 9.2). All participants have been made anonymous so as to minimize potential interference with their daily lives. As some interviews were conducted in Swedish to lower the language barrier, relevant material from these were translated into English.

In consultation with the management of the company examined, the authors chose to keep the company's name private and used the pseudonym "Astros" throughout the thesis to protect the corporate dignity.

5. Empirics

The empirics will be presented in four parts: organizational structure, cultural dimensions, cultural implementation, and cultural perceptions.

5.1 Organizational structure

Astros is a company of 63 employees, of which 23 are based in Sweden and 41 in Poland. The company has grown fast, consisting of 12 people only four years ago. There are four teams; Customer Success, Marketing & Sales, Tech, Business Operations, which are dispersed across the two offices, three teams weighted towards Sweden (Customer Success, Marketing & Sales, Business Operations) and one towards Poland (Tech). There are three C-level executives (CEO, COO, CTO), all of whom are Swedish, co-founders, and based in Sweden. There are two other team managers, Head of Sales, based in Sweden, and Head of Customer Success, based in Poland. Generally management is located in Sweden, with the more junior roles in Poland. The reason for locating one office in Poland is that the CEO has a Polish background, and was inspired by a company to which Astros has close ties that had an office in Poland. Travel between the two offices has become a rarity during the pandemic, with most respondents visiting the other office 2-3 times per year. Most communication between the two offices is digital.

5.2 Cultural Dimensions

This part of the empirics aims to provide cultural cornerstones according to some of the elements that Hofstede describes as culture, combined with Schein's model of organizational culture as expressed through three dimensions. Understanding the cultural dimensions is an essential tool for any company that wants to become multicultural (Czinkota 2007) and Sweden and Poland have previously been subjected to comparisons in line with the Hofstede model, the results of said comparison showcase that the countries have different cultures (Hofstede Insights). In light of the scope of this study some alterations had to be made to the overarching model. The study hence does not incorporate the model in its entirety rather some of Hofstede's cultural dimensions .

5.2.1 Power distance

Swedish employees

"It's a really friendly and relaxed environment [...] people here are so laid-back and friendly and so nice in term of how they communicate with you"

- SSM3

"Oh yeah we do that! We give feedback [...] also the way we present and comment on feedback, being nice and polite. Everyone is super eager to receive feedback promoting that we want to receive negative feedback so we know how to improve"

- SSM3

"When ... [the CEO] talks everybody listens, it's fucking important that he's the one saying these [important] things. If I say the same thing it's still from my role ... [the CEO] is top-dog[...]"

- SSM5

“Now I think hierarchy has become a little more important”

- SSG1

Polish employees

“Flat structure and open communications and we are kind to each other, it is not correcting it is more discussing”

- PSM8

“Like any company that grows it has to create more structure as you approach fifty people, we need to start having more defined responsibilities. There are not enough people for us to do a million things. [...] Right now structure grows, and what comes after that is that rules are more clear”

- PSM8

“Yeah of course if there would not be some kind of hierarchy we would fall into anarchy, but if there are different points of view I do not hesitate to share my opinion if I think differently.”

- PSM6

Conclusion

The power distance internally is not perceived to be big by employees, rather the organization is described as flat and inclusive. However, significant growth and employee expansion has increased the importance of titles and formality as mentioned by some employees. The case of growth bringing more importance to formality is not an unusual case. Blomberg describes it as a common phenomenon when companies go from start-up to scale up (Blomberg 2020). Although the offices internally described little power distance there are differences between the Swedish and Polish office. These differences are made clear in respect to the power distance and organizational structure. Managers are almost exclusively seated in the Sweden office, giving the Swedish office a senior relative standing to the Poland office. Both offices promote relaxed yet professional relations between managers and employees.

5.2.2 Individualism/collectivism

Swedish employees

“The perfect employee should be interested in what we are doing, educate themselves and keep up with the business, do what you understand needs to be done but also become proactive and self-going.”

- SSG1

“There is some form of collective identity, but not so explicit that it is a fact, more a sense of belonging, we use to call ourselves Astros [pun referring to the name of the company]”

- SSM5

In Poland you are never alone, we are always there for each other, here [Sweden] we are forced to be more delegating for efficiency reasons.

- SSM5

Polish employees

“Dragging a vessel together with out collective force, rarely do I see someone acting as an individual [...] We are pretty much collective oriented”

- PSM9

“If you are working from Poland, from Sweden, from Spain or whatever, it should be one culture”

- PSM6

“If the team is becoming too big, it is natural that it will fall into sub-groups and it's natural. And on the other hand if there are people looking to socialize with people who are somehow similar, which is related to what they are doing, what are their interests, and it's natural. It is natural in teams that are bigger than 5-6 people that there are sub-groups.”

- PSM6

“There is no I in Astros in in terms of that we win as a team and fall as a team”

- PSM4

Conclusion

In respect to the two offices some differences are visible, for instance the Polish office being more catered towards a collective nature. This was not only mentioned by the Polish employees but also by the Swedish office. Something brought up during the interviews that ties to building a social group is the differences in physical presence in the offices. A majority of the Polish employees work partly or for the most time remotely, whereas the Swedish office has higher physical presence.

The starting-point for the management is therefore different, one office has the benefit of being able to build a culture in person whereas the other has to resort to building the culture remotely.

In both offices there exists some groupings of people, these were described by the employees to mostly be grounded in the working-tasks of the people. Being a part of the group did not bring favorable treatment in any way, rather it was a way of gathering around the working processes they were familiar with. All groupings were described as welcoming to outsiders.

5.2.3 Masculinity/Femininity

Swedish employees:

I have actively chosen a work-place where my job is bonus based, to some degree to be able to influence my income.

- SSM2

Wins meeting on Fridays where we encourage each other of the wins we have had during the week.

- SSM5

“Not that much, we almost have a culture here to be modest and downplay our own success”

- SSG1

Polish employees:

“The culture in a job summed up in a few words, understanding, kind, patient, respectful, tolerant, inclusive rather than exclusive, social outgoing party oriented, relying on jokes, more informal than formal”

- PSM9

“Admire, we have a lot of skilled people and a lot of cool people and it's really a cool opportunity to learn from them.”

- PSM7

“The praise, it might contradict what I said about ego, but everybody loves praise, and because I know this, I praise people a lot.”

- PSM9

Additionally, employees in both the Swedish and Polish offices look up to the CEO, for example:

“[The CEO] I look up to, he is a very intriguing person”

- SSG1

Conclusion:

The culture at Astros can be described as feminine. Values of the firm revolve around involvement, friendliness and equality. Employees value their autonomy but it comes under conditions of meeting goals. General tendencies are also to downplay big achievements and successes. The Sales team differs slightly in this aspect and identifies more with masculine characteristics, for instance placing greater value in materialistic motivations and achievements.

5.2.4 Indulgence

Swedish employees:

“On one Friday we sent a bartender to the Polish office, thinking that they would stay a little longer; mix drinks. Then an employee called exactly at 4 PM, asking if they could go home. I don't want it to be like that, I don't want this to feel like an 8-5 job.”

- SSG1

“I think [work-life balance] is kind of important but I've also thought that if it is fun working then it does not matter that much and I like working. Work with your hobby and you won't have to work a day in your life.”

- SSG1

“Yes and no but [work-life balance] is [important]. Personally I do not require a set limit, I work 8-17, it is not important to me. I can work 10-17, do dinner then work 19-01, it does not matter.”

- SSM2

“I literally moved for a job and I realize that I'm so happy cause Astros is a part of it.”

- SSM3

Polish employees:

"I think this is my personal issue not an Astros issue but personal, I have problems differentiating [work and free-time]. I often think about work in my free time."

- PSM9

"I am happy with my current work-life balance, absolutely."

- PSM6

"What's most important is the contract of employment, because in Poland not many companies offer contracts of employment, especially for younger people. Usually companies like to use something [...] which is very similar to a contract of employment, but you get stripped out of all your employee rights."

- PSM10

"If I had a worse job with better money I would not be happy, I would not be motivated if I did not have the opportunity to work with the awesome people that are at Astros."

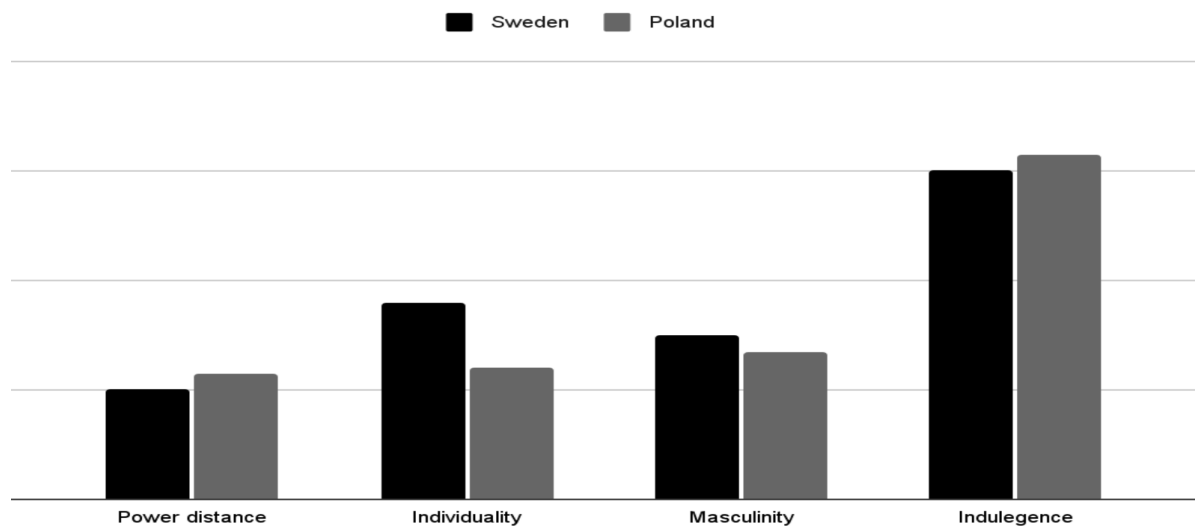
- PSM9

Conclusion:

The two cultures in the offices are different but both are indulgent. Both offices have a high percentage of satisfied employees that sense they have control over their work and life in general. There is however a clear difference in indulgent behavior relating to leisure time between the two offices. Polish employees tend to view working at Astros in a professional manner: they take their work seriously, but work is nine-to-five everyday. They value working at Astros but it does not infringe on their personal time. Swedish employees on the other hand tend to have more fluid working-hours, meaning that Astros-time spills over to their leisure time. Although no Swedish respondents viewed it in a negative light, rather they found working at Astros fulfilling and did not mind taking some of their own time for the sake of the company.

5.2.5 Visual Overview

Figure 5.3 showcasing differences cultural differences in light of Hofstede dimensions



5.3 Cultural Implementation

This part of the empirics aims to provide insights into the process of building a common culture at Astros with an outspoken goal of uniting the two offices under a common culture mainly driven by Swedish values and influenced by Polish ones. The interviewees in this part have taken on explicit roles in the cultural strategy, recognizing that there are pre-existing cultural conditions that have led to difficulties.

“Swedish values can be strange to Polish people in some ways.”

- SSG1

“In Poland there is a tech-culture. That can test us, those working in Poland are born between 1985-1995, so they’re a bit younger than [us in Sweden], they’re the first generation that has had the opportunity to get an education, the first generation that was not brought up behind the Iron Curtain. Or maybe not the first generation with an education, their parents were also educated, but they make much more money than their parents. You can meet people there in our age with children, a house, it’s very correct there, you take your work very seriously in a way you don’t do here.”

- SSG1

“How do we build a good culture? It involves several units, recruiting the right personalities seen to the culture we are trying to build, implementing a new recruiting process, aligning with culture and values before talking about their competencies.”

- SSG2

There is a clear perception that there are cultural differences that have created obstacles in the cultural strategy, understood by management to be mainly cultural and historical, but also professional, where the tech side is perceived as more difficult to reach. Whereas the goal is to:

“Get [the Polish employees] to feel a connection to the product and value proposition that they are creating, more connection to Astros rather than just the technical side and the feeling that ‘I am just going to deliver on my tasks’.”

- SSG1

The sentiment among the management team is that the Polish office has been more difficult to reach. The following example is mentioned:

“On one Friday we sent a bartender to the Polish office, thinking that they would stay a little longer, mix drinks. Then an employee called exactly at 4 PM, asking if they could go home. I don’t want it to be like that, I don’t want this to feel like an 8-5 job, it should be a nice place where we can spend part of our day and do a good job.”

- SSG1

This citation shows the willingness of the management team to use direct artifacts, as theorized by Schein, to promote behavior that would be considered normal in Sweden. Another example of the use of artifacts is how the Polish office has been decorated and the use of meetings:

“We tried making the Polish office non-Polish; the ventilation system was visible, which looked cool, we bought Scandinavian design furniture to make it cooler. Most of the Polish employees work remotely and continue doing so. I have not brought it up [...] but I don’t want people to feel like they have to come in [to the office], you shouldn’t feel bad if you don’t or feel left out if you aren’t.”

- SSG1

“Having monthly company meetings which we didn’t have before, everyone spending some time on where we are going, having a yearly physical kick-off. Aligning everyone, making them understand that we are going somewhere and getting them to join the journey, not just individually but see the product.”

- SSG2

This shows that the cultural strategy has been both subtle and abstract, while also bringing up the increased frequency of remote work resulting from the pandemic, both for the Swedish and Polish offices. However, since the restrictions have loosened, the Swedish office has consistently had higher physical presence than the Polish office where many employees prefer to work from home.

The remote working caused by the pandemic combined with communication being digital between the two offices is also recognized as a problem in uniting the two offices.

“Communicating physically vs. digitally, it’s more difficult to use your intuition and talk casually. If you go into a digital meeting with 7-8 people, it’s hard to ask what you did this weekend. The relationship with the people in Poland becomes more professional in the bigger picture, we don’t have the same possibility to get to know each other. [...]. [The environment we meet in with the Polish employees is] more direct and professional.”

- SSG2

5.4 Cultural Perception

5.4.1 Perceptions of the culture and satisfaction at work

“There has to be a culture, we don’t want employees to create sub-cultures, we are trying to structure this now. If you ask [our employees] to say 10 words to define Astros you might get 50 words in total, but there will be 3-4 words that everyone mentions, but the rest will be a little bit of everything.”

- SSG1

This shows how the culture strategy’s success is perceived by management. This part of the empirics aims to present how the employees perceive the culture of Astros, which can then be compared with management’s perception.

One of the managers in the Polish office seems to think that the culture is strong and satisfaction is high, despite remote-working for the last two years. Transparency is mentioned in different interviews as an important part of Astros:

“Before the pandemic we had the office and we had so many laughs everyday, and when we moved to the distributed way of working we were afraid that the times of great atmosphere were bound to us being in the same place, but now we have worked remotely for two years and still people are joining Astros and saying that the atmosphere is amazing and having so much fun.”

- PSM4

*“The manager style of Swedish companies felt similar to me, I really like the **transparency**. If some decision is made it’s the bottom as well, it’s not to be hidden from people and this I really appreciated. The previous companies I worked for, if some decision was made, it was assumed that as an employee you don’t need to know, it only concerns management.”*

- PSM4

*“**Transparency**, kindness, responsibility, are some keywords, respect towards peers.”*

- PSM8

Satisfaction is also high in the Swedish office:

“I love Astros, that is something that I have already said to the management, whenever there is a survey I’m just like I love my job.”

- SSM3

The Polish employees demonstrate a high satisfaction with their workplaces and the culture at Astros, and those who have worked in larger corporate Polish companies were motivated to join Astros because of the freedom that comes with working for a smaller company. They also experience the cultural differences between these workplaces and Astros to be significant, showing an appreciation of working for a Swedish start-up and what that might imply culturally.

“In some ways yes, [you can see similar openness and flat hierarchy as at Astros in other Polish companies], it depends. If you take a look at some [Polish] start-ups and some modern companies, yes, but in majority I wouldn’t say so. There you have top-down management structures.”

- PSM6

"In Poland not many companies offer a contract of employment, especially for younger people. Usually, companies like to use something called [...] which is very similar to a contract of employment, but you get stripped out of all your employee rights, like for example you don't have to have paid vacation, it's optional for the employer to give paid vacation. You don't have to have paid sick leave, it's optional for the employer to give this. And this is very popular in Poland, so yeah [my friends and family] are happy that I have this stable job with a contract of employment."

- PSM10

It becomes evident that some of the Polish employees with this type of career journey explain the difference as working for a Swedish company rather than a Polish one, combined with the start-up culture. The Swedish employees who come from corporate offices instead point solely to the start-up culture as the difference.

"I worked at [a corporate Swedish company], which is not a huge company [...]. There were some hundred employees, managed from the top, strict job descriptions, and we signed contracts with dress codes when I started. And that's not for me. And it differs quite a lot from this type of company"

- SSM2

For the Swedish employees, the culture at Astros is not perceived as something unusual, rather it is expected. They also seem more comfortable with their roles in the company and their places in the culture. The impression is given that the Polish employees view Astros' culture as something out of the norm, and express a greater pride at being part of this culture than their Swedish colleagues.

Management here describes Astros' view of the the perfect employee, emphasizing the importance of being intrinsically motivated:

*"The perfect employee should be interested in what we are doing, be educated within this, stay updated to changes in the industry, if you do this then you understand what has to be done, be independent and **proactive** in your thinking. That you are loyal to the company as long as you work here [...]. If you spill on the floor then you clean it up, even if there is a cleaner who does it later. You take responsibility for the big picture, not just your own little bubble."*

- SSG1

This type of motivation is present in both offices:

"Part of it is getting what you want, you want knowledge and to grow, you want relevant knowledge. It's important for me to feel that the product, service, industry I am part of will be relevant in 10-15 years. So this type of growth motivates me."

- SSM2

"What motivates me at work the most is, two things, one thing is that seeing this product and being here for a long time, seeing products that were just ideas, solving real business problems, and listening to customers' stories, what motivates me the most is seeing people grow."

- PSM4

When asked what behavior they think their superiors want them to embody, PSM6, PSM8, and PSM10 all mentioned “*proactivity*” as one of the most important characteristics, a word which was also used by one of the founders to describe the perfect employee. This shows that the employees understand the expectations of them, and combined with their respective motivations they understand what profile their superiors are looking for.

5.4.2 Company growth

A strong feeling among employees who have been at the company longer is that the culture has changed since Astros’ inception. These employees joined when Astros was a team of less than fifteen people, and feel that they have benefited by having a closer relationship with management. Astros in its early days was described by one employee as a “*sports team*” (PSM4), a feeling that is no longer as strong. At this point hierarchy was perceived to be less structured and the informal relationships that were formed then are still intact. This fast growth of the company has contributed to uncertainty.

“It’s different when a company consists of 5-8 people, and this is also important for understanding the culture here. Everybody was aware about everything.”

- PSM6

“If you are part of a company of 10 people and a decision has to be made, you don’t wait for anyone unless maybe it’s a huge direction shift, but most cases where you have to do something you feel that you are part of the decision group because it’s so small.”

- PSM4

This change is understood by the affected employees as a natural process on a hierarchy basis; they realize that everyone cannot be involved in decision making when the company is reaching 60 people. However, it creates a problem on the cultural side as senior employees can compare the previous culture to this current changing one and show sentiments of nostalgia, which could give them a more negative perception of the “new” culture.

5.4.3 Professional background/Hierarchy

Speaking to the employees based in both Poland and Sweden it also becomes clear that there are groupings in the company, however they are more explained to be caused by team belonging rather than national differences.

“Support and Customer Success are different types of people.”

- SSM3

“Of course [groupings] exist in a social context, if you work in Sales, their team has grown, then it has grown into a flock around a group.”

- SSM5

“If there are people looking to socialize with people who are somehow similar, which is related to what they are doing, what are their interests, and it’s natural. It is natural in teams that are bigger than 5-6 people that there are sub-groups.”

- PSM4

These citations show that the groupings within the company are perceived not to be caused by nationality, rather professional background and team belonging. This split goes beyond national differences and exists in both offices. The geographical split of the teams naturally contributes to the

groupings, although this might not be recognized by the employees as it is a non-issue for them. Additionally, it was observed that the Stockholm office is physically divided by department, which could arguably contribute to the team groupings, whereas the presence in the Polish office is understood to be too low to influence groupings.

5.4.4 Interaction between Swedish and Polish offices

From a relatively junior engineer:

“Most of the time we are communicating with people from our own team, sometimes we are communicating with people from the Swedish office if they are involved in the project but yes there are times when we are cross-office communicating.”

- PSM7

“There were things that were not communicated to the rest of the Polish part of the company, and we sometimes learned it just because we had good relations, we would need to go over heads just to speak with like [the management team].”

- PSM4

One of the more senior Swedish employees said:

“There have been many communication challenges between the offices, it’s been difficult to get the sense of emergency [down to Poland], difficult for them to understand some things we feel are obvious.” “When we only have digital meetings you lose a dimension when communicating.”

- SSM5

Communication is almost exclusively digital with travel being rare between the two offices, limiting physical interaction. Most interaction is within the teams, except for company-wide meetings on Fridays.

6. Analysis

6.1 Sources of contrasting cultural dimensions

Starting with the influence that the national culture carries on *Individualism* in the respective country, both Swedish and Polish employees perceive a greater sense of collective when working in Poland. Part of this differentiation can be due to the distribution of roles and workload. The Polish office has 31 out of 40 total employees employed under “tech” categories, implying less groupings on a team-basis. Therefore the heterogeneity of the roles/tasks which differs greatly between Sweden and Poland provides insights to the difference in the more collective nature. Another part that anchors and strengthens the collectivism of the Polish office is their sense of identifying themselves as part of a Swedish company abroad, which we see throughout the empirics as a strong frame of reference for the Polish employees.

One major difference between the Polish and Swedish offices is their view of work and how it aligns and coexists with their leisure time, labeled *Indulgence/Restraint*. Polish employees show a tendency of separating work and leisure, whereas Sweden employees see their jobs as a part of their life to a larger extent. Again, the reference frame of a Swedish start-up in Poland strengthens this pattern, as the Polish employees appreciate the relaxed working conditions. Thus previous professional experience and nationality can provide an explanation to this difference.

The difference of *Masculinity/Femininity* in Astros is mainly explained by team belonging. Intrinsic motivation to improve the product was universal in the company, which could be interpreted as a masculine trait. On the whole however, the universally followed company values emphasizing togetherness and helpfulness reflect a more feminine side.

The only team in the company that was noticeably different was the *Sales* team, where more masculine values were prominent. Although more aligned to the general company values, the *Customer Success* team could also be argued to show more feminine traits, strengthening the role of team-belonging in *Masculinity/Femininity*.

In relation to *Power Distance*, there were no palpable differences between the two offices. The lack of differences was due to the fact that all employees identified themselves as a part of a company that is in a start-up phase. Their perception of a start-up was hence utilized in relation to power distance internally. This was more present in the more senior employees who were more used to a flat hierarchy, and showed appreciation of what this entailed.

Although the firm has some noticeable differences they are not problematic. In a sense sources of contrasting cultural dimensions are minimized and part of the explanation can be attributed to the successful recruiting of Astros that was mentioned as a part of the sensegiving. There is a clear emphasis from management and people hiring on finding the right people in terms of a cultural fit, professional background and capabilities are secondary.

6.2 Managing the cultural differences - sensegiving

6.2.1 Building a frame

As shown in the empirics, culture has been a major concern for the management team of Astros. There has existed an intent to incorporate Swedish values such as transparency and freedom for each employee to structure their own work-life balance. The cultural strategy has involved the construction of an environment designed to invoke feelings of belonging, satisfaction, proactivity and intrinsic motivation, elements identified by management as important values of a Swedish work culture. In line with Weick's frame of sensemaking, the goal is to steer the direction of the cues extracted from the environment by the employees (1995). A successful example is the word "proactive" which is widely used across the organization to describe optimal behavior. A failed example of sensegiving is the use of Scandinavian design furniture in the Polish office, which was not acknowledged by the employees. The pre-existing cultural differences complicate this process as they can influence the way we perceive and understand our surroundings. Efforts have been made to even out these differences to ensure that the sensemaking process is as common as is possible. For example, the hiring process is well-developed. Despite these efforts, the frame in the Swedish office appears to be more self-sustaining; the staff does not need to be pushed, while the approach in Poland is more hands-on. The fact that three of the co-founders are still active in the company as C-level executives reinforces the cultural importance and serves as a source of inspiration for the employees both culturally and professionally.

6.3 Sensemaking: Astros' Espoused Values and Basic Assumptions

An espoused value noted during the study was how employees thought they should act and how management wanted them to act. For example, management wants employees to embody behaviors such as proactivity and responsibility. Both of these behaviors were present in the behavior of the employees, with proactivity even being mentioned by several interviewees. Sensegiving has therefore been successful in cultivating motivation and to some extent behavior, as these were noted as part of the basic assumptions of Astros.

Another basic assumption of Astros is that motivation is intrinsic; all employees are motivated by improving the product. This is present in both offices, and is in line with the type of motivation management wants to see in the employees. The success of this sensegiving can possibly be attributed to successful recruitment. However, the extent of this motivation is not consistent across the company. A potential explanation is the fact that Astros is mainly active on the Swedish market, making it difficult for the Polish employees to relate to this part of the product journey.

As presented in the theoretical framework, there are sources of inertia preventing common basic assumptions uniting the two offices. Whereas management believes this to be cultural, grounded in the differences between Polish and Swedish culture, there are more factors explaining why the common frame building at Astros has only been moderately successful.

For example, the two offices showed clear differences in how they viewed work in relation to their private lives, as mentioned. Whereas the work-life balance seen in the Swedish office is preferred by management (espoused value), this does not hold across the entire company. Hence, basic

assumptions in this regard differ, meaning that basic assumptions are not universal at Astros. Here the cultural differences can explain this difference, in combination with previous professional experience. The Polish employees see themselves as part of a collectivity different from their previous Polish jobs. The benefits that come with working for a Swedish company in Poland creates an environment that is perceived as special, and is given more relative importance than in Sweden. The frame in Sweden can therefore be said to be more natural as the employees are more in line with the espoused values of the company, making the frame they are working within familiar. No additional relative importance is given to this frame, making the extracted cues natural and common.

The fast growth of Astros, going from only 12 to over 60 employees in a few years, has had a de-stabilizing effect on the cultural frame of Astros. For one, employees who have been at the company longer tend to let their experience of working in a smaller group with a tighter connection to management affect their sensemaking. This aspect of retrospective sensemaking means that discrepancies can be made in comparison with the current work environment, creating a major difference vis-à-vis newer employees in how the culture is interpreted. The fast growth additionally means that the frame is constantly changing as the social environment changes, affecting the interactive element of sensemaking. This is however a natural process; as interaction becomes less frequent, generic subjects are created (Blomberg 2020). It is also important to recognize that the relatively short lifespan of Astros and fast growth means that the culture and its inherent values and norms have likely not been stabilized or institutionalized (Alvesson 1989, p.168).

The geographical split between the teams in the company has led to the already existing cross-team separations to widen. The limited interaction between the teams on a social level has led to the creation of separate frames for the respective teams, limiting the shared experiences that are vital in building a common sensemaking frame and basic assumptions.

7. Discussion

7.1 Answer to the Research Question

Through extensive insight from qualitative material, the authors have investigated organizational culture at Astros. Using a nuanced theoretical framework, empirics have been extracted to answer the following research question:

How are cultural differences interpreted and managed when merging two national workforces? A case study of a Swedish tech start-up expanding into Poland

Sensemaking and sensegiving are active and adapted to different cultures

The analysis shows that sensemaking and sensegiving are both active in the organizational culture of Astros. This is seen in the fact that management used varying signals to communicate with the different offices and professional groups, while these signals were interpreted differently by the different groups.

From the theoretical framework and analysis, it can be derived that there are differences between the two workforces that affect the sensegiving and sensemaking process. Whereas the theoretical framework and literature review suggested that the strongest factors would reside in national cultural differences, the analysis shows that professional background and role within the company provide strongest explanatory value of differing ingoing cultural values. These have the strongest effect on the sensemaking process, forming a discrepancy between the sensegiving and sensemaking. The perceptions differ between these two perspectives, as one is ruled by expectations on how the environment should react (sensegiving), and the other ruled by personal reflection (sensemaking) and what could be interpreted as a lack of understanding in relation to the larger picture as individual satisfaction is prioritized.

Hayden and Edwards' (2001) notion that the Swedish management style's influence can become weakened when expanding abroad is arguably relevant in Astros as well. It can be argued that the values prioritizing personal freedom have been interpreted in the wrong way in Poland, where the employees are used to a top-down hierarchy. For instance, the differences in how the employees in Sweden and Poland separate work and leisure could be a result of this.

Sensemaking is influenced by culture and background

Although employees at Astros are satisfied with their work and are intrinsically motivated by the product, the basic assumptions of the two offices still differ, despite that sensegiving is adapted to the different cultures. The conclusion follows from the empirics that the national cultural differences can provide an explanation as to why the commitment to the company differs between the two offices, however not the entire explanatory value. This supports Alvesson's observations from Enator, from which he inferred that there is a difference between intended and actual culture (1989). The same is seen in Astros, strengthening our argument that sensemaking and sensegiving are active in the cultural journey of an organization, and that there are factors of inertia impeding the alignment of the sensegiving and sensemaking processes.

Professional background and growth provide strongest source of inertia to sensemaking

In the case of Astros, the analysis shows that inertia affects how the culture is perceived and managed by the employees. These factors dictate how the culture is interpreted and present an obstacle to achieving a fully cohesive company culture. The strongest sources of inertia include professional background, the geographical split of the offices and its subsequent effect on communication, and the hierarchical structure of the company. Returning to Alvesson's study of Enator (1989), his conclusions regarding the importance of leadership combined with the interactive element of sensemaking, makes the geographic and hierarchic split a source of discussion generating insights into the misalignment of the intended and actual culture. The lack of physical interaction and isolation of leadership (and co-founders) in the Stockholm office can be argued to impede the influence Alvesson claims leadership has on building a culture, harming the sensegiving process. This in turn damages the culture and results in basic assumptions contrasting with the espoused values.

7.2 Implications for Organizational Culture Practice

Although the results of this study are not applicable on a general scale as they are derived from a case study, the specific example can be argued to provide lessons for how to practice organizational culture in companies similar to Astros. As mentioned, collaboration across borders is a growing trend (Torstensson 2021), implying that organizational culture in such collaborations should show the same trend. Our results showing that splitting hierarchy and teams geographically could potentially harm building a culture is an example of organizational culture practice that could be of interest for start-ups planning on expanding abroad.

7.3 Limitations of Study

A natural limitation of the study is the fact that it is a case-study, thereby limiting the scope to which the results can be applied. A second limitation is the use of an interpretivist approach, meaning that the authors' interpretations are to some extent present throughout the analysis, despite efforts to minimize this. The same limitation is relevant regarding the participants, where potential biases may have been present, or the possibility that they were not completely honest. Additionally, potential points of interest may have been unintentionally excluded by limiting the theoretical framework to the chosen theories.

7.4 Further Research

An interesting conclusion derived from this work is the special nature of "tech-culture", more specifically the values and motivations of programmers. This was perceived as a special phenomenon of organizational culture both by participants of the study and by the authors, yet there is very limited contemporary research on this. Given the growth of IT services and programming as a practice (CodinGame Developer Survey 2021), we see this as an area of organizational culture that deserves further attention. Our results clearly point toward both a perception and actual pattern of tech teams differing in their behavior compared to other teams of tech companies.

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9. Appendices

(N.B placed above reference list as RefWorks ruins formatting)

9.1 Appendix 1: Interview Table

Respondent number	Respondent	Interview form	Duration	Date
1	SSG1	Physical	46:22	2022-03-16
2	SSM2	Physical	31:10	2022-03-18
3	SSM3	Physical	59:31	2022-03-18
4	PSM4	Digital	45:59	2022-03-22
5	SSM5	Physical	42:24	2022-03-22
6	PSM6	Digital	41:10	2022-03-24
7	PSM7	Digital	41:22	2022-03-30
8	PSM8	Digital	41:07	2022-03-31
9	PSM9	Digital	48:40	2022-03-31
10	PSM10	Digital	34:39	2022-04-08
11	SSG11	Digital	36:23	2022-04-12
Key: example respondent 1: SSG1 (Sweden, Sensegiving #1) Respondent 9: SSM9 (Polish, Sensemaking #9)				

9.2 Information sheet

Following is the message sent to participants in advance of the interview aimed to supply them with information regarding the thesis:

Hello,

Our names are Max and Anton and we are two students from Stockholm School of Economics, currently writing our Bachelor Thesis in Management. The thesis aims to

investigate how Swedish tech-companies handle cultural differences and implement an organizational culture when expanding abroad. Increased globalization and economic collaboration across borders makes this question especially relevant.

This is where you enter the picture! Contact has been established with the management team of Astros but we also want to make sure that you, the interviewee, understand and approve of the project and subsequent interview. The interviews last for approximately 45 minutes and require no preparation on your behalf. You have the option to be anonymous throughout both the interview and the entire project and every bit of information collected during the work will be deleted in June.

In advance of the interview, you will be provided with a form where you consent to participating in the project. All data collection follows our university's GDPR guidelines, which you can find on the consent form.

If you have any questions do not hesitate to contact us, we look forward to your interview!

Best regards

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9.3 Interview Guide For Cultural Strategists (Swedish)

Basic information about GDPR, rights of participant, etc.

Theme 1: Background

- Could you tell us a little about yourself?
 - Where are you from etc.
- Could you tell us a bit about Astros and the industry in your own words?
 - How are the people?
- Could you tell us about your role in the company?

Theme 2: Organizational culture

- What does a normal work day look like?
- How do you communicate within the company? Do you communicate with everyone?
- Would you say that you are comfortable with correcting your supervisor?
 - Does your supervisor ever come to you for help?
 - Who do you ask for help?
- Does everyone in the company has clearly defined roles?
 - Do roles matter?
- Is a collective corporate identity important?
- Would you say that there are clear groups in the work-place?
- When are you the most comfortable with work?
 - Having a clear set of rules to adhere to or more personal freedom?
- Is there a corporate identity?
- Is there anyone you admire in the company?

- How are successes celebrated?
- What motivates you at work?
- Do you feel in control of your life at work?
 - Has it always been like this?
- Is work-life balance important to you?
- How would you describe your personality at work? More introverted/extroverted?
- Do you prefer remote working or coming into the office?

Theme 3: How is the cultural strategy shaped? Sensegiving

- What is your idea of the perfect boss?
- How would you define work culture? What is included?
 - How would you define Astros's organizational culture?
 - Is the organizational hierarchy structured in the same way?
- What is your idea of the perfect employee?
 - Are these the traits you look for when hiring?
 - How important is cultural fit when hiring?
 - How do you check this?
 - Have you had trouble finding these employees?
 - Same experience when hiring in Poland and Sweden?
- Does your leadership style differ when dealing with Poland and Sweden based employees?
 - Why/Why not?
 - Do you have the same expectations on Polish/Swedish employees?
 - Do you have an example?
- What kinds of ideas and values do you promote?
 - Does Astros have any outspoken ideals, "guiding stars", mottos?
 - How do you motivate or inspire your employees?
 - What kind of behavior do you want these to inspire
 - Do you have an example of how you implement an idea/value?
- How do you use your surroundings, like the office environment, to implement messages to promote a certain behavior?
 - Are there some important "artifacts" that symbolize the working space?
- Overall, do you think that the implementation has been successful?
 - Why/Why not?
 - What has been the most difficult part?
 - And easiest?
 - What has surprised you?
 - Example of successful or failed situations?
- Would you say that Astros is Swedish or Polish?

9.4 Interview Guide for Employees (English)

Basic information about GDPR, rights of participant, etc.

Theme 1: Background

- Could you tell us a little about yourself?
 - a. Where are you from etc.
- Could you tell us a bit about Astros and the industry in your own words?

How are the people?

- Could you tell us about your role in the company?

Theme 2: Organizational culture

- What does a normal work day look like?
- How do you communicate within the company? Do you communicate with everyone?
- Would you say that you are comfortable with correcting your supervisor?
 - Does your supervisor ever come to you for help?
 - Who do you ask for help?
- Does everyone in the company has clearly defined roles
 - Do roles matter?
- Is a collective corporate identity important?
- Would you say that there are clear groups in the work-place?
- When are you the most comfortable with work?
 - Having a clear set of rules to adhere to or more personal freedom?
- Is there a corporate identity?
- Is there anyone you admire in the company?
- How are successes celebrated?
- What motivates you at work?
- Do you feel in control of your life at work?
 - Has it always been like this?
- Is work-life balance important to you?
- How would you describe your personality at work? More introverted/extroverted?
- Do you prefer remote working or coming into the office?

Theme 3: How is the organizational culture perceived by employees; Sensemaking

- Is this your first job?
 - Yes
 - Is it as you expected?
 - No
 - How does it differ?
- Why did you apply for this job?
- Do you think that culture is an important part of Astros?
- How would you describe the work culture of Astros?
 - Do you have an example?
 - How did you find it acclimating yourself to the culture when you started?
 - Have there been any noticeable changes since you started working here?
 - What do you think about this change?
 - Do you have an example of a situation or problem that you dealt with and were praised by your superiors for your solution? Or the opposite?
- What do your friends and family think about your job?
 - Have you recommended them to apply, or referred any of them?
- Would you say that the culture here has influenced you outside of work?
- What do you think about the office?
- Do you feel that the Polish and Swedish branch are “one and the same”
 - Why do you think this is?

- How do they differ? Do you have an example?
 - How much do you interact with employees based in Sweden?
- Do you see Astros as Swedish or Polish?

9.5 Interview Guide for Employees (Swedish)

Basic information about GDPR, rights of participant, etc.

Tema 1: Bakgrund

- Kan du berätta kort om dig själv?
 - Var du kommer ifrån osv.
- Kan du berätta kort om Astros och industrin i dina egna ord?
 - Hur är människorna?
- Kan du förklara din roll på Astros?

Tema 2: Organisationskultur

- Hur ser en vanlig arbetsdag ut?
- Hur kommunicerar ni inom företaget? Kommunicerar du med alla?
- Är du bekväm med att rätta din chef?
 - Kommer din chef någonsin till dig för hjälp?
 - Vem ber du om hjälp?
- Har alla i företaget tydligt definierade roller?
 - Är roller viktiga?
- Är det viktigt för dig att ha en kollektiv identitet på jobbet?
- Skulle du säga att det finns tydliga grupperingar på jobbet?
- När är du mest bekväm på jobbet?
 - Föredrar du tydliga regler eller mer personlig frihet?
- Finns det en företagsidentitet?
- Finns det någon på jobbet som du ser upp till?
- Hur firar ni framgångar?
- Känner du att du har kontroll över jobbet?
 - Har det alltid varit så?
- Är work-life balance viktigt för dig?
- Hur skulle du beskriva dig själv på jobbet? Mer introvert eller extrovert?
- Föredrar du att jobba hemifrån eller på kontoret?

Tema 3: Hur uppfattas organisationskulturen av de anställda; Sensemaking

- Är det här ditt första jobb
 - Ja
 - Är det som du förväntade dig?
 - Nej
 - Hur skiljer det sig åt?
- Varför sökte du det här jobbet?
- Tycker du att kultur är en viktigt del av Astros?
- Hur skulle du beskriva arbetskulturen på Astros?

- Kan du ge ett exempel?
- Hur var det att anpassa sig till kulturen när du började?
- Har det skett några kulturella förändringar sedan du började?
 - Vad tycker du om den här förändringen?
- Kan du ge ett exempel på en situation eller ett problem som du löste och fick beröm för lösningen? Eller tvärtom?
- Vad tycker dina vänner och familj om ditt jobb?
 - Har du rekommenderat dem att söka?
- Skulle du säga att kulturen på Astros har påverkat dig utanför jobbet?
- Vad tycker du om kontoret?
- Känner du att de svenska och polska kontoren är en och samma?
 - Varför/varför inte?
 - Hur skiljer dem sig åt? Kan du ge ett exempel?
 - Hur mycket kommunicerar du med de polska anställda?
- Ser du Astros som svenskt eller polskt?