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## The Expatriates' Acculturation Process

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Individual differences within the social context

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KANDIDATARBETE I PEDAGOGIK

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**Titel: Kulturinläring vid anställning i ett nytt land; Individuella skillnader i en social kontext**

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**Abstrakt**

Ökad internationell mobilitet på arbetsmarknaden har ökat behovet av forskning kring vilka faktorer som påverkar huruvida en arbetande expatriat är framgångsrik eller inte. Målet med vår studie är att nå en djupare förståelse om expatriatens kulturinläring i det nya landet. Vår ansats var multimetodisk och vi mätte work locus of control, kulturinlärningsstrategier och den sociokulturella anpassningsprocessen kvantitativt samt individens upplevelse av kulturinläringen fenomenografiskt. Vi tolkade våra resultat med hjälp av verksamhetsteori. Vi fann att work locus of control och kulturinlärningsstrategier påverkar expatriatens kulturinläring och att en individ med både assimilering (eng. assimilation) som strategi och intern work locus of control verkar anpassa sig lättast till den nya kulturen. Det fenomenografiska resultatet tillförde en nyanserad bild av den subjektiva upplevelsen; individerna uttryckte kvalitativa skillnader av kulturinläringen beroende på om den var relaterad till arbetet, kulturen som koncept, sociala relationer eller deras självkänsla. Studien bidrar till ökad förståelse av området i allmänhet samt arbetets roll vid kulturinläring i synnerhet. Slutligen presenterar vi förslag på hur dessa resultat kan appliceras praktiskt av företag och expatriaten själv, samt förslag till framtida forskning.

**Nyckelord:** Expatriat; Kulturinläring; Sociokulturell anpassning; Work locus of control; Verksamhetsteori

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### **Abstract**

As expatriation and cross-border assignments have become increasingly frequent, so has the need for research on what makes a successful expatriate. The objective of this study is to further understand the working expatriate's acculturation process, which is the process of learning and acquiring the requisite skills to successfully inhabit a new cultural realm. We used a mixed-methods approach, quantitatively measuring work locus of control, acculturation strategies and sociocultural adaptation, and investigating the expatriate's subjective experience phenomenographically. We interpreted these results using cultural-historical activity theory. We found that work locus of control and choice of acculturation strategy affect the acculturation process, suggesting that an assimilator with an internal work locus of control adapts easiest. The qualitative differences were more nuanced, showing that expatriates view acculturation in terms of four separate but intertwined relationships; to work, to culture, to social relationships, and to their self-identity. This study contributes to expanded knowledge on the acculturation process in general, but particularly on the role that work plays in expatriate acculturation. Finally we make suggestions for application of these findings and future research.

**Keywords:** Acculturation; Activity theory; CHAT; Cultural learning; Expatriate; Sociocultural adaptation; Work locus of control

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## Introduction

Taking employment outside one's country of origin is increasing, as common language and relaxed border controls make it easier. Expatriation has previously been the arena of large international corporations, thus most of the research into expatriates, as in qualified workers, has been on corporate assignments. However the mobile international workforce is making an impact in other sectors such as academia, where recruiting internationally is commonplace (Selmer & Luring, 2012). More and more employees are initiating their own overseas employment by applying for jobs in countries other than their own. These self-initiated expatriates appear on the surface to be more successful in international employment than the corporate assignees, staying longer and feeling more satisfaction while there. This makes expatriation an attractive area to research (Holopainen & Björkman, 2005; Selmer & Luring, 2012).

Expatriate assignments need to be understood on various levels. As well as providing the individual with access to travel and adventure they are becoming useful career development stages. Expatriate assignments assist in knowledge transfer between locations within an organisation, and with building a common corporate culture. Sending someone overseas for a job is expensive, and premature repatriation makes the cost explode economically; the repatriation costs be paid, and another person has to replace the first. Furthermore the costs in morale and individual career can be devastating. Despite the assumption that personality traits and attitude to other cultures is relevant to how successful an individual will be, selection strategies between candidates in most corporate settings are based on personal recommendations or business-based evaluations: How well someone can do the job in their home culture does not account for how well they can do the job in a foreign culture (Abbott, Stening, Atkins, & Grant, 2006; Holopainen & Björkman, 2005).

Personality traits are individual and psychological in their very nature but they affect our learning process, our learning experience, and how we adapt to and interact with the environment (Cole & Wertsch, 1996; Rotter, 1966; Vygotsky, 1978). Research on personality traits and aptitude for expatriation has revolved around the big 5 personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness) (Holopainen & Björkman, 2005; Taras, Rowney, & Steel, 2009). The lack of knowledge on traits outside the big 5, and their possible connection to successful expatriation, cause costly mistakes in the recruiting process (Flytzani & Nijkamp, 2008; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2014). Even though previous studies have shown that there seems to be a connection between locus of control and the ability to cope with cultural adjustment, the area needs further research (Flytzani & Nijkamp, 2008; Kayes, Kayes, & Yamazaki, 2005).

The product of the process, that is the visible behaviours, has been more thoroughly researched than the effect of the subjective experience of the expatriate on the acculturation process. The scarcity of research of the subjective experience becomes even more obvious in a field outside of the big five, like locus of control. The research that does exist shows that the reason to expatriate, if one is being proactive or reactive, affects one's acculturation experience (Berry, 1997). Several indirect or vague connections between job satisfaction and well-being and a successful adaptation to a new culture would be valuable to clarify (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2014; Reio & Sutton, 2006; Taras et al., 2009).

Acculturation is the process of learning and acquiring the requisite skills to successfully inhabit a new cultural realm (Sam & Berry, 2010). There are two kinds of adjustments for expatriates, psychological and sociocultural. We are interested in the sociocultural adjustment which consists of behaviours, cultural learning through interaction, and identification with the host culture (Ward & Kennedy, 1999). We use the term acculturation as a synonym for sociocultural adaptation or sociocultural adjustment.

## **Problem, purpose and research questions**

When moving to a new country and encountering a new culture, expatriates go through a socialisation process called acculturation. Research has shown that individuals with some personality traits seem to cope better than others, but there's still a lack of knowledge on which these traits are, and how big their impact is. One trait that is less understood is locus of control (LOC), specifically work locus of control (WLOC), in relation to acculturation strategy and sociocultural adaptation. Neither is the subjective experience of the expatriates during the acculturation process properly resolved.

The purpose of this study is to further understand the acculturation process. We do so by examining connections between successful acculturation, WLOC, acculturation strategies and the working expatriate's subjective experience of the process.

We will do this by answering and testing the following research questions (RQ) and hypotheses (H), using Berry's model of acculturation strategies, the Work Locus of Control measure (WLOC) and the Socio-Cultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS) in combination with interviews:

RQ (1a): Is there a connection between which acculturation strategy one has and their WLOC? *H (1a): There will be a correlation between which acculturation strategy an individual uses and their WLOC, and we believe that the integration group will tend to have an internal WLOC while the assimilation group will instead have a central WLOC.*

RQ (1b): Is there a connection between the acculturation strategy someone has and their sociocultural adaptation? *H (1b): There is a correlation between acculturation strategy and sociocultural adaptation, and the integration group and assimilation group will score higher on sociocultural adaptation than the separation and marginalisation groups.*

RQ (2): Is there a connection between work locus of control and sociocultural adaptation? *H (2): There will be a correlation between low (internal) or central (neither particularly internal nor external) WLOC and successful sociocultural adaptation.*

RQ (3): Is there a connection between the demographics and acculturation strategy, work locus of control and sociocultural adaptation?

RQ (4): How does the individual experience the acculturation process?

With RQs (1-3) and Hs (1) and (2) we will quantitatively investigate specific factors that we believe will increase our understanding of the acculturation process. RQ (4) is considerably broader and open ended, as we intend to explore qualitatively how the expatriate acculturation process in general and if WLOC or acculturation strategy colour the individual experience.

## **Previous Research**

Taras et al. (2009) conducted a thorough literature review of 121 studies on culture. They found that the overwhelming majority are quantitative studies based in full or in part on Hofstede's cultural dimensions (individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and long or short-term orientation). They point out that although the conceptual basis for culture and personality differ, the line between them is ambiguous and the instruments used to measure them are materially similar. Furthermore, these measures tend to measure values, which ignores other facets of culture, such as norms and behaviours.

Reliance on cultural dimensions to measure individual responses when the cultural dimensions are national level measures, is also problematic, particularly when trying to relate them to individual level measures such as personality traits or adaptation.

Taras et al. (2009) argue that despite being in the majority, quantitative measures do not sufficiently capture unique variance and that self-created measures of culture often have low validity and reliability. They suggest that cross-cultural studies should consider using more qualitative methods and future research should focus on individual-level analysis. Our study uses existing measures in an effort to answer these validity and reliability issues. We also use individual level measures, and combine these with a qualitative analysis in order to avoid some of the pitfalls identified by Taras and colleagues.

Holopainen and Björkman (2005) performed a longitudinal quantitative study on corporate assignees to investigate relationships between personality traits, demographics and expatriate success. They had access to pre-expatriation personality evaluations and demographic information, and had the expatriates and their superiors fill out job performance evaluations. The authors (*ibid.*) chose a longitudinal design because some of the personality traits under investigation, such as communication ability, are unstable and change with circumstances and experience.

While noting that poor adjustment is often the cause of expatriate failure, they also discuss the difficulty of defining success and failure. This is the reason they chose to use job performance as a measure. They also note that for the company assigning an employee overseas, this is in fact the only measure they are interested in. However the employees' self-evaluation on their own job performance differed significantly from their superiors evaluations (Holopainen & Björkman, 2005).

The results showed that some personality traits, particularly communication ability, correlate with likelihood of success as an expatriate. So do some demographic variables, such as previous experience as an expatriate, family situation, and cultural fit. Holopainen and Björkman (2005) make a note on the fact causal relationship between adjustment and expatriate success is unclear.

Holopainen and Björkman (2005) capture only the experience of the fixed-term corporate assignee. They raised issues with using self-evaluated job performance and completion of assignment as measurement of success, and that these measure the outcome rather than the process. So we chose to look at alternative methods of measuring acculturation using SCAS (Ward & Kennedy, 1999) as an analytical tool.

Research about personality traits and aptitude for expatriation has mostly revolved around the big 5 personality traits. Holopainen and Björkman (2005) do find links between personality factors and success as expatriates, however LOC was not one of the traits they studied. LOC is generally considered stable (Rotter, 1966), making it appropriate for our cross-sectional study.

Internal LOC in managers relates to an ability to cope with the adjustment to a new culture due to being proactive and open to learning (Flytzani & Nijkamp, 2008). The authors (*ibid.*) studied LOC and cross-cultural adjustment in a quantitative study of corporate assignees, noting that a lack of knowledge on personality traits outside the big 5 and their possible connections to successful expatriation cause costly mistakes in the recruiting process. They report that 20-40% of expatriates do not complete their assignments and in some cases up to 80% of expatriate managers were ineffective in their new positions. They found that managers on corporate assignments with internal LOC were more likely to adjust well. In their case study, the sample was 65% external LOC and 35% internal.

Once again, Flytzani and Nijkamp's (2008) sample was exclusively corporate assignees, consisting of middle and upper management, and measured success purely on the completion of the assignments. Flytzani and Nijkamp (*ibid.*) grouped the LOC scores into high or low, without allowing for different behaviour of a central LOC. Our study extends the sample to non-managerial, self-initiated expatriates and includes the possibility of a central LOC group, complementing their study.

## Theory

### Sociocultural Theory and CHAT

The Vygotskian cultural-historical perspective suggests that culture is a major factor in individual development. We all develop as individuals within the context of a culture and interaction with other people affects our learning and development in all aspects. We acquire from culture both the content of our thinking, or what to think, and our processes, or how to think it (Vygotsky, 1978). Cole and Wertsch (1996, p. 252) say that culture and cultural heritage in fact “exists in the present to coordinate people with each other and the physical world”.

Once individuals move from their culture into another with a different set of norms, values, and history, their own cultural heritage may not translate at all, and it may even be in opposition. When an individual interacts with the environment this action cannot take place independently from the sociocultural context it occurs in. As the expatriate learns to negotiate the new environment, cultural mediation occurs and a new process of socialisation takes place (Cole & Wertsch, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). The individual learns to understand and eventually take part in the cultural heritage connected to the new context.

The Activity Theory of learning (also called CHAT – Cultural-Historical Activity Theory) (Engeström, 1987; Vygotsky, 1978), using the *activity* as the smallest basic unit of analysis, brings together the mediating tools, the subject, and the object. Tools can be physical or psychological, the subject is the actor performing the activity, and the object is the task at hand. This is often represented with a triangle diagram, with the mediating tools at one point and the subject and object at the others.

Second generation activity theory added another layer to the triangle (Engeström & Kerosuo, 2007; Engeström, 1987) providing a tool for analysing relationships between activity and social and collective contextual factors which are integral to the activity as a systemic unit. These additional items are the rules and constraints that limit activity, community and division of labour. The rules provides limiting factors, both formal and informal, while the community aspect recognises the fact that the individual does not perform an activity isolated from the context. Division of labour describes stratification of the activity in relation to the overall object; modern activities are invariably divorced and abstracted from their eventual outcomes. Approving payroll transactions in an office is an essentially meaningless task in itself, but as part of the greater operation of the entire organisation, it is very important.

Even more important than the items themselves is emphasis on interactions, and how they affect each other. This second generation system is often depicted with a more complex triangle compared to the first generation triangle.

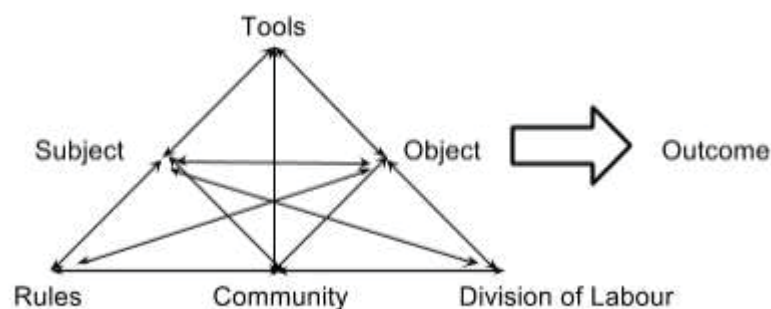


Figure 1 CHAT Activity Triangle from Engeström 1987

The third generation of activity (Engeström & Kerosuo, 2007; Engeström, 1987) recognises that activities rarely occur in isolation, extending the model to include at least one other activity that is interacting with the first. CHAT provides a way to visualise and analyse the expatriates' qualitative experience in the context of activities undertaken during the acculturation process.

The sociocultural viewpoint has a clear focus of the social and contextual factors of learning, emphasizing how they affect the individual. The individual learns what is absolutely necessary to be able to manage the activity, such as in our case, the requisite skills to navigate a new culture (Säljö, 2001).

Marton (2000), whose research focuses on the individual with a phenomenographical viewpoint, states that while sociocultural theory is splendid to use when understanding the contextual factors of learning it neglects the importance of individual differences within the social practice. Säljö (2001), on the other hand, argues that while all individuals are different, their differences are either irrelevant for the activity at hand or so standardized through formal rules, for instance individuals working within the legal system.

While Marton agrees with Säljö that the activity constrains the behaviour of the individual, and that the acts "derive their meaningfulness from the purpose they serve" (Marton, 2000, p. 232), he believes that it doesn't determine it. This is why it's important for future research to investigate the individual differences within the activity.

### **Work Locus of Control (WLOC)**

Spector (1988, p. 335) says LOC is a personality trait defined as "a generalized expectancy that rewards, reinforcements or outcomes in life are controlled either by one's own actions (internality) or by other forces (externality)". An individual with an internal LOC is instinctively likely to be proactive, to be open to taking actions they consider advantageous, and she is likely to be open to learning about the new culture. Conversely someone with a central LOC is likely to try to get along with everyone, and she may exhibit similar behaviours, but at a conscious level. According to Rotter (1966) someone with an external LOC may conclude that nothing they do matter, and be very passive. Rotter (ibid.) predicts four results for those with an internal LOC (and the converse for those with an external LOC): (a) they are more alert to aspects of the environment that are useful; (b) they take steps to improve their environment; (c) they place greater value on reinforcements that they attribute to skill or behaviour and are more concerned with their own ability, and (d) they are resistant to subtle attempts to influence their behaviour. Of these outcomes (a) and (b) are probably most relevant to our study.

We also chose to use WLOC, a domain specific measure of the personality trait LOC, developed by Spector (1988) in response to the general nature of the original LOC instrument (Rotter's I-E scale of general locus of control, 1966). Spector found that the WLOC measure correlates with the general LOC, but predicts workplace behaviour more strongly (Spector, 1988; Spector et al., 2001).

### **Acculturation Strategies**

Acculturation has historically been a synonym for complete assimilation into the host society. This was due to early research being at the macro level of entire groups of immigrants moving to new countries on a permanent basis, and where assimilation was the typical government policy in the host country. Modern international mobility has made immigration more likely to occur at an individual level. At the same time, most societies have backed away from assimilation as a goal, in favour of inter- and multiculturalism. Assimilation is now only one of the strategies employed during acculturation (Berry, 1997).

Berry's acculturation model consists of a two-dimensional matrix of four groups, each of them using a particular acculturation strategy to guide their behaviour. These groups are *Integration*, *Assimilation*, *Separation* and *Marginalisation*. Individuals fall into a group depending on their attitude to the value of maintaining their native cultural identity and characteristics, and the value of creating and maintaining relationships within the dominant culture (Berry & Sam, 1997).

		Is it important to maintain one's identity and cultural characteristics?	
		<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
Is it important to maintain relationships within the larger society?	<i>Yes</i>	Integration	Assimilation
	<i>No</i>	Separation	Marginalization

Figure 2 The acculturation strategy matrix

Integrators find positive value in both directions, while those who are less invested in their native cultural identity but willing to invest in the dominant society are assimilators. Separationists value keeping their native culture to the exclusion of the dominant culture, while marginalisers do not focus on, or are unable to maintain their native cultural identity, but are themselves excluded from the dominant society. Marginalisation or separation would be unusual results from voluntary expatriates, as it is often associated with refugees, or with minority groups that are otherwise subject to exclusion or discrimination (Berry, 1974, 1997; Sam & Berry, 2010).

Integration is often held to be the ideal, but depending on the context, assimilation or even separation can be viable strategies for the individual. For example if the expatriate sojourn is of limited duration and there is a strong expatriate community available, a separationist strategy might work because there is little need to socialise or interact with the local culture. Conversely, when the expatriate has no expectation of returning home, perhaps having married into the local culture, assimilation may be a successful strategy. In general reason to emigrate, and if it is proactive or reactive is also a factor (Berry, 1974, 1997; Sam & Berry, 2010).

Berry's model, (Berry & Sam, 1997; Berry, 1974, 1997; Ward & Kennedy, 1999; Ward, 2008) focusses on sociocultural adaptation rather than psychological adaptation, making it directly relevant to our area of research, while providing convenient groupings for quantitative analysis and selecting participants for the qualitative interviews.

## Methodology

### Approach

The study is a mixed method non-experimental design, with the aim of examining the relationship between WLOC, acculturation strategies, sociocultural adaptation and the working expatriate's subjective experience of the acculturation process.

Conclusions of previous research that descriptions of experiencing acculturation have higher validity than self-rating, suggest it would be relevant to qualitatively explore the expatriate experience (Holopainen & Björkman, 2005; Taras et al., 2009). While quantitative analysis is generalizable and organises individuals into comparable groups, phenomenography

helps us see the difference in each individual's lived experience (Dahlgren & Johansson, 2009; Marton, 1981), hence our choice of design.

We collected quantitative data with the help of a survey, which we then analysed using SPSS to provide statistical results. Based on the statistical results, we created an interview guide. We collected qualitative data from semi-structured interviews based on this guide, and analysed the transcripts phenomenographically in a software for analysing text called ATLAS.ti. Finally we interpreted the quantitative and qualitative results together with CHAT, thus combining individual differences with the social context.

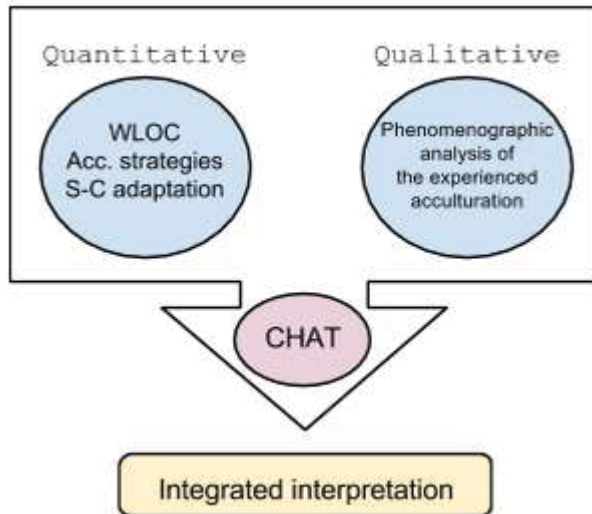


Figure 3 Design

There are no standard paradigms yet for how to combine quantitative and qualitative methods, but mixed method research is becoming common. Our use of quantitative survey combined with interviews, while unconventional in the same study, is an acknowledged approach (Niglas, 2009).

Without the quantitative surveys we may have asked the wrong questions during the interviews, and by doing the interviews we gained qualitative data that shed new light on the survey results. Quantitative surveys by their nature tend to capture spontaneous responses, which became obvious in the interviews. In several cases, interviewees answered questions one way, then when invited to explore their own experience further, proceeded to talk about the same experience in almost opposite terms. For instance, expressing that acculturation was completely easy, followed by a list of reasons it was difficult. Invariably they were unaware of this until they started to talk about it.

The post-phenomenographic interpretation using CHAT explicitly placed the individual within the social context, alleviating the objections of Säljö (2001) mentioned in the theory section of this paper. In our study, individual differences do exist and are relevant to the activity at hand. The individual being placed in a new culture also removes the possibility of her individual personality traits being standardized.

During analysis we attempted to bear in mind that we were establishing second order *categories of description* rather than *ways of experiencing* (Marton, 1981, 2000; Säljö, 1997, 2001). Säljö argues that we can't know how the respondents experience a phenomenon, only what they say about it, and a feeling of obligation to answer or a wish to save face may affect that. We attempted to respond to Säljö's objections by reducing the situational effects for our interviews.

## **Epistemology and Ontology**

The first researcher's ontological and epistemological perspectives are both social-constructivist and slightly positivistic, based on a belief that epistemologically, knowledge is an individual construction, incorporating new information into the framework provided by previous experiences and existing knowledge. Knowledge is also a social construction, created first through interaction with others before the individual can internalise it. Observers construct their view of a phenomenon, synthesizing knowledge between their own experience and the actions of others through their conversations (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011; Engeström, 2008; Packer & Goicoechea, 2000).

Ontologically speaking, truth is relative and dependent on perspective, and an individual's constructed truth is shaped by historical, social and cultural forces. Observation tell us what people do and how they report it, instead of how they experienced or understood that experience. Understanding conversation requires interpolation beyond the empirical evidence and one reader's interpretation will differ from any other. Even recorded conversation, while excellent empirical evidence, is never the whole story in the way that physically measuring, weighing and counting are (Cohen et al., 2011; Packer & Goicoechea, 2000).

The second researcher's ontological and epistemological viewpoint is a mix of dialectic materialism, pragmatism and positivism. However, in the context of this study the researcher limits the positivistic part to its value in replicable and reliable measurements.

Reality is social and contextual, mediated by physical, conceptual and linguistic tools. Reality is also what the individual experiences to be true, which once again depends on context. The spoken word is important, from a dialectic materialism point of view as the mediator between the mind and real life, and from a pragmatic point of view as the tool to investigate something new, in order to become conscious of it (Stensmo, 2007).

Learning is a culture bound process, since language is the cultural artefact that mediates knowledge, and is thus situated. However, the individual also has an active role to play, by encountering problems, identifying them and actively working to solve them. To understand something is to know the meaning of something, and this meaning depends on the context (Stensmo, 2007).

Despite coming from slightly different epistemological and ontological viewpoints, we find our positions complementary rather than in opposition. We agree on the larger points of knowledge as an individual construction in a social context, the central role of discourse and the value of positivistic measures.

## **Data Collection**

Our original plan was to post surveys on expatriate internet forums, but we soon realised that it would be hard to reach a large amount of respondents, thus we also used our own network to send the survey to expatriates individually. We informed all participants of the general subject of our study and assured of anonymity before filling out the survey. Two weeks after posting the survey at the forums, we stopped the data collecting process and started the analysis.

We chose to use existing scales for the quantitative part of the study to make sure we measured what we intended to, and to allow us to compare our results to large existing bodies of work. These instruments were Spector's WLOC instrument (Spector, 1988), Berry's model of acculturation strategies (Berry, 1997) and the SCAS instrument (Ward & Kennedy, 1999) which measures how easy or difficult the actual sociocultural adaptation process was. For more details please see *Appendix A*.

Sixty-three expatriates (39 women and 24 men) participated in the study, ranging in age from 20 to 58 ( $M = 29.08$ ,  $SD = 7.33$ ). The majority of respondents travelled alone ( $n = 48$ ) rather than with their family ( $n = 6$ ). Most were self-initiated expatriates who either moved after finding a job on their own ( $n = 37$ ) or moved first and then found a job ( $n = 18$ ).

Our typical participant, based on the median, is a 26 year old woman from the United States, on her second overseas assignment, on a job she found herself. She travels without a family, and she has spent a total of four years abroad, the last three of them on the current job, which is in Spain.

While participation was anonymous, referral tracking on the survey link indicates that about 50 % of the participants found the study through online postings, and the remainder by word of mouth or our convenience sample.

Our qualitative data consists of the interview transcriptions from five semi-structured interviews. The interviewees were all volunteers from the survey and chosen based on the result from the quantitative analysis. We created the interview guide based on the previous results, and developed it between interviews to explore factors mentioned by the participants.

We performed the interviews via webcam on Skype, and recorded the audio portion. One of the researchers acted as the main interviewer, and the other as the observer with camera and microphone turned off after the introduction. At the end the main interviewer invited the observer back in to the conversation to ask follow-up questions. We transcribed all interviews shortly after, and the transcriptions were used for the analysis.

## **Analysing Data**

We normalised the quantitative data, and summed and grouped the various subscales. We also analysed the subscales for internal reliability with Cronbach's alpha.

The WLOC subscale provides a single score, in the range of 8 to 48, with lower scores being internal WLOC and higher being external WLOC. The scores were also grouped into internal (scores 8 to 21), central (22-35) and high (36-48), in order to facilitate analysis methods that require such data. Berry's model of acculturation strategy provides one of four discrete results. The SCAS subscale provides a mean score overall, which we refer to as SCAS 22, and a sub-score for the standard adjustment questions that are commonly used in all applications of the SCAS measure, which we refer to as SCAS 10. In both cases, the higher the score, the easier the individual found the adjustment.

We analysed the WLOC scores and Berry's model for correlations. Scores on the WLOC and Berry's model were further analysed together with the SCAS scores using two-way between-subjects ANOVA or MANOVA, with Tukey's HSD post-hoc tests when applicable.

In the final survey question we asked if they were willing to participate in follow-up interviews. Initial analysis grouped the survey respondents on the basis of Berry's model. From each group, we aimed to find two participants for a follow-up interview, however our data was heavily weighted towards integrators and assimilators, thus we interviewed three assimilators and two integrators.

We used phenomenography to analyse our interview transcripts with the purpose of discovering and organising conceptions and descriptions of experiences the participants have about the acculturation process (Cohen et al., 2011; Dahlgren & Johansson, 2009; Marton, 1981). The breadth of differences in these conceptions makes up the outcome space of the phenomenon, and the different categories that arise from this outcome space is the result of the analysis.

Studying the conception of a phenomenon, and not directly the phenomenon itself, provides a second order analysis (Marton, 1981). We strive to describe the meaning of the phenomenon "acculturation process", and this meaning can change over time due to learning

processes that provoke a change of understanding in the individual (Dahlgren & Johansson, 2009; Larsson, 2010). For our study that means that the individual will describe the acculturation process differently the more she acculturates.

We used ATLAS.ti to analyse the interviews separately, and then compared and merged our results, to take full advantage of being two researchers while analysing (Dahlgren & Johansson, 2009). We did this in four stages; first we analysed and compared the results of the two first interviews. After merging our results, we repeated the first step with the third and fourth interview, and after merging our results again, we analysed the fifth interview.

During this process, we recoded the material several times, exchanging code lists, discussing possible meanings of quotes, groups within the codes and category schemes, while we became familiar with the data. We considered, and discarded, a number of possible category schemes; categorising based on a timeline, recurring factors in every single interview versus unique items that were only mentioned once, etc. These suggestions lacked in inter category difference, didn't fill the outcome space and/or failed in expressing the experience of acculturation. We finally realised that the "why" was the key; the perceived reason for doing something seemed to give us different groups with few overlaps. This discovery made us look at the data in a new way, with a new understanding.

The fourth and last step was to re-code all of the interviews with these categories, to test their inter-category differences and to merge closely related codes and form subcategories.

### **Reliability, Validity and Ethics**

Using standardised instruments enhances external reliability and construct validity, by making sure that we are investigating the factors the same way that the existing body of research has. The high Cronbach's alpha scores on the subscales of our survey instrument strengthens internal reliability and validity; these were 0.88 for the SCAS 22 scale and 0.73 for the WLOC. This compares favourably to the overall consistency reported for these measures as reported of a 0.75 to 0.91 for the SCAS (Ward & Kennedy, 1999) and 0.81 for the WLOC (Spector, 2013). These values are highly reliable and reliable, respectively. The binary nature of Berry's model makes it difficult to calculate statistical reliability but since it is extremely widely used and cited we consider this provides a measure of external reliability.

The surveys do suffer from self-selection response bias, which is unavoidable in the case of surveys that are not targeted to a specific group. Therefore we did not capture the entire breadth of possible experiences; in particular, failed or unhappy expatriates were unlikely to respond.

When interviewing the participants, we kept a relaxed and informal tone to make them feel comfortable. Performing the interviews on Skype, the participants were at a time and place of their choosing, often at home, adding to that comfort. We believe this helped them to answer honestly and in depth, and as much as possible avoid bias. In the qualitative analysis we strived to maximize constructed validity by making sure that the categories were from the participants' perspective, and not ours (Cohen et al., 2011). We did so by using an investigator triangulation, analysing the data partially separately.

Methodological triangulation, that is using a mixed-methods approach, increased the validity of our findings. Data from both methods largely validated each other while providing nuanced views. We used the three theories CHAT, WLOC and Berry's acculturation strategies, thus providing theoretical triangulation. We also combined the viewpoints of phenomenography and CHAT by using the former as the method, and interpreting the results with the latter.

With regards to ethics, the surveys were taken anonymously, and any contact information provided by the participants was done so on a voluntary basis and excluded from

the data file during the analysis phase. Participants were informed about anonymity and a general outline of the purpose of the study before taking the survey. The interviewees volunteered through the survey, and were again informed that their contribution to the paper would be completely anonymous, without identifying information connecting them to the quotes. Before every interview began, we received the participants' assent to record, transcribe and possibly quote the interview. We also informed them that we, the researchers, would be the only ones with access to their personal information. When asked if they still wanted to participate, they all did.

## Results

### Survey results

In RQ1a and H1a we hypothesized a correlation between acculturation strategy and WLOC, and that integrators would have an internal WLOC and assimilators a central WLOC. We did not perform any tests on the external WLOC group because there was only one individual in the group. This does however show that the sample is heavily skewed towards internal and central WLOC.

An ANOVA using WLOC groups found a significant difference ( $t(59) = 5.47$   $p = .023$ ) in WLOC mean scores in the direction expected, that is that assimilators have a higher mean WLOC score ( $M = 22.40$ ,  $SD = 7.25$ ) than integrators ( $M = 21.57$ ,  $SD = 5.05$ ).

We do not consider this hypothesis to be strongly supported. We did not find any direct correlation between acculturation strategies and WLOC scores. While assimilators scored higher than integrators on WLOC, as predicted, the difference between means is too small to use acculturation strategy to predict WLOC.

In RQ1b and H1b we also hypothesized a connection between acculturation strategy and sociocultural adaptation, and expected integrators to have higher scores than assimilators. There were many more integrators than assimilators in our sample group (51 vs 10), and only two marginalisers making it hard to draw generalizable conclusions about the marginalisers.

A one-way MANOVA on the acculturation strategies and the SCAS measures gave a significant result both for the SCAS 10 ( $F[2, 59] = 3.57$ ,  $p = .034$ ) and the SCAS 22 ( $F[2, 59] = 7.55$ ,  $p = .001$ ). Post hoc comparisons using Tukey HSD test for SCAS 10 showed that the marginalisation group scored significantly lower compared to the assimilation group ( $M = -1.08$ ,  $SD = .41$ ,  $p = .026$ ), and the same Post hoc test for SCAS 22 showed that the marginalisation group scored significantly lower than both the assimilation group ( $M = -1.33$ ,  $SD = .36$ ,  $p = .001$ ) and the integration group ( $M = -.94$ ,  $SD = .33$ ,  $p = .017$ ). However, an even more interesting result is that the assimilation group scored significantly higher on the SCAS 22 than the integration group ( $M = .39$ ,  $SD = .16$ ,  $p = .047$ ).

We consider this hypothesis partially supported: These figures show that marginalisers did score significantly lower on ease of acculturation which supports the hypothesis, but there were too few marginalisers to be certain. An interesting and unforeseen result was that the assimilators scored noticeably higher than the integrators.

In RQ2 and H2 we expected to find a correlation between WLOC and sociocultural adaptation in general and specifically that internal and central WLOC would correlate with SCAS.

First we performed an independent samples t-test on the SCAS 22 and the internal and central WLOC groups, in order to determine if there was any difference at all. This showed that the internal WLOC group ( $n = 32$ ,  $M = 3.82$ ,  $SD = .51$ ) scored significantly higher ( $F[60] = .01$ ,  $p = .026$ ) than the central WLOC group ( $n = 30$ ,  $M = 3.54$ ,  $SD = .47$ ). The same test on

SCAS 10 showed a similar result, although not significant ( $F[60] = .12, p = .057$ ). Both mean scores were well above the midpoint (2.5) of the SCAS scales. Correlations between the WLOC scores and SCAS scores were less conclusive, with only marginal correlations between both WLOC Groups and SCAS 22 ( $r[63] = -.24, p = .064$ ) or SCAS 10 ( $r[63] = -.24, p = .55$ ), and the WLOC raw scores showing only a marginal correlation with the SCAS 10 ( $r[63] = -.24, p = .56$ ) and no correlation with the SCAS 22 results.

We find this hypothesis only partially supported. On the one hand, both internal and central WLOC groups reported an easy time adapting, but of the two, the internal WLOC group had a significantly easier time than the central. On the other hand, the correlations were not significant enough to draw conclusions from.

Finally in RQ 3 and H3 we explored any connection between demographics and acculturation strategy, WLOC and sociocultural adaptation. Although we tested every demographic variable in our data, we only found one significant, relevant and non-ambiguous result, albeit an interesting one: The central WLOC group had a much easier time adjusting when travelling with their family than the internal WLOC group, while the internal WLOC group had a much easier time when travelling alone than the central WLOC group ( $F[1,40] = 5.25, p = .027$ ). Overall there appear to be only weak relationships between the demographic variables and the WLOC, acculturation strategy or the ease of sociocultural adaptation.

While investigating our hypotheses we noted that there was a distinct difference in responses between WLOC groups or the different acculturation strategies for some of the individual questions in the SCAS subscale. Detailed tables showing these differences are in *Appendix B*.

The assimilation group had by a significant margin the easiest time dealing with unsatisfactory service, adapting to local etiquette and dealing with people of higher status, while the integration group had a significantly more difficult time with these same items. The assimilation group also did better on accepting and understanding the local political system. The marginalisation group in general found most items difficult, but significantly so the items dealing with going to food outlets and dealing with people in authority.

We also found that individuals with an internal WLOC scored significantly higher, that is, they found it easier, on several of the items on the SCAS than those with a central WLOC: Going shopping, dealing with people in authority, understanding the local's worldview and going to coffee shops and other food outlets.

## **Interview Results**

Our final RQ asked how the individual experiences the acculturation process, which we explored in interviews and analysed with phenomenography. This analysis showed that respondents express their acculturation process in terms of four distinct relationships: to *work*, to *culture as an everyday concept*, to *people outside of work*, and to their own *self-identity*.

These categories are different but connected in the process as a whole, creating the outcome space. Each subheading is a distinct category, which consists of subcategories created from the different components within the main categories. These are written in italics where they appear in the text and a comprehensive list of the subcategories is available in *Appendix C*.

### **Relationship to work.**

Our interviewees describe work and their relationship to work as distinct from and outside of the other categories. The expatriates expressed that their workplaces are not only reflecting the host culture, but also have the *universal structure* of an office. This brings familiarity,

stability, and *support* to the expatriates, allowing them to adjust more easily in the workplace than outside it. The workplace also actively facilitated the process by providing *support* in the initial phase.

There's an office culture and office mentality [...] the rules and the regulations of an office that means that everyone is more or less taught certain types of behaviours [...]. It makes it easier to adjust to.

There was a strong tendency for the expatriates to *identify more with the home culture* at work, holding on to their native ideas and values much longer than they did outside of work. The easy adaptation mentioned above could be lack of a need to adapt in the universal office environment, which results in cultural clashes when they meet local cultural norms in the workplace.

At work, I still am a little crazy, and I haven't forgotten my [native] work ethic [...] I still feel like I should demand a certain amount of professionalism, that sometimes I don't get from people, but I mean, I still expect it and will demand it.

It's a real etiquette clash for me with meetings. For example my boss tend to arrive very late to meetings, then allow them to run very late, or allow them to run over lunch, which for me... I have to remind myself that he doesn't mean to be rude.

When the expatriates adjust to the culture, the process is often connected to *food as a mediator*, rather than towards direct connection to the actual work. For example, one of the expatriates mentioned the change from eating lunch at her desk, to taking a break and socialising during the lunch hour. The self-initiated expatriates also mentioned that they saw work as a *means to an end to stay in the country* of their choice, and their *foreignness being a resource* that enabled this.

### **Relationship to culture as an everyday concept.**

Respondents tend to express their opinions about culture as a concept, distinct from social relationships. They see culture as something to be learnt, understood and that takes effort, but adaptation as something that just happens over time, without connecting the two.

*Language, food and relationships with the locals* are repeatedly mentioned as tools to gain insight into the culture, and the expatriates are aware of the importance of these tools in learning the new culture, and the danger of isolating themselves from the host culture by only socialising with expatriates.

When I first got here I made a pretty conscious decision to live with [local] people, that was mostly for language purposes so that I could learn quicker, but also for culture, so that I could understand you know, what they cook, and how they cook it, and when they cook. You know, those types of things, like everyday stuff that might seem unimportant, but it actually is something different from life in [native country].

*Language* is also a major hindrance, with almost all respondents expressing that it was initially more difficult than expected. They found it frustrating not being able to communicate properly. Another hindrance is *everyday things* that seemed similar enough on the surface, like grocery shopping and going to the gym, but that in their small variances quite notably clashed with the expatriate's expectations on how to go about everyday life.

I'm not in my, how do you say, my comfort zone. You are completely out. In the beginning I was thinking 'Ok, this is easy, that is easy', but I was learning a lot of things, and somehow I was feeling overwhelmed after a month or something [...] Even going to the gym, or going to the swimming pool, you have to learn all that.

so it's.. small things that in the end make a big thing.

These differences were specifically mentioned by expatriates without *previous experience* from expatriation, while more bureaucratic *systemic differences*, such as paying a visit to the tax office, were a consistent source of frustration and difficulty for all respondents.

### **Relationship to people outside of work.**

The respondents clearly express the importance of social relationships outside of work. They are aware that *making friends takes active effort*, and whether or not this comes naturally for the expatriates, they consciously work to meet new people.

*Language* is of great importance when it comes to making *local friends* outside of work. Many respondents use gatherings that don't require an already established social network, such as sport clubs, language exchanges and other social events as means to meeting people. They also stress the importance of being open to invitations by newly established acquaintances.

I signed up for these meet-ups [...] and it's also like an international language exchange, and I think these are nice. Even if you don't make friends or yeah, you get to talk to people, interesting people.

I don't just go out with all my western friends, I go, I made friends with local residents and I go out and spend time with them, I go eat their food, I go eat with them, uhm, so I make the effort to sort of say "yes" to everything. [...] once you make the mental shift to be able to do it, it's, it's fine.

*Relationships with other expatriates* are both easy and common, but the reasons vary. For instance, it can be because of common language, because they are most easily accessed in the case of foreigner-dense neighbourhoods, and sometimes because the shared experience of expatriation provides a bond.

If you also have expat friends who are in a similar situation with the same interest, who are also driven to integrate, I feel like you can open up that door and you can all integrate together.

They observe that socialising exclusively with other expatriates hinders adaptation, and those who avoid adapting in this manner, are unhappy with their expatriate experience.

### **Relationship to self-identity.**

Being an expatriate has an effect on the respondents' view of themselves, and there is a strong time-based component which many of the respondents are well aware of and able to articulate.

Culture shock in the initial phase is often unexpected and expatriates idealised expectations let them down. For instance, they harbour illusions that everything will be easy, or that they are more proficient in the language than they really are, and find reality a frustrating surprise.

Over time the *host culture feels like home*, becoming the new normal, and respondents experience that the *home culture seems foreign* when they return home. Sometimes in the case of serial expatriates, this leads to homesickness for the last country they were accustomed to rather than their home country.

If I go back to [hometown] for Christmas or something, I find myself not in agreement with the way of life there.

There is a clear expression of *flipping a switch*; once a commitment to stay in the new country is made, a distinct decision to increase effort towards acculturation occurs. They express this in various ways, from an increased interest in politics, in learning the language, or being open to finding a local partner.

I felt like I kind of had to choose to stay here and embrace [...] life here, and embrace the culture here, or whether to just [...] go home, as it was then, back to the [native country], and treat this as if it were, you know, a fun interlude, and get back to you know, my real life.

Once feeling like a native, they noticed how the *language affected identity* in some ways. A direct language may lead to a more direct way of expressing oneself even when switching back to the native language. They also expressed an awareness that how they see themselves (native) is not always how others see you (foreigner).

I forget sometimes that I'm foreign here. I mean, other people don't forget that, because I don't look [host nationality] and I don't sound [host nationality].

Our interviewees were able to articulate several ways that the experience of being an expatriate lead to *personal growth*, becoming more open and tolerant. While building tolerance for accepting different cultures might be expected, this expanded tolerance extends to accepting that life has taken an unexpected turn, for instance that this is not the career they planned.

## Interpretation

### Interpreting quantitative data

The choice of acculturation strategy (integration or assimilation) doesn't seem to have much effect in our sample, which mostly consists of self-initiated and content expatriates. WLOC means between strategies differ with less than one point. However, assimilators score high on sociocultural adaptation, and so did expatriates with internal WLOC. Looking closer at the individual SCAS questions in the additional results show that the adaptation differences between assimilators and integrators, and between internal and central WLOC are on different items. This suggests that the combination of an assimilator with an internal WLOC would score better on all those items, adapting more easily than any other combination.

From a hiring perspective though, different profiles might suit different situations. The assimilator who voluntarily sets aside much of her own culture to embrace the new culture, might be a valuable expatriate if you want to bring someone to your company from another country to stay there permanently (Berry, 1997). However, if you want to send an employee on an assignment, and then after a year send them to another country or even bring them home, the assimilator may have difficulties. In this case the integrator might be the most suitable candidate, since they do not seem to merge to the same extent with the new culture, making it easier to uproot again (Berry, 1997).

The underrepresentation of marginalisers and separationists (2 and 0 respectively) in our sample shows that expatriates are generally integrators or assimilators. The sample was also heavily skewed towards integrators and internal WLOC, suggesting that this is a common profile for self-initiated expatriates, just as the theory predicts (Berry, 1997; Rotter, 1966).

The lack of results on demographic variables is a result in itself: WLOC and acculturation strategies appear to be highly individual, and only weakly, if at all, affected by demographics. The one significant result we did find was the interaction effect of WLOC and whether the expatriate moved to the country alone or with a family. This might be because the individual with internal WLOC believes outcomes, in this case of the acculturation process, are decided by her own actions (Spector, 1988), thus the influence of a family might limit the individual's ease of acculturation. Meanwhile someone with central WLOC possibly embraces the fact that she is not the only one playing a part in this process.

### **Interpreting qualitative data**

In the following section we will interpret the qualitative data with CHAT. First we interpret every category as an activity, then the workplace activity in further detail (see *Appendix C*). We examine the varying roles of language and food within the activities, and finally we show that while each category is a distinct activity, they can function as tools or other variables in a separate but interacting activity.

#### **Each main category is an activity.**

The expatriates describe their experience of the acculturation process in terms of relationships to work, to the culture as an everyday concept, to people outside of work, and to their self-identity. We interpret this result using CHAT from a second generation standpoint in general, bearing in mind the third generation viewpoint that activities are rarely performed in isolation (Engeström & Kerosuo, 2007; Engeström, 1987). While the activity provides a delimited social context, individual differences affect how the subject chooses to act within that context, given the tools and rules at hand (Marton, 2000).

*Table 1 The CHAT activity object of the four final phenomenographical categories*

<i>Category</i>	<i>Object of the Activity</i>
Work	Fulfill work obligations
Culture	Act according to the local culture
People outside of Work	Social integration
Identity	Evaluate ones place in the world

Each main category we found in the phenomenographical analysis, is a CHAT activity with a unique object. In each activity the expatriate is the subject, and different variables (the phenomenographical subcategories) become the activities mediating tools, rules, community and division of labour where appropriate. The difference in object, that is the goal of each activity, form the qualitative differences between the categories. (See *Table 1*).

#### **Activity at the workplace.**

The main focus of this study is the acculturation process associated to the workplace. The result showed that there were differences in the acculturation process at work compared to outside of work: (a) a familiar and universal office environment makes adjustment seem easy, (b) the expatriate tends to hold on to native values and ideas to a greater extent at work, and

(c) they do so for a longer time compared to outside of work, a fact which tends to lead to cultural clashes.

Regarding (a), the universal structure of the workplace is a part of the rules, that is the formal and informal limiting factors (Engeström & Kerosuo, 2007; Engeström, 1987). Since this structure is rather familiar to the expatriate, her acting and adjusting as the subject comes easily.

The expatriate as actor uses the mediating tools that she considers efficient to complete the objective (b), which according to our results seem to be her home-culture tools. In many cases, the host and home culture tools are reasonably similar, cloaking minor differences but highlighting major differences. An example of this would be the poorly scheduled meetings mentioned in the results, a contradiction between an expatriate from a society that values punctuality, living in a society that doesn't.

The masking effect of the familiar office structure and the fact that retaining home-culture tools does in fact often produce acceptable results, significantly delays the adoption of local mediating tools at the workplace, thus explaining (c).

The community and the social context are the colleagues and managers, and their support especially in the initial phase of the expatriation is a tool for the expatriate to feel integrated. Division of labour reflects the subject's role in the overall activity of the workplace (Engeström & Kerosuo, 2007; Engeström, 1987), a role that most expatriates in our study experienced as important, due to the fact that they brought international expertise and language skills to the company. Aside from performing well at your job, a desirable outcome for the expatriates from the work activity was to be able to stay in the country of choice. In this sense, the job itself becomes a tool for staying on in the country.

Apart from this purely work focussed activity, we found a cultural aspect to the workplace; food and language were the main tools to integrate socially. Further integration in the workplace increased the satisfaction at work and generally in life.

### **Language and food in the activities.**

Language and food appear in all activities, but their roles vary considerably in each activity. Participants consider the work setting to be easy to adjust to. However when the interviewees were able to come up with specific work-related incidents where they felt pressure from colleagues, the triggers of the process were cultural rituals rather than work-related tasks. Food in particular is a major tool to socialise newcomers into the prevailing cultural norms at the workplace, suggesting that food is one of the absolutely necessary things to learn in order to manage the activity (Säljö as cited in Marton, 2000). The expatriates express when, what, where and with whom you eat in terms of cultural characteristics, instead of in terms of work. Most of the interviewees say they understood food and the rituals surrounding it to be a major influence on fitting in socially, and something they go to pains to learn.

The role of these cultural rituals changes depending on the object of the activity. When learning about and adapting to a foreign culture is the object, food and language are a significant part of the culture, but food and language can also function as the mediating tools of the activity. Food and its rituals help understand culture. Language and food are deeply intertwined tools. Language, or rather the lack of language, work as constraining rules, limiting the expatriate's learning process.

Language's role as a constraining rule becomes salient when socialising with people outside of work. Several participants mention lack of linguistic knowledge and proficiency as a show-stopper for making friends with the locals. Food is also a regulation in this activity. What, but most importantly when and how people eat can become a separating factor between expatriates and locals, limiting the social interaction.

In relation to self-identity, language is a tool for personal change. Several interviewees mention how the culture and tone of the new language change their personality, for instance making them more direct than before. This change went identity deep and it is salient when they switch back to their native tongue.

### **When activities interact.**

Even though the activities, and so the categories, are qualitatively distinct features of the process, they still interact in a social context, according to the third generation of activity theory (Engeström & Kerosuo, 2007; Engeström, 1987). A prominent example describes how learning about culture as a concept can become a mediating tool for relationships to people outside of work, and vice versa.

When discussing learning about culture as the object of the activity, the interviewees mention getting to know people as a mediating tool. They might live with the locals in order to learn about their eating habits. Similarly, when talking about getting to know people and make friends as the object of the activity, they mention that they use learning about the culture as the mediating factor, such as when they join a language exchange in order to meet people. These similar objects are tightly intermingled, but perceptually the respondents see them as two different goals. Social relationships also belong to the community point of the activity triangle for both activities.

Relationships between activities suggests that all four activities are important for successful acculturation. To be able to work in a host country environment with few clashes, and to be able to interact with local clients, expatriates needs to learn about the culture as a concept. In order to do so, relationships with people outside of work is an important tool. Learning about the culture and building relationships with locals' impacts self-identity.

### **Integrated interpretation**

The trait of WLOC and the acculturation strategy the subject chooses affect the activity as a whole. In this context Säljö's (2001) theoretical issue with focussing on the individual when individual differences are not relevant to the activity, is not applicable. For instance assimilators and people with internal WLOC adapt more easily than others. This finding suggests that their activity is efficient, and that these traits affect the other variables as well.

Interview data suggest the way the expatriates discuss their place in the division of labour of the organisation relates to the coordination of individual acts being subordinate to the overall object of the activity (Engeström & Kerosuo, 2007; Marton, 2000). The expatriates see neither foreignness nor newness as a hurdle. Being foreign becomes meaningful in completing the task at hand, because the quality brings a different set of individual tools to the activity which the local colleagues do not have at their disposal. Meanwhile the universality of the office environment provides another set of tools which they share with their colleagues. The new set provides a common ground allowing the expatriates to see themselves as valuable members of the organisation right from the beginning. This sense of self-efficacy combined with the feeling that work provides structure and security explains the feeling of successful adjustment at work.

Individuals with an internal WLOC tend to be instinctively proactive, while those with a central WLOC are proactive at a conscious level (Rotter, 1966; Spector, 1988). The results show that all interviewees have a proactive and active approach to problem solving. However they see the outcome of the activity, actually adjusting to the culture, as a natural process that happens over time. It is disconnected from their engagement in the activity. In fact, the longer the respondent had been an expatriate, the more they emphasised how things came naturally.

Despite the fact that adjustment and adaptation require learning, expatriates distinguish the two as separate processes.

Assimilators and integrators differ in their commitment to the new culture. Assimilators making the leap more wholeheartedly, more or less as predicted in Berry (Berry, 1997). Adapting to local etiquette and accepting or understanding the local political system were two items from SCAS 22 that came significantly easier to assimilators than to integrators. These items were explicitly mentioned in the context of *flipping the switch*, an expression which illustrates the decision to make an increased effort towards acculturation, showing an agreement between the quantitative data and the expatriates' subjective experience.

This change in attitude is essentially a change in the identity forming activity. The object is to identify one's place in the world. The rules, more specifically the informal restrictions that individuals create, change when subject becomes acculturated. This process allows the individual to place herself in the world freely rather than to automatically refer back to her native roots.

Individuals with different WLOC scores adapt differently depending on their family status at the time of expatriation. This finding introduces the possibility of analysing how the family affect the activity as depending on the subject. While the family will always be part of the community of the activity, the family might be an additional tool for the subject with central WLOC, and instead a restricting rule for the subject with internal WLOC. From a central WLOC perspective, being single could mean that you have one less tool at your disposal than when you have a family. From an internal WLOC perspective being single might mean fewer factors to have to account for than when you have family.

## Discussion

Our hypotheses were partially confirmed, producing unexpected and relevant results. We also answered the research question about individual experiences, fulfilling the purpose of further understanding the acculturation process and the perceived experience of the working expatriate.

Based on our findings, we agree with Taras et al. (2009) stating that there is a need for qualitative methods in research of culture. We found similarities between our quantitative and qualitative results, giving further support for mixed methods research. We found variation, confirming that the quantitative and qualitative findings complement each other. This supports Holopainen and Björkman's (2005) argument that self-evaluation in questionnaires alone is an inappropriate method for measuring cultural adaptation.

We predicted that internal or central WLOC would lead to easy adaptation, based on theory and the results of Flytzani and Nijkamp (2008). Bearing in mind that our studied sample consists of successful expatriates, the strong skew in the result towards internal and central WLOC agrees with this prediction. By using a model made up of three WLOC groups instead of two, we acknowledge the possible impact of a central WLOC. As a result we found significant variances that studies with a two group model neglect.

Our sample was also skewed towards the acculturation strategies of integration and assimilation, supporting the assumption that individuals using these strategies would adapt easily as well (Berry, 1997).

Previous research assumes successful acculturation leads to a good expatriate employee experience (Holopainen & Björkman, 2005) and that failure of acculturation leads to unsuccessful expatriation. Our results agree on both matters and furthermore the interviewees said that failure to adapt leads to unhappiness with the whole experience.

Holopainen and Björkman (2005) found that various demographic factors predict expatriate success, for instance when the expatriate is married and travels with family. Our results were ambiguous and could not bear on demographic predictions. We suspect this is

due to the predominance of corporate assignees in previous research, while our sample mostly consists of self-initiated expatriates. Holopainen and Björkman (2005) suggest such ambiguities could relate to the country-of-origin and cultural fit between the home and host cultures. Contrary to their (ibid.) view we suggest that globalisation, multicultural employment practices and increased international mobility creates a global office environment with a distinct and universal culture, mediating the difference between the home and host culture by providing a middle point.

Causal relationship between successful acculturation and work performance are unclear but often assumed to go in the direction of successful acculturation and leading to good work performance. Holopainen and Björkman (2005) suggest further research on this matter due to this lack of clarity. Our findings suggest that adaptation at work comes first with the familiar structure and then through support from colleagues who make it easier to adapt at work than outside of work. However, since acculturation at and outside of the workplace are intertwined settings, we see great benefit for the employer to support newly arrived expatriates in their adjustment outside of work as well.

While we found the results largely in line with previous research, we contribute by sharing new findings. Whenever acculturation takes place, food and language are sure to have important, although varying, roles. Companies should arrange food or language themed events, or encourage the expatriates to find such events outside of work to facilitate the acculturation process. Joining sport teams and other organised groups also facilitates socialisation. Expatriates should be encouraged to accept offers of social interaction even if this is not their natural inclination.

Proactive conscious effort by the expatriate arose as an important factor in our results. Even those who described the acculturation process as natural and easy going explained that they made conscious effort to meet people, to be involved, and to learn. The disconnection between how much work they put in and the outcome may explain why this result has not shown up as a factor in the previous research.

Proactivity is a characteristic of the internal WLOC. Predominantly self-initiated expatriates, 80% of participants in our study had an internal WLOC while only 35% were internal in Flytzani and Nijkamp's (2008) study on corporate assignees. This difference suggests a strong relationship between self-initiated expatriation and internal WLOC, a result which we attribute to proactivity.

Based on previous research, and in some cases the lack of previous research, we chose a number of factors to investigate in relation to the acculturation of the working expatriate. While none of these factors on their own is a sentence to failure or recipe for success, we found a combination based on our results that is most likely to be the ideal expatriate in terms of sociocultural adaptation. This combination is the assimilator with an internal WLOC.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

It would be relevant for future research to investigate a broad spectrum of expatriates. Interesting groups would be struggling and unhappy expatriates. It would be interesting to learn how their acculturation process differs from successful expatriates'. The interaction effect found on WLOC and family status is another factor for further study. A repeated remark from the interviewed expatriates was change over time. A longitudinal study could clarify issues and findings of adaptation over time.

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## **Appendix A: Materials**

### **Survey**

The WLOC instrument is a short format questionnaire consisting of eight questions on a six point Likert scale ranging from “Disagree Strongly” to “Agree Strongly” on questions such as “People who perform well on their jobs generally get rewarded”. The summed results provide a single score out of 48, with a low score indicating an internal locus of control and a high score indicating an external locus of control. The WLOC instrument is available for use free of charge for non-commercial educational and research purposes in return for sharing results, and is copyright 1988, Paul E. Spector.

Berry’s acculturation strategy model groups individuals into one of four primary strategies on a two-dimensional matrix, providing discrete groups.

The SCAS (Socio-Cultural Adaptation Scale) consists of 42 questions, in two parts. Standard procedure is to use the first ten questions in all cases, and to select appropriate questions from the remainder for the context. We selected 12 of these questions relatable to workplace situations for a total of 22 questions. We refer to the scores on the standard questions as SCAS 10 and on the full subscale as SCAS 22 respectively. The instrument uses a five point Likert scale ranging from “Very Difficult” to “Very Easy”. The questions ask about situations typically encountered in daily life, such as “How did you find using the cafeteria” and “How did you find dealing with people in authority”. SCAS is in the public domain and formal permission for use is not required.

### **Interview Guide**

We based the interview guide was based on results from the quantitative data, specifically the SCAS 22 items that gathered a broad range of responses, as we considered these more likely to provide a qualitative difference in experience. We also included questions about the experience of moving to a new country in general and at the workplace, and adaptation in general and at the workplace.

After conducting each interview, we performed an initial analysis across the interviews to date and tweaked some interview questions in order to further explore interesting answers. The questions were open-ended, to give room for follow up questions and to let the interviewees fully elaborate and explore their experiences. Some examples of questions are ”What was your biggest surprise, the thing that made you most say ‘wait, what?’ when you started working here?” and ”How did you find adapting to local etiquette?”.

## Appendix B: Additional Survey Results

### *Interesting results from the SCAS 22 Measure*

<i>Variable</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Int.</i>		<i>Ass.</i>		<i>Mar*</i>	
			<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Dealing with people in authority	4.37	.017	3.46	.96	3.89	.78	2.00	1.41
Going to coffee shops etc.	1.58	.020	4.57	.62	4.89	.33	2.00	1.41
Adapting to local etiquette	2.79	.039	3.61	.98	4.33	.87	2.00	1.41
Unsatisfactory service	6.30	.004	2.61	.98	3.67	.87	2.00	1.41
People of higher status	3.70	.010	3.78	.92	4.56	.73	4.00	1.41
Local political system	6.33	.004	2.76	.99	3.89	1.05	2.00	1.41

\* Limitations due to small sample size (n = 2)

Int = Integration, Ass = Assimilation, Mar = Marginalisation

df(2,49)

### *WLOC versus SCAS 22 scores*

<i>Variable</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Internal</i>		<i>Central</i>	
			<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Going Shopping	1.55	.024	4.31	.82	3.80	.92
Dealing with People in authority	2.08	.042	3.75	.98	3.23	.97
Understanding the local's Worldview	2.51	.015	3.68	.91	3.10	.86
Coffee shops, etc.	1.96	.054	4.71	.64	4.33	.84

df(2,60)

## Appendix C: Examples of qualitative results and analysis

**Relationship to Work:** *A means to an end to stay in the country, Cultural differences and identifying with home culture, Universal structure facilitates adaptation, Food and language as cultural mediators, Power relations, Support, The expatriate's foreignness is a resource for the company.*

**Relationship to culture as an everyday concept:** *Active effort to learn, Adjustment perceived as a natural process, First impressions, Everyday things, Expectations and previous experience, Food as a tool or hurdle, Language as a tool or hurdle, Preference host- or home culture, Relationships with people as a mediator to learn about the culture as a concept, Social differences and Systemic differences.*

**Relationship to people outside of work:** *Active effort to meet new people, Food as a tool or hurdle, Language as a tool or hurdle, to make friends with locals and expatriates.*

**Relationship to self-identity:** *Flipping the switch from short term- to long term perspective, Home culture seems foreign, Host culture feels like home, Language affecting sense of identity, Personal growth.*

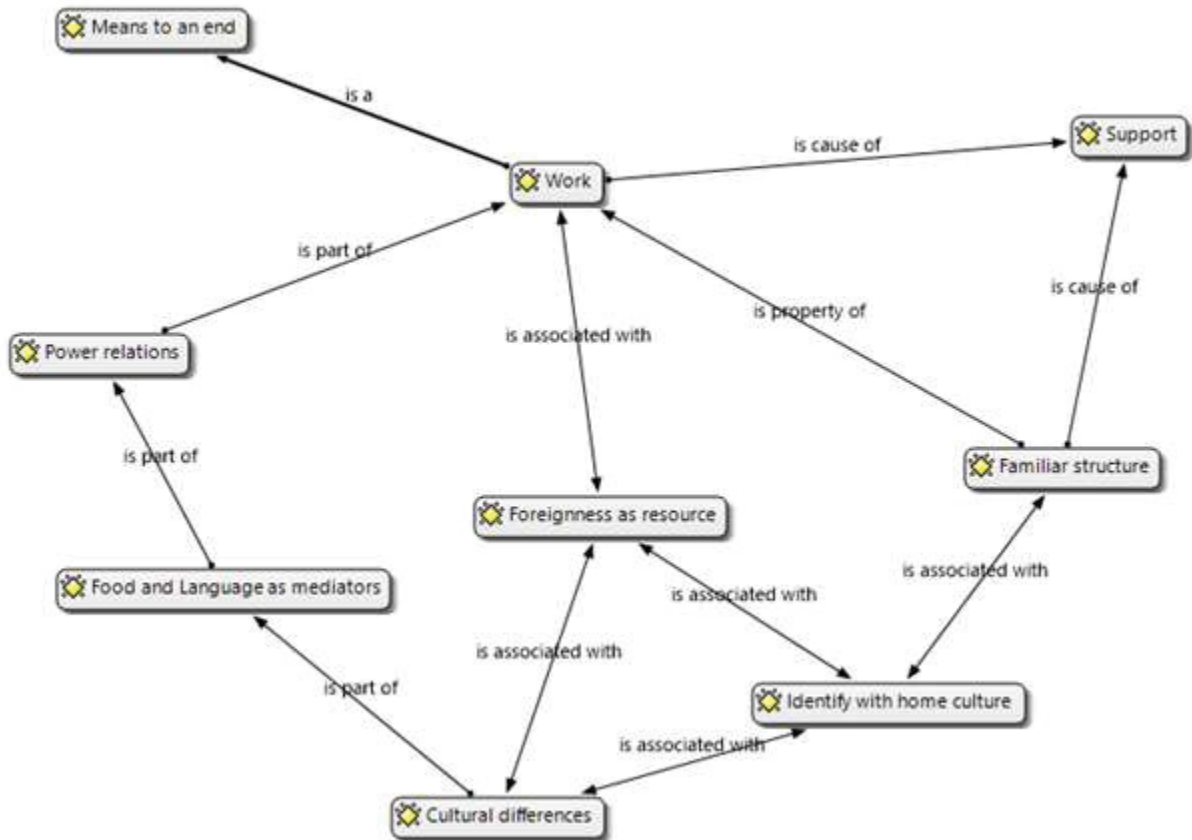


Figure 4 An example category network diagram from Atlas.ti