

Peyton M. Creadick  
International Technical Communications  
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## Sally in Sweden

By Peyton M. Creadick

### Abstract:

This is a two-fold case. What Mike did, and what Sally did. Sally St. John is a 29-year-old Senior Project Manager at a small but fast-growing company called Monroe Microchips. Monroe is run by Mike Monroe, a hardworking, dedicated and demanding employer who expects high quality work at a sometimes impractical pace. Sally has worked hard and has attracted Mike's attention. Now she finds herself in charge of the company's first international project - a joint venture with Svenske Computers. The project has a lot of potential for additional business, but they must complete the initial phase. Mike feels the project could be completed sooner. He is growing impatient and wants to speed up the project in the hopes of negotiating further contracts with Svenske.

Consequently, Sally finds herself in Sweden trying to hammer out the details and speed matters up, so the next phase of the project can proceed. Sally works with Alberik Benske (middle-level manager) and Rut Johansson, Managing Director of Svenske Computers. Sally is simultaneously confused by the casual environment and high expectations of the Swedes. Sally is used to a more formal environment when such expectations are present. However, Sally is flexible. Mike is not.

After several days, Sally begins making progress, but Mike's patience runs out.

He continually pressures Sally to meet her goals. The new dates must be confirmed. Finally, Mike decides that his involvement is necessary. Sally hopes a visit to Sweden will help Mike understand the cultural differences, and he will change his tactics when he does.

Mike's arrival in Sweden doesn't give him the same experiences Sally has had. He doesn't get to know anyone. Instead, it causes conflict, and he blames Sally for not being able to handle the project and calling him in too late. Monroe Microchips not only fails to move up the dates, but Sally finds herself busted back to much less important projects.

Sally's experiences show just what can go wrong when a highly masculine and individualistic culture like the U.S. attempts to do business in highly feminine and considerably less individualistic culture like Sweden.

## **Background for the Case**

Having been labeled the "Silicon Valhala," Sweden has been called "the most wired and wireless nation on earth" ("Selling to Sweden," 2007, ¶4). Sweden, with its low Uncertainty Avoidance Index score (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005, 169), is known "as a country of early adopters" ("Selling to Sweden," 2007, ¶4). Close to "70 percent of Swedish households have an advanced PC" and "more than 50 percent of all Swedes use the Internet" ("Selling to Sweden," 2007, ¶6).

Sweden's techno-savvy population and openness to new things make it an excellent prospect for new technology-related businesses. In addition, Sweden has been called "the most Americanized country in the world, with the possible exception of the United States" by a "noted Political Scientist," and "Foreign Policy ranked Sweden as one of the top three most globalized countries in the world" ("Selling to Sweden," 2007, ¶1).

On paper, Sweden looks ideal for American business investments and ventures.

## **The Whole Scenario**

Mike Monroe, president of Monroe Microchips, expects results. He's entrusted Sally St. John with his pet project, because she's shown she knows what needs to be done. His employees know they must be committed, or they will find themselves working elsewhere. Mike's employees work around the clock when needed, and they don't make excuses. Mike's confident, perhaps too confident, that he and his people know how to get the job done. In the U.S., this has proven true time and time again.

Mike's efforts to move into the international arena have involved a lot of research into companies and markets. After settling on Svenske Computers, Mike deepened his research and focused on business practices in Sweden. Once the initial contacts had been made and appointments arranged, Mike sent his V.P. of sales to cement the deal. The V.P., knowing how different people can be, did a significant amount of research and successfully completed the deal in February. The dates for delivery were not to Mike's liking, and Mike refused to accept excuses regarding summers in Sweden and vacation time.

Consequently, Mike wants to speed things up. He doesn't understand why his sales V.P. would agree to such distant dates in the first place. To further complicate matters, efforts to arrange meetings were thwarted by frequently vacationing Svenske executives. Mike's V.P. explains to him that the timing of their "venture" has a significant amount to do with the delayed dates. Mike can't fathom this sort of lack of dedication. He finally accepts that he will have to delay his plans, but he makes up his mind that Sally will be pushing this project through as quickly as possible once a meeting in Sweden can be arranged. There will be no time to waste. Time, after all, is money.

In April, Mike learns that Rut Johansson is back in the office. He also learns that the executives and other employees will be much harder to reach as the summer advances. Anxious to complete business, Mike sends Sally to Sweden to hammer things out with "Mister" Rut Johansson ASAP. Mike thinks a woman will warm up Mr. Johansson more than Mike can, and Mike's efforts to-date have been less successful than he would normally expect. Thus far, Mr. Johansson seems immune to Mike's usual methods.....compliments regarding the Svenske's successes, gifts, etc. Furthermore, on the phone, the Svenske's employees are abrupt, and (to Mike's frustration) Svenske Computers doesn't want Sally to arrive for two weeks.

Consequently, Sally suddenly finds herself in Sweden with her aggressive employer constantly demanding updates. Sally refuses to let Mike's impatience impact her work. She has prepared a thorough presentation detailing the whys, hows and whens, and she is ready to give it at a moment's notice. Intending to do some research regarding Swedish businesses and its culture, Sally decides not to after being told by Mike that Sweden is very Americanized, and she should act normally. They're "used to us," he says. Since this is Sally's first project of this magnitude, she defers to Mike. After all, Mike is Mike. He wouldn't steer her wrong when it could impact business.

### **Sally in Sweden**

Sally arrives the afternoon before she is due at Svenske. She is relieved to have

some time to rest before the events begin to unfold. In the morning, Sally is met by a fashionably well-dressed blond man in a hat who introduces himself as Alberik Benke. She's surprised to find a male assistant, but attempts to mask her surprise and to focus on business. Alberik stands farther from her than she finds comfortable, and he seems to expect something from her as she introduces herself. Sally is unsure what to do and tries to follow Alberik's lead.

In addition to his hat, Sally notices that Alberik is also wearing sandals. His toes are well-groomed, but she finds their exposure a bit too casual. He takes her on a tour of Svenske Computers, and she finds herself constantly fighting the urge to move closer to him. She feels myopic. The space between them makes her uncomfortable. Sally also notices that none of the men seem to shake her hand. They give her an expectant look and seem confused when she doesn't respond. She also notices she's being introduced to a lot more women than she expected, and they ALL shake her hand. Both the men and the women stand farther from her than she would like, and they seem cold and sedate. They never seem to touch her again after shaking her hand, and when they meet her, they look her straight in the eyes.

She spends much of her first day with Alberik who talks more and is cold like the others, but he seems less cold as she spends more time with him. Aware that she is not in the U.S., Sally attempts to keep an open mind; however, she is plagued by doubts. What if her treatment isn't cultural but personal. Maybe they don't like her. Maybe Mike's "way" has set things off on the wrong foot.

In the middle of showing her some offices, Alberik stops for something he calls Fika. He explains that this is break time. Upon noticing everyone taking a break, Sally realizes that this is some sort of corporate break, and she is frustrated, because she knows Mike would not want her to take a break. She doesn't have time for a break. Sally suspects it's safer to do as the Romans do when in Rome and goes along with the break.

As the day goes on, Sally is puzzled by the wearing of sandals, strange amount of personal space, relaxed atmosphere, and almost militant adherence to corporate break schedules. She continues to log things as "cultural differences" and tries to stay on task, but it's difficult. The personal space issue is a constant source of distraction. She knows she is not accomplishing as much as Mike would demand, but she doesn't want to offend the Swedes.

This method seems moderately successful. She spends much of her first day and a half with a group of middle-level managers who are Alberik's colleagues. What she can't understand is the dividing line between accepted conversation and offensive conversation. She attempts the level of casual conversation she

perceives as fitting to the environment. She tries to tell Alberik about herself, but he seems uncomfortable. Efforts at forms of small talk fail, too. She continues to make mental notes in preparation for her meeting with Rut Johansson.

Sally learns that she doesn't have a meeting scheduled with Rut Johansson until the following afternoon. That, Alberik tells her, is the soonest "Rut" could see her. Meetings are usually scheduled two weeks in advance, and it was quite difficult for them to "fit her in." Sally again wonders if Mike's aggressive business tactics reflect badly on her.

Each time Sally updates Mike, he seems to become more impatient. Mike is insulted by the casual Swedish behavior and lack of urgency. This is just more time lost. Mike has waited long enough and insists on Sally's seeing Mr. Johansson ASAP. Standing IN Sweden, and used to working "with" a variety of different people to get things done, Sally is growing concerned about her position. She is between a rock and a hard place. To satisfy Mike, she will anger the Swedes. To satisfy the Swedes, Sally senses that more time will be required.

Sally convinces Mike not to push for an earlier meeting. He might inadvertently offend the Swedes, and then they will not be willing to alter the contracts and change the dates. She advises him that she believes this country to be a softer sell than Mike is used to. It requires more patience. Finally, Mike defers to her, but she wonders how long she will be able to keep him satisfied. Mike tends to label anything outside "yes sir" as an excuse.

## **Rut Johansson**

Finally, Sally meets with Rut Johansson the following afternoon: Tuesday at 4 PM. To her surprise, Rut is a woman! In fact Rut is a tall, cold, businesslike woman resembling most of the other Svenske employees with her stylish outfit and casual shoes. Sally is surprised that Alberik never told her Rut was female. Alberik gives an uncomfortable look when she introduces herself to Rut. Like the other women Sally has met, Rut shakes Sally's hand and advises Sally to call her by her first name. Sally's attempts to impress Rut with a few informed compliments about this area of Sweden fail to impress Rut. Sally is a bit disconcerted when Rut invites Alberik and the rest of the middle-level managers to join the meeting. They comply happily, and Sally is unsure what this means.

Rut resists Sally's attempts to continually discuss the new proposal in this first meeting, and Sally is put off by changes of subject. Rut wants to discuss Monroe Microchips, Sally's function, and the expectations of the project. As the meeting progresses, Sally finds she has made little progress in discussing the dates. Her presentation remains unaddressed as well.. The meeting is very low-key.

Despite the facts that the deal has been previously negotiated and this is a follow-up meeting to speed things up, she feels as if she is being evaluated. Rut's informal business style confuses Sally who is thankful she's had a few days in Sweden to adjust, or this meeting would be even more confusing. She is less worried by Rut's abruptness and other strange behaviors than she might have been if she'd gone in to meet with Rut during her first day at Svenske.

To Sally's surprise, at 5:30, business ceases. The managers agree to meet with Sally again on Thursday, and the meeting is over. Sally senses that the middle-level managers are a little irritated with her for some reason. Sally decides to spend her evening on the Internet researching Sweden. Armed with a few key pieces of information, Sally approaches Alberik the next day. With a few carefully worded inquiries to Alberik, she learns more about the process than she expected. She wishes she had known how different business can be when conducted in other countries. Sally explains to Alberik that this is her first international venture. Her sincerity is met with a willingness from Alberik to provide direction.

Thanks to Alberik and her research, the second meeting is better. Sally is more confident and comfortable with Rut and the other managers. She is finally able to show her presentation, which is well-received. One thing she has in common with the Swedes, Sally notes, is an appreciation for details. No decisions have been made, but, according to Alberik, the group will make the decision together. Mike believes the Swedes are stalling for time, and he is growing even more frustrated. Mike has no patience for committees, with or without stalling tactics.

By Friday, Sally learns that though the dates were firmly stated in the contracts, it may be possible to move them up somewhat. They can't meet Mike's demands, but they can compromise. Alberik and the other middle-level managers will be working with her on the dates. She calls Mike to advise him of the developments, and he is less than pleased. Compromise is not what he was looking for. He believes that Rut is now pushing off the job as less important. They don't seem to understand that time is money.

Despite objections from Sally and the sales V.P., Mike heads off to Sweden after demanding a meeting with Rut Johansson. He refuses to listen to Sally's suggestions, having decided that Sally was not as ready for this assignment as he originally thought.

### **Mike in Sweden**

Mike's experience with Rut and Alberik is strikingly different. He introduces

himself and then dominates the conversation. Mike steers the discussion and continually interrupts when he receives any verbal resistance. He presents no supporting data for his views, and the discussion goes nowhere. Mike believes his passionate dedication to the success of this venture will communicate the need to change the specific dates, but Rut's response confuses him. She is abrupt and consults the other lower-level managers. She is weak, he decides. He presses her for a decision, and she advises him that she will consult with her colleagues.

Mike wonders why she can't make the decision for herself. Why does she have these middle-level managers in the meeting with them? He finds some of the men very wimpy. Other executives should be in this meeting. They should have been called in to the office. No further meeting is scheduled.

### Going Home

The next day, Mike is advised that it's simply not possible to move up the negotiated dates. Sally and Mike return to the U.S., and Mike wonders if he made a mistake in working Svenske Computers at all. Even their work hours and long vacations show they simply aren't concerned with being competitive.

When the project is finally completed (on the dates originally negotiated), Svenske Computers opts to work with another microchip company instead of negotiating further contracts.

### Background for Analysis

Table 1 shows how Sweden and the U.S. compare in terms of Hofstede and Hofstede's five cultural dimensions.

**Table 1**

Index	Swede n	United States
Power Distance (p. 43)	31	40
Individualism (p. 78)	71	91
Masculinity (pp. 120–121)	5	62
Uncertainty Avoidance (pp. 168–169)	29	46
Long Term Orientation (p. 211)	33	29

Notice the similarities in the scores for Power Distance (PD) and Long Term Orientation (LTO). The PDI scores indicate that Sweden has similar but slightly less boundaries between the levels of management. The LTO scores indicate Sweden is very slightly more oriented toward the long term.

Sweden and the U.S. differ somewhat more in their Long Term Orientation (LTO) and Individualism (IDV) scores, but both countries' scores are positioned on the same side of the median. The IDV scores indicate Sweden is less individualistic than the U.S., and the UAI scores indicate Sweden is somewhat less concerned with uncertainty. Based on Hofstede's scores, Denmark is the only European or Anglo-Saxon country scoring lower than Sweden on UAI and IDV. To put things into perspective, only two countries, Jamaica and Singapore, score lower on Uncertainty Avoidance than Sweden, and they are both on the collectivist side of the median. Hong Kong and Sweden share the same UAI score.

The primary difference between the U.S. and Sweden is Masculinity (MASC). Sweden's score of 5 (vs. the U.S. score of 91) makes the two countries vastly different in some very important ways. This is the only index in which they fall on opposite sides of the median.

The following table provides comparisons between the work environments of Masculine and Feminine societies as presented in *Cultures and Organizations* (2005, p. 147) by Hofstede and Hofstede:

**Table 2**

<b>Workplace Traits</b>	<b>Feminine</b>	<b>Masculine</b>
Management style	Intuition and consensus	Decisive and aggressive
Conflict Resolution methods	Compromise and negotiation	Strongest wins
Size of Organization	Small preferred	Large preferred
Work vs. Life	Work to live	Live to work
Time vs. Money	Time	Money
M/F career options	Optional for both	Required for men
Women at work	Higher share of women in the professions	Lower share of women in the professions
Humanization of work	Contact and cooperation	Job content enrichment

This table helps provide some perspective on the potential problems that might result from a poorly researched attempt at international business between a masculine and feminine culture.

The following section provides some brief advice from Sweden.se on how best to behave while attempting to establish or do business in Sweden:

### Do's

- Be punctual – do not be late if at all possible and *never* without calling
- Plan Ahead – Give people time to prepare. Meetings should be booked two weeks in advance.
- Work Hard – Be prepared. Be thorough and detailed.
- Give yourself time – It can be hard to break in to business in Sweden. Be patient.

(*Taking Care of Business*, 2007, Dos and don'ts, ¶1)

### Dont's

- Use force – easing your way into a relationship with a company takes time. Swedes do not like new ideas forced upon them.
- Boast or Brag – Swedes are modest and avoid embellishment.
- Show disrespect – watch and listen before you act.

(*Taking Care of Business*, 2007, Dos and don'ts, ¶2)

Based on Table 2 and the above Do's and Don't, we can now begin to understand the depth and variety of Sally's and Mike's mistakes. Further explanations will be provided along with the analysis in the following section.

A final note before proceeding to the analysis: "Egalitarianism is the most dominant social value in Sweden" (*Doing business*, 2007, Egalitarianism, ¶1).

## Analysis

This analysis will focus on Mike, Sally, and the impact they have on each other in relation to their mistakes while attempting to secure the new delivery dates with Svenske Computers. The following table will help illustrate some of the key differences. It will also help to show why Sally was more successful in her efforts (though ultimately a complete failure) than Mike.

### Table 3

Sally's Traits	Mike's Traits	Sweden's Cultural Traits
Direct and decisive but flexible	Direct and decisive	Direct. Decisions on consensus
Expedient but open-minded	Expedient	Patience
Work is life	Work is life	Work is not life
Thorough	Thorough	Thorough

As shown in the table, Sally is flexible where Mike is not. Sally is willing to find ways of meeting the Swedes on their terms, if necessary. Sally is sincere and thorough. According to *Doing Business in Sweden: Business Etiquette*, sincerity is a valued trait in Sweden (2007, Formal Meetings, ¶3). For Sally, Sweden's less aggressive and more "feminine" status is a lucky break. With her luck, her thoroughness, and her flexibility, she has an excellent chance of achieving her goal to move up the dates. Unfortunately, Mike's demands are the equivalent of expecting a American teacher to be in her classroom on July fourth.

Mike, on the other hand, is the Anti-Sweden type. He is direct but decisive. He makes the decisions. Like our friend Austin Megan from earlier in the semester, Mike has no patience for committees. He wants Sally to extract a decision from Rut, and that's something Rut simply can't provide. In addition to being a member of a consensus-based decision-making society, Rut is also too high in the food chain. She is consulted and present as most Swedish executives are, but Sweden is heavily unionized with most workers belonging to "one of several labor unions" (Porter, 2007, Shorter chain of command, ¶2), and "ideas are discussed openly and across all levels" (Porter, 2007, Shorter chain of command, ¶3) with middle management making the final decision. Kwintessential.co.uk says "do not channel all your energy into endearing yourself to the top-level executives. In many cases, the power to make a decision will fall to middle managers, who may even pass it over to lower levels" ("*Doing business*," 2007, Doing business - Meetings and negotiations, ¶4). Like Austin Megan, Mike assumes that speaking to the head means he will get things done.

### Sally's Mistakes

In Sally's first few days, she is confused by this strange country. She takes personally a number of "customs" such as the way the men do not shake her hand. She must present her hand before a man will present his ("*Doing business*," 2007, Doing business - meeting and greeting etiquette, ¶1), so the men rarely shake her hand. In addition, she is confused by the negative responses she receives when she attempts to make "small talk" or talk about herself.

Sally doesn't know that Swedish people rarely mix business and private time, and they have a higher expectation for the quality of conversation than small talk allows. At work, "welcome topics of conversation [include]: nature, arts, philosophy, current events, soccer, hockey, and music," and unwelcome topics include family, personal life, praising one region of Sweden over another, and anything superficial (like the weather) (*Doing business in Sweden: business etiquette*, 2007, General etiquette, ¶8-9).

She is distracted by the abrupt way of speaking and amount of personal space Swedes prefer ("*Doing business*," 2007, *Doing business - meeting and greeting etiquette*, ¶4-5). Although she doesn't take these personally, they do distract her significantly in the beginning, and they cause her to miss important cues that might have increased her confidence and Alberik's confidence in her. Finally, she is confused by the number of people involved in her meetings with Rut Johansson. She knows nothing of Sweden's somewhat collectivist decision-making style and doesn't understand how these people fit into the "big picture."

Sally's major issues are caused by her lack of research. Granted, it doesn't seem as if Mike allowed her much time or encouraged much information gathering, so part of the blame falls on Mike for sending an internationally green employee into a foreign country with "don't worry, they're just like us" instructions. Had she been more experienced, she might have known better. Research pays. And, with the knowledge gained, she would have had a better understanding of the Swedes, resulting in fewer mistakes, a potentially faster decision, and a more favorable outcome. In addition, she would have had the information necessary to make Mike understand WHY they must wait. He, like the Swedes, is thorough. He requires concrete explanations or he suspects excuses are being made. With Sally's time at the company, THAT is something she should have known sooner.

Sally's flexibility is very nearly her saving grace, but she hasn't done her research. She doesn't understand Swedish culture thoroughly enough to convince Mike that she knows what she is talking about, so he barrels over her.

Sally is used to pulling rabbits out of hats. She's excellent in an impossible environment, but she's never been in a position to have to tell Mike "no" until now. She's had to learn a hard lesson.

### **Sally's Successes**

Sally remains somewhat open-minded and flexible. Like the V.P. of sales, she is used to working with a variety of people and adjusting her behavior as needed. Her success has made her somewhat overconfident. In my own experience,

people who fit “naturally” into something may have no idea why, and this may result in a lack of real skill in that department. Luck, unfortunately, does not always have long-term benefits for the lucky.

Despite Sally’s obstacles in Sweden, she manages to turn things around and is very close to establishing new dates when Mike has enough. Some of Sally’s successes, again, are luck. For example, unlike Mike who demands immediate attention, Sally senses the need and allows for the change of pace. Because of this, she experiences several delays which ultimately resulted in the building of trust with Alberik. This trust is how she was able to achieve more success. Had she actually been seen by Rut and pushed for the dates as Mike had demanded, the operation would have failed much sooner.

Had it failed under those conditions, Sally’s relations with the Swedes would have been even poorer. At least, for Sally, she may be able to build relations with Svenske Computers in the future (perhaps, when she’s moved on to another company). More of the reasons why will be addressed in the next section.

Not all of Sally’s successes are the result of dumb luck, however. For example, Swedes expect thorough reports. They want details. According to Kwintessential.co.uk, “before doing business in Sweden, know that Swedes respect someone who comes to them with knowledge and experience” and “any proposal or presentation must be meticulously planned and logically organized” (“*Doing business*”, 2007, *Doing business – meetings and negotiations*, ¶3). Sally was thorough, and her request was given consideration.

### **Mike’s Mistakes**

Table 4 provides a list of business-related expectations from “*Doing Business in Sweden: Business Etiquette*” (2007) and Mike’s corresponding mistakes:

#### **Table 4**

##### **Sweden**

Swedes do not like to say no.

Direct orders and negative speech are frowned upon.

They do not like confrontation.

They do not like raised voices.

##### **Mike’s Mistakes**

Mike insisted on a meeting with Rut immediately.

Then, Mike attempted to force a yes or no answer from Rut in

They do not like emotion during both an aggressive and business negotiations. passionate manner.

Men and women are equal.

Mike assumed Rut was male and that sending a female would manipulate the situation in Mike's favor.

Swedes like Consensus.

Mike failed to understand this. He demanded a meeting with Rut and expected an answer when she alone could not give him one. He then took this as a sign of weakness.

Swedes expect strangers to be introduced by a third party.

Mike introduced himself.

They dislike boasting.

Mike's confidence is a boast of sorts.

In addition, according to Kwintessential.co.uk, many Swedes are unavailable during the summer months ("*Doing business*", 2007, *Doing business - meetings and negotiations*, ¶ 1). This is why the dates were so far in the future. Mike's failure to understand Sweden's attitude toward business is a huge failing. His expectations were based on ignorance and were ultimately unobtainable, even with the correct steps. Compromise was the only real solution.

To further illustrate this, I once had a co-worker whose American corporation sent him to Sweden for most of the U.S. fall and winter every year. He would arrive back in the U.S. for June through August, because (as he put it) most of Sweden "shuts down." Business, he would tell me, is almost impossible.

The items in Table 4 are the primary ways in which Mike violated customs and expectations in Sweden. The tricky part is WHY. We've seen the U.S. scores for PDI, UAI, IDV, MASC, and LTO. What went wrong to cause Mike to behave in ways that would ultimately cost him this contract?

The initial explanations are simple. Like Sally, Mike didn't do his research. He, like Austin Megan, tends to be overconfident. Not only did he (and probably still would) fail to understand Sweden, he failed to understand the myriad of

differences that can exist from one culture to another. His overconfidence contributed to his inflexibility. He assumed he was right because his behavior was acceptable in his home country. He assumed a familiar hierarchy existed where one did not (*"Doing business,"* 2007, Egalitarianism, ¶1).

In short, Mike's personal make-up was so stereotypically American (in terms of Hofstede's scores) as to cause him further problems. To illustrate, I have provided some examples based on Hofstede and Hofstede's work:

- His personal PDI score was higher, based on his behaviors, than the overall score for the U.S. He's aggressive and unrealistically demanding with his employees. He expects information on demand and cannot differentiate explanations from excuses. Lastly, he expects to hold and wield all the power (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005, pp. 55-66).
- His IDV score was as high or higher than the over-all score for the U.S. He listens to no one but himself, he doesn't work well with others, and he's made it to a position where that can backfire in expensive ways (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005, pp. 99-104).
- His MASC score, again, was as high or higher. He's decisive, aggressive, subscribes to Darwinist thinking, lives to work, and expects men to be running the companies (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005, p. 141-147).

His [typically American and somewhat Darwinist] sense that the strongest will win caused him to appear as a bully to the Swedes, and they don't like to be bullied (*Taking care of business,* 2007, Dos and don'ts, ¶2). He assumed that their less-aggressive culture, milder men, and collectivist meeting environment meant weakness on their part. He would need to "whip them into shape." This, unfortunately, was his ultimate failing. The Swedes, being very low on the MASC index, don't have the same expectations. According to Hofstede and Hofstede, for example, there is not the same desire to be "top dog." Success does not necessarily mean obliterating the competition like it does in the U.S. The average student is the norm in Feminine societies, and there is "jealousy of those who try to excel" (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005, 142). The latter concept is almost alien to Americans, I suspect.

## **What Should Have Happened . . .**

What Mike should have done was to consult the V.P. regarding the best plan of action for achieving the desired results. Then he would have seen the need to send the V.P. with or without Sally. The Swedes were familiar with him, which would

have eliminated the time it took for them to get to know Sally. In addition, the V.P. had a good working knowledge of Sweden.

Mike failed to make the best use of his knowledge base (the V.P.) due to his fundamental belief that people are all alike on the basic levels. If Mike intended for Sally to work with them in the future, then Sally should have been sent WITH the V.P. instead of without him.

### **Solutions and Resolutions . . .**

The only solution, I'm afraid, is to learn from these mistakes and make sure to thoroughly research a country as quickly as possible. Learning to do business in foreign countries is like learning to dance: You will step on a lot of toes without the proper preparation.

Had Mike been savvier with less lead lining his skull, he might have immediately sent the V.P. back to Sweden to try and rebuild relations. He might not have been able to achieve his original goals, but he might have been able to salvage the working relationship and profit in the future from his mistakes.

In Sally's case, she won't make the same mistake twice. She knows better and will hopefully find employment in a more positive environment. Some people thrive on pressure, however.

## Conclusion

Ultimately due to lack of proper preparation, our two Americans manage to sabotage each other, offend the Swedes and damage the company's reputation. If Sally had done more research, she might have been able to coax Mike to have more faith in her. If Mike had faith in Sally, she would have persevered. With or without faith in Sally, if Mike had done his research, he might have been more understanding of why Sally was not receiving instant information. He might not even have sent her alone.

The Swedes knew and trusted the V.P., but with a contract in hand, Mike didn't want to waste an expensive resource like his V.P. on such an issue as renegotiation of dates. In addition, if Mike had been kinder to the middle managers and less demanding of Rut, they might have continued to work with Sally on the dates. Ultimately, he wasn't. He was the anti-Sweden type. He was loud, masculine, demanding, and forceful.

As with our friend Austin Megan, research was key. Mike's lack of foresight and insight damaged his business. It's unfortunate that this so often happens, especially in the U.S. where our borders are so far away that we're culturally prone to assuming the world shares our values and expectations.

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