Language Competence and Subjective Career Success:
A Study of International Business Managers in Finland

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**Title of thesis:** Language Competence and Subjective Career Success: A Study of International Business Managers in Finland

**Abstract:**

This thesis investigates the role of language competence for the subjective career success of Finland-based managers working for multinational corporations (MNCs) with a Swedish parent company or with extensive operations in Sweden. The research design is inductive. Qualitative interviews with MNC managers form the basis of data collection, and analysis of resulting empirical data is carried out through coding strategies inspired by Charmaz’ (2006) constructivist grounded theory.

The findings reveal how the respondents conceptualize their own career success (= subjective career success), and that language competence can play a significant role for this. This can occur through language skills affecting e.g. recruitment decisions, social capital and networking, ability to convince and lead others, and one’s emotional wellbeing. Even though inter-cultural or communicative competence is often deemed more important than language competence, these three competences are interlinked, and language competence plays an integral role in this tripart constellation. In this particular setting, the main languages (discounting Finnish) that are deemed important are English (a basic requirement), and Swedish (a strong advantage).

The findings pose implications for individuals, organizations, national policy makers and researchers. They emphasize the importance of developing required language skills (individuals), incorporating language considerations in recruitment and training decisions (companies), ensuring competence is fostered in the languages of Finlands business partners, including Sweden (national policy makers), and adopting more qualitative approaches when studying subjective career success (researchers).

**Keywords:** language, language competence, careers, career success, subjective career success, multinational corporations, managers
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

The role of language in international management processes has in the past tended to be overlooked by researchers (Welch, Welch & Piekkari, 2005), language even being termed the “forgotten factor” (Marschan, Welch & Welch 1997). Recently, however, it has received increased attention, it being realised that language is in fact “at the core of management processes and that these processes can indeed be understood and approached through a linguistic lens” (Tietze, 2008: 2). Research in the international management sphere clearly points to the fact that language effects are not confined to individuals; their language skills have implications for macro-level inter-organizational and micro-level intra-organizational interactions, language dynamics taking place “at the individual manager and employee level, within cross-cultural teams, in headquarters-subsidiary, and inter-unit relationships, as well as among MNCs” (Piekkari & Zander, 2005: 4). Language has been shown to have implications for example for inter-unit communication, knowledge sharing, formation of social capital, coordination and control and post-merger integration (Welch et al., 2005). It has also spurred discussions concerning translation activities, and debates about whether to opt for language standardization through the introduction of formal company languages or whether to acknowledge the context-dependence of language and therefore the impossibility to dictate language use by general policies (Piekkari & Tietze, 2011).

Such implications as depicted above stem from the multilingual nature of many corporations that operate on an international scale, MNCs being termed “multilingual almost by definition” (Barner-Rasmussen & Björkman, 2005: 43) and “multilingual communities” (Luo & Shenkar, 2006). Firms may adopt a common functional (or corporate, or company) language – which is likely to be English due to the emergence of it as the lingua franca in international business contexts (Tietze, 2008) – in an attempt to facilitate formal reporting and informal communication, and create a sense of belonging to a ‘global family’ (Marschan-Piekkari, Welch & Welch 1999b: 379). However, this does not eradicate their multilingual character, as “communicating within the multinational corporation is rarely a monolingual event” (Piekkari, 2008: 131). Instead, internal communication “involves operating at the interface between several languages” (Fredriksson, Barner-Rasmussen & Piekkari, 2006: 407) including those of home country, host country, and functional language. Such a situation may confront a company internationalizing from a non-English speaking country even at the
very early stages of internationalization: for companies internationalizing from Finland for example “there is virtually no scope for utilizing Finnish in their international operations” (Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999b: 378).

The same processes that have been witnessed in MNCs due to language diversity could be expected to operate to a certain extent in multilingual, but mono-national contexts such as Finland, minus national boundaries. Following centuries of interlinked history, there still resides a Swedish speaking minority in Finland, with Swedish being spoken by 5.4% of the population as their first language (Tilastokeskus, 2010), and Swedish being, alongside Finnish, one of the two constitutionally determined national languages (Ministry of Justice Finland, 2010). In terms of other minority languages, the largest group in Finland is Russian (approximately 1%) followed by Estonian (approximately 0.5%) (Tilastokeskus, 2010). In terms of languages used in business, a survey conducted by the Confederation of Finnish Industries EK, an organization that represents the entire private sector including industry and services firms, found that, in addition to Finnish, 88% of firms emphasized English skills when recruiting. This reflects the importance of this language in business, especially in international firms with operations in Finland whose functional language is usually English. The requirement for English was followed by a demand for Swedish (50%) and Russian (29%) (Elinkeinoelämän Keskusliitto EK, 2010). The demand for Swedish is not surprising given that Sweden is one of Finland’s most important business partners, and a survey carried out for the Finnish-Swedish think tank Magma confirms that in business transactions with Sweden the language used is often Swedish; in relation to firms with significant operations in Sweden or whose parent company is Swedish, Swedish was used in 63% of all communication with these Sweden-based units (Magma, 2011).

Such multilingual settings as depicted above render the role of language competence for career success especially pertinent, both for the organization and the individual concerned. From an organizational perspective, individuals’ career success in general is of concern because “employees’ personal success can eventually contribute to organizational success” (Ng, Eby, Sorensen & Feldman, 2005: 367). As such, the factors, including language competence, that impact individuals’ career success are also of interest to the employing organization (Ng et al., 2005), the role of the organization being to support, enable and develop its human assets (Baruch, 2006). Diversity, in terms of for example gender, ethnic minorities and age, are big issues in career
management from an organization’s point of view (Baruch, 2006). In multilingual employment settings, language diversity and what this means for individuals’ career success may be an equally politically sensitive area, for example in cases where a functional language restricts the career success of groups who cannot speak it, as was the case after the merger of Merita and Nordbanken (Vaara, Tienari, Piekkari & Säntti, 2005).

From an individual perspective, understanding the role of one’s language capability for one’s career success is important at a time when the individual is becoming increasingly responsible for managing her own career (Baruch, 2006). Naturally in such a situation it is desirable for individuals to know what the determining factors for career success are in order to be able to manage their careers effectively (Wayne, Liden, Kraimer & Graf, 1999). There is increasing evidence to suggest that language competence affects career outcomes, “shaping, steering or even diverting individual career paths” (Piekkari, 2008: 131) and affecting the subjective perceptions of the individual about his or her career success (e.g. Traavik & Richardsen, 2010). Understanding how language competence affects such career related outcomes will enable the individual to assess his or her likelihood of career success in various organizations, manage her own expectations, and will provide indication of areas in need of development in terms of language skills, leading to more successful career management initiatives.

1.2. Contribution

The empirical research that has been conducted on MNCs to date has not – with the exception of Steyaert, Ostendorp and Gaibrois (2011) and Peltokorpi (2010) – to any great extent focused or accounted specifically for the national context(s) in which these firms are embedded. Thus it is pertinent to examine the ways in which previously unearthed MNC-level dynamics in fact pan out at the individual level in a particular country context. Such dynamics include the role of language competence for career success, although, despite its importance, this is an area that does not appear to have been that extensively researched academically, be that at the MNC or some other level (see e.g. Piekkari, 2008). Most research that has been conducted on language competence and career success appears to focus on general language needs and initial hiring decisions (e.g. Bloch, 1995; Kordsmeier, Arn & Rogers, 2000) or has been conducted in single case study settings (e.g. Marschan-Piekkari, Welch & Welch, 1999a, 1999b; Muukari, 2008; Piekkari, Vaara, Tienari & Säntti, 2005), often not having as the
main objective the desire to understand the impact of language competence on career success, and often focusing on how language competence affects objective, observable achievements such as vertical career progression.

The importance of language competence for individuals’ subjective career success, and the ways in which language competence affects this, is a sparsely researched area, with only a few studies mentioning this explicitly (e.g. Culpan & Wright, 2002; Traavik & Richardsen, 2010). This thesis will hopefully contribute to this area through building on existing theory and generating new theoretical knowledge. A point to note here is that research dealing with subjective career success has tended to focus on predetermined conceptualizations of this, such as job satisfaction. However, individuals may in fact evaluate their career success differently. Therefore more qualitative approaches should be employed to understand this. (Arthur, Claman & DeFilippi, 2005; Heslin, 2005) This thesis will aim to take this into account in the methodology.

Furthermore, in the literature that does touch on language competence and career success, it is sometimes unclear as to whether it is language competence per se or language competence as a facet of communicative competence that has implications for career outcomes. In settings such as MNCs it is also likely that communication will take place between individuals from different cultural backgrounds, which may require some form of inter-cultural competence. Therefore, it is relevant to explore language competence in relation to such communicative and inter-cultural competence, which does not appear to have been done to a great extent previously. Peltokorpi (2010) for example states that international management research has tended to focus on either language or cultural values, and thus there is little knowledge about the combined influence of language and cultural skills on inter-cultural communication in MNCs.

1.3. Aims of the thesis

This thesis is investigating the role of individuals’ language competence for their subjective career success, the focus being on individuals in managerial positions working for Finnish MNCs with subsidiaries in Sweden, and vice versa. Being multilingual, such organizational contexts are especially interesting as settings in which this phenomenon can be investigated. As a Swedish-speaking Finn, fluent also in Finnish and English, such settings are fascinating to the researcher also on a personal level.
Main aim

1. The main aim of this thesis is to understand the role of language competence for individuals' subjective career success, from an individual, as opposed to organizational, perspective, the outcome being to extend current theory on the role of language competence for subjective career success and potentially develop new theory.

Sub aims

1.1 This thesis aims to understand the ways in which, i.e. the mechanisms through which, language competence affects individuals' subjective career success. For example, is it through increasing the individual’s social capital and/or through affecting the individual’s objective career attainments?

1.2 Although this thesis is focusing on language competence as distinct from inter-cultural and communicative competence, these are closely linked concepts, and it may not be language competence per se, but language competence as a facet of this larger whole, that may affect the subjective career success of individuals. Therefore, this thesis is interested in discerning how language competence, inter-cultural competence and communicative competence are perceived to be related, and what is perceived as important for career success.

1.4. Delimitations

Individual unit of analysis. This thesis is focused at the level of the individual, meaning that the individual is the primary unit of measurement and analysis, not a group or organization or society (Bryman & Bell, 2003).

Isolating language effects. A significant limitation is the fact that the impact of language on career success is hard to distinguish from other factors as they are so interconnected; as stated by Piekkari (2008: 130): “isolating the language effect on careers is very difficult as final career outcomes are intertwined with a number of other personal and contextual issues”. This limitation renders the methodology adopted in this thesis, namely a qualitative approach based on interviews, appropriate.

Only language. Although several factors have been found to impact career success (see section 2.2 on factors impacting career success in the theoretical framework), the focus of this thesis is on the effects of language competence only on the career success of
individuals. Therefore, the effects of e.g. demographic variables such as gender are not considered.

*Everyday language.* Welch et al. (2005) distinguish between three layers of language, everyday spoken/written language, company ‘speak’ and technical/professional/industry language. In this study, language is taken to mean the everyday spoken/written language and the focus is on the individual’s competence in terms of this. This is not to say that other layers of language are not relevant for researchers in this field.

*Language (not culture) focus.* Language has generally, until relatively recently, been included in the ‘culture box’ and as such has been treated as just one component of culture (see e.g. Henderson, 2005; Welch et al., 2005). In this study, the focus is specifically on language competence as a contributor to career success. This does not mean to say that the intertwined nature of language and culture is rejected, but that the discussion is focusing specifically on language, not culture.

*Language, inter-cultural and communicative competence.* Language competence is taken to mean exactly that, i.e. an individual’s ability to produce speech or text in a specific language. This is conceptualized separately from communicative competence and inter-cultural competence, although they are clearly related to each other (see the discussion at 2.3.3 in the theoretical framework).

*Research setting.* This thesis is studying managers in Finland working in Finnish MNCs with extensive operations in Sweden, or in Swedish MNCs with extensive operations in Finland. Thus, the focus is restricted to these individuals and firms only and will not include other kinds of actors or other kinds of firms.

### 1.5. Definitions

*Career:* To include an acknowledgement of the changing nature of careers, an appropriate definition of career is that it is “a process of development of the employee along a path of experience and jobs in one or more organizations” (Baruch & Rosenstein, 1992, cited in Baruch, 2006: 126).

*Career success:* This refers to “the positive psychological or work-related outcomes or achievements one has accumulated as a result of one’s work experiences” (Judge, Cable, Boudreau & Bretz, 1995: 486). A distinction can be made between objective (or
extrinsic or external) and subjective (or intrinsic or internal) career success. Traditionally, a focus has been placed on objective career success, which refers to objectively observable accomplishments, such as promotion, salary and status (see e.g. Baruch, 2006). However, given the recent trends as discussed in the theoretical framework, this thesis is interested in understanding the effect of language competence on the subjective career success of individuals. Subjective career success refers to the subjective judgment of the individual in question about his or her career attainments (Ng et al., 2005), specifically, “the individual’s internal apprehension and evaluation of his or her career, across any dimensions that are important to that individual” (Van Maanen, 1977: 9, cited in Arthur, Khapova & Wilderom, 2005: 179).

**Communicative competence**: This means having insight and skill in the communicative process, making appropriate decisions in terms of the setting, topic, message, channel (written or spoken), contact (professional or private), and code (the language used) in order to ensure that the objective of the communication is attained (Ulijn & Strother, 1995).

**Functional language**: This is the language that has been formally designated as the language by the focal unit of a company (i.e. headquarters) to be used in verbal and written communication within this focal unit and with overseas subunits (Luo & Shenkar, 2006). This is used synonymously with the phrase *corporate language* or *company language*.

**Home country language**: This refers to the language(s) of the firm’s home country, the country where headquarters are located.

**Host country language**: This refers to the language(s) of the country where an overseas subsidiary is located.

**Human capital**: This refers to the knowledge and skills of employees (Evans, Pucik & Björkman, 2011: 62), and can be said to include language competence (Traavik & Richardsen, 2010).

**Inter-cultural competence**: This refers to knowledge of cultural and non-verbal communicative factors (Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2006).

**Language competence**: Drawing on Weinreich’s (1979: 75) discussion on language proficiency in terms of various levels (understanding, expression and inner speech), in
this thesis language competence will be taken to refer to the ability of an individual to understand a particular language and express herself, in speech or in writing, in that language. As such, the focus is on verbal and written language, not non-verbal language, and, as stated in the delimitations section at 1.4, language competence will be taken to mean competence in the everyday spoken/written language and is perceived as distinct from communicative competence and inter-cultural competence.

*Linguistic glass ceiling:* Originally applied to female managers to denote a transparent barrier that kept women from being promoted above a certain managerial level, the phrase ‘glass ceiling’ is valid for any disadvantaged sub-group in an organization (Baruch, 2006). In the context of this thesis, the phrase ‘linguistic glass ceiling’ (Piekkari, 2008) refers to the situation where promotion above a certain hierarchical level depends on proficiency in a certain language or languages.

*Multinational corporation (MNC):* The OECD (2008) defines MNCs as firms which “usually comprise companies or other entities established in more than one country and so linked that they may co-ordinate their operations in various ways. While one or more of these entities may be able to exercise a significant influence over the activities of others, their degree of autonomy within the enterprise may vary widely from one multinational enterprise to another. Ownership may be private, state or mixed”. According to this definition, an MNC can be a company with just one subsidiary in one other country, or an organization with a large number of subsidiaries spanning several countries; therefore, the degree of multinationality will vary across MNCs.

*Multilingual:* This term refers to a setting, such as an organization or society, within which more than one language co-exist (Tange & Lauring, 2009: 221). It can also be used to refer to an individual speaking more than one language.

*Social capital:* This refers to the “structure and strength of social relationships between individuals and units” (Evans et al., 2011: 62), however for the purpose of this thesis social capital will be taken to refer to individual social capital, i.e. the relationships between individuals, not organizational units.

1.6. **Structure of the thesis**

The structure of the thesis is presented visually in figure 1. Drawing on the aims of the thesis outlined in section 1.3, a theoretical framework was developed and is presented
in section 2. This framework is based on previous literature concerning careers and subjective and objective career success, as well as literature concerning language competence and career success, and the interrelationships between language, intercultural and communicative competence. The theoretical framework, in conjunction with the aims of the thesis, was drawn upon to develop an appropriate methodology, consisting of an inductive research design employing interviews as the primary data collection method, and grounded theory as the inspiration for data analysis. The methodology is outlined in section 3. Based on these data collection and analysis methods, section 4 presents the results of the empirical investigation. Drawing on these results, and linking back to the aims and the theoretical framework, section 5 provides a more in-depth analysis and discussion, with concluding remarks about the contribution of this study, its limitations and suggestions for future research.

![Figure 1 Thesis structure](image-url)
2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section presents a theoretical framework on which the empirical investigation is based. Literature on careers in general is reviewed, including shifts in the nature of careers, conceptualizations of career success, the relationship between subjective and objective career success, and the relevance of subjective career success. This is followed by a review of the factors that affect subjective career success, the purpose of which is to provide a background into which the consequent review of the literature about the effects of language competence on career success can be anchored. Finally, language competence and subjective career success is discussed, including a section about language competence in relation to inter-cultural competence and communicative competence.

2.1. Careers

2.1.1. Changing nature of careers

Traditional conceptualizations of careers focused on “stability, hierarchy, and clearly defined job positions for career progression” (DeFilippi & Arthur, 1994: 307), mirroring the hierarchically structured organizations that these conceptualizations were set in. Unidirectional upward mobility and promotion within one firm, and a psychological contract based on loyalty to the employer in return for job security was emphasized (Arthur et al., 1995). However these ideas have been challenged by changes in organizational contexts, with corporations undergoing downsizings, restructurings, outsourcings and spinoffs in order to adapt to rapidly changing competitive circumstances (DeFilippi & Arthur, 1994). Such shifts to more fluid structures are also reflected in the design of global organizations (see e.g. Cappellen & Janssens, 2005).

Correspondingly to changing organizational contexts, it is also argued that the nature of careers has changed, with individuals, as opposed to organizations, assuming responsibility for managing their own careers. Such self-directedness is epitomised in concepts such as the ‘boundaryless career’ (Arthur, 1994; Arthur et al., 2005; DeFilippi & Arthur, 1994), emphasizing careers paths crossing the boundaries of a single organization, and the ‘protean career’ (Hall, 1996), emphasizing individuals being in charge of driving and reinventing their own careers in response to changes in themselves and the environment. Career progression now encompasses options for
development both within and outside organizations (Ballout, 2007), and psychological contracts reflect a new short-term orientation in employment relationships where productivity is exchanged for work experience (Arthur et al., 1995). In terms of empirical evidence, it does appear that at least for international assignees such boundaryless careers are becoming the pattern, the majority of expatriates in a particular study perceiving their international assignment “as an opportunity for skill development and future career advancement, even though it may not be with their current company” (Stahl, Miller & Tung, 2002: 222).

However, it has also been argued that these polar opposites – the traditional versus the ‘new’ career paths as conceptualized by some scholars – are extremes, neither capturing the true nature of careers today; although change has taken place, it may not be to the extent insinuated (Baruch, 2006). For example, in their study of senior managers’ career paths in the Australian public sector McDonald, Brown and Bradley (2005) found that the traditional career model, encompassing length of service and progression up the corporate ladder, is still dominant in some organizations, even though there is a trend towards more protean careers. As stated by Baruch (2006: 125) “current organizations are less rigid, but not fully fluid; control may not be solely with the organization, but the shift does not mean that the organization has no say in career management; individuals take more control of their own career, but much remains for the organization to manage”.

2.1.2. Emergence of subjective career success

Nevertheless, in line with the argument that the nature of careers has considerably changed, scholars are also arguing that, in the era of such boundaryless and protean careers, and with a myriad of career paths open to individuals today, the traditional standards of career success – whereby success is defined purely in terms of objective indicators including status, hierarchy, promotions, and salary – are no longer as relevant. Instead, more subjective measures of career success, which focus on the individual’s own judgment about his or her career attainments, are more appropriate. (Hall, 1996; Park, 2010; Eby, Butts & Lockwood, 2003; Valcour & Ladge, 2008; Heslin, 2005) As stated by Arthur et al. (2005: 195) “in an unpredictable world responsibility for both career development and the interpretation of career success rests with the individual. This in turn heightens the significance of the subjective career”.
Even for individuals following a more traditional career path, reliance purely on the objective measures of career success appears to be under increasing scrutiny, it being recognized that “it would be inappropriate for one person to evaluate another person’s career” (Park, 2010: 3, citing Hall, 2002) and that “other people too should be considered successful if they have high level of internal career satisfaction” (Baruch, 2006: 134). Traditional objective career success indicators (such as e.g. status, promotions and salary) have been criticized as being deficient because they do not acknowledge that other objective outcomes (such as e.g. the number of lives saved for doctors) or subjective outcomes (such as e.g. work life balance) may be more important for certain individuals, and that being objectively successful in one’s career does not necessarily mean that the individual will feel successful (Heslin, 2005).

### 2.1.3. Defining subjective career success

Nevertheless, there appears to be some controversy in the careers literature as to what exactly constitutes subjective career success. A common conceptualization appears to be career satisfaction (see e.g. Park, 2010; Wayne et al., 1999; Zhang et al., 2010; Ng et al., 2005; Valcour & Ladge, 2008; Seibert, Kraimer & Liden, 2001; Eby et al., 2003; Judge et al., 1995), which refers to the “subjective perception and evaluation of one’s career progression and success” (Zhang et al., 2010: 1326). Job satisfaction has also been argued to be a salient indicator of subjective career success (Judge et al., 1995; Judge, Higgins, Thorensen & Barrick, 1999), the rationale being that “individuals who are dissatisfied with many aspects of their current jobs are unlikely to consider their careers, at least at present, particularly successful” (Judge et al., 1999: 623).

However, these conceptualizations have been criticized for not fully capturing “the phenomenological meaning of career success to those surveyed” (Heslin, 2005: 114). In terms of job satisfaction, a person may be dissatisfied with their current job although satisfied with their preceding career, it even being argued that, “although job satisfaction may contribute to subjective career success, they are conceptually distinct constructs that are not necessarily related” (Heslin, 2005: 117). This is reflected in the findings of Judge et al. (1995) where the factors affecting job satisfaction did not equate fully with those affecting career satisfaction. In terms of career satisfaction, Greenhaus et al.’s (1990, cited in Heslin, 2005: 117) scale, which is commonly used to measure career satisfaction in quantitative studies, focuses for example on advancement, which may not be relevant for those working on a contract basis for example (Heslin, 2005).
As stated by Arthur et al. (2005: 179), “how can subjective careers be adequately researched when the subjective interpretation of the career actors themselves – apart from their non-verbal responses to a limited set of questionnaire items – are not allowed expression?”

The failure to account for the perceptions of individuals themselves when researching subjective career success appears to be a limitation in the current careers literature, as not one of the 68 published articles on career success that Arthur et al. (2005: 196) examined “involved listening to the research subjects, or even allowing them to elaborate on their own criteria for career success”; neither did such an approach emerge in my own readings of the literature. To truly assess subjective career success, researchers should employ more qualitative approaches in order to understand the subjective standards against which people evaluate their own career success, which may not be the same for all individuals (Arthur et al., 2005; Heslin, 2005). According to Heslin (2005), individuals may assess their career success in relation to self-referent and/or other-referent criteria, drawn from objective and/or subjective spheres.

The key elements argued to be indicative of objective and subjective career success are outlined in figure 2. Section 2.1.4 will discuss the relationships between these two forms of career success.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Objective Career Success</th>
<th>Subjective Career Success</th>
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<tr>
<td>•Status</td>
<td>•Career Satisfaction</td>
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<td>•Hierarchy</td>
<td>•Job Satisfaction</td>
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<td>•Promotions</td>
<td>•Individuals’ own standards / evaluation of own career success</td>
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<td>•Salary</td>
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Figure 2  Objective and subjective career success

2.1.4. Relationship between subjective and objective career success

As alluded to in the above discussion, certain individuals are likely to evaluate their career success based on objective achievements, and indeed objective and subjective career success, although distinct from each other, do display interdependencies in both directions, such interdependencies occurring over time (Abele & Spurk, 2009b; Arthur et al., 2005). In terms of objective career success affecting subjective career success,
certain quantitative studies have found that objective career success in the form of pay and promotions is, albeit moderately, positively related at least to career satisfaction (Ng et al., 2005, Judge et al., 1995), possibly due to traditional indicators of career success engendering positive self perceptions and enhancing one’s perception of success compared to others (Ng et al., 2005). This positive relationship is supported by a recent study of employed mothers, which found that income was positively associated with career satisfaction, supporting the existence of “a link between extrinsic and intrinsic indicators of career success and that some variables may affect subjective career success through their impact on objective career outcomes” (Valcour & Ladge, 2008: 307). The effect of objective career success on job satisfaction is less straightforward, with mixed results as to the relationship between these (see Abele and Spurk, 2009b for a short review), certain authors (e.g. Abele & Spurk, 2009b; Judge et al., 1995) not finding any positive relationship.

2.1.5. Importance of subjective career success

Whatever the case, subjective career success is obviously a desirable condition to be in, as it has implications for the mental wellbeing and quality of life of the individual concerned (Peluchette, 1993). Furthermore, subjective career success has been shown to strongly influence objective career success over a long time span, perhaps due to making the individual self-confident and increasing the individual’s motivation and effort expenditure (Abele & Spurk, 2009b: 819). Such effects render it relevant for individuals to know what factors will affect their subjective perceptions about their career success, in order to be able to take steps to increase such positive emotions, and thereby also their objective career attainments (if this is what is important to them). However, the implications of subjective career success are not limited to the individual.

On an organizational level, the psychological wellbeing and quality of life of employees is of concern to most organizations (Peluchette, 1993), and by affecting objective career success, subjective career success also has clear implications for the organization in terms of career progression and career management initiatives. However, subjective career success may also have more direct organizational implications. Korman (1980, cited in Peluchette, 1993: 199) argues that “if individuals do not feel successful, there is a greater risk of alienation and detachment”, and according to Korman, Wittig-Bergman and Lang (1981: 343) “to the extent that professionals and managers are experiencing their careers negatively and with much disquiet, their attitudes and
behaviours will be affected negatively”. Such negative attitudes may affect motivational processes by generating “increased anxiety, lack of concern for self-actualization and decreased rationality” (Korman et al., 1981: 345), and may lead to negative behaviours that may inhibit work or organizational effectiveness, a particularly pertinent concern among managers and professionals who serve as role models for others and whose activities are furthermore of a discretionary nature (Korman et al., 1981). Conversely, as stated by Peluchette (1993: 199) “individuals who feel successful are likely to be happier and more motivated, which in turn, would enhance their performance”. Therefore, supporting employees to achieve subjective career success can be considered of great importance to organizations, and organizations should be aware of the factors that affect this in order to be able to accomplish this task better.

Subjective career success has been argued to be important also on a societal level. Due to the assumptions held by society that objectively successful individuals are more satisfied, “negative attitudes and behaviors among the [objectively] successful are unexpected and a great source of distress” (Korman et al., 1981: 343), potentially leading to “a depressing effect on those aspiring to become professionals and/or managers, a matter of clear societal concern” (Korman et al., 1981: 343). A brief overview of the factors that are important for subjective career success is provided below.

### 2.2. Factors affecting subjective career success

Career success has been conceptualized in different ways in terms of the factors that are seen to affect it (see Ballout, 2007), and due to its comprehensiveness, Ng et al.’s (2005) framework, encompassing organizational, socio-demographic, stable individual difference, human capital, motivation and social capital factors will be drawn on to frame the following discussion. Although this thesis is focusing on subjective career success, the positive relationship between objective and subjective career success and the fact that certain individuals may evaluate their career success based purely on objective criteria, makes it relevant to also outline the factors affecting objective career success in this section, as such factors may affect subjective career success through their effect on these objective achievements.

The purpose of this section is not to provide a comprehensive analysis of all the literature on the determinants of career success, this being well beyond the scope of this review, but to provide a conceptual overview in which to anchor the discussion about
the role of language competence for subjective career success. A point to note is also that although objective and subjective career success are empirically distinct constructs, and the factors that affect subjective career success may not equate fully, at least in magnitude, with those that affect objective career success (see e.g. Ng et al., 2005; Judge et al., 1995), this review will not distinguish between such effect sizes because the unanimity of literature that discusses this is somewhat unclear. For example Ng et al. (2005) and Judge et al. (1995) diverge in their findings in terms of the extent to which certain factors affect objective and subjective career success.

2.2.1. Organizational factors

Certain organizational factors, including, but not limited to, organizational sponsorship and size (e.g. Ng et al., 2005), job design, and the design of HRM (human resource management) policies and practices (Culpan & Wright, 2002), are important for career success. Organizational sponsorship for example has been shown to affect objective as well as subjective career success (e.g. Wayne et al., 1999; Ng et al., 2005; Park, 2010). The effects on objective career success can be explained with reference to a sponsored-mobility model, organizational rewards accruing to those who have received greater support and guidance from superiors and organizational elites (Ng et al., 2005; Turner, 1960, cited in Wayne et al., 1999). The effects on subjective career success occur because “organizational sponsorship provides important cues to employees that they are valued and possess career potential: these cues are then likely to elicit favourable affective reactions including higher levels of career satisfaction and a stronger sense of career success” (Ng et al., 2005: 376, referring to Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978).

2.2.2. Socio-demographic factors

The effect of socio-demographic factors, such as marital status, age, race and gender on objective career success can as above be explained with reference to the sponsored-mobility model, certain individuals, based on their socio-demographic profile, being more likely to be selected for sponsorship (Ng et al., 2005). For women, objective career success is limited by family factors and by related departures from traditional career paths, such as career gaps and part-time work, which signal a lack of commitment and therefore negatively affect the rewards the organization is prepared to offer (Valcour & Ladge, 2008). Certain socio-demographic factors, including race and
marital status, have also been shown to predict career satisfaction, although less strongly (Ng et al., 2005).

### 2.2.3. Stable individual differences

Stable individual differences, such as personality (Judge et al., 1999; Ng et al., 2005), proactiveness (Ng et al., 2005; Seibert, Crant & Kraimer, 1999), mental or cognitive ability (Judge et al., 1999; Ng et al., 2005) and career- or self-efficacy (Abele & Spurk, 2009a; Valcour & Ladge, 2008) have been found to influence career outcomes. Such dispositional traits and abilities can be understood to affect objective career success with reference to sponsored-mobility and contest-mobility models of career success: by attracting or repelling sponsorship (sponsored-mobility), and by providing certain individuals with extra resources such as high levels of initiative to compete in career contests (contest-mobility) (Ng et al., 2005). In contrast to the sponsored-mobility model, the contest-mobility model “allows for a fair and open contest for each promotion decision” (Wayne et al., 1999: 578), positive career outcomes accruing to “those who are the most skilled and most willing to put forth the effort” (Ng et al., 2005: 371). Individual differences, personality traits in particular, affect subjective career success because they influence our self-perceptions, including perceptions of career success (Ng et al., 2005).

### 2.2.4. Human capital

According to human capital theory, (Becker, 1964, cited in Ballout, 2007), the level of an individual’s investment in education, training and experience will determine her level of performance, and thereby, in line with the contest-mobility model of career success, the level of organizational rewards she receives. Empirical studies do indicate that human capital factors impact objective career success, however they also affect subjective career success (Judge et al., 1995; Ng et al., 2005). Language competence and cultural sensitivity for example have been shown to affect the job satisfaction of expatriate women (Culpan & Wright, 2002). However, the relationship between gender and human capital investments is complicated. The impact of education on subjective career satisfaction and salary for example has been found to be stronger for women than men (Ng et al., 2005). Such moderating effects may explain why, in contrast to Ng et al. (2005), Traavik and Richardsen’s (2010) study indicated that education did not have an effect on subjective career success, however this may also be due to differing
national contexts (Traavik & Richardsen, 2010). A point to note is that for individuals pursuing boundaryless careers, flexible rather than firm specific human capital (‘know how’) that is transferrable across employment settings and organizational boundaries, is required (DeFilippi & Arthur, 1994; Eby et al., 2003).

2.2.5. Social capital

Individuals’ social capital also affects objective and subjective career success (Seibert et al., 2001; Ng et al., 2005). The amount of contacts in other functions and at higher levels in the organization have been found to affect salary, promotions and career satisfaction through affecting access to information, access to resources and career sponsorship (Seibert et al., 2001). Access to information and resources should affect individuals’ work performance as well as the perception of the individual as powerful and influential, leading to organizational rewards. Also, access to information and resources should lead to more enriched jobs through increasing feelings of psychological empowerment, competence and control, such jobs being more satisfying for individuals (Seibert et al., 2001). Similar mediation processes have been found in a study set in a Chinese state owned enterprise, as well as a direct link between social capital and subjective career success, expected to be the case because of the support provided by co-workers and the enhanced recognition and status that an individual’s social capital can engender (Zhang et al., 2010: 1326). For boundaryless careers, social capital – ‘know who’ – that encompasses also inter-organizational networks is important (DeFilippi & Arthur, 1994; Eby et al., 2003), as individuals must look outside their place of work as well as within it for career support (Arthur et al., 2005).

2.2.6. Motivation

Motivation affects objective career success and career satisfaction (Traavik & Richardsen, 2010, Judge et al., 1995) and also job satisfaction (Judge et al., 1995). The importance of motivation is reflected indirectly in research on global managers (Suutari, 2003), of which the majority interviewed had a strong commitment to an international career and had international experience as a specific career goal from early on, such aspirations spurring them to actively work for such opportunities and job roles. The need for motivation and identification with one’s career, as opposed to a specific employment setting – ‘know why’ career competence – is pertinent for boundaryless careers (DeFilippi & Arthur, 1994; Eby et al., 2003) which require
individuals to understand themselves, explore possibilities and adapt to changing work situations (Arthur et al., 1999, cited in Eby et al., 2003).

### 2.2.7. Overlaps

The above discussion has discussed the factors in isolation, however as acknowledged by Ng et al. (2005: 370) in their classification, this classification “is not hard and fast with no potential overlaps”. This can already be seen from the above review, for example by social capital impacting career outcomes through increasing organizational sponsorship (Seibert et al., 2001), and gender mediating the relationship between certain human capital factors and career outcomes (Ng et al., 2005). Another example is that human capital factors have been found to affect career outcomes through affecting social capital (Friedman & Krackhardt, 1997; Lin & Huang, 2005). A full account of the inter-relationships that do exist has not been included due to the high-level scope of this review. In any case, as stated by Lin and Huang (2005: 192) “very few studies have actually tested the complex relations among determinants [of career success] and career outcomes”, and therefore, even if all of the literature were drawn upon, it is likely that this would be an incomplete representation.

### 2.2.8. Summary of factors

The diagram depicted in Figure 3 summarizes at a very abstract level the factors that have been found to be important for subjective career success (also through their impact on objective career success), namely organizational factors such as sponsorship and size, socio-demographic factors such as gender and age, stable individual differences such as personality, and the individual’s human capital (i.e. education and skills), social capital, and motivation. The diagram also shows the positioning of an individual’s language competence within this framework; as mentioned in the discussion on human capital above, language capability is a part of individuals’ human capital. It constitutes a valuable skill that, furthermore, is transferrable across organizational boundaries. The role of language competence for career success will be covered in more detail in the following section.
2.3. **Role of language competence for subjective career success**

Language competence on the part of the individual has been termed a “valuable resource” (Bloch, 1995: 16) and a “strategic career asset” (Luo & Shenkar, 2006: 336). A review of the relevant literature, which will be discussed below, clearly illustrates that this element of an individual’s human capital can have a role to play in an individual’s subjective career success. Although this thesis is interested in the role of language competence for the subjective career success of individuals, there is, as discussed at 2.1.4, a positive relationship between objective and subjective career success and certain individuals may evaluate their own (subjective) career success based on their objectively observable achievements. Therefore it is relevant to also here outline how language competence may affect objectively observable career achievements. Indeed, language competence has been shown to affect both objective career success, including initial recruitment, career progression and mobility within organizations, as well as subjective career success more directly.
2.3.1. **Language competence and objective career success**

It has been stated that despite the increasing use of English as the lingua franca in international business, the demand for foreign-language skills and multilingual employees in the corporate world are on the rise. This is due to, for example, increasing competitive pressures pushing companies to provide customer service in local languages, international mergers and acquisitions rendering individuals with appropriate language skills a requirement, and MNCs wishing to send expatriates to overseas operations in an attempt to ensure business success. (Tietze, 2008) A certain study has even indicated that eleven per cent of exporting European small and medium enterprises (SMEs) may be losing business due to insufficient language skills and the resulting communication barriers caused by this (European Commission, 2007). Indeed, and on a more academic level, research has revealed the important role of language for, for example, inter-unit communication intensity (Barner-Rasmussen & Björkman, 2005), communication in international management teams (Henderson, 2005), inter-cultural communication in foreign subsidiaries (Peltokorpi, 2010), inter-unit relationships (Barner-Rasmussen & Björkman, 2007), coordination and control (Marschan et al., 1997), power dynamics (Vaara et al., 2005), integration efforts in cross-border mergers (Piekkari et al., 2005), and the wider business strategy in terms of language’s strategic role as a supporting mechanism for this (Luo & Shenkar, 2006). Therefore, it would seem quite logical for businesses to pay attention to individuals’ language skills when selecting, promoting and rewarding staff.

2.3.1.1. **Recruitment and selection**

Recruitment has been identified as one strategy companies can adopt - in addition to, for example, training and the reliance on existing linguistically capable employees – to diminish the negative effects of the so called ‘language barrier’ (Feely & Harzing, 2003). This barrier can be conceptualized along three dimensions: (i) language diversity, i.e. the number of languages present in the company, (ii) language penetration, i.e. the number of functions and levels within the functions that engage in cross-lingual communication, and (iii) language sophistication, i.e. the level of language skills required by the company (Feely & Harzing, 2003).

The evidence clearly indicates that companies pay attention to language skills when recruiting (see e.g. Bloch, 1995; Kordsmeier et al., 2000; Piekkari et al., 2005; Peltokorpi, 2010; Elinkeinoelämän Keskusliitto, 2010). For example in Merita-
Nordbanken (MNB), a cross-border merger of Finnish bank Merita and Swedish bank Nordbanken, which initially selected Swedish as the corporate language but later changed this to English, “competence in English and Swedish was made a prerequisite for new recruits” (Piekkari et al., 2005: 339). Likewise in a study of Nordic subsidiaries in Japan it was found that Nordic expatriates attempted to improve inter-cultural information flows in these subsidiaries through various strategies, including the recruitment of individuals with sufficient English language competence (Peltokorpi, 2010). In relation to the Finnish setting specifically, a survey by the Confederation of Finnish Industries EK indicates that language can be a determining factor when recruiting, a lack of the required language skills bringing an abrupt end to the process despite the candidate being otherwise fully qualified, and candidates occasionally being selected based purely on their language skills if the company in question has had trouble finding speakers of less common languages (Elinkeinoelämän Keskusliitto, 2010).

Despite the above, language skills are naturally rarely enough on their own, it being argued that they “should be looked on as binary, that is they work best in tandem with non-language skills” (Bloch, 1995: 17). They are one recruitment criteria in addition to other human capital factors discussed earlier such as education and experience, and have been argued to contribute to a ‘powerful portfolio’ if combined with for example training in economics, engineering or accounting (Bloch, 1995). Furthermore, the extent of the required language competence for positions will vary in terms of “the complexity, refinement and type of the language skills required” (Feely & Harzing, 2003: 40). The ‘pinnacle of the scale’ is argued to be the international manager, who will “need excellent language proficiency embracing the full range of rhetorical skills such as negotiation, persuasion, motivation and humour. At this level the capability level might well exceed that of a typical Masters graduate in modern languages” (Feely & Harzing, 2003: 40). However, although international managers are required to be able to sophisticatedly express themselves in potentially foreign languages, this needs to be combined “with an astute sense of achieving objectives and relevant technical expertise” (Tietze, 2008: 56). As such, language skills are a tool by which objectives and tasks can be accomplished, as reflected in Tietze’s (2008) conceptualization of international managers: “they work with discourses, i.e. words, meanings and techniques in mainly (but not exclusively) multinational organizations and need to be able to address tasks and achieve business goals in different languages” (Tietze, 2008: 56).
Although recruitment would appear a straightforward avenue in terms of ensuring the required level of language competence in a firm, “the balance of language and other skills (e.g. technical) does not always come as neatly packaged as required” (Piekkari et al., 1999b: 382). For certain companies language skills play only a secondary role to technical skills in recruitment and career advancement in the company (Fixman, 1990, cited in Piekkari et al., 1999b: 382), which may be reflective of the companies (US based) in question. Perhaps due to being based in an English speaking country, languages do not pose an issue to the same extent as firms based in for example the Nordic countries, as mentioned in the introduction. Indeed, studies in other settings clearly indicate that language plays a role in vertical career progression within organizations, as will be discussed in the following section.

2.3.1.2. Vertical and horizontal mobility

Research in MNC settings illuminates the hampering effect that language can have on an individual’s promotion prospects by acting as a linguistic glass ceiling (Piekkari et al., 2005), preventing individuals that are not well versed in a certain language or certain languages from vertically advancing in the company. Research on the multinational Kone for example (Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999a; 1999b), which made the decision in 1972 to adopt English as the common corporate language and to conduct all top management meetings and internal matters in English, indicates that these decisions sent an implicit message to employees: “if you are interested in career progression in this company, it is essential that you learn the common language” (Marchan-Piekkari et al., 1999b: 381). Similar findings emerged from the study of the cross-border merger of Merita and Nordbanken mentioned earlier: when Swedish was initially selected as the common corporate language it was made a prerequisite for advancing to the highest levels in the company, considerable attention being paid to the language skills of those individuals that were running for promotion (Piekkari et al., 2005).

This ‘in-built inequality’ (Vaara et al., 2005) led to Finnish employees questioning whether their Swedish-speaking colleagues were rightly promoted or whether these were in fact ‘unearned increments’ endowed upon them purely due to their language skills (Piekkari et al., 2005). Such a belief in the power of one’s language skills is mirrored in the findings of Huusko (2008) in a study of an MNC headquartered in Espoo, Finland. In this MNC the transition to English as the common corporate
language led to some employees believing that this was a threat to their careers and that English language skills were in fact “more important than the actual skills required for many key positions” (Huusko, 2008: 48). The required language skills may not be restricted to knowledge of the formally designated company language. As evidenced by Fredriksson et al.’s (2006) study into the MNC Siemens where the designated corporate language was English, in Germany, where it was believed that two common company languages, English and German, were equally important, knowledge of these two languages appeared to be a requirement for advancement to the managerial level.

The above discussion has focused largely on the effects of language competence on the vertical career progression of the individual within a company, however the effects of language competence have been shown to extend beyond this, affecting the horizontal mobility of individuals within the firm as well (Piekkari et al., 2005; Vaara et al., 2005; Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999b). These effects can be seen in restrictions placed on the ability of linguistically incompetent individuals to partake in training programmes and international assignments, leading to such individuals being confined to local operations, as found in the study of Kone (Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999b). Similarly, in their study of two Swiss based firms, Steyaert et al. (2011) discovered that in one of the firms insufficient English language skills posed a linguistic glass ceiling in terms of restricting the ability of such linguistically ill-equipped individuals to for example go into another country.

Perhaps more poignantly the effects of linguistic incompetence also include individuals moving internally out of their own accord in order to escape a certain language, as was the case after the Merita-Nordbanken merger (Vaara et al., 2005; Piekkari et al., 2005). In this case, some Finnish-speaking employees sought to “escape the Swedish language through internal mobility” (Vaara et al., 2005: 615) to ‘Finnish-speaking havens’ that existed for example in the domestic branch network in Finland; this was the case despite the fact that international experience was valued when promotion was considered (Piekkari et al., 2005). Mobility may not be restricted to such internal horizontal moves, as it appeared that many people even decided to leave MeritaNordbanken due to their inability to compete with their Swedish-speaking colleagues careerwise (Vaara et al., 2005).
2.3.1.3. Remuneration

Research on the effect of language competence on remuneration renders somewhat conflicting results, which may be due to diverging national settings and the scope of individuals included in samples. In their study of the value of bilingualism in the U.S. labour market, Fry and Lowell (2003) for example used data from a National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS), which is designed to represent the entire national adult resident population, and did not find that bilingual skills made a statistically significant contribution to salaries once all human capital characteristics were held constant. This led them to conclude that “the market little values foreign language proficiency and creates no incentive to acquire or maintain it” (Fry & Lowell, 2003: 128). However, in contrast to this, and with a focus on international professional women in Norway, which is a focus that is perhaps more relevant for this particular thesis, Traavik and Richardsen (2010) discovered that language competence in English and Norwegian did in fact significantly correlate with objective career success measured in terms of self-reported salaries.

The above discussion has focused on the direct impact of language competence on objective career success – recruitment and selection, career progression and remuneration. Language competence has also been shown to affect employees’ performance, through which such objectively observable career achievements will also undoubtedly be affected. Furthermore, and perhaps more informally and indirectly, language competence may have various career related outcomes through its ability to increase individuals’ social capital and status. These processes will be discussed below.

2.3.1.4. Performance and performance management

There is evidence to suggest that limited language competence does impact the performance level of employees (see e.g. Park, Hwang & Harrison 1996; Piekkari et al., 2005; Piekkari, 2008). After the Merita-Nordbanken merger for example, “the ability of Finnish-speaking employees to perform to required standards was somewhat restricted by limited competence in Swedish, the new common corporate language” (Piekkari et al., 2005: 338), leading to perceptions that these otherwise capable employees were underperforming. Without sufficient language skills, certain top experts for example were unable to contribute in meetings and convey their thoughts and ideas in relation to professional matters, appearing instead as “silent and unintelligent” (Piekkari et al., 2005: 338).
The effects of language competence on job performance are especially relevant when considering expatriates, as these employees are required to be able to communicate with the subsidiary’s staff and local business environment to perform their work, which frequently requires them to be proficient in the local language, a lack of which has been shown to detrimentally affect the expatriate’s job performance (Piekkari, 2008: 133, referring to e.g. Park, 1996). Whether language competence translates into explicit performance evaluation criteria may depend on the specific company’s attitudes regarding language skills (Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999b); Fixman (1990, cited in Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999b) for example did not find that any of the US companies interviewed directly included language skills in performance reviews, however if it was necessary for the job it would nevertheless make a difference in these reviews.

Unfortunate situations arise when individuals motivated to learn a language are unable to achieve a required level of proficiency and thus suffer careerwise as a result (Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999b). The negative consequences of limited language competence may not merely affect current performance, but future performance through restricting the ability of employees to partake in training programmes. As discovered by Marschan-Piekkari et al. (1999a; 1999b) in their study of Kone, insufficient knowledge of English prevented staff at operating and middle management levels from attending Kone’s training programs (Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999a), such a barrier naturally leading to detrimental consequences where career progression was concerned (Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999b). Such training programs “are not only avenues for career advancement, but also forums for making broader company contacts” (Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999b: 384). The role of language competence for increasing the social capital and informal status of the employee is discussed below.

2.3.1.5. Social capital and informal status

A somewhat more indirect, unofficial mechanism through which language competence may affect career progression of employees within companies is through the facilitating effects that such competence can have for the building of networks and relationships, i.e. social capital. As discussed in the section on the factors affecting career success, social capital clearly affects career outcomes, and through its effects on social capital, language competence can be seen to contribute to career success also through this mechanism.
Language competence has been shown to affect the ability of the individual to build informal networks through which advice, assistance and additional information can be gained (Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999a). In Kone, “limited language skills appeared to constrain the possibilities for subsidiary staff to engage in building horizontal relationships with other units and headquarters” (Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999a: 427), with subsidiary staff communicating through intermediaries in order to overcome the language barrier. Expatriates, well versed in the common corporate language and Finnish, developed into so-called ‘language nodes’, becoming the interface between subsidiary and headquarters and between subsidiaries, a role which perhaps extended after repatriation if the expat had become competent in the host country’s language (Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999b). Furthermore, knowledge of Finnish appeared to ensure access to a ‘Finns only’ informal network through which sensitive internal information, perhaps not available through normal channels, was collected and monitored. In Kone in general, “the possession of relevant language skills often led to individuals having more power than their formal position would normally indicate” (Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999a: 431).

Similar findings emerged from the study of the Merita-Nordbanken merger, with Swedish-speaking Finns becoming language nodes, operating as interfaces and gatekeepers of information between different groups in the organization due to their language skills (Vaara et al., 2005; Piekkari et al., 2005), leading to a situation where the “power position and influence of many Swedish-speaking Finns grew far greater than their official position would have implied” (Vaara et al., 2005: 611). Simultaneously, some of these individuals suffered professionally in that they were overburdened with work as ‘translation machines’ (Vaara et al., 2005; Piekkari et al., 2005). In this way, “knowledge of Swedish operated like a double edged sword: it stretched the normal job description and responsibility, but it also extended personal communication relationships, improved access to information, enhanced career opportunities and staff mobility” (Piekkari et al., 2005: 340).

2.3.2. Direct effects of language competence on subjective career success

Although some of the abovementioned research has limitations in that it has been conducted in single case study settings, the above discussion clearly demonstrates that language competence can affect the objective, observable career success of individuals. As mentioned, objective career success has been shown to affect subjective career
success, and indeed it is not unreasonable to assume, as argued by Heslin (2005), that certain individuals evaluate their career success using criteria drawn from the objective domain. However, language competence affects subjective career success also more directly, and although the research in this area is sparse, the research that does exist has shown language competence to directly impact subjective career success (e.g. Traavik & Richardsen, 2010).

Traavik and Richardsen (2010) studied the career success of international expatriate women (including immigrants and migrants, trailers and transferees) in Norway, and discovered that English and Norwegian language competence significantly correlated with subjective career success. Subjective career success was measured using three items including whether the individual in question perceived her career to be on the same level as others in her field, and whether she was satisfied with the extent that her skills were being used in her current position. However, the authors do not give any concrete explanation as to the effect of language competence on subjective career success, stating only that this relationship exists. More in depth understanding is in relation to job satisfaction as a potential indicator of subjective career success provided by Culpan and Wright (2002), who studied the determinants of job satisfaction for expatriate women working in American corporations overseas. They found job satisfaction to be significantly affected by knowledge of a foreign language. This was because such foreign language competence opened doors, enabling better communication with locals and occasionally facilitating task completion, and helping the expats “in their professions to develop better communication at work and also to improve relationships with people in the host country” (Culpan & Wright, 2002: 794).

Such facilitating effects of language competence pertain also to the discussions on social capital outlined at 2.2.5 and 2.3.1.5. As mentioned, language competence affects objective career success also through affecting the ability of the individual to build relationships, gain access to information and advice, and achieve a higher informal status in the organization. Such consequences can be expected to have implications also for the subjective career success of the individual. Increased access to information and resources should increase feelings of empowerment and competence, leading to more enriched and satisfying jobs (Seibert et al., 2001), and social capital per se should affect career satisfaction because of the support provided from colleagues, and the increased recognition and status that it may engender (Zhang et al., 2010).
Language competence can also affect subjective career success through affecting individuals’ perceptions of their own competence, which in turn has been found to contribute to an individual’s feelings of career success (Peluchette, 1993). The challenges associated with communicating one’s opinions in situations where one is required to operate in a second language one is not fully comfortable with, can lead to a sense of professional incompetence, as was the case for Finnish speakers after the Merita-Nordbanken merger, who experienced difficulties in meetings conducted in Swedish and when writing reports in Swedish (Vaara et al., 2005; see also Piekkari et al., 2005; Charles, 2007). One such employee, a secretary to senior management, felt like “half our professional competence had been taken away when we had to use a language that was not our own native tongue. You felt like an idiot... The main thing was to get over the feeling of inferiority” (Vaara et al., 2005: 609). This is not surprising, given that professional competence consists of “deep knowledge in substance matter, argumentation skills and ability to conceptualize” (Piekkari et al., 2005: 338), which in an unfamiliar language is doubtless a challenge.

These findings are confirmed by Tietze (2008), who argues that “second-language users often find themselves faced with a loss of rhetorical skills, which in turn has consequences for their professional identity and can undermine the authority and standing of often quite senior managers, who feel uncomfortable with committing to agreements or objectives or processes, which are expressed in a language they have not fully mastered”. She draws attention to a Managing Director of a Germany-based international haulage company, who “feels that his whole career has been dogged by his lack of competence in the English language. Despite attempts to obtain a degree of fluency in this language through private tuition, he continued to feel of his depths in business meetings, where he felt his years of experience and his insights were ‘wasted’ as he did not possess the linguistic means to express himself” (Tietze, 2008: 58).

Such feelings of disempowerment and frustration as depicted in the above examples have also been argued to have implications for job satisfaction by Charles (2007). Referring also to the experiences of individuals after the Merita-Norbanken merger, Charles (2007: 274) argues that the frustration caused by situations where people “feel deprived of their ability to communicate and express themselves adequately” is “bound to result in employee dissatisfaction with the jobs and the company”. Furthermore, such dissatisfaction will have organizational consequences due to the resulting low performance levels, and therefore, in multilingual MNC settings it is “particularly
important for managers to be aware of the significance of language and communication skills for staff motivation and job satisfaction” (Charles, 2007:274).

2.3.3. Language, inter-cultural and communicative competence

What becomes evident from the reviews of the effects of language competence on for example job performance (2.3.1.4), social capital (2.3.1.5), job satisfaction (2.3.2) and professional competence (2.3.2), is that language competence can have various career related implications through affecting the ability of the individual in question to communicate effectively. In multicultural settings such as MNCs, some form of inter-cultural competence may also be necessary for such communication to take place. Indeed, and focusing specifically on inter-cultural communication, Peltokorpi (2010) found in his study of Nordic subsidiaries in Japan that the effectiveness of communication between Japanese and Nordic individuals was affected by the Nordic expatriates’ knowledge of the host country language and culture. The interrelationships between language competence, communicative competence and inter-cultural competence will be discussed more thoroughly below.

Communicative competence means having insight and skill in the communicative process, making appropriate decisions that take into account the setting, topic, message (the speech signals that can be physically observed, e.g. a written e-mail), channel (written or spoken), contact (professional or private), and code (the language used), in order to ensure that the objective of the communication is attained (Ulijn & Strother, 1995). The communicative process is depicted in Figure 4.

![Sender-receiver model of communication](Ulijn and Strother, 1995: 24)

According to Ulijn and Strother (1995: 25), and as clearly indicated by this model of communication, “communication requires mastery of the code by the sender (speaker or writer) and the receiver (listener or reader)”. This mastery of the code refers to
language competence (or linguistic competence as termed by these authors) – “a speaker’s underlying abilities and knowledge of the language” (Ulijn & Strother, 1995: 25). Thus, language competence can be seen to clearly affect communicative competence of individuals by affecting the ability of the individual to master the ‘code’ element of the communicative process.

It has been suggested, however, that insufficient language capability can be overcome by employing so called ‘communication strategies’, such as drawing on the superior language skills of other participants in the conversation to co-construct one’s message when for example one’s own vocabulary is insufficient (see e.g. Tanaka, 2008). However, the extent to which this is a viable strategy for (especially international) managers is questionable; as stated by Holden (2002: 298, cited in Tietze 2008:68): “the main medium for the cross cultural manager as communicator is the mode of language which was designated as facilitating networking and mobilizing synergies. The kind of skills of communication and motivation that are required to facilitate participative competence require linguistic skills of a high order, whether in English or in other common language”.

Ulijn and Strother (1995: 25) also state when discussing communicative competence that “problems could also arise if the sender and receiver do not belong to the same culture”. In relation to the language (or code) for example, this “should be comprised of verbal conventions which are shared by both sender and receiver alike in order to ensure effective communication” (Ulijn & Strother, 1995: 25). However, according to Henderson (2005), even if talking in the same language, people from different cultural backgrounds ‘hear’ differently due to using different mechanisms to interpret what is being said, and this causes misinterpretations to be unwittingly made. Non-verbal behaviour such as the use of silence may also be misconstrued. This is evidenced by Tanaka’s (2008) study of French-Japanese business meetings, where the fact that “Asians saying ‘yes’ or ‘ok’ followed by silence means acknowledgement but not agreement” (Tanaka, 2008: 167, citing Mulholland, 1997) led to a Japanese participant seemingly agreeing with a French participant, even though he was in fact merely indicating that he had heard what was being said (Tanaka, 2008: 167). Thus, it is clear that some form of inter-culturel competence – argued by Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor (2006) to comprise knowledge of cultural and non-verbal communicative factors – can be seen to affect the communicative competence of individuals in inter-cultural interactions.
From the above discussion it is clear that language competence, inter-cultural competence and communicative competence are closely linked concepts, with language competence and inter-cultural competence affecting the communicative competence of the individual concerned. The interactions between these, as highlighted by this discussion, are illustrated in Figure 5.

![Figure 5](image)

**Figure 5  How language-, communicative- and inter-cultural competences are related**

### 2.3.4. How language competence affects subjective career success

From the above chapter outlining the role of language competence for subjective career success it is clear that language competence is a factor which affects this, especially for individuals on a managerial or professional level for whom the effective communication and understanding of ideas is important if not crucial. Language competence has been shown to affect subjective career success directly, having implications for job satisfaction and career satisfaction, also by affecting the individual’s ability to complete job related tasks, build relationships (social capital) and maintain a sense of professional competence. For individuals evaluating their own career success based on objective achievements, language competence can be seen to have an effect on the subjective career success of these individuals through affecting objectively observable career achievements such as recruitment, organizational mobility, promotion and remuneration, possibly also through affecting the performance of the employee and more indirectly through increasing the individual’s social capital and informal status. These dynamics are illustrated in Figure 6. This figure thus illustrates a subset of the issues covered in Figure 3, focussing on the language competence element of an individual’s human capital and the ways in which this competence can be seen to affect individuals’ subjective career success.
What is also clear is that it may not always be language competence per se that facilitates such career related outcomes, but the communicative ability of the individual, a concept with which language competence is inextricably intertwined. In settings such as MNCs where individuals will have to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds, inter-cultural competence appears to also be important for such effective communication to take place.

### 2.4. Summary of the chapter

This chapter has outlined the relatively recent trend in careers literature to focus on, or at least incorporate, subjective career success when researching career success in general (Baruch, 2006), and the importance of understanding what affects this. Not only does it ensure mental wellbeing for the individual concerned (Peluchette, 1993), it can also affect individuals’ objective career success in the long run (Abele & Spurk, 2009b), as well as individuals’ motivation, effort and performance (Korman et al., 1981). Thus, it is in the interest of individuals, as well as organizations, to understand what affects subjective career success.
From extant research it is clear that a number of factors affect an individual’s subjective career success, from organizational factors such as sponsorship to individual factors including socio-demographic factors, personality, motivation, human capital and social capital (Ng et al., 2005). Some of these factors, such as socio-demographic factors including age and gender for example, are beyond the control of the individual. However, others, such as the individual’s human capital, which includes language competence, can clearly be improved upon to the individual’s advantage through for example training initiatives.

Language competence has been shown to have a clear effect on individuals’ subjective career success, affecting job satisfaction (Culpan & Wright, 2002) and career satisfaction (Traavik & Richardsen, 2010) directly, as well as by affecting individuals’ ability to complete tasks, build social capital (Culpan and Wright, 2002) and maintain a sense of professional competence (e.g. Vaara et al., 2005). Language competence has also been shown to affect subjective career success more indirectly through affecting objective career success indicators – recruitment (e.g. Piekkari et al., 2005), organizational mobility and promotion (e.g. Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999a; 1999b), and remuneration (Traavik & Richardsen, 2010) – also through affecting the performance (e.g. Piekkari et al., 2005), social capital, and informal status (Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999a; 1999b) of the employee. However, it may not always be language competence per se that facilitates such career related outcomes, but communicative ability of the individual, which according to previously referred to literature is affected both by language competence and inter-cultural competence (Ulijn & Strother, 1995).
3 METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the research design (section 3.1) and means of data collection (section 3.2) and analysis (section 3.3) that have been adopted in order to answer the research aims of this thesis outlined in section 1.3 of the introduction. A chapter outlining certain reflections of the researcher, for example in relation to her own pre-understanding and role in the research process, is also included (section 3.4).

3.1. Inductive research design

In order to achieve the research aims, a broadly inductive research design – whereby theoretical conclusions are developed from empirical observations (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008: 22) – was employed. An inductive research design was deemed appropriate as the research aims include a desire to extend the current theory and potentially generate new theory about the role of language competence for individuals’ subjective career success. It was also deemed appropriate because the aims are relatively exploratory in nature, seeking for example to determine the various ways that language competence could affect subjective career success, and how individuals themselves perceive relationships between language, communicative and inter-cultural competence. These aims would not be as readily achievable if a deductive approach, with the formulation pre-defined hypotheses based on prior literature and the subsequent empirical testing of these hypotheses (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008), would be employed. This is because deduction does “not say anything new about reality beyond what is already in the premises” (Danermark, Ekström, Jakobsen & Karlson, 1997), i.e. the hypotheses.

In contrast to the initial formation of pre-defined hypotheses or theoretical propositions inherent in deduction (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008), empirical observations formed the starting point in the data collection and analysis phases in this study. Empirical observations in the form of qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Drawing largely on grounded theory methodology (e.g. Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), these observations were then analysed through coding strategies in order to develop categories on which the emergent theory has been founded. Inductive reasoning, however, is incomplete, the conclusions reached containing “knowledge claims not analytically implied by the premises” (Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010: 316), i.e. the empirical observations. This incompleteness
leads to a practical reasoning dilemma (Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010), namely how the researcher should convince her audience of her knowledge claims, as these claims are not the only possible version that could be developed from the data. In this thesis, this has been attempted by adopting a contextualization strategy (Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010) that acknowledges the researcher’s active role in the research process, that embraces transparency in terms of how the research has been conducted and the way that the theoretical findings have been developed, and that attempts to remain close to the empirical context and transmit this to the reader.

A point to note is that “pure induction is rare, or even impossible” (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008: 22), and within this broadly inductive design that has been employed, elements of deduction are also present. This is perhaps most evident in the iterative approach that has been adopted, with data collection and analysis overlapping to a certain degree. For example, by reflecting on the data gathered from initial pilot interviews preliminary theoretical suggestions were made, which led to revisions in the interview schedule and the collection of data to understand these suggestions further.

3.2. Data collection

The primary data collection method was through semi-structured interviews conducted with 22 individuals working in MNCs in Finland, these corporations being either the subsidiaries of Swedish companies, or companies with extensive operations in Sweden. These interviews were conducted as part of a more extensive project carried out for the Swedish-Finnish think tank Magma about the extent to which the Swedish language is needed in Finnish business life. The interviews were conducted mostly by the researcher herself, with the exception of the first three interviews at which the person responsible for the Magma project was also present.

3.2.1. Rationale for conducting interviews

Qualitative data, which includes semi-structured interviews, is argued to be more suitable compared to quantitative data elicited through surveys or questionnaires, when the aim of the research is to extract subjective understanding or study a sparsely researched phenomenon where relevant variables have not yet been identified (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Being interested in the subjective career success of individuals requires an understanding of how they themselves perceive career success and what matters to them in terms of this, which can be better unearthed through a
qualitative approach (Arthur et al., 2005; Heslin, 2005). Also, although research does exist about how language competence affects career success, this is still a relatively sparsely researched phenomenon, especially in terms of subjective career success, where the different ways that language competence affects subjective career success have not yet been fully unearthed. Thus, interviews were deemed an appropriate primary method of data collection.

Interviews were used as the sole data collection method as this is argued to be appropriate when the purpose of the research is to “uncover and describe the participants’ perspectives on events – that is, that the subjective view is what matters” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006: 102). Research making more objectivist assumptions would attempt to triangulate data gathered through interviews with data gathered through other means (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). However this thesis is interested in how the respondents perceive that language competence affects their subjective career success, as well as how the respondents perceive the language/inter-cultural/communicative competence issue. Such a focus on the subjective view of participants renders interviews as the sole data collection method appropriate.

3.2.2. Interview guide

An interview guide was developed including areas to be covered and questions related to both the Magma project and this study. The English version of this guide can be found in Appendix 1 of this thesis. The interviews as a whole were semi-structured interviews, with the area of language competence and subjective career success being one of the main areas to be covered in each interview. Within this area, also following a semi-structured approach, certain broad questions were determined in order to aid comparison across interviews. These questions were open-ended, the respondents being encouraged to speak freely about how they defined their own career success, how they perceive their language competence to affect this, and how they perceive the language/inter-cultural/communicative competence matter. Follow-up questions were posed to explore areas more fully and to explore emergent themes. The use of a few broad, open-ended questions in interviews has been advocated for grounded theory research by Charmaz (2006), who argues that, “by creating open-ended, non-judgemental questions, you encourage unanticipated statements and stories to emerge” (Charmaz, 2006: 26).
The formulation of such non-judgemental questions was particularly important in this study, as career success is such a sensitive topic, being very personal and thus perhaps uncomfortable for respondents to discuss with a complete stranger. Also the role of language competence – especially Swedish – for individuals’ careers in the Finnish context may be a sensitive area as the need for Swedish is such a contested and politicized issue today. Given such a backdrop, and perhaps even without it, certain respondents who do not speak Swedish, or speak it less fluently, may feel uncomfortable discussing this with someone who is fluent and a Finland-Swede. These considerations rendered the interview process quite challenging as such sensitive issues require the researcher to operate on two levels, “satisfying the needs of your line of inquiry while simultaneously putting forth ‘friendly’ and ‘nonthreatening’ questions” (Yin, 2003: 90). Therefore, instead of asking immediately to what extent and why the individual concerned felt that he was successful in his career, a more neutral approach was assumed, concentrating on what factors the individual uses to personally assess his or her own career success. In terms of language competence it was also attempted to assume such a neutral approach, focusing on the respondents’ language competences as a whole, not on Swedish speaking skills in particular.

3.2.3. *Pilot interviews & sampling strategy*

Two pilot interviews were conducted, with one Finnish- and one Swedish-speaking manager at two different companies, in order to test the interview guides in these languages. After these interviews, certain changes were made to the guides, taking into account unanticipated but relevant themes that emerged during these interviews. The most prominent theme was that the respondents discussed language competence in conjunction with communicative competence and inter-cultural competence, which had not been anticipated initially. Therefore, a question concerning this was added to the interview guide, and the focus of the research modified to include an exploration of the possible overlaps between these forms of competence. After this question was added, four more interviews were conducted, and it was discovered that the question led to respondents speaking quite briefly about this topic. Therefore, a scenario illustrating an extreme of language/inter-cultural/communicative competence was added in conjunction with this question to prompt the respondents to reflect more deeply around the subject and any resulting career consequences.
In terms of the sampling strategy, purposeful, as opposed to statistical, sampling (Patton, 2002) was employed, such sampling ensuring that ‘information-rich cases’ will be chosen, which will “generate insights and in-depth understandings”, and “illuminate the questions under study” (Patton, 2002: 230). This is appropriate as the purpose of this study is not to be able to statistically generalize the findings, common in theory testing research, but to develop theory and generalize the findings analytically. The respondents all occupied managerial positions (20) or had managerial responsibilities (2), and as such, within the realm of purposeful sampling, homogenous sampling (Patton, 2002) was used, this thesis taking interest in understanding the role of language competence for this particular sub-group’s (managers’) career success. Within this sub-group, maximum variation sampling (Patton, 2002) was sought in relation to the companies that the respondents worked for, and in relation to the respondents themselves, as this captures “the core experiences and central, shared dimensions of a setting or phenomenon” (Patton, 2002: 235). The companies span eleven different industries, are of different size and age, and consist of three Finnish-owned and nine Swedish-owned companies. The respondents have different linguistic backgrounds (12 Swedish speakers, 10 Finnish), genders (13 males, 9 females) and occupational fields (including CEOs and individuals in HR, communications, finance, sales and property).

In terms of how the respondents were concretely selected, ten of the individuals were selected based on the fact that they had indicated a willingness to participate in an interview when answering a survey that was sent out in conjunction with the Magma project. This survey had been directed at individuals in key positions in companies with a Swedish parent company, or companies with extensive activity in Sweden. Three of the individuals (the two pilot interviewees and the individual interviewed directly after these) were selected based on the Magma project responsible’s personal contacts. These first three interviews had thus not been exposed to the survey and were therefore not tainted by preconceptions about the study. When interviewing these first three respondents a snowball sampling strategy was used to identify other potential individuals to interview within their companies. Nine interviews were conducted with such snowballed respondents. As the vast majority of the respondents to the survey as well as the personal contacts were male and had Swedish as their mother tongue, it was attempted through this snowball sampling technique to bring as much diversity to the sample as possible in terms of linguistic background, gender and occupational fields. As with the first four interviews, these snowballed respondents were free from preconceptions about the study, not having participated in the Magma survey.
A summary of the interviewee profile is provided in Figure 7, which shows the interviewees being categorised based on whether they were Finnish or Swedish speaking, and working for a Finnish or Swedish parent. The respondents inside the shaded area are the respondents selected based on the Magma survey. (M) and (F) designate male and female. Due to the interviews having been carried out in confidence, the names of the individuals and companies have been anonymised.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FINNISH SPEAKING INTERVIEWEE</th>
<th>SWEDISH SPEAKING INTERVIEWEE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• VP, Engineering Company (M)</td>
<td>• Customer Ombudsman, Energy Company (F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• VP Internal Communications, Energy Company (F)</td>
<td>• HR Manager, Food Company (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Communications Director, Food Company (F)</td>
<td>• Magma Survey Respondent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table showing respondents from both Finnish and Swedish parent companies, with M for male and F for female.]

**Figure 7 Interviewee profile**

### 3.2.4. Use of language in the interviews

Given the researcher's fluency in English, Finnish and Swedish, the decision was made to conduct the interviews in the respondents' mother tongue, due to the beneficial effect that this has been shown to have on “data accuracy and authenticity, rapport-building, and the construction of shared understandings” (Welch & Piekkari, 2006: 417). Welch and Piekkari interviewed 34 researchers to explore the use of languages in qualitative interviewing. Some of the interviewees were clearly neo-positivist, romantic or localist in their interviewing approach, which the authors argue tend to be combined with an objectivist, interpretivist or social constructionist epistemology respectively. The majority, however, were not exclusively one or the other, and in any case benefits
of interviewing in respondents’ native language were discerned that related to all three perspectives, indicating agreement (for once) among positivist and subjectivist researchers that interviewing in the respondent’s native language is preferable.

Based on the empirical experiences of the researcher it is somewhat challenging to determine the extent to which such positive effects took place, as all interviews were conducted in interviewees’ mother tongues and as such incomparable to alternative experiences. The impression of the researcher is, however, that the use of interviewees’ mother tongue was of benefit especially for data authenticity and rapport-building, which are of importance when assuming a more subjectivist stance that acknowledges the role of the researcher in the interview process (Welch & Piekkaari, 2006). Related to data authenticity, many respondents used phrases and terminology that effectively depict a thought or situation but which are hard to translate into English, and which can best be understood when uttered in the native linguistic context, such as the phrase ‘management by perkele’ that depicts the stereotypically Finnish way of managing through making quick and occasionally brutal decisions. Interviewing in the respondents’ mother tongue also appeared to facilitate rapport building in certain instances. For example where a respondent had communicated with the researcher in Swedish when booking the interview, but where it was discovered when meeting face to face that her preferred language was in fact Finnish, she appeared to become much more at ease with the whole situation when the language was changed into Finnish. The interviewer was left with the impression that such rapport-building effects were slightly more pronounced with Swedish speaking interviewees, perhaps given the researcher’s own background as a Swedish-speaking Finn.

3.3. Data analysis

The data analysis strategy was inspired to a large extent by grounded theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Charmaz, 2006), which has been argued to be appropriate for data that consists of “a fairly large number of comparable incidents that are all richly described” (Langley, 1999). All interviews were included in the analysis, also the pilot interviews. The interviews were transcribed in full by the researcher, as advised by Strauss and Corbin (1990) for cases where the study conducted is the researcher’s first one and thus where the researcher is inexperienced in grounded theory methodology. Given that the interviews also included material not directly relevant to the research questions, the analysis process was instigated through marking
those passages of text that were relevant. Inspired by Charmaz’ (2006) constructivist approach to constructing grounded theory, these passages were then analysed through the coding strategies depicted in the following section (section 3.3.1).

3.3.1. Initial, focused and theoretical coding

Initial coding was carried out by identifying segments of text consisting of partial or full sentences and labelling these with a statement depicting what was going on in that segment, as advocated by Charmaz (2006). This rendered a very large number of codes, so a second phase of coding – focused coding – was carried out, which consisted of using the codes that occurred most frequently or that were deemed most significant from the initial coding phase to go through the data again (Charmaz, 2006). This required decisions to be made about which codes to use to categorise the data, and allowed larger data segments to be synthesised and explained (Charmaz, 2006). In this phase, comparisons were continuously made between data segments and focused codes in order to ensure consistency, and the focused codes used to categorise the data were occasionally modified to ensure they depicted the data accurately. Tables that included the key arguments made by respondents in relation to each category/focused code were drawn up and these were then analysed in order to identify sub-categories and properties of the main categories. These sub-categories and properties tended to be drawn from the initial codes.

During the data collection phase, field notes had been made after each interview to record preliminary themes that emerged during the interviews, and these field notes were also used in the coding phases to assist in categorising the interview transcript data. Every attempt was made to ensure that the labels of the categories/focused codes would emerge from and be closely tied to the data, not be pre-imposed, in order to ensure that the emergent theory would be thoroughly grounded in empirical observations as advocated by Charmaz (2006). Care was made not to unjustifiably impose pre-conceived categories (e.g. concepts drawn from prior literature), although prior literature was to a certain extent drawn upon to assist in making sense of the data. The focused codes, or categories, that form the basis of the resulting theoretical models (depicted in section 4), their sub-categories and properties, and examples of data segments used to build these focused codes, are shown in figure 8. The focused codes centre on conceptualizations of career success and the mechanisms through which language competence was perceived to affect these conceptualizations.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focused Codes</th>
<th>Sub-categories and Properties</th>
<th>Examples of Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language competence</td>
<td>English/Finnish/Swedish/German/Russian/the company language/language of clients/language of markets ...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptualizations of career success:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remuneration</td>
<td>“No onhan se totta kai taloudellinen puolikin on yksi että sää saattaa niin kuin parempaa palkkaa ja nään, että niin kuin tuntuu että sää, että sun työpanosta arvostetaan ja niin kuin, että sää saattaa myöskään jotakin taloudellista hyötyä siitä.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieve results</td>
<td>Contribute to firm success; Achieve results in own role; “Det är ju inte bara att liksom uppnå någon vakans utan det är också att vad man gör i den vakansen, hur framgångsrikt blir bolaget?”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieve career goals</td>
<td>Formal position; “Man måste gå bakåt i tiden och reflektera, jämföra med vad du hade byggt upp för förväntningar under studietiden eller den första arbetsplats. Jag råkade ha det ganska enkelt, för jag kommer ihåg min första intervju, så den där intervjuaren blev alldels paff när han frågade att ’nå vad har du för karriärförväntningar’, en sådan där standard fråga, så att ’jag vill bli personaldirektör i ett finskt, men gärna internationellt, bolag’.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job content related criteria</td>
<td>Interesting tasks; Challenging tasks; Personal development; Enjoying your job; “Ennen kaikkea se että mulle löytyy koko ajan haasteita, uusia haasteita, ja on sellaisia työtehtäviä joissa mä voin sitten oppia uusia juttuja koko ajan. Että se on ollut mulle semmoinen draiveri tehdä duunia tai hakea uusia haasteita tai hakea uusia työtehtäviä. Että silloin kun mä olen kokenut että, tavallaan että jymähtää paikalleen, että tekee sitä samaa juttua eikä, ei tule mitään lisää, niin siinä vaiheessa mä olen sitten katsonut että mitäs nyt sitten, ja mutaman kerran sitten vaihtanut työpaikkää.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling appreciated/respected</td>
<td>By colleagues; By superiors; “Också det att man känner att man är med i ett team och att man är respekterad och, respekterad är säkert rätt ord.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanisms:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social capital/networking</td>
<td>More personal contact (shared language); Wider networks (Swedish); Visibility with top management (Swedish); Succeeding with clients (client language); Language node; “Om inte jag skulle kunna svenska, skulle jag antagligen inte ha diskuterat med produktionschefen i X-by. Så han kan nog engelska, nu skulle jag säkert ha diskuterat jobbet med honom i något skede, men vi skulle inte ha suttit på kvällen i baren och druckit öl efter någon workshop eller konferens, om inte vi skulle ha haft ett gemensamt språk.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment</td>
<td>Formal selection criteria/requirement; Merit/informally considered; Role dependent; Need other skills; Finnish/Swedish/English; “Jag skulle säga lite på nivå, det är ett typiskt exempel att CFO behöver egentligen inte, medan kanske personaldirektören behöver, för det är liksom mera mänskliga relationer och så vidare, men jag skulle säga att lite individuellt. Men nu kommer vi att rekrytera mer och mer mänskor som har internationell bakgrund och kan engelska. Vi satsar mycket på att förkära mänskor i engelska och ryska, det är helt klart.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility increases</td>
<td>Broader client base; Broader tasks/doings; “För att liksom då kunna bli riktigt tung i kundssammanhang, och, och liksom ta på sig mera ansvar, så då måste man naturligtvis kunna engelska, och, och det lokala språket.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assimilating information</td>
<td>From the business; “För det första är det ju det att jag kan liksom surfa runt på olika språk, och förstå det på originalspråket, som antingen talas, är skrivet. Och det är</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
vänder långt det vad kommunikation handlar om, att liksom samla ihop helhetsinformationen och försöka liksom analysera vad det handlar om och. Så det försnabbar ju upp processen enormt förstås.”

| Good feeling effects/ emotional wellbeing | Confidence; Enriching; Good feeling; Feeling stupid/incompetent; Pain/fear; “Det är ju jätte frustrerande om du inte kan uttrycka dig själv på något språk. Nu t.ex. om några minuter så om jag skulle vara rädd att gå framför ett stort gäng med vargar i det här fallet som har finska som moderssmål så nu skulle det ju vara nervöst. Man skulle inte känna sig riktigt du med situationen. Så nu ger det en sådan där viss trygghet.” |
| Convince & lead others | Exert influence; Lead people; Convince people; Get your point across; Other skills more important; “Totta kai sun pitää pystyä, jos sä aiot johtaa, jos puhutaan ihmisten johtamisesta, niin kyllähän sun pitää pystyä puhumaan vakuuttavasti. Et sä voi takerrella ja mietiskellä ja niin edespäin ja sitä kaukta, jos et sä sihen pysty, niin et sä pysty etenemään uralla, että näin se vaan menee.” |
| Promotion | Required for promotion; Informally affects promotion; Lacking language competence can lead to demotion; Need other skills; Finnish/Swedish/English; “Jos haluaa johtotehtävän, niin se tarkoittaa automaattisesti sitä että silloin silla pitää olla konsernikieli hallussa ja englanti, koska, koska tuota, silloin sä olet han koko aika telemisissä, etkähän sä voi oikein muuten tehdä itsestäsi minkään näköistä vaikutusta sitten vastakumppaniin, jos et sä pysty kommunikoimaan, että erittäin tärkeät.” |
| (Internal) mobility | Cross-border transfers; Leaving the organization; Changing roles; Access to training; Need other skills; Swedish/English; “Se myös mahdollistaa sen henkilön siirtymistä tehtävistä toiseen koska...koska tuota, aika monissa työtehtävissä sitten se kontakti Tukholmaan ja Ruotsin on tärkeä osa, ja silloin jos ei ole ruotsin kielen taitoa niin se rajoittaa sitten tiedystä niitä työmahdollisuuksia.” |

**Figure 8  Focused codes**

During and after focused coding, theoretical coding was carried out in order to identify relationships between the main categories, or focused codes (Charmaz, 2006). A record was made of all instances of such relationships being put forward by interviewees. Short memos were kept to keep a note of and analyse the nature of relationships between categories. These memos also included ever developing diagrams illustrating these relationships, which formed the basis of the diagrams presented in the results section (section 4). As in the open coding phase, the field notes that had been made after each interview were also drawn upon in this phase, as these included initial impressions of possible relationships. The theoretical codes that form the basis of the resulting theoretical models (depicted in section 4), and their core dynamics, are shown in figure 9. Examples of data segments used to base the theoretical codes on have also been included where possible, although it is worth mentioning that the theoretical codes are often based on interviewees’ responses to specific interview questions, and as such the relationship discussed does not always become apparent solely from an
interviewee’s response, but from the interplay of interview questions and interviewee responses. The theoretical codes focus on the relationships between mechanisms and career success conceptualizations, and the relationships between language, inter-cultural and communicative competence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical Codes</th>
<th>Dynamics/Examples of Data</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language competence’s effect on career success</td>
<td>Minimal effect; Definite effect; Fundamentally important; Finnish (Finnish context)/Swedish (Nordic context)/English (international, basic requirement)/other (clients, markets); “Språk, det jag skulle säga är att språk är liksom, om jag inte skulle ha kunnat så mycket språk, skulle jag aldrig ha varit var jag är nu, faktiskt, alltså det är, språk är helt number one.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language competence’s effect on remuneration</td>
<td>No/little effect; Indirect effect through affecting objective career success indicators and results; “Alltså annat än att då med mera ansvaret så har man fått, det där, och mina språkkunskaper har påverkat det att jag har haft möjligheter att få mera ansvarsfulla uppgifter, så då jo. Men inte en direkt inverkan.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective career success affects job content related criteria</td>
<td>Desirable job content linked to (new) role/organization/position, attainable through recruitment, promotion and internal mobility; “Ennen kaikkea se että mulle mulle löytyy koko ajan haasteita, uusia haasteita, ja on sellaisia työtehtäviä joissa mä voin sitten oppia uusia juttuja koko ajan. Että se on ollut mulle semmoinen driveri tehdä duunia tai hakea uusia haasteita tai hakea uusia työtehtäviä. Että silloin kun mä olen kokenut että, tavallaan että jymhäättää paikalleen, että tekee siitä samaa juttua eikä, ei tule mitään lisää, niin siiä vaiheessa mä olen sitten katsonut että miltä se nyt sitten, ja muutaman kerran sitten vaihtanut työpaikkam.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased responsibility in your role affects job content related criteria</td>
<td>Increased responsibility affects level of interest/challenge/personal development in the role. “Myöskin se että, että sulla on mielenkiintoisia työtehtäviä. Että sehän se on tosi tärkeätä että ethän sä muuten jaksaa puurata sitä joka päivä sitä työä [nauraaj jos ei siinä ole mitään niin kuin semmoista mielenkiintoa [...] En mä voi kuvitella että mä olisin tehnyt tällä tällää kaikkia niitä asioita ellen mä osaisi – no ensinäkin tietysti englantia – mutta myöskin se että jos en mä osaisi ruotsia, niin, niin tuota, kyllä mä sanon että se olisi paljon keapea alaisempia niin työpaikka. Niin kuin keapea alaisempana se, tämä tekeminen jollakin tavalla”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social capital/ networking with top management affects career progression</td>
<td>By gaining visibility with top management; “Kaikki nämä työtehtävät niin kyllä jolla on, kyllä sillä on ollut tosi iso merkitys että mulla on ruotsinkielien taitoja, ja sitä, sen kielitaidon kautta mulla, mä olen pystynyt luomaan kontakteja Ruotsin jotka siten myöskin on edestaatunut”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social capital/ networking with colleagues helps achieve results</td>
<td>Access to information; Language node advantages and disadvantages; “Det kan vara lite jobbigare att nå sina personliga mål om det är på det sättet som jag sade tidigare att all kontakt från koncernen kommer via mig därför för att jag kan svenska. Så då tar det ju tid och det har en viss hindrande inverkan nog.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social capital/ networking with clients helps achieve results</td>
<td>By having a shared language; “Men det är ju klart, det är för fan, att om vi skall vara framångsrika i Sverige, som har alltid varit en stor ändå kund till oss och stor samarbetspartner idag, så att är inte säga åt mig att någon han ligger på samma, samma möjligheter som bara kan engelska, bara engelska. Det är...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to convince/lead others helps achieve results</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Jos aiakoo pärjätä tällaisissa tehtävissä mitä mäkin olen tehnyt niin se [englanninkiel] on oikeastaan välttämätön. Ilman hyvää kielitaitoja, ilman sellaista kielitaitoa että sä pystyt selvästi ja järkevästi ilmaisemaan itsesä, puhumaan ihmisille, myymään sun omia ajatuksia ihmisille – joko asiakkaille tai sitten sisäisesti – niin kyllä sun pitää pystyä luontevasti puhumaan.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assimilating information helps achieve results</th>
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</table>
| By understanding what is going on in the business;  
"För att bidra till framgång måste du ha en förståelse för verksamheten och för omvärlden och det som händer, och kunna omsätta det och kunna tolka det, och kunna dessutom analyser och fatta beslut.” |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good feeling/emotional wellbeing affects subjective career success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generally discussed in conjunction with discussing how language competence affects participants' career success.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language competence is required for communicative competence</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| Basic requirement/tool; Express yourself; Make yourself understood;  
Understanding synonyms/nuances; Deeper discussions;  
"Återigen är det nog ganska enkelt, att om du kan förstå språk, så har du möjlighet att kommunicera med folk i alla olika lägen på ett helt annat sätt, och få dig förstådd.” |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language competence does not equal communicative competence</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| Language competence is no guarantee you will be understood; Can communicate with limited language competence; Language competence is not enough for communicative competence; Barriers (cultural, knowing audience);  
"No kielitaito ja kommunikointitaito ei välttämättä suoranaisesti yhteneen. Tai siis siinä mielessä että jos mietti että esim. puhuu paremmin tai jotakin. Ja sitten toas toisaalta jos on hyvä puhumaan ja esiintymään omalla äidinkielellään niin se kuitenkin potkisi myös vaikka olisi vieras kieli, ehkä. Tai joku senmoinen luontevuus siihen säilyy” |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language competence affects inter-cultural competence</th>
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</table>
| Gateway to culture; Understanding mentality;  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inter-cultural competence affects communicative competence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Adapting to/understanding different styles of communication;  
Understanding what people mean by what they say; Understanding nuances;  
Cultural differences between Finns and Swedes affects understanding each other;  

**Figure 9  Theoretical codes**
3.3.2. **Triangulation of interviewee responses**

The respondents' responses were triangulated, i.e. compared, against each other to uncover any contradictions in responses. Where contradictions were found to exist, these have been mentioned in the results section (section 4). The focus of the analysis has been to analyse the results at the individual level, as this thesis takes interest in understanding how language competence affects career success of individuals and therefore not necessarily limiting the time span to the time spent at the current company. However, the respondents did tend to focus mostly on experiences in their present workplace, and thus, inspired by the methodology advocated by Eisenhardt's (1989) approach to theory building from case study research, responses were also compared across the case companies where this was relevant and possible (e.g. in relation to language competence and recruitment, promotion and internal mobility). In the context of this, the responses of respondents that worked in the same company were also triangulated in order to check whether their perceptions in relation to company specific statements matched (no significant discrepancies in relation to this were found).

3.4. **Reflections**

This section presents various methodology-related reflections, including the researcher’s own pre-understanding and role in data collection and analysis, the political context of the interviews, and respondents’ reactions to interview questions.

3.4.1. **Researcher’s own pre-understanding**

It is inevitable to have some sort of pre-understanding, or prejudice, on the topic that you have chosen to research; according to Gillham (2005: 9) “we approach everything in terms of that, whether researchers or not”. As a Finland-Swede, the standing of the Swedish language in Finland is of concern, as this is very much related to the position of the Finland-Swedens in Finland in general. Acknowledging this vested interest in the importance of the Swedish language from the beginning of the research process, the researcher has made every attempt to keep this in mind and not to let this bias influence the data collection and analysis. As a Finland-Swede, the researcher’s understanding of the wider societal and political context in which the study takes place, although perhaps slightly biased in this respect, is nevertheless beneficial when it comes to understanding and interpreting interviewees’ responses, which frequently
refer to wider societal and political spheres of activity. A perhaps more neutral realm of pre-understanding relates to the theoretical framework. Such a body of knowledge to draw from created both benefits and drawbacks during data collection and analysis. It made it easier to understand and follow up on certain themes during the interviews, but it was also a challenge in terms of not letting this prior understanding influence the analysis of the data, especially when coding and categorising the data.

### 3.4.2. Researcher’s role in data collection and analysis

The researcher plays an active role in data collection and analysis: her “age, gender, class, race, ethnicity, orientation, history and experiences play a role in shaping the research process and interpreting and understanding materials” (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008: 57). Therefore, both the data that is produced (i.e. the voice recorded interviews) and the interpretation and analysis of this data, can be viewed as social constructions that are “contextually situated in time, place, culture and situation” (Charmaz, 2006: 131). In relation to data collection, power dynamics were a pertinent issue as the researcher was explicit about being a student and interviewees tended to be much older, occupying relatively high status positions. This led to occasional situations where respondents had certain issues on their minds related to the language matter that they wanted to discuss, and where it was difficult for the researcher to steer the interview back on track. In relation to data analysis, although grounding this in the empirical observations, coding categorising the data is a subjective process; “the theory depends on the researcher’s view: it does not and cannot stand outside of it” (Charmaz, 2006: 130). Bearing this in mind, the researcher has attempted to remain critical of her own interpretations and formulations when analysing the data, in order for her interpretation not to be unduly influenced by her own preconceptions, pre-understandings, background, identity, etc.

### 3.4.3. Political context of the interviews

The interviews were conducted between February and May 2011, either very closely before or after the parliamentary elections held on 17th of April. During the time up to the elections the media was rife with debate about the role of the Swedish language in Finland in terms of whether it should remain a mandatory subject in primary and secondary school, and the question featured more or less prominently in parties’ election campaigns. The most prominent opposition to this mandatory Swedish came
from Perussuomalaiset, or the ‘True Finns’ party, who experienced a historic victory in the elections, becoming the third largest party in parliament (Yle, 2011). The degree to which such a political context influenced interviewees’ responses to undue extents is difficult to assess. The respondents themselves quite often concretely referred to it during the interviews, certain respondents quite decidedly placing themselves on one side or the other in this debate, which indicates that this was clearly a topical issue for them. It may well be that respondents’ opinions on the matter are reflected in their interpretations of whether certain language competences have had a bearing on their career success, however the extent to which this is the case is challenging to say. Nevertheless, such a possibility rendered it pertinent to interpret interviewees’ responses bearing this possibility in mind.

3.4.4. Interviewees’ reactions to interview questions

Interviewees generally appeared to understand and respond positively to the questions asked. For the questions relating to language competence and career success, the researcher was left with the impression that these issues were discussed in enough detail. The approach taken to ask about perceptions of career success appeared to work well, as only one interviewee responded somewhat defensively when asked about this. In this case the researcher was left with the impression that the interviewee would rather not have talked about this, and that this was quite a sensitive area for him. For the questions relating to the language/inter-cultural/communicative competence issue, there was not always enough time to explore these issues fully, given time constraints set by the respondents. In eight of the interviews the interviewees could not come up with a specific example of a situation where a person has had good language competence but lacking inter-cultural or communicative skills; however quite often this question prompted them to discuss this issue more deeply in general terms. In any case, given the number of interviews conducted that specifically asked about these issues (20), the researcher believes that enough material has been gathered to address this sub-aim.
4 RESULTS

This section presents the results of the interviews. Section 4.1 outlines high-level findings about the importance of language competence in the context of career success, as well as a summary of the languages mentioned as important. Section 4.2 outlines the ways in which language competence was seen to affect subjective career success (including an overview of how career success was conceptualized by interviewees). Section 4.3 outlines the findings in relation to the language/intercultural/communicative competence question. Section 4.4 summarises the whole results chapter.

4.1. Role of language competence for subjective career success

All respondents indicated that language competence played a role in their career success in one manner or another. The majority (17) of interviews indicated that their language competence has had a definite enabling or constricting effect, although a handful of interviewees felt that their language competence was only of quite minimal importance. Certain managers (5) even felt that their language competence was of fundamental importance to their career success:

Språk, det jag skulle säga är att språk är liksom, om jag inte skulle ha kunnat så mycket språk, skulle jag aldrig ha varit var jag är nu, faktiskt, alltså det är, språk är helt number one. HR Manager, Food Company

De [språkkunskaper] har ju varit så klart mer än viktiga. Om man nu antar att man enbart skulle ha talat finska så skulle man aldrig ha över huvud taget haft en möjlighet. CEO, Industrial Components Company

Jag kan säga att språkkunskaper är nog väldigt viktigt. Det är, jag tror att det är lika viktigt – det beror igen på i vilken miljö, om du inte har något behov av det, om du jobbar för en finsk firma någonstans som bara har finska kunder och så vidare så kanske det inte behövs någon – men det där, för internationellt samarbete, handel och så vidare, så då så är språkkunskaperna alldeles avgörande viktiga. Expansion and Property Manager, Interior Design Company

In terms of the specific languages mentioned as important, in addition to Finnish – which was unsurprisingly indicated as an important language in the Finnish context in relation to these managers’ careers – the vast majority (19) of respondents identified their Swedish speaking skills as an asset in some way in relation to their own career success. These respondents often discussed the importance of Swedish with reference to frequent cooperation with Sweden or other Nordic countries being required, or with reference to the dominant markets their companies were present in:
Certain interviewees (3) however did not feel that their (either existing or non-existing) skills in the Swedish language had had any marked effect on their career success. These respondents viewed their English skills as much more central for this. Competence in English was indeed mentioned as important by most managers in the context of their career success, as such a universal language is essential when having to do with international parts of the business, parts of the business where English is the working language, or international clients. However English-speaking skills tended to be regarded more as a basic requirement, without which you could not begin to develop a career with an international dimension in the first place, than as a language giving you an edge or advantage compared to others:

Engelska är inte bara vårt språk utan det är liksom ett internationellt språk när det gäller, liksom, business och finansvärlden. Så därför för att hänga med bara så måste man ju kunna, kunna engelska och läsa på sig, nu måste man kunna engelska, och så vidare bortåt. Senior Partner, Communications Consultancy

In addition to Finnish, Swedish and English, certain interviewees also mentioned mastering or not mastering other languages as having had an effect on their career success. These languages also tended to reflect the markets the MNC was operating in or the nationality of the MNC’s clients. More in depth examples in terms of how specific language competences have affected the respondents’ subjective career success are provided throughout section 4.2.

4.2. How language competence affects subjective career success

This chapter outlines the results in relation to how, i.e. the mechanisms through which, language competence was perceived by respondents to affect career success. Interviewees conceptualized career success in different ways, and therefore also discussed language competence as affecting their career success differently. The discussion is structured around the different conceptualizations of subjective career success and how language competence was perceived to affect these. A summary diagram of these findings is presented in figure 10 and will be explained and elaborated on in the following sections.
4.2.1. **Subjective career success**

The most prominent conceptualizations of career success included job content related criteria (15): having tasks that are interesting and/or challenging and/or personally developing (11), or having a job that you enjoy (4). The majority of the interviewees that defined career success as having interesting, challenging and/or personally developing tasks indicated that having such tasks is connected to changing roles, titles or organizations. The respondents that defined career success explicitly as having a job...
you enjoy discussed this in terms of different things, from working with products that you are passionate about, to having a strong social dimension to your work, to feeling that there is a balance between what you give and what you receive from your job.

Another strong trend that emerged related to achievement of results. Eight interviewees indicated that career success to them included some kind of performative, or results-based element. The majority of these respondents (5) discussed this in terms of being able to contribute to the success of the company, for example through making money for the company or daring to try out new things. The rest of the interviewees (3) discussed this in terms of achieving more role-specific results: having the most effective division in the group, being able to solve client’s problems or doing well in their job.

Additional conceptualizations of career success included achieving career goals, having a certain level of remuneration and feeling appreciated or respected. Three respondents indicated that career success means achieving what you have wanted to do or to become; two of these interviewees directly referred to their formal position in this context. Three respondents mentioned a certain level of remuneration as being an element of career success, however no interviewee stated that this was the sole definition of career success. Three respondents indicated that a part of career success to them means feeling appreciated or respected by colleagues, however also in this case did no interviewee state that this was the sole definition of career success.

4.2.2. Job content related criteria

All respondents that conceptualized career success in terms of job content related criteria indicated that their language competence has affected this in one way or another, primarily by influencing their ability to attain positions with such tasks or features by playing a role in recruitment (6), promotion and internal mobility (7) as well as more indirectly through networking- and social capital related effects in the direction of top management (3). Language competence was also indicated by certain managers (4) to affect the extent of challenge/interest/personal development in one’s current role through providing the possibility of assuming more extensive responsibility for tasks and clients. These relationships, and their particular dynamics, are summarised in figure 11 and elaborated on in sections 4.2.2.1 - 4.2.2.4.
Most managers indicated that language competence has played a role in their being recruited to their current companies, certain languages they possess being deemed either a direct requirement or a strong merit. Discounting Finnish for the moment, English appears to be the most crucial language, with most managers (15) explicitly stating that this was a formal criterion. Swedish was also deemed of central importance, either more formally (11) or by being a merit in some way during the recruitment process (3). These results mirror to a large extent the managers’ responses in relation to the languages being considered during recruitment in general in their companies. In all 12 companies English appears to be a requirement when recruiting staff, either as a competence deemed necessary of all staff or at least required for managerial positions and for positions with an international element. The reasons for demanding English of staff were motivated precisely by the companies’ international make-up of clients and colleagues, as well as in some cases by the functional language being English. As stated by certain managers:

Kyllä se niin on ettiä, jos puhutaan urasta ja siitä että millä tasolla organisaatiossa on, niin mitä ylemmäs organisaatiossa menee, puhutaan kansainvälisistä tehtävistä, niin sitä suurempi
Only in one company – the Travel Agency – did it appear that Swedish would be emphasized as important for all staff. In eight of the companies – Food Company, Energy Company, Industrial Components Company, Publishing House, Interior Design Company, Recycling Company and Bank A – Swedish was stated to be a requirement for certain roles, primarily for positions that require cooperation and contact with Sweden or other Nordic countries. In Bank A, this requirement was argued to be the case for all managerial posts. As stated by respondents:

If not a formal requirement, Swedish was in any case explicitly stated to be a merit and a language that would give you an advantage in the recruitment situation in all companies apart from the Engineering Company. This was argued by some managers to be a reflection of the markets the company is active in, and due to this reason certain managers also mentioned Russian as being a merit.

The importance of Finnish was also highlighted by some managers (11), emphasizing that this is particularly important in the Finnish context in client facing roles such as consultancy, marketing or sales, although certain posts (such as internally facing roles) may not require it. What some managers (8) also emphasized was the fact that language competence is naturally not sufficient per se, other skills or competences, the attitude or potential of the candidate, or a consideration of the person as a whole often being more important, but that language competence is one factor among many that affects the selection decision.
4.2.2.2. Promotion and internal mobility

Ten managers mentioned that their language skills – in English, Finnish, Swedish or a mixture of these – have played a role, either formally or informally, in their ability to be promoted or to otherwise move internally within their companies:

One manager highlighted that without her Swedish language competence she would not have been able to partake in a training course held in Sweden and thus not fulfil the requirements for her new role:

Such statements reflect the languages identified by managers as being deemed important for attaining top management positions in their companies. English was identified as a fundamental language in this respect, often combined with either Swedish or Finnish (or both). Finnish tended to be emphasized when discussing top management positions located in Finland, whereas Swedish was mentioned with reference to such positions located in Sweden or to the increased need for top management to cooperate with other Nordic countries:

On se tärkeä [ruotsi], koska kun täällä uralla edetään tässä firmassa, poikkeuksetta se tarkoittaa sitä, että ne työtehtävät tulevat olemaan sellaisia joissa sinä olet paljon yhteydessä meidän emoyhtiöön Tukholmassa... Sulle yleensä matkat lisääntyvät, ja ne matkat on Tukholmaan,
The effects of not being fluent enough in a language can be devastating, leading to demotions or even to a decision by the employed person to leave the company of one's own accord:

Vi hade då när jag började till exempel en försäljningsdirektör som inte behärskade engelska. Och den, han fick, det var nog en av orsakerna att han sedan i något skede blev degraderad så att säga. Att han inte [...], han fick inte resultat i försäljningen, men sedan dessutom språket och allt det här så det fanns inte tillräckligt mycket argument för att låta honom försöka ännu. Business Controller, IT Logistics Company

I början var det, var det kanske till och med, det var kanske en av orsakerna jag flyttade bort från [American car company] för att, jag skulle flytta till England och jag hade ganska svårt att liksom sälja in mig där. Expansion and Property Manager, Interior Design Company

As with recruitment, however, certain managers (9) did state that, although language competence is a factor that is considered and does affect promotion and mobility-related decisions, business/technical and other competences often play a more central role.

4.2.2.3. Networking and social capital: Top management

The managers that discussed language competence as having had an effect on their career success through enabling them to network with and build contacts with top management in Swedish all worked for Swedish-owned firms. They indicated that being able to communicate with top management in their mother tongue (i.e. Swedish) may have increased their visibility with these individuals and thus paved the way for future career development prospects in the form of new roles and tasks. As stated by one respondent:

Källan nämni työtehtävät niin kyllä niillä on, kyllä sillä on ollut tosi merkitys että mulla on ruotsinkielien taitoja, ja sitä, sen kielitaidon kautta mulla, mä olen pystynyt luomaan kontaktuja Ruotsiin jotka sitten myöskin on edesauuttanut [...] kun nääsä uusissa työtehtävissä mun esimiehet on ruotsalaisia, niin heillä on kuitenkin, mmm, he ovat kuitenkin olleet päättämässä siitä kuka rekrytoidaan tähän työtehtävään ja tuota, kun sitten edellisten työtehtävien kautta on tutustunut paljon ruotsalaisiin niin kyllähän sielläkin sitten sana kiertää että 'onko se huono tai ei' – varsinkin jos on huono niin se sana kiertää ihan varmasti, jos tekee työnsä huonom niin kyllähän siitten. Niin kyllä se on edesauuttanut ihan varmasti että on luonut niitä kontaktuja sitten sinne pääkallopaikalle. CEO of Division 2, Bank A

One respondent also indicated that the contacts she had made with top management at the headquarters in Sweden facilitated her being involved in more projects and endeavours, as her colleagues urged her to get involved in these instead of themselves due to her good contacts with headquarters and her good Swedish language skills:
4.2.2.4. More extensive responsibility for tasks, projects and clients

In addition to the Assistant to the Country Manager depicted in the preceding section, three other respondents indicated that language competence has directly affected the extent of their involvement in tasks or projects or the extent of responsibility for clients that they have been able to assume. This has been due to them being skilled in the particular language required to assume responsibility for particular clients or tasks. As stated by certain interviewees:

För att liksom då kunna bli riktigt tung i kundsammanhang, och, och liksom ta på sig mera ansvar, så då måste man naturligtvis kunna engelska, och, och det lokala språket [in this case Finnish]. Senior Partner, Communications Consultancy

Se oli yksi tietty niin kun semmoisen virstanpylväs mun uralla, että mä hoidin semmoisen tärkeän asian ja se että mä olin siellä johtui siitä että mä osaan saksaa. VP Internal Communications, Energy Company

4.2.3. Achieving results

Managers who identified performance- or results-based outcomes as a facet of their career success all identified language competence as a factor that affected this to a certain degree. Three main themes emerged in terms of how language competence was seen to play a role in their ability to achieve results: (i) through various effects related to social capital and networking with clients and colleagues (3), (ii) through affecting one’s ability to convince and lead others (4), and (iii) through affecting one’s ability to assimilate information (2). These relationships, and their particular dynamics, are summarised in figure 12, and elaborated on in sections 4.2.3.1-4.2.3.3.
4.2.3.1. Networking and social capital: Clients and colleagues

Three respondents indicated that their language competence impacts their ability to achieve results through various effects related to networking and social capital, either with clients or within the sphere of the company. In terms of the client sphere, respondents argued that being able to build relations and network with clients in the client’s own language – be this Swedish, German, or some other language – leads to more success with those clients than if a third language such as English is used. As stated by managers:

I den här typen av jobb så desto flere språk du kan desto starkare sits har du över huvud taget att klara dig, i och med att om du har huvudmän från många olika länder. Som jag sade tidigare, om jag talade ännu tyska och franska skulle det vara en ytterst, skulle jag säga, ett bra tillägg till ens, vad heter det, kompetens helt klart […] möjligtvis så hade man, vad heter det, på det sättet kunnat utveckla, skulle jag säga, bolaget ännu mera med att då ha flere intressanta leverantörer

CEO, Industrial Components Company

Men det är ju klart, det är för fan, att om vi skall vara framgångsrika i Sverige, som har alltid varit en stor ändå kund till oss och stor samarbetspartner idag, så att att inte säga åt mig att någon han ligger på samma, samma möjligheter som bara kan engelska, bara engelska. Det är den som kan svenska som kommer att vinna! Recently Retired CEO, Recycling Company

In terms of the intra-firm sphere, respondents indicated that competence in certain languages has led to stronger networks and relationships (i.e. social capital) in the business, and that this affects their ability to get the job done. The ways in which such social capital affects one’s ability to achieve results was discussed in detail by a Business
Controller in an IT logistics company. He indicated that his Swedish competence led to him becoming a translator between the Swedish and Finnish parts of the business in his area, and that this position mostly helped him to achieve results, through forcing him to become acquainted with the entire business’ value chain. However he also states that this role as a language node made it more difficult to reach his personal objectives, as he was forced to complete tasks that fell outside his sphere of responsibility. He also suggested that his language competence helped him to achieve results due to being able to build strong personal relationships through which access to information and advice could be gained:

A common language was indeed deemed to be much more fruitful in terms of building such personal relationships by several other interviewees (6), the general consensus being that the connection with your counterparty is always much better and closer when you are speaking the same language. In the context of building social capital within the business, respondents mostly mentioned English- and particularly Swedish-speaking skills as important; several interviewees (5) working for firms with a Swedish parent stated that competence in Swedish creates opportunities for one to build much wider networks than if only knowledge of English is held. As argued by one interviewee:

Thus, even when the functional language is English, knowledge of Swedish in such firms is clearly beneficial from an informal networking point of view.

4.2.3.2. **Convincing and leading others**

Respondents (5) indicated that language competence can impact one’s performance by affecting how well one is able to make oneself understood and get one’s point across in various situations, to influence others or convince others of one’s ideas, to lead people
or to inspire people. Managers furthermore indicated that in terms of this, fluency in the relevant language is required; basic language skills where you may need to pause or think about how you should express yourself are not sufficient. As stated by certain respondents:

Englanninkielellä on varmaan kohtuullisen iso merkitys. Jos aikoo pärjätä täällä tehtävissä mitä mäkin olen tehnyt niin se on oikeastaan välttämätön. Ilman hyvää kielitaitoa, ilman sellaista kielitaitoa että sä pystyt selväästi ja järkevästi ilmaisemaan itseisiä, puhumaan ihmisille, myymään sun omia ajatuksia ihmisille – joko asiakkaille tai sitten sisäisesti – niin kyllä sun pitäää pystyä luontevasti puhumaan. Että jos se on semmoista se kielitaito että sä takertelet tai joudut miettimään tai pitämään taukoja tai muuta niin et sä pysty saamaan sun viestää perille. VP, Engineering Company

Vi har många, jätte duktiga mänskor som tyvärr har ett handikapp i språket o de kommer aldrig fram. Det är hemskt och medge, men att man ser hur de lider på situationer, man vet att de skulle ha mycket att ge, många åsikter och tankar att komma med, men de håller tillbaka eller kommer sen klumpigt fram och blir missförstådda. Så det är, det spelar nog, man ska inte undervärdera språket heller. HR Director, Energy Company

Kyllä mä koe että se oli niin kuin hirveän vahvaa semmoista muutosjohtamista, eli sun piti itse olla valmis ekana ottaa ne ruotsalaiset tai tässä tapauksessa Bank A:n arvot, ja sitten sun piti niin kuin pystyä välittämään ne, ja silloin, silloin sun, silloin sille kollegoille. Eli silloin tulee enemmän niin kuin siihen arvomaailmaan ja siihen kommunikaatioon, että tota kai sun piti niin kuin ymmärtää mitä ruotsalaiset sanoi, mutta sinänsä pitää niin kuin käänntää ja tulkita se suomeksi. CEO of Division, Bank A

However one manager did state that language competence is not enough in this context, business competence clearly being more central:

Nå nu är businesskompetensen klart den viktigaste... Att inte kan man prata sig ur alla situationer, utan nu måste man liksom ha det här själva kunnandet där bakom, och ha substans i det vad man gör, för allting måts ju ändå, vad man håller på med. Och ingen mäter ner det att, hur bra du talar svenska, engelska eller någonting annat. Sales Director, Travel Agency

This however may depend on the extent of one’s fluency in the particular language. In the case of one manager, his lacking English language skills were such a severe handicap for him when working for an American MNC that even less competent colleagues were able to exert more influence over decisions than he could (and ultimately this inability to sell himself internally led to him leaving the business, as mentioned in the promotion and internal mobility section at 4.2.2.2):

I början på min karriär, jag var inte så där väldigt stark i engelska, jag hade lite problem, och inte är jag nu så där väldigt, väldigt stark i det heller men jag är så där liksom normal, ska vi säga. Och då när man jobbade i amerikanska bolag och träffade sina engelska kollegor så – som ofta visade sig vara liksom så där kompetensmässigt kanske lite lägre eller så – men de hade den här muntliga och skriftliga framföringen så stark, så kunde de liksom påverka eventuellt de här cheferna, besluten, det, det låt så fint att det okej, att det var liksom, men om du riktigt började titta på kontenten så var det inte. Expansion and Property Manager, Interior Design Company
4.2.3.3. Assimilation of information

Two managers indicated that their language competence impacts achievement of results by affecting their ability to assimilate information or ideas from the business, allowing them to have a better understanding of what is going on and to better address their tasks at hand. As stated by one respondent acting as the Communications Manager at a Finland-based Food Company fluent in Finnish, English and Swedish:

Jag kan liksom surfa runt på olika språk, och förstå det på originalspråket, som antingen talas, är skrivet. Och det är väldigt långt det vad kommunikation handlar om, att liksom samla ihop helhetsinformationen och försöka liksom analysera vad det handlar om och. Så det försnabbar ju upp processen enormt förstås. Communications Director, Food Company

För att bidra till framgång så måste du ha en förståelse för verksamheten och för omvärlden och det som händer, och kunna omsätta det och kunna tolka det, och kunna dessutom analysera och fatta beslut. Att kanske vi, för oss skulle det kanske passa att jobba på det här sättet eller att göra på ett visst sätt. Så jag skulle säga att för mig, det [språkkunskaper] är en jätte viktig del av hur jag jobbar. Communications Director, Food Company

This interviewee also states that she would benefit from knowing Russian, as her company is expanding in Russia and at the present time her non-existent language skills mean that she has to use for example translators to understand what is going on, which is not always good enough. These respondents’ entire linguistic repertoires (as well as lacking Russian language skills in the case of the Communications Manager) were in the case of both managers identified as important in the context of assimilating information.

4.2.4. Achieving career goals

The respondents that discussed career success as encompassing the achievement of career goals indicated language competence as having affected this primarily through playing a role in recruitment decisions in the course of their careers. The role of language competence for recruitment has been covered in section 4.2.1.1 and will therefore not be elaborated on again here.

4.2.5. Remuneration

Language competence was not seen by any of the seven managers that discussed remuneration during their interviews to directly affect this for managerial groups. Interviewees did on occasion state that their companies paid staff extra for language competence, but that this was in the sphere of lower ranking personnel such as secretaries or assistants or customer facing staff on the shop floor. It was mentioned by
several respondents that remuneration is rather based on business competence and the requirements of the role. This is reflected in the following quote from one interviewee:


However three respondents did state that language competence affects remuneration indirectly, through influencing one’s ability to attain better roles or tasks with more responsibility (possibly through recruitment, promotion or internal mobility) or through affecting how one carries out one’s tasks (i.e. achieving results).

### 4.2.6. Feeling appreciated/respected

Although three respondents mentioned feeling appreciated or respected as a facet of career success, only one of these interviewees indicated that language competence has any bearing on this. According to this individual, her competence in the Swedish language increased the appreciation colleagues held for her as they would request that she be in contact with Sweden on certain matters due to her Swedish-speaking skills and her good contacts to Sweden; thus, she was acting as a kind of language node. Given this limited evidence for a link between language competence and this facet of subjective career success, this possible relationship has not been included in figure 10 above.

### 4.2.7. Emotional wellbeing

Language competence was identified by several respondents (8) as having or having had certain implications for some facet of their emotional wellbeing in the context of their work lives and careers. This was mentioned in conjunction with discussing how language competence affects their own career success generally, rather than being explicitly connected to any of the above-mentioned conceptualizations of career success in particular. Three of these interviewees identified their current language competence as a source of confidence and as a contributor to feeling at ease with the situation at hand. As stated by one manager:

Ehkä se tuo kanssa sitä semmoista itsevarmuutta ja semmoista niin kuin... mmm, tavallaan niin kuin että sää olet sinut sen, niin kuin sen tekemisen kanssa, että sä, että ei. Kyllä mä muistan ihan hyvin sen ajan silloin kun mä olen aloittanut, en mä ollut niin valva ruotsissa ollenkaan, että, et
tuotta, että se oli niin kuin enemmänkin semmoinen vähän että, että no mitä mä nyt sanon ja mitä mä nyt, miten mä nyt tämän asian esittäen, että jos oli vähän niin kuin vaikeampi joku asia. Mutta että, sitten tavallaan kun huomaa että yltää sen kynnyksen, niin tuota noin, sehän on kauhean hyvää tunne. Että ei ole niin kuin semmoista, ei ole niin kuin, ei ole estettä tarttua puhelimen lueriin – oli se asia mikä tahansa niin sä voit sen esittää ja sä tiedät että sä selviät siitä Assistant to Country Manager, Bank B

One respondent even ventured to argue that were it not for the confidence he had gained through learning English properly, he would not have dared to pursue his career in the international playing field:

Mä tiesin sen mun englanninkielen heikkoukteni ja mä ihan tietoisesti lähdin, lähdin tekemään sitä MBA tutkintoa; totta kai mulla oli niin kuin semmoinen vähän että, että no mitä mä nyt tämän asian esittäen, että jos oli vähän niin kuin vaikeampi joku asia. Mutta että, sitten tavallaan kun huomaa että yltää sen kynnyksen, niin tuota noin, sehän on kauhean hyvää tunne. Että ei ole niin kuin semmoista, ei ole niin kuin, ei ole estettä tarttua puhelimen lueriin – oli se asia mikä tahansa niin sä voit sen esittää ja sä tiedät että sä selviät siitä Assistant to Country Manager, Bank B

Other managers (3) told of the discomfort that they have had to endure with lacking language skills, to the point of feeling stupid and incompetent when interacting with colleagues more fluent in the relevant language. As stated by one interviewee:

Sen mä huomasin kun esimerkiksi just sillä kurssilla millä mä olin, niin tavallaan justiin se että, että että, mä aina ajattelin että joo vitsit kun mä näytän varmaan ihan tyhmältä koska mä olisin pystynyt suomeksi sanomaan jotain hirveän briljantia niin kuin tähän näin. Mutta sitten ruotsiksi mun pitää vähän niin kun, käännellä ja väänellä se sillän hitaammin, niin silloin tuntui aina sillain itsensä ihan tyhmäksi tavallaan, että se että sun pitää olla sen verran sitä kielitaitoa hanskassa että sä pystyt kuitenkin kommunikoimaan. CEO of Division, Bank A

Other emotion-related effects identified by managers (2) included language competence leading to a more enriched life also in the context of work:

Onhan se nyt hirveän rikastuttavaa, voi lukea saksalaisia lehtiä, mä olen pystynyt lukemaan aika hyvin esimerkiksi saksaa ja Saksassa tehdään kivoja lehtiä, ja ruotsinkieli totta kai, siis Ruotsi on läheinen markkinsa ja siellä on, meillä on paljon samaa niin kuin mitä voi apoin saa sotaan ja saksalaisia lehtiä luen hirveän paljon. Niitäkin jotka ei olisi ihan siis meidän niin kuin edes tässä niin kuin tavallaan kilpailukentässä tai, tai samaa aiheuteita, että Ruotsissa tehdään hirveää lehtiä. CEO, Publishing House

The following section (4.3) will outline the results in relation to the perceived relationships between language, inter-cultural and communicative competence and what is deemed as important.

4.3. Language, inter-cultural and communicative competence

From the above results, and from the interviews as a whole, it is evident that the respondents are quite capable of discussing the importance of language competence for their own career success independently of inter-cultural or communicative competence.
However, it becomes clear from the responses in relation to the relationships between these three forms of competence, that language competence is part of this wider picture, and that the picture is incomplete if focusing only on the language aspect. The relationships between language competence, inter-cultural competence, and communicative competence, as identified by respondents, is depicted in figure 13, which will be elaborated on in section 4.3.1. What respondents deem important is presented in section 4.3.2.

![Figure 13 Relationships between language, communicative and inter-cultural competence](image)

### 4.3.1. Perceived relationships

The majority of the respondents (12) were of the opinion that language competence is required for communicative competence. It is a basic requirement for (4) and a tool in (2) the communicative process, it allows one to express oneself and make oneself understood (4), allows one to understand nuances and synonyms (2), and enables one to have deeper discussions with others (2). As stated by respondents:
Jag menar om man ser bara på språkkunskaper och språkkunnande med, vad heter det, i sammanhang med att ha kontakt med övriga mänskor, och alltfrån huvudmän och personal, vad som helst, om man då är begåvad språkmässigt så är det lättare då att även ta hand om den biten, och kunna liksom uttrycka sig både i skrift och tal på ett förståeligt sätt. För det är inte så lätt att skriva och uttrycka sig, det är svårt, varje ord. CEO, *Industrial Components Company*

För den som inte kan det där språket, han får ju inte sig egentligen förstådd hos motparten på det sättet som han vill, utan det är någon annan som tolkar hans språk och översätter det på det sättet som man själv, eller den här andra, förstår det. Då blir det ju liksom lite halvdant. CEO, *Industrial Components Company*


Siis sanotaan näin että ehkä se kielitaito on siinä niin välttämätön jotta voi ymmärtää, ensinäkin että pysty kommunikoimaan. Mutta kyllähän se just on että se kielitaito pitää olla sen verran hyvällä tasolla, että että pystyt kommunikoimaan niin kuin si haluat. HR Development, *Bank A*

Och det var det som var problemet med min chef. Att förstå mig rätt, han gillade inte mig och jag gillade inte honom, men problemet var ju det att vi hade, vi kom ju aldrig, hade aldrig egentligen förmågan att faktiskt ha en mera djupgående diskussion, för att han pratade engelska dåligt, och jag pratade engelska kanske lite bättre vilket ännu mera irrerade honom som min chef. Så därför är språk viktigt. Retired CEO, *Recycling*

Sä sa att ne nyanssit paremmin niin kuin, sä niin kuin – se on hinveän vaikea selittää – mutta että on niin kuin, tavallaan että, että tuota... se kiel ei tavallaan menetä, siiä ei menetä mitään, niin kuin ei menetä niitä nyansseja, vaan että sä pystyt niin kuin puhumaan, kommunikoimaan, samalla tasolla sen toisen henkilön kannsa. Assistant to Country Manager, *Bank B*

Despite such comments depicting how language competence is a factor that positively affects communicative competence, certain (9) respondents indicated that language competence is not enough in a communicative situation and that it does not guarantee you will be understood. Barriers do not only relate to purely linguistic aspects such as understanding the range and meaning of synonyms in a non-native language but also to situational factors such as knowing your audience and cultural aspects such as the meaning of certain expressions. As stated by respondents:

På möten är det ju intressant, att trots att folk har en god språklig, eller hur ska jag säga, en okej språklig nivå, så sitter folk ändå och funderar att vad är det den här människan säger. Och det, alltså jag tror att det är, du har inte riktigt reflekterat över vad det är du vill få fram, och vilken din publik är. Alltså det är, det har väldigt mycket med kommunikation att göra, och kommunikation är ju absolut inte, det är ju en individuell kompetens också hos männskorna. Och det där, så att jag tror att du kan kunna ett språk utan att på riktigt få fram ditt budskap över huvud taget. Communications Director, *Food Company*

Det är nyanser och det är uttryckssätt och ordel och så vidare bortåt, som är så olika för den igen som inte är riktigt insatt. Alla förstår vad det står i en svensk kommuniké, men svenskarna förstår kanske inte alltid vad vi har haft för avsikt, vad vi har velat uttrycka oss, eller få fram i nån skrift. Och därför finns det liksom mycket, många tillfällen där man då har måsta förklara sig. Och vi har lärt oss det att det är ingen idé att vi försöker – vi finländsvenskar här – försöker göra någonting som ska publiceras på något sätt i Sverige. [...] Man ska ha liksom, nån ska i Sverige ta del av det och liksom uttrycka det på svensk svenska. Senior Partner, Communications Consultancy

Igen, så blir det väldigt lätt att man säger någonting men någon hör någonting annat, inte bara just av den här interkulturella grejen utan helt enkelt därför att du inte kan kommunicera ut det på rätt sätt, och tala med bönder på bönder vis, som man brukar säga i Sverige. Så att, det ligger mycket i det, talesättet [...]. Vare sig bönderna är företagsledningen eller verklig bönder, så det spelar inte någon roll, utan man måste förstå varandra, och det är på så många plan som man måste förstå varandra. CEO, Travel Agency

What becomes evident from these statements is that language competence is not enough for communicative competence; it is a factor that certainly assists in communicative situations, but communicative competence requires more, including an understanding of your audience, and inter-cultural competence if your audience comprises other nationalities than your own. Inter-cultural competence was indeed indicated to be a factor that affects communicative competence by the majority of respondents (13), in terms of adapting to and being able to understand different styles of communication across cultures, understanding nuances and vocabulary, and understanding what people mean by what they say. As stated by respondents:

Och det hör att kunna uttrycka sig själv så det går ganska hand i hand tycker jag med det här kulturella. Fast du har ett bra språk men om du inte alls har den biten, så då blir det väldigt tekniskt och kallt. Så att det är kanske till och med litet viktigare den här kulturella biten, än det här tekniska språket. HR Director, Energy Company

Englanninkieli on englanninkieli ja he [kiinalaiset] osasi sitä, ja minä osasin sitä, mutta siellään tulee tosi vahvasti sitten semmoiset, tuota, kulttuuritoimintatapaan liittyvät asiat. Että mä en, mä en muuttanut niin kuin – mulle sanottiin että, joku sanoi että sä et oikeasti ehkä tuolla johtamistyöllä pärjää siellä [Kiinassa]. Ja mä tiedän sen että kun mä olen aika osallistuvaa ja keskestelevaa johtaja, ja kiinalaiset haluavat tuota vieläkin – vaikka ne on käynyt kouluja ja, ja kulttuurivallankumoukset on pitkä aika – niin ne haluavat vieläkin aika semmoista konkreetista ja selkeää sanomista miten asiat tehdään. CEO of Division 2, Bank A

Inom en nordisk koncern, speciellt med dansk, så är diskussioner ganska hetsiga från tid till annan. Och det gäller att förstå att det inte betyder att de vill, danskarna vill ju skåra halven av dig, alltså det är deras sätt. Alltså, två danskar på koncernledningsnivå kan ju säga till varandra att ’du din jävla idiot!’ Men de har sitt sätt att prata på, och om du inte hänger med där så har du inte en chans. Om du inte kan utläsa varför de säger så till varandra och så där också, så är du ju ännu mera chanslös. Så det är både och förstå språket och delvis sen att försöka fundera ut de här små kulturella skillnaderna som ligger i bakgrunden där CEO, Travel Agency

Cultural differences between Finns and Swedes were often referred to when discussing the relationship between inter-cultural competence and communicative competence. Although certain respondents were of the opinion that Finns and Swedes are relatively similar, more often than not it was highlighted how different they in fact are, and the problems that this can lead to, as evidenced by the quotes below:

Mä muistan joskus 70-luvun lopulla kun meillä oli joku projekt, ja tuota, rakkaat ruotsalaiset kollegat tuli aivan innoissaan siitä – ja niin mekin oltiin, mun mielestä me oltiin ihan että ’yea,
tämä on ihan jees juttu” – muta tuota, kun ne tuli tänne ja kysyi että “onko tämä niin kuin että, tehdäänkö me tämä? Että onko tämä niin kuin strålande tai kanon” vai mitä nyt käyttää, niin sitten kun me sanottiin “joo, tämä on ihan ok”, niin nehän oli ihan niin kuin ”ai siis te ette oikeasti halua tehdä tätä”, ”Ei mehän sanottit että tämä on ok”. Mutta sitten niiden skaalalla, suomalaiselle, jos suomalaiselle sano ”yea, tämä on ok” se tarkoittaa sitä että tämä on kunnossa. Mutta [...], jos ei se ole strålande tai jotenkin muuta, niin ne oli jo oikein pääpainoksessa lähtemässä kotiin, että ”ei tässä nyt mitään tullutkaan”. CEO of Division 2, Bank A

Suomalaiset on liian suoraviivaisia – management by perk trained – siis niin kuin perinteinen tämänmais suomalainen insinööriinsin. Ja sitten taas Ruotsi on paljon feministisempi, ja sitten samaan aikaan kuitenkin suomalaiset otti vallan. Ja mun kemokemukuin mukaan niin suomalaiset insinööröiti oni sillä oikein pääpainoksessa strålande tai jotain muuta, niin se ymmärrys siitä kulttuurista ei ollut riittävän hyvä... Että Suomi ja Ruotsi on kuitenkin erilaiset; Suomessa ja Ruotsissa on erilaiset yrityskulttuurit. VP Internal Communications, Energy Company

Although cultural barriers can clearly create misunderstandings and problems, and language competence is clearly not enough to break this barrier, certain respondents were nevertheless of the opinion that language competence somehow affects inter-cultural competence in a positive way. It was stated that language competence is a gateway to the culture, and can facilitate an understanding of the other culture’s mentality. As explained by respondents:

Jos e ymmärrä sitä, niin kuin, yrityskulttuuria myös sieltä mentaalipuolelta, niin et sä pysty toimimaan kunnolla. Ja silloin, jotta s ymmärtäisit sitä mentaalipuolta, niin mun mielestä sun pitää puhua sitä paikallista kieltä. CEO of Division 2, Bank A


Thus, language competence may not only affect communicative competence in a positive way directly, but also indirectly through facilitating cultural understanding. The following chapter discusses the relative importance of these three factors as identified by respondents for their own career success.
4.3.2. Relative importance

The managers that discussed the relative importance of the three forms of competence (18) identified either inter-cultural competence (9) or communicative competence (7), or a combination of all three competences (2) as important when considering their careers. As stated by some of these respondents:

Ja varsinkin sitten jos aikoo menestyä sitten siellä kansainvälistellä uralla taikka ulkomailla niin nimenomaan se kulttuurin oppiminen on ihan A ja O. Että ei siiseni riitä pelkkä kielitaito vaan pitää ruveta vähän sillain mukautua. *HR Development, Bank A*

Ilman kielitaitoa niin sä hän et pysty olemaan minkäänlaissa kommunikaatiotilanteessa, mutta kyllä mä luulen että tuota se mun kannalta se on ollut kaikkien tärkeintä se, kuitenkin se... yrityskulttuurien ja tuota sen, sen muun kulttuurin ymmärtäminen ja hyödyntäminen. Että sä olet niin kuin, tavallaan sun pitää kasvaa pois siitä, pelkästään siis sun omasta tavasta toimia, sun omasta mukavuusalueesta koska silloin, silloin sitä on helposti monessa paikassa kuin norsu porsliikaupassa, että ei se, ei se mene perille vaikka sä puhuisit kuinka hienoa Oxfordin englantia jos tuota se, puhut vääristä asiasta viitattävä tavalla. *CEO of Division 2, Bank A*

Det viktigaste är väl nog det att man dels kan språket, men lika viktigt att man själv är flexibel och mottaglig, och kan anpassa sig själv. Att om man vägrar att ta emot de leganden [...]

I min roll då, som sittit i ledningsgruppen och alltså, kommunikation är ju oerhört viktigt. Speielt intern kommunikation för mig som har ansvarat för administrationen och så men också extern kommunikation. Och då är ju språk, språken, det är ju språket man använder i kommunikation alltså det är ju, men där har det ju nog varit viktigare för mig att behärska finska och engelska än svenska. Alltså språket i den bemärkelsen så har den, som ledare, så är ju språket nästan det viktigaste. *Business Controller, IT Logistics Company*

Siis kyllähän salla täytyy olla muutakin substanssia että, et niin kuin, täyttyhän salla olla se niin kuin, se osoamien ja kommunikointi tykykky niin kuin ylipäättänsä, että sitten se on eri asia – se kielihän on vain väline miten salla niin kuin esitet sen että, et, ja kenelle milläkään kielellä. *Assistant to Country Manager, Bank B*

Se on aika pitkälti semmoinen kokonaispakketti. Että mun on hirveän vaikea eritellä sitä, mikä olisi se vahvin, mutta tuota niin, varmana niin kuin, se kielitaito on aika iso osa sitä kokonaispakketti, niin kuin moni muukin asia siinä. *CEO of Division, Bank A*

With good language skills but little communicative or inter-cultural competence, it may be that your career will be restricted to back office tasks, as argued by this respondent:

Sitten jos on hyvät kieltäidot mutta huonot [communication/inter-cultural competences] se helposti voi toimia back-office tehtävissä tai tämäoissi tehtävissä missä käyttää sitä kielta vain kirjallisesti, mutta sitten se etenemiskahdellisuudet heikennee just sen takia että, kyllähän esimerkiksi yksi tärkeä osa etenemisestä uralla on se että salla, sä verkostoidut siinä yrityksessä. *CEO of Division, Bank A*

Although communicative or inter-cultural competence tended to be identified as the key competences when considering these respondents’ careers, from some of the above quotes it can also be seen that language competence is perceived as an important tool in this larger whole, in line with the findings presented in section 4.3.1 about the relationships between language, inter-cultural and communicative competence.
This whole chapter has presented the findings in relation to the research questions outlined in the introduction. The following chapter presents a more in-depth analysis of the results, as well as concluding discussions.
ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter firstly presents an analysis of the results in relation to the main research aim (section 5.1) and sub-aims (sections 5.2 and 5.3) in more depth, focusing on how the results reflect prior research. It then discusses the main contributions and consequences of the research findings (section 5.4), the limitations of this study (section 5.5) and finally presents suggestions for future research (section 5.6).

5.1. Role of language competence for subjective career success

The results indicate that language competence plays a clear role in the subjective career success of the interviewed managers, and that extending one’s linguistic repertoire certainly beyond Finnish – and conceivably even English – can have a facilitating effect on one’s subjective career success in the context of these MNCs. Language competence has played a role in the career success of all managers to some extent, certain managers even deeming their language competence of the utmost importance in terms of their career. Language competence can clearly have a strong enabling or restricting effect, with an ability to affect subjective career success in a myriad of different ways. These results support existing research that emphasises the importance of language competence in the context of careers and that has found strong relationships between language competence and career success (e.g. Piekkari, 2008; Culpan & Wright, 2002; Traavik & Richardsen, 2010).

In terms of specific languages, in addition to Finnish there is a clear trend of English and Swedish being deemed important by the interviewed managers, reflecting the international (in the case of English) and Nordic (in the case of Swedish) sphere of activity that these MNCs are involved in. Whereas English seems to be a fundamental requirement without which one cannot even begin to develop a career in the international arena, other languages can give one a clear advantage if they reflect the markets the company is operating in or the nationality of its clients. In the case of the managers interviewed for this thesis, working in MNCs with a Swedish parent or extensive operations in Sweden means that Swedish-speaking skills constitute a clear asset. However, these MNCs also have clients and markets outside the Swedish context, and the interview data does indicate that corresponding languages would be of benefit.

It is clear that traditional objective career success indicators do feature in certain managers’ subjective career success, certain managers evaluating their career success
directly against objective criteria of remuneration and one’s formal position. However, it is interesting to note that the majority of managers clearly appraise their career success against more subjective standards, ranging from having interesting or challenging tasks, to having a job one enjoys, to being able to achieve a certain level of performance in one’s role. Such findings reflect Heslin’s (2005) argument that the standards against which individuals evaluate their own career success are different, and can be drawn from objective and/or subjective spheres, lending to the argument put forth by Heslin (2005) and Arthur et al. (2005) that evaluations of subjective career success should move away from constructs such as job satisfaction and career satisfaction that purport to measure subjective career success using pre-defined criteria. The results also supports the argument about the increasing significance of subjective career success as put forth by for example Hall (1996), Heslin (2005) and Arthur et al. (2005).

5.2. How language competence affects subjective career success

Language competence plays a clear role in terms of facilitating the attainment of certain job content related factors as well as the achievement of career goals by enabling individuals to attain positions or tasks with such features. In line with previous research findings (Peltokorpi, 2010; Piekkari et al., 2005; Elinkeinoelämän Keskusliitto, 2010), language competence is a factor that is taken into account in the recruitment process. Likewise do the results support prior research in that language competence can clearly affect internal career paths and progression opportunities (Piekkari, 2008; Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999a; 1999b), and may even discourage individuals from staying in the organization because of this (Vaara et al., 2005). A linguistic glass ceiling (Piekkari et al., 2005) can clearly be discerned, as limiting one’s language skills to Finnish – and occasionally even English – can impair one’s possibilities to not only be recruited, but also to move internally within the business and for example take on managerial roles requiring frequent cooperation with other Nordic countries. These results also indicate, in line with the arguments of Blotch (1995) and Piekkari (2008), that language skills need to be complemented by other competences such as business acumen or technical expertise, and should be perceived as a tool with the help of which managerial tasks can be accomplished.

As recruitment, promotion and mobility can be seen to be indicators of objective career success, and as achieving objective career success allows these managers to meet their
definition of subjective career success, this supports the argument outlined in previous research that there is a link between subjective and objective career success. However, in this case the dynamic is not that objective career success engenders positive self-perceptions or perceptions of success compared to others, as was the argument set forth by Ng et al. (2005) to explain the relationship between objective career success and career satisfaction. Rather, objective career success enables the individuals concerned to assume positions providing the desired features (e.g. challenge, personal development) or to meet their personal career goals.

Language competence plays an obvious role for both job content related factors and achievement of results also by facilitating networking and the creation of social capital. The role of Swedish for networking and building contacts with top management at headquarters in Sweden is clearly of benefit in terms of increasing one’s visibility with them, and thus paving the way for future career progression. Such results suggest some form of career sponsorship on the part of these top managers, and in line with previous research findings social capital has indeed been found to affect promotions through access to career sponsorship among other things (Seibert et al., 2001). Social capital and networking is also clearly important in the context of achieving results, be that in terms of improving managers’ success with clients through being able to network in the clients’ own language, or allowing managers to carry out their tasks better through having access to support networks, and functioning as intermediaries between parts of the business that are more comfortable speaking different languages. Such results support the findings of Marschan-Piekkari et al. (1999a; 1999b) and Piekkari et al. (2005): language competence has been shown to affect the ability of employees to build networks through which advice, assistance and information can be gained, and may lead to certain employees becoming language nodes – unduly overburdened with translation work but also in a position to increase their understanding of business processes through acting as intermediaries between different parts of the organization.

It is interesting to note that unlike the findings of for example Marshan-Piekkari et al. (1999a; 1999b) and Piekkari et al. (2005), none of the participants interviewed for this thesis explicitly indicated that their language skills led to any increase in their own informal status, other than to state that their language competence allowed them to build better networks with top management located in Sweden and thus increase their visibility with these higher echelons in their organizations. Perhaps this would have
been better discerned by speaking to colleagues or the like, as respondents possibly did not want to praise themselves too excessively during the interviews.

A good linguistic level also allows MNC managers to perform better in their endeavours by enabling them to convince others of their ideas and opinions and to lead others. In line with the arguments of Tietze (2008) and Feely and Harzing (2003) in relation to international managers, fluency in the necessary languages is deemed essential in order to be able to express yourself in a convincing and timely manner, but needs to be combined with more concrete business competence. Influent language competence can lead to severe difficulties, as reflected in the findings of Piekkari et al. (2005) in that lacking language skills led to certain top experts not being able to express their opinions and thus impairing their performance.

Such non-fluency can clearly also affect managers’ confidence and self-worth, and engender feelings of incompetence and stupidity when not at a sufficient level, which is strongly in line with prior research identifying a link between insufficient language competence and feelings of (professional) incompetence (e.g. Peluchette, 1993; Vaara et al., 2005; Piekkari et al., 2005; Charles, 2007). It is not surprising then that this theme has emerged from the interviews, as such perceptions of incompetence and the associated disempowerment and frustration experienced by individuals have been found to affect career success (Peluchette, 1993) and job satisfaction (Charles, 2007) also by previous authors. A point that has not been made in previous research, but which surfaced in the results of this thesis, is that language competence may also be a valuable competence to have for its own sake, as it enriches life (including work life) in general.

Other dynamics not apparent in the literature to date is the relationship between language competence and the extent of responsibility granted in individuals’ current roles, and between language competence and the ability to assimilate information from the business. Language competence can play a role in the attainment of job content related factors by allowing individuals to assume more responsibility for tasks and clients in the context of their current roles and give rise to opportunities to be involved more extensively in the business. Language competence can also facilitate the achievement of results by enabling managers to assimilate information from foreign parts of the business that may not always be produced in English. In this context managers’ entire linguistic repertoires are unsurprisingly of benefit, given that their companies are multinational ones with operations also outside of Scandinavia, and thus
any language competence that allows one to understand what is going on in the business is an asset.

The results about the effect of language competence on remuneration seemed to indicate no direct relationship between these, reflecting the findings of Fry and Lowell (2003) that language competence bears little relevance to final salaries. However as stated by certain interviewees language competence is likely to affect remuneration indirectly through enabling individuals to get tasks with more responsibility (through recruitment or promotion for example) or through enabling individuals to perform better in their roles. Such an indirect effect may be why Traavik and Richardsen’s (2010) study found a correlation between language competence and salaries; the reason for this correlation was not made explicit in their paper.

5.3. **Language, inter-cultural and communicative competence**

Although the majority of interviewees deemed inter-cultural or communicative competences most important for international managerial careers, language competence is clearly of benefit in this wider constellation, reflecting previous research findings (e.g. Ulijn & Strother, 1995). In line with prior theory, language competence was generally perceived by respondents to affect communicative competence positively through enabling participants to express themselves, have deeper discussions and understand nuances and synonyms; in the words of Ulijn and Strother (1995: 25), sufficient language competence allows the participants to be in control of the ‘code’, which is one element that is required for effective communication. Only one of the respondents stated that as a manager you may get by with limited language competence, which indicates, as argued by Holden (2002, cited in Tietze, 2008), that for managers working internationally and across cultures, as communicators advanced linguistic skills are required.

However, also in line with the arguments of Ulijn and Strother (1995), the results indicate that language competence is not enough for effective communication, and that also inter-cultural competence is required if communication is taking place across cultures. Respondents’ statements and examples to this effect illustrate how essential an understanding of one’s counterparty is, and how misunderstandings can occur when a mutual understanding of for example vocabulary or communication style is missing. Such results reflect the argument of Henderson (2005) in that although speaking the same language, people from different cultures ‘hear’ differently, and thus may
misconstrue cross-cultural messages. A large proportion of interviewees did indicate that competence in a specific language enhances understanding of the corresponding culture, and this is of course of benefit in situations where the language spoken is either party’s own language. The extent of such effects translating into situations where the language spoken is a foreign language to both parties is unclear.

5.4. Contributions and consequences of the thesis

This thesis has answered the research aims set out in the introduction, finding that language competence can play a significant role for the subjective career success of MNC managers. This can occur through various mechanisms including recruitment, promotion and internal mobility, social capital and networking, gaining more responsibility for tasks and clients, assimilating information, convincing and leading others, and through affecting the emotional wellbeing of these managers. Even though inter-cultural or communicative competence is often deemed more important, the three competences are interlinked, with language competence playing an integral role in this tripart constellation.

The findings of this thesis confirm the importance of understanding and considering language skills as an aspect of individuals’ human capital that can pose significant career success-related consequences, as argued by authors such as Tietze (2008) and Traavik and Richardsen (2010). The findings also indicate that individuals’ career success can have implications for the organization, for example through affecting networking and social capital and thereby also (organizational) results. This further supports the importance of understanding the relationship between language competence and subjective career success; not only is it necessary for effective personal career management initiatives at the individual level (cf. Wayne et al., 1999), it is also a relevant consideration for organizations, because – and as argued also by Ng et al. (2005) – employees’ career success can also clearly affect organizational success. More generally, the findings support the relatively recent trend in international management research that acknowledges the importance of language (see e.g. Piekkari, 2008; Piekkari & Zander, 2005), and the ability to analyse issues in organizations – in this case employees’ career success – through a linguistic lens.

From the point of view of making a theoretical contribution to the existing literature base that also goes beyond confirming what has already been unearthed, the most significant findings of this thesis centre around the concept of subjective career success
and what this can include for managerial groups, the integrated model of the various ways that language competence can affect managers' subjective career success, and the results in relation to the relationships between the various forms of competence (language, inter-cultural and communicative). These theoretical findings have practical implications for several groups: researchers, individuals, companies, and policy makers at the national level.

The findings confirm the importance of focusing on subjective career success as well as Heslin’s (2005) argument that subjective career success needs to be evaluated based on individuals’ own criteria. This would in practice entail (i) moving away from studies using pre-defined constructs and quantitative methods when attempting to measure subjective career success, as well as (ii) the adoption of more qualitative methods that allow the true meaning of career success for the research subjects to be unearthed. Although this thesis has mapped out how the interviewed managers perceived their career success, and thus contributed to an understanding of what managers’ career success consists of, it is still a very individual issue, and not all managers may evaluate their career success based on these criteria.

The theoretical model that has been developed illustrating the mechanisms between language competence and subjective career success (figure 10) contributes an integrated picture of the ways in which language competence can affect managers’ subjective career success, a picture that confirms as well as extends the prevailing theory base that exists in relation to this area. It shows that language competence affects career success through several dynamics, and from the interviews it was also discerned that these effects can pan out with quite significant consequences. Thus, the importance of language competence is not to be undervalued. The theoretical model that has been constructed in relation to the language, inter-cultural and communicative competence issue (figure 13) also contributes a synthesised model illustrating the relationships between these forms of competence, relationships which are in line with prior theory but which have not been specifically researched in this tripart constellation. Although inter-cultural or communicative competences were often deemed more important than language competence for managerial career success, language competence is an important facet of this larger whole.

For individuals, the practical implications of these findings pertain to choices about skill development and career paths. These are important choices to be made now that the onus of responsibility for career management and development rests with the
individual rather than his or her employer (Baruch, 2006). To enhance one’s own subjective career success, which is desirable given that it can affect one’s mental wellbeing (Peluchette, 1993) and one’s objective career success over the long term (Abele & Spurk, 2009b), one should develop the relevant language skills for the context one wishes to build a career in, and consider playing also to one’s linguistic strengths when making decisions about career paths and the companies one wishes to work for. In this particular research setting, language skills centre on Finnish, English and Swedish, as well as more peripherally on the languages of the company’s clients and markets. Language requirements (formal as well as informal) do of course vary by role, however constraining one’s language skills to the bare minimum – Finnish and English – constitutes a definite limitation from a career perspective in this context.

For companies, it is important in practice to, firstly, map out what language skills are required for various roles, and in the company as a whole when considering more informal activities such as networking, as well as seriously consider these requirements when recruiting or promoting staff. Secondly, companies should consider supporting employees in developing required language skills through providing access to training. In theory, everyone should get by with the formal company language, and this does appear to be true to a certain extent, however additional advantages clearly accrue to those who are well versed also in more informally required languages. These advantages include elements of direct concern to the employing organization, such as the achievement of results, and the emotional wellbeing of employees. It is in the very strong interest of companies to ensure that the overall subjective career success of their staff is facilitated, as negative perceptions of one’s overall career success can decrease motivation and performance (Peluchette, 1993; Korman et al., 1981). It is also pertinent to reiterate here the argument put forth by e.g. Piekkari (2008) and Fredriksson et al. (2006), and which is also supported by the empirical data, that the existence of a formal company language will not eradicate multilingual communication in MNCs. Therefore, solutions that acknowledge and take into account the linguistic complexity inherent in these settings are required, in order to support staff in their career-related endeavours to the greatest extent possible.

For policy makers at the national level, the findings of this thesis clearly indicate that Swedish is an important language in companies with strong ties to Sweden, and that individuals with Swedish-language skills are in demand in this context. This demand needs to be met, whether by keeping Swedish as a mandatory language in primary and
secondary school or by some other method, given that Sweden is one of Finland’s most important business partners. If not kept a mandatory language, there needs to be very clear communication about the importance of the Swedish language, so that individuals can make informed choices about what languages to study. However, focus cannot remain purely on Swedish, as the findings indicate that languages of companies’ clients and markets in general are of benefit. Therefore consideration should also be paid to ensuring that competence in the languages of Finland’s other main and growing business partners, such as Germany and Russia, is fostered to adequate levels. Finally, and given the importance placed on inter-cultural and communicative competence as opposed to purely language competence, it should be ensured that language education plays a part in fostering these competences also, and not be restricted to a limited focus on mechanical and grammatically correct language use.

5.5. Evaluation of the thesis and its limitations

Criticisms have been posed against using the traditional evaluation criteria of reliability and validity for evaluating qualitative research that acknowledges multiple realities and socially constructed understanding (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Thus, Charmaz’ (2006) criteria of credibility, originality, usefulness and resonance for evaluating constructivist grounded theory studies are proposed as an alternative for evaluating this thesis. This thesis has attempted to achieve credibility by striving to become intimately familiar with the research area, gathering a large amount of data to support the claims being made, and being transparent about the researcher’s role in this process and how she has built the resulting theoretical models from the empirical data. The theoretical models support and extend the current theory base, providing new insight into the areas being researched and drawing from this practical implications for individual, organizational and societal levels, thus contributing to originality and usefulness (Charmaz, 2006). Staying close to the data throughout the process, and attempting to incorporate and display the nuances and breadth of respondents’ experience, hopefully means that the grounded theory presented in this thesis will resonate with people in similar circumstances.

Notwithstanding these attempts to construct a credible, original, useful and resonating grounded theory, existing limitations in relation to generalizability, accuracy of respondents’ statements, and sampling need to be addressed. In relation to generalizability, this thesis has focussed on managers in Finland working for Finnish
MNCs with subsidiaries in Sweden, and vice versa, and therefore it may be argued that it is not possible to extend the results outside this context. It is also worth mentioning here that a lot of the literature on the effects of language competence on careers has a Nordic focus, e.g. the studies on Finnish MNC Kone (Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999a; 1999b) and the Finnish/Swedish MNB Nordea (Piekkari et al., 2005; Vaara et al., 2005), which does perhaps make the results resonate more strongly on a Nordic level. However, it is also arguable that the results of the study can be applicable to and useful for understanding the dynamics present in other settings with similar language patterns, i.e. other companies characterized by multilingualism because of the country they are resident in being inherently multilingual and/or because they are operating in several countries with different languages, and that the specific focus on the Finnish/Swedish context impacts only the empirical study of the topic. This argument is supported by existing research that has been carried out in companies in such multilingual settings elsewhere in the world. One example of this is the study by Steyaert et al. (2010) that focuses on two Swiss firms, one local and one global, from which it emerges that both firms are experiencing tensions in terms of the languages that are used, and that such tensions are posing career related implications for these firms’ members.

In relation to the accuracy of respondents’ statements, this thesis has been interested in unearthing the perceptions of the interviewees themselves in relation to the research questions, however the unanswerable question remains to what extent these responses reflect their true beliefs as opposed to what they feel is e.g. appropriate or advantageous to say. This question is alleviated to some extent though by the sheer number of respondents, combined with the fact that the thoughts and ideas of these respondents often support each other’s. In relation to the sample of firms that have been included, being comprised of nine Swedish-owned and three Finnish owned firms, this sample is heavily skewed towards Swedish owned MNCs. This may have had some unearthed bearing on the results, for example in relation to the relative importance of the Swedish language in these firms. To gain a completely balanced view would have required more Finnish owned firms to be included, a possibility which was constrained by the accessibility into such firms at the time when the interviews were being conducted.
5.6. Suggestions for future research

Given the increased importance of subjective career success, it would be relevant to understand what career success means to other occupational groups besides MNC managers. Understanding how different individuals conceptualize career success will enable companies to support these conceptualizations through various HRM-related initiatives, leading to more satisfied employees. This thesis has focussed on the subjective career success of MNC managers, however the likelihood is that other groups will evaluate their career success differently. As discussed in section 5.4, uncovering the true meaning of career success for these various groups would require a focus on more qualitative approaches.

In relation to the mechanisms through which language competence was found to affect career success, it would be interesting to research each mechanism more in depth using a quantitative approach, in order to get a better understanding of the extent to which language competence affects that particular mechanism and the extent to which that mechanism affects various facets of subjective career success. It would also be interesting to research the comparative importance of language competence for subjective career success as a whole compared to other human capital-related factors using a more quantitative approach. Relying purely on interviews, it was not possible to investigate these relationships from a quantitative angle in this thesis.

It would also be interesting to delve more in depth into some areas that surfaced in the results, but which have not been researched extensively previously. A particularly pertinent area is that of emotions in organizations, as the results clearly indicate that questions of language competence engender quite emotion-laden responses, and that language competence can affect one’s emotional wellbeing in organizations through affecting for example one’s confidence and self-worth. Research focussing on languages in MNCs does touch on emotions – for example Huusko (2008) mentions individuals feeling threatened by the introduction of a foreign functional language, and Piekkari et al (2005) draws attention to individuals feeling incompetent and disempowered due to lacking language skills – however emotions are not the sole focus of this body of research. It would therefore be pertinent to investigate the connections between language competences at the individual level, language choices at the corporate level, and emotions in MNCs in more detail. The research on emotions could touch also on power- and equality related issues, as language choices are inevitably connected to such
questions (cf. Tietze, 2008; Vaara et al. 2005), and these issues no doubt engender various emotive responses in individuals.

This thesis has approached the topic of language competence and careers from the point of view of the individual employee (manager); a further suggestion for future research would be to approach this topic from the perspective of the employing organization. Tietze (2008: 137) states that “the choice of the common corporate language may also shape the company image among potential recruits in terms of its attractiveness as a potential employer”. It would be interesting to investigate in more detail how organizations’ own language-related choices – be that in terms of choosing a functional language (or not), drafting language requirements for particular roles, or making some other language-related decision – shape their image and attractiveness as a place to work, both with reference to new recruits and to already employed individuals. This would perhaps also provide another dimension to the debate about language standardization versus contextualization that is currently being carried out in language-related international management research (Piekkari & Tietze, 2011).
REFERENCES


Appendix 1  INTERVIEW GUIDE

Background information on the respondent

1. Position in the company
2. Career path in the company (and previously)
3. Ability to express themselves in various languages

General

4. How do you think the linguascape of Finland’s business life (näringsliv/elinkeinoelämä) looks like today?

Company’s perspective

5. How does the linguascape of your company look? What languages are used at official/unofficial events and situations, who uses what, since when, why/how is this motivated, have there been diverging opinions regarding language? What language(s) are used at top management and board meetings?
6. The company’s policy and strategies in regard to language
7. The role of language in HR policy and practice
   i. Recruitment & Selection
   ii. Training & Development
   iii. Performance Management/Promotion

Individual perspective

8. Linguascape
   a. Which languages do you use in which situations?
      i. Why? What consequences do these choices have?
      ii. Can you give an example of how you in a certain situation chose which language you use?
9. The effect of language on the respondent’s subjective career success
   a. What does career success mean to you personally? What factors do you use to evaluate your own career success?
      i. To what extent are you satisfied with your career success?
   b. If you now consider your own personal definition of career success, how do you feel that your language competence has affected or is affecting your career?
   c. Ask more specifically about the effect of language on the above mentioned factors
i. Benefited/Prevented? In what ways? To what extent? In which situation(s)?

   d. Would your career success have been different if you had known more or less languages?

10. Can you reflect over how you personally view language, communicative and inter-cultural competence
   
   a. Relation to each other? Differences? Effect on career success? What is important?
   b. Can you think of a situation where either you or someone else has had good language competence but no or less inter-cultural or communicative competence, and where this person has had to act as a manager? What was the situation, what happened and with what consequences?

**To remember**

1. Copy of the company’s language policy
2. Access to other potential interviewees (at different levels/departments and with different language backgrounds)
3. Check e.g. language of newspapers that are lying around
4. Generally: check the language requirements in job advertisements on the company’s home page