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Norwegian expatriates in the U.S.: what skills are important for successful adjustment?

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A. Executive summary

This study is an attempt to gain insight into the process of cross-cultural adjustment and development of cross-cultural skills by Norwegian expatriates living and working in the United States.

Title

Norwegian expatriates in the U.S.: what skills are important for successful adjustment?

Key words

Cross-cultural adjustment, adaptation, integration, culture shock, cross-cultural skills, intercultural competence, cultural intelligence, facilitators of cross-cultural adjustment, Norwegian expatriates.

Purpose

The purpose of the thesis is to define the cross-cultural skills which have the most significant impact and lead to a smooth adjustment and adaptation of Norwegian expatriates to a new cultural environment in the U.S. Adjustment to a new cultural environment is a challenging process which requires change in behavioral and communication patterns that should be adapted to the accepted norms of a host culture. The study makes an attempt to explore the phenomenon of cross-cultural skills and their relation to cross-cultural adjustment and cultural differences.

Research methodology

This is an exploratory study. It is qualitative in nature and focused on cross-cultural skills significant for cross-cultural adjustment of Norwegian expatriates during the period of their assignment in the U.S. Interviews were chosen to collect the primary data as one of the commonly used research methods within studies with explorative design. The sample population is Norwegian expatriates, working and living in the U.S. The respondents are employees of different multinational companies on their foreign assignment in the United States for a period from two to five years. All eight in-depth, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted in the United States.

Findings

Cultural differences between Norway and the U.S. define the main areas for cross-cultural adjustment. The cross-cultural adjustment requires a certain degree of change from Norwegian expatriates. In order to adjust, the expatriates have to go through a transformation process and develop certain cross-cultural skills required for a comfortable well-being in the U.S.

The research findings lead to the assumption that cultural differences trigger the development of certain cross-cultural skills required for adjustment to the new cultural environment.

Norwegian expatriates define their adjustment as a smooth process. Research findings indicate that Norwegian expatriates consciously choose a light form of integration which implies avoidance of deep immersion into a new cultural environment. The light form of integration is caused by two factors: insignificant cultural differences which create predisposition for the adjustment and a status of short-term settlers.

The research findings provide an answer to the main research question in the overview of cross-cultural skills required for a smooth and successful adjustment of Norwegian expatriates in the U.S. The six cross-cultural skills were defined by Norwegian expatriates as the most significant for the adjustment:
1. Openness and curiosity. 2. The ability to be sensitive. 3. The ability to display behavioral adaptation and flexibility. 4. The ability to communicate interpersonally. 5. The ability to communicate effectively. 6. Language proficiency, clarity and conversational skills.

Conclusions

Cross-cultural adjustment provides Norwegian expatriates with an exclusive possibility to be exposed to a new culture, be challenged both mentally and professionally which leads to an improvement and development of cross-cultural skills. Cross-cultural skills imply a valuable knowledge of a host culture and abilities which help expatriates to fit in a new cultural environment.

Those expatriates who recognize the importance of this knowledge and a necessity to work on development of cross-cultural skills have a unique chance to learn new skills and grow on a foreign assignment experience.

B. Acknowledgments

The process of thesis writing was an exciting, creative but rather challenging experience which provided me an opportunity to get to know many intelligent and interesting people, enthusiastic and dedicated to their job. Without their help it would have been impossible to achieve the goals of the study.

Firstly, I would like to express my gratitude to my mentor and supervisor, Kristin Engh for her guidance and support during the research period.

Secondly, I want to thank all Norwegian expatriates who willingly participated in my study and provided valuable information about cross-cultural skills based on their own experience. All of them are very busy people with a wide range of responsibilities and I feel grateful for their help and contribution to my research.

Thirdly, my special thanks are addressed to my family, my husband and my kids for their encouragement and understanding which allowed me to dedicate a big portion of everyday life to consistent work on my project.

Last but not the least, I would like to thank the leaders of Seamen's Church, Innovation Norway, the Norwegian-American Chamber of Commerce in Houston and Stavanger Chamber of Commerce for their interest and input in this research.

C. Abbreviations

CCA – cross-cultural adjustment

IC - intercultural competence

CQ - cultural intelligence

CCC - cross-cultural competence

NE – Norwegian expatriate

HR – human resources

"The future for many is not just intercultural but international. We, and our children, will more and more have to be able to feel at home wherever we are and to function with the ease and familiarity that is habitual to us on home soil. The opportunity to travel overseas is precious. The investment is our time and aspirations and the energy we give to the process. Part of the dividend we receive is enhanced cultural intelligence" **(Thomas&Inkson, 2004, p.180).**

1. Introduction

1.1. Background for the chosen research topic and problem

The main focus of this study is set on cross-cultural skills and their impact on the adjustment to a new cultural environment. This choice of cross-cultural skills as a topic for the study is mainly justified by my life experience and the challenges I encountered while living and working abroad. Russian by origin, I spent four years in Hungary, working for ExxonMobil, a multinational oil corporation. I have worked and studied in Norway and this summer I moved with my family to Houston, USA, due to my husband's foreign assignment. Our time spent in the USA was rich in experience, both positive and challenging. I met other Norwegian families who shared their stories and advices about the challenges and success of cross-cultural adjustment. It made me think about the possibility of uniting the experience of Norwegian expatriates and their families in the framework of the research study aimed to explore the practical significance of cross-cultural skills.
Cross-cultural competence is an interesting, multidimensional and complex phenomenon. It is defined in different ways in our multicultural world but still shows signs of mutual key values and principles. Awareness and ability to operationalize these values and principles can provide expatriates with the tools needed for a smooth and efficient cross cultural adjustment, integration and successful international career.

Norwegian expatriates have a rich experience in working and living across cultures. Their life is often hectic and full of challenges. Under the pressure of these challenges it can be quite difficult to correctly process and act on available information. A successful career abroad is the result of several factors. One of them is the ability to develop the skills required for a successful cross-cultural adjustment. In today's business globalization, people are challenged to develop the skills required to work effectively in an international environment. Cross-cultural adjustment process is one of the important dimensions of our modern multicultural world. This adjustment implies change and transformation on both personal and professional levels. Norwegian expatriates living in the States undergo this process every single day and their personal experience is very valuable in regards to defining the characteristics and skills that help make a successful career in our multicultural world.

To compete globally, expatriates must be equipped with the knowledge and skills to behave in a manner appropriate to a specific culture. "Inevitably, cultural diversity will manifest within the global marketplace, making intercultural competence an extremely important skill" (Spitzberg&Changnon, 2009, p.4). In order to succeed internationally, it is crucial to hire internationally competent employees.
This research might help management in selection and training of internationally competent expatriates that will further increase the effectiveness of business on the international arena and decrease the level of repatriation and turnover. In addition, this research might help other expatriates acquire knowledge and skills that will make life abroad easier and help them achieve a successful international career.

For many expatriates, an international assignment turns out to be the most memorable career experience which facilitates a personal growth process. Foreign assignment is an opportunity for increased challenges and responsibilities and, for personal and professional development. However, stress and difficulties from adapting to a new culture might lead to expatriates' early repatriation.

Expatriate's failure is a highly estimated cost which could be reduced if human resource management (HRM) takes into consideration the multiple dimensions of evolving portrait of intercultural expatriate. The purpose of the current study is to define the cross-cultural skills which have the most significant impact on the adjustment process of Norwegian expatriates during their foreign assignment in the United States. In the light of globalization, the issue of intercultural competence is especially important on the path towards a successful international career and competitive business in our multicultural world.

According to Blaikie an important aspect of any research project is the reason why it is to be undertaken (Blaikie, 2010). The choice of the research topic and problem illustrates the combination of both personal and social motives.

1.2. Purpose of the thesis

The purpose of the thesis is to define cross-cultural skills which have the most significant impact and lead to a smooth, successful adjustment to American cultural environment. Examining the process of expatriates' adjustment is important for several reasons.

Firstly, both expatriation and repatriation carry potential benefits of career development as well as risks of career disruption (Thomas&Inkson, 2004). Previous research revealed that between 16% and 40 % of American expatriates return prematurely from their overseas assignments due to their poor performance or failure in cross-cultural adjustment (Black&Mendenhall, 1990). The costs associated with expatriate failure are high and it is crucial to identify ways to reduce and eliminate such failures.

Secondly, expatriate failure has a negative effect on the self-esteem, self-confidence, job performance, family relationships and willingness to work abroad.

Cross-cultural skills are seen to be an efficient tool that can help cope with this challenge and turn the period of foreign assignment into an ongoing learning process which promotes personal and professional transformation and development.

During the data collection process, an offer was received from the department of Innovation Norway in Houston to develop the study further, as a training program for Norwegian companies interested in increasing the intercultural competence of employees and the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication and performance.

1.3. Thesis structure

The structure of the thesis will be as follows:

Introduction

Theoretical framework

Research methodology

Findings and discussions

Conclusions

Further directions and limitations
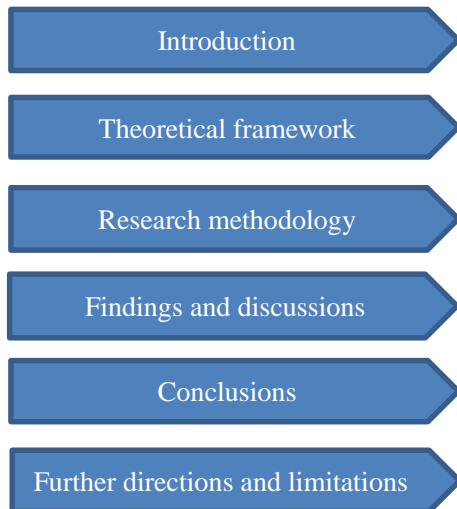
The introduction reveals the research problem and the purpose of this thesis. Next chapter presents reviewed theory for the study, existing models and previous research in the field of cross-cultural skills.

The chapter of theoretical framework is followed by the research methodology chapter where the method, design, sampling technique and analysis are discussed. The validity and reliability are also accounted for in this chapter.

This paper has its own chapter for the discussions of the results and used theory. The last three chapters provide the overall conclusions, the answer to the main research question as well as recommendations for further research and limitations.

Introduction

This chapter presents the background of the research problem, research question and purpose of the thesis.

Theoretical framework

Brief overview of the relevant theory for the study highlights existing models and approaches to the research of such a complex phenomenon as cross-cultural skills.

Research methodology

The method and the design of the study are discussed. The validity and reliability of the study are also accounted for.

Findings and discussions

This chapter of the thesis presents the main findings, mainly derived from interviews, and interprets them in the light of relevant theoretical background to provide an answer to the main research question.

Conclusions

This section of the study provides the overall conclusions and recommendations.

Further directions and limitations

This chapter provides directions for further research and highlights limitations.

1.4. Research question

The main question of the research is "Which cross-cultural skills are considered by Norwegian expatriates to be the most significant for a smooth and successful adjustment process in the United States?"

A set of additional questions was elaborated to help to answer the main research question.

❖ What cultural differences have significant impact on the adjustment process of Norwegian expatriates in the U.S.?

❖ How do Norwegian expatriates describe their adjustment?

❖ What kind of facilitators do Norwegian expatriates consider to be important for a smooth, successful adjustment?

❖ What kind of cross-cultural skills are developed by Norwegian expatriates as a result of cross-cultural adjustment?

1.5. Target group

This study provides in-depth information about the most significant cross cultural skills describing the personal experience of Norwegian expatriates living and working in the U.S. The results of this study can be valuable for Norwegian companies actively operating on international markets and searching for relevant information and findings that might help to

prevent and reduce the costs related to expatriates' failure and repatriation due to inability to adjust to a new cultural environment.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Globalization

In the last couple of years this word has turned up more and more in newspapers, articles and academic research works. The sense of the word seems to be evident. But though concept of globalization has become widespread, there is still no single accepted definition of it. The reference to one of its definitions might help underline the complexity of this phenomenon. "Globalization refers to the multiplicity and linkages and interconnections that transcend the nation-states (and by implication the societies) which make up the modern world system. It defines a process (emphasis added) through which events, decisions, and activities in one part of the world can come to have significant consequences for individuals and communities in quite distant parts of the globe" (McGrew, 1992, p.65-66).

We are all living increasingly global lives, but the life of expatriates is more global than most. Globalization means an increase in the permeability of traditional boundaries and has a significant impact on all of us but most of all on the people involved in business. In business today, people may travel overseas and meet people from other cultures. We speak with them on international telephone calls, correspond with them by e-mail and build relationships with people who are culturally different.

The days of stable career paths are past in dynamically developing international business life. Employees of international companies are exposed to a higher level of demands and requirements in a rapidly developing business environment. In fact, globalization makes the environment of business to be more complex, more uncertain and competitive than before (Thomas&Inkson 2004).

Modern expatriates experience a higher level of challenge since they are expected not only to interact with host nationals using their local language but to live, make relationships and communicate effectively across the cultures on a daily basis. Expatriates face the reality of global business which involves knowledge about the skills required for an effective interaction and communication with people who are culturally different. This challenge could be minimized if expatriates are aware of which skills they need to develop in order to define effective patterns of behavior in a new cultural environment.

2.2. Definition of an expatriate

The growing globalization and increasing number of multinational companies have resulted in an increase in highly competent staff sent on foreign assignment for periods ranging from a few months to several years. In literature expatriates are defined as "international assignees".

Dowling and Welch define an expatriate as "an employee who is working and temporarily residing in a foreign country" (Dowling&Welch 2004, p.5). Richardson and McKenna define expatriates as professionals who are living overseas on a temporary basis (Richardson McKenna, 2002). An expatriate is expected to perform effectively and offer a new knowledge for locals. The role of expatriates is significant in today's business since they meet the needs for skilled professionals in various fields.

There are two groups of business expatriates: self-initiated and organizational expatriates. The main distinction between these two groups lies in different initiation to work internationally. In many cases expatriate assignments are strongly company-controlled. Organizational expatriates are provided with either guidance or direction in their career decisions. However, some prefer to be responsible for their own destinies and they develop their international careers in their own ways as self-initiated expatriates (Thomas&Inkson, 2004). A significant part of literature on international human resource management is focused on organizational expatriates, but in the last years a widespread phenomenon of self- initiated expatriates attracts more attention.

Regardless of the primary initiation for international work, all expatriates going abroad experience situations that show differences in language, communication, interpretation of various every day and business related situations, attitudes to work, time, private and business relationships, dress and food. The new environment that surrounds an expatriate on an international assignment requires many adjustments to be made in a relatively short period of time which can cause disorientation and cultural shock. Adjustments require time, effort and moreover motivation and interest to go through what can be a painful period of transformation to learn new practices.

2.3. Culture

Expatriates that move to a new cultural environment experience various challenges and a big part of these challenges is connected to the understanding of their own culture and the culture of the host country. Effective behavior in a new culture is dependent on the expatriates' ability to find appropriate patterns of behavior and communication, which are recognized in the new cultural environment, and to foresee the consequences of their interaction with members of a host culture. This can't be done without an understanding of what culture is and how their native culture is different from the culture of a host country.

This paper is focused on the importance of cross-cultural skills for adjustment and adaptation in a foreign country. Both adjustment and adaptation are linked to cultural awareness and understanding of similarities and differences between the native and host culture.

What is culture and what hidden meanings does this widely used term imply?

Culture is a word we are all familiar with but it is quite challenging to find a precise definition of it. In literature we can find various definitions of culture. For example, culture could be described as mutual expectations of morally acceptable behavior (Deardorff, 2009). Or culture

could be defined as a random assortment of customs and behaviors, the values, attitudes and assumptions about behavior that are shared by people in specific groups. Our understanding of culture and how it affects behavior is the first stage of development of intercultural competence or intercultural intelligence (Thomas&Inkson, 2004).

In general, many people associate the word "culture" with the "home world" - the family or significant others. The unwritten task of every culture is to organize, integrate, maintain the "home world" of individuals that makes them fit to live with others who share similar image of reality and self (Gudynkunst, 2005).

People from different cultures exhibit different values, customs and traditions, which leads to cultural differences. Expatriates interact with people from different cultures on a daily basis. This increases the risk of making significant mistakes if it is assumed that people are basically the same, have the same needs, desires and approaches to different life and business related situations. The expatriates with a high level of cultural awareness and knowledge about the cross-cultural skills have better chances to act, behave and communicate effectively across the cultures.

Cultures of different countries might share common characteristics which unite them and at the same time have specific characteristics which make them unique and different from other cultures. Thomas and Inkson argue for understanding of some basic characteristics that could apply to any culture (Thomas&Inkson, 2004, p.24).

1. Culture is shared. It is a gift which is passed from one generation to another and could be defined according to its values, the fundamental beliefs that people within the culture share about how things should be and how one should behave.
2. Culture is learned and is enduring. Culture does not arise by accident, it builds up systematically over time. Some aspects of culture are built into institutions, others are passed on through generations in the form of role-modeling and advice.
3. Culture is a powerful influence on behavior. Culture could be defined as a certain form of mental programming. In a different culture, people have a natural tendency to revert to their cultural roots.
4. Culture is systematic and organized. Culture is not random, it could be defined as an organized system of values, attitudes and beliefs, a sort of mental programming which make people perceive other cultures as strange or illogical. But this is just a superficial judgment. A deeper insight into a new culture reveals its own, often exquisite logic.
5. Culture might be "tight" or "loose". Japan is a good example of a "tight" culture which is based on uniformity and homogeneous populations. Such country as the U.S. is a good example of a relatively "loose" culture with diverse populations and encouragement of freedom of thought.

Culture is a complex phenomenon. Many scholars compare culture with an iceberg and find this comparison to be the best form to describe the complexity. In this analogy, one tenth of the culture is visible and above the surface while nine tenths is below the surface and invisible.
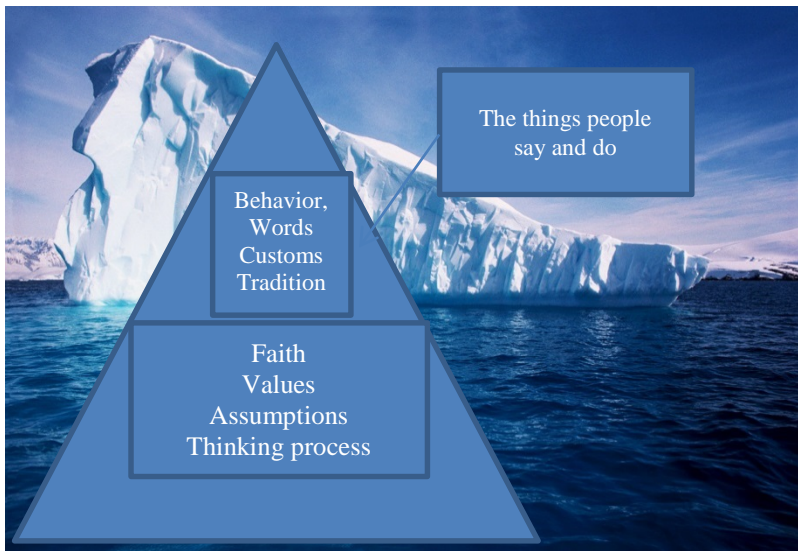
Figure 1. Culture: adapted version (Linde, 2003).

Beneath the surface of the visible part we find different ways of thinking, assumptions, values, norms, beliefs and informal elements of social culture and communication. Above the surface we find various cultural expressions like behavior and traditions which are actually symbols of a deep, shared consciousness.

A deep and profound research on American and Norwegian cultures could definitely reveal a layer of invisible hidden values, norms and assumptions which make the ground for behaviors, customs and traditions. A capacity to sense and define this specific hidden layer of culture is a part of cross-cultural competence, an important skill that helps to adjust to a new cultural environment.

2.4. Hofstede's Dimensions: Norway versus the United States of America

Understanding of cultural similarities and differences is an important element of cultural awareness and creates predisposition for the development of cross-cultural skills. In the framework of the thesis it is important to highlight some of the cultural differences between Norway and the U.S. Through understanding these cultural differences, it's easier to gain a better insight into the challenges Norwegian expatriates might experience when they meet a new cultural environment.

This thesis makes an effort to track the impact of cross-cultural skills on the adjustment of Norwegian expatriates. Cultural distance is determined as an important element in the framework of the current thesis since the socio-cultural adjustment (which is in the main focus of the study) is dependent on cultural distance. It is important to make a brief comparative analysis of Norway and the United States to make an assumption about the adjustment challenges Norwegian expatriates might experience when they move to the United States.

The concept of cultural difference is based on Hofstede's dimensions of national cultures. Professor Geert Hofstede conducted a study of how values are influenced by culture. The results of his research are valuable because they provide insights into other cultures and allow people to be more effective in interaction with people from other cultures.

The values that distinguish country cultures from each other were categorized into four groups which became Hofstede's dimensions of national culture.

> Individualism versus Collectivism (IDV). A society's position on this dimension is dependent on whether people's self-image is defined in terms of "I" or "WE" (The Hofstede centre, 2014).

> Power Distance (PDI). This dimension shows how large differentials of power (between a higher-status and a lower-status person) are expected and tolerated.

> Masculinity versus Femininity (MAS). The masculinity represents a preference in society for achievement, heroism, material rewards for success while femininity stands for a preference for cooperation, caring for the weak and quality of life (The Hofstede centre, 2014).

> Uncertainty avoidance (UAI). This dimension shows the extent to which the culture emphasizes focusing on ways to reduce uncertainty and create stability. Countries with strong UAI maintain rigid codes of belief. Weak UAI societies maintain a more relaxed attitude when practice counts more than principles. (The Hofstede centre, 2014)

Hofstede dimension	U.S.A.	Norway
Individualism	91	69
Power distance	40	31
Uncertainty avoidance	46	50
Masculinity	62	8
TOTAL:	157	158

Figure 2. Adapted description of Hofstede's dimensions (Thomas&Inkson, 2004).

The table presented in figure 2 shows that the United States has a very high level of individualism (score 91), above average masculinity and moderate power distance and uncertainty avoidance.

2.4.1. Individualism (IDV)

Norway shows a rather high level of individualism (score 69) which is still much less than the score for the U.S. It means that citizens of the U.S. and Norway are self-orientated, value highly individual opinion and privacy. But Americans could be defined as extremely independent,

individualistic. They like to be different from each other though it might seem inappropriate to characterize Americans as "individualists" and "materialists" because the United States has such a diverse population and many Americans would not recognize those descriptions. Norway is a far more cohesive society than the United States. An American person visiting Norway for the first time would definitely pay attention to the homogenous quality of Norwegian society. There is no obvious poverty, people are relatively uniform in their appearance, dress and manner (Avant&Knutsen, 1993).

2.4.2. Power distance (PDI)

The power distance in the United States scores moderately low on the cultural scale (40). Norway shows a lower score on this dimension (31) which could be defined as an extremely low result. Norway and the United States could both be defined as relatively small power distance countries which show limited acceptance of power inequality and less dependence on subordinates on managers. Norway is known for a rather flat organizational structure and nonhierarchical managerial style. In low PDI cultures the focus is set more on one's identity than on one's status.

2.4.3. Uncertainty avoidance (UAI)

Norway and the United States score moderately low in this dimension (46 for USA and 50 for Norway) which indicates their ability to accommodate ambiguity and uncertainty in the workplace.
Cultures with low UAI show a low need for written and unwritten rules to guide the work responsibilities.

2.4.4. Masculinity (MAS)

Although Norway and the Unites States score similar on other dimensions, they show a big difference on Masculinity index. Norway with a score of 8 in this dimension is labeled "feminine" and the United States with a score of 62 is labeled "masculine". The "live in order to work vs. work in order to live" dichotomy is often used to illustrate the fundamental difference. In broad understanding, the masculine cultures show a clear distinction in social gender roles while feminine cultures value modesty, cooperation and quality of life (Sørnes&Stephens, 2004).

In masculine societies, people need to exert themselves more to appear trustworthy business partners. In societies with high MAS we will find more institutions with a duty to cope with distrust. The opposite is a feminine culture which reflects more forgiving moral rules, less harsh punishment and condemnation of violence. This dimension is about morality. In high MAS cultures the moral world of both men and women is strongly stratified and a clear distinction between the admired heroes and despised losers is vivid. In cultures with low MAS moral

qualities are more allocated and even the worst of criminals can have some good (Deardorff, 2009).

Based on Hofstede's Dimensions, the overall difference between Norway and the United States is not big. There are two dimensions (individualism and masculinity) that show a relatively significant difference and should be specially paid attention to. Despite the fact that both countries are categorized as individualist, there is still a significant point spread between Norway (69) and the US (91). This suggests that both the US and Norway exhibit individualist tendencies, but the U.S. is more individualistic. Clear differences are seen in the masculinity dimension where Norway scored 8 and the US scored 62 points on Hofstede's Masculinity Scale. It shows that Norway exhibits more feministic traits. Some research based on Hofstede's dimensions show quite a few differences between Norway and the United States and the findings differ from those of Hofstede as they reveal similarity on Individualism (IDV) and Masculinity (MAS) dimensions (Sørnes&Stephens, 2004).

Hofstede (1980) asserts that the main cultural tendencies of a nation are revealed and replicated by their institutions. The behaviors and practices of individuals reflect these cultural tendencies. Even after so many years of use, Hofstede's dimensions of culture are still found useful to understand differences between national cultures.

2.5. Acculturation, adaptation, adjustment and culture shock

Literature overview shows that concepts of acculturation, adaptation and adjustment are used interchangeably. This research makes an attempt to define the power of influence of cross-cultural skills on adjustment of Norwegian expatriates in the United States. For the purposes of this thesis it is important to make a review of approaches to various definitions of these concepts to describe the complexity of such phenomenon as cross-cultural adjustment.

2.5.1. Acculturation

A pioneer in the field, John Berry, has led contemporary approaches to acculturation. His contributions reflect his capacity for innovative, big picture thinking and ability to construct representations of theories and models of acculturation process. His organizational frameworks are known in certain circles as "Berry boxes" (Ward, 2008).

Berry defines acculturation as "a dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members" (Berry, 2005, p.698). American cultural anthropologists Redfield, Linton and Herskovits (1936) emphasize that "acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups…under this definition, acculturation is to be distinguished from culture change, of which it is but one aspect, and assimilation, which is at times a phase of acculturation…" (Berry, 2008, p.330).

MAINTENANCE OF HERITAGE CULTURE AND IDENTITY
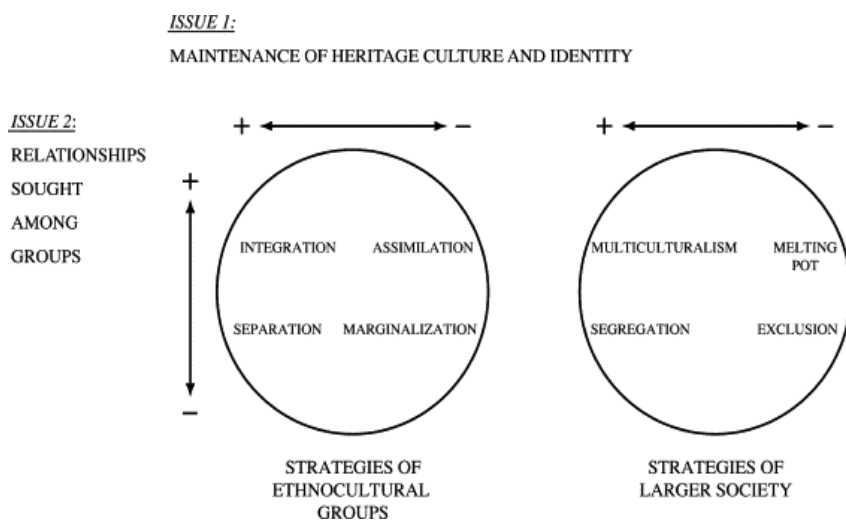
Figure 3. Intercultural strategies in ethnocultural groups (J.W. Berry 2008, p.332).

The concept of acculturation strategies introduced by Berry (figure 4) refers to various ways people seek to acculturate. Four acculturation strategies are based on distinction between:

1. A preference for maintaining one's heritage, culture and identity versus not maintaining them;
2. A preference for seeking relationships with other groups versus avoiding such relationships (Berry, 2008).

On the left side of the figure 4, the four strategies are presented which individuals use when entering new environment and seeking acculturation. On the right side of the same figure, the other four strategies are presented which reflect how dominant groups expect newcomers to acculturate.

Both sides of the figure require more precise attention and explanation in terms of the current thesis.

- When individuals do not want to maintain their cultural identity and seek daily interaction with other cultures, the *assimilation* strategy is defined. *Assimilation* initiated by the dominant group is often named the "melting pot".
- When individuals place a value on holding on to their original culture and avoid interaction with other groups, the *separation* strategy is defined. *Separation* forced by the dominant group is named *segregation*.
- When there is an interest in both maintaining one's culture and daily interaction with others, the *integration* strategy is an option. Mutual *acculturation/integration* initiated by the dominant group is called *multiculturalism.*
- When there is little interest/possibility in cultural maintenance, the *marginalization* is defined. *Marginalization*, imposed by the dominant group is *exclusion* (Berry, 2008).

The same acculturation model could be presented differently if the dimension measuring the desire to adopt a new culture is crossed with the culture maintenance dimension:

- culture maintenance high and culture adoption high = integration;
- culture maintenance low and culture adoption high = assimilation;
- culture maintenance high and culture adoption low = separation;
- culture maintenance low and culture adoption low = marginalization (Zagefka, Tip, Gonzales, Brown, Cinnirella, 2012).

Additional dimensions of the acculturation model could be found in a dualistic perspective. Expatriate adjustment includes not only adjustment to the foreign culture, but also the changes in the expatriates' view of their home culture. This typology of expatriate adjustment views both adjustment to the host culture and reevaluation of the home cultures as important criteria in understanding different outcomes resulting from expatriates' decisions. Takeuchi, Marinova, Lepak and Liu state that "the degree of the expatriates' overall adjustment to the host culture and of the home culture can range from (very) high to (very) low. Expatriates can reevaluate the home culture in a positive or a negative light. Accordingly, expatriates can make any one of the following types of adjustment: dual high adjustment (well-adjusted to the host and positive evaluation of the home culture); unilateral home culture maladjustment (well-adjusted to the host culture but evaluating the home culture negatively); unilateral host culture maladjustment (not well adjusted to the host culture but evaluating the home culture positively); or dual low adjustment (not well adjusted to the host as well as evaluating the home culture negatively)" (Takeuchi, Marinova, Lepak, Liu, 2005).

HIGH	**Changing one's own values, attitudes, beliefs and norms.** *Unilateral Maladjustment to the home culture*	**Changing one's view of the host culture's values, attitudes, beliefs and norms.** *Dual High adjustment*
Adjustment to the host culture	**Adapting cognitions which minimize the inconsistency of values, attitudes, beliefs and norms.** *Dual Low adjustment*	**Withdrawal from the dissonance-causing situation** *Unilateral Maladjustment to the host culture*
LOW	Relatively negative	Relatively positive

Figure 4. Adapted model of types of dualistic adjustment (Takeuchi, Marinova, Lepak, Liu, 2005).

Takeuchi, Marinova, Lepak and Liu argue that it is logical to assume that when expatriates are well adjusted to a host culture, they would most likely evaluate the culture positively. If the evaluation is combined with a positive evaluation of the home culture, we have a case of a *dual high adjustment* which is seen to be similar to integration (Berry, 1980). The case of dual high adjustment is an ideal variant for both the individual expatriate and the company because it minimizes the risk of readjust challenges when expatriates return to their parent companies. If expatriates' reappraisal of their home culture is positive, they would most likely readjust more easily. If at the same time, they evaluate positively the host culture, they would most likely maintain their network established in the local company to their own benefit and the benefit of their parent company (Takeuchi, Marinova, Lepak, Liu, 2005).

2.5.2. Culture shock

The concepts of acculturation, adjustment and adaptation are connected to the phenomenon of "culture shock". The concept illustrates the experiences of a stranger entering a new cultural environment. The phenomenon of "culture shock" is an important stage of all these concepts since almost all strangers are likely to experience a certain degree of discomfort entering a new cultural environment.

The adjustment process was first described as a U-shaped process by Lysgård (1955) in a study of Norwegian Fulbright grantees during their stay in the U.S. (Halsberger, 2005). Lysgård claims that after the initial period of excitement, the expatriate enters an adjustment crisis. "Very generally adjustment seems to have been "good" among those who stayed in America less than six months , also "good" among those who stayed there more than eighteen months , while those who left America after a stay from six to eighteen months seem to have been "less well" adjusted" (Lysgård, 1955, p.49).

Lysgård found that the U-curve could be divided into sections depending on the length of the stay: up to six months, more than six, up to eighteen months, and more than eighteen months. Based on the time dimension, Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) have extended the U-curve hypothesis by including not only abroad adjustment but also repatriation adjustment which was named the W-curve. Experience of many expatriates after a big "come back home" is not always as positive as it was expected. Some Norwegian expatriates describe their experience upon return as an anticlimax. Though readapting to one's culture is less demanding than adapting to a new culture, the whole re-entry experience represents a similar psychological adaptation process. The returnee has been changed by the overseas experience, but the home culture has changed as well and the returnee once again has to go through the same process of cross-cultural adaptation (Kim, 2012).
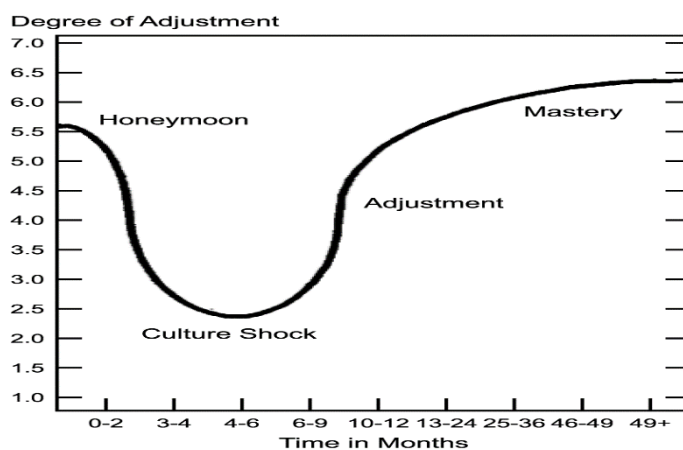
Figure 5: The U–curve of cross cultural adjustment. Retrieved from http://comm211xspring2012.blogspot.com/2012/03/cole-frederick-caps-blog-4.html.
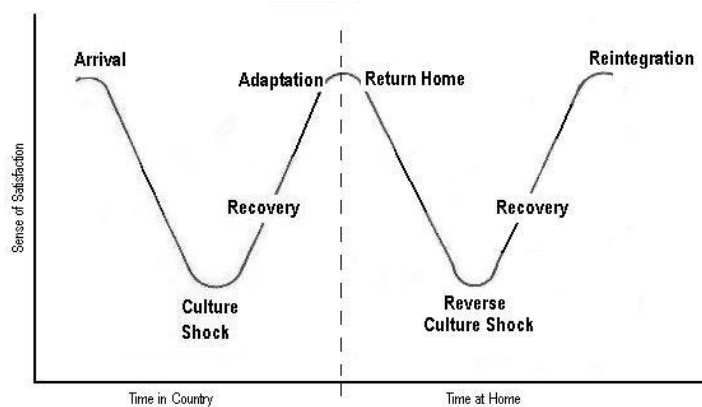
Figure 6: Adapted visualization of U and W-curves. Retrieved from http://www.uwec.edu/cie/studyabroad.

A person experiencing an adjustment crisis may develop feelings of loneliness and depression. This emotional condition is typical for the second stage of adaptation process that was defined by Oberg (1960) as a "culture shock". In the literature various typical signs of a "culture shock" are described as it's symptoms: fatigue, loneliness, homesickness, depression. The literature overview shows that only after the period of six months or more newcomers start to feel comfortable with the new environment and are able to function normally.

2.5.3. Cross-cultural adjustment

Literature overview indicates that the concepts of adaptation, adjustment and acculturation are used interchangeably.

Adjustment, defined as a fit between the individual and his/her social environment, is a widely spread definition (Gudynkunst, Wiseman, Hammer, 1977). The phenomenon of cross-cultural adjustment is complex and not clearly defined. Searle and Ward (1990) state that a wide range of variables have been used to measure adjustment: mood states, acceptance of the host culture, satisfaction, feelings of acceptance, coping with everyday activities, acquisition of culturally appropriate behavior and skills (Searle Ward, 1990). Previous research of cross-cultural adjustment (CCA) suggested that CCA is a key determinant of expatriate success in international assignment (Ramalu, Rose, Uli, Kumar, 2010).

The scholars Searle and Ward (1990), Bochner and Furnham (2001) differentiate between two forms of adjustment: *psychological and socio-cultural*. "*Psychological* adjustment refers to the psychological wellbeing in the foreign context whereas *socio-cultural* adjustment is the ability to interact successfully with members of the host culture" (Festing&Maletzky, 2011, p.188).
Ward argues that these two forms of adjustment are "conceptually related, but empirically distinct". She states that psychological adjustment focuses on "feeling of well-being or satisfaction" while sociocultural adjustment "refers to ability to fit in or execute effective interactions in a new cultural milieu" (Ward, 2001, p.414).
This thesis pays less attention to psychological adjustment and is mainly limited to socio-cultural stream of cross-cultural adjustment.

2.5.4. Dimensions of cross-cultural adjustment

Hippler and Caligiuri state that even after 25 years of academic work on the concept of adjustment, the field of expatriate adjustment still appears fragmented and inconsistent. The concept of Black, Mendenhall and Oddou (1991) and Black, Mendenhall (1991) dominates in literature analyzing adjustment (Hippler&Calliguiri in Festing&Maletzky, 2011, p.186). Black, Mendenhall and Oddou made a review of recent empirical articles and defined five dimensions (themes) of cross-cultural adjustment process:

1. Pre-departure training
Black and Mendenhall (1990) state that "the empirical literature gives guarded support to the proposition that cross-cultural training has a positive impact on cross-cultural effectiveness" (Black&Mendenhall, 1990, p.120).

2. Previous overseas experience
Black and Mendenhall admit a certain ambiguity of this dimension when they say that previous overseas experience is related to the work adjustment for expatriates, but not to general adjustment. Literature overview confirms though that previous experience seem to facilitate the adjustment process. At the same time, some scholars like Church (1982) argue that previous international experience may be an accurate source of information which forms accurate expectations. Previous work experience would facilitate the formation of accurate work expectations and previous experience not related to work would facilitate the formation of non-work expectations (Black&Mendenhall, 1991).

3. Organizational selection mechanisms
The research in the field of cross-cultural adjustment shows that in the 70s and 80s the main focus was set on one selection criterion: technical competence (Black&Mendenhall, 1991). Recent research shows that as well as technical competence it is also highly important to take into account other selection criteria like confidence in own identity , realistic expectations, the ability to build relationships based on trust, respect, tolerance and flexibility, the ability to listen and have self-control in stress related situations (Linde, 2003).

4. Individual skills;

Mendenhall and Oddou (1985) categorized these skills into three dimensions:

a). The self-dimension includes skills required for expatriate's mental and psychological health. Some scholars like Black, Mendenhall and Oddou (1991) do also refer to self-efficacy as an important element of the self-dimension. They argue that individuals with high level of self-efficacy tend "to persist in exhibiting new behaviors that are learned even when those efforts are not successful…the more individuals attempt to exhibit new behaviors in a foreign situation, the more chances they have of receiving feedback… to reduce the uncertainty of what is expected of them…and correct their behavior to better correspond to the expectations" (Black, Mendenhall&Oddou 1991, pp.307-308).

b). <u>The relationship dimension</u> includes skills required for the development of relationships with host nationals. The greater individuals' relational skills, the easier it is for them to interact with host nationals and receive more information about what is appropriate and inappropriate in the host culture (Black, Mendenhall&Oddou, 1991).

c). <u>The perception dimension</u> includes cognitive abilities that help expatriate to perceive and evaluate new cultural environment in a correct way. These skills help to reduce the uncertainty associated with the foreign environment and help to understand correctly and interpret the host culture (Mendenhall&Oddou, 1985).

5. <u>Non work factors</u>, including family adjustment and culture novelty.

These five dimensions are grouped according to the time stage of the adjustment process. The first three dimensions are relevant for the period before the expatriates leave their home countries and the other two describe issues that exist after the expatriates arrive to a host culture and start their foreign assignment (Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991).
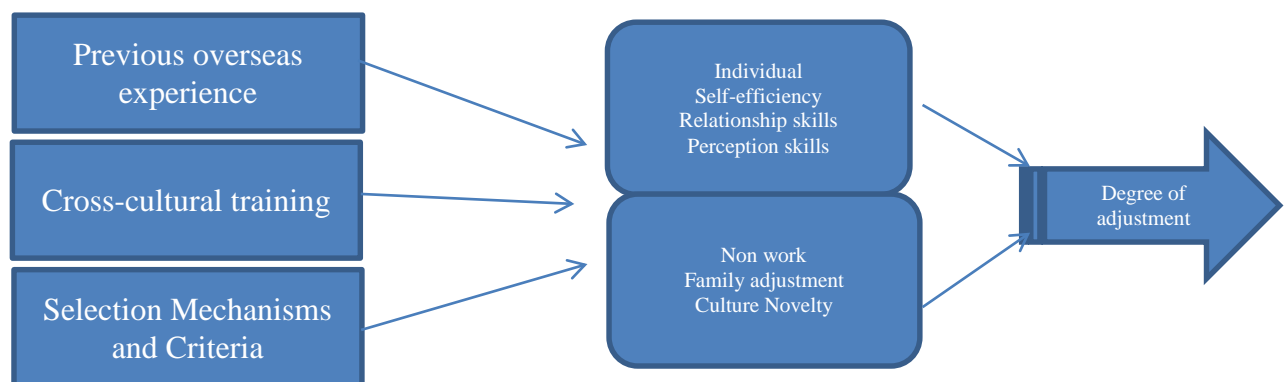
Figure 7: Dimensions of cross-cultural adjustment. Adapted version based on works of Black, Mendenhall and Oddou, 1991.

2.5.5. Stress, adaptation, growth

Young Yun Kim's theory of cross-cultural adaptation requires a special attention in the framework of this thesis. Kim's theory provides explanation to an ongoing interaction between the cyclical pattern of cross-cultural adjustment and cross-cultural skills. Her theory suggests a pattern of cross-cultural adaptation different from the widely used U-shaped process of adaptation earlier described in this chapter.

Unlike the U-curve, Kim's model resembles a cyclical pattern. Kim writes that the stress–adaptation-growth process continues as long as there are new environmental challenges. It does not unfold a smooth, arrow-like linear progression, but in a cyclic pattern of "drawback to leap" (Kim, 2012).

Kim states that stress experience triggers various defense mechanisms such as denial, hostility, avoidance and withdrawal. At the same time, stress drives newcomers to adaptation. She

presents a newcomer as a "system" which goes through "disequilibrium" when it enters a new cultural environment. The person uses feedback to put the "system" into balance again. The general idea of her approach is presented in the stress-adaptation-growth model (figure8).

The model suggests that stress instead of causing only negative emotions is an important factor that facilitates personal growth and development. Kim presents this development as "two steps forward, one step back" pattern. Stress serves as a powerful force that encourages individuals to overcome obstacles and adapt to a new environment through active new learning.
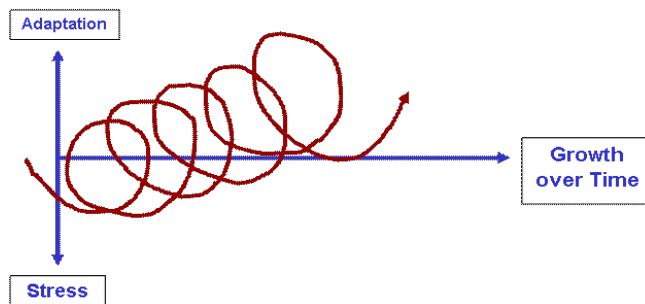
Figure 8: The stress-adaptation-growth dynamic (Kim, 2001).

Kim argues that each individual starts the process of cross-cultural adaptation with a set of qualities and characteristics that determine adaptive changes individuals go through during the adaptation process. These characteristics could be grouped in three categories:

1. Preparedness for change is directly linked to the readiness to develop intercultural competence. The readiness could be described as a set of formal and informal learning experiences like schooling, training or previous cross-cultural adaptation experiences. Kim underlines that long-term immigrants have a higher level of preparedness for change than short term visitors.

2. Ethic proximity/distance could be described at a certain level of linguistic and cultural difference which each individual has to overcome to develop intercultural competence.

3. Personality predisposition could be described as a set of qualities (openness, strength, positivity) that help to facilitate individual's adaptation by enduring stressful challenges and maximizing new learning (Kim, 2012).

2.5.6. Long-term and short-term adjustment

Theoretical overview indicates a difference between long-term and short-term forms of adjustment. Unlike immigrants, expatriates whose foreign assignment lasts from two to five years, tend to limit their contact with a new culture to peripheral areas, like career, educational degree or prestige they gain while they are staying and working abroad. Differences between long-term and short-term adjustment are largely a matter of degree. Both types of adjustment

have similar modifications in the original cultural habits but different level and depth (Kim, 2012).

Kim argues that adaptive experiences of long-term and short-term settlers are different. Immigrants are more likely to be committed to adapting than short-term settlers who are less motivated to change as their period of staying in a foreign country is limited by time. At the same time, representatives of a host culture tend not to expect culturally appropriate behavior from short-term settlers and are more willing to forgive mistakes as long they see an interest and respect to their culture (Kim, 2001).

It is logical to assume that expatriates as short-term settlers would hardly choose the same acculturation strategy like for example immigrants who intent establish themselves permanently in a foreign country and have to undergo a deeper process of cultures' evaluations and a higher level of adjustment to the host culture.

Different goals make short-term settlers, for example expatriates, and long-term settlers like immigrants, choose different ways to adapt to host cultures. Expatriates generally do not change their identities while immigrants might do that.

2.6. Cross-cultural competence (CCC), Intercultural competence (IC) and Intelligence (CQ)

Researchers have for several years debated what cross-cultural competence actually is. Literature overview reveals different approaches which link many different elements to the phenomenon of cross-cultural competence such as intercultural competence, cultural intelligence, global mindset, global competence, culture learning, cultural intelligence, global leadership competence, intercultural communication competence. Many of the disciplinary roads lead to a similar place. Benett states that there is "emerging consensus around what constitutes intercultural competence, which is most often viewed as a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts" (Benett, 2008, p.97).

Scholars like Bird, Mendenhall, Stevens and Oddou (2010) , Javidan & Walker (2012), Thomas (2006) have identified "a strong overlap between CCC and other similar concepts including adjustment, adaptation, cultural intelligence (CQ) and global mindset, which all describe the capabilities to interact effectively with culturally different others" (Wang, Feng, Freeman, Fan, Zhu, 2013).

Today the reality of global business involves interactions and relationships with people who are culturally different. This requires the understanding of different cultures and the ability to interact effectively with people from a different cultural environment. When interpersonal interaction takes place across cultural boundaries, the potential for misunderstanding and failure is much higher. Poor cross-cultural skills are a costly issue in business settings. The last decades show that the importance of intercultural or cross-cultural competence is highly recognized by

the management of international companies. Various tools are applied to develop and facilitate these skills and intercultural competence component is often a part of the selections criteria for international assignments.

Previous studies differentiate between two areas of research on international adjustment. The first stream of research indicates the things that cannot be learned (the inherent personal attributes, personality traits, age of expatriates) and determines the adjustment. The second stream argues that a successful adjustment depends on expatriates' ability to learn and practice new skills and knowledge in cross cultural adaptation process.

For the purposes of the thesis the second stream is especially relevant as it provides insights into how expatriates develop skills which help them to adapt to host expectations and new cultural demands.

Previous studies indicate that skills are important determinants of the desired adjustment and performance during international assignments. The links between skills and expatriate performance tested in previous studies show that cross-cultural skills characterized by abilities to manage stress in a new cultural environment, to understand host perceptions, and to build up relationships with people in an effective way lead to positive outcomes of cross–cultural adaptation (Wang, Feng, Freeman, Fan, Zhu, 2013).

Figures 9 and 10 describe well-known models of intercultural competence (IC) and cultural intelligence (CQ). As we see, skills are an integral part of these models.
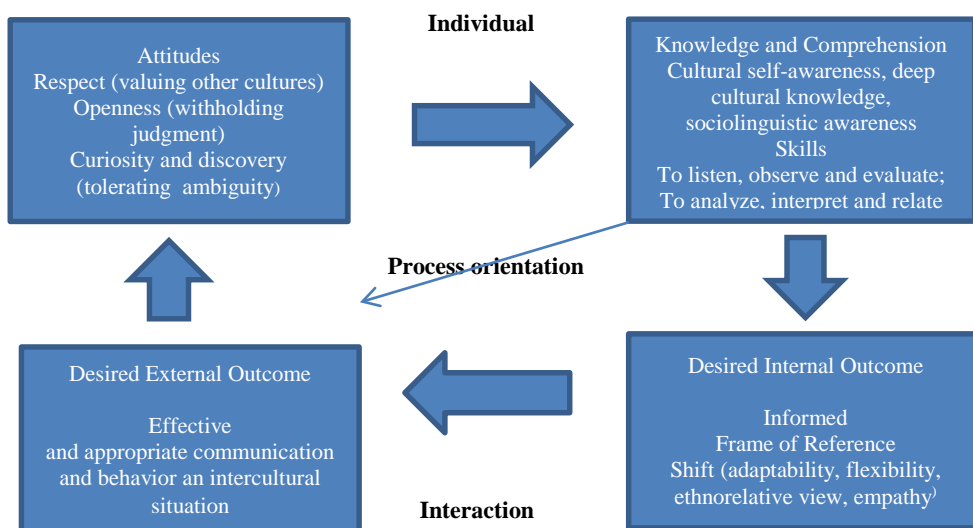
Figure 9: Process Model of Intercultural Competence (Deardorff, 2006).
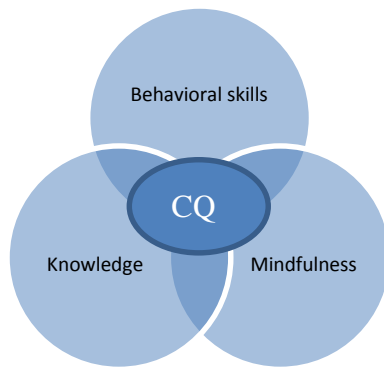
Figure 10: Components of Cultural Intelligence (CQ), adapted visualization (Thomas&Inkson, 2004, p.14).

2.7. Cross-cultural skills

2.7.1. Dimensions of cross-cultural skills

The overview of the literature shows that scholars like Black and Mendenhall (1990), Mendenhall and Oddou (1985) have identified three cross-cultural skill clusters:

1. Self-maintenance skill dimension
2. Perceptual skill dimension
3. Relationship skill dimension

Later research has also identified to additional skill clusters:
4. Communication skill dimension
5. Language skills dimension

Cross-cultural skills are characterized by the ability to tolerate stress, find appropriate patterns of behavior in new cultural situations, understand people from different cultural backgrounds and behave, communicate effectively in a new cultural environment (Wang, Feng, Freeman, Fan, Zhu, 2013). It is logical to assume that an effective behavior in a new cultural environment has a positive impact on the adjustment process. The expatriates, able to manage their stress, interpret new patterns of behavior correctly, react adequately and effectively to new challenges, have better possibilities to adjust smoothly and report a lower level of anxiety and stress.

1. The self-maintenance skill dimension is associated with stress-reduction, self-confidence achieved through regulating own emotions. This skill dimension is required in the initial stages of the learning process when expatriates realize that social expectations in a new cultural environment are different from their home culture. Those expatriates who show abilities to diminish stress increase their overall chances to experience a feeling of general wellbeing and increased confidence.

2. The perceptual skill dimension is about expatriates' abilities to correctly interpret unfamiliar models of communication and behavior and respond appropriately to the host national's behaviors. Expatriate literature reveals a direct impact of perceptual skills on cross-cultural adjustment. Through various experiences in a new context, expatriates with perceptual skills are sensitive to new information and have better predisposition to enrich their knowledge and modify their behavior towards the expectations of a new cultural environment. Perceptual skills are connected to relational or interpersonal skills and communication skills.

3. The relational or interpersonal skill dimension encompasses skills that allow expatriates to communicate effectively with people from different cultures. Cross-cultural studies reveal that the relational skills of expatriates are important success factors for successful adaptation and effective performance.

4. The communication skills are related to the ability to receive and process information appropriately and effectively. Kim argues that "once acquired, host communication competence facilitates cross-cultural adaptation in direct and significant ways. It serves as an instrumental, interpretive, and expressive means of coming to terms with the environment. It enables strangers to develop their view of the way things are carried out in the host environment and the way they themselves need to think, feel, and interact with that environment" (Kim, 2001, p.73).

5. Language skills are associated with expatriates' fluency in speaking and using local language and are determined by several scholars like Selmer, Kim and Slocum as a factor of successful expatriate adjustment (Wang, Feng, Freeman, Fan, Zhu, 2013).

2.7.2. Cross cultural training (CCT), previous overseas experience

Theory overview shows that many researchers indicate a positive impact of previous overseas experience and cross-cultural training on cross-cultural adjustment. Expatriates adjustment and adaptation is directly connected to the degree of their preparedness for change, their readiness of understanding the challenges of crossing culture and cross-cultural interactions in a new cultural environment. The greater this preparedness, the higher level of realistic expectations about the life in a foreign country is most likely to be. Realistic expectations increase the chances for a smooth adjustment and adaptation (Kim, 2001).

Cross-cultural training, previous overseas experience and motivation or willingness are determined as factors that increase the level of realistic expectations towards the challenges of the adjustment process and thereby create a predisposition for cross-cultural awareness and skills development. Cross-cultural training, previous overseas experience and willingness to change are defined as *facilitators* of cross-cultural skills development in the framework of the thesis. It is logical to assume that the expatriates with previous overseas experience and cross-cultural training are to a certain extend better prepared to acquire and develop cross-cultural skills than the ones who lack this experience.

Kim (2001) states that training in a host language and culture can potentially facilitate adaptation. Many companies, recognizing the importance of cross-cultural communication and adaptation to success in the global market, offer various forms of training to prepare their employees to work in unfamiliar cultural environment. At the same time, Kim states that those people who have had foreign cultural experiences are better prepared for a new cross-cultural transition (Kim, 2001).

1. Willingness to be changed:

The willingness to be changed is vital for people who undergo an adjustment process as it implies preparedness to accept that we may be changed by our new experiences. Success of expatriates' assignment is dependent on their willingness and capacity to understand relevant local standards and practices. Kim (2001) argues that people need "to recognize, further, that we, not the local people, are the ones who are expected to make adaptive corrections. This simple understanding echoes the time-honored folk wisdom-"when in Rome, do as the Romans do" (Kim, 2001).

2. Cross cultural training:

The impact of cross-cultural training is a highly debated issue. The results of many studies show that expatriates with cross-cultural training adjust better in the host country.

The defenders of cross-cultural training like Dowling and Welch (2004) argue for the effectiveness of pre-departure training programs which contribute to a smooth transition which includes cross-cultural training, preliminary visits, language training as well as support with practical matters (Dowling&Welch, 2004).

Black and Mendenhall (1990) reviewed 29 studies to determine whether CCT was effective in developing the skills related to the maintenance of own psychological health, the cognitive skills necessary for cultural awareness and interacting with host nationals. Their findings show that "it seems that cross-cultural training is effective in developing important cross-cultural skills, in facilitating cross-cultural adjustment and in enhancing job performance" (Black&Mendehall, 1990). The studies that addressed self-maintenance skills found a positive relationship between cross-cultural training and the development of self-confidence and overall well-being.

International companies compete more intensively in the global market and the role of cross-cultural training becomes more and more crucial. Most international companies take training for outgoing personnel quite seriously. They offer a brief informational package followed by one week pre-departure preparation program and sometimes on arrival orientation.

Intercultural training tends to cover the following principal areas:

- ❖ Practical information

This is the most common form of pre-departure orientation when the focus of orientation programs is set on living conditions, job characteristics, travel arrangements and other practical outcomes of life in a foreign culture.

❖ Area studies

This is an inevitable component of all training programs which is about the history, culture, social structure, economy and politics of the host country, strategic goals of the host organization.

❖ Cultural awareness

This form of training is a midway between area studies and more experimental modes of training. It enhances a more personal attitude to a culture, values and traditions of a host country and gives impersonal facts about values, traditions and customs of a new culture.

❖ Intercultural effectiveness and skills training

This form of training is focused on the intercultural effectiveness skills like adaptation skills, cross-cultural communication and partnership skills which are often learned through experimental training mode.

Studies of cross-cultural training in the framework of social learning theory reveal the influence of cross-cultural training on the development of each dimension of individual skills.

✓ The self-dimension: cross-cultural training increases expatriates' confidence and ability to act effectively in cross-cultural settings. Cross-cultural training provides verbal and visual models of appropriate and inappropriate behaviors in cross-cultural interactions and expected consequences which increases individual's efficacy due to learned proper model of behavior.

✓ The relationship dimension: cross-cultural training supplies expatriates with the knowledge about cognitive maps of people from the other culture. This information and knowledge about consequences of certain behaviors help expatriates to recall models and imitate them better than people who had not been trained.

✓ The perception dimension: cross-cultural training provides information about how people of a host country view the world which enables expatriates to make the association between behaviors and cognitive maps of people of the other culture and act effectively in actual interaction situations (Black&Mendehall, 1990).
Cross-cultural training familiarizes the individual with the culture, new and appropriate behaviors and enhances advanced cross-cultural understanding which leads to less anxiety and culture shock and thereby facilitates adjustment.

3. Previous overseas experience:

It is assumed that previous overseas experience has a positive impact on the adjustment process because expatriates are to a certain extent familiar with the challenges that many expatriates experience when they enter a new cultural environment.

Black, Mendenhall and Oddou (1991) state that previous overseas experience does seem to facilitate the adjustment process. A more recent research of Park, Pringle and Tangri shows that expatriates confirm that previous overseas experience enhanced broadening of perspectives and knowledge, their awareness and appreciation of cultural differences, building of confidence and independence. However, many researchers admit that the impact of previous overseas experience contributions to subsequent careers remain unexplored (Park, Pringle, Tangri, 1995).

In the framework of this thesis, cross-cultural training and previous overseas experience are viewed as facilitators of cross-cultural skills development. Through their positive impact on skills development process, they positively affect the desired outcome - an effective and appropriate communication and behavior in a new cultural environment.

2.7.3. Expatriates' successful adjustment

Since the aim of the research is to define the most significant cross-cultural skills for a smooth, successful adjustment, it is important to describe how a smooth, successful adjustment is defined in the framework of the thesis and why a successful adjustment is an important element of all international assignments.

Successful expatriate adjustment and adaptation are often connected to a desired effective behavior, communication, task performance, happiness in the life overseas and positive interpersonal relations with host nations.

Expatriate failure in adjustment is often associated with repatriation or early return home due to an ineffective performance, failure in cross-cultural adjustment of an expatriate and his/her family. Expatriates moving to a foreign country face many changes they have to deal with. They have to perform in a new corporate culture with new responsibilities, deal with unfamiliar norms related to a new culture, business practices, living conditions and use foreign language on a daily basis. Inability to cope with all these challenges might have negative consequences such as disruption of relationships with locals, negative influence on expatriate's psychological health and even damage of companies' reputation.

Harvard Business school together with Amtrop conducted a research "Business Leadership for the 21st Century" in the end of 90s". Three hundred international companies were asked to define the success factors for a "successful foreign assignment". "Successful foreign assignment" was defined as an assignment which was not interrupted because of an expatriate inability to perform and adjust to a new environment as expected.

The results of this research showed the following:

- ✓ 90% answered that personal abilities played a decisive role for a successful foreign assignment and they emphasized the ability to adjust to a new culture, be flexible and use own knowledge and skills in a new context;

✓ 60% answered that a professional competence which is necessary for a good performance at work had the most significant impact on the success of assignment;

✓ 50% enhanced the involvement in the local culture and explained that the ability to function and perform in a new cultural environment increased through active learning which could be achieved if an expatriate is personally engaged and motivated to participate in various social activities (Linde, 2003).

Research that was done in Canada has shown that only 12% of 250 expatriates had a smooth adjustment and successful assignment. The research made an attempt to define the criteria for success through a comparative analysis of expatriates who successfully completed their foreign assignment and those who failed. The research results showed that personal skills play a decisive role but they were unfortunately not in focus in a selection process. The following skills were named as the most significant:

✓ ability to build up personal relationships based on trust;

✓ motivation to learn language, respect, tolerance, flexibility, ability to listen;

✓ ability to self-control in stressful situations;

✓ confidence in own identity and realistic expectations (Linde, 2003).

The overview of some late research on successful adaptation and foreign assignment reveals the importance of cross-cultural skills for a smooth adjustment and successful foreign assignment. Cultural competence and skills are something that companies value more and more. Many companies provide and implement cross-cultural training to decrease the risk of failing due to difficulties to adjust.

2.7.4. Cross-cultural skills and adjustment

The complexity of cross-cultural adjustment and the impact of cross-cultural skills on adjustment development are the main focus of the study. The model presenting the relation between cross-cultural skills and adjustment process was worked by the author of the study on the basis of the presented overview of theoretical approaches to cross-cultural competence, cross-cultural skills and adjustment (figure 11).
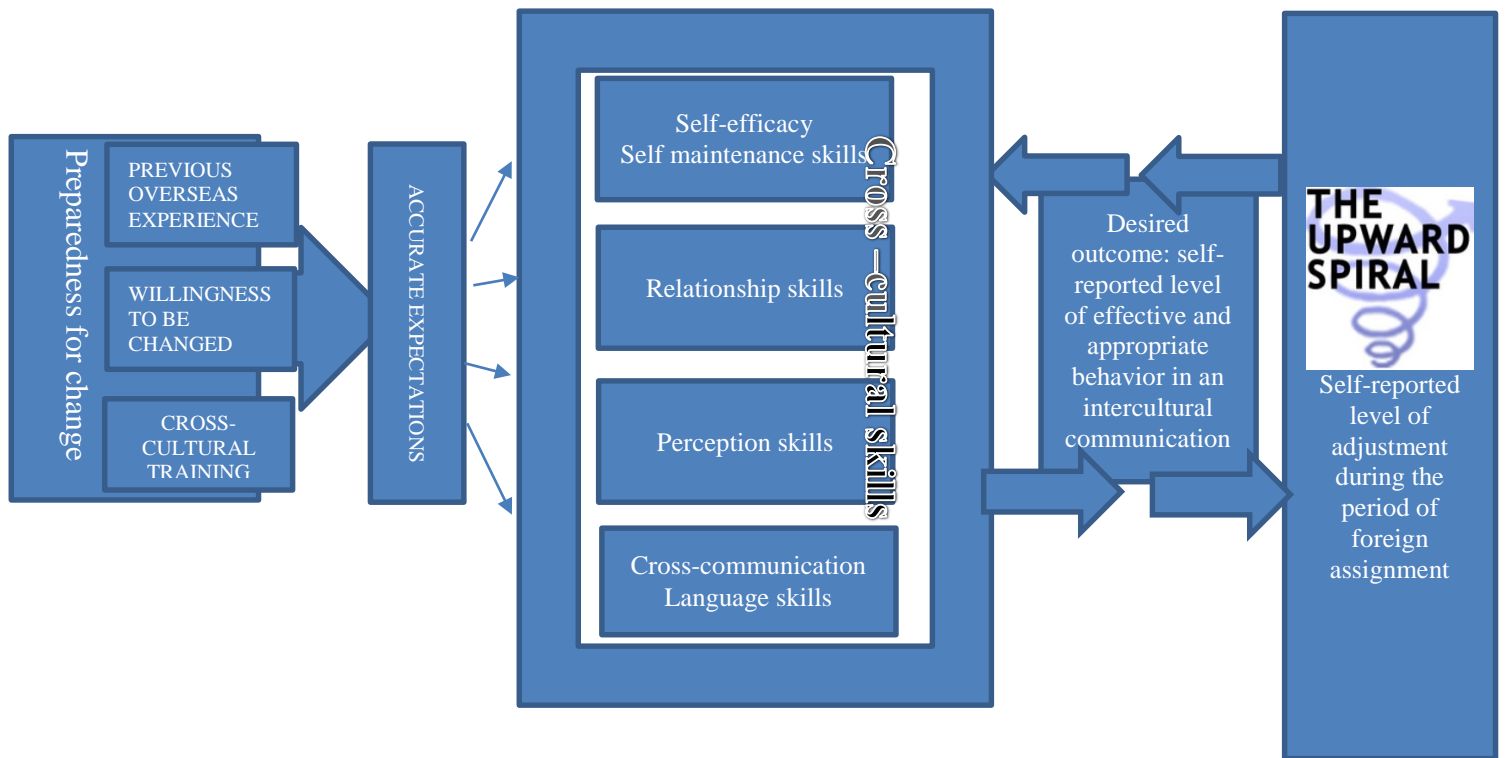
Figure 11: The model of relationships between cross-cultural skills and adjustment. The model was worked out on the basis of literature overview.

This model presents the relationships between the cross-cultural skill clusters and self-reported level of adjustment of expatriates in a host cultural environment. Previous overseas experience, motivation and cross-cultural training are determined as facilitators that help to form accurate expectations to foreign assignment. The development of cross-cultural skills results in appropriate behavior, effective communication and interactions with host members of a host country. This outcome enhances a smooth, successful process of adjustment to a new cultural environment. Adjustment is seen as an ongoing growth process in the framework of this research. Each new level of adjustment is higher than the previous one and the achieved level of adjustment requires a more advanced set of cross-cultural skills to continue the growth process.

2.7.5. Limitations

For the purposes of the study individual skills of expatriates are linked to cross-cultural skills to research the impact of cross-cultural skills on the adjustment of Norwegian expatriates in the US.

The study highlights the social perspective of expat adjustment and pays less attention to the psychological perspective. The main focus of the study is on personal experiences of Norwegians expatriates .The experience of spouses and other family members is an important factor influencing the adjustment process of expatriates, but it requires special attention and is not covered in the framework of this study.

This study shares the approaches to cross-cultural skills development recognized by a learning perspective. A learning perspective indicates that international assignments provide multiple opportunities for expatriates to learn from new cultural environment and new social relationships (Black&Mendenhall, 1990; Caligiuri&Tarique, 2009). It provides useful insights into expatriates' self-initiatives in gaining new skills through interactions with a new cultural environment.

2.8. Summary

This chapter covered a broad spectrum of issues related to cross-cultural competence phenomenon and cross-cultural skills as its important element which reveals the overall complexity of the chosen field for the research.

The definition of culture and cultural distance were reviewed to highlight the predisposition factors that influence the adjustment process of the Norwegian expatriates living and working in the US. The overview of the theories on cross-cultural adjustment, adaptation and related challenges like cultural shock presents insight into the complexity of cross-cultural adjustment and various approaches to the research of this phenomenon.

On the basis of the reviewed theoretical approaches to the research of cross-cultural adjustment and cross-cultural skills, a model of relationships between cross-cultural adjustment and adaptation was worked out to test the influence of cross-cultural skills on the adjustment process and interaction between these two phenomena.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Introduction

The main aim of the methodology chapter is to explain the methods of the research, namely how the research was conducted and justify the choice of research method used to study the chosen phenomenon.
The choice of the most suitable design and method for the study depends on the field of study, research problem, resources and the time at the disposal of the researcher. This study makes an attempt to find the answer to the main research question: "Which cross-cultural skills are considered by Norwegian expatriates to be the most significant for a smooth and successful adjustment process in the United States?"

In the first part of this chapter the choice of the qualitative research method is discussed, followed by the explanation of method used for data gathering and how the data was analyzed.

3.2 Research method

When discussing the research method, it is important to specify the distinction between quantitative and qualitative research methods. The distinction between qualitative and quantitative research could be expressed through what we may call the purpose of the method. The quantitative method is concerned with counting and measuring of social life, when numbers are valued and statistical tools are used to analyze the data. The qualitative method helps to understand people better, their ideas and their perception of the world. In the current study the qualitative method is the most appropriate to use for exploration of expatriates' meaning and interpretations of cross-cultural skills.

The author's choice of qualitative method is justified by the purposes of this study, which is concerned with the influence of cross-cultural skills on the adjustment and adaptation of Norwegian expatriates in the U.S. The study is occupied with a personal, detailed and unique experience of each single expatriate which is expressed in words.

Blaikie refers to numbers and words as two main forms of data which is the basis for the distinction between the quantitative and qualitative research. In this research the author is using mainly the data expressed in words which guides the study in the direction of the qualitative research. The data related to cross-cultural skills will be collected in words, remain in words and the findings will be reported in words, though the level of language will change from lay to technical and some segments of the text will be coded (Blaikie, 2010).

Jacobsen argues that the qualitative method of research is appropriate to be used when the researcher is interested in clarifying and exploring the meaning and content of a certain term or phenomenon. While the quantitative research is the best to be used when a researcher wants to describe the frequency or magnitude of a phenomenon to find out how often phenomenon occurs (Jacobsen, 2005).

This particular research is focused to reveal the details and hidden shades of understanding and interpretations of the cross-cultural skills phenomenon through personal experiences of Norwegian expatriates. That means the study is more focused on exploration of cross-cultural phenomenon in its richness and depth than in its frequency or extent.
It is important to mention that both qualitative and quantitative methods are considered to be complimentary rather than competitive. The choice of the method depends on the nature of the study, type of data needed, availability of time and financial resources.

3.3. Design

A research design could be defined as "the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study's initial research questions and, ultimately, to its conclusions" (Yin, 2009, p.26). A research design covers four major research areas: what questions to study, what data is relevant for the research, how to collect the data and how to analyze the results. It is important to bear in

mind that a research design is more than just a plan, its main purpose is "to avoid the situation in which the evidence does not address the initial research question" (Yin, 2009, p.26).

A brief description of the chosen research strategy is an important element of a research design which should also include justification for the research strategy appropriateness to answer the research questions of the study which is presented further (Blaikie, 2010).

The author of the thesis considers an exploratory study to be the most relevant for the purposes of the research since its main purpose is to discover ideas, insights and meanings of people, the reasons and motivations for their actions. The aim of the study is to make an attempt to explore individual opinions about cross-cultural skills development, individual meanings about the importance of this phenomenon in the process of cross-cultural adjustment and the influence of this phenomenon on the process of adjustment.

In order to achieve the aim of the study, abduction research strategy is chosen to interpret and decontextualize individual phenomenon of cross-cultural skills within a defined theoretical framework and a set of ideas (Danermark, Ekstrøm, Jacobsen, Karlsson, 2002). The researcher intends to enter the world of Norwegian expatriates to discover the motives and meanings that accompany the phenomenon of cross-cultural adjustment and cross-cultural skills. The task is to re-describe these motives and meanings in the technical language of the scientific discourse in the framework of the chosen theoretical background (Blaikie, 2010).

By using the abductive strategy the researcher plans to get a practical insight into the process of personal growth and skills development using personal experience, ideas and thoughts of Norwegian expatriates. The researcher is inspired to redefine the conception of cross-cultural skills through the experience of Norwegian expatriates in the US, holding the main focus on their practically significant dimension. Abduction provides a possibility to acquire the knowledge about the key values, various elements of cross-cultural skills explained in relation to the structures, internal relations and contexts which are not directly observable.

The researcher understands that abductive conclusions in social science are seldom of the nature that let us easily decide whether they are true or false. However, the strong side of the abductive strategy is its ability to provide a type of knowledge that cannot be acquired either through deduction or inductive generalizations (Danermark, Ekstrøm, Jacobsen&Karlsson, 2002, p.92).

3.4. Sampling technique

Blaikie underlines that regardless the purposes of the research, the type of social phenomenon being studied, the form of data and methods of data collection, reduction and analysis, all social research involves decisions about how to select data from whatever the sources may be. The researcher has a choice of either taking a whole population or selecting a sample from population (Blaikie, 2010).

The researcher had to use relevant sampling technique to provide adequate and relevant information to the study collected through in-depth interviews. The research problem of cross-cultural skills defined the group of respondents which was selected purposively. This group involved Norwegian expatriates, representatives of different international companies who moved to the U.S. to work and live for a period from two to five years.

The researcher used purposive non probability sampling technique – both judgment and snowball sampling (Sekan&Bougie, 2010). Judgmental or purposive sampling is a commonly used non-probability method which is used for selecting some case of a particular type (Blaikie, 2010). The selection was a matter of judgment as to which type of respondents was the most appropriate to adequate information. The boundary of this study is limited to the cross-cultural skills of Norwegian expatriates working and living in U.S. The respondents vary in age, gender and their working position in the biggest international companies operating in the United States like Marathon Oil, ExxonMobil, ConocoPhillips, Lloyd's, Subsea7. Altogether eight expatriates were interviewed: four males and four females, four of them have leading positions. All of them have some experience of life and work in the U.S., which varies from six months up to two and a half years. All interviewed expatriates have families accompanying them during their period of stay in the U.S.

Prior to in-depth interview the researcher conducted three "pilot" interviews which helped to conduct follow up questions for the interview guide. Purposive sampling method was used to define the group of interviewees for "pilot" interviews to specify the content of the questions on the chosen topic of cross-cultural skills. As the main purpose of the "pilot" interviews was to test the interviewing strategy and the content of the questions, the members of this group were chosen for their professional background, more than five years' experience on a foreign assignment and knowledge about cross-cultural skills topic. Four leaders of Seamen's Church, Innovation Norway, Stavanger Chamber of Commerce and the Norwegian-American Chamber of Commerce were interviewed and provided important information which was useful for pre-work done prior to in-depth interviews.

Snowball sampling technique was used to find more respondents. This technique allowed contacting first one or two respondents who were further asked for the names of other relevant respondents. Snowballing is widely known as a chain referral or reputation sampling (Blaikie, 2010).

When it comes to a sample size, the researcher had to find a balance between the ideal and the practical goals based on the available resources. The chosen in-depth method is time-intensive and it was quite difficult to decide in advance what size would be appropriate to meet the requirements of the research. The sample size was defined by the researcher's decision to stop interviewing when the answers get too repetitive and do not contain new information that could be used for the purposes of the study.

3.5. Methods of data collection

One of the most commonly used qualitative methods includes focused and in-depth interviews and various types of observation (Blaikie, 2010). The research method widely used in the studies with an exploratory design is a direct communication with an object of the study. Therefore the researcher considered that the most suitable form for empirical data collection is individual in-depth interviews. The motivation for the researcher to choose in-depth interviews is based on the task of this study to enlighten the complicated topic of cross-cultural skills and adjustment. Prior to an interview phase, a review of relevant literature and research works was conducted to identify the relevant theoretical framework for the study that would the basis the collected empirical data would be compared to in order to back up findings and discuss the results of the research.

3.5.1. Primary and secondary sources

Both primary and secondary data was used in the research. The primary data, which is the data generated by the researcher, is considered to be the most relevant to answer the main research question of this study. New information about cross-cultural skills was collected by means of interviewing Norwegian expatriates and facilitated the process of defying new dimensions of cross-cultural skills phenomenon.

Secondary data was also be used in the form of documents, reports and presentations which Stavanger Chamber of Commerce, the Norwegian-American Chamber of Commerce in Houston, INTSOK and partners including Norwegian Seamen's Church are using to build up a competence in the field of cross-cultural skills.

3.5.2. Conducting interviews

Interviewing is one of the most common and powerful ways used by people to understand their fellow humans. The most common form of interviewing involves individual, face-to-face verbal interchange. "Both qualitative and quantitative researchers tend to rely on the interview as the basic method of data gathering whether the purpose is to obtain a rich, in-depth experimental account of an event or episode in the life of the respondent…" (Denzin, Lincoln, 2005, p.698). As the purpose of the study is to explore the meanings of Norwegian expatriates regarding cross-cultural skills, in-depth interviews were chosen as the most appropriate form to gain insight into the life and experience of the respondents. The in-depth interview can "get close to the social actors meanings and interpretations, to their accounts of the social interaction in which they have been involved" (Blaikie 2010, p. 207). This research method was considered to be the one that meets the purposes of the study.

Three "pilot" interviews were conducted in the preparation phase for in-depth interviews. The task of these "pilot" interviews was to specify the content of the questions in the interview guide and evaluate if any changes are necessary to be introduced. A set of "pilot" interviews consisted

of three interviews with the key employees of the Norwegian-American Chamber of Commerce, Innovation Norway and Seamen's Church. The respondents of this group were chosen purposefully as they possess valuable information about cross-cultural competence due a long overseas working experience including the United States.

The researcher is aware that the target group for "pilot interviews" is a valuable source of information but at the same time this group of respondents could not been seen as the only undisputable source of truthful information. Their experience makes them very knowledgeable in the area of this research, but they have their own opinions, values and stereotypes which form their experiences in certain ways and make them diverse and individual.

Individual in-depth interviews were conducted on a one-to one basis between the researcher and the respondents. The researcher during the interviewing process was trying not to privilege any special way of looking at the world but was focused on asking questions and getting answers. The researcher chose semi-structured interviews rather than structured interviews since in structured interviewing there is little flexibility in the way questions are asked and generally little room for variation in response except where open-ended questions may be used (Denzin, Lincoln, 2005).

Semi-structured interviews leave space for improvisation and the use of pre-formulated questions but do not require a strict devotion to them. The researcher can make adjustments and ask new questions if the interviewer-respondent interaction requires that. The researcher elaborated a list of open ended questions on the basis of the research problem and the reviewed theoretical background. The list included thirteen questions (see appendix 1) which are focused to define the most significant cross-cultural skills through the personal experiences of Norwegian expatriates.

The researcher made certain preparations before conducting the interviews and studied literature on interviewing techniques. The researcher did her best to be punctual and arrive on time for each interview, was prepared with necessary equipment and was clear, sensitive and open in the process of interviewing. At the same time, she tried not to deviate from the goals of the discussion, suggest answers or give personal views on the research topic.

All interviews were conducted in English and took from one to one and half hours depending on the results and the speed of interaction between the researcher and a respondent. Prior to each interview all respondent were informed about the topic and the purposes of the study. The list of questions was not sent before the interviews as the researcher wanted to get spontaneous replies and reactions. To establish a relationship of trust, the researcher informed all respondents that the information would be kept confidential and asked them for permission to record the interviews. The recordings were later transcribed into a word-document format. These transcripts made the basis for the research.

Challenges: The researcher was aware of the fact that good interviewing technique requires training and experience. Lack of interviewing experience might cause situations when the researcher fails to see that the respondents are "actively constructing knowledge around

questions and responses". Interviewing skills resemble less motor skills like riding a bicycle. They are more about a combination of observation, openness, sensitivity and judgment (Denzin, Lincoln, 2005 p.699). The researcher admitted her limited experience in conducting in depth interviews which allowed to minimize the risk of misinterpretations.

3.6. Data analysis

The analysis of qualitative data involves several techniques. Each of them has advantages and disadvantages. The researcher needs to have a creative approach when making decisions about how to extract the data and identify connections.

In many cases it is impossible to separate data reduction and analysis. In fact, data collection, data reduction and data analysis can blend into one another in a cyclical process and we can trace coherence between all these elements (Eckett 1988, Minichiello et al.2008 in Blaikie 2010, p.208). There are different ways of analyzing and interpreting qualitative data. The data analysis process involves coding and categorizing of the collected data which allows us to establish patterns and draw conclusions.

In the study the researcher used coding to reduce and organize the data. Coding was approached by splitting the text into categories and using keywords. The researcher also used content analysis to analyze documents and relevant articles. These analysis techniques were considered to be the most appropriate for analyzing qualitative data collected through this research work. The responses of the expatriates contained large parts of unstructured valuable data. The chosen techniques were helpful to categorize these parts of data and moreover they allowed preserving the views, meanings and values of Norwegian expatriates on cross-cultural skills and their significance in the process of cross-cultural adjustment.

The strategy of Ryan and Bernard to code data and the basic elements of relational content analysis, aimed at examining the relationships among the codes in the texts, were used to code and analyze the collected data (Ryan&Bernard, 2000).

The following six steps to code and analyze the collected data were used in the research:

1. To identify the question
The researcher should find the answer for the question by examining the text. Without a focused question, the researcher could have left a lot of options for limitless interpretations which would make the analysis difficult to complete.

1. Sampling
Once the question was formulated, the task of the researcher was to identify the relevant parts of the text which should be analyzed and the basic units of analysis within the text - the responses to the open-ended questions.

2. To identify themes derived from the text or from the literature

Theoretical review and the transcriptions of interviews were valuable sources for identifying themes as well researcher's own values, experiences with the subject of the study and professional definitions. The researcher started with general themes based on the theoretical review of cross-cultural competence phenomenon and later added some subthemes based on a closer reading of the texts.

3. To build codebooks and organize the lists of codes

Codebooks include a detailed description of each code as well as inclusion and exclusion criteria. Codes are seen as devices used to identify specific themes in the text and are used for data reduction.

4. To mark texts and assign codes to the units of texts

The researcher used codes as values assigned to certain fixed units of the text. This approach is often associated with classic content analysis.

5. To construct models, establish relationships between codes, identify how the themes, concepts, beliefs are linked to each other

The next step after the researcher identified themes and concepts was to figure out how they were linked or interrelated with each other and reflect these links in the form of the models. With the help of these models, the researcher tried to explore the relationships between them, including the degree to which the concepts are positively or negatively related and the direction of these relationships.

6. To test relationships between the codes against empirical data

Challenges: Coding involves certain challenges: coding could be too general, it could be out of context or used to summarize rather than analyze. The researcher might overlook how people construct actions and processes or be more occupied by disciplinary and personal concerns rather than respondents' concerns (Charmaz, 2006).

The main aim of the qualitative research is to produce new knowledge and the researcher tried to avoid categorization of observation based on her own understanding. The main focus was set on the respondents' understanding of the categories.

3.7. Reliability and validity

Reliability and validity play a crucial role in both qualitative and quantitative research. It is argued that evaluation of both validity and reliability in qualitative research is a difficult issue.
Internal validity is about the correct nature of the results and whether the study measures what it is supposed to measure. External validity or generalization refers to the degree to which the findings are applicable to other populations or samples (Ryan&Bernard, 2000).

In the study the researcher did her best to verify internal validity through the following steps:

- Relevant literature on cross-cultural competence and cross-cultural adjustment was thoroughly studied to search for theories and guidelines for conduction of in-depth interviews. Questions to the interviews were unambiguous and as neutral as possible.
  The main task during interviews was to be clear, open and focused on the goals of the interview, trying to avoid ambiguity and leading questions.
- Preliminary pilot interviews were conducted to adjust the content of the questions for in-depth interviews.
- Respondents were informed about the purpose of the research and the interview procedure was presented.
- The results of the study were presented to the respondents. They were encouraged to provide their evaluation of the findings independently of each other.
- The results of the research were controlled against the relevant theory and judgments of other professionals. One of the leaders of Stavanger Chamber of Commerce with more than ten years of experience and valuable knowledge and competence in the relevant field reviewed the findings. It is important to admit that validation role of this professional could be seen as limited since human judgments could be influenced by personal experiences and values.
- The methods chosen for the analysis were based on the relevant theory. Theory states that the technique of content analysis and coding could be learnable and divorceable from the researcher's authority which was used as a basic principle in analysis performance (Krippendorff, 2013, p.24).
- The chosen methods of analysis allowed preserving the ideas, meanings of the expatriates about cross-cultural skills which was actually what the researcher intended to measure.

If internal validity is focused on the correct description of the phenomenon, the external validity is more about the degree of generalization of the findings in the research. Generalization in qualitative research is a controversial issue and the researcher should be careful to make strong generalizations based on a few units of observation. "Generalizability refers to the degree to which the findings are applicable to the other populations or samples" (Ryan&Bernard, 2000, p.786). The researcher has to admit that the sample chosen for the study is relatively small and the results might vary if a different sample would be chosen. Therefore, generalizability of the findings is limited and the researcher was very careful in evaluating if the results could be replicated. The researcher finds it would be interesting to repeat the study with the same group of respondents - Norwegian expatriates working and living in other parts of the world.

According to Yin, reliability is about minimizing the errors and biases in a study. He argues that the most general way to approach the reliability problem is to make as many steps operational as possible. Following this approach, the researcher tried to document all the procedures in the study because the performance of the reliability check would be impossible if the procedures are poorly documented (Yin, 2009).

The researcher undertook the following steps to ensure reliability in the research:

- In order to avoid situations where the researcher had such a big impact on respondents that they behaved abnormally and findings did not reflect the correct description of situation, the researcher provided them anonymity/confidentiality and was focused on establishing relationship of trust with the respondents.
- The researcher tried to minimize the side effects of the interview by the way the interview was conducted. Special attention was paid to the interview settings because uncomfortable interview situation might cause misrepresentation of real results.
- To minimize the risk connected to the respondents' ability to share and disclose useful information, the theory overview was presented prior to each interview. This step helped to reduce difficulties in interpretation of the terms and avoid a poor correlation between the respondents' descriptions, meanings and the theory.
- The collected data was accurately registered. Notes, interview recordings and transcription provided an opportunity to check raw data and evaluate if the conclusions are right and trustworthy.
- Accurate analysis of the data is a key success factor. The researcher was clearly aware that the chosen methods for analysis like relational content analysis leave a room for errors, especially on a higher level of interpretation, and the researcher could be tempted to draw meaningful conclusions too liberally. Accurate performance of the analysis techniques and understanding of the basic mechanisms that compile the essence of these techniques helped to create a certain possibility to replicate the findings.

Challenges: The researcher had to interpret empirical data and make her own conclusion based on the collected data. It is widely discussed that the results are not always easily replicated and verified in qualitative research. It is therefore important for the researcher to be open about the achieved results, the type of used research method and analysis and their impact on the results. The researcher used openness as a tool that provides the possibility to have insight in the research procedures and criticize the results (Jacobsen, 2005).

The most important test in qualitative research is the quality of the material, its diversity and relevance to the research question and argumentation for new insights. To secure both validity and reliability, the researcher tried to focus throughout the whole research on the following questions: are conclusions from my research analysis correct, valid and reliable?

3.8. Preliminary summary

Chapter three explained the used methodology including research design, sampling techniques, method of data collection and analysis. This research is explorative and qualitative in nature where face to face in-depth interviews are the main source for data collection. Challenges, validity and reliability issues are also covered by this chapter.

4. Findings and discussions

This chapter presents and discusses the findings obtained from the in-depth interviews. Presentation of the findings is structured in accordance with the conceptual framework presented in the chapter two.

At first, the aspect of cultural differences between the U.S. and Norway is discussed to highlight the cultural differences between the countries which have an impact on adjustment process and the development of cross-cultural skills.

Secondly, the findings on the level of adjustment of Norwegian expatriates in the U.S. and their relation to cross-cultural skills are presented and discussed. The issue of importance of cross-cultural adjustment facilitators is also described in this part of the study.

Finally, an overview of findings and discussions along with recommendations of Norwegian expatriates is presented to answer the main research question: "which cross-cultural skills are considered by Norwegian expatriates to be the most significant for a smooth and successful adjustment process in the United States?"

4.1. Cultural differences

Research findings show that the main challenges Norwegian expatriates face when they enter American cultural environment are directly related to cultural differences between Norway and the U.S. The respondents underlined that they were not considering the cultural differences to be significant. They were all fluent in English and many of them had visited the States before or previously had American co-workers. They confirmed that this experience was helpful but their foreign assignment required a deeper immersion into a new cultural environment.

Norwegian expatriates stated that cultural differences became more visible and significant when they moved to the U.S. and had to interact with Americans on a daily basis. They admitted that many Norwegians thought there were no cultural differences between Norway and America since the cultures looked rather similar. They meant that by overlooking these differences Norwegians exposed themselves to a risk of failure in a far more competitive and individualistic American culture.

For the purposes of the study it is essential to define what cultural differences Norwegian expatriates see as the most important for adjustment to a new cultural environment in the U.S. These differences are considered to determine the main areas for change and adaptation of Norwegian expatriates to a new cultural environment.

There is an assumption that cultural differences between Norway and the U.S. determine the main areas for cross-cultural adjustment and influence the level of adjustment challenges. The bigger cultural distance, the more challenging the process of adjustment might be. Countries

with significant cultural differences require a substantial change in communication and behavioral patterns.

The research findings indicate that the responses of Norwegian expatriates mainly comply with Hofstede's research on cultural differences. The research findings revealed additional differences that are not included in Hofstede's dimensions but still significant to take into account while adjusting to the American cultural environment.

This chapter starts with the presentation of the research findings on cultural differences between Norway and the U.S. based on Hofstede's dimensions, including a description of some new dimensions discovered through the interviewing process.

Hofstede's dimensions are documented through numerous studies across many disciplines (Sørne&Stephens, 2004). Data collected through in-depth interviews with Norwegian expatriates shows that the main cultural differences are related to Individualism and Masculinity dimensions.

The U.S. has the highest score on Individualism dimension of all nations. Research findings show that personal achievements and efficiency are especially valued in American culture. Americans are focused on individual accomplishments by which each single individual success is measured. Norway scored moderately high on this dimension, but is still defined by Norwegian expatriates as a less individualistic cultural environment compared to the U.S. Data collected during in-depth interviews showed that Norwegian expatriates view American culture as a more ***individualistic and competitive***.

4.1.1. Individualism.

Theory	Findings: Individualism
Individualism The U.S. 91 Norway 69 *The high side of individualism dimension is defined as a preference for loose individual ties where individuals are expected to look out for themselves and their families (The Hofstede center,2014)*	"Americans are more individualistic than Norwegians. They are more concerned about their own interests and I would say it is a general characteristic which is very visible in the working environment" NE, Statoil. "Everybody eats in their office, in front of their computers and they do not want to be bothered. It happens really rarely that you go and eat lunch together with the same people. I feel especially at the meetings that they are very individualistic. They do not like to share and they want to keep it like that. In Norway people work on purpose together to deliver for the project while here it is more like everyone wants to find a way to break through. Everybody wants to show that it is me who did it for the project" NE, ConocoPhillips.

The research findings revealed three additional dimensions: competitiveness, team work, ability to be highly professional. Hofstede did not describe these dimensions, but they seem to be relevant to the professionals that took part in this study.

4.1.2. Competitiveness

Norwegian expatriates highlight *competitiveness* as an important aspect of American society. The analysis of the relevant documentation shows that the size and the type of population could be defined as possible reasons for a high level of competitiveness: "Maybe the size and diversity of our population in the U.S. combined with our focus on individual success make us more competitive" (Patrick, 2013, p.25). "There are hundreds more competitors in the U.S. market than in Norway. Norwegian companies are expected to actively compete and persuade their prospects…" (Patrick, 2013, p.7).

Findings: Competitiveness

"In general, Americans are less open when it comes to sharing information that could be useful for another person. The reason is probably competitiveness and a fear to fail to succeed. If you are an engineer who is doing not that well and you are in a lower range compared to the others, the salary differences are tremendous in the U.S. In Norway the differences are really small. I see there is an element of stronger incentive and a bigger reward in the end in the States". NE, ExxonMobil.

"Americans are very competitive. Obviously, I am competitive myself. I have achieved certain things and want to take credit for it. But here you will find the risk to run over the other people. You have to watch a balance: you have to market yourself but not step on the others at the same time" NE, ExxonMobil.

4.1.3. Team work

Norwegian expatriates participating in the study emphasized the difference between the team work model in Norway and in the U.S. Cultural differences become visible through *the approach to cooperation*. Findings show that the American way of cooperation is characterized by individualism even inside a team. Many expatriates highlight that Norwegians are very focused on cooperation in order to deliver on time. Americans tend to distribute the tasks inside the team and work individually, uniting the efforts before presenting the results. They may save some time on mutual discussions, but they communicate less inside the team and probably lose some mutual organizational spirit. While in Norway the achievements are presented more as team results, in the U.S. the focus is more set on individual achievements and success.

Findings : Team work and approach to cooperation

"In Norway if you have a team, you will tell the team what we are going to achieve and everybody would make an input to reach a goal. In Norway where it is all about deliverables, people are used to work towards the goal and deliver tasks. In the U.S. it is more about what you are going to do for me and I want it to be done as soon as possible" NE, Marathon Oil.
"I do not think they are good team workers. I think they do not realize that sharing could be beneficial. They probably think that not sharing is a personal advantage" NE, ConocoPhilips.

4.1.4. Ability to be highly professional

Most of the expatriates underline that individualism and competitiveness are closely connected to the ability to be *highly professional*. The definition of the term *highly professional*, provided by Norwegian expatriates, is explained in the framework of the research as the ability to be highly competent, proactive, skilled and effective at work.

They underline that being highly professional and proactive is an important ability which is expected and valued both in the American working environment and society in general. Many of them refer to a more individually competitive working environment in the U.S. Americans are more eager to advance their careers, to be professional and enthusiastic. People in Norway also do their job professionally, but the whole atmosphere is more laid back.

Findings: The ability to be professional and proactive.

"Here you have to be more professional and proactive. The requirements for being professional are much higher and it is not only the job, it is also interacting with management and colleagues. You have to be more sensitive to what you say. It implies the off work topics. Be professional and think what you say" NE, ExxonMobil.

4.1.5. Power distance

The majority of respondents confirm Hofstede's description of *power distance* in the Norwegian and American work culture. Norwegian expatriates described a difference in backgrounds of Norwegian and American managers. "The majority of managers in the U.S. are formally educated to be managers. In Norway, we normally find a mix: people who reached their managerial position through experience and good performance and managers with relevant formal education" NE, Marathon Oil. Expatriates emphasized that hierarchy is much more visible and important in the U.S. than in Norway.

Theory	Findings:
Power distance The U.S. 40 Norway 31 *"This dimension expresses the degree to which the less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally" (The Hofstede center, 2014).*	"Norwegians are raised to believe in their own skills and abilities. Our flat organizational structure allows us to take initiative and make improvements if we see that there is a need for this. We can make decisions on our own if it is necessary. In Norway, there is no obvious distance between the manager and the subordinates. In the US the organizational structure is more hierarchical and there are many levels in decision making" NE, Stavanger Chamber of Commerce "There is definitely a bigger distance between management and subordinates in the U.S. People speak about management as a scary thing. I am not used to this kind of attitude…" NE, Statoil. "Here you do as the manager says. If your manager comes and says that you have to do this, you are expected to say simply "yes". In Norway, people might ask "why", if they consider it to be inefficient" NE, ExxonMobil.

4.1.6. Uncertainty avoidance

THEORY	FINDINGS
Uncertainty avoidance The U.S. 46 Norway 50 *This dimension Hofstede defines as" the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations" (Hofstede, 1991, p. 113).*	Date collected through interviews did not reveal any specific cultural difference between the U.S. and Norway on the uncertainty avoidance dimension. Both cultures score low on this dimension and are described as innovative where tasks are delegated. Managers are not expected to be the experts in the field they manage.

4.1.7. Masculinity

Research findings show a strong contrast on the masculinity dimension. Respondents underline that American society is very focused on material success. Americans are described as highly competitive and career-seeking. They demonstrate an assertive type of behavior, promote themselves easily and follow a strict path of subordination. Most of the interviewed expatriates stressed the fact that it's not appropriate to question the decisions of the management in American working environment. People do not want to be seen as a "difficult employee". Possible reason for that could be differences in a law enforcement related to the work contract (Patrick, 2013, p.18). In general, the data confirms the difference between a more feministic Norwegian culture and more masculine American culture.

Americans perceive the Norwegian working environment as a more relaxed, considerate and caring. They know they will get a close dialog with management. They will get an employer who will respect their private life. "Americans are interested in having a fair employer and be valued as an employee. Average American companies would not have the same attitude to their employees" NE, Statoil.

Theory	**Findings**
Masculinity The U.S. 62 Norway 8 *"This dimension represents a preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material rewards for success"(The Hofstede center, 2014).*	Findings show a distinct cultural difference on this dimension. The following differences were underlined: • -modesty Data indicates that American society cultivates in people a proactive and competitive behavior. People invent different ways to stand out from the crowd to be seen and rewarded. This type of behavior is more unusual in Norwegian work culture "Norwegians are more humble and respectful" NE, Stavanger Chamber of Commerce". "I would encourage people in Norway to stand out and be unique. In general, Norwegians like to be on the same level" NE, ConocoPhillips. • -assertive behavior Data indicates that Americans show a higher level of self-esteem.

	"Americans promote themselves easily and they use great words about themselves. Norwegian let the work speak for itself" NE, ExxonMobil.
	"A lot of people here have a very high self-esteem" NE, Lloyd's.
	• -work and life balance
	American companies expect their employees to cope with a high work load even though it is in conflict with other interests. People in general work longer hours and more intensively than in Norway. Time and efforts required to maintain personal relationships are often compromised to get the job done.

4.1.8. Summary

The U.S. working culture is described as a *more individualistic and masculine* with a more visible hierarchical structure. This is in accordance with Hofstede's dimensions though it is relevant to include additional dimensions revealed during the research such as competitiveness, team work and ability to be highly professional and proactive.

The described dimensions determine the main areas for cross-cultural adjustment. New cultural and working environment requires expatriates to be more proactive, competitive, to show initiative and promote achievements. Adjustment to a more individualistic approach to goal achievement within the team is also expected. Expatriates have to get used to long working hours and a bigger distance between the management and subordinates, as well as less interaction between them.

All the expatriates described that cultural differences encouraged them to change their behavior in the direction of being more individualistic, competitive, be ready to work harder and take into account the American way of cooperation and subordination. In general, Norwegian expatriates see the need of being more aggressive and proactive to be successful in the new cultural environment.

The enriched set of cultural differences is an interesting finding because they define the main areas for cross-cultural adjustment required for Norwegian expatriates in the U.S. Hofstede's dimensions do not seem to cover all the aspects of cultural differences. The analysis indicates that competitiveness, approach to team work and collaboration, professionalism and the ability to be proactive represent important additional cultural differences. These dimensions might be

connected to *individualism* in Hofstede's theory. A closer look at the new dimensions show that competitiveness, approach to team work and collaboration, professionalism and the ability to be proactive have *individualism* as a background. Further research is required to confirm this assumption.

It is logical to assume that individualism and a desire to fulfill "American dream" encourage people to act more competitively in all spheres of life. Expatriates are expected to be more independent and individualistic even during team work. They are also expected to perform highly professionally at work to prove that they as individuals are valuable, knowledgeable and comply with the norms accepted in the American society.

The greater the cultural distance between the countries, the bigger change is needed. The change can't be practically implemented without the development of certain cross-cultural skills. Though cultural differences are not very significant, an important change in individual behavior is still required.

This study makes an attempt to reveal the link between the cultural differences and cross-cultural skills. In other words, there is an assumption that cultural differences trigger the development of certain cross-cultural skills important for a smooth and successful adjustment. It is therefore interesting to study the nature of the relationship between the cultural differences and cross-cultural skills.

4.2. Self-reported level of adjustment

4.2.1. General description of adjustment

The research findings indicate that the majority of expatriates define their adjustment as a smooth process.

> "The easy part in the U.S. is that you have so many values here you have yourself. You have social activities and entertainment activities similar to those back home" NE, Marathon Oil.
> "The U.S. is a western country, easy to adapt for Norwegians" NE, ExxonMobil.

4.2.2. Pattern of adjustment.

The research findings show that the adjustment process of Norwegian expatriates resembles more a cyclical pattern described by Kim (2001) than the U-shaped pattern of adjustment presented in the theory chapter. The U-curve pattern of adjustment suggests that the process starts positively, dips to a negative stage called "culture shock" and returns back to a positive level of well-being. The stress-adaptation-growth model suggested by Kim (2001) describes

adjustment as a cyclical process where personal growth and development are facilitated by challenges and stress.

The pattern of adjustment described by Norwegian expatriates is similar to Kim's cyclical pattern of cross-cultural adaptation. Kim argues that stress causes defense mechanisms and at the same time stimulates the adjustment (Kim, 2012).

Data from the interviews indicates that negative emotions are triggered by a necessity to change in order to adapt to the new environment. You have to leave the comfort zone and seek new ways of behavior and communication through active learning.

> "It looks similar in the beginning , but the more you talk to people and observe various situations the more differences you notice, and what you did not consider to be challenging becomes more meaningful" NE, ExxonMobil.
>
> "I want to be integrated, but you would hardly get any help at work with that. It is somehow frustrating. People are very competitive and this is something I have to adapt to. I had to figure out my own ways to be integrated. It goes well when I manage, but still slowly as I have to learn by mistakes" NE, ConocoPhillips.

4.2.3. Culture shock.

The theories of adjustment presented in the theory chapter include the phenomenon of "culture shock" as an important phase of adjustment. The move to a new cultural environment triggers stressful reactions to new, unpredictable challenges. It is quite understandable that newcomers seek balance and a feeling of well-being which could be achieved by acquiring and developing intercultural skills.

Entering a new culture can be demanding. Newcomers discover that they lack understanding of a new environment, culture and they need to learn and acquire many of its symbols and activities in order to adapt. In other words, they need to acquire cross-cultural skills (Gudykunst, 2005). This process requires change, growth and development of intercultural competence. Both the change and the growth can imply a painful transformation period. The cost of acquiring something new is inevitably the loss of something old. Uncertainty, confusion and anxiety are ingredients in the term called "culture shock".

None of the interviewed expatriates experienced "culture shock" as an intensive crisis associated with negative feelings. They described this period of adjustment as rather mild. Findings indicate that male expatriates tend to define this stage of adjustment as less stressful than female expatriates. Most of the expatriates experienced the feelings of loneliness and frustration caused by homesickness, bureaucracy challenges or stressful situations at work. None of them described

this period as a crisis. They view it more as an ongoing process with its ups and downs. It looks like over a timespan, the frequency of these periods is getting reduced. This might have to do with "an increasingly more intimate levels of contact with the community visited" (Lysgård, 1955, p.51). It means that the longer expatriates live in the U.S. the better adjusted they feel.

The analysis of a mild nature of "culture shock" brings up the following explanations. Firstly, the mild nature of "culture shock" could be explained by a limited applicability of the U-curve adjustment model to all types of newcomers as well as a limited variability of individual responses.

Norwegian expatriates are a special category of newcomers. The fact that they are selected by their companies for a foreign assignment might prove a certain level of their competence and professionalism. All respondents are highly educated people, many of them have previous overseas experience or experience from work in multinational companies. This category of people could be described as highly knowledgeable, experienced and thus having better predispositions to learn how to adapt.

At the same, it is important to underline that similarity between two cultures creates a predisposition for a smooth and successful adjustment.

Theory	**Findings**
"Culture shock" is described as a crisis in which a person feels less adjusted, somewhat lonely and unhappy" (Lysgård, 1955).	"Everybody gets homesick at a certain stage. After the six months stay, people start to feel tired of all fancy new things and start to miss things they are used to at home. The U.S. is a bit easier than other countries because it has some of typical western standards. Anyway, after a while everybody gets homesick" NE, Marathon Oil. "I did not feel any culture shock because the cultures are not that different and my previous overseas experience made me prepared for what could be expected. I knew things could be different in another country" NE, Statoil.

4.2.4. Level of adjustment.

Cultural differences define the areas of cross-cultural adjustment and a set of cross-cultural skills which Norwegian expatriates need to acquire.

All interviewed expatriates defined the adjustment as a rather smooth process. They consciously chose the easiest and lightest form of integration. They understood the importance of adjustment but they chose an adjustment strategy by the duration of their stay. They realized that they were going to stay in the U.S. for a short period of time, and they felt reluctant to make too much effort to be fully integrated since they knew that they were going to move back home.

The analysis of responses indicates that Norway and the U.S. are relatively similar on a cultural level. It makes the adjustment process less challenging and allows expatriates to adjust to the new life in the U.S. for a short period of time. Rather insignificant cultural differences predispose a light form of adaptation. It is logical to assume that the adjustment process is easier in a cultural environment which has many common characteristics with the home culture.

The responses of Norwegian expatriates are not homogeneous. As it was mentioned before, the expatriates defined their adjustment as a cyclical process. As long as they felt comfortable with the existing level of adjustment challenges, they provided a positive evaluation of their adjustment level which was similar to integration. New challenges required additional energy and efforts which led to a less optimistic evaluation of the adjustment.

Theory	Findings
Separation: when individuals place a value on holding on to their original culture and avoid interaction with other group (Berry, 2008).	"With American people I do not get under their skin since I know I am here for a limited period of time. I would call my communication with Americans a shallow communication" NE, Statoil.
Unilateral host culture maladjustment: not well adjusted to the host culture but evaluating home culture positively (Takeuchi, Marinova, Lepak, Liu, 2005).	"I want to be integrated but you would hardly get any help at work with that. Americans mainly communicate professional. They do not communicate to get to know what kind of person you are. Here you work, fulfill your task and go home afterwards" NE, ConocoPhillips.
	"My strategy is to live as possible comfortable for three years. I am conscious about that. I prefer to communicate mainly with Norwegians and other expatriates. I know I will not stay here on a long term. I want to enjoy the life without trying that hard" NE, ExxonMobil.

Integration: when there is an interest in both maintaining own culture and daily interaction with members of a host culture (Berry, 2008).	"I have done adjustment to American culture long ago, during my first visits to the States. The U.S. is an easy country to adjust for Norwegians, the main similarities are here" NE, Marathon Oil. "My advice is not to socialize only with Norwegians. Go and be exposed to a new culture, communicate with people who are actually living here. It is hard to be integrated if you all the time think and say that things had been better in Norway" NE, Sunsea7. "Integration is important and I am working on that. My son plays football in a local team, I have some American friends, my wife goes to a language course where she met many interesting people. In order to be integrated it is important to be open. But at the same time, I am not planning to be deeply integrated because I know I am going to move back to Norway" NE, Subsea7.

The expatriates use various strategies of adaptation. Even though the majority of the respondents evaluate Norwegian culture positively, they interact with Americans, make friends, learn culture and become members of various clubs at school or at work. But they limit the degree of interaction when it requires too much effort. The result is that they primarily communicate and make bonds with Norwegian families. This indicates that interaction with representatives of American culture requires additional energy. There is reason to believe that these extra efforts to some degree keep them from integrating and adapting to the foreign culture.

> "Business in the States is very relationship based. It is very important here to spend a lot of time with your clients in non-working hours. I can't do it the whole American way. I have two kids, a husband and I need some private time outside of my work. I know that I am here for a limited period of time and can't make all expected relationships" NE, Lloyds.

The results revealed relevant links to the theoretical framework which says that unlike immigrants, expatriates, whose foreign assignment lasts from two to five years, tend to limit their contact with the new culture to peripheral areas like career, educational degree or prestige they gain while they stay abroad. Differences between long-term and short-term adaptation are largely a matter of degree. Kim (2012) argues that both types of adaptation have similar modifications in the original cultural habits but different level and depth.

The adaptive experiences of long-term and short-term settlers are different. Kim (2001) argues that immigrants are more likely to be committed to adapting than short-term settlers who are less motivated to change as their period of staying in a foreign country is limited by time. At the same time, the representatives of a host culture tend not to expect culturally appropriate behavior from short-term settlers. They are more willing to forgive mistakes as long they see an interest and respect for their culture (Kim, 2001). The research findings indicate that the fact of a different cultural background is recognized by Americans who are used to living and working in a diverse cultural environment. They are ready to forgive cultural misunderstandings when they see that expatriates make an attempt to learn the culture.

Data indicates that Norwegian expatriates go for a light form of integration. Earlier discussed theory on adjustment and adaptation does not cover the description of a light form of integration. Literature overview revealed two definitions close to the described form of a light integration. One definition is provided by Berry (2008) and describes integration as "maintaining own culture and daily interaction with members of a host culture". The other definition of integration is based on a dualistic perspective which includes both the adjustment to the foreign culture and evaluation of a home culture. It is called unilateral host culture maladjustment, the condition when people are not well adjusted to the host culture but evaluate home culture positively (Takeuchi, Marinova, Lepak, Liu, 2005).

4.2.5. Summary

The research findings indicate that Norwegian expatriates tend to choose a light form of integration and develop those cross-cultural skills which allow them to behave and communicate appropriately in American society, be effective at work and compete on the same level with Americans. At the same time, the research findings show that Norwegian expatriates do not plan to invest too much effort into the development of cross-cultural skills and go above the necessary level of skills required for a comfortable, easy life in the U.S.

4.3. Facilitators of adjustment and cross-cultural skills development

The research findings show positive effect of previous overseas experience and cultural training. The literature review revealed a certain ambiguity of the impact of previous overseas experience and training on the adjustment and cross-cultural skills development. Some of the previous studies indicate a positive impact of previous overseas experience and cross-cultural training on the adjustment and cross-cultural skills though the scholars admit that the nature of this impact is not totally explored.

The research findings show that both previous overseas experience and cross-cultural training help Norwegian expatriates to form correct expectations and thus increase the expatriates' confidence and ability to act effectively in American culture. They feel less tension and stress when they enter a new cultural environment.

Mendenhall and Oddou (1985) categorized the skills into three dimensions: *the self-dimension, the relationship dimension and the perception dimension.* In the framework of the research an attempt was made to track the impact of previous overseas experience and cross-cultural training on these three dimensions of skills.

The research findings confirm the impact of previous overseas experience and cross-cultural training on the *self-dimension* of skills which is associated with stress-reduction and self-confidence. Norwegian expatriates with previous overseas experience and cross-cultural training felt more confident and less distressed when they moved to the States.

The research findings indicate that cultural training helps to develop cultural awareness. But the practical experience is defined by Norwegian expatriates as a more powerful factor that forms accurate knowledge of behavioral models accepted in American society. This finding indicates that practical experience has a bigger impact on the *relationship dimension* of cross-cultural skills than theoretical cultural training. One of the Norwegian expatriates in a leading position requested cultural training upon arrival as he experienced some challenges in interpersonal communication with American subordinates during personal evaluation meetings.

> "I am going to improve my cultural and interpersonal skills. I want to become culture sensitive, be a better listener, be able to read people's signs and see better if people feel comfortable, if they are agreeing or disagreeing" NE, Subsea7.

The empirical data of the study indicates the influence of cross-cultural training also on the *perception dimension.* Norwegian expatriates state that the information about American culture helped them to understand better the patterns of appropriate behavior in American society. The findings did not disclose any impact of previous overseas experience on the *relationship* and *perception* dimensions of the skills which could be a topic to further research in the field of cross-cultural skills.

4.3.1. Previous overseas experience

Theory	Findings
Previous international experience maybe an accurate source of information which forms accurate expectations (Black&Mendenhall, 1991).	"Cultural training activated my ability to read the behavior of Americans and understand what I need to change to adapt" NE, ExxonMobil. "My previous overseas experience made me prepared for what could be expected" NE, Statoil.

4.3.2. Cross-cultural training

Theory	Findings
Cross-cultural training seems to be effective in developing cross-cultural skills and facilitating cross-cultural adjustment (Black&Mendenhall, 1990).	"Cultural training is important particularly here in the U.S. since you have to work here with so many different people" NE, ConocoPhillips. "I have had cultural awareness training offered by the company. It was definitely helpful. But experience is more important. You can be trained in many things, but you need to experience and learn things yourself to find the correct way to deal with challenges and adapt yourself" NE, Lloyds.

4.3.3. Own initiative and willingness to be changed

The research findings revealed an additional facilitator: own initiative and willingness to be changed. Expatriates emphasized the importance of own initiative and willingness to learn new things. They meant that own initiative and curiosity helped them to be prepared for a new life in a foreign country and encouraged them to explore the world.

> "I want to experience culture and learn new things. It is definitely a valuable experience."
> NE, Statoil.

> "I have learned to get familiar with the country I am going to, with the company, culture and people through Wikipedia, Google. To begin with, I learn the first things about the culture, how to meet and greet for example. You have only one chance to make a first impression"
> NE, Marathon Oil.

The author of the study admits that the findings in the area of the impact of cross-cultural training and overseas experience require an additional verification. Further research focused on a macro approach, exploring the impact of the described facilitators on the adjustment process, could be useful to study the nature of this phenomenon.

4.4. Cross-cultural skills required for a smooth and successful cross-cultural adjustment

4.4.1. Clusters of cross-cultural skills

Previous literature overview based on the works of Black and Mendenhall (1990), Mendenhall and Oddou (1985) showed that cross-cultural skills could be divided into five main clusters.

1. Self-maintenance skill dimension.
2. Perceptual skill dimension.
3. Relationship skill dimension.
4. Communication skill dimension.
5. Language skills dimension.

In this study these five clusters define the framework for the analysis of practical significance of cross-cultural skills. The main aim of this study is to define the most important cross-cultural skills. It is logical to present first an overview over the existing cross-cultural skills and then define the most significant out of them. The described five clusters were used as the background to sort out the existing cross-cultural skills. The communication and language skill dimensions were merged together due a similar nature of these dimensions.

The overview of the existing cross-cultural skills was made on the basis of Spitzberg and Changnon's (2009) listing of Concept and Factor labels associated with interpersonal, communicative and intercultural competence. In this overview the skills were sorted out per each of five clusters of cross-cultural skills. This work was an important preparation that helped to define the order of priority of the most significant cross-cultural skills for a smooth and successful adjustment.

The list of four clusters of cross-cultural skills based on relevant literature on international adjustment and cross-cultural skills.

1. Self-maintenance/Self efficacy:
Stress-monitoring
Stress-balance
Emotional control
Reflectiveness
Ability to deal with stress
Coping with feelings

2. Relationship skills:
Trust building
Collaborative dialogue
Ability to establish interpersonal relationships
Ability to understand others
Displaying behavioral adaption/flexibility

3. Perception skills
Listen
Observe
Interpret

4. Cross-communication and language skills
Ability to communicate effectively
Ability to accommodate behavior
Ability to communicate interpersonally
Ability to facilitate communication
Flexibility (selecting and using appropriate communication styles and behavior)
Language proficiency
Conversational skills
Verbal skills
Clarity
Creativity

4.4.2. Priority order of cross-cultural skills

The research findings show the following order of priority of cross-cultural skills.

1. The self-maintenance cluster of skills: openness and curiosity

The majority of respondents define *openness* and *curiosity* to be the main cross-cultural skill which creates the predisposition for the development of other cross-cultural skills. Openness and curiosity were not previously included in the overview of cross-cultural skills. They were placed under the perception cluster of skills which includes abilities to listen, observe and interpret.

Openness and curiosity activate willingness to be changed and learn new things. When a person lacks this ability or ignores the necessity to leave the comfort zone and learn new things, he or she blocks the development of cross-cultural skills required for a smooth adjustment. Expatriate literature reveals a direct impact of perceptual skills on cross-cultural adjustment. Expatriates, freely operating these types of skills, have a better predisposition to enrich their knowledge and modify behavior in compliance with expectations from a new cultural environment.

Norwegian expatriates state that openness, curiosity and willingness to learn foreign culture and understand people from a different cultural environment create the basis for the development of cross-cultural skills.

> "The most important skill is the ability to be open and curious. If you are open, you realize that it is an advantage to have new experience, to be exposed to so many new things, new culture and get the possibility to improve your skills" NE, ExxonMobil
>
> "You have to be open and it should be reflected in your behavior. You have to be open to ask questions, you have to be hands on all the time" NE, Statoil

2. The perception cluster of skills: the ability to be sensitive

The research findings show that the *ability to be sensitive* is highly valued by Norwegian expatriates as a cross-cultural skill. This skill helps to identify a correct path the expatriates have to follow in order to adjust their behavior in accordance with the accepted norms in American society.

> "In Norway people are very direct, they work together towards a goal. Here it is more about politics, you have to be more sensitive in giving feedback. Being Norwegian you get away with many things as you are a kind exotic. When you put something on the table, be sure it looks nice and people do not lose the face. In Norway we have no face to lose because of the transparency and we want to have a solution quickly. Here you have to be sure that nobody loses face and everybody gets respect" NE, Marathon Oil.

The analysis of this skill indicates that the ability to be sensitive helps the expatriates to sense the areas where they have to change and adapt their behavior in order to fit in a new environment. There are no clear rules or written manuals which Norwegian expatriates could use to identify the main areas for adjustment. Each single situation of cross-cultural adjustment is unique and the *ability to be sensitive* provides expatriates with guidelines which help them to adjust to a new cultural environment.

3. The relationship cluster of skills: the ability to display behavioral adaptation/flexibility

Most of the expatriates defined the ability to comply with the accepted norms of behavior and communication in American society to be the one of the most significant skills.

> "Since I moved to the U.S. my role in the company has changed. I have to adjust my behavior to this new role and behave in a more sensible way. I go and chat with people to see how they think, make decisions and work together" NE, Subsea7.

It is logical to assume that such characteristics of American society like individualism, competitiveness and ability to be proactive encourage Norwegian expatriates to develop or activate *behavioral adaption and flexibility*.

It is rather challenging for Norwegian expatriates to succeed in a highly competitive American working environment if they continue to show a modest and humble type of behavior appreciated in Norway. Success in the U.S. is often associated with the ability to be proactive, extremely confident, highly professional and good at promoting one's own strengths. Americans promote themselves easily and are focused to emphasize own personal achievements even in a teamwork.

Norwegian expatriates emphasized that inappropriate behavior can mess up bonuses and rewards of their coworkers. Inappropriate behavior might turn a person into an unwelcome member of the team. The analysis of this type of skill provides the following explanation of its significance.

Since American society is more individualistic and material success oriented, inability to show an accepted level of competitiveness and effectiveness might negatively influence your career. This fact encourages expatriates to activate behavioral flexibility and adaptation to meet the expectations of American cultural environment.

> "You need to understand who is important and comply with what they say. You need to identify the key people to have success in your work. In Norway you have people around who say what to do, you have guidance and procedures. Here you are mainly on your own and you have to figure out your own path and have success on your path" NE, Marathon Oil.

Those Norwegian expatriates who value the meaning of the old saying "when in Rome, do as Romans do" and show the ability to be adaptive and flexible in American cultural environment, have better chances to adjust quickly and be effective in this new cultural environment.

4. The cross-communication cluster of skills: the ability to communicate interpersonally

Data indicates that the whole American society and business are relationship based. Networking is a very valuable part of everyday life in the U.S. Expatriates state that many Norwegians underestimate the importance of personal relationships. Inability to approach Americans in a culturally accepted way and build up relationships based on trust exposes Norwegians to a risk of failure in American cultural environment.

A correct approach to team work and subordination codes creates a solid background for a successful career in American working environment. The research findings state that the ability to comply with the correct codes of interpersonal interaction is a crucial success factor in American society. The knowledge of accepted norms of communication and the ability to transfer this knowledge into practice help expatriates to build up valuable relationships and enhance career.

Respondents emphasize the importance of being diplomatic in interaction with Americans. In Norway people tend to say things the way they really are. In the U.S. you have to evaluate carefully what you are going to say and how you are going to present the information in the best way. It is important to show respect for the feelings of other people and be aware of which topics are inappropriate to be discussed in public.

> "Here you have to be caring about the people you work and communicate with because it is different issues that might hurt people in this culture and you want them to be on your side. Americans have another attitude to harassment issues, race, gender, sex, age, religion. You have to deal with all these differences" NE, Statoil.

The research findings on cross-communication cluster show that the ability to communicate interpersonally is linked to understanding of cultural differences between Norway and the U.S. Business in the U.S. is more relationship based than in Norway. The structure of American team

work is different in nature. It is based more on an individual approach to a goal achievement. Relationships between subordinates and managers are more distanced than in Norway. In the U.S. subordinates are expected to follow the decisions of management. Management is considered to know better which decision is politically correct and beneficial for the company.

In general, American society requires a more diplomatic approach to interpersonal communication. People are much less direct than in Norway, very cautious to discuss private issues and prefer communication in the framework of professional topics.

5. The cross-communication cluster of skills: the ability to communicate effectively

The research findings indicate that Norwegians are much more direct and straightforward than Americans. It is important to take into consideration this culture related difference in communication with Americans. An effective communication based on trust creates a solid basis for long term relationships. The importance of relationships and networking was already emphasized and discussed.

> "If you are going to ask an uncomfortable question, you have to do that in a trusting setting and warm them up first. You cannot not ask the questions that require "yes" or "no" answers which we normally address in Norway. Here you have to put more sugar on it and find a way to lead into possible answers" NE, Marathon Oil.

Data indicates that the ability to communicate effectively might eliminate the cause for conflicts. Expatriates note that due to a high level of competition in American working environment some people work more for themselves than for the team or use inappropriate methods to their benefit. This is something Norwegians are not used to face in their home culture. The ability to communicate effectively and be clear that you do not accept the situation when people benefit unfairly helps to build up relationships and win respect. Respondents underline that American approach to cooperation resembles more a competition. In the States there are more people willing to become leaders and stand out. The success measured by status, position in a professional hierarchy and income are clear signs of masculine American society which scores very highly on this dimension in Hofstede's research.

> "Sometimes you need to be very clear when you see that people ran over you. You need to be very clear that you do not accept that." NE, Lloyds.

> "I am much more sensitive now to see differences and easy to adjust to new situations. I know that the environment here requires that my arguments should be much stronger and based on facts. There are some arguments here that work more than in Norway. I have to use some other more effective ways to present these facts than in Norway. You have to find some specific things that work here, which you had never paid attention to and even were not aware of at home" NE, Marathon Oil.

6. Language skill cluster: language proficiency, clarity and conversational skills

The respondents emphasized the importance of presentation and language skills. Data indicates that presentation skills play a more important role in the U.S. than in Norway for a successful career and effective communication. It seems that Americans are more trained in presentations than Norwegians. It is assumed that such dimensions of American cultural environment like *individualism and competitiveness* encourage Americans to develop presentation and conversational skills. People learn to stand out from the crowd throughout the whole educational system in the States.

The expatriates state that their kids are challenged to present individual projects in front of the whole class even in the kindergarten. Conversational and presentation skills are traditionally developed very early in American school system. They are improved systematically during the whole educational process.

Norwegian expatriates have to develop language and presentation skills to the accepted norm. Improved skills help expatriates to present the thoughts, arguments and ideas on the same level as their American coworkers.

In general, Norwegian expatriates show a high proficiency in English. Many of them worked abroad previously and used English as a corporate language. Daily interaction in a foreign language is a challenge for many expatriates and requires a profound knowledge of language and professional terminology. Most expatriates use strategically simple words and phrases to minimize misunderstandings. They emphasize the importance of language skills in negotiations, meetings and presentations.

> "I feel I am taken seriously and people listen to me carefully even if I use a simple language. My previous working experience in English speaking working environment helped me a lot. I know I would struggle without it" NE, ExxonMobil.
> "The situation when you play a key role in the meetings where you negotiate and have to think strategically encourages you to pick up special words and phrases. I am glad I had lots of language related experience working for my company" NE, ExxonMobil.

> "English is sometimes a challenge, but I am doing well and I am trying to find an elegant way to express myself if I feel a risk to be misunderstood" NE, Subsea7.

Previous researches on language skills proposed this cluster to be number one in a priority order list of cross-cultural skills. This study recognizes the importance of language skills but places them at the end of the priority order list. It could be explained by the high language proficiency of Norwegian expatriates in English and previous working experience in multinational companies where English is the corporate language.

According to the research findings, the respondents value language and presentation skills and willingly improve them to the expected level.

> "Here you have to be a much better talker, you have to be good at making presentation and stand out in front of the crowd and gather attention" NE, Marathon Oil.

4.5. Recommendations.

The purpose of the study is to answer the main research question "which cross-cultural skills are considered by Norwegian expatriates to be the most significant for a smooth and successful adjustment in the United States?" The overview of the six most significant cross-cultural skills, made on the basis of the collected data, was presented as an answer to the main research question. This answer is enriched by the recommendations of Norwegian expatriates on the development of cross-cultural skills. The recommendations are presented in the form of an overview over the skills required for a smooth and successful adjustment to American cultural environment.

	Recommendations of Norwegian expatriates
➢	To be open and curios. A. Be open and demonstrate it by behavior. B. Be ready to be exposed to a new culture C. Try to learn new things. D. Stop to compare and think over what was better in Norway. Be more focused on your new experience and what you can learn from people in this country.
➢	To be more sensitive. A. Be more diplomatic in interpersonal communication. B. Be less direct.
➢	To be more flexible and adapt yourself to the norms and expectations of American society. A. Be ready to confront a new attitude to competition. B. Be ready to compete actively. C. Be ready to be proactive and promote your strengths.

➤	To balance out the old and the new sets of skills.
	A. Be aware of your strengths and skills and use them actively in a new environment. B. Be prepared to improve the existing skills and acquire new skills.

5. Conclusions

The findings of the study indicate that cultural differences between Norway and the United States determine the main areas for cross-cultural adjustment. Adjustment implies a necessity to improve existing cross-cultural skills and acquire new skills.

The adjustment process in the United States is defined as a smooth process. The described nature of cross-cultural adjustment is explained by substantial cultural similarities between Norway and the United States.

Data shows that Norwegian expatriates consciously choose an easy or light form of integration. The light form of integration is an important finding of the research which is explained by two main causes: insignificant cultural differences between Norway and the U.S. and a limited period of stay in the States.

Insignificant cultural differences create a predisposition for the chosen adjustment strategy as adjustment to the life in the U.S. does not require too much effort. Adjustment could be achieved through modification of habitual forms of behavior and communication up to the accepted norms in American cultural environment.

The limited period of foreign assignment has impact on the choice of a light form of integration. The status of short-term settlers encourages expatriates to evaluate carefully how much effort they would like to invest into integration. The expatriates work on integration until they reach the level of a comfortable well-being. Most of the expatriates feel reluctant to spend time and effort on integration when they are going to leave the country within a five years period.

The research findings on cultural differences show that American society is more individualistic, competitive and masculine compared to Norway. In order to be successful in this new cultural environment, Norwegians have to adapt to the accepted norms and be more proactive, competitive, individualistic and diplomatic.

The findings on cross-cultural skills are presented in the form of overview reflecting the order of their significance.

Self-maintenance skills	Perception skills	Relationship skills	Cross-communication and language skills
1.Openness and curiosity	2. Ability to be sensitive. This skill helps to define what kind of adjustments are required from newcomers in American cultural environment.	3. Ability to display behavioral adaptation and flexibility. This skill helps to become more proactive, competitive, and individualistic and fit in American cultural environment.	4. Ability to communicate interpersonally and be diplomatic. 5. Ability to communicate effectively and show own strengths in competition. 6. Language proficiency, clarity and conversational skills help to become a better talker, be good at presentations, express ideas clearly and bring forward strong and logic arguments.

The research findings show that the first two cross-cultural skills in the priority list: openness, curiosity and ability to be sensitive create a predisposition for a smooth adjustment process. Adjustment requires change which can hardly be made when expatriates are not open and are not willing to learn. The ability to be curios and open encourages expatriates to learn new culture, make new contacts and develop new skills.

The remaining cross-cultural skills in the overview are meant to help the expatriates to adjust to cultural differences between Norway and the U.S.

A more masculine American society expects that newcomers show the ability to be proactive, confident, highly professional, diplomatic and effective in promoting own strengths. In other words, Norwegian expatriates are expected to display behavioral adaptation to comply with these new demands.

The research findings indicate that business in the U.S. is extremely relationship based. Expatriates, able to communicate interpersonally in compliance with American norms and values in communication, have a better chance to fit in and be recognized.

A high level of competitiveness of American society encourages Norwegian expatriates to demonstrate a more individualistic, confident and decisive type of behavior. The ability to

compete and communicate effectively while trying to balance your own interests and the interest of your competitors requires a good understanding of culturally determined rules and norms of effective communication.

Conversational and presentation skills are necessary attributes of a successful person in American individualistic society. The ability to operate these skills allows Norwegian expatriates to present strong arguments, formulate ideas clearly and be one step ahead of others in competition for success.

The cross-cultural adjustment requires an understanding of norms and values of a host country culture. During the adjustment to a new cultural environment, Norwegian expatriates are challenged both mentally and professionally. They learn to live and be successful outside of their comfort zone in a home culture. Those expatriates who recognize the importance of this knowledge and the necessity to work on development of cross-cultural skills have a unique chance to learn new skills and grow on a foreign assignment experience.

6. Further directions and limitations.

The study has the following limitations:

Firstly, the findings of the study could hardly be generalized outside of the U.S. and Norway as the results of the study are based on the experience of Norwegian expatriates living and working in the U.S.

Secondly, one more reason for limited generalization possibilities is a relatively small sample size (eight respondents) which can hardly be representative for the whole group of Norwegian expatriates in the U.S.

Thirdly, the study had clear time frames. Six months were given to complete the research. The given timeframe sets certain limits to the amount of literature reviewed and the size of population included in the study. Since the research is qualitative in nature and should be finalized within six months period, it was found more important to explore the data in depth instead of increasing the sample size. The results of a new research with a larger population could possibly deviate from the results of the current study. Further study is required to confirm the findings.

Future studies are recommended to test the research findings. Since the sample size of the study is relatively small, it could be useful to focus further research on a macro approach in addition to a micro approach used in this study to find additional interesting dimensions of the explored phenomena.

It could be interesting to study what impact the culture of origin has on the expatriates' adjustment. One of the possible research questions of future studies could be "what is the direct effect of culture of origin on cross-cultural adjustment?"

One of the research findings is a special form of integration defined as a light form of integration in the framework of this research. Further research is required to explore the nature and structure of the discovered form of integration.

After the representative of Stavanger Chamber of Commerce reviewed the research findings, it was received an invitation to present the research results at one of the meetings with HR representatives. It is a good opportunity to discuss the research findings with people who have certain expertise in the field of cross-cultural adjustment.

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8. Appendix: Interview guide.

1. As an expatriate, what kind of cultural challenges did you experience during the first period of your stay?
2. What differences between Norwegian and American culture do you see as the most significant?
3. What were the most important adjustments of behavior and communication you had to make?
4. How did all this affect your well-being and the level of adjustment?
5. Transition to a new cultural environment is often followed by a pretty painful psychological reaction defined by researchers as "culture shock". Did you experience "culture shock" at any time during your stay in the U. S.?
6. What kind of abilities or skills helped you to overcome "culture shock"?
7. Do you know anyone else who has experienced "culture shock"? What skills or personal qualities did they lack? Which abilities helped them to overcome this condition?
8. What skills and abilities were facilitating your adjustment?
9. If this assignment is not your first overseas experience, describe the impact of your previous experience on the adjustment in the U.S?
10. If you have previously received any form of cultural training, describe the impact of cultural training on your adjustment in the U.S.?
11. What skills do you consider to be the most important for a smooth and successful cultural adjustment?
12. What skills had the most significant impact on your adjustment to a new cultural environment?
13. What kind of skills would you recommend to develop for people going on a foreign assignment to the U.S.?