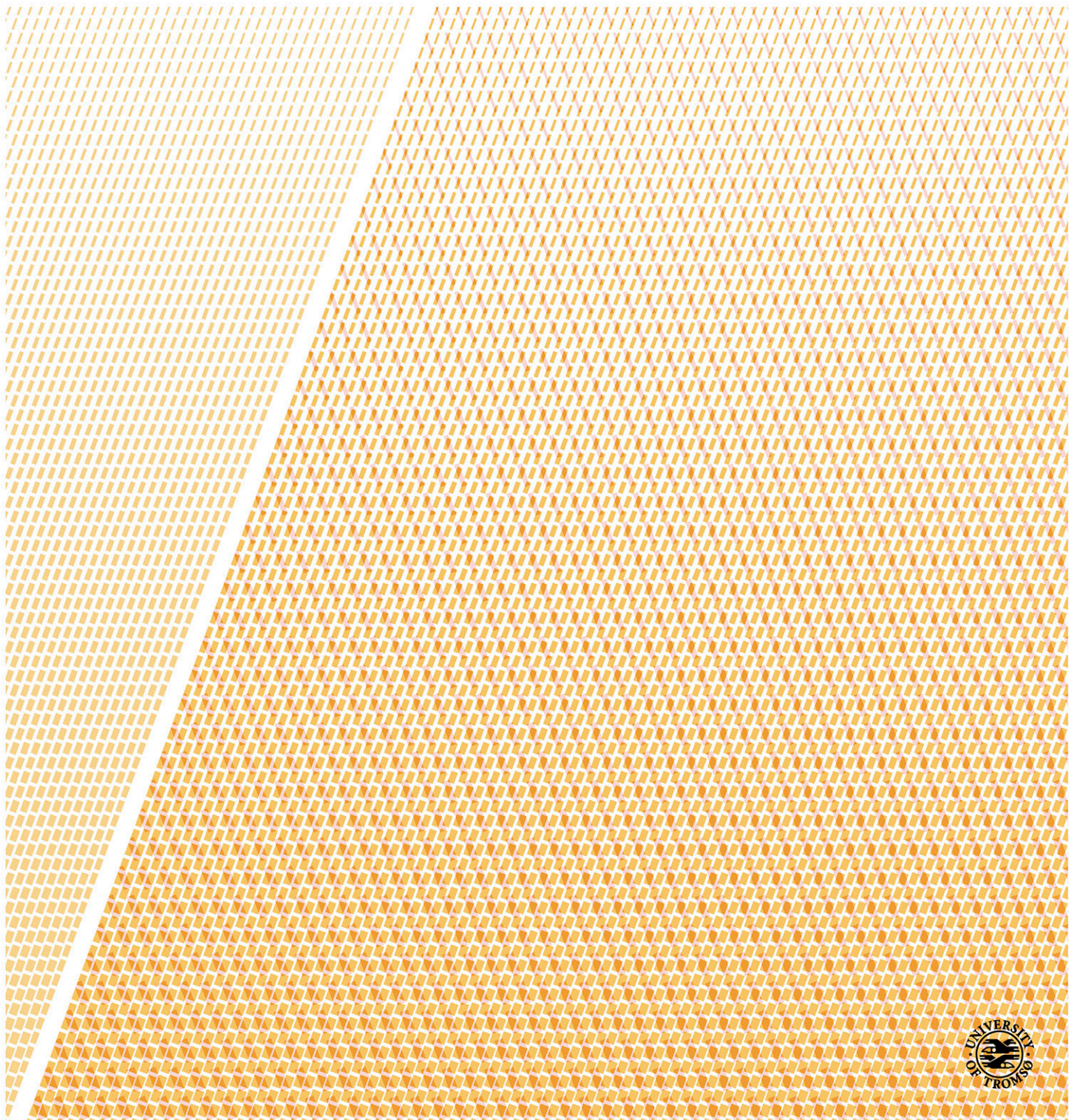


**Buyer-seller relationships across cultures:**  
*Conceptual, empirical and methodological issues*

—  
**Gøril Voldnes**

*A dissertation for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor – October 2014*





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### Appendix

Appendix I: Norwegian-Russian seafood trading

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### Paper I

Voldnes, G., Grønhaug, K. and Nilssen, F. (2012), *Satisfaction in buyer-seller relationships – Influence of cultural differences*. *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 41, pp. 1081-1093.

### Paper II

Voldnes, G. and Grønhaug, K. (2014), *Cultural Adaptation in Cross-National Buyer-Seller Relationships - a study of Norwegian Sellers and Russian Buyers of Seafood*, *International Journal of Emerging Markets*, In Review.

### Paper III

Voldnes, G., Grønhaug, K., and Sogn-Grundvåg, G. (2014), *Conducting qualitative research in Russia: Challenges and advise*. *Journal of East-West Business*, Vol. 20, Iss. 3, pp. 141-161.

# Part I





# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

The aim of this thesis is to examine factors important in achieving success in cross-cultural business relationships. The setting chosen for this research is the relational environment between Russian importers and Norwegian exporters of seafood.

If operating in perfect markets, described as markets having an infinite numbers of buyers and sellers, identical product offerings, complete information, and zero transaction costs (Pindyck and Rubinfeld, 2001), there would be no reason for building buyer–seller relationships. Food commodity markets, like the seafood market, have been characterized as close to the economist’s ideal of “perfect” competition, with multiple sellers offering almost identical products (Ottesen and Grønhaug, 2005). However, in real-life settings, actors are seldom completely informed, product offerings and firms are not absolutely identical, and transaction costs are seldom or never zero. Even if dealing with commodities, firms often have limited abilities and resources to manage a large number of customers, and need to know that these customers can be trusted to make payments in a timely manner (Haugland and Grønhaug, 1996). Dealing with many alternatives for every single transaction will be too time consuming and costly for companies. The incurring of transaction costs, the cost of running the economic system associated with search costs, contracting costs, monitoring costs, and enforcement costs must also be considered (Coase, 1937; Williamson, 1985; Hennart, 1993).

The question of how to organize market exchanges thus depend on minimizing the costs that arise in the presence of transaction-specific arrangements and uncertainty. The presence of uncertainty is attributed to the fact that information is incomplete. Business representatives such as buyers and sellers are faced with bounded rationality, meaning that humans have cognitive limits (March and Simon, 1958). This means that they are unable to gain knowledge of all alternatives, as there exists uncertainty about relevant exogenous events and actors are unable to calculate consequences (Simon, 1978). Lack of information can lead to bad business choices and firms may face the potential that opportunism, self-interest seeking with guile (Williamson, 1975), may arise. Also evaluations of all available alternatives for each transaction may be a timely and costly affair.

Building close relationships with partners is one way of reducing uncertainties and transaction costs and thus increasing competitiveness and performance (Dwyer et al., 1987; Grönroos, 1990). A relationship in this context involves that partners in an exchange recognize the value of cooperation and long-term benefits and resist attractive short-time alternatives (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). The

long-term experience with a partner reveals whether the partner can be trusted or not. The meaning of close relationships is in this setting related to trust. Trustful business partners may contribute with valuable information about products, buyers and competition which all are important for well-founded decision making. Business relationships based on trust are found to reduce the potential of opportunism (Anderson and Narus, 1990). Thus close relationships may help reducing uncertainties by gaining valuable market information, reduce the potential of opportunism, and thus reduce transaction costs.

The value of building relationships becomes even more evident when firms are operating in international contexts where access to information is more restrained. The physical distance makes it more difficult to attain information about all possible buyers and other competitors. Foreign infrastructure, different political, cultural, economic and legal systems may create additional uncertainties (Bello et al., 2003). Trustful information about companies and market situation on the internet is not available for all markets. Like for Russia there exist no available lists of seafood importers. Also, the available information about companies are often limited, web pages are often not updated or totally lacking. Keeping close relationships with the foreign business partners may help attain valuable market information and thus reduce uncertainty.

Although building close relationships with foreign business partners may help reduce some of the challenges involved with conducting business internationally (Cavusgil, 1998), building international relationships has been found to be more challenging than building domestic relationships (Bello et al., 2003). This is mainly due to substantial cultural, religious, and ethnic differences between the firms' personnel which may limit the socialization and shared expectations needed to develop and maintain coordinated relationships (Nevin, 1995).

## **1.2 Research problem**

In spite of the increased importance of and challenges associated with managing international business relationships, limited research attention has been devoted to investigating relationship marketing across national and cultural boundaries (Skarmeas et al., 2008; Leonidou et al., 2006; Samiee and Walters, 2003; Atanasopoulou, 2009). Cultural differences are often emphasized as some of the main factors increasing the challenge of conducting business across national borders compared to conducting business within national borders (Shoham and Albaum, 1995; Stöttinger and Schlegelmilch, 2000) and the reasons why many cross-border business relationships fail (Phan et al., 2005; Shamkarmahesh et al., 2003). Even though culture has been cited as a key determinant of relationship outcomes, it has received little attention in relationship marketing research (Batonda and Perry, 2003).

Culture is context specific and has a profound impact on the way people perceive, think, and behave (Kluckhohn, 1951; Hall, 1976; Clark, 1990; Leung et al., 2005; Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Research has shown that the ability of a firm to break down cultural barriers and establish close business relationships with partners is a major factor for success in international business marketing (Terawatanavong and Quazi, 2006). Thus, the manner in which relationships between exporters and their foreign importers is handled could determine firm success or failure in overseas markets to a great extent (Ford, 1984; Leonidou and Kaleka, 1998; Leonidou et al., 2006; Styles and Ambler, 2000; Phan et al., 2005; Shamkarmahesh et al., 2003).

Relationship marketing is defined as the process of establishing, developing, and maintaining successful relationship exchanges (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). A key issue in the field of relationship marketing is understanding how companies can succeed in developing and sustaining long-term relationships (Haugland, 1999). Doing so requires companies to understand which factors influence their relationships with other firms and how these should be addressed to achieve the desired relational benefits (Takala and Outi, 1996). Thus, much research attention has been devoted to revealing which factors are important for achieving relationship quality, defined as an “umbrella construct” (Ashnai et al., 2009). This “umbrella construct” consist of distinct, yet related, factors (Crosby et al., 1990) whose overall assessment can reveal the strength or success of a particular relationship (Mohr and Spekman, 1994; Garbarino and Johnson, 1999). Research has identified several major factors of relationship quality, including trust, satisfaction, commitment, coordination, communication, joint problem-solving capacity, bond formation, goal congruence, investment, profit, and power (Crosby et al., 1990; Mohr and Spekman, 1994; Storbacka et al., 1994; Wilson and Jantrania, 1995; Naudé and Buttle, 2000; Lages et al., 2005).

It is claimed that gaining understanding of relationship quality is not possible without understanding the research context (Ashnai et al., 2009). An interesting research context in need of further exploration regarding cross-cultural business relationships is Norwegian–Russian business relationships. Having experienced massive economic growth and shown huge potential as a burgeoning market for goods and services (Puffer and McCarthy, 2007), Russia has the potential to become an even greater player in the global business world (Puffer and McCarthy, 2011). However, reports of relationship dissolution stemming from a lack of understanding Russian business culture are abundant (Fey and Shekshnia, 2011; Barnes et al., 1997; Puffer, 1993; Peng, 2001). Thus, examining Russian business interaction with a Western country, such as Norway, is highly relevant.

When conducting business with Russians, building and managing close personal relationships is regarded a prerequisite (Ledeneva, 1998; Michailova and Worm, 2003). Several aspects of Russian

cultural behavior, including formation of social networks or “sviazi” (connections), the informal exchange of favors through personal networks known as “blat,” and the Russian tendency toward collectivism and particularism result in a special need to maintain dependence on personal networks, both in business and personal life (Ledeneva, 1998; Butler and Purchase, 2004; Michailova and Hutchings, 2006; Puffer and McCarthy, 2011). According to Michailova and Worm (2003), business success with Russians is influenced by the quality and cultivation of personal relationships. Thus, the main consideration when working with Russians is not *whether* to build close business relationships but *how to establish and manage* such relationships.

In spite of the geographical proximity of Norway and Russia, the countries are culturally very different. East–West cultural clashes often reflect inconsistent frameworks of meaning regarding time and work styles, inhibiting communication and coordination between partners (Michailova, 2000). Nevertheless, trading of seafood between the two countries has a long tradition, dating back to the Viking era, continuing through the Pomor trade in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and until the Russian Revolution in 1917. The seafood trade between the two countries was re-established in the 80-ties. In 2013 Russia was one of the largest seafood markets for Norwegian seafood and Norway has a significant share of the total Russian import of seafood. For a more thorough presentation about Norwegian Russian seafood trading see the Appendix 1. This long trading tradition between the two countries may indicate that the Norwegian exporters and Russian importers have found a successful way of conducting business.

This research is based on the assumption that overall satisfaction with a business relationship is a good indicator of whether business partners perceive their relationship to be successful. If the buyers and sellers are satisfied with their business relationship, they are more likely to continue conducting business and less likely to end the relationship and seek other business partners (Abdul-Muhmin, 2005). Thus satisfaction is used as an indicator of success. This research is also based on the assumption that as the existence of a business relationship denotes the existence of interaction between two parties (Williams, 2012), it is important to investigate the constituents of relationship satisfaction from both the Norwegian and Russian point of view. Indeed, a great omission in existing buyer–seller relationship research is investigation of relationship quality from both the buyer and the seller point of view, whose perceptions of relational aspects may differ (Wathne et al., 2001; Svensson et al., 2013; Atanasopoulou, 2009; Terpend et al., 2008; Samiee and Walters, 2003; Holmlund, 2008). According to Blois (2003: 90), examining only one side of an exchange dyad provides only a partial picture. Perceptions of the impact of relationship antecedents on satisfaction and performance might vary between buyers and sellers (Whipple et al., 2010). When buyers and

sellers represent different cultures, different perceptions might be even more apparent, as cultural background influences perceptions (Hall, 1976).

More precisely this thesis addresses the following research questions:

1. Do cultural differences between Norwegian exporters and Russian importers of seafood influence their perceptions of the factors important for relationship satisfaction and, if so, how?
2. Does culture influence how Norwegian seafood exporters and Russian importers manage their cultural differences and, if so, how?

The first question is addressed in paper 1, "Satisfaction in buyer-seller relationships- influence of cultural differences," which examines the factors important for achieving relationship satisfaction. Examination of both Russian and Norwegian perceptions revealed several differences which may be explained by cultural differences between the partners. Such cultural differences may result in misunderstandings and misperceptions of the other partner's intentions and behavior, leading to both dissatisfaction and dissolution of business relationships (Shamkarmahesh et al., 2003). Thus, not only becoming aware of the existence of differences but also of how to manage them to achieve relationship satisfaction and increase the likelihood long-term successful relationships is crucial. One way of managing cultural differences is to adapt to the norms and behavior of the other party's national culture (Hall and Hall, 1987; Kale and Barnes, 1992), a consideration further addressed in paper 2, "Cultural adaptation in cross-National buyer-seller relationships - a study of Norwegian sellers and Russian buyers of seafood." This paper examined the Russian and Norwegian adaptation behavior revealing a more or less unilateral adaptation behavior from the Norwegian side. The unilateral adaptation is further explained by cultural differences between the partners and asymmetrical power distribution.

Gaining knowledge of relationship quality across cultures requires conducting research across cultures, which can be challenging (Michailova, 2004). This consideration, reflected in the third research question, is addressed in paper 3, "Conducting qualitative research in Russia: Challenges and advice," which elucidate several of the methodological challenges involved in conducting qualitative research in a foreign cultural setting, such as Russia. Existing research into the methodological challenges of conducting research across cultures has largely been confined to examination of quantitative methods, such as administration of standardized mail surveys (see, for example Cavusgil and Das, 1997). In spite of a plea for more exploratory and theory-generating studies in international business research and a growing recognition of the benefits associated with qualitative methods (Doz, 2011), there has been few attempts on examination of the specific

challenges arising from their application in an international context (Marschan-Piekkari and Welch, 2004).

By addressing these research questions and methodological challenges this thesis will contribute to enhanced knowledge and understanding of the factors and behaviors important in achieving relationship satisfaction, and thus relationship success, in cross-cultural business relationships between Norway and Russia.

## **2 Theoretical framework**

The description of the theoretical framework begins with a brief presentation of relationship marketing to explain and justify the focus on relationship formation. Relationship quality, considered the essence of relationship marketing and the determinant of the well-being of relationships and thus their success, is then presented. Relationship satisfaction, defined as an overall assessment of a relationship, is then introduced as a good indicator of relationship success. Among the many different factors described in the literature as important to relationship satisfaction, trust, commitment, power dependence, and communication/information sharing appear particularly important, and are thus elaborated upon. The role of culture in relationship marketing and relationship quality in international/cross-cultural settings is briefly discussed before a short review of cultural differences in international business relationships is presented. Adaptation is then presented as a method for managing cultural differences to achieve successful relationships crossing cultural borders.

### **2.1 Relationship marketing**

The evolution of relationship marketing has been one of the most significant developments in marketing over the decades, particularly in relation to industrial marketing (Dwyer et al., 1987; Palmatier et al., 2006). As the first researcher to introduce the concept in industrial marketing while focusing on the buyer–seller interaction as a marketing task that can be fulfilled through relationship building with the customer, Grönroos (1990) argued that the purpose of relationship marketing is to establish, maintain, and enhance relationships with customers.

One challenge in gaining understanding of relationship marketing is that the literature lists many definitions of this concept as well as of its dimensions, leading the relationship marketing paradigm to assume a broad, loosely defined nature (Samiee and Walters, 2003). According to Samiee and Walters (2003), relationships are complex phenomena that can be examined from a variety of perspectives in terms of theoretical frameworks, constructs, and methodology.

The literature regarding the utility of establishing and maintaining close long-term relationships with exchange partners is abundant. Formation of close inter-firm ties has given rise to a variety of beneficial relational outcomes, such as reduced transaction costs (Williamson, 1985) and reduced risk associated with inaugurating new exchanges (Dorsch et al., 1998). Exchanging with partners that are known is more beneficial than spending time and energy constantly identifying new partners. Thus, formation of close relationships may result in reduced purchasing costs, reduced uncertainty, greater protection of investments, and creation of additional benefits as cooperation between two partners enhances the utilization of resources (Kumar et al., 1992; Jahre, 2006; Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978).

However, the research has also identified negative factors in or disadvantages resulting from maintaining a relationship. Given that building and maintaining a relationship is resource demanding, and firms have only limited resources, they must constantly prioritize use of these resources. As such, it may not be possible to pursue all attractive opportunities (Blois, 1998; Haakanson and Snehota, 1995). Thus, forming relationships with partners that may appear attractive individually may be irreconcilable with maintaining an existing relationship. Maintaining close relationships with a few selected partners may result in the incurring of alternative costs, namely loss of opportunities offered by other partners (Heide and John, 1990). Developing a relationship also means relinquishing, to some degree, control over some resources, activities, and even intentions (Blois, 1998; Haakanson and Snehota, 1995).

Relationship marketing may be both resource demanding and require much effort (Haakanson and Snehota, 1995). Maintaining relationships has been found to be challenging because a relationship constantly changes, meaning that its future is uncertain and is, in part, determined not only by its history but also by current events and the parties' expectations of future events (Haakanson and Snehota, 1995). Maintaining relationships may also require meeting unexpected demands. As the other party in a relationship has other relationships, establishing a relationship requires becoming linked, if only passively, with a network of relationships. Such "membership" in a network may bring with it obligations or expectations by others of specific behaviors (Haakanson and Snehota, 1995). The degree to which each of these factors exists will vary according to the nature of the relationships, and the degree to which each is a disadvantage will vary within individual relationships (Blois, 1998).

Building close business relationships may not always be the best strategy. In markets with a large number of sellers and buyers, identical product offerings, where all information is easily available (Pindyck and Rubinfeld, 2001), relationship building may not be the best use of resources. In others

cases, when selling more differentiated products building close relationships may be crucial. When the number of buyers and sellers is limited, and harder to get access to, relationships may be needed for keeping existing buyers or sellers. Close relationships may in such cases also be crucial for receiving valuable product feedback, and sharing valuable market information, and thus reduce uncertainties and transaction costs. Food commodity markets, like the seafood market, have been characterized as close to the economist's ideal of "perfect" competition (Ottesen and Grønhaug, 2005). There exist multiple sellers offering often identical products and there are many available buyers all over the world. However, using time and energy to find new buyers for every transaction is not found to be effective. All businesses want to make a profit, and one way of making profit is by reducing the transaction costs, like reducing the search costs for finding buyers and sellers. In cases where seafood is sold in auctions the transaction costs are reduced and thereby also the need for relationships. However, when dealing with seafood, the product itself may be a commodity, but other factors such as quality of the products and secure deliveries may vary extensively. For the buyers of seafood it is crucial to know that the quality of the seafood is consistent with their expectations and that it is delivered on time. Maintaining close relationships with partners that fulfil their obligations reduce transaction costs on both sides of the exchange. When operating across national border cultures these costs are more prevalent due to greater extent of uncertainties because information may be more limited and hard to get.

The choice of building close business relationships may also depend on the market one operates in. Some cultures have a much stronger relational focus than others; for instance differences between universalistic and particularistic cultures. People in universalistic culture focus more on rules and contracts than on relationships compared with people from particularistic cultures (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2012).

The types of relationships in which companies choose to engage with their partners depend on their business strategy; companies may choose to have weaker relationships with actors and close and strong relationships with a few. When companies wish to build and maintain close relationships with a partner, in this case a foreign one, it is important to be aware of the factors needed to achieving quality relationships.

## **2.2 Relationship quality**

Relationship quality is considered the essence of relationship marketing and an indicator of the health and future well-being of long-term relationships (Atanasopoulou, 2009; Crosby et al., 1990; Jap et al., 1999). Previous research conceptualizes relationship quality as an overarching meta-construct composed of several key relational outcomes reflecting the overall nature of the exchange



relationship and consisting of several components that support, reinforce, and complement each other (Dwyer et al., 1987; Kumar et al., 1995). Although considerable research has been devoted to the conceptualization of relationship quality, the literature has not reached a general consensus regarding its constituents (Skarmeas et al., 2008; Naudé and Buttle, 2000). A variety of relationship quality factors has been proposed as important in prior research, including information sharing, communication (Lages et al., 2005), trust (Crosby et al., 1990; Geyskens et al., 1999; Hewett et al., 2002), conflict minimization, willingness to invest, expectation of continuity (Jap et al., 1999; Kumar et al., 1995), and cooperation (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Gummesson, 2002). The quality of business relationships is often seen as a determinant of the probability of continued exchange between buyers and sellers (Crosby et al. 1990).

However, comparing relationship quality studies and their findings is difficult, as the same factors/concepts are used as antecedents and consequences, as well as elements of relationship quality. Moreover, the direction of the links between relationship quality and other relationship concepts is unclear (Holmlund, 2008). Although satisfaction, trust, and commitment appear to be core factors in both successful and deficient relationships (Atanasopoulou, 2009), the relationships among these factors are unclear (Svensson et al., 2013). While satisfaction has been found to be an antecedent to trust and commitment (Ha and Muthaly, 2008; Sanchez-Garcia et al., 2007), Svensson et al. (2010) found support for the argument that trust and commitment precede relationship satisfaction.

Further, as no agreed-upon scale has been designed to measure relationship quality, a series of factors is used to determine the perceived relationship quality (Moliner et al. 2007). Therefore, what is often measured is not specific variables but rather abstract concepts of a qualitative nature (Moliner et al. 2007), most commonly satisfaction, commitment, and trust (Holmlund, 2008; Dwyer et al., 1987; Crosby et al., 1990; Moliner et al., 2007). Other researchers have emphasized additional factors, such as conflict or degree of conflict (Bruggen et al., 2005; Kumar et al., 1995), power dependence balance (Anderson and Weitz, 1989; Kumar et al., 1995), appropriate exercise of influence strategies (Lai, 2007; Leonidou et al., 2008), and interchange of information (Rodrigues et al., 2006) as important factors in relationship quality, all of which are complex constructs made more complex by their interrelation with each other.

An additionally complicating factor occurs when business partners in different cultures value several of the factors constituting relationship quality differently (Ashnai et al., 2009; Leung et al., 2005; Cannon et al., 2010). In an international context, cultural diversity can have important implications for the development and maintenance of buyer–seller relationships (Samiee and Walters, 2003).

Ashnai et al. (2009) found that the Iranian, Russian, Chinese, and British companies in their sample rated the value of trust, satisfaction, coordination, power, and profit differently. Specifically, they found that whereas profit is highly valued by all the companies, it is valued much more highly by the Russian companies, which also value trust much less. Other studies have found that while Chinese buyers and sellers emphasize “xinyong” (personal trust) to such an extent that they may sacrifice business profits to generate relationships (Leung et al., 2005), American buyers and sellers and their relationships are much more focused on performance and profit (Cannon et al., 2010).

In the three geographical regions that they examined, Aulakh et al. (1996) found differences in inter-organizational trust across partnerships, specifically that U.S. firms’ partnerships in Asia and Europe are characterized by higher levels of trust than those in Central or South America. Positing that the role of trust in inter-organizational partnerships and its underlying dynamics may vary according to the internal organizational cultures of the partner firm, as well as the macro-cultural environment that surrounds the partnerships (Aulakh et al., 1996), they encourage research incorporating the cultural differences that exist across countries.

In the current study aiming to identify the factors important for achieving successful relationship, satisfaction, defined as an as an overarching construct resulting from an evaluation or outcome of other relationship quality factors (Mysen and Svensson, 2010), was found to be a good indicator of success and willingness to continue a relationship. For cross-cultural business relationships to succeed, obtaining knowledge of the partner’s perceptions of the constituents of satisfactory relationships, as well as determining whether the partners’ perceptions are congruent so that expectations on each side of the dyad are reasonably similar, is crucial (Mehta et al., 2006). Based on these findings, the study aimed to further examine relationship satisfaction from both the Russian and Norwegian point of view.

### **2.3 Relationship satisfaction**

Satisfaction is the positive affective state resulting from the appraisal of all aspects of an organization’s working relationship with another organization (Geyskens et al., 1999). Ulaga and Eggert (2006) found that satisfaction has a direct impact on the intention to expand business with an incumbent supplier and the propensity to leave the relationship. If the buyer and the seller in an exchange dyad are satisfied, they are more likely to continue the relationship, while they are more likely to exit it if dissatisfied (Abdul-Muhmin, 2005). Based on these findings, the current study proposes that satisfaction is an overall evaluation of the relationship that influences whether buyers and sellers perceive their relationship as successful and are thus willing to continue it.

According to a review of the literature, satisfaction was the most popular construct for measuring relationship quality from 1970 to 1996 (Geyskens et al. 1999). Business partners' satisfaction has been found to increase long-term orientation and continuity (Ganesan, 1994; Selnes, 1998) and reduce conflict (Ganesan, 1994; Hunt and Nevin, 1974). A complicating aspect of satisfaction is that what is perceived to determine it may vary across cultures, as cultural background influences people's perceptions (Mehta et al., 2006). According to Geyskens and Steenkamp (2000), it is important to distinguish between economic and non-economic satisfaction. Whereas economic satisfaction is defined as the perceived discrepancy between prior expectations and actual profits (Brown et al. 1991), non-economic satisfaction is defined as an emotional response to the overall working relationship with a partner (Crosby et al. 1990). Nevertheless, the economic and the non-economic dimensions have been found to be related to each other (Rodrigues et al., 2006). While Whipple et al. (2010) found that buyers perceive satisfaction with the relationship itself to be different from economic or result-oriented satisfaction, they also found that collaborative relationships offer higher levels of satisfaction and performance than transactional relationships (Whipple et al., 2010).

In the research into relationship satisfaction, many factors or antecedents have been identified, including trust (Crosby et al., 1990; Geyskens et al., 1999; Hewett et al., 2002), information sharing, communication quality, long-term orientation (Ellram, 1995; Lages et al., 2005), power dependence structure (Anderson and Weitz, 1989; Kumar et al., 1995), exercise of power or influence strategies (Lai, 2007; Leonidou et al., 2008), conflict (Kumar et al., 1995; Skarmas and Robson, 2008), and commitment (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). The explorative approach used in the current study revealed that trust, communication/information sharing, power dependence, and commitment, which are further described in the following sections, were perceived as especially important factors for achieving relationship satisfaction between Norwegian sellers and Russian buyers.

### **2.3.1 Trust**

Trust can be defined as the willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence (Moorman et al. 1992), as well as the extent to which supply-chain partners perceive each other as credible or benevolent (Doney and Cannon, 1997; Ganesan, 1994). Credibility, in turn, reflects the extent to which a firm in a relationship believes that the other party has the required expertise to perform the expected task effectively. At the same time, benevolence is created when one relationship partner believes that the other party has intentions and motives that will benefit the relationship (Ganesan, 1994).

Trust is a complex construct that encompasses the integrity, reliability, and confidence that one party places in another and is particularly important in relational contexts where individuals seek predictable behavior from their relational partner such that a relatively high degree of certainty is attached to future rewards (Macneil, 1980). Trust has been found to be an important factor in the development of high-quality relationships (Dwyer et al., 1987) and to have a positive effect on the stability (Anderson and Weitz, 1989), continuity, and enhancement of buyer–supplier relationships (Zhao and Cavusgil, 2006). High levels of inter-organizational trust have been found to mitigate opportunism (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978), foster cooperation (Morgan and Hunt, 1994), reduce conflict, and enhance partners’ satisfaction (Anderson and Narus, 1990). Considered “the glue that holds collaborative relationships together” and the most important attribute of successful supplier relationships (Monczka et al., 1998), trust may be an even more critical factor when operating across national borders; in situations in which the legal entities governed by one partner’s state may not apply to the other partner, trust is the only way to secure the business relationship (Rousseau and Sitkin, 1998).

Different levels of trust within buyer–seller relationships typically exist among four different actors: (1) the buying organization, (2) the buyer (i.e., the individual who represents the buying organization), (3) the vendor organization, and (4) the sales representative (i.e., the individual who represents the vendor organization)(Ganesan and Hess, 1997). The existence of cultural differences between buyers and sellers may influence their ability to trust and perceptions of what is needed to build trusting business relationships.

### **2.3.2 Communication/information sharing**

Evaluation of communication, identified as a factor that contributes to the success of a partnership (Mohr and Spekman, 1994), includes assessment of the quality of communication, extent of information sharing, and degree of participation. Communication quality refers to the accuracy, timeliness, and credibility of the information shared; information sharing to the extent to which critical information is exchanged (Tuten and Urban, 2001; Mohr and Spekman, 1994); and participation as the degree to which the partners jointly plan and set goals (Mohr and Spekman, 1994). Assessment of communication focuses on the extent to which each party in the relationship jointly participates through engaging in communication efforts (Whipple et al., 2010). Both communication depth (i.e., quality and participation) and information breadth (i.e., the extent of sharing) have been found positively to be related to relationship satisfaction (Dash et al., 2007; Monczka et al., 1998). In the exporter–importer relationship, information sharing is defined as the extent to which the exporter openly shares information that may be useful to the relationship with the importer (Lages et al., 2005).

Communication and information exchange are related to the formal as well as informal sharing of meaningful, timely, and frequent information between firms (Perks, 2000; Anderson and Narus, 1990) and have an essential role in establishing and maintaining relationships (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998; Wong et al., 2007). Formal communication between parties is likely to be routinized and take the form of written materials and formal meetings, whereas informal forms of communication, such as discussion of family issues, tend to be more personalized (Ruekert and Walker, 1987). While formal communication tends to be planned, precise, and structured, informal communication tends to be unplanned, vague, and ad hoc (Mohr et al., 1996).

High-quality information exchange has been found to have a central role in inter-firm relationships (Mohr and Nevin, 1990) and be a success-generating factor in the development of long-term relationships (Anderson and Weitz, 1989). Successful communication is considered an important source of satisfaction because it can lead to a shared understanding of performance outcomes and expectations or norms (Selnes, 1998). As such, communication through the exchange of information has been positively associated with increased satisfaction (Shuler, 1979). Due to its importance, difficulties with communication have been identified as a major cause of problems among relationship parties (Mohr and Nevin, 1990). For communication to occur, partners must not only exchange information but also be able to decipher each other's code (Lages et al., 2005) such that communication exchange occurs between both parties to achieve shared understanding (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998). However, achieving dyadic relationship quality often requires information sharing by both parties, and inefficient communication may lead to conflict due to misinterpretation and reciprocal dissatisfaction (Etgar, 1979). In cross-cultural buyer–seller relationships, unfamiliar or unknown relationship factors and foreign competitive environments add complexity, which makes the quality of information exchange all the more crucial (Voss et al., 2006). Cultural differences may, however, distort communication across cultures, even at the subconscious level (Mehta et al., 2006), and lead to misinterpretations and misunderstandings that lead to conflict and reduce satisfaction.

### **2.3.3 Power dependence**

Power is the ability of one partner to persuade or coerce another party to do something it would not otherwise do (Dahl, 1957; Dash et al., 2007), and thus often linked to dependence (MacFie and Thomson, 1994). In business relationships, dependence is associated with a buyer's/seller's lack of knowledge of alternative suppliers/buyers and/or perceived switching costs involved in replacing the supplier/buyer (Weiss and Anderson, 1992). It is posited that only by understanding the power regime that exists can buyers and suppliers fully understand the appropriate way to manage relationships (Cox, 2004).

The link between power dependence and relationship satisfaction has, however, not been clearly established (Andaleeb, 1996), as dependence may both enhance and reduce relationship satisfaction and have positive and negative impacts on relationships (Mysen et al., 2012). Power may entail abuse, inequity, and exploitation but may also lead to improved coordination and higher relationship quality (Coughlan et al., 2001). Dependence may also represent a threat to the buyer's survival or autonomy, and thus result in dissatisfaction (Kotter, 1979). On the other hand, a high level of dependence on a supplier can motivate a buyer to engage in increased exchange of information and show greater willingness to express solidarity with the supplier (Bello et al., 2003), which may increase satisfaction (Mysen and Svensson, 2010). Research has shown that trust and commitment tend to be high when interdependence asymmetry is low, whereas conflict tends to be high when interdependence asymmetry is high (Kumar et al., 1995; Zhou et al., 2007).

Power dependence imbalance or asymmetry in buyer–seller relationships is defined as an imbalance resulting from differences between two or more partners' levels of dependence within a relationship (Caniëls and Gelderman, 2007). Symmetrical interdependence exists when the partners' levels of dependence on each other are equivalent (Kumar et al., 1995). Symmetric power dependence between buyers and sellers has been found to be positively related to satisfaction and asymmetric power dependence distribution to be negatively related to satisfaction (Geyskens et al., 1999). Thus, unequal power distribution within partnerships is often a serious barrier to relationship success (McDonald, 1999).

An important aspect to the influence of power on relationship partners is the execution of power by the more powerful partner, often referred to as its influence strategy. Influence over and by the partner firm are constructs that reflect the extent to which a firm has applied power to influence partner firm action and reflect the extent of interdependence between exchange partners (Dash et al., 2007). Influence strategies are usually divided into (1) coercive strategies, e.g., promises, threats, and legalistic pleas, and (2) non-coercive strategies, e.g., information exchange, discussion, requests, and recommendations (Frazier and Summers, 1984). A supplier's use of non-coercive strategies is associated with increased distributor commitment, trust, and satisfaction, while its use of coercive strategies is associated with reduced levels of these variables (Frazier and Rody, 1991; Keith et al., 1990; Lusch, 1976; Frazier and Summers, 1986). However, in highly relational systems, attempting to increase non-coercive influence may negatively impact trust and satisfaction (Simpson and Mayo, 1997). Once relational norms develop within a relationship, an increase in the supplier's use of either coercive or non-coercive power may negatively impact the relationship (Simpson and Mayo, 1997). The literature regarding power also distinguishes between exercised power and unexercised power (defined as the mere presence of a power source) and reports that the former has a stronger effect

on dealer satisfaction and conflict than the latter (Gaski and Nevin, 1985). In consideration of these findings, the current research aimed to examine Russian and Norwegian partners' perceptions of power dependence symmetry/asymmetry and influence strategies in relation to relationship satisfaction.

#### **2.3.4 Commitment**

Commitment has been identified as one of the key characteristics of successful relationships (e.g., (Dwyer et al., 1987; Morgan and Hunt, 1994) and the signaling of commitment has been found to increase satisfaction (Selnes, 1998). Typically defined as a partner's intention to continue a relationship (Dwyer et al., 1987; Moorman et al., 1992), commitment is also described as "a desire to develop a stable relationship, a willingness to make short-term sacrifices to maintain the relationship, and a confidence in the stability of the relationship" (Anderson and Weitz, 1992: 19). Likewise, Morgan and Hunt (1994: 23) describe commitment as "an exchange partner believing that an ongoing relationship with another is so important as to warrant maximum efforts at maintaining it."

Long-term relationships tend to be characterized by the willingness of both parties to commit different assets to future transactions (Rinehart et al., 2004) with the intention to achieve mutual gain for both buyers and suppliers (Anderson and Weitz, 1992). Commitment has therefore been widely studied in order to identify the factors that contribute to its development, maintenance, and enhancement (Geyskens et al., 1996). The concept has an attitudinal component operationalized as the behavioral intention to develop and maintain a stable relationship (Moorman et al., 1992) and a temporal component operationalized as the buyer's and supplier's expectation to continue their relationship (Kumar et al., 1995). Research has also distinguished between affective commitment, defined as the extent to which partners desire to continue a relationship because they like their partner and enjoy the partnership (Buchanan, 1974), and calculative commitment, defined as the extent to which business partners perceive the need to maintain a relationship given expectation of significant termination or switching costs associated with leaving it (Geyskens et al., 1996). Commitment has also been identified as an instrumental attribute in which a partner commits valuable investment or allocates resources that become specific to the relationship and, therefore, difficult to redeploy. When both commitment and trust are present, they produce outcomes that promote efficiency, productivity, and effectiveness, all of which lead to relationship marketing success (Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

While a strong sense of commitment has been found to be positively related to buyer-seller satisfaction (Rodrigues et al., 2006), perception of the importance of commitment, as well as of trust,

communication/information sharing, and power dependence, in achieving relationship satisfaction and how these factors are developed or executed may vary across cultures.

## **2.4 Cultural differences in international business relationships**

In international business research, a widely used definition of culture is “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the member of one group or category of people from others” (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). A great challenge in addressing culture and cultural differences is that one’s home-country culture is taken for granted, leading to less understanding and acceptance of differences. Indeed, an unconscious reference to one’s own cultural values has been posited to be the root cause of most international business problems (Lee, 1966). Given the powerful influence of culture on all aspects of human behavior, it is reasonable to assume that cultural differences between Russian buyers and Norwegian sellers may influence factors perceived as important for achieving relationship satisfaction. Building and maintaining satisfactory relationships across cultures requires identifying both partners’ perceptions of what is important for achieving relationship satisfaction.

Culturally sensitive firms adapt better to their exchange partner’s national business practices (LaBahn and Harich, 1997) and exhibit greater concern for their partners, both of which are foundations for trust development (Nguyen and Nguyen, 2014). A high level of exporter cultural sensitivity has also been found to have a positive effect on relationship quality among Vietnamese exporters (Nguyen and Nguyen, 2014).

### **2.4.1 Cultural differences: The case of Norway and Russia**

In spite of the geographical proximity of Norway and Russia, the cultural differences between the two countries are significant. Norway represents a Western market characterized by a long tradition of market economy and democracy while Russia remains a market in transition with an unstable democratic structure. Russian attitudes and motivations have been shaped by a set of economic, political, and social circumstances that give the nation a unique character (Puffer, 1993), with attitudes and behaviors inherited from Russian history and the Soviet period still widely prevalent in today’s Russia. Experience from the Soviet period, when neighbors and even relatives revealed sensitive information about each other to the state, made Russians both suspicious and distrustful of foreigners as well as fellow Russians (Hallén and Johanson, 2004). Soviet citizens were also strongly influenced by propaganda regarding the sovereignty of the Soviet state and by negative information regarding foreigners, particularly Westerners and their “gniloi” (“rotten”) capitalism (Barnes et al., 1997). This attitude continues to prevail in many cases and is likely to influence trust and the factors needed to build trusting relationships with Russians. The Russian distrust of not only fellow Russians



but also the Soviet system necessitated the creation of informal, personal networks for the exchange of personal favors to protect individual and group interests (Butler and Purchase, 2004; Ledeneva, 1998). The use of “sviazi” (connections) and “blat” (informal exchange of favors) has been found to be highly prevalent in Russia even today (Butler and Purchase, 2004) due to the institutional void (Puffer and McCarthy, 2011) resulting from a lack of formal institutions to protect people’s rights. In contrast, Norwegians have a very different historical background and, having had little reason to distrust either their government or other people, are often regarded as being too trustful or even naïve by the international business community (Ryen, 2002).

In collectivist societies, relationships assume priority over tasks, while in individualist societies tasks assume priority over relationships (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). In terms of particularism versus universalism, particularists are more focused on relationships than on rules, view legal contracts as readily modified, and have several perspectives on reality. In contrast, universalists are more focused on rules than relationships; view legal contracts as binding; and have only one perspective on reality, including that “a deal is a deal” (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2012). The Russian collectivism/particularism, together with the “blat” tradition, have made the Russian business culture much more relationship focused than the Western business culture (here Norway), implying that it is necessary to develop close, personal relationships with business partners before conducting business in Russia. This tradition contrasts considerably with Norwegian business culture, according to which partners should get “straight to the point” and in which business activities, not personal relationships, are the focal point. This difference can be compared with one of the significant distinctions in cross-national business behavior, namely that of being deal or relationship focused (Gesteland, 2002). Conflicts often arise in interactions between deal-focused people, who are fundamentally task oriented, and relationship-focused people, who are more people oriented, as the former may perceive the latter as pushy and aggressive, while the latter may perceive the former as dilatory and vague (Gesteland, 2002:16).

The Russian cultural tradition of mistrust and reliance on close, personal relationships may also affect communication and willingness to share information. Having been found to have a culturally ingrained resistance toward sharing information with outsiders (McCarthy and Puffer, 2002) and highly value being in the so-called “in-group,” Russians may withhold information required for ensuring successful relationships (McCarthy and Puffer, 2002). In contrast, Westerners, including Norwegians, have been found much more willing to share information with their business partners (Snaveley et al., 1998). Moreover, Russians’ pride from the time when the Soviet Union was a superpower (Barnes et al., 1997) may influence their sense of power and dependence. The collectivistic Soviet Union was for many years a closed society that did not participate in the global

economy, aiming at self-sufficiency and avoidance of reliance on other countries. The attitudes resulting from this policy appear to prevail in Russia even today. For example, in the seafood industry, the government is endeavoring to reduce import dependence, and thus increase the landings of Russian fish to Russian harbors for domestic consumption. Because of its relatively small size, Norway has, on the other hand, traditionally been much more dependent on trade with other countries.

Power distance refers to the extent to which less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). The extent of power dependence in Russian society and business is likely influenced by its highly hierarchical, high power-distance structure (Elenkov, 1998). Norway, compared to Russia, is characterized by a significantly lower level of power distance (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005) and a much flatter and more democratic structure in both society and business. Russians are accustomed to strong leadership, both with regard to company management and national leadership, and not to employee involvement, expression of disagreement, or management willingness or ability to listen to subordinates (De Vries et al., 2008), all of which are taken more or less for granted in Norway. The Russian autocratic management style likely influences how Russian buyers regard their business partners, especially when their partner comes from a small country like Norway.

Russians have also experienced numerous sudden, dramatic economic and political changes that might still influence their willingness to commit to long-term obligations. This historical experience may also be a reasonable explanation for Russians' high level of uncertainty avoidance (Elenkov, 1998), which indicates the extent to which people feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). The much lower level of uncertainty avoidance in Norway (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005) may be due to the stability of Norway's political and economic conditions over many years. Different levels of uncertainty avoidance may influence how the partners deal with uncertainty and what they do to reduce uncertainty, as well as their willingness to commit to future obligations.

Conception of time has also been found to be strongly affected by culture, as time is an idea rather than an object (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2012). How one thinks of time is interwoven with how one plans, strategizes, and coordinates activities with others (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2012), including those with whom one has business relationships. In business relationships between partners with different time perceptions, misunderstanding and frustration may arise to the detriment of successful relationship formation (Hall, 1990). Perception of time can be classified as sequential or synchronic (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2012), depending on whether one

engages in only one action at a time (sequential) or several simultaneously (synchronic), and whether one views time as tangible and measurable (sequential) or continuous and diffuse (synchronic). While the time set for appointments is precise in sequential time-oriented cultures, it is more approximate in synchronic time-oriented cultures. Relationships are generally subordinate to schedules in sequential cultures (Norway), while schedules are generally subordinate to relationships in synchronic cultures (Russia) (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2012). The cultural differences between Russians and Norwegians described above are summarized in Table 1 below.

**Table 1** Summary of cultural differences between Norway and Russia

| Norway       | Cultural characteristic  | Russia       |
|--------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| Low          | Power distance           | High         |
| Low          | Collectivism             | Moderate     |
| Low/moderate | Uncertainty avoidance    | High         |
| Low          | Particularism            | High         |
| Flat         | Organizational structure | Hierarchical |
| Democratic   | Leadership style         | Autocratic   |
| Low          | Chauvinism               | High         |
| Sequential   | Time orientation         | Synchronic   |
| Trustful     | Trust                    | Distrustful  |
| Formal       | Formality                | Informal     |

**2.5 Adaptation**

A key challenge of conducting business across cultures is not only gaining understanding of cultural differences (Phan et al., 2005) but also acknowledging and determining how to manage them. One way of managing differences is adapting to the norms and behaviors of the other party’s national culture (Hall and Hall, 1987; Kale and Barnes, 1992).

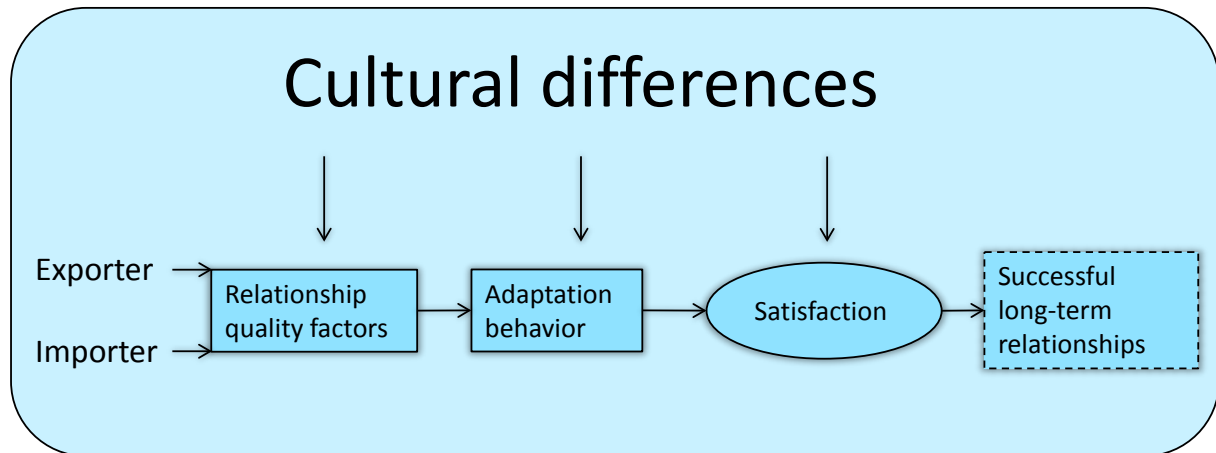
Defined as behavioral modification by one organization at the individual, group, or corporate level to meet the specific needs of another organization (Brennan and Turnball, 1995:182), adaptation communicates commitment to the relationship, which is essential for strengthening the relationship (Haakanson, 1982). Companies in a relationship tend to continuously adapt to each other to ensure the relationship’s functionality (Haakanson and Snehota, 1995). However, the degree and type of adaptation have been found determined by the characteristics of the parties involved a particular interaction (Hagberg-Andersson, 2006).

Cross-cultural adaptation has been defined as “the dynamic process by which individuals, upon relocating to a new, unfamiliar or changed socio-cultural environment, establish (or re-establish) and maintain a relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationship with the environment” (Kim, 2001:31). In cross-cultural business relationships, one or both parties need to make adjustments to match the other party’s behavior or style to be able to interact in a meaningful way (Lin, 2004). Such adaptation goes beyond simply adapting to a certain business practice and involves understanding, adjusting to, and learning about the other party from a cultural standpoint (Lin, 2004), which may require a temporary shift in one’s frame of reference and the taking of subsequent actions that are more appropriate in the other culture than in one’s own (Bennet, 1986).

Since adaptations tend to be reciprocated (Hallén et al., 1989), there is an expectation of mutuality in successful relationships. Indeed, mutual adaptation of some degree has been identified as a prerequisite for the development and continued existence of a relationship between two companies (Hallén et al., 1989). The mutual adaptations that bind companies together account for the substance of a business relationship, as they generate and reflect a mutual commitment that both constrains and empowers the companies (Haakanson and Snehota, 1995). As performance of mutually adaptive actions in a working relationship is conducive to more equitable exchanges between the parties involved (Leonidou et al., 2011), mutual adaptation would be expected in successful cross-cultural business relationships (Hallén et al., 1989; Haakanson and Snehota, 1995; Leonidou et al., 2011). However, previous research has shown that adaptive behavior can be influenced by the extent of power dependence between the business parties such that the party in the weaker position in the relationship is expected to adapt to the more powerful party (Hallén et al., 1991; Brennan et al., 2003), as well as that business people from certain cultures have a stronger or weaker ability and willingness toward cultural adaptation (Hamel, 1991; Selmer, 2000; Lin, 2004). In this context it will be interesting examining the adaptation behavior in Norwegian-Russian buyer-seller relationships and how do cultural characteristics of Russians and Norwegians influences their ability and willingness to adapt.

## 2.6 Conceptual model and outline of the research

This section describes the conceptual model developed, based on the literature review, to guide the research questions under scrutiny in this thesis.



**Figure 1** Conceptual model

The conceptual model in figure 1 should be viewed with the understanding that cross-national buyer–seller relationships consist of buyers/importers and sellers/exporters embedded in different cultures and that cultural differences may influence the factors needed to achieve relationship quality (i.e., trust, communication/information sharing, power dependence, and commitment). Hence, to develop and maintain buyer–seller relationships across cultures, the partners in the relationships need to manage their differences, for instance by making adaptations (Kale and Barnes, 1992), but adaptation behavior may also be influenced by cultural differences in the willingness and ability to adapt to other cultures.

Management of cultural differences will further influence relationship satisfaction, which has been identified as a prerequisite for continuance of the business relationship, thus enabling successful long-term relationship. As the perception of satisfaction may also be influenced by cultural differences, it is important to investigate both the sellers’/exporters’ and buyers’/importers’ perspectives in this study. However, it is important to remain aware that long-term relationships may be influenced by satisfaction with factors other than investigated in this research, such as by the availability of alternatives, and switching costs (Cannon and Perreault, 1999).

It is important to point out that the arrows in Figure 1 are only used to indicate associations between the different factors, not cause and effect. We also acknowledge that other important factors, both internal (companies’ key resources and/or dynamic capabilities) and/or external (competition) (Barney, 1991; Teece, 1984) may be important influences for relationship success as both key resources and capabilities are important for building relationships and operating across cultures.

However, the setting and focus of this study is the interaction between exporter and importer and not internal company resources and/or external competition.

### **3 Methodology**

This section first provides a brief presentation of the research design used in this study. Then the data collection strategy is described, including the collection of secondary and primary sources of information. Further a description of the research process together with a discussion of the reliability and validity of qualitative research, in general and in this study in particular, is offered.

#### **3.1 Research design**

The primary aim of this research was to gain greater understanding of how culture and cultural differences may influence satisfaction, thus success, in cross-cultural buyer–seller relationships. Although much research has examined satisfaction in domestic buyer–seller relationships, little research has examined satisfaction in cross-cultural buyer–seller relationships. Several researchers have pointed out this surprising lack of cross-cultural focus, given the globalization of world trade and challenges involved with building and maintain business relationships across cultures (Skarmeas and Robson, 2008; Leonidou et al., 2006; Mehta et al., 2006). This lack of cross-cultural research attention, together with the study goal of investigating how culture and cultural differences influence ways of perceiving and thinking regarding relationship satisfaction, and thus preferred ways of conducting business, are the reasons for the use of an exploratory approach in this study (Churchill, 1992). In spite of a plea for more exploratory research in international business research and a growing recognition of the benefits associated with qualitative methods (Doz, 2011), most international business studies have been conducted using a quantitative design (Marschan-Piekkari and Welch, 2004). After a thorough literature review, a study guide was designed with which to conduct in-depth interviews with Norwegian sellers and Russian buyers of seafood. The research process is described more thoroughly in the sections below.

##### **3.1.1 Secondary sources of information**

The research began with an extensive review of the literature regarding buyer–seller relationships before focusing on the literature regarding the antecedents and factors in achieving satisfactory and successful business relationships. Review of this literature revealed a limited focus on buyer–seller relationships across cultures, a surprising finding given the increase in global trading. As the role of culture was found especially interesting, the literature regarding culture and cultural differences was further reviewed, as was the literature regarding adaptation and cultural adaptation to provide additional insight into the management of cultural differences. Finally, the literature regarding

qualitative research methods was evaluated, focusing on the literature regarding the interviewing of elites. This focus on interviewing of elites was based on the understanding that the respondents in international business research are often elite individuals in the firm with particular expertise (i.e., business elites). Further, the challenges and issues addressed in the literature regarding the interviewing of elites very much resembles the challenges experienced when conducting interviews for international business research purposes, including gaining access and attaining openness from the respondents and balancing power between the researcher and the respondent in a foreign cultural setting.

In order to decide which companies we wanted to interview for this research the internet was extensively used trying to get an overview of and information about the Norwegian exporters and Russian importers of Norwegian seafood. Much information about the Norwegian-Russian trade was already known to the author after having conducted research in Russia about the Norwegian-Russian seafood trade for several years, giving a broad network both in Norway and in Russia. Russian and Norwegian scientific papers and newspapers also offered valuable information. The Russian import restrictions, imposed on Norwegian seafood in 2006, resulted in much media focus which provided updated information about the Russian-Norwegian seafood trade. Information was further gathered from official web sites of the Russian and Norwegian Veterinary service (Norwegian Food Safety Authority and The Russian Federal Veterinary and Phytosanitary Service) and the Norwegian Seafood Council. The Norwegian Seafood Council and the Norwegian Embassy also have representatives in Moscow working to promote Norwegian seafood in Russia. Both representatives contributed with valuable knowledge about the main actors in this industry.

According to the statistics from the Norwegian Seafood Council, Norwegian export of pelagic fish (herring/mackerel) and red fish (salmon/trout) to Russia contribute almost equally much in value. Thus it was decided to interview companies representing both pelagic and red fish industry. The interviews with the Norwegian companies were conducted in Tromsø, Bergen and Ålesund with four companies exporting salmon and 4 companies exporting pelagic fish to Russia. Three of the Russian companies imported both salmon/trout and pelagic fish, while two imported just pelagic (see table 2 and 3). For the Norwegian companies a lot of information was found both through the companies' own web pages and in Norwegian media about product range, size and employees. We also attended several seafood conferences and trade fairs both in Norway and in Russia and interviewed many of the actors exporting seafood to Russia. Information about Russian companies was based on Russian and Norwegian press, conversations with Norwegian exporters and Russian seafood importers and the representatives from the Norwegian Seafood Council and Embassy. We also had valuable

contacts in Russian research institutes in Moscow (VNIERKH<sup>1</sup>), Murmansk and Apatity (Academy of Science) who offered knowledge about the Russian seafood sector. Russian companies' web pages offered limited information as they were rarely updated, were non-functioning or even lacking.

**Table 2** Norwegian companies exporting seafood to Russia

| Company name | Industry              | Production/sales volume (1000 tons) | Export share to Russia (% of tot prod) | Company experience with Russian export (years) | Personal experience with Russian export (years) |
|--------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Company 1    | Salmon                | 100                                 | 10                                     | 18 (1992)                                      | 12  |
| Company 2    | Salmon/trout          | 20-30                               | 50                                     | 8 (2002)                                       | 8   |
| Company 3    | Salmon/trout exporter | 20-30                               | ?                                      | 9 (2001)                                       | 9   |
| Company 4    | Pelagic               | 100                                 | 30-35                                  | 15 (1995/6)                                    | 15  |
| Company 5    | Pelagic               | 480                                 | 15                                     | 21 (1989)                                      | 21  |
| Company 6    | Salmon                | 200                                 | 10                                     | ?*   | 9   |
| Company 7    | Pelagic               | 62                                  | 25                                     | 11 (1999)                                      | 2   |
| Company 8    | Pelagic               | 55                                  | 45-50                                  | 15 (1995)                                      | 15  |

\* Unknown because of a merger of three different companies into one in 2007.

**Table 3** Russian companies importing seafood from Norway

| Company name             | Industry                      | Production/Sales volume (value) (1000 tons) | Import share from Norway (% of tot import) | Company experience with Norwegian import (years) | Personal experience with Norwegian import (years) |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|---|--|--|---|
| Company 1                | Pelagic wholesaler            | ?* (USD\$40m)                               | 60   | 4 (2006)   | 5-6   |
| Company 2                | Pelagic wholesaler            | ?* (USD\$1m)                                | 15   | 7 (2003)   | 7   |
| Company 3 (resp pelagic) | Pelagic and salmon wholesaler | 70  | 70   | 14 (1996)  | ?   |
| Company 3 (resp salmon)  | Pelagic and salmon wholesaler | 70  | 70 (30% of tot. salmon import)             | 14 (1996)  | 2   |
| Company 4                | Trader                        | 3   | 50   | 8 (2002)   | 8   |
| Company 5                | Trader                        | ?* (USD40m)                                 | 100  | 12 (1998)  | ?   |

\* The respondents did not know the production/sales volume, and this information was not accessible on the internet.

<sup>1</sup> Vserossiyskiy nauchno-issledovatel'skiy i proektno-konstruktorskiy institut ekonomiki, informatsii i avtomatizirovannikh sistem upravleniya ribnovo khozyaystbo



The total number of exporters and importers of Norwegian seafood may at first glance seem as many. However, when studying the statistics one find that a limited number of Norwegian exporters and Russian importers have control of the majority of seafood being exported/imported. As we can see illustrated in table 4 and 5 below, we see that the total number of actors have decreased significantly the last ten years, and the 10 largest importers and exporters contributed with respectively 72 and 76 percent of the total import/export value in 2013.

**Table 4** Total number of Russian importers of seafood from Norway (Source: SSB)

| In volume       | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 |
|-----------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| nr < 20 tons    | 306  | 299  | 256  | 187  | 157  | 97   | 97   | 113  | 108  | 118  |
| 3 largest       | 16 % | 16 % | 18 % | 19 % | 22 % | 36 % | 35 % | 32 % | 28 % | 24 % |
| 10 largest      | 38 % | 37 % | 36 % | 45 % | 48 % | 67 % | 63 % | 66 % | 65 % | 62 % |
| In value        | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 |
| nr < 80 000 USD | 263  | 288  | 272  | 172  | 143  | 83   | 93   | 110  | 99   | 119  |
| 3 largest       | 14 % | 20 % | 18 % | 36 % | 31 % | 45 % | 39 % | 34 % | 33 % | 37 % |
| 10 largest      | 35 % | 44 % | 41 % | 59 % | 57 % | 77 % | 77 % | 76 % | 73 % | 72 % |

**Table 5** Total number of Norwegian exporters of seafood to Russia (Source: SSB)

| In volume       | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 |
|-----------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| nr < 20 tons    | 108  | 100  | 99   | 79   | 61   | 64   | 64   | 74   | 75   | 65   |
| 3 largest       | 33 % | 33 % | 38 % | 35 % | 42 % | 37 % | 37 % | 31 % | 36 % | 36 % |
| 10 largest      | 68 % | 67 % | 65 % | 65 % | 68 % | 66 % | 63 % | 62 % | 68 % | 70 % |
| In value        | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 |
| nr < 80 000 USD | 97   | 94   | 98   | 73   | 61   | 61   | 62   | 69   | 69   | 66   |
| 3 largest       | 24 % | 23 % | 25 % | 30 % | 33 % | 31 % | 26 % | 28 % | 33 % | 39 % |
| 10 largest      | 56 % | 57 % | 56 % | 65 % | 75 % | 65 % | 63 % | 62 % | 70 % | 76 % |

### 3.1.2 Primary sources of information

Qualitative research methods is defined as: “an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world (Van Maanen, 1979: 520). Qualitative research methods may include review of documents and application of various types of observation and interview techniques. Interview-based research studies are particularly well suited for conducting exploratory and theory-building research (Eisenhardt, 1989; Parkhe, 1993) or research into a topic that cannot be meaningfully examined by administration of a questionnaire (Daniels and Cannice, 2004).

The main method used in this study was in-depth interviewing, defined as a face-to face verbal interchange (Fontana and Frey, 1994) between a researcher and an informant with the purpose of understanding the latter's experiences and perspectives (Welch et al., 2002). Use of an interview-based study may be optimal when there is a small population of possible respondents (Daniels and Cannice, 2004), as it is important to focus on the depth of collected data when breadth is unattainable. Conducting interviews also allows researchers to develop a deeper rapport with informants than is possible through administration of written questionnaires (Daniels and Cannice, 2004).

The qualitative nature of in-depth interviewing allows for flexibility, which may prove advantageous in situations in which planned questions are found irrelevant for the specific context (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Doing so may be particularly advantageous when interviewing across cultures or operating in unknown territories where cultural peculiarities may hinder respondents from answering questions. It may also be advantageous in situations in which planned questions are revealed irrelevant for the specific context; in some cultures certain questions may have no meaning. If researchers want to compare across cultural contexts, they need to use concepts and research instruments that are understood in similar ways in all the cultures studied (Usunier, 1998). This is a complicated matter. When using in-depth interviewing the interaction between interviewer and respondent allows greater opportunities for motivating the latter to provide more accurate responses and for providing the former with the means of coping with sources of errors that generally go undetected when using questionnaires (e.g., those related to question wording) (Pedhazur and Schmelkin, 1991). Although the positivistic view of qualitative research argues that the method is only suitable for exploratory research (Wright et al., 1988), an opposing perspective is that qualitative research has an important role to play in theory testing, particularly in cross-cultural research (Harari and Beaty, 1990).

As in-depth interviewing has been found to provide the best opportunity for engaging in deeper probing of respondents to gain understanding of different perceptions and the complex nature of culture and cultural differences, it was selected as the means of collecting primary data in this study. In-depth interviewing allows the researcher to gain insights into the respondents' own interpretations of their environment, and may enhance the researcher's capacity for understanding underlying or latent constructs (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Having spent many years studying Russian language and culture and conducting research in Russia, the researchers concluded that Russia was the ideal target for exploring the research questions. As previously described, Norway and Russia have long trade experience in the fish market in terms of the Norwegian export of fish and seafood products to Russia and the landing of Russian fish to Norwegian harbors. This trade

experience and knowledge of the great cultural differences between the two countries (e.g., Hofstede, 2005, 2010) led to the conclusion that Russian–Norwegian buyer–seller relationships were suitable targets of the research.

Exploration of the possible influence of cultural differences on the factors important in relationship satisfaction in Norwegian–Russian buyer–seller relationships required investigation of both the Norwegian and Russian sides of the exchange. A dyadic approach enables acquisition of insight regarding both partners' perceptions of the issues under scrutiny and the extent of congruence between the two partners. It may also reveal potential differences between what one side of the partnership reports regarding itself and the other partner's perception of it. The first step in the application of this approach was the development of an interview guide, including open and closed questions, based on the literature review regarding satisfaction in buyer–seller relationships and the impact of culture and cultural differences. A pilot study consisting of interviews with four Norwegian companies exporting to Russia was then conducted to test the interview guide and to learn more about the specific terms of the trade in seafood between the two chosen markets. General, broad questions, such as “What is important for you to be satisfied with a business relationship?” and “What is important to you when selecting a new business partner?” were developed to examine the respondents' perceptions of the factors required to build and maintain satisfactory buyer–seller relationships. Trust, communication issues, power dependence issues, and commitment were the factors most often mentioned and emphasized by the respondents, followed by such factors as solvency and ability to sell or buy in sufficient volume, which are crucial for business survival but were not further elaborated upon by the respondents.

After conducting the pre-study interviews, the interview guide was revised to contain slightly more specific but also including open questions. In-depth interviews were then conducted with additional four Norwegian companies representing both the red fish and pelagic sector that exports to Russia, followed by six interviews with five Russian import companies at a food exhibition (World Food) in Moscow. Gaining access to potential participants in Russia can be challenging, as it often requires making connections with a personal network that can assist the researcher in obtaining access to potential respondents. Communication with a Norwegian seafood company with a helpful Russian employee with very good connections assisted the researchers in gaining access to the Russian companies. In contrast to the process of gaining access to Russian importers, the process of gaining access to Norwegian exporters was quite straightforward. Having been working with the seafood industry for many years, the members of the research institute were relatively familiar with the Norwegian seafood export companies examined. After a review of the Norwegian export statistics revealed that both salmon/trout and herring/mackerel are the main species exported to Russia,

several companies exporting salmon/trout and several exporting herring/mackerel to Russia were contacted for interviews.

All the respondents interviewed were the individual or one of the individuals responsible for export to or import from the respective countries. The position of this individual varied among the companies, from managing director to sales director to import or export manager. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner in accordance with their exploratory aim while allowing for the flexibility necessary to explore certain aspects in greater depth. The level of satisfaction of the Russian and Norwegian partners was assessed by asking such general questions as “When you consider your relationship with your most important Norwegian supplier/Russian buyer, do you feel that your expectations have been fulfilled?” The aim was to avoid asking about one specific partner to prevent informants from being less open due to fear of disclosing data to the opposite partner.

Conducting in-depth interviews is challenging in itself, particularly in deciding on the correct follow-up questions to ask. Conducting interviews in a non-native language may create additional challenges because of the extra focus that must be placed on ensuring proper use of language. With these considerations in mind, the Norwegian interview guide was first translated into Russian and then back-translated into Norwegian by a second translator to ensure the validity of the questions (Geisinger, 1994). The translation was conducted by native Russian speakers who speak fluent Norwegian, one of whom is an expert in the field of marketing, to ensure the validity of the translations of the concepts into Russian, and the few deviations found were resolved through discussion. All the interviews were conducted by me personally, with assistance of a Russian interpreter, speaking fluently Norwegian, for the Russian interviews. This was found necessary to secure the understanding of the interviews as they were conducted in Russian. My personal knowledge to Russian language was found limited in order to attain all valuable information from the interviews. Still, my Russian capabilities allowed me to understand the majority of information being revealed in the interviews, making me able to ask probing questions when necessary. Questions were first asked openly about the exporters’ and importers’ perceptions of what is important for keeping a good relationship with their respective partners. Further questions were asked more specifically about factors found important in previous research focusing on domestic buyer-seller relationships such as trust, communication, information sharing, power-dependence distribution. Openly directed questions were further asked about perceptions about cultural differences and possible challenges related to such differences. The interviews were conducted very much as conversations, with emphasis on letting the respondents play the active role; typically lasted 60 to 90 minutes; and were recorded for later transcription. The transcriptions were then carefully analyzed to identify important factors in relationship satisfaction and possible cultural differences between the exchange partners.

The use of qualitative research in a foreign cultural setting such as Russia is thoroughly addressed in paper 3, "Conducting qualitative research in Russia: Challenges and advice." The respondents in international business research are usually persons occupying a senior or middle management position who have functional responsibility in an area that enjoys high status in accordance with corporate values, considerable expertise, and a broad network of personal relationships (Welch et al., 2002). Since the typical respondents in international business research resemble or are elite persons representing the top echelons of a firm and possessing particular expertise, the challenges addressed in the elite literature are highly relevant for discussing challenges related to conducting in-depth interviews across national borders. Based on this understanding, the challenges related to conducting international business research are compared with the challenges often experienced when interviewing elites. It should be noted that elite interviewing has received much research attention in fields such as sociology and geography, but limited attention in the management literature, and even less in international business research (Welch et al., 1999). While elites share several common traits, they are also likely to have differing identities that emerge in distinctive contexts and environments, which necessarily has implications for interviewing them (Moore and Stokes, 2012). Thus, acquiring knowledge of the specific research context in which elite interviewing is conducted is important. This can be related to how to get access to respondents in a foreign cultural environment or how to behave to gain a trustful interview environment to gain valuable information. This has been particularly addressed in paper 3.

### **3.1.3 Procedure of analysis**

Qualitative content analysis was used in order to analyze and systemize the gathered data from the interviews. Content analysis is regarded a flexible method for analyzing text data (Cavanagh, 1997). The type of content analysis approach chosen varies with the theoretical and substantive interests of the researcher and the problem being studied (Weber, 1990). When existing theory or prior research exists about a phenomenon that is incomplete or would benefit from further description, a directed content analysis may be found appropriate (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). For this particular study existing theory and prior research existed on satisfaction in domestic buyer-seller relationships, but lacked in cross cultural settings. Existing research literature thus helped focus the research questions in the questionnaire. For this purpose open-ended questions was used, followed by targeted questions found in existing research.

After having personally interviewed the respondents, the tape recorded data were transcribed. This is essential in order to assure that all information emerges and is found in the right context, and for the confirmability of data (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). The transcriptions were read carefully several

times by the principal researcher and the co-authors. The transcriptions were searched for relevant quotations or excerpts which either supported or contradicted existing theories. Highlights using different colors were used to systemize the data and to extract important information. For the first paper the highlighted text was used to create a table showing the answers given by the Russian and Norwegian respondents related to perceptions emphasized as important by the respective respondents. The table was developed by listing the topics under scrutiny on the left column, like for communication; type of contact, frequency of contacts, who takes initiative, level of communication and what is discussed. On the right hand side, the respondents' answers related to the given topics were listed so one could easily reveal similarities and dissimilarities among the respondents and between the Norwegian exporters and Russian importers.

The analysis of data revealed several differences between the Norwegian exporters and Russian importers regarding perceptions of power-dependence in buyer-seller relationships, how to achieve trust, type of information that is perceived as important to share, and how the partners prefer to commit themselves. The data revealed interesting contradictions regarding what the Norwegian exporters expressed to be their preferred way of doing business versus how it was possible to conduct business in Russia. Further investigation of the data revealed that the Norwegian exporters to a large extent adapted to the Russian way of conducting business in order to manage the differences. This result gave input to the second paper about cultural adaptation. The third article was conceptual and included a literature review about qualitative research methods in cross-cultural setting. The literature review revealed interesting similarities in conducting interviews with international business actors and interviewing of elites. Thus an extensive literature review of elite interviewing was performed, combined with own experiences from conducting interviews in Russia, resulted in the third paper about conducting qualitative research in Russia.

#### **3.1.4 Reliability and validity in qualitative research**

The relevance of reliability and validity, as important criteria in establishing and assessing the quality of research for the quantitative researcher, in qualitative research has been the subject of debate (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Among the alternative criteria that have been proposed to assess the quality of qualitative research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Guba and Lincoln, 1994), trustworthiness and authenticity have been emphasized. Trustworthiness consists of four criteria that each has an equivalent in quantitative research: 1) credibility, which is equivalent to internal validity; 2) transferability, which is equivalent to external validity; 3) dependability, which is equivalent to reliability; and 4) confirmability, which is equivalent to objectivity. A major reason for the proposition of alternative criteria is unease regarding the simple application of criteria presupposing that a single

absolute account of social reality is feasible. Agreement with the view that there is no absolute truth regarding the social world led to the conclusion that use of Guba and Lincoln's (1994) criteria is appropriate. As the criteria regarding authenticity, which include fairness and ontological, educative, catalytic, and tactical authenticity, have not been widely accepted and their emphasis on the wider impact of research is controversial, they were not applied. The criteria for trustworthiness and their use in this study are described in Table 6.

**Table 6** Trustworthiness of the study and methods used (based on Guba and Lincoln, 1994)

| Trustworthiness criteria   | Methods used in this study   |
|--|--|
| <p><i>Credibility:</i> The degree to which the results are a credible account of the social reality.</p>   | <p>A thorough literature review was conducted and preliminary study of Norwegian export companies was performed to learn more and modify the interview guide - which provided a strong background in preparation for conducting several interviews in Norway. The interview guide was translated and back-translated and tested by two native speaking Russians speaking fluently Norwegian before being used with the Russian respondents. In spite of the limited number of respondents the companies interviewed represent a major part of the Norwegian-Russian seafood trading market. Data revealed many similarities, which were further examined.</p> <p><i>Result:</i> Credible account of the true relationship between Russian importers and Norwegian exporters.</p> |
| <p><i>Transferability:</i> The extent to which findings hold in another context or in the same context at another time.</p>  | <p>A thick description, rich accounts of the details of a culture, and excerpts were offered. Cultural knowledge is context specific, but the results may be relevant to other industries/cultures by comparison based on defined criteria</p> <p><i>Result:</i> Provide others with data for making judgments regarding the possible transferability of the findings to other milieu.</p>   |
| <p><i>Dependability:</i> The stability or consistency of explanation— whether the findings are unique to the time or place. “Auditing” approach used to evaluate whether the proper procedures are followed.</p> | <p>Semi-structured interviews asking probing questions were conducted. Repeated findings were obtained. Complete records are kept of all the phases of the research process. The course of the research was frequently discussed with peers; “auditing” approach.</p> <p><i>Result:</i> Dependability.</p>   |
| <p><i>Confirmability:</i> Interpretations are the results of analysis of data and the studied phenomenon, not personal values and researcher biases.</p>   | <p>Full transcription of all recorded interviews was performed to allow for interpretation by the authors. A dyadic approach was used to limit cultural bias.</p> <p><i>Result:</i> Confirmability of interpretation of the data.</p>  |





## Part II



## Paper I

**Gøril Voldnes, Kjell Grønhaug and Frode Nilssen (2012)**

**Satisfaction in buyer–seller relationships—Influence of cultural differences**  
*Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 41, Iss. 7, pp. 1081-1093



## Paper II

**Gøril Voldnes and Kjell Grønhaug (In Review)**

Cultural adaptation in cross-national buyer-seller relationships  
- a study of Norwegian sellers and Russian buyers  
*International Journal of Emerging Markets*



## Paper III

**Gøril Voldnes, Kjell Grønhaug and Geir Sogn-Grundvåg (2014)**

**Conducting qualitative research in Russia: Challenges and advice**  
*Journal of East-West Business*, Vol. 20, Iss. 3, pp. 141-161





## Part III



## 4 Main findings

The aim of this thesis was to examine the factors important for achieving success in cross-cultural business relationships, in this case between Russian buyers and Norwegian sellers. Emphasis was placed on exploring how cultural differences influence factors important in forming relationship satisfaction, how to attain the various factors, and how cultural differences are managed by buyers and sellers to achieve successful relationships. The thesis addressed the following research questions:

1. Do cultural differences between Norwegian sellers and Russian buyers of seafood influence their perceptions of the factors important for relationship satisfaction and, if so, how?
2. Does culture influence how Norwegian sellers and Russian buyers manage their cultural differences and, if so, how?

The first paper, Voldnes et al. (2012) explored satisfaction in buyer–seller relationships between Norwegian sellers and Russian buyers. The aim was to identify which factors, as perceived by Norwegian sellers and Russian buyers, are important in achieving satisfactory business relationships, and possible cultural differences between Norwegian and Russian business actors. The findings revealed congruence between the partners in terms of which factors were considered important in achieving relationship satisfaction, namely that trust, communication/information sharing, commitment and power-dependence symmetry were important in business relationships. These factors are commonly found to influence relationship satisfaction in previous research (Geyskens et al., 1999; Lages et al., 2005; Kumar et al., 1995; Morgan and Hunt, 1994). At the same time, several interesting differences regarding the means of achieving the various factors were identified (Voldnes et al., 2012). While both Russian buyers and Norwegian sellers emphasize **trust** as an important factor in buyer–seller relationships, their perceptions of the factors necessary to build trusting relationships differ. In accordance with their belief that trust is personal, depending on an individual acting in a trustworthy manner and being reliable, the Russian buyers base their perception of trust on the people in a company, rather than the company itself. Therefore, to build a trusting relationship, the Russian buyers aim to become familiar with the sales representative personally. The Norwegian sellers, on the other hand, are more focused on the company, and, accordingly, base their level of trust on **information** about the company and not the individuals representing the company. However, Russians tend not to share company information, preferring to share personal information, and obtaining reliable information about Russian companies from outside sources may be impossible. Moreover, triple bookkeeping is not an unusual feature in Russian companies. As these

results reveal, both the Russian and Norwegian partners emphasize information sharing as an important factor in achieving trust and satisfaction in business relationships, but differ regarding what type of information they consider important (Voldnes et al., 2012).

Likewise, both the Russian buyers and Norwegian sellers consider **commitment** important for relationship satisfaction, but differ in the manner in which they prefer to show commitment to their business partner (Voldnes et al., 2012). Russians prefer not to complete any formal binding contracts other than the necessary contracts allowing them to import goods, and instead prefer to commit by investing time and energy in the relationship. The Norwegians, on the other hand, are accustomed to showing commitment with performance of more formal actions, such as completion of formal contracts.

While **power dependence** symmetry is perceived as important to achieving relationship satisfaction from both the Russian and Norwegian side, further probing into the matter revealed rather asymmetrical power distribution in favor of the Russians. This asymmetry is strongly related to the import ban imposed by Russia in 2006 on Norwegian-farmed salmon, which has since gradually expanded to include other fish species (Elvestad and Nilssen, 2010). Both the Russian buyers and the Norwegian sellers interviewed admitted that the Russians have taken advantage of this power advantage in negotiations by threatening to get the Norwegian companies' export license withdrawn (Voldnes et al., 2012). Such actions indicate that the Russian partners not only have a power advantage but also an inclination to exercise their power, which prior research has found to be detrimental to relationship satisfaction (Gaski and Nevin, 1985; Frazier and Rody, 1991).

The differences identified regarding the achievement of trust, demonstration of commitment, type(s) of information perceived as important to share, and management of power asymmetry can be explained by the **cultural differences** between the partners in terms of the cultural dimensions described by Hofstede (1980) and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1993). The Russian tendency toward collectivism and particularism leads Russian buyers to be much more relationship focused than the Norwegians sellers. Indeed, the high Russian power distance (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005) compared to the lower Norwegian power distance may explain the Russian buyers' inclination to exercise their power advantage without reflecting on its impact on relationship satisfaction. The Russian tendency toward collectivism and particularism also influences the extent of information sharing, resulting in a willingness to share information only with those in the so-called "in-group."

Interesting differences were also revealed regarding how the Russian buyers perceive themselves compared to how they are perceived by their Norwegian partners. While the Russian buyers perceive themselves as very open and willing to share all types of information, the Norwegian sellers perceive

their Russian partners as very closed and unwilling to share information. This can be explained by the cultural differences with regard to what type of information is regarded important to share with a business partner. In accordance with Russian particularism, which emphasizes relationships in business matters, the Russians consider it more important to share personal information with their exchange partners. In accordance with Norwegian universalism, which emphasizes business activities and performance, the Norwegians find it more important to share information related to business tasks and company revenues, sales, and figures.

Another difference regarding the Russians' perceptions of themselves versus how they were perceived by their Norwegian partner is related to time orientation. While the Russian buyers perceive themselves to have a long-term time orientation, their Norwegian partners perceive them to have a very short-term time orientation. This difference can be explained by not only cultural differences regarding the definitions of a long- and short-term time orientation but also how the partners show long-term orientation. While the Russian buyers invest much time in resources necessary for building close, personal relationships as a way of showing long-term commitment, the Norwegian sellers pursue the completion of long-term formal contracts as a way of showing long-term commitment. Table 7 presents an overview of the findings discussed in paper 1.

**Table 7** Overview of the findings presented in paper 1 (from Voldnes et al., 2012)

| <b>Antecedents to satisfaction</b>        | <b>Russian buyers</b>   | <b>Norwegian sellers' perceptions about the Russian buyers</b>   | <b>Norwegian sellers</b>   | <b>Russian buyers' perceptions about Norwegian sellers</b> |
|---|---|--|--|--|
| <b>Trust</b>                              | Personal trust  | Personal trust<br>Mix business and pleasure<br>Need to be friends  | Company trust<br>Not used to mixing business and pleasure  | Transaction oriented                                       |
| <b>Communication/ Information-sharing</b> | Frequent communication<br>Talk about everything<br>Open                               | Personal relationships<br>Withhold information<br>Closed   | Frequent communication<br>Share information  |  |
| <b>Power-dependence</b>                   | Power advantage because of import restriction on salmon<br>Depend on market situation | Russian power advantage because of import situation and amount of available raw material<br>Personal relationships | Power disadvantage because of export restrictions on salmon<br>Buyers' marked for pelagic fish because of available raw material | Power disadvantage because of special import situation     |
| <b>Commitment</b>                         | Contracts mandatory<br>Long-term oriented   | Intentional contracts – no binding value<br>Short-term oriented<br>Personal relationships                          | Wants more written, binding agreements and more long-term deals  |  |

In spite of the differences identified between the Norwegian sellers and the Russian buyers, their business relationship appears to function well, as evidenced by the expression of satisfaction with the relationship by respondents from both sides and no expression of any intention to terminate the relationship by any of the respondents. Some of the Russian respondents complained regarding the Norwegian preoccupation with family and relatively less emphasis on business, but otherwise perceived the relationship to function well, and described the Russian and Norwegian cultures as very similar. While the Norwegians described observation of many cultural differences between Norwegian and Russian business practices, they appear to accept the current situation and understand that they must manage it in the best way possible to continue conducting business with

the Russians (Voldnes and Grønhaug, In Review). The fact that the relationship partners appeared satisfied despite their differences indicated the need to examine how they managed their differences more deeply. Doing so revealed that the Norwegian sellers indicated that they would have preferred it one way, but that this did not work in Russia, so they have had to change their behavior, leading to the second research question and second paper on managing cultural differences and adaptation.

Thus, the second research question in paper 2 investigated the partners' management of cultural differences regarding attaining trust, information sharing, committing, dealing with power asymmetry, and perception of time (Voldnes and Grønhaug, In Review). Analysis of the data revealed that the Norwegian sellers, to a large degree, prefer building trust and commitment and communicating in a manner that differs from that of their Russian partner, requiring them to adapt to their partner by making certain behavioral changes. While the literature argues that mutual adaptation by both sides of an exchange dyad is a prerequisite for the formation of successful business relationships, the results revealed a more or less unilateral adaptation by the Norwegian sellers, most notably their building of trust by building close relationships with their Russian partners. Regarding information sharing, the Norwegian sellers appear to have accepted that they will receive little company information from the Russian buyers, and accordingly limit their own presentation of this type of information. In this regard, the Norwegians described that at the onset of the relationship, they would start their business meetings with a PowerPoint presentation of company revenue, number of employees, and so on. When these presentations were met with no interest from the Russian buyers, who instead wanted to get to know the individual representing the company, the Norwegian sellers adapted to the Russian way by investing time and resources into relationship building and by accepting a lack of formal commitment.

The study findings revealed many different perceptions regarding time and the use of time in building relationships. This was not further elaborated on in paper 1 (Voldnes et al., 2012), but was pursued further in paper 2 (Voldnes and Grønhaug, In Review). A notable finding was that the Norwegian sellers perceive the Russian buyers as having adapted to Norwegian norms regarding expenditure of time with business partners when visiting Norway. The Russian buyers, however, expressed some dissatisfaction regarding the Norwegian priority on family over business, indicating that their adaptation in this regards appears a misperception by the Norwegian sellers, which can have consequences for the satisfaction and success their relationship. Accustomed to separating business from private life, Norwegians are preoccupied with family life, and often restrict working hours from 8 am to 4 pm. The Russian buyers, on the other hand, do not separate business from private life to the same extent, and are generally available for business 24/7 and are surprised that the Norwegians are not. The Norwegian sellers expressed that the Russian buyers do not expect to

be followed and entertained constantly when visiting Norway, as the Norwegians are when visiting Russia (Voldnes and Grønhaug, In Review). While this may indicate that the Russian buyers have adapted to the Norwegian perception of time when visiting Norway, it may also be a misperception by the Norwegian sellers, as the Russian buyers complained about the Norwegian preoccupation with family and lack of business attention after 4 pm.

Regarding management of power asymmetry, the Norwegian sellers have found it necessary to build close relationships with Russian individuals and companies that have power. Several of the Russian importers have formed very close relationships with the Russian Federal Veterinary and Phytosanitary Service (VPSS), who decides which Norwegian companies are awarded licenses for exporting seafood to Russia. The Norwegian sellers have found it necessary to invest much time and effort into building relationships with these importers to ensure that they can retain their licenses for exporting seafood to Russia.

Interesting differences were also found regarding perceptions of cultural differences between the Norwegian sellers and Russian buyers. While the Russian buyers indicated that Russians and Norwegians are very similar and that no cultural differences exist between the partners, the Norwegian sellers described the Russian buyers as representing a completely “different world.” This highly interesting difference can be explained by the Russian lack of cultural sensitivity; that is, lack of awareness of cultural differences, knowledge of why these differences exist, and willingness to accommodate these differences (Harich and LaBahn, 1998). The literature implies that Russians tend to underestimate the extent of cross-cultural differences (Snively et al., 1998), leading them to assume that Western businesspeople follow the same business practices and have the same expectations as they do. The Russian seeming lack of cultural sensitivity and the large power asymmetry between the Norwegian sellers and the Russian buyers appear to be reasonable explanations for the more or less unilateral adaptation by the Norwegian side.

The findings in papers 1 and 2 revealed both similarities and difference between the Norwegian sellers and Russian buyers regarding their ways of building and maintaining business relationships. One important finding was that most of the differences are managed by more or less unilateral adaptation by the Norwegian side, indicating that business relationships may function well in spite of lack of mutual adaptation. However, another study finding was that the behaviors of the business actors can be misperceived by their respective partners. The Russian buyers perceive the Russians and Norwegians to be similar culturally, failing to understand that the Norwegians have adjusted to Russian ways of conducting business. Further, while the Norwegian partners believe the Russians have adapted to Norwegian norms regarding the expenditure of time with partners who are visiting



Norway, the Russians regard the Norwegians relatively limited time expenditure on business matters as problematic. Such incongruent perceptions between exchange partners' expectations has been found to reduce relationship satisfaction (Mehta et al., 2006). Even though the differences identified do not appear to be reasons for dissolving the relationship, awareness of them may lead to increased understanding of one's business partner, and thus greater satisfaction. Table 8 presents an overview of the adaptations by the Norwegian sellers and Russian buyers in this study.

**Table 8** Overview of the findings presented in paper 2 (from Voldnes and Grønhaug, In Review)

| Adaptations made by Russian buyers   | Cultural dimensions                       | Adaptations made by Norwegian sellers   |
|--|---|---|
| Adapt to the "Western" drinking culture; drink less during business meetings   | <b>Trust and Personal networks</b>        | Build personal trust and relationships<br>Engage in more informal business conduct; mix business and pleasure (i.e., dinner and drinking before business) |
|  | <b>Communication/ Information sharing</b> | Accept lack of information sharing<br>Give fewer company presentations and offer more personal information  |
|  | <b>Commitment</b>                         | Accept oral agreements and lack of formality<br>Engage in more relationship building than contract establishment  |
|  | <b>Power structure</b>                    | Build personal networks and lobby   |
| Adapt to Norwegians' separation of work and leisure times when visiting Norway | <b>Time perception</b>                    | Spend much time with Russian buyers when in Russia<br>Take Russians out to dinner when they visit Norway  |

The third research paper addressed challenges involved with conducting qualitative research across cultures, with the challenges faced by a Western researcher conducting research in Russia presented as an example (Voldnes et al., 2014). The research into the challenges in conducting international business research has mainly been confined to quantitative research (Marschan-Piekkari and Welch, 2004). However, the use of qualitative research approaches in international business research has

been found to have many advantages, including greater flexibility and collection of richer data (Leung et al., 2005). Thus, the focus was identification of several of the challenges that may be encountered by Westerners (here Norwegians) planning and conducting in-depth interviews in Russia.

Since the typical respondent in international business research is a powerful member of the elite (business elite), such as a business manager (Welch et al., 2002), the elite literature regarding the challenges in gaining access to and attaining openness from respondents and balancing power in the interview situation (Welch et al., 2002) was applicable to addressing research challenges in relation to several of the cultural characteristics of Russia. The Russian tendency toward collectivism, particularism, high uncertainty avoidance, high power distance, suspicion, and a hierarchical business structure (Hofstede et al., 2010; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2012; Elenkov, 1998; Rivera et al., 2002), resulting in a high reliance on personal networks, tends to impose additional challenges in gaining access to, balancing power with, and attaining openness from Russian respondents. These challenges are heightened if the researcher is foreigner, defined as an out-group member. In collectivist cultures, being integrated into the so-called “in-group,” defined as a group of individuals who protect each other throughout their lifetimes in exchange for unquestioning loyalty (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005), is often a prerequisite for attaining information, and sometimes even for gaining access to the targeted respondents. However, being a foreigner and thus positioned in the out-group may also be advantageous in relation to gaining access and attaining openness (Sabot, 1999; Herod, 1999; Welch et al., 2002). Foreign researchers may be more trusted as they are not perceived to pose any threat to the respondents’ status and position, especially if the results of their study are published in another country (Sabot, 1999).

## **5 Implications of the study findings**

As previously described, markets are rarely ever perfect (Ottesen and Grønhaug, 2005), and building buyer–seller relationships can be a beneficial way of managing the lack of information and reducing the costs of transactions in imperfect markets (Dwyer et al., 1987; Grönroos, 1990). As information is even more limited in cross-cultural buyer–seller relationships due to differences in infrastructure, political and legal systems, culture, religion, and other factors, building relationships when operating across cultures assumes increased importance in achieving relationship success (Bello et al., 2003).

The study findings confirm that relationship building is important in ensuring the formation and continuance of business transactions between Norway and Russia. Indeed, to address the lack of information and the uncertainties previously described when conducting business with Russians, building relationships is not an organizational option but rather a prerequisite. Thus, this

investigation of the means of building and maintaining successful business relationships contributes important knowledge regarding the formation of cross-cultural buyer-seller relationships between Norway and Russia, and perhaps between other Western and Eastern European countries with similar cultural characteristics.

## **5.1 Theoretical implications**

The findings presented in the first paper (Voldnes et al., 2012) confirm the findings of other studies regarding the importance of certain factors, such as trust, commitment, communication/information sharing, and power dependence in buyer–seller satisfaction (Geyskens et al., 1998; Caniëls and Gelderman, 2007; Rodriques et al., 2006; Whipple et al., 2010). As previously described, because limited research has been conducted into buyer–seller relationships across cultures (Atanasopoulou, 2009; Mehta et al., 2006; Skarmeas and Robson, 2008), the findings of this cross-cultural study contribute new knowledge to the international business literature. Previous studies have reported that different cultures may have different perceptions of which factors contribute to relationship quality or satisfaction (Ashnai et al., 2009; Cannon et al., 2010; Leung et al., 2005). Adding to this knowledge, this study contributes important findings regarding significant differences in perceptions of how to attain the various factors needed to achieve relationship satisfaction and how these perceptions are influenced by cultural differences. The findings revealed that cultural differences may influence what types of information are considered important to share in business relationships, which factors are important in building trust, what is perceived as the “right” way to commit to a relationship, and what is perceived the “right” way to manage and take advantage of power asymmetry. These findings are important, as knowledge regarding which factors are needed for achieving satisfaction is useless if knowledge regarding how to achieve them is lacking.

The study also revealed that Russian buyers have limited awareness of the cultural differences between them and their Norwegian partners. Lack of awareness of cultural differences affects the extent of cultural sensitivity, which has been found to be important for building trust, increasing communication, decreasing conflict, and increasing commitment and performance (Harich and LaBahn, 1998; Skarmeas et al., 2002; Johnson et al., 1996). The findings of this study may thus contribute to improvement in cross-cultural business research aiming at attaining more insight into the factors necessary for achieving success in international business.

The findings presented in the second paper (Voldnes and Grønhaug, In Review) revealed that balanced adaptation is not as crucial for formation of functional, successful long-term buyer–seller relationships (Geyskens et al., 1996; Kumar, 2005; Mukherji and Francis, 2008; Anderson and Weitz, 1989; Leonidou et al., 2011; Haakanson and Snehota, 1995). As initially revealed by Hagberg-

Anderseon and Grønhaug (2010) and Brennan et al. (2003) and confirmed in a cross-cultural setting in the current study, the power dependence distribution between buyers and sellers influences their adaptation behavior such that the less powerful partner adapts to the more powerful partner, and may involve cultural adaptations when the partners are from other countries. This study of Russian buyers and Norwegian sellers revealed significant power asymmetry in favor of the Russian buyers, and more or less unilateral adaptation by the Norwegian sellers to manage the cultural differences between the partners. Nevertheless, the business relationship between the Norwegian and Russian partners appears to function well, given that both sides expressed satisfaction with it and none of the respondents expressed any willingness or intention to terminate it. This fact may be explained by “simple” economics; that is, as long as the Norwegian partners are making a profit, they are satisfied and willing to overlook the power asymmetry and the fact that they are making most of the effort to adapt to make the relationship function and be successful. It also reveals that the power relations in buyer–seller relationships are complex issues.

As previously described, the use of qualitative research methods in international business research is limited in spite of the advantages that are associated with it (Doz, 2011; Marschan-Piekkari and Welch, 2004). As conducting research in foreign cultural settings is not always straightforward due to the existence of many differences and uncertainties, it is important to gain knowledge of the possible challenges and obtain advice regarding how to manage them. The third paper focused on examining the challenges associated with conducting qualitative research across cultures which has received little research attention (Voldnes et al., 2014). The aim was to contribute to the knowledge regarding qualitative research, particularly in-depth interviewing, in a foreign cultural context. This knowledge may contribute to enhancement of the quality of data collection in similar research studies, which in turn may benefit further theory development in cross-cultural research.

This thesis revealed the importance of using a dyadic approach when investigating buyer–seller relationships in general and when investigating relationships between buyers and sellers from different cultures in particular, as buyers and sellers may perceive the issues under scrutiny differently.

## **6 Concluding remarks**

Cultural differences between exchange partners may result in different perceptions and expectations and lead to misunderstandings, conflict, dissatisfaction, and dissolution of relationships. This study presents useful findings for business managers working with Norwegians and Russians regarding the factors perceived as important for achieving relationship satisfaction, and thereby success, and how

to achieve these factors, including trust, effective communication, and commitment. The study also elucidated the means of managing cultural differences between buyers and sellers representing different cultures. It revealed that when conducting business with Russians, it is important to acknowledge their limited cultural sensitivity and lack of awareness of cultural differences, allowing them to believe that their way of conducting business is the global norm. It also revealed the existence of substantial power asymmetry in the Norwegian–Russian relationships. Given the Russian hierarchical structure and large power distance of Russians, power advantage and inclination to take advantage of it, may be the case often found in business relationships with Russians, not only in the seafood business and with Norwegians. Gaining knowledge of this power asymmetry and the Russian inclination to use it may assist foreign business partners in safeguarding themselves from its consequences when possible.

### **6.1 Limitations, future prospects and suggestions**

This research was limited to exploring the interaction between two national cultures within one industry. While recognizing that cultural knowledge will always be context specific, knowledge of buyer–seller relationship between Norwegian and Russian fish traders may also be relevant for the management of business relationships between other western countries and Eastern European countries with similar cultural background and representing a variety of fields or industries.

However, future research would benefit from investigation of several cultures and/or investigation of buyer–seller relationships within other industries. Examination of buyers and sellers with power dependence structures differing from those of the Russian buyers and the Norwegian sellers in the seafood trade, the latter of whom have been subject to import bans, would be particularly interesting, as would comparison of the findings obtained thereof to those of this study. Power dependence symmetry or asymmetry in business relationships is a complex phenomenon whose influence appears both positive and negative (Mysen and Svensson, 2010; Bello et al., 2003; Coughlan et al., 2001). As perceptions of this phenomenon differ across cultures, the power dependence issues in buyer–seller relationships are assumed complex in international buyer–seller relationships. Thus, further exploration of impact of power dependence symmetry and asymmetry across cultures is needed.

The results indicate that the impact of several factors previously found important for relationship satisfaction, such as trust, quality communication/information, symmetrical power dependence, and commitment (Anderson and Narus, 1990; Dash et al., 2007; Geyskens et al., 1999; Rodrigues et al., 2006), may not be entirely clear. The Norwegian sellers and Russian buyers have formed a successful relationship in spite of their differing views regarding the building of trust, implying that the

relationship may not necessarily be built on mutual trust. Additionally, the business relationship appears to function well in spite of the existence of a large power asymmetry and the partners' differing perceptions of what type of information is important to share and how to show commitment in business relationships. Thus, other important factors not examined in this research, such as profit, may have a significant impact on cross-cultural buyer-seller relationships. Future focus on companies' key resources and critical capabilities (Barney, 1991; Teece, 1984; Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000) related to building and managing business relationships and conducting business in foreign cultural settings, may also contribute with valuable future knowledge.

A comparison of relationship quality between managers in Russia, Iran, China, and the United Kingdom revealed that the Russian managers had a significantly higher focus on profit and significantly lower perception of intangible quality drivers, such as trust, compared with the other managers (Ashnai et al., 2009). Further research of the impact of profit may be beneficial to explore how this factor might outweigh the impact of other factors, such as asymmetrical power dependence or lack of quality communication, among partners. Ashnai et al.'s (2009) identification of variance among the individual datasets examined in their study indicates that managers must manage their portfolio of relationships in an individual manner, and suggests that more research should explore the characteristics influencing perceptions of relationship quality both within and across cultures.

The perception of conflict would also be an interesting topic for further exploration. This study revealed that the Russian buyers perceive their relationship with the Norwegian sellers as lacking conflict, while the Norwegians perceive conflict as often occurring within the relationship. This discrepancy can be related to cultural differences in ways of perceiving what constitutes conflict, or it may be grounded in different perceptions regarding acknowledging the existence of conflict. Some level of constructive conflict has been found beneficial in business relationships, as it can enhance the effectiveness of strategic decision-making (Cosier and Dalton, 1990; Anderson and Weitz, 1992; Skarmeas, 2006). However, the beneficial outcomes of conflict cannot be realized if the partners cannot acknowledge that conflict exists. The perception of conflict and the cultural factors impacting its acknowledgement would be interesting topics for future research.

The use of a dyadic approach, which has been a great omission in the investigation of buyer-seller (importer-exporter) relationships (Atanasopoulou, 2009; Svensson et al., 2013), was found very useful in the current study. It should thus be applied to a greater extent in future research into buyer-seller relationships in general and into cross-cultural buyer-seller relationships in particular, as the perceptions of importers and exporters may differ significantly (Mehta et al., 2006; Voldnes et al., 2012; Voldnes and Grønhaug, In Review).

Longitudinal research would also be useful to explore differences in factors associated with satisfaction and their possible cultural influences during the various stages of relationship formation. A final interesting research direction would be longitudinal research exploring changes in global ways of conducting business. Some have argued that culture's impact is overrated and that when operating across cultures, other factors, such as differences in language, differences in legal environment, are more significant. Others have posited that the increase in global trade has led to creation of a borderless world in which diffusion of best business practices may result in similar ways of conducting business, and thus making cultural differences less apparent (Metcalfe et al., 2006). Longitudinal research into the impact of globalization on the ways of conducting business across borders could help resolve this debate.

## 7 References

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# Appendix I



## Norwegian-Russian seafood trading

The trading of seafood between Norway and Russia has a long tradition, dating back to the Viking era, continuing through the Pomor trade in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and until the Russian Revolution in 1917. However, during the Soviet era (1922-1991) the Russian trading with the outside world was limited. A few fishing companies were given special permission to sell cod and shrimps to foreign harbors, such as Norwegian harbors, in order to get hold of Western capital but Russian imports were very low. Before direct trading between the two countries were re-established a large quantity of fish was exchanged between Norway and Russia through quota exchange (Nilssen, 1993). Between 1982 and 1988 Norway exchanged 350 thousand tons of the Soviet cod quota for 3.5 million tons of mainly blue whiting and redfish (Bendiksen and Nilssen, 2001).

As a consequence of over-fishing in the Barents Sea in the late eighties leading to substantial idle capacity in the Norwegian fishing fleet and onshore industry (Esaassen and Nilssen, 2002), trading between the two countries increased as the lack of fish led to a search for alternative raw material sources for the Norwegian fishing industry. This combined with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 resulted in a substantial increase in imports of Russian fish by the Norwegian fishing industry (Bendiksen and Nilssen, 2001). In the Soviet Union the Russian fishing fleet was owned and controlled by the State and received subsidies securing the running of the companies. The State was also the buyer of the fish. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union the Russian fishing companies achieved independence, which also meant no security from the Russian State (Nilssen and Hønneland, 1997). This resulted in a sudden lack of buyers for the Russian fishing companies and a search for new buyers. For Russian vessels from the North-West of Russia it was found lucrative to deliver cod to Norwegian harbors as it was close to the fishing ground saving them fuel costs, they got paid in western currency, and they had some previous experience with and knowledge about Norwegian buyers (Nilssen et al., 2005). Many of the Russian fishing companies had limited knowledge about how to get in contact with potential Western buyers. Delivering cod to Norway helped the Russian fishing companies compensate for termination of State subsidiaries, increased fuel costs and an overall reduction in total catches (Hønneland, 2000). A change in Norwegian law in 1992 also contributed to increased direct landings of fish from foreign vessels in Norwegian harbors (Bendiksen et al., 1998). Thus, the Norwegian fishing industry gained access to a significantly larger market for raw materials, and the Russian fishing fleet was given the opportunity to sell fish following market-based principles (Nilssen and Hønneland, 1997).

The fall of the Soviet Union also opened up a new market for sale of fishing vessels from the West to Russia. The Russian fishing fleet was old and in serious need for upgrade (Esaassen and Nilssen,

2002). The introduction of a market-based economy in Russia made the fishing companies and their respective fleets responsible for their own economy. Lack of equity capital and imperfections in the Russian bank- and finance systems made it necessary to search for alternative finance systems for Russian vessel upgrade and fleet renewal (Esaassen and Nilssen, 2002). This situation led to Russian deliveries of fish (cod) to the Norwegian fishing industry as payment for vessel upgrade and/or renewal<sup>1</sup>.

Due to the high price for cod in foreign markets, Russian vessels focused on fishing cod instead of pelagic species such as herring and mackerel. This led to high demand for herring and mackerel in Russia. Herring and mackerel was cheap fish species and provided much protein for the money. This was highly needed for many of the Russian consumers experiencing an economic breakdown after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. This demand made Norwegian actors starting to export herring and mackerel to the Russian market. The export from Norway has gradually increased from a total export volume of 24 273 tons in 1993 (7 million USD) to 295 339 tons in 2013 (value exceeding 1 billion USD) (Norwegian Seafood Council, 2014). Norwegian capelin also experienced great success in the Russian market.

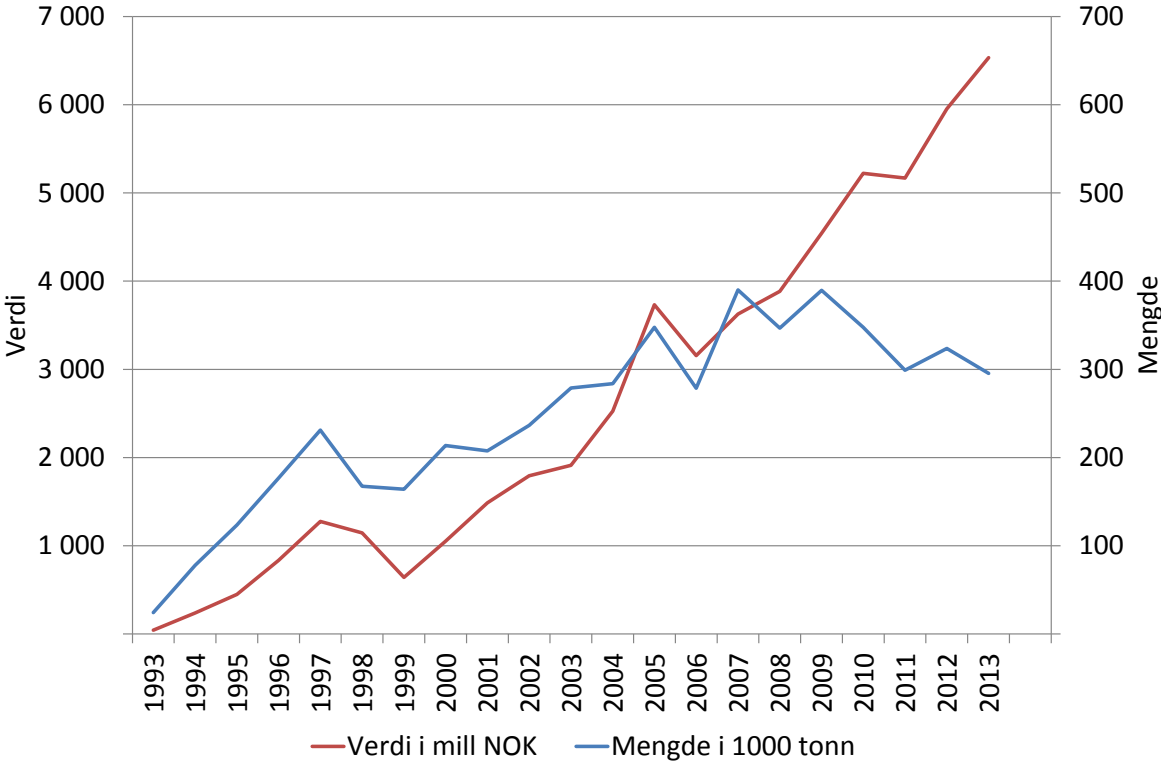
During the 1990-ties the Norwegian fish export to Russia mainly involved pelagic species such as herring and mackerel. The volume increased from 30 803 tons in 1993 to 205 793 tons in 1997. As the Russian economy gradually improved, the demand for more valuable species such as salmon increased. Norwegian export of salmon to Russia increased from 8 267 tons in 2000 to 134 195 tons in 2013. The Norwegian seafood export volume to the Russian market are now split almost 50/50 between salmon and pelagic species, but the value of the salmon export (approximately 900 million USD) is about five times as high as the export of pelagic species (approximately 150 million USD) (Norwegian Seafood Council, 2014).

As of 01 January 2006 Russia introduced an import ban on farmed Norwegian salmon, which *de facto* included all types of salmon and trout from Norway. The Russian Federal Veterinary and Phytosanitary Service (VPSS) claimed that it had discovered high levels of cadmium and lead in farmed Atlantic salmon and rainbow trout imported from Norway. It thus imposed an import ban that excluded many Norwegian sellers from exporting to Russia and granted a few Russian importers control of all red fish imports, as well as power to influence the VPSS regarding which exporters should receive approval and which should be excluded (Elvestad and Nilssen, 2010). The import restrictions was expanded to include all fish species exported from Norway to Russia and resulted in

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<sup>1</sup> This system has been termed «bareboat charter» which involved a sort of leasing agreement of Norwegian and other Western vessels to the Russian fishing fleet in exchange for Russian fishing quota.

a reduced number of Norwegian and Russian companies with licenses to export and import seafood. According to statistics taken from Norwegian Custom declaration the total number of Russian importers of seafood from Norway was in 2013 119 (exceeding a minimum value of 80 thousand USD). However, the 10 largest Russian companies imports more than 70 percent of total Norwegian seafood import. The total number of Norwegian exporters of seafood to Russia was in 2013 approximately 65. Also in this case the 10 largest companies had more than 75 of the total value (for more details see table 1 and 2). It must be mentioned here that this statistics includes all kind of seafood and not only salmon/trout and pelagic species which have been studied explored in this study. Russia have become one of the largest seafood markets for Norwegian seafood and Norwegian seafood constituted more than 40 percent of Russian seafood import in has a significant share of the total Russian import of seafood (Norwegian Seafood Council, 2013). A new import ban, including all fish from Norway, was introduced 07. August 2014 as a response to the Western sanctions directed towards Russia as a response to the Russian military actions in Ukraine. The results of these political actions are too early to predict.



**Figure 1** Diagram showing the Norwegian export of seafood to Russia from 1993 to 2013, in value and amount (Source: Norwegian Seafood Council, 2014).

**Table 1** Total number of Russian importers of seafood from Norway (Source: SSB)

| In volume     | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 |
|---------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| nr < 20 tons  | 306  | 299  | 256  | 187  | 157  | 97   | 97   | 113  | 108  | 118  |
| 3 largest     | 16 % | 16 % | 18 % | 19 % | 22 % | 36 % | 35 % | 32 % | 28 % | 24 % |
| 10 largest    | 38 % | 37 % | 36 % | 45 % | 48 % | 67 % | 63 % | 66 % | 65 % | 62 % |
| In value      | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 |
| nr < 80 000 U | 263  | 288  | 272  | 172  | 143  | 83   | 93   | 110  | 99   | 119  |
| 3 largest     | 14 % | 20 % | 18 % | 36 % | 31 % | 45 % | 39 % | 34 % | 33 % | 37 % |
| 10 largest    | 35 % | 44 % | 41 % | 59 % | 57 % | 77 % | 77 % | 76 % | 73 % | 72 % |

**Table 2** Total number of Norwegian exporter of seafood to Russia (Source: SSB)

| In volume     | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 |
|---------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| nr < 20 tons  | 108  | 100  | 99   | 79   | 61   | 64   | 64   | 74   | 75   | 65   |
| 3 largest     | 33 % | 33 % | 38 % | 35 % | 42 % | 37 % | 37 % | 31 % | 36 % | 36 % |
| 10 largest    | 68 % | 67 % | 65 % | 65 % | 68 % | 66 % | 63 % | 62 % | 68 % | 70 % |
| In value      | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 |
| nr < 80 000 U | 97   | 94   | 98   | 73   | 61   | 61   | 62   | 69   | 69   | 66   |
| 3 largest     | 24 % | 23 % | 25 % | 30 % | 33 % | 31 % | 26 % | 28 % | 33 % | 39 % |
| 10 largest    | 56 % | 57 % | 56 % | 65 % | 75 % | 65 % | 63 % | 62 % | 70 % | 76 % |

## Appendix II





# Intervjuguide hovedstudie - eksportør

## 1. Først, ville jeg gjerne at du forteller litt om bedriften?

- Årlig omsetning (NOK og tonn)?
- Produksjon (kvantum, hvilke fiskeslag)?
- Viktigste kunder (supermarkedskjeder, grossister/distributører, restauranter, kantiner, offentlige institusjoner - hvilke)?

## 2. Hvor mange land selger dere fisk til? Hvilke land?

- Markedssituasjon? Nok kjøpere? Tilfredsstillende prisnivå? Stabile kjøpere?
- Foretrekker dere å ha mange eller få kjøpere?

## 3. Handel med Russland

- Når startet dere å eksportere fisk til Russland? Når fikk du ansvaret?
- Hvordan ble kontakten med russiske bedrifter etablert første gang?
- Hvor mange russiske kjøpere har dere i dag?
- Hvordan har antallet kjøpere utviklet med tiden - fra dere startet med eksport til Russland frem til i dag?
- Hvor stor andel av den totale eksporten av fisk til deres bedrift går til Russland? (volum/verdi)

## 5. Hva er viktig for deg/deres bedrift ved valg av ny kjøper?

Åpent spørsmål

- like faktorer for russiske kjøpere som for kjøper fra andre land?

### - La oss snakke om de(n) kjøpern(e) dere har hatt lengst kontakt med.

Nedenfor er det listet opp en rekke faktorer som har vist seg å ha betydning for partene i en bedriftsrelasjon. Vennligst indiker på en skala fra 1 til 5 hvor viktig (5) eller ikke viktig (1) du føler følgende faktor er for din bedrifts relasjon med kjøpere av fisk?

|  | Ikke viktig |   |   | Viktig |   |
|--|-------------|---|---|--------|---|
| 1. Tillit                                | 1           | 2 | 3 | 4      | 5 |
| 2. Kommunikasjon                         | 1           | 2 | 3 | 4      | 5 |
| 3. Økonomisk tilfredshet (pris/gevinst)  | 1           | 2 | 3 | 4      | 5 |
| 4. Sosial tilfredshet (trivsel/vennskap) | 1           | 2 | 3 | 4      | 5 |
| 5. Langsiktighet                         | 1           | 2 | 3 | 4      | 5 |
| 6. Forutsigbarhet                        | 1           | 2 | 3 | 4      | 5 |
| 7. Formelle bindinger (kontrakter)       | 1           | 2 | 3 | 4      | 5 |
| 8. Velvilje                              | 1           | 2 | 3 | 4      | 5 |
| 9. Felles verdier                        | 1           | 2 | 3 | 4      | 5 |
| 10. Relasjonsspesifikke investeringer    | 1           | 2 | 3 | 4      | 5 |
| 11. Forpliktelse                         | 1           | 2 | 3 | 4      | 5 |
| 12. Lite konflikt                        | 1           | 2 | 3 | 4      | 5 |
| 13. Gjensidig avhengighet                | 1           | 2 | 3 | 4      | 5 |

**6. Hva er viktig for deg/deres bedrift for å ønske og opprettholde en god relasjon med en kjøper?**

- like faktorer for russiske kjøpere som for selger til andre land?

**7. Er langsiktige kjøperforhold viktig for deg/din bedrift?**

- Hva er den lengste bedriftsrelasjonen du har hatt med en russisk kjøper?

**8. Hva gjør deres bedrift for å opprettholde/pleie en forretningsrelasjon?**

- forskjell Russland andre marked?

**9. Tilfredshet**

- Føler du deg generelt tilfreds med bedriftsrelasjonene med russiske kjøpere?

**10. Tillit**

- Stoler du på dine russiske samarbeidspartnere?
- I møte med nye forretningspartnere – hva trenger du for å føle tillit til motparten?
- Er det ulikt fra marked til marked?

**11. Kommunikasjon**

- Fungerer kommunikasjonen med russiske partnere godt?
- Hvor ofte har dere kontakt?
- Hvem har dere kontakt med hos den russiske kjøperen? (Tittel/nivå)

**12. Informasjonsutveksling**

- Føler du at du får tilstrekkelig informasjon fra den russiske partneren?
- Mengde og type informasjon (info om bedriften?)
- Går den begge veier? Føler du at dere får like mye informasjon tilbake som dere gir?
- Personlig/bedriften?

**13. Makt**

- Hvordan føler du at makten mellom dere og deres russiske partner er fordelt?
- Føler du at dere har makt til å påvirke viktige sider av handelsrelasjonen med russiske kjøpere?
- Hvem legger premissene for forholdet mellom deres bedrift og de russiske kjøperne?
- Hvilken konsekvens har importrestriksjonene mot norsk laksefisk og trusselen om samme restriksjoner for pelagisk fisk for dere?

- Har den spesielle importsituasjonen til Russland noen gang blitt brukt i mot dere i forhandlinger?

#### 14. Avhengighet

- Føler du at dere og deres russiske partnere er like avhengig av hverandre?
- Kjøpe fisk – selge fisk; Alternative marked?

#### 15. Forpliktelse

- Er det viktig med gjensidig forpliktelse mellom kjøper og selger for at der skal føle dere trygge? (formelle kontrakter, muntlige lovnader, relasjoner?)
- Hvordan foretrekker dere å forplikte dere til deres kjøpere?
- Forplikter dere dere annerledes til russiske kjøpere enn til kjøpere fra andre land?
- Synes du at de russiske partnerne dere har relasjon med forplikter seg på noen måte med tanke på videre handel med dere?

#### 16. Benytter dere skriftlige kontrakter med kjøperne?

- Generelt?
- Med russiske kjøpere?
- Innhold?

#### 17. På en skala fra 1 til 5 hvor uviktig eller viktig synes du det er med formelle kontrakter?

|             |   |   |   |        |
|-------------|---|---|---|--------|
| Ikke viktig |   |   |   | Viktig |
| 1           | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5      |

#### 18. Føler du at dine forventninger til de russiske kjøperne blir innfridd?

#### 19. Kan det dere har investert i en russisk leverandør (tid, oppmerksomhet...) overføres til en eventuell ny kjøper?

- Innebærer det store kostnader i form av tid, penger etc. å skifte leverandør?

#### 20. Kultur

- Synes du at det er forskjell i norsk og russiske kultur? Hvis ja – på hvilken måte? Eksempler
- Har dere opplevd utfordringer som skyldes ulikheter i kultur?
- Har kulturen noe å si for deres forhold med russiske kjøpere?
- Føler du personlig at du har god innsikt i særegenheter ved russisk kultur?

#### 21. Hvordan håndteres kulturelle ulikheter/utfordringer?

- Tilpasninger – hvem føler du tilpasser seg hvem med hensyn til måte å drive forretning på?
- Hvordan er det å jobbe med Russland sammenlignet med andre land? (Forutsatt at respondenten handler med andre land enn Russland)



## **РУКОВОДСТВО ПО ОПРОСУ, ОСНОВНАЯ ТЕМА ИССЛЕДОВАНИЙ**

### **1. Расскажите, пожалуйста, о Вашем предприятии**

- количество сотрудников
- годовой оборот (в рублях и в тоннах)
- производство (какой тип рыбы Вы используете, какие продукты Вы производите, относительное распределение производства по различным типам продуктов)
- самые важные клиенты (по выбору - сети супермаркетов, оптовики/ дистрибьютеры, рестораны, столовые, общественные организации или другое) и относительное распределение Вашего оборота по различным клиентам?

### **2. Из каких стран Вы покупаете рыбу? Количество этих стран?**

- Оцените, пожалуйста, ситуацию на рынке на сегодняшний день.
- Сложно ли найти рыбу? Хороших поставщиков? Уровень цен, который Вас устраивает? Стабильные поставки с достаточным объёмом товара?
- Для Вас предпочтительнее иметь много или мало поставщиков?
- Какое, на Ваш взгляд, идеальное количество поставщиков?

### **3. Торговля с Норвегией**

- Когда Вы начали импортировать рыбу из Норвегии?
- Каким образом Ваше предприятие впервые установило контакт с норвежской фирмой/фирмами?
- Сколько норвежских поставщиков Ваше предприятие имеет на сегодняшний день?
- Увеличилось ли Ваше количество норвежских поставщиков с того дня, как Вы начали импортировать рыбу из Норвегии?
- Из каких стран, кроме Норвегии, Вы еще импортируете рыбу?
- Какую долю занимает импорт рыбы из Норвегии в общем объёме импорта Вашего предприятия (в тоннах и рублях)?
- С кем из норвежских поставщиков Вы сотрудничаете дольше всего?
- Как Вы поддерживаете контакты с теми норвежскими поставщиками, с которыми у Вас сложилось долгосрочное сотрудничество?
  - Какого рода контакт – личный/по телефону/по электронной почте?
  - Как часто Вы общаетесь?
  - Вы и Ваш норвежский партнер одинаково часто проявляете инициативу с целью поддержания контакта?
  - С каким представителем норвежских фирм-поставщиков Вы поддерживаете контакт? (Должность: директор фирмы, владелец, административный директор, директор по маркетингу, продавец)
  - Какие вопросы Вы обычно поднимаете, когда Вы общаетесь с Вашим норвежским поставщиком/поставщиками?
  - Что Вы в целом обсуждаете, когда общаетесь?
- Долгосрочные отношения с поставщиком важны для Вас/Вашего предприятия?
- Насколько долгими, по Вашему мнению, должны быть торговые отношения с поставщиком, если мы говорим о долгосрочном сотрудничестве?
- Приведите, пожалуйста, пример Вашего самого долгого сотрудничества с норвежским поставщиком.

**4. Заключаете ли Вы официальные письменные контракты с Вашими поставщиками?**

- Что в таком случае Вы обязательно включаете в контракт/особо уточняете в контрактах?

**5. Оцените, пожалуйста, важность подписания официального контракта, где 1 означает неважно, а 5 означает важно.**

|          |   |   |   |       |
|----------|---|---|---|-------|
| Не важно |   |   |   | Важно |
| 1        | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5     |

**6. Что важно для Вас/Вашего предприятия при выборе нового поставщика?**

Открытый вопрос.

**7. Что важно для Вас/Вашего предприятия для поддержания хороших отношений с поставщиком?**

Открытый вопрос.

**8. Сейчас речь пойдет о том поставщике/поставщиках, с которыми у Вас сложились самые длительные торговые отношения.**

В таблице ниже приведен ряд факторов, которые являются важными для обеих сторон в торговых отношениях. Пожалуйста, оцените по шкале от 1 до 5, насколько важен (5) или не важен (1) тот или иной фактор по отношению к торговому сотрудничеству Вашего предприятия с поставщиками рыбы.

|   | Не важен |   |   | Важен |   |
|---|----------|---|---|-------|---|
|   | 1        | 2 | 3 | 4     | 5 |
| 1. Доверие  | 1        | 2 | 3 | 4     | 5 |
| 2. Взаимное общение   | 1        | 2 | 3 | 4     | 5 |
| 3. Удовлетворение экономических нужд (цена/выгода)                    | 1        | 2 | 3 | 4     | 5 |
| 4. Удовлетворение социальных потребностей (приятная атмосфера/дружба) | 1        | 2 | 3 | 4     | 5 |
| 5. Долгосрочность   | 1        | 2 | 3 | 4     | 5 |
| 6. Предсказуемость  | 1        | 2 | 3 | 4     | 5 |
| 7. Официальные связи (на контрактной основе)                          | 1        | 2 | 3 | 4     | 5 |
| 8. Доброжелательность   | 1        | 2 | 3 | 4     | 5 |
| 9. Общая система ценностей  | 1        | 2 | 3 | 4     | 5 |
| 10. Инвестиции  | 1        | 2 | 3 | 4     | 5 |
| 11. Взаимные обязательства  | 1        | 2 | 3 | 4     | 5 |
| 12. Безконфликтность  | 1        | 2 | 3 | 4     | 5 |
| 13. Взаимозависимость партнеров                                       | 1        | 2 | 3 | 4     | 5 |

В нижеследующих вопросах речь будет идти об одном из ваших основных норвежских поставщиков, с которым у вашего предприятия сложилось долгосрочное сотрудничество.

- 9. Есть ли у Вас такое ощущение, что у Вашего предприятия больше власти, чтобы как-то повлиять на важные аспекты Вашего торгового сотрудничества, чем у норвежских поставщиков?**  
- Если да, то каким образом?
- 10. Кто, по Вашему мнению, диктует основные правила в отношениях между Вашим предприятием и предприятиями-поставщиками?**  
- Насколько это варьируется для различных предприятий-поставщиков? (в зависимости от размера и т.п.)
- 11. Ощущаете ли Вы, что Ваши ожидания по отношению к норвежскому поставщику оправдываются?**
- 12. Может ли Ваше предприятие использовать на нового потенциального поставщика то, что оно уже вложило в одного конкретного поставщика (время, внимание и т.п.),?**  
- Насколько дорого Вам обойдется смена поставщика (сколько времени, денег и т.п.)?
- 13. Культура/менталитет**
- Считаете ли Вы, что существуют различия в норвежской и российской культуре/менталитете? Если да, то какие? Приведите примеры.
  - Случалось ли Вам встречаться с некоторыми трудностями, которые объясняются различиями в культуре/менталитете? Если да – то каким образом вы их разрешали?
  - Имеет ли культура/менталитет какое-нибудь влияние на Ваши отношения с норвежскими поставщиками?
  - Считаете ли Вы, что Вы лично хорошо разбираетесь в особенностях норвежской/западно-европейской культуры/менталитета?
  - Как Вы можете охарактеризовать Вашу работу с Норвегией по сравнению с работой с другими странами?  
(при условии, что респондент работает с другими странами, кроме Норвегии)

