NORGES HANDELSHØYSKOLE

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How should Norwegians prepare for doing business with Japan?

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Abstract

This thesis examines the differences between Norwegian and Japanese culture, and how these differences might impact business relations between companies from the two countries. We also look at the language barrier as a possible source of difficulty, and see how this can be overcome through the use of interpreters, or by using a common language. We look at the usefulness and dangers of stereotyping, before analysing both Norway and Japan using Hofstede's and Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner's cultural dimensions and giving some thought to the issue of cultural convergence. Finally, we look at the considerations a Norwegian firm will need to take when entering into a business relationship with a Japanese firm.

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1. Foreword

Japan is an important factor in the world economy. It is the second largest economy in Asia, and the third largest economy in the world, after the USA and China (CIA, 2005). While Japan accounts for a small percentage of the Norwegian trade (2.5% of imports and 0.8% of exports in January-September 2006 (Statistics Norway, 2006)), it is a large factor in Norwegian trade with Asia (accounting for nearly 20% of both imports and exports in the January-September 2006 timeframe (Statistics Norway, 2006)). A 2005 report published by the WTO shows that there has been a significant increase in the trade of both merchandise and commercial services with Japan on a world level.

For the reasons listed above, it is not unreasonable to suggest that we might see an increase in the Norwegian trade with Japan. Unfortunately, most literature on the subject of acquiring or maintaining a business relationship with Japan is written from an American viewpoint. Very little information exists on the Norwegian perspective of Japanese business dealings. The intent of this thesis is to add to the literature in this field, and to answer the question: "How should Norwegians prepare for doing business with Japan?" In order to answer this question, we will look at the differences and similarities between the Norwegian and Japanese business culture and how this will influence business between the two countries.

2. The Language Barrier

The first, and most obvious, issue to come to mind with regards to Norwegian-Japanese business dealings is the language. In a perfect world we would all speak the same language, but this is unfortunately not such a world. The Norwegians speak Norwegian and the Japanese speak Japanese. Theses language are belong to two widely different language families (Norwegian is Germanic and Japanese is Japonic), making the gap between them much larger than between e.g. Norwegian and German. There are various methods that can be used for bridging this gap.

2.1 Foreign Language Competency

One possible method would be for either part to learn the language of the other. Since it would take a significant amount of work to gain the necessary fluency, it is not realistic to use this as a measure in preparation for a business meeting. This would require the participants study the language with an eye towards long-term use. One can unfortunately not expect that the Japanese would seek to learn Norwegian on a large enough scale to be able to depend on this competency, seeing as Norwegian is a fairly small language, with only 4.8 million speakers worldwide (Norwegian Language, 2006), thus not making it a very attractive business language.

Japan is working towards spreading the Japanese language. A survey quoted by Kaiser (2003:199), states that there were more than two million people studying Japanese in the 1998-99 period, and the number was a 29% increase over the 1993 figures. Some of these would have been Norwegian, and perhaps these people could be used to handle dealings with Japan. Unfortunately, this might not be the best solution. First of all, the firm would need to get a hold of these people, and put them in a negotiation position. There are no guarantees that there would be enough people with the required language skill and the desire to fill the position. Second, assuming that the firm uses several people on a negotiating team, all members of the team would need to possess the same skill with Japanese, or it would simply be a case of having an internal interpreter. Third, and perhaps most importantly, simply being able to converse in a language does not give you the ability to negotiate in that language. In addition to being understood, the representatives must be able to successfully negotiate the desired deal, which requires skills outside mere language.

There are also dangers involved with using the native language of the other part. In particular, one might give the impression of having a greater comprehension than is really the case. This can easily lead to misunderstanding due to expressions and idioms that don’t exist or don’t mean the same thing when translated. There is also the fact that any language uses non-verbal cues in addition to spoken phrases, and the use of a language will often lead to listeners expecting the speaker to both give and receive cues related to that language. Failing to use and understand these cues might lead to misunderstandings and anger. Hamers and Blanc (1989) suggests, however, that bilinguals, in addition to obtaining skills in the spoken language, also tend to acquire and assimilate the non-verbal behaviour inherent in the language. This would give great advantages in negotiations, in that one would be able to both accurately read one’s counterpart and ensure that one gives the correct signals.

Even if you choose not to use the language of your counterpart, there might be advantages in simply knowing it. One such advantage, which we will look at in more detail in the next subsection, is that if an interpreter is used you can use the time spent translating to formulate a response. Further, you have the ability to listen in on the other party in the event that they start talking among themselves in their native language. This can give you valuable insight into the state of the negotiations.

Gaining better response time and being able to eavesdrop on the other party are definite advantages, but perhaps you can get even more with a little language knowledge. Hamers and Blanc (1989:115) state that “all definitions of culture agree that language is an important part of culture”. Tietze et al. (2003:93) goes further, saying: “We view meaning culture and language as intrinsically bound together”. We will look at the cultures of Japan and Norway later on in this thesis, but it does seem that perhaps knowing the language will give you some knowledge about the culture. Tietze et al. (2003:93) mention linguistic determinism, which “proposes that the language one grows up with determines how one will see the world, how one thinks about it, and what kind of consciousness one has about it”. Thus, knowing the language will give you a window into your counterpart’s perception of the world. Of course, linguistic determinism can seem very confining, never allowing you to escape your language’s construction of the world. To counter this rigid structure, Tietze et al. also mention linguistic relativity where a language is seen to create patterns of thought and perception that is common amongst the practitioners of the language, but doesn’t confine them to these patterns. This is perhaps closer to the real world and, although it doesn’t give the same certainty, this approach also gives you valuable insight into your counterpart by knowing his language.

As will be seen in section 4 and 5, Japan places great emphasis on trust and on building a relationship. Knowing the language and culture can ease the contact, and thereby help in establishing the necessary relationship and trust.

2.2 Using an interpreter

If neither part can use the language of the other, then one can consider using an interpreter. The obvious advantage of using an interpreter is that it allows two parties that would not normally understand each other to do business. Even in the case that one party speaks the language of the other, Hodgson et al. (2000) point out that the use of an interpreter can give advantages. By asking questions in ones native language and using an interpreter, the other party will often have its focus on the interpreter during the translation, thereby enabling the first party to carefully and unobtrusively observe facial expressions and nonverbal responses. It should be mentioned that anyone aware of this advantage could simply choose to have his focus on the other party instead of the interpreter, thereby negating this advantage. The other advantage is not so easily dismissed. By understanding the language of your counterpart, you gain twice the response time, since you can formulate your response during the translation process.

A very important consideration when using interpreters is the interpreter's affiliation. Is he an employee of your company, of the other party's company, or an independent? Unless a firm is doing extreme amounts of business with a foreign company, with frequent negotiations and meetings, it will rarely be necessary to employ an interpreter fulltime. In order to use an interpreter, one of the parties will have to hire him. Being "in control" of the interpreter can be very important. *"Firstly, you will need to brief the interpreter before the discussions begin. Second, you will need to sit with the interpreter after the negotiations end each day to assess results and the interests of the Japanese side"* (Hodgson et al., 2000:76). These options will not be available to anyone without their own interpreter.

Interpretation is not only concerned with translating a statement. It can be just as important to ensure that the intent of the statement is carried over. It is vital to use a skilled interpreter in order to prevent miscommunication. This brings us to another point: the quality of interpretation. Proper communication might require a certain level of technical knowledge on the part of the interpreter. It can be difficult to find interpreters with the skills needed for a negotiation.

Exhibit 1 lists several recommendations for the use of interpreters in business negotiations with the Japanese made by Howard Van Zandt and amended by Hodgson et al. (2000:103-104). While these recommendations are intended for Americans, they are generic enough to be valuable for Norwegians.

Exhibit 1

Van Zandt's Recommendations Regarding Interpreters (Amended by Hodgson et al.

1. Brief the interpreter in advance about the subject and give him a copy of the presentation to study and discuss

2. Speak loudly, clearly and slowly. (Some Americans try to talk with a cigar in the mouth – an egregious mistake)

3. Avoid little-known words, such as "arcane", "heuristic", or "buncombe".

4. Maintain a pleasant attitude.

5. Explain each major idea in two or three different ways, as the point may be lost if only discussed once.

6. Do not talk more than a minute or two without giving the interpreter a chance to speak.

7. While talking, allow the interpreter time to make notes of what is being said.

8. Assume that all numbers over 10,000 may be mistranslated. Repeat them carefully and write them down for all to see. The Japanese system of counting large sums is so different from that of the west that errors frequently occur. Also, the number billion should be avoided, as it means 1,000,000,000,000 in Europe, and 1,000,000,000 in the United States

9. Do not lose confidence if the interpreter uses a dictionary. No one is likely to have a vocabulary of 40,000 words in each of two languages, and a dictionary is often essential.

9. (Amended) We disagree. Having to use a dictionary is a sign of potentially serious problems.

10. Permit the interpreter to spend as much time as needed in clarifying points whose meanings are obscure.

10. (Amended) If the interpreter is spending more time than you in talking, then he is doing more than translating. This may help or hurt you.

11. Do not interrupt the interpreter as he translates. Interrupting causes many misunderstandings, usually.

12. Do not jump to conclusions, as Japanese ways of doing things are often different from what foreigners expect.

13. Avoid long sentences, double negatives, or the use of negative wordings of a sentence when a positive form could be used.

14. Don't use slang terms, as, for example, "If you will let me have half a 'G' at six bits a piece, it'll be gung ho with me". Rather, state simply, "I want 500 at 75 cents each".

15. Avoid superfluous words. Your point may be lost if wrapped up in generalities.

16. Try to be as expressive as possible by using movements of hands, eyes, lips, shoulders, and head to supplement words.

17. During meetings, write out the main points discussed; in this way both parties can double-check their understanding.

18. After meetings, confirm in writing what has been agreed to.

19. Don't expect an interpreter to work for over an hour or two without a rest period. His work is exhausting and a nervous strain.

20. Consider using two men if interpreting is to last a whole day or into the evening, so when one tires the other can take over.

20. (Amended) This is only true in cases of "simultaneous" translation, as opposed to

21. Don’t be suspicious if a speaker talks for five minutes and the interpreter covers it in half a minute. The speaker may have been wordy.

21. (Amended) Be suspicious. This can be a sign that the interpreter is fatigued or simply not paying attention.

22. Be understanding if it develops that the interpreter has made a mistake. It is almost impossible to avoid making some errors, because Japanese and European languages are so dissimilar.

22. (Amended) Mistakes are a sign of the interpreter’s incompetence. Often in major negotiations, minor mistakes can result in the breakup of the negotiations.

23. Be sure the Japanese are given all the time they want to tell their side of the story. If they hesitate, ask the interpreter for advice on what next to say or do.

The main disadvantage of using an interpreter is that the communication becomes indirect; by going through a third party the risk of miscommunication and misunderstanding becomes greater. A quote from Torben Dahl (in Harbom & Tsalapatis, 1996:59) illustrates this: *“I think, it seems much better, if we both use a foreign language. If we used interpreters, we would never get the direct comment. When it goes through an interpreter, the nuisances do not follow”*. There is also the fact that many people use language actively as a tool to get what they want, and using an interpreter makes this more difficult since the interpreter might be unable or unwilling to convey this use in the translation.

2.3 Common language

In cases where neither party speaks the language of the other, and they are unable or unwilling to use an interpreter, there is a third option available. If both parties know a third, common language, they can use this when communicating.

The most obvious language to use is English, which has become the de facto lingua franca of the world. There are of course other alternatives, e.g. French or German, but since English is the most wide-spread language, as well as the only obligatory foreign language taught in schools in both Norway and Japan, the following will assume that English is used. Many of the same points hold true with regards to other languages, but one can expect that the grasp of the language will be less, at least on a general basis.

Gesteland (2002:293) writes that: *"Most Norwegians speak and read English fluently"*. Su-Dale (2003) echoes this statement, though she cautions that the exception is those in their 60s and older. Regarding the Japanese, Gesteland (2002) notes that Japanese business people are more apt to speak foreign languages these days, especially English. He goes on to mention however, that many of them are more fluent in the written than in the spoken language. Nishiyama (2000) goes further and mentions that while those assigned to overseas subsidiaries are usually given several weeks of intensive English lessons, the average Japanese businessman does not have a good command of English.

We see that it might be desirable for the Norwegians to use English, given their strong grasp of this language. The question then, is how this would affect the interaction with the average Japanese, who is assumed to have a limited grasp of the language. One problem is that *"when people are bad at speaking a language, one can easily get the illusion that they are not very clever"* (Harbom & Tsalapatis, 1996:58). This problem is perhaps more pronounced in the native English countries where according to Nishiyama (2000:166) *"people with thick foreign accents are often looked down upon as poorly educated or new immigrants"*, but one cannot discount that the same holds true for Norway.

A further problem is the issue of comprehension. Unless both parties has en equally strong grasp of the language, one runs the risk of miscommunication, either because the other part did not correctly hear what was said, or because they simply misunderstood the statement. Hodgson et al. (2000:102) notes that “confusion can result when Japanese executives, because of politeness, indicate they understand when in fact they don’t.

Are these problems insurmountable? Not really, they merely require you to take more care when speaking. The “bad language skills equal a poor education” problem can be solved simply by avoiding the trap of making judgement on this basis. Miscommunication is somewhat more difficult to avoid, but one can reformulate a statement several times, use visual media (such as slides and brochures) and use written support materials.

There are of course not only problems associated with using a common language. Using a common language can more easily give the impression that the parties are on equal footing. This is mentioned by Harbom & Tsalapatis (1996:58) together with a quote by a Japanese stating (regarding the Danish and the Japanese): *“It is good that English is not the mother tongue of either of us. London English is the worst, because it is very difficult to understand. German English or Scandinavian English is much easier to understand”*. This quote illustrates what is perhaps the most important aspect with using a common language, namely that it forces both parties to adapt to a foreign language. A native speaker will often fall into the trap of speaking as if his counterpart was also a native speaker, but with both parties using a foreign language they will more easily recognise the problem with translating their intended message and can take steps to ensure clarity in communication.

Using a common language also opens for the possibility of cooling down the discussion. I.e. in a tense discussion one can cool down while the other party confers in their native language. Mr Nakagawa (quoted in Harbom & Tsalapatis (1996:60)) says that *“it is a good break to cool down the head. When the Danes speak Danish, we can relax”*. It is naturally important to be careful when switching to ones native language. It can be seen as rude, and can also give the impression that one is hiding something.

Finally, one must always be aware that even if both parties use a common language, there might still be some cultural influence colouring the language and expressions.

3. Stereotypes

If everyone were similar, then the world would be a much simpler place (and perhaps a great deal more boring). It is obvious to anyone who has interacted with someone that people are different. This makes it very difficult to give advice on how one should relate to others, and what to expect. If we were to cover the entire breadth of Norwegian-Japanese interaction, this thesis would be hundreds or even thousands of pages, and still there might be unconsidered angles. In order to provide a meaningful discussion, one must therefore generalise to a certain extent. A useful tool for doing this is to employ stereotypes.

3.1 The nature of stereotypes

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (1997:1169) defines stereotype as *"a fixed idea, image, etc that many people have of a particular type of person or thing, but which often is not true in reality"*. Stewart et al. (1979:5) stresses that *"stereotyping is one of the processes which assists in reducing and editing sensory input into meaningful wholes"*. A stereotype is often seen as something negative, something to be avoided. It is, by its nature, a judgement based on limited information (e.g. "this person is black and therefore a criminal"). Stereotyping lumps people together with little regard for individual differences. Relying exclusively on stereotypes will most like backfire when you realise that the person you are talking to is not at all how you thought he would be, and at this point your preconceived notion might have caused irreparable damage.

3.2 Using stereotypes

As was mentioned above, stereotypes allow us to take a large set of disparate data and put it into a more understandable system. Instead of trying to describe every single Japanese person, one can create stereotypes that explain the Japanese people as a whole. Aggregating to this level enables us to give meaningful advice on how the Japanese are likely to behave. The problem with creating stereotypes is that they will rarely be entirely accurate; it is a rare person who embodies all the traits ascribed to his stereotype. For this reason it is important to use stereotypes, not as a clear answer to a person’s behaviour, but simply as guidelines to likely behaviour (e.g. instead of thinking “all Japanese avoid saying no”, try to think “most Japanese are likely to avoid saying no”). This of course means that any advice given might prove to wholly inappropriate in a real-world situation, but they will at least provide a starting point, from which one will simply have to adapt to the situation at hand.

4. Culture

Sun Tzu once wrote: *“Know your enemy and know yourself and you can fight a hundred battles without disaster”*. It is perhaps a bit extreme to liken a business meeting to a battle and a business partner to an enemy, but the main principle still holds. In order to be reliably successful in business you must understand both yourself and your partner. This understanding will let you know what makes your counterpart “tick”, and thereby understand how he is likely to react in a given situation. In order to gain the full advantage of this knowledge, it is also necessary to understand oneself, both so that one can accurately grasp in what areas the other party is similar or dissimilar, and in order to accurately see how your counterpart is likely to view you. Hill (1998) mentions cross-cultural literacy, and defines it as *“an understanding of how cultural differences both across and within nations can affect the way in which business is practised”* (1998:66)

It seems that we should look at culture, but the question then becomes: What is culture? The definition of culture varies. Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (1997:285) calls it *“the customs, arts, social institutions, etc of a particular group or nation”*. Hofstede (2001:9) defines culture as *“the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another”*. A third definition, from Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner (2001:6) is that culture is *“the way in which a group of people solves problems and reconciles dilemmas”*. As we can see, these definitions are quite different, but they all have one thing in common: culture deals with groups. “Group” is of course a very wide term; it can be employed on anything from a family, via organisation and up to national level and beyond. For our purposes, however, culture shall be looked at on the national level only. While it is tempting to look to the organisational level, we would again reach the problem of overextending ourselves, and this is therefore better left for the preparations before a business meeting.

Culture is often split into two parts: Values and norms. Hill (1998:67) defines values as *“abstract ideas about what a group believes to be good, right, and desirable”*. Values, then, can be said to be the underlying fundament of people's beliefs and perceptions. The counterpart to values, norms, can be defined as (again from Hill (1998:67)) *"the social rules and guidelines that prescribe appropriate behaviour in particular situations"*. Norms can be seen to be more situation-dependent than values, explaining how people should behave in a situation, depending on the existing factors. These two together form the way people think and act. Figure 1 illustrates how culture (and norms and values) are affected by various factors.

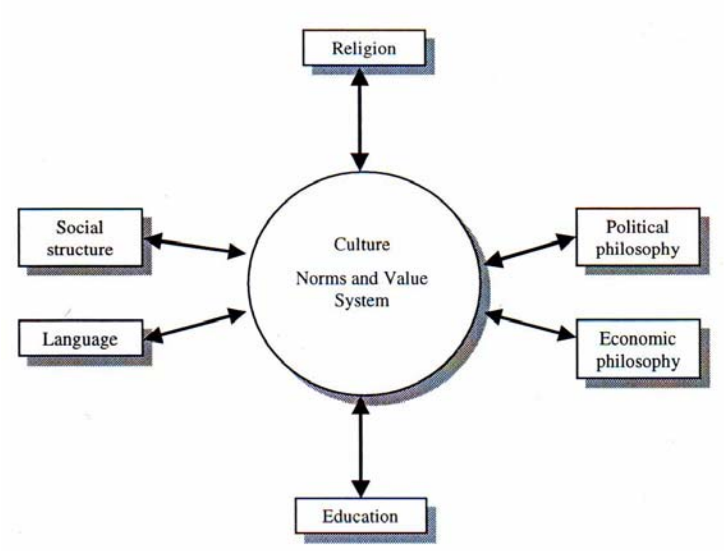

Figure 1

Source: Hill, 1998

How will we examine the cultures of Norway and Japan? While culture is, as previously mentioned, a very broad field with many definitions, there are two recognized authorities: Geert Hofstede, and the pair of Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner. Both of these have conducted studies of national culture, and they have developed frameworks to explain culture and how countries relate to each other.

4.1 Hofstede's dimensions

Hofstede could perhaps be said to be the "grand old man" of cultural research. He conducted studies of IBM employees in various countries between 1967 and 1973. These studies led to the creation of a framework with four dimensions, and after an additional study he added a fifth. These dimensions are:

- Power Distance – This dimension measures whether inequality and hierarchy is expected and accepted. High power distance indicates a high level of inequality in terms of power and wealth. Conversely, low power distance indicates more equality and cooperation between levels.
- Individualism – The purpose of this dimension is to measure how important the individual is compared to the group. Cultures with high Individualism have people mostly concerned with their own self-interest and who are very self-reliant. Low Individualism places the importance on the group and harmony within the group.
- Masculinity – Measures whether the culture has a large or small degree of gender differentiation. High Masculinity indicates clearly defined emotional gender roles, with males dominating a significant portion of the society and power structure. Low Masculinity indicates a low level of differentiation and discrimination between genders.
- Uncertainty Avoidance – This dimension measures how comfortable people are with regards to ambiguity and uncertainty. A high ranking for Uncertainty Avoidance means that there is a low tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity, leading to a rule-oriented society. A low ranking for Uncertainty Avoidance indicates less concern for uncertainty and ambiguity, leading to a society more open for risks and less constrained by rules.
- Long-term Orientation – Here one looks at whether short-term achievements are more important than long-term achievements. High Long-term Orientation indicates a culture that places the focus on the long term. Such a culture easily accepts change, believe in many truths and have thrift for investment. Low Long-term Orientation means that a culture focuses on the short term, believes in absolute truth, is conventional and traditional and is concerned with stability.

<u>Criticism of Hofstede</u>

As with any piece of research, there has been some criticism of Hofstede's results. Hill (1998, 88-89) mentions the most common complaints: *"First, the research itself may have been culturally bound, because the research team was composed of Europeans and Americans. The analysis may well have been shaped by their own cultural biases and concerns. Second, Hofstede's informants worked not only within a single industry, but also within a single company. At the time IBM was renowned for its own strong corporate culture and employee selection procedures. It is possible, that the values of IBM employees are different in important respects from the values that underlie the cultures from which those employees came. A third caution is that Hofstede's work is now beginning to look dated. Cultures do not stand still, they evolve over time, albeit slowly. What was a reasonable characterisation in the 1960s and 1970s may not be so reasonable today"*.

As Hill indicated, the research was based on surveys conducted within one single organisation. It is not unreasonable to assume that organisations (especially those of such a size as IBM) will tend to attract a certain type of individual, as well as assimilate its employees into the organisational culture. Despite this, Hofstede found clear indications that the difference in cultural background was visible. While we should be aware that the findings of Hofstede could be somewhat removed from the reality of the world, they are nonetheless a reasonable starting point when looking at how cultures differ, and what effect these differences will have.

4.2 Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner's dimensions

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner have a somewhat different angle from Hofstede with regards to culture. As stated on their web-site: *"We talk culture. We mean business"* (Trompenaars Hampden-Turner). Instead of merely doing research in the field of culture, they run a company providing consulting, training and coaching to help leaders and professionals with business and culture dilemmas. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner also have a framework for culture, developed through studies in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This framework consists of seven value orientations, or cultural dimensions:

- Universalism versus Particularism – Measures whether adherence to rules or relationships are more important. A high score in this dimension shows a culture leaning towards Universalism, that is, believes that there are universally applicable rules with no regard for the unique situation. The reverse is a culture leaning towards Particularism, believing that each situation must be evaluated according to unique factors, with special attention given to the relationship with the people involved.
- Individualism versus Communitarism – This dimension is similar to Hofstede's Individualism-dimension, and measures whether the individual or the group is most important. A high score on this dimension indicates that the culture is mostly concerned with the individual, and has a high degree of self-interest. A low score indicates that the group is most important, with a focus on the collective.
- Neutral versus Emotional – Looks at how appropriate it is to show emotion. A Neutral culture believes that it is inappropriate to show emotion, and expects cold detachment. An Emotional culture, on the other hand, sees it as natural to show strong emotions, and relies on these emotions to understand how the other part really feels.
- Specific versus Diffuse – The purpose of this dimension is to measure whether work and private life is separate or connected. In a Specific culture, each interaction is covered by a set of expectations that are not connected to other interactions, i.e. work and private life is separate. In a Diffuse culture, all parts of a relationship are connected, both professional and non-professional. One influencing the other.
- Achievement versus Ascription – This highlights how status is accorded: by accomplishments or by gender, age, etc. In an achievement-based culture, you are judged according to your accomplishments and your record. On the other hand is the ascription-based culture, where statud is attributed according to age, connections, educational record, etc.
- Attitudes to time – Measures which is most important of past, present or future. Also looks at if time is viewed as a straight line or with past, present and future interacting.
- Attitudes to the environment – This dimension examines whether motivations and values are derived from internal or external factor. In a culture with an external focus, the

belief is that the things happening have external reasons, and so is outside the personal control. The opposite of this is internal focus, believing that when something happens to someone it is their own doing, and they are in control.

Criticism of Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner

There has been some criticism of Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, notably from Hofstede (1996) who claimed that the theory of Trompenaars is not supported by his database. As a result of correlation and factor analysis at the country level, Hofstede said that only two dimensions could be identified, both of which correlated with Hofstede’s “Individualism” dimension. In a response to this criticism, Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars (1997) made explicit the differences in approach. They presented two contrasting lists of assumptions attributed to Hofstede’s work and their own, respectively. Part of their critique of Hofstede referred to the uses to which their two contrasting approaches could be put. Hofstede’s approach appears to be about the analysis of the variables of national culture, whereas Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner are more involved in the process of cultural creation.

On the basis of this critique/counter-critique, we see that Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner’s approach can be just as valid as Hofstede’s, so long as we understand that they express two different points of view.

4.3 Analysing Norway and Japan with Hofstede

Having gone over the background of the cultural theory, we will now apply it on the two countries at hand, and see how they compare to each other. The values used here are from Hofstede & Hofstede (2005)

4.3.1 Power Distance

Japan scores higher than Norway on Power Distance (54 compared to 31, where the highest is 104 and the lowest is 11). While both countries are in the lower end of the ranking, there is a significant difference, with Japan ranked at 49th, and Norway ranked at 67th, of a total of 74 countries.

These rankings show that one can expect a greater degree of hierarchy and power inequality in Japan than in Norway. Table 1 shows some differences we can expect to find based on Power Distance (with emphasis on the workplace)

Table 1. Power Distance

Small degree of Power Distance (Norway)	Large degree of Power Distance (Japan)
Hierarchy in organizations means an inequality of roles, established for convenience	Hierarchy in organizations reflects existential inequality between higher and lower levels

There are fewer supervisory personnel	There are more supervisory personnel
Managers rely on their own experiences and on subordinates	Managers rely on superiors and on formal rules
Privileges and status symbols are frowned upon	Privileges and status symbols are normal and popular

(Extract Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005:59)

4.3.2 Invididualism

With regards to Individualism, Norway scores a great deal higher than Japan (69 versus 46, with 91 as the highest and 6 as the lowest). Norway ranks 16th, with Japan ranking 33rd (of 74), placing both countries in the upper half of the table.

Japan is likely to have a greater focus on the group than Norway, which will look more towards the individual. Table 2 shows the effects of difference in Individualism.

Table 2. Individualism

Small degree of Individualism (Japan)	Large degree of Individualism (Norway)
Employees are members of in-groups who will pursue their in-group’s interest	Employees are “economic men” who will pursue the employer’s interest if it coincides with their self-interest

The employer-employee relationship is basically moral, like a family link	The employer-employee relationship is a contract between parties on a labor market
In-group customers get better treatment	Every customer should get the same treatment
Relationship prevails over task	Task prevails over relationship

(Extract from Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005:104)

4.3.3 Masculinity

This dimension shows the most extreme difference between Norway and Japan. The scores are 95 for Japan and 8 for Norway (with 110 as the highest and 5 as the lowest). Of 74 countries, Japan ranks 2nd while Norway ranks 73rd.

The rankings clearly show that while Japan has clearly defined emotional gender roles, while Norway is rather diffuse. Table 3 shows expected characteristics resulting from the scores.

Table 3. Masculinity

Small degree of Masculinity (Norway)	Large degree of Masculinity (Japan)
Resolution of conflicts by compromise and negotiation	Resolution of conflicts by letting the strongest win
People work in order to live	People live in order to work

Careers are optional for both genders	Careers are compulsory for men, optional for women
There is a higher share of working women in professional jobs	There is a lower share of working women in professional jobs

(Extract from Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005:147)

4.3.4 Uncertainty Avoidance

In this dimension we again see a significant gap between Norway and Japan. Japan scores 92, while Norway scores 50 (with scores ranging from 112 to 8). Japan ranks 11th, while Norway ranks 57th (again among 74 countries).

It is clear that Japan has a much lower tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty than Norway. Table 4 shows the differences we can expect to find.

Table 4. Uncertainty Avoidance

Small degree of Uncertainty Avoidance (Norway)	Large degree of Uncertainty Avoidance (Japan)
There should be no more rules than strictly necessary	There is an emotional need for rules, even if these will not work
There is tolerance for ambiguity and chaos	There is a need for precision and

	formalization
Focus on decision process	Focus on decision content
Motivation by achievement and esteem by belonging	Motivation by security and esteem by belonging

(Extract from Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005:189)

4.3.5 Long-term Orientation

With regards to Long-term Orientation, Japan scores higher than Norway, with 80 versus 44 (118 is the highest score and 0 is the lowest). The rankings are not very far apart, Japan is 4th and Norway is 13th, but in this case there are only 39 countries in the ranking.

Japan shows a greater propensity to look towards the long-term, while Norway looks more towards the short-term. Table 5 shows some key differences.

Table 5. Long-term Orientation

Small Degree of Long-term Orientation (Norway)	Large degree of Long-term Orientation (Japan)
Leisure time is important	Leisure time is not important
Importance is this year's profits	Importance is profits 10 years from now

Meritocracy, reward by abilities	Wide social and economic differences are undesireable
Personal loyalty vary with business needs	Investment in lifelong personal networks

(Extract from Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005:225)

4.4 Analysing Norway and Japan with Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner

Having looked at the differences between Norway and Japan as seen with Hofstede's dimensions, we will now turn our attention to Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's point of view. The following values from Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner (1997)

4.4.1 Universalism versus Particularism

In examining this dimension, we encounter a problem: there are no values given for Norway. Are we then unable to use this dimension? The lack of information does not automatically disqualify the dimension, but it does introduce a degree of uncertainty. Lacking values for the country we want to look at, we must instead look to a similar country and assume that they would have similar values. In our case we will look at Norway's neighbouring country, Sweden. While there might be some difference between these countries, it is not unreasonable to assume that they would be fairly similar in terms of Universalism/Particularism.

In order to determine whether a country is Univeralist of Particularist, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner used a case where a friend of yours is speeding and hits a pedestrian. They ask the question: “What right has your friend to expect you to protect him?” Those who said he had a right to expect this would be Particularists, while those who said he has no right to expect this would be Universalists.

92% of Swedish respondents answered that he had no right to expect them to protect him. Sweden (and thereby Norway), would therefore seem to be very Universalist. Of the Japanese respondents, on the other hand, 68% would not protect him. While Japan seems to be fairly Universalist, it is nonetheless a great deal more Particularist than Norway, laying more focus on the relationship with the people involved than universally applicable rules. Table 6 shows some important differences between Universalist and Particularist cultures.

Table 6. Universalist versus Particularist

Universalist (Norway)	Particularist (Japan)
Focus is more on rules than relationships	Focus is more on relationships than on rules
Legal contracts are readily drawn up	Legal contracts are readily modified
There is only one truth or reality, that which has been agreed to	There are several perspectives on reality relative to each participant
A deal is a deal	Relationships evolve

(Extract from Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997:48)

4.4.2 Individualism versus Communitarism

In order to determine whether a country is Individualist or Communitarist, participants were asked to choose one of two statements:

A. "It is obvious that if individuals have as much freedom as possible and the maximum opportunity to develop themselves, the quality of their life will improve as a result."
B. "If individuals are continuously taking care of their fellow human beings the quality of life will improve for everyone, even if it obstructs individual freedom and individual development."

Statement A is Individualist, while statement B is Communitarist.

Of the Norwegian respondents, 54% opted for statement A, while 39% of the Japanese respondents opted for the same. This is not a huge gap, and both countries are near the middle, but Norway shows itself as being Individualist and Japan demonstrates its Communitarism. Norway is therefore more likely to concentrate on the individual, while Japan is most likely to concentrate on the group. Table 7 shows the key differences.

Table 7. Individualism versus Communitarism

Individualism (Norway)	Communitarism (Japan)
More frequent use of "I" form	More frequent use of "We" form

Decisions made on the spot by representatives	Decisions referred back by delegate to organisation
People ideally achieve alone and assume personal responsibility	People ideally achieve in groups which assume joint responsibility
Vacations taken in pairs, even alone	Vacations in organised groups or with extended family

(Extract from Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997:67)

4.4.3 Neutral versus Emotional

For this dimension, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner simply asked respondents whether they would show emotions openly. For Norway, 39% of the respondents said they would not show emotions openly, which means that Norway has a predominantly Emotional culture. There is a significant gap to Japan, where 74% of the respondents would not show emotions, marking Japan a Neutral culture. This means that whereas it would be natural, even expected, for Norwegians to show emotion, the same is not true for the Japanese. The key differences are listed in table 8.

Table 8. Neutral versus Emotional

Neutral (Japan)	Emotional (Norway)
Do not reveal what they are thinking or feeling	Reveal thoughts and feelings verbally and non-verbally

Cool and self-possessed conduct is admired	Heated, vital, animated expressions admired
Physical contact, gesturing or strong facial expressions often taboo	Touching, gesturing and strong facial expressions common
Statements often read out in monotone	Statements declaimed fluently and dramatically

(Extract from Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997:79)

4.4.4 Specific versus Diffuse

To test whether a culture is Specific or Diffuse, participants were asked if a company should provide housing for its employees (a different questions has also been used, but it was found to give a false rating for Japan). 45% of the Japanese respondents disagreed with the questions, marking Japan as a somewhat Diffuse culture. For Norway, on the other hand, 77% disagreed, showing that Norway is predominantly Specific. We should therefore expect that the Japanese will differentiate less between work and personal life than Norwegians will. Table 9 lists the key differences.

Table 9. Specific versus Diffuse

Specific (Norway)	Diffuse (Japan)
Direct, to the point, purposeful in relating	Indirect, circuitous, seemingly “aimless” forms of relating

Precise, blunt, definitive and transparent	Evasive, tactful, ambiguous, even opaque
Principles and consistent moral stands independent of the person being addressed	Highly situational morality depending upon the person and context encountered

(Extract from Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997:100)

4.4.5 Achievement versus Ascription

This dimension was measured by two statements, marked on a five-point scale (where 1 = strongly agree and 5 = strongly disagree):

A. The most important thing in life is to think and act in the ways that best suit the way you really are, even if you do not get things done.
B. The respect a person gets is highly dependent on their family background.

Of the Norwegian respondents, 77% disagreed with A, and 94% disagreed with B. This strongly indicates an Achivement-based culture. The Japanese respondents had 26% in disagreement of A and 79% in disagreement of B, indicating that Japan is leaning towards Ascription, at least more so than Norway. This suggests that Norwegians are more likely to look at *what* you have done, rather than *who* you are, than is the case for Japan. Table 10 shows key differences.

Table 10. Achievement versus Ascription

Achievement (Norway)	Ascription (Japan)
Use of titles only when relevant to the competence you bring to the task	Extensive use of titles, especially when these clarify your status in the organisation

Respect for superior in hierarchy is based on how effectively his or her job is performed and how adequate their knowledge	Respect for superior in hierarchy is seen as a measure of your commitment to the organisation and its mission
Most senior managers are of varying age and gender and have shown proficiency in specific jobs	Most senior managers are male, middle-aged and qualified by their background

(Extract from Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997:118)

4.4.6 Attitudes to time

Attitudes to time are measured in two ways:

1. The relative importance of past, present and future, and how they relate to each other
2. The time horizon, found by looking at the start and end of past, present and future

Norway shows connection between past and present, and present and future. This is indicative of a sequential culture All three are given equal importance. The Norwegian time horizon is between weeks and days, but more towards weeks.

Japan shows connection between all three of past, present and future, though less so for past and future, this indicates the Japan has a synchronic culture. The past is seen as slightly less important than the present and future. Japan also has a time horizon between days and weeks, but this more tilted towards weeks than the Norwegian time horizon. Table 11 shows key differences between sequential and synchronic cultures.

Table 11. Sequential versus Synchronic

Sequential (Norway)	Synchronic (Japan)
Only do one activity at a time	Do more than one activity at a time
Keep appointments strictly; schedule in advance and do not run late	Appointments are approximate and subject to “giving time” to significant others
Relationships are generally subordinate to schedule	Schedules are generally subordinate to relationships
Strong preference for following initial plan	Strong preference for following where relationships lead

(Extract from Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997:139)

4.4.7 Attitudes to the environment

In order to find values for this dimension, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner posed two questions, each of which took the form of a pair of alternatives. The first pair was as follows

A. It is worthwhile to control important natural forces, like the weather
B. Nature should take its course and we just have to accept it the way it comes and do the best we can.

The second pair was more personally related.

A. What happens to me is my own doing
B. Sometimes I feel that I do not have enough control over the directions my life is taking

43% of the Norwegian respondents believed it was worth trying to control nature, while 86% believed what happens to them is their own doing. Conversely, among the Japanese 19%

believed it was worth trying to control nature and 63% believed what happens to them is their own doing. It is difficult to draw any firm conclusions from these figures with regards to internal/external focus, but the numbers do show that Norwegians have a greater tendency towards an internal focus than the Japanese, meaning that Norwegians are more likely to believe that they are in control of their own destiny. Table 12 shows the key differences between the two approaches.

Table 12. Internal versus External

Internal (Norway)	External (Japan)
Often dominating attitude bordering on aggressiveness towards environment	Often flexible attitude, willing to compromise and keep the peace
Conflict and resistance means that you have convictions	Harmony and responsiveness, that is, sensibility
Focus is on self, function, own group and own organisation	Focus is on "other", that is customer, partner, colleague
Discomfort when environment seems "out of control" or changeable	Comfort with waves, shifts, cycles if these are "natural"

(Extract from Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997:155)

4.5 Cultural Conclusion

As we have seen from both Hofstede and Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, there are several differences between Norwegian and Japanese culture. While these differences are small in certain dimensions, on the whole the differences are quite significant and indicate that the tried and true approaches from Norway may lead to trouble if one does not take the effort to understand how the Japanese culture would react.

4.6 Cultural Convergence

There is of course the possibility that the cultural differences will become a thing of the past. If we are moving towards a single global culture, perhaps it is a waste of time to examine foreign cultures, and we would be better served focusing on the culture we see, which would be the world culture. Gooderham and Nordhaug (2002) performed a study among students at European business schools which indicates *"a significant convergence of values across Europe"* (Gooderham & Nordhaug, 2002:52). One can question how valid these findings are for the world level, however. Gooderham and Nordhaug comment that the European Union can be a significant factor for explaining this convergence, especially since Norway (a country outside the European Union) diverged significantly from the mean in two of the four Hofstede dimensions examined. Since the study was merely concerned with Europe, one cannot say with any accuracy whether the rest of the world has experienced a similar cultural convergence.

We should not forget that, as was put forward in section 3, the theories of Hofstede and Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner are generalisations, and as such will not apply to everyone. It is possible that the results of this study says more about the research subjects, all being students at business schools, rather than demonstrating a general cultural change.

Hofstede (2002) has criticised the study, going so far as to say: *"Gooderham and Nordhaug's attempt to replicate Hofstede's study is amateurish"*. Although Gooderham and Nordhaug (2002) has replied to this criticism and clarified their intentions and methods, one cannot discount it out of hand. In the end it would be unwise to use this study as an argument for global cultural convergence, and rather assume a slow or nonexistent convergence until corroborating studies are published, preferably with a more global focus.

5. Doing business

So far we have looked at language issues and the underlying cultures of both Norway and Japan. However, simply knowing that Norway is more individualist than Japan doesn't tell how the Japanese operate in a business setting. This section will attempt to give a more real-life perspective on doing business with Japan.

5.1 The first meeting

Regardless of the type of business venture intended, whether it is an attempt to sell something or a desire to enter into a joint venture, there must always be a first meeting where one part contacts the other and begins the work towards an agreement. The method one should employ varies between countries.

According to Gesteland (2002) it is useful to have references and introductions when trying to contact Norwegian companies, just as it is anywhere else in the world, but even without such things it is still possible to contact the company directly in order to make an appointment. This process is unfortunately somewhat more difficult in Japan. Both Hodgson et al. (2000) and Nishiyama (2000) stress the importance of the Japanese ritual called *aisatsu*. This is essentially an introduction made by a third party, usually one known and trusted by both companies. Nishiyama (2000:44) says: *"It is impossible to approach a prospective Japanese business associate by writing a letter of self-introduction and asking for an appointment… A phone call from a stranger will be answered courteously, but it is unlikely that an appointment will be given."* Only very rarely will a company gain an appointment through self-introduction by letter or phone. Such approaches are viewed as too impersonal and even rude by the Japanese.

The best way to initiate business talks with a Japanese company is to have an introduction. This should be fairly easy if both companies move in similar circles, i.e. they both have business relations with a third company, or the managers have a mutual friend or friend of a friend who can do the introduction. If there are no such alternatives, bankers, bureaucrats or trade organisations can fill the role of introducer. This need for an introduction mirrors the Japanese scores for the Individualism and Individualism-versus-Communitarism dimensions seen in section 4, i.e. the need to build a relationship.

Gesteland (2002) and Su-Dale (2003) mention the Norwegian propensity to go straight to the business at hand, and largely avoiding small talk. This is not very compatible with the Japanese approach. Gesteland (2002:167) mentions that it is *"essential to get to know your counterparts before starting to discuss business"*. According to Hodgson et al. (2000), the Japanese consider it inappropriate to discuss business during the *aisatsu*, and the whole first meeting is largely intended to get a feel for the other party and start a relationship. Indeed, talking business at this stage can cause significant harm to the relationship, and thereby impact further negotiations. This again shows the emphasis on relationships inherent in Japanese culture.

5.2 The meeting protocol

The Norwegian protocol for meeting someone involves (according to Gesteland, 2002) a warm, friendly welcome, *"accompanied by a firm, brief handshake and steady, moderate eye contact"* (Gesteland, 2002:296). The Japanese protocol (again according to Gesteland, 2002) is somewhat different. First of all, you should have a business card ready and hand it over using both hands. You should then shake hands with a slight bow, stating your name and company name. You will then receive your counterpart's card, which should be accepted with both hands, studied for a few seconds and above all should be treated respectfully. After this you might receive a bow and a soft handshake. Gesteland (2002:170) cautions that one should *"avoid an excessively firm handshake or overtly direct eye contact"*. The Japanese greeting is somewhat colder than the Norwegian, reflecting the scores from Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's Neutral versus Emotional dimension seen in section 4. Nishiyama (2000) cautions against the common Western mistake of exchanging cards first with the person who happens to stand closest. Japan is very conscious of status, and it is therefore important to greet those with highest status first. One can find the proper sequence by observing the Japanese and their interactions, or one might get some non-verbal cue indicating where one should start. The importance of status follows from Hofstede's Power Distance dimension and from Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's Ascription versus Achievement.

Gesteland (2002) also comments on the forms of address which are not all that different. Norwegians will generally start with full names before moving on to surnames and titles. Sometimes, one merely uses surname alone without titles. The Japanese protocol uses the family name plus a suffix, *san* (e.g. Watanabe-san). Family names are given first in Japan, but the order is occasionally reversed on business cards meant for foreigners, so when in doubt ask which is the family name.

A third consideration of meeting protocol is gift giving. Both Gesteland (2002) and Su-Dale (2003) mention that Norwegians are reticent with regards to gift giving in business situations. According to Su-Dale (2003:192), presenting a gift *"will alienate you and leave the Norwegian feeling most suspicious and cautious"*. To the Japanese, on the other hand, exchanging gifts is an important part of the business culture, contributing to building relationships. Nishiyama (2000:61) notes that *"it is customary in Japan that new business relations begin with gift exchanges. The value and the type of gifts depend on the size of future business and the status of the relationship"*. Nishiyama cautions that an overly expensive gift can be viewed akin to a bribe, with the intention of creating an obligation on the part of the receiver. Nishiyama further notes that the giver should downgrade the value of the gift, while the receiver should deny this statement.

5.3 How to prepare for a meeting

One of the most important parts of the business negotiation process is the pre-meeting preparations. The wrong people, or simply lack of details, can cause serious difficulties during a meeting. If you are a Norwegian firm, it is fairly easy to prepare for a meeting with another Norwegian firm. Both companies will have the same cultural basis, and it is therefore fairly simple to intuit what the other party will want or expect. This is not to say that all Norwegian companies are similar, but with a similar base it takes less preparation to hold a successful meeting.

Japanese firms have a different cultural basis, and so it requires more effort on the part of Norwegian firms to prepare for meetings with them. It is important that the representatives have the right attitude. In Japan, as opposed to Norway, sales are made through good relationships with customers, not merely through persuasion based on facts and figures. One must also note that the Japanese will likely go into negotiations with an expectation of status differences. Whereas in Norway the two parties would be considered equals (at least if the companies were of equal size and power), in Japan the salesperson is regarded as having lower status than the buyer regardless of circumstances. The Japanese will expect a salesperson to act with regards to his lower status, i.e. showing humility, respect and politeness. This attitude reflects the Power Distance and Ascription-orientation of the culture.

Hodgson et al. (2000:65) mention seven characteristics that are particularly important in Japanese negotiations:

1. Listening ability
2. Interpersonal orientation

3. Willingness to use team assistance
4. Self-confidence
5. High aspirations
6. Social competence
7. Influence at headquarters

Listening ability

This ability is crucial in any bargaining context. Listening will ensure that you acquire information about the other party's needs and preferences, as well as letting you pick up on their real interests. Listening is important both in Norway and Japan, but in the latter situation it gets even more important due to the need to *"[ascertain] meaning in the context of less than fluent English and different nonverbal vocabularies"*.

Interpersonal orientation

Interpersonal orientation consists of two aspects. One is to attend to the other party's behaviour. Two is to respond accordingly. This is the art of adjusting the bargaining approach according to the situation. This is a useful skill in Norway, where there are likely to be variation between people, but it is crucial when dealing with a foreign company since there will most probably be significant differences from what one is used to in the home country.

Willingness to use team assistance

In any negotiation there will be a great deal of expertise required (e.g. technical details, financial matters and maintenance of business relationships). It is a bit much to expect that a single individual can accurately wield the expertise in all these areas, especially when you add on the things that appear once you go international, such as cultural considerations. Using a team where each member covers his own bit of the total picture will alleviate the burden of the team leader, and let him focus on the important task of reaching a successful agreement. Having team member along will also give you the advantage of another point of view in the negotiations, and even if they don’t contribute much it can be a valuable training experience for younger employees. There is also the fact that this approach leads to padding the meeting, i.e. having many people attend giving the impression the deal is important.

Self-confidence

Self-confidence is an important ability when negotiating in Norway. Who wants to deal with someone doesn’t seem to believe in himself? It is important however, to make sure that this self-confidence doesn’t lead to boasting and self-promoting. Gesteland (2002) notes that this is seen as a negative trait. Japan is much the same way; you should be self-confident, but you should not overplay your importance and accomplishments. Self-confidence also gains a greater importance in international business. Bridging the gap between companies and cultures takes a lot of work and can be exhausting. “*Negotiations are being conducted not only with clients but also with the home office*” (Hodgson et al., 2000:66). Everyone will question you at every turn, and self-confidence is an important asset when working with such role ambiguity. Self-confidence is especially important due to the large degree of Uncertainty Avoidance.

High aspirations

According to Hodgson et al. (2000:67), “*high expectations regarding the business deal are key*”. Bargainers who ask for more in the beginning often end up getting more. High aspirations can thusly be used to break a tie between two otherwise equal executives.

Social competence

Social competence, simply the ability to get along wit other people, is an important part of business negotiations, since they largely rely on meetings between people. This ability smoothes the social contact, and tends to encourage the flow of information from the other party. In a relationship-based culture such as Japan, this ability becomes even more crucial. Again we see the focus on the relationship which we saw in section 4.

Influence at headquarters

As was mentioned earlier, you negotiate not only with the other company, but also with the home office. Bridging both organisational and cultural barriers is difficult, and as Hodgson et al. (2000:67) report *"the toughest part of business negotiations is selling the agreement to headquarters"*. There is also the danger of being to good at presenting the other side's point of view. This could lead to the representative gaining mistrust at the home office. Using people who has influence at headquarters will aid in getting approval from the home office, thereby making the battle at home easier to fight.

The characteristics mentioned above are of course not the only factors to take into consideration when deciding on a team. Patience is a very important characteristic. Negotiations and decisions are likely to take longer in Japan than in Norway, in particular the early stages with nontask sounding and information exchange. To go with the listening ability, one should use people of quiet demeanour, i.e. individuals who in addition to being good at listening are also comfortable with silence. It would also be apt to consider the case of language, mentioned in section 2.

We should also not ignore the notion of ethnocentrism. Being ethnocentric (defined by Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (1997:393) as *"making judgements about another race and culture using the standards of one's own"*) can be the cause of major problems, in that it easily leads to seeing the other party as doing things wrong, and becomes unwilling to adapt to the situation. Especially in Japan, where mutual respect is the basis of all interpersonal contact, this attitude will lead to poor performances.

We should perhaps look at the case of female representatives, especially female executives. While Norway is open for executives of both genders, the Japanese business community is very male-dominated. Female executives face the serious drawback of usually being excluded from late evening outings at hostess bars and nightclubs, settings where the business at hand can be talked about more informally, and where things that would be considered inappropriate for the conference room can be mentioned. Nishiyama (2000:61) says (with regards to American female executives): *"It is a good idea to have an older American manager accompany her as "senior advisor" and to ask him to take on socializing duties reserved for men only. It is also advisable to give him a "big title" that gives him credibility in the eyes of the Japanese, even if such a title does not exist at the home office"*. Overall, a female executive can be most effective by emphasising the business-part of her role, while downplaying the woman-part. This attitude to females confirms the scores on the Masculinity dimension in section 4. To a lesser degree it also reflects the Japanese Ascription-orientation.

Once it has been decided what characteristics the negotiation team should possess, one must be able to find the right people. In order to do this it is necessary to keep a record of the various characteristics each employee has. Hodgson et al. (2000:69-70) lists four options for finding these characteristics: "First, the most frequently used personnel selection device is the interview… Second, paper-and-pencil psychological tests are often used in employment and assignment decisions… Third, observation of the various characteristics during actual business negotiations… Fourth, when field observations are not possible, as with new employees, role playing and observation". Of these four options the third probably the best, followed by the fourth, role playing. The least useful of these options would probably be the pen-and-paper psychological test which is most likely to give inaccurate results due to the non-presence of a human element.

The next decision is how many people on should send. In dealings with Norwegian firms it is possible to send a single representative to the meeting. Such a tactic would be ill advised when dealing with Japanese firms. Nishiyama (2000) recommends sending at least three people (at least for the first meeting). Japanese business relations focus on the relationship part and it is therefore important to select representatives who can establish good rapport and mutual trust with the Japanese side. If you cannot establish a good relationship, it is likely that the deal will fall through, and you may never reach agreement. On the first meeting, three roles are especially important: a senior executive manager, a middle manager and a young junior assistant. Nishiyama (2000:58) describes their tasks the following way: *“The senior executive plays a ceremonial role of rendering credibility, the middle manager takes on the task of conducting business discussions, and the young assistant acts as interpreter and coordinator”*.

Hodgson et al. (2000) expands the team roster to five positions/roles, a typical Japanese negotiation team:

1. Introducer
2. Operational staff
3. Middle manager
4. Chief executive officer
5. Mediator

This largely follows Nishiyama’s (2000) recommendations mentioned above, when we take into account that the introducer will be a third party, and the mediator will only be brought in if the talks lock up, and even then he will be a third, probably neutral party. Hodgson et al. (2000) assigns the following tasks to the “core” members:

<u>Operational staff</u>

The operational level staff meets to exchange information and hammer out the concessions and agreements. Such meetings continue until both sides are satisfied, and may take many meetings over a long period of time.

<u>Middle manager</u>

Hodgson et al. (2000:72) notes that *“middle managers may attend operational staff level meetings but will seldom participate in the discussions and persuasive efforts”*. Their role is primarily to listen and observe. They will occasionally confirm concessions and decisions made during other meetings, but decisions will seldom be made at the negotiation table.

Chief executive

Chief executives act as ceremonial figures in the Japanese negotiations. According to Hodgson et al. (2000:72) *“ordinarily, they will be brought in at the final signing of the agreement. They are not involved in the discussions of details, nor do they make the decisions”*. It is important to note that due to the decision-making process in Japan (by consensus, which follows from the low Individualism and high Collectivism), it is impossible to influence the decision via persuasive tactics directed towards the chief executives. Indeed, such tactics are considered boorish behaviour. Consensus does have its place in Norwegian decision-making as well, but here the boss is much freer to make the final decision.

We can see that the roles put forth by Nishiyama (2000) and Hodgson et al. (2000) clash to a certain extent. While they both agree that the senior executive manager/chief executive manager primarily has ceremonial duties. With regards to the other two team members, however, they differ quite markedly. Nishiyama leaves the business discussions to the middle manager, while Hodgson et al. gives this responsibility to the operational staff. The young junior assistant in Nishiyama’s example does the work as a coordinator, while Hodgson et al.’s middle manager is generally present at meetings simply to observe. How can one explain this discrepancy? One possibility is that they use similar terminology for different things. It is possible that Nishiyama’s middle manager is synonymous with Hodgson et al.’s operational staff, and they simply define these terms differently. Another, and very interesting, possibility is that these differences exist due to different research bases. This would indicate that the Japanese businesses have non-homogenous approaches to negotiation (a reasonable assumption, sine it’s not a country populated by clones), and would lead to the conclusion that different Japanese firms might use different levels of staff in their negotiations.

Regardless of the cause of the discrepancy between Nishiyama and Hodgson et al., there is enough similarity that this team composition is a useful starting point for a Norwegian firm putting together a team for negotiations.

At this point it is perhaps also useful to look a little closer at the two third-party members of the team: the introducer and the mediator.

The introducer

As was mentioned earlier, the introducer is the one who makes the initial contact with the courted party. Hodgson et al. (2000:70) notes that the introducer *"will ordinarily participate in the business discussion during the initial meeting (and perhaps the second one) and the last meeting, when the chief executives meet to give final, ceremonial approval to the deal"*. In the event that an interpreter is needed, the introducer will often help to locate one. If one acquires an introducer through an organisation or firm might be a good idea to use two kinds of introducers: operational level introducer for the operational level staff, and president level introducer for the top executive staff. If a mediator is required, the introducer will sometimes fill this position.

The mediator

If a conflict appears, it might be necessary to bring in a mediator. In the event of a conflict, Japanese firms will prefer to avoid going to court. The first step in a conflict resolution is mutual consultation. This involves arranging an informal meeting between representatives for the two companies. Nishiyama (2000) notes that these discussions should initially be conducted at the staff level, in order to help save face for the executive who approved the original agreement. When these staff members come up with several solutions, they will consult their top executives. If these consultations do not help, then it is time to bring in the mediator. This mediator can be the introducer, an attorney, an influential politician, etc. Nishiyama (2000:112) gives the following criteria for a mediator: *"He must be known as a neutral and fair-minded person who can easily establish interpersonal relations, who is* *considered highly trustworthy, reliable, and knowledgeable, and who has many years in international business”*. It is of course also very helpful if he is a bilingual and bicultural person. The mediator must first get an accurate assessment of the parties’ level of dispute and their actual positions. He will try to help each party overcome the negative feelings, and tentatively present suggestions and recommendations. Only rarely will he give absolute suggestions or overstatements. A good mediator will push the parties together instead of forcing an agreement. This reflects the need for a cordial relationship which, as we have seen several times now, results from the Japanese culture’s focus on Collectivism and low Individualism.

Nishiyama (2000) stresses the importance of matching the ranks of the other party. “If a senior vice president, vice president of the international department, and director of marketing are expected to come from the Japanese side, the [other] side should send executives of the same rank to the negotiation table” (Nishiyama, 2000:86). Sending a young, junior manager to represent the company in Japan is likely to be viewed as a grave insult. This demonstrates the large degree of Power Distance in Japanese culture..

Hodgson et al. (2000) gives a final warning about team selection. Since trust is so important to the Japanese, one must take care not to endanger this trust by having one person handle several competing companies. The important point is to not cross industrial group lines (e.g. both Toyota and Daihatsu are in the Toyota family, and so could be handled by the same person).

Once the team has been put together, the next step is gathering information about the potential business partner. Nishiyama (2000:88) notes that *“the investigation should include information regarding the company’s market share, ranking within its industry, financial status, and plans for future expansion”*. While one should of course acquire information about the people who will be participating in the negotiation sessions, it is equally necessary to obtain personal background information about the key executives of the company. Such background information will be available Japanese “Who’s Who” books, and perhaps through other sources such as companies who have dealt with the company in question in the past. Remember: *who* is involved is more important than *what* is being done. In addition, it is necessary to know the group affiliation of the company, and a main bank that the company has been dealing with. Representatives of both the parent company (if any) and the main bank will often participate in important negotiations as observers. This need for information reflects several aspects of Japanese culture. First, there is of course the oft-mentioned need to establish a relationship, which one cannot do if one does not know who one is dealing with. Second it showcases the Diffuse nature of Japanese culture, i.e. the person and the job is closely interrelated. Thirdly, though perhaps to a lesser degree, it demonstrates the Uncertainty Avoidance, the need to possess information, and thereby avoid uncertainty.

5.4 The negotiation

So, your team is in place, you know what you want to achieve and what you are willing to give to get there. What now? The negotiations themselves are where you will meet the other party, sitting around a table, and it's generally at this point that problems will make themselves manifest. We will try to look at the differences between Norwegian and Japanese bargaining tactics, and the pitfalls you should strive to avoid.

5.4.1 The time factor

The Japanese handle time differently from Westerners. Nishiyama (2000:91) mention that *"they become very cautious and are willing to take lots more time when it comes to an international business negotiation"*. They will on occasion intentionally delay a decision in order to squeeze out concessions. If for instance your team has been given a one-week limit to bring the negotiations to a close (and the Japanese party is aware of this) the other party may try to have the negotiations drag, in order to get concessions that would otherwise not have been given in order to close the deal on time. On the other hand, as noted by Hodgson et al. (2000) and Nishiyama (2000), planning for a longer stay in Japan will communicate a strong message of commitment, which in turn will have an influence on the Japanese side during the negotiations. This is a clear reflection of both the large degree of Long-term Orientation and the Synchronic view of time seen in section 4.

In addition to the traditional Norwegian holidays, one should avoid scheduling negotiations during long Japanese holidays such as the Golden Week (April 29th through May 5th), Obon (August 15th through 17th) and New Year's holidays (December 27th through January 5th).

With regards to punctuality, Gesteland (2002) notes that both Norwegians and Japanese value punctuality. As in Norway, business meetings in Japan should start on time, and it reflects badly on you if you are late.

5.4.2 Talking business

Gesteland (2002) shows the difference between Norwegians and Japanese with regards to communication style. *"Norwegians are used to frank straightforward language"* (Gesteland, 2002:293). The Japanese on the other hand "frequently employ indirect, vague, oblique language wherein the meaning is deliberately ambiguous and implicit rather than clear and explicit" (Gesteland, 2002:168). To use technical terms, Norwegians have a low-context culture while Japanese have a high-context culture. Figure 2, the context triangle, illustrates the stored information used in high-context and low-context cultures, i.e. implicit, assumed knowledge.

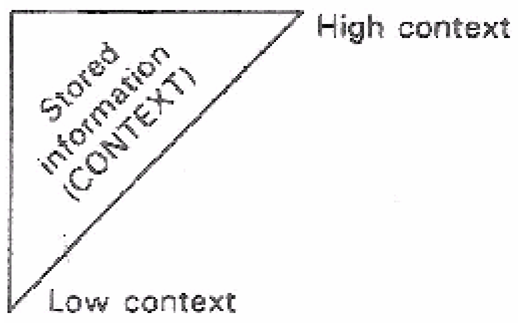

Figure 2. The context triangle

Source: Hall. 1990

The counterpoint to the context triangle is the information triangle, shown in figure 3. The information triangle shows the actual information explicitly transmitted in any communication. The top of the triangle reflects high-context communication in which the messages rely on what is understood, while the bottom suggests low-context communication that relies on transmitting much information explicitly.

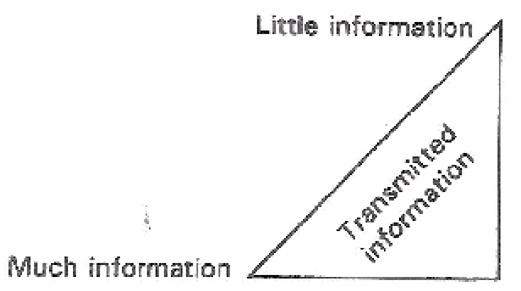

Figure 3. The information triangle

Source: Hall, 1990

The context triangle and the information triangle can be combined to form the communicated meaning square, shown in figure 4. This figure illustrates that as context is lost, information must be added if the meaning is to remain constant.

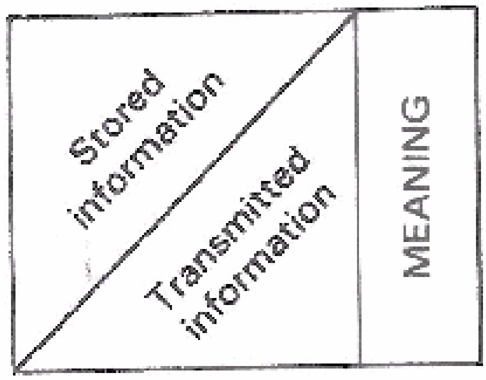

Figure 4. The communicated meaning square

Source: Hall, 1990

Knowing that Japan is a high-context culture, it is important to know whether your partner will cater to low-context cultures and increase the amount of transmitted information, or if you yourself must take the initiative and learn the stored information your counterpart is operating with in order to fully understand what is said.

It is important to be aware that being too direct in a high-context culture can lead to breakdown in communication. Likewise, expressing disagreement in a high-context manner preserves face and prevents loss of dignity one the part of the person you are talking to, which is an important part of the Japanese culture.

A common complaint by Westerners is that they have great difficulty getting feedback from Japanese negotiators. Hodgson et al. (2000:38) gives three reasons to explain these complaints: *"First, the Japanese value interpersonal harmony, or wa, over frankness. Second, the Japanese have perhaps not come to a consensus regarding the offer or counteroffer. Third, Westerners tend to miss the subtle but clear signals given by the Japanese"*.

The Japanese are in fact loath to say no directly, instead they will try to suggest that the answer is no without coming right out and saying it. This follows logically from the

Japanese focus on maintaining good relationships. Ueda (1974) has described sixteen ways the Japanese use in order to say nom shown in table 13. In addition to these sixteen ways, Hodgson et al. (2000:39) add two more: *"(17) changing the topic, and (18) letting lower-level negotiators say "no" in informal settings"*.

Table 13. Sixteen ways the Japanese avoid saying no
1. Vague "no"
2. Vague and ambiguous "yes" or "no"
3. Silence
4. Counter question
5. Tangential responses
6. Exiting (leaving)
7. Lying (equivocation or making an excuse – sickness, previous obligation, etc.)
8. Criticizing the question itself
9. Refusing the question
10. Conditional "no"
11. "Yes, but…"
12. Delaying answers (e.g., "We will write you a letter.")
13. Internally "yes", externally "no"
14. Internally "no", externally "yes"

15. Apology

16. The equivalent of the English “no” – primarily used in filling out forms, not in conversation

Source: Ueda (1974)

Besides rarely giving a clear “no”, there will often difficult to get a clear “yes” from the Japanese. This is because of the previously mentioned process of decision-making by consensus, and the cultural importance of the group. If a consensus has not been reached, the Japanese will simply avoid giving an answer. The need for consensus means that negotiations tend to be time-consuming, and it will be difficult to find key decision makers.

Gesteland (2002) mentions the differences and similarities in nonverbal communication. Both Norway and Japan are low-contact cultures, where they stay at arm’s length and avoid touching, except for a handshake. They also both avoid vigorous gestures. Gaze behaviour is quite different in the two countries. While *“Norwegians normally employ moderate gaze behaviour, i.e. alternately looking their counterparts in the eye and the looking away”* (Gesteland, 2002:295), the Japanese avoid strong, direct eye contact and may mistake the Norwegian approach as hostile behaviour. One should also take note of the fact that the Japanese might use smiles to mask disapproval or anger.

In terms of paraverbal communication, the Japanese are more soft-spoken and hesitant than Norwegians, are more frequently employ silence. Both Norwegians and Japanese regard it as rude to interrupt another speaker. An important difference is that in Japan, laughter or giggling might signal nervousness or embarrassment rather than amusement.

5.4.3 Outside the office

Unlike in Norway, business in Japan is not merely restricted to the negotiation table. After the negotiations have ended for the day, there is usually a social arrangement of some sort, e.g. dinner or a bar visit. Harbom & Tsalapatis (1996) stresses the use of these arrangements as part of cooperation. They call this "nominication", from the Japanese word "nomi" meaning drink. *"The purpose of drinking together is, that one at the same time get to talk with each other; one "nominicates""* (Harbom & Tsalapatis, 1996:78). There are varied opinions about what should be talked about. Some think that such an informal setting is a good way to be able to speak freely and without commitment. Others believe that nominication can be used to sort out complications or find allies to influence others.

A few quotes in Harbom & Tsalapatis (1996:79) illustrate the usefulness of nominication. *"When we go to a bar they don't talk much at first. But sometimes during these three four hours we get the chance to hear the persons very clear opinion on the ongoing negotiations. Normally they don't tell this, but while drinking and singing they become very open and sometimes we get important information. That is the purpose of entertainment"*, *"The purpose is to improve the communication and of course we expect a leak of information from them. It is useful if the client does not want to say things in the office while other people are present. Nominication is an important aspect of doing business. It is not right but officially it is quite accepted in the Japanese society. We make a good business relationship with the client in an informal way"*.

The purpose of nominication isn't just to get information or solve conflicts. With the Japanese focus on long-term relations and trust, after-hours social interaction is a good way to get to know each other and thereby build the trust necessary for a good relationship.

5.4.4 Negotiating

The first part of the negotiations is the presentation. Gesteland (2002) cautions against opening with a joke or a humorous anecdote, since this would show a lack of respect for the topic and the audience (demonstrating the Neutral bent of Japanese culture seen in section 4). The Japanese are similar to Norwegians in that they prefer a well-documented, straightforward approach without hype or exaggerated claims. Hodgson et al. recommends presenting the background and explanations first, and only making the actual request or proposal towards the end.

The Japanese are apt to ask many questions. This is in part due to the style of consensus decision-making, where several people may ask for the same information or explanation, and also to ensure that your explanation holds up under close scrutiny. As we saw earlier, the Japanese culture has a large degree of Uncertainty Avoidance, and asking many questions is a way to reduce ambiguity and uncertainty. Due to this tendency to ask many questions, it is useful to include technical experts on the negotiations teams, so that all the relevant information is available. While one should show patience with the questioning, there comes a point where the process becomes unproductive. Hodgson et al. (2000:106) suggests three tactics for ending the Japanese side's questions:

"

1. *Summarize your previous answer after such statements as the following: "I already gave that information to Suzuki-san yesterday, but to reiterate…", or, "That's the same question we talked about before, but I'll go over it again".*
2. *Offer to write down the requested information so that it may be shared with all concerned Japanese executives.*
3. *Generally, a repeated question should be answered the second time in about three minutes. The third time it is asked the answer should be a one-minute summary. If the same question is asked a fourth time, it is probably a persuasive tactic and not information gathering. The appropriate response is then silence or a change of subject.*

".

During the presentation, it is helpful to employ visual aids and provide copies of the presentation. Ideally, the presentation should be available in Japanese.

Once the presentation is done, it is time to start persuading. Hodgson et al. (2000) lists several tactics appropriate for persuading the Japanese, shown in table 14.

Table 14. Persuasive tactics appropriate for negotiations with the Japanese

At the negotiation table

1. Questions
2. Self-disclosure
3. Positive influence tactics
4. Silence
5. Change of subject
6. Recess and delays
7. Concessions and commitments

Informal channels and buyers only

1. Aggressive influence tactics

Source: Hodgson et al., 2000

The first tactic one should use is to ask questions. The key here is to have the other party reveal information about itself. If you receive good answers, perhaps you should compromise on the issue. Often, however, close scrutiny might reveal that their answers are not very good, and by exposing this they can be obligated to concede.

Once the usefulness of questions has been exhausted, it is time to reveal information about yourself. You should re-explain your company’s situation, needs and preferences.

The next step is to use positive influence tactics. Such tactics are promises (e.g. "If you can deliver the equipment by June 1st, we will make another order right away"), recommendations (predicting that a pleasant environmental consequence will occur to the other party), rewards (a statement that is thought to create pleasant consequences for the target) and positive normative appeals (indicating that the other party's past, present or future behaviour was or will be in conformity with social norms).

You can try silence as a tactic, letting them think about it and giving them an opportunity to change their position. You should be aware, however, that the Japanese are the world's experts at the use of silence, and they will frequently use this tactic against you.

Should the previous tactics fail, it is time to try a different approach. Utilising the already mentioned tactics in an informal setting may yield a better response, or perhaps expose new information or objections that could not be broached at the negotiation table.

If even the informal channels fail to yield results, one can consider using aggressive tactics, such as threats, warnings, punishment, negative normative appeal (same as positive normative appeal, except that the other party's behaviour is in violation of social norms) or commands. It is vital to note, however, that the Japanese are extremely likely to react negatively to aggressive influence tactics. Hodgson et al. (2000) notes that these tactics should only be used via informal channels, and even then should only be used indirectly. Further, these tactics should only be used when the company is clearly in the stronger position. The downside of using aggressive tactics is that it will damage harmony, and influence the long-term relationship. Should the power shift, the Japanese company will be quick to exploit the change. On the other hand, if one maintains harmony and good relations, the Japanese side will consider the other company's interests.

The next tactic to consider is time. Letting the Japanese consider new information and reach a consensus. This tactic requires the cooperation and understanding of the home office.

Should the companies still be deadlocked, it is time to bring in the introducer or a mediator to arbitrate the differences. Such help can successfully settle otherwise irreconcilable differences. Serious considerations should be given to making concessions yourself before calling in outside help, however, since third-part arbitration will usually only work once.

If all else fails, one can try to bring together the top executives of the two companies. If aggressive influence tactics have been employed in the past, this tactic is likely to fail. If this tactic doesn't help the situation, then the business is finished.

After the persuasions, it is time to work towards an agreement. This is where we get the give and take of concessions. Nishiyama (2000) cautions that the Japanese take a holistic approach to the agenda items. *"The Japanese usually begin with the general issue, talking unsystematically around it and meandering without regard to the agenda or structure"* (Nishiyama, 2002:98). This is in stark contrast to the typical Western practice of settling each issue independently. Hodgson et al. (2000:116) states that *"to a Japanese businessperson, a business negotiation is a time to develop a business relationship with the goal of long-term mutual benefit. The economic issues are the context, not the content, of the talks"*. As a consequence of this, they seek to establish a harmonious business relationship first, and believe that any issues will take care of themselves afterwards. This is seen in the scores for Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's Universalism versus Particularism dimension. Since it is difficult to gauge the flow of negotiations, one should always be wary of giving concessions. These should not be decided upon at the negotiation table, but away from the social pressure of the formal negotiations.

Since on cannot trust in the number of issues settled to measure progress in the talks, Hodgson et al. (2000:118-119) lists some important signals of progress:

"

1. *Higher level Japanese executives being included in the discussions*
2. *Their questions beginning to focus on specific areas of the deal*
3. *A softening of their attitudes and position on some of the issues: "Let us take some time to study this issue"*
4. *At the negotiation table, increased talk among themselves in Japanese, which may often mean they are trying to decide something*
5. *Increased bargaining and use of lower level, informal channel of communication*

". All these signals will give indications about the quality of the business relationship.

We should also mention some behaviour by the Japanese which can seem rude. First, breaking into side conversation in Japanese. This is usually to clarify something that was said. Second, executives will often enter or leave in the middle of your comments. This merely reflects a different view of meeting etiquette, and their busy schedule. Finally, one might sometimes discover that one of the Japanese is sleeping during the meeting, perhaps even the senior Japanese executive. Again, this is simply due to a different view of appropriate behaviour at meetings. As an aside, if the senior Japanese executive is sleeping, it could signal that he is comfortable with how things are going – a good sign.

5.4.5 The contract

Gesteland (2002) shows us that Norwegians and Japanese have radically different attitudes towards contracts. To the Japanese, "the final written agreement is less important than the strength of the relationship with your counterpart" (Gesteland, 2002:170). They may expect to renegotiate if there is a change in circumstances. Some Japanese even view the contract as more of an expression of intent. With the Norwegians, on the other hand, the written agreement is viewed as definite. We saw these attitudes in section 4 in the Universalism versus Particularism dimension, as well as in the Attitudes to the environment.

As has been mentioned before, the Japanese concentrate on the relationship. Nishiyama (2000:107) even mentions that *"it is a commonly accepted practice in Japan to begin production or start selling before the final contract is signed if both parties feel that they have reached verbal understandings"*.

The most important part of contract negotiations, is that you should push for the kind of contract you feel is necessary.

5.5 After negotiations

Once an agreement has been reached, the negotiations have been completed and a contract has been drawn up, there are still a few things Norwegians have to keep in mind.

5.5.1 Signing ceremony

Both Nishiyama (2000) and Hodgson et al. (2000) mention the importance of the signing ceremony. While some may consider the ceremony a waste of time and money, it plays a number of important cultural functions in Japan. Nishiyama (2000:108) notes that "the ceremony allows the top executives of both sides to meet and sign the contract. This signing is not only the official approval of the contract, but also serves as public notice of the action". The ceremony typically include the chairman of the board, the president, senior vice presidents, vice presidents, division managers, section chiefs and junior staff members of the company. Guests of honour, such as bank managers, local politicians, etc., are also invited.

At the ceremony, top executives of both companies give formal congratulation speeches, and exchange gifts to commemorate the occasion. The gift should match the size or importance of the contract entered into. After the ceremony, there will usually be an elaborate cocktail reception.

5.5.2 Maintaining the relationship

Once the contract has been signed, it is fairly typical of all Western companies to simply put it aside, and put the whole thing out of their minds. This is a big mistake when doing business with the Japanese. Nishiyama (2000:109) mentions that *"Japanese businessmen always want to stay in constant personal contact with their business associates"*. Rather than using telephone or fax, they will prefer to make personal visits as frequently as possible, both to get acquainted again with the individuals in charge and to informally obtain feedback regarding the ongoing business.

It is important to remember that all Japanese companies give out midsummer and year-end gifts, though it may not be necessary for foreign companies to adhere to these traditions. These gifts are given as tokens of gratitude to client companies or individuals that have given them lots of business or favours. Nowadays many Japanese companies also send Christmas cards to foreign business partners. *"Gift giving and sending Christmas cards are important prerequisites for continuing successful business relations with the Japanese"* (Nishiyama, 2000:110)

A final consideration when doing business with the Japanese is to avoid switching executives managing your Japanese business relationships. Hodgson et al. (2000:126) states that *"in Japan most executives stay with the same company permanently. Moreover, Japanese executives are given long-term (five to ten years) responsibility for managing intercompany relationships. After all, much was invested in building the personal relations* *that make business between the companies work smoothly*". This means that if your company switches key managers, Japanese business partners can get very nervous. This attitude reflects the Log-term Orientation in Japanese culture.

6. Conclusion

In this thesis, we have looked at the language barrier and the advantages and disadvantages inherent in the various methods for breaching it. We have seen that while the best approach might be for Norwegians to learn Japanese, it is possible to communicate by using an interpreter or a common language. One should keep in mind that even in cases where these secondary solutions are employed, it is a definite advantage to know the language of your counterpart.

Our brief stint into stereotypes emphasised that while the analyses and tips given in this thesis are useful, they will not apply to everyone and so you should always be prepared to change your tactics should your business partner prove to be an exception to the rule.

The analyses of Norway and Japan using the cultural dimensions of Hofstede and Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner showed some similarities, but also many significant differences between Norwegian and Japanese culture. These cultural characteristics continued to show themselves when we looked at the actual Japanese business practises, demonstrating that a knowledge of Japanese culture is an important asset for anyone who wishes to do business with them.

Probably the most important factor in doing business with the Japanese (a factor which has appeared again and again in this thesis), is the importance of building a relationship. If you only remember one thing from this thesis, let it be this: to the Japanese, a good relationship is alpha and omega. Other considerations are of course important, but if you manage to build a good relationship, these things will be taken less seriously and an oversight or error on your part is more easily forgiven.

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