Exploring Colombian business culture from a Danish perspective

A qualitative study of cultural differences and challenges as experienced by Danish professionals in a Colombian business context

Master’s thesis

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STU count: 181,732 (79,9 pages)

Submitted: February 9, 2015
En udforskning af colombiansk forretningskultur fra et dansk perspektiv

Colombia udgør i stigende grad et attraktivt marked for danske virksomheder, hvor især sprog og kultur kan udgøre de primære udfordringer for danske virksomheder og forretningsmænd set i lyset af den nyligt iværksatte frihandelsaftale mellem EU og Colombia.

Kulturforskelle og interkulturelle kompetencer kan have afgørende betydning for, om virksomheder internationalisering bliver en succes eller flasko.

Om end der findes tværkulturelle studier, som har belyst kulturforskelle og ligheder mellem Danmark og Colombia, så fremgår der ikke – set med danske øjne – dels hvilke kulturforskelle og dels hvilke kulturelle udfordringer, som måtte komme til kende i et forretningsøjemed.

Som følge heraf er formålet med dette studie at udforske colombiansk forretningskultur set med danske øjne for dels at hjælpe såvel potentielle som aktuelle danske virksomheder og forretningsfolk med henblik på det colombianske marked, men også for at styrke det handelsmæssige forhold mellem de to lande, hvilket kan styrke de to landes forhold også i andre henseender.

Således ønskes undersøgt, hvad er de kulturelle udfordringer, som danske professionelle oplever i en forretningskontekst i Colombia?

Undersøgelsesspørgsmålet er blevet belyst via et kvalitativt studie, hvor empirien er baseret på interviews af fem danske forretningsfolk med forskellig forretningsmæssig erfaring i forhold til Colombia.

Undersøgelsens resultater viser, at de mest presserende kulturforskelle, som lader til at være udfordrende, relaterer sig til betydningen af netværk, vigtigheden af personlige relationer, opbygelsen af tillid, en indirekte kommunikationsform og en fleksibel tidsorientering, som i alt gør, at mange forretningsmæssige processer kan tage tid. Samtidigt virker gode spansk-kundskaber også afgørende i langt de fleste tilfælde i henhold til at gøre forretning i Colombia. Når det er sagt, så beretter alle fem interviewpersoner om positive oplevelser i forhold til at gøre forretninger og samarbejde med colombianske virksomheder, kollegaer og kunder.

Set fra et kulturelt perspektiv, så virker ydmyghed, åbenhed og tålmodighed, som et vigtigt mantra, som danske virksomheder og forretningsfolk skal have for øje, hvis de ønsker succes i Colombia.
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1 INTRODUCTION

“As economic borders come down, cultural barriers most likely go up and present new challenges and opportunities in business.” (House, 2004, p. 1)

A year after the free trade agreement (FTA) between the European Union (EU) and Colombia took effect on August 1, 2013, Denmark opened its first embassy in Colombia, in the capital of Bogotá, reflecting Colombia’s progress and growing economic importance regionally, which makes the country increasingly appealing for Danish firms from a business perspective (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2014). Indeed, Colombia looks like a revived country and seems far away from its nearly failed state by the turn of the century following an escalation of a several decade-long internal armed conflict and drug-related violence during the 1990s. Though significant challenges remain, much has changed, which was also my impression when I studied a semester in Medellín, Colombia’s second largest city, and travelled around the country in 2010. The security situation has improved significantly, a historical peace agreement may be reached with the principal insurgent group, FARC, by the end of this year while Latin America’s third most populous country (almost 47 million) is about to become the region’s third largest economy following more than a decade of impressive growth figures (4.5% average GDP growth rates, 2002-2013) and record high foreign direct investments inflows (most recently a record high USD 16.8 billion in 2013) (Central Bank of Colombia, 2014; Central Intelligence Agency, 2014, June 22; Economist Intelligence Unit, 2015a; Jensen, 2011; World Bank, 2015)1. In these years, Danish companies experience a greater need to diversify beyond their traditional markets, principally in the neighboring countries, due the changing economic landscape, inter alia, following the global economic crisis in 2008/2009. As Mogens Jensen, the Danish Minister for Trade and Development Cooperation, put it during his visit to Colombia in relation to the inauguration of the Danish embassy, “around 90 percent of our [Denmark’s] growth will be outside of Europa in the years to come and we wish to be where the growth is (…), and Colombia, in particular, is of great interest for Danish companies” (Ramírez, 2014).

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1 For a more in-depth introduction of the research setting of this study, Colombia, in terms of relevant background information and key data seen to be relevant from a business perspective, see appendix A.
Selling and investing abroad, however, is not as easy as at home: Some firms may enjoy domestic success but fail when entering foreign markets while others may succeed in their internationalization efforts. From an institution-based perspective (IBV) (Peng & Meyer, 2011), this can partly be explained by the role of institutions, commonly referred to as the “rules of the game” (North, 1991). The central proposition of this view is that firm performance, i.e., the success of failure of firms, is partly determined by the institutional environment in which firms operate. Thus, as related to IBV, challenges may arise for firms when entering new foreign markets since important differences exist in terms of rules, laws and regulations (formal institutions) and in culture (e.g., norms, values, ethics), religion and languages (informal institutions). Thus, the ability of firms to operate successfully in foreign markets depends on their familiarity with the local context, i.e., their knowledge on formal and informal rules of doing business in other countries, making competences to navigate in foreign environments with differences in the institutional setting increasingly needed. Indeed, Danish firms appear to encounter more challenges in relation to exports to developing countries and emerging markets outside of Europe than in Europe, suggests a study conducted among 465 Danish firms by the Confederation of Danish Industry (DI) (Sørensen, 2012). In these foreign markets, language and culture predominantly compromise the most challenging aspects, particularly for small- and medium-sized firms (less than 100 employees) vis-à-vis the bigger companies (more than 100 employees) (Sørensen, 2012, p. 4). In relation to South and Central America, the study shows that culture (14.5%) constitutes the third most challenging aspect for the participating Danish export firms after languages (17.7%) and high tariffs and technical trade barriers (33.9%) (Sørensen, 2012, p. 2). However, country-specific information is lacking, which represents an important gap as the individual countries are likely to differ according to their institutional setting. In addition, noting that the EU-Colombia FTA has been in effect for more than a year, the region’s most poignant challenges (tariff and technical barriers) are likely to be less significant in Colombia, potentially making culture and language the principal challenges in such a context. In this way, cultural differences can be one the major sources of complications for firms doing international business, which particularly appears to be the case for Danish firms with exports to Latin America. However, what are the cultural differences between Colombia and Denmark? In this study, the intent is to go a step further and investigate the central question for Danish firms or managers, i.e., what are the cultural challenges from a Danish perspective as related to doing business in Colombia?

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2 For a more in-depth explanation of the institution-based perspective, see appendix B.
3 It is worth noting that 29.0% of the firms with exports not report any particular challenges when exporting to this region.
Studies on the significance of culture and cultural differences are vast. In terms of cross-national cultural studies, several competing cultural frameworks exist each involving a unique definition of culture and a variety of cultural dimensions to measure this somewhat intangible and complex concept (see, e.g., Hofstede, 2001; 1980; House, Hanges, Javidan, & Dorfman, 2004; Schwartz, 1999; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997). The nine dimensional cultural framework of the GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness) study done by House et al. (2004) is adopted as the theoretical framework guiding this thesis as it is considered a more comprehensive cultural study than its predecessors, perhaps the most sophisticated to my knowledge, and has the most recent data on cross-cultural comparison between Colombia and Denmark. Thus, their findings have been used as a point of departure to gain an idea about the cultural context of Colombia and Denmark in terms of the values and behavior of individuals and organizations of these societies.

Several deficiencies may apply to the available research on the subject. Firstly, available research can be considered insufficient in the sense that other cultural dimensions may exist, which cannot be captured through their research method based on quantitative questionnaires. Secondly, the complex nature of culture may not be suited to quantitative measures since cultural contact between two (or more) cultures may entail unique dynamics that cannot be measured through objective measures, or as some the GLOBE authors put in their final remarks of their 10-year study, “What is probably important is not how a culture is objectively measured but how it is subjectively perceived by those from another culture” (italics added by author, Javidan et al., 2004, p. 730-731). Thus, a gap is missing in terms of how subjects from one national culture perceives the culture of those from another national culture which may give new insight into cultural differences. In relation to this point, it can be argued that there exist a need to explore and describe the impact of national culture as related to a specific setting, e.g., in relation to different modes of internationalization. Fourthly, the quantitative measurement of cultural differences between nations do not necessarily entails they are challenging which from a business perspective may be a more important point to consider. In sum, according to my knowledge, qualitative studies are lacking regarding the cultural challenges in Colombia from a Danish point of view as related to the internationalization efforts of Danish firms or professionals. That said, the cultural frameworks of national culture and their findings do provide valuable insight, which would be a shame not to depart from.

The purpose of the present study is to address some of these deficiencies by producing exploratory research concerning cultural challenges based on the experiences of Danish professionals as related
to a Colombian business context since such knowledge appears increasingly important for Danish professionals and firms in order to effectively communicate and collaborate with actual or potential Colombian clients, colleagues, or partners as the economic borders between the two countries are coming down. In a larger perspective, the purpose is to move Denmark and Colombia closer to each other in business related matters, which might spill over into other types of cooperation and mutual dialogue, and eventually build a stronger relationship between the two countries.

1.1 Research question
Based on the before mentioned issues, the main research question, which serves as a guidance for my thesis, is:

- What are the cultural challenges as experienced by Danish professionals in a Colombian business context?

The research question unveil several concepts that requires to be defined. A tentative definition of *culture* has been already stated and may involve values, norms, and ethics that guide individual and organizational behavior while a *challenge* refers to “a difficult or demanding task, esp. one seen as a test of one’s abilities or character.” (OED Online, December 2014a). The word, *experience*, refers to “knowledge resulting from actual observation or from what one has undergone” (OED Online, December 2014b) while *Danish professionals* are defined to encompass a variety of managerial levels whether that be managing director, regional manager, middle manager or managers of different seniority levels. The *Colombian business context* is defined to refer to a variety of settings encompassing international business which may include one or both of the following two aspects: “(1) A business (firm) that engages in international (cross-border) economic activities and/or (2) the action of doing business abroad” (Peng & Meyer, 2011, p. 6). This definition is rather broad and can involve a variety of international entry modes, including exports, joint ventures, foreign investments or Greenfield investments, e.g., start-ups. Finally, these phenomena evolve around the context of day-to-day dealings as related to communications, management and negotiations.

In order to answer the research question, I adopted a qualitative strategy of inquiry using a qualitative semi-structured research interview for data collection, involving five participating subjects, and thematic analysis based on coding for data analysis. This was largely done through an abductive (inductive-deductive) research approach. Firstly, based on a selective literature review on cross-national cultural studies, I chose to depart from GLOBE’s conceptual framework and findings in
order to obtain an understanding of the cultural context of the two societies in question, i.e., their cultural differences, similarities and their implications. Secondly, I adopted their nine dimensional framework and based on my interpretation I constructed my own theoretical framework as related to a business setting in the form of an interview guide. In third place, based on the categorization of my data, I presented the results through ‘thick’ description according to the constructed framework while for the discussion, I applied internal triangulation by using the findings of GLOBE in order to assess the credibility of my findings. Subsequently, based on the cultural challenges, I presented some implications for practitioners, i.e., Danish managers or firms, in the form of a “toolkit” conceptualized around entering Colombia for the first time, in order to help them to better their performance in Colombia and cooperation with Colombians. However, these tools may only serve as guidelines concerning central culturally-derived issues – they are not prescriptive – and should not be taken for granted since they are considered to be context-dependent, e.g., in relation to the specific entry mode and/or industry. In addition, their application inevitably depends on the internal capabilities and competences (resources) of Danish firms and managers.

1.2 Thesis structure

The thesis is divided into seven main chapters. In the present chapter, an introduction was provided in order to present the relevance of the study, its audience, the research problem and the research purpose. In addition, the research question was presented along with definitions of central concepts, followed by a brief presentation of the strategy of inquiry. In sum, the introduction also points towards the delimitations of the study.

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework adopted for this thesis, i.e., a presentation of GLOBE’s nine dimensional framework and their findings concerning Colombia and Denmark while it justifies this choice vis-à-vis other cultural frameworks. Finally, an overview is provided in terms of the conceptual frameworks and scores of Colombia and Denmark along with an explanation of the relevance of this study for academia and practitioners alike.

Chapter 3 provides an elaboration of the research design of this thesis comprised of four main parts: the philosophical worldview underpinning this study, the adopted strategy of inquiry, the applied research methods for data collection and analysis, and finally, the trustworthiness of the findings is discussed.
Chapter 4 presents the results of the present study in as an objective manner as possible according to the thematic analysis of the data. Prior to a systematic in-depth presentation of the findings as related to the research question, a data structure table is presented in order to provide an overview concerning the categorization and presentation of the data.

In Chapter 5, my findings will be discussed in relation to the findings and conceptual framework of GLOBE as regards to what appears culturally challenging as related to a Colombian business context from a Danish perspective.

Based on this discussion, in Chapter 6, I will address the implications of the findings for practitioners, i.e., Danish firms and managers, by providing some guidelines that outline the central cultural issues considered relevant in a Colombian business context.

Finally, Chapter 7 will present a conclusion, address the limitations of the study and point toward future research.
2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The purpose of this chapter is to present the theoretical framework applied in this thesis in order to answer the research question. Firstly, it involves a literature view and justification for applying GLOBE as the conceptual framework. Secondly, the operationalized definitions of culture and a Colombian business context are given. Thirdly, follows a presentation of GLOBE’s nine culture dimensions, a cultural comparison of Colombia and Denmark and the theoretical implications of their scores. Finally, an overview of their findings in relation to Colombia and Denmark is provided, followed by an outline of the deficiencies of available research, mainly GLOBE, justifying this research study.

2.1 Why the GLOBE study?

The term culture is a complex and dynamic concept continuously evolving. There are different ways to understand culture; there exists a multitude of definitions and different methodological ways of measuring culture, resulting in many controversies and heavy debates among scholars (see, e.g., Hofstede, 2006; Javidan, House, Dorfman, Hanges, & de Luque, 2006). Some of the major cross-national cultural studies of recent decades (see, e.g., Hofstede, 2001; 1980; House et al., 2004; Schwartz, 1999; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997) each apply different understandings to operationalize culture and to measure cultural differences and similarities. A holistic view may approach culture as a multi-layer (e.g., national, organizational and individual cultures) and multi-level (e.g., behaviors, values, assumptions) construct (Leung, Bhagat, Buchan, Erez, & Gibson, 2005). In this study, I focus on national cultures, more specifically, the impact of Colombian culture in a business related setting from a Danish point of view. National culture is defined as “values, beliefs, norms, and behavioral patterns of a national group” (Leung et al., 2005, p. 357). I have chosen to adopt project GLOBE’s nine dimensional cultural framework (House et al., 2004) and their findings on the practices of the national (societal) cultures of Colombia and Denmark as the conceptual background of this thesis for a variety of reasons.

Firstly, GLOBE is the newest large cross-cultural study on nations and thus reveals the most recent large-scale findings concerning the national (societal) cultures of Colombia and Denmark. Secondly, is can be considered a more robust cultural study, e.g., vis-à-vis Hofstede’s landmark study, as it was specifically designed to measure culture through the use of multiple methods and methodological
measures. Thirdly, GLOBE’s nine cultural dimensions can be argued to reflect the most recently developed conceptual instruments to measure culture. Based on an extensive literature review, the GLOBE researchers constructed nine cultural dimensions that both builds on existing cultural studies, inter alia, Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961), McClelland (1961), Triandis (1995), and particularly, Hofstede (1980), but also develop new cultural dimensions. Their nine constructed cultural dimensions, which are elaborated more extensively in section 2.3, are: “Uncertainty Avoidance, Power Distance, Institutional Collectivism, In-Group Collectivism, Gender Egalitarianism, Assertiveness, Future Orientation, Performance Orientation, and Humane Orientation” (House & Javidan, 2004, p. 11). Fourthly, GLOBE’s findings reveal that the distinction between cultural values (the ways things should be) and cultural practices (the way things are) can be considered a more precise or at least a more nuanced way to understand and measure national cultures. Thus, since GLOBE measure national cultures through practices, their results on Colombia and Denmark are seen to be more compatible with this thesis, considering that the research question concerns how Danish professionals perceive the way things are (practices) in a Colombian business context – and not necessarily the values of Colombians. Again, with reference to the research question of this thesis, the fifth and final point involves that GLOBE’s research approach seems more in line with mine in the sense that both studies investigate how subjects perceive others though they differ significantly since GLOBE base their results on the aggregated perceptions of others in the participating subjects’ own society whereas I seek to explore the perceptions of others in the society of others. In sum, I consider GLOBE’s conceptual framework and findings on culture the most comprehensive and sophisticated cross-national study to date relevant for my study.

2.2 Defining culture and a Colombia business context

The definition of culture as applied in this thesis reflects that culture, in general terms, from a social science perspective, is “a set of parameters that differentiate each collective in a meaningful way” (House & Javidan, 2004, p. 15). In this study, I focus on national cultures, more specifically, the impact of Colombian culture in a business related setting seen from a Danish point of view. National

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4 The quantitative and qualitative study was done based on responses of approximately 17,000 managers in three selected industries (Financial services, food processing, and telecommunications) from 951 organizations functioning in 62 societies with each major geographical region of the world represented by at least three societies (Javidan, House, & Dorfman, 2004, p. 29). In addition, it is worth stressing that GLOBE is a truly multinational research program as the research team involved 170 researchers (and their support groups) from 62 societal cultures around the world.

5 According to my knowledge, the vast majority of recent researchers, inter alia, Hofstede, measure national cultures through a set of values which are believed to be a sufficient way to know a culture and to know actual behavior (practice). However, GLOBE found cultural values and practices to meaningfully differ significantly according to the vast majority of their nine cultural dimensions.
culture is defined to compromise “values, beliefs, norms, and behavioral patterns of a national group” (Leung et al., 2005, p. 357). However, culture still appears somewhat elusive and intangible. Thus, in order to operationalize an otherwise rather complicated concept, I will do it based on an interpretation of GLOBE’s nine cultural dimensions and their theoretical implications, which are elaborated extensively in the forth-coming section, 2.3.

The Colombian business context, as earlier stated, refers to a variety of settings encompassing international business operations in relation to Colombia, and may include one or both of the following two aspects: “(1) A business (firm) that engages in international (cross-border) economic activities and/or (2) the action of doing business abroad” (Peng & Meyer, 2011, p. 6). Thus, it can involve a variety of international entry modes, including exports, joint ventures, foreign investments or Greenfield investments, e.g., start-ups. Finally, these phenomena evolve around the business context of day-to-day dealings mainly as related to communications, management and negotiations.

2.3 GLOBE’s nine cultural dimensions

In the present section, the nine cultural dimensions as developed by GLOBE are defined one by one while their findings regarding Colombia and Denmark will solely be presented in terms of cultural practices (‘As Is’) while their scores on values (‘Should Be’) are left out since this study seeks to investigate the practices of Colombian society from a Danish perspective. Besides, the theoretical implications of their practices scores, i.e., the implications of societies scoring higher or lower on the nine cultural dimensions as determined by GLOBE, are given, which necessarily are selective. Finally, a table will be presented in order to provide an overview of the definitions of GLOBE’s nine cultural dimensions and to enable comparison of the scores of Colombian and Danish society in terms of practices.

It is worth noting several aspects regarding the theoretical framework and findings of GLOBE. Firstly, GLOBE does not appear to operate with a fixed definition of their cultural dimensions, which I perceive to reflect that it is the dimension as a concept that is important, not the actual wording\(^6\). Therefore, these definitions are used interchangeably in this thesis. Secondly, in order to characterize and compare the practices scores of Colombia and Denmark, GLOBE’s findings on these two countries are presented according to the banding (grouping) of their scores\(^7\). This method is

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\(^6\) For an overview of the varieties of definitions presented by GLOBE, see table C.1 in the appendix.

\(^7\) The societies that GLOBE studied were grouped into three or four meaningful bands (groups) – A, B, C, and/or D – using a statistical procedure, i.e., A is higher on the dimension than B, etc.
considered the best way by the GLOBE authors to describe and compare the scores of societies in their study since the average scores of the participating societies within the same bands are not found to statistically differ from each other. In addition, in order to enable a more reader-friendly and assessable description and comparison of the scores of Colombia and Denmark, their band-scores have been given value denominations according to the number of bands identified by GLOBE to significantly differ, which, as earlier stated, can range from three to four bands. Thus, the corresponding value scales can range from high, medium to low (three bands) or from high, medium-high, medium-low to low (four bands). Thirdly, it is very important to note that the implications (tendencies of societies) of scoring high on low on these dimensions are extreme stereotype cases. Thus, the tendencies are neither inclusive nor exhaustive in terms of the attributes connected to each dimension. The implications are used to serve as a guide to better understand the different possible implications of the cultural dimensions. In other words, they illustrate the tendencies of the cultural attributes of societies that score higher or lower on the different dimensions. Mixtures are expected.

2.3.1 Power distance

In general terms, the cultural construct, power distance, “reflects the extent to which a community accepts and endorses authority, power differences, and status privileges” (Carl, Gupta, & Javidan, 2004, p. 513). More specifically, the GLOBE project’s definition of power distance is “the degree to which members of an organization or society expect and agree that power should be shared unequally” (Carl et al., 2004, p. 517).

According to the GLOBE findings, Colombian society scores high on power distance practices with a score of 5.56. By contrast, GLOBE found Denmark to be the society with the lowest score on power distance practices, i.e., a score of 3.89. Based on the GLOBE study, Colombia and Denmark can thus be considered as direct opposites in terms of power distance practices.

Societies that are high on power distance, such as Colombia, tend to make a clear distinction “between those with power and status and those without, and expect obedience towards superiors” (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2009, p. 47). Thus, society is clearly differentiated into classes and those holding the power “are granted greater status, privileges, and material rewards than those without power” (Gupta, de Luque, & House, 2004, p. 166). In addition, power bases are stable and scarce while power is seen as providing social order through clear allocation of rigid roles. The authors, Carl et al., point out a dysfunctional element of this, namely that high power prevents “the society from questioning, learning, and adapting as there is little opportunity for debate and voicing of divergent views. Asking
questions may be interpreted or regarded as criticizing and blaming, and therefore be prohibited” (2004, p. 559). Finally, information is localized; different groups, e.g., women, have different involvement (based on table 17.2, Carl et al., 2004, p. 536).

Societies that score low on power distance, in this case Denmark, tend to differentiate less between “those in power and those without” (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2009, p. 47). In lower power distance countries, “each individual is respected and appreciated for what the person has to offer (…)” (Carl et al., 2004, p. 518). Society has a large middle class, power bases are temporary and sharable, while power is considered a source of corruption, coercion and dominance. In addition, information is shared, all groups enjoy equal involvement (based on table 17.2, Carl et al., 2004, p. 536).

2.3.2 Uncertainty avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance concerns “the extent to which ambiguous situations are threatening to individuals, to which rules and order are preferred, and to which uncertainty is tolerated in a society” (de Luque & Javidan, 2004, p. 602). More specifically, uncertainty avoidance is defined as “the extent to which a society, organization, or group relies on social norms, rules, and procedures to alleviate unpredictability of future events” (Javidan et al., 2004, p. 30).

According to the GLOBE study, Colombia scores medium-low on uncertainty avoidance practices with a score 3.57. The contrary is the case for Denmark, which is a highly uncertainty-avoiding society with a score of 5.22. Thus, Colombia and Denmark can once again be considered direct opposites, yet, this time in terms of uncertainty avoidance practices.

Societies that score low on uncertainty avoidance (Colombia) tend to “have a strong tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty, live less structured lives and are less concerned about following rules” (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2009, p. 47). A keyword seems to be informality; interactions with others are more informal, they prefer to rely on the word of others that they trust rather than contractual agreements, and rely on informal norms for most matters rather than formalized policies, procedures and rules. Besides, they tend to be less orderly and keep fewer records, e.g., they often do not document conclusions from meetings. In addition, they are less calculating when raking risks and are less resistant to change while there is more tolerance for breaking rules (based on table 19.1, de Luque & Javidan, 2004, p. 618).

Societies that score high on this dimension (Denmark) “value orderliness and consistency, structured lifestyles, and rules and laws to govern situations” (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2009, p. 47). Thus, the
keyword here appears to be *formality*; they use formality in interactions with others, they prefer to document agreements in legal contracts (contrary to relying on the word), and they are more reliant on formalized policies and procedures, establishing and following rules, verify communications in writing – establishing these rules are often in order to allow the predictability of behavior. They are much more orderly and keep meticulous records, e.g., document conclusions from meetings. Besides, they take more moderately calculated risks while they are more resistant to change and less tolerant to break rules (based on table 19.1, de Luque & Javidan, 2004, p. 618).

### 2.3.3 Humane orientation

*Humane orientation* as defined by GLOBE is “the degree to which an organization or society encourages and rewards individuals for being fair, altruistic, friendly, generous, caring, and kind to others” and manifests itself “in the way people treat one another and in the social programs institutionalized within each society” (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2004, p. 569).

According to the GLOBE findings, Colombia scores *medium-low* on humane orientation practices with 3.72. By contrast, Denmark score *medium-high* on humane-orientation practices with 4.44. Hereby, according to the results of GLOBE, Colombian and Danish society are considered opposites as Denmark is more humane-oriented in terms of *practices*.

In societies that score low on humane orientation (Colombia), “more emphasis is placed on power, material possessions, self-enhancement and independence. People prefer to solve their own problems (…)” (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2009, p. 46). More specifically, people are motivated by power and material possessions while promoting self-interest is important – which involves lack of consideration and support for others – self-enhancement is key (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2004, p. 570-595). At the same time, in low humane-oriented (paternalistic) societies, “people in authority are expected to provide social support by taking care of subordinates’ and employees’ problems” (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2004, p. 596).

In societies that score high on humane orientation (Denmark), “human relations, support for others and sympathy for others (especially the vulnerable) are highly valued. People value belongingness and caring for the well-being others. Paternalistic and patronage associations and relationships are common” (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2009, p. 46). In these societies, others, i.e., family, friends, community, and strangers, are considered important and people are primarily motivated by a need for belonging and affiliation (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2004, need reference, perhaps p. 596).
At the same time, members of society are responsible for promoting well-being others. In more humane-oriented societies, “social control is based on shared values and norms, practices reflect individualized consideration, and informal relationships provide development opportunities to employees” (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2004, p. 596).

2.3.4 Individualism and collectivism

Individualism and collectivism is related to the idea of examining “the nature of the relationship between the individual and group”, and more specifically, it reflects “the extent to which people are autonomous individuals or embedded in their groups” (Gelfand, Bhawuk, Nichii, & Bechtold, 2004, p. 440). Project GLOBE’s dimensions of individualism and collectivism are collectivism I (institutional collectivism) and II (in-group collectivism).

2.3.4.1 Collectivism I: Institutional collectivism

Institutional collectivism reflects “inducements and rewards for collective behavior and norms, rather than incentives and rewards for the enactment of individual freedom and autonomy” (Gupta et al., 2004, p. 165). This construct puts emphasis on “shared objectives, interchangeable interests, and respect for socially legitimated institutions” (Gupta et al., 2004, p. 165). More specifically, it is defined as “the degree to which organizational and societal institutional practices encourage and reward collective distribution of resources and collective action” (Javidan et al., 2004, p. 30).

According to the GLOBE findings, Colombia scores medium-low on institutional collectivism practices with a score of 3.81 while Denmark’s score of 4.80 is considered high. Thus, Colombia and Denmark again appear as opposites as Colombia is a more individualistic society while Denmark is more collectivist.

In societies low on institutional collectivism (Colombia), “autonomy, self-interest and individual freedom are valued and organizations tend to reward individual performance” (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2009, p. 46). In addition, societies characterized by lower institutional collectivism is related to an emphasis on self-reliance and independent personality (Gupta et al., 2004, p. 165).

Organizations in societies high on institutional collectivism (Denmark) put an emphasis on “group harmony and co-operation and reward the group and not the individual” (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2009, p. 46). Higher institutional collectivism is related to “the notion of autonomous individuals, living free of society while living in that society (...)” (Gupta et al., 2004, p. 165).
2.3.4.2 Collectivism II: In-group collectivism

In-group collectivism refers to “how individuals relate to an in-group as an autonomous unit and how individuals attend to responsibilities concerning their in-group” (Gupta et al., 2004, p. 165). This dimensional construct mirrors “pride in membership of group members and general affective identification toward family, group, community and nations” (Gupta et al., 2004, p. 165). More specifically, it is defined as “the degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty, and cohesiveness in their organization or families” (Javidan et al., 2004, p. 30).

Based on GLOBE, Colombia scores high on in-group collectivism practices with 5.73 while Denmark scores low with 3.53 (the lowest of all societies in the GLOBE study). Thus, in terms of in-group collectivism Colombia and Denmark can be considered direct opposites in terms of their practices.

In societies scoring high on in-group collectivism (Colombia) it is very important to people to be a member of a family and a close group of friends (an in-group). It is critical to people to satisfy the expectations of the in-group (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2009, p. 46). In these in-group oriented societies, an emphasis is put on “collaboration, cohesiveness, and harmony”, and members experience a strong sense of group identity which can expand from family level to the group level and to the national level (Gupta et al., 2004, p. 165-166).

Societies characterized by low in-group orientation (Denmark), “family members and friends do not expect any type of special treatment and people do not feel obliged to ignore rules to care of their close friends and family members” (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2009, p. 46). Thus, there exist little distinction between in-groups and out-groups (based on table 16.1, Gelfand et al., 2004, p. 454).

2.3.4.3 Summing up collectivism I and II

According to the GLOBE findings, Colombia scores medium-low in terms of institutional collectivism. Yet, Colombians score high in terms of in-group collectivism. The opposite is the case for Denmark as Danes score high on institutional collectivism and low in terms of in-group collectivism. These scores reflect the multidimensionality of the construct of individualism and collectivism.

2.3.5 Assertiveness

In general terms, assertiveness “reflects beliefs about as to whether people are or should be encouraged to be assertive, aggressive, and tough or nonassertive, nonaggressive, and tender in social relationships” (Den Hartog, 2004, p. 395). More specifically, its definition as developed by GLOBE
is “the degree to which individuals in organizations or societies are assertive, confrontational, and aggressive in social relationships” (Den Hartog, 2004, p. 395). Assertiveness relates to notion of expressing one’s opinion in a confident manner without doing harm to others (or to build stronger relationships). However, it is context dependent whether one’s action will be seen as assertive or not, as well as whether it is possible to obtain a desired outcome through assertive behavior. In sum, assertiveness as a concept can be seen as a set of social and communicative skills, a certain behavior, a style of responding, a personality trait, which appears gender-determined, i.e., it is frequently seen as a “masculine”-trait (though more related to sex-trait stereotypes) (Den Hartog, 2004, p. 396-401).

Based on the GLOBE findings, assertiveness practices are high in Colombia with a score of 4.20. Denmark is a medium assertiveness-oriented society with a score 3.80 score. Thus, the difference between the two societies is less visible in relation to assertiveness orientation than the previous cultural dimensions. However, a difference still exists as Colombia practices it more than Denmark.

In societies with high scores on assertiveness (Colombia), people tend to have “a more ‘can-do’ attitude and tend to be more competitive in business” (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2009, p. 46). Members of these societies view the strong with sympathy while dominant and tough behavior is valued for everyone just as the term aggressiveness is viewed with rather positive connotation, e.g., in relation to helping someone to win. More so, they value communicating directly and unambiguously, being explicit and to the point, while expressing and revealing thoughts and feelings are valued (based on table 15.1, Den Hartog, 2004, p. 405).

In societies with lower assertiveness orientation (Denmark – though it scored medium), there is a tendency of having “more sympathy for the weak, more emphasis on harmony and loyalty” (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2009, p. 46). In these societies, members value cooperation, people, warm relationships and modesty while competition is associated with defeat and punishment. In terms of communications, people speak indirectly and try to “save face”; they value ambiguous and subtle language and communications, and detached and self-possessed behavior. The term aggression is associated with connotations that are more negative, e.g., it only leads to negative outcomes (based on table 15.1, Den Hartog, 2004, p. 405),

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8 Situational constraints compromise, e.g., gender and culture (some cultures value humility, subservience, and tolerance above assertiveness, which is often the case for women) (Den Hartog, 2004, p. 399). In addition, while direct communication about one’s opinion is valued in the United States, many non-Western cultures value a less-direct manner of responding (Den Hartog, 2004, p. 403).
2.3.6 Gender egalitarianism

*Gender egalitarianism* refers to how societies divide roles between women and men (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2004, p. 343). More specifically, its operational definition is “the degree to which an organization or a society minimizes gender role differences while promoting gender equality” (House, 2004, p. 30). This culture construct reflects “societies’ beliefs about whether members’ biological sex should determine the roles that they play in their homes, business organizations, and communities” (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2004, p. 347). Thus, gender egalitarian societies “seek to minimize differences between the roles of females and males in homes, organizations, and communities” (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2004, p. 347-348).

According to the findings of GLOBE, both Colombia (3.67) and Denmark (3.93) score high on this dimension in terms of practices. Thus, this is the first cultural dimension where Colombian and Danish society do not constitute opposites poles: Based on the GLOBE study, both societies are equally less male dominated societies in relative terms.

Societies with high scores on gender egalitarianism (Colombia and Denmark) assess/vision “women’s status as being higher and their involvement in decision-making stronger compared to more male-dominated societies” (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2009, p. 47). Thus, these societies perceive that men and women can suit similar roles. More women are in positions of authority, the percentage of women participating in the labor force is higher, and occupational sex segregation is less. Besides, males and females have similar education levels (based on table 14.2, Kabasakal & Bodur, 2004, p. 359).

In societies with lower score on this dimension, men have higher status and has relatively fewer women in positions of authority (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2009, p. 47). Thus, in these societies there exists a belief that men and women should perform different roles. Women has a small role or no role in decision-making. Less women actively participate in the labor force; occupational sex segregation is more widespread, and the level of education of females is lower in comparison to males (based on table 14.2, Kabasakal & Bodur, 2004, p. 359).

2.3.7 Future orientation

*Future orientation* is “the degree to which a collectivity encourages and rewards future-oriented behaviors such as planning and delaying gratification” (Ashkanasy, Gupta, Mayfield, & Trevor-Roberts, 2004, p. 282). In more concrete terms, GLOBE’s definition of future orientation is,
the extent to which members of a society or an organization believe that their current actions will influence their future, focus on investment in their future, believe that they will have a future that matters, believe in planning for developing their future, and look far into the future for assessing the effects of their current actions (Ashkanasy et al., 2004, p. 285). According to the GLOBE findings, Colombia is a medium-low future-oriented society with a score of 3.57. By contrast, future-orientation in Danish society is high with a score of 4.44. Thus, it can be interfered that Colombia and Denmark are opposites in terms of future-orientation as Colombian society is rather little future-oriented in terms of their practices while Denmark, in contrast, is a society very oriented towards the future.

In less future-oriented societies (Colombia) there is tendency of “less systematic planning and more preference for opportunistic behaviors and actions” (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2009, p. 46). People in lower future-oriented cultures, oriented in the presence, demonstrate “the capability to enjoy the moment and be spontaneous” (Ashkanasy et al., 2004, p. 285). At the same time, they can be unwilling or incapable to “plan a sequence to realize their desired goals, and may not appreciate the warning signals that their current behavior negatively influences the realization of their goals in the future” (Ashkanasy et al., 2004, p. 285). In addition, organizations tend to have a shorter strategic orientation while they tend to be inflexible and maladaptive (based on table 12.1, Javidan et al., 2004, p. 245).

High future-oriented societies (Denmark) tend to “have a longer time horizon for decision-making and more systematic planning processes” (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2009, p. 46). In future-oriented societies, people tend to “have a strong capability and willingness to imagine future contingencies, formulate future goal states, and seek to achieve goals and develop strategies for meeting their future aspirations” (Ashkanasy et al., 2004, p. 285). Organizations tend to be more long-term oriented while they are flexible and adaptive (based on table 12.1, Javidan et al., 2004, p. 245).

2.3.8 Performance orientation

Performance orientation refers to “the extent to which a community encourages and rewards innovation, high standards, and performance improvement” (Javidan, 2004, p. 239). GLOBE’s
definition of this dimension derives from David C. McClelland’s (1961), American psychologist, work on the concept of need for achievement, i.e., “the need to do better all the time” (House & Javidan, 2004, p. 13).

Based on the GLOBE study, both Colombia and Denmark are medium performance-orientated societies in terms of practices. However, when taking their individual scores into account, Colombia appear less performance-oriented than Denmark with a score of 3.95 while Denmark scores 4.22. Thus, GLOBE found both societies to be almost equally performance-oriented. While either society falls into the bracket of higher or lower performance orientation, the implications of the two dualties (high or low) are still outlined as the empirical data might differ with the GLOBE results.

In societies scoring high on performance orientation, organizations put emphasis on “training and development” (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2009, p. 45). Higher performance-oriented societies tend to “value education and learning, emphasize results, set high performance targets, value taking initiative, and prefer explicit and direct communication” (Javidan, 2004, p. 276). Besides, these societies tend view feedback as necessary for improvement while individuals believe that success dependents on one’s determination. In addition, education is considered critical for success while they value what you do more than who you are (achievement) (based on table 12.1, Javidan, 2004, p. 245).

On the contrary, in societies scoring low on performance orientation, the emphasis is on “family connections and background” (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2009, p. 45). These societies are inclined to give importance to “social and family relations, loyalty, tradition, and seniority, and use subtle and indirect language” (Javidan, 2004, p. 276). In addition, lower performance-oriented societies tend to view feedback as judgmental and uncomfortable. More so, it is about attending the “right” school while they value who you are more than what you do (ascription) (based on table 12.1, Javidan, 2004, p. 245).
2.3.9 Overview: GLOBE’s culture definitions and results on Colombia and Denmark

Based on the findings of the GLOBE study, the national (societal) practices scores of Colombia and Denmark can be summarized as in table 2.110:

**TABLE 2.1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture construct</th>
<th>Definition11</th>
<th>Colombia</th>
<th>Denmark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power distance</td>
<td>The degree to which members of a collective expect power to be distributed equally.</td>
<td>H (5.56)</td>
<td>L (3.89)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty avoidance</td>
<td>The extent to which a society, organization, or group relies on social norms, rules, and procedures to alleviate unpredictability of future events.</td>
<td>ML (3.57)</td>
<td>H (5.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humane orientation</td>
<td>The degree to which a collective encourages and rewards individuals for being fair, altruistic, generous, caring, and kind to others.</td>
<td>ML (3.72)</td>
<td>MH (4.44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional collectivism</td>
<td>The degree to which organizational and societal institutional practices encourage and reward collective distribution of resources and collective action.</td>
<td>ML (3.81)</td>
<td>H (4.80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-group collectivism</td>
<td>The degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty, and cohesiveness in their organizations or families.</td>
<td>H (5.73)</td>
<td>L (3.53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertiveness</td>
<td>The degree to which individuals are assertive, confrontational, and aggressive in their relationships with others.</td>
<td>H (4.20)</td>
<td>M (3.80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender egalitarianism</td>
<td>The degree to which a collective minimizes gender inequality.</td>
<td>H (3.67)</td>
<td>H (3.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future orientation</td>
<td>The extent to which individuals engage in future-oriented behaviors such as delaying gratification, planning, and investing in the future.</td>
<td>ML (3.27)</td>
<td>H (4.44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance orientation</td>
<td>The degree to which a collective encourages and rewards group members for performance improvement and excellence.</td>
<td>M (3.95)</td>
<td>M (4.22)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: H = high; MH = medium-high; M = medium; ML = medium-low; L = low

10 For a more detailed comparison of the societal practices scores of Colombia and Denmark which both include their banding (and added value denomination), ranking and scores, see table D.1 in the appendix.
11 The definitions are based on the definitions provided in table 3.1, Javidan et al., 2004, p. 30.
As seen in this table and in the previous sections, the societal (national) cultures of Colombia and Denmark appear to differ significantly according to seven out of GLOBE’s nine culture dimensions. However, such knowledge is considered insufficient from the view of both academia and practitioners. The nature of culture may not be suited to quantitative measures since cultural contact between two (or more) cultures may entail unique dynamics that cannot be measured through objective measures. Thus, “the importance of culture may lie in the subjective perceptions by those from another culture” (Javidan et al., 2006, p. 911, italics added by author). In relation to this point, it can be argued that there exist a need to explore and describe the impact of national culture as related to a specific setting, e.g., a business context. In addition, while the quantitative measurement of cultural differences between nations may point towards potential challenging aspects, they do not necessarily provide information concerning what is culturally challenging, which from a business perspective may be a more important point to consider. Finally, GLOBE’s research instruments may leave out additional cultural issues to consider as their findings are based on rating questionnaire items designed to capture their nine culture dimensions on a 7-point Likert-type scale. In sum, the study seems relevant from both the view of academia and practitioners. Thus, the resulting research question of this study is:

- What are the cultural challenges as experienced by Danish professionals in a Colombian business context?
3 RESEARCH DESIGN

In the present chapter, the purpose is to elaborate on the research design that is applied to this thesis in order to answer its main research question, i.e., what are the cultural challenges as experienced by Danish professionals in a Colombian business context. According to Creswell, research design refers to a “plan or proposal to conduct research”, which involves the interaction of three components that researchers need to consider, namely; philosophical worldview, strategy of inquiry, and research methods (2009, p. 5). Thus, the chapter begins with an outline about the philosophical worldview assumptions framing this study and then outlines. Secondly, it outlines the selection of a qualitative strategy for inquiry. Thirdly, a detailed elaboration as regards to the research methods is provided, particularly in terms of data collection and data analysis, and finally, the trustworthiness of this study is assessed.

3.1 Philosophical worldview

According to Creswell, “worldview” refers to “a general orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher holds”, and encompasses what others have called paradigm, epistemology and ontology, and methodology (2009, p. 6). The philosophical worldview adopted for this thesis is mainly allied with social constructivism while a pragmatic worldview is also applied.

From a social constructivist worldview, the world and the nature of research is socially constructed by individuals which means that individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences in relation to certain objects, things or situations in order to understand them. These meanings (or interpretations) are “varied and are multiple” and are generated through social interaction with others and shaped by the historical and social (cultural) background (and perspectives) of individuals (Creswell, 2009, p. 8 - 9). Based on this worldview, the aim of research is “to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation being studied”, and participating subjects commonly construct meaning of a given situation through “discussions or interactions with other persons” while the researchers’ own experiences and background shape their interpretation of the encounter (Creswell, 2009, p. 8).

As applied to this thesis, I have tried to depart from the objective measures of culture in quantitative studies such as GLOBE and to investigate how individuals from one culture (Denmark) subjectively perceive those from another culture (Colombia – though in a business context). I have used the theoretical framework of GLOBE, i.e., their nine dimensional cultural framework and findings
concerning Colombia and Denmark, as a point of departure in order to have a cultural framework of reference and to obtain an idea about theoretical cultural differences between the two societies, which can be potentially challenging for Danish professionals in a Colombian business context. GLOBE’s nine dimensional framework are considered cultural constructs which I have adopted by developing an interview protocol that reflects my interpretation of which themes that their nine cultural dimensions can imply in a business setting. While more philosophical considerations are mentioned later in research methods it is worth stressing here that a qualitative semi-structured research method was chosen for data collection as it allowed me the flexibility to explore and seek an understanding of the multiple experiences and perceptions of the participating subjects as related to cultural challenges in a Colombian business context. For data analysis, thematic analysis based on coding through abduction (i.e., going from deduction to induction or vice versa) was chosen as the ideal approach as it is an interactive way that enabled me to go back and forth between the theoretical framework and the empirical data in the research process, and hereby, continuously expand my understanding in both areas.

As regards to the specific contexts of the participating subjects, they are only briefly presented since the focus of this study is on investigating their experiences as related to cultural challenges in a Colombian business setting – and not how their setting and background influences these experiences - though it inevitably is conceived to constitute an important factor from a social constructivist perspective (more in this in the section on future research). However, the participating subjects are briefly presented in terms of industry, origin of company, HR position, gender and professional background as related to Colombia and Latin America while a presentation of the specific setting of this study, i.e., Colombia, is briefly given as regards to what is considered relevant background knowledge from a cultural and business perspective. Finally, stemming from my principal worldview, the research conducted in this thesis is naturally shaped by me, i.e., my philosophical worldview and historical, cultural and social background.

The study undergoes a transformation from a social constructivist worldview into a pragmatic worldview in order to make my findings “real-world practice oriented” (Creswell, 2009, p. 6). A central assumption of pragmatism entails “a concern with applications – what works – and solutions to problems” (Creswell, 2009, p. 10). Thus, based on my findings ultimately are an interpretation in relation to cultural challenges as experienced by Danish professionals in a Colombian business context, I present an advice list or “toolkit” in order to equip Danish managers (companies) who wish
to do business in relation to Colombia, and hereby, potentially better their performance. However, I wish to stress that my findings in relation to cultural challenges and their implications for practitioners implies a holistic view. Thus, the cultural challenges and “toolkit” must be perceived to represent rough tendencies – they are by any means not to be conceived as rules – and should be modified.

Lastly, it is worth stressing that the main knowledge purpose of this thesis is to produce exploratory research concerning cultural issues from the perspective of Danish professionals in a Colombian business context. In second place, the knowledge purpose in terms of the implications for practitioners is of normative character.

3.2 Strategy of inquiry

According to Creswell, strategies of inquiry “provide specific direction for procedures in a research design” and multiple types of strategies exist within qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods research (2009, p. 11). For this study, I adopted a qualitative strategy of inquiry using a qualitative semi-structured research interview for data collection and thematic analysis based on coding for data analysis. An abductive research approach has largely been applied to the study. Firstly, I departed from GLOBE’s theoretical framework (i.e., their nine cultural dimensions, their results concerning Colombian and Danish society, and the theoretical tendencies of societies scoring high or low) in order to obtain a theoretical understanding of the cultural context of these two societies, which could point towards culturally challenging aspects in a Colombian business setting from the perspective of Danish professionals. Secondly, I adopted their nine dimensional cultural framework and based on my interpretation I constructed my own theoretical framework as related to a Colombian business setting through an interview protocol, which also implied an adaptation of some of their questionnaire items. Thirdly, new themes emerged during the qualitative semi-structured research interviews, which during the data analysis, i.e., thematic analysis based on coding, was systematically categorized. For the discussion, I applied internal triangulation in relation to GLOBE to assess my results while the implications are based on the discussion of my results. In fifth place, based on my findings in relation to cultural challenges, I developed an advice list or ‘toolkit’ to help Danish managers better their performance when entering a Colombian business context. Finally, a conclusion was made in relation to my research question, which also assess the limitations of the present study and points towards themes or issues for future research.
3.3 Research Methods

3.3.1 Primary data
The primary data collected for this thesis consists of interviews with Danes with professional experience in Colombia. The whole process of my interview investigation, i.e., from the preliminary steps of developing an interview guide and an ethical protocol to conducting the interviews to transcribing, interview analysis and finally, reporting the results, draws inspiration from Brinkman and Kvale's book, *InterViews – Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing* (2009). Therefore, my understanding of conducting interviews is inspired by their understanding of doing interviews notably as a craft, i.e., learning by doing, and when found necessary they are explicitly quoted in the following sub-chapters.

3.3.1.1 Interviews
The primary data for this thesis consists of five interviews conducted in July, 2014 (see appendices F-J for their transcription). The interviews took from 58 minutes to 1 hour and 33 minutes with an average length of 1 hour and 14 minutes, including personal talk which in sum take from 5 to 20 minutes. The first two interviews were done face to face in Denmark while the remaining three were done via Skype since these interviewees both work and live in Colombia and due to the geographical distance between Denmark and Colombia this was found to be the most convenient option.

The qualitative research interview approach was adopted for this thesis as it aims to "understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 1). Kvale and Brinkman (2009) emphasize that the specific purpose of research interviews is to produce knowledge which is socially constructed in the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee, and thus depends on their relationship. Therefore, a deliberately chosen strategy was to spent a considerable amount of time with personal talk prior to starting with the interview guide or during the actual interview in order to create a platform where the subjects felt secure and confidential talking with me, in particular, in relation to the three Skype interviews in order to minimize the physical and non-visual distance, while it was also natural as I genuinely was interested their life stories. Besides, I purposely tried to open up about me and my personal life as Kvale and Brinkman (2009) also stress that the interviewer cannot be impersonal and must give something of him or herself in order to get an open response.
A semi-structured research interview as advocated by Kvale and Brinkman (2009) was chosen as the most relevant and ideal interview type for the purpose of this thesis since it provides structure and flexibility. Thus, it enabled me to develop an interview guide reflecting my cultural conceptual framework as related to a Colombian business while it opened up for the possibility to ask follow-up questions either going in-depth regarding specific themes in relation to this framework or beyond my interpretation of GLOBE’s nine cultural dimensions, i.e., inductively developed themes. Finally, it allowed me to talk in personal terms with the interviewees, which is of great importance for the qualitative research interview in order to increase the trust between the interviewer and interviewee and to consequently to increase the quality of our knowledge production.

3.3.1.1 Interview protocol
Prior to conducting the actual interviews, an interview protocol was designed, tested and modified (see appendix E). It was designed based on my interpretation of GLOBE's nine cultural dimensions as related to a Colombian business context. Worth noting is that a funnel-shaped questioning technique was deliberately chosen in order to get the interviewees' spontaneous views on the topic, Colombian business culture, prior to the more specific questions elaborated in relation to GLOBE's nine culture dimensions. In addition, it was designed in Danish as it is the mother tongue of the present author and of the five interview subjects. However, citations used in this thesis were translated into English and when cited, there is a clear reference to the author of the quotation. The interview protocol was tested on a Danish business man, a non-participating subject of this study, with almost two decades of professional experience from another Latin American country, i.e., Guatemala, both as an entrepreneur and manager for a various companies. This interview took approximately 55 minutes and some questions of the interview protocol were added, deleted or modified, which was also an ongoing process from interview to interview.

3.3.1.1.2 Ethical protocol
A variety of ethical concerns were considered regarding the participation of the interview subjects – value issues, sensitive issues, and ethical dilemmas – that could occur from the initial contact to during the actual interviews to the final reported findings. My ethical position was seen to depend on the personal virtues of me, i.e., my ability to perceive and judge (to reason) by using my practical wisdom within a given context (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 67). Most importantly, I obtained their informed consent in written and oral form regarding the requirements of their participation, which, inter alia, involved anonymity besides industry and shallow background information in order to
enable them to talk about the subject matter in a more in-depth, nuanced and revealing or honest way. In addition, any explicitly revealing information was made unrecognizable in the transcripts in order to protect their identity. Finally, all five interviews were audio recorded and deleted after transcription. That said, Brinkman and Kvale (2009) notes that the consequences of a study are often unpredictable.

3.3.1.1.3 Transcription
Transcribing interviews from an oral to a written form is in itself considered an analytical process where few standard rules exist but where many technical and interpretive choices must be made as "there is no true, objective transformation from the oral to the written mode" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 186). Since the five interviews constitute the main body of the primary data in this thesis, an "intelligent" or light form of verbatim transcription was chosen, i.e., transcription with light editing. The intended aim of this procedure was to come as close as possible to what was said and how it was being said in the best possible and most detailed manner without going into too much unnecessary detail considered irrelevant for this study.

3.3.1.1.4 Interviewees
Table 3.1 provides a presentation of the five participating interviews subjects with relevant background information (the variables, sector and position, reflect their most recent or most referred to professional setting in relation to Colombia). It is worth stressing that the most important aspect considering their profiles as relevant in this study concerns that they are professionals of Danish origin and that they are substantially experienced in working in a Colombian business context as defined in earlier. That said, it is worth noting that they vary according to many of the variables, e.g., in relation to industrial sectors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject (S)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sector</td>
<td>Media</td>
<td>Health care</td>
<td>Fitness</td>
<td>Health care</td>
<td>Telecommunications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Head of Development, Executive Vice-President, Latin America</td>
<td>Senior Project Manager, Latin America + other regions</td>
<td>Managing Director, Colombia</td>
<td>Director, Legal Affairs, Latin America</td>
<td>General Manager, Colombia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total years working in/with Colombia</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience in other positions in Colombia</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience in other Latin American countries</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3.2 Secondary data

In order to discuss my findings and to increase their credibility, I applied internal triangulation in the discussion section by using the results of GLOBE and their implications in relation to Colombian and Danish society as already outlined in the theoretical background section.

3.3.3 Processing the data

The method chosen for processing the primary data, i.e., the five interview transcripts, is thematic analysis based on coding. The creation of the codes was conducted through an abductive approach, which, firstly, involved creating a coding list deductively based on the interview protocol prior to the analysis (see table K.1 in the appendix, which also includes their definitions). This initial coding list was based on the nine cultural dimensions of GLOBE (main categories) and my interpretation of their related questions (sub-categories) designed to reflect business-related aspects within these dimensions. Secondly, other themes emerged inductively from the data which meant that new sub-categories added to the pre-established nine dimensional framework based on GLOBE. Besides, a primary data protocol done in excel was developed based on the code list in order to keep system of the codes and their coding units and to enable a more systematic approach for comparison when presenting the results.

Following the method of Saklan (2013), the coding process was divided into two major stages: The first cycle of coding entailed assigning codes to data chunks (summarizing the data) and the second cycle of coding entailed grouping these into a smaller number of themes or categories and to look for patterns. The latter cycle also meant grouping the coding units into the primary data protocol. More specifically, during the first cycle of coding, I was inspired by some of Bryman’s stages of coding.

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12 Additional main categories were also inductively developed in relation to non-cultural challenges of doing business in a Colombian setting and are treated in the ‘Future research’ section as they are still considered important.
(2008, p. 550 - 552), which, inter alia, entailed reading the text as a whole and making notes at the end regarding major themes or what was considered interesting, important or significant - then I tried to compare these to what I jotted down directly following the interviews when I did them. Secondly, I read the text again while marking the text (coding everything from small sentences to paragraphs) and making marginal notes about significant remarks or observations. Thirdly, I systematically reviewed my codes and began on the second cycle of coding, i.e., categorizing them into the primary data protocol. An overview of the categorization of the data can be seen in the results section.

3.4 Trustworthiness

According to Rasmussen, Østergaard and Beckmann, contrary to quantitative methods, there does not exist a “standardized conceptual scheme whereby the quality of studies based on qualitative methods can be expressed” (2006, p.116 - 117). These authors argue that common terms of quantitative methods such as validity and reliability “are not precise terms for what takes place in a study based on qualitative methods” (Rasmussen et al., 2006, p. 117). Thus, Rasmussen et al. suggest using the term “trustworthiness” in order to assess the quality of a study based on a qualitative methods, which “implicitly implies that insight into the premises of the study will be able to permit an assessment of its quality” (2006, p. 117). Thus, openness and transparency concerning the research process is considered of particular importance when conducting qualitative research in order for the reader to assess the credibility of the results.

As applied to this study, a variety of measures have been applied in order to make the research process as open and transparent as possible. To begin with, I have tried to provide a precise formulation of the research problem, which rests on three central notions. Firstly, culture matters and cultural differences between nations (societies) can be challenging when conducting business in foreign cultural environments, e.g., by including empirical data suggesting such a problem in relation to Danish exports to Latin America. Secondly, however, an empirically founded gap exists in terms of investigating the cultural challenges as experienced by Danish professionals in relation to conducting business in a Colombian setting. Thirdly, a theoretical gap exists in terms of investigating how people from one culture subjectively perceive those from another culture. In second place, I have put forth arguments for using a theoretical framework consisting of the institution-based perspective and GLOBE in the theoretical background section. In third place, I have provided an extensive elaboration as regards to the research design applied for this study in order to answer its research question, which
include a systematic outline of the applied philosophical worldview, strategy of inquiry and research methods. As regards to the chosen research methods, it is worth stressing that in the appendix, I have attached my interview protocol (appendix K) and five interview transcripts (appendices F-J), which form the basis of my data, while I have attached my code list for data analysis. In addition, I deliberately chose to present my findings in an as objective manner as possible in the results section, which include relevant quotations to back up my findings while additional representative quotations are provided in table M.1 in the appendix.

In sum, though there does not exist a standard set of rules to assess the quality of a study based on qualitative methods, then I have applied a variety of measures to make my research approach/process as open and transparent in order to raise the trustworthiness of my findings.
4 RESULTS

4.1 Data structure

Table 4.1 provides an overview regarding the categorization of the data (see below). In total, it consists of one (1) aggregate dimension, nine (9) second-order themes and a total of thirty-five (32) first-order categories. The first-order categories put in italics are the only ones elaborated in this section as they relate to the research question (cultural challenges). The presentation of the results concerning the remaining first-order categories and the only second-order theme left out (institutional collectivism) can be seen in appendix L. In addition to the quotations presented in this section (and in terms of the before mentioned remaining results section), further exemplary quotations underlying the first-order categories can be seen in table M.1 enclosed in the appendix. Additionally, it is worth noting that seven (7) first-order categories emerged inductively as opposed to the interview protocol during the interviews. Inductively developed elements as opposed to the interview protocol are marked with a (*) in the table.

TABLE 4.1
Data structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First-order categories</th>
<th>Second-order themes</th>
<th>Aggregate dimensions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Orders (relationship)</td>
<td></td>
<td>A. Power distance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Decision-making</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Access to decision makers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Ethnicity and title</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Instructions (detail level)</td>
<td></td>
<td>A. Power distance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Written and oral agreements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Compliance with agreements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Uncertainty and changes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Language (*)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Mistakes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Level of generosity and kindness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Supportiveness during personal crisis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Human resource management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Firms and society</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Firms and employees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>16. Individual work and teamwork (*)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>17. Employee pride of individual results</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>18. Manager pride of individual results</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>19. Networks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Personal openness (*)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>21. Trust (*)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural differences, similarities and/or challenges</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2 Cultural challenges

4.2.1 Power distance (A)

Regarding orders (1), i.e., the relationship between the boss and employee when orders (instructions) are given (1) in a Colombian business context, it appears as if all the subjects, with the exception of S2, emphasize that orders and/or instructions are carried out without asking any questions. As S5 states, “Well, they [the instructions] are orders and the reaction of the [Colombian] employees are just, 'Sí, señor' - it will be done without asking any questions (…).” More specifically, both S4 and S5 state that Colombian subordinates typically would not voice their disagreement about an order, e.g., when asked the question of whether Colombians would obey the order without asking questions even though they disagree, S4 answers, “Many Colombians would just do that. If it is given as an instruction, then they will just do it.” More so, S1 recalls that Colombians would not voice if they had misunderstood something, and, consequently, stresses the importance of precise communication when orders are given. In addition, S3 appear to agree on both such notions but based on his experiences, it mainly applies to subordinates on a low level, e.g., unskilled employees. The following quotations serve as examples of these aspects:

“A Colombian employee would normally not voice their disagreement [about an order]. Of course, there are exceptions but normally (…).” (S5)

In the beginning, they [the Colombian employees] would do as you say [obey the order and do it as they thought it was supposed to be even though they misunderstood something] and be like, ‘I wonder what it is he is saying?’ - but they would not explicitly state it (…)

(*) = Inductively developed elements as opposed to those considered in the interview protocol by the researcher.
[Afterwards], they would desperately try to figure out what it was that he meant with what he was saying. This made it very important to be clear about what you are saying. (S1)

In relation to getting the opinion of Colombian subordinates, both S1 and S5 stress the importance of explicitly stating the willingness to hear their view while S4 emphasize a positive outcome when promoting a collaborative working environment contrary to not discuss things with subordinates. The following quotations exemplify these notions:

You also have to state that you would like to hear what they have to say or else you will not get to know their opinion. And then you have to say it three or seven times because the first time they will simply not believe that you are serious about wanting to hear their opinion. They think that it is just something that I am saying because that is what they have learned at some course. Therefore, you really have to state it clearly that you are actually interested in hearing what they have to say. (S1)

(…) you also need to spend some time to explain them that if they think that it can be done in a better way, then they are very welcome to make suggestions because they are very creative and have many good ideas but they are just not used to working in an environment where it is promoted. (S5)

In addition, S3 recalls challenges as related to over-interpretation by subordinates when he or the CEO in particular gave instructions, “then it might have been that we thought that it was important but it did not mean that everything else had to be put aside until this task was done. Here we could sometimes risk that what we said was over-interpreted.”

Finally, it is worth mentioning that S5 considers it primary cultural difference,

(…) that people over here are not used to be given responsibility. I am generalizing, of course, but over here they are used to be treated as slaves, i.e., it is very much like in Germany where it is the boss who decides and the boss who knows everything.

As regards to ethnicity and title (4), it seem to play a significant role in a Colombian business context and society, in general. Whether there are any particular benefits associated with being specifically from Denmark, however, appears debatable, e.g., S2 does not recall any. Still, S1, S3, and S5 all seem to consider it advantageous to be from (Northern) Europe as you almost automatically gain higher importance or status (S1, S3 and S5) – and even trust (S3) – which can imply easier access to decision-
makers (S5) while S1 also highlights a lack of historical fallouts as beneficial vis-à-vis Spain or U.S. Illustrious quotations showing these advantages include:

Yes, then you are per definition important [being a white man with relatively blue eyes]. In addition, there often is a form of submissiveness associated with it, that I am particularly important because I am from Europe - the old continent. (S1)

I believe that your status becomes elevated [being from Northern Europe]. They are very flattered when foreigners come [to Colombia] and show interest in their country and want to do business over there. You get many points from that. It would undoubtedly be more difficult for me to do my project had I been Colombian. It would be much more difficult. (S3)

[Knowledge about Denmark] is a bit mixed. It is also very specific to say that you are Danish but North Europeans have a very good reputation in terms of morality, ethics and trust. In this way, you will per definition receive a great deal of trust if you are from Northern Europe. (S3)

To me it is very easy [to get access to decision makers], which is one of the benefits of being a foreigner from the Northern hemisphere in Colombia: There exists an inferiority complex in Colombia so if things are from Colombia, then they are worse than if they are from abroad. The general perception is that if it is imported then it is better than if made in Colombia - which of course is not true but that is their perception. Therefore, it is a huge advantage to come to Colombia and just contact people because I can get access to everyone. If I wanted a meeting with the [Colombian] President tomorrow, then I could also get that. (S5)

However, while there might appear to exist advantages of being from Northern Europe, S1 also appears to stress the importance of showing an interest for Colombia:

It is of crucial importance that you are not just considered as someone who has come to Colombia to pull money out of them - Latin American history is full of examples of that, from Columbus until now. Therefore, Colombians are also more cautious, "Is this European or American coming to our country, is he just here to make money or does he actually also find our country fascinating and exciting?" I believe that you can score a lot of points by doing so.
Besides ethnicity, S4 notes that one’s title almost also automatically gives you more importance in Colombia than in Denmark:

There is no doubt - and that concerns all of Latin America - that when you have a certain title, whether you like it or not, then there is more hierarchy (…) people are more respectful, a bit afraid of you. (S4)

### 4.2.2 Uncertainty avoidance (B)

In terms of instructions (5), there appears to exist a tendency that they have to detailed and precise in order for Colombians to have clear expectations about what to do since all subjects, with the exception of S2, appear to confirm this, e.g., “Yes, you have to be very precise about what you are saying. You need to give them very clear instructions (…).” (S5). Otherwise, there appears to be a risk of that the outcome will be of a poorer standard and, alternatively, that the tasks are not carried out or that it will be very time consuming. The following quotations show exemplifications of these aspects:

I must say that they need very concrete instructions or else there is a very high risk that they will do things wrongly or [that they will] not do it or [that they will] take too much time doing it. (S3)

It was not possible [to get things done as you wanted them]. It did not matter how many or how detailed instructions that you gave them. You will end up with a document that you need to adjust because they do not have that gene [detail orientation], and quite frankly, I do not believe that it can be learned. I simply do not believe that it can be learned. They cannot understand that it is a problem, and therefore, they cannot correct it. (S4)

Regarding uncertainty and changes (8), there appears to exist a greater toleration of changes according to some of the subjects. S2, S4 and S5 all seem to agree that changes acceptable by Colombians and that they are adaptable to them:

My experiences have been that they are quite adaptable. I believe that perhaps it has something to do with that it is a country who to say the least have been subject to change. I have not encountered any stiffness or problems in relation to making agreements. (S4)

I think that they are like us. Few people like changes, particularly unexpected changes, but they [Colombians] are quick to adapt [like Danes] (…). In this way, they are also very innovative as people. (S5)
However, the experiences of S3 and S4 seem to show a stronger toleration for uncertainty as related to negotiations, which according to S4 might be related to conflict shyness, e.g.:

They [Colombians] do not feel uncomfortable if it is a bit messy or if it is a bit uncertain where we are in the process - they are used to that. They are used to that a process is much more floating, much more ad hoc and much more out of control, you can say. [Therefore], negotiating an important deal with lots of money involved can take a long time and be characterized by a lot of uncertainty. I think that they are okay with that, they are used to that things are like that, it is a part of the game for them. (S3)

[…] maybe they would have preferred more chitchat and maybe a more soft formulation of the agreement [during some important negotiations] and then solve potential conflicts along the way instead of having a clear agreement from the beginning and to clear things out in advance. I think that it has something to do with that they are shy of conflicts. (S4)

As regards to the relationship between written and oral agreements (6) in a Colombian business context, the impression is given that there exists a Colombian preference for or tendency to use oral agreements (S1, S2 and S4). However, based on the experiences of S2, it might depend on the personal relationship or is then, followed up in written terms. Exemplary quotations include:

Yes, there were many who preferred that since we have made an oral agreement [then it would be enough]. (S1)

In reality, I do not think that it is an expression for a tendency but if you can avoid written agreements then you do not have to do as much work. It might be that it is the easiest [thing to do]. The attention to details, order, to do things thoroughly and carefully, it is not much stronger in Colombia than in the rest of Latin America. It is not the continent's strongest point. (S4)

However, both S3 and S5 emphasize the insufficiency of oral agreements in a Colombian business context (that said, the other subjects also stress their preference and advice always to use written agreements):

It is my experience that oral agreements are close to worthless so you need to have it on paper. (S3)

It needs to be written. It can also be by e-mail but you cannot just make an oral agreement and that will be it. It is very important to document things. (S5)
Concerning the *compliance with agreements* (7), it appears difficult to say whether Colombians differ from Danes. Taking into consideration the latter quotations, particularly from S3, oral agreements appear to have little value in Colombia. More so, S3 also voice skepticism in terms of written agreements:

> If you have it on paper, then they do not necessarily comply with what is agreed but then at least you have a sign of commitment, a hope of that it could become an agreement, because if you only have an oral agreement, no matter how positive it is, then you almost have nothing. (S3)

In line with the abovementioned argument, S5 highlights that their compliance with payment deadlines is not their strongest side, “They are bad at paying on time (…) they are just miserable to comply with payment deadlines”.

Nevertheless, S1 and S4 underscore that Colombians keep their agreements just as Danes keep their agreements, e.g., S4 states,

> (...) they [Colombians] are definitely people you can make agreements with and who will keep their agreements. Are there Colombians who do not keep their agreements? For sure. Are there Danes who do not keep their agreements? For sure (...). My experiences are that it has not been a problem at all. (S4)

An additional theme concerns *language* (9), i.e., the role of knowing their national language, Spanish, vis-à-vis English when doing business with Colombians. All five subjects seem to unanimously consider it very important and advantageous to speak Spanish if one wishes to do business with Colombians, in particular when working in Colombia. In terms of knowing English, there appear to exist a massive language barrier when you operate on the hierarchical levels below the top executives, and their English can be on a surprisingly lower level than expected (S1). Knowing the local language, not only appears to allow you to communicate, particularly in more technical terms, but it is also seen with good eyes by Colombians as it shows an interest in their culture while it can be time-saving as opposed to using Google Translate or the like. In sum, in most cases it seems necessary to know Spanish and by all means it is considered a huge advantage by the interview subjects, and alternatively, as S5 puts it, "It is important to have someone who speaks Spanish. That [knowing Spanish] is the key if you want to do business over here." In addition, the following quotations illustrate the centrality of speaking Spanish:
From the beginning, the primary challenge for me was the language. I did not speak Spanish when we moved to Colombia and you cannot do anything in Colombia without speaking Spanish. It does not make sense to believe that you can survive with English. You can do that in some very closed circles in Bogotá but in a company such as the one where I worked, with around 3000-4000 employees in Latin America, only three could speak English, including myself, and the rest spoke Spanish. This was despite the fact that it was a relatively big company, which was run in a very professional way, but they do not have much to use English for (...) I could not even speak in English with my CFO [Chief Financial Officer]. It was a huge challenge. (S4)

(...) higher up in bigger companies, then their English is fine. If you are on the top level, for example, if you are only in Colombia to make a bigger contract on a big level where you do not have the need to move into a more technical level, then you would be fine with English because then you will only talk with some Colombian partners on a high level whose English will be fine, who are used to being in an international environment and then there will be other people to do the more technical stuff afterwards. But if you are an entrepreneur, for example, as I am, where you have do it all by yourself, i.e., also the more practical stuff, then it is a must to know Spanish because if not then you will not get anywhere. Therefore, in most cases, it will be a must to speak Spanish, and, in all cases, it would be an advantage. But you will be able to get by if you are solely working on a higher level - then you can do it in English. (S3)

Perhaps, the vital importance of knowing Spanish is best summed up based on the experiences of S1, who stress it as a way of minimizing insecurity concerning linguistic and/or communicative complications:

I do not think that I know any examples of anyone who have been successful in South America if they have not had someone in their top management team, for example, in U.S. or in Denmark, who knows the language - it is crucial. You cannot underestimate the importance of it. And, as said earlier on, you can be lucky to meet a CEO who have taken an MBA in U.S. and is absolutely fluent in English. However, you might as well risk that they do not or that they speak half-bad English but you will wonder whether they have understood what you just said. Therefore, it is very important.

4.2.3 Humane orientation (C)

In terms of the perception and consequences of making mistakes (10), it appears to be a rather severe issue based on the experiences of S1, S3, and S5 while S2 and S4 recall its toleration – almost like in
Danish context. Yet, according to the before mentioned subjects, making and/or admitting mistakes within a Colombian context appears to be taboo as it is associated with the loss of face or considered a sign of weakness. At the same time, making mistakes can have fatal consequences as there is a “guilty plea culture” (S5) with the aim of pinpointing who is guilty in order to preferably fire that person. The following quotations illustrate such concerns:

Making mistakes is taboo. Therefore, they [Colombians] will try to blame it on someone else or give an answer, which is kind of a lengthy side-step with some force majeure involved. To admit a mistake does simply not happen [in Colombia] - no one admits mistakes. There will be one excuse after the other or in many cases, people will simply try to hide. If an employee or a partner has made a mistake, then they will either come up with an explanation which is a kind of lengthy side-step or simply not pick up the phone when you try to get in contact(...) The loss of face is a big issue. If you admit that you have made a mistake, you will lose face. It is a question about respect - to lose face. (S3)

(...) if a mistake is made then it is not important to find out how we can avoid making this mistake [again], then it is important for them to find out who did it, and preferably to fire the person who is guilty (...) (S5)

On the other side, as S1 stresses, "you have to remember that when you have a culture where many people are used to getting fired all the time, then there is also greater rotation and thereby it is also easier to get a new job. It is not like in Denmark (...)".

4.2.4 In-group collectivism (E)

Regarding networks (19), i.e., the significance of networks in a Colombian business context, it seems as if all five subjects undividedly agree on ascribing them paramount importance in terms of doing business in Colombia. It is as if neither subject cannot overstate their significance in a Colombian business context, e.g., “[i]t is absolutely the key to everything” (S5). In fundamental terms, it seems much more important than in Denmark – S1, e.g., explicitly considers Colombia, “a network society (...)”. Other exemplary quotations include:

Networking is extremely important over here. I would say that it is an absolute must. If you do not know how to network or are not willing to it then do not try to do something in Colombia because it is a fundamental part of doing business here. (S3)
I think that it is absolutely vital to have the right connections in Colombia if you wish to break into the market (...) There is no doubt that in Colombia you look to a far greater extent at who your personal connections are than in Denmark. (S4)

The subjects point to a variety of factors as to why it is of such vital importance. The decisive factor appear to stem from that, in fundamental terms, a relatively small and closed group controls the Colombian business environment (S4 and S5). Therefore, a strong or the right kind of network is important in order to get access to decision-makers and people with the right information (S1 and S4) and to avoid con artists (S2). Besides, it is seen to increase trust with potential business partners as there appears to be an extremely high degree of mistrust between people (strangers) in Colombia (S3). Ultimately, it can be the decisive factor to get a contract (S5). The following quotations exemplify these factors:

We choose to hire people who have a strong network [with access to decision-makers and people with the right information]. We put a great deal of effort into this aspect. It was very, very useful and it would be a deadly sin not to do it. (S1)

(...) the Colombia business environment is run by a relatively small group of people and families, which we are not used to in Northern Europe. Therefore, if you have the right connections, then you can get really far. If you do not have the right connections then it can be difficult to break in because you will not talk to the right people, you will not talk to the decision makers. (S4)

The lack of trust between strangers is something that you can feel in practice over here because everything is about making things happen through contacts that you know where you sort of get the green light - where they say that he or she is good enough. It can be really, really difficult if you have not been given the green light through contacts. That is a big challenge. (S3)

[A good network in Colombia] is much more important than in Denmark because it is on a personal level and if you know someone personally then you get a contract just because of that - then it almost does not matter which product the company sells. (S5)

Meanwhile, the mechanisms of networking and/or of doing business in Colombia give the impression of being different from Denmark since they appear to be more dependent on personal relations rather than hardcore business aspects per se. Therefore, personal openness (20), i.e., being more open about your personal life and letting potential business partners get to know you as a person, looks as an
influential factor (S2, S3, and S5) while even personal charm (S3) can play a role when networking and/or interacting with potential business partners. The following quotations give an idea about such a notion:

Networking is a bit complex in Colombia. They go more around the bush where a Danish person prefers to talk business straight away - cut to the chase - it is not like that over here. Here you talk about the weather before you begin to talk about business. You sort of get to know each other each other before you begin on the hard stuff [business], and it is important that you are a bit patient and try to be or appear as a person who is sympathetic, social, outgoing and trustable. (S3)

Personal relations are very important in order to do business [with Colombians] – very important. (S2)

You also need to be personal if you want to do business with Colombians because it is a matter of building trust and if they know a bit about your family and know a bit about you as a private person, then it is much, much easier to do business [with them]. (S5)

Nevertheless, as regards to personal involvement and openness, S3 stresses that it is a delicate balancing act as it may push people away from you if too private questions are asked too quickly:

I believe it is a bit complex [personal relations, being open, etc.]. It requires that you have been in Latin America for some time before you become really good at reading how people react to these things because, on one side, you have to be social and outgoing and appear sympathetic and be more than just a 'boring' business man who only cares about talking business - the hard numbers. On one side, that is a really big thing. On the other side, you should not expect that they will open up and talk about family relationships right away because they are also very private people - more private than Danish people. Danish people are actually quite open and very direct and not afraid to ask tough questions very quickly. People in Colombia are much more private and much more reluctant to ask about personal things, etc. (S3)

However, as regards to whether doing business in Colombia requires good personal relations per se, S3 describes such a statement as, “a bit too drastic (…) as money talks - you can buy yourself from everything (…).” That said, S3 appears to consider good personal relations to be very advantageous in a Colombian context, “it makes the processes a whole lot easier and in all cases, it would be a huge advantage.”
In addition to the importance of personal openness in a networking or business context, personal openness also appear to play a central role when working for in a company in Colombia and in terms of interacting with Colombian colleagues as S1, S2, S4 and S5 all seem to stress such aspects. Based on their experiences, it can manifest itself in the form of an emotional, personal and social openness where you express your emotions and you open up about your personal life and share personal stories. In an organizational working environment, the impression is that there exists a certain openness or informality concerning one’s personal or private self. The following quotations give an idea about the notion of emotional and private openness:

Colombian culture is much more open. You wear your emotions on your sleeve. [Therefore] you can have crying employees, very enthusiastic employees or very sad employees. All these type of things that you would typically keep away from your workplace in Denmark. (S1)

(…) people [Colombians] are much more emotional when at work, which means that it is a very family-like environment even though it, of course, is very professional [as well]. It is a very warm, chattering and direct environment [working in Colombia]. Colombians have very few inhibitions as regards to what you talk about so they are very, very, very open when you come as a Dane. You have to get used to that but once you have done it then it is charming. (S4)

(…) they [Colombians] are incredibly sweet and friendly people [and] very open, much more open than we are in Denmark (…). (S5)

In a personal and private sense, S1 and S4 both seem to have experiences of Colombian colleagues being rather private and open about their personal life with fellow colleagues, e.g.:

Sometimes when I came [to Colombia], then the first thing we would do was to go out and have lunch with the [top] management team. There I would get know all kinds of stories about their whole families that they would tell each other including details about their families that you would never have heard of had it been in a Danish company. (S1)

There are some things that you can easily talk about - perhaps to a greater extent than you would in Denmark - and then there are some things which you as a Dane experience as being so private that you do not feel the need to talk with your colleagues about it. It has been possible to manage. It is not like that they keep on asking you about something if they
feel like that you do not want to answer or go into depth about a specific issue. It is possible not to answer. (S4)

The openness also seem to reflect itself in a social sense, whereby the professional relationship merges into the private arena and/or can involve more social activity with colleagues in one’s private time. The following quotations reflect aspects of the social engagement besides work:

It is very important to recognize that being open about your personal life plays an important role in a Colombian company. [Therefore], if you are invited to lunch and the General Manager wants you to meet the General Managers' father then you have to meet the General Manager's father, which you typically would not see in Denmark. (Subject 1)

(…) but [I also consider them] as someone who wants to do other things besides work. I believe that they appreciate, to a greater extent than us, that you do something else together than the project; that you go out to eat or see something special or whatever it might be. (S2)

In the vein of informality, it seems as if humor plays a central role on a Colombian workplace while there appears to exist disagreement in terms of use of self-irony. In terms of humor, S5 puts particular emphasis on its importance for the Colombian employees, "It is important to be humorous. A big part of Colombian culture is that you also have a laugh at the office every day" (Subject 5). More specifically, S5 outlines that there exist similarities in the form of our humor, i.e., in terms of the use of self-irony:

(...) our [the Danish] form of humor is very much like the Colombian form of humor. We [Danes] use a lot of self-irony in our humor and they [Colombians] also have that. In this way, it is a thousand times easier for me do business in Latin America than in Asia, for example, where it is a completely different culture.

On the other side, S3 appears to disagree with this point of view and argues that the use of self-irony, particularly as in relations to admitting mistakes, is seen as a sign of weakness. In addition, S3 stresses the importance of appearing strong and self-confident within a Colombian business context, e.g., when asked whether that is the case in Denmark, he answers:

Yes, to a greater extent than in Denmark – definitely. Danes have a lot self-irony and can make jokes about their own mistakes (...) You cannot do that over here or else you will not be taken seriously. You have to appear self-confident and free of errors and not joke about your own flaws and your shortcomings. That would be a huge mistake to do - they do not
get that type of irony at all. It has to be some very personal relations where it might be possible but in general, it would be a huge mistake to begin admitting your own flaws or be ironic about your own flaws and shortcomings. That will, in my eyes, only be seen as a sign of weakness.

On the subject of trust (21), it seems to constitute a central aspect as regards to Colombian culture as such and within a business context as already shown earlier (the roles of networks) but is more explicitly elaborated here. There appears to exist a very high degree of mistrust between people (strangers) in Colombia, which, based on the experiences of S3 and S5, seem to have important implications in terms of doing business as it make many processes more time-consuming and dependent on one’s personal relationship with the potential business partner and/or one’s network. The lack of trust seem to manifest itself in the centralization of power (S5), bureaucratic formalities (S5), the importance of networking and good personal relations for current and potential business partners (S3 and S5). Business operations even appear as if they center on not being cheated by others (S5). Thus, executing a business plan and negotiations, in particular, can become rather time-consuming (S5). The following quotations exemplify some of these concerns:

What is definitely an important factor is that Colombians feel very different about making agreements and making binding agreements with people than what you know from Denmark [due to] an extremely high degree of mistrust between strangers in Colombia and Latin America as such. (S3)

Out of our entire business plan, we managed to execute around 30 - 35% during those twelve months, which has to do with that there is a distrustful culture, i.e., you are guilty until proven innocent. It is the completely opposite from what we think in Denmark. Therefore, you expect that a partner, a business connection will try to cheat you - that is your approach to do business [in Colombia]. All your business centers around ensuring that you will not be cheated and if you do not have that trust, then it also means that things take that much longer. (S5)

4.2.5 Assertiveness (F)
As regards to problem management (22), i.e., the way that Colombians handle problems, disagreements and/or conflicts, there seem to exist a certain conflict shyness or at least that problems are expressed in an indirect or subtle way in terms of language and communications as all subjects seem to agree on this matter. Illustrative examples:
[In terms of conflict management], [t]hey did it in an indirect way. It was indirect. There was a time when you had to understand signals, etc. You cannot solve a problem if you do not [know that it exists]. You cannot even be sure that the counterpart knows what the problem is or if there is a problem, and then you obviously unable to solve it. Actually, we spend a great deal of time in saying that we had to be professional and solve those type of problems. (S1)

(...) normally, and that is probably a big cultural difference (...); we are very direct in Denmark. We call it like it is. You do not do that over here (...) They may disagree a lot but they would not even... You can mention something for them and they will completely agree. An hour later, you will get an e-mail in which they describe that they disagree but to say it face to face, it will just not happen. (S5)

The directness regarding problems, disagreements and/or conflicts seem to relate to the hierarchical level of the parties involved, according to S1 and S5:

They were more direct towards a colleague [on the same level] but if it was towards a managerial colleague, that was where the problems occurred. (S1)

[When on the same level], they are not afraid to have a discussion where you are more direct (...). (S5)

Nevertheless, there appear to exist an indirectness (23) of a more general character (S1, S3, S4 and S5), not just of a networking (doing business), organizational and/or hierarchical character as stated above. It looks as if it manifests itself in terms of a supposed Colombian tendency to purposely say ‘yes’ to something even though it will not be materialized, which, as S3 stresses, “can be quite frustrating if you are not aware of that - that these are the rules of the game”. This may relate to the abovementioned conflict shyness or be seen as a form of politeness. Illustrative quotations exemplifying these aspects include:

In the beginning it was charming but then it became deeply frustrating.. They say ‘yes’ to everything. If you ask a Colombian about something, then they will say, ‘Yes, of course”, and then they will hope that they never hear about it again. If you then confront them about it three months later and say, ‘How is it going with X?’, then they will begin by saying, ‘Lo que pasa es...”, then it will always begin with ‘Lo que pasa es..’ Something has gotten in their way (...) Colombians try to avoid conflict. They would rather say ‘yes’ and hope that they can solve along the way or that they will never hear about it again than say, ‘No, we
cannot do that’. It differs from Denmark where we have a tendency of saying things in a more tough way. (S4)

They do not say 'no' to anything over here. You will not get a Colombian to say that something cannot be done or that the person would not like to do it or that we have to do it later. It is always a 'yes' to everything and then you just have to be aware that nothing will happen. If they do not want to do something then it just will not happen. (S3)

(... in general, Colombians are not direct and you need to take that into account. It might be that Colombians may say 'yes' but really mean 'no'. Maybe they are so polite that they do not dare to say, 'no'. [Then], they will just say 'yes' and nothing will happen. I have had to work with my people and explain them that they can ask very direct questions to me. (S5)

Besides a particular indirectness (in terms of handling disagreements) and an indirectness of more general character (in terms of a supposed tendency to say ‘yes’ to everything while nothing will happen), S3 and S4 both outline what appears to be a certain preference for indirectness when it comes to negotiations:

There is a marked [cultural] difference [between Colombian and Denmark] in relation to their [Colombians’] inability to say 'no' and in terms of how direct they are. It is difficult to get a clear idea about what is possible, what is not, and what needs to be changed when you try to make an agreement with Colombians. It is complex and you get many rather of strange indications, which makes it difficult to know in which direction things are going. (S3)

They do not like conflicts (...) I am a very, very, very quiet and calm guy - even by Danish standards (...) [During some important negotiations], they experienced me as being extremely aggressive (...) and if there is one thing that I am not then it is extremely aggressive. [But I think that they experienced me as extremely aggressive], partly, because we had to move quickly during some difficult negotiations so I had to be very explicit and rigid (...), but also since maybe they would have preferred more chitchat and maybe a more soft formulation of the agreement and then solve potential conflicts along the way instead of having a clear agreement from the beginning and to clear things out in advance. I think that it has something to do with that they are shy of conflicts. (S4)
4.2.6 Gender egalitarianism (G)

On the matter of the significance of gender for doing business (24) in Colombia, there seem to exist many contrasting or diverging experiences and opinions of the subjects. The spectra goes from a “very male-dominated society” (S1) to “some differences [between Colombia and Denmark]” (S3) to “there really is not any difference” (S5). More specifically, on one side, S1, S3 and S4 emphasize that men to varying degree are the more privileged in a Colombian societal and business context – at least what appears to be more than in Northern Europe. Exemplary quotations include:

There is no doubt that Latin America in general - and Colombia as well for that matter - are much more male-dominated societies than Europe and U.S. It is clearly easier to be a man in such contexts [related to doing business] in Colombia - still. However, it is not as a bad as it was twenty years ago - it was very obvious back then. (S1)

Business-wise, there is definitely greater respect for men in Colombia than for women. Having said that, then we had some strong women in the organization so it is not as if you are ruled out in advance because you are a woman. In terms of [gender] equality, Colombian society is without a doubt quite a bit behind in comparison to Northern Europe. (S4)

I think that there are some differences [in terms of how women are treated or looked upon within a business context] but they are not particularly big. (S3)

More specifically, the disadvantages of women within a business context can mean that they have to work harder (S1) while the experiences of S1 and S2 give the impression that their network is smaller:

We had a female CEO because we thought that she was extremely talented so we hired her but she had to work even harder than the rest [due to her gender] (...) It was not my impression that the employees thought that it was a problem. It was more related to surroundings things: It [Colombia] is a network society so you have a slightly smaller network when you are woman than when you are a man. This means that you have to fight harder in order to be powerful. (S1)

I believe that there is a network for men, between men, also in a business context. When you are in a management meeting, working professionally, where each [person] has their function and theirs to contribute with, then it does not matter whether the head of sales or marketing [director] is a female. As long as what comes out is reasonable, people will listen and discuss on equal terms. If there are any disagreements, then there are some things,
which suddenly get solved through other means because there is an informal network
which I believe primarily consists of men. (S2)

On the other side, S2 being the only female subject does not recall any personal experiences of her gender playing a role in a Colombian business context, “No, not at all”. However, she does not know whether it applies to Colombian women. Meanwhile, S5 completely dismisses gender as a factor of significance and points toward the importance of education, “No, it actually does not [the significance of gender in terms of doing business]. It is distributed very equally - it is a matter of education. There are also women on very high posts over here.” (S5)

At the same, S3 feel surprised by the amount of strong and well-educated women in Colombian business life as compared to Chile. Besides S5, who already stressed (quotation above) the presence of strong business women, S2 also seem to point toward such a tendency stressing that two out of eight people in their top management team in Colombia are women while it is a third concerning all of their Latin American operations. The following quotation exemplify such a tendency:

It has surprised me how many strong women that are in business in Colombia which is a considerable difference from Chile (...) where there is far more machismo. There are far more well-educated women high up in companies in Colombia relative to Chile where it is much more male-dominated. It is still a male-dominated society in Colombia but you see far more strong women high up in the organizations, higher up in companies, than you do in Chile. It surprised me quite a bit; that it is a bit more gender neutral than I had expected. (S3)

In addition, S5 makes a distinction between a private context and a business context in terms of the role of *machismo*, saying that it concerns the private sphere; “No, I do not think so. It is more on a private level but it does not matter business-wise - there I have not experienced any *machismo* at all.” (S5)

With that said, in terms of the *gender of their business partners* (25), both S3 and S5 have primarily done business with men in a Colombian context. As S3 notes, “I have primarily done business with men. I cannot remember that I have met a businessperson who has been a woman on a high level. They undoubtedly exist but there are not that many of them.” However, S3 notes that this might be due to that more women stay at home and/or since they work within public and care services:
It has primarily been men [in terms of gender of business partners]. There are more men in the business world. There is still a certain percentage of women who stay at home so there are more men in the labor market than women in total terms but the difference is not that big as many think it is. Like in the rest of the world, including Denmark, there is a tendency for women to work with public and care services. (Subject 3)

4.2.7 Future orientation (H)
On the theme of how Colombians feel about planning (26) within a business context, the subjects seem to differ on this matter. On one side, it appears as if planning is less widespread, in particular, long-term planning (S3 and S4), and there seems to be a focus on the presence according to their statements. More specifically, S5 highlights the realization of long-term planning as particularly problematic. More so, it appears to depend on the size of the company since it is less widespread in the big companies, states S3. The following quotations exemplify such aspects:

They do not do it that much [long-term planning] (…), and the long-term or medium-term planning that we did while I was there, it was me who drove it (…) It is more about the here and now. (S4)

Of course, it is not that normal over here to plan on a super long-term basis. The big companies do it, of course, but smaller companies do not plan that much. When I had the first meeting with my lawyer who helped me set up the company in Colombia… I had the meeting five to six months before the time that I expected to set up the company in order to be prepared and to sort things out in good time. She laughed quite a bit and said that she was definitely not used to people coming so well in advance. They do things as they come and a bit at the last minute. To do things in good time, they do not do it that much. (S3)

I will say that it is not their strong side [planning]. The companies make their plans, of course, and then they try to implement them but they will not comply with them in terms of time due to different reasons but they are not world champions in planning, i.e., they are not Germans. (S5)

On the other side, S2 considers Colombians’ relationship with planning as, “Fine”, while in line with her experience, S1 appears to agree; “I think that they were equally good and some times better – like you have it in other countries”. However, in line with the subjects of the abovementioned quotations, S1 also seems to point towards problems of implementing long-term strategies – yet, he does not appear to consider it particularly Colombian, “Working towards the greater ideas [future planning]
could be a bit more difficult. However, it often is. There is nothing easier than to plan a strategy. The difficult part is implementing it.”

S4 and S5, in particular, stress that Colombians have great difficulties of time management, which affects their planning in terms of goals, which are not materialized. Illustrative quotations include:

You can easily agree on a deadline. You can easily arrange a schedule [plan] with certain goals and then they will hope that they never hear about that schedule again. In this way, it is ‘day to day’. It is not because that you do not respect the deal - you [Colombians] are just not good at managing your time. (S4)

It might be that they say that something has to be ready tomorrow but it is ‘mañana country’ so tomorrow can be in a year. (S5)

Actually, S4 stresses that he perhaps has experienced a much greater need to plan in Colombia since, “if you do not plan ahead in Colombia and just let things float, then they really float, whereas if you plan things, then there is a chance to be slightly ahead.” That said, S3 appears to highlight that there are limitations concerning what can be planned in Colombia, which has to be accepted somehow, “there are just things that you cannot plan [in Colombia] to the same extent as in Denmark (...) You need to accept that”. However, S3 still seem to consider planning very relevant and important in a Colombian business context, “Try to plan what makes sense in a Colombian context as much as possible in order to gain a competitive advantage in relation to others who plan less.”

As regards to the time orientation (27) of Colombians, not just as related to planning, which in line with the abovementioned quotations appears as a more flexible concept in a variety of contexts: Lunch (S1), negotiations (S3 and S5), in terms of answering in time (S3), and as a more general characteristic of Colombians (S4). In short, things take time. The following quotations illustrate these aspects:

When I mean open [Colombian culture], then I believe that you have to accept that things take a bit more time. The term working lunch is not something that has been used there [Colombia]. When you are having lunch then it is to have lunch (...) You have to be willing to spend several hours before getting somewhere. I think it is absolutely vital to accept that there still is a bit of siesta culture [things take time] - and that it is not in a negative way - but one has to play along with that and understand it. (S1)

The bigger the negotiations, the longer time they take over here. In a Danish company you can make an agreement quite fast if you agree about the numbers no matter how big the
numbers are. My experiences over here are that it is almost a reflex, particularly if it concerns large amounts [of money], then it needs a certain time to mature. It has to mature a bit before people make the decision. (S3)

They work hard but as for the whole of Latin America, some things take a lot of time. You have to drive many things forward. (S4)

Consequently, many of the subjects state that patience becomes a virtue when operating in Colombia and working with Colombians. However, it appears as if it can be necessary to push things forward explicitly in order for things to materialize:

[In terms of negotiations/making agreements], [o]n one side, you need to have patience, and, on the other side, it can be beneficial at times to put your foot down and say that you want something concrete. You can also be too nice or too patient. (S3)

Patience - things take time. I know that it is a standing joke with Latin America but there is a grain of truth to it - a large grain of truth to it. It requires a certain amount of patience, and unfortunately, it also requires that you put your foot down, that you send a reminder, push for things and rule because if not, then nothing will really happen. You definitely need to be tougher in this respect [in Colombia than in Denmark] but based on my experiences, then I have only had to be like that to external [people], not to colleagues...

Almost. (S4)

4.2.8 Performance orientation (I)

As regards to the relationship between performance and background (28), it has already been elaborated partly within in-group collectivism, namely concerning the networks (19), which give the impression that the participating subjects consider a powerful and preferably personally related network essential for doing business in Colombia. Therefore, it seems as if one’s social background, particularly in terms of personal connections, is advantageous in a Colombian business setting. However, while it can be an advantage in terms of network or status, it does not appear to be the sole factor. It seems as if a lot of effort is put and needs to be put into one’s actual performance (more on this in appendix L, i.e., concerning what appears to be a relatively high ambition level (30) and professional and educational level (31) of Colombians). For the time being, the following quotations may exemplify the relationship between performance vis-à-vis background in Colombia:

Your background is definitely an advantage in a society such as the Colombian. For example, something as banal as memberships to clubs (...) where you can go and have a
lunch - the nicer, the better. The difficult part is to become a member of them [the clubs] as it typically is something that you inherit. On the other side, it was seen with very good eyes to invite someone to business lunch in such a place as it showed that you have connections. There was a lot of benefits and status associated with it. (S1)

It is very much about personal contacts which we, of course, are fighting against because we are a relatively newly established company. Therefore, when we try to beat the established contacts because we have a better product, then it requires a bit more extra work. (S5)

My impression is that it [your family or "surname"] does not really matter that much as I thought. Again, if we compare it with Chile, my impression was that it meant a lot. Over here [in Colombia], it is more about your credentials than in Chile, for example. It will certainly mean a lot with certain surnames but it is not my impression that you see certain actors who only do business with some other specific surnames, which at times was my impression in Chile. (S3)

(...) it is obvious that you need to have a good project which can catch people's attention. They do not fall for anything. They [Colombians] do also have plenty of options. There are many who wish to invest in Colombia. [Therefore], you need to have a good case and you need to do your market research properly before you throw yourself into it. (S2)
5 DISCUSSION

In the present section, I will concentrate on a discussion of the main research question of this thesis, namely; what are the cultural challenges as experienced by Danish professionals in a Colombian business context? The procedure is to selectively discuss through internal triangulation what can be considered challenging within each of the second-order themes based on the experiences of the five subjects as outlined in the results section. Table 5.1 gives an overview of the suggested challenges as related to doing business in a Colombian business context from a Danish perspective:

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5.1 Cultural challenges

5.1.1 Power distance

As regards to power distance, i.e., the degree to which members of an organization or society expect and agree that power should be unequally shared, there exists a cultural difference between Colombian society and Danish society in theory since Colombian society scores high (5.56) on this dimension while Danish society scores low (3.89). Thus, from a theoretical perspective, the greater acceptance and endorsement of authority, power differences and status privileges in Colombia vis-à-vis Denmark may cause potential challenges for Danish professionals operating in a Colombian business context.

Some of the theoretical implications of GLOBE concerns that most individuals in high power distance societies expect obedience towards superiors. Consequently, GLOBE states that in these societies,

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13 It is worth stressing that institutional collectivism is left out since the subjects did not appear to point towards any cultural challenges in relation to this cultural dimension.
there tend to be limited room for debate and for subordinates to voice differentiating views towards those in power, which, e.g., can inhibit individuals from questioning and learning. In addition, asking questions towards those in power may be prohibited since it is associated with criticizing and blaming. According to S1, S3, S4 and S5, these aspects appear to constitute a cultural challenge since their experiences appear to show that Colombian subordinates tend not to ask questions about orders and/or instructions given by superiors. More specifically, it is highlighted by some of these subjects that Colombian subordinates typically do not voice disagreement about an order from a superior, e.g., if they think it can be done in a better way or if they have misunderstood something about the instruction. Thus, it seems as if it can be challenging to get to know their opinion. At the same time, the experience of S1 shows that the greater respect for authority may cause Colombian subordinates to over-interpret the importance of a task and put other tasks aside if a superior stresses it as important. One the other side, it is worth emphasizing that S2 considers that Colombians can voice their disagreement about orders.

The associated challenges of obedience towards superiors and potential over-interpretation of the importance of their orders seems to be potentially aggravated based on one’s ethnicity and title. Though GLOBE highlights that different groups tend to have different involvement in high power distances societies, e.g., women, and that power clearly allocate rigid roles, the GLOBE authors do not explicitly elaborate on the role of ethnicity. Based on the responses of S1, S3 and S5, ethnicity appears to play a central role in a Colombian business context in the sense that one’s status (power) almost automatically becomes elevated when one comes from Northern Europe, which can allow easier access to decision-makers. In addition, one’s title seems to constitute another influential factor in terms of elevating one’s position (power), S4 states. That said, these aspects also seem to allow Danes greater access to important decision-makers, which appears as a non-problematic experience according to some of the subjects (see A3 in appendix L).

In sum, it seems as if the theoretical difference in power distance between Colombia and Denmark along with some of the implications of societies characterized by high power distance can compromise a challenge from a Danish perspective due to the great respect for authority from Colombian subordinates, who seem to tend to obey orders from superiors even though they might disagree with the order or if they have not understood something about it. In addition, it seems as if it can be difficult to get to know their opinion, e.g., if they have a better way of doing it. However,
the greater endorsement of power privileges in relation to the role of ethnicity and title also seem to be advantageous in terms of getting access to decision-makers.

5.1.2 Uncertainty avoidance

The second culture dimension, which potentially can cause challenges for Danish professionals operating in a Colombian business environment concerns **uncertainty avoidance**, i.e., the extent to which a society, organization, or group relies on social norms, rules, and procedures to alleviate unpredictability of future events. In theory, based on the results of GLOBE, there exists another cultural difference between the two societies as Colombia scores *medium-low* (3.57) while Denmark, contrastingly, scores *high* (5.22).

According to GLOBE, one of the theoretical implications of less uncertainty avoidance-oriented societies such as Colombia is that there tend to exist a greater toleration in relation to uncertainty, ambiguity and change. In addition, most individuals in these societies tend to live less structured lifestyles while there is also more toleration for not complying with rules and individuals tend to be less orderly. These aspects appear to converge with the experiences of S1, S3, S4 and S5 and manifest themselves in several forms. Firstly, the before mentioned theoretical tendencies of a less uncertainty avoidance-oriented society seem to compromise a challenge in a Colombian business context since these subjects appear to consider it a great necessity to give Colombians very detailed and precise instructions in order for them to have clear expectations about what to do. More so, some of these subjects seem to consider the rather thorough and specific instructions as a necessary must in order to minimize the risk of an outcome of a poorer standard, to prevent tasks from not being done or from becoming too time-consuming. In addition, S4 seems to explicitly consider their lack of attention to details, order and to do things thoroughly as a particularly weak spot, which can be challenging for a Danish professional – though he also stresses that these aspects are not necessarily important in a Colombian business context. A second challenge may concern that some of the subjects explicitly state that Colombians are comfortable with uncertainty, and S3, in particular, seem to argue that they are used to that a process is more ad hoc and out of control. Thus, according to S3, negotiations, e.g., can be characterized by uncertainty and indirect signals and can be rather time-consuming while an experience of S4 also seem to point towards that Colombians may prefer agreements characterized by more uncertainty as they preferred a soft formulation of the agreement, which might be related to Colombians being shy of conflicts, he says. Thirdly, based on the interview answers from all of the subjects, Colombians appear to lack a sufficient level of English skills in order to do business, which
can be argued to reflect a stronger toleration for uncertainty in terms of doing business, considering that the current dominant lingua franca in international business is English. More specifically, some of the subjects seem to consider that while the English level of Colombian top executives appears to be considered sufficient – though perhaps lower than expected – the challenges can occur when operating on the highest hierarchical levels where there appear to exist a language barrier if one cannot communicate or has someone involved to communicate in Spanish.

A second relevant theoretical implication of a society such as Colombia who scores lower on uncertainty avoidance is that a higher degree of informality tend to characterize interactions with others. Thus, according to GLOBE, most individuals in these societies tend to prefer to rely on oral agreements with whom they trust vis-à-vis written agreements while there is a greater neglect for formalized policies, procedures and rules. Taken these features into consideration along with some of the earlier theoretical implications, i.e., a stronger tolerance for breaking rules, the notion of relying on informal interactions may compromise a challenging aspect in practice in a Colombian business environment. Accordingly, all five subjects appear to confirm the notion that Colombians might tend to use oral agreements – though they are usually followed up in written terms. S2 stresses that the use of oral agreements can depend on the personal relationship, which can be considered an indication of trust. That said, S3 and S5 appear to consider oral agreements insufficient while S5 also outlines that Colombians have difficulties of complying with payment deadlines. On the other side, it is worth mentioning that some of the subjects seem to stress that they have not had any particular problems with Colombians in relation to their compliance with agreements – oral or written.

In sum, GLOBE findings concerning Colombia and Denmark in terms of uncertainty avoidance points towards a cultural difference, which together with its theoretical tendencies of less uncertainty-avoidance societies seem to constitute a variety of cultural challenges from a Danish perspective in terms of doing business in Colombia due to what appears to be a stronger toleration of uncertainty and for breaking the rules. Firstly, Colombians seem to need rather precise and detailed instructions in order to know what to do and to minimize the risk of undesirable outcomes. Secondly, different processes, particularly negotiations, can be characterized by uncertainty and be rather ad hoc. Thirdly, there is a lack of English skills, which makes Spanish a must in most cases. Fourthly, and finally, there may be a tendency to use oral agreements, which appear insufficient, while there seems to exist challenges associated with Colombians paying on time.
5.1.3 Humane orientation

The third cultural dimension which appears to unveil culturally challenging aspects for Danish professionals doing business in a Colombian context concerns *humane orientation*, i.e., the degree to which an organization or society encourages and rewards individuals for being fair, altruistic, friendly, generous, caring, and kind to others. Based on the results of GLOBE, Colombian society and Danish society appear to differ as Colombia scores *medium-low* (3.72) while Denmark scores *medium-high* (4.44).

According to GLOBE, important implications of lower-scoring societies on this dimension can include a greater emphasis on power and self-enhancement while most individuals tend to treat each other in a way that is less fair, altruistic, and friendly, etc. (recall the definition). More specifically, individuals in such societies tend to be more concerned about promoting self-interest and prefer to solve their own problems while there is a lack of consideration and support for others. According to S1, S3 and S5, these theoretical latent features of Colombian societal culture seem to manifest themselves in relation to the perception of making and admitting mistakes in a Colombian business context, which for Colombians appears to be associated with loss of face and seen as sign of weakness. In addition, making mistakes seems to have rather fatal consequences in the sense that an employee potentially can lose his or her job due to the existence of a “guilty plea culture” in Colombia. S5, e.g., states that the aim for Colombian managers is not to prevent the mistake from happening again but rather to fire the person who did it. Therefore, in a Colombian business context it can be challenging to talk about mistakes with Colombians, and, thus, to handle and prevent them from happening again, since it appears to be associated with face loss and seen as sign of weakness for Colombians. In addition, it can be argued that it applies both ways as S3 seems to stress. Thus, if one admits having made a mistake, Colombians may see it as a sign of weakness and lose respect for one. On the other side, it is worth remarking that S2 and S4 recall the toleration of making mistakes in Colombia. Therefore, it may be difficult to conclude on this aspect.

In sum, it appears as if there exist some convergence concerning theory (GLOBE), i.e., the implications of Colombia’s lower score regarding humane orientation vis-à-vis the higher score of Denmark, and the primary data as regards to what can be considered a less humane perception of making and mistakes in a Colombian business setting. This aspect appear to cause challenges for Danish professionals since making mistakes appear taboo and can be seen as a sign of weakness in a Colombian business context. Therefore, it appears challenging to constructively talk about mistakes.
and prevent them from happening again due to the potentially associated loss of face on the Colombian part.

5.1.4 In-group collectivism

Regarding the cultural dimension, in-group collectivism, i.e., the degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty, and cohesiveness in their organizations or families, there exists, based on the GLOBE findings, a theoretical difference between Colombian and Danish society as Colombia scores high (5.73) while Denmark scores low (3.53). Some of the theoretical implications for an in-group oriented society such as Colombia can include that it is very important for Colombians to be a member of an in-group, e.g., family or a close group of friends, and to satisfy the expectations of the in-group. Moreover, there is a strong sense of group identity in an in-group oriented societies, and most individuals tend to emphasize collaboration, cohesiveness, and harmony towards their in-group, which can imply that in-group members expect special treatment while people are more likely to ignore rules to take care of their in-group members. In addition, GLOBE states that there is greater distinction between in-groups and out-groups in a highly in-group oriented society, Colombia, vis-à-vis Denmark, a low-scoring in-group-oriented society.

When compared to the primary data, the implications of GLOBE seem to manifest themselves in a variety of ways in a Colombian business setting, which according to the experiences of some of the subjects can be rather challenging. Firstly, the stronger distinction between in- and out-group members and cohesion concerning in-group members seem to manifest itself in terms of the centrality of networks. According to all of the participating subjects, networks seem to play a particularly crucial role in order to do business in a Colombian business context as networking is considered a way to gain access to decision-makers, people with the right information, and to increase trust with potential business partners while it can serve as a way to avoid con artists. More specifically, S4 and S5 seem to state that the strong role of networks in Colombia derives from a business environment, which is controlled by a relatively small and closed group. These aspects also seem to reflect a more special treatment of in-group members and that members are more likely to ignore what can be considered more market-based rules to satisfy in-group members. In line with this argument, S5 even states that the right personal connections can be the decisive factor to get a contract while S3 appears to stress that one needs to be given the green light by a personal contact in order to do business. Thus, based on the experiences of some of the subjects, obtaining the right connections (networking) can be
challenging in order to do business in Colombia vis-à-vis competitors who already have access and have been given the green light.

However, the mechanisms of networking in a Colombian business setting may constitute another challenging element, which GLOBE does not explicitly elaborate on but which perhaps can be implicitly subtracted, namely that networking appear to depend more on personal relations rather than hardcore business aspects. Thus, some of the subjects state that it is more important to be more open about one’s personal life in terms of networking and to allow potential and actual business partners and clients to let them know you on a more personal level. Yet, S3 outlines it as a “balancing act”, which requires some amount of experience from Latin America. Therefore, e.g., he stresses that one should not ask too private questions too quickly. Either way, according to some of the participating subjects, personal relations seem to play a large role in terms of doing business in Colombia, which can be challenging depending on one’s point of view. In addition, it appears both stressing that openness about one’s personal life also seem to compromise an important aspect in relation to existing Colombian partners, colleagues and clients. According to some of the participating subjects, Colombian culture in a Colombian company seems characterized by more emotional, personal and social openness (or informality) in the sense that people are not afraid to express their emotions; share personal stories and involve people in their personal (private) life while they seem more social as it as with networking appears important to do other things together besides work.

In sum, it seems as if the greater theoretical distinction between in- and out-groups in Colombia in contrast to Denmark manifests itself in the form of a mistrust towards out-group individuals, which can make many business processes rather challenging since one has to earn the trust of potential business partners and clients, which appears to involve a certain openness about one’s personal life. Thus, networks and personal openness appear to have paramount importance in a Colombian, which may be challenging in terms of doing business in Colombia or with Colombians depending on one’s view.

5.1.5 Assertiveness

In terms of assertiveness, i.e., the degree to which individuals in organizations or societies are assertive, confrontational, and aggressive in social relationships, Colombian society scores high (4.20) while Danish society scores medium (3.80). Thus, while the difference is less striking than the previous cultural dimensions, there still exists a theoretical difference, which, based on GLOBE, can imply that most Colombians value direct and unambiguous communications. Thus, according to
GLOBE’s theoretical framework, it is valued to express and reveal thoughts and feeling by most people in Colombia.

However, the statements and experiences of the participating subjects seem to diverge strikingly with the abovementioned theoretical tendencies of highly assertiveness-oriented societies. According to some of the interviewed subjects, it seems as if Colombians do the exact opposite in relation to handling problems, disagreements or conflicts, namely that they use indirect and subtle language and communications. Thus, some of the subjects seem to stress that it can be rather difficult to know if there is a problem or a disagreement, which again can make it challenging to solve eventual problems.

In addition, some of the subjects state that Colombians tend to say ‘yes’ to everything while it does not necessarily mean that it will happen. Therefore, the challenging aspects seems to compromise that one does not know if a ‘yes’ really means ‘no’ until the supposed agreement does not materialize. While some of the subjects state that it reflects a certain conflict shyness, another subject stress that it may be related to a form of politeness. Either way, the theoretical differences and implications according to GLOBE seem to diverge with practice as some of the interview subjects seem to consider Colombians indirect in their communications style, which can be challenging and time consuming to code.

5.1.6 Gender egalitarianism

*Gender egalitarianism*, i.e., the degree to which an organization or a society minimizes gender role differences while promoting gender equality, constitutes the first cultural dimension in which Colombian and Danish society can be considered culturally similar in theory according to the findings of GLOBE. Thus, while Denmark has a slightly higher score (3.93) than Colombia (3.67), both societies are considered *highly* gender egalitarian. One of the defining implications of higher-scoring societies are that women have a higher status and stronger involvement in decision-making in comparison with more male-dominated societies. In addition, women and men are seen as capable of suiting similar roles. Thus, e.g., there are more women in positions of authority and women constitute a greater part of the labor force.

In general, it looks as if the theoretical picture differs from the experiences of some of the interviewed subjects who seem to portray that one’s gender in terms of being female can be challenging in a Colombian business context. Thus, S1, S4 and S5 appear to state that it can be more difficult to be a woman in a business context. S4, e.g., states that there is greater respect for men than women while S1 outlines that women have a smaller network than men and thus have to work harder to be powerful.
In relation to this notion, S2 also states that there is an informal network for men in a business context, which women seem to be excluded from. On the other side, it seems as if the significance of gender in terms of doing business in Colombia is smaller than previously and diminishing. Thus, some of the subjects outline that women also hold high posts in Colombia. S1, e.g., hired a female CEO in Colombia while S2 stressed that a one-fourth of their top management team in Colombia are women while it is a third of all their Latin American operations. In line with these experiences, some of the subjects seems to point towards that it is the professionalism and educational level that matter – not gender. In addition, the only female subject, namely S2, stressed that she did not have any personal experiences of her gender playing a role in Colombian society nor in a business context. Finally, S5 says that based on his experiences, gender discrimination (male-domination) more concerns the private sphere than business life, which seem to point towards greater gender equality in Colombian business life.

In sum, it appears as if women can experience challenges as related to their power in relation to networking and that they might have to work harder than men have to in order to earn the respect of men. With that said, there also appears to exist a tendency that gender plays a rather smaller or non-significant role in a Colombian business setting. As one subject says, “it is not as if you are ruled out in advance because you are a women” (S5).

5.1.7 Future orientation

As regards to future orientation, i.e., the degree to which a collectivity encourages and rewards future-oriented behaviors such as planning and delaying gratification, there exists, based on the results of GLOBE, a cultural difference between Colombia and Denmark. According to their findings, future orientation in Colombian society is medium-low (3.57) while Danish society is characterized by a high degree of future orientation (4.44).

Some of the theoretical implications of less future-oriented societies (Colombia) involve that most individuals tend to have a stronger orientation towards the presence while there is less systematic planning. More specifically, most people tend to be unwilling or incapable in terms of developing strategies in order to meet their future goals and in terms of appreciating warning signals if their current behavior negatively influences the fulfilment of their desired goals. More so, the strategic orientation of organizations tend to be shorter while they can be more inflexible and maladaptive.
On one hand, these features appear to converge with the experiences of some of the subjects, who seem to stress that Colombian companies and/or Colombians tend to do less long-term planning while it can be difficult or problematic for them to implement these plans. Although S3 seems to emphasize that the development of longer-term plans depends on the size of the company, S5 gives the impression that all Colombian companies make longer-term plans while S4 seems to consider that Colombian companies do not engage in making plans on a long-term (nor medium) basis. With that said, the same subjects appear to consider that Colombians have a greater orientation towards the presence and difficulties of realizing their future goals in a business context. On the other hand, S1 and S2 seem to diverge from this point of view as they seem to consider Colombians’ relationship with planning as either good, equally as good or even better at times.

A second challenge as related to future orientation appear to concern the time orientation of Colombians, which as a theoretical concept seems highly related to future orientation as it involves temporal aspects. However, the strict definition of future orientation mainly relates to future orientated behaviors, e.g., planning, while the concept of time orientation is a more a general construct that concerns the subjective experience of time. Either way, some of the subjects appear to consider that Colombians have a more flexible and open orientation towards time, which can be challenging for Danish professionals in a Colombian business setting. Thus, e.g., what has to be done tomorrow does not necessarily mean tomorrow. In line with this argument, some of the subjects stress that there seems to be a tendency in Colombia that things can take a certain amount of time in variety of contexts, e.g., in terms of negotiations, as time appears to be subordinate to other factors, e.g., in relation to interpersonal relations.

5.1.8 Performance orientation

The final cultural dimension, which seem to entail challenging aspects, concerns performance orientation, i.e., the degree to which a collective encourages and rewards group members for performance improvement and excellence. According to GLOBE, both Colombia (3.95) and Denmark (4.22) scores medium in relation to this cultural dimension. However, considering their individual scores, Colombia seems slightly less performance-oriented than Denmark based on the findings of GLOBE.

Since GLOBE does not provide a list of implications for societies with scores in the middle band, relevant parts from both sides of the spectra are included here. Therefore, whereas education and learning are particularly valued in more performance-oriented societies along with an emphasis on
results, less performance-oriented societies put greater emphasis on family connections and background (social and family relations). In other words, one of the most defining implications of this cultural dimension seem to include that in high performance-oriented societies, most people tend to value what you do more than who you are (achievement) while low performance-oriented value who you are more than what you do (ascripton).

As related to the participating subjects, it appears difficult to determine whether the theoretical implications converge or diverge from their interview responses. The relationship between performance vis-à-vis background in a Colombian business context seems rather complex. On one side, it appears as if the theoretical implications of a less performance-oriented society seems to converge with some of the statements of the participating subjects. As already illustrated within ingroup collectivism, namely concerning the important roles of networks, it seems as if all the subjects consider a powerful and preferably personally related network particularly essential for doing business in Colombia. One of the subjects, S5, even states that knowing someone personally can alone help one in landing a contract. In addition, S1 seems to state that one’s background plays a particularly important role in a Colombian business setting. The subject, e.g., states that memberships to certain social clubs in Colombia are associated with status and gives benefits, and can be beneficial when inviting actual or potential business stakeholders to lunch. However, while good social relations (personal connections) appears to be advantageous in terms of network or status, it does not appear to be the sole factor. On the other side, the experiences of some of subjects seem to show that Colombians can also be considered rather performance-oriented as a considerable amount of effort is put and needs to be put into one’s actual performance in Colombia. S3, e.g., states it is more about credentials than family background in Colombia in comparison with Chile. In addition, some of the subjects state that Colombians have a positive attitude towards feedback (improvement); that they have a certain ambition level while the subjects unanimously appear to consider the professionalism and educational level of Colombians particularly high (see I29, I30 and I31 in appendix L). In addition, some of the subjects seem to put an emphasis on that Colombians are hardworking and people who have rather long working hours by some of the subjects (see I32 in appendix L). In addition, S2 appear to stress the importance of having a good product or project if one wishes to do business in Colombia.

In sum, the picture appears mixed. While it appears to be challenging that there is a certain emphasis on social relations, particularly personal connections, in terms of doing business in Colombia, it is
not necessarily the sole factor and one’s actual performance is also important. In addition, it seems as if Colombians put a lot of effort into improving their performance.
6 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS

In the following section, I will present some general guidelines concerning culturally-derived issues that Danish firms or managers may wish to consider in their internationalization efforts in Colombia. However, the guidelines are by no means exhaustive nor prescriptive and should not be taken for granted. Ultimately, their application inevitably depends on the internal capabilities and competences (resources) of Danish firms and managers.

The guidelines are necessarily selective and relates to my analysis of the experiences of the five participating Danish professionals in a Colombian business context; mainly in relation to the cultural challenges discussed in the previous section while important cultural differences between Colombian and Danish business context from a Danish perspective, as presented in the results section in appendix L, are also included. In addition, their generalizability is considered to inevitably depend on several factors related to the specific context of internationalization towards Colombia, e.g., in relation to entry mode or industry, while their practical applicability in terms of how to implement them necessarily depends on the internal capabilities of Danish managers and firms. Nevertheless, knowing a sample of central cultural issues in a Colombian business context can enable Danish managers and firms to better their performance in relation to doing business in Colombia. In this way, the Danish manager can more effectively communicate and collaborate with Colombian clients, colleagues, or partners. Humility, openness and patience are considered key words.

1. **Contextualize and show a preferably genuine interest in Colombia**, the country, its culture and its people. In order to contextualize, e.g., read reports, news or even guides concerning Colombia in order to gain knowledge about important issues in relation to the country’s history, political, economic, social and cultural context – even sports. If one is familiar with Spanish or feels comfortable using an online translation tool, e.g., Google Translate, the sources may range from the websites of the bigger national newspapers, e.g., El Tiempo, or more locally based newspapers who all seem to have online websites (Wikipedia can provide a brief overview of Colombian newspapers and their online addresses). Otherwise, English-sources can range from the independent national newspaper, Colombia Reports, or the Bogotá-based, The City Paper, while The Guardian and The New York Times, inter alia, have specific online sections solely concerning Colombia (a quick google search may provide the links). In terms of reports, these can be obtained online, e.g., through The Economist Intelligence Unit, CIA’s World Factbook, while the Danish Embassy in Brazil has an online report concerning Colombia and its relationship
with Denmark (in time, I believe that the newly-opened Danish Embassy in Colombia can also provide information). In addition, reading literature by some of their most important authors, e.g., Gabriel García Márquez, may also provide contextualization and spark an interest in their country, which seems to be valued by its people. Asking questions or engaging in conversations with potential or actual business stakeholders (partners, clients, and colleagues) about Colombia, sites to see and experience, local dishes to eat, and the like, may be another strategy, which may also serve as an ice-breaker prior to talking business.

2. **Know Spanish or involve someone** in the project **who knows Spanish** as the English level of Colombian professionals appears insufficient in the vast majority of business settings – even at a top management level. In addition, Spanish proficiency may also serve as a way to reduce communicational uncertainties while it seems to reflect an interest in Colombia and their culture.

3. **Networking is paramount** in order to do business in Colombia for a variety of reasons, which appears to come down to a question of overcoming a fundamental mistrust of Colombians towards strangers – national or foreigners – including potential business partners. However, networking does not merely relate to talking business. Therefore, it is important to **build personal relations** with Colombian stakeholders (partners, clients and colleagues), which seems to require a certain set of social skills (see the following advice). Attending business and social events, e.g., trade fairs, receptions and lunch gatherings may compromise vital gateways to mingle with potential Colombian stakeholders. In other words, successful networking appear vital in order to do business with Colombians as it is a matter of increasing trust.

4. When networking or collaborating with Colombians, a certain degree of **openness** seems beneficial. Thus, build personal relations not just by taking business-related matters but try to be embark on more **small talk**, e.g., prior to meetings, trade fairs or business-related lunch. **Involve yourself a bit more personally and open about your private life** when building personal relations with Colombian stakeholders. The personal openness may relate to more superficial and shallow matters, e.g., whether one has children or not, and not necessarily fundamental beliefs, e.g., religion. Indeed, it seems as if one should not move forward to quickly as regards to asking Colombians too personal or private questions. However, informal matters seem to **matter** in a business-related setting. Therefore, when networking and doing business with Colombians, it seems important to **appear social, outgoing, sympathetic**, and not just as someone who is only concerned about doing business. In concrete terms, e.g., it can be beneficial to invite prospective
Colombian business stakeholders to lunch and talk about business in a more informal setting while the subject matter can initially center on non-business related aspects – talking about Colombian football players or positive experiences in Colombia can serve as icebreakers. Again, it appears to be a question of building trust between the parties, which seems particularly important for the Colombian part.

5. At a certain point, it might seem obvious to make a formal business agreement. However, **do not rush making formal (written) agreements** since it might, firstly, involve making an informal (oral) agreement as the relationship matures. However, when the parties are ready, oral agreements must be followed up in written terms in order to matter since oral agreements by themselves seem of little value in a Colombian business context, i.e., Colombians may not respect informal agreements to the same extent as written agreements, though it may depend on the personal relationship. That said, a Colombian ‘yes’ in relation to doing something may not necessarily be carried out, which seems related to that Colombians appear to handle problems, disagreements or conflicts through indirect and subtle language and communications, which might reflect a form of conflict shyness or seen as a form of politeness in order for either of the parties not to lose face. Thus, **be aware about and initially respect the use of indirect and subtle language and communications** since it may be a matter of not losing face for the Colombian part while a more direct communicational relationship may involve when a greater degree of trust has been developed.

6. **Be patient** since a variety of aspects can take time in a Colombian business context. Firstly, it appears as if Colombians have a stronger toleration for uncertainty and are more used to that processes are much more ad hoc and out of control, e.g., in relating to negotiations, which may be characterized by a lot of vagueness and be rather time-consuming – which can be related to that it is a matter of building trust between the parties. Secondly, it seems as if Colombians have problems of realizing their plans on time, particularly of long-term character, which can imply that their plans may easily slide. Thirdly, Colombians in general seem to have a more flexible and open relationship with the concept of time and are more concerned about the presence. Thus, on one hand, it appears beneficial to **accept** that being patient is a virtue in a Colombian business context while, on the other hand, **pushing** things forward also seems useful at times.

7. **Communicate precisely** about what you are saying or **create an environment** in which it is acceptable or possible for Colombian subordinates to ask questions or voice divergent views in
response to instructions and/or orders given by superiors – or else it can be challenging to know their opinion. Firstly, it seems as if Colombian subordinates appear to have great respect concerning hierarchy differences, i.e., authority, which can imply that they will not question the orders of superiors even though that the subordinates might have understood something about the order or if they have a better way of doing it. Secondly, it seems like Colombians need precise and detailed order in order to prevent an outcome of a poorer standard or for tasks to be carried out or in terms of preventing them from being too time-consuming. Thirdly, these aspects may be related to the existence of a “guilty plea culture” in Colombia, i.e., it is important to find out who made a mistake, the person who is guilty, in order to preferably fire that person, which appears to cause a fear of making and admitting mistakes, which can be seen as a sign of weakness or have fatal consequences in terms of being fired. Fourthly, it may also relate to that Colombians seems to prefer to handle problems, disagreements or conflicts in an indirect and subtle manner. In addition, the before mentioned issues may be aggravated concerning one’s ethnical background, i.e., being from Northern Europe, or depending on one’s title as they appear to elevate one’s power (see the next point for more on some of the implications of ethnicity).

8. Be cautious when talking about mistakes with Colombian stakeholders since it may be a delicate issue for them. Firstly, it seems to be associated with face loss, and thus, is perceived as a sign of weakness. Secondly, it may be related to fear since it seems easier and commonly practiced to fire people in Colombia. Thus, when talking about mistakes, try to do it in a delicate manner, i.e., try to create an environment in which mistakes can be talked about in a constructive way in order to minimize face loss and fear of disrupting the business relationship.

9. Preferably, it is important to figure out who has the authority to make decisions since the power seems rather centralized in a Colombian business context – the decision-making capability is not necessarily delegated to subordinates. In doing so, remember that title matters, which in combination with a person of Danish ethnicity seem to easily open doors to Colombian decision-makers. In terms of gender, males may be preferred since gender stills seems to play a role in a Colombian business context – though it is diminishing. More specifically, females may have a slight disadvantage in a Colombian business context as they may have to work harder in order to earn respect or have greater difficulty in terms of networking where certain networks can be male dominated.
7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

7.1 Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis has been to produce exploratory research concerning culturally derived challenges as experienced by Danish professionals in a Colombian business context since knowledge of cultural differences and of what can be culturally challenging is important for Danish professionals in order to effectively communicate and collaborate with Colombian clients, colleagues, or partners. Firstly, in order to answer the research question, it was found relevant to obtain a theoretical understanding about the cultural differences between Colombia and Denmark, which can point towards potentially challenging aspects in terms of culture for Danish professionals working with Colombian stakeholders (partners, clients and colleagues). Thus, through a selective literature review, the GLOBE project, their findings and nine constructed cultural dimensions was chosen as the theoretical framework guiding this thesis, i.e., as a tool to assess the impact of societal culture on a Colombian business setting. Secondly, the theoretical framework of GLOBE was adjusted through an interview guide in order to explore the main research question by interviewing five subjects of Danish origin professionally experienced in a Colombian business context.

According to GLOBE’s findings, there exists a variety of cultural differences regarding Colombia and Denmark as their banding differs in seven out of their nine cultural dimensions while taking their individual scores into consideration, the two societies also slightly differs concerning the latter two cultural dimensions. Some of GLOBE’s results concerning cultural differences appear to have many converging manifestations according to the experiences and views of some of the five interviewed subjects – unanimous consent appeared to be the case at time – while others diverge. Either way, not all of them seems to be considered challenging in a Colombian business context.

The following list provides an overview of what can be culturally different and challenging in a Colombian business setting from a Danish perspective. The order does not follow relevance or frequency, it simply follows the same structure as the data structure table:

- The respect for power, authority and status seems to impede Colombian subordinates from asking questions or voicing diverging views (disagreement) on orders given by superiors (Power distance).
- The toleration of uncertainty tends to make detailed and precise instructions a necessity; oral agreements can be made but must be followed up in written terms in order to be valid;
negotiating can be a particularly ambiguous and uncertain process; English skills are lacking, making Spanish proficiency a must in most cases (Uncertainty avoidance).

- Mistakes seems to be taboo and associated with face loss since making and admitting mistakes may be seen as a sign of weakness and result in loss of respect (Humane orientation).
- The centrality of in-groups appears to make networks, the development of personal relations, personal openness and trust decisive when doing business with Colombians (In-group collectivism).
- The use of indirect communications and language seems to make it difficult to know when there is a problem, conflict or disagreement, and thus, difficult to solve such issues (Assertiveness).
- Female discrimination appears low in a business context but women may still have to work a bit harder to earn respect and may have a slightly smaller network (Gender egalitarianism).
- Plan management – in particular weak plan execution – and a flexible time orientation makes it difficult to plan or count on (Future orientation).
- Social connections and background seem to matter significantly in terms of firm performance though the actual firm performance also appears essential (high ambition, professional and educational level) (Performance orientation).

In sum, the contribution of this study not only consists of exploring how people from one national culture subjectively perceive those from another national culture as related to a specific context in terms of cultural differences, challenges and even similarities, it also provides some implications for practitioners, i.e., Danish firms or managers. Through a set of guidelines designed to assist them in their internationalization efforts in Colombia, humility, openness and patience are considered key words in such a process, which hopefully may spillover to involve other types of cooperation, mutual dialogue and learning in other areas, eventually to build a stronger bond between the two nations.

7.2 Limitations

Firstly, it is worth stressing that the social constructivist worldview applied in this thesis naturally limits the generalizability of my findings since the world and nature of research, and hereby all knowledge, is socially constructed uniquely tied to a specific context. Besides, the rather broad definition of Colombian business context (almost encompassing all possible international operations) and the small sample (five participating subjects) and their different backgrounds and context clearly also constitute limiting factors concerning the generalizability of my study.
Secondly, the adopted philosophical worldview, strategy of inquiry and research methods for this thesis clearly limits the reliability of my research and findings as the research design implies an active role of the researcher, me, during the entire research process, e.g., in terms of interpreting GLOBE’s theoretical framework for an interview protocol; conducting the actual interviews; interpreting (categorizing) my findings; and, in terms of developing the implications for practitioners. In other words, while I have done my best to make my research process and findings as trustworthy as possible (inter alia, through ‘thick’ description in the results section and internal triangulation in the discussion section), it seems unlikely that another researcher would reach the same exact same findings of this study as the applied research design implies that its research and findings is context-specific product of the researcher and the participating subjects and their interaction.

Thirdly, it is worth mentioning that the adopted research design and participating subjects compromise a view or several views, respectively. GLOBE, e.g., represents a constructed conceptual framework concerning culture that I have adopted and interpreted in a business context. However, as shown in the theoretical background section, other cultural frameworks exist or cultural dimensions exist while others may not have been discovered yet. Thus, other cultural or other perspectives of other subjects clearly exist as based on their experiences and context.

7.3 Future research

Firstly, it seems relevant and interesting to study the other side of the story, namely an exploration of what Colombian professionals consider culturally challenging and different in a Danish business context – or perhaps just in terms of cooperating with Danes when they operate in their context (Colombia). Such a study could potentially raise the trustworthiness of my findings in relation to cultural differences and challenges.

Secondly, future research concerning cultural differences and culturally challenging aspects in relation to doing business in a Colombian context might narrow down or try to unite the sample of the participating subjects in terms of their background and business context, which may compromise important variables. Thus, future research might focus on one entry mode of Danish professionals or Danish firms, e.g., in relation to startups or exports, or one within one particular industry. Recall that the primary data consists of five participating interview subjects with rather different backgrounds and unique settings in relation to their “professional relationship” with Colombia (Colombians). Their background or context are not studied or taken into account in this thesis though they vary in terms of entry mode (their Colombian business context), industry, position, gender and “space and time”
(i.e., space; some might only have done business in Bogotá; others in Medellín while in terms of time; some have brief, sporadic or “virgin” experiences in relation to Colombia; others may have lived and worked there for several years). As related to this point, I wonder how these factors along with other contextual factors such as personality or educational and professional background might influence the encounter between people of two different national cultures (probably difficult to map but still interesting). Lastly, the power-relationship between the Danish professional (or firm which the person represents) vis-à-vis the Colombian business context might constitute another important and influential factor in the encounter in terms of which cultural aspects that might merge to the surface and appear different or challenging.

Thirdly, the primary data, i.e., the interviews of the five Danish professionals, revealed several other themes as opposed to the interview protocol, and which did not comply with the constructed concept of culture, which appear to compromise important contextual aspects to consider when doing business in Colombia worth investigating. These themes entail potential institutional voids, namely safety, corruption and bureaucracy, which can constrain business operations in Colombia. While these aspects are briefly presented here, see table N.1 in the appendix for representative quotations underlying these themes and the additional themes presented afterwards.

As regards to safety, while it appears a non-essential issue causing particular problems for some of the subjects – perhaps in contrast with popular belief considering Colombia’s more than six decades long armed conflict – S1 stressed it as the biggest challenge when operating in Colombia. It, e.g., stalled the pursuit of opening new offices in Medellín and two other places while it could also involve the personal safety of S1. However, S1 also stated that it might be industry-specific. On the other side, it was never mentioned as an issue by S3 while the remaining subjects completely dismiss it as a particular issue based on their experiences: no special security measures had to be taken while common sense appear to take you far. However, some of the subjects stress that there exist areas regionally and within cities where one should not enter.

On the matter of corruption, it particularly appeared as a central theme for S1 as related to the media industry while S3 seems to point towards the existence of a corrupt political system. However, with the exception of S1, none of the other subjects mentioned corruption as an issue in Colombia. Regarding the media industry, S1 seems to stress two types of corruption. Firstly, that you should write about someone in positive terms, and, secondly, corruption related to state and industry interests concerning contracts.
Concerning *bureaucracy*, some of the subjects seem to stress that the bureaucracy in Colombia is heavier than in Denmark. A common denominator for these subjects seem to be that it can be rather time consuming due to the amount of formalities and paperwork, e.g., in relation to purchasing a Colombian company (S2), becoming a supplier (S5), setting up a company (S5) or due to the widespread practice of using notaries in order for something to become valid (S3 and S5).

Fifthly, it seems highly worthy investigating a perceived importance of *physical presence* on the Danish part in Colombia as related to doing business. Perhaps it relates to the greater in-group orientation of Colombians, who seems to apply a greater weight towards personal relations in a when doing business. Accordingly, though in different contexts, two of the subjects highlighted the importance and value of being physically present in Colombia. As a more general business advice, S5 stressed it as particularly important to be physically present and give ‘physical attention’ to key clients if one wishes to do business in Colombia. Meanwhile, S4 also stressed the value of being present, e.g., if a Danish company buys up a local company, then S4 considers it to have great value for both parties.

Sixthly, there seems to exist important *regional differences* in Colombia in terms of their business culture, S5 states, which appear to be important to understand. Important questions arise in terms of which regions seem to differ significantly and in which aspects that might differ, e.g., S5 contrasts the business culture of Bogotá, Medellín and the Caribbean coast.

In seventh place, two of the subjects appear to consider *Colombia* – and Latin America for that matter – less culturally different and challenging from a Danish perspective than *other parts of the world*, e.g., than some parts of Asia. Then, why does there appear to be more Danish interest commercially in Asia, particularly China, than in Latin America, which when considered as a whole compromise a rather populous and emerging region while several countries, particularly those facing the Pacific Ocean, have underwent and are undergoing significant positive progress from a commercial perspective, e.g., in terms of their transformation towards more market-based and free trade-oriented economies.

Finally, it appears interesting to study the advantages and disadvantages of involving *Colombian vis-à-vis Danish labor* to serve as a ‘bridge’ in the Colombian market and under which circumstances, e.g., it is beneficial to use Colombian labor as a local partner, a ‘middle man-position’ or as part of a board vis-à-vis using Danes professionally experienced in Latin America, preferably Colombia.
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