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**Cross-Cultural Communication and the Adjustment of  
Western and Non-Western Expatriates in Multicultural  
Companies: Investigating Operations in Oman**

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR A DOCTORAL DEGREE**

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**College of Social Science**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis explores the state of existing knowledge on expatriate work assignments and matters of adjustment and adaptation as they affect Western, non-Western and host workers in Arab countries, specifically Oman. The main purpose of the research is to provide an integrated analysis of expatriate adjustment from the perspectives of Western and, crucially, non-Western expatriates and their host national counterparts. It offers a critical appreciation of factors included in Black, Mendenhall, and Oddou's (1991) influential Framework for International Adjustment (FIA). The thesis identifies weaknesses in the Black et al approach, drawing insights from more recent literature to consider the dynamics of cross-cultural interaction and offer a deeper understanding of reciprocal influence, accommodating the neglected viewpoints of non-Western expatriates and focusing greater attention on host national attitudes and responses to dealing with Western workers.

This sort of relational approach is rare in this area, as much of the literature talks only about the Western expatriate experience. A crucial point borne out by this research is that the way host nationals and expatriates cooperate and interact helps to explain: (i) why host nationals are often reluctant to integrate with Western expatriates in particular; and (ii) how host national reluctance can influence the adjustment experience of wider expatriate communities. These neglected factors were explored by developing an understanding of the extent to which host nationals interpret differences in culture and forms of behaviour within and across multinational work groups, and also by investigating host national attitudes towards unacceptable cultural behaviour on the part of expatriates.

Quantitative and qualitative data on these issues was gathered through a detailed survey, supplemented by in-depth interviewing. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with 18 expatriates and 22 Omani managers and employees drawn from petroleum and educational institutions. The results show important differences between Western and non-Western expatriates in terms of both their sense-making about adjustment and attitudes and orientations to working with host national Omanis. The research also highlights significant challenges for the cultural adjustment and workplace effectiveness of host nationals themselves. These centre on competing ideas about the significance of religion, customs, traditions, and gender segregation. Cultural novelty emerges as a significant phenomenon, showing positive links to cultural (social) and work adjustment. The analysis of these factors demonstrates that Western-centric accounts provide an inadequate basis for understanding and facilitating multinational work assignments in Oman.

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## ***AUTHOR'S DECLARATION***

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Printed name \_\_\_\_\_ "

# ***THE RESEARCH INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW***

## **Introduction**

This thesis presents original research on the experiences of Western and non-Western expatriates working and living in the educational and petroleum sectors in Oman. The purpose is to identify and understand the adjustment issues experienced by expatriates following their relocation to the host country. Expatriates are workers who have either chosen to leave their homeland to live or work in another country or who have been sent to work in another country by their employers for a lengthy period of time (Tran, 2008). In this study, Western expatriates are defined as expatriates came from nationals, who have been sent to work on international assignments or projects for a specified period of time lasting from twelve months to multiple years. In the most political sense commonly used, ‘the West’ describes an interstate political space comprised of states in Europe and North America, and Australia, New Zealand and possibly Japan in the Pacific (see appendix F) (Hellmann et al, 2017). However, constructivists argue that rather than a geographical area or group of states united by a common cultural heritage, the West is a socially may constructed political space (Adler and Barnett, 1998). Non-Western expatriates, in this study, are defined as those who came to work in Oman from other countries around the world, including India, Pakistan, and the Philippines, which are key sources of incoming labour.

The research focus is on the main factors surrounding the cultural novelty and differences between Western and non-Western expatriates and Arabic cultures that influence the adjustment of expatriates during their time in Oman. In more detail, it focuses on the major factors that influence lifestyle adjustment, interaction adjustment to working with Omani nationals and work process adjustment. By contrast with established literature on the experiences and adjustment challenges confronting expatriates, this study is distinguished by a relational focus that considers the dynamics of interaction between and among local Omanis, Western and non-Western expatriates working in the Sultanate of Oman. It aims for an integrated understanding of their interrelated experiences, emerging interpretations and on-going responses to distinctive patterns of reciprocal interaction, mutual adjustment, and also tension in the working out of every day contacts between these fluid workplace communities.

Conceptually, this thesis draws substantially on the international expatriates' adjustment developed by Black et al. (1991). This provides a useful platform for developing insights, because Black's approach is developed by placing greater emphasis on the ways in which cross-cultural interactions between host nationals and expatriates can influence the adjustment process. It also relates to the perceptions, interpretations, reactions and associated adjustment concerns of host national managers and colleagues of the expatriates. These stakeholders play an essential part in the adjustment process, yet are frequently neglected in accounts of predominantly Western expatriate experiences from a Western centric perspective. An important part of the logic of this investigation is that of understanding how local managers in particular relate to expatriate workers, studying Western and non-Western, is vitally important and merits more explicit attention in both conceptual and applied research.

Traditionally, a great deal of attention is placed upon the personal and organisational advantages of engaging and retaining Western expatriates in Arab work organisations. One often cited reason for this relates to the financial implications of losing and then rehiring expatriates, which can present prohibitive costs. The cross-cultural obstacles that expatriates frequently confront provides the key focus for many accounts dealing with this issue, with emphasis being placed on the consequences that follow from expatriates failing to complete the full term of their overseas assignments (Kim and Slocum Jr, 2008). Most research along these lines estimates failure rates as being very high, varying between 20% and 50% (Scullion and Collings, 2006, Harzing and Christensen, 2004, Silbiger and Pines, 2014, Chan et al., 2016). Personal costs are also a consideration, though again predominantly and often exclusively for Western expatriates. Their financial consequences when struggling to adjust figure prominently in discussions of departures from assignments prior to completion, for example. The wider impact on expatriate and national working communities has received less attention, which is unfortunate, and, as a consequence, likely to promote narrow insights and interpretations.

Viable research carried out in this area must become more relational and give explicit attention to the dynamics of cultural and interpersonal interaction that promote adjustment or otherwise. For this reason, the empirical work for this investigation places a great deal of emphasis first-hand information relating to the causes of expatriate failure or success in overseas assignments. It also widens the focus of study to accommodate labour from countries that have been neglected or tangentially covered in earlier studies, including the

Philippines and India. Earlier research has given some attention to China (Selmer, 2002a, Shih et al., 2010, Seak and Enderwick, 2008), Japan (Black, 1988, Chang, 1997, Peltokorpi, 2008), Thailand (Clegg and Gray, 2002) and Korea (Kim, 2008), though not in relation to the Sultanate of Oman, and only very generally to Arabic countries. Again, the distinguishing feature of this research is an integrated focus on wider communities of expatriate and host national employees.

To this extent, it involved a rigorous attempt to fill gaps in knowledge about the interactional, and possibly mutually reinforcing, problems confronted by expatriate communities during their living and working experiences in Arabic cultures (Collett, 1971, Hills and Atkins, 2013, Raddawi, 2014). The study is responsive to repeated appeals from prominent researchers in the field such as Dabic et al. (2015), Harrison and Michailova (2012) related to studies of the adjustment of expatriates in new cultures (i.e. those that move beyond China, the USA, and Japan, where most previous studies have been conducted). These authors confirm the lack of studies focusing on the challenges and adjustment stages of expatriates in Arabic cultures in general, and in the Omani context specifically. This is despite the cultural novelty and different work environments between their countries and Oman, and despite the high proportion of expatriate workers in the Gulf States. This investigation offers a means of building upon existing theoretical frameworks – notably that of Black et al. (1991) by providing new quantitative and qualitative data that focuses on an understudied context and an under-reported phenomenon (namely that of the complex interactions that occur between host nationals and expatriates).

The following sections of this chapter provide the background to the research and provide greater detail on the study aims, issues, key questions and the significance of the research. An overview of Oman is also provided, including some detail on demographic and other pertinent information in order to provide the research context. Finally, the thesis structure is presented.

## **Background and research problem**

The expansion of global businesses and the internationalisation of world markets have resulted in many multinational companies (MNCs) depending on their expatriate workers to manage and/or facilitate their worldwide operations (Mellahi, 2007, Tahir and Ismail, 2007, Ng et al., 2009, Hailey, 2007, Harvey and Moeller, 2009, Brewster, 2007, Moeller and Maley, 2017, Sparrow et al., 2016). In order to transfer organisational cultural change,

transfer knowledge and control systems internationally, multinational organisations have taken to sending their most talented employees on overseas assignments (Gayle Baugh et al., 2005, Feldman and Thomas, 1992). In the last half of the twentieth century, the number of international work assignments has steadily increased (Black et al., 2001, Sparrow et al., 2016). Harvey and Moeller (2009) indicate that 65% of all multinational companies will be relying on an increased number of expatriate managers by the year 2020. This increase in the use of expatriates has led to expatriate management scholars placing great emphasis on the need to identify the numerous factors that assist expatriates in their adjustment and to successfully fulfil their assignments, from the point of view of both the organisations and the expatriates themselves (Hechanova et al., 2003, Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005, Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2004, Takeuchi, 2010, Caligiuri, 2000).

Ostensibly, the major benefits that expatriates may provide to international companies are integration and co-ordination of subsidiary practices in business policies and control of foreign operations (Suutari and Brewster, 2001). The expatriates transfer organisational capabilities such as learning, networking, and innovation between organisational units, facilitate effective communication between international companies and the host country, and ensure the progress of competent international managers (Suutari, 1998). The reason for this is that they may either have a better understanding of overall corporate priorities and a greater commitment to overall corporate objectives of MNCs compared to that of their locally hired counterparts (Shaffer et al., 2006), or they may be willing to work longer hours and have lower rates of absenteeism when compared to the local workforce (Rose et al., 2010). Additionally, in some cases, especially in developing countries such as Oman, it might be difficult to find adequate numbers of highly-skilled and experienced managers locally (Rajasekar and Renand, 2013). For these reasons, using employees from the host country is still widely regarded as a basic strategy for human resource management in international companies (Suutari, 1998, Thomas and Lazarova, 2006).

However, according to Takeuchi (2010) there could be several negative consequences associated with the use of expatriate workers, including poor performance, difficulties in adjusting to the new environment, poor support, and disappointment with the parent company due to expectations not being met. Understanding why expatriates adjust easily or with difficulty remains a major issue, especially for countries which are not generally covered in the literature, such as Oman, or for any specific Arab country that is considered in a homogeneous manner with all other Arab states (Takeuchi, 2010).

Cultural barriers, such as inaccurate perceptions and negative stereotypes as well as communication problems usually lead to a breakdown of understanding between people and this causes conflict and problems at an interpersonal level (Hewstone and Giles, 1997, Campbell, 1967). According to Jassawalla et al. (2004), scholars agree that communicating and adjusting to different cultures on the part of expatriates, requires that expatriates first obtain a basic psychological level of comfort with the values, attitudes and behavioural practices considered normal in the in the host culture. Secondly, expatriates must accept and honour the cultural assumptions and laws of the host country and adjust to the differences that appear in the physical, psychological and communication environments. Previous research has not paid sufficient attention to the ways in which complex interpersonal interactions between host nationals and expatriates condition this process of adjusting to a new culture.

It has been highlighted in previous literature (Aryee and Stone, 1996, Claus et al., 2011) that expatriates will experience a number of fundamental changes in terms of the work practices in the host country and how they, the expatriates, are expected to act and perform. For example, in terms of giving instructions, Westerners tend to be direct and clear, while in Eastern cultures ideas are normally expressed indirectly (Hall and Hall, 1990). In most cases, these differences in working practices can be very substantial and can result in what has been called 'culture shock' (Adler, 1975, Baier, 2005). Culture shock involves confusion, frustration and may even lead to a lack in confidence as expatriates try to adapt to their new work practices (Aryee and Stone, 1996, Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). In this way, expatriates have to face the task of learning their new role in a new company and in a new country. In fact, they have the added pressure of having to learn to work in a new way. This can cause a great deal of stress for the expatriates and make the transition into their new role all the more difficult (Aryee and Stone, 1996).

These fundamental changes can result in the expatriates feeling out of control and out of depth in their new situation. The difficulties associated with adjusting to their new working environment's culture can cause high levels of psychological discomfort, which ultimately leads to job dissatisfaction (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). Performance may be affected by the unfamiliarity of the situation and through the process of coming to terms with what is expected of expatriates. These significant and fundamental changes all contribute to a number of expatriates giving up on their assignment and making the decision to return to their home countries (Aryee and Stone, 1996).

It is worth noting that for the most part, the majority of expatriates manage to successfully integrate into their new role, adjust well and conquer the challenges they face when embarking on their new assignment (Adler and Rigg, 2012, Onosu, 2012). However, there will inevitably be a substantial amount of comparisons and contrasts being made by the expatriates between their host and home countries, which will eventually affect their decisions regarding whether they wish to stay in their current expatriate role or repatriate to their home countries (Lee, 2007, Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005, Aryee and Stone, 1996, Black and Gregersen, 1991c). The differences in an expatriates' current roles when compared with their previous roles and experiences in their home county ('role novelty') will also play a critical roles in the adjustment process. The degree of difference in these roles will undoubtedly affect how comfortable the employees feel in their new position, thus impacting whether they choose to stay on in their expatriate role or return to their home country (Aryee and Stone, 1996, Lee, 2007).

It is apparent that a multitude of contributory factors and reasons impact upon the success or failure of the adjustment process of any expatriate embarking on a new work assignment in a new country (this fact is discussed at length in the literature review). In both overseas workplaces and in the foreign society in which they reside, expatriates will have to overcome numerous obstacles, such as culture shock, differences in work-related procedures, isolation, homesickness, differences in health care, housing, schooling, cuisine, language, customs, gender roles and the cost of living, to name but a few (Morley and Heraty, 2004).

To summarize, from the existing literature, six main reasons are offered for expatriate failure:

- 1) An inability to adapt to an unfamiliar environment;
- 2) A lack of family acceptance and assimilation;
- 3) A lack of support from the head office;
- 4) Not having an open mindset;
- 5) A reluctance or lack of willingness to learn; and
- 6) A lack of technical competence (Lee, 2007).

Some additional factors (see for example, Black et al., 1991, Selmer and Leung, 2003) indicate challenges associated with being able to identify and distinguish between acceptable and non-acceptable forms of behaviour in the new country. Expatriates must also come to terms with and adapt to the new language and familiarise themselves with expressions they

may not be used to. This can result in stressful situations, as well as necessitating the unlearning of existing practices and behaviours and learning new response strategies appropriate to the host culture (Collett, 1971, Harrison and Michailova, 2011). In cases where the expatriate is unable to learn and take on board the new forms of behaviour, respect the new culture or respond appropriately during interpersonal interactions, the possibility of expatriate rejection of the host culture increases. This can consequently lead to the development of a divisive of 'us versus them' mindset. Lastly, some expatriates are unable to adequately meet the expectation of host organisation or carry out their new job role efficiently. Indeed, Black and Gregersen (2007) established that almost one-third of expatriates failed to successfully complete their assignments for this very reason.

It can be seen, then, that expatriate failure can be a severe matter for MNCs, requiring them to come up with effective ways to counteract these problems. For example, having an awareness of cultural diversity, learning about diverse cultures and being competent in cross-cultural communications are some of the requirements that expatriate managers need to take into consideration in order to successfully adjust to culturally diverse environments and execute fruitful overseas projects (Selmer, 2005). Therefore, awareness of the challenges associated with adjustment may enable expatriates to be more properly prepared. Such awareness may prompt the undertaking of appropriate cross-cultural training (CCT) to develop relevant abilities. Many MCCs have, in fact, taken such a need into consideration and have used CCT to prepare their expatriates with the necessary skills essential for successfully working abroad (Deshpande and Viswesvaran, 1992, Ko and Yang, 2011) (this is discussed in detail in section 2.4 the literature review). However, CCT has not, thus far, led to optimal outcomes with respect to retaining expatriates, thus warranting further exploration of expatriate needs and its associated challenges.

The more the expatriate is equipped with knowledge of the host culture (including being able to speak the local language), has values that match that of the host country to a reasonable degree, and accurate expectation, the higher his or her chances are of fruitful job performance (Ko and Yang, 2011, Gregersen and Stroh, 1997). These factors add to the quality of cross-cultural learning required to ease adjustment, and, at the same time, enable successful organisational management within the parameters of a new culture.

As previously stated, when an expatriate fails to adjust to the host country, then poor work performance, low levels of job and personal satisfaction and in many cases, the early



departure of the expatriate from both the job and the country, before the assignment has been completed, are generally the outcome (Konanahalli et al., 2012). Despite on-going research and increased efforts devoted to improving the experiences of expatriates by providing them with training programs, the past two decades have not led to a decrease in the number of expatriate failures (see, Rajasekar and Renand, 2013). The situation becomes even more alarming if we consider total losses resulting from these failures, which range between \$250,000 and \$1 million. In fact, one study estimated that the cost of failure for US multinational companies equates to over \$2 billion a year (Yeaton and Hall, 2008). Given that expatriate failure is both costly and time-consuming for an organisation, it is of paramount importance for organisations to firstly recognise and understand the potential causes of failure, and, secondly to develop and implement strategies designed to minimise and avoid this failure, or at least to minimise it.

In the Sultanate of Oman there are multinational companies working across different sectors such as the oil, gas and construction industries, as well as other economic sectors. These companies use expatriates and employees from different countries with different cultures and languages. To achieve success in such companies a high degree of quality communication and adjustment via adequate cross-cultural training are necessary. However, working in international companies can lead to many problems and can have adverse consequences with respect to communication. As will be seen in the description of the qualitative results, there are several distinct communication problems that are connected with cultural and language-related differences.

Black et al. (1998) has pointed out that cross-cultural adjustment is the degree to which an expatriate is psychologically comfortable with the various aspects of the foreign country he or she experiences. In their model of international adjustment Black (1988), and Black et al. (1991) have mentioned three dimensions of adjustment. The first dimension relates to work and is understood to be the most difficult of the three dimensions of adjustment. Work adjustment refers to the levels of comfort experienced by expatriates when dealing with or interacting with host country nationals in the workplace (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005).

The second dimension is 'interaction adjustment' which relates to the experiences of expatriates when interacting with host nationals. This dimension deals with the adaptation of the expatriates into their new job roles in their new employment environment, and how they adapt their existing practices when approaching new tasks. In terms of procedures,

policies and task requirements, work adjustment is easier if there are similarities between the parent and the host organisations as well as similarities between old and new roles. The final adjustment relates to ‘general (non-work) environment adjustment’ which concerns the overall adjustment relating to living in a foreign country and adjusting to the new and often very different culture. It includes aspects such as housing conditions, public services, healthcare services, transportation and the costs of living (Konanahalli et al., 2012). The qualitative results of this study provide nuance to the dimensions identified by Black et al., by carefully considering how host national and expatriate interactions (as well as interactions between expatriates and their new culture) impact upon adjustment.

Accordingly, the volume of literature on expatriate management which considers the increasing level of importance and relevance of the topic has expanded (Lee, 2007). The continuous growth in international business management and the growing number of people who work in countries other than their own has led to renewed attention being paid to the management of internationally mobile employees (Haslberger and Brewster, 2009).

Western researchers like Scullion and Collings (2006) and Brewster (2007) have highlighted the fact that when an expatriate relocates to a country that has similar cultural values and operates in a similar way to their own country, this may experience unique difficulties. Such difficulty may be due to the fact that any differences and variations will be much subtler than those apparent in other very different countries and cultures. As such, it will be harder for expatriates to recognise these differences, thus resulting in an increase in the number of cultural clashes they experience. This is a phenomenon that might be particularly acute in the case of non-Western expatriates working in Oman. In cases where expatriates relocate to a country which has very obvious and blatant cultural differences, more often than not, the expatriates will take more time to research these differences, will be more prepared and will have more in-depth knowledge and information about what to expect and how to act (Selmer and Luring, 2010). This also highlights how important it is for host countries (in this case, Oman) to obtain more knowledge and information on the adjustment processes for expatriates coming to work in their country. This study works toward this goal by providing new knowledge on how past and present expatriates have experienced the adjustment process.

Sociocultural adjustment is a concept which is defined as an individual’s ability to fit into and adapt to a new cultural environment (Ward and Kennedy, 1992). It is measured by the

degree of difficulty these individuals experience in managing their living and working situations on a daily basis (Ward and Kennedy, 1993). Based on the principle employed in the international adjustment framework proposed by Black et al. (1991), Lee (2005) asserts that the expatriate adjustment experience is, in the main, very predictable. This implies that initially, all expatriates are excited by the prospect of living and working in a new country and are eager to experience this new way of life. They are often fascinated by the new culture they are entering and feel privileged that they have the opportunity to undertake this new challenge. However, according to Black et al.'s international framework, this excitement slowly diminishes and after a few months, the reality of the situation begins to hit home which then results in a feeling of culture shock arising (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). Following this period of adjustment, the expatriate will either begin to adapt to, accept and fit in with most of the new cultural differences, differing work practices and lifestyle changes and will fully adjust, or will find this too much to deal with and will return home instead (Black et al., 1991, Aryee and Stone, 1996, Lee, 2005, Lee, 2002).

### **Aims of the study**

The three elements comprising Black et al.'s (1991) framework have been described above. However, it is noteworthy that the model has been supported by the literature on cultural adjustment with a sufficiently substantial number of empirical studies to allow for two meta-analyses (e.g., Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005, Hechanova et al., 2003). Nonetheless, influential research and prescriptive commentaries on international cultural adjustment have tended to focus on expatriates as a single group, including, for example, Western expatriates, Korean expatriates or American expatriates. There has been relatively little research about specific national groups of expatriates in particular countries. This matters because the level of similarity between the home country and the host country can have a significant influence on the adjustment process (Black and Gregersen, 1991b). Furthermore, in relation to their work with expatriates and their perceptions of the expatriate experience, little attention to date has been given to the views of host national employees. This issue is particularly important, because the perceptions host nationals have of expatriates (along with how they both react and adjust to expatriate presence) offer great insight into the cultural adjustment process experienced by expatriates. This, in turn, may enable refining of Black et al.'s (1991) model of international adjustment, an issue that will be discussed in Chapter 1.

In addition, the lack of comparative studies examining the adjustment of Western and non-Western expatriates is notable. The only study of the cultural adjustment of both Western

and non-Western expatriate students was conducted by Baier (2005) in the USA. This distinction between Western and non-Western expatriates was also obvious in Roth (2015), who added a comparison between Western and non-Western expatriates during their work in managing and working in the aid industry. Therefore, this study attempts to open the door for more studies to clarify the extent of the differences in the level of adaptation based on the degree of cultural novelty. In addition, this study is one of few that has paid attention to the view of the local people, as they play an essential role in facilitating the processes of the adjustment of expatriates (Selmer, 1999c, Stahl and Caligiuri, 2005). In contrast, this study will deploy Black et al.'s (1991) model to analyse Western and non-Western adaptation across Islamic conservative cultural contexts. Black's model has strong empirical backing and is, therefore, a good starting point. However, the model might be refined through incorporating a non-Western perspective (including both the experiences of host nationals in Oman, and non-Western expatriates to Oman). This enrichment will enable a more sophisticated understanding of the types of adjustment Black et al. discuss, as well as of the U-Curve theory of adjustment.

The current study also places a prominent level of emphasis local managers and employees put on the greatest degree of cultural differences and challenges that influence the adjustment of expatriates and their interaction with Omanis. In this way, the current research aims to address the gap in the literature on expatriates in the Middle East region, more specifically in Oman. According to Dabic et al. (2015) "Further research is called for in order to expand the narrow scope of investigations in this field to date. Also, additional research is required on economies other than China and Japan, with a clear focus on cultural differences in the findings." (P. 331). These authors add that "this may offer interesting results for building a future theory. For instance, transitional economies, other than Asiatic, may also require foreign investments and human resources to be hired in order to boost their transitions successfully." (p. 331).

In particular, the following specific objectives for this study have been identified and are detailed below:

- 1) To investigate cultural adjustment and intercultural communication problems which expatriates may face in international companies;

- 2) To examine the consequences of intercultural communication issues between expatriates and workers from the local culture, with a focus on the role of host national perceptions on expatriate adjustment;
- 3) To understand the work experience and the issues of expatriates' adjustment during their work with local employees.
- 4) To assess the impact that training programs have on expatriates and identify the extent to which they are useful;
- 5) To consider how factors such as gender, age, previous experience and the number of years worked in Oman influence or affect their adjustment to the Omani culture.

### **The researcher's personal goal**

The study of expatriate adjustment was of particular interest to the researcher as a result of his own personal experiences as an international student in Jordan, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom as well as his experiences of other expatriates he had close contact with who shared their own cross-cultural experiences. Whilst working in the Higher Education sector in Oman, the researcher had the opportunity to interact closely with most of the expatriates from Europe, Africa and Asia assigned to this region. This meant he had first-hand experience and knowledge of the various physiological and sociological challenges these expatriates faced in the new environment, despite all of the resources that had been made available to them. He also noticed that there was a lack of communication and interaction between the expatriates and local employees. The researcher also had a period of study in New Zealand, during which time discussions focused on how expatriates felt isolated from the local people and the difficulties that arose in trying to interact with them. Thus, the researcher began to ask questions and subsequently established that the difficulties in adjustment were primarily encountered due to the transition in culture, communication issues and a lack of adequate training offered to expatriates.

In addition, the researcher chose this particular topic because of his own personal experience as an international student in Jordan, as well as in New Zealand and the UK. He has personally experienced the challenges of adjusting to a new cultural environment and, based on these experiences, sought to gain a more comprehensive level of knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon of the expatriate adjustment process. This personal

experience has only served as an objective reference for this research. However, since this personal experience is similar to the phenomenon being researched, the possibility that his experiences will positively reinforce the trust participants have to share their story without reservations cannot be over-ruled.

Furthermore, the researcher had first-hand knowledge of culture shock when he returned to live in Oman following his period of living in the West and experiencing Western culture. This experience also inspired the researcher to conduct the current study. Thus, he began to compare and contrast between the two cultures and this comparison made it very difficult for the researcher to re-adjust back to his original culture in Oman. In fact, he felt as though he had developed more individualistic views and a more individualist outlook whilst living and working in a collectivist society. For the researcher, this raised the question: “If I am originally from this culture yet I am finding it difficult to adjust to it just because I lived overseas for few years, how then can Western expatriates who have lived and experienced a totally different culture move to, live and adjust to life in Oman?”.

## **Research significance**

Studying the adjustment of expatriates and their intercultural communication is very important. According to Furnham and Bochner (1986), studies like these are especially important in the work environment, in which people from different backgrounds interact on a daily basis. It is of crucial importance that people from diverse cultural environments appreciate and tolerate differences pertaining to language varieties, non-verbal behaviour, attitudes, values, customs and worldviews. If such tolerance is not achieved, there is likely to be an intercultural communication failure and asynchrony of interaction between workers (Huynh et al., 2007). Furthermore, because firms often assign multiple expatriates to each foreign subsidiary, understanding how individual and subsidiary-level factors together affect expatriate effectiveness should thus help organisations to better manage their expatriate selection and assignment processes (Collett, 1971).

Cross-cultural training programs play a significant role in overcoming intercultural communication failures. Black and Gregersen (2007) suggest that the aim of cross-cultural training is to help employees be comfortable living and working in a host country, thereby improving their cross-cultural adjustment and solidifying their ability to comprehend and appreciate diverse cultural viewpoints. Due to concerns regarding the high ratio of expatriate failure, their high cost and their impact on MNCs, specific recommendations are given to

aid in enhancing the success of expatriate projects. It has been proposed that cross-cultural training programs be designed in such a way that objectives will allow assignees to execute the following:

- 1) Handle change with regard to professional and personal transition;
- 2) Manage cultural dissimilarities; and
- 3) Manage their duties within a multicultural environment.

The information gathered from this research will make several contributions to research projects in the field of cross-cultural expatriate adjustment. This study proposes and examines a theoretical framework representing the experiences, tribulations, and responses of participants during their cross-cultural adjustment in Oman. It will achieve the following significant outcomes: first, while the starting point of this framework is the work of Black et al. (1991) and the U-Curve theory of adjustment and the three varieties of expatriate adjustment measures, the work to come will enable a refinement of this theory based on new data from the Omani context. Second, it will move significantly beyond this basis, by offering a contextual understanding of the unique expatriate experiences in the Omani context, the perceptions of host nationals, and the varied experiences of Western versus non-Western expatriates. Thirdly, from an empirical point of view, this study will also provide human resources professionals with the knowledge necessary to plan more appropriate activities and cross-cultural training courses for expatriates working in Oman.

## **The Research Questions**

Concerning the purpose of this study, this research highlights four specific research questions as follows:

- 1) What are the most important adjustment issues and challenges facing expatriates working in international companies in the Sultanate of Oman?
- 2) What is the nature of cross-cultural interaction involving the Omani nationals working with expatriates in Oman? And how does it affect the collaboration of group and job performance via perceptions, relational understanding and communication?
- 3) What type of training and development is available to assist expatriates to adjust and to work successfully in Oman?
- 4) Do variables such as gender, age, previous experience and the number of years worked in Oman influence or affect their adjustment to the Omani culture? How?

## **Increasing knowledge of expatriate adjustment experiences**

As previously mentioned, the issues associated with expatriate adjustment have been studied in an array of different countries and cultures. Unfortunately, however, only a limited number of research studies have been carried out in Oman. According to Dabic et al. (2015) “Even after more than four decades of intensive research, the literature on expatriation is still nascent and requires higher order content. New contexts and organisations should be included in the research agenda, while an effort must be made in systematic approaches and in building higher order content in the international HRM field.” (p. 316). As such, the current study hopes to address this unjustified gap and contribute to the available literature in this area which specifically studies expatriates in Oman.

Despite the large expatriate population and the growing number of expatriates in the Arab Middle East in general, and in Oman in particular, research in this area is surprisingly limited and, where existent, has depended primarily on secondary data (Alon and McIntyre., 2008). In fact, according to Harrison and Michailova (2011) in the *Journal of International Business Studies*, the premium international business journal, between 1990 and 1999 less than 1 per cent of all articles published addressed a Muslim country in the Middle East. In short, the Arab world has been largely ignored by the international management literature.

Similarly, the literature on cross-cultural adjustment, despite being the subject of several studies over the years, for example in China (Kaye and Taylor, 1997; Selmer, 2001, 2002a), Japan (Black, 1988); (Peltokorpi, 2007), Thailand (Clegg and Gray, 2002), and Malaysia (Lazear, 2008), the Arab world has only been scarcely mentioned. There is, in fact, great competition between the Gulf countries, such as Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Oman, with regard to attracting expatriates from different countries to work in multinational companies dealing with millions of dollars in sectors such as gas, oil, and construction. Despite this, there have been very few publications examining the adjustment and cultural communication stumbling blocks of Western expatriates in Arabic cultures, particularly in terms of the “...widespread Western perception of the Middle East that tends to centre on stereotypes portrayed in the media of violence, instability, and oppression amidst untold oil riches.” (Harrison and Michailova, 2012, P. 625). Shay and Tracey (1997) also add that the argument concerning seeking a better understanding of expatriate adjustment and failure “...become more salient when we consider that the more attractive and growing regions of the world are in developing countries.” (p. 31).



Furthermore, although Oman shares several of the cultural characteristics of its Arab neighbours, along with rapid economic development, there are important contextual factors that make Oman unique in the Middle East. These factors are as much a product of geography and history as of culture and economic change. Common (2011) argues that in Oman, cultural change has occurred much more slowly, despite the rapid economic transformation since the discovery of oil. Oman still holds on to traditional values in the face of rapid modernization. There is sufficient cultural heterogeneity within its national boundaries to consider Oman differently from other Arab Gulf states, while writers tend to follow Hofstede (2001) and group the Middle East within Arab culture. In addition, with different cultures originating from East Africa or Baluchistan (a region that now straddles Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan) Omanis themselves are more ethnically diverse. Thus, it has been asserted that, given its historical expansion to East Africa and the Indian Ocean, Oman's cultural diversity is much greater than that of its Arab neighbours (Alon and McIntyre., 2008). These unique characteristics and the differences of management and culture in Oman could lead to novel results in the field of intercultural communication studies.

## **The context of the study**

This section summarises the applicability of the literature surveyed above to the Omani context. In doing so, it highlights the fact that existing research on the expatriate experience in adjusting to a new culture is insufficient with regards to immersion in Arabic contexts such as Oman, especially with regards to the perspectives of locals on cross-cultural adjustment.

### **Omanisation: A historical perspective**

Studying Oman history is important to understand circumstances. This is because each case study of expatriate adjustment is a complex entity located in its own unique situation (Black and Gregersen, 2007, p.12). Black and Gregersen claim that cultural and physical contexts are of interest, in addition to the social, economic, political, ethical, and aesthetic contexts. Black and Gregersen also claim that qualitative case studies call for the examination of experiences in these situations, and that the study of situations reveals experiential knowledge that is essential for understanding the 'quintain' (i.e., an object or phenomenon or condition to be studied).

Oman is an Islamic (Arab), country located in the South-Eastern corner of the Arabian Peninsula, with a total land area of 309,500 square kilometers, and is the third largest country in the Arabian Peninsula. It shares its borders with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen and overlooks the Arabian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea. As a gateway between the Indian Ocean, East Africa, and the Arabian Gulf, Oman's location has always been strategically important. The population of some 3.8 million consists of approximately two million Omanis plus 1.8 million expatriates. Oman has one of the most progressive and a stable political environments of all the countries in the Middle East, and has a well-established legal system and international banking standards and regulations that encourage investment and enterprise (Khan and Al-Moharby, 2007). According to Budhwar and Mellahi (2006a), in Oman the main ethnic groups are Arabs (74 per cent). Pakistanis (15 per cent), Baluchis (4 per cent), Persians (3 per cent), Indians (2 per cent) and Africans (2 per cent). Islam lies at the heart of the Omani culture, with Ibadhi Muslims (74 per cent) in the majority. The remaining 26 per cent comprises Sunni Muslims and Shiite Muslims (Al-Lamki, 1998).

On most Omanis' lives and practices Islam has a great impact. The law of Oman derived from Islamic Sharia's law. The Sharia's principles are contained in the Quran and through the prophet's sayings and practices, which latter are the second fundamental source of Islamic law after the Quran (Abdalati, 1993). The Omani Government follows Islamic law for civil cases and modern civil law for criminal cases (Budhwar and Mellahi, 2006a, Al-Hamadi et al., 2007). For example, there is an Islamic court of law known as the Sharia's Court and a Magistrates Court; the Sharia's Court deals with marriage and divorce, the issue of power of attorney, distribution of an estate in the absence of a will, writing wills and related matters. On the other hand, the Magistrates Court deals with violations of the laws, both felonies and misdemeanors (Budhwar and Mellahi, 2006a). The Sharia's Law does not interfere in government affairs however, when advice is needed the Government consults the Islamic laws and scholars (Naser, 1993).

According to Budhwar and Mellahi (2006a), along with both Islam and the tribe, the family in Oman occupies a central place in both individual and social life. After Islam, the tribe and the family are the second top authorities in formulating the culture of the country. "In Islam, the only recognized form of a family is that which comprises a lawfully wedded man and woman" (P.41). In Muslim families, kinship and the identification of every single relative in the family are extremely important. Inheritance, custody and marriage are all determined by

one's kinship. Because of the close ties between family members, shame and honor can be brought to the whole family by the conduct of one single member (Budhwar and Mellahi, 2006a).

Arabic is the official language and the mother tongue in Oman. English is the second official language (Al-Hamadi et al., 2007). Knowledge of another language or dialect only earns personal credit though, it is not deemed a criterion for judgement. English, in contrast, is widely demanded and entered as a criterion in job applications (Budhwar and Mellahi, 2006a).

For a considerably long time, Oman and other GCC countries have been living on cheaper migrant labor as well as on more qualified Western expatriate labor for many reasons, including a lack of qualified local employees and a dislike of blue collar, technical, tourist and marketing jobs by locals (Al-Lamki, 1998, Shaeffer, 1989, Eickelman, 1991). In contrast, expatriates have been willing to work longer hours, accept lower wages, and tolerate poorer working conditions as well as more physically demanding jobs. Consequently, in most GCC countries, over 60% of the labor force is foreign (Randeree, 2012). Several studies indicate that the education system is not providing skilled workers to meet the current requirements of the labour market in Oman (Al Kindi, 2007; Gonzalez et al., 2008). In addition, is the factor that the price of expatriate labour is generally considerably less than that of national labour. Sometimes the unemployment faced by locals in Oman is artificial in the sense that local people simply find it culturally difficult and unacceptable to relocate and work in cities far away from their families, except sometimes Muscat. Many Omanis do not want to leave family, community and in-groups to work in far-away places detached from their families, even if the consequence of not taking up such a job is unemployment. In addition, there are jobs that Omanis find culturally unacceptable, including blue-collar jobs, construction jobs, hotel jobs, menial jobs and others – most Omanis would choose unemployment over such roles.

## **Omanisation**

The government of Oman has recently began implementing a policy of localization of skills and jobs called Omanisation. While similar policies have been very successful in some GCC countries, it has had many setbacks and implications for cross-cultural communication and adjustment for Western expatriates in Oman. In fact, it is this factor more than any other that has influenced the expatriate experience in recent years (as will be seen later in this thesis).

This research provides a novel contribution to the existing body of research surveyed in this chapter by seeking to better understand the impact of Omanisation on expatriate adjustment. It also delves deeply into the following issues: Omanisation, education and culture, cultures of unity and respect for authority, 'Wasta' (meaning bribery or favours), and immigration and management contracts. It is often difficult to find adequate numbers of high-ability managers locally (Saunders et al., 2011). Thus, the key management positions in international companies deploy workers from the host country, as a basic strategy of human resource management (Suutari, 1998). According to Beamish and Inkpen (1998) a key role has been played by expatriate managers in representing and implementing corporate objectives in international business. However, the reasons given to explain this strategy have been under-explored in the context of the Arabic region and Oman in particular. In this connection, it is essential to understand why the challenges discussed here (i.e., a shortage of skilled committed labour) continue, while, at the same time, degrees and diplomas have been awarded to locals studying in Omani universities since 1986 and thousands of Omanis have been sent to overseas universities and colleges. Despite these educational developments, communication and multicultural challenges still exist in Omani firms to this day.

## **Structure of the thesis**

The objective of this study is to investigate the adjustment of Western expatriates and their intercultural communication, in addition to their training experience. The study is organized as per the following chapters:

Chapter 1 reviews the current literature which supports this study and focuses on cross-cultural adjustment, and existing theoretical frameworks used to explain this phenomenon. It also introduces the Omani context in more detail, along with current methods of cross-cultural training used in MNCs.

Chapter 2 describes the research methodology used in this study, including sampling techniques, as well as the instruments and procedures used to collect and analyse data.

Chapter 3 outlines the major quantitative findings from the research and demonstrates the results of the research proposition.

Chapter 4 outlines the major qualitative findings of the research.

Chapter 5 summarises the main findings and provides a discussion of the results and how they relate to the research questions identified in this chapter. This section also discusses the results of the factors identified and compares them with the results of other studies. This chapter also will provide a conclusion and detail the limitations of this study. This section also highlights the implications for Western expatriates and, more generally, for international human resource management and future research on the cross-cultural adjustment of both Western and non-Western expatriates.

## **Chapter 1: Literature Review**

*“The increasing connection between countries does not mean that cultural differences are disappearing or diminishing... When cultures come into contact, they may converge on some aspects, but their idiosyncrasies will likely amplify” (Javidan and House, 2001, p. 291).*

### **1.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, a comprehensive literature review has been presented. Creswell and Clark (2007) mentioned that the literature on a given topic “provides evidence for the purpose of the study and the underlying problem addressed by the inquiry” (P. 29). Therefore, this chapter aims to evaluate critically the related literature on which this research is based, to analysis and compare the findings of the previous studies, and to illustrate their relevance to the aims of the current study. The chapter is divided into three major sections. In the first section, various definitions of cultural distance are reviewed, the Hofstede (1980; 2001) cultural framework is also presented. The second section aims to review the existing expatriate adjustment literature by presenting the U-Carve theory of adjustment and the Black et al. (1991) framework of international adjustment. The third section of this chapter presents the literature review of cross-cultural training.

### **1.2 Cultural distance**

Most individuals perceive culture as an encompassing overview of how large communities of people live. However, the term culture is often used in describing the way in which smaller groups live (Saeid et al., 2012). Culture, according to (Ajmal, 2016), is the way large communities and the manner in which their lifestyles as well as their beliefs differ. It is important to study because it has been suggested time and again that where people live as well as what they believe has a great effect on every aspect of their lives even if they do not realise it.

Cultural distance and culture novelty are terms that are often synonymously used in the international business literature (see for example, Hofstede, 1980, Torbiörn, 1982,

Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985, Mendenhall et al., 1987, Black et al., 1991, Selmer, 2001). These terms denote cultural differences between Arabic countries and Western countries. In addition, there are also other theories which focus on domains of cultural adjustment. Cultural distance is defined as “the degree to which the cultural norms in one country are different from those in another country” (Jun and Gentry, 2005, P. 2). It is also defined as the degree to which national cultures and the culture of the host compare and contrast with each other (Riusala and Suutari, 2004), while Gudykunst and Hammer (1984) define cultural distance as the extent to which the culture of the home country differs from that of the host country. This notion of cultural distance is the central theoretical construct of this thesis. However, the closely-related notion of cultural novelty (see, Burns and Grove, 1993) will also be heavily drawn on in order to emphasise the experience an expatriate may have when encountering a new and unfamiliar culture. The greater the degree of novelty, the greater the degree of cultural distance. In addition, the notions of cultural novelty and cultural distance will be used in relation to expatriates considered in the orthodox sense, namely those who live and work in a foreign country for 12 months or longer. This excludes the experiences of short-term workers who might reside in a country for a number of months, and business travellers who may attend workshops or complete short-term assignments in a foreign country. The experience of the longer-term expatriate (i.e., 12 months or more) provides the best opportunity to witness the struggle to adjust, because those who move to another country for this period of time face challenges that other types of visitors do not (e.g., the adjustment of an accompanying spouse, see the discussion below).

According to Froese and Peltokorpi (2011), while cultural distance has received considerable attention in the literature on international business strategy and marketing, systematic research on multiple facets of cultural distance in the literature on expatriates is still scarce. It should be noted, however, that scholars have used cultural novelty (Black et al., 1991) and cultural toughness (Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985) to refer to cultural distance. In addition, scholars have examined how cultural differences between the host and home countries directly influence cross-cultural adjustment of the individual expatriate (e.g., Selmer, 2006, Selmer and Luring, 2010, Waxin, 2004). However, none of these studies examine the cultural novelty between Western and Arabic culture. Furthermore, they have studied the issue of cultural novelty from the perspective of one group only. Finally, most of the previous studies ignore the influence of cultural novelty from the perspective of the local people who play an important role in facilitating the adjustment of expatriates. This study will fill these gaps in the knowledge base.

In contrast, Peltokorpi (2008) asserts that in culturally similar countries, living and working is less stressful than in culturally distant countries because expatriates are likely to adjust more easily to countries that are similar to those where they have spent most of their lives. Peltokorpi asserts that cultural similarity also makes possible greater accuracy in expatriate ability to predict and explain host national behaviour. In contrast, the larger the cultural distance between the home and host countries, the more difficult it is for expatriates to identify with host country nationals and the less well-adjusted they are likely to be in their lives and work (Peltokorpi, 2008). Manev and Stevenson (2001) added that another difficulty expatriates may face is that many of the locals are not ready to understand and accommodate the cultures of the expatriate. Language factors are often another barrier that limits the interpersonal interactions between the expatriates and locals. Power distance, which usually is found in the less-developed countries, is also a hindrance for these expatriates (Hofstede, 1980). For example, Parker and McEvoy (1993) conducted a study on 169 expatriates in 12 different countries and they clearly stated that due to the cultural distances present in the country, expatriates suffered in both adjustment and interaction. Furthermore, Feldman and Thomas (1992) concluded that due to vast cultural differences expatriates have been reluctant to mingle and interact with locals in Saudi Arabia. In contrast, expatriates in other nations, such as Japan, were found to be more comfortable.

Naumann (1993) identifies cultural differences as one of the primary factors contributing to culture shock. They found general support for a relationship between the level of social difficulty and cultural distance. Waxin (2004) also found that culture of origin has a direct effect on interaction adjustment and a moderating effect on its antecedents. In the international adjustment literature, Van Oudenhoven and Hofstra (2006) and Brislin (1981) found that host culture novelty is negatively associated with expatriate adjustment. It also suggested that cultural similarity (i.e., short cultural distance) produces more accuracy in a sojourner's ability to predict and explain host behaviour (Waxin, 2004). As a result, expatriates consider the location, including cultural similarity and dissimilarity, and security, when making the decision to pursue global work experience (Anderson, 1994).

Although the traditional assumption in the literature on expatriate management is that the greater the cultural novelty of the host country, the more difficult it will be for the expatriate to adjust, Burns and Grove (1993), however, found in their study of Western business expatriates in China, that there was a negative relationship between cultural novelty and the three adjustment variables (general, interaction and work adjustment). They also found no



significant association between them. This can be due to cultural differences confronting expatriates to be as surface or deep-level differences. Characteristics of a host country's culture, such as food, housing conditions, or climate, which are easily observable to the expatriates, can be classified as surface-level differences. Other characteristics, such as beliefs and values, of the host country's culture are not immediately visible and must be indirectly inferred. These deep-level differences may only be visible to expatriates after extended interactions with residents from the host country. Hutcheson and Sofroniou (1999) also found a negative relationship between surface-level cultural differences and general adjustment, but no association with interaction adjustment and work adjustment. Similarly, there was only a negative relationship between one (self-transcendence) of the four deep-level cultural differences examined and two of the adjustment variables (interaction adjustment and work adjustment).

Due to the spread of international companies and the expansion of the use of expatriates, communication and language have become vital components of multinational companies' abilities to conduct their business adequately and play a role in global activities. Schaffer et al. (2014) assert that the absence of communication and language skills can make the daily passing of information difficult, which leads to miscommunication. In order to clarify the theory of the influence of cultural novelty on cross-cultural adjustment and interaction, and to highlight the most prominent cultural differences between Arabic and Western cultures, the following sections will present the influence of cultural novelty on communication in the workforce. It will then describe the great diversity present in the Omani organisations. Finally, it will discuss the cultural dimensions which differentiate Western expatriates from Omani Arabs.

### **1.2.1 Cultural differences in communication**

The cultural orientation of any society represents the complex interaction of values, attitudes, and forms of behaviour exhibited by its members. These members express culture and its normative qualities through the values they hold about life and the world around them. These values influence their attitudes about the nature of behaviour in any given situation considered most appropriate and effective (Adler and Gundersen, 2008).

While certain forms of communication are acceptable in one country, these may be considered as taboo in another. Therefore, while direct physical contact (for example, a kiss

on the cheek) may be normal in North America, they are not accepted in Asian cultures. Cultural values and situational variables determine the norms for communication. In a recent study in Thailand, Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) aimed to explore the effects of cultural values (high uncertainty, high power distance, low individualism, low masculinity), on the communication practices of Thai business professionals. The results show coherence between culture and communication. The results also show that Thai business professionals reflect their cultural values by communicating in reserved, respectful, deferential and intimate ways.

Cultural differences often lead to misunderstanding in communication amongst people from different cultural backgrounds. Schaffer et al. (2014), for instance, write: “No internationally operating firm, no manager, however experienced in international business, can, it seems, ever escape from the possibility of misjudgement, misperception and mistakes in handling the complexity of cultural relationships with customers, suppliers and stakeholders” (Schaffer et al., 2014, P. 104-105). The international management literature, as we shall see, represents cultural differences, and even culture itself in its plain and simple terms, as fiendish causes of corporate undoing (Rice, 2003).

For two main reasons, interaction with host nationals and participation in social life (socio-cultural adjustment) are also expected to develop effectiveness and commitment. First, in work and non-work contexts the more one interacts with others in the new culture, the more one learns about the appropriate behaviour in the host culture (through observation and feedback from others). By reducing conflicts, this will enhance interpersonal effectiveness, and hence increase job performance. Second, acquaintance with others in the new culture increases the understanding of and identification with the host nationals which, in turn, enhances commitment (Searle and Ward, 1990).

Hofstede (1983) attributed communicational misunderstanding to interference with the accurate sending and receiving of messages. Brein and David (1971) suggest that cultures differ regarding the kind of communication style that should be used in various situations. This is the reason international business people, expatriates, and others who often communicate with members of other cultures should aim to develop a flexible communication style repertoire that will enable them to meet the other person’s communicative expectations.

## 1.2.2 Approaches to the study of cultural distance

Scholars have developed several frameworks to categorize the cultures of the world (Darlington, 1996). Most models assume what values will hold for a particular culture of people. However, they cannot predict what everyone in a particular culture believes. Sometimes, within single cultures there is a greater variation than across cultures. According to Ghemawat and Reiche (2011), “While the cultural frameworks are certainly useful in comparing one culture with another, they only represent central tendencies at the level of the nation rather than a description of specific individuals within that nation,” (P. 5).

The next section will describe five cultural dimensions developed by Hall (1976) and Hofstede (1980). These frameworks provide concepts of culture which differentiate Western expatriates from Omani Arabs. This approach of cultural dimensions provides a general overview and an approximate understanding of other cultures, what to expect from expatriates and how to behave towards groups from other cultures.

## 1.2.3 High against low context cultures

High-context cultures and contrasting low-context cultures are terms presented by Hall (1976), Gulick (2010) claims Edward T. Hall used the concept of context to explain differences in communication styles among cultures. In a high-context culture, the surrounding situations, the external physical environment as well as non-verbal behaviours, all become significant to members in determining the meanings conveyed in a communication process. The covert clues within such contexts make a difference to members and are utilised in searching for real meaning which goes beyond verbal messages. In high-context cultures, members seem related to one another in a relatively long-lasting relationship. For the members to communicate effectively, high-context cultures demand that members be sensitive to the immediate environment through feelings. Gulick (2010) agrees that the patterns of communication in a high-context culture are associated conceptually with the learning mode of Concrete Experience. Arabic countries, such as Oman are classified as a high-context culture.

Briscoe and Schuler (2004) observed that meaning and context are inextricably bound up with each other and that it is necessary that people look at meaning and context together to understand communication. To conceptualize the difference between high and low context

communication using scale, Littrell and Salas (2005) identified high context communication to be indirect, ambiguous, maintaining harmony, reserved and understated. Examples of high-context cultures are most countries in Asia; the Middle East; Arabs; Africa; and South America. In contrast, low-context communication was identified as direct, precise, dramatic, open, and based on feelings or true intentions. Examples of countries with low-context cultures are the USA; Germany; Switzerland; and Scandinavian countries.

In low-context cultures, the surrounding situations, the external physical environment as well as non-verbal forms of behaviour are less significant in generating as well as interpreting meanings, while an explicit verbal message is crucial in a communication process (Goldstein and Pevehouse, 2010). Much information is conveyed using explicit codes. The pattern of communication in low-context culture focuses less on interpersonal relationships and more on analysis that is rationally detached. Goldstein and Pevehouse (2010) contend that traits of communication in low-context cultures are typically consonant with characteristics of the learning mode of Abstract Conceptualization. Therefore, people in the low-context culture can likely learn through logical thinking as well as analytical cognition. Britain is classified as a low-context culture (Goldstein and Pevehouse, 2010). In Thussu (2010) research, 35.5 % of Western expatriates' samples comprised the British with the other 40% coming from other Western European countries and the United States. It is therefore, quite clear that expatriates from Western countries will exhibit different forms of behaviour from the locals in Oman, since the two geographical divides are culturally distant (one is a high-culture context and the other is a low culture context).

According to Schaffer et al. (2014) the most common three values of Arabic culture and communication patterns are collectivism, hospitality, and honour. Mellahi and Budhwar (2010), in a study of communication patterns, divided cultures according to their methods of communicating, and categorised them as either high or low depending on how much meaning was found in the context versus the code. Individuals from high-context cultures tend to focus on building relationships, and their messages are communicated implicitly while those from a low-context culture tend to be task focussed and communicate their messages explicitly. Arabs are considered to rely noticeably on complex nonverbal communication, due to this high-context behaviour (Rice, 2003). Western culture is expected to be a low-context culture, tending to place more meaning on language code and very little meaning on context. As a result, communication in such a culture tends to be more specific, explicit and analytical. Thus, in order to realize the full meaning of the message, the listener

must understand the context. Accordingly, a ‘high-context’ person usually tends to talk around a point and assumes his listener will know what he means. As the details are in the context and not in the message, it is not necessary for the speaker to be specific (Hair et al., 2006b, Gregersen and Black, 1999). The great strength of considering cultural distance from this perspective is that perceived distance is likely to be experienced as greater when a person from a high-context culture attempts to communicate with a person from a low-context culture. However, we should not assume that the high-context versus low-context distinction exhausts all there is to say about cultural distance, as can be seen through the myriad of aspects of cultural difference under consideration in this section.

The following sections build on this understanding by focusing on the dimensions theory developed by Hofstede (1980), that has been used as a framework for cross-cultural communication. Hofstede (1980) asserted that, based on five different dimensions, cultures can be compared and classified. These dimensions can affect organisation practices, behaviour, and social practices such as marriages and religious ceremonies. These dimensions are: collectivism against individualism; low against high power distance; long-term orientation; masculinity against femininity; and uncertainty avoidance.

#### 1.2.4 Collectivist and individualist cultures

These distinctions define “the degree to which people in a country prefer to act as individuals rather than as members of groups” (Hofstede, 1994, P. 6). Thussu (2010) argues that the fundamental issue emphasised in collectivism versus individualism is the interdependence degree that societies maintain among their members. The concern is one of whether individuals’ self-image is defined as that of ‘I’ or ‘we’. Cooper (2011) argues that, in the individuality case, the rights of an individual are paramount in the society. In the individualistic cultures, the individuals appear to form large numbers of looser relationships. They are obligated to take care only of themselves and their direct families only (Cooper, 2011). Brislin (1993) found that in individualism cultures – such as the USA, the UK, and Slovenia – people tend to give their priority to their individual needs and concerns and interests over those of their group or organisation or extended family. On the other hand, in collectivist societies, such as Japan and Taiwan, the opposite is true. On the contrary, as Caligiuri (2013) examined culturally distant self-construal, he proposed the following two classifications: the interdependent-self and the independent-self. The interdependent-self has been viewed as representative of the self-construal of members of the Arab community,

whereas the independent-self has been exemplified as the self-construal of the numerous cultures of Western Europe (Caligiuri, 2013). Thomas and Peterson (2014) classified this kind of cultural dimension of the interdependent-self against the independent-self to be analogous to one of collectivism against individualism. Thomas and Peterson (2014) argue that Arabic or Eastern cultures, such as that of Oman, are holistic, relational, as well as field-dependent, whereas Western cultures such as that of the Western Europe and the USA are analytical as well as field-independent.

Arabic culture is most appropriately seen as a highly collectivist culture in which people act with respect to what interests the group as opposed to what interests themselves as individuals. In-group considerations influence hiring as well as promotions with close in-groups, for example, family members receiving preferential treatments. It has been argued that, in this case of collectivist culture, relationships with others are cooperative in the case of in-groups, but in the case of out-groups the relationships are cold and/or hostile. In Arab countries such as Oman, personal relationships are more important than tasks and organisations. In contemporary studies, Western expatriates such as managers from Western Europe and the USA, receive assignments from their respective countries which have individualistic cultures to Oman which has a highly collectivist Arabic culture. Most scholars, therefore, see the possibility of the Western expatriates being troubled by the characteristics of the collectivist culture of Oman.

### 1.2.5 The power distance

The second cultural dimension is power distance. Power distance is taken to be the degree of equality or inequality between individuals forming a country's society. Power distance is perceived as the extent to which members of an institution and organisation within a nation and who are less powerful expect as well as accept the unequal distribution of power. Power distance scores highly when power inequalities as well as wealth have been left to thrive within society (Rajasekar and Renand, 2013). Such societies are highly likely to have systems similar to the caste systems, which does not allow for upward mobility.

Arab countries such as Oman are ranked highly in the index of power distance. This means that Oman is one society which believes and accepts inequalities among its people (Al-Azri, 2013). Subordinate-superior relationship appears polarised and the country has no defence against the abuse of power by superiors. Members of such a society are influenced through

formal authority as well as sanctions (Al-Azri, 2013). They are generally optimistic about the capacity of people to lead as well as to take initiative. In this society, individuals are not allowed to have aspirations that go beyond their rank. On the contrary, Western countries are categorised as a culture of low-power distance. Within organisations where the power distance is low, hierarchy is established only for convenience, and superiors are usually within easy reach and managers depend on individual employees as well as teams' expertise to succeed (Al-Azri, 2013). Both managers and employees have expectations of being consulted and the information is shared frequently. In the same breath, communication is often informal, direct as well as participative. Most studies show that Western expatriates are assigned from countries with low-power distance to Oman where there is a high-power distance.

### 1.2.6 Uncertainty avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance is the third cultural dimension in Hofstede's framework. Some scholars argue that uncertainty avoidance is the extent to which members of a particular culture appear threatened by situations that are uncertain and/or unknown. Moreover, the index of uncertainty avoidance is defined as the tolerance level for uncertainty and ambiguity (Torstrick and Faier, 2009). A high score on the index of uncertainty avoidance shows that that country has low uncertainty tolerance as well as ambiguity. The country is, therefore, rule-oriented and institutes laws, regulations as well as controls so as to reduce uncertainty. Societies at the opposite end of the spectrum have less concerns regarding ambiguity as well as uncertainty and show higher tolerance for a variety in opinion (Torstrick and Faier, 2009). Societies that have a culture with weaker uncertainty avoidance appear less rule-oriented as well as more readily able to accept change. The strong uncertainty avoidance characteristics are seen in the culture of Arab countries like Oman. The major concern of such societies is controlling everything and eliminating or avoiding the unexpected. Consequently, such a society is not readily accepting of change and is also risk adverse.

Organisational members in the strong uncertainty avoidance nations have fear when encountering risks which are unfamiliar, deviant ideas and/or conflicts in the workplace. These members require taking time for actions until they have acquired enough knowledge as well as information aimed at reducing or resolving unclear as well as unstructured situations. On the contrary, organisational members in the weak uncertainty avoidance nations appear less uncomfortable when in unclear as well as unstructured circumstances

and are highly likely to undertake risks under unfamiliar situations while encountering very deviant and/or innovative ideas as well as forms of behaviour (El Hamamsy and Soliman, 2013). Oman is classified as a culture with a strong uncertainty-avoidance tendency while Western countries are classified as cultures with weak uncertainty-avoidance (Cooper, 2011).

### 1.2.7 Long-term and short-term orientation

Long-term orientation is another cultural dimension from which to distinguish between Arabic and Western cultures. Hofstede (2011) takes long-term orientation to be the degree to which society embraces a long-term orientation towards traditional and forward-thinking values. A high score on the long-term devotion index indicates that the given society subscribes to values of long-term commitment and that members respect tradition. This supports a strong work ethic in which long-term reward is expected as a result of current hard work. A low score on the index of long-term orientation indicates that such a nation is not reinforcing the long-term and traditional orientation concept. In societies with such cultures, changes occur more rapidly since long-term traditions and commitment do not impede change. According to El Hamamsy and Soliman (2013), comparisons of national culture suggest that Oman is a highly long-term oriented country where persistence as well as perseverance is considered normal. Western expatriates, in contrast, come from countries categorised as short-term cultures. Western businesses measure performance on the basis of short-term results, such as profits as well as loss statements issued on a quarterly basis. It also drives citizens to strive to get quick results in their workplaces. The literature shows that Western expatriates are assigned from cultures with an orientation that has a more short-term focus, versus that of Oman with a culture which is focused on the long term.

### 1.2.8 Masculinity against femininity

According to Hofstede (2011), "Masculinity stands for a society in which social gender roles are clearly distinct: Men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success; women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life." (P. 12). The assertive pole has been called 'masculine' and the modest, caring pole 'feminine'. The women in feminine countries have the same modest, caring values as the men; in the masculine countries they are somewhat assertive and competitive, but not as much as the men, so that these countries show a gap between men's values and women's



values (Hofstede, 2001). A High Masculinity ranking indicates the country experiences a high degree of gender differentiation. In these cultures, males dominate a significant portion of the society and power structure, with females being controlled by male domination. A Low Masculinity, in contrast, ranking indicates the country has a low level of differentiation and discrimination between genders. In these cultures, females are treated equally to males in all aspects of the society.

This section has shown that Arabic culture contrasts in significant ways with Western culture. Oman is a useful example of this from a Western perspective, Oman is perceived as very foreign. Companies in various cultures follow varying means of conducting businesses (Thomas and Peterson, 2014). There is rich evidence that differences in culture can be a significant barrier for business expatriates. According to Thomas and Peterson (2014), the more foreign, dissimilar and/or strange a situation is, the higher the negativity in attitudes of the expatriates towards the situations. The psychological-cultural barriers become associated with negative reactions towards other cultures, norms of other cultures appear to be less familiar and less normal as well as less optimal than the ones to which the expatriate is acculturated (Thomas and Peterson, 2014). Psychological-cultural barriers are known to be rather obvious in a case where the two cultures appear different with regard to language as well as other cultural norms (Caligiuri, 2013).

This framework of Hofstede has some limitations. One obvious weakness is that Hofstede's study was restricted to data from a single organisation (McSweeney, 2002, Verbeke, 2000). Moreover, his generalizing about national cultural characteristics is based on the analysis of a small subset of cultural members of IBM employees (McSweeney, 2002). However, this framework continues to be the most widely used approach and has received a great deal of attention in the literature as a means of comparing and classifying national cultures (Kirkman et al., 2006, Sivakumar and Nakata, 2001, Blodgett et al., 2008). Most previous research studies do not give adequate attention to linking cultural novelty and the factors which influence and impact the adjustment processes of expatriates, or highlight that this may vary depending on the culture that expatriates came from (not excluding the likelihood of the additional complexity created by consideration of in-culture differences, e.g., differences within the same culture). This study fills this gap in knowledge by studying the most important cultural novelty factors between the countries of the expatriates and the host country (Oman). It will then measure the impact of these factors on all adjustment types (cultural, interaction and work adjustment). While it would be a mistake to suggest that a

consideration of cultural novelty exhausts all there is to say about the expatriate experience, this construct (along with the associated construct of cultural distance) is useful in enabling identification of key factors that help us understand and categorise the sources of difficulty in the expatriate adjustment process.

The relevance of this discussion of cultural diversity is that it highlights the significant differences between Western and Omani cultures. This is essential background for the work to come, as it tells us something about the types of cultural novelty expatriates face, and the extent to which such differences are likely to constitute a disruption in the attempts of expatriates to adjust. The next sections of the literature review will focus on the second theoretical and conceptual background for this study, which is expatriate adaptation and adjustment.

### 1.2.9 More observable cultural differences between Western countries and Oman

A crucial point to note is that, in Oman and the rest of the Arab world, the religion of Islam is foundational for the operation of the government, the culture and the community (i.e., it is not a choice). Management practices in the Islamic and Arabic world are strongly influenced by religious beliefs and religious prescriptions. The key sources of Islamic prescriptions are the Quran, which is considered by Muslims to be the verbatim word of God (Allah), and the Sunnah-demonstrations and real-life examples of the Prophet Mohammed. It is worth pointing out that the study of the association between Islam and HRM is not only relevant for organisations operating in the majority of Islamic countries, but also in countries where Muslims are not in the majority. According to Grim and Hsu (2011) a total of 300 million Muslims, one-fifth of the world's Muslim population, live in countries where Islam is not the majority religion. For example, there are more Muslims in China than Syria, more Muslims in Russia than Jordan and Libya combined, while India has the third-largest population of Muslims worldwide. In these countries, organisational guidance on how to accommodate the religious practices of employees is required.

Accordingly, Islam is influential in most aspects of Muslims life. For instance, about 50% of women graduates remain at home after graduation as some families regard female employment as anti-Islamic. Some girls refuse government or company scholarships to study outside the country, for fear of exceeding the age of twenty-six whilst outside the country.

After this age, it is almost impossible to find a spouse due to a culture in which bachelors will not marry a girl above the age of twenty-six. Foreigners are not allowed to marry Omani girls or women as a rule, but Oman men can marry foreigners.

Furthermore, naming and shaming wrongdoers in public or the media is seen as anti-Islamic, as is shouting in public. Furthermore, the dress code calls for clothes that cover shoulders fully, with no sleeveless dressings, no small shorts in public, no mini-skirts, and a preference for trousers or long skirts that go beyond the knees. Furthermore, women must cover the entirety of their bodies except for their face and hands (Abu-Odeh, 1991). There is also a strict separation of the sexes.

In addition to such customs, there are notable economic differences. Due to Islamic teaching, employees are reasonably honest, and pilferage and theft is very low. Crime is also very low. This reduces the costs of operations, increases profits and competitiveness and business confidence. It is very difficult if not impossible to evict an Oman citizen, even if he or she fails to pay rent as this is considered anti-Islamic and cruel (thus, if your industry is real estate then you need to take note). Usury and receiving or charging interest is considered abominable or sinful ('haram' in Arabic). Most Omani citizens and Arabs in the oil rich GCC do not want to perform menial jobs (such as that of house girl, gardener, cook, sweeper, construction labourer). Furthermore, Omani Government policy, which is in line with Islamic teaching, does not allow profiteering; companies are required to have profit margins up to a maximum of 20%. This may shock some Western expatriates who have worked in 3<sup>rd</sup> world countries where, due to inflation, profits may be up to 50-100%. This has resulted in consumer prices remaining very stable in Oman in the long run.

The experience of expatriates cannot be isolated from the local culture of the host county. In the same way, according to Bhawuk and Brislin (2000), Western expatriates sometimes comment that the capacity of their non-Western colleagues to change their behaviour, language and values according to pragmatic needs was both unexpected and disconcerting. Similarly, non-Western expatriates often became frustrated and commented that Western expatriates were inflexible, intolerant and unwilling to adjust to local conditions. Cultural ambiguity is inimical to economic co-cooperation and productivity, leading to a loss of trust on both sides. In order to improve workplace performance, non-Westerners need to better understand and appreciate why Westerners appear to be relatively unwilling to adapt, as has been suggested by the literature. Westerners need, on the other hand, to understand and

accept that non-Westerners are adept at assuming multiple identities - which may seem disconcerting but does not reflect untrustworthiness. Therefore, the authors suggest that cross-cultural training should go well beyond behavioural issues, should include the study of underlying values, and must be undertaken across all cultural groups present in the workplace (Bhawuk and Brislin, 2000).

Most analysts argue that there are fundamental differences in the way of life in the West and the way of life in East. Some are social while others are strictly for business (Joshnloo, 2014). Therefore, Western expatriates should be aware, nonetheless, of Arabic culture as well as ways of doing business in the environment of Arabian business. They add that in Oman, different from anywhere else, business is conducted based on personal relationships as well as mutual trust. Therefore, it is important to build on these. Although this perspective is changing fast and is not applicable to all large firms, most companies are usually run by families, and the ultimate decision-maker is the family head. Even in instances when the head of the family may not be the chief decision-maker, it is important to clearly identify the decision maker. However, initial meetings are often held at lower levels (Wilmsen, 2014). This may be shocking to an expatriate who has been dealing with high-level board meetings where businesses are, for the most part, impersonal, and must then deal with family members at such high levels. Some observers view the official weekend as another form of culture shock. This occurs because the official weekend is on Friday and Saturday. This is because the dominant culture in Arab countries like Oman is Islam and Muslims attend mosques on Friday (Walker and Butler, 2010). This is the reason some private companies close only on Friday and Saturday (Daher and Maffi, 2014).

According to many analysts of culture, Western countries are assumedly Christian countries, which means church attendance occurs on Saturdays and Sundays. This implies that the official weekends that Western expatriates are used to are on Saturdays and Sundays; at least they are the days that the dominant cultures in Western countries recognise. Businesses run for fairly long hours, the least being eight. However, there are significant hour breaks ranging from three to four hours, which many people attribute to worship. During Ramadan, working hours are often shortened by three hours, with most work being accomplished in the early morning hours or very late in the evening after fasting is broken at sunset (Daher and Maffi, 2014). This is a major deviation from the context of Western culture, bearing in mind that most Western expatriates are either Christians or secular (Droeber, 2013). Therefore, the

presence of numerous breaks for religious worship in Oman requires that expatriates from the West adjust to the new demands of the business environment.

Most literature states that the Omani people speak the Arabic language. Though it is the officially-spoken language, (Droeber, 2013) adds that English is also widely utilised in doing business transactions in Oman, such as in printing business cards and brochures. According to Benesh (2008), good manners as well as courtesy are attributes that are highly prized. It is important to arrive always on time during any meeting. However, an expatriate should be aware that punctuality has never been perceived as a virtue in Oman. People are commonly left to wait before and/or during business meetings. This is often surprising to Western expatriates since to them time means money. However, no matter how surprising this time-wasting may be, expatriates need to stay patient and not take the delays as indicating a lack of respect.

Much of the literature (Minces, 1982, Omair, 2009) has also pointed that the conservative dress code is problematic, especially for females. The men have to wear suits and women should put on business clothes which cover their arms as well as their legs. Recently, for example, there has been increased tension in most Arab nations surrounding expatriates with regard to their habits of dressing and how offensive this dress code has been to local Omanis. This problem is not unique to expatriates living in one particular Arab country such as Oman. All Arab countries require foreigners to dress decently during business meetings. The only problem expatriates have is that what they have been used to wearing is now considered indecent in this new environment. It has been argued that, most of the time, Western women expatriates find themselves confronted by older women used to Arab culture and told off for not respecting the cultural guidelines of the land.

According to some, there are also some cultural differences that affect the non-working lives of expatriates. El Hamamsy and Soliman (2013) add that it is due to religion that the East and the West are seen to be culturally distant. These impact upon expatriates who experience the guest-host relationship. The encounter types that are identified between the host and the guest are threefold. They include the expatriate offering services from the host, being together at work with the locals, as well as being face-to-face so as to be able to exchange information and/or ideas (El Hamamsy and Soliman, 2013).

According to Leung et al. (2009), the larger the gap in economic, cultural and social factors between expatriates and locals, the greater the likelihood that relationships will be unequal

and unbalanced. The difficulty in the relationship between the host and the expatriate often arises from a lack of knowledge and understanding, as well as from a lack of sensitivity of expatriates towards local culture as well as customs. Some scholars argue that conflicts between Arabic culture and the culture of Western expatriates occur at an interpersonal as well as a structural level. Conflicts are mostly generated from cultural distance which results in differences during interaction as well as misunderstandings during interpretation (Torstrick and Faier, 2009). For example, marriage as well as co-habitation in Arab countries - Oman included, is a point of difficulty for Western expatriates. They point out that in Oman, it is forbidden for men and women who are not legally married to cohabit. This has been a major and persistent problem for many unmarried expatriate 'couples' from the West who are working in Oman. However, its implementation and enforcement has always lacked vigour. Daher and Maffi (2014) note that most unwed couples give the impression they are married through referring to each other as husband or wife and by wearing 'wedding' rings. It is a challenge to expatriates because in the Western culture, a man and a woman can live together without attracting public attention even before they legalise their marriage. Droeber (2013) notes that the practice of cohabiting while not married is treated very seriously, and is punishable by imprisonment, deportation or both.

Another difference is that, in the Arabic East, taking pictures of government houses or personnel and/or Omanis (specifically women) is forbidden. Male Western expatriates also need to be careful to avoid staring at or being accompanied by local females. Western expatriates come to Oman with their own customs and habits and are rarely aware of the cultural shock that they cause to Oman residents. El Hamamsy and Soliman (2013) note that rules which are acceptable in the West and among Western expatriates may not necessarily be accepted in Arabic cultures where expatriates are internationally assigned. This often leads to misunderstandings as well as misinterpretation of laws in the other culture (El Hamamsy and Soliman (2013). In most cases, this creates difficulties in how expatriates interact with their hosts, and can lead to confusion as well as generating tension and conflict (El Hamamsy and Soliman, 2013).

Furthermore, because Islam is the official religion, it is forbidden to speak ill of it or distribute materials against Islam while working in Oman. According to Walker and Butler (2010), there are many other cultural differences in cultures between Oman and the West that can breed conflict. For example, practising any forms of other religions apart from Islam in and around public areas is forbidden (Walker and Butler, 2010). During Ramadan's holy

month, eating in public is forbidden from sunrise until sunset. Therefore, if Western expatriates are to dine, they must do so in private. Problems can also arise from criticising any of the ruling families of the emirates.

In Oman, one can be imprisoned for homosexuality, extra-marital affairs, intoxication, as well as kissing sexually in a public place. It has been argued that dancing in public is also prohibited, not to mention the strict regulations on dressing in various places. Abusive language as well as indecent dressing may result in trouble with the authorities. Western expatriates need to be aware that alcohol can be consumed only in designated areas, therefore, except in such areas, it is prohibited to be intoxicated (and Kirk, 2014). Serious misconduct often leads to a death penalty conviction.

Most literature indicates that there are variations in the level of knowledge that Western expatriates have with regard to cultural norms in Oman. However, as many scholars put it, Western expatriates need more knowledge of the cultural norms of Oman, given their long-standing relationship with the Middle East. Scholars also argue that the role of women in Oman often affects the experience of Western women expatriates. The role played by women in Arabic and Islamic countries has been in the Western world's news for decades (Wilmsen, 2014). Robinson (2016) argues that even though some Arab countries are more liberal with regards to women's clothing, the roles that local women perform are still very traditional. Women are capable of gaining ministerial positions as well as being promoted in hierarchical organisations (Syed et al., 2014). However, women are nonetheless constantly supervised, and actions from them are approved by the 'mahram' (male guardians) before they are implemented. In most cases, the mahram is a husband (for married women) or any family member in the case of unmarried women (Robinson, 2016). This is because most businesses are run by families in the Arab world. Women in Oman have consistently complained that their work-related achievements are generally not as visible as the achievements of males, and usually occur in back-office positions (Syed et al., 2014).

Offering a contradictory viewpoint, Torstrick and Faier (2009) compare opportunities that Western and Arabic women have had in business while concentrating on Oman. These researchers conclude that Western as well as Arabic women hold positive views of their careers as well as of their lives in Arabic countries. In addition, these authors found that success usually relied upon the dedication of the person rather than their gender. However, these scholars noted that Western women and Emiratis appeared to have different desires for

the future, and attributed this to cultural differences as well as subsequent values. An additional point made by Torstrick and Faier (2009) is that the inequalities in salaries paid to men versus women are also a matter of comparison among locals and expatriates alike (Torstrick and Faier, 2009). Torstrick and Faier (2009) suggest that, although women of the two cultures tend to be content with what they get in terms of pay, more steps are needed in future to enable balance between genders and nationalities as well as different sectors of industry. Torstrick and Faier (2009) add that Oman has fewer women expatriates compared to most Western countries, as has been witnessed in the number that come to Oman on a yearly basis. This is because Oman is somewhat traditional with respect to Arabic values.

Given the influence of cultural distance on adjustment, this study has examined the numerous aspects which relate to the cultural differences between Oman and the countries of expatriates. The purpose of this was to identify the cultural differences involved, in order to link them to the main obstacles experienced by expatriates when going through the adjustment process. In addition, it is hoped that the information obtained can also be used to provide organisations with in-depth knowledge about these cultural differences which, in turn, will assist them during the expatriate selection process and enable them to make informed choices with regards to those employees who, in theory, could more easily adjust to Omani culture.

### **1.3 Expatriate adjustment**

The concept of socio-cultural adjustment is important in the literature on international adjustment (Cavusgil et al., 2011). International assignment research highlights socio-cultural adjustment as a vital construct which underlies the rewards as well as costs of the expatriate experiences to the individual, their families as well as to their firms (Harzing and Pinnington, 2015). Socio-cultural adjustment is the ability to fit in effectively and to interact with members of the host culture (Harzing and Pinnington, 2015). Socio-cultural adjustment is associated with the variables which promote as well as facilitate the learning of culture and acquisition of the social skills in the host culture (Bidanda et al., 2014). The notion of socio-cultural adjustment notion has been based on the theory of cultural learning and emphasises social behaviours as well as practical social skills that underlie attitudinal factors (Bidanda et al., 2014). The theories of the adjustment process in the form of the U-curve model and the four adjustment phases, necessary to understanding the challenges of cultural



adjustment are introduced in this section. Following this, the different dimensions of the adjustment processes are covered.

Harzing and Pinnington (2015) suggest that international assignments cause alterations in the daily work the individual carries out and the corporate culture wherein responsibilities are executed (compared to what they experience in their home culture). Having to deal with norms that are unfamiliar and which are related to general culture, conditions of living, weather, foods, health care and daily customs as well as political systems can be difficult. Scholars estimate that twenty to forty per cent of all expatriates who have been sent on foreign assignments have returned home prematurely (Vance and Paik, 2015).

In addition to the risk of premature return, stereotypes and generalisation may also influence the adjustment of expatriates in a new culture. Stereotypes are defined as “cognitive structures that contain the perceiver’s knowledge, beliefs, and expectations about a human group” (Samovar et al., 1981, P. 133). The allegation of stereotyping usually is not far behind, when the topic of cultural difference is discussed. Stereotypes occur when we act as if all members of a culture or group share the same characteristics. To any assumed indicator of group membership, such as race, religion, ethnicity, age, or gender, as well as national culture, stereotypes can be attached. There are both positive and negative stereotypes. Positive stereotyping occurs when people respect the characteristics that are assumedly shared by members of the group, while in the more likely case the negative stereotype appeared if these characteristics are disrespected. For several obvious reasons stereotypes of both kinds are problematic in intercultural communication. The stereotype is usually only partially correct, whether it is positive or negative. Additionally, when we observe others in selective ways that confirm our prejudice, stereotypes may become self-fulfilling prophecies (Hanson et al., 2005).

Brislin (1981) claims that, due to stereotyping, expatriates categorize all host nationals on the basis of their nationality. The expatriate who is stereotyping may have a set of characteristics that they attribute to all host nationals (for example, ‘British people are very polite’ or ‘all Italians are poor at time management’, p.360). Accordingly, stereotyping can lead to over-generalizations about host nationals and inappropriate assessment of an individual’s traits. Stereotypes can also produce expectations which, if untrue, may lead to inaccurate evaluations of situations and to the development of an inappropriate, ineffective, and frequently harmful guide to reality, although it may be useful for processing information

in a situation of uncertainty. The expatriate's reality may run counter to the reality of a given situation once the expatriate moves to the host country, thus producing unmet expectations, because cultural stereotypes are often formed on the basis of little (e.g. a short trip to a country) or misleading (e.g. TV) information. Therefore, the cross-cultural adjustment of expatriates may potentially be restricted by this mismatch between their expectations and reality. The next section summarises the U-curve theory of adjustment model.

### 1.3.1 U-Curve theory of Adjustment and culture shock

The "U-Curve Theory" of adjustment (UCT), which is based on the work of Lysgaand (1955), has been one of the most popular and consistently used models of the factors that influence cross-cultural adjustment. The motivation for the focus on the U-Curve theory is its deployment in Black et al.'s (1991) influential framework for cultural adjustment. The theory adequately explains the multi-stage, temporal process undergone by the expatriate, enabling consideration of the various factors influencing adjustment. The concept of cultural shock plays a significant role in the development of ideology, such that that greater cultural distance is more likely to result in a sojourner developing and experiencing cultural shock. This concept has stuck in the cross-culture training field since then, and, despite the scarcity of information in the concept of culture shock measure, there have been major developments in recent years. Among them is the establishment of a new framework by Triandis (1994) as a way to provide more insight and conceptual ground. Among the factors identified by Triandis as triggers to cultural shock by sojourners are:

- A history of conflict between the cultures in question;
- Large cultural distance between the two cultures;
- A lack of knowledge of each other's cultures;
- Cases where second-language proficiency of the sojourner or the host is weak.

The factors listed above lead to the concerned individuals perceiving each other as dissimilar, leading to culture shock (May, 2011).

The U-curve model of adjustment describes four stages that signify transformation stages (see Figure 1). It begins with the 'honeymoon', stage lasting from a few days to 6 months depending on how soon real everyday coping and communication with the new culture must begin. This stage has been characterized by fascination, elation, and optimism. Most

individuals are fascinated by the new environment during the first few weeks. The second stage is the most influential stage of culture shock. If individuals overcome stage 2, they will stay; if not, they will leave before they reach the stage of nervous breakdown. Stage 2 has been characterized by hostile and emotionally stereotyped attitudes toward the host country and increased association with fellow expatriates. An individual also experiences frustration and lacks sufficient understanding of the host nation and its people (Adler and Gundersen, 2008, Chew, 2004). Some expatriates never leave the culture shock phase and maintain a sense of antagonism towards host nationals during the time of the assignment.

The recovery stage is the third. The expatriate in this stage begins to assimilate into the new cultural environment if he/she succeeds in gaining knowledge of the language and learns to travel independently. An individual also starts to appreciate and reflect on the norms and values of the host culture (Moran et al., 2011). Finally, the fourth stage occurs when adjustment is as complete as possible, anxiety is largely gone, and new customs of the country are accepted and enjoyed. By completing the adjustment, the expat not only accepts the food, drinks, habits, and customs of the host country, but in fact begins to enjoy them (Myers, 2013).

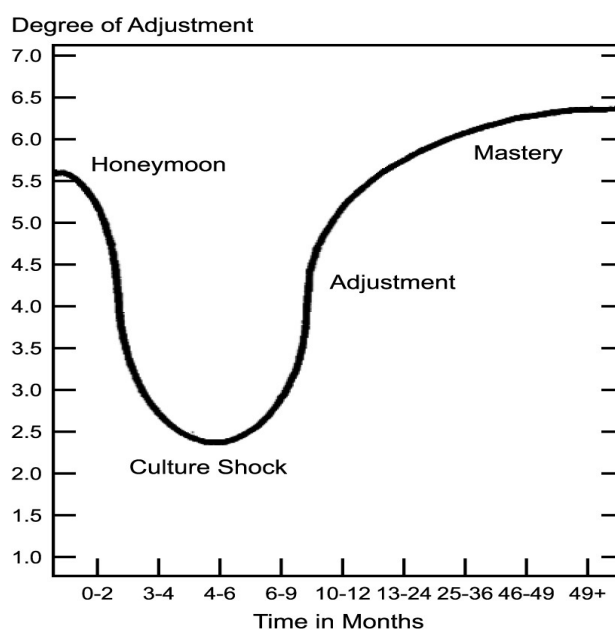


Figure 1 The U-Curve theory of cross-cultural adjustment

Source: J. Stewart Black, Dartmouth College and Mark Mendenhall, 'The U-Curve adjustment hypothesis revisited: A review and theoretical framework', *Journal of International Business Studies*, Second Quarter 1991, 22(2), pp.227.

The U-Curve was derived based on the degree of adjustment of expatriate employees against the time taken to adjust (Selmer, 1999b). The curve shows the change over time in the degree of adjustment to an unfamiliar environment. The U-Curve of adjustment represents the early feelings of optimism and euphoria in the host culture, the subsequent dip or trough in the level of adjustment, followed by a gradual recovery to higher adjustment levels.

The relationship between the degrees of adjustment to time taken for the adjustment, as depicted in the U-Curve, has received both positive and negative responses. While the positive responses support the dependence of an expatriate employee on time to adjust to cultural shock while undergoing the four phases of adjustment, negative responses were mostly neutral (Black and Gregersen, 1991b). However, according to Hofstede (2001) the U-Curve adjustment pattern has been criticized on the grounds that, whereas longitudinal studies are required to demonstrate its plausibility, cross-sectional data is the only form of data currently available to support these assertions. Furthermore, it also could be argued that the previous experience of the expatriates and cultural novelty between his or her culture and the host culture could influence the stages of U-Curve adjustment.

A further concern relates not the temporal aspect of the U-Curve theory, but rather the individual qualitative description provided for each of the stages. The argument could be made that the individual stages are not adequately described in the model, owing to a lack of due consideration being given to the experience of non-Western expatriates working in foreign countries, as well as the lack of focus on the perceptions of those from the host culture. The U-Curve theory could be improved through incorporation of the perspective of host nationals, and the unique perspectives of those expatriates from non-Western countries.

Fourteen types of cultural shocks have been identified as experienced by expatriates when they visit a foreign country for the first time (Saunders et al., 2011). The study interviewed both Omani nationals and expatriates currently working in the Sultanate of Oman. These categories include: communication, dress, ethics, individualism/collectivism, food, language, structure, perception, power distance, religion, rules, time orientation, traditions and weather. The findings showed that both Omanis and expatriates who travel abroad encountered cultural shock. The study also concluded that most respondents were affected by religious and traditional issues, while factors such as individualism vs. collectivism, power distance, rules and weather patterns did not affect them much. Unfortunately, the

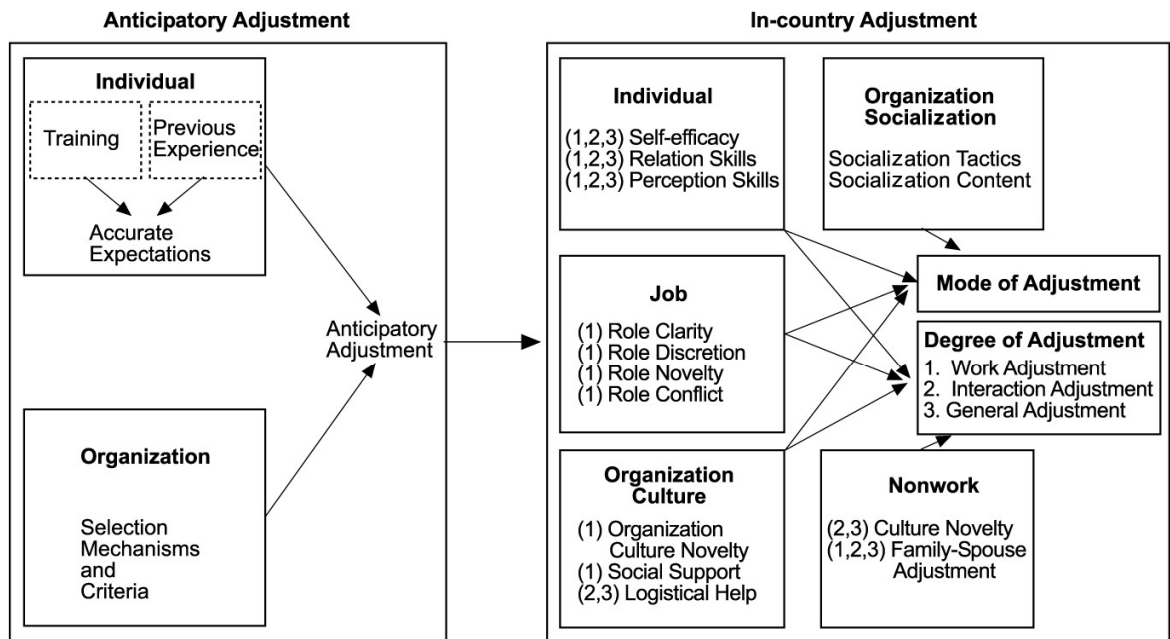
study only focused on identifying the factors that cause cultural shock, rather than identifying factors that might reduce cultural shock.

### 1.3.2 The dimensions and process of expatriate adjustment

Black (1988) confirms that expatriate adjustment to a cross-cultural environment may be perceived as involving three basic dimensions: degree, mode, and facet. Adjustment degree can be perceived as a subjective as well as an objective concept. Subjectively, it can describe the degree of comfort expatriates feel in new roles and the extent to which they feel they have adjusted to the requirements of the role (Li, 2016). Objectively, however, it can describe the extent to which expatriates have mastered the requirements of the role and are capable of demonstrating that adjustment through their performances (Peterson and Soendergaard, 2008). Adjustment mode refers to the way in which an expatriate adjusts to his new role. In other words, expatriates are capable of adjusting through alteration of their new role so as to match them better, or through altering their attitudes as well as forms of behaviour so that they can match role expectations better or alter both in order to compromise (Black, 1988).

In the 1980s, research by Black (1988) and Black and Stephens (1989) resulted in the development of a model that describes the cross-cultural adjustment process for expatriates. This model suggested international adjustment has at least three types of adjustment, including: (1) adjustment to work; (2) adjustment to interacting with host nationals; and (3) adjustment to the general environment. These types of adjustment could in turn be affected by five basic components (Black et al., 1991). The five components involve pre-departure training, previous overseas experience, organisational selection mechanisms, individual skills and non-work factors (see Figure 2). The first three dimensions refer to issues that occur before expatriates leave their home countries as well as the other issues that become relevant after the expatriates arrive at their host country and begin their overseas assignments.

### Framework of International Adjustment\*



**Note:** \*Numbers in parentheses indicate the numbered facet(s) of adjustment to which the specific variable is expected to relate

**Source:** Black, Mendenhall & Oddou (1991)

Figure 2 Framework of international adjustment

As represented in the theoretical framework for international adjustment, coverage is made with respect to the socio-cultural aspects of adjustment and has been supported by a series of empirical studies (Tylor and Bogdan, 1998). For example, (Harrison and Shaffer, 2005) in their examination have strongly supported the framework developed by Black et al. (1991). The results indicate that the host country's language ability is useful in these areas as it allows expatriates to adjust to overseas living conditions as well as to engage in rewarding interpersonal exchanges with host country nationals. Native language competence was more useful for non-native speakers of English going to English-speaking Anglo-Saxon countries than for English-speaking expatriates going to non-English speaking countries.

Non-work-related variables experienced, such as culture novelty and spouse adjustment have been found to be extremely potent in predicting overseas adjustment (Black et al., 1991). This provides important support for findings indicating that expatriates taking on foreign assignments assume that the new cultural experience will be exhilarating, educational, and uplifting. The results also support the long-suggested central role of family in the psychological mechanisms of internal work role transitions and point perhaps to a stronger role for family in the domestic turnover literature. It showcases the effects of poor expatriate adjustment on long-presumed but under-documented strains of withdrawal

decisions and performance, even after major influences such as job satisfaction have been accounted for. However, the results indicate that some of the most obvious inputs, such as previous overseas experience and host country language ability, have the least significant effects.

There are also anticipatory factors identified as affecting adjustment (Samovar et al., 1981). For instance, language ability was significantly and positively related to interaction but not to general or work adjustment. Previous overseas experience was positively and significantly related to both work and interaction but not to general adjustment. For individual factors, self-efficacy was positively related to both work and interaction adjustments; relational skills were positively related to all three facets of adjustment. Education levels were found to be negatively related to interaction adjustments but positively related to general adjustment and work adjustment.

In the context of the workplace, role clarity and role discretion were positively related to all three facets of adjustment, while role conflict was negatively related to work and interaction but not to general adjustment (Samovar et al., 1981). Furthermore, job level was negatively related to general and work adjustment but positively related to interaction adjustment; organisational tenure was positively related to work and interaction but not to general adjustment; months on assignment and outcome expectancy were positively related to all three facets of adjustment; and cross-cultural training was negatively related to all three facets of adjustment. With regard to organisational factors, co-worker support was positively related to all three facets of adjustment while logistical support was positively related to general and interaction but not to work adjustment. Finally, culture novelty was negatively related to all three facets of adjustment in context of non-work factors, while spouse adjustment was positively related to all three facets of adjustment.

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005), organisational support was perceived positively and associated with general adjustment, while cross-cultural training such as stress anticipation training, coping strategy, etc., had a low and negative relationship with general adjustment, apparently due to the poor quality of cross-cultural training. Culture-general prior experience moderated the relationship between tenure (i.e., length of time in the current assignment) and work adjustment, whereas prior experience with a similar culture moderated the relationship between tenure and general adjustment.

One of the main purposes of this study is to examine the influence of cultural novelty, previous experience, and Arabic language ability factors in the Black et al. (1991) framework on the social, interaction, and work adjustment. This is a much-needed and important study for several reasons. First, although this study seems to ask a question that is almost too obvious to pose—that is, does cultural novelty, previous experience, and Arabic language ability enhance the ability of expatriates to adjust to the work and social environment, especially in a very “foreign” land such as Oman?, the answer is not really known through previous research. No other study has examined the impact of the above-named factors with regard to Western and non-Western expatriate adjustment in Oman. Overall, the impact of cultural novelty, previous experience, and Arabic language ability in international business is an under-researched topic. In addition, the aforementioned evidence that lower degrees of cultural novelty can, at times, exacerbate the difficulties associated with the adjustment process deserves more detailed exploration. The experiences of non-Western expatriates in Oman provides useful analytical opportunities in this context. The next section will provide more detail about factors assumed to influence adjustment in the Black et al. (1991) framework.

It is worth noting from the outset, that, while the framework of Black et al. will be used as an aid in conceptualising the expatriate adjustment process, this thesis does not attempt to refute or displace it. Rather, it aims to suggest that the model could be refined. This will be achieved through a sensitive consideration of how the perception host nationals have of expatriates and the experience of both Western and non-Western expatriates feed into this process. That is, the thesis will deploy the factors described by Black et al. (in particular, the U-Curve theory of adjustment described in the previous section) toward an analysis of expatriate adjustment, in order to better understand the need for cross-cultural training in the context of Arabic countries such as Oman.

### 1.3.3 Factors affecting cross-cultural adjustment

The notion of anticipatory adjustment has been used to understand international adjustment in the theoretical framework of Black et al. (1991). This framework will feature significantly in the work to come and so is outlined here in some detail. Anticipatory adjustment revolves around anticipating the stress level of the employee prior to their move to the foreign country. It is convincingly argued that the actual in-country adjustment in the new international setting will be easier and quicker if appropriate anticipatory adjustments can be made. The



new unfamiliar international setting upsets old routines and creates psychological uncertainty. Individuals generally work to reduce uncertainty in the new setting. This is applied in cases where new forms of behaviour might be required or expected, as well as old forms of behaviour that may be considered unacceptable or inappropriate. Once they have arrived in the host country, expatriates start to reduce the level of uncertainty present and discover what forms of behaviour and attitudes are appropriate or inappropriate. This either inhibits or facilitates adjustment, according to the degree to which various factors either increase or decrease uncertainty (Selmer, 2002b).

The key to effective anticipatory adjustment and actual adjustment is the accuracy of the expectations held by individuals (Black et al., 1991). The more accurate the expectations expatriates form, the more uncertainty will be reduced and the better the anticipated adjustment will be. The better the anticipated adjustment, the fewer surprises and negative affective reactions (i.e., culture shock) individuals will experience, the more appropriate forms of behaviour and attitudes they will display, and the smoother and quicker they will adjust to the host country.

When expatriate employees are selected, based on their expectations, expatriates should be informed of the difficulties associated with their potential assignment (Yavas, 2001). Once they have been selected for an overseas assignment, expatriates should be grouped into categories based on their level of expectations relative to their assignments. Different training and expectation-lowering programs should be provided for each group of expatriates based upon their level of expectation. Upon each assignment, the actual level of culture shock and alienation should be determined for each expatriate for the macro as well as the organisation culture. Management will need to follow up with expatriates in order to ensure that the recommended level of expectation lowering has occurred, following an expectation lowering evaluation.

### 1.3.3.1 Individual and personal factors

Individual factors have been found to influence cross-cultural adjustment, e.g., tolerance for ambiguity or stress and non-ethnocentrism (Oberg, 2006). The decision-making ability of an expatriate is dependent on individual and personal factors such as social self-efficacy, previous experience, cross-cultural motivation, language efficacy, etc. These are briefly summarised below

- **Social self-efficacy**

Self-efficacy is the level of confidence individuals have in their ability to accomplish tasks (Ward and Kennedy, 1993). Human accomplishment and personal well-being is enhanced in several ways by a strong sense of self-efficacy (Samovar et al., 1981). People with high assurance in their capabilities approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than as threats to be avoided. This efficacious outlook assists them to set challenging goals and maintain a strong commitment to those challenges. This allows them to improve and maintain their efforts in the face of failure. In contrast, people who doubt their capabilities view difficult tasks as personal threats they must try to avoid (Samovar et al., 1981). They have low aspirations and weak commitment to the aims they choose to achieve, and this often leads to sub-optimal outcomes.

Self-efficacy has been found to be directly related to the general environment adjustment, interaction adjustment, and work adjustment (Ward et al., 2001, Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). Self-efficacy can have a significant, positive correlation with adjustment. On each of the three adjustment factors of general, interaction and work adjustment, expatriates with high general self-efficacy indicated they were significantly better adjusted than those with low general self-efficacy. On the other end, a significant relationship between self-efficiency and work-related performance was established by May (2011) while Black et al. (1991) concluded that self-efficacy did not facilitate cultural adjustment. This is perhaps because of its primary conceptualization and measurement as task-related.

- **Previous experience**

Another vital contribution made to the success of expatriate employees is previous experience (Moran et al., 2011). An individual that has failed while on a previous international assignment would likely undertake limited subsequent international assignments. It has been argued that an expatriate's years of international experience are positively related to satisfaction and commitment, and thus involvement may result in simple trial and error (Hoecklin et al., 1995). Also, an expatriate's linguistic ability is related to their international experience. As the expatriate becomes more fluent in the language of the host country, it is easier to socially integrate into both the work and general environment.

It is known that previous international experience can influence their adjustment to a new host country (Browaeyns and Price, 2011). Prior international non-work experience, for

example, travelling as well as studying, are highly associated with the degree to which Western expatriates adjust to Arabic culture in Oman (Browaeyns and Price, 2011). Despite the clear link between previous international experience and adjustment, inconsistent research findings suggest that the exact manner in which this occurs is unknown. Primecz et al. (2011) suggest that the interaction influences of prior international experiences differ with respect to the measurement mode that is being used. Interaction figures for length-based measurements of past international experiences illustrated direct as well as indirect effects, whereas number-based measures of past international experiences only indicated mediating effects. Primecz et al. (2011) conclude further that past international experiences act as moderators instead of as antecedents to cross-cultural adjustment of Western expatriates in Oman. Primecz et al. (2011) also assessed the mediating influences of past overseas assignments. They argue that the time that is spent on current assignments can enhance the positive effects of past international experiences on work adjustment. Expatriates can leverage previous experiences better since they stay longer on assignments. As the assignments progress, the expatriates are better capable of picking out experiences which best aid them in adjusting to their work surroundings.

Furthermore, assuming previous international experience may be an essential source of information from which expatriates can establish accurate expectations (Harrison et al., 2005). Based on the concept of uncertainty reduction, it can be said that more international adjustment experiences can provide information from which uncertainty can be reduced and accurate expectations formed.

Early studies conducted on the effects of cross-cultural adjustment have shown a positive but not significant relationship between prior international work experience and adjustment (Jiang et al., 2014, Black, 1988, Black and Gregersen, 1991a). Furthermore, inconsistent findings have also been presented. For example, Black (1988) found a significantly positive relationship between length of international work experience and work adjustment while no such effect was identified by Van Oudenhoven and Hofstra (2006). On the other hand, Shaffer et al. (1999) did not find a relationship between previous international work experience and general or work adjustment. This suggests that there is a need for more theoretical development and examination of international experience and its relationships to expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment (Brewster, 1991, Shaffer. et al., 1999). In particular, there may be a need to develop more specific hypotheses to be tested, hypotheses that specifically address the relationship between prior work experience and adjustment. This

thesis contends that a fruitful approach to developing such hypotheses is through conducting qualitative research on the expatriate experience.

- **Language fluency**

Communication is vital to management. While communication depends on a common language, this condition seldom exists in many international business settings (Tylor and Bogdan, 1998). A significant problem is faced when mutually incomprehensible languages create a challenging language barrier (Morley and Heraty, 2004). Language might indeed be considered the primary source of culture shock, as, for some people, the study of language may cause an acute shock. The reason for this is the centrality of language as a medium of communication. As established earlier, international experience and fluency in the host-country language has a significant and direct influence on expatriate interaction adjustment (Shaffer. et al., 1999). This is because of the difficulty of learning a local language in a relatively short period of time and the lack of appropriate candidates. Consequently, organisations should track qualified employees who already have appropriate language competencies. Even if local employees can speak the language expatriates speak, local language fluency may be helpful for expatriates' work and interaction adjustment by enabling them to gain information and communicate with local people.

### 1.3.3.2 Job factors

Brett (2014) identified job-related factors that many scholars have hypothesised as influencing adjustment by facilitating or inhibiting the expatriate experience on the basis of the international adjustment literature as well as domestic adjustment. They suggest four job-related factors that can increase uncertainty, uncontrollability and unfamiliarity and/or the unpredictability of new work roles. Job factors require aligning oneself fully with the work environment, its new requirements and expectations (Selmer, 2005). This becomes even easier when there are similarities and common areas of interest between the host and parent subsidiary in view of procedures, rules and task needs. The four job-related factors which inhibit adjustment include role novelty, which refers to differences between previous roles and new roles, the role of ambiguity, conflicts in the role as well as role overload. Furthermore, it has been argued that some job-related factors have the potential to reduce uncertainty as well as facilitate expatriate adjustment. These include role discretion and previous transfer and/or past overseas experiences of work, as well as pre-departure

knowledge. International assignments are often associated with policy as well as procedural conflicts with parent companies (Brett, 2014). Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2005) explains further that role clarity implies understanding the exact requirements of the position. Role discretion can be taken to mean autonomy in decision making. Role novelty refers to differences between the host and the native country work roles, while role conflict refers to cues relating to job expectations. The four job-related factors have a likelihood of influencing the ability of expatriates in adjusting to a new environment.

Cross-cultural adjustment has been linked to several job-related factors such as an increase in uncertainty, unfamiliarity, unpredictability, uncontrollability and the new work role itself (Black, 1988). Among these, primary factors include role novelty, role ambiguity, role conflict, and role overload. The significance of these job-related factors highlights the importance of job design to the success of international assignments. It suggests that multinational firms should provide more emphasis on designing global positions so that the expatriates have more clearly defined jobs and greater decision-making authority. The more expatriates perceived their work role conflict, ambiguity and overload, the poorer their overseas adjustment (Hammer, 1999). Additionally, greater levels of pre-departure training may be necessary for expatriates expected to experience higher levels of role novelty (Shaffer. et al., 1999).

Poor working conditions, low performance standards, and other work-related stressors very often result in a delay to work adjustment (Brein and David, 1971). In developing countries, expatriates often experience very difficult working conditions that are difficult to adapt to. Sivakumar and Nakata (2001) describe the situation by reporting the following complaint made by a Western expatriate manager in Malaysia:

*“The way we (European) work is quite different. We have to...work with precise objectives and targets. The pressure is very high in Europe. We cannot have this pressure here because people are not used to this type of pressure. Too strong pressure, it is not very easy to handle. I do have this problem...with the staff...I cannot put on the pressure all the time. But my bosses in France have to be apprised of the constraints we have here. The people here are not quite the same as the people in Europe...And at the same time we have targets to achieve...and I am in the middle of two different cultures... “ (Sivakumar and Nakata, 2001, p. 87).*

- **Role clarity and role discretion**

Role clarity and role discretion have been described as important factors that facilitate adjustment, and role novelty has been found to inhibit adjustment after a relocation transfer (Black, 1988, Black et al., 1991). Role clarity refers to a lack of ambiguity about what expatriates should actually be doing in their job (Landis and Brislin, 1983). This lack of clarification not only increases uncertainty upon arrival into a new host organisation, but also produces misunderstandings between the parent company and the expatriate in later stages of the assignment (Hammer, 1999). Job clarity has a direct link to work uncertainty, which in turn facilitates adjustment. With prior clarity, a lower level of expatriate adjustment is inherent. Furthermore, significant relationships between role clarity and work adjustment has been found in a study of American expatriates in Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong (Black and Gregersen, 1990). Role conflict includes an incompatibility between role demands and conflicting expectations at work.

For instance, Hill (2014) conducted meta-analyses using data from 847 expatriates in 66 Western countries supporting a significant correlation between job role clarity and work adjustment. The uncertainty with regard to objectives as well as requirements of the role was deemed to be the strongest stressor in expatriate overseas environments. Brett (2014) also found a significant positive correlation between length of tenure of current assignment and work adjustment. He adds that it is important to note that there is also a positive relationship between the current tenure of the international assignment and expatriate adjustment. When Western expatriates initially arrive in host countries such as Oman, they often face significant uncertainty about several aspects of life as well as work. However, with time, the expatriates are more likely to obtain information which aids them in functioning effectively in this new environment. Van der Bank and Rothmann (2006) have also found evidence supporting the view that current tenure of assignment bears a significant relationship with general as well as work adjustment of expatriates.

- **Role conflict**

Expatriates tend to exhibit managerial behaviours abroad similar to those used in their previous employment at home, due to an absence of appropriate pre-departure and in-country cross-cultural training. Although the expatriate may decide to a limited extent how that role is interpreted and performed, the parent company (the role sender) often determines the role

of the expatriate manager (role recipient) in the foreign assignment. The resulting managerial forms of behaviour, however, may be in contrast to the preferred role communicated by the host environment, initiating a situation of potential role conflict (Andreason, 2003). Role conflict describes the level of congruency and compatibility in the requirements of the role, where these are judged relative to a set of standards or conditions which impinge upon role performance. Additionally, in new roles, experienced individuals often send conflicting signals about what is expected of them. Expatriates are less able to determine which messages to ignore and which to follow. They have difficulty executing appropriate forms of behaviour when experiencing conflicting messages about expected forms of behaviour (Black, 1988). It can be said that the greater the role conflict, the greater the difficulty of the role transition.

- **Role novelty**

Role novelty, according to Black (1988), increases the degree of unfamiliarity with the new role, which decreases the degree of predictability. The greater the difference between the past role and the new one, the longer it takes the employee to develop proficiency after a domestic transfer. According to (Andreason, 2003), new cultural settings not only create conflicting signals with regards to expected behaviours, but also set up a demand for new skills and forms of behaviour. The job abroad will often differ in many key respects from how it is performed at home. Similarly, the type of business operation, along with the stage of international business, may also affect expatriate success.

The expatriate manager may also need to learn how to interact with and manage host nationals (Black, 1988). These factors create a situation in which the job in the overseas assignment is often different from the job at home. Organisations must make special efforts to train expatriates in the obligations that will be expected of them in the foreign assignment and especially for those assignments in which expatriates are likely to experience greater levels of role novelty.

All of the four job factors specified by Black and Gregersen (1991a) have been found to be significantly related to expatriate work adjustment. In a study by Black and Gregersen (1991a), role clarity, role discretion, and role conflict were significant predictors of work adjustment. Additionally, Shaffer. et al. (1999) found that the significance of three job-related factors (i.e., role clarity, role discretion, and role novelty) highlighted the importance of job design to the success of international assignments. Contrary to this, role clarity also

was found to have moderate potential to spill over and minimize non-work difficulties (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). Giving greater structure and explicitness to the processes and outcomes necessary for expatriates to perform their jobs well via setting realistic assignment expectations is recognized as an element that can ease expatriate transitions. In addition, logistical support and co-worker support were significant positive predictors of adjustment (Shaffer. et al., 1999).

- **Job satisfaction**

The last job factor identified as having an effect on cross-cultural adjustment is job satisfaction. This concept was initially defined in the context of job performance by Tran (2008) as ‘a pleasurable emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job as frustrating or blocking the attainment of one’s values’ (P. 316).

From a psychological perspective, job satisfaction is often associated with task environment, compensation, communication, and social relations in the workplace. While having several common predictors, job satisfaction is a broader concept than the related cross-cultural facet of work adjustment that measures only the degree of comfort and adaptation regarding different performance standards and expectations and work values in a new environment.

In domestic settings, job satisfaction has been found to be determined by employee personality and job task and organisational characteristics. This, in turn, acts as an antecedent of internal motivation, absenteeism, anxiety, stress, organisational citizenship and commitment, turnover, and individual job performance (Froese and Peltokorpi, 2011). Consistent with domestic settings, lower turnover tendency and withdrawal cognition and higher motivation to perform and finish expatriate assignments are linked with job satisfaction.

Interestingly, it has been found that a positive impact on job satisfaction can be found if work-role clarity is provided. This enables the surpassing of expectations about job discretion, e.g., the ability to do the job as one wishes (Black and Gregersen, 1990). Evidence suggests that poor expatriate adjustment and job satisfaction may lead to withdrawal from overseas assignments (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005).



In sum, important personal factors that influence the success of expatriate adjustment include social self-efficacy, previous experience, and language fluency. Important job-related factors that influence the success of expatriate adjustment include role clarity and role discretion, role conflict, role novelty, and job satisfaction level. The next section introduces relevant organisational factors.

### 1.3.3.3 Organisational factors

A result of the increasing globalization of business is a high desire on the part of companies to minimize the costs and maximize the benefits of intercultural exchange (Bhatti et al., 2012). To aid the adjustment process, managing expatriates and training methods are needed. These are constructive, and are to be welcomed for improving companies' awareness of their responsibilities and for finding ways to provide tangible support to expatriates.

Selection criteria as well as mechanisms of an organisation are also significant factors which influence expatriate adjustment. Konanahalli et al. (2012) agree that when selected expatriates match the organisation's needs closely, it is easier for those expatriates to adjust after entering into an international assignment. Furthermore, the larger of the variation between the organisational culture of the subsidiary organisation in the host country compared to the organisation in the native country (Konanahalli et al., 2012).

In addition, logistical back-up from the organisation, parent firm support with daily life, such as assistance with housing and schools as well as grocery stores among other factors, can reduce potential uncertainty related to international assignments. This may consequently facilitate the adjustment of expatriates (Konanahalli et al., 2012). Thus, the social support of the organisation described with regard to sources as well as the quality of assisting relationships, acts like a stress buffer and also has an indirect impact on strains, e.g., job dissatisfaction.

- **Selection**

The use of criteria-based selection for personnel with similar positions as in their home country may not be sufficient when selecting personnel for expatriate positions (Jiang et al., 2014). Expatriates who are effective at home are not necessarily effective in foreign missions. Furthermore, in designing valid overseas personnel selection programs some companies have proven to be more effective than others (Moran et al., 2011). Firms seem to

focus their selection efforts on various job-related criteria such as job design to overseas success. Technical competence is one of the most common criteria mentioned.

In private sector organisations, selection is carried out largely on the basis of technical competence, with minimal attention being paid to the interpersonal skills and domestic situations of potential expatriates (Brewster, 1991). Factors such as intercultural competence should also be taken into account (Jiang et al., 2014). Additionally, it is normally assumed that companies select expatriates that experience culture shock very mildly or not at all. Other companies focus on personality as an intercultural competence, and attempt to identify attitudes and other personality traits that characterize intercultural competent individuals so that they can be singled out in selection processes.

#### 1.3.3.4 Non-work factors

Contemporary research has, from two perspectives, assessed the non-work-related factors that influence the adjustment of expatriates from two perspectives. These perspectives include the adjustment of the expatriates' family as well as adjustment to the novelties present in the host culture. Poor adjustment to the cross-cultures on the part of spouses can inhibit the adjustment of expatriates. In Harvey et al. (2012), the American multinational executive survey demonstrated that executives believed that the inability of their spouses to adjust to a foreign host-culture is the leading reason for failures of expatriates. Mahajan and De Silva (2012) also argue that the inability of the family of expatriates to adjust is the most significant barrier in the ability of expatriates to succeed in the transition. Mahajan and De Silva (2012) agree that the inability of the families of the expatriate to make the necessary adjustments to their new culture has a significant effect on the transition of expatriates during work as well as during adjustment. Mahajan and De Silva (2012) investigated not only a large Western expatriate sample on assignment using from numerous different Western countries, but included also expatriates' spouses in their investigation. They realised that a positive and important relationship existed between the expatriates and spouses in terms of cross-cultural adjustment. In a recent study conducted by Harrison and Michailova (2012), the situation of the family was rated by expatriates as the leading contributor to success in international assignments.

- **Family and spouse adjustment**

Family and spouse adjustment is one of the effective factors that influences the process of expatriate adjustment (Cieri et al., 1991). Eighty per cent of international expatriates worldwide are married and take their spouses with them overseas. The spouse in this situation, usually without the aid of a corporation and co-workers has to start a new life in a new environment. The employee leaves for work each morning, while his or her spouse remains at home to figure out how to shop for groceries, navigate through the town, and find healthcare, among other things (Okpara and Kabongo, 2011). The additional challenges of accompanying spouses are vital for companies and researchers to understand, since it has been established that spousal adjustment is one of the most critical determinants of whether an expatriate completes his or her assignment.

Managing family problems that arise during the international assignment is an additional challenge for expatriates, despite the stabilizing effect of families on expatriate success. For dual-career expatriate couples, spouse job/career considerations are a concern (Weiss, 2002, Anderson, 1994). Work–family conflict is another family issue that is problematic for many expatriates (Anderson, 1994). With work–family conflict spouse support offsets much of the strain associated with this; however, for female expatriates, work–family conflict restricts many from progression to senior positions.

Spousal and familial stress can lead to emotions such as anxiety, frustration, homesickness, and dissatisfaction, as well as the problem of stress (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). The sources of expatriates' and their spouses' stress, as stated by the author are 'the feeling that they spend too little time with each other, missing close friends, isolation and uncertainty about the future after returning to the home country as well as the difficulty in dealing with too many contrary expectations/demands'. It should be noted that in international assignments, the presence of children makes both expatriates and their partners feel less isolated than in the case of singles.

The impact of culture shock and having greater difficulty in interactions and general adjustment has a derivative effect on the spouse (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). An unhappy spouse may affect the expatriate's ability to adjust, influence the expatriate's job performance and have a negative impact on the adjustment of the children. Also, spouses, especially wives, can also influence their partners' decisions and forms of behaviour. In an early seminal study, on failure in a global assignment, the spouse's dissatisfaction was the

single most frequently-reported reason (Benson, 1978). Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963a) found that nearly half of the 300 surveyed companies in their study at that time had brought families home early due to unwillingness or inability of the spouse to adapt. A point to note here is that, due to differing cultural values regarding the necessity of spouses to accompany their partners, along with stricter educational goals for the children, there are now fewer accompanying spouses present. Japanese respondents reflect a relatively lower ranking of spouses as being problematic (Gullahorn and Gullahorn, 1963a, Benson, 1978).

Expatriates' overall success in cross-cultural adjustment can be positively influenced by spouse/family cross-cultural adjustment and vice versa (Black, 1988). This is referred to as a 'crossover effect' in work-family conflict literature. The explanation for the cross-over effect is that in the foreign assignment the spouses may become more dependent on one another for support due to isolation from their physical and psychosocial support systems. One obvious implication of this crossover influence is that of the spouse's experience in the foreign environment and its effect on the expatriate employee's experience at work (Gullahorn and Gullahorn, 1963b, Benson, 1978). Importantly, it has been found that, for married expatriates, the spouse adjustment is the single most critical variable in predicting all three dimensions of expatriate adjustment (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). The results supported the central role of family in the psychological mechanisms of internal work role transitions and point perhaps to a stronger role for family in domestic turnover.

Non-work factors, such as culture novelty and spouse adjustment, are recognised as important direct influences of interaction and general adjustment (Black et al., 1991). Cross-cultural training for expatriates and their spouses, whose own adjustment is vital for the success of international assignments, will likely be affected by culture novelty. In addition, firms must place more emphasis on preparing spouses for international assignments and supporting them once they are in a foreign environment. This is because the level of adjustment experienced by expatriate spouses directly influences the adjustment processes of the expatriates themselves. In order to reduce much of the uncertainties associated with settling into a foreign culture, having a person in the firm that spouses could contact directly, rather than relying on 'second-hand' information from expatriates, would be helpful (Shaffer et al., 1999). Similarly, with the increasing number of dual career couples, it is likely that more spouses will lose their jobs. MNCs can facilitate the adjustment of these spouses, by offering employment assistance, such as help with work visas or subsidized career development activities.

### 1.3.3.5 Organisational culture factors

Further details of the comprehensive model developed by Black et al. (1991) on expatriate adjustment can be provided via consideration of three organisational factors including cultural novelty, social support and logistical support. The first of these, increasing levels of organisational culture novelty relates to the difference between the organisation culture in the home country and foreign country and how it would be expected to have an inhibiting influence.

- **Culture novelty**

The performance of expatriate employees may or may not be dependent on culture novelty (Schein, 1984). Professionals that work internationally not only consider job and family, but culture as well. Culture has been identified as a set of social norms and responses that conditions the behaviour of groups of people. One of the earliest definitions provided by Schein (1984) is: ‘the complex which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as member of society.’ (p. 18). Hofstede (1980) pointed out that the central concept in use may include ideologies, a coherent set of beliefs or basic assumptions, a set of shared core values, important understandings, and the ‘collective will’, or the ‘collective programming of the human mind’ (P.25). Schein (1990) defines culture as ‘a pattern of basic assumptions, invented, discovered, or developed by a given group, as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore is to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems’ (p. 36). Schein’s (1990) definition is endorsed throughout this thesis as a whole.

- **Social support**

Social support can be broadly defined as ‘the availability of helping relationships and the quality of those relationships’ (Leavy, 1983, P. 5). Social support may be of three types: aid, affect, and affirmation. In the expatriate context, in order to reduce stress and aid making sense of the work environment, expatriates can be provided with relevant information and assistance.

Stress management scholars have stressed the role of social support in assisting individuals reduce uncertainty when in novel situations (Hair et al., 2006b, Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). The role of social support in the successful acculturation of immigrants and sojourners is important to aid and improve work-life balance. Social support in the work domain may be provided from a variety of sources, including peers and supervisor support, as well as more formal social support mechanisms, such as organisational work–life balance programmes. Non-work social support, such as support from the family, has been found to play an essential role in reducing work–non-work conflict (Yavas, 2001).

Hair et al. (2006b) examined the role of three sources of support in facilitating expatriate adjustment and performance. They explored the influence of perceived organisational support, leader member exchange, and spousal support on expatriates' adjustment to work, the country, and interacting with foreign nationals. The results indicate that organisational support had direct effects on expatriate adjustment, which in turn had direct effects on both dimensions of performance. Although leader member exchange did not influence adjustment, it did have a direct influence on expatriate tasks and contextual performance.

In closing, it is worth noting that Black's model is limited because the U-Curve theory of adjustment does not incorporate the way in which host national reactions to expatriates enrich our understanding of the temporal process of adjustment. In addition, the categories developed by Black et al. have the effect of marginalising the distinctive ways in which non-Western expatriates adjust to working in non-Western countries such as Oman. Thus, while the U-Curve theory is in and of itself an adequate model, it needs to be refined in such a way that it can incorporate the experiences of both Western and non-Western expatriates, while also being able to describe the causal relationships that exist between host national perceptions of expatriates, and the temporal processes of adjustment undergone by the expatriates themselves.

### 1.3.4 Summary

Black et al. (1991) claim that much of the research on adjustment tends to be 'anecdotal in nature and few scholars have rigorously investigated the phenomenon, empirically or theoretically' (p. 289). Likewise, Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963a), Johnson et al. (2007b) and Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) have offered their critiques of existing research, calling for deeper and more precise understandings of poor adjustment and its associated

issues. There is still substantial room for human resource practitioners and scholars to investigate the multifaceted nature of expatriate capabilities. Specifically, there is room to consider how organisations can maximize the business and career potential of each expatriate. The major challenge in the adjustment literature is the observation that, cross-culturally, some individuals adjust more quickly and easily than do others.

The literature reviewed has presented several factors which influence the adjustment of expatriates, such as family and work roles. These factors have been categorized in one framework by Black et al. (1991). Furthermore, these factors have been studied in some societies, such as Japan, China and the USA. However, few studies have been undertaken which examine the factors that influence the adjustment process or the challenges that face Western and non-Western expatriates in conservative societies, such as Arabic and Islamic countries. The literature indicates that there are several differences between Arabic and Islamic cultures and the culture of Western societies. This may make the adjustment of Western expatriates into these cultures extremely difficult. This will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter. Furthermore, the majority of previous studies have examined the impact of these factors without differentiating between the cultures that the expatriates came from. All the expatriates in these studies have, in fact, been grouped together with no consideration being given to the cultural differences between them. For example, the expatriates who came from Asian and Western countries have been combined in previous studies with no differentiation applied in respect of their different cultural background.

The omission of an examination of the subject of Western expatriates in a cultural context and the differences between other cultures (such as Omani society and Arab culture), as well as the lack of identification in respect of the classification and cultural background of expatriates may make it difficult to generalize the results of previous studies. This lack of in-depth information has encouraged researchers in the field to call for additional studies to be carried out on the subject (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2004, Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005, Shay and Baack, 2004, Chang, 1996). This study was, therefore, designed to contribute to addressing these gaps in the information available. Thus, the current study has examined the influential factors in the adjustment of Western expatriates in an Arabic environment characterized as a conservative culture. This study has also taken into account the cultural differences of participating expatriates. It has classified the expatriates as being either Westerners or non-Westerners and has compared the findings of each culture, indicating that

there are several differences in their views with respect to the issues they face when going through the process of adjustment.

Furthermore, the literature also highlights the essential roles of communication in the adjustment processes (see for example, Puck et al., 2008) Nevertheless, previous studies have investigated the interaction between expatriates and local people as a part of adjustment, with limited attention being paid to expatriate perceptions, and without studying the factors that encourage or prevent locals from communicating with expatriates. The researcher recognizes that expatriates who experience a greater level of communication may have a better experience when adjusting to their new environment.

To facilitate cross-cultural adjustment, Mendenhall and Oddou (1985) suggest: (1) extending the selection criteria from its current sole focus on technical competence to also covering skills in line with individual dimensions; and (2) providing expatriates with appropriate Cross-Cultural Training (CCT) programs. Black and Mendenhall (1990) propose CCT to smooth the progress of adjustment processes. Grove and Torbiörn (1985) also mention that cross-cultural training programs cannot be presented, but must instead be planned according to both the context of the assignment and the individual characteristics of the expatriate.

Caligiuri et al. (2001) pointed out that CCT programs have three main advantages: (1) assisting the expatriate to identify how to appropriately perform work tasks and behave in the new culture; (2) assisting the expatriate to reduce cultural conflicts caused by unexpected events and situations; and (3) assisting the expatriate to create realistic expectations about working and the day-to-day aspects of living in the new culture (Österdahl and Hånberg, 2009)). As with any other learning techniques, there are several existing training methods. The next section will present the most commonly-used methods.

## **1.4 Cross-cultural training**

According to Harvey et al. (2012), there is no way an expatriate can adjust efficiently to other cross-cultures without first going through some kind of learning. They argue that as an expatriate gathers concrete experience, he becomes fully aware of what the situation demands. In Oman, according to Harvey et al. (2012), expatriates (considered a unified category by the authors) are expected to face numerous challenges. This research study seeks to uncover and explore the challenges presented by the expatriate experience, uncovering the most influential factors that will impact their adjustment into the Arabic culture in Oman.



Furthermore, taking into consideration the importance of cross-cultural training, which has been highlighted in many studies, this study also explores the reality of the training programs provided for expatriates in Oman and also takes on board their suggestions for the improvement of their quality. The next section presents the literature on cross-cultural training programs.

To facilitate the process of expatriate adjustment and interaction, different essential skills are required. According to Littrell and Salas (2005) the skills necessary to adjust and succeed in a new culture can be subsumed under multiple dimensions: skills linked to the maintenance of self; skills related to the fostering of relationships with host nationals; and cognitive skills that promote a correct perception of the host environment and its social systems. Cognitive knowledge is built at a fast rate by expatriates in such environments, as they become more civilized, gain a historical background of the new country they are in, and attain a valuable orientation to the structure and the functioning of social economics as well as the organisational system of the partner culture (Black and Gregersen, 2007).

Indeed, some scholars (Black and Gregersen, 1990, Brislin, 1981, Scullion and Collings, 2006) have argued that in order to allow individuals to more rapidly adjust to the new culture and, therefore, be more effective in their new roles, they need cross-cultural training. Adjusting to a new culture includes the gradual development of familiarity, comfort, and proficiency regarding expected behaviour and the values and assumptions inherent in the new culture,

In order to increase the knowledge and skills of individuals, training can be simply defined as any intervention aimed to help with more effective personal coping, working more effectively with others, and performing better professionally. Although continuous training and development is now being espoused by many organisations, in most circumstances training is a short-term and “one-shot” learning situation (often one week or less), see Scullion and Collings (2006). This is problematic, because it is known that many of the problems faced by expatriates cannot be addressed within a single week of training (e.g., adapting to the unique communication style of the ‘high-context’ culture, when one resides in a ‘low-context’ culture). Littrell and Salas (2005) found that in the cross-cultural situation, cross-cultural training has a positive influence on the individual's development of skills, on his or her adjustment to the cross-cultural situation, and on his or her job performance. Intercultural training (CCT) is one application within the domain of intercultural relations

comprising cultural anthropology, cross-cultural psychology, sociolinguistics, multicultural education, intercultural communication, and international business management. It focuses on training individuals to be cross-culturally competent (Gregersen and Morrison, 1998).

### 1.4.1 Efficacy of cross-cultural training

As organisations move into the global marketplace, cross-cultural training and orientation programmes are being heralded as raising productivity, and for producing greater satisfaction among expatriates with their foreign assignments. In order to adjust to assignments overseas and to life in foreign cultures this type of pre-departure training is very vital (Bhatti et al., 2012). For cross-cultural training, resources must be allocated to ensure that international employees have the essential skills to interact effectively in a global environment, as the cost of failed expatriate assignments is higher compared with the cost of training employees to work internationally. Cross-cultural training provides trainees with essential knowledge about their new culture and the new and appropriate forms of behaviour required within that culture. Cross-cultural training also provides realistic expectations of what their jobs and their lives will be like in the new culture. By teaching individuals how to adjust more rapidly, they are supported in becoming more effective in their new roles. Adjusting to a new culture, or becoming cross-culturally well-educated includes the gradual improvement of familiarity, comfort and proficiency in dealing with the expected behaviour, values and assumptions inherent in the new culture (Anderson, 1994).

Cross-cultural training facilitates multi-cultural communication and interaction adjustment (as discussed above). A positive relationship has been found between cross-cultural training and the development of confidence in one's ability to interact effectively in a foreign setting. This training also improves relational skills and has a positive impact on how expatriates perceive other cultures and members of those other cultures (Andreason, 1994).

Samovar et al. (1981) asserts that, due to the high rate of expatriate failure, organisations should be highly motivated in preparing expatriates for their new assignments. Such preparation should occur in two distinct stages. First, organisations select and train individuals for expatriate assignments in the pre-departure stage. Second, in the post-arrival stage, behavioural cross-training can be implemented when expatriate workers begin to interact with host country nationals (HCNs), enabling them to adjust their forms of behaviour to the host country's cultural norms and values in order to achieve a better work performance.

However, some scholars (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998) have argued that because expatriates tend to be more motivated to learn once they are in their assignment, behavioural training is more effective in the post-arrival stage than in the pre-departure stage.

According to Budhwar and Mellahi (2006b) CCT has been advocated as a means of facilitating effective cross-cultural interactions and cross-cultural adjustment for more than twenty years. There has been a positive trajectory of growth with respect to MNCs who are offering CCT. For example, Al-Lamki (1998) found that only 32 per cent of MNCs offered CCT in the early 1980s. Twenty years later this situation had significantly changed, with the 1998 Global Relocation Trends Survey Report indicating that 70 per cent of the 177 MNCs surveyed provide CCT of at least one day's duration (Budhwar and Mellahi, 2006b). One worry here is that MNCs are not taking seriously the idea that employees need professional training in order to successfully adapt to a new culture. One way in which this worry can be fleshed out is by considering the experiences of expatriates themselves. If expatriates face difficulty in a new assignment overseas after being in short-term training, this strongly suggests that the training they received was inadequate.

According to Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963b), training methods should be chosen according to the type of assignment and should be contingent on two determinant factors: the degree of similarity between the culture of origin and the host culture (a synonym of cultural distance) and the degree of interpersonal interaction between the manager and host country's inhabitants, which would be linked to the role and function of the manager. In conclusion, the different models of cross-cultural training and their content are based around three fundamental variables: the cultural distance between the country of origin and the host country, the manager's level of integration with his/her environment, and the duration of the expatriation (Waxin and Panaccio, 2005).

Cross-cultural training is seen as a major part of the step that paves the way for expatriate managers to travel, settle and work successfully in foreign countries. In addition, quantitative research is evident in the invigilation of inter-cultural expertise training, derived from the experiences of Western expatriates. In this case, it is vital that there be a workable kind of qualitative research approach that delves into the question of the sorts of challenges expatriates face, and how these can be improved through CCT methods.

## 1.4.2 Expatriate training and preparation

A variety of methods to teach expatriates cross-cultural skills have been used by international companies including facilitating adjustment and the interaction of expatriates in foreign cultures. This section briefly describes some of the main cross-cultural training methods by describing the focus, timing and activities used to provide expatriates with essential knowledge.

### 1.4.2.1 Didactic training

According to Brewster (1995), didactic training is one of the most common forms of CCT. Most multinational organisations offer didactic training in the form of informal briefings to their expatriates before they travel abroad. According to Bennett et al. (2000), this type of training is mainly provided using traditional teaching methods employed in schools and universities, i.e., using one-way communication to transfer information through lecture or other formats (Österdahl and Hånberg, 2009, Littrell and Salas, 2005). Additionally, this type of training can be delivered in an informational booklet which provides facts about the country (Brewster, 1995, Littrell et al., 2005). Factual information about working, living conditions, and cultural aspects of the host country are provided to expatriates in didactic training (Littrell and Salas, 2005). Caligiuri et al. (2001) argue that didactic training should not be considered the only way to prepare expatriates for a foreign mission and should be combined, at times, with experiential methods of providing information (Österdahl and Hånberg, 2009).

Tung (1981) pointed out that didactic training should not try to cover all the information needed for expatriates during their stay in a foreign country due to the fact that there are numerous cultural differences between any two nations. Rather, Caligiuri et al. (2001) argue that didactic training should not be considered as the only way to prepare expatriates for a foreign mission and should be combined with other more experiential methods of providing information (Österdahl and Hånberg, 2009).

### 1.4.2.2 Experiential training

Experiential training uses a number of methods which include practical exercises, workshops and simulations. It also extends to using a 'look-see' visit to the host country strategy as a

type of training (Caligiuri et al., 2001). In ‘look-see’ trips expatriates and sometimes their families are given the opportunity to have their first real experience of the host country. This opportunity gives them a chance to meet people in the new country and begin to understand the new environment and the workplace (Littrell and Salas, 2005, Brewster, 1995). However, the disadvantages of using this method include the fact that, in order to ensure it is effective it needs to be well-planned and this can be prohibitively expensive. Furthermore, as the visits are designed to give the expatriate a positive view of the country, hosts may not provide a ‘true’ picture of the country (Brewster, 1995, p. 63).

#### 1.4.2.3 Attribution training

The purpose of attribution training is to give expatriates the necessary skills for thinking and acting as host nationals, as well as giving them an insight into the cultural point of view of the host country (Littrell and Salas, 2005). This sort of training assists the expatriate to understand the host country’s national behaviour. By teaching such skills, the aim is to make the expatriates’ attributes more isomorphic (symmetric) to the new culture (Österdahl and Hånberg, 2009). This method involves a series of short intercultural sessions which are crucial for enabling the expatriate to understand the interactions between members of the two cultures (Tung, 1981). This type of training, according to Ko and Yang (2011) allows trainees “to make isomorphic attribution and to handle discomfort expectation as well as possible, in order to internalize the values and standards of the host country” (P. 160)

#### 1.4.2.4 Language training

Language skills are among the most obvious training needs. The argument here is that the decision has to be made as to whether it is necessary to learn local and sometimes very exotic languages, or whether the expatriate can be expected to be able to manage with some major language, such as English, French or German. Without reasonable skills in the local language, there will be a question about whether real adjustment in the workplace and beyond will be possible, although in many places the expatriate may survive in their job without such competencies. This has been pointed out, for example, by expatriates employed in European countries. Language training is very common within the European context, e.g. 85 per cent of British, 91 per cent of German multinationals and 70 per cent of Scandinavian organisations provided such training to their expatriates (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Pre-departure cross-cultural training is the other very widely-discussed preparation activity. Evidence has been provided, for example, by Littrell and Salas (2005), that such training is successful in supporting expatriates in their adjustment processes. Companies still do not provide such training as often as might be expected. Among multinationals, the findings indicate that a majority of companies do not provide such training at all. For example, 44 per cent of British and German multinationals and only 32 per cent of Scandinavian firms provided such training. Furthermore, some companies providing such training defined cross-cultural training as a one- or two-hour introduction to the culture of the host country, which included only basic, pragmatic survival skills. In addition, given that many companies have provided training to at least some expatriates, HRM-departments may easily exaggerate the use of support practices. When questioned, it transpired that only 10 per cent of Finnish expatriates had received cross-cultural training (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

#### 1.4.2.5 Cultural awareness training

The aim of cultural awareness training is to provide the expatriate with an insight into the concept of culture, and to identify cultural differences by providing awareness of the home culture (Littrell and Salas, 2005, Caligiuri et al., 2001). Training activities involve self-awareness building and value-ranking charts. It can also include simulation games and perceptual exercises (Grove and Torbiörn, 1985). Role-play and self-assessment are other methods that can build self-awareness, all of which translates into acceptance of oneself and an ability to adapt to the host culture (London, 2003, p. 212).

#### 1.4.2.6 Interaction training

Interaction training can either take place before departure with previous expatriates or on arrival in the host country. It is based on the interactions between new expatriates and existing expatriates who have more experience of the local culture (Brewster, 1995). Overlaps, which is also known as on-the-job training, is the most common form of interactional training used in expatriate preparation (Brewster, 1995, Littrell and Salas, 2005). This method can be very beneficial for the expatriate adjustment processes by explaining tasks, introducing contacts and also in providing coaching in the management and operation of the workplace. Families can also benefit in a similar way from interactions with the outgoing family (Brewster, 1995, p. 64). Although the benefits are clear with this

model, most actors do not use it due to the cost issues and doubts in its value. According to Brewster (1995), overlaps are hard to manage, even for very skilled organisations.

#### 2.4.2.7 Sequential training

The early ideas about CCT suggest that the training should be carried out before the expatriate departs for the host country. Some researchers still think that pre-departure training helps the expatriate to form realistic expectations prior to their arrival in their new environment (Caligiuri et al., 2001). However, some researchers have argued that the training would be more efficient if parts of it took place following arrival to the new culture (Grove and Torbiörn, 1985). Selmer et al. (1998) has argued that firstly, to concentrate much of the training in the post-arrival phase is during a very short time span which takes place between selection and departure which, in some cases, is less than a month. Secondly, if it is learned in a non-authentic environment, it may be difficult to understand and later recall abstract social behaviour of the host culture. These differences in opinion resulted in a new model - sequential training - being developed which combines the benefits of both pre-departure and post-arrival training (Littrell et al., 2005). According to Selmer et al. (1998), this model is not a method in itself but a combination of different training methods applied at different times during the training processes. Forster (2000) asserted that sequential training can start at long or short period before the move and continue for months when in the new country.

Scholars argue that a fact-based training method about the certain characteristics and forms of behaviour of the new culture may be important to know before, or just after arrival. Similar to the cognitive-behaviour the modification approach can also be applied either pre-departure, post-arrival, or in both phases. It also has been suggested to use both attribution training and cultural awareness training before departure because the cultural awareness training is very general in nature and can therefore be an effective part of a pre-departure training program that is designed for expatriates who are going to be experiencing living with in very different regions and in very different cultures (Grove and Torbiörn, 1985). In contrast, both interactional learning and a certain level of language skills are best used post-arrival, since an authentic cultural context is necessary for the expatriate. By this time the expatriate starts to realize most of the challenges he or she will be facing (Grove and Torbiörn, 1985). These realizations and personal experiences about the cultural differences

between the home and host countries can be used effectively in the CCT and they can motivate the expatriate to participate in the training (Selmer et al., 1998).

Although the level of language skills needed are not defined, Puck et al. (2008) pointed out that the person's previous language skills and ability to learn new languages have to be taken into consideration during the selection process. According to Puck et al. (2008), since language has a very strong effect on expatriate adjustment, the better the language skills are the easier the adjustment processes will be. As the culture shock phase is the stage where the expatriate is the most likely to obtain the CCT, both didactic and experiential training can be provided, as well as explanations of observed behaviour. The latter method, on the other hand, is an effective approach to developing appropriate behaviour and learning how to gain more knowledge of the host culture (Grove and Torbiörn, 1985, Selmer et al., 1998).

As an example of pre-departure training, Okpara and Kabongo (2011) investigated the influence of the different types of cross-cultural training (general conventional cross-cultural training, general experimental cross-cultural training, specific conventional cross-cultural training and specific experimental cross-cultural training) on the three facts of adjustment (general, work and interaction). They examined 400 Western expatriates from the U.S., the UK, France, Germany, Netherlands, Greece, Sweden, Norway and Denmark working in Nigeria using the quantitative method. They found that expatriate adjustment could be predicted from different types of cross-cultural training. Pre-move cultural training has a positive effect on the adaptation to international assignments. The study also indicates that experimental types of training are the most effective ones. Additionally, the effectiveness of cross-cultural training is clearly demonstrated by the magnitude of expatriates' embarking on this training prior to their international experience. This study presented some preliminary evidence that the effectiveness of cross-cultural training on expatriate adjustment may be contingent on the specific circumstances and the culture of the foreign assignment.

The importance of cross-cultural training is obvious. Cross-cultural training must become a mandatory element of expatriate relocation assignments if global companies are to truly maximise their potential abroad. Ignoring this would lead to a continuation of failure, loss of potential growth abroad and a workforce base that lacks international cultural competencies (Harvey et al., 2012b). However, getting feedback from those who have often undertaken cross-cultural training is beneficial in order to improve such training programs. For obvious reasons, this study aims to understand the training and support necessary and



the needs of expatriates in both pre-departure and in the host country. It asks what kind of training and support was received by the expatriates and the suggestions they have for developing such training. While the studies cited above provide some information about the success of cross-cultural training, it unfortunately is the case that these studies have been performed by researchers, rather than by MNCs themselves. The efficacy of training programs requires that organisations engage in extensive follow-up with regards to the success of their programs. Until this becomes a norm in MNCs, it is unlikely that the experience of expatriates overseas will be improved.

Through a review of previous studies, it is clear that whilst the majority has referenced the importance of expatriate training, this has been studied separately from the cultural differences. In addition, the factors which highlight adjustment and the communication issues which arise between the different cultures have also been studied separately. Thus, the decision not to link the acclimatization and adjustment problems with the cultural differences and training needs for expatriates may have reduced the validity of the studies that chose to review these separately. However, the current study has linked the cultural differences, the problems of adjustment and interaction with the real experiences of the participants and has also included the relevant training requirements for the expatriates. The study has also investigated the point of view of the host nationals to assess and highlight the different views and experiences they encounter. Studying the perceptions of the local people highlighted several training needs which may not have been perceived by the expatriates had the study been limited only to them, thus without including the views of the Omanis. Identifying the needs from the perspective of the locals, coupled with including them in the training programs for expatriates may serve to avoid many of the previously experienced adjustment and interaction problems in the future.

Finally, in the literature in the area of cross-cultural training (Shaffer et al., 2006), there has been a continued call for additional research. Years ago it was asserted that ". . . research is urgently needed to ascertain the types of training procedures (e.g. culture assimilator, sensitivity training, field experience) that are more appropriate to use depending upon the type of culture, job and person." (Shaffer et al., 2006, P. 543). However, the call for more research into the area of cross-cultural management continues with a recent statement that this is needed because there is ". . . an increasing need for international companies to deliver high quality training in different countries across Europe and the world" (Jackson, 1995, P. 42). Most recently, Yvonne Feilzer (2010) also called for more in-depth studies using

qualitative research methods to add more insights to their research findings, which was about cross-cultural training (CCT) effectiveness, self-efficacy and adjustment of expatriates in Asia. The current study endeavours to respond to these concerns by providing additional insights into aspects of cross-cultural training for adjustment and work effectiveness for Western expatriates working in Oman.

In summary, this section has examined methods for cross-cultural training, in order to assess the learning expatriates typically undergo prior and during their work assignments in foreign countries. After establishing the need for such training, it described didactic training, experiential training, attribution training, language training, and cultural awareness training. This work is picked up in the discussion section of this thesis, in which the experiences of Western expatriates in Oman is viewed in context of cross-cultural training needs.

## **1.5 Synthesis**

A wide range of factors that affect the cross-cultural adjustment of expatriate employees have been discussed in this review. Early research on the cross-cultural adjustment of expatriates signified the presence of positive, negative and mixed responses to theoretical perspectives. Various theories of adjustment were critically analysed to study the degree of their effect on expatriates. Along with this, other factors like job factors, organisational factors, non-work factors, etc., suggest the exposure-characteristic dependency of cross-cultural adjustment of expatriates. However, this body of literature could be enriched significantly through the addition of qualitative data that shows how both Western and non-Western expatriates adjust in the Omani context, and how host national perceptions can influence the potential for successful adjustment. Shifting the focus from the past literature on cross-cultural adjustment and expatriate adjustment, the next chapter explores the natural course of intercultural communication between expatriate management and the local people. With this clear objective in mind, the researcher will examine how cross-cultural communication can influence expatriate adjustment.

There is rich evidence that cultural differences act as significant barriers for Western business expatriates. Harrison and Michailova (2012) argue that culture novelty is culture toughness. They add that countries such as Oman appear more difficult for Western expatriates to adapt to. They claim that the greater the variation between cultures of the host country and the home country (as in high novelty in culture), the more cumbersome the

expatriate adjustment is. Harrison and Michailova (2012) point out that culture novelty exerts its largest effects on expatriates in the initial two years of the assignment. Thereafter, culture novelty impact diminishes somewhat. Certain scholars such as Thomas (2012) question the efficacy of immersion strategies of culture. Thomas agrees that cultural values as well as norms in individuals typically do not change through simply residing in, and/or learning another culture's language. According to Thomas (2012) of thirty-six UK-based firms, the respondents that had similar cultures, for example, all Western expatriates were likely to have adjustment problems the same way as expatriates who have been assigned to dissimilar cultures such as Oman. He, therefore, deduced that the cultural novelty degree between host country and parent country does not correlate with the outcome of the international assignment. Based on interviews with ethnic Qatari company managers who were assigned to Oman, Thomas (2012) realised that the perceived closeness of cultures tended to promote easy as well as quick adjustment expectations, which if not accomplished, resulted in frustration as well as withdrawal. Moreover, comparing the adjustment of Western as well as overseas Omani business expatriates in Oman, Thomas (2012) asserts that, even though Westerners perceived a higher culture novelty degree than the overseas Omani Arabs, they adjusted better in their work environment. Thomas (2012) also examined one hundred and sixty-five Western expatriates assigned through Western organisations to Oman in finding out whether culture novelty can be a relevant factor when assessing the adjustment of Western expatriates in Arabic culture. His results indicate that the significant correlation between culture novelty and expatriate adjustment does not exist.

This finding may be explicable with reference to the fact that expatriates from very different cultures are sometimes tolerated as well as given the benefit of the doubt when going through processes aimed at adjusting to new cultures. Expatriates from similar and/or presumed identical-culture, however, can be seen as treatable with little patience and accorded little latitude for forms of behaviours appearing as culturally deviant (Thomas, 2012). Expatriates, overlooking a possible cultural difference that could be present in foreign destinations with a similar culture (and perhaps even showing insignificant inappropriate behaviours) can attract the most unfavourable assessment. Nugée and Subacchi (2008) admit that in Oman, other Arabs can be judged using different standards. The judgment they face may be harsher than Westerners for mistakes made, since they presumably have knowledge about Arabic etiquette as well as manners and are, therefore, expected to fully understand acceptable social protocols and so behave accordingly.

In closing, it is worth highlighting some of the essential points borne out by this literature review. One point to note is that, while, a great deal of work has been done in discussing, in broad terms, the factors that influence cultural adjustment (including the framework of Black et al., 1991), less work has been done in exploring the processes of expatriate adjustment in the context of Oman. This is a notable omission not only because studying expatriate adjustment in Oman offers an opportunity to explore how Western and non-Western countries differ, and the extent to which those in the former experience culture shock in the latter, but also because the role of host nationals in expatriate adjustment remains under-explored. The role that host national perceptions play in expatriate adjustment are particularly relevant in this context, because, in Oman, there are very strict religious mores and social systems, and failing to abide by these impact upon host national perceptions, which in turn impacts upon the experience of expatriates. Thus, while this thesis does not attempt to refute the U-Curve theory of adjustment, or the framework developed by Black et al. (1991), it does add to it, by exploring how the concepts that underlie these frameworks may be deployed in understanding the expatriate adjustment processes in the context of Oman. In addition, it builds on the existing literature base, by showing why the perception of host nationals is so important in understanding the expatriate experience, and why the experience of non-Westerners visiting Oman may differ from the experience of those from Western countries.

## **CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

*'A science is often thought of as being a coherent body of thought about a topic over which there is a broad consensus among its practitioners... However, the actual practice of science shows there are not only different perspectives on a given phenomenon, but also alternative methods of gathering information and analysing the resultant data'.*

*(May, 2011, p. 7-8)*

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter explains the methodology used to collect and analyse the research data and address the research questions. The chapter is structured into six main sections. In the first section, the philosophical and theoretical perspectives underpinning the study are explained. The second section, will then discuss the research design and philosophical foundation of the study. The third section provides information about the qualitative and quantitative approach and the mixed method design which were adopted in this study. The fourth section identifies the methodological considerations by describing the designs of both qualitative and quantitative methods. The fifth part describes the population and sampling procedures, clarifies the instruments used to collect data and provides details of how the variables were measured and the data analysis procedures used. Finally, the strategies regarding the ethical issues encountered in this study are mentioned in the sixth section.

### **2.2 Purpose of the Research**

The extant literature on cross-cultural management and assessment of how expatriates adjust to their new living and working environments and the training and development strategies for expatriates were reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3. This clarified that although there is a growth in the body of research on expatriates and the expatriation/repatriation process, there has been relatively little research about specific national groups of expatriates in particular countries. Furthermore, in relation to their work with expatriates and their perceptions of the expatriate experience, to date, little attention has been given to the views of host national employees. As a result, this study has been designed to examine the areas of cross-cultural management, working and living adjustment and training and development, with respect to

(Western) expatriates working in Oman, comparing their experience with those of non-Western expatriates. Both quantitative and qualitative research data from Omani host national managers and employees, as well as foreign expatriates, have been collected and analysed in relation to the four major study questions.

## **2.3 Process of Mixed Methods Research Design**

A research design, according to Bryman (2012), provides a framework for the collection and analysis of data. A researcher selects the research design in order to reflect decisions about the priority being given to a range of dimensions of the research process. Yin (2003) adds further that "...colloquially a research design is an action plan for getting from here to there, where 'here' may be defined as the initial set of questions to be answered and 'there' is some set of (conclusions) answers." (p. 19). Ratner (2002) also identified the research design as "...the plan or proposal to conduct research which involves the intersection of philosophy, strategies of inquiry and specific methods." (p. 5). Creswell, in his definition, asserts that research design involves the intersection of three important components - the philosophical orientation, the strategy of inquiry and the specific methodological procedures.

One main argument here is that the equation of research design with data collection method(s) often leads to a narrow concept of research design (De Vaus, 2001, Mellahi and Budhwar, 2010). Although data collection methods are assumed to be at the core of the process, research design is a wider concept which expands throughout the life time of a project. Recently, by using the metaphor of an 'onion', Saunders et al. (2011) emphasized the consistency of research design. They represented the process of research design as a process of onion peeling. As can be seen in Figure 3, data collection methods constitute the centre of the research 'onion' and before coming to this central point there are important layers that need to be peeled away. In this form, the thoughts with regard to the research problem lie in the centre and thus several layers have to be "peeled away" before coming to this central position. These layers are the important aspects to be considered in determining the research methodology for a particular research study. Accordingly, the research philosophy, approach, strategy, choice, time horizon and techniques were the layers identified (Wedawatta et al., 2011).

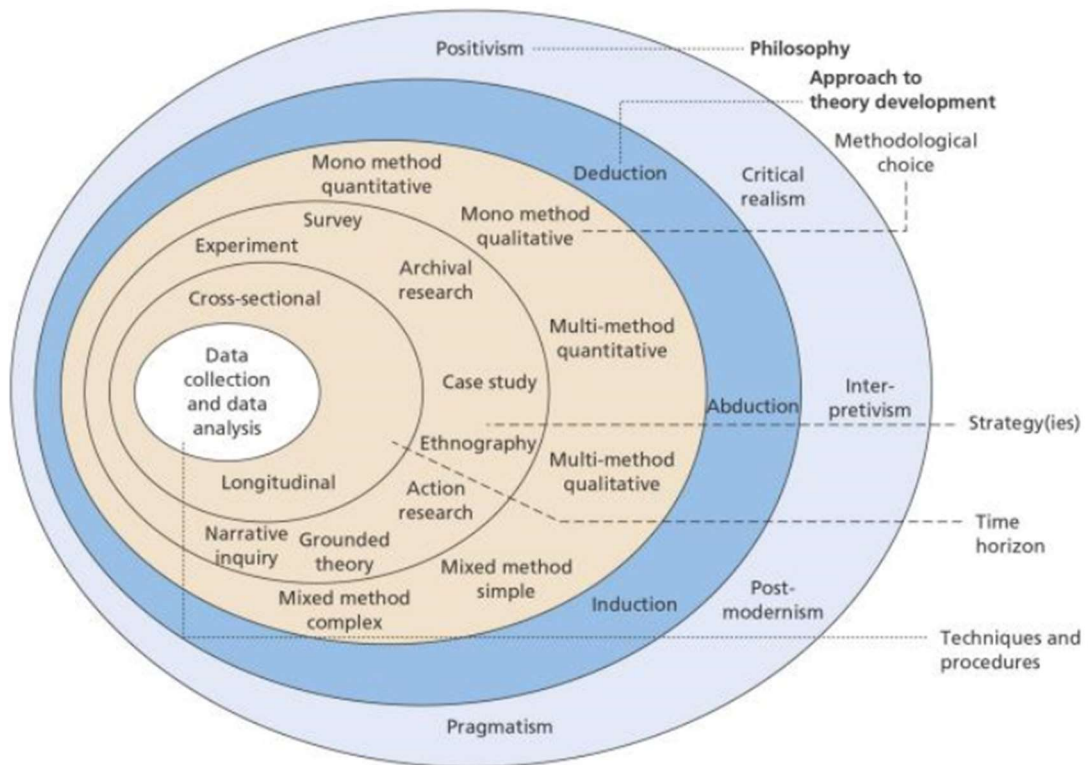


Figure 3 the research design process (adapted from Saunders et al (2016: 124))

The next sections will discuss all aspects of the research design used in the current study starting with the philosophical foundations of this study.

## 2.4 The philosophical foundations of this research

According to Crotty (1998), theoretical perspectives are essential components of research methodology which guide the research process. Researchers have to decide whether their study is going to adopt a quantitative or a qualitative approach, or both (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). There are continuous debates about the relative merits of these two approaches (Kawachi and Berkman, 2003, Rist, 1977). According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998), this is a result of the ongoing struggle between two different philosophical assumptions or paradigms which are 'positivism' and 'constructivism'; the first being linked with quantitative methods and the second with qualitative methods. Interpretivism is another philosophical approach which has been associated with qualitative research (Creswell, 2013, Bryman, 2012). However, the struggle has become even wider with the emergence of the growth of combining and mixing between these two methods. While incompatibility purists argue that researchers will not succeed in bringing these two methods together, the contrasts between positivist and constructivist paradigms are not as great as have been perceived (Howe, 1988,

Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005b). Accordingly, the pragmatist paradigm begins to handle the incompatibility between these two paradigms and brings qualitative and quantitative methods together in the mixed method approach.

The next section will discuss some of the philosophical issues behind the selected methodology for this study. Different philosophical assumptions or paradigms will be discussed, particularly positivism, post-positivism, interpretivism and pragmatism. Various definitions and explanations are proposed by different authors, and these will be explained as they relate to the current investigation. These include discussing the implications that these philosophical approaches would have for choosing a quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods approach.

## **2.5 Research paradigms**

'Paradigm', 'methodology' and 'methods' are terms commonly related to research design. According to Creswell (2013) researchers have to clarify these aspects in their research in order to assist them with deciding on the research approach they will adopt, starting from discussing a wide range of assumptions to selecting the method used for gathering and analysing data. This section will discuss these terms in more detail, starting with a discussion of the term of 'paradigm'.

A research philosophy or research paradigm has been identified as a belief about the way in which data about a phenomenon should be gathered, analysed and used (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998); or the way that people look upon the development of knowledge (Saunders et al., 2011). Bogdan and Biklen (1998) described the term 'paradigm' as "...a loose collection of logically related assumptions, concepts or propositions that orient thinking and research." (P.22). According to Bryman (2003, P. 4), a paradigm is a cluster of beliefs that, for scientists, dictates which particular discipline influences what should be studied, how research should be done and how results should be interpreted. Paradigms are opposing worldviews or belief systems that are a guide and reflection of the decisions that researchers make (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998). According to Bryman (2012), the selected research approach can impact the research processes, such as data collection.

The current research philosophy can be clarified by the understanding of the ontological, epistemological and methodological considerations. The ontological inquiry is concerned with 'the nature of reality'. Epistemology refers to the theory of the nature of knowledge



within its validity and limits (Remenyi, 1998). It can be used to identify the knowledge in a certain level which can be used to analyse and describe reality. Methodological inquiry asks 'How do we gain knowledge about the world?' (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, P.185). In this thesis, I chose to examine the adaptation experiences of expatriates living in Oman through the lenses of the pragmatism paradigm to deeply understand meanings of their experiences through their own perspectives. In order to understand the philosophical foundations and the paradigm of this research the following sections will discuss the research paradigm.

### 2.5.1 Pragmatism

Saunders et al. (2016) present pragmatism as a position which argues that the most important determinant of the research philosophy is the research question, further arguing that it is possible to work with a combined approach, connecting positivist as well as interpretivist positions. The emphasis is on the practical, adapting and drawing from different perspectives to collect and interpret data. Although Howe (1988) takes a contrary view, that quantitative and qualitative research paradigms and methodologies should not be mixed; pragmatism is still considered to be a viable choice because this pragmatic oriented research methodology offers greater opportunity to answer research question instead of dwelling on discussions about the underlying paradigm or approach. According to Johnson et al. (2007b) there is an agreement about the philosophy of science, or set of philosophical positions, which will best partner with mixed methods research. As constructivism and post-structuralism are associated with qualitative research, post positivism has been connected to quantitative research. Sale et al. (2002) mention that science is characterized by empirical research; all phenomena can be reduced to empirical indicators which represent the truth. The ontological position of the quantitative paradigm is that there is only one truth, an objective reality that exists independent of human perception (Sale et al., 2002). Most of the mixed methods scholars have argued for some version of pragmatism as the most useful philosophy to move knowledge forward and support a productive dialogue about the outcomes of research. Johnson et al. (2007b) also agree that pragmatism is a well-developed and attractive philosophy for integrating perspectives and approaches. Pragmatism offers an epistemological justification (i.e., via pragmatic epistemic values or standards) and logic (i.e., use the combination of methods and ideas that helps one best frame, address, and offer tentative answers to one's research questions for mixing approaches and methods (Johnson et al., 2007b).

Pragmatism provides an alternative worldview to those of positivism/post-positivism and Interpretivism and focuses on the problem to be researched along with the consequences of the research. According to Ratner (2002), pragmatists do not see the world as an absolute unity in a similar way; researchers of mixed methods look to different approaches to collect and analyse data rather than subscribe only to one way (e.g. quantitative or qualitative). They also look to the *what* and *how* of research based on intended consequences and where they want go with their research (Creswell, 2003, P. 11). They need to establish an aim for their mixing and a rationale for the reasons why the quantitative and qualitative data need to be mixed in the first place. Ratner (2002, P. 11) summarises the pragmatic position by stating:

*“Thus, for the mixed methods researcher, pragmatism opens the door to multiple methods, different worldviews, and different assumptions, as well as to different forms of data collection and analysis in the mixed methods study.”*

According to Goldkuhl (2012), the major concern of methodological pragmatism is how knowledge is created. Pragmatism stresses the active role of the researcher in creating data and theories and believes that experimentation is pivotal in all aspects of life and all over the world. The researcher is participating in practice in order to explore – through own actions or the close observations of others’ actions - the effects and success of different tactics. In action research, there is a continual development, application and evaluation of knowledge and tactics which follows the basic idea of methodological pragmatism. Another important aspect is the use of different methods. Pragmatism does not take a dogmatic position concerning different methods.

According to Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005a), pragmatism provides advantages to the researchers who use this approach. It provides researchers with the flexibility to select the methods that help them to address a wide range of research questions. Wahyuni (2012) states “...pragmatists believe that objectivist and subjectivist perspectives are not mutually exclusive.” (P. 71). Therefore, in order to approach and understand social phenomena, a mixture of ontology, epistemology and axiology is acceptable. Here, the importance is on what works best to study the research problem. Pragmatist researchers prefer to work with both quantitative and qualitative data because these offer them better understanding of social reality (Wahyuni, 2012).

The Post Positivism paradigm has developed out of criticism of Positivism. It views reality as probabilistically true where Positivism (the paradigm of Science) views reality as really

true and fully independent of the mind (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Although, Post Positivism works have been associated with quantitative methods and methodologies they also work with qualitative approaches (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Many who accounted themselves as Post Positivists do utilise mixed methods. The significant differences between Pragmatism and Post Positivism at the Epistemological level is that Post Positivism understands reality as a single reality that is probabilistically true and independent of the mind (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010). Pragmatists in contrast, view reality as containing elements that are accessible and independent of the mind and as elements that are constructed and therefore dependent on the mind. From an epistemological perspective, Pragmatism already leans more towards Mixed Methods than Post Positivism (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) suggest that the pragmatic approach for mixed methods “allows for a pluralist view of research methods - a middle position - as opposed to engaging in the age old duality debate about whether qualitative or quantitative methods are better” (P.17). Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) also assert that approaching research pragmatically not only reflects what occurs in practice more accurately, but also reflects an important skill for researchers to possess - conducting methodologically rigorous scientific research through practical and cost- effective means.

Due to these reasons and, in particular, to enable an understanding of the social reality of Western expatriates and non-western adjustment and interaction in Oman, the pragmatism paradigm offers the greatest potential for understanding the social realities of expatriate adjustment and exploring patterns of interaction with Omani nationals. Hence, it is adopted for the purposes of this research, to permit a flexibility advance of established research agendas in this area and make the most of available opportunities to conduct quantitative and qualitative research.

## **2.6 Justification for the selected method**

A mixed method approach has been applied for this study to answer the research questions. The pragmatist paradigm is the methodological approach in this study, which is considered as a suitable theoretical framework for mixed methods. A mixed methods approach has been used in this research because it provides many advantages to a study. Some of the advantages of mixed methods research are that pluralistic methods are required to answer the complex and interdisciplinary research questions (Creswell, 2011, Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010). Therefore, this design is suitable for both the exploration and explanation of

the research problems (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004, Creswell and Clark, 2011). This compensation between methods adds rigour and depth and strengthens the conclusions that can be drawn thus creating a better understanding of the phenomenon under research (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004, Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009).

Mixed methods study overcomes the weaknesses of using a single method. At the same time, it offers the strengths that each method can be contributed to the research (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004, Creswell, 2013). However, mixed methods have some limitations. For example, this requires a broad understanding of multiple methods, it also time-consuming and can be expensive. (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004, Creswell, 2011). It could also require a research team to be involved in the data collection and analysis, rather than these processes being able to be carried out individually, especially when the research has adopted concurrent study phases (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). According to (Creswell and Clark, 2011), once the two sets of data are analyzed, the two strands are mixed during the interpretation stage. The two separate methods are then combined in the discussion. In this design, it is expected that the contradictions or congruence between the findings of the two approaches may be revealed from the data.

In this study, the main aim of mixing methods is to answer the research questions: primarily, the quantitative questions, which are concerned with examining the features of cross-cultural adjustment of Western expatriates in Oman, taking into account their concerns and perceptions of cultural novelty between Oman and their countries and link these features with the training programs they require. These features of the adjustment of Western expatriates will be compared with the perceptions of both non-Western expatriates and Omanis in order to explore the influence of cultural novelty on their perceptions. Secondly, the qualitative question aims to explore the expatriates' and Omanis' perceptions of their experiences of cultural adjustment, working together and interacting with each other.

Based on Creswell and Clark's (2011) classifications of mixed methods designs, this study adopted the convergent parallel mixed method design. According to Creswell and Clark (2011), this kind of mixed method design has many advantages over the other designs. Firstly, this design provided the researcher with the possible understanding and development interventions concurrently and was conducted over a short period of time. Moreover, the researcher gave priority to the quantitative methods and placed greater emphasis in this area, while the qualitative method was implemented as a secondary role. However, despite the

fact that the qualitative had a secondary role in the study, this method constituted an important part of the research as it covered the lack of comprehension of the quantitative method. For the purposes of this study, quantitative and qualitative data were collected in order to reach a possible understanding as well as to develop interventions concurrently and in a short amount of time in respect of the adjustment and interaction of Western expatriates living and working in Oman.

## **2.7 Quantitative and Qualitative Approach of the study**

### **2.7.1 Research mixed method**

A sequential exploratory mixed method design, which some scholars prefer to call *multi-method research*, (see Johnson et al. (2007b), combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches and have been adapted as a model for this study. The following definition of mixed method research posited by Creswell and Clark (2007) has been utilized in this study. Mixed method research is a research design with philosophical assumptions as well as methods of inquiry. As a methodology, it involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of the collection and analysis of data and the mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches occur in many phases in the research process. As a method it focuses on collecting, analysing and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies. Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of the research problems than either approach alone (Creswell and Clark, 2007, P.5).

Mixed methods research assists in answering the questions that cannot be answered using only qualitative or quantitative research methods alone. Mixed methods research provides a “...more complete picture by noting trends and generalizations, as well as providing in-depth knowledge of participants’ perspectives.” (Creswell and Clark, 2007, P.33). When both quantitative and qualitative data are included in a study researchers may enrich their results in ways that using only one form of data does not allow (Brewer and Hunter, 1989, Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998). Using both forms of data allows researchers to simultaneously generalize results from a sample of a population and develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of interest. It also allows researchers to test theoretical models and modify them based on the feedback from participants (Hanson et al., 2005).

Although quantitative approaches are still broadly used, numerous studies have started to employ mixed method designs in a single study in order to obtain fuller answers to their research questions (Silverman, 2010). However, researchers are still required to select the most appropriate method which is best suited to the form of mixed methods design and that will enable the research questions to be answered more accurately. In this research study the researcher collected data by using quantitative instruments and qualitative data reports to see if the two types of data revealed similar results but from different perspectives (Ratner, 2002).

The next section will focus on the different types of the mixed method designs. Figure 4 describes the research designs adopted in the current study.

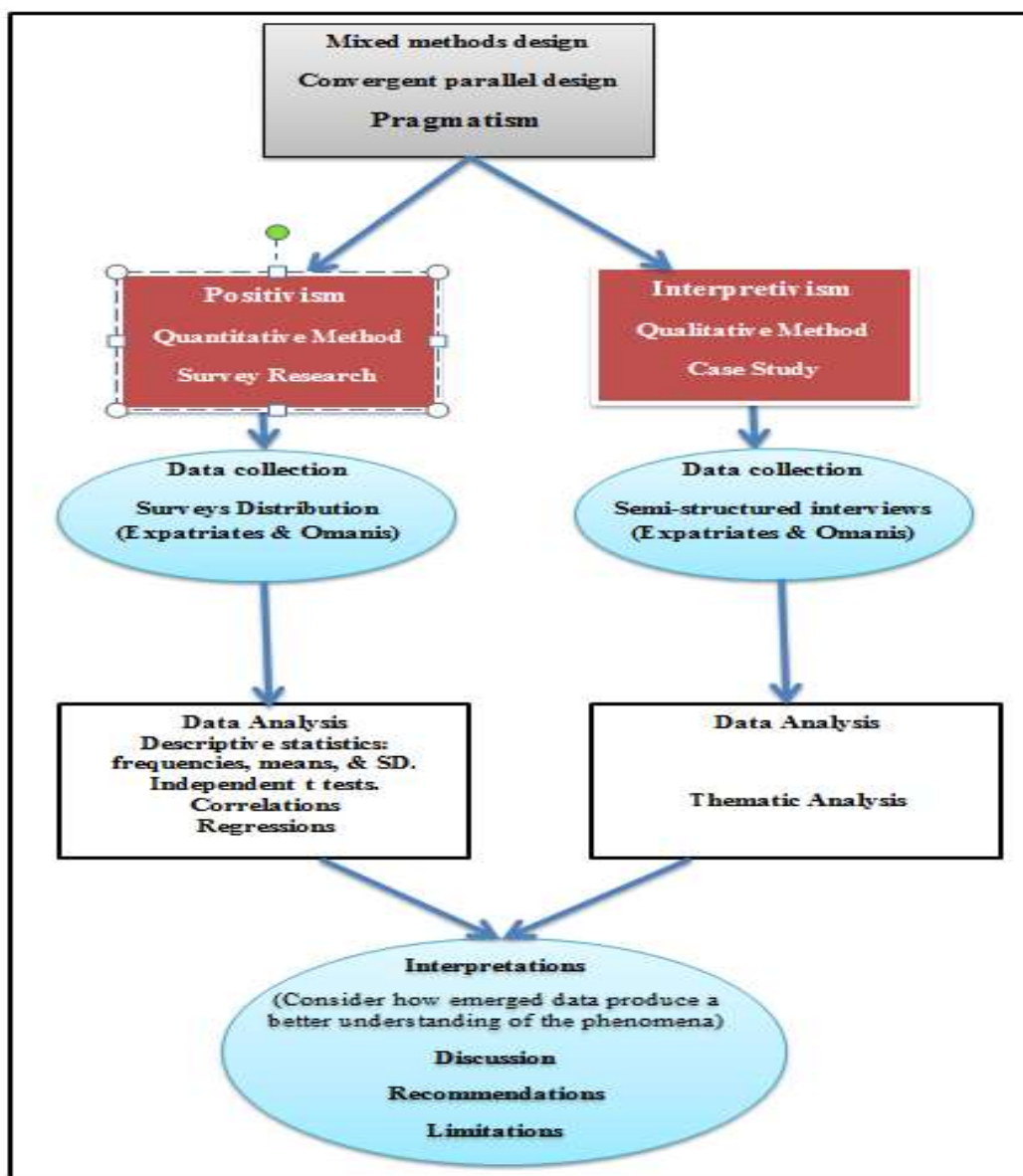


Figure 4 the Research Design. Source: created by the author.

## 2.7.2 Mixed method designs

The comparison between quantitative and qualitative research and the extent to which this may occur in a study has led to the identification of different variations of mixed methods research (Creswell and Clark, 2011, Saunders et al., 2016). According to Creswell and Clark (2011), choosing the specific design is based on two factors. First, how will the different methods be organized and which one will come first. Second, to which of the methods will the researcher give priority. Different methods in different orders can be adopted by researchers which will reflect what they think about. A researcher might start with conducting a quantitative design and then follow it by a qualitative one, or vice versa. It might also be useful to conduct two different methods at the same time in order to compare the findings from each approach with one another (Creswell and Clark, 2011). Finally, qualitative and quantitative methods might be used within multiple levels (Creswell, 2009).

The different ways of combining qualitative and quantitative methods have been described by Creswell and Clark (2011) and these will be explained below.

## 2.7.3 The convergent parallel design

With this design, researchers conduct qualitative and quantitative methods at the same time. For example, they distribute questionnaires and interview participants during the same phase; however, they gather and analyze the data independently for each method. This separation between the two methods extends to the analysis phase and each data is analysed with its own paradigm and its own data analysis method. After interpretation, both data sets will be integrated in order to explore the convergences and divergences across both sets of data.

## 2.7.4 The explanatory sequential design

This design uses the qualitative data to provide explanations for the initial quantitative results. In the different stages of this design data collection will occur. In the first phase the researcher will begin with collecting and analysing the quantitative data because the quantitative results will address the primary questions of the study. Then, the second stage will be the process of gathering and analyzing the qualitative data.

### 2.7.5 The exploratory sequential design

This design is similar to the explanatory sequential design; however, the researcher collects the data on different occasions. The researcher, in the first stage, will start with collecting and analyzing the qualitative data. Following this the quantitative tools are created based on variables that are built on the categories which have emerged from the qualitative data.

### 2.7.6 The embedded design

This design appears when researchers have gathered and analyzed both sets of data within one of the paradigms, either qualitative or quantitative. The researcher may add a qualitative item to a quantitative approach or the opposite. Accordingly, the convergent parallel design has been employed in the current research for several reasons and forms the major part of the mixed design. Firstly, in order to obtain the understanding of the research problem, According to Creswell and Clark (2011), the aim of using the convergent parallel design is to get the best understanding of the research problem by obtaining "...different but complementary data on the same topic." (P. 77). Secondly, as the current study was conducted as one part of the researcher completing his PhD there was limited time to carry out the data collection process; this meant that both sets of data were collected at the same time and during one field visit. Finally, the researcher had obtained the necessary skills required to implement quantitative and qualitative research methods when he previously studied his masters' degree. The following sections will focus on the selected quantitative and qualitative designs respectively for the current study.

## 2.8 Methodological considerations

### 2.8.1 Quantitative research design

According to Punch (2005), quantitative research is defined as "...empirical research where the data are in the form of numbers." (P. 3). It aims to generate 'general statements' or 'laws' which are applicable to different settings and different populations; therefore, it predominantly reflects the positivism school of thought (Bryman, 2012, Creswell, 2013). This type of methods keeps the distance between the researchers and observed context in order to maintain the objectivity of this approach (Bryman, 2003).



According to (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004) quantitative research has standardized methods which are used to gather and statistically analyses data. Creswell (2009), has classified the quantitative research into two main types, namely: survey research and experimental research. Each type will be described separately within the following subsections.

**Survey research:** by studying a sample of the population, this research type provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes or opinions of a population. It uses questionnaires or structured interviews for data collection and includes cross-sectional and longitudinal studies in order to generalize the results from a sample to the population (Creswell, 2009).

**Experimental research:** this type of design aims to determine cause and effect relationships. Researchers seek to study the changes in independent variables by manipulating or changing the independent variables. This type of research requires a high level of control of variables; therefore, it has been categorised as the strongest quantitative method

This study adopted the survey research design for the quantitative method. This quantitative research design assists research by collecting data from a large sample of both expatriates and local employees in a short period of time. Kelley et al. (2003) reviewed the advantages and disadvantages of the survey research approach (p. 262), as follows:

**Advantages:**

- The research produces data which is based on real-world observations (empirical data).
- The breadth of coverage of many people or events means that it is more likely to obtain data based on a representative sample than some other approaches and can therefore be generalized to a population.
- Surveys can produce a large amount of data in a short period of time for a fairly low cost. Researchers can therefore set a finite time-span for a project which can assist in planning and delivering end results.

**Disadvantages:**

- The significance of the data can become neglected if the researcher focuses too much on the range of coverage to the exclusion of an adequate account of the implications of those data for relevant issues, problems or theories.
- The data that are produced are likely to lack details or depth on the topic being investigated.
- Securing a high response rate to a survey can be hard to control, particularly when it is carried out by post, but is also difficult when the survey is carried out face to-face or over the telephone.

There is a current dearth of scientific research that examines the Black and Gregersen (1991c)'s framework of international adjustment by comparing three important groups, namely: living, working and interacting with each other. More specifically, to date there has been no published study which has examined the (Black and Gregersen, 1991c) model by studying Western and non-Western expatriates and the host national Omanis as the targeted population under study. This present study addressed a gap in the academic literature on expatriate adjustment by partially replicating earlier studies on the factors influencing adjustment of those expatriates from three different groups, in order to explore the differences of the perceptions between them.

### 2.8.2 Qualitative research design

Qualitative research has been defined as "...any type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification." (Johnson et al., 2007a, p. 34). According to Burns and Grove (2010), qualitative research refers to inductive, holistic, emic, subjective and process-oriented methods. These methods are used to gain a better understanding, interpretation, description and development theory about a phenomenon. These methods are mostly linked with words, language and experiences, rather than measurements or statistical and numerical figures. Therefore, it could be identified as a systematic and subjective approach which is adopted to describe the experiences of individuals in their social lives and give them meaning (Burns and Grove, 2010).

By using a qualitative research strategy, researchers can adopt more than one single resource to collect research data. Observations, interviews and document examination are the most

frequently used methods. Then the researchers will go through all of the collected data and transcribe this into written form and conduct analysis to extract the themes that are related to the investigated topic (Burns and Grove, 2010, Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research has several methods with narrative research, case studies, grounded theory and phenomenology being the most common qualitative designs. As the current study adopted the case study design to explore the adjustment and interaction of Western expatriates in Oman, the next section will outline the definition of the case study and the justifications for using it.

### 2.8.2.1 Case study strategy

With the case study design the researcher examines one person or a group of individuals. For the purposes of the current study the case study will be used to identify the factors that impact expatriates and the related influences on assignment success. According to Kapiszewski (2000), the case study is an approach to research that facilitates the exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources. This ensures that the issue is not explored through one lens, rather, a variety of lenses are used which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood. Case study methodology is guided by two key approaches; one proposed by Robert Stake (1995) and the second by Robert Yin (2003, 2006). Although both seek to ensure that the phenomenon of interest is well explored and that the essence of the topic is revealed, the methods that they each employ are quite different and are worthy of discussion (Kapiszewski, 2000).

A qualitative case study was conducted in Omani MNCs in the private sector in order to identify the adjustment, cross-cultural communication and training of expatriates and collect empirical data to answer the above-mentioned research questions. The case study approach has been selected because it "...can be used to explain everyday practices that are affected by the culture in which they are embedded (for example, absenteeism) and in cross-national research (for example, cultural differences)." (Kealey and Protheroe, 1996, P. 75). Furthermore, Skousen and Miller (1998) mentioned that qualitative studies provide a deeper understanding of human behaviour and assist to uncover the motivations behind actions. Therefore, this format enables researchers to explore the expatriates' environment and their specific experiences while being on an international assignment.

There are a number of factors to consider when selecting the research strategy of a case study. According to Mellahi and Budhwar (2010), A case study has a distinct advantage over

other research strategies when "...a 'how' or 'why' question is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the investigator has little or no control." (P. 9). It provides the opportunity to "...explain why certain outcomes may happen – more than just find out what those outcomes are." (Denscombe, 1998, P. 31). This is actually very important for the present study to identify the expatriates' experience of adjusting and interacting in Oman.

In addition, according to Rose et al. (2010), an exploratory case study is considered to be an appropriate method for theory building, particularly when little is known about the underlying phenomenon and the research cannot rely much on past empirical findings. In addition, it is used in order to "...provide freshness and a new perspective to an already researched topic." (Hills and Atkins, 2013, p. 548). As mentioned in Chapter 3, previous research on expatriates and related fields has produced a multitude of findings. However, there remain certain gaps which need to be investigated. Indeed, some of the research conducted over recent years has acknowledged that there is still a lot to learn about the complex construct of expatriation (for example, Harrison and Shaffer, 2005, Shaffer et al., 2006, Takeuchi, 2010, Hedrick, 1994). In this context, Yin (2003) emphasises that the case study is the preferred research method whenever reasons for certain phenomena ("why" questions) or detailed explanations ("how" questions) are required. In order to find the respective answers, the RQs of this case study represents this view and are designed to drill deeper into the expatriate environment.

According to Saunders et al. (2016), case studies have been used for different purposes and can be designed in many different ways; they have been used deductively and inductively by positivist and interpretivist researchers. Furthermore, they have been used for descriptive, exploratory and explanatory purposes. Case studies also offer researchers with opportunities to use a mixed method research design which combines archived records and documents and uses different forms of observation, ethnography, interviews, focus groups and reflection (Saunders et al., 2016).

There are a number of advantages associated with the use of case studies. First, according to Cassell and Symon (1994), case studies provide a means of investigating complex social units involving several variables which are essential to understand the phenomenon. Therefore, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon. Due to its strengths, the case study is a particularly appealing design for several applied fields of study,

such as education, social work, management, health and so on. Bakogiannis et al. (2014) addressed several advantages of case studies; one of the key advantages being that they allow for the collection of various attributes in the studied field which would not be possible when using a quantifiable method. The flexibility of the case study enables the researcher to begin the study by setting broad questions and then narrow their focus on a latter part of the research where the relevant findings are extracted. Additionally, case studies "...bridge the gap between abstract research and concrete practice by allowing researchers to compare their first-hand observations with the quantitative results obtained through other methods of research." (p.44).

Although case studies have several advantages there are a number of weaknesses which have also been identified. For example, weaknesses in the methodology are represented by their subjectivity, along with insufficient precision, the validity of the questions as well as the risks of generalization. Furthermore, other weaknesses are linked to the high risks emerging from personal integrity, sensitivity, prejudices or biases of the researcher (Bakogiannis et al., 2014).

### 2.8.2.2 Quantitative design variables

The independent variables used in this research study included previous experience, foreign language ability and cultural novelty of the host country. The dependent variables included cultural adjustment, interaction adjustment, work adjustment and training. The control variables included the working sector (petroleum and educational), gender, marital status, nationality, age, highest degree, overall degree of satisfaction with previous experience, religious status.

These control variables have been included for several reasons. Firstly, in other previous studies, these variables have been proven to have a positive effect on cross-cultural adjustment (Church, 1982, Hechanova et al., 2003, Stahl and Caligiuri, 2005), although they were not examined in the Black et al. (1991) model. Secondly, most of the previous studies focused on examining the correlations between these variables and dependent variables, while current research has examined all independent and controlling variables in order to produce the highest percentage of explanations of the variance in the dependent variable.

### 2.8.2.3 Type of case study employed

An exploratory case study approach has been implemented in the current research study. The evocative research design relies on replicating the respondents' experiences; as such, it is meticulously linked to ethnographic studies although a quantitative structure is also a key and significantly suitable structure. For instance, a population's subgroup characteristics relative to demography can be described. An exploratory research approach will enable the study to adequately address the research questions.

### 2.8.2.4 The strategic selection of the cases

A descriptive research design is centered on appropriately defining and expounding on a populace or social portent's characteristics. Such can be viewed as efficient when applying a quantitative structure in the provision where it is possible to determine the impact that one variable has on another (Bryman, 2003). The descriptive study can be explained as an assessment of a subject matter which occurs prior to the point where sufficient information is known in respect of undertaking a systematic research project. Normally it is undertaken so as to inform further researching and studying in the concerned subject area.

## 2.9 Time horizons

Time horizons are the time structure within which the researcher intends to complete the project. The research onion states that there are two kinds of time horizons which are either longitudinal or cross sectional. The longitudinal time horizon is described as the collection of data recurrently and over a prolonged period of time. The longitudinal time horizon is used when an imperative factor of the study is measuring change over time. It is advantageous for the purposes of examining development and change (Bryman, 2003). Moreover, it facilitates the establishment of specific control over the variables being researched. On the other hand, the cross-sectional time horizon is one which has been already founded and where the data ought to be gathered. This is labeled as the snapshot time collection, where the data is gathered at a particular point. The cross-sectional time horizon is used when the examination is concerned with the research of a certain phenomenon at a particular time. The specified time horizon does not depend on a methodology or research approach.

## **2.10 Data collection methods**

Survey and semi-structured interviews were selected as the most appropriate mixed methods to open relevant insights and generate a suitably detailed and contextualized understanding of the topic. This section will present information about data collection and data collection instruments for both quantitative and qualitative methods respectively.

### **2.10.1 Quantitative instruments and data collection**

This section will present information about the quantitative instruments have been used in this study. It also describes the sample of quantitative design and the procedures of the data collection.

#### **2.10.1.1 Quantitative survey**

For this research the objectives of the quantitative survey were firstly, to explore the cultural distance between Oman and the countries of expatriates; secondly, to discover the main challenges that expatriates working and living in Oman face in terms of culture, work and interaction adjustment and finally, to explore the reality of the training programs provided and the expatriates' suggestions as to how to develop these programs, it also aimed to examine the differences in perspectives about adjustment between Western, non-Western expatriates and Omanis. As the quantitative research method in this study is a partial replication of previous empirical tests of the Black et al. (1991) model of expatriate adjustment study, constructed measurement scale was applied using Black and Stephens (1989) questionnaire / scales.

The questionnaire / scales developed by Black and Stephens (1989) are considered as being the most frequently used tool to measure expatriate adjustment (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). According to Mendenhall et al. (2002), the deployment of these scales has provided substantial amounts of evidence regarding expatriate adjustment (see also, Hechanova et al., 2003). However, some modifications have been made to the original version of the scales. For example, the cultural novelty scale originally contained 8 items but subsequently 2 items were added to explore the novelty of work and culture.

The survey consisted of five parts. The first part deals with socio-demographic data gathered through close-ended questions. In the original Black and Gregersen (1991c) study the scale of cultural novelty consisted of 8 items and reported an acceptable reliability level for this scale with .64. In the second part, there were 10 items that measured the cultural novelty between Oman and the countries of the expatriates. This was followed by 21 items which focused on cultural adjustment, which in the original study expatriates' cultural, interactional (Black and Gregersen, 1991c) scored .82 reliability. The three items of the third part measured work adjustment with a reliability score of .91 in the original study (Black and Gregersen, 1991c). In the original work of (Black and Gregersen, 1991c), four items measured interaction adjustment with a .89 reliability score. In this study 9 items have been added to the interaction scale to be 13 items. The last part of the questionnaire was the cultural training scale, which consisted of 17 items and another opened questions. All items in the survey followed Likert five-point scales to record respondent answers. As most answers were agreed or disagreed scale, the cultural novelty scale used the answers of 1 (Highly Similar) and 5 (Not at all similar), while end anchors of the scale of cross-cultural adjustment was 1 (No Difficulty) and 5 (Extremely Difficulty) (see Appendix B). The following section will describe the research sample.

#### **2.10.1.2 Sampling of quantitative design and data collection procedures**

It is generally agreed that the larger the sample size the better. Indeed, Hair et al. (2006a) state "...it is comforting to have at least 300 cases for factor analysis." (P.613). Hutcheson and Sofroniou (1999) propose the inclusion of at least 150 – 300 cases. While Hair et al. (2006a) suggest that the subjects-to-variables ratio should be no lower than 5. In the present study the sample size available for analysis totalled 592 cases, thus fulfilling the rule of 300, as suggested by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007).

One thousand, one hundred and fifty surveys were initially distributed by hand to the human resource managers in both the educational and petroleum sectors in Oman. The researcher outlined the participants' rights and aims of the study then provided them with supporting documents such as the participants' statement, ethics approval letter and a supporting letter from the Ministry of Higher Education in Oman. Two hundred and ninety-five useable surveys were returned which were considered to be legitimate for this research. Seventeen additional surveys were returned but were not considered appropriate for the purpose of this study. A total of 550 surveys were distributed to Omanis with 297 surveys being completed



and returned. This figure takes into account a number of returned surveys which were unable to be used. The following tables describe the characteristic of expatriates and Omani sample participated in this survey. The following table describes the diversity of the expat experience of the participants.

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of the survey expatriate participants in the study

Nationality		Gender		Current Position		Working Sectors		Age categories	
Western expats Australian (28) British (79) Canadian (27) New Zealand (4) Belgium (3) Nationalities (1) USA (51) France (2) Dutch (6) Hungary (1) Finnish (1)	Other India Philippians Eritrean Malaysian	Males	Females	Positions	N	Petroleum	Educational	Age categories	N
203	92	224	71	Director/General Manager/Chief Executive	1	115	180	20-30	24
				Senior Manager	11			31-40	166
				Middle Manager	20			41-50	55
				Manager	22			51-60	36
				Non-manager	224			61+	11
<b>Total</b>		<b>295</b>							

Table 2 Demographic characteristics of the survey Omani participants in the study

Gender		Working positions		English Speaking		Working sectors		Age		Country of study		
Males	Females	Positions	N	Yes	No	Petroleum	Educational	Age categories	N	USA	Europe and Asia	Oman and
147	150	Director/General Manager/Chief Executive	8	272	21	122	177	Under 25	22	69		228
		Senior Manager	29					25-34	198			
		Middle Manager	2					35-44	68			
		Manager	99					45-54	8			
		Non-manager	159					55+	1			
<b>Total</b>		<b>297</b>										

The qualitative instruments, samples and data collection process will be presented in the next section.

## 2.11 Reliability measure

Reliability refers to the process of measuring the extent to which an item, scale or instrument will produce the same results when applied in different times, at different locations or with different populations, when the two applications use the same variables (Drost, 2011). In other words, reliability analysis provides the researcher with information about the proportions of the measurement scales and the items that will be used in the study. The researcher can easily measure the scale's reliability and the relationships between individual items in the scale by using the SPSS Reliability Analysis. By checking the components of a questionnaire against each other the internal consistency reliability will be determined.

This research reports the internal consistency reliability in the form of Cronbach alpha. Cronbach's alpha is considered to be the most common measure of scale reliability. The Cronbach's alpha presents the correlation coefficient, which has values ranging from 0 to +1. To select the items of the scale the alpha score should be 0.70 or higher. To verify the accuracy of the measurement process of this study, the internal consistency reliability of the three dependent variable scales and the independent variable scale have been tested. The alpha score of the expatriates' scale was 0.7.97, while the Omanis' scale scored 0.748 which located in acceptable range as mentioned above. Table 4 shows the instrument reliability of the scales used in the current study, as follows.

Table 3 Instrument reliability of expatriates' scales

<b>Instrument Reliability</b>		
<b>Variables</b>	<b>Number of Questions</b>	<b>Cronbach's alpha (<math>\alpha</math>)</b>
Cross-Cultural Adjustment	21	0.81643
Work Adjustment	7	0.77482
Interaction Adjustment	16	0.83643
Cultural Novelty	10	0.89543
Cross-culture Training	18	0.74482
Family supports	2	0.71482

The same steps were taken in order to examine the reliability of the Omani scales. The following table (Table 5) describes the number of items and Cronbach's alpha scores.

Table 4 Instrument Reliability of Omanis scales

<b>Instrument Reliability</b>		
<b>Variables</b>	<b>Number of Questions</b>	<b>Cronbach's alpha (<math>\alpha</math>)</b>
Cross-Cultural Adjustment	20	0.77625
Work Adjustment	7	0.72936
Interaction Adjustment	16	0.84831
Cultural Novelty	10	0.85839
Cross-culture Training	18	0.71632

As this study used statistical analysis and multi-regression models in particular, several assumptions have been required to reach a satisfactory level of validity. According to Jaccard et al. (2006), multiple regressions examine the relationship between a single outcome measure and several predictor or independent variables. To apply the model and establish validity, several critical assumptions are required to be satisfied in order to obtain the correct use of the multiple regression models (Jaccard et al., 2006). For example, the data for most statistical testing has to assess normality levels. Although testing normality is important in non-parametric testing, in the case of parametric analysis it is not only a prerequisite but a required assumption (Jaccard et al., 2006). For the current study, testing normality was important for conducting the independent t-test and regression (Field, 2009).

Numerical testing of both the Shapiro-Wilks test and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test have been used for exploring the normality tests for the overall dependent variables (social, work and interaction adjustment) based on the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Accordingly, the independent t-test, regression models and other statistical tests can be used to answer the research questions posed for investigation. The required assumption of normality has been achieved and hence, such statistics are very much suitable.

## **2.12 Qualitative instruments and data collection**

As previously mentioned, case studies provide an in-depth exploration and description of a complex phenomenon (Yin, 2003, Zainal, 2007). The data for this study were collected by conducting semi-structured, face to face interviews with eighteen expatriates currently working and living in Oman at a location that was selected by the participant. Using semi-structured interviews provided the researcher with cues and hints to further probe the subjects and enable both the interviewer and interviewee to discuss the issues more

elaborately. This process is consistent with Ratner (2002)'s discovery that semi-structured interviews allow the use of open ended questions which give the participant the opportunity to discuss any issues as openly as he or she desires. In addition, a few close-ended questions were included in the interview. Each of the interviews lasted between one and two hours with ten of the interviews taking place at different restaurants selected by the participants and five being conducted in one of the meeting rooms at the participants' place of work. The majority of the interview questions were open-ended, thereby allowing for in-depth discussion.

The interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and were supported by the researcher's written notes. All of the eighteen participants gave the investigator prior permission to record the interviews, all of which were recorded and labelled with a code for easy identification. A total of eight male expatriates and eleven female expatriates were interviewed from four Western countries which included Australia, New Zealand, the USA and the UK. All the interviews were conducted in English and all participants were asked the same questions. The average duration of each of the interviews was approximately one hour and thirty minutes. During the interviews, only the questions formulated in advance were used as a guide to direct the flow of the discussion and the conversation was conducted informally to allow the participant the freedom to tell their stories.

The subjects of the study ranged from customer service personal, engineers, translators and chefs working within various departments in the education and the oil sectors in Oman. Thirteen out of the eighteen expatriates interviewed had prior international experience of working in other countries, prior to their current assignment. Two out of the five expatriates interviewed had previously been on a one-year assignment to a location in the Oman that was different to their present assignment location. None of the remaining five expatriates interviewed had prior international work experience. Although three of this group of expatriates had travelled to other countries on personal vacation, their current international assignment would be regarded as their first cross-cultural work assignment for the purpose of this study.

Prior to conducting the interview, the researcher sent out the informed consent forms to each of the participants who indicated their interest in participating in the study. Each of the participants interviewed signed the consent form and returned it back to the researcher. Upon receipt of this form, the researcher then contacted the subject to explain the purpose of the

study and also to arrange a time and venue for the interview to be conducted. This study was conducted using the eighteen expatriates who responded and returned the consent form.

### 2.12.1 Qualitative Sample

A qualitative researcher should engage in the collection of data through relevant approaches that can assist in validating the findings against the scope of the research. In this process, the participants were purposefully selected to contribute effectively to the line of study. A total of eighteen interviews were conducted with expat managers working within various organisations on a varied and different nature of assignments in the sultanate of Oman. From managers to professors in universities, the expat managers were considered to be the most suitable as they worked in a diverse range of industries, thus their perception of being an expat worker and their experiences in situations of culture shock, cultural differences and cultural adjustment, cross-cultural communication with Omanis and training programs and requirements would help to answer the research questions.

The interviews were held with both male and female expatriate managers with their native countries being identified as the United States of America, United Kingdom and Australia. The language to communicate with the interview participants was chosen as English – the universal language and each interview was conducted one to one. Prior to starting the interviews, the interview purpose and the scope of study was shared with the participant. They were briefed on the types of questions they would be asked and also that their personal details would remain confidential. The interview with each expat participant was recorded in the form of an audio file which was later analysed and decoded to identify themes and trends that are based on the core factors analysed.

The majority of the interviewees selected for the interviews held managerial positions and worked in senior management environments, as well as having experience of decision making and employee management. Of the 18 expats selected for the study, the majority had prior experience living as an expat in other countries, such as the Gulf, Europe and Asia. Many expat managers hailed from the US and had prior experience working on various international assignments (non-Gulf) whilst also having an average of 10-15 years of experience working in a Gulf based country – an Arab country. The following (Table 5) describes the diversity of the expatriate experience of the participants and details the demographic information of the participants.

Table 5 Demographic characteristics of the interview expatriate participants in the study

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Prior expat experience</b>	<b>Country of expat experience</b>	<b>Years of Expat experience</b>
1		Yes	Sudan, KSA, Jordan	20+
2	USA	Yes	Costa Rica	10+
3	USA	Yes	Canada, Japan, China, Gulf	15+
4	USA	Yes	KSA, Oman	10+
5	UK	Yes	New Zealand	10+
6	South Africa	No		8+
7	USA	Yes	Korea, Japan, KSA, Oman	8+
8	UK	Yes	Abu Dhabi, Oman	20+
9	USA	Yes	USA, Europe	-
10	India	No		-
11	USA	No	UK	-
12	India	No		-
13	USA	Yes	KSA, and others	10+
14	USA	No		
15	Dutch/Canada	Yes	Egypt, Canada	20+
16	South Africa	Yes	Dubai, KSA	-
17	USA	Yes	Mexico	10+
18	UK	Yes	KSA, Iran	20+

To acquire information representative of Western expatriates and Omani employees who work in international companies in Oman, the author conducted 18 in-depth semi-structured interviews with Western expatriates who have different levels of experience of working with Omani employees. Twenty-two interviews were also conducted with local employees from different economic sectors. The participants all worked in a supervisory or managerial capacity and had many years of experience of working with foreign superiors or partners as work experience with expatriates is an important factor in intercultural communication between expatriate and Omani workers.

In order to understand the experience of adjustment and communication barriers among foreign and local managers, each interviewee was asked to provide some personal information, such as their age, educational background, current position, his or her work experience and length of time spent living in Oman (for expatriates). They were also asked to describe the nature of their company's business and the nature of their work groups.

Groups of expatriate and Omani employees who worked in the same group and the same company were selected to take part in the interviews. The employees were first asked whether or not the communication barrier or differences in behaviour made them feel uncomfortable, anxious, dissatisfied or disappointed when interacting with each other. Secondly, they were asked to describe how they dealt with any problems and how they adjusted their behaviour to work better in the international/intercultural environment. Finally, both groups were questioned about the consequences of any communication problems that arose.

## **2.13 Data analysis process**

This section is divided into two subsections. This section explains the data analysis processes employed in the research.

### **2.13.1 Analysis strategy and techniques**

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. This approach has been defined by (Braun and Clarke, 2006) as a method of identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data (p. 802). The data gathered from the surveys was analysed using Microsoft Excel and the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) was used for all calculations. First and foremost, the descriptive statistics were summarized to capture the characteristics of the participants. Following this the inferential statistics consisting of means and t-tests were conducted and the results computed to analyse the variance. Tables and graphs were used to display the results and interpretations were made in the data analysis section. The use of a Likert scale for quantitative data collection as explained by (Creswell, 2013) allowed for painless analysis and measurement of internal consistencies with the help of IBM SPSS statistics. As stated by Saunders et al. (2011), the Likert scale permits the expression of responses over a degree of opinion or no opinion at all.

## **2.14 Validity and reliability**

The case study strategy utilised in this study has enhanced the richness of the data obtained from the participants and enabled the researcher to develop a greater and more in depth understanding of the issues facing Western and non-Western expatriates in Oman within a real-life context and in all areas of their daily lives. Generalisation is the most common criticism of the case study (Punch, 2005). Golafshani (2003) argued that the inability to

measure the validity and reliability of qualitative research, including case studies, is the main reason why generalization occurs. However, scholars such as Patton (1990) and (Golafshani, 2003) both agree that applying the mixed methods approach can enhance the validity and reliability of case studies and qualitative research. Accordingly, this research used the mixed methods approach to examine the adjustment of expatriates in Oman.

## **2.15 Ethical issues**

As this research involves engaging with people, the four parties expected to be involved are the researcher, the respondent, the university and the organisations in the Sultanate of Oman. The researcher respects the rights of all parties including the participant's rights to privacy and confidentiality and the right to be informed about all aspects of the research. Respondents were informed about the nature and aims of the study both verbally and in writing. Each participant was asked to sign a consent form. All the names and personal details of the participants and their departments were kept confidential. The research meets the requirements of the Ethics Committee of the University.



## ***Chapter 3: Data Analysis & Findings: (Quantitative Results)***

### **3.1 Introduction**

The results of the current study have been divided in two different chapters according to the research methods. The first chapter of the result presents the quantitative and statistical results, while the next considers the in-depth findings from the interviews.

As indicated in the methodology, the purpose here is to assemble profile data and point to significant associations from the statistical processing of survey material. This should establish a strong platform for subsequent discussion and in-depth analysis of theoretically important results. The perceptions and experiences of the participants are considered, with particular attention to their reasons for choosing to live and work in Oman. Matters of cross cultural communication and adjustment identified by western, non-western expatriates, and Omanis in both survey in this chapter and interview responses are introduced in the following next chapter, along with contrasting observations and reports from native Omani workers and managers.

The first section identifies and explores the cultural distance between the countries of expatriates and the host national culture (Omani culture). The second section will highlight the cultural and general life adjustment issues, while the next section explores work adjustment. Finally, this chapter will present the findings on cross-cultural communication and the training of western expatriates living and working in Oman.

Each section will begin with presenting the result of expatriate participants on each scale then will examine the differences between western and non-western expats. This will be followed by presenting the local employees result and the comparison between them and the expatriates. Each section will be concluded by a regression model in order to provide the highest percentage of prediction by using both independent and controlling variables.

### **3.2. Cultural Distance (Novelty)**

As explained with the earlier review, culture novelty is identified in the literature as the extent to which the culture of the home country varies from that of the host country (Gudykunst and

Hammer, 1984). As also mentioned in the literature (Black et al., 1991, Selmer, 2006, Everaert, 2013, Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005) that the greater the differences in values, norms, religious beliefs, and the gender roles of the host-country compared with the home-countries, the more cultural novelty the expatriates will experience in the new cultures. In addition, the greater the cultural novelty in the host culture, the more adjustment challenges that expatriates will experience. In order to examine the validity of this hypothesis and to answer the first research question which was what is the influence of cultural distance on expatriates' cultural, interactional, work adjustment in Oman?, this section will, first, study the natural of cultural novelty between Oman and the countries of expatriates from point of views of western and non-western expatriates and Omanis. Then, will test this hypothesis by comparing between the level of cultural novelty and the degree of adjustment. Finely, the factor of cultural novelty will be examine through regression models to testify its influence and interaction with other factors such as language ability, gender, and age, on different types of adjustment (social, interaction, and work).

The culture novelty was measured by a scale of 10 items. The minimum and maximum score obtained was 1.0 and 5.0, respectively. Scores that were considered low level cultural distance had a mean ranging from 1 to 2.33, the moderate level cultural distance had a mean ranging from 2.34 to 3.67, while the high level cultural distance had a mean ranging between 3.68 and 5. The descriptive analysis of the cultural distance scale provides valuable information in favour of level of distance between expatriates' culture and the host culture. This information can be used in first, the extent of the cultural difference between Oman and the countries of expatriates from the standpoint of both western and non-western expatriates, and Omanis, which will assist to reach an in-depth explanation of the degree of the adjustment and the challenges that facing by expatriates. Second, it will provide knowledge about the most Omani cultural aspects, vary from countries of expatriates and this will also be linked to the results of the adjustment. The highest and lowest mean of the survey results were calculated. Items that were equal to or greater than the overall average of the questionnaire have been selected.

### A. expatriates' point of view.

The average mean of expatriates on the cultural distance scale was 36.9, (3.69) SD= 5.47. This might show that the expatriates surveyed may illustrate high level of cultural distances between Oman and their countries.

The climate (weather conditions), transportation systems used in Oman, and general living costs scored the highest mean which is higher or equal the average mean (3.55). This can be used as an indicator of the temperature difference and the lack of appropriate public transportation system in Oman in comparison to what the expatriates have in their home countries. However, general housing conditions, general living conditions, everyday customs that must be followed, scored the lowest means, see table (7). This result may have attributed that expatriates may condones the level of housing and everyday customs between Oman and their counties, whereas, the differences on the climate and transportation system have a strong impact on their daily lives.

Table 6 Expatriates' point of view of cultural distance (Cultural Novelty) of living between the host country (Oman) and the home countries influencing their adjustment.

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
Climate (i.e. weather conditions).	4.19	.966
Transportation systems used in Oman	3.93	1.074
General living costs	3.55	.975
Using health care facilities	3.34	.976
Overall Omani culture compared to your national culture	3.30	1.090
Work environment	3.21	1.045
Available quality and types of foods	3.18	1.059
General housing conditions	3.17	.945
General living conditions	3.07	.983
Everyday customs that must be followed	2.91	1.110

Next, the results of comparison between westerns and non-western expatriates will be presented in order to assess the novelty between western and non-western, at first hand, and between expatriates and Omanis on the other.

### **B. Comparison between westerns and non-western expatriates.**

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the differences between western expatriates and non-western expatriates in terms of cultural distance of living between the host country (Oman) and the home countries. The results show that there is a significant difference in the scores for western ( $M= 35.34$ ,  $SD= 6.040$ ) and non-western expatriates ( $M= 32.65$ ,  $SD=6.94$ ) conditions;  $t(270) = (2.580)$ ,  $p= .001 <.05$ . The majority of the similar studies (Feldman and Thomas, 1992, Langinier and Froehlicher, 2016, Awais Bhatti et al., 2014) previously conducted in this area placed all the participating expatriates in one category, despite the fact that they came from different cultural backgrounds; this resulted in inaccurate and misleading results (Harzing and Pinnington, 2010). Thus, the following comparisons should be used as a guide only as the results of this categorisation may also be misleading

Further analysis of an independent-samples t-test in cultural distance items is presented in Table 5 concerning means and standard deviations with the respondents of significance of each item that described differences between western expatriates and other expatriates. The results show significant differences between westerns and other expatriates in items of: everyday customs that must be followed, Overall Omani culture compared to home and national cultures and work environments. On average, western expatriates experienced greater cultural novelty in all three items than non-western expatriates (see table 8). This could be indicator that western expatriates believe that cultural novelty everyday customs and overall Omani culture and work environment between Oman and their countries are more obvious than other expatriates. This could be explained due to most non-western expatriates came from cultures have been categorised with Omani culture according to cultural dimensions theory (Hofstede, 1980) which has been mentioned in the literature. Therefore, they, unlike western expatriates, tend to give less estimations for these cultural differences between Oman and their countries.

Table 7 differences between western expatriates and other expatriates in terms of cultural distance of living between the host country (Oman) and their home countries.

Items	Expatriates	M	SD	t	df	Sig. (2tailed)
Everyday customs that must be followed	Westerns	3.23	1.123	4.439	279	.000**
	Non-western	2.62	1.016			
Overall Omani culture compared to your national culture	Westerns	3.58	1.059	3.463	283	.001**
	Non-western	3.03	1.056			
Work environment	Westerns	3.37	.985	2.156	282	.012*
	Non-western	3.06	1.080			

p\*\*< 0.01, p\*< 0,05

### C. from Omanis' point of view.

As the host country Oman is considered to have a responsibility to provide suitable working and living environments for expatriates. It is, therefore, reasonable to investigate the perceptions and views of the Omanis and also to measure the degree of compatibility and differences between Omanis and expatriates in respect of the cultural distance between the groups under scrutiny. From next table, it can be seen that Omanis selected items of climate, overall Omani culture compared to their (expatriates) national culture, Transportation systems used in Oman, and the general living costs as the most differences between Oman and the home countries of the expatriates. This factor scored the highest means as 3.74 was the average means for the scale. This could be an indicator that Omanis show a higher level of cultural novelty between Oman and the countries of expatriates. While general housing conditions, work environment, and available quality and types of foods scored the lowest means see table (9).

Table 8 Omanis' point of view of differences in cultural distance of living between the host country (Oman) and the home countries influencing their adjustment.

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
Climate (i.e. weather conditions).	4.21	.825
Overall Omani culture compared to their national culture	4.03	.708
Transportation systems used in Oman	3.99	.979
General living costs	3.72	.939
General living conditions	3.65	.875
Everyday customs that must be followed	3.65	.851
Using health care facilities	3.45	.941
General housing conditions	3.45	.860
Work environment	3.40	.918
Available quality and types of foods	3.28	.947

Likewise, to expatriates, Omanis also tend to show a moderate cultural novelty between Oman and the countries of expatriates with mean of 33.94 (3.39), and SD= 6.64. This will be more obvious with the result of independent t-test in the next section.

#### **D. Comparison between Omanis and expatriates.**

An independent-samples t-test also was conducted to compare the differences between expatriates and Omanis in terms of cultural distance of living between the host country (Oman) and the home countries. The results show that There was a significant difference in the scores for expatriates (M= 36.9, SD= 5.47) than Omanis (M= 33.94, SD=6.64) conditions;  $t(539) = (5.658)$ ,  $p = .000 < .05$ . From the participants surveyed, the evidence indicates that the expatriates (M= 36.9, SD= 5.47) believe that the size of the cultural gap between their countries and Oman is much more significant than the Omanis (M= 33.94, SD=6.64) do and this could influence the amount and quality of the training programs that are provided by the host country. This could also explain why there is high incidence of expatriate failure during the adjustment process.

Thus, an independent-sample t-test was applied to the project sample in order to identify the areas of cultural differences between the expatriates and the Omanis. As can be seen in Table 7, the results show five out of ten significant differences between the Omanis and expatriates between Oman and their home countries. These aspects include everyday customs that must be followed, the Omani culture in general, which is in total contrast to the expatriates' culture, general living conditions, living costs, general housing conditions and work environment. This appears to be an indication that the expatriates surveyed may evaluate the size of the cultural gap between their countries and Oman more than Omanis do. It may also be attributed to the degree of estimation of expatriates to the cultural difference between the Omani culture and their culture, as expatriates may have a better awareness of their needs and the influences of the Islamic religion and its teachings on the Omani culture and differences of customs and traditions between the two cultures. It may also indicate that the Omanis have little knowledge about expatriates needs and they under estimating the novelty between their own culture and expatriates culture. This could be due to the weakness of the training programs provided, as it will explain in the training section. As some Omani participants have asked to provide training programs for local people about the culture of expatriates and the differences between their culture and Omani culture. Some participants went much further and advise Omanis to find ways to explain their culture to be more clear for expatriates.

To investigate in which aspects of cultural novelty expatriates differ than Omanis, an independent-samples t-test shows significant differences between Omanis and expatriates on five of ten differences between Oman and their home countries. From Table 10 it can be seen that expatriates tend to consider the following cultural aspects presenting the cultural novelty between Oman and their own countries. The aspects are everyday customs that must be followed, overall Omani culture compared with expatriates' culture, general living conditions, general living costs, general housing conditions, and work environment.

Table 9 Differences between Omanis and expatriates on cultural distance between Oman and their home countries.

Items	Expatriates	M	SD	t	df	Sig. (2tailed)
Everyday customs that must be followed	Expatriates	3.65	.851	8.8	563	.000**
	Omanis	2.91	1.110			
Overall Omani culture compared to your national culture	Expatriates	4.03	.708	9.5	569	.000**
	Omanis	3.30	1.90			
General living conditions	Expatriates	3.65	.875	7.4	567	.000**
	Omanis	3.07	.983			
General living costs	Expatriates	3.72	.939	2.2	567	.026*
	Omanis	3.55	.975			
General housing conditions	Expatriates	3.45	.860	3.7	566	.000**
	Omanis	3.17	.945			
Work environment	Expatriates	3.40	.918	2.2	568	.026*
	Omanis	3.21	1.045			

p\*\*< 0.01, p\*< 0,05

Following the examination of the gap between the Omani culture and the cultures of the countries of expatriates, the next section will investigate the cultural challenges faced by the expatriates in the general day to day living in Oman.

### 3.3. Expatriates Cultural adjustment and challenges in Oman

#### A. from expatriates' point of view.

In order to explore the most important features of the expatriates' adjustment, the second section of the survey included a group of questions about expatriates' experience of adjusting to life in Oman. The headline results can be recognized in table (11). Listed among the most important factors were entertainment/recreation facilities and opportunities, using the transport system, dealing with unsatisfactory service, health care facilities, dealing with bureaucracy, and cost of



living were the most difficulties that expatriate facing during their adjustment in Oman. For the most part, the difference that expatriates experience in their day to day living in Oman, when compared to their home countries, can be attributed to the many differences in the quality and quantity of public services provided in Oman, particularly as most expatriates have come to a developing country from a developed one. These major lifestyle changes could negatively influence their adjustment in this new environment. The average mean for the scale was (3.155). In contrast, statements such as understanding ethnic or cultural differences, understanding the host country's value system, psychological adjustment, adjustment to performance standard and expectations and the practice of worship all have the lowest means. These results clearly indicate that the majority of the problems facing expatriates are associated with general daily living and lifestyle adjustment, rather than cultural adjustment.

Table 10 Cultural and social adjustment difficulties from expatriates' point of view

N	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Entertainment/recreation facilities & opportunities	3.84	1.169
2	Using the transport system.	3.54	1.260
3	Dealing with unsatisfactory service.	3.37	1.028
4	Health care facilities	3.34	1.122
5	Dealing with bureaucracy	3.25	1.172
6	Cost of living	3.19	1.071
7	Going to social gatherings.	2.96	1.070
8	Finding food that you enjoy	2.90	1.102
9	Making yourself understood.	2.80	.831
10	Communicating with people of a different ethnic group.	2.78	.872
11	Shopping	2.72	.973
12	Housing conditions	2.70	.872
13	Living conditions in general	2.69	.860
14	Seeing things from a host national's.	2.67	.843

N	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
15	Understanding ethnic or cultural differences.	2.66	.780
16	Understanding the host country's value system.	2.65	.889
17	Psychological adjustment	2.60	.795
18	Your practice of worship	2.56	.973
19	Taking the host country's perspective on the culture.	2.56	.797
20	Working with the local co-workers	2.47	.771
21	Following rules and regulations.	2.47	.776

### **B. Differences between westerns and non-western expatriates on cultural adjustment in Oman.**

In order to identify and compare whether there are any differences in the experiences of both Western and non-Western expatriates and whether they share any similar difficulties in their cultural and social adjustment, an independent-samples t-test was conducted. The results show that there was no significant difference in the scores for Western expatriates ( $M= 43.08$ ,  $SD= 14.29$ ) and non-Western expatriates ( $M= 40.59$ ,  $SD= 13.39$ ) conditions;  $t(1.533) = (291)$ ,  $p= .126 < .05$ . This distinction between Western and non-Western could be an indication that most expatriates face similar cultural and social difficulties during their period of adjustment.

Although generally no significant differences were indicated, further analysis and independent sample t-tests were carried out which revealed a number of significant differences between the experiences of Western and non-Western expatriates in other areas. It can be seen in Table 9 that Western expatriates highlighted differences associated with the cost of living, adapting to the host country's laws and perspective on culture, dealing with bureaucracy and working with the local co-workers (see Table 12). The results in these areas differed from those of the non-Western expatriates. Thus, these results could be an indication that there is, in fact, a difference in the type and degree of suffering and adjustment difficulties that the expatriates face depending on the country and culture from which they originate. This result may show a contradict with the previous result, which indicates that there were no significant differences between Western and non-Western in the degree of adjustment, but in spite of the emergence of these differences in the effect of some factors in the adjustment of Westerners and non-Westerners, there is no

difference in the whole degree of the scale as indicated result in the preceding paragraph. As such, it is unproductive and inaccurate to generalise, or to expect that all expatriates will encounter the same difficulties when actually, the country from which they originate plays a crucial role and has to be taken into consideration.

Table 11 Differences between western and other expats in difficulties of expatriates' adjustment

Items	Expatriates	M	SD	t	df	Sig. (2tailed)
Cost of living	Westerns	2.02	.967	-2.657	279	.008**
	Non-western	2.36	1.145			
Taking the host country's perspective on the culture	Westerns	1.71	.884	3.157	272	.002**
	Non-western	1.41	.670			
Dealing with bureaucracy	Westerns	2.45	1.235	2.942	274	.004**
	Non-western	2.04	1.070			
Working with the local co-workers	Westerns	1.58	.861	2.336	278	.020*
	Non-western	1.37	.658			

p\*\*< 0.01, p\*< 0,05

### C. From Omanis' point of view.

Omanis, in contrast, selected the lack of entertainment/recreation facilities & opportunities, going to social gatherings, taking the host country's perspective on the culture, understanding ethnic or cultural differences, using the transport system, dealing with unsatisfactory service, making themselves understood, and understanding the host country's value system as the most factors influence the adjustment of expatriates in Oman. The average mean for the scale was (3.41). While the lowest means scored by factors of finding food that you enjoy, working with the local co-workers, and shopping see table (13).

Table 12 Difficulties of expatriates' adjustment from Omanis' point of view

N	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	The lack of entertainment/recreation facilities & opportunities	3.82	1.123
2	Going to social gatherings.	3.60	1.131
3	Taking the host country's perspective on the culture.	3.55	1.058
4	Understanding ethnic or cultural differences.	3.53	.986
5	Using the transport system.	3.52	1.209
6	Seeing things from a host national's point of view.	3.50	1.049
7	Dealing with unsatisfactory service.	3.42	1.126
8	Making themselves understood.	3.42	.977
9	Understanding the host country's value system.	3.41	1.056
10	Dealing with bureaucracy	2.86	1.210
11	Their Worshipping.	2.30	1.099
12	Living conditions in general	2.03	.902
13	Housing conditions	2.02	.968
14	Health care facilities	2.01	1.088
15	Psychological adjustment	1.96	.815
16	Following rules and regulations.	1.92	.988
17	Cost of living	1.73	.927
18	Finding food that you enjoy	1.66	.822
19	Working with the local co-workers	1.65	.755
20	Shopping	1.59	.889

#### **D. Comparison between Omanis and expatriates.**

An independent-samples t-test also was conducted to compare the differences between expatriates and Omanis in terms of difficulties that expatriate face during their adjustment in Oman. The results show that there was a significant difference in the scores for Omanis (M=

48.3, SD= 12.3) than expatriates (M= 42.52, SD= 12.54) conditions;  $t(456) = (-4.96)$ ,  $p = .000 < .05$ . This result may seem unexpected, as the literature indicated that the greatest novelty leads to more difficulties to adjustment. Despite in previous results, expatriates showed more cultural novelty than Omanis, they show lower estimates of the difficulties faced by expats during their adjustment than Omanis. This result may attributed to strategies that expatriates have developed to facilitate their adjustment. For example, in qualitative results expatriates mentioned that in order to avoid the influence of the culture shock stage they used strategies such as, keeping in contact with their families in their home countries. They also tried to spend most of their times at work or doing activities, keeping themselves busy, and developing new friendships with another expatriate.

The independent-samples t-test also shows significant differences between Omanis and expatriates on 17 of 23 statements of difficulties of adjustment in Oman. The next table presents those differences (see table 14).

Table 13 Differences between expatriates and Omanis in difficulties of expatriates' adjustment

Items	Expatriates	M	SD	t	df	Sig. (2tailed)
Living conditions in general	Expatriates	1.69	.860	-4.65	563	.000**
	Omanis	2.03	.893			
Housing conditions	Expatriates	1.70	.872	-4.27	567	.000**
	Omanis	2.03	.967			
Finding food that you (they) enjoy	Expatriates	1.90	1.102	2.9	572	.004**
	Omanis	1.67	.818			
Cost of living	Expatriates	2.19	1.071	5.69	574	.000**
	Omanis	1.72	.922			
Health care facilities	Expatriates	2.34	1.122	3.73	570	.000**
	Omanis	2.00	1.085			
Following rules and regulations.	Expatriates	1.47	.776	-6.32	573	.000**
	Omanis	1.94	.988			

Items	Expatriates	M	SD	t	df	Sig. (2tailed)																																																																												
Taking the host country's perspective on the culture.	Expatriates	1.56	.797	-12.7	568	.000**																																																																												
	Omanis	2.56	1.053				Understanding the host country's value system.	Expatriates	1.65	.889	-9.3	566	.000**	Omanis	2.41	1.05	Making yourself understood.	Expatriates	1.80	.831	-7.9	572	.000**	Omanis	2.39	.972	Seeing things from a host national's.	Expatriates	1.67	.843	-10.46	572	.000**	Omanis	2.50	1.04	Going to social gatherings.	Expatriates	1.96	1.07	-6.8	573	.000**	Omanis	2.59	1.12	Understanding ethnic or cultural differences.	Expatriates	1.66	.780	-11.9	573	.000**	Omanis	2.54	.982	Your practice of worship	Expatriates	1.56	.973	-8.44	559	.000**	Omanis	2.30	1.09	Working with the local co-workers	Expatriates	1.47	.771	-2.7	572	.006**	Omanis	1.65	.751	Psychological adjustment	Expatriates	1.60	.795	-5.3	565
Understanding the host country's value system.	Expatriates	1.65	.889	-9.3	566	.000**																																																																												
	Omanis	2.41	1.05				Making yourself understood.	Expatriates	1.80	.831	-7.9	572	.000**	Omanis	2.39	.972	Seeing things from a host national's.	Expatriates	1.67	.843	-10.46	572	.000**	Omanis	2.50	1.04	Going to social gatherings.	Expatriates	1.96	1.07	-6.8	573	.000**	Omanis	2.59	1.12	Understanding ethnic or cultural differences.	Expatriates	1.66	.780	-11.9	573	.000**	Omanis	2.54	.982	Your practice of worship	Expatriates	1.56	.973	-8.44	559	.000**	Omanis	2.30	1.09	Working with the local co-workers	Expatriates	1.47	.771	-2.7	572	.006**	Omanis	1.65	.751	Psychological adjustment	Expatriates	1.60	.795	-5.3	565	.000**	Omanis	1.97	.810						
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p\*\*< 0.01, p\*< 0,05

To explore if expatriates encounter difficulty in cultural differences when they are carrying out their job in Oman or not, and are there significant differences between western and non-western expatriates and between expatriates and Omanis. As this analysis will provide clear evidence and approve that expatriates face difficulties in their adjustment in Oman.

The results in table 15 show that the two groups of expatriates were differed in difficulties that they are encountering in cultural differences when they carrying out their job in Oman. There was a significant difference in the scores for western (M= 2.53, SD= 1.027) and non-western expatriates (M= 2.25, SD=.947) conditions; t for western (2.391) and the non-western is (2.384),

while  $p = .017$ . This result indicates that expatriates who came from western cultural background seem to encounter more difficulties comparing with non-western expatriates.

Table 14 Differences between westerns and non-western expatriates and between expatriates in general and Omanis on cultural difficulties when they are carrying out their job in Oman

Item	M	SD	t	df	Sig. (2tailed)
You (they) encounter difficulty in cultural differences when carrying out your job in Oman	Westerns	2.53	1.027	2.391	284
	Non-western	2.25	.947		

A significant difference also has been found between expatriates on the first hand ( $M= 2.38$ ,  $SD=.994$ ) and Omanis ( $M= 2.80$ ,  $SD= 1.246$ ), on the other, in encounter difficulties in cultural differences that expatriates facing during their assignment in Oman, conditions;  $t$  for western ( $4.39$ ) and the Omanis is ( $4.39$ ), while  $p = .000$ .

Table 15 Differences between westerns and non-western expatriates and between expatriates in general and Omanis on cultural difficulties when they are carrying out their job in Oman

Item	M	SD	t	df	Sig. (2tailed)
You (they) encounter difficulty in cultural differences when carrying out your job in Oman	Expatriates	2.38	.994	-4.39	568
	Omanis	2.80	1.246		

$p^{**} < 0.01$ ,  $p^* < 0,05$

This result indicates that Omanis tend to believe that expatriates will encounter difficulty in cultural differences when carrying out their job in Oman more than expatriates do. This may illustrate that the Omanis' previous experience about expatriates' difficulties constituted these views.

## **Exploratory Analysis**

To investigate factors and challenges that expatriates facing in Oman and in preparation for answering the fourth research question which was do variables such as working sector (Petroleum & Educational), Gender, marital Status (Married or Partner & single), nationality, age, highest degree, previous experience as an expatriates, overall degree of satisfaction with previous experience, religious status, and the language ability influence or affect the adjustment, the intercultural communication and work adjustment?. In order to answer this question, regression models have been designed examining these controlling variables (working sector (Petroleum & Educational), Gender, marital Status (Married or Partner & single), nationality, age, highest degree, overall degree of satisfaction with previous experience, and religious status) and dependent variables (previous experience as an expatriates, the language ability, and cultural novelty) with independent variables (cultural adjustment, work adjustment, and interaction adjustment).

## **Regression models**

It is important to check if there is a high correlation between the independent variables before conducting a regression model. The strong correlation between any of the independent variables has been identified as potentially being a major problem which may occur when using two or more predictors' variables (Mason and Perreault Jr, 1991), therefore, A Pearson Product-Moment correlation has been conducted in order to explore whether there is a high correlation existing between the independent variables namely: working sector (Petroleum & Educational), Gender, marital Status (Married or Partner & single), nationality, age, highest degree, previous experience as an expatriates, overall degree of satisfaction with previous experience, religious status, and the language ability. The results show that there is no high correlation (range between 0.00 - 0.50). For example, marital status and the spouses are employed in Oman have been excluded due to the high correlation with the availability of the spouse in Oman with .818 and .640 respectively. Then, multiple linear regression model has been generated to identify the most important factors effected the adjustment of expatriate in Oman. According to Pao (2008), Multiple linear regression models are often used as empirical models when more than one independent variable is involved, which can approximate the true unknown functional relationship between the dependent variable and independent variables



Cultural adjustment: A significant model emerged when testing the dependent variable cultural adjustment ( $F(9) = 8.095, p < .000$ ) with an  $R^2$  of .228, and independent variables. This model explains 20% of the variance in the dependent variable (Adjusted R square = .20). In order to generate the highest percentage of variance in the dependent variable not significantly correlated variables have been eliminating. The variables that have been found as most predictor variables are cultural novelty, nationality, age category, highest degree, family support, and organisational support provided. Although, the training satisfaction, religious status, the current position variables have no significant prediction of cultural adjustment, they have not been eliminated because excluded them led to a decrease in the degree of model explanation of the variance in the dependent variable (see table 17).

Table 16 Results of Regression Analysis with Cultural Adjustment as the Dependent Variable.

Predictor Variable	N	$\beta$	SE $\beta$	$\beta$	t	p	Tolerance
(Constant)	272	9.741	3.671		2.653	.008	
Cultural novelty	272	.252	.057	.260	4.398	.000	.894
Nationality	272	.127	.053	.141	2.382	.018	.900
Age category	272	-.911	.304	-.172	-2.996	.003	.952
Highest Degree	272	.997	.375	.158	2.655	.008	.891
Family support	272	-.436	.179	-.141	-2.439	.015	.944
Organisational supports	272	1.829	.577	.181	3.172	.002	.963
Training satisfaction	272	-.134	.097	-.082	-1.383	.168	.899
Religious status	272	-1.120	.634	-.106	-1.767	.078	.872
Current position	272	.361	.350	.059	1.032	.303	.955

As previously mentioned expatriates are not only required to adjust socially and culturally but also need to adjust to working in a new and different environment. The next section will investigate the degree of the work adjustment of expatriates in Oman.

### 3.4. Work adjustment

As mentored in the earlier review, work adjustment is another anxiety that expatriates have to deal with during their international movement (Black et al., 1991, Selmer, 1999b, Hutchings,

2003, Selmer, 1999a). Work adjustment is the facet which involves the adaptation to new job tasks, work roles, and the new work environment. According to Black et al. (2001) work adjustment is aided by similarities in procedures, policies, and task requirements between the parent company and host subsidiary abroad (Black et al., 2001). This section will examine the work adjustment of western and non-western expatriate and compare them with Omanis.

The minimum score in the scale of the work adjustment was 3, while the maximum score was 14. The sample of expatriates shows a slight work adjustment by mean of 7.4 and 1.5 standard deviations.

According to the results of the flowing table of expatriates responds, the item of I understand my supervisory responsibilities scored the highest mean 4.32 and standard deviation of .803. While “the statement of my specific job responsibilities are clear” scored the lowest mean with 3.88 and std deviation of .900.

Table 17 Expatriates' work adjustment from expatriates' point of view

N	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	I understand my supervisory responsibilities	4.32	.803
2	I know the performance standards and expectations of my job	3.96	.838
3	My specific job responsibilities are clear	3.88	.900

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the differences between western expatriates and non-western expiates in terms of work adjustment. The results show that There was a significant difference in the scores for non-western expatriates (M= 12.46, SD=1.91) than westerns (M= 11.77, SD= 2.18) conditions;  $t(291) = (-2.84)$ ,  $p = .005 < .05$ . This result could be indicating that non-western expatriates represent more work adjustment comparing with western expatriates.

Omanis in contrast show less expectations of the expatriates' work adjustment than expatriates by mean= 5.49 and std deviation= 2.06 as the minimum score was 3 and minimum score was 12. This result may indicate that Omanis believe that expatriates in general will face serious

challenges during their adjustment at work. They selected “they understanding their supervisory duties” to be the highest mean and the item of I believe their specific job responsibilities are clear as lows mean (see table 19).

Table 18 Expatriates' work adjustment from Omanis' point of view

N	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	They understand their supervisory duties	2.80	1.244
2	They know the performance standards and expectations of my job	1.95	.900
3	I believe their specific job responsibilities are clear	1.89	.820

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the differences between western expatriates and Omanis in terms of work adjustment. The results show a significant difference in the scores for expatriates (M= 12.37, SD=2.06) than Omanis (M= 5.60, SD= 2.16) conditions;  $t(589) = (38.83)$ ,  $p = .000 < .05$ . This result confirms the previous finding that’s Omanis expect that expatriates will not easily adjust at work environment in Oman. This may be attributed to their perceptions of the differences between the work systems and environments between Oman and expatriates’ countries.

Work adjustment: A significant model emerged when testing the dependent variable cultural adjustment ( $F(9) = 4.900$ ,  $p < .000$ ) with an  $R^2$  of .146, and independent variables. This model explains approximately 12% of the variance in the dependent variable (Adjusted R square = .116). In order to generate the highest percentage of variance in the dependent variable not significant correlated variables have been eliminating. The variables that have been found as most predictor variables are current position, age category, number of children, language abilities, cultural novelty, family support, previous experience, gender, marital status, and nationality. Although, the previous experience, gender, and nationality variables have no significant prediction of work adjustment, they have not been eliminated because excluded them led to a decrease in the degree of model explanation of the variance in the dependent variable (see table 20).

Table 19 Results of Regression Analysis with Work Adjustment as the Dependent Variable

Predictor Variable	N	$\beta$	SE $\beta$	$\beta$	t	p	Tolerance
(Constant)	267	9.112	1.062		8.576	.000	
Current position	267	-.224	.105	-.124	-2.134	.034	.988
Age category	267	-.388	.094	-.249	-4.118	.000	.905
Arabic language abilities	267	.167	.070	.140	2.372	.018	.944
Cultural novelty	267	.048	.018	.164	2.709	.007	.899
Family support	267	-.134	.055	-.147	-2.410	.017	.890
Previous experience	267	-.017	.176	-.006	-.096	.924	.844
Gender	267	.343	.224	.096	1.530	.127	.837
Marital status	267	-.506	.233	-.140	-2.170	.031	.791
Nationality	267	-.019	.016	-.074	-1.208	.228	.893

As it has been mentioned previously in the literature expats not only required to socially and culturally adjust, but they also need to interact with local people. The next section will investigate the interaction of expatriates with locals in Oman.

### 3.5 Cross cultural interaction adjustment

Due to the differences in perceptions, beliefs and values, cultural interaction is yet another challenge presented to expatriates; it is one which could strongly influence the adjustment process for the expatriates who have no choice but to interact with the host country nationals. As the newcomers enter into the new, foreign culture, conflicts and misunderstandings may arise with the host nationals as a result of these differences. This, in turn, can lead to anxiety, anger and depression which will ultimately hinder and negatively affect the adjustment process. This section will focus on understanding the nature of the interaction adjustment of Western and non-Western expatriates from the perspectives of expatriate and Omani employees.

The first test explored the perceptions of the expatriates on their interaction with the host national. The results revealed that the expatriates demonstrate a moderate level of cultural interaction in the scale with a mean of 42.2 (3.1) and SD 4.59. The results also show that items of I often interact with Omani nationals on a day-to-day basis, I maintain good relationship with local social environment , I am interested in having friends from the host country, I enjoy social activities with Omani nationals, I maintain good relationship with local co-workers, I believe that verbal and non-verbal behaviours vary across my culture and the host culture, Language affects the interaction with Omani people, I maintain good relationship with local social environment, I usually interact with Omani nationals outside of work, I try to use local language when I talk to local host country nationals, and At work, I behave in a typically my cultural way scored the highest means. The average mean was 2.67. While items such as you face language communication difficulties when executing your job in Oman, I do not handle myself well in social gatherings; it is difficult for me to make new friends from Oman, I find it difficult to hold a conversation with most people scored the lowest means.

Table 20 working and non-working cross-cultural communication and interaction features of expatriates working in Oman with Omani employees

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
I often interact with Omani nationals on a day- to-day basis	4.16	.896
I maintain good relationship with local social environment	4.15	.895
I am interested in having friends from the host country	4.00	1.065
I enjoy social activities with Omani nationals	3.98	.967
I believe that verbal and non-verbal behaviours vary across my culture and the host culture.	3.85	.989
Language affects the interaction with Omani people	3.40	1.297
I usually interact with Omani nationals outside of work	3.39	1.143
At work, I behave in a typically my cultural way.	2.73	1.179

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
You face language communication difficulties when executing your job in Oman.	2.52	1.300
I do not handle myself well in social gatherings.	2.25	1.226
It is difficult for me to make new friends from Oman.	2.19	1.219
I find it difficult to hold a conversation with most local people.	1.81	1.027

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the differences between western expatriates and non-western expatriates in terms of interaction adjustment. The results show that there was a significant difference in the scores for non-western expatriates ( $M= 39.1, SD= 4.77$ ) than westerns ( $M= 36.7, SD=9.15$ ) conditions;  $t(276) = (-2.72), p= .000 < .05$ . This result could be indicating that non-western expatriates represent more interaction adjustment than western expatriates. Western and non-western expatriates also significantly differ in their selection in 4 items which were: I find it difficult to hold a conversation with most people; I do not handle myself well in local social gatherings, I believe that verbal and non-verbal behaviours vary across my culture and the host culture.

Table 21 Differences of working and non-working cross-cultural communication and interaction features of western and non-western expatriates working in Oman with Omani employees

Items	Expatriates	M	SD	t	df	Sig. (2tailed)
I find it difficult to hold a conversation with most local people.	Westerns	1.71	1.00			
	Non-western	1.93	1.07	-1.734	266	.003**
I do not handle myself well in local social gatherings.	Westerns	1.96	1.14			
	Non-western	2.47	1.31	-3.321	261	.001**
I believe that verbal and non-verbal communication varies across my culture and the host culture.	Westerns	4.04	.929			
	Non-western	3.70	1.04	2.822	263	.005*

$p^{**} < 0.01, p^* < 0,05$

Omanis also show low perceptions of interacting with expatriates as the mean of the overall interaction scale was 37.3 (2.8) and SD 5.2. Omanis also selected items of I maintain good relationship with my expatriate co-workers, I try to use foreign language when I talk to expatriate, at work, I behave in a typically my cultural way when dealing with expatriate, I believe that verbal and non-verbal behaviours vary across my culture and expatriates' cultures, I am interested in having friends from expatriate, I enjoy social activities with expatriate, I often interact with expatriate on a day- to-day basis scored the high means in the scale. The scale average was 2.89. While items such as I usually interact with expatriate outside of work, I face language communication difficulties when executing my job with expatriate, it is difficult for me to make new friends from expatriate, I do not handle myself well in social gatherings with expatriates, I find it difficult to hold a conversation with expatriate got the lowest means.

Table 22 working and non-working cross-cultural communication and interaction features of Omani employees with expatriates working in Oman

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
I maintain good relationship with my expatriate co-workers	4.13	.779
I try to use foreign language when I talk to expatriate.	4.05	.995
At work, I behave in a typically my cultural way when dealing with expatriate.	3.79	1.144
I believe that verbal and non-verbal behaviours vary across my culture and expatriates' cultures.	3.44	1.132
I am interested in having friends from expatriate.	3.41	1.033
I enjoy social activities with expatriate	3.26	1.074
I often interact with expatriate on a day- to-day basis	3.21	1.183
Language affects the interaction with expatriate.	2.94	1.326
I usually interact with expatriate outside of work	2.60	1.160
I face language communication difficulties when executing my job with expatriate.	2.08	1.180
It is difficult for me to make new friends from expatriate.	2.00	1.097
I do not handle myself well in social gatherings with expatriates.	1.74	.919
I find it difficult to hold a conversation with expatriate.	1.66	.800

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the differences between expatriates and Omanis in terms of interaction adjustment. The results show that There was a significant difference in the scores for expatriates (M= 42.2, SD= 4.59) than Omanis (M= 37.3, SD= 5.2) conditions;  $t(530) = (8.1), p = .000 < .05$ . This result could be indicating that expatriates represent more tendencies to interact with Omanis more than Omanis.

In order to discover the most important factors influence expatriates' relationships with their Omanis colleagues, the results show that expatriates selected their communication skills, their technical knowledge/ expertise and organisational networks, and language abilities as the most important factors, while, the gender and nationality are the less important factors influencing their relationships with Omani colleagues (see table 24 and figure 5). The average mean for the scale was 3.29. This result corresponds with the cultural differences previously highlighted and indicates that the Omanis require new and more appropriate communication skills with expatriates and the expatriates need to further develop their communication skills to suit the local environment. This result could also illustrate the differences in communication skills, technical knowledge, organisational networks and language between Oman and the expatriates' countries.

Table 23 Factors most important in the expatriates' relationship with Omanis

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
Your communication skills	3.98	.991
Your technical knowledge/ expertise	3.68	1.164
Your organisational networks	3.67	1.034
Your language abilities	3.53	1.162
Your position in the hierarchy	3.21	1.166
Your gender	2.94	1.258
Your nationality	2.60	1.072



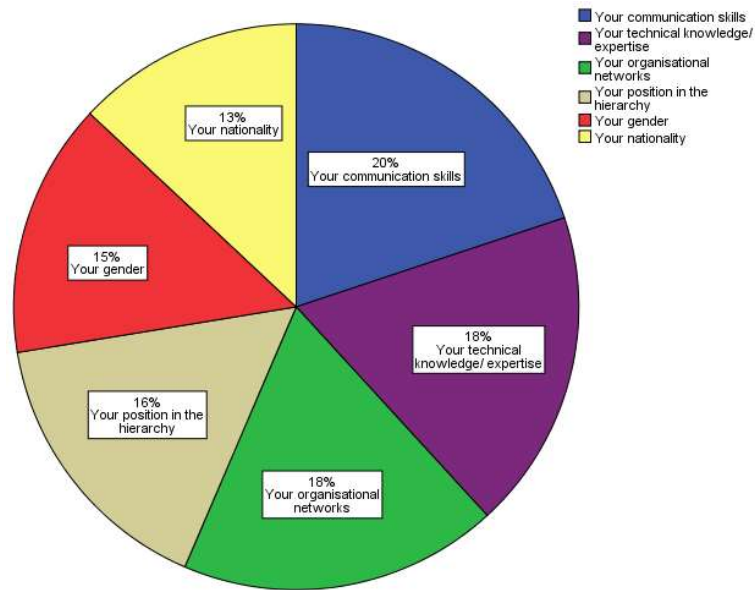


Figure 5 Factors most influence the relationship between expatriates and Omanis from expatriates' perspectives

Only two items have significant differences between western and non-western in most influence factors in their relationships with Omani colleagues. Western expatriates tend to consider communication skills and gender as influential factors more than non-western do.

Table 24 Differences between western and non-western expatriates on factors most important in the expatriates' relationship with Omanis

Items	Expatriates	M	SD	t	df	Sig. (2tailed)
Your communication skills	Westerns	4.15	.977	2.82	285	.005**
	Non-western	3.82	.981		283.9	
Your gender	Westerns	3.10	1.24	2.113	282	.035*
	Non-western	2.79	1.26		281.5	

$p^{**} < 0.01$ ,  $p^* < 0,05$

Omanis also select their communication skills, organisational networking, technical knowledge/ expertise, and the position in the hierarchy as the most important factors, while, nationality and their gender as lowest important factors influence their relationship with their expatriate colleagues (see table 26 and figure 6). The scale average was 3.08. This result may reflect that both Omanis and expatriates believe that expatriates and Omanis need to develop new communication skills and new organisational networks to enable them to communicate with each other.

Table 25 Factors most important in Omanis' relationship with expatriates

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
Your language abilities	3.61	1.126
Your communication skills	3.58	1.117
Your technical knowledge/ expertise	3.52	.985
Your organisational networks	3.44	1.003
Your position in the hierarchy	3.34	1.084
Your gender	2.80	1.227
Your nationality	2.55	1.226

The next par chart shows the percentages of each facture influencing the relationship between expatriates and Omanis.

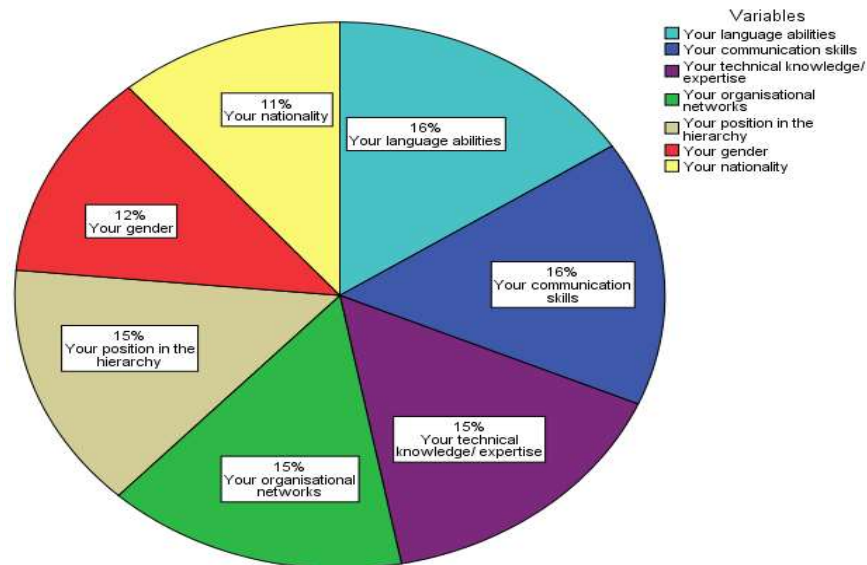


Figure 6 Factors most influence the relationship between expatriates and Omanis from Omanis' perspectives

### Regression models

Further investigate has been conducted with the purpose of explore whether there is a strong correlation existing among the independent variables namely: working sector (Petroleum & Educational), Gender, marital Status (Married or Partner & single), nationality, age, highest degree, previous experience as an expatriate, degree of satisfaction with previous experience, religious status, work performance, family supports, organisational supports and, language ability on interaction. A significant model emerged when testing the dependent variable cultural interaction ( $F(9) = 17.495, p < .000$ ) with an  $R^2$  of .389. This model explains 36.7% of the variance in the dependent variable (Adjusted R square = .367).

The significant predictor variables were nationality, gender, language ability, and work performance. The result may illustrate that these factors play essential roles during cross cultural communication between expatriates and the host national.

Table 26 Results of Regression Analysis with Cultural Adjustment as the Dependent Variable

Predictor Variable	N	$\beta$	SE $\beta$	$\beta$	t	p	Tolerance
(Constant)	257	5.947	1.933		3.077	<b>.002</b>	
Cultural novelty	257	-.037	.028	-.073	-1.333	.184	.831
Nationality	257	-.052	.025	-.108	-2.036	<b>.043</b>	.874
Gender	257	-.748	.336	-.120	-2.228	<b>.027</b>	.851
Arabic language ability	257	.396	.128	.181	3.092	<b>.002</b>	.718
Family support	257	.160	.090	.099	1.789	.075	.806
Organisational supports provided	257	-.026	.046	-.033	-.572	.568	.761
Marital Status	257	-.659	.351	-.105	-1.878	.062	.789
Religious status	257	-.117	.337	-.021	-.348	.728	.656
Work performance	257	.661	.064	.521	10.309	<b>.000</b>	.967

The next section will explore the natural of cross-cultural training programs and support that expatriates may have in Oman. It's also presenting the suggestion of both expatriates and Omanis in developing these programs.

### 3.6 Cross- cultural training and supports

As it has been clarified in the literature, that there is a lack of cross-culture training (Black and Mendenhall, 1990, Forster, 2000, Selmer et al., 1998), although, studies have approved the effectiveness of such training in adjustment (Waxin and Panaccio, 2005, Puck et al., 2008, Okpara and Kabongo, 2011). The current study has linked the cultural differences, the problems of adjustment and interaction with the real experiences of the participants and has also included the relevant training requirements for the expatriates. The study has also investigated the point of view of the host nationals to assess and highlight the different views and experiences they encounter. In order to answer the third research question, what type of training and development is available to assist western and other expatriates to adjust and to work successfully in Oman?

This section provides information about the experiences of expatriates and Omani about the reality of training programs and supports provided to expatriates working and living in Oman. It also discovers their suggestions to improve these programs and topics which have to cover.

Expatriates were asked if their organisations usually provide their employees with support in their international moves. The results show that 52 per cent of participants in this study indicated that their organisations usually provide supports for its employees, while 48 per cent pointed out that their organisation do not provide any support. 83 per cent of expatriates mentioned that they haven't had any type of pre-departure training, while; only 17 per cent had such trainings.

However, 74.2 % of expatriates say that their organisation did not provide any type of training, while 36.6 % say they had self-initiated training. 82.7% of expatriates show that their organisation did not provide them with any pre-departure training Table 28.

Table 27 percentages of training provided for expatriates

Type of training expatriates had	Yes	No
provided by organisations	25.4 %	74.2 %
self-initiated training	36.6 %	63.1 %
organisations do provide pre-departure training	16.9 %	82.7 %

Likewise, only 19.6 present of Omanis agreed that their organisations usually provide its expatriate employees with support when they arrive to Oman. While, 70.9 per cent pointed out that their organisations do not provide any support. This result indicates that both expats and Omanis agreed there is a lack of training that organisations need to provide for newcomers in order to help them to easily adjust in Oman.

Expatriates also were asked to select the most important topics that have to be covered by pre-departure training programs. The results show that expatriates prefer to have pre-departure training in first in briefing about the host country. Second, training in new job role. Third, cultural orientation (values, norms and traditions). Fourth, was specific information about the

new working environment. Then, cross-cultural adjustment skills. Finally, in Arabic language training (see figure 7).

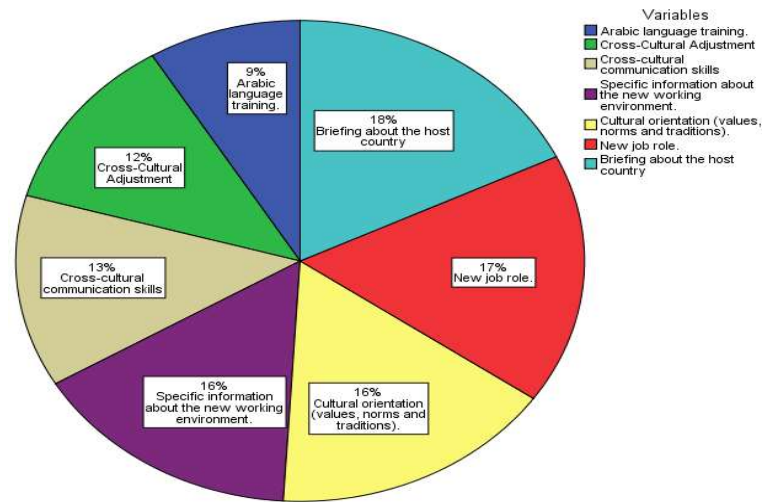


Figure 7 the percentages of important topics that expatriates prefer to be provided in pre-departure training programs

Omanis also were asked to select the most important topics have to be covered by pre-departure training programs. The results show that Omanis have slightly differed in their selection than expatriates about pre-departure training important topics; they selected cultural orientation (values, norms and traditions), cross-cultural communication skills, and cross-cultural adjustment skills as the most important topics for pre-departure training. Arabic language training was in the second. Briefing about the host country was the third selection. Finally, was the specific information about the new working environment and training in new assignment (see figure 8). This finding indicated that, whilst the Omanis give priority to cultural orientation, cultural communication and adjustment skills, expatriates considered that topics giving information about the host country and offering training for their new job were more important to include in the training programs than cultural orientation.

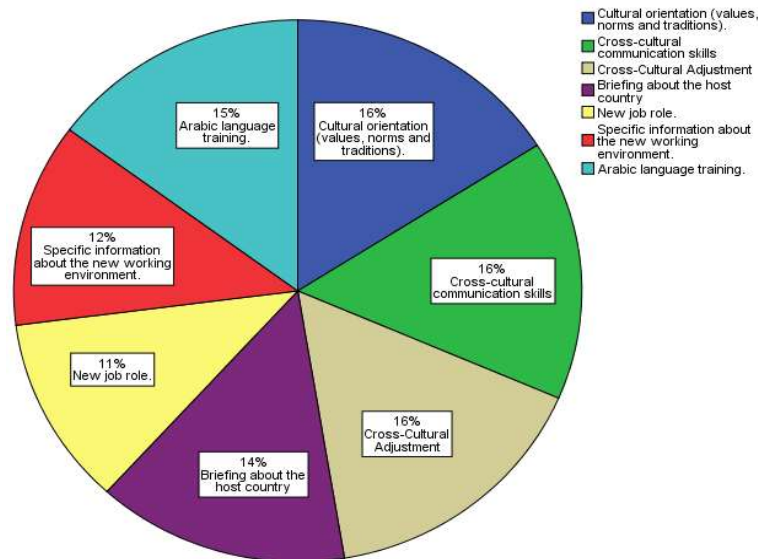


Figure 8 the percentages of important topics that Omanis prefer to be provided in pre-departure training programs

In order to explore the nature of provided cross-cultural training programs for expatriates working and living in Oman and their suggestion to improve it, the next survey explore the beliefs of expatriates about the training programs and supports they had during their moving and working in Oman. This part of the current study highlight the nature of cross cultural training provided for expatriates in terms of the natural of organisational and family supports, them believes about cross cultural training, their degree of satisfaction of their training, and their recommendations. The positive percentage is a measure of all positive answers given to a question. The positive percentage is the sum of the 'Strongly Agree' and 'Agree' responses.

From table 29 it can be seen that there are a moderate agreement of the training and support provided by organisations for their expatriate employees. For example, 49.5% of the expatriate participants agree that the practical assistance offered by their companies helped them to settle in faster. Also 50.5% believe that the practical assistance offered by companies helped them to be more relaxed about the relocation. These percentages have significantly increased when asked them about the family support. As 74.6% of expatriate participants agreed that their family really tried to help them during their assignment in Oman, while, 82.7% asserted they got the emotional help and support they need from their families. However, the percentages of agreement declined when asked about the degree of satisfaction with the training provided. As

only 50.1% of respondent feel satisfied with the amount of cultural awareness training they received from their companies prior to arrival at the host country. This percentage sharply decreased to 16.6% for satisfaction of the amount of language training they received prior to arrival, and 30.2% for satisfaction of the amount of practical assistance offered for the relocation to the host country. Finally, the expatriate participants show a high percentage of agreement for recommendations of providing cultural and language training programs for expatriates working in Oman (see table 27). According to Table 29 below it can be seen that expatriates received the most support from their colleagues and a slight level of dissatisfaction was indicated in respect of the level of support provided by their respective organisations. The expatriates surveyed also highlighted their dissatisfaction with language training, relocation assistants and the general training and support they received from their respective organisations. However, they were generally satisfied with the help and emotional support they received from their families. Finally, some expatriates suggest that organisations should provide them with extra support and training in cultural awareness and local language skills.

Table 28 the perceptions of expatriates about training programs that they had.

N	Statement	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither Disagree / Agree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5	Percentage of positive
Organisational support provided							
1	Omani colleagues are willing to help whenever you need.	1 (.3%)	4 (1.3%)	30 (10%)	170 (57.6%)	90 (30.5%)	260 88.1%
2	Management encourages employees' suggestions/opinions	4 (1.4%)	18 (6.1%)	52 (17.6%)	160 (54.2%)	60 (20.3%)	220 74.5%
3	Cross-cultural team work is encouraged in the organisation you work.	4 (1.4%)	8 (2.7%)	51 (17.3%)	160 (54.2%)	70 (23.7%)	230 77.9%



N	Statement	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither Disagree / Agree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5	Percentage of positive
4	You are treated better than the local employees in your organisations.	37 (12.5%)	61 (20.7%)	125 (42.4%)	60 (20.3%)	12 (4.1%)	72 24.4%
5	The practical assistance offered by my company helped me settle in faster.	12 (4.1%)	26 (8.8%)	110 (37.3%)	104 (35.3%)	42 (14.2%)	146 49.5%
6	The practical assistance offered by my company helped me to be more relaxed about the relocation.	17 (5.8%)	35 (11.9%)	93 (31.5%)	106 (35.9%)	43 (14.6%)	149 50.5%
Satisfaction of provided training							
7	I am satisfied with the amount of cultural awareness training I received from my company prior to arrival at the host country.	22 (7.5%)	53 (18.0%)	131 (44.4%)	78 (26.4%)	11 (23.7%)	89 50.1%
8	I am satisfied with the amount of language training I received prior to arrival at the host country	40 (13.6%)	76 (25.8%)	129 (43.7%)	32 (10.8%)	17 (5.8%)	49 16.6%
9	I am satisfied with the amount of practical assistance my company offered for the relocation to the host country.	16 (5.4%)	84 (28.5%)	104 (35.3%)	50 (17.0%)	39 (13.2%)	89 30.2%

N	Statement	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither Disagree / Agree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5	Percentage of positive
10	I am satisfied with the amount of training and support I received from my company prior to arrival at the host country.	22 (7.5%)	53 (18.0%)	131 (44.4%)	78 (26.4%)	11 (3.7%)	99 30.1%
Family supports:-							
11	My family really tries to help me	6 (2.0%)	13 (4.4%)	55 (18.6%)	134 (45.4%)	86 (29.2%)	220 74.6%
12	I get the emotional help and support I need from my family	2 (0.7%)	10 (3.4%)	45 (15.3%)	128 (43.4%)	110 (37.3%)	238 82.7%
Suggestion to improve training programs:-							
13	I would recommend companies to offer cultural awareness training to expatriates.	1 (3.0%)	6 (2.0%)	45 (15.3%)	153 (51.9%)	90 (30.5%)	243 82.4%
14	Cross-cultural training should be a part of compensation package for each expatriate.	4 (1.4%)	11 (3.7%)	73 (24.7%)	160 (54.2%)	46 (15.6%)	206 69.8%
15	I would recommend companies to offer language training to expatriates.	3 (1.0%)	12 (4.1%)	56 (19.0%)	117 (39.7%)	107 (36.3%)	224 75.9%
16	I would recommend companies to offer practical assistance to expatriates.	4 (1.4%)	7 (2.4%)	34 (11.5%)	131 (44.4%)	118 (40.0%)	249 84.4%
17	I would if I had more training	6 (2.0%)	17 (5.8%)	81 (27.5%)	111 (37.6%)	79 (26.8%)	190 64.4%

Omani results consistent with expatriate responses. As Omanis show a high percentage with the benefits of training and support provided from companies to their expatriate employees. Omanis also expressed their agreement with expatriates in the degree of satisfaction with the amount and quality of training provided by companies. For example, only 27% of Omanis satisfied with the amount of cultural awareness training that expatriates received from their company prior to arrival Oman. This percentage has dropped to only 14.8% with Omanis satisfied with the amount of language training expatriates received prior to arrival. Finally, the results show that Omanis strongly recommend companies to provide cultural awareness training to expatriates and these cross-cultural training should be a part of compensation package provide for each expatriate (see table 30). This table shows that there is a degree of consensus of views between Omanis and expatriates in terms of degrees of satisfaction with the amount of support and in the quantity and quality of training, as well as they agree on the need to increase the amount of this support and training in order to assist expatriates to easily adjust.

Table 29 the perceptions of Omanis about training programs that expatriates had.

N	Statement	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither Disagree/ Agree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5	Percentage of positive
Organisational support provided							
1	Omani colleagues are willing to help expatriates whenever they need.	2 (7%)	13 (4.4%)	26 (8.8%)	135 (45.5%)	101 (34.0%)	236 79.5%
2	Cross-cultural training helps expatriate to be successful in his foreign assignment.	7 (2.4%)	15 (5.1%)	51 (17.2%)	155 (52.2%)	49 (17.7%)	204 69.9%

N	Statement	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither Disagree/ Agree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5	Percentage of positive
3	Management encourages Omani and expatriate's employees to work as a team.	4 (1.3%)	8 (2.7%)	22 (7.4%)	153 (51.5%)	92 (31.0%)	245 82.5%
4	I have treated better than the expatriates in my organisations.	46 (15.5%)	59 (19.9%)	77 (25.9%)	72 (24.2%)	24 (8.1%)	98 32.3%
5	The practical assistance offered by my company helped me settle in faster.	8 (2.7%)	13 (4.4%)	40 (13.5%)	172 (57.9%)	42 (14.1%)	214 72%
Satisfaction of provided training							
6	I am satisfied with the amount of cultural awareness training they received from my company prior to arrival Oman.	31 (10.4%)	83 (27.9%)	85 (29.6%)	59 (19.9%)	21 (7.1%)	80 27%
7	I am satisfied with the amount of language training I received prior to arrival at the host country	46 (15.5%)	113 (38.0%)	71 (32.9%)	32 (10.4%)	17 (4.4%)	49 14.8%
8	I am satisfied with the amount of training and support they received from my company prior to arrival at the host country.	28 (9.4%)	73 (24.6%)	80 (26.9%)	67 (22.6%)	28 (9.4%)	95 32%

N	Statement	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither Disagree/ Agree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5	Percentage of positive
Suggestion to improve training programs:-							
9	I would recommend companies to offer cultural awareness training to expatriates.	1 (3.0%)	6 (2.0%)	24 (8.1%)	140 (47.1%)	107 (36.0%)	147 83.1%
10	Cross-cultural training should be a part of compensation package for each expatriate.	7 (2.4%)	16 (5.4%)	69 (23.2%)	142 (47.8%)	41 (13.8%)	183 61.6%
11	I would recommend companies to offer language training to expatriates.	6 (2.0%)	18 (6.1%)	56 (18.9%)	123 (41.4%)	73 (24.6%)	196 66%
12	I would recommend companies to offer practical assistance to expatriates.	7 (2.4%)	7 (2.4%)	54 (18.2%)	149 (50.2%)	52 (17.5%)	201 67.7%
13	I would recommend organisations to provide training programs for both Omani and expatriate employees about cultural differences.	11 (3.7%)	12 (4.0%)	42 (14.1%)	142 (47.8%)	72 (24.2%)	214 72%
14	It is important to provide training programs for Omani employees about the culture of expatriates and their way of thinking.	9 (3.0%)	20 (6.7%)	43 (14.5%)	138 (46.5%)	68 (22.9%)	206 69.4%

N	Statement	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither Disagree/ Agree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5	Percentage of positive
15	I would recommend companies to provide training programs for Omani employees in how to deal and communicate with expatriates.	11 (3.7%)	18 (6.1%)	41 (13.8%)	138 (46.5%)	71 (23.9%)	209 70.4%
16	Organisations should provide adequate training to the families of expatriates about the culture of Omani society.	1 (3.0%)	19 (6.4%)	54 (19.2%)	145 (48.8%)	56 (18.9%)	201 67.7%

### 3.7 Conclusion

This chapter presented the statistical analysis and interpretation of the quantitative data collected during this study. The cultural novelty between Oman and the countries of expatriates was the first factor examined in the current study. The result shows that expatriates believe there is a high degree of cultural distance between their countries and Oman. They selected climate and transportation systems in Oman as the most of the differences between Oman and their countries. The result also illustrates significant differences for Western compared with non-Western expatriates in cultural novelty. Omanis, in contrast, show a moderate cultural novelty between Oman and expatriate's countries. Omanis also selected climate as most factor in cultural novelty, while, they selected overall Omani culture as a second factor in cultural distance between Oman and expatriate's countries. The results also show significant differences between Omanis and expatriates in cultural distance for expatriates.

This study also examines the cultural adjustment of expatriates and most factors that provide a highest percentage of prediction for the adjustment. The result shows a moderate degree of adjustment for expatriates in Oman. Lack of entertainment, transportation system, and lack of service facilities are the most challenges that expatriate face in Oman. The results also show no significant differences between western and non-western in cultural adjustment. Omanis also expected a moderate degree of adjustment for expatriates. They also selected lack of entertainment facilities and going to the social gathering as most difficulties that expatriates may face. Finally, the result shows significant differences between Omanis and expatriates in the degree of cultural adjustment of expatriates. These differences were for Omanis. Examining independent and controlling variables of cultural novelty, nationality, age category, highest degree, family support, and organisational support provided the most regression predictor model for cultural adjustment by 20%. Although, the training satisfaction, religious status, the current position variables have no significant prediction of in this model.

Regarding to the work adjustment, the result shows a slight work adjustment for expatriates. The result also shows significant differences in the work adjustment between western and non-western. These differences were for non-western as they show more work adjustment than westerns. Omanis, in contrast, show less expectations of work adjustment for expatriates in Oman. This result has been supported by an independent t-test. As the result showed significant differences for expatriates than Omanis in the work adjustment.

This chapter presented the results of the cross-cultural interaction between expatriates and Omanis. The result shows that expatriates present a moderate cultural communication with Omanis with mean of 3.1. Independent sample t-test shows significant differences in cultural interaction for non-western than western expatriates. This may have linked with the differences on cultural distance, as westerns show more cultural novelty than non-western in Omani culture to their culture. Omanis, on other hand, show less perception in cultural interaction than expatriates. This result has been asserted by significant independent t-test for expatriates than Omanis.

Finally, the investigation of cross-cultural training and supports shows that there is a lack of support for expatriates during their arrival to Oman. The result also shows a lack of pre-departure and after arrival training programs in all aspects of adjustment (culture, work, and

interaction). Expatriates prefer to have pre-departure training in briefing about the host country, training in new job role, and cultural orientation (values, norms and traditions), while Omanis gave the priority of pre-departure training to cultural orientation (values, norms and traditions), cross-cultural communication skills, and cross-cultural adjustment skills.

This chapter presented the statistical analysis and interpretation of the quantitative data collected during this study. Cultural novelty between Oman and the countries of expatriates was the first factor to be examined in the current study. The result shows that expatriates believe there is a high degree of cultural distance between their countries and Oman. They selected the climate and transportation systems in Oman as the main differences between Oman and their countries. The result also illustrates significant differences for Western expatriates when compared with non-Western expatriates in cultural novelty. Omanis, in contrast, show a moderate level of cultural novelty between Oman and the expatriates' countries. In addition, the Omanis selected the climate as being one of the main factors of cultural novelty and selected the overall Omani culture as being the second factor of cultural distance between Oman and the expatriates' countries. The results also show significant differences between how the Omanis and expatriates view the cultural.

This study also examines the cultural adjustment of expatriates and highlights most of the factors that provide the highest prediction percentages relating to the success or failure of expatriate adjustment. The result shows a moderate degree of success for the adjustment of expatriates in Oman with a lack of entertainment, dissatisfaction with the transportation system and lack of good quality and frequent public service facilities being stated as the main challenges that expatriates face in Oman. The results also show no significant differences between Western and non-Western in cultural adjustment.

The results reveal that the Omanis expect a moderate degree of success in the adjustment of expatriates. They also selected the lack of entertainment facilities and being unable to attend social gatherings as the main difficulties that expatriates may face. Finally, the results show significant differences between Omanis and expatriates in the degree of cultural adjustment of expatriates. These differences were indicated by the Omanis who, following examination of the independent and controlling variables in respect of cultural novelty, nationality, age category, highest degree, family support and organisational support, provided the most regression



predictor models for cultural adjustment by 20%. The level of satisfactory training, religious status and current position variables had no significant predictions in this model.

In respect of work adjustment, the results show a slight level of work adjustment for expatriates. The results also show significant differences in the level of work adjustment required between Western and non-Western expatriates. These differences indicate that non-Western expatriates show more work adjustment than Western expatriates. Omanis, in contrast, show less expectation of work adjustment for expatriates in Oman. This result has been supported by an independent t-test, the results of which showed significant differences in the level of work adjustment needed for expatriates than Omanis.

This chapter presented the results of the cross-cultural interaction between expatriates and Omanis. The results show that expatriates present a moderate difference in cultural communication difficulties than the Omanis with a mean of 3.1. The independent sample t-test results show a significant difference in the cultural interaction experiences of non-Western expatriates when compared with their Western counterparts. This may be linked with the differences in cultural distance, as Western expatriates demonstrate more cultural novelty than non-Western expatriates in dealing with the Omani when compared to their own culture. Omanis, on other hand, show less expectation of cultural interaction than the expatriates. This result has been supported significantly by the independent t-test results for expatriates and not the Omanis.

Finally, the investigation of cross-cultural training and support indicates that there is a lack of support for expatriates following their arrival to Oman. The result also shows a lack of pre-departure and post-arrival training programs being available in all aspects of adjustment (culture, work and interaction). Expatriates prefer to have pre-departure training and briefing about the host country, as well as training in the new job role and cultural orientation (values, norms and traditions). On the other hand, the Omanis gave priority to pre-departure training in cultural orientation (values, norms and traditions), cross-cultural communication skills and cross-cultural adjustment skills

## **Chapter 4: Qualitative Data Collection and Data Analysis**

The previous chapter covered the quantitative aspects of the study, outlining the results on cultural distance (novelty) between the countries of expatriates and Oman. It also pointed to the most pressing challenges that expatriates face in their cultural and work adjustment and their interactions with local people in Oman. The quantitative parts of this thesis show that there is a cultural distance between Oman and the countries of expatriates. These distances put several cultural and living obstacles in the way of easy adjustment and interact. However, the quantitative results do not explain the nature of these challenges facing expatriates or the way they deal with it. Therefore, a qualitative approach involving in depth interviews is needed to cast further light on how groups of expatriates selected Oman and how y they deal with culture shock and the adaptation challenges by getting into the real-life situation where the phenomenon is developed.

As has been demonstrated in chapter four, mixed-methods research that combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches provide a route to greater detail and a depth of understanding that quantitative research alone is unable to match. From the literature review, it is clear that most previous studies (see, Selmer, 2006, Bhatti et al., 2012, Jenkins and Mockaitis, 2010, Lee, 2005) focused on examining the factors such as novelty, previous experience, family, and job satisfaction that influence their adjustment without in-depth investigations into the nature of cultural differences and how they affect the adjustment and interaction of expatriates in their new environments.

### **4.1 Cultural differences and challenges of Expatriate Adjustment in Oman**

More on who/groups interviewed first – here or in the methodology, the first section of the interview focused on identifying the cross-cultural adjustment of the expatriates in Oman. It included crucial elements such as first impressions, biggest day-to-day differences, cultural differences identified, support received upon arrival to Oman, challenges and negative factors to name a few. Female expats experienced adjustment challenges in the form of not being independent, being conservative and soft spoken, and overcome the culture shock by

themselves. Western expats grow up to be independent and live a free life, without any hold backs which is quick opposite to that of the Omani culture.

## **1. Expatriate Movement to Oman**

### **A. Being an Expat**

The first phase of the interview process with expatriates was based on examining the initial experiences of the employee or individuals arriving in the sultanate of Oman. These includes questions such as why the individual has chosen to be an expat working in a foreign country, recent experience and how they identified and felt about the work opportunity in Oman. The sub-themes identified in this section include new culture education and career development. A majority of the respondents that participated in the interviews expressed that they choose being an expat in a new culture and learn wider cultural experience. The prime factors identified during the interviews was that a majority of the expats had good English language skills and share similarity in choosing Oman to gain new culture experience while very few had prior experience working in Oman and returned as they are familiar with the culture and have developed a liking towards it.

Change of work destination seems to be one of the crucial phases for expatriates looking for better and stable opportunities of work. They seek to explore new places and new cultures with English being a universal language. It does not restrict their scope of travel to new countries and ostensibly makes adjustment easier. However, the movement of the expats to a gulf country has a slight deviation as the common language found in the gulf region is Arabic, with English being secondary. One respondent specified that Gulf Cooperation Council GCC is a crucial destination in the career path that encompassed jobs in various GCC countries such as Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, etc.

One expat stated that:

*'It wasn't really too much of a culture change for me because I have previously been in a number of Arab countries. So Oman was one more country and it wasn't really new to me. It was simply a variation for me over other Arab countries I have experienced.'*

Most of Omani participants assumed that Oman has unique aspects of culture which make it differ than other Arabic and Islamic countries, as it will be discussed later in their interviews. In contrast, expat employees found the culture of Oman to be similar to that of surrounding Arab cultures, and identified a similarity that they feel comfortable about. This may be attributed to the lack of adequate knowledge with expatriates about Omani culture, or they may only have a smattering knowledge without understanding all of its aspects. This similarity in culture between Oman and GCC countries, from point of view of expatriates was the primary reason why people from GCC, especially expats working in the GCC, to move to a better job opportunity when staying in the Arab region.

One female expat shared that:

*'I wanted to get out of KSA and Oman was in the ME. I had heard it is a beautiful country and only positive comments. Knowing that I have to move out of KSA, Oman was the next clear choice.'*

Another Canadian female expat explained reasons of choosing Oman rather than other GCC countries:

*'Oman has a politically sound, there's no social out rest, or unrest, it has a lot of traditional stuff I liked. The ecology of Oman suited me, and I could get out and travel, not the same as Canada, not the same as Japan, but it wouldn't nearly be as restrictive as me living in Saudi. So of all of my choices in the gulf, Oman was clearly above and beyond the first choice for me.'*

Expat shared that:

*'Well, I think the basic reason is simply to learn about other cultures, to learn about how different people live in different situations, and basically to see the world. To get a wider cultural experience.'*

Another Expat shared that:

*“Because I wanted to leave the UK, and experience a different part of the world, that is very different to what I used to. And my sister was teaching in Kuwait, so I had some experience of this part of the world from her... I chose Oman because of different reasons. Because Oman has a lot of natural, nature, so really I like going out and I like diving”.*

While some expats have revealed that they have past interaction with the Arabic culture in the form of students or fellow employees from the region. This motivated them to choose to better understand the culture of Oman and be a part of it as an expat.

There are few expats that have worked in Eastern Asian countries that include Japan and China to move towards the Middle East due. It seems that their presence in these Asian countries encouraged them to move to the Middle East, believing that there is a similarity or difference in the cultures of these countries and they want explore that. A female expat shared that:

*‘I started in East Asia in Japan and stayed there for 6 years...It was my intention to move continuously forward. ‘...Though I would have gone to one of the stands, but I moved to the Gulf area. Oman was my first choice as it gave me free interaction with men and women comparing with some countries in the Gulf. It is a nice quiet country after Japan and I like it.’*

The movement of the expats from Asia to Middle East was identified due to the failing economic security in the Eastern region and the high economic stability in the Middle East, especially in Oman. They specified that Oman was the most stable economy in the Middle East as they found the country to have higher currency, high government support to the women in Oman (for single Expat women) and also, challenging opportunities. Also, the growing reputation of Oman amongst the other Gulf countries has led to the high movement of expats to this country.

Travel was also one of the factors considered especially by women expats to choose Oman as they do not have any restrictions on driving as imposed in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia or other Gulf countries. One expat puts it as:

*'I heard from a lot of my friends living in Oman is more liberating for especially women over Saudi. I was in Saudi earlier and it was restricted for us, females.'*

Talking about the low crime rate on the Middle East, a female expat from the South Africa stated that:

*'In South Africa, there is a decrease in trade and professionals started seeking jobs outside the country. I heard that ME has absence of crime, while South Africa has a very high crime rate. I wanted to see and feel living in a place with absolutely no crime.'*

Omanis, on the other hand, believe that expatriates work abroad mainly for economic reasons, to make better money. Other reasons include gaining wider knowledge and experience opportunities, through knowing new foreign cultures, thereby developing some skills they lack in their home countries; while others come merely for tourism and sightseeing. However, Omani participants also mentioned that it is not to be denied that the Sultanate of Oman still needs to be enriched with the experience and knowledge expatriates and this is another reason encourages expatriate to move to Oman.

An Omani participant analysed the reasons which push foreign workers not to choose Oman for working outside their own countries by saying:

*"It depends which country a foreign worker is coming from. Europeans mostly come for a change and for getting to know new cultures while other nationalities come for better money. I do not believe that a foreign worker would come merely for exploring a new culture if he or she was financially stable and relaxed in their home country".*

Omani participants also strongly believe that Oman, as a developing country, still highly needs foreign workers to come for reasons of lack of qualified national workforce and for the high quality and level of experience foreign workers possess since they come from highly developed countries.

Most of the Omani participants also mentioned that foreigners choose to work in the Sultanate of Oman because of the simplicity of dealing with Omani people and their tolerance and acceptance to the others, although it is a conservative society. Participants also pointed out that

the good reputation of the Sultanate encouraged expatriates to work in the Sultanate and many of them moved to work in the Sultanate after they heard about it from their colleagues who have previously worked in Oman or from the Internet or from blogs which described the good treatment of Omanis with foreign workers as well as the level of safety and stability in the Sultanate. As well as, to the availability of jobs in senior management positions due to the lack of national qualified staff.

As it has been mentioned in the literature that although, the Omani government has been implementing a policy of localization skills and jobs called Omanisation, international companies using people from the host country are still widely regarded as a basic strategy of human resource management (Suutari, 1998). According to Beamish and Inkpen (1998) an important role has been played by expatriate managers to represent and implement the corporate objectives in international business. Omani participants asserted that having high numbers of foreign workers in Oman diminishes chances of qualifying the national workforce and brings about negative influences on the local Omani traditions and national culture introduced by those foreign workers and their dependents accompanying them. In this aspect a female participant in answered:

*“The cultures they come from clash with the local traditions and national culture of the Omani society...For example, I remember in Oman in 2012 we feel upset about any behaviour that come by foreigners. For example, by that time all Omanis had to wear the Omani outfit, but after the advent of arrivals we see strange fads that are found in the newcomer and transmitted from them to the students. Even the way of dressing and the way of handshaking and the way we use to greeting now we use their way to great, even haircut styles we use their styles. Isolation has become more common with youth these days. Students refuses to intervene in its affairs while he accepts the advice in the past... and understand the isolation and freedom the wrong sense and that's what citizens obtained from foreigners”.*

It can be clearly seen that some Omanis are concerned when it comes to the cultural side effects of having expatriates working in Oman. These effects could be both in culture and the employment opportunities for Omanis. This perception among Omanis could create some sort of psychological impact in the Omanis, such as non-acceptance of their presence in Oman,

which may affect the nature of the work and communication between them and their expatriate peers.

***B. Moving to Oman and culture shock stage.***

Expatriates perceive their assignment as a challenge, and share that they understand the need to adapt to the new culture. They think that there is a greater threat of being misunderstood and also, consider communication as a challenge to understanding better. Furthermore, due to the ambiguity of the new culture expatriates mentioned that after their arriving they had become nervous and suffered from culture shock.

*'time I think one always is challenged with home sickness, and missing kind of the things that you're used to, and you know I still have those moments where I think about just some of the things back home that I was accustomed to doing or having, and miss those things, and people of course, most definitely.'*

The expats in Oman believe that the culture experience and the professional experience gained by working in this country. A majority of the expats (western expats) believe that by working in Oman, they are getting first-hand experience about the culture and the people. Also, the close proximity of Oman with other countries contributed as a rewarding experience to explore various Arab countries by visiting those Arabic countries while working in Oman. One expat puts it as follows:

*'the first six months was very stressful and I, yes, I was thinking maybe this was a mistake, but I'm going to try and stick it out, you know, and after the first, I'd say, six months it was okay after that, and then you know I ended up staying, so obviously I'm okay now, but no, in the first six months it was quite difficult, just not having anything familiar, is after a while, every day, you start to feel a little crazy.'*

Expatriates also attributed the culture shock to their high expectations before they came to Oman and the cultural differences they found between their countries and Oman. One expat who came from the UK shared that:



*'So depending on where you're coming from, depending on what your expectations are, there are teachers that are teaching here now that are not coming back because Nizwa is not too much for them, and we're not even talking about people that are atheists or Christians, we're talking about Muslims. So even for some Muslims, it's difficult to come back, because for them it's not enough, so they're going to move to the UAE, you know, because their needs aren't being met. But yes, I think it depends on the individual, but I think on average, it's going to take a month or so to get into a rhythm.'*

From previous quotations, it can be seen that some cities in Oman (such as Nizwa, Ibri and Sur) where expatriates work do not reach the expatriates' expectations when they select to work in Oman. As most of these cities lack for most of the services needed by expatriates, such as coffee shops, transportation, and entertainment facilities. Therefore, they are likely to face culture shock, moving to another country, or turning back to their home countries.

However, some western expatriates believe that Oman has several features which asset to reduce culture shock with newcomers as one expatriate mentioned:

*"the culture shock here was on a more positive experience, that the culture shock from other Middle Eastern countries, because Oman is a lot more relaxed, a lot friendlier, they have I think, it seems to me, that the Omani people have a lot more respect for foreigners than in other countries, so it was less of a culture shock, and if I had never been anywhere, if I came directly from Canada to Oman".*

There were instances of first time interaction that reported the hospitable Omani culture and the friendly natives. A female expats shared the following:

*'My first interaction with the Omani culture was really interesting and exciting. We were eating on the floor, sitting together. We moved to another room, and were eating different things and were using our hands. It was a bit difficult but it was ok.'*

It is identified that expats have landed in Oman on job has first considered destinations such as a Kingdom of Saudi Arabia over Oman. However, the instability in the economy and poor

support of the government towards female expats led them to look for better opportunity in other gulf countries.

One expat stated that:

*'I have tried to work in KSA in 1997 and recount working for the British council in KSA. The council promised to give me housing accommodation. However, when I got there, I was disappointed. However, I quit and travelled back to Britain where I met a number of gulf Arabs for the first time and there were a couple of Omanis and Qataris. I liked them and had travelled privately to Iran. I like the Middle East experience and understood I may have given an unfair treatment towards the ME. The education opportunities in Britain were less, so I thought to visit the gulf and work here for 3 years.'*

However, it was identified that Western expats that are no prior Arab or Gulf experience may have experienced cultural shock on their first arrival to Oman. As expatriates who had opportunities of working in other Arabic countries, such as Jordan, Saudi Arabia and UAE mentioned that this previous experience of Arabic culture advantage them to adopt in Omani culture. Among the various feelings shared by the interviewees, one shared that the possibility of moving to Oman make them excited to learn and interact with a new culture. They were motivated to look forward to the challenge of staying away from home and to stay adjusted to the new culture. They view the new culture as a new experience. This new culture is differing than other countries, such as Korea, China, and Japan as participants believe that these countries have been influenced by western culture. On the contrary, few expats considered remuneration as a decisive factor. One expat stated that:

*'I had done a lot of travelling before moving to Korea. I was 17 when I visited Jamaica. Korea is very westernized. So I didn't have a hard time adapting to Korea. It was an easy adjustment. Living in KSA was night and day... I knew it was a huge adjustment living in KSA. I thought lets open up my mind before I move to America. But it was difficult'*

Lack of communication and coordination as identified as the factors that led to poor cultural experience of expats arriving in Oman on job assignment as one expat stated:

*'After receiving the job offer, I didn't not hear anything back. I had to serve my notice period, but I have no starting date. I was frustrated due to lack of communication. When I arrived in Oman, we were provided accommodation but with no transport to get food. We get very frustrated over lack of coordination or the lack of welcoming around.'*

Expatriates suggest some solutions to overcome the obstacles of lack of supports during the arriving. For example, they suggest for organization to leaning (rely) on the former expatriates' employees to welcome newcomers.

As the expatriates explained their experiences of suffering from culture shock, they also noted the strategies they used to overcome these issues. Having relationships with new friends in Oman, staying in contact with family and friends back home, learning about the local culture and spending most of their time at work were given as the most useful solutions to help deal with and overcome any culture shock difficulties. Some participants also added that they try to keep themselves busy by hiking, going outdoors and travelling in Oman because they believe that down time is not good for their mind and increased their feelings of culture shock. One expat shared that:

*'Well mostly people who would really come to Sur city in Oman, they will mostly have adaptability, be able to adapt to anything and you have to have patience, because everything moves at a different pace here, and usually everything takes two to three attempts before you can get it done. This is just my experience over four years here. Everything takes two or three attempts and then it's, you know it's done. So you have to have patience and you have to be adaptable to you know be able to adjust to a different pace of life, a different kind of, when things are not going to be the same as home and you have to just accept that. I think those people will be more successful here, you know, and to make friends, you have to be friendly.'*

The majority of Omani participants believe that most expatriates suffer from culture shock, while others think that the foreign expats spend a lot of time working and so they don't have enough time to get over this culture shock.

The main things that expatriates are most like about living in Oman and what they admire about the Omani culture are the great kindness shown from people, family closeness and safety. At work I like the collectiveness and solidarity shown by the employees.

On the other hand, non-western expatriates, especially those who came from Asian background such as India, mentioned that moving from their countries to Oman was much easier for several reasons. First, due to the similarities in general life and working environment between Oman and their countries. Second, the existence of high number of expatriate workers who came from the same countries and they start to communicate with them. Finally, the availability of their daily requirements they are accustomed to in their home countries such as coffee shops and restaurants. All these reasons facilitate their movement to Oman.

### ***C. On Arrival Support and Challenges***

On arrival, expats in Oman are usually guided by the hiring company in terms of understanding the local culture. Few respondents shared that the hiring company had provided them with learning material on what to expect upon arrival and documents that shared useful information. However, the information was quite limited and didn't fulfil the expectations of the expatriates. They specified that the material needs to be broken down in to various sub categories.

One expat manager specified that the first few months in Oman was a challenge by stating that:

*'we told the college and we told our company that this is the things that we need and some of the teachers tried to make a handbook to try to help the future teachers, you know, so they have something to tell them what to do, and how to, you know, go around, so we tried to make our own handbook to try and help our colleagues, you know who came after us, so there have been those, but nothing official really.'*

Lack of direct support during the arrival caused an early feeling of discomfort and anxiety for expatriates moved to new environment. Another female expat stated that:

*'When I first came, they took you from the airport, and put you in a hotel, the next day they put you into a flat. That's it. The flat was dirty, we didn't have cars, we didn't know where to get cars, we didn't have groceries... we didn't have anything to clean. They just dropped us into the flat and said here, and so we had to call them back and say look, you need to send us somebody to tell us where to go... so there are no taxis out there, we could, even if we found a taxi, we didn't know where to tell them to take us to get clean, they left us with nothing...'*

Some of the respondents also rejected that they had someone to help them with the local culture of Oman, they specified that they didn't receive any official help from the hiring company. Few respondents had personal friends employed in Oman, and helped them in understanding the culture and environment of Oman at a non-professional level.

One Male expat stated that:

*'For expats coming from USA they face the challenge and problem and they solve it, but in the region they don't take it seriously or give it to others which are very difficult to digest.'*

Omani participants mentioned the availability of support provided to expatriates when they arrived in the Sultanate by some institutions although not all of the institutions offer the same support. For example, one type of support offered is the provision of reception staff to meet the expatriates at the airport and travel with them to their hotels. Also offering advice and support with visa procedures and applications, as well as providing booklets about life inside and outside the organisation and the labour laws and regulations in the Sultanate are also some of the services offered by some organisations.

Omanis also stated that there is no provisional team available within organisations to help and support foreign expats and listen to their problems. However, there are some organisations which may offer this kind of help to assist the foreign expat in adapting to the new environment. Some suggested that it is considered dereliction from the hosting association's part. One of the participants describing the missing supports for expatriates says:

*“The organisations put a lot of effort into bringing these employees from their countries and they are in a desperate need for them as they invest thousands of Dollars in them, unfortunately though, when it comes to making them feel welcome and helping them to this is where we fail!!*

He suggested that organisations have to provide supports for the new arrivals in official ways. He says:

*“There should be someone to greet them when they arrive here, stay with them, explain to them about the nature of their work, and introduce them to the surrounding area. Some managers may be doing this voluntarily but there are no training courses offered to them to educate them about the cultural side of living here and this is a really important matter. In my opinion it’s important that they receive training courses and have a guide inside the institution.”*

#### **D. First Impressions and Initial Adjustment**

According to culture shock theory (Furnham and Bochner, 1986, Zhou et al., 2008) in the literature expatriates from the moment of their arrival have to pass through several stages of adjustment. As the current study aimed to examine the experience and the challenges of each stage of adjustment of expatriates this section explores these challenges facing expatriates during their arrival to Oman. The first impression of a majority of the expatriate managers was that Oman has an Arab Culture and quite different from the Western culture. There were instances wherein Western expat managers specified that the way Omani students or employees communicate was the same way they have experienced before in their home country.

During the first visit of expats in Oman, different individuals experienced differently. While those with prior Gulf experience or Oman experience had very less or no difficulties in adapting to the country, others had a tough time as every minute thing was different. Right from brands to shop for to food to eat, they found it difficult to choose. However, within a period of few months, they were able to adjust themselves and integrate better into the Omani Society. An expat shared that:

*'I had to learn about new food, new brands, everything. This was a complete new thing and I had to learn. Sometimes, it took me half a day to learn and do it right. There is no manual or guidance to do things right. The first few months were very difficult. But now, I am OK.'*

One female expat expressed the conservative nature of public greetings, especially with Omani men by stating that:

*'I was shocked that men don't shake hands with women. I made that mistake when I extended my hand to a man and he didn't want to embarrass me and was reluctant to shake my hand. They were hesitant to shake my hand, and were really fast. I learnt a lesson.'*

For western expats, it is quite common to engage in public greetings initiating by shaking hands, which was a bit awkward in Oman. They felt embarrassed when the locals refuse from shaking hands with western women or women in particular. Some expat females experienced a culture shock in staying behind in expressing their greetings as they used to do in their native country or other foreign countries such as the UK or Australia. A majority of the interviewees found no major differences in life in Oman over their native country. They stated that, apart from the climatic differences, they found a similar work zone in Oman that matched their native country or other countries they have worked as expat managers.

For expats with on gulf experience or expat experience, the day to day differences were huge compared to the native country. One female expat stated that:

*'One biggest day to day difference was my daily life. Here, it is really difficult to access food especially getting foods I am familiar with. Other than that, the houses are set up differently as in the USA. Things like the shower, the wall AC, etc. are the new things I am seeing here. The other thing is the heat in the country.'*

Social etiquettes are regarded with high importance by Western expats, and have the same expectation even if they move to another country. Issues such as low courtesy among the people

of Oman in social behaviour, however, they are courteous only if they are requested to do that as a favour.

One expat on manners stated that:

*'One of the things that I struggled is the way people behave. There are certain manners and ways to behave with other people. When I walk through a door, I always look back and hold the door for the person behind me. But I have noticed that everywhere I go, they just open the door, and they see you right behind you and they don't hold the door. The door almost slams on your face. It is difficult but it is a part of the culture.'*

Another expat added that:

*'I was shocked that men stare at women. It is normal to see women covered in Abaya and at a sudden you see woman in western clothes; people ask 'where is the Abaya'. I didn't think it is crazy, but I was shocked'.*

## **2. Cultural Differences, Adjustments and Challenges**

When asked if the expats had any cultural differences, the interviewees accepted that Oman has a different culture than their respective culture with both similarities and differences.

One female expat stated that:

*'There are many differences. I learnt early when in Oman that women are not supposed to be very loud because it is not very feminine or not very acceptable for women. So men can be loud, but women have to be quiet. At first, I was laughing out loud because that's the way I am, I grew up that way and it is socially acceptable in my country. But they told me to be quiet, don't speak so loud. I felt I have to adjust and it didn't bother me.'*

Participants not only stated that Oman has different culture than their own culture, but also they stressed that Arabic culture is totally differing than some Asian countries such as China and Japan. One female expat stated that:



*So I remember that experience more vividly than I do my first few days in Korea. Korea is much westernised, of course it's Western East Asia, but it's still very Westernised. So I didn't have a hard time adapting to Korea so much. But in Arabic culture it was, yes, to be quite honest, not a very easy adjustment. So from that day forward I knew it was going to be a big, big difference, it was going to be a huge learning curve for me, a huge adjustment*

Expats with previous Arab culture experience found no culture shock as they have prior experience of a similar culture. They stated that they found it easier to adapt to the Omani Arab culture with minor variations. The problem that was stated by a majority of the expat managers is the difficulty in finding restaurants, commute to and fro from the office, method to find transport, and accommodation. On the contrary, female expats in Oman may have had to experience a step more in the issues they have faced in Oman, especially with men. One female expat stated that:

*'One taxi driver asked me... Will you be my second wife? I say I am not Muslim. I don't know if they are just joking and trying to be funny, or really looking for a second wife. They get a lot curious when they see Western women because I think they watch too many movies and so I must be like them. I have to tell them I am married so stop them bugging me.'*

Both western and non-western expatriate also mentioned cultural differences related to differences in religion, which they were unfamiliar with. For example, Ramadan (holy month with Muslims they have to fast during the day time from the sun rise to sun set) affects the expatriates' daily life for a month even if they are not a Muslim (no drinking/eating/smoking in public – by cafes on the beach, restaurants tend to be closed during the day – or hidden behind panels; roads get even more dangerous because of sleepy fasting drivers. Forging women have to dress more conservatively). For example, one expatriate female explained how she behaves during the month of Ramadan:

*'during Ramadan, and I was, when I first got there, no one really explained it to me when I was young, and I hadn't done any research, and I didn't understand the importance of it, so I was extremely culturally rude, walking down the street having a*

*drink, you know I think I was drinking some Coca Cola or something. I can't imagine how many people I just offended. I can't, I don't even want to imagine. But then halfway through it, one of the other expats I was with actually started explaining more about it to me, so I adjusted my behaviour accordingly. I tried to be a bit more covert when I needed a drink in the hot weather.'*

They experience opinion on the fact that a majority of the expats working in Oman have experienced working in a similar country, and hence, find low or no difficulties in adjusting to the Omani culture. However, expats with no prior Gulf or Omani experience find it really difficult especially in communicating with the host nationals.

Many Omani participants blame the Omanis and their negligence to introduce the local culture to foreign staff. Without this, foreign employees will suffer from ambiguity and the lack of familiarity with the culture of the country. One of the Omani participants said:

*"I hope that in the future there will be more respect for the culture of the country from expatriates than there is now. In saying this though, I do not blame them for this and, in the end, I actually blame us. We did not explain our culture to them very well. It would make sense for our institutions to embrace the foreign staff and let them know that they are welcome in our country, but at the same time tells them of this country's culture and that they have to respect it. I do not accept that expatriate women should be allowed go to a village without covering her shoulders or dress in short skirts; I think this is not appropriate and it is obvious that we haven't been clear with them about the culture from the beginning."*

Omani participants also showed their dissatisfaction with certain behaviours by the Western expatriates in the month of Ramadan. As a teaching of Islamic religion, Muslim people have to fast and to avoid looking at any women who are not relatives; even more so in the month of Ramadan. Most of the Omani managers who participated in this research mentioned that a lot of the Omani employees had complained about the expatriate females who did not dress appropriately at work, often having their legs and arms on view and this negatively affected their fasting. Some participants even mentioned that they were forced to take their holiday in the month of Ramadan while they were fasting in order to avoid looking at expatriate employees.

According to Omani managers they get forced by this situation to reschedule the work teams based on the acceptance of employees to work in such environment as some employees show more tolerance about these issues than the others. How does this impact on work patterns or experiences/relations? More detail on the work process/context – too many vague and general associations for this stage in the presentation

An Omani participant says:

*"Most of the foreign staff observes Ramadan in our culture, for example, if any new arrivals who forget and drink water in front of us while we are fasting will usually apologize. In terms of dressing they are generally trying to understand as much as possible and take into account the clothes they have to wear and the modesty they need to show, although I think that some of them should show more modesty than they do now."*

In both Arabic and Islamic culture, as it has been mentioned in the literature, kissing in public is totally unacceptable behaviour in Oman and it was also mentioned by Omani participants that some foreign staff ignored this rule while working in educational institutions. When managers alerted them to avoid this behaviour in public places they said they do not do so in front of students. The manager said they do this behaviour in front of others in public places and this is culturally unacceptable in Muslim countries.

Climate is another challenge for expatriate to adjust. The heat in Oman in the summer can be oppressive, particularly on the coast, where humidity reaches high levels.

Another challenge that expatriates face is the lack of certain facilities are easily accessible in their own countries; especially those who are living and working in small cities. One example which was mentioned by the majority of the expatriates highlighted the transport system in Oman. The participants agreed that Oman has a sound infrastructure and some of the best highways but the amount of public transport available is insufficient and the transport system is unreliable. As a result, expatriates are forced to rely on taxis which are costly as they are often overcharged. One expat stated that:

*'In fact there's very little transportation, you rely on taxis. So you should be informed. Here's the Rial, you should pay this much, and then there's no resentment. It's very expensive to rent a car here. And we had to. In my opinion you can't live here without a vehicle. So it's, again, that would be nice to know in advance. Public transportation is limited, you may have to rent a car, that is, and some of the costs involved for that.*

Although this expat showed his dissatisfaction about transportation system as many expatriates did. He thinks there is a positive side in this area, he says:

*On the positive side, you have some of the best infrastructure I've ever seen. You have the best highways, and although many young Arab men like to drive fast, your highways are so good. Your roads and directions and signage and the logistics and infrastructure to get from here to there, is excellent.'*

In respect of the transportation issues, the lack of public transportation is not the only challenge that expatriates face in Oman. They also express that they are worried about the reputation of Oman as it has a high accident rate and, as a result, most participants, especially females, try to avoid riding in taxis and prefer to hire cars. Furthermore, the absence of street names and house numbers in Oman creates an additional problem for expatriates as this makes it extremely difficult for them to navigate around the city or accurately give directions to taxi drivers to take them home. An American expat stated that:

*'I mean traffic laws in Oman are a joke...they are treated by the population as a joke. Everyone ignores them, ...but it is on more important things, like using your phone when you are driving, I mean it is ridiculous here, you know, the quality of driving is so bad, unfortunately I would say especially among Omani men, everyone drives like they are playing a computer game... again this is something very, very dangerous, and I mean the thing, across the Middle East, the governments are very good at making laws. You know, we make a law about mobile phones, we make a law about seat belts, but that's it, that's all you do, you write the law, and somebody stamps it, and then you forget about it.'*

The cultural difference relating to solving problems is another issue facing expatriates who came to Oman for work or other reasons. Expatriates assert that in the Western culture people tend to focus directly on the problem and then try to solve it, while in Arabic and Eastern cultures people would rather avoid having to deal with problems and would prefer to give the problem to someone else. One American expat stated that:

*'I think it's so embedded in the culture here, that management, administration, when there's a problem, they don't attack the problem...is very, very difficult for Westerners, especially Americans to accept. We see a problem, we want to fix it, and we want to fix it now. We want to attack it. And it's not just Arab culture, it's also Indians... so I really can't wait to go back to America in a week, because I miss that...because I think it's in the blood, it's in the DNA of the people in the Arab region, and it's hot, there's probably some kind of Darwinian reason why we call it trope.'*

Expatriates also mentioned the differences of the way of thinking and behaving between Western and eastern culture. Many of participants shared that the critical thinking skills is the lacking with a lot of the folks that are living in Oman, not Omani so much, but other nationalities such as Indian, Bengalis, and Afghanis. One expat stated that:

*'Americans are very good at critical thinking, we're taught it at a young age, how to think critically. But because of cultural differences, especially with Bengalis, Indians, Pakistanis and Afghanis and Nepalese that are living here, they are like the horse with the blinders in the city, you've got to stay on the road, they can't think outside of the box. And that drives me crazy. I should accept it, but it still drives me crazy. This inability to think for yourself, and to think outside of the box. And I can't wait to go back to America, because when I have a problem at the store, I can talk to someone, and he'll fix it or he will go get his manager and it will be fixed, because the customer is important.'*

### **3. Challenges for female expatriates**

As Oman generally remains very traditional and conservative country. Women should wear garments which cover their upper arms and their legs at least to their feet, both men and women

are expected to dress conservatively in public places. Etiquette is essential to consider in Arab countries; on the whole Oman and her neighbours' are deeply conservative countries, and it is essential (and sometimes a legal requirement) to conform. The majority of expatriate participants agreed that Oman is an extremely religious and conservative society. This conservative was obvious when expatriate females described the most challenges they faced during their adjustment and communication in Oman. This section highlighted these challenges.

The selection of appropriate clothing is one of the most essential challenges facing the Western women as well as non-western during their moving to live in Islamic countries. One female expat telling her story about the lack of knowledge of selecting of appropriate dress:

*'Absolutely we had none, and in fact the one thing that did distress me a little bit, was I could not find any information as to what culturally specific clothing a Western woman should wear. I could find nothing online. The best I could find is one time I got a hit on Princes Noor University in Saudi, for maybe about two weeks, they had some information up on their website, and it came down right after that. But luckily I logged in during that two week period and I downloaded a bunch of stuff from there, and they had a couple of pictures. So I saw what some of the Western teachers were wearing there, so when I came over I had purchased some black tunics, and I had a couple of very long black travel skirts, so I figured if it's good enough for Saudi, it will be appropriate in Oman, even if it's boring. And clearly it's boring here, I don't have to wear black, but I was dressed appropriately. That was my biggest concern.'*

The lack of training and the knowledge about the suitable dress that acceptable in Islamic culture make the female expats get confuse what they have to wear during their travelling to Oman. A female expats shared the following:

*"Well I read about the dress and I read, so I figured it was very different, so I ended up calling Oman, I called somebody in Oman and asked them questions, because they sent, the only thing I received prior to coming was a paper on how to dress, which said to dress conservatively. But that's very ambiguous. To dress conservatively in one place is very different than dressing conservatively here. So I just kind of did my best and once I was here I had to go obviously buy more appropriate things".*

The stereotypes associated with females from Western countries is another challenge female expatriates experience and is one which causes them a great deal of discomfort. For example, due to the images and perceptions portrayed to the citizens of Oman from movies and the media, Eastern and Arabic men, particularly those with little contact with the West, view Western women as highly sexualised. As a result of this stereotyping, many female expatriates from the West are more likely to encounter incidents of sexual harassment.

*“They're in groups, that I assumed were from India or Pakistan, and they openly stare at me, but they don't stare at me with admiration or with hate, it's not those... It's with, I would say, lust. I would say they stare at you like you are something they could drag home. It wasn't a good feeling. It was the most uncomfortable I had ever felt in all of my travels. So, but that was not an Omani, that was other foreigners”.*

Another female adds:

*“According to some foreign women employees they have been exposed to harassment by Omanis - maybe by teenagers. This is because of the perception that Omanis have of the West through the Western media and movies which implies that sex is available to them from Western women. As well as this, the way they wear their clothing has another role in supporting such ideas about females from the West.”*

The appearance of the female expatriates plays an important role in how to deal with them by either local people or other market retailers from other nationalities such as Indians or Pakistanis. Thus, some female respondents stated that they prefer to be with their friends or relatives to avoid any harassment and to assist them with overcoming language variation problems. An American female expat stated that:

*‘In America I would do everything on my own. I can do it on my own; I don't need any man to escort me. Here, there is sometimes you have to have a man with you, because otherwise you know, have difficulties. I tried to do those things by myself, and it's very difficult. Either they charge you a much higher price, or they tell you to buy something*

*you don't need, to get more money, or they just don't talk to you, because they think I'm African. When they find out I'm American, sometimes then they treat me nicely. If they think I'm African, they won't even be nice, which I think is pretty bad.'*

They viewed the cultural challenges being an expat in Oman as an opportunity to adapt to the local culture. Female expats in Oman voiced opinion that the ratio of men over women is high, and it makes them a bit uncomfortable to travel around the city alone.

One expat puts it as follows:

*'Yeah, it is fine. But sometimes it is hot, that is ok. Besides that, I find Omani speak more English than I speak Arabic. That helps a lot. When I first came, I would go around with my brother to the market. There were a lot of men, Indians, Pakistani's... I had my brother around to escort me, because it is really difficult with all those men.'*

Western expatriate females also usually have attracted a great attention from local people due to their distinctive dresses and skin colours. To face these challenges, they learned how to ignore it. One female expat stated that:

*'but sometimes those things do make you feel a certain way, and I found this even working in another country, where you're noticed because you're different, and or because you look different and that, there have been times like that where you know I never really liked being the centre of attention... people looking and then I realise that, okay, I'm different here.'*

Contrary to the communication barrier there are also instances of cultural difference where female expats have had to abstain from engaging in an activity that they would like to do and would be able to participate in in their home country. One female expat shared that:

*'I like to see more swimming pools here. We have a pool but we don't have a female lifeguard and the Egyptian lifeguard said I can do it but he is not allowed to do it because it is Omani culture. All the women couldn't swim. It was a culture shock, and frustration.'*



Gender segregation, often termed as the prescriptive prohibition of free-mixing in Islam especially when alone. Furthermore, As has been addressed in literature Li (2016) takes cultural dimension of masculinity/feminity as extent to which society reinforces or fails to reinforce traditional, bias masculine show of male achievement and control as well as power. High score on index of masculinity indicates that such a country experiences high gender differentiation degree. Gender segregation often influences the expatriates not only in the society but even in the working places. This segregation between the two genders influence the work and the adjustment of expatriates without adequate knowledge about the natural of the relationship between males and females and the determinants of this relationship, as one female expat stated that:

*'Well my life here is very segregated from men, and even with some Omani women, I think it's hard for Westerners, at least Western women to move to a culture that is divided between the sexes, because we are very used to being, having friends that are male and female, and here it is a very hard to do that, because of all the cultural and religious separations. And I think that's, and in some parts I think it's difficult for even Omani women sometimes to connect to Western women, just because of ideologies and just the way they do day to day things.'*

Omani participants also focus on cultural and general living differences that influencing the adjustment of expatriates. Omanis asserted that the lifestyles and day to day of living in expatriate country and in Oman is different. In addition, the type and quality of services available in the Sultanate are quite different in Oman, and this is often one of the main causes for expatriates to leave the country and return to their home country. Most of the participants pointed out that the foreign employees, especially those who came from developed countries in west, will face difficulty when experience an inferior health service, shopping differences, restaurants and cafes favoured by expatriates, housing, sports facilities, recreational playgrounds, tennis clubs, gyms, swimming pools and places to walk when compared to centres in their own countries. Omani participants pointed out that in contrast to most areas of the capital, Muscat is characterized by nature and villages and therefore lacks the availability of several services. Thus, many newcomers encounter difficulties in terms of the standard of living. One Omani participant says:

*"I know some expatriates who live in Muscat and work in Nizwa. This means they have to travel approximately 140 km every day to go to work but they would prefer to do this due to the availability of services in Muscat and their inability to adapt to the lifestyle in Nizwa. For example, in terms of housing, it is not all barracks here on the same required level as in Muscat. Also, if we come to health centres, spas or different public parks, there are not many of them here. As for transportation, this is also a problem and one expatriate said that they cannot feel safe with anyone here because if they want to go somewhere, sometimes they have to wait for more than half an hour in order to find taxi while in Muscat it is much easier and perhaps the longest they will have to wait is only for 10 minutes."*

Another participant added:

*"By nature, the Asians in general and the Omanis in particular rely on rice as a staple food in their basic diet. The quality of popular restaurants here do not meet the food favoured by most Western expatriates such as McDonald's and Pizza Express and other fast food restaurants which are not available in abundance here. This is a burden to them both inside and outside the workplace. Moreover, this sometimes forces them to leave work at meal times to look for food that suits them and this causes them to embarrassment often they are late back to the office as they are unable to find what they want to eat."*

Omanis also mentioned the climate and temperatures as another factor influences the adjustment of Western and non-western expatriates. One Omani says:

*"The new climate and high temperatures have a role to play in the adjustment to the country for foreigners. Most of them come from countries where they have cool rainy weather throughout the year so find it difficult to adapt to the new climate when moving to the dry and sunny environment where temperatures can reach as high as 50 degrees or more. They find this very difficult."*

The difference in the health system is also an obstacle facing the expatriates during their adaptation to the Oman. One of the Omani participants says:

*“Also difficulty which faces many of them is the health system in Omani hospitals as the system is completely different to their own. For example, in their countries, each individual has his or her own doctor or private clinic where they are registered and have information and data about their condition recorded. While in Oman the problem is all clinics have to start from the beginning as there is no history for each patient. Now when they go to a hospital then go to another hospital they will start from the beginning and this is time-consuming consumption for them.”*

Another participant summarizes the most important daily difficulties faced by expatriates in their adjustment and which can sometimes lead to many of them returning early to their home countries. He attributed the early return of expatriates, first, to the cultural differences and the lack of entertainment facilities, when he said:

*“When I was director of administrative and financial affairs of an institution, some expatriates returned home as they could not co-exist with our culture. For example, in some regions of the country there are no places to spend their free time; they were used to often spending their leisure time in certain places such as bars and cafes, but here there are very few. There are also no places to go for entertainment and a lot of them had no patience with this aspect so they tendered their resignation.*

The second reason for an early return of expatriates is the poor services. Lack of transportation has been giving as an example for these poor services which influence the general live of expatriates, especially, western women. An Omani participant added:

*Other reasons for leaving Oman were due to poor services, particularly the transport system, as the transportation system in their countries is organized and they may not need a car. Here if you do not have a car you will be in trouble. Moreover, it is also a problem for expatriate women to stand outside in the street on her own - as you know the culture of the people here stereotype women from the West which makes them highly vulnerable and subject to harassment as they came from the West.”*

In terms of the general life adjustment, Oman participants also pointed out that the bureaucracy followed in conducting transactions in Oman represents another issue to the foreign employees which leads to many of them wanting to leave the country.

Omani participants also focused on cultural differences that must be considered when moving from the Western environment to live in the Arab conservative environment, such as Omani environment, which often increase the cultural shock with expatriates in Oman.

One of the participants indicates that there is a pattern of flexible dealing which prevails in the Arabic and Omani community in many areas. There is also a culture of pleasantry and leniency in dealing with others. For example, the allocation of time or commitment to queuing during is the completion of transactions which have flexibility in our culture. He says:

*"I do not think the expatriates will adapt to living in the Omani environment easily because such things are often too much of a disruption for them. For example, the issue of the commitment of time needed for queuing does not mean a lot to the average Omani citizen but may mean a lot to me, especially since I studied in the West, and will more than likely mean a lot to a newcomer from the West. This commitment is part of his personality and part of the cultural make up (cultural created)".*

Some participants consider that the cultural difference has more influence in the adaptation of expatriates than the difference of general living. For example, participants believe that the religious factor affects the adjustment of the newcomer. It even influences his choice as to whether to come to the country, in particular, the nature of the Islamic religion and its teachings, as participants are incompatible with most of the qualities and habits that the foreign employee believes in. When Western expatriates come to work in Islamic countries, they find that the teachings of the Islamic religion are different to their beliefs. Therefore, they may alienate them or create difficulties which are hard for them to adjust to. While some Omani participants argue that most of the expatriates already knew these differences, so they are convinced that they will be missing out on some parts of their original life and behaviours, on the other hand by the pros of the economic side as a profit, they will get more than what they will lose.

Omani participants also pointed out that the expectations of expatriates play a major role in the extent of their adjustment. An Omani participant said:

*“From my experience with them, I think foreigners expect something greater than the reality of how life is in this country and they are shocked by what they find. Possibly they imagine the life here may be closer to their own way of life and their own culture and then they are surprised that there are differences in cultures.”*

Another female added:

*“The adjustment of expatriates depends on the extent of the prior expectations they have. For example, if the prior expectations are not identical with the reality that they found then their adjustment will be more difficult. It is certain that they have an idea of the Muslim countries and especially the restrictions imposed on women.”*

As this section highlighted the most issues and challenges facing both expatriates and Omanis during their interaction, the next section will shed the light to work differences that expatriates may find during their assignment in Oman.

## **4.2 Work adjustment**

Expatriates expressed that though there were no instances of surprise in the way people communicated, they didn't find any major differences. However, it did surprise them that people were able to understand them well and the way they received their inputs was appreciable.

Hard work by expats in Oman has been appreciated by the interviewed expat managers as they share that expat employees put forward their best abilities and skills to succeed. They are always in competition and try to improve themselves in every aspect. It is also identified that though the local people are stress free and easy going, some expats do not like it as it hinders their goal to get something done. One expat shared that:

*'One thing that I appreciate in Omanis is that they don't get stressed out, which is nice thing because they don't stress you out too. They are easy going, but that can be a problem sometimes especially when you have something to get worked out.'*

Work in Oman characterized, from the viewpoint of expatriates, by kind of flexibility compared to work in their countries. This flexibility occurs in their meetings, as it would be acceptable sometimes to be late. One Canadian female says:

*"One difference would be sometimes the Omani staff will, you know, kind of casually roll in, so when someone says we start at 8 O' clock, it means, any time before 9 O' clock"*

Another participant describe that the culture of work is differ than in west and expatriates have to accept that and try to learn how to flow the new system. He explains:

*"With the Omani clock is different from the Western clock. Walk slower. If you're five minutes late for a meeting, it's not the end of the world. Relax. Everything will get done in due time. It's a process, everything here is a process. It will get done, but not at the same speed or at the same manner as you would do it at home, so follow the Omani and try and do it their way. This is their country, so you can't come to a foreign country and expect that everyone does something your way. You're in their country. So you must adapt and do things their way, and if you can't, go home"*

Doing activates for show at work is another thing that expatriates dislike it at work in Oman. When one expatriate asked about things that he would like to change in his work in Oman said:

*"...Doing something less for show, and more about actual achievement. There's sometimes things are done just for show. It would be more effective and more productive if it was done with the full intention of a goal"*.

Another expatriate mentioned that while he in the UK can directly tell his colleagues that he/she made a mistake at work, he cannot do that in direct way in Oman. He explained:

*“In the UK I would come up to you and, I don't know, say it was to do with marking and you'd made a mistake, in the UK I would walk up and I would directly say to you, look, do you realise you've made a mistake here and that we need to sort this out and that this has happened, that has happened. Here, if you know the Omani well enough then you can do that, but if you don't, then I, there's a very much like a more of a round way, dealing with it. Either you go through the HOD, or the co-ordinator”.*

Another American asserted:

*“In America you can be more frank, you can be more direct, here, you have to be more implicit, you have to smile more, you have to shake hands more, it's part of the culture, and you know that's the way things are done, so for me that's been a huge learning curve, yes. It's not really my personality, I have a very strong personality, but diplomacy, diplomacy gets things done here. So that's probably the biggest thing for me that I've learned, is to be more diplomatic. You know and it's a very good thing, because you want to go back to America, you know, even though you want to be firm, sometimes it's about just being diplomatic and biting your tongue”.*

Lack of accountability at work is another difference that expatriates mentioned as an issue during their work in Oman. They compared between accountable management style in their countries and what they call it “laissez faire style” in Oman. This result agree with the statement raised by Sidani and Thornberry (2013) and Iles et al. (2012) who argue that lack of control giving opportunities for corruption, such as “wasta” which is using social connections to obtain favours or preferential access to services or differential treatment, could lead to low accountability in organisations in many Middle Eastern countries. One American expiates said:

*“...Different kinds of management, and on one side you have the authoritative, you know manager, and on the other side you have the laissez faire, and things tend to be laissez faire here. So that's quite different than what I'm used to in America. Every job is different in America, but for the most part, there's more accountability, and that's a key word, there's not as much accountability here..., and that's a problem for me, and that's a cultural issue, if you do something wrong, or you're not doing your job, you've got to be held accountable”.*

Among the differences in work and that make it difficult for expatriates what they called “lack of a work ethic” and delay the work until the last minute. One expatriate expressed his dissatisfaction:

*“I think it's the, there is a lack of a work ethic and I agree, we've talked already about the cultural reasons for this. But you know there isn't this idea of making sure that the job gets done well. You might make sure the job gets done, but if it's done, it's done. You know there is no idea of, you know, making sure that everything is perfect. It's just, oh, we get there and something happened and there was this, okay, it's good enough. Saying things like organising open days and things like this”.*

He provided several examples of the delay of work, which is influence his planning for doing his work or organising his social life. He said:

*“... I tried to organise two months in advance, still it ends up, one day before, oh, shall we produce a poster, shall we tell people about it? Yes, I suppose so. A little poster. I mean it's the same, you know, a lot of good events happen in Oman. People find out, one day before, sometimes one day after. By the way, yesterday there was this amazing event. But you didn't tell anyone. No, but you know it was good. And this is the kind of, and the same happens with work. With the exams and with everything that happens here... there is no organisation. You say there is an exam, oh, but we have a lesson there... nobody tells the teachers, or nobody tells the students. Nobody tells anyone. Again it is the same in other countries in the region. You know, like a public holiday. Nobody tells you until one day before... So you can't organise things in advance. Everything is last minute, nothing is planned in advance. Nothing is organised in advance... that means things do not work well... The same when they cut the water off for maintenance. They don't tell you one week in advance, they tell you after they've cut the water... then they come and say, oh, by the way, yes the water is cut, yes we know, yes”.*

While non-western expatriates indicated that there are some similarities in the work between their countries and the work environment in Oman, where the existence of type of flexibility and bureaucracy at work.



The local Omani employees admire the foreign expats and that is because they have left their country to work and to adapt in a completely different atmosphere, also for their punctuality in time and their sanctification for their work being in order and their commitment to it.

Most of the Omani participants pointed out that the expats are committed to being on time and make sure that their work is precise. They make sure they hand everything at the specified time and attend meetings on time; this is the work culture they are used to. Conversely, many of the local workers are often late handing in their work and attending meetings on time, this may be due to the nature of the culture that they are used to. In addition, many participants have commented that they like the fact that the foreign expats are very honest and open when it comes to work as they will immediately notify their manager about any mistakes they have made and ask for help if they do not understand something. This is seen as a good thing and is something that not many of the Omani workers do.

Omani participants attributed the differences of work between Omani and the expatriate employees to the flexibility of the working culture in the Arabic world. For example, an Omani participant described the following:

*“In the Arabic working environment if you request assign a work task to the workers and give them a deadline of three days the local worker could hand it back to you a week later. This is because the local workers are sure that the boss will believe and understand his excuse for submitting the work late”*

The same Omani participant compares the work commitment between Omani and expatriate employees. He said:

*However, the foreign expats have more fear of not completing the work in time and when they are asked to complete an assignment in three day period, in many cases they will usually hand it in the next day. This might be a cultural pattern and we accept this and we don't blame them and for the nature of the working culture they are used to.*

Omani employees who had the opportunities to study abroad in western countries, in particular, they seem to follow the western working style of commitment of time. However, after a while they switching to the Arabic fixable style of time commitment. As an Omani participant mentioned:

*On the other hand, when an Omani worker who has studied abroad in countries such as America or Britain they become very aware of deadlines and are committed to them. They become very particular about this and it then takes a while for them to change these habits.”*

Far too long and speculative to be of transparent value

This understanding of time commitment is forming a problem with some foreign expats as one of the Omani participants mentioned:

*“We are able to use the photocopying machine in our institution between 12:30pm to 4:00pm so when the foreign worker wants to use the copier outside of this time period they find it closed and they show their disappointment and anger to the situation because this time is the time to get work done and he cannot get it done. He shows anger and we try to calm him down saying that this might have happened for some reason but this happens more than once so he learns to accept it and understands what time flexibility means and how cultures differ in this aspect. Here we have more flexibility in being committed to time and getting work done and it is the same as what they are used to experiencing in their countries as in their culture, every second has value. These are the cultural differences that are noted with the foreign expats.”*

On the other hand, there are some Omani participants who don't agree with this and think that the foreign expats were forced to commitment. In her opinion not due to the cultures they come from but because they obliged to follow the work systems in their country which is not evaluable in Oman. One of the Omani female participants says:

*“In my opinion, in the case of their time commitment, it is not because of their culture but because of the punishments and rules that are forced upon them in cases of there being any delay. They begin to learn to see that they will not be in any trouble for anything so they feel freer because the system here isn’t as strict as the system they are used to. It is okay here to be an hour late as I, as a manager, do not have any legal rights. For example, I can’t touch their salaries or implement any decisions that can cause the worker to not feel committed to their time in respect of renewing their contract. However, in their countries, the companies place a great deal of importance on being on time and if you are late this is very serious.*”

She compared between the working rules in Oman and western countries where she used to study. She added:

*“There are millions of people who could take their job and this is the fear that the expats are used to in their culture. Things are very different here and this is not the culture. Unfortunately, there is a lot of indulgence here and carelessness in the worker. They see that if they are an hour late to work, no one is going to yell at them and if they did they don’t care because they only have one year and they won’t renew the contract. It makes you feel uneasy when you know this as a responsibility.”*

Moreover, some Omani participants pointed out the difference in communicating and getting the information across in work. The western expats get straight to the point without explaining everything without any introductions, but the local workers and non-western expatriates mostly begin with a long introduction before getting to the main point. One of the Omani participants’ states:

*“When an expat comes to deliver a certain message he doesn’t bother me with long introductions as he gets straight to the point; for example, he says that we suffer from a shortage of workers in the department and we need a new worker. However, in the case of the local workers, they give a long introduction saying such things like we thank the Ministry for its efforts and we would also like to thank the administration of the department and so on. After all the introductions they would*

*then get to the main point that they would like a new worker if you would please. This makes me feel that the main reason isn't as important as the long introduction."*

This section provided a great knowledge about work differences and challenges that expatriates experienced in Oman. The next section will explore the nature of cross-cultural communication between expatriates and Omanis.

### **4.3 Expatriates' Cross-cultural Communication Adjustment**

Most expatriates (western and non-western) mentioned that lack of communication and coordination during their first arriving to Oman was frustrating. This lack of communication leads to many consequences, for example, expatriates weren't be able to know the places to get their basic needs such as food, transportation or shopping centres and even when they tried to get there by themselves, they are hampered by the language factor which hampers communication with the local people. One female expat who came from the UK shared that:

*'The first three months are very frustrating for a Westerner, coming to Oman, because we come from a very organised culture. To this part of the region which is very unorganised, and I don't mean that in any very bad way.'*

Religion and customs, is another reason of the lack of cross-cultural interaction between expatriates and Omanis. Expatriates mentioned that each avoid interacting with other group so do not behave contrary to the culture of the other party. A female expatriate said:

*I think I would like to have more friends from Oman, but I find that maybe there's a little reluctance to get to know me because I'm not from here. I find that it's, it may take a little bit more time for me to develop more friendships... especially when you're from a different country...you know the Muslim religion, either being a Muslim, I think can make a big difference... the way that you dress is important as well, and the way that you carry yourself and your values.*

Expatriate participants mentioned that the presence of their families play a role in the lack of communication between them and the local employees. After work most of these staff is busy with their families. An expatriate female stated:

*“The women, they go home, they've got family responsibilities, and they don't have time to hang with me. And the other local women that I do meet them in the grocery store, and I think they are mostly curious, but again they have families and responsibilities and in Nizwa city, I do feel it is much more conservative, and although there might be a willingness to try to understand a little bit. There is still a desire to maintain that cultural significance. And I don't think that that's a bad thing”.*

According to the culture dimensions theory, that an individual with a collectivist culture has the strong belongingness sense to a social context as well as relationships (Diaz, 2014). Female Omani participant attributed this lack of interaction to the family obligations. As a collectivist society families become at the forefront of the priorities of Omanis, especially for females. Therefore, they spent most of their time looking after them and because of that they do not have enough time to establish any type of relationship with expatriates. As one Omani female explained:

*“The relation of friendship doesn't exist. As for the workers ...we have a life and other things to do after work like family. We don't have time to socialize and go out with foreigners. If we do go out, we go out with family. We don't have time to go out with even Omani friends. Women have a different world after work; we are busy with commitments, like the house and the kids. Even if they aren't married, women are still busy dealing with her siblings, parents and family so it is less likely that these friendships would happen with women.”*

Some participants blamed the ambiguity and lack of clarity of both Omanis and expatriates in expressing and explaining the important cultural aspects in their culture. This ambiguity is often slowing the process of developing communication between them. An expatriate participant explained:

*“A New Zealander that's never left New Zealand, okay, doesn't understand about Halaal food and the pork, but if you never make friends with them, they're never going to learn. If you're excluding yourself from other cultures because of it, this is, that's a really bad excuse”.*

He blames Muslims because they don't disclose their cultural requirements for non-Muslims such as type of food they need. He provided some suggestions to encourage people who came from different cultural backgrounds to start to communicate with each other in order to clarify and understand these cultural differences between them. He said:

*“I think it's an opportunity for Muslim people to hide behind themselves and not engage in the rest of the world, especially when they go to other countries. People don't understand the Halaal food, okay, but if you speak to people and you say, okay, you know, I want to be friends with you, but we don't drink, so what's stopping Omani people going to a vegetarian restaurant with New Zealanders, and not drinking, and asking them, can we do this but not drink? And if the New Zealander really wanted to be friends with the Omanis, that's exactly what they would do”.*

He has indicated that it is not worthwhile to travel to a different country without interacting with the local culture. As he added:

*“And if you're going to stay only in your own culture where you go New Zealand or UK, then there's, then for me I'm missing a really good opportunity to broaden your horizons, broaden your views, in the same way as a Westerner coming here, and living in this part of the world, will have a very different perspective of this part of the world, than they would do living in America and seeing American news and TV. And it's about taking those opportunities; otherwise why leave our country?”.*

Other expatriates consider that they do not develop their relationship with Omanis because they think it is easy for them to have friends from their own country. That is due to their knowledge about what their expectation, how they doing things, and sometimes people just don't want to make the extra effort to try to meet or understand or get to know people, who will be different.

Omani participants pointed out a number of differences in relation to culture and customs that make the Omanis try to avoid developing a strong relationship with foreign colleague expats. He made one reference to an Arab and Omani custom to let one person pay when couples or groups go out to eat food or grab a coffee, however, foreigners pay individually. Another Omani custom when eating is to wait for the person they're with to finish their food. However, foreigners will leave the table as soon as they have finished eating, leaving whoever they are with alone. Mood swings are another unpleasant habit that most foreigners have, according to the majority of the Omani participants. They feel that this is a primary reason for the many difficult relationships experienced between Omani workers and expats and most participants think that expats are controlled by their mood in their treatment of their Omani colleagues. One of the participants says:

*“I feel like most of the foreign expats are moody as sometimes they would say hi to you when they're in a good mood but when they're in a bad mood they would pass you without a greeting and act like they have never spoken to you before. We feel proud of our culture, no matter how much we are suffering from work pressure but we respect, appreciate and consider each other and what's important is that we get along with everyone who is around us.”*

Also another Omani participant stresses that expatriates are moody and they would be very close in one day and not even talk in the next day: he says:

*“In general they don't communicate with the society or the Omanis. We used to have one of the workers joining us while we eat dates and drink Arabian coffee. I used to sit with him as he told me about his mother and how they used to sit around the fire and how the situation has changed. The next day the same person came in to work and did not speak to me, but only spoke when felt like talking”*

The Omani participants point out that when they were studying abroad, they wished to have a good relationship between them and foreigners but when they returned back to Oman this desire decreased. The most prominent reasons for this offered by the respondents was that there are Omani colleges with students, friends and peers of the same culture and background here so they would prefer to have relationships with these people rather than foreigners. They also stated

other commitments, such as spending time with family members, taking out their children and doing other jobs as other reasons as to why they did not have the time to spend with the expats.

Other Omani respondents claimed that the foreign expats do not show any interest in communicating with them. Thus they disliked attempting to communicate with the foreign expats as they don't feel like the foreigners have the desire to communicate with them when they try to interact.

Omani participants also claim that the lack of activities at the work place is another reason for the limited communication and interaction with foreigners. They felt that if there were more options for socialising available, this would help integrate the Omanis and expats and minimise the isolation. They also suggested that these activities would help to motivate expats into having more loyalty to the institution. It would also change their perceptions of the Islamic and Arabian lifestyle, as some of the participants felt that the Islamic customs and way of life can be quite tough and rigid which makes it difficult to adapt to.

One of the participants also specified that the social and religious teachings on the nature of dealing with women in Arabic societies were another reason why she felt reluctant to communicate or engage with them and she wanted to avoid embarrassing situations. She said:

*“Their ignorance about our culture makes me, as a woman; avoid dealing with them so I don't put myself or them in embarrassing situations or forming any kind of clash between my culture and theirs. For example, I avoid anyone touching me or trying to shake my hand and so on.”*

The Omanis pointed out that there is no relationship or communication outside of work with the expats. They suggested that it was because foreigners refuse to have a relationship with the Omanis for the sake of their cultural differences. As one of the participants mentioned:

*“I have tried to invite some of them, telling them that I want to form a relationship with them but I noticed that they are conservative when it comes to this point. Some of them were even honest with me saying that it is difficult for his wife and daughter to come when they don't wear a head scarf while your wife does. I have tried a*



*countless number of times with more than one expat but there is no response, maybe there is a barrier between us because of the cultural difference. Maybe they couldn't understand our societies and privacy customs and we couldn't interpret it to them properly. I blame society; foreigners are present with us so there must be communication and interaction between us."*

Another Omani participant describes the cultural differences that influence cross-cultural communication between Omanis and expatriates. The natural of individualism and collectivism cultural back ground influence the interaction between Omanis and expatriates. Gender mixing and type of activities that expatriates prefer to do during their gatherings restrict Omanis to participate. He said:

*"None of them has ever formed a relationship with the individuals of the society because of the different cultures and customs. We are very sociable in nature but they tend to be more alone and free in spending their time...but there are other causes like culture and customs. The Omani culture and customs don't compatible with the foreigners' culture, for example, the foreigner prefers to spend his weekend relaxing, drinking and partying but the Omani prefers not to do these things. They also prefer to have both genders in their parties while it's difficult to mix the two genders within the Omani society; moreover, there are the clothes and very different ways of dress".*

From this participant point of view expatriates have another reason to interact with Omanis. According to him media not only influence the stereotypes of western but also make an idea about Arabic and Muslims with western, therefore, expatriates also refrain from interacting with Omanis. He added:

*There is also a possibility that they have a perception about us because of what the media says about us and our society, it might be difficult for them, so they prefer not to socialize with us. The media represents us as terrorists so even when we travel abroad we are avoided but only in some rare cases."*

Another adds:

*"I have no relationship with Europeans - only a little. In reality we cannot guess if behaviour suits their culture or not so sometimes we might behave in a way they do not accept. Maybe they are afraid of the colloquial society or they might just don't want to be part of it. I don't think it's easy to make friendships with them because of the differences in culture and moods and maybe it's because Europeans aren't the ones who want to build friendships."*

Some Omani participants noted that the anaphylaxis among many expatriates also considered one of the psychological obstacles that hinder their adjustment and their communication with Omanis. For example, if an Omani employee was asked about his family this would be considered as a type of appreciation, however, with expatriates, this is considered as being nosey and snooping on personal life. An Omani female described the following:

*"One point that is always mentioned is hypersensitivity. Expatriates in most situations are very sensitive, unlike us. As Omanis it is possible to be asked about your family and your brothers and your sisters and how they are. If you do know their culture and you ask such questions about their family, they consider this as very personal and you are not able to ask them about their family. For example, if any one of the Western expatriates came and told me as Head of the Department that one of his family had died I can't ask him who or how or when or show my condolences as they may not accept that and ask 'why are you consoling me? I did not love my father so please do not console me'. Such things are a normal and happen daily with us while with them it is very sensitive. You have to get used to them and that everything in their life is very personal. We love the social relations while they are opposite us and they hate social relations."*

Cultural differences also appear through the dealings between the two genders. Usually, both parties avoid dealing with each other and this is because of the fear of or disposal to doing things that might be culturally incompatible with the other. One Omani female says:

*"I try to avoid dealing with foreigners because I always feel the caution while I deal with them and that is due to the apprehension of one of them not knowing the nature of the relationship which should be followed between the two genders in the Arab*

*and Islamic countries. They deal with each other normally and without any restriction. In their dealings with us they try to be more careful but in the crowds and the busy work environments they may forget that and become more free but we are governed by Islamic culture."*

Another participant says:

*"Dealings between males and females is very different here than their countries. For example, in their countries the relationship between the two genders is open and free while here we have to be more conservative. As it is not always possible to talk to women, we also have to take into account how we speak to them and the distance between us and them. All these things must be taking into consideration and observed by newcomers. These things in our society have a religious background they do not understand. Sometimes they understand them in different ways; therefore, these things have to be explained for them and the reasons why they must bear in mind these things in the Muslim communities."*

This reluctance of mixing between the two genders not only appears with Omani females but also with males as Islamic instructions says not to touch any foreign person, whether male or female. Omani male shared his experience of interaction with western female and how he dealt with the situation when he said:

*"There have been some times that a foreign female employee has approached me much more than they should do, according to our culture. I do not like this, I believe that this is inappropriate and therefore it bothers me. In such cases when they are approaching a lot I try to keep away... sometimes I have told them in an indirect way, that they need to keep distance between me and them; for example, I moved away and they understand that I do not feel comfortable with them approaching me a lot.*

He provided another example of the influence of culture and religion in interaction with expatriates when he said:

*“Not only that but there was also an instance where another expatriate female has approached me and wanted to shake my hand but I apologized and put my hand to my side. I said I was sorry but I am not allowed to shake a foreign women’s hand. She understood my behaviour although she felt a little embarrassed so I explained that from a religious and cultural I cannot shake hands with her.”*

### **Language barriers**

When the participants were questioned about the issue of language they had differences of opinion in respect of how important they felt this issue was. However, the majority of the participants who do not speak English fluently said that language could play a major role in the communication between Omanis and foreigners. As one of the participants mentioned:

*“Yes, I think language plays a major role. In my case, language is an obstacle because I can’t speak English very well. With that said, there are people who do speak English very well but they still do not communicate with them because they have failed to deliver the privacy of the society and this is our problem.”*

Language also plays a role in the expats ability to make things easier for them in a society in which not all members speak in English. One of the Omani principals mentioned that both she and the expats working with her struggle from the problems that the language difference causes:

*“The ability to acquire the language is important for the foreign expats. Outside of work there are the transport systems and shopping malls that the expats need to become familiar with and it is hard to deal with these simple things if you don’t speak the language. For example, workers try to coordinate with taxi drivers but they can’t communicate with them, they can use signs to ask about the price but they can’t use signs to agree on a date because they don’t know the language. There have been many times where I have had to go and speak to a taxi driver on behalf of an expat to translate information ...and explain the details of what is required”.*

Another Omani manager asserted and describes how she had to leave here work to solve problems facing expatriates due to lacking of language abilities not only in their general live but also in their official transactions. She adds:

*“Some workers have been involved in robberies or had car accidents and have had to go to the police station to report the incident. In these cases, they have been unable to carry out the necessary procedures correctly and also did not know how to send the information across so they have called me, told me their issue and I have had to speak to the officer for them and translate the issue for them so all the legal procedures were done through me.*

She continued to explain how lack of language ability with expatriates influences their interaction and here work:

*I was the face between the worker and the police officer which I found annoying as this takes a lot of time and requires a lot of effort from me. I have to work and have had to go to the police station multiple times to make a pledge. Unfortunately, even the public relations within our institutions don't speak English, so when the expats need to do anything official they are unable to do it and so they call on me to help them which are sometimes inconvenient and it is also very tiring.”*

Next section will shed the light to natural of training and supports that expatriates had and their suggestion to develop suitable training programs for the newcomers to Oman.

#### **4.4 Cross- cultural training and supports**

In the qualitative analysis the pre-departure training is an aspect that can be stated by the interviewees as a majority of both western and non-western participants didn't receive any formal pre-departure training. Some of the interviewees stated that they did receive training prior to their visit to Oman; however, the training was job-related and had no specific link to cultural training or language training. Most expats believe they did not have enough information before they moved to Oman. One female expat stated that:

*'I think it is important to have pre-departure training especially in case with this country, the local people. There should be some kind of training and local understanding. Coming from Canada or America, we sometimes think that we know everything. So it is very hard for someone to train us as we are very difficult to train.'*

As there interviews included English language trainers to second language students, they had certain outlook on the new culture and how to interact with the second language individuals. This experience helped them in integrating better. Female expat managers expressed concern that they had no pre-departure training on how to dress in the society to be called 'dressed appropriately'.

*'We didn't receive any pre departure training. They sent me a small packet that said this is the way we prefer to dress, and a little bit of introduction. There was anyone talking to you or explaining something. It would be good to have a teacher for example to help you out.'*

The expats had to undergo self-training to understand the culture by themselves, and to know the do's and don'ts of living and interacting in Oman. The expats prefer to have pre departure training to understand the cultural differences at least a session of 3 to 4 hours would help them to understand how to interact with people in Oman.

*'No, we talked about all the times, I have done lot of travelling, and I think I have been unfortunate about cultural training. At least 3 to 4 hours cultural training would help.'*

This highlights the fact the women expats have a higher level of cultural barriers that restrain them from engaging in job opportunities in the Arabic Counties.

Surprisingly, some expatriate looking to the training programs from different perspective. They think this type of programs will not contribute to their knowledge. However, this may happen not because of weakness of training programs but from some expatriates' point of view due to their characters. One female expat stated that:

*'It's sometimes very difficult to train a foreigner, a Westerner specifically. We sometimes feel, whether it's right or wrong, that we're coming into a third world country,*

*and we think we know everything... That's the nature of being Canadian or American. We think we know everything.'*

This lack of pre-departure training led expatriates to self-training. For example, they tried to find useful information about cultures and costumes in Oman. However, some of expatriate respondents argue that such information which they obtained online was misinformation. One female expat shared that:

*"If you make decisions based on what you read on someone's personal blog, or personal website, you will be misled. You will have the wrong information, so I think it's the responsibility of the employer, or the recruiter, to provide accurate true information about".*

### **Feedback on Culture Shock and cross-cultural adjustment**

Lack of prior training or knowledge of the Omani culture has limited the scope of the expat managers to fully integrate themselves in the host society. The advice suggested by the expat managers are shared below:

- To interact with the host country national to receive as much support as possible for expats with no prior experience in the new country.
- To respect people from different diversities, to understand the differences at diversity, and to overcome them to be more productive.
- To engage in building more communication with friends and family to overcome the loneliness at work, and to be more productive at work.
- Malleability, be an open minded person with religious views, and the ability to change with the new environment and avoiding rigid ideas and firm views.

Likewise, most of the Omani participants also agree on the importance of offering training courses to the foreign expats in this research. These courses should focus on introducing them to the aspects of religion, Omani culture, Omani customs, the nature of the job and the rules inside of the Sultanate. One of the participants says:

*“First, they should be introduced to the aspects of the Islamic religion, as it is what decides the rules of the Omani culture when looking at the dress code, considering others feelings and also in not showing certain behaviours that clash with the Omani culture”.*

He also asserted that the Omani society may accept some strange behaviour from expatriates due to their lack of knowledge to the Omani and Muslim culture but in some circumstances it cannot be ignored. He explained:

*Society might let go of some of the behaviours as it takes into account that they aren't Muslims when looking at their facial features, but society won't condone all inappropriate behaviour such as going inside holy places while wearing revealing clothes or appearing in public places while wearing inappropriate clothing. Also expats behaving in ways that bring shame to the community like kissing and the like, society's reaction would be very strong then.”*

Omani participants also pointed to the need for foreign staff to be introduced to the Omani and Arabic culture before they arrive at the Sultanate, as this is obviously profoundly different to their original cultures. However, in reality, it would prove difficult to train foreigners before their arrival moving because of the high material cost. One participant says:

*"Foreigners who come here are embarking on a new society which has completely different habits and different traditions. For example, there are things they should not do and by doing so this may hurt others; they need to know their boundaries and limits so they can feel comfortable. If expatriates are not given this knowledge and information before they arrive they will not know how they should behave in a strange and conservative society. This could cause them further worry and result in them being apprehensive in the approach and their ability to deal with Omanis because they do not know specifically how they should to deal with them."*

Another Omani female manager mentioned subjects that training programs have to cover:



*“A great program for training the expatriates must be designed by organisations, at the state level, including the rights, the duties, the ethics, the cultures of the community and the work in the Sultanate. Every organisation should have to detail this program and the expansion of the nature and culture of the region and the traditions and habits of the country, as well as giving advice on what is allowed and what is not allowed”.*

She also asserted that reading a booklet is not enough to training expatriates but they have to provide with real training programs prepared and introduced by expert trainers. She said:

*“I don’t think they should just be given a booklet only because this is inadequate, but they should have to attend courses which give examples of life and realistic advice about the experiences and problems faced by foreign staff whilst they are living in Oman. We are ready as managers to do this and we wrote a special book named Factbook which contains information that all expatriates need to know. For example, implicit restaurants, pharmacies and basic foundations that the newcomer should need to know when dealing with Omanis.”*

Another participant commented on the problems that arise as a result of the expats ignorance when it comes to the society’s culture and the importance of training them:

*“In my opinion, I think that it necessary to train them as soon as they arrive... It has to involve all aspects like religion, language, culture and customs. Religion has a huge impact in our everyday life, for example, anyone who is talking to you would leave you suddenly when they are called for prayer”.*

Such lack of trainings or knowledge about local culture could lead to conflicts between expatriates and locals as they may cross the red lines of the culture. One Omani manager described the situation:

*“This has happened in one of the display halls when one Omani couple were choosing some ceramic pieces and there was a small gap between the two of them. One of the foreigner sellers passed through them, resting his hand on the wife’s*

*shoulder and asking her to make some space. This action caused a huge problem and the husband was about to kill the expat for his actions which only happened as a result of his ignorance to the culture and customs in the society. The managers have to inform the man that this worker was new and doesn't know how to act properly but if he had been trained he would have avoided such a situation."*

Participants focused on the training of expatriates on privacy which is characterized in the Omani culture in addition to the privacy of social, religious and political systems. This also prevails in the rest of the Gulf countries and other Islamic countries, such as the privacy of non-interference in the political affairs of others.

Some very important advice the Omani participants pointed out to the foreign expats is that the foreign expats should seek to adapt to the Omani society. They added that the expats should have the flexibility in behaving, accepting the culture of the society and go with its rules. For example, foreign women shouldn't wear whatever they want because it is considered disrespectful against the country's customs. In this case, the female expat should keep the country's culture in mind and have respect for what is culturally acceptable. The participants agree on the importance of expats respecting the country's culture, and they should also be educated about it beforehand so when they arrive here they are fully prepared and can avoid any embarrassment. They should also be aware of the working structure and that it's different from what they're used to in their institutions. The participants also pointed out that they tell the female workers to wear suitable clothes if they are seen to be wearing revealing clothes; others may do this by sending a message through another female employee. They had noticed that some expat females take the advice on board while on the other hand, some refuse to listen and think that dressing is a personal choice and that their freedom of choice is being invaded.

Some Omani participants also claim that the training programs should not be limited to training expatriates about Arabic and Islamic culture and specificities distinctive Omani society only, but they should also provide training for Omanis, especially those who work with expatriates, about the culture of the Western and expatriates and how to communicate with foreign staff to help them to cope and adjust in the Omani environment.

## 4.5 Reasons for an early return of expatriates

The expatriates failure or an early return of assignment was the subject of discussion in numerous studies (e.g. Okpara and Kabongo, 2011, Yeaton and Hall, 2008, Bidanda et al., 2014, Vance and Paik, 2015). Scholars argue that expatriates' inability to adjust in the new culture may possibly lead to failure in the assignment. Although the issue of adjustment failure was not a major theme of the current study, however, several participants raised this issue during the sessions of interviews. As expatriate participants pointed out that they had experienced many encounters with foreign expats leaving their jobs stating that they preferred to leave before their pre-arranged time period in the Sultanate for a variety of reasons. One of the reasons is their inability to adapt to their new situation as they were used to certain lifestyles in their homelands and they found the new situation different so preferred to leave. The participants also mentioned that maybe the family issues and their inability to adapt plays a role in the non-continuity of foreigners in their job. They also pointed out the lack of suitable schools for their children plays a role in their decision to leave. One expatriate mention:

*“Yes, I remember one of the workers that left their job in an organisation in her first week...that it was because of the nature of the place, it was almost arid, humid and really hot; it also lacks services and so on. Another person left after a while and nobody knew the reason why he left but the institution eventually found out that he felt that he couldn't adapt and didn't want to continue, preferring returning to his homeland.”*

Likewise, Most of the Omani participants have attributed the case of many foreign employees leaving their occupations in the Sultanate for several reasons. One example of this was offered by one of the participants who commented:

*“I knew some of the expats found that the life here is extremely quiet and they had come from living in big cities that have a lot of activity, parties and many shopping malls. It transpired that the quiet life did not suit the lifestyle they grew up with and were familiar with. When I asked one of them why he left he replied by saying that the life here is too quiet and boring so he couldn't go on living here.”*

Another Omani female principal stated that:

*“They often leave the country with the excuse that it doesn’t have anything interesting to offer so they visit for a year to see Oman, its mountains, the religion and the beaches and they like this element but they say that there is no entertaining places for them. For example, there are no cafes or bars and the wine here is really expensive so things like that make them leave and go to work in neighbouring countries.*

Lack of promotion at work and lack of career trainings is another reason lead expatriates to an early leave. Some of these reasons also related to their family and their work. An Omani manager explains:

*I always ask them why they want to leave, I read their reviews and it is clear that they are unhappy with the career prospects and that feel that there is no system that allows them to move up higher in their career or even get a promotion. They also don’t receive any training so this also upsets them. They also mentioned the infrastructure of Oman and that multilingual schools are only provided in the capital but not in the other regions which is another reason why they leave as there are no places for their kids to learn. Some of the expatriates have said that the students here are not serious about their education as they are automatically given a place in college or university so they don’t put a lot of effort into learning.”*

## **4.6 Summary**

This chapter presented the interpretational analysis of the qualitative data of cross-cultural adjustment, work adjustment, interaction adjustment and training of expatriates living and working in Oman. These findings are based primarily on the analysis of interview transcripts of both western and non-western expatriates and local employees. Through the analysis of the interviews of Omanis and expatriates, several themes have appeared.

First is the movement of expatriates to work and live in Oman and the reasons that they selected Oman rather than other countries in the area. The responses of both the expatriates and Omanis

show that the main reason for deciding to move to Oman was to explore the new culture and to increase their income. They made this decision after they had reviewed some information about Oman which they obtained either via the internet, from their friends and colleagues and through meeting some Omani students in their countries. The Omani participants also mentioned that, as a country, Oman still needs to rely on expatriates due to its lack of qualified managers, especially in senior management positions. This has been confirmed by annual statistics which show a high proportion of expatriates being employed in high management positions. The Omanis also agree with the expatriate participants' views that expatriates move to work overseas to improve their income and to explore new cultures. They mentioned that they select Oman because of its reputation of having a tolerant nature with people and its acceptance of others, despite being considered as being conservative in nature. The Omani participants also raised the point of the Western culture of the expatriates having a strong influence on the Omani society, particularly with the younger generation, having an impact in areas such as fashion and style of dress, communication styles and behaviour. They mentioned that this influence could, in fact, lead to the introduction of negative cultural changes in the Omani society.

Secondly, the results also show that most of the western expatriates suffered from culture shock during their move to Oman, especially, in the first stages of their move. Although, the degree of culture shock stage was more obvious with western expatriates than non-westerns. As several western expatriates mentioned that they considered returning back to their home countries before they had completed their assignment due to the culture shock they were experiencing. However, some expatriates who had previous experience of working overseas mentioned that their previous experience of living in another country actually helped them to get through this stage.

Some of the other participants stated that they used several different strategies to overcome this stage such as staying in contact with their families and friends in their home countries, keeping themselves busy at work, taking part in social activities after they finished work and looking for new friends in Oman who came from the same country or had a similar cultural background. Participants also asserted that the lack of pre-departure and post-arrival support and training programs along with the high expectations of some expatriates played an important role on their experiences of culture shock. As some Omani participants mentioned, such support and training

would minimise the amount of difficulties the expatriates would have to encounter as a result of the cultural differences.

Thirdly, the cultural differences and the challenges this presented was another factor raised by both the expatriate and Omani participants. They asserted that there are cultural differences between the Western countries, Oman, Asian and even other Arabic countries. These differences are specifically related to the influence of the Islamic religion on the Omani culture and customs. For example, expatriate females face several challenges in selecting suitable attire which is in accordance with the Omani culture and. In addition, the nature of the relationship between men and women in the Islamic culture was highlighted as being challenging for expatriate males and females, as well as the Omanis. This was further affected due to the lack of knowledge the expatriates have about the nature of the Islamic religion and how this is applied in respect of the relationship between males and females. Both the Omanis and expatriates also face challenges at specific times throughout the year, for example, in the month of Ramadan Muslims are required to fast and all Muslim males are expected to turn a blind eye to all strong women because looking at them may affect his ability to fast and present them with too much temptation. The situation regarding Ramadan will also be particularly challenging for expatriates as they are required to wear extra clothes which they are often not happy about doing. Accordingly, some of the Omani participants showed their dissatisfaction of the appearance of some expatriate females who refused to cover up their whole body which is contrary to the teachings of the religion and the customs of the society. The participants stated that many expatriates resorted to taking their holiday during Ramadan in order to avoid this situation.

Expatriates additionally face the challenge of being unable to purchase food and drinks during the day in this month as most coffee shops and restaurants are closed. Even if they are able to get food they have to avoid eating or drinking in public; firstly, because it is not permitted to do so during the day in the month of Ramadan and secondly, because they have to respect the feelings of their Muslim counterparts who are fasting. Participants also mentioned differences between Oman and Western countries in respect of life style, climate and the transport system.

Expatriate females also encounter additional problems relating to the cultural differences. In addition to their concerns regarding their style of dressing, this relates to the stereotypes associated with Western women and how they are perceived, particularly by males. In Oman,

Western women are negatively presented by the media which limits the mobility of foreign women who are often unable to travel alone, whether in shopping areas or on public transport such as taxis. In many cases, as a result of these stereotypes, Western women are subjected to some form of harassment, especially from some of the foreign nationals working in the Sultanate.

Work adjustment and the differences at work between the countries of expatriates and Oman was another theme that the participants presented. This applied to the flexibility offered at work in Oman, such as delays in submitting work on time and delays in attending meetings and appointments. They also stated that expatriates have to follow the work systems and methods prevailing in Oman and do not go against this. Participants were also criticised for doing some work 'only for show' and without having a real reason for doing it and this negatively impacted the productivity of these organisations. Some expatriates found themselves having to be less frank when dealing with locals and alerting them to their mistakes as it is unacceptable to directly say to an employee in Oman that they have made a mistake; however, this is a major contrast to the normal work practices in their home countries. According to the expatriate participants, Omani workers "...have a lack of accountability." which is essential for the work to be completed successfully. In fact, they went so far as to refer to the prevailing system as "...laissez faire in style". Other comments offered by the expatriates also mentioned that the employees in Oman "...have no work ethic." This applied to the late delivery of information to the employees, as well as some workers having "...a lack of organisation." in some areas.

Omani participants, on the other hand, praised the commitment and dedication that the expatriates applied to their work although some believed this to be part of the Western culture. Conversely, some Omanis argued that this is not part of their culture and they only worked in this way due to the labour sanctions applied in Western countries.

The nature of the cross-cultural interaction between Omanis and expatriates was another theme that appeared through the qualitative data analysis. As both the Omanis and expatriates emphasized, generally, there is a lack of interaction between the Omanis and expatriates. They attributed this to the influence of the cultural differences between them; as a result of which they avoid any interaction so as to minimise the prevalence of inappropriate behaviour or inadvertently causing offence to the person of a different culture. They also attributed this lack of interaction

to the lack of activities which can be jointly undertaken both inside and outside of their place of work. Participants also added that differences in religion, costumes, family obligations and language abilities also have a great impact on the level of interaction.

Some Omanis also attributed the lack of interaction of the different cultures to the moodiness and hypersensitivity of expatriates. The results also show that the lack of expression about their respective cultural needs and not showing the desire to communicate with others is another factor that influences the level of interaction between the different cultures. Furthermore, the teachings of the Islamic religion also play a part in controlling the level of interaction between males and females. In particular, many of the Omani female participants stated that they would avoid any interaction with the expatriates due to their ignorance of the Islamic laws and what was behaviour was unacceptable, such as shaking hands or males approaching females.

The results also explored the nature and needs of cross-cultural training and support from the viewpoint of the expatriates and the Omanis who work with them. The interview results highlighted the fact that there is a lack of training and support made available to expatriates by their employing organisations, despite the level of importance placed on this by the participants. Some also stated that this actually added to the several other difficulties they faced during their adjustment and interaction in the new environment. The participants felt the need for training in areas such as language, Omani culture and customs and the working roles applicable in Oman. Omani participants added that training programs have to include training for the Omani employees about the expatriates' culture and ways of interacting with them.

Finally, the participants also mentioned the reasons for some expatriate failure being attributable to their inability to overcome the culture shock phase as this was the most challenging, particularly for those who arrive with high expectations about the life and culture in Oman. In addition, the lack of services and facilities that expatriates were accustomed to in their home countries was offered as another reason for their early departure and assignment failure. As well as this, the high temperature, lack of transportation, the different life style and entertainment facilities, such as coffee shops, bars and clubs, also presented a problem for the expatriates. Finally, the lack of work promotion, work incentives and training courses at work were another factor for their early departure.



## **Chapter 5: DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this chapter is to pull the various threads of the research together, relate the results and data analysis to the themes emerging from the literature review and explain how the research questions have been answered. In addition, the contribution to knowledge will be spelled out, along with the implications for theory and practice and an acknowledgement of the limitations and areas for future study.

As explained at the outset, this study developed a relational approach to understanding the experiences of adjustment and mutual interactions of Western and non-Western expatriates and their working relationships with Omani nationals whilst on assignment in Oman. The study had several aims; firstly, to develop a deeper appreciation of the cultural contrasts and tensions between multiple groups of international and indigenous workers in Oman; secondly, to provide detailed insights into the dynamics of their cross-cultural interactions and offer a sensitive evaluation of the challenges and pressures that host nationals, Western and non-Western expatriates experience in their collaborative work; and thirdly, to consider what lessons can be drawn from this for respective training and development initiatives to promote more effective adjustment.

Most studies of the latter look narrowly at international expatriates, mainly Americans, British, Australasian and occasionally Chinese (Selmer, 2001, Konanahalli et al., 2012, Black, 1988, Black and Stephens, 1989, Fee et al., 2011, Jenkins and Mockaitis, 2010), so their substantive and applied research tends to be Western centric and lacking in relational sensitivities and reference points. Moreover, they fail to provide a rounded or balanced view of the collective support necessary for international work groups (Adler and Rigg, 2012, Krautgasser, 2013, Selmer, 2001).

### **5.1 Experiencing cultural novelty**

Cultural novelty is often taken as the basis for exploring the adjustment issues that confront expatriates. In one of their most influential presentations, Black et al. (1991) suggest that culture novelty is a more important variable for international expatriates in comparison to domestic transitions. In other words, they expect culture novelty to have a greater impact on the

adjustment of Western expatriates on international assignments and tend to magnify the degree of variance in culture novelty in a one-way rather than two-way basis. In tune with this sort of approach, some of the results of this study show that expatriates do believe that there is a high degree of cultural distance between their own culture and the Omani culture. However, this is not the full picture.

The results of the quantitative study highlighted differences in the evaluations of cultural novelty between expatriates and Omanis on the one hand and between Western and non-Western expatriates on the other. All of the expatriates in this study believe there is a high level of cultural novelty, while the Omanis believe that the level of cultural novelty between Oman and other countries is moderate. This suggests that expatriates feel the cultural differences between their home countries and Oman more keenly than it appeared to the perception of host nationals themselves.

The results of independent t test also illustrate that there is a significant difference for expatriates than Omanis in their experience and perception of cultural novelty. Some of the major variations identified include climatic conditions, transportation systems and general living costs. The results support the proposition by Raddawi (2014) that Arabic and Western cultures have staggering differences that are rooted in origins, religious and cultural backgrounds. Raddawi (2014) pointed out that it is almost impossible for people from Western countries like the United Kingdom and the United States to agree with Arabs in matters of religion, for example.

This study adds to our knowledge of this cultural difference through a qualitative examination of the aspects of culture novelty that impacted most heavily on expatriates from both Western and non-Western countries. This study not only explores the extent of culture novelty from the point of view of the three parties involved, it goes further to study the importance of these cultural differences from the perspective of the participants.

It is clear that both Western, non-Western expatriates and Oman nationals perceive climatic conditions to be a major factor in widening the cultural distance between the cultures. The findings of this study concur with the propositions of Mithen and Black (2011) who state that people moving to the Middle East from Western countries find it difficult to adjust due to the

different climatic conditions they experience. Moreover, they add to this knowledge by showing that climatic conditions are problematic for Western and non-Western expatriates alike.

The majority of Arab countries, including Oman, experience a dry season throughout the year with precipitation of less than 400 millimetres. On the other hand, the majority of Western countries experience heavy rainfall during the fall and spring, with summer being the only dry season. Oman is dry for most of the year and day and night temperatures fluctuate widely. For expatriates who are used to low variations in day and night temperatures it can be difficult to adjust to the new weather changes. Their bodies may not be used to prolonged hot conditions and many even become sick shortly after arriving in the country. Though perhaps rather obvious, this factor has a major impact according to respondents; and locals agree that the climate in Oman is one of the most important challenges that expatriates confront when adjusting to life in Oman.

Although climate differences seem to be a common issue for expatriates, especially in the gulf area, the stress that the majority of the participants placed on this (in both the survey and interviews) makes it essential to consider their reactions and the impact this has on them whilst at work. Some Western respondents said that they knew some people from their countries who had given up and left Oman due to the harsh climatic conditions. Furthermore, other interviewees stated that they always left the country during summer to avoid the heat of the season. The majority stated that they preferred to remain indoors, even if this adversely affected their frequency of contact with Omani nationals.

Some non-Western expatriates had similar views. Even though non-Western expatriates did not encounter as many difficulties as their Western counterparts, they said that they experienced challenges associated with adjusting to the hot weather, especially during their first few days in the country. In addition, this factor influenced their attempts to adjust to work assignments. One obvious implication of this is that the companies that send their workers to Oman, or any other country with dramatic climatic differences, give greater attention to the health and wellbeing of expatriate workers long before they depart. It is also worth noting that this is another case in which the phases of adjustment described in Black et al.'s framework do not necessarily match the experience of expatriates in Oman.

As discussed in the literature review, both the Non-Western and Western expatriates who arrived in Oman during the hot season did not experience the “honeymoon period” described by Lysgaard (1955) in a thoroughgoing way; even if they were initially pleased by the novel features of the country, they were nonetheless unaccustomed to the very hot weather.

The findings relating to the differences in public transportation systems between Western countries and Oman confirmed the report by Verma and Ramanayya (2014). These authors indicated that Oman, being a developing economy, has a semi-developed infrastructure to support an efficient public transport system. There are no major railway developments or mass transport systems to match those in the UK or Australia. People in Oman rely on private car hire services to move from one place to another. This can be costly, especially for individuals who travel frequently. On the other hand, Western countries have a well-established public transport system where people can move in masses through rail and road.

Expatriates going to work in Oman find it challenging to adjust to a costly and inefficient public transport system and this can extend the time they take to adjust to the unfamiliar environment. Thus, the differences in the public transportation system in Oman were shown to negatively affect working conditions by increasing the time and planning involved when commuting to and from the workplace. Furthermore, it was often cited as a reason for disrupting meetings or for inefficient group engagement.

The outcomes of the quantitative research were supported by the interview responses as many Western expatriates expressed their concerns about the lack of an efficient public transport system in Oman. Many of those interviewed said that they were having to spend more than 300 percent of the amount of money they would normally spend on transportation in their home country. This is significant as it shows that an additional hindrance to successful expatriate adjustment in Oman is the cost burden of commuting to and from work. The majority said that they were taking a longer period of time to cover the same distance than they would in their home countries.

Conversely, however, the non-Western expatriates did not express as much concern about the transport system as their Western colleagues. This is a notable feature that highlights the value of incorporating the experiences of non-Western expatriates. It suggests that certain culturally

novel features will be experienced as less significant by non-Western expatriates due to a difference in expectations or due to a similarity in the infrastructures between the home and host countries. The majority did point out that the cost of transport was higher than in their home countries, though not as high as expressed by the Western workers.

The results of this survey concur with the theory that the transport costs in developing economies is higher than in developed countries due to the differences in infrastructure development and again, this has implications for orientation and pre-arrival preparation. Thus, the companies in other countries that sends employees to work and live in Oman need to highlight these difficulties, rather than leave people to confront basic everyday challenges that are often unsettling.

The results on the differences in living costs between Western countries and Oman agreed with the previous findings of Walker and Butler (2010). The authors reported that foreigners find the cost of accommodation and food high because they have to live in unusually constructed houses and consume imported food items. Imported food items are more expensive than locally produced ones and this makes it difficult for expatriates who find the types of food grown in the country or in the surrounding regions to be unpalatable; this results in them having to rely on expensive imported products. Again, basic issues have a more dramatic impact than often realised.

The outcomes of the quantitative study concur with those of qualitative research with regard to the higher cost of living in Oman compared to Western countries. The interviewees cited the cost of food as being one of the major factors that contributes to the high cost of living. However, most understood that this was due to the importing of their preferred food and the lack of familiar fast food outlets, such as McDonalds and KFC, which are only located in major cities. Another contributory factor mentioned by the expatriates was the relative cost of housing which was noted by most of the participants as being higher than in their home countries; they also commented that their housing costs were higher than that of the locals.

Although the interviewees complained about the difference in housing costs for foreigners and locals, this seemed to relate to the differences in the design of houses. The housing structure in Oman is different to the structure of housing in Western countries as religious aspects are

incorporated into their design. Thus, the Western expatriates found these structures to be unusual, even awkward, and most sought homes that were built in a similar way to properties in the West. Even though such houses are available, the rent is usually higher than the models occupied by the locals and this caused some Western expatriates to feel disadvantaged or uncomfortable with the price differences.

Despite the significant differences between Western and non-Western expatriates on their evaluation of the cost of living the non-Western expatriates also reported that they found the cost of living in Oman higher than in their home countries. However, they were more likely to note that the cost of food and housing was reducing their capacity to save, which was a key consideration for improving the standards of living when they returned to their home country in the future. Very few non-Western expatriates said that they would like to stay in Oman after their tenure had elapsed.

These basic results of the quantitative and qualitative studies are consistent with previous work in identifying that there are considerable differences between home and host cultures, though it relates this to differential reactions and variable rather than polarised workplace behaviour. As indicated below, culture shock can negatively affect the productivity of expatriates and cross-cultural workgroups and as such, international companies should develop policies that provide adequate training about the cultures of host countries.

In developing this theme, this research focused on three types of adjustment (social adjustment, work adjustment and interaction adjustment). Unexpectedly, the regression model shows that cultural novelty is positively related to culture (i.e. social) adjustment. This result is inconsistent with what is traditionally noted in the literature which is that cultural novelty (as the extent to which the host country culture differs compared with the expatriates' home culture) typically makes the adjustment process more difficult (Church, 1982, Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985).

According to Thomas and Peterson (2014), most expatriate studies have found that cultural novelty is negatively related to general and social adjustment. However, the research support for this negative relationship is not universal. In fact, positive relationships between cultural novelty and general adjustment have been found in studies such as Black et al. (1991) and Parker and McEvoy (1993). A similar result has been documented in a study of the adjustment process

for Japanese expatriates (Takeuchi and Hannon, 1996). One reason for finding this positive association may be that this quantitative study incorporated the opinions of non-Western expatriates to Oman. These expatriates may have found the areas in which culture novelty was present as ones which aided their adjustment, because these expatriates already shared, to some extent, a common set of cultural and/or religious beliefs with Omani locals inasmuch as both represent non-Arab countries.

Additionally, the results also show that the presence of novel cultural aspects in the host country positively related to work adjustment and negatively related to interaction adjustment. This result is contrary to that of Europeans on assignment in Europe, North America and Asia where cultural novelty was found to be positively related to the level of intercultural interaction (Janssens, 1995). These contradictory findings suggest the possibility that, depending on the characteristics of the individual and the situation, cultural novelty can exert its influence in different ways (Thomas and Peterson, 2014). This is one of the ways in which Black et al.'s international model of adjustment could be refined. For instance, the experiences encountered by Americans relating to the environmental differences in the United Kingdom might have, as a consequence, resulted in their expectations about accommodation being exceeded. This may, in turn, affect their perception of adjustment difficulties.

This point can be supported by considering how the interview results showed the influence of cultural novelty in terms of values, religion and customs. The Omanis, Western and non-Western expatriates all highlighted several challenges in relation to adjustment and interaction, in addition to misunderstandings between local employees and expatriates as a result of the lack of cultural knowledge on both sides. Furthermore, the results of the study tend to validate the findings of previous researchers, such as Reynolds (2015), who indicated that religious differences between Western countries and Arabic societies are so deep that they can negatively affect people from both sides when they try to work or live in each other's lands.

The majority of the expatriates interviewed expressed their concerns over the challenges they encountered as they tried to adjust to religious practices in Oman. For example, they reiterated the difficulties they encountered during the holy month of Ramadan as most of the restaurants and shopping outlets were closed until later in the evening. Some of the interviewees narrated how disappointed they were because they were not used to fasting for an entire day. Others

noted that they often went about eating their snacks in public as they had no knowledge of the fact that in doing so, they were actually offending others.

This is important, as it indicates the relevance of moment-by-moment interactions between Omanis and expatriates and how they may affect adjustment. For example, one expatriate noted that she felt judged by her Omani co-workers when eating during Ramadan. This had a strong negative effect on her experience of adjustment. Hence, her cultural novelty was experienced as stressful as she felt that she was being negatively judged by her co-workers. This factor is not incorporated into Black's international adjustment framework which posits a series of adjustment phases that are considered independently of expatriate and local interactions. This is problematic because the phases of adjustment an expatriate experiences may depend not only on how long he or she has been in the host country, but also on how the host nationals interact with her and when certain highly significant interactions (such as being judged during Ramadan) occur. This study highlights the importance of incorporating this relational and temporal dimension of the expatriate experience.

The findings of this study highlight basic matters of intercultural awareness among employees that merit more serious attention by employing organizations across their management regimes. Apart from showing sensitivity to other people's cultures, the study provides an opportunity for expatriates and host nationals to review their own cultures and identify how they can each be enriched by the experience of dealing with the other. Every culture is different and it is important for foreigners and locals to appreciate these differences, particularly when they interact, both in the workplace and at social gatherings.

This section has discussed some of the main cultural differences highlighted by expatriates in respect of their countries and Oman. While some of the differences that emerged were more applicable to Western rather than non-Western expatriates, such as the unavailability of Western-style fast food outlets, other differences were universal, such as having to adjust to a harsh climate. The next section will discuss the cultural challenges of adjustment facing expatriates.



## **5.2 Cultural adjustment and the challenges facing expatriates in Oman**

Some of the results of the survey relating to the types of cultural adjustment and the challenges that expatriates face in Oman are not surprising. The study established that expatriates struggle to settle and adjust rapidly to the situation they are confronted with in respect of recreation, entertainment, transport, government agencies and healthcare services. However, the researcher did not anticipate that expatriates would consider bureaucracy in their place of employment to be a major factor in determining how long they would take to adjust to living and working in Oman.

In terms of how expatriates adjust to factors beyond the workplace, the findings of the investigation are consistent with the results reported in previous works; notably Valeri (2009), who stated that the recreation facilities in Oman are not ‘foreigner friendly’ because they have been developed with the Arabic culture in mind. For example, there are very few hotels with swimming pools. This is because the Omani culture does not approve of most internationally-recognized swimming costumes. Furthermore, the recreational facilities in Oman such as hotels do not provide the familiar atmosphere that foreigners are accustomed to as the majority do not sell wines and spirits.

In Western countries, alcoholic drinks are the norm and feature as a regular accompaniment with meals. Many Western expatriates reported that they usually find it difficult to adjust to the standard offerings in Omani hotels as this often means they have to give up their alcohol consumption or find alternative sources. This raises further issues about acceptable adjusting behaviour.

The outcomes of the quantitative surveys relating to the recreational facilities available in Oman and how expatriates are adjusting to them were supported by the interview responses. The majority of respondents stated that they could not find the types of recreational facilities they were used to in own their countries. Moreover, many females stated that they could not go to restaurants because it was difficult to find other women in these places and others said that they were put off from going to public places due to the exclusion of women from many events.

Some of the respondents said that they could not practice some sporting activities due to a lack of facilities in the country. Swimming is one activity that many expatriates stated they were unable to partake in the way they used to in their country of origin. When this factor is combined with the individualistic nature of the country's culture, many foreign respondents complained that it is difficult to find recreational facilities that will meet the same standards as the ones they have in their home countries.

The results of the investigation into the type's entertainment activities in Oman and how expatriates adjusted to them also concurred with the findings of previous studies. One of these findings by Shannon (2013) was that entertainment activities were closely linked to religion. Indeed, the author could not find any entertainment event that was not related to the Islamic religion in one way or another. For example, people in Oman like to attend wedding events and consider this as entertainment. This is unlike the entertainment available in Western countries where people often meet in bars and restaurants to drink alcohol and socialise. In Oman, the number of restaurants that sell alcohol is very few.

The interviews conducted with Western expatriates and Omanis provided the same results as the quantitative studies on how expatriates adjusted to the types of restaurants in Oman. They said that it took them a long time to get used to the types of entertainment being offered. Some of the challenges highlighted included the unavailability of alcoholic drinks in social gatherings, little or no women frequenting restaurants and the closing of restaurants during the month of Ramadan. Some Western expatriates noted that since they could not go to bars in the evening to relax with friends, they developed a tradition of visiting other Western expats to drink in the confines of their homes, thereby reinforcing separate and possibly insular patterns of interaction that rendered cross-cultural contact or socialisation less likely or more difficult.

The non-Western expatriates agreed with their Western and Omani counterparts in that the entertainment element of restaurants was very different from their home countries. The majority of them cited the same reasons given by Western expatriates as being responsible for the difficulties they experienced in adjusting to life in Oman. They mentioned the shortage of alcohol in many social places as one of the major challenge they had to overcome. Some indicated that they had to travel long distances to get the types of alcoholic drinks they wanted.

The closure of many public and social establishments during the month of Ramadan was another issue that the non-Western expatriates highlighted as affecting their efforts to adjust to life in the Arabic nation. Some stated that they had to reduce their movements during that month as everything looked “dull” and life seemed to be at a standstill. The results from the quantitative and qualitative studies from Western, Omani and non-Western expatriates reinforce the sense of separation or restricted contact between the various communities.

It is useful to note that expatriates could, in some cases, find ways to work through the difficulties posed by the alternative recreational opportunities available (or not) in Oman. This again presents a finding that contradicts the model presented by Black et al. (1991). This is so because of the expatriates’ abilities to develop novel ways, over time, to habituate, such as drinking in their own homes instead of at bars. This suggests that a coping rather than an adjusting experience can be expected to increase in some cases, contingent on the ability of the expatriates to continue to habituate and improve their own, individual surroundings. However, it did appear that there were some factors that were difficult to improve upon, such as the lack of availability of swimming pools. Thus, whether any individual expatriate was more likely to adjust over time or not might depend on their own resilience and attachment to particular lifestyles and preferences.

The findings in respect of the expatriates’ reactions to healthcare services in Oman are similar to the results of Sheikh (2015) who found that the healthcare system is still developing, with a lot of improvements still needing to be made. Sheikh (2015) reported that the patient per doctor ratio in Oman is greater than what is recommended by the World Health Organization. Hence, the quality of healthcare is low, as health professionals have to attend to more patients than they can efficiently handle. Sheikh (2015) adds that hospitals are few and far between and are geographically dispersed. More than half of the 3 million people in Oman live more than five kilometres from an accredited health facility. The situation makes it difficult to deal with emergency medical cases like heart failures and heart attacks. Other challenges that expatriates are dealing with include language barriers with healthcare providers, a lack of medicines and unqualified medical personnel.

The interviews and quantitative studies showed almost the same results, with most of the participants agreeing that they found the healthcare system to be inefficient and costly. Some of

the major problems identified included the inaccessibility of health centres, the lack of specialised treatment facilities, the use of unqualified health professionals and the high cost of health services. The Western expatriates said that they were not used to paying the full cost of health care as their countries had universal healthcare policies where national insurance covered most of the medical expenses. Oman is yet to adopt universal health cover for its citizens and this makes its system different from Western countries that have a highly developed healthcare system.

Conversely, however, the Omanis do not see healthcare delivery in Oman as a major issue which hinders the expatriates' adjustment to life in their country. They inferred that the only differences that they were aware of is that in Western countries medical expenses are paid through insurance companies, while in Oman the expenses were paid directly to the healthcare provider by the patients. Hence, the Omanis did not find the cost of health services in their country as being higher than in Western or non-Western countries.

This difference in perception provides a classic example of the disagreements experienced between host nationals and expatriates' and, in some way, it demonstrates how host national and expatriate interactions can experience increased levels of tension. Thus, if expatriates complain about the healthcare costs in Oman, it could lead to a sense of hostility, with Omanis feeling unfairly criticized for an imagined financial burden. The interviews demonstrated that an increase in tensions from the disagreements arising on these sorts of political issues could foster poor relationships both at work and in social engagements, exacerbate poor or strained relationships on other occasions and weaken cross-cultural collaboration. This is one way in which the host nationals' perceptions of expatriates can influence the expatriate adjustment process.

The non-Western expatriates' views of the differences in the healthcare systems of their home countries and Oman did not support the views of their Western counterparts. Moreover, they did not indicate that they experienced any major problems relating to the delivery of healthcare services in the host country. The only major issue they raised was the language barriers between themselves and the medical practitioners, as some could not communicate well in English and the expatriates were not conversant in Arabic. This resulted in many incidences of reported misdiagnosis which, unsurprisingly, affected the patients in negative ways.

The reason why the non-Western expatriates were comfortable with the healthcare system operating in Oman could result from the fact that most of them came from developing countries like India and China, where the quality of medical services is still relatively under developed. In addition, these expatriates were used to paying for medical expenses from their own pockets so experiencing the same process in Oman did not present them with any major challenge.

While their difference of opinion from the Western expatriates is understandable, the fact that such a divergence in opinion exists points to the fact that there are, indeed, ways in which the non-Western expatriate adjustment process is likely to differ from that of the Western expatriates in a non-Western country. In particular, expatriates visiting from countries that bear cultural similarities in respect of certain hardships, such as personally paying for medical expenses out of your own pocket, are more likely to already be familiar with them.

The results of this survey differed with previous studies with regard to bureaucracy in the organisations which employ expatriate workers. Even though there is no evidence in the previous literature which identifies bureaucracy as being one of the challenges facing foreign workers in Arab countries, many participants cited this as being one of the difficulties they encountered when trying to adjust to their new life. Expatriates felt that companies in Oman have stringent rules and procedures that hamper their decision making authority to a great extent. They said that they found the operational systems in the subsidiaries too rigid, this rigidity prevented them from making critical decisions that would have a beneficial impact and also save their employers a lot of time and resources.

One example was provided by a field manager in an oil drilling company who was not permitted to hire a machine operator, despite the fact that the former machine operator had left abruptly due to bureaucratic loopholes. Previous studies have not investigated bureaucracy in subsidiaries and as such, this work provides an opportunity for further exploration.

The interviews conducted with both the Western expatriates and the Omanis showed also revealed that bureaucracy was seen as a challenge that many foreign workers in Oman were struggling with. The majority of participants said that the organisations they work for had too many complicated administrative procedures that affected the level of productivity of the workers. For example, some said that the hiring of middle-level managers was being performed

by parent companies located outside Oman. In addition, the local managers of the multinational corporations had little or no authority regard the selection process for employees hired to work in the subsidiaries.

The majority of the companies in Oman are subsidiaries of Western-based multinationals and most of the critical decisions are made many miles away from where the actual operations are taking place. Furthermore, the local managers are mainly involved in implementing policies and strategies that have been agreed by the Boards of Directors who are either based in the U.S. or in Europe. Thus, the expatriates who come from head offices where the senior managers of the MNCs are usually based find it difficult to adjust to the management procedures of the subsidiary companies. They reported experiencing feelings of unease with the decision making process when they realised that this was slower than what they had been accustomed to. The Omanis were also of the same opinion, noting that the subsidiaries of the MNCs had a higher level of bureaucracy than their parent companies.

The non-Western expatriates tended to concur with the views and experiences of the Western expatriates and the Omanis. They felt that the level of bureaucracy in the subsidiaries was higher than in the parent organisations. Some said that the lack of authority for managers in Oman was delaying the completion of major projects and also resulting in a lot of mistakes and errors occurring in workplaces. They also indicated that the bureaucracy was affecting the subsidiaries' ability to respond to the market because the strict chain of command made it very tedious to make even the simplest of decisions.

As Styhre (2007) notes, hierarchies are usually the default approach of architectures that many large organisations use to promote specialisation and control; however, the outcome is a loss of speed, innovation and flexibility. The expatriate respondents frequently expressed their frustration about the fact that their opinions and contributions as to how to make work improvements are ignored and do not seem to matter.

A further difficulty associated with a hierarchical arrangement is that it is increasingly difficult to change the culture within an organisation because the employees are dissatisfied and become resistant (Courpasson, 2012). The respondents stated that bureaucracy was significantly

affecting their levels of innovation because the parent company representatives would not acknowledge or recognise their efforts.

This is a case in which it is instructive to observe that non-Western and Western expatriates alike agreed that a hierarchical bureaucratic structure hindered workplace relations and the development of more effective and efficient processes, along with the making of expedient hiring decisions. One of the benefits of considering the experiences of both non-Western and Western expatriates is that those features of cultural adjustment that are experienced as troublesome by both of these expatriate types are the ones that organisations need to focus on most urgently. Indeed, these are the issues that are most likely to be endemic to the expatriate experience itself, rather than being context-specific features relating to the particular country an expatriate comes from and the ways in which it differs from the host country.

The outcomes relating to cultural adjustment in the workplace concur with previous studies regarding the adjustment challenges that Western females go through while trying to live and work in Oman. Bryan (2012) states that women in Oman and in Arabic countries in general have to exist in a space made by the intersection of religion and culture. The dress code is different from Western countries inasmuch as the women in Oman are supposed to cover their entire body, except for their hands and their face. Women are not supposed to shake hands with strangers or appear in public places without the accompaniment of a male relative. In addition, Muslim women are not supposed to board a taxi without having a male relative with them, even if they are a young boy, as travelling alone is seen as taboo according to the Omani culture. In Oman the treatment of women in society is very different from how women are treated in Western countries and this makes it a challenge for female expatriates to adapt to their new situation.

The results of interviews conducted with Western expatriates and Omanis tended to support the findings of the quantitative survey on the difficulties women from Western countries experience. Many women complained about difficulties associated with being forced to wear heavy clothing in the extremely hot weather. However, the female non-Western expatriates reported a somewhat different experience; they did not fully agree that the treatment of women in Oman was different from their home countries.

Most of the non-Western expatriates were from Asian countries which are mostly patriarchal societies. These women considered that the way they are treated in their patriarchal societies does not differ a great deal from the way that they are handled in Oman. In contrast with some earlier studies, the finding that non-Western female expatriates were less likely to experience difficulty in adjusting to the patriarchal and conservative nature of Omani society with regard to dress, transport, chaperoning and relations with men suggests that such features are less culturally novel, at least for some non-Western expatriates. This, in turn, suggests that there are ways in which non-Western expatriates may have an easier time in adjusting to the Arabic working and living environments when compared with their Western expatriate counterparts.

In refining our best theories of cultural adjustment, the different experiences of non-Western expatriates are very relevant as they help us better understand the contexts in which culture novelty gives rise to an improved or worsened adjustment process for the expatriate.

### **5.3 Work adjustments**

Work adjustment refers to the process of adapting to new organisations, roles, job tasks and general working environment. It can be difficult for workers to adjust to new working environments if the procedures, policies and task requirements between the two workplaces differ significantly (Griffin et al., 2007). In this study, the quantitative and qualitative findings provided similar results in respect of the work adjustments required for both Western and non-Western expatriates. Additionally, the results concurred with the previous work of Bhatti et al. (2012) which suggests that expatriate adjustment is one of the major challenges facing global human resource management.

Most expatriates living and working in Oman have to deal with a great deal of anxiety and are concerned that they may not be able to replicate the performance they delivered in their home country when working in a foreign land. This study considered whether there was a significance difference in the work adjustment experiences of Western and non-Western expatriates. It established that the latter performed slightly better than the former and that non-Western expatriates seemed to adjust with greater ease to the working conditions in Oman when compared with their Western counterparts.



The study revealed that the Omanis do not expect expatriates to adjust rapidly or easily to the working environment in Oman as they expressed the view that generally, foreigners face a serious problem when trying to adjust to non-Western working environments. They highlighted understanding supervisory roles as the predominant area that expatriates were more likely to adjust to more quickly, and being clear about specific job responsibilities as the area in which they would take longer to adjust to.

This difference again highlights the importance of considering the perceptions of both host nationals and non-Western expatriates with regards to expatriate adjustment. The fact that the Omanis were of the view that expatriates would find it difficult to understand the informal style of work division in Omani corporations indicates that host nationals also found it difficult to adjust to expatriates, especially if they came from Western countries, assuming that they might expect a very sharp and rigid division of labour.

#### **5.4 Cross-cultural interaction adjustments**

Clearly, when expatriates come to live and work in Oman, they find themselves in a totally unfamiliar environment and are presented with a wide range of difficult challenges associated with having to adapt to a culture that is vastly different to anything they have ever encountered. As such, the consequence of having to interact with the residents of the host country will undoubtedly have a significant effect on their lives. One of the reasons for this is that the host nationals have different beliefs, perceptions and values, all of which can make it all the more difficult for foreigners to have the confidence needed to enable them to engage in useful, meaningful conversations (Smith, 2011).

Expatriates in Oman frequently encounter conflicts and misunderstandings when interacting with host nationals as the two groups will see things in different ways. Moreover, since foreigners are fewer in number, they have no other option than to find ways to live with the locals. Unfortunately, however, as explained by the interviewees, during this process they can become anxious, angry and depressed and these emotions will eventually obstruct their adjustment (Black et al., 1991).

This study revealed that the Western expatriates consider their level of cultural interaction with the local residents to be moderate. About 50 per cent of the participants reported that interacting with a resident on a daily basis, being interested in maintaining sound connections with the local social environment, building friendships with locals and enjoying social activities with Omanis was important to them. In addition, almost half of the participants indicated that maintaining a good relationship with local co-workers was important. However, they also believed that communication behaviours differed from one culture to the next and this regularly created barriers to their interaction with Omani nationals both inside and outside of work.

A quantitative survey that compared the different experiences of Western and non-Western expatriates established that the latter performed better than the former which suggests that non-Western expatriates do not experience the same difficulties as expatriates from Western countries. Three significantly different perceptions were highlighted; namely, the difficulties in holding conversations with most people, being comfortable in local social gatherings and believing that communication behaviours varied across the different cultures.

To a significant extent, the results of the qualitative survey agreed with the findings of the quantitative studies on cross-cultural interactions. In addition, the results of the survey tended to concur with the outcomes of the previous research conducted by Rozkwitalska (2010). He found that cultural barriers are critical to the success of foreign subsidiaries as they include factors that impede cross-cultural interactions. They also hinder MNCs and their subsidiaries from achieving their goals (Maude, 2011).

The outcomes of this survey are important for expatriates and Omanis as they can render it possible for us to find a way to increase their interactions, so that both can benefit from each other. Expatriates possess professional skills that they can transfer to the locals to help them improve their job performance, while the locals possess life skills that the foreigners can learn and apply while in the country Molinsky (2007). Additionally, organisations should encourage their workers to embrace diversity in workplaces through team building activities. Work groups should be made up of people with diverse backgrounds as this will not only help to improve cross-cultural interactions but also provide enhanced solutions to problems.

However, it is worth noting that the frequent negativity of interactions between foreigners and host nationals may be a feature that drives the increase in expatriate dissatisfaction over time, as noted by Black et al. (1991). To compensate for this a developmental framework needs to be put in place which encourages host nationals and expatriates to interact in more charitable and constructive ways. If it were possible for MNCs to address ways of achieving this goal, the expatriate experience might well change significantly.

During the interviews some participants suggested that regular cross-cultural, integrated and joint team-building activities should be introduced into subsidiary workplaces. Moreover, if these activities also included cultural adjustment issues and were delivered by the host nationals who had first-hand knowledge, experience and expertise in these areas, this could result in at least some proportion of expatriates having a consistently positive experience while working abroad. This fact highlights the dependency that holds between host national interactions with expatriates and expatriate satisfaction. Highlighting this dependency is one of the ways in which seeking the perceptions of host nationals is essential for improving our understanding of the expatriate adjustment process.

## **5.5 Cross-cultural training and concepts**

In the attempt to determine what types of training and development could help host nationals, Western and other expatriates when adjusting to new work situations, both quantitative and qualitative surveys were used. When the expatriates were asked whether their organisations had a structured policy to help their employees who moved to international operations, the majority of respondents stated that there was no such policy in place. Although the literature highlights that greater levels of pre-departure training may be necessary for expatriates expected to experience higher levels of role novelty (Shaffer. et al., 1999), the participants stated that they had not gone through pre-departure training. This suggests that many organisations do not understand the importance of preparing their workers for the cultural and social changes they will experience in their new workplaces.

Some of the participants said that their organisations did not offer any form of training that would help them adjust to the new culture. The results show that only 36.6% of the participants had any form of training provided for them by their companies, while 74.6% had no training at

all. Surprisingly, this result is supported by the study conducted in Oman by Al-Lamki (1998) who asserted that only 32 per cent of MNCs offered cross-cultural training (CCT) in the early 1980s.

According to Budhwar and Mellahi (2006b) during the past twenty years the situation in the Middle East had significantly changed. The 1998 Global Relocation Trends Survey Report indicates that 70 per cent of the 177 MNCs surveyed provide CCT programmes which run for a minimum of one day, the current study approved that the situation still remains although there are some companies that avoid providing adequate training programs for expatriates which are designed to facilitate their adjustment. This was demonstrated by the fact that only 30.1 of participants felt reported that they felt satisfied with the cross-cultural training provided by the host companies.

A sizable proportion of the expatriates indicated that they had undertaken self-initiated training. This suggests that some of these expatriates are aware of the changes they will encounter when they move to a different country. This finding supports the result of Kleingartner and Jiang (2001) who argue that it is not surprising that there is rapid growth in self-initiated training and education activities by expatriate managers. It also supports the study of Black and Gregersen (1991a) who concluded that this type of training is significantly related to the adjustment of both expatriates and their spouses with host country nationals.

A total of 19.6 per cent of Omanis pointed out that their organisations supported expatriates when they arrived in Oman; this signifies the fact that only a few organisations appreciate the challenges that expatriates encounter when they come to Oman. A total of 70.9 per cent of Omanis said that their organisations did not offer any support and this shows that there is a consensus between the two groups in that the host organisations, as well as the originating organisations, do not provide the relevant training for expatriates to make their adjustment experience more positive. The results of the interviews with both Western and non-Western expatriates did not show any major differences with regard to the findings of the quantitative studies with the same groups.

Previous work also supports the results of the study in cross-cultural training and concepts in the same areas. This is especially so in the case of Chebium (2015) who established that the

need for developing effective training programs for cross-cultural interactions and sensitivity has exploded in recent years. This need has increased due to the desire by organisations and individuals to reduce misunderstandings and improve corporate competitiveness. Even though Chebium (2015) does not provide the exact content of the training program he asserts that organisations should commit themselves to boosting internal and cross-cultural communications and notes that many of the programs in place do not offer adequate etiquette training. The results of this study and the views of previous researchers are important for MNCs as they can use the findings to prepare appropriate training and development programs. The results will help them to develop training programs that address invisible and subtle differences between people from diverse cultures.

The findings of both the quantitative and qualitative research in this study show that significant obstacles hinder cross-cultural working and the team job performance of expatriates and host nationals in Oman. Organisations need to invest more resources to jointly support these working communities so that they can reduce the amount of time taken to deliver competent collaborative working. MNCs need to provide adequate awareness training for their expatriates before sending them to new countries. They cannot leave expatriates to their personal initiative to appreciate the full range of factors that have a bearing upon their adjustment without shortfalls in performance relative to expectations. Nor can they expect host nationals to be equipped to integrate visiting staff without more developed support.

## **5.6 The impact of cultural differences on the locals and society**

This neglected group has a significant impact and an important role to play regarding the adjustment and interaction of expatriates. The results of this research showed significant aspects about local employees which had not been addressed in previous studies. In addition, the interviews produced several results on the impact of cultural differences between the expatriates' cultures and those of local communities.

One significant finding is that some host nationals are significantly influenced by expatriates and exhibit the tendency to emulate the dress codes of expatriates and imitate their greeting styles. Other results of the qualitative study support the earlier work of Mayer (2009) which suggests that cultural imports are a threat to domestic customs and traditions. The presence of

foreigners together with other foreign factors such as music, TV shows and movies introduce a foreign and typically Western culture into a country. To this extent, foreign cultures have both direct and indirect influences on the lifestyles of at least some of the local people who will either empathise or criticise depending upon whether they relate to it or react badly to it.

Additionally, the phenomenon of globalization is playing a significant part in the transferring of customs and traditions from one region to another, as people can access information about events occurring in different regions of the world. Even though many individuals see globalisation as a positive development it has come with many cultural, social and economic challenges for different nations. It can be more challenging for societies to retain their cultures as they now face great pressures from others. Even the strongest cultures in the world are finding it difficult to cope with the sweeping wave of globalisation, especially with young people who access information about other cultures through the Internet. The results obtained in this study offer some support for suggestions about the unsettling effects on cultural cohesion.

The respondents expressed their concerns, particularly in respect of the local teenagers who have started to dress in the same styles of clothing as the Western expatriates and abandon traditional clothes like the hijab. Others said that they no longer practised the traditional Omani way of greetings as they found the Western method of saying 'hi' or 'hello' as being more accommodating than the traditional way. Quite a number of local participants stated that certain behaviours of the expatriates in Oman were unacceptable, more often focussing on the behaviour of females. It is taboo in Oman and other Arabic countries for a woman to get very close to a man or shake hands. However, some noted that they had seen Western females getting very close to males and shaking their hands. This could cause embarrassment for the Omanis and they would consequently find themselves facing personal anxieties about causing embarrassment to others by asking them to respect Omani customs.

According to both the Omani and expatriate respondents the interaction between expatriates and Omanis has been strongly affected by this situation. Indeed, many asserted that they had avoided interactions where unacceptable behaviours were anticipated. For example, one expatriate said that he refused to visit his Omani colleague because his wife does not wear the hijab. Another Omani participant mentioned that he did not accept an invitation from his expatriate colleagues to participate in a journey in order to avoid mixing between the two genders.

Organizational costs and dilemmas were also affected by this issue. It was noted that some expatriates are highly entrepreneurial and innovative and it would be beneficial if the locals could emulate them. However, other cultural practices were considered threatening and were discouraged and disregarded by locals on the grounds of eradicating long-standing traditions.

The difficulties host nationals and expatriates have faced in terms of personal interactions is instructive as it shows that, although there are tensions, there is also greater potential than is often realised. Analysing the perceptions of both the host nationals and expatriates suggests that the success of the adjustment process could be improved through targeted interventions designed to improve the quality of host national and expatriate interactions. For instance, interactions in which the host nationals help the expatriates learn about Omani customs would likely be welcomed by both groups, especially if the host nationals were open to learning about aspects of the expatriates own cultural heritage.

The quality of such interactions (i.e., between host nationals and expatriates over time) is highly likely to be a significant predictor of the success of adjustment. Black et al.'s (1991) framework of adjustment could be greatly improved if it were to incorporate such interactions as a variable, allowing that the quality of the relationships developed between host nationals and expatriates may be a key determinant of cultural adjustment.

## **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

### **6.1 Conclusion**

This study set out to enrich the body of expatriate management literature by investigating the subjective experiences and interpretations and considering the experiences of cross-cultural adjustment of both Western and non-Western expatriates in Oman. Three specific research questions were asked in order to discover the kinds of adjustment challenges facing expatriates in Oman. First, to highlight the factors which are regarded as enhancing their adjustment experience; second, to highlight any recommendations the expatriates could provide in order to improve the adjustment experiences of future expatriates relocating to Oman and third, to identify the types of training currently provided to expatriates and identify the training needs specified by the expatriates themselves.

Using a mixed methods research design, results were obtained that revealed new information about the adjustment experiences of host nationals, Western and non-Western expatriates. Despite the limitations of this study the findings have provided a new lens through which the topic of expatriate management may be examined and developed. These findings lay a foundation upon which a broader theoretical study should be built and subsequent practical applications for organisations that seek to hire Western or non-Western expatriates may be based.

Unlike the previous studies which identified a specific set of variables and studied their impact on adjustment, this study identified a set of variables and studied the interaction between them in a relational fashion. The resultant data illuminates the adjustment experiences of both Western and non-Western expatriates posted on international assignments to the Middle Eastern regions. It also examines the influence of host national experiences of interacting with visiting work colleagues.

Most organisations and expatriates take cross-cultural adjustment for granted. However, as others have also recognized, assignments to the Middle East in general and Oman in particular, generate problems for highly diverse teams of work colleagues with differing backgrounds, experiences, insights and expectations which together creates numerous pressure points for



expatriate interaction. Hofstede and others are famous for stressing cultural differences and equating Western countries with individualistic qualities, such as individual initiative and achievement, competition rather than co-operation and the valuing of individual decision making (Samovar et al., 2014). When expatriates work on assignments in ostensibly collectivistic Middle Eastern regions there seems to be some internalising of these notions and categories, as exemplified by respondents at interview which can pose problems and present themselves as major hurdles.

For certain groups of mainly Western expatriates there was a lack of sensitivity to local priorities and practices and occasionally suspicion, for example, about the way locals awarded contracts, promoted their relatives and members of their extended family (Konanahalli et al., 2012). They were also unaware that some of the protocols in the Arab world could have devastating consequences for themselves, their communities and families (Konanahalli et al., 2012). To this extent the recent political uprising in Oman came as a shock and source of great concern which has a serious detrimental effect on their ongoing adjustment. The lack of well-rounded support from their employers was a frequent talking point, with many feeling exposed and vulnerable (Takeuchi et al., 2008, Konanahalli et al., 2012).

Additionally, the study has deepened the appreciation of host national perceptions and reactions as an indispensable element of an integrated approach. Omanis were also inclined towards quite critical views, magnified by their interpretations and experiences of dealing with expatriate workers. The Omani respondents tended to identify the cultural characteristics of incoming labour as more of a problem than any relational element of their interactions and as such, they conceptualised appropriate training requirements as largely one way, more for those arriving than receiving. The need for a more developed relational understanding of the expatriate working phenomenon is evident from this, together with a stronger commitment from the range of expatriates, Omanis and their employing organisations to devise and engage with integrated training and ongoing development programmes.

The findings suggest that more considered training and support should be provided by the companies in order to facilitate the adjustment of their expatriates in Oman. Pre-departure training should consist, at least, of awareness and familiarity training, language and communicational training for all, along with assistance on practical issues for incoming workers.

This sort of development should also continue at the location to meet the emerging needs of the expatriates, especially with joint workshops and interactive sessions to break down barriers and foster a collective ethos or at least respect and capacity for collaborative working.

## **6.2 Theoretical and practical implications**

Considering the findings from the literature and the results of the current study there seemed to be contradiction on the importance of adjustment factors included in the Blacks' framework. According to the findings in this research it seems that there are several factors related impacting the expatriate's adjustment to Omani culture. Although several decades have passed since the appearance of the Black's framework as one of the most widely used models of expatriate adjustment, the current study shows that there is a discrepancy in the results of previous studies that studied this model. For example, some studies (Janssens, 1995) concluded that culture novelty has positively related to the work adjustment, while Thomas and Peterson (2014) found a negative relationship between the two factors. This may indicate that the factors included by Black need further studies to be relied upon as a model factors influencing the adjustment.

Moreover, this research has presented plentiful of practical advices and implications for the use of both companies and expatriates. The findings suggest that especially proper training and support should be provided by the companies in order to facilitate the adjustment of their expatriates in Oman. Pre-departure training should consist, at least, of cultural training, pre-visits, language and communicational training and assistance with practical issues. The training should also continue on the location to meet the emerging needs of the expatriates, particularly because it was found that expatriates thought it might be impossible to train for something you cannot understand.

The findings indicate that cultural and work-related values differ in many aspects. In order to understand the differences and their implications to daily work and management, for example, Hofstede (see e.g. 2001, 1993), cultural studies can be used as a starting point. According to the findings the Arabic and Omani social, work and management culture can be seen as hierarchical, collectivist and rather long-term oriented, as well as masculine in comparison to the expatriates' culture. Because of the significant differences between the Western and Arabic cultures, it is highly recommended to provide proper cross-cultural training for expatriates going to Oman.

Furthermore, this research has demonstrated the need for understanding the highly different communication style of Arabic in comparison to Western countries. The findings support the view that the Arabic communication style is high-contextual (Hall 1989: 90–91) and face-conscious (see e.g. Selmer 1998). Therefore, expatriates should be aware of the communicational differences in order to communicate and function effectively in Oman. It can be argued, that proper interaction in Arabic culture training plays a crucial role in this.

### **6.3 Study limitations and suggestions for future research**

As with most studies, this research has a number of limitations. Firstly, the current study has been heavily focused on Black's model. While this was done by examining both Western and non-Western expatriates, in addition to investigating the host national employees to satisfy the aim of this research, additional work could be done to introduce further predictors to the adjustment model; for example, to examine the influence that the motivation and emotional intelligence of expatriates has on their adjustment. It could also be beneficial to explore the interaction between the expatriates working in intergovernmental organisations in Oman and institutional structures to identify how this has led to changes within these organisations.

Secondly, the survey used the same respondents to assess many of the variables at certain points in time. Thus, the incidence of 'same-respondent bias' and 'common-method bias' could be a cause for concern. In respect of expatriates and HR staff, however, a different method of collecting data, namely interviews, was used in order to minimise the possibility of the occurrence of common-method bias.

Overall, despite its limitations, this study provides the appropriate groundwork for future research on expatriate adjustment to be conducted on a relational basis. This dissertation highlighted the lack of interrelated research on Western, non-Western and local employees in the Arabic workplace, establishing the importance of continued research on this basis. Considering the findings, there are several issues related to the appreciation of cross-cultural communication and respect for difference that could be further developed. To begin with it would be interesting to study developmental ideas and interventions on training and staff support, ideally with an action research approach to devising, training and testing forms of joint stakeholder engagement and cross cultural team-building.

According to the findings from the study and the wider literature, there seem to be hardly any companies that actually provide their expatriates with extensive and useful training. The case for changing this could be set out more clearly and convincingly with academics adopting more active applied research projects to fill the gap.

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## **Appendixes**

### **Appendix A Plain Language Statement**



#### **Plain Language Statement for participants in the interview**

##### **1. Study title and researcher details**

I am Abdullah Al Mahrouqi and I am studying a PhD in Management at The University of Glasgow. I am carrying out a project to research cross-cultural communication and the adjustment of western expatriate managers in multicultural companies: investigates operations in Oman. Email: [a.al-mahrouqi.1@research.gla.ac.uk](mailto:a.al-mahrouqi.1@research.gla.ac.uk), telephone: 0096899430441. This research is supervised by Professor Martin Beirne. Professor of management and organisational behaviour at The University of Glasgow; contact details: email: [Martin.Beirne@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Martin.Beirne@glasgow.ac.uk), and Professor Phillip Beaumont, email: [Phillip.Beaumont@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Phillip.Beaumont@glasgow.ac.uk), telephone: 01413305129.

##### **2. Invitation paragraph**

You are being invited to take part in this research study. Before you decide whether you would like to take part it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with me if you wish. Please feel free to ask questions about anything you are unclear about or if you would like to have more information. Please take the time to consider whether or not you wish to take part.

##### **3. What is the purpose of the study?**

The purpose of the study is to provide information regarding firstly, expatriate managers' adjustment; and what is the cultural challenges they faced and how they overcome these challenges. Secondly, in connection with any international or intercultural communication problems which have been experienced between expatriate and local managers; thirdly, the need for training and finally, the managers' tactics for dealing with adjustment and how they cope with managing intercultural communication problems when they occur.

#### **4. Why have I been selected?**

You have been selected, along with 30 other individuals, as matching the research criteria because you are part of one (or several) of social practice which is chosen as unit of analysis. The researcher believes that you will be able to positively contribute to the study due to your interest and as it has been mentioned before, this research aims to study the issues of cross-cultural communication, particularly, on the experience of Western expatriate managers of working and living in Oman. Oman has different and unique culture than their home countries. You have been chosen in order to give information about the major difficulties faced by those expatriate managers during their living and working in Oman in terms of their adjustment and their communicate and interaction with Omani people and the expatriate managers from other countries.

#### **4. Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to you wish to take part. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and do not need to provide a reason.

#### **6. What will be required of me if I agree to take part?**

In the event that you agree to take part in the study you will be asked interview. The aim of this interview is to gather some information about you and learn about your experience as a Western expatriate managers or working with them. It is anticipated that this interview will take approximately one hour to complete. The format of the interview will be semi-structured and the session will be recorded by an audio recorder.

#### **7. Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will be identified by an ID number and any information about you will have your name and address removed so that you are unable to be identified.

#### **8. What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The interviews, notes, tapes, and interview transcripts will be kept in a secure place at my home and only my supervisor and I will be privy to these. I will analyse the data collected and use the

information to write my dissertation to be graded by my supervisors and other assessors. I may also present the research results in the form of a conference paper and/or a journal article. Once the thesis and conference paper and journal article have been written/published, the notes, and interview transcripts will be destroyed and tapes erased.

No participants will be named in research reports unless explicit consent has been given, and every effort will be made to disguise their identity.

Declaration to participants

- If you take part in the study, you have the right to:
- Refuse to answer any particular question, and to withdraw from the study at any time.
- Ask any further questions about the study that occurs to you during your participation.
- Be given access to a summary of the findings from the study when it is concluded.

## **9. Who will review the study?**

This study will be reviewed by the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

## **10. Contact for Further Information**

For further information, please contact Professor Martin Beirne on: [Martin.Beirne@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Martin.Beirne@glasgow.ac.uk), or Professor Phillip Beaumont, email: [Phillip.Beaumont@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Phillip.Beaumont@glasgow.ac.uk), telephone: 01413305129. In addition, if you have any concerns regarding the conduct of the research project then you can contact Dr Muir Houston, the Ethics Officer, at the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at: [Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk).

## Appendix B: SURVEY INSTRUMENT OF EXPATRIATE



University  
of Glasgow

### SURVEY INSTRUMENT OF EXPATRIATE IN OMAN

#### Dear Participant:

Thank you for participating in this survey. The aim of the research is to find out the experience of cross-cultural adjustment, communication, and training since arriving to work in Oman. This survey has four sections. **Section A** consists of general questions about you. **Section B** contains a set of questions to measure your experience of cross-cultural adjustment to the living and working environment in Oman. **Section C** contains another set of questions to find out your cross-cultural communication experiences with other expatriates as well as people and co-workers from the host country. The last **Section D** covers cross-cultural training and support.

Please rate the following statements based on your experiences of living and working in Oman. There are no right or wrong answers. The survey seeks to find out YOUR opinions, feelings, or ideas. So please be honest. The responses you give are anonymous (please do not write your name on the survey) and confidential. The data provided by respondents will be treated collectively and will be used for scientific research purposes only.

#### Section A: Biographical background Information:

In this section, please circle the answer that applies to you.

1. What is your current position?
  - a) Director/General manager/chief executive
  - b) Senior Manager
  - c) Middle Manager
  - d) Manager
  - e) Not manager
2. My Gender is:
  - a) Male
  - b) Female

3. My marital Status is:
  - a) Married or Partner
  - b) Unmarried
4. If you are married, is your spouse also resident in Oman?
  - a) Yes
  - b) No
  - c) N/A
5. If your spouse is resident in Oman, is he/she employed?
  - a) My spouse works full time in Oman.
  - b) My spouse works part time in Oman.
  - c) My spouse is not employed. d.
  - d) N/A
6. What is your nationality according to your passport? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Number of children
  - a) 0
  - b)1
  - c)2
  - e)3
  - f)+3
8. What is your home country? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Please indicate your age category:
  - a) 20-30
  - b) 31-40
  - c) 41-50
  - d) 51-60
  - e) 61+
10. What is the highest degree you have earned?
  - a) Doctorate (Ph.D., D.Phil, Ed.D., D.Sc., D.B.A., etc)
  - b) Master's (M.A., M.Sc., M.Phil., M.Ed., M.B.A., etc)
  - c) Bachelor's (B.A., B.Sc., B.Ed., B.Comm., etc)
  - d) Other : \_\_\_\_\_
11. How many previous jobs have you held outside of your home country before coming to Oman?
  - a) a. 0
  - b) b. 1
  - c) c. 2
  - d) d. 3+
12. Name of your last assignment countries before Oman? For how long it was?
  - a) Oman is my first experience as an expat.



b) I have previous experience.

N	Countries of previous experience	Period of work	
		Years	Months
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6	OMAN		

13. If you have had previous jobs outside of your home country, overall how satisfying were those experiences?

Item	Very Dissatisfied				Very Satisfied	N/A
	1	2	3	4	5	
14. Overall degree of satisfaction with my previous job(s) outside of my home country.						

15. What is your religious status?

- a) Muslim                      b) Non-Muslim

16. Why did you accept this assignment?

---



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17. In how many foreign languages are you at a conversational level of fluency or higher?

.....

18. What language(s) you spoke most frequently while in Oman?

.....

.....

Item	1 Not at all	2 A little	3 Moderate	4 Fluently	5 Very fluently
<b>19.</b> How well do you feel you speak the Arabic language?					

**Section B: cross-cultural Adjustment.**

1. Please indicate how much difficulty and satisfaction you experience in Oman in each of these areas.

Use the following 1 to 5 scale. How do you feel about?

N	Questions	NO difficulty 1	Slight difficulty 2	Moderate difficulty 3	Great Difficulty 4	Extreme Difficulty 5
1	Living conditions in general					
2	Housing conditions					
3	Finding food that you enjoy					
4	Shopping					
5	Cost of living					
6	Entertainment/recreation facilities & opportunities					
7	Health care facilities					
8	Following rules and regulations.					
9	Taking the host country's perspective on the culture.					
10	Using the transport system.					
11	Dealing with bureaucracy					
12	Understanding the host country's value system.					
13	Making yourself understood.					
14	Seeing things from a host national's point of view.					
15	Going to social gatherings.					

N	Questions	NO	Slight	Moderate	Great	Extreme
		difficulty	difficulty	difficulty	Difficulty	Difficulty
		1	2	3	4	5
16	Communicating with people of a different ethnic group.					
17	Understanding ethnic or cultural differences.					
18	Dealing with unsatisfactory service.					
19	Your practice of worship					
20	Working with the local co-workers					
21	Psychological adjustment					
22	I enjoy living in Oman					

**Section c: work Adjustment.**

N	Questions	NO	Slight	Moderate	Great	Extreme
		difficulty	difficulty	difficulty	Difficulty	Difficulty
		1	2	3	4	5
1	Adjustment to job and responsibilities.					
2	Adjustment to my performance standard and expectations					
3	I understand my supervisory responsibilities					

2. What has been the most difficult things to adjust to in Oman and why? (In order most difficult first)

1- .....

2- .....

3- .....

3. Do you feel adjusted in Oman?

a) Yes

b) No

4. If you encounter cultural difficulties, what types of difficulty do you encounter in cultural differences when carrying out your job in Oman?

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5. Please indicate your assessment of the similarities or differences in the following items in Oman when compared to your home country. Select the rating scale point that best describes how you feel.

N	Items	Highly Similar 1	Similar 2	Somewhat similar 3	Not very similar 4	Not at all similar 5
1	Everyday customs that must be followed					
2	Overall Omani culture compared to your national culture					
3	General living conditions					
4	Using health care facilities					
5	Transportation systems used in Oman					
6	General living costs					
7	Available quality and types of foods					
8	Climate (i.e. weather conditions).					
9	General housing conditions					
10	Work environment					

6. On a scale from 1 to 5 and comparing to your home culture how would you rate the overall Omani culture?

Statement	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither Disagree nor Agree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
You encounter difficulty in cultural differences when carrying out your job in Oman					

7. Thinking about Omani working practices and norms, to what extent do you agree with each of the following statements? Please tick your choice on a scale of 1 to 5.

N	Statement	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither Disagree nor Agree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
1	In this country, team working relationships are affected by seniority.					
2	Omani employees prefer working alone rather than in teams.					
3	Omani managers tend not to seek subordinates' participation in decision making.					
4	Omani employees have a high expectation of promotion based on their length of service with an organisation.					
5	The informal rules or expectations are important in determining Omani working practices.					
6	Omani managers work well in teams.					

N	Statement	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither Disagree nor Agree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
7	For Omani employees, emotions play little part in defining relationships at work.					
8	In Omani practices, social and personal relationships are essential for work to be carried out.					
9	Religious and family matters have an integral role in influencing Omani employees' working life.					
10	Omani employees tend not to separate work criticism from personal criticism.					
11	Omani employees find it easy to work with employees from other cultures.					
12	My specific job responsibilities are clear					
13	I know the performance standards and expectations of my job					
14	Omani managers work very hard.					
15	I enjoy working in Oman.					
16	Omani managers are good at dealing with colleagues.					

8. On scale from 1 to 5 for how extent do you feel satisfied:-

	Very Dissatisfied 1	Dissatisfied 2	Nether Satisfied or Dissatisfied 3	Satisfied 4	Very Satisfied 5
Satisfaction with work environment					
Satisfaction with living conditions					

**Note: If your family is with you please continue, if not please go to the next section C.**

9. What were the biggest obstacles that your family experienced when settling into Oman?

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10. What would have helped to make it easier?

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11. How would you rate your family's satisfaction with the living conditions in Oman?

	Very Dissatisfied 1	Dissatisfied 2	Nether Satisfied or Dissatisfied 3	Satisfied 4	Very Satisfied 5
My family is					

**Section C: Cross-Cultural Communication.**

1. What is your impression of Omani people in general?
2. On a scale of 1 to 6, how would you rate your relationship with:-

	None 1	2	3	4	5	Very strong ties 6
Relationship with Omanis						
Relationship with expats from your home country						
Relationship with expats from other nationalities						

### 3. Cross-cultural Social-Efficacy Scale for Expatriate Managers:-

N	Questions	Strongly disagree 1	Slightly disagree 2	Neither 3	Slightly agree 4	Strongly agree 5
1	Language affects the interaction with Omani people					
2	You face language communication difficulties when executing your job in Oman.					
3	It is difficult for me to make new friends from Oman.					
4	I have difficulties making new friends at work.					
5	I find it difficult to hold a conversation with most people.					
6	I am interested in having friends from the host country					
7	I enjoy social activities with Omani nationals					
8	I often interact with Omani nationals on a day- to-day basis					
9	I usually interact with Omani nationals outside of work					
10	I maintain good relationship with local social environment					



4. Do you prefer spending time outside your work with :
- 1) Omanis
  - 2) Expats from your home country
  - 3) Expats from other nationalities
5. For how extent the following factors affect your cross-cultural communication and adjustment in Oman:

<b>Statements</b>	Disagree 1	Slight Disagree 2	Neither Disagree nor Agree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
You encounter difficulty in cultural differences when carrying out your job in Oman					

6. To what extent the following factors are important in your relationship with Omani colleagues:

	Not at all important 1	Not very important 2	Somewhat important 3	Important 4	Very important 5
Your communication skills					
Your organisational networks					
Your position in the hierarchy					
Your technical knowledge/ expertise					
Your nationality					
Your gender					

**SECTION D: CROSS-CULTURAL TRAINING AND SUPPORTS**

1. Does your organisation normally provide its employees with support (e.g.: logistical support) in their international moves?

- a) Yes                      b) No

2. Did you undertake any pre-departure training before your arrival in this post?

Please tick (X) all that apply:

Yes, provided by my organisation	
Yes, self-initiated training	
No, my organisation does not provide pre-departure training	
No, but my organisation does provide pre-departure training	

3. If you undertook pre-departure training (either on your own or through your organisation), did it cover any of the following issues? Please tick (X) all that applies.

Cultural orientation (values, norms and traditions).	
Cross-cultural communication skills	
Cross-Cultural Adjustment	
Briefing about the host country	
New job role.	
Specific information about the new working environment.	
Arabic language training.	
Others:-	

4. Please tick your choice on a scale of 1 to 5. Please tick (X).

N	Statement	Strongly Disagree  1	Disagree  2	Neither Disagree/ Agree 3	Agree  4	Strongly Agree  5
1	Colleagues are willing to help whenever you need.					
2	Management encourages employees' suggestions/opinions					
3	Cross-cultural team work is encouraged in the organisation you work					
4	You are treated better than the local employees in your organisation.					
5	Cross-cultural training helps expatriate to be successful in his foreign assignment.					
6	Cross-cultural training should be a part of compensation package for each expatriate.					
7	I am satisfied with the amount of training and support I received from my company prior to arrival at the host country.					
8	I would recommend companies to offer cultural awareness training to expatriates.					
9	The cultural awareness training helped me understand the local culture of the host country better.					

N	Statement	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither Disagree/ Agree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
10	The cultural awareness training helped me adapt to local needs in order to avoid what is considered inappropriate behaviour in the host country.					
11	I am satisfied with the amount of cultural awareness training I received from my company prior to arrival at the host country.					
12	I am satisfied with the amount of language training I received prior to arrival at the host country					
13	I would recommend companies to offer language training to expatriates.					
14	I am satisfied with the amount of practical assistance my company offered for the relocation to the host country.					
15	My family really tries to help me					
16	I get the emotional help and support I need from my family					
17	The practical assistance offered by my company helped me settle in faster.					

N	Statement	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither Disagree/ Agree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
18	The practical assistance offered by my company helped me to be more relaxed about the relocation.					
19	I would recommend companies to offer practical assistance to expatriates.					
20	I would if I had more training					

**NOTE:** In order to reach in-depth understanding of cross-cultural communication and adjustment in Oman and as a part of the research, there is also an interview; if you would be interested to take part please provide your contact details so I can contact you:

Phone number: .....

E-mail: .....

Or you email me: [abha616@hotmail.com](mailto:abha616@hotmail.com)

**This is the end of the survey. Thank you again for your participation.**

**Appendix C: Western expatriate interview**

**General Interview Guide**

***[INTERVIEWEE PROFILE]***

Location of interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Date (day and month): \_\_\_\_\_

Time of interview: From \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

Duration of interview: \_\_\_\_\_ minutes

Was interviewed taped? Yes  No

Comments:

**INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND  
ADJUSTMENT OF WESTERN EXPATRIATE MANAGER SPROJECT**

***[1. INTRODUCTION]***

First of all, I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project. Your help is very much appreciated.

As I previously said, the purpose of the interview is to find out about cross-cultural communication and the adjustment of western expatriate managers working in Oman. I'm doing this research as part of my PhD's thesis at the University of Glasgow in Scotland. But before we start the interview, I would like you to read this information sheet. *[Hand information sheet to participant.]* It provides further details about the project, such as what it's about, how the information gathered will be analysed and used, what your rights as a participant are, and so on. Please feel free to ask questions if there's anything you're not clear about.

There are no right or wrong answers; I am interested in your own opinions and experiences. I'd like to also assure you that the information you give will be treated collectively, confidentially, and anonymously. So please be as honest as you can in your responses. For the purposes of the research analysis this interview will be audiotape recorded.

Shall we begin?

### **SECTION 1: Initial Experiences upon Arriving In Oman**

1. Why you have been choosing to be an expat?
2. Could you tell me about your recent assignment, from the time when you first learned about the possibility of going to Oman? What did you think (feeling) when you first heard you were going to Oman?
3. Could you explain more about pre-departure training?
4. Did you have someone who could explain the local culture to you and that you could confide in? Who were they and how did they help you?

### **SECTION 2: Cross-Cultural Adjustment Questions**

1. What were the first impressions and hopes you had upon arriving to Oman?
2. What kind of adjustment/adapting challenges did you face when you had first *arrived* to Oman? What were the first few days like?
3. How would you sum up your first six months?
4. What support did you have upon your arrival? (for example, organisational support)
5. In what way was this initial support helpful to you?
6. If you did not obtain any organisational support after arrival, how did this impact on your initial experiences?
7. What were the key challenges you faced during each overseas assignment?
8. What was your first big "aha" about the culture? What were the cultural differences you found most challenging in Oman?
9. What were the main challenges that you faced during the assignment which were caused by cultural differences?
10. How did you overcome these challenges? Were they being successful?
11. Which personal strengths (skills) did you find most helpful during your overseas assignment?
12. Were there things that surprised you about the way people thought or worked?
13. How did people (of Omani culture) see you?
14. Describe an experience on your assignment that highlighted cultural differences, an occasion when you knew the normal way of doing things at home was not the same in the host country? What do you do when this happens? How do you feel?



15. If you were asked to write an email about two or three “cultural incidents” that presented/exposed cultural differences between your host country and your culture in a way that you did not understand or may have caused some anxiety.
  - Please choose one incident and describe, in detail, how it happened?
  - What did you do when this incident occurred? If you don’t understand, what do you do?
16. How do you know “what you don’t know” about another culture?
17. How did you come to understand this incident?
18. Have you 1) resolved this incident in 2) a way that makes you feel comfortable and that 3) you understand it now?
19. “Culture shock” and “reverse culture shock” are terms used when facing adjustment challenges in moving to new countries or back home. Have you experienced “culture shock” and/or “reverse culture shock”? Please share one or two examples.
20. Have you given advice to others about culture shock based on your own experiences? What are a few pieces of advice you’d give to someone about culture shock?
21. On your assignment, what factors made your adjustment into the new environments easier?
22. If you are going to work as an expatriate again, what would you do differently this time?
23. What factors negatively contributed to the assignment?
24. What about positively?
25. What are the most rewarding things about being an expat?
26. What advices would you give other expatriates?

### SECTION 3: CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION QUESTIONS

1. Do you have Omani friends out of the work? If No could you explain why not?
2. IF YES, could you describe your relationship with Omani people in the society?
3. How do you usually deal with cultural differences when you deal with Omani people?
4. Dose these differences led to misunderstandings? If YES, could you explain how do you usually overcome these situations?
5. How would you describe your interaction with host nationals on a day to day basis?
6. How often do you interact with host nationals outside of work?
7. How easily do you communicate, when speaking with host nationals?

8. Do you have any tips or strategies you use to make new friends with people from different cultures?
9. From your point of view, what is the most communication difficulties between managers and expatriates Omanis?

#### SECTION 4: MANAGERIAL WORK IN OMAN

1. Are the ways in which you make decisions in your current job in Oman different from those you experienced while working in [HOME COUNTRY].
2. [IF YES]
3. 13. What are the differences?
4. 14. Since you began work in Oman, can you identify ways in which you have modified your managerial behaviour?
5. [IF YES]
6. 15. Could you describe how your behaviour has changed?

#### SKILLS

1. 16. What skills have helped you to function successfully at your present job in Oman?
2. 17. Are these skills the same ones that you would require if you were working in a similar job in [HOME COUNTRY]?
3. 18. Can you identify any new skills that you **have DEVELOPED** because of your job in Oman?
4. [IF SO] Please describe them.
5. 19. Can you identify any skills that you have **ENHANCED** because of your job in Oman?
6. [IF SO] Please describe them.
7. 20. Generally, what skills and abilities do expatriate managers need when working in Oman?
8. 21. How do you think that such skills and abilities can be developed most effectively?
9. 22. [OPTION] Generally, what skills and abilities do expatriate managers need when working in [ADDITIONAL WORK LOCATION]?
10. 24. Can you identify any management practices from your [HOME COUNTRY] that you would like to see adopted more extensively in Oman?
11. 25. Can you identify any management practices from your [HOME COUNTRYI] that you believe cannot be adopted successfully in Oman?

#### ATTITUDES

1. Before you began working in Oman what did you expect it would be like to work here?
2. In what ways have your expectations changed?
3. In the time you have been working in Oman, have you ever felt estranged from your own national background?
4. Could you explain more fully?
5. What have you learned from working as a manager in Oman?
6. What problems have you encountered in your work as an expatriate manager in Oman?
7. What do you admire most about Omani society?
8. What do you admire least about Omani society?
9. What do you admire most about Omani management?
10. What do you admire least about Omani management?
11. What things do you particularly like about working in Oman?
12. What things do you particularly dislike about working in Oman?

#### CONFLICT RESOLUTION

1. Recall the most recent conflict situation you have been involved in at work and describe the nature of the situation and how you handled it?
2. If a similar conflict situation had arisen in [HOME COUNTRY] how would you have handled it?
3. Do conflict situations arise because of different issues in Oman than in [HOME COUNTRY]?

#### SECTION 5: NON-WORK ENVIRONMENT

In living overseas there are often non-work related factors which are important. This section asks you about some of these factors.

##### **FAMILY**

1. If family accompanied you, what did they think about living in Oman?
2. To what extent has your family's level of adjustment to living in Oman affected your work performance?
3. Whom did you mainly socialise with (people from your own culture, third -country expatriates or host-country nationals)?

4. How would you describe your living situation? (e.g. a. Lived in a compound of expatriates, b. Lived in a neighbourhood composed primarily of expatriates, c Lived in a neighbourhood composed primarily of host-country nationals)
5. Since Oman is a Muslim country, how are expatriate women viewed by locals? How much do you feel it is necessary to cover up?

#### **LEISURE TIME**

1. With whom you usually participate in social activities? Could you explain why?

#### **SECTION 4: TRAINING**

1. What are your recommendations for future preparation of expatriate managers?
2. What are your suggestions to improve cross-cultural training programs to expatriates came to work in Oman?
3. Do you personally know of any cases where expatriate managers have had to cut short a job assignment in Oman?
4. [If yes] Can you summarise what happened? / Can you explain the nature/circumstances of what happened?

**Thank you very much for your time. Your help is greatly appreciated. If you think of anything else, or if you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.**

*[Record the time the interview ends.]*

*[Complete the interview profile as soon as possible after the interview.]*

## Appendix D : SURVEY INSTRUMENT OF HOST NATIONALS



# SURVEY INSTRUMENT OF HOST NATIONALS

### SECTION 1: BACKGROUND (A)

**Before discussing your work I would like to ask you several general questions about your background.**

### **BACKGROUND (B)**

Please tick the correct box and fill in the blanks for the open-end questions.

1. My gender is:
  - a) Male
  - b) Female
  
2. My age category is:
  - a) Under 25
  - b) 25-34
  - c) 35-44
  - d) 45-54
  - e) 55 or over
  
3. My current marital status is:
  - f) Single
  - g) Married
  
4. The highest level of education which I have completed is:
  - a) Secondary School
  - b) Sub-degree qualification (e.g. higher diploma)
  - c) Professional qualification
  - d) Degree (BA or equivalent)
  - e) Degree + Professional Qualification
  - f) Master's Degree

- g) Doctorate
- h) Other

5. I received my education in the following country(ies):

.....

6. My mother tongue is: .....

7. Do you know any languages other than your mother tongue?

- a) Yes
- b) No

8. If the answer to question is 'yes' then please answer the following question.

9. My familiarity with other languages is as follows:

Language	Level		
	Beginner	Intermediate	Fluent

10. What is the approximate length of your full-time work experience?

11. Have you ever worked full-time outside of Oman?

IF YES: For what period(s) of time? .....

12. Did you ever live overseas before the age of 20?

**SECTION B: MANAGERIAL WORK**

Would now like to ask you, in some detail, about your present job:

13. What is the job title of your current position?

.....

14. Is your position formally designated as a managerial post?

- a) Yes
- b) No

15. Do you work with expatriate managers within your organization?

- a) Yes
- b) No

[IF YES]

16. What nationality (ies) are the expatriates?

.....

17. Could you tell me more about the nature of your work-related contacts with expatriates within your organization?

18. When you are working with expatriates, can you identify ways in which you modify your managerial behaviour?

[IF YES]

19. Could you describe how your behaviour changes?

20. Do you have any work-related contacts with expatriates outside of your organization?

- a) Yes
- b) No

[IF YES]

21. What nationality (ies) are the expatriates?

.....

22. When a company selects people for an assignment in Oman to what extent should the following factors be taken into account?

- a) Medical fitness
- b) Needed expertise
- c) Adaptability
- d) Maturity
- e) Emotional maturity

23. Please indicate how much difficulty expatriate managers experience in Oman in each of these areas. Use the following 1 to 5 scale.

N	Questions	NO difficulty 1	Slight difficulty 2	Moderate difficulty 3	Great Difficulty 4	Extreme Difficulty 5
1	Living conditions in general					
2	Housing conditions					
3	Finding food that you enjoy					
4	Shopping					
5	Cost of living					

6	Entertainment/recreation facilities & opportunities					
7	Health care facilities					
8	Following rules and regulations.					
9	Taking the host country's perspective on the culture.					
10	Using the transport system.					
11	Dealing with bureaucracy					
12	Understanding the host country's value system.					
13	Making themselves understood.					
14	Seeing things from a host national's point of view.					
15	Going to social gatherings.					
16	Communicating with people of a different ethnic group.					
17	Understanding ethnic or cultural differences.					
18	Dealing with unsatisfactory service.					
19	Worshipping.					
20	Adjustment to job and responsibilities.					
22	Adjustment to the performance standard and expectations at work.					
23	Working with the local co-workers					



N	Questions	NO difficulty 1	Slight difficulty 2	Moderate difficulty 3	Great Difficulty 4	Extreme Difficulty 5
24	Psychological adjustment					
25	They enjoy living in Oman					

24. In your opinion, what are the most challenges facing Western expatriate managers during their adjustment in Oman and why? (In order most difficult first)

1- .....

2- .....

25. If they encounter cultural difficulties, what types of difficulty do they encounter in cultural differences when carrying out their job in Oman

.....

.....

26. Please indicate your assessment of the similarities or differences in the following items in Oman when compared to their home country. Select the rating scale point that best describes how you feel.

N	Items	Highly Similar 1	Similar 2	Somewhat similar 3	Not very similar 4	Not at all similar 5
1	Everyday customs that must be followed					
2	Overall Omani culture compared to their national culture					
3	General living conditions					
4	Using health care facilities					
5	Transportation systems used in Oman					

N	Items	Highly Similar 1	Similar 2	Somewhat similar 3	Not very similar 4	Not at all similar 5
6	General living costs					
7	Available quality and types of foods					
8	Climate (i.e. weather conditions).					
9	General housing conditions					
10	Work environment					

27. On a scale from 1 to 5 and comparing to their home culture how would you rate the overall Omani culture?

Statement	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither Disagree nor Agree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
They encounter difficulty in cultural differences when carrying out their job in Oman					

**Section C: Cross-Cultural Communication.**

28. What is your impression of Western expatriate managers in general?

.....

.....

.....

.....

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.....

.....

.....

29. Cross-cultural Social-Efficacy Scale for Expatriate Managers:-

N	Questions	Strongly disagree 1	Slightly disagree 2	Neither 3	Slightly agree 4	Strongly agree 5
1	Language affects the interaction with expatriate managers					
2	I try to use local language when I talk to expatriate managers.					
3	You face language communication difficulties when executing your job with expatriate managers.					
4	At work, I behave in a typically my cultural way.					
5	It is difficult for me to make new friends from expatriate managers.					
6	I find it difficult to hold a conversation with expatriate managers.					
7	I am interested in having friends from expatriate managers					
8	I enjoy social activities with expatriate managers					
9	I often interact with expatriate managers on a day- to-day basis					
10	I usually interact with expatriate managers outside of work					
11	I do not handle myself well in social gatherings with expatriates.					
12	I believe that verbal and non-verbal behaviours vary across my culture and expatriate managers.					
13	I maintain good relationship with my expatriate managers co-workers					

30. On a scale of 1 to 6, how would you rate your relationship with:-

	None 1	2	3	4	5	Very strong ties 6
Relationship with expatriate managers from Western countries.						
Relationship with expats from your other countries						
I prefer to make relationship with Omani people.						

31. Do you prefer spending time outside your work with :

- 4) Omanis
- 5) Expats from Western expatriate managers
- 6) Expats from other nationalities

32. For how extent the following factors affect your cross-cultural communication expatriate managers:

<b>Statements</b>	<b>Disagree 1</b>	<b>Slight Disagree 2</b>	<b>Neither Disagree nor Agree 3</b>	<b>Agree 4</b>	<b>Strongly Agree 5</b>
Overall Omani culture differ to their national culture					
You encounter difficulty in cultural differences when you communicate with expatriate managers					

33. To what extent the following factors are important in your relationship with expatriate managers colleagues:

	Not at all important 1	Not very important 2	Somewhat important 3	Important 4	Very important 5
Your communication skills					

Your organizational networks					
Your position in the hierarchy					
Your technical knowledge/expertise					
Your nationality					
Your gender					

#### SECTION D: CROSS-CULTURAL TRAINING AND SUPPORTS

5. Does your organization normally provide its employees with support (e.g.: logistical support) when they arrive to Oman?
- a) Yes                      b) No
6. If they undertake any training by the organisation, did it cover any of the following issues? Please tick (X) all that applies.

Cultural orientation (values, norms and traditions).	
Cross-cultural communication skills	
Cross-Cultural Adjustment	
Briefing about the host country	
New job role.	
Specific information about the new working environment.	
Arabic language training.	
Others:-	

7. Please tick your choice on a scale of 1 to 5. Please tick (X).

N	Statement	Strongly Disagree  1	Disagree  2	Neither Disagree/ Agree 3	Agree  4	Strongly Agree  5
1	Colleagues are willing to help expatriate managers whenever they need it.					
2	Management encourages employees' suggestions/opinions					
3	Team work is encouraged in the organization you work					
4	You are treated better than expatriate managers in your organization.					
6	Cross-cultural training helps expatriate to be successful in his foreign assignment.					
7	Cross-cultural training should be a part of compensation package for each expatriate.					
8	I am satisfied with the amount of training and support they received from my company prior to arrival at the host country.					
9	I would recommend companies to offer cultural awareness training to expatriates.					

10	The cultural awareness training helped them understand the local culture of the host country better.					
N	Statement	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither Disagree/ Agree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
11	The cultural awareness training helped them to adapt to local needs in order to avoid what is considered inappropriate behaviour in the host country.					
13	I am satisfied with the amount of cultural awareness training they received from my company prior to arrival at the host country.					
14	I am satisfied with the amount of language training they received prior to arrival at the host country					
15	I would recommend companies to offer language training to expatriates.					
16	I am satisfied with the amount of practical assistance my company offered for the relocation to the host country.					
17	The practical assistance offered by my company helped them to settle in faster.					
18	The practical assistance offered by my company helped them to					

	be more relaxed about the relocation.					
N	Statement	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither Disagree/ Agree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
19	I would recommend companies to offer practical assistance to expatriates.					
20	I would if they had more training					

**NOTE:** In order to reach in-depth understanding of cross-cultural communication and adjustment in Oman and as a part of the research, there is also an interview; if you would be interested to take part please provide your contact details so I can contact you:

Phone number: .....

E-mail: .....

Or you email me: [abha616@hotmail.com](mailto:abha616@hotmail.com)

**This is the end of the survey. Thank you again for your participation.**



## Appendix E: Omani and other expatriates interview

### *[INTERVIEWEE PROFILE]*

Gender: Male  Female

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Highest qualification obtained: \_\_\_\_\_

In managerial position? Yes  No

Location of interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Date (day and month): \_\_\_\_\_

Time of interview: From \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

Duration of interview: \_\_\_\_\_ minutes

Was interviewed taped? Yes  No

Comments:

### **Perceptions about Expatriate**

1. Do you work with expatriate managers within your organization?  
[IF YES]
2. What nationality (ies) are the expatriates?
3. Why do you think your company employs expatriates?
4. What are the main differences between them and locals in their way to manage? With whom you prefer to work? Why?
5. In your experience have you found that expatriate and Omani employees behave similar to or different from one another?
  - [IF SIMILAR] Can you describe the similarities?
  - [IF DIFFERENT] Can you describe the differences?
6. Can you describe what differences when you undertake a decision-making exercise that involves western expatriate or Omani employee members of staff?

### **Expatriate Adjustment**

1. What do you think are the major challenges for Western expatriates to adjust in Oman?
2. What do you think are the major challenges for Western expatriates' families and children to adjust in Oman?
3. What do you think are the major cultural challenges for Western expatriates to work in Oman?
4. Can you identify factors that you believe assist expatriates in adjusting to living in Oman?
5. What factors that you think could restrict the adjustment of expatriates in Oman?
6. Do you personally know of any cases where expatriates have had to cut short a job assignment in Oman?
7. [IF YES]
8. Can you explain the nature/circumstances of what happened?
9. Can you describe any culture shock on the part of expatriates that you have observed within your workplace in Oman? Why it happened?
10. What do you think might be useful to expatriates in coping with such culture shock?

### **BEHAVIOUR**

1. Can you describe the nature of your work-related contacts with expatriates within your organization?

2. Can you identify ways in which you modify your managerial behaviour when you are working with expatriates?

[IF YES]

3. Could you describe how your behaviour changes?

### **Skills**

1. Can you identify any new managerial skills that you **have DEVELOPED** because you need to work with expatriates?

[IF SO] Please describe them.

2. Based on your experience in working with expatriates, what skills and abilities do you think that expatriate managers need in order to be successful working in Oman?
3. How can expatriates develop these skills and abilities most effectively?
4. What have you learned from working with expatriates in Oman?
5. What problems have you encountered in your work with expatriates in Oman?

### **Interacting and socializing with expatriate managers**

1. How frequently do you socialise with Western expatriates?
2. How would you describe your interaction with Western expatriates on a day to day basis?
3. How often do you interact with Western expatriates outside of work?

**IF YES**, could you explain more? What nationality (ies) are the expatriates?

**IF NO** could you tell me why?

4. What do you admire most about Western expatriate management?
5. What do you admire least about Western expatriate management?
6. To what extent do you participate in social activities with any of your Western expatriate managers colleagues?
7. During the past 7 days have you spent any leisure time with your Western expatriate managers work colleagues?
8. Take for example dining out/sports activity
9. Would you say this is typical?

### **SECTION: CONFLICT**

1. Have you had any conflict situations with expatriates?
  - If yes, could you give me more details about the situation? Why it happened? How did you deal with the conflict with them?
2. Can you tell us about the expatriation process at your organisation?

3. Can you tell us which advantages the organisation has gained by having expatriates instead of local workforce?
4. Can you tell us about the downside of having expatriates instead of using local workforce?
5. What will happen, if the expatriate terminates the assignment and returns to the home country prematurely?
6. How do you think the expatriation process can be done differently at your organisation?

#### **SECTION :TRAINING**

1. What is your opinion about the need for pre-departure training programmes for expatriates?
2. What would you like to see included in a pre-departure training programme for expatriates coming to work in Oman?
3. If you were designing a training programme for an western expatriate, without any previous work experience in Omani society. What part you will focus more:
  - Managerial Training
  - Cross-cultural training (Interpersonal Interaction)
  - International Business Training
  - Language Training
  - Omani local culture
  - Islamic values

Could you explain why?

4. What are your recommendations for future preparation and training courses of Western expatriates?

**Thank you very much for your time. Your help is greatly appreciated. If you think of anything else, or if you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.**

*[Record the time the interview ends.]*

*[Complete the interview profile as soon as possible after the interview.]*

## **Appendix F: List of Western Countries**

Albania  
Australia  
Austria  
Belgium  
Bulgaria  
Canada  
Croatia  
Republic of Cyprus  
Czech  
Republic  
Denmark  
Estonia  
Finland  
France  
Germany  
Greece  
Hungary  
Ireland  
Iceland  
Italy  
Japan  
Latvia  
Lithuania  
Luxembourg  
Malta  
Netherlands  
New Zealand  
Norway  
Poland  
Portugal  
Romania  
Slovakia  
Slovenia  
Spain  
Sweden  
Turkey  
United Kingdom  
United States