Sharing learning across diversity: Immigrant employees’ inclusion in communities of practice

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Abstract

In Norway research on immigrants and the labour market has to a large degree focused on immigrants’ shortcomings, be it their lacking knowledge, competence and skills (KCS) or their failures in being recruited to available jobs. This study seeks to refocus current academic interest and investigates the potential benefits of recruiting immigrant employees. It explores highly skilled immigrants and how their KCS is valued, shared and used in a Norwegian workplace.

In this study seven immigrant employees in a State organisation (the Directorate) are interviewed about their experiences with having their KCS validated, shared and used. In addition they reflect on the Directorate’s framework conditions for sharing learning, and whether the organisation is able to expand the organisational culture to embrace immigrants’ values, opinions and practices.

The study adopts a socio-cultural view on learning and operationalises this approach through the use of Lave and Wenger’s concept of communities of practice (CoPs). Employees in the Directorate are thus seen as members of CoPs and new immigrant employees as novices going through a participative process to gain access to the CoPs’ repertoire of accepted practices.

Findings indicate that the negotiation of meaning taking place when new, immigrant KCS enters CoPs is a contested process in which both new employees and veteran members go through a process of identity formation. Findings also indicate that although an organisation may have an inclusive work environment regarding surface-level diversity, the inclusion of foreign values, opinions and practices and the development of a diverse learning environment is dependent on a conscious strategy on harvesting foreign KCS.

**Keywords:** immigrants, labour market, knowledge, competence, skills, employees, workplace learning, qualitative study, validation of knowledge, knowledge sharing, framework conditions for workplace learning, socio-cultural perspective, community of practice, Lave and Wenger, identity, diversity.
Acknowledgements

This thesis is part of the requirements for the Master’s programme Adult Learning and Global Change (ALGC), which is an international Master’s offered by the University of Linköping in collaboration with the Canadian University of British Columbia, the South African University of Western Cape and the Australian Monash University. I would like to thank my fellow international students who have inspired me throughout the ALGC programme. I would also like to thank my tutors of ALGC and my supervisor Robert Aman from the University of Linköping. In addition, I would like to thank my respondents for their engagement and interest in this study. Lastly, but most importantly, I would like to thank Rune Andersen for his endless patience, support and love during this two-year process.

Kristiansand, September 2014

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>ALGC</td>
<td>Adult Learning and Global Change (Master’s programme)</td>
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<td>CoP</td>
<td>community of practice</td>
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<td>DM</td>
<td>Directors’ meeting (in the Directorate)</td>
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<td>EEA</td>
<td>European Economic Area</td>
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<td>KCS</td>
<td>knowledge, competence and skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<td>PhD</td>
<td>Doctor of Philosophy</td>
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<td>SSB</td>
<td>Statistisk sentralbyrå [Statistics Norway]</td>
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<td>WPL</td>
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Chapter 1 Introduction

In recent years there has been a development in Norway towards increased ethnic diversity and visible multiculturalism. Immigrants now comprise about 12 percent of the total population and 24 percent of the population in the nation’s capital city. The number of immigrants has doubled from 2003 to 2013 (Andreassen et al., 2013). Immigrants are active members of Norwegian society, including Government, civil society and the working life.

Immigrants carry with them diverse knowledge, competence and skills (KCS). Foreign education, qualifications and experiential learning are assessed and recognised by the education authorities or NOKUT, the Norwegian Competence Centre for Foreign Education. For most professions and trades, however, employers decide whether their companies’ competence requirements are met by immigrant applicants. Some industries actively try to attract skilled labour from abroad. The most skilled immigrants work in the oil industry and in other high-entry professions where Norway is unable to produce enough workers (Horgen, 2013). For instance, 20 % of regular General Practitioners in Norway are immigrants (Vold, 2011).

There is limited research on the KCS such high-skilled immigrants bring with them to a workplace and how this kind of foreign labour influences Norwegian workplaces. So far research has focused on the upskilling and reskilling of low-skilled immigrants and refugees to decrease the skills mismatch between their KCS and the needs of the labour market. This attention reflects the many cases where newly arrived refugees lack basic skills or skills relevant for the labour market, or when skilled immigrants’ KCS is not recognised by Norwegian authorities or employers. Other important focus areas are recruitment policies and discrimination of immigrants by employers (AID, 2007). In short, existing research has focused mainly on the shortcomings of immigrants, whether it is their KCS or how and why they fall through in recruitment to jobs (Midtbøen & Rogstad, 2012; Thorshaug & Valenta, 2012).

Regarding immigrant influence on working life there is however a certain growing focus on managing diversity in Norwegian organisations. In many companies, diversity strategies are adopted to increase the number of immigrant applicants in recruitment processes, and combat discrimination at work. Diversity practices are however more than just fair recruitment policies and the absence of discrimination (Wrench, 2007). Although diversity management can be defined in several ways, it usually encompasses the idea of developing a work environment that works for all employees (Thomas, 1991). There is little research on organisations that include highly skilled immigrants and how these immigrants’ diverse KCS contributes to or changes the organisational culture.

1.1. Aim
The aim of this thesis is to investigate how the KCS of high-skilled immigrant employees is valued, used and shared in the workplace, and how this ‘foreign’ KCS contributes to organisational change. By doing so the study will contribute to current learning in this field and hopefully inspire employers – especially heads of units and human resources staff – to explore the diversity of their organisations’ learning environments. The focus of the study is
immigrants working in a State organisation (the Directorate) where higher education is an entry requirement for employment. The reason for this choice is to refocus the current preoccupation with immigrants’ shortcomings in the Norwegian labour market and rather address highly skilled immigrants’ contribution to the learning environment and organisational culture of Norwegian workplaces. Apart from Al-Mousa (2008) there is not much literature available on immigrant KCS being adopted, valued and used in workplace communities of practice. This thesis may thus manage to create new knowledge on this topic, at least in a Norwegian perspective.

1.2. Research questions

- How, specifically, is highly skilled immigrant workers’ KCS valued, used and shared with colleagues in the Directorate?
- In what ways do the Directorate’s KCS and identity (organisational culture) change as a result of the inclusion of immigrant workers with higher education?

1.3. Overview of this thesis

This current chapter has outlined the particular questions upon which this thesis aims to reflect. It has also placed the questions within a context.

Chapter 2 offers a brief background to immigrant labour in Norway.

Chapter 3 gives a limited overview of the literature connected to this field of study, with special relevance to Norwegian research. The review aims to present different viewpoints and explanations and situates the thesis in an academic context.

Chapter 4 presents the theoretical framework on which this thesis rests, including an overview of concepts used.

In Chapter 5 the methods used are presented and discussed, as well as the ethical considerations and limitations of this thesis.

Findings are to be found in Chapter 6.

Chapter 7 presents a discussion of the results and methods used.

Chapter 8 presents a brief list of issues suggested for further research on this topic.

The references section lists the literature used in this study,
Chapter 2 Immigrant labour in Norway

Immigration has been a part of Norway’s history since Viking times. Many immigrant groups have constituted elites in Norwegian society, among them the German members of the Hanseatic League (c. 1350-1550) and the Danish officials during the union between Denmark and Norway (1537-1814). Foreign labour has been important to develop the export industries since the era of wooden sailing ships to today’s petroleum and gas.

2.1. Immigrants and immigration to Norway today
In 2014, immigrants comprised 12.4 % of the Norwegian population. Statistics Norway’s definition of ‘immigrant’ is widely used: a person who has immigrated to Norway; and who is born abroad to two parents born abroad (SSB, 2014). This definition is adopted in this thesis.

Immigrants to Norway are a diverse group. However, much policy, research and statistics on immigrants and the labour market have not aimed to subdivide this group further. Some studies have however looked specifically at refugees (Bore et al., 2013; Djuve, 2011) and a few have concentrated their efforts on immigrants from the EU/EEA (Berge, 2006). Østby explores specifically the large immigrant groups from Asia and Africa: Pakistan, Turkey, Vietnam, Iraq, Iran and Somalia (Østby, 2013a), but his research includes descendants.

The number of immigrants moving to Norway to work has grown immensely since 2004-07 when 12 Eastern and Southern European countries joined the EU and got access to the labour market of the EEA. In 2012 immigrants from the EU and their descendants born in Norway constituted 41.5 % of all immigrants in Norway (Østby, 2013b). The three largest groups of immigrants in Norway originate from Poland, Sweden and Lithuania (Statistics Norway, 2014). EU immigrants are included in the respondent groups of this thesis.

Refugees and their families are also a growing immigrant group in Norway. In 2012 they constituted 1.9 % of the population. The largest nationality groups are Somalis, Iraqis, Vietnamese and Iranians (Østby, 2013b). This thesis includes respondents of refugee background.

2.2. Immigrants in the Norwegian labour market
Norway has one of the highest levels of employment in the world. 75.4 % of the population between 15 and 64 is active in the labour market, compared to an OECD average of 65.2 (OECD, 2014). The share of women workers is highest in Europe. 73.3 % of Norwegian women work, compared to an EU average of 58.2 % and an OECD average of 59 %. “Don’t envy us our oil; envy us our women,“ the Norwegian President of the Parliament is fond of saying (Royal Norwegian Embassy, Washington D.C., 2012, p. 2).

Immigrants to Norway are active members of the labour market. While constituting 12 % of the population, about 13 % of all workers in Norway are immigrants. Immigrants are responsible for more than 60 % of the growth in the total number of employees in Norway in the 2002-2012 period (Olsen, 2013). Statistics for the age group 15-74 show that 68.6 % of the native population in Norway work while the employment rate for immigrants is 63.1 % (SSB, 2014). Register-based data from the second quarter of 2014 however show an unemployment rate among immigrants of 7 %, compared to 1.9 % for the native population.
The vision of the Norwegian Government is to ensure employment opportunities for all, and to close the employment gap between immigrants and the general population, and specifically ensure that immigrant women participate in the labour market (BLD, 2012).

To achieve this goal, the Government has implemented an expansive list of measures. These range from processes recognising foreign education, qualifications and experiential learning via anti-discrimination regulations and fair recruitment procedures to an active promotion of the ideals of the Norwegian social model to immigrants (Rugkåsa, 2013). Norwegian language skills are often considered the most important factor in ensuring access to the labour market (BLD, 2012). The Government offers free language classes for certain categories of immigrants (mainly refugees and their families). Refugees also have the right to a comprehensive programme that aims to qualify them for the labour market. Although constituting the biggest immigrant group in the labour market, EU immigrants have no right to free language classes (Einarsen, 2013).

Norwegian companies count on average 10.5% immigrants among their employees and the number has been growing since 2008 (Horgen, 2012). 66% of companies with more than 10 employees have immigrant workers. There are however great differences between the different sectors. Immigrants are overrepresented in jobs like cleaning and hotel services and underrepresented in the finance and insurance sectors. Immigrants from Africa and Asia are underrepresented in most sectors except construction, farming and fisheries, and local transport.

2.3. Diversity in State organisations in Norway

The organisation studied in this thesis is a public, bureaucratic organisation where higher education is an entry requirement for employment. To preserve the anonymity of this organisation and the respondents, the organisation has been renamed the Directorate. There are 60 directorates in Norway. This Directorate is, like many others, a decentralised organisation with regional offices.

Being a public institution, the Directorate is committed to the State’s overall policies and strategies regarding its employees. The Norwegian State has a visible inclusion and diversity focus in its recruitment policy and is at the forefront in implementing measures against discrimination in the workplace. State organisations have to report on their diversity measures and policies annually.

All businesses in Norway, public and private, must follow the regulations set out in the Law on discrimination. Public organisations on State level are committed to a policy in which at least one immigrant applicant must be invited to participate in an interview if he or she is otherwise qualified for the position.

There are great differences between various State organisations regarding the number of immigrant staff. Likewise there is a difference concerning systems and competence needed to make use of the skills offered by immigrant workers (BLD, 2012).

Every year the Directorate publishes its annual report where the organisation describes its aims, objectives and results. Related to diversity issues, the Directorate’s objective is the following: 25% of employees should be of immigrant origin [either immigrants or persons born in Norway to two immigrant parents, excluding Nordic citizens]. Both in 2011 and 2012 this goal was exceeded as 30% of employees belonged to this category, while in 2013 the
number was 29 %. 25 % of managers in the organisation are of immigrant origin, and 48 % of all newly employed in 2012 (the Directorate, 2012, 2013).
Chapter 3 Literature Review

3.1 Sharing immigrant KCS in Norwegian workplaces

This thesis investigates how highly skilled immigrant workers’ knowledge, competence and skills (KCS) are valued, used and shared with colleagues in the Directorate, and how this process changes the Directorate’s overall KCS and organisational culture. KCS is an essential concept in this study and Cedefop’s definitions are used (Cedefop, 2008):

- **Competence**: The ability to apply learning outcomes adequately in a defined context (e.g. the workplace). Competence is not limited to cognitive elements (involving the use of theory, concepts or tacit knowledge); it also encompasses functional aspects (involving technical skills) as well as interpersonal attributes (e.g. social or organisational skills) and ethical values;
- **Knowledge**: The outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is the body of facts, principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of study or work;
- **Skills**: The ability to perform tasks and solve problems.

There is a need to identify literature that will broaden our understanding of how immigrants’ KCS is valued, used and shared at work in Norway. In the context of this thesis, valuing, using and sharing KCS involve the assumption that there is a group present that can access and make use of the knowledge, competence and skills of the individual immigrant. How this acquisition process is understood in this thesis is explained in the theory chapter.

There are few Norwegian studies relating specifically to the aim of this thesis. Tronstad’s study on experiences of discrimination among immigrants (2009) has a chapter on working life, but he has not explored the learning environment of immigrants.

Tynes and Sterud’s survey on working conditions of immigrants (2009) briefly explores immigrants’ possibilities to make use of their skills and knowledge at work. The focus seems to be on the individual worker and his or her possibilities of making use of their previous learning at work; not on how the organisation values, makes use of or shares their KCS. The survey finds that 75% of immigrants consider their possibilities to make use of their knowledge and skills ‘good’ or ‘very good’. This is lower than the score of the total population, where 85% answer ‘very good’. Immigrants with higher education score higher than those with lower education levels. The survey does not explore the reasons why immigrants score lower than Norwegians, but briefly mentions issues like lack of network, language difficulties and cultural issues.

In his 2010 study Tronstad interviewed employers and union representatives about diversity. While the learning environment is not specifically addressed, the study shows that language skills are both a problem and a blessing at work, especially regarding immigrants from land group 2 (land group 2 is a concept used by Statistics Norway. It comprises countries in Eastern Europe excluding EU countries, Africa, Asia (including Turkey), Middle and South America and Oceania excluding Australia and New Zealand). Companies get access to foreign language skills but at the same time the lack of Norwegian language skills is a
challenge. However, several employers and union representatives identify creativity, innovation, better work ethics and an international work environment as benefits that accompany immigrant workers.

3.2. Diversity in Norwegian State organisational cultures

There exists hardly any Norwegian literature on how the inclusion of immigrant KCS changes a workplace’s organisational culture, let alone the organisational culture or identity of State organisations.

The Randstad work monitor concludes in their 2013 survey that 20% of Norwegians believe their work environment has changed in a negative manner because of immigrants in the workplace, while 30% argue the inclusion of immigrants has had a positive effect on the work environment (NTB, 2014). This survey is not limited to public organisations and there is a lack of research on how State employees experience the growing diversity in their workplaces.

In 2012, the Royal Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion (BLD) solicited a knowledge summary on diversity in Norwegian workplaces (Bore, et al., 2013). The main focus of this report is recruitment and discrimination. Bore finds that much literature and discourse on diversity in Norwegian workplaces relate to surface-level diversity (age, gender, physical characteristics, citizenship, country of origin). There is a lack of research on deep-level diversity, which refers to values, opinions, personality, knowledge, skills and application of certain practices like management.

In her 2012 paper, Urstad has included a discussion on the notion of knowledge regimes, which, although it is not specifically linked to the public sector, offers a link between diversity and knowledge in the workplace:

Diversity is viewed as coming into play as employees belong to various knowledge regimes. Each knowledge regime is comprised of individuals with similar education and institutional experience [...]. The concept of knowledge regimes provides an understanding of deep-run differences between individuals and groups. Regimes of knowledge can be seen as fields of understanding and communication of both verbal and non-verbal signs. They constitute cognitive models for thinking, and within these regimes there are conceptions of how the good life looks like, what the important and relevant facts are, how a problem is to be solved, and what the preferred results are (Urstad, 2012, p. 25).

Literature on managing diversity in Norwegian State organisations is scarce. Rogstad and Solbække (2012) have looked into diversity management among heads of units in a major Norwegian hospital with an ethnically diverse staff. They found that while managers strongly support ideals of diversity, little is done to ensure equal treatment of staff, and passiveness and benign indifference is widespread.

In 2011 The Norwegian Directorate for Diversity and Inclusion (IMDi) produced a report on diversity in State enterprises. The findings show that the number of immigrants being successful in recruitment procedures has increased, and that there has been a slight increase in the number of top executives with immigrant background. 16 out of 25 organisations studied have diversity practices as part of their strategies, but the number of organisations that specifically work to enhance multicultural issues in their diversity work has decreased from
“In many enterprises, middle managers feel that a clearly stated internal prioritisation and demonstrated efforts from the top management are lacking and that the HR department does not support them when it comes to employing immigrants and in relation to diversity management” (IMDi, 2011, p. 9).

IMDi’s report touches briefly upon some issues concerning work environments where immigrants from land group 2 are employed. The findings indicate that more daily management is needed in such environments, and middle managers are concerned that the work teams will suffer. Knowledge sharing among middle managers and more engagement from top management and HR are proposed as solutions to these challenges (IMDi, 2011).

Literature reveals that there is, broadly speaking, a lack of a sophisticated view on diversity management in State organisations. In this study, managing diversity is defined as a mutual process between the individual employee and the organisation he or she works in, in which adaptation is a two-way street. Managing diversity is not about integrating employees into a majority culture; it is about creating an organisational culture or identity based on the diversity of staff (Thomas, 1991).

3.3. International literature

There is also a lack of international studies that specifically address the research questions of this thesis. Al-Mousa in his PhD dissertation shares my focus on “the implications of the knowledge era for how organisations manage their culturally diverse workforce. The purpose of [his] research is to explore the organisational strategies required for […] businesses to support and encourage the development and sharing of knowledge between employees of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds” (Al-Mousa, 2008, p. 1). He continues:

\[
\text{The research commenced with an interest in identifying effective mechanisms for sharing knowledge in a culturally diverse organisation. The literature review proceeded by exploring the field of knowledge management/sharing which showed that although there has been recognition of the value of leveraging tacit knowledge and the need to share it to enhance the development of social capital, there is no recognition of the importance and value of the variety of cultures and their influences on the development and richness of individuals’ knowledge. Moreover, there was no awareness of the potential contribution cultural diversity can have on individuals’ knowledge (p. 10, my italics).}
\]

Al-Mousa’s answer to this knowledge gap is to create a framework for ‘a holistic Diversity Knowledge Management/Sharing Strategy,’ which identifies the need for organisations to develop a diversity management model which includes, among other elements, an opportunity for social networking through communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Outside Norway, there exists much literature on diverse organisational cultures in both public but especially private enterprises, some of which may be relevant to this study. Bearing in mind the often huge differences between the Norwegian labour market on one hand and the American, European or East Asian (the three regions with most research on diversity in the workplace) on the other, this review has made a very limited selection of international literature, focusing on general approaches. A good example is Wrench, who has developed a typology for diversity management strategies in a workplace. His sixth and last step involves both valuing diversity as well as diversity as contributing to organisational culture:
We can divide this level into two stages. The first is the stage of valuing diversity, where there is a positive desire to work towards an ethnically mixed workforce and recognition of the positive benefits that a diverse workforce can bring to the organisation. The second stage is that of managing diversity which goes further than this by actively managing the diverse mix of employees in ways to contribute to organisational goals and develop a heterogeneous organisational culture (Wrench, 2003, p. 6).

This thesis has made use of Wrench’s typology in the discussion of findings (chapter 6).
Chapter 4 Theoretical framework and concepts

The theory presented in this chapter has been selected to function as a framework through which to explore the research questions of this thesis (see chapter 1). In these questions the perspective is both on individual immigrants’ experiences with having their KCS validated, shared and used, but also on the organisation’s ability to adapt and change as new foreign learning is introduced. The theoretical framework selected is grounded in perspectives and theories of adult learning and workplace learning (WPL), and the data obtained is understood through this approach.

4.1. Learning theory: the socio-cultural perspective

The theoretical understanding of adult learning presented in this thesis rests on a socio-cultural perspective. There are several reasons for this choice. First of all, this perspective places great significance on the context in which learning is processed and meaning is obtained, and how this context influences the content and outcomes of learning. In fact, learning is viewed as situated – it is embedded in an activity, context and culture (Lave and Wenger, 1991). In this study, the context discussed is the workplace (the Directorate).

Secondly, in a socio-cultural view on learning it is proposed that learners through participation are active constructors of knowledge. Information and data only have meaning in a social context which can transform this information into knowledge. Knowledge is the result of social interaction and language use in a shared environment (Vygotsky, 1978). The immigrant employees and their Norwegian colleagues in the Directorate are thus viewed as participants in a shared social environment (the workplace), in which they construct knowledge together.

In this study this socio-cultural perspective is made operative through learning in communities of practice (CoPs). There exists no single-sentence definition of what a CoP is. Wenger describes it in this manner: Members of a CoP have a common identity defined by a shared domain of interest. Membership implies a commitment to this domain, and a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people. To strengthen their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share their experiences and knowledge, and this information is experienced, criticised and acknowledged based on the individuals’ different backgrounds. This process is called negotiation of meaning (Wenger, 1998b). Members build relationships that enable them to learn from each other. Learning takes place not only in the final product but in the process of getting there. Finally, members of a CoP are practitioners. They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, and ways of addressing recurring problems, which ensures a shared practice. This process takes time and sustained interaction (Wenger, 2006).

A CoP goes through several stages of development (Wenger, 1998a). In this study, the focus is on participation in the active stage of development:
4.2. Linking the socio-cultural perspective with workplace learning

Wenger has frequently discussed his theory on CoPs in relation to the labour market and work organisations (Wenger 1991, 1998a, 1998b; Lave and Wenger, 1991). He maintains that CoPs are crucial to organisations that value learning. An organisation contains “a constellation of interconnected communities of practice” in which “knowledge is created, shared, organized, revised, and passed on. [I]t is by these communities that knowledge is ‘owned’ in practice” (Wenger, 1998a, http://www.co-i-l.com/coil/knowledge-garden/cop/lss.shtml).

According to Wenger, CoPs have the potential of filling the following roles in an organisation:

- They can act as places for the exchange and interpretation of information.
- They can retain knowledge in a humane way that also preserves the tacit aspects of knowledge that formal systems cannot capture. For this reason, they are ideal for initiating newcomers into a practice.
- They can act as places of innovation and development as members of these groups discuss novel ideas, work together on problems, and keep up with developments inside and outside a firm.
- They provide homes for identities. Having a sense of identity is a crucial aspect of learning in organisations. The world of work is full of displays of identity, which manifest themselves in the jargon people use, the clothes they wear, and the remarks they make.

In this study the employees of the Directorate have a common identity in the informal work teams they belong to (domain). Employees are committed to these communities, and possess a shared competence that distinguishes them from other people in other workplaces and other CoPs in the Directorate. Members engage in projects, have contact with external and internal
partners, solve problems and discuss laws and regulations. In this work they discuss, disagree, propose solutions, ask for and receive help and thus share their experiences and knowledge (negotiation of meaning). Their KCS is based on their different individual backgrounds, formal education, training, culture, and personal opinions and values, but is being transformed via the social learning processes in the CoP. The employees (practitioners) develop a shared repertoire of resources based on their engagement in the CoP, ensuring a set of common values, opinions and practices (‘this is how we do things in the Directorate’).

Newcomers to a CoP go through a process called legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Learning happens when a newcomer increases his or her skills and moves from the periphery of the group into full participation in the CoP. These ideas are applied in this study as it explores immigrants’ experiences when newcomers to the CoPs in the Directorate. However, unlike Lave and Wenger’s preoccupation with apprentices (that is, novice workers who bring in little relevant learning to the existing CoP and whose main aim is to get access to the CoP’s shared KCS and thus become legitimate members), this study focuses on highly skilled workers and how their KCS was negotiated by existing members in the CoPs.

The introduction of new members has the potential of changing the CoP since it is a context for new insights to be transformed into knowledge. Learning is reciprocal as old-timers engage in new practices based on the transformation of new information into a common pool of knowledge. In this study focus is on the interaction and participation of immigrant employees in existing CoPs in the Directorate. However, it also briefly explores the identity formation of veteran members and how the organisational culture of the Directorate is changing to adapt to diverse KCS.

Since this study explores how immigrants’ KCS is valued, shared and used at work the emphasis is on the interaction in the CoPs and how this is described by the respondents. The immigrant respondents were asked to describe the process in which their KCS was experienced, criticised and acknowledged by the CoPs, while the focus group was asked to assess this process from their veteran point of view (see Methods chapter for further information on methodology and definitions of newcomer and veteran concepts used in this section).

4.3. Workplace learning
The small scope of this thesis means that the learning processes taking place in the CoPs, however interesting, can not be subjected to further exploration. However, it may be beneficial to the reader to get a brief overview of the concepts commonly associated with workplace learning (WPL) and which are implicit in the author’s understanding of learning in the CoPs in the Directorate.

In this study, WPL is understood as learning-on-the-job and includes non-formal and informal learning embedded in work tasks and in job-related processes (Cedefop, 2012). The reason for this definition is its relevant link to the author’s view of learning as situated, as described above.

There is no single accepted definition of WPL. The concept is used along a continuum of how closely linked it is to the workplace, from off-the-job training based on workplace-relevant topics to learning-on-the-job (Cedefop, 2012). Categories of WPL can also be linked to its
formality or level of recognition and include formal learning (learning as a result of formal education, proven by an official, recognised diploma), non-formal learning (learning as a result of planned instructional activities, e.g. an ICT course) and informal learning (learning as a result of executing regular work tasks).

When a newcomer arrives at a workplace he or she is usually offered non-formal courses in the various systems used by the organisation. In a public organisation like the one studied in this thesis, such non-formal courses would include training in relevant ICT systems, planned and steered discussions on the application of laws and regulations, presentations of current projects and initiatives, etc. This kind of training is usually offered by colleagues and closely linked to the work tasks the newcomer is supposed to execute. It is part of the organisation’s strategy for ensuring that the newcomer is operative as soon as possible.

Informal learning is of special relevance to this study as this is the most common form of learning in the workplace. Informal learning occurs through direct involvement in work tasks and may be intentional and conscious, but most often unintentional and unconscious. Schugurensky (2000) proposes this subdivision of the concept:

- **Self-directed learning** refers to ‘learning projects’ undertaken by individuals (alone or as part of a group) without the assistance of an ‘educator’ (teacher, instructor, facilitator), but it can include the presence of a ‘resource person’ who does not regard herself or himself as an educator. It is both intentional and conscious. It is intentional because the individual has the purpose of learning something even before the learning process begins, and it is conscious, in the sense that the individual is aware that she or he has learned something.

- **Incidental learning** refers to learning experiences that occur when the learner did not have any previous intention of learning something out of that experience, but after the experience she or he becomes aware that some learning has taken place. Thus, it is unintentional but conscious.

- **Socialization** refers to the internalisation of values, attitudes, behaviors, skills, etc. that occur during everyday life. Not only we have no a priori intention of acquiring them, but we are not aware that we learned something.

Workplace learning is often discussed in terms of explicit and tacit learning. Tacit learning (Polanyi, 1967) is knowledge learners possess which influences cognitive processing. However, they may not necessarily express it or be aware of it, cf. Schugurensky’s term *socialization* above. Explicit knowledge is knowledge a learner is conscious of, including tacit knowledge that converts into an explicit form (Cedefop, 2008). According to Lave and Wenger, workers get access to each others’ tacit and explicit knowledge via social participation in a CoP. Newcomers’ KCS is validated by the members of the CoP, but at the same time veterans are influenced by new KCS, resulting in a development of practice and ultimately a potential for organisational change.

In this thesis employees are considered members of CoPs in the Directorate and WPL is understood through the lens of situated learning. Through negotiations between members, knowledge is created and included in the shared repertoire. Apart from non-formal courses offered by the organisation, most learning is informal and may be subdivided further according to Schugurensky.
By the use of Unwin’s identification of variations of political economies (Unwin et al., 2007) the Directorate can be located within a coordinated market economy (CME). An organisation in a CME is characterised by a strong support for training and collaboration in order to enhance the skills and efficiency of the workers, because these organisations control assets (workers) that cannot be readily diverted to other purposes and the results obtained by the organisation depend on the collaboration of these assets. CME organisations are also characterised by a high unionisation rate, long-term employment, and equal income distribution (Hall and Soskice, 2001). The level of employee representation in the power structures of the labour market in Norway is the highest in Europe; making sure that workers are influencing their daily work tasks and participating in work improvement processes. The level of autonomy in the execution of work tasks and the incidence of team work is also among the highest in Europe, ensuring high performance or output and high motivation in workers (Eurofound, 2012).

4.4. Identity formation in communities of practice

Identity formation is an essential part of the learning processes in CoPs. According to Wenger, “it is our participation in social communities and cultural practices that provides the very materials out of which we construct who we are, give meaning to what we do, and understand what we know” (Wenger, 1991, p. 2).

Each member brings different experiences to the CoP, and the social context influences these experiences. As members constantly encounter new information and data, they negotiate new meaning based on their different backgrounds and experiences, and ultimately reach consensus to include new practice into the repertoire. Fenwick describes this perspective as participative: “Adults do not learn from experience, they learn in it” (Fenwick, 2000, p. 254) and underlines the social and personal outcomes of this participation. The learning taking place is considered meaningful, not only because it is related to meaningful work tasks or is identified as relevant to the work taking place but also because it reinforces the social bonds between the members of the CoP and strengthens their identity as a fellowship of learners. However, “engaging in the practices of a workplace is a negotiated and contested process, not simply a matter of being shaped by social agency or asserting a personal approach” (Kubiak and Sandberg, 2011, p. 17).

Barriers to negotiating new meaning and creating new practices are often linked to the strength of existing norms and values: “Norms, values and practices shape and sustain activities and interactions within workplaces, as in other social practices […] the structuring of these experiences in workplaces is often inherently pedagogical as they are directed towards the continuity of the practice through participant learning” (Billett, 2002, p. 59). Many organisations are conservative in adopting new KCS, values and opinions and in developing new practices.

Employees in the Directorate belong to professional class of civil servants as described by Davies (2002). Their work is based on a complex body of knowledge and expertise, steered by a set of values, ethics and methods. Chappell argues that global change involves the restructuring of “working identities, working knowledges [sic] and working relationships” (Chappell et al., 2000, p. 1) since mobility of workers implies foreign KCS being introduced to CoPs. While many sectors like the petroleum industry, manufacturing and sales have been exposed to foreign KCS, including values, attitudes and practices, for years, State
organisations like the Directorate have just recently experienced an influx of immigrant labour.

In addition, Chappell claims that the mission of a workplace is to construct a social identity beneficial for the organisation. The organisation is however also the sum of the identities of the staff, as the employees bring KCS, values and individual identities into a workplace and help shape it. The applicability of this process increases in organisations with flat power structures and a high degree of trust and responsibility. These framework conditions are briefly explored in this study.

4.5. Framework conditions for workplace learning

To create a workplace where learning is shared between workers, and CoPs are recognised as functional learning environments, certain framework conditions need to be in place (Ellström, 2010; Tynjälä, 2008; Järvensivu and Koski, 2012). Among these are mechanisms that ensure access to relevant information and instruments for sharing information, organisational features that ensure participation, motivation and innovation, and management practices that highlight power sharing and shared ownership. An organisation who values diversity needs framework conditions that ensure that the diversity is not only accepted but actively made beneficial to the organisation (Thomas, 1991).

Many researchers (Billett, 2002; Järvensivu and Koski, 2012) discuss power relations in workplaces as barriers to learning. In a Norwegian context, much emphasis is placed on trust and the absence of hierarchies in order to develop successful learning environments.

Wenger has outlined a set of proposals for organisations on how to nurture CoPs. They include among others how to support CoPs by recognising the work of sustaining them; by giving members the time to participate in activities; and by creating an environment in which the value communities bring is acknowledged. Another proposal is to create awareness of CoPs’ strategic value:

People work in teams for projects but belong to longer-lived communities of practice for maintaining their expertise. The value of team-based projects that deliver tangible products is easily recognized. The learning that communities of practice share is just as critical, but its longer-term value is more subtle to appreciate. Organisations must therefore develop a clear sense of how knowledge is linked to business strategies and use this understanding to help communities of practice articulate their strategic value (Wenger, 1998a, http://www.co-i-l.com/cool/knowledge-garden/cop/lss.shtml).

A concept that is particularly interesting to explore in this study is an organisation’s absorptive capacity as defined by Cohen and Levinthal (1990): the ability to recognise the value of new information, assimilate it and apply it to commercial ends. It refers to an organisation’s ability to use opportunities (e.g. newcomers’ KCS) for its own innovative purposes. Unlike material resources, knowledge is increased when shared. The ability to harvest foreign KCS thus involves several positive loops:

Absorptive capacity […] stimulates own R&D&I [research, development, innovation] activities within the company, and this, in turn, has a positive effect on absorptive capacity. Another positive feedback loop concerns interdependencies between absorptive capacity and [KCS] development: the
higher the absorptive capacity, the more learning potential is available for building up expertise. High levels of [KCS] again boost absorptive capacity (Cedefop, 2012, p. 20).

That learning in the workplace is dependent on the organisational practices discussed above is a premise in the theoretical framework of this thesis, and the mechanisms at work for valuing, using and sharing outside knowledge are explored in the discussion of the data obtained. Of particular interest is the absorptive capacity of the Directorate and if and how it has created a recognised framework for securing the adoption and negotiation of KCS of immigrant employees.

4.6. Foreign knowledge, competence and skills

The respondents in this study possess extensive KCS since the Directorate is a complex organisation with high entry demands. Many of them have obtained their informal and formal KCS abroad before they started working in the Directorate, or have mixed their foreign KCS with Norwegian learning experiences. This situation creates a slightly different variant on newcomers’ process of becoming legitimate members in a CoP. This fact is also the basis for a discussion on how such foreign KCS changes the repertoire and practices of existing CoPs in a way that contributes to diversity in the organisation. Of particular interest are the interpersonal attributes and ethical values that are aspects of the competence element. While all new employees bring with them values, opinions and practices that are negotiated and may be included in the repertoire of the CoP, immigrant competence and knowledge have the potential of creating larger changes in the organisation since they can be perceived as less traditional and thus more innovative. However, this perception of foreign KCS may also hinder its negotiation and inclusion in the repertoire as it may be viewed as being of less value.

4.7. Organisational culture and diversity

Most organisations appreciate a certain diversity. By diversity is meant an inclusion of minorities in the workforce. In a typical Norwegian public organisation context like the Directorate these minorities commonly encompass groups like the disabled, immigrants and ethnic minorities and a variety of employees based on gender and age. This thesis has singled out one of these minorities: immigrants.

One of the main reasons for recruiting minorities and promoting diversity is to get hold of qualified candidates, despite prejudices. Another is the potential for alternative viewpoints and creativity that may come with a diverse staff. One of the objectives more peculiar to public organisations is to mirror the existing diversity in the population and thus create better services for the total population. (BLD, 2012). Whatever argument is used, the exceptionality of minorities is accepted by the Norwegian government as being of value and therefore to be provided via a specific recruitment policy.

The Directorate has applied a specific recruitment policy to hire immigrant workers, has set objectives for the number of immigrants to be interviewed and hired, and reports on this policy in their annual reports (The Directorate 2012, 2013). No other minority receives this kind of attention, which suggests that the Directorate places greater value on the recruitment of immigrants than on other minority groups like for instance the disabled and ethnic minorities like the Sami.
As outlined in the research questions (see chapter 1), this thesis investigates how the KCS of high-skilled immigrant employees is valued, used and shared in the workplace, and how this ‘foreign’ KCS contributes to organisational change. These questions are understood and explored through the theoretical lens of learning in CoPs. The selection of immigrant respondents is a conscious choice to link learning theory to diversity in the workplace. By recruiting immigrants with foreign KCS or a mix of foreign and Norwegian KCS there is a greater potential for change, as discussed above. Highly skilled immigrants bring with them a slightly different type of KCS than the majority culture, and contribute thus to a potential of changing existing CoPs in a slightly different way than other new employees belonging to the majority culture. BLD’s argument on alternative viewpoints as a benefit of recruiting immigrants and promoting diversity is thus echoed in the theoretical framework described in this chapter.

The benefits of recruiting immigrants are dependent on how successful CoPs are in adopting and adapting immigrant KCS, and how the framework conditions of the organisation enhance the learning environment. These aspects are discussed in chapter 6 below.
Chapter 5 Methods

This study proposes a view on workplace learning (WPL) as a social practice and has thus selected a theoretical framework that is compliant with this view. By the use of a qualitative research strategy the study seeks to uncover the experiences, identity and learning of the members of a CoP in an organisation.

A qualitative research strategy can uncover the largely tacit or implicit knowledge, attitudes, values and ideas that respondents possess and which may explain their behaviour and ideas. This empirical data is subsequently used to identify similarities and differences between the respondents and extract patterns. By the use of a theoretical framework (see previous chapter) the aim is to identify a connection between the social reality of the respondents and theories of workplace learning.

5.1. Qualitative methods

As a data collecting technique, this study has made use of semi-structured interviews as they allow the author to make use of an open, flexible method of data gathering that can be adjusted to explore the interviewee’s points of view and thus obtain rich, detailed answers (Bryman, 2012). As opposed to structured interviews used in quantitative research, where respondents must be pigeon-holed to fit into the researcher’s preordained boxes, a qualitative interview may produce new information and convey experiences outside any preconceived notions the researcher may possess. In this way theory and concepts are created while performing the interviews and the analysis, and the data collection is not used to prove an already existing theory.

To explore interactions in a CoP, methods like ethnography may be better suited to observe actions and activities. Qualitative interviews are limited as they mainly provide descriptions of CoP activity, as seen through the eyes of the respondent. The reason for selecting qualitative interviews over ethnography was the fact that the Directorate did not have a sufficient number of new immigrant employees that could be observed during this study’s brief period of data collection. In addition, the Directorate is a decentralised organisation, which would mean that the author had to travel extensively to make observations. A feasible solution was therefore to interview available immigrant employees about their historic experiences, and secure triangulation via the use of focus groups.

Semi-structured interviews follow a list of questions called an interview guide. There is however a lot of freedom in applying the guide, and sometimes the guide is just an inventory of issues to be covered. To create a useful interview guide the author asked herself the questions suggested by Bryman (2012):

- Just what about this thing is puzzling me?
- What do I need to know in order to answer each of the research questions I am interested in?

The last bullet point is necessary in order to plan what the interviewees will see as significant and important.
For interview guides used in this study, please see Appendix 2 and 3.

5.2. Context description
The enterprise selected for this study is a State organisation of medium size (200-500 employees). It is one of 60 directorates in Norway. The directorates are part of the executive branch of government and commonly linked to a ministry. Directorates vary extensively in size, organisation, management, tasks and visibility. Most of them have specialist tasks that demand highly skilled employees, continuous competence development and a high degree of flexibility.

Like many Norwegian directorates, the organisation selected for this study is decentralised with several regional offices. It has a Director that leads the organisation through the Directors’ meeting. Recruitment, competence development and diversity strategy are the responsibility of the individual offices as well as the centrally placed human resources unit.

The Directorate’s diversity policy regarding immigrants is mostly linked to recruitment and anti-discrimination. It is highly active in recruiting immigrants to available positions.

5.3. Semi-structured interviews
Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven immigrant employees to explore in depth their experiences as new immigrant employees to existing CoPs in the Directorate. The objectives of these interviews were:

1) To provide descriptions of the processes in which the respondents’ KCS was negotiated by existing CoPs;
2) To provide specific examples on how their KCS was used;
3) To explore circumstances that helped or hindered the validation, use and sharing of their KCS;
4) To explore the processes of identity formation that took place when respondents became members of existing CoPs;
5) To explore the potential benefits for validating, using and sharing immigrant KCS in the organisation.

Four interviews were conducted in person and three via Lync. The interviews were conducted in the respondents’ workplace during working hours. Each interview took between 50 and 90 minutes and was recorded via an app on iPhone5. The data was then uploaded onto a computer via iTunes and iExplorer, allowing the author to replay interviews and transcribe them by hand.

All respondents took a great interest in the study and readily accepted the author’s invitation to act as participants. They were presented with an information sheet about the study and informed about anonymity and other ethical considerations (see Appendix 1).

5.4. Focus group
One focus group with a total of four participants was established to provide information on veteran Norwegian employees’ experiences with processes of validation, use and sharing of KCS in the Directorate, and reflections on diversity and organisational development. The focus group approach was selected because this study is primarily interested in the participants’ experiences as members of a CoP, and not specifically in their individual experiences. Focus groups are considered a good method because it may increase the volume
of relevant knowledge if the participants become inspired by each other and collectively manage to come up with more examples and viewpoints, including disagreements.

To ensure that the participants provided information during the focus groups that could be used to answer the research questions, an interview guide with general, open-ended questions was created. The author strove to create an atmosphere of trust and openness where the participants collectively made sense of the research questions and constructed meaning around the topic. As a moderator, the author however allowed the participants much leeway to secure engagement and a wide approach to the topic and only interfered when the discussion became irrelevant. She also made sure all participants were active and that only one person spoke at a time.

5.5. Selection criteria

The selection criteria for participants were as following: Immigrant participants had to be employed by the Directorate in a permanent position and they had to comply with Statistics Norway’s definition of being an immigrant. While the Directorate itself applies a wider definition in their diversity work (including descendants of immigrants), the respondents of this study needed to adhere to Statistics Norway’s definition. The reason for this is that the study seeks to explore the validation, use and sharing of KCS partly or wholly developed abroad.

Participants were sampled to ensure a variety concerning gender, age and country background:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fictional name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Level of education</th>
<th>Region born in</th>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Number of years in Norway</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zahi</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Higher education</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>30-50</td>
<td>10+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gavriel</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Higher education</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>50+</td>
<td>10+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Higher education</td>
<td>EU</td>
<td>50+</td>
<td>10+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ewa</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Higher education</td>
<td>EU</td>
<td>30-50</td>
<td>10+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Higher education</td>
<td>EU</td>
<td>30-50</td>
<td>10+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jahan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Higher education</td>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>30-50</td>
<td>10+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lejla</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Higher education</td>
<td>Europe outside EU</td>
<td>50+</td>
<td>10+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The respondent group for the interviews consisted of four women and three men, within the age groups 30s to 60s. Two participants were from Africa, one from Asia, three from the EU and one from Europe outside the EU. All participants have resided in Norway for more than 10 years, and none of them classified as newly arrived immigrants when they obtained a job in the Directorate.
The participants exhibited great KCS variation, with different combinations of higher education and work experiences obtained in Norway and abroad. This type of background information as well as the number of years they have been employed by the Directorate is not presented in the table above for anonymity reasons (see Ethical considerations below).

Participants in the focus group had to be employed by the Directorate in a permanent position; and they had to be employed by the organisation for a number of years. The reason for this is that they had to be able to have a historical perspective on the organisational development and the CoPs of the Directorate. In this respect they are in this study considered ‘veterans’. They were all Norwegians without immigrant background, in the age groups 30-60. All focus group members were women:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fictional name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Number of years in the Directorate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nina</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30-50</td>
<td>5-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marianne</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50+</td>
<td>10+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kari</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50+</td>
<td>10+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristine</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30-50</td>
<td>10+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants were recruited via personal emails, where the study was described and the value of their participation outlined.

5.6. Analysis

All interviews were recorded using an app by iPhone5, uploaded onto a computer and subsequently transcribed manually. The reason for recording the interviews was to ensure that the dynamics of the group processes and interviews were not interrupted. The manual transcription method was selected since the number of interviews was limited. A larger number would have demanded the use of transcription software. The analysis is based on the data obtained during the focus groups and interviews.

A qualitative data analysis approach was applied in this study. Data was broken down into components and coded as they emerged from the focus groups and interviews. The codes were not preconceived, but emerged from the material at hand and were subjected to constant revision.

The coded units were constantly compared in order to establish categories and concepts that were subjected to theoretical analysis by way of exploration of relationships between categories. The components that were shared by several participants received most attention. In this way, hypotheses about connections between categories emerged.

The themes that emerged across all interviews were the following:

- New employees’ willingness and skills in sharing their KCS
- Leadership qualities in the Directorate
- Strategic mechanisms for sharing learning between employees
- The wish for acknowledgement of the potential benefits of immigrant KCS

Finally, findings were interpreted through the theoretical framework selected for this thesis and prepared for presentation, including picking quotes that would illustrate the findings. See chapter 6 for discussion of findings.
5.7. Ethical considerations
Since the author knows several people in the Directorate there will be a risk of biased analysis of data. This fact is countered by involving various approaches like respondent validation and peer review (involving students from ALGC as well as employees from other public organisations).

The data received from the participants was in Norwegian, since the focus groups and interviews (except one) were held in Norwegian. The report is presented in English and the participants’ quotes if used in the report thus had to be translated. The mother tongue of the participants varied, but this did not cause any problems in the communication since they were all fluent in Norwegian.

To keep the anonymity of organisation and participants the organisation has been renamed ‘the Directorate’ and pains have been taken to not include information that could identify it to outsiders. The participants have been given fictional names and quotes that could have helped identifying them have not been included in this report. In this methods chapter, the author has refrained from linking information to the individual participants that taken together could have revealed their identity, and rather provided such information in a manner that secures anonymity.

The participants’ consent to be involved in the study was secured via a consent form which included information on how their data would be treated. The ethical principles of the Swedish Research Council have been applied. These principles outline the duty of the researcher to inform participants of their rights and obtain their consent, and give guidelines on how to treat data.

5.8. Limitations
Due to this thesis’ confined scope, it carries several limitations. First of all, there is little room for an extensive literature and theory review (Chapters 2, 3 and 4). The literature review is in addition limited because there is a severe lack of Norwegian research on the topic of this thesis.

The number of respondents is restricted. One consequence of this is a limited amount of data, creating findings and conclusions that at best are tendencies or trends instead of presenting a complete picture. However, since the research design is qualitative, the findings are not meant to be representative for the Norwegian labour market – indeed not even for the entire organisation in which the respondents work. However, although the results of this study are specific to the Directorate and the individual respondents, the presentation of the research design in this chapter, as well as the theoretical framework, strengthens the possibility that this study may be repeated in other organisations.

Being a decentralised organisation, the process of conducting focus groups with the commonly proposed number of participants would involve extensive travelling. Focus group recordings also take a long time to transcribe. The author therefore decided to do just one focus group, although this severely undermined the number of groups proposed by theorists. However, the Directorate is not a large organisation, and with the combination of interviews and focus groups 60% of regional offices were covered, which will probably ensure that the findings of the study will have at least a certain level of significance.
Although this thesis discusses immigrants’ skills, the focus is on workplace learning and how an organisation handles immigrants’ knowledge, competence and skills and how such foreign KCS changes the organisational culture. The field of WPL carries a complexity that this study is too limited to explore in detail.

It is problematic on many levels to treat the immigrant participants of this study as one group. As outlined in the selection criteria (5.5) the participants were sampled based on country background and represent thus a heterogeneous group. The focus of this study is not on identifying which types of KCS immigrants of various categories (EU immigrants, refugees) or from various countries or regions may bring to an organisation or how an organisation handles these. This kind of specific information were touched upon in the data material but has not been linked to categories or regions in the analysis. Differences between the individual immigrant respondents are to a large extent disregarded as this study rather focuses on their commonality as immigrants as well as their foreignness - the foreign element that they bring with them to a workplace.
Chapter 6 Findings

As mentioned previously, there are not many studies discussing the validation, sharing and use of immigrant KCS in Norwegian organisations. Most studies on immigrants and Norwegian working life concentrate on the shortcomings of immigrants’ skills, or on discriminatory practices of employers. The focus of this thesis is highly skilled immigrants and their experiences on contributing to the learning environment as new employees to a Norwegian State organisation. This chapter outlines these experiences as described via interviews and discusses them through the lens of the theoretical framework presented in chapter 4.

The immigrant respondents of this study became members of CoPs through legitimate peripheral participation. Within the CoPs, their identity and learning were developed as they got access to the CoPs’ repertoires via participation in work activities. In this thesis the focus is mainly on the respondents’ KCS and how it was negotiated to become part of the common repertoire. There is less focus on the learning already present in the CoP and how this learning was made available to the respondents through participation.

Since this study makes use of a methodology that does not include direct observation of this negotiation process, the findings are based on the respondents’ descriptions of the reality they encountered in the CoPs. They describe how their KCS was validated, shared and used via participation in work activities. To a great extent, their descriptions focus on whether their KCS was accepted or not by the CoPs; that is, the outcome of the initial processes of negotiation of meaning.

The Directorate exhibits traits of an expansive learning environment as described by Unwin (2007), where the main skills formation takes place between employees in CoPs in the form of informal learning. In the Directorate, in addition to concrete artefacts like reports, manuals, regulations and routines there is in place a tacit ‘curriculum’ encompassing the silent how tos and don’t dos that exist in a workplace. A new employee gets access to this tacit knowledge via participation.

Respondents had varied experiences with the negotiation process they encountered in the CoPs in the Directorate. Some had positive experiences and quickly became legitimate members of CoPs, while others did not:

*My expertise was welcomed and used and shared, both in this office and in the whole organisation. After three days in the Directorate I did an independent work task outside the office. A room was created for me and my expertise. I felt all the time that I could contribute and that my knowledge was used and challenged. This was one of the reasons I stayed on after my initial engagement with the Directorate: the possibility to contribute and the possibility to develop myself further (Zahi).*

*I was able to transform my [KCS] into something that was relevant for the Directorate; I had no problems [with this]. I knew several people in the Directorate from before. I had worked in another directorate and in [an organisation that cooperates with the Directorate]. Some of what I had written was known to the
organisation. My subject expertise and position was more visible than my status as immigrant. I had practical experiences that fit into my new job in the Directorate. What I lacked was knowledge about how things were done here. I felt equal to my colleagues. I had a certain perspective, with a mix of my own immigrant experiences and a subject expertise. I could bring these perspectives and the expertise into the discussions at work (Gavriel).

I have never been asked to share my [KCS] in the Directorate. No one has asked me about my [KCS]. No one is interested in my knowledge from abroad or curious about that competence. There is absolutely no system in the Directorate for receiving the expertise I brought. I have never heard any other immigrant colleague have any other opinion than mine. I think we share this opinion. I wish my [KCS] was wanted because I would like to keep the knowledge I brought with me to the Directorate (Anna).

There was not much sharing of knowledge in the Directorate when I was hired (Ewa).

This study does not investigate the reasons for the various experiences of the respondents. However, the findings suggest that the success of the negotiation process in the CoPs in the Directorate is based on several factors. Among these are:

- New employees’ willingness and skills in sharing their KCS
- Leadership qualities in the Directorate
- Strategic mechanisms for sharing learning between employees
- A recognised acknowledgement of the potential benefits of immigrant KCS

Each of these themes is discussed below.

6.1. New employees’ willingness and skills in sharing their KCS

Several respondents underline the need for new employees to actively share their KCS with colleagues to enhance the possibility of a successful outcome of negotiations. Findings suggest that new employees who share their KCS willingly and skilfully shape the most effective communities, and quickly become legitimate members of CoPs:

I went into the organisation with openness and my colleagues appreciated my openness. I came up with ideas that resulted in me being invited further into the community. One has to take this kind of responsibility as a newcomer. I didn’t have to prove anything but I got access to a place for sharing knowledge. To be able to listen is important for both newcomers and old-timers. I had to reflect on my KCS and work on knowledge that the Directorate would need (Zahi).

It is important to prove in action that one is able to work. What your papers say or what was discussed during the recruitment process has little to do with how you actually work and what KCS you have. One has to prove that one is able to work, and then one is accepted by colleagues. The employer may be a bit insecure – have we hired the right person and she is an immigrant too – and we have to prove we can. Then trust is established. Skepticism against immigrants is bigger than towards Norwegians. Foreign education is unknown and has to be proven in practice (Maria).

From the first week I started to set in motion a couple of projects (Jahan).
[Newcomers today] want challenges; this is a fine attitude. They are very curious, they ask questions, they are engaged and independent workers (Ewa).

Sharing one’s KCS is very up to the individual – also how one navigates through the organisational system (Gavriel).

These findings are supported by the veteran CoP members of the focus group:

One has to be active to share one’s KCS. If one is active there are good possibilities for one’s KCS to be valued and used. Some know how to use their experience, others are passive. [The potential of sharing KCS] depends on how active they are themselves (Nina).

Willingness to participate and engagement in existing practice is however not enough to secure legitimate participation. Newcomers’ KCS needs to be negotiated by the CoP, and the result of this process can be negative:

I took an initiative and started courses and was very active, [but] the Directorate was not prepared for people like me. In the beginning [when the Directorate was established] there was no thirst after new knowledge (Lejla).

There may be many risks for the negotiation process to go wrong for newcomers. It may be that the newcomer’s KCS is considered irrelevant, obsolete or useless in one way or another. However, it may also be that the new KCS challenges existing norms and values (Billett, 2002). Lejla seems to propose that her KCS was too foreign for the Directorate, and that her KCS did not become a part of the common repertoire because of this characteristic.

I felt that I had a lot to give to the organisation when I started. I was full of enthusiasm. I was the only one with refugee background in my office. I was met with curiosity and pleasantries. I was someone new and different. However, the culture I met was very set in its ways. The curiosity was about my personality and personal history as a refugee, not about my [KCS]. The organisation lacked to a great extent multicultural competence (Lejla).

Jahan supports this view:

Maybe it is not the skills but the practices that are different with immigrants and this may be hard to accept for the majority (Jahan).

Chappell argues that global change (in this case, mobility of labour across international borders) involves restructuring “working identities, working knowledges [sic] and working relationships” (Chappell et al., 2000, p. 1). Lejla clearly suggests that the Directorate did not have a conscious approach to foreign KCS and thus was unable to initiate such a restructuring.

A person who, for some reason, does not contribute with learning in a CoP, is considered a non-participant. Wenger describes how CoP members adhere to a regime of accountability; i.e. that they identify with its practices and contributes to its further development. This kind of commitment is hard work, and a member’s willingness to do it is dependent on his or her identification with the CoP and its practice (Wenger, 2009).
6.2. Leadership qualities in the Directorate

Leadership is commonly recognised as part of an organisation’s framework conditions for learning. Leadership is invaluable for creating and maintaining beneficial learning environments since leaders are hired to motivate employees to follow a common vision, set objectives, secure available resources and co-operate with staff to ensure a good working environment. In short, they have large responsibilities in creating, maintaining and developing an organisation’s culture.

According to Wenger, members of CoPs need time and space to collaborate. The availability of such resources is usually the responsibility of leaders: “[CoPs] do not require much management, but they can use leadership. They self-organize, but they flourish when their learning fits with their organisational environment. The art is to help such communities find resources and connections without overwhelming them with organisational meddling” (Wenger, 1998a, http://www.co-i-l.com/coil/knowledge-garden/cop/lss.shtml).

Several respondents highlight the importance of leadership in the process of recognising, using and sharing immigrants’ KCS. However, the kind of leadership that actively encourages the use of newcomers’ KCS seems to be coincidental in the organisation:

*Personally I have good experiences with valuing, sharing, using KCS at my local office. I believe this has to do with my manager, not with the culture of the Directorate. [...] It’s not an organisational thing, it’s a [name of his leader] thing: a management style that [that person] has. It’s a leadership culture here in [the city in which his office is placed]. I’m pretty sure that if I was in another office it would be different. We [the Directorate] are quite bad [at valuing, using and sharing foreign KCS] (Jahan).*

*I had a manager that recognized my KCS and made room for its use. A leader who made my expertise a priority. I don’t think this is typical for the rest of the organisation (Gavriel).*

Other respondents underline the importance of the Director himself taking an interest in newcomers’ KCS:

*I met the Director and he asked me what is needed for the Directorate to succeed with [a particular work task] – he asked for a meeting. I got confirmation that I was part of a team that stretched to all levels (Zahi).*

*My [previous] leader [in the Directorate] was incompetent in managing and establishing a good working culture. The Director got involved in my case and liked my KCS; it was used extensively by him and made me feel very valuable as an employee. I was challenged a lot; it was very motivating (Ewa).*

The focus group supports these findings. They find that leadership is essential for creating a beneficial work culture, but that leadership qualities are unevenly spread in the Directorate:

*This regional office has extremely good growth possibilities, not sure about rest of the Directorate (Kristine).*

The way decisions are made and how hierarchical an organisation is can have great impact on its work environment, and is thus commonly regarded as part of an organisation’s framework.
conditions for learning (Ellström, 2010; Tynjälä, 2008; Järvensivu and Koski, 2012; Billett, 2002). Management practices that highlight power sharing in the planning, implementation and execution of policy and shared ownership of an organisation’s deliverables are considered essential for the development of learning organisations. In the Directorate the Director steers the organisation by the use of a group of Regional Directors and Executives responsible for HRM, the budget and R&D. Common policy and strategy are discussed and concluded in the Directors’ Meeting (DM). The focus group proposes that the current organisational structure and how the Directors run the organisation is a hinder for learning:

The Directorate has become an organisation where the DM discusses a lot of things previously discussed by the experts. We have become a large organisation with many managers and without instruments for sharing knowledge. Before we had a flat open structure but now it is very hierarchical with many levels. It’s difficult to know who one should contact. The lines are long. The huge number of managers is the greatest barrier for learning. This turn from flat to high structure is very visible, but not intuitive. This creates a slowness in the organisation. It’s difficult to introduce new points to the agenda. It has created insecurity and irritation. The DM is far removed from the ordinary employee. Before we wrote the cases and presented them. Now we just receive information. We only respond when the cases are almost finished and there is little time before the next DM (Marianne).

This kind of practice (if related correctly) goes against WPL theory on how to nurture CoPs by creating an environment in which the value communities bring is acknowledged and their strategic value is endorsed.

6.3. Strategic mechanisms for sharing learning between employees

Ideally, the learning environment should be expansive (that is, ensure that a range of different learning opportunities are available for all workers) to secure the necessary skills formation (Unwin et al., 2007). In most studies on new employees to organisations the discussion focuses on learning opportunities made available to them. In this study, however, the focus is on how the organisation receives new KCS. The concept of expansiveness thus includes how the organisation manages the process of adopting and adapting new KCS, and whether it has any planned strategy for this process.

For CoPs to develop and learn, they need to be continuously redesigned by the influx of new information. CoPs can be effective learning environments if they exhibit mechanisms that ensure that new KCS is adopted and adapted into a legitimate, relevant form.

As outlined in the theory chapter, organisations need to have in place strategies and mechanisms to secure positive learning conditions. By mechanisms are meant a systematic way of acknowledging the KCS of employees and the creation of a framework suitable for sharing KCS in a way beneficial for colleagues and the organisation. Most respondents agreed that there are no common mechanisms or instruments in place that ensure that employees’ KCS are recognised, used and shared in the Directorate:

The Directorate has no mechanisms or instruments for sharing KCS. One needs time to uncover the organisation’s tacit knowledge. Some are better than others in picking up this type of knowledge. It is probable that an immigrant with little work experience in Norway will have trouble with this tacit knowledge (Gavriel).
The Directorate has no system for knowledge management. It’s a bit strange. In an organisation one should have steel control on what kind of KCS people bring (Anna).

This is supported by the focus group:

Innovation doesn’t happen on its own in an organisation. There must be a strategy and tools for exploiting new KCS. We don’t have any mechanisms for the use and sharing of newcomers’ KCS (Kari).

They continue:

How we treat newcomers is institutionalized just recently, with plans on how to receive them upon entry. We are good with welcoming people and we all think it is positive to get new colleagues. Colleagues use a lot of time on teaching newcomers how we do things in the Directorate, to offer training. From the start it is a goal to be operative very quickly, learn how to do things correctly, how to behave in meetings, for instance. There is very little focus on the fact that the newcomer brings new [KCS]. Something is not being done correctly at this point. The organisation lacks a strategy here or we don’t know the importance of it. It would have been extremely interesting to ask newcomers how they react to what they see and hear and learn (Nina).

When asked what the Directorate could do in order to harvest the KCS of immigrants, several respondents came forward with ideas commonly linked to knowledge management:

I would not go for a specific ethnic diversity plan to harvest the expertise of immigrants. We need a new thinking approach. To uncover hidden skills, unused skills. A broader plan on how to harvest new thinking and hidden skills. Have a bank: what they are working with, skills, hidden skills. How can the organisation benefit from these skills (Jahan).

How, specifically, can an organisation like the Directorate ensure that learning is validated, shared and used? How can its absorptive capacity (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990) be enhanced? Ellström defines an organisation’s learning environment as enabling or constraining on a gliding scale (Ellström, 2010). An enabling learning environment promotes a balance between adaptive learning (learning with a view to master a given task and improve routines) and developmental learning (learning with a focus on creating changes by asking critical questions, questioning the existing situation and developing new ways of learning). The structural factors in a workplace that promote or constrain learning are, among others, the complexity and variety of work tasks and how much control the worker exerts over the tasks, the degree and nature of feedback, the level of participation in problem-solving and development, and the time allocated to reflection, analysis and interaction with others. Norwegian workplaces have a high score on many of these factors (Eurofound, 2012).

The respondents in this study were surprisingly similar in identifying which structural factors need to be in place in the Directorate to promote WPL: a recognition of the importance of shared reflections among employees and cross-regional learning arenas upon which such discussions and reflections may take place:

It’s hard to turn the ship in the public sector. Not much of self-correction. We should discuss how do we change, how do we adapt (Jahan).
There exists an asymmetry between the Directorate’s mandate and how we work in practice. We could have done more if we had a better mandate and a vision about the future. We have too much focus on the immediate and pragmatic while the inner drive is frozen. We ought to think more ahead and have a mandate that match what we do and want to do. How can we become more leading? Or steer policy more? We only do practical stuff (Zahi).

We could establish reflection groups or discussion groups about strategy – how to share KCS in the Directorate. This should be shared with everyone in the organisation. Also more transparency on the skills one has that are not used. Current discussions with the Ministry could also be shared more with immigrant employees as we may have a different perspective. Hearings internally have too short deadlines and are a problem – too little time, perspectives of immigrants and others are not heard (Ewa).

We have no arenas for reflecting together and we have no time. We never get to know each other. Before we had an initiative where a colleague was interviewed once a week by the communication office, and we all got to know each other. This was discontinued (Lejla).

Previously, the Directorate applied cross-regional networks to ensure co-operation and the sharing of KCS across the organisation. This instrument is sorely missed by respondents:

The Directorate’s main learning arena was the internal networks. They were removed by the Director and I miss them. We used the networks for discussions on how to solve problems and work tasks, had a lot of contact via telephone and email – I learnt a lot from my networks. It is important to have contact with people in the other offices that work with the same tasks but now we don’t have any common arenas. The regional office becomes very small and limited and we don’t know what the other colleagues outside our office do (Maria).

I miss the first years when we all knew each other and we had much more co-operation and networking. We could have contributed much more if we had the mechanisms, and we could have reflected more and gone deeper into our field. Very sad that the networks have gone. It means a lot to be secure and trust one’s colleagues and to be able to share freely what is on one’s mind. The newcomers need seminars and networks. I feel so lucky that I was new in an organisation that valued sharing and working together (Lejla).

The focus group, that consists of Norwegian employees with several years in the organisation, backs up their immigrant colleagues:

It isn’t a good learning environment in the Directorate for sharing knowledge. There is a lack of mechanisms for communication and co-operation between employees. We don’t have networks; they were all cut. This has been catastrophic for the sharing of knowledge in the organisation – it’s a scary development […] The Directorate has a structure where some experts make a suggestion about how to work with a problem. This suggestion is sent on a hearing in the organisation and then sent to the DM. Previously the suggestions were worked on in networks that were cross-regional, and all experts were involved. Many suggestions came from the experts themselves. But
now we only receive them and have a short time to respond, without conferring with other experts in the organisation (Marianne).

These reflections by the respondents underline the fact that CoPs are not isolated, but part of a social system that involves other CoPs inside and outside the Directorate. This social system offer access to multiple practices and repertoires. By negotiating our participation in this system, we make sense of it and our position in it, ultimately creating identities that can potentially extend across the whole system (Wenger, 2009).

The respondents’ craving for more cross-regional learning suggests a sophisticated view of identity across CoP boundaries. Their reflections support Wenger’s ideas of identity as a trajectory as well as a nexus of multimembership. Instead of these identities merely co-existing within the Directorate, there is a wish for them to complement and enhance each other.

Thus, respondents recognise a potential in creating framework conditions for co-operation and learning across CoPs in the Directorate. There is only one respondent who believes that such a system is already in place:

I was invited into the cross-regional cooperation. This is a systematic way of sharing knowledge, both in this office and in the whole organisation (Zahi).

6.4. A recognised acknowledgement of the potential benefits of immigrant KCS
In this study the respondents are different on several surface-level diversity aspects: age, gender, ethnicity and country of origin. They also belong to different knowledge regimes (Urstad, 2012, see below). What they have in common is their immigrant origin and their status as members of CoPs in the Directorate. By isolating this commonality they are in this study treated as a group and investigated as someone different from other members of the CoPs in which they participate. Findings reveal some of the benefits of this difference, or, rather, how the diverse KCS these immigrants bring to the Directorate may benefit the organisation’s repertoire of knowledge, competence, skills and practice. As outlined in the theoretical framework (chapter 3), this study proposes that foreign KCS has the potential of creating larger changes when successfully negotiated than the varieties of KCS brought to the organisation by new employees belonging to the majority culture.

Findings suggest that immigrant employees to a large degree consider their foreign KCS beneficial to the organisation. Many respondents highlight KCS that is linked to their non-Norwegian expertise, i.e. KCS that is viewed as a bonus compared to the KCS of their Norwegian colleagues. Specifically, this KCS is useful in work tasks connected to the immigrant population in Norway:

My cultural background has helped me reflect on what is necessary to do to succeed with our work tasks. I am often asked by other offices to visit partners or clients in their regions to use my cultural background on top of my KCS. The clients are very welcoming and I am useful for them. My background is not a hinder but contributes to the Directorate succeeding. I am a foreigner combined with my personal experiences in Norway and my work experience and knowledge from the Directorate. In sum this is successful (Zahi).
I have asked to work with [a special project] because I understand the dynamics of the nationalities involved (Anna).

I was asked to share what reflections I had about [a special subject that involved immigrants]. It was very well received and my colleagues saw that they need my perspective (Lejla).

The experiences of being an immigrant and having been an idiot concerning the language is beneficial to me in the Directorate. The experience of being an outsider (Gavriel).

The importance of diversity changes from one work task to another. When being in situations where the Directorate has direct contact with immigrants it is extremely important to have a conscious application of the KCS of the organisation. Immigrant employees may come up with alternative views on dilemmas linked to work tasks and discussions with the public. In policy development the organisation may test if the policy is relevant to the reality out there by making use of immigrant employees (Gavriel).

When working with the immigrant population Norwegian colleagues are set in their ways and use a Norwegian method and ideals on how to work with immigrants. They don’t know much about what immigrants need and want. Norwegians are very careful and always try dialogue even when the client is obviously wrong and needs to be put in his place. Norwegian colleagues don’t know how to go out of the Norwegian way of thinking and behaving and be international in their attitudes and practice. They don’t know anything else but the Norwegian way (Lejla).

Diversity in KCS is very important. Some immigrants have personal experiences that may be very valuable for the Directorate. They can be used to legitimize the organisation when we have dialogues with our partners. Invaluable! This can be a fantastic resource for the Directorate (Marianne).

However, some respondents consider that the mixture of foreign KCS into a Norwegian work environment supersedes the quality of exclusively homegrown KCS. They seem to indicate that the infusion of foreign KCS is beneficial also in general work tasks, i.e. work tasks that do not have any specific immigrant aspect:

The Directorate has everything an organisation needs, but diversity is an add-on feature that makes excellence. If we had all been similar we had been another organisation, less successful. We immigrants are as good as Norwegians but at the same time we have more. We can see things differently from other state organisations with only 2-3 % immigrants. In order to succeed we need to recruit good workers, have the instruments to share and involve employees. We need to combine the differences and thus we will succeed. This is a strength in the Directorate. Immigrants with KCS and the foreign element: crème de la crème! (Zahi).

Immigrants are maybe more concerned about doing things the right way than Norwegians (Maria).

Many immigrants work twice as hard as Norwegians, because of the language – it is an extra demand. I may put in an extra gear compared to many Norwegians (Anna).
Although respondents share the opinion that immigrant KCS is beneficial to the organisation, many would like to see more reflection and discussion on the conscious use of this type of KCS in the Directorate. Some express a certain frustration with the current situation:

We need to discuss why we want diversity. Is it just for show? A diverse workforce can have different approaches to how the Directorate should solve its tasks. How we should communicate with the Ministry and our partners. How we look at the tasks we are asked to do. How we work as a directorate with subject knowledge. This is about the Directorate’s identity (Anna).

My Norwegian colleagues were very similar and had similar ideas and this was a drawback for the organisation. I got a central role because I was a refugee and knew the field. I wish that the Directorate had more competence and knowledge. Immigrants should be used more consciously, like when creating routines and rules relevant for immigrants. Immigrants understand better other immigrants. We know the importance of qualifications. The Directorate’s practice would have been better if we had included the competence of immigrants to a larger extent (Lejla).

I have a skill because of my background on land info on [my home country]. I know about push and pull factors of immigrants. I know the fake stories. Nobody has ever asked me about these skills. It’s minimal. I was not asked for advice when colleagues in the Directorate planned a trip to [my home country]. Neither was [a colleague from the same country] (Jahan).

The approaches [of immigrant staff] may be different [from the Norwegian majority]. There is one work task that most people with immigrant background at the Directorate have a specific opinion of. Although they disagree with the current policy they sort of conform – me too. I am as coward as they are. [The work task] has created a tremendous amount of irritation among many immigrants and we have not been heard. Self-censorship – this opposition has never been communicated. [The work task] is a bit racist actually. It’s unnatural but to complain may have the opposite effect. [If immigrant staff would complain about this task] it will be translated into a defense [of the problem the policy tries to solve] (Jahan).

The negotiation process in CoPs on adopting and adapting new KCS and including it into the repertoire may seem like a closed process. It is in fact anything but. Negotiation processes are influenced by similar processes in other CoPs and by the organisation’s framework conditions for WPL. The time allocated to reflection, analysis and interaction with others is such a framework condition (Ellström, 2010), another is to what extent the organisation has developed a policy on knowledge management that is recognised by members in CoPs.

Findings indicate that the Directorate makes use of immigrant KCS and understands how it can be of specific use in work tasks directly linked to the organisation’s work on immigrants in Norway. However, respondents seem to believe that the potential inherent in their KCS is not exploited and that the Directorate lacks a recognised approach on how to make use of foreign KCS.

6.5. Linking WPL to a diverse organisational culture
The respondents reveal through interviews glimpses into the working and learning environment of the Directorate. They mainly work in small teams (communities) and they
work together on various work tasks that are linked to the Directorate’s mission. The execution of these work tasks follows certain rules (practice), some of which may be tacit and therefore not communicated directly to new employees. The Directorate consists of several formal and informal CoPs at all levels of the organisation. Formal communities are for instance the regional offices, which consist of a leadership team and a limited number of employees. Informal communities are smaller ad hoc work teams or groups that exist outside the formal structure. Within both these types of CoPs the aim is to produce up to date, relevant deliverables.

Most employees in the Directorate work in small units face to face. This makes it easier to get access to the tacit knowledge than in many other jobs (Gavriel).

The CoPs are not isolated. Each works with and relies on outside resources for information and advances. Technology plays an important role in communication and information gathering as it allows members to remain connected to outside sources. Each CoP requires members with various KCS in order to fulfill their mission.

The process of negotiation of new KCS is a contested process in which existing values, opinions and practices of the newcomer and the veteran members may be challenged and ultimately changed. It is also a process of identity formation, in which participants confront their learning trajectories. Some CoPs consist of members with very similar learning and experience, who can be seen as belonging to a knowledge regime (Urstad, 2012).

To introduce new learning into such CoPs may entail long and complex processes of negotiation of meaning as identity formation is an essential aspect of membership. In a learning process, the context shapes our identity (Wenger, 2009).

If an organisation wants to create a diverse organisational culture, a conscious policy of challenging knowledge regimes by introducing new KCS can be necessary. This need is addressed by some respondents:

The people who work with R&D in the Directorate - I will guess about 80% of them are Norwegians with [similar] degrees. They will see the world very similarly. But there are different academic approaches to R&D. If the organisation wants diversity there should be a conscious recruitment of foreigners to those positions (Anna).

This chapter has presented and discussed how the KCS of highly skilled immigrant employees is valued, used and shared in the Directorate. The second research question of this study (see chapter 1) is how this ‘foreign’ KCS contributes to organisational change, as the negotiation of new KCS results in a new repertoire of values, opinions and practices. The selection of immigrant respondents is a conscious choice to link learning theory to diversity in the workplace.

As discussed above and in the theory chapter, this study proposes that by recruiting immigrants with foreign KCS (or a mix of foreign and Norwegian KCS) there is greater potential for organisational change (BLD, 2012; Tronstad, 2010). According to the Directorate’s annual reports it has a conscious strategy on recruiting immigrants, but respondents find that the expected benefits of this strategy are not communicated:

There is a lack of focus on what we want with the diversity of employees after the recruitment period. How is this policy meant to benefit our work? What kind of
benefits do we get from diversity? This is a weakness in the Directorate since we are not conscious in our use of this variety of KCS. We don’t have a strategy. We should have a strategy (Kari).

The Directorate needs to define what diversity is and how it can be achieved. There is potential, but no systemic approach to diversity. This is necessary to achieve diversity, but do we dare? Norwegian culture is the majority culture of the Directorate. But the majority becomes coloured and the sum becomes different. The culture should be Norwegian, but the immigrants should spice up the majority culture. To achieve this blend there is a need to map what kind of spices we have in the Directorate - not the surface-level kind, but the deep-level kind. One has to systematize this knowledge. Have the minorities made the majority more curious about how they see the world? What does it do with a Norwegian to work in a diverse organisation? We should start with systematizing. Why is diversity a good thing? If language problems hinder production it cannot be a good thing? Do we dare to investigate this? Define what diversity is in the Directorate. It has never been defined. Only ethnic diversity? We should all be aware of what we are talking about. A common definition will make it easier to create paths to strategies to increase the diversity of the organisation (Anna).

Several respondents offer statements showing their appreciation of the inclusiveness of the organisational culture of the Directorate:

Immigrants from other directorates and organisations where the immigrants employees are fewer say that they feel liberated when visiting the Directorate; lovely to not be the odd man out. Some people outside the Directorate believe that since we talk with an accent we think with an accent – not perfectly. We are a long away from this kind of thinking in the Directorate. For our partners it can take some time before they forget the accent and forget that we are immigrants. It is wonderful that it is a natural thing to be an immigrant in the Directorate (Maria).

However, findings suggest that this inclusiveness is mainly on surface-level; that is, an appreciation of diversity like variation in ethnicity, religious practices, food, clothes, etc. (Bore et al., 2013). There is little focus on deep-level diversity like differences in values, opinions and work practices:

Diversity in the Directorate means external manifestations only. This is absolutely the biggest fault of the organisation. There are no changes in the organisational culture caused by the inflow of immigrant employees. Immigrant employees have to adapt to the majority culture (Jahan).

The Directorate is only concerned with surface-level. I don’t know what the other immigrants know and bring to the organisation (Anna).

The Directorate can be better on diversity. Immigrants carry a bonus that is not appreciated or used or explored. All employees do the same work tasks, and diversity can only be seen in social gatherings or privately. Then everyone thinks it is funny and interesting to hear immigrant experiences with the workplace. But it is not used in the organisation; the organisation is silent on this aspect (Maria).
Findings suggest that there are benefits of recruiting immigrants to an organisation like the Directorate, but respondents would like to see a more conscious knowledge management policy that includes transparent discussions and reflections on the value of foreign KCS. This study proposes that such approaches may enhance not only the transparency and availability of immigrants’ KCS, but also the diversity processes contributing to organisational change in the Directorate.

This study does not investigate the reasons for this lack of a recognised strategy on diverse KCS, but during interviews respondents offer comments that may shed a light on the organisational culture of the Directorate. They suggest several different reasons that may be linked to attributes of Norwegian colleagues or managers:

> My colleagues were surprised that I knew so much; it was a surprise that I was good enough (Maria).

> Deep-level diversity may happen if diversity was reflected in top management and in career positions. Who gets the career positions? If most immigrants work in ordinary positions we may just be alibis for the policy (Anna).

The interviews suggest a certain discrepancy between Norwegian and immigrant respondents regarding the concept of KCS diversity:

> I disagree with the premise that immigrants’ values, opinions and practices are in any way different than Norwegian diversity (Marianne).

Maria disagrees:

> We need to start thinking or reflecting about what value immigrants bring to the organisation, not only socially. The equality principle is very grounded in Norwegians – it is bad form to believe an immigrant is different. But then the potential bonus is lost for the organisation. We immigrants are not afraid of differences. I am interested in these differences because I believe they can be positive for the organisation, but the organisation think it is negative or wrong to focus on them (Maria).

> The organisation is like a hand with five fingers. I love all my fingers but they are not similar. All of them are important but they are different (Zahi).

This study proposes a view on diversity management as recognition of diverse values, opinions and practice which leads to an adaptation that goes both ways (Thomas, 1991). The negotiation processes in CoPs are examples of how this adaptation may happen. However, in order to increase the possibility of success, this adaptation can be aided by diversity management as described by Wrench (2002). According to Wrench a diversity management strategy should have two stages: Valuing diversity where there is a positive desire to work towards an ethnically mixed workforce and a recognition of the positive benefits that a diverse workforce can bring to an organisation, and managing diversity by actively managing the diverse mix of employees in ways to contribute to organisational goals and develop a diverse organisational culture (Wrench, 2002).

It seems like the Directorate exhibits some of the traits of the first stage, namely the positive desire to work towards obtaining a diverse workforce. There are however mixed signals from the respondents to what degree the organisation consciously recognises or communicates the
positive benefits of having a diverse workforce in the form of immigrant employees. Findings also suggest that although the Directorate has an inclusive work culture, it is mainly on surface-level, not ensuring an integration of immigrant values, opinions and practices, and not having the instruments for reflecting on or discussing diversity.

Respondents have various ideas on how the Directorate could work in order to create a diverse organisational culture that also acknowledges deep-level diversity:

We can document our current practices. Describe the things immigrants do in the Directorate and how we contribute to responsibility and production. We can move from examples to overall text. We can show how involvement increases diversity. We need to create arenas where our differences are debated and it will be exciting to reflect on the diversity if the organisation knows how to appreciate diversity and has the correct instruments to involve employees (Zahi).

You need to have a thoughtful approach to harvest immigrants’ skills. If not [staff] will conform and they will become socialized (Jahan).

Gavriel highlights the challenges of diverse organisations and that this is complex territory:

There is a greater potential for misunderstandings and tension in a diverse organisation. It is important that we are conscious about this fact and that we have the tools to solve this (Gavriel).

In personnel conflicts with only Norwegians no one talks about culture although the conflict may be based on different opinions, views, values, ideals. When immigrants are involved it is easy to start thinking about this aspect. Under which circumstances should culture be used to explain behaviour? This is a difficult question [...] How can we prevent that we don’t create images of the others based on the fact that they are immigrants? How do we create a reflection around this topic? The dilemma is not whether we should discuss the impact of immigrants in the Directorate but how we do this (Gavriel).

However, Zahi believes that the Directorate has the means to ensure that immigrants’ values, opinions and practices are included:

The instruments we work with are Norwegian [involvement, democratic practices]. This ensures diversity since everybody can be heard. Openness, transparency, internal hearings are our strengths also for diversity among the Norwegians. One is invited in to decide, one knows the background of decisions and the level of involvement increases. In many organisations diversity strategies are just words [...] The Directorate is more neutral than many organisations regarding values etc. The documents we create and the way we do things are often diverse. This leads to a pulsating organisation (Zahi).

In conclusion, it can be proposed that the Directorate displays many of the framework conditions necessary for sharing diverse KCS and developing a diverse organisational culture. However, respondents indicate that the organisation lacks a conscious policy on WPL and the strategic tools to implement such policy. These tools include first and foremost a recognition or knowledge about what framework conditions are needed to develop a learning
organisation, but most importantly in the view of this study’s findings a conscious approach on how to reflect on diversity and its benefits to the organisation.

As noted in the literature review and elsewhere in this thesis, there is a noticeable lack of approaches designed to exploit the KCS of a diverse workforce:

While this is understandable given the complexity of tacit knowledge, its individuality, its various sources and forms, and the difficulties often involved in first recognising and then sharing it, this indicates an important gap in the current research in terms of how this may be achieved. In so doing, there does seem to be an acknowledgement of the potential role of HRM in developing approaches that, first, raise awareness of the influence of cultural factors on employees’ tacit knowledge and, second, clearly communicate the diversity message, particularly in assisting the recognition and understanding of the tacit dimension of diversity. While it is evident that many of the strategies proposed in the diversity literature focus on the importance of knowledge and communicating this knowledge, there [is] no mention of how to link diversity and knowledge management strategies (Al-Mousa, 2008, p. 75)

Al-Mousa has created a framework for a holistic diversity-knowledge management-sharing strategy designed to assist organisations seeking to encourage knowledge sharing, particularly tacit knowledge sharing, among employees of ethnically diverse workforces. His strategy consists of a set of elements, of which recognition of the value of diverse KCS, an implementation process that recognises the importance of communication, training and the encouragement of CoPs, and an HR process that links diversity to knowledge management are crucial. Most of these elements have already been identified as important by the respondents of this study.
Chapter 7 Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings of the previous chapter and gives an overview of what we can know from this study. In addition, it provides a critical discussion on methods used.

7.1. Discussion of methods

As outlined in the methods chapter, there are several limitations to this study. Because of the limited time allocated as well as set characteristics of the organisation under study, a qualitative research design with semi-structured interviews of seven participants and a focus group with four participants was selected. A qualitative analysis was performed on the data provided by these interviews.

An ethnographic approach with observations of newly employed immigrants in the Directorate could possibly have yielded somewhat different findings. Unfortunately, this design was not feasible under the current circumstances. Instead the findings are based on the participants’ narratives about historic events. This approach has several weaknesses, for instance the fact that historic events may be recalled differently than they were perceived at the actual time. Facts may be distorted.

Participants were sampled to provide a variety of gender, age and country of origin. In additions, participants were different in other aspects, like the number of years they have resided in Norway and how long the Directorate has employed them. While these last two aspects were not considered in the sampling, all participants have been residing in Norway for more than a decade, and none of them are recent members of the Directorate’s CoPs. All participants have higher education, but some have all their formal education from abroad while others exhibit a mixture of formal education (and also work experience) from Norway and abroad. All these factors may have a certain consequence for the data obtained.

The interviews provided many open and reflective answers, and the approach seems to have suited the participants. They provided a rich collection of data, some of which is quoted in the previous chapter. The data analysis process was rewarding, as categories emerged easily and many participants offered similar reflections.

7.2. Discussion of results

This study aimed to investigate how highly skilled immigrant employees’ KCS is valued, used and shared with colleagues in the Directorate, and how the Directorate’s KCS and identity (organisational culture) change as a result of the inclusion of immigrant employees. Findings were interpreted through the socio-cultural perspective on learning, more specifically Lave and Wenger’s theories on situated learning and communities of practice.

Besides strengthening the basic foundations of these ideas, the findings encouraged interesting theoretical reflections on the differences between highly skilled new employees and novices like apprentices. Most classic studies on CoPs discuss novices to the world of work, and how they get access to the CoP’s repertoire and become legitimate members of the community. This study, on the other hand, sampled newly employed workers with extensive
KCS and how this KCS was handled by the Directorate – that is, the negotiation processes that existing members of CoPs go through when highly skilled immigrants enter the communities. The classic perspective is thus skewed. However, this change in perspective yielded rich reflections on the negotiation processes of the CoPs.

Findings suggested that the success of the negotiation processes in the CoPs in the Directorate is based on several factors. Among these are:

- Newcomers’ willingness and skills in sharing their KCS
- Leadership qualities in the Directorate
- Strategic mechanisms for sharing learning between employees
- A recognised acknowledgement of the potential benefits of immigrant KCS

Although the interview guide focused on the Directorate’s reception of the participants’ KCS, most participants chose to discuss at length how newly employed immigrants can benefit from sharing their KCS. Their focus was not on the existing CoP members’ willingness and skills in sharing, or even their own willingness and skills in getting access to the CoP’s repertoire. On the contrary, their focus stayed on their own willingness to share, which in this respect was considered a success factor for becoming legitimate members of the CoPs. It may be suggested that this perspective is not much researched, since many studies target apprentices or other novices. In a Norwegian perspective, research on immigrants in the labour market has, as previously noted, mostly focused on low-skilled workers.

Some participants experienced that their KCS was not readily accepted by the CoPs. This lack of recognition may stem from a view that their KCS is considered irrelevant, obsolete or useless, or that it challenges existing norms and values. Since all employees in the Directorate are highly qualified and have gone through a competitive recruitment process, the former seems unlikely. If the latter is true, it may be an example of the organisation’s views on foreign norms and values. According to the participants in this study, the Directorate has exemplary norms concerning surface-level diversity, while differences between Norwegians and immigrants regarding values, practices and opinions are not discussed and seldom reflected upon. If diversity management is a two-way process in which both veterans and new employees need to adapt, it seems necessary to have a strategy for identifying and recognising foreign norms and values. Norms and values are part of an employee’s KCS, but findings indicate that the Directorate does not have a conscious strategy on how to harvest new KCS, which is a crucial feature of a learning organisation.

Such strategy can be the outcome of processes in the organisation if management and employees are willing to engage in transparent discussions and reflections on this topic. Findings indicate that immigrant employees in the Directorate are ready for and welcome this process.

Participants identify the shortcomings of the Directorate as weaknesses in leadership qualities. Leaders fail to harvest the potential bonus represented by immigrant employees’ KCS; they are unable to communicate the link between recruiting immigrants and how the organisation will benefit from this recruitment; and they do not have a strategy on how to create a diverse organisational culture that goes below surface level.
It is highly unlikely that the Directorate is unique in its failure to reap the rewards of foreign KCS. It may be suggested that many organisations experience the same challenges, and lack policies and strategies in this field. Global change – like the mobility of labour – demands a sophisticated and tolerant view of foreign KCS, and since Norway currently experiences an influx of immigrants, strategies are needed in many organisations.

Leadership is commonly acknowledged as a framework condition for workplace learning. The leadership culture and how an organisation is steered may have great impact on WPL. The participants of this study maintain that the Directorate is a hierarchical organisation that lacks basic instruments for sharing knowledge across regional offices. The potential benefits of WPL are thus weakened. This view is at odds with previous research on WPL framework conditions in Norway, as for instance reported by Eurofound.

How, then, may this situation be improved? Participants identify a range of solutions and they are remarkable similar in their reflections. Most would like to see a type of knowledge management system applied in the organisation, which would make KCS visible – not only immigrant KCS but all employees’ KCS. They also want cross-regional learning arenas to ensure cooperation between CoPs, exhibiting a sophisticated view of identity across CoP boundaries. This longing for common reflection and learning arenas has great potential in developing the Directorate as a learning organisation.

All immigrant participants consider that their foreign KCS is of special value to the Directorate. In particular, participants highlight work tasks directly connected to Norway’s immigrant population. In Gavriel’s words:

> When being in situations where the Directorate has direct contact with immigrants it is extremely important to have a conscious application of the KCS of the organisation. Immigrant employees may come up with alternative views on dilemmas linked to work tasks and discussions with the public. In policy development the organisation may test if the policy is relevant to the reality out there by making use of immigrant employees.

However, several participants express a more interesting view on their KCS. They claim that the combination of foreign KCS and Norwegian work experience in the Directorate creates a type of KCS that supersedes the exclusively homegrown KCS of Norwegian employees. The infusion of foreign KCS is viewed as beneficial in common work tasks that are not specifically related to the immigrant population. While the reasons for this are not touched upon directly in the interviews, the potential for alternative viewpoints and creativity that may come with a diverse staff has been extensively researched elsewhere, also in Norway (Rasmussen and Forseth, 2002). In this thesis the author’s argument is that immigrant KCS has a greater potential for contributing to organisational change and thus is invaluable in creating a diverse organisational culture. However, this potential must be realised via organisational policy and strategy which, according to the participants of this study, is currently not present in the Directorate.
Chapter 8  Ideas for further study

_Diversity is an extra good thing. KCS in isolation is not enough, diversity is the extra that makes it even better. The Directorate is a competent organisation but diversity makes it even better (Zahi)._  

This thesis has explored highly skilled immigrant employees’ experiences of having their knowledge, competence and skills valued, used and shared in a State organisation. Further, it has linked the negotiation processes connected to their membership in communities of practice to the development of a diverse organisational culture. Findings suggest that these employees may possess a potential due to their foreign KCS that is not strategically harvested by their employer. There are indications in the findings that the reasons for this lack of recognition are insufficient framework conditions for workplace learning and a failure to reflect on diversity and its benefits to the organisation.  

This study has several limitations (see methods chapter). Ideas for further study include therefore approaches that ensure that these limitations are overcome. First and foremost, findings should be strengthened by extending the number of participants in other State organisations. Secondly, a shift in methodology to include observations of CoPs which receive new, highly skilled immigrant employees will enhance the study’s reliability and validity.  

In the preparation of this study it became obvious that the topic of discussion or highly skilled immigrants as target group is not subject to much research in Norway. There is a gap in current research indicating that resources are tied to studies on shortcomings of immigrants. It is to be hoped that research on WPL in diverse organisations and the KCS of highly skilled immigrants may increase in the future as Norwegian workplaces become more and more multicultural.
References


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Norrköping: Centre for Ethnic and Urban Studies.


Østby, L. (2013b). “Hvor i landet betyr EU-innvandringen mest? “ [Which municipalities are most affected by the immigration from the EU?]. *Samfunnspesilet*, 2013: 5 Statistisk sentralbyrå (SSB) [Statistics Norway].
Appendix

Appendix 1  Thesis information statement
Appendix 2  Interview guide: semi-structured interviews
Appendix 3  Interview guide: focus interviews
Thesis information statement

Participation as interviewee in a master thesis

Dear Participant,

Your organisation has been invited to participate in a project being conducted by a Master student with the University of Linköping. This information sheet describes the project. Please read this sheet carefully and be confident that you understand its contents. If you have any questions about the project, please ask the Master student in charge of the project.

Who is involved in this research project? Grethe Haugøy is currently a M.Ed. student in the international Master programme Adult Learning and Global Change. Her supervisor is Ph.D. candidate Robert Aman, University of Linköping.

The research is being conducted as part of a Master of Education degree.

Why have you been approached? A qualitative interview approach has been chosen for this research to provide detailed data on the issues at hand. Yourself and six others from your organisation have been chosen to participate in this research based your status as permanently employed by the Directorate and your personal background as an immigrant to Norway. You will be interviewed to share your views and your personal experiences related to the research topic.

What is the project about? What are the questions being addressed? In recent years there has been a development in Norway towards multiculturalism and ethnic diversity. Immigrants now comprise about 12 percent of the total population and 24 percent of the population in the nation’s capital city. The number of immigrants has doubled from 2003 to 2013.

Immigrants carry with them diverse knowledge, competence and skills (KCS). However, many immigrants experience skills mismatch between their own KCS and the needs of the labour market. In some cases their prior competence is not recognised by Norwegian authorities or employers, while in other instances there may be a lack of basic skills or skills relevant for the labour market.

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1 This Information Statement is inspired by Dr. Ahmad Al-Mousa’s Ph.D. thesis from RMIT University, December 2008.
So far the Government and social partners have mainly focused on upskilling and reskilling immigrants to decrease the KCS mismatch. Other important focus areas are recruitment policies and discrimination of immigrants by employers. Existing research has focused mainly on the shortcomings of immigrants, whether it is their KCS or how and why they fall through in recruitment to jobs. Little attention has been given to what kinds of KCS successful immigrants bring with them to a workplace and how foreign labour influences Norwegian workplaces.

The project’s aim is to investigate how the knowledge, competence and skills (KCS) of immigrant labour is valued, used and shared in the workplace, and how the KCS of the workplace changes due to the inflow of immigrant workers.

The primary research questions addressed by this study are:

- How, specifically, is immigrant workers’ KCS valued, used and shared with colleagues?
- In what ways does the organisation’s KCS and identity change as a result of the inclusion of immigrant professionals?

A theoretical framework for this study has been developed from literature relevant to this issue. This includes a theoretical approach to workplace learning and diversity in the workplace.

**What will I be required to do?** Part of conducting the study is interviewing employees to explore issues related to workplace learning and the development of a diverse organisational culture in the Directorate. The interview will be directed at getting your response to the conditions that exist for sharing the diverse knowledge of the workforce, as well as your reflections on how your organisation adopt and adapt immigrant employees’ values, opinions and practices into the organisational culture.

The interview will take about an hour and it will be held on the organisation’s premises. The interview will be audio-recorded subject to your consent, to ensure the accuracy of the transcription of the interview conversation. You are able to terminate the audio recording at any time. You are also able to withdraw partially or completely at any time during this research and you may refuse to answer any questions.

**What are the benefits associated with participation?** The research will provide valuable feedback to the organisation on how employees view the processes of valuing, using and sharing the KCS of immigrant employees and how ‘foreign’ values, opinions and practices are adopted and adapted by the organisation to enhance the organisational culture. It is considered that this will provide ideas for any future adjustments to the organisation’s diversity strategy and workplace learning framework.

The research is intended to inspire managers and HR staff to explore the diversity of their organisations’ workforce. The research attempts to make a contribution to the existing body of knowledge in the field of diversity and knowledge management.

**What will happen to the information I provide?** The information collected will be analysed by the investigator as part of her M.Ed. thesis and the results may appear in conference papers or journal publications. The results will be reported in a manner that does not enable you to be identified. Thus, anonymity will be protected and maintained throughout the research.

The confidentiality of the data collected for this research is guaranteed by the author, with access to the information collected available only to the author and her research supervisor. Your identity will be disguised in all published reports by using pseudonyms. All taped interviews will remain totally confidential. Thus, your anonymity and confidentiality will be strictly maintained.
The research data will be disposed of in a locked paper disposal bin. A summary of the findings of the research will be published in a thesis.

**What are my rights as a participant?** This research is voluntary and you may withdraw your participation at any time, without prejudice. You have the right to have any unprocessed data withdrawn and destroyed, provided it can be reliably identified. You have the right to have any questions answered at any time.

**Whom should I contact if I have any questions?** If you have any queries regarding this project please contact the author on her details provided below or her supervisor Robert Aman at [robert.aman@liu.se](mailto:robert.aman@liu.se) or phone: +46 13 28 21 97 at Linköping university, Department of Behavioural Sciences and Learning, Division of Education and Adult Learning, SE-581 83 Linköping, Sweden.

Thank you very much for your participation!

Yours sincerely,

Grethe Haugøy

[email]

[telephone]
### Interview guide: Semi-structured interview (60 mins)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 1: Framing the interview</th>
<th>1. Informal talk (2-3 min)</th>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Information (5 min)&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Brief background to my thesis; objectives for interview (underlining that the interview is meant to produce data that can answer research questions – it is not the place to discuss the theoretical framework or principles etc of the thesis. I’d be happy to discuss these outside the interview). How answers will be used; anonymity. Clearing up any questions. Informing that the interview will be recorded; securing agreement to record. Starting the recording.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2: Opening question</td>
<td>3. Opening question (10 min)</td>
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<td>In its staff policy the Directorate states that it wants 25% of its staff to be of immigrant origin. Today some 30% of your colleagues in the Directorate are immigrants, and the number is growing. These numbers are much higher than with most organisations (10%), especially State organisations (2-3%). Most State organisations say that the reason for their low numbers is that they have high entry requirements (university degree, high demands on Norwegian language skills, high demands on understanding a complicated public system). How come the Directorate’s immigrant employees have managed to transgress these obstacles? How did you transgress these obstacles?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 3: Key questions</td>
<td>4. Key questions (30 min)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>I would like you to reflect on the learning environment and organisational culture of the Directorate, both overall and regionally (in your unit). First, let’s start with your previous knowledge, competence and skills that you brought with you to the Directorate. When you started working in the Directorate, would you say that your colleagues/manager encouraged you to share your previous knowledge and expertise? Did you feel that your previous knowledge, competence and skills (KCS) was of value to the Directorate?</td>
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<sup>2</sup> Most information will be provided in the preparation sheet to be handed out before the interview
Can you come up with concrete examples of how your KCS has benefited the Directorate?

(If agreement: Explain how the Directorate manages to accept and adopt new ideas/KCS and make productive use of them – what is done to encourage immigrant employees to share their knowledge and expertise/how does this KCS become beneficial to other colleagues in their work or in new projects - focus on the receiving end and on production).

(If disagreement: Do you think that the Directorate would have benefited from you sharing your previous KCS/that your previous KCS could have been of value to the Directorate? Explain why/why not).

Second, let’s continue onto another topic – organisational culture and diversity. The Directorate aims to adhere to government policy regarding promoting surface-level diversity (gender, age, ethnicity, religious practices, clothing, food, etc). However, in this interview I’d like to ask you about deep-level diversity issues like differences in values and opinions, and application of certain practices like management, research/development and networking outside the Directorate.

Would you say that you as an immigrant brought with you values, opinions and practices that were different from the ones you encountered in the Directorate? If yes, could you try to identify these?

Would you say that the Directorate welcomes reflections and discussions on its values, ideals, and practices and consciously works towards achieving an organisational culture where the values, opinions and practices of its immigrant employees are included? Or do you feel that immigrant employees to a greater extent than Norwegian colleagues have to adapt to the organisation’s values, opinions and practices?

Finally, I’d like to round off with one last question.

If you were to give input to a diversity policy to encourage greater knowledge-sharing of immigrant KCS at the Directorate, what would you include?

If time, I’d like you to reflect on two statements that are commonly heard when discussing diversity/the inclusion of immigrant workers in the workplace:

Immigrants are part of the diversity of the organisation. Diversity is positive because it leads to more innovation as new ideas/KCS are added into the existing organisation.
(if agreement: name some innovative practices in the Directorate that have resulted from the adoption of ideas/the use of KCS of immigrant colleagues or yourself)

(if disagreement: expected answers:

a) There is no difference between immigrants and other new employees regarding the infusion of new ideas/KCS. We all contribute to innovation and new ideas.
b) We are all treated similarly to other newcomers.
c) It’s our personal attributes/KCS that are beneficial, not where we come from or where we obtained those KCS.

=> Does this mean that

a) there is no use hiring immigrant employees and expecting a higher level of innovation than with hiring a Norwegian = disagreement with current research.
b) The Directorate is colour-blind to diversity and treats all employees in the same manner = no discrimination but also no benefits from diversity.

**Immigrants and other minority groups are beneficial to the organisation because they make us reflect on our orthodoxies/our existing notions/our values and ideals and maybe even challenge our practices.**

(if agreement: in what way has the inclusion of immigrants been beneficial for the organisation/ how has the Directorate changed/developed its values, notions, ideals, orthodoxies as a result of this diversity).

(if disagreement: expected answers:

a) All newcomers may make the organisation reflect on our orthodoxies and challenge our practices. There is no difference between immigrants and Norwegians

Does this mean that

a) The Directorate is consistently hiring immigrants who are deeply integrated into Norwegian society and have internalized Norwegian workplace practices and values before they start working at the Directorate.
b) There is no room for voicing severe disagreement with the Directorate’s orthodoxies.
c) The Directorate is colour-blind to diversity and treats all employees in the same manner = no tension from diversity but also no benefits.
Phase 4: Conclusion

5. Conclusions (10 min)

- Summing up
- Clearing up mistakes
- Additional information
- Thanks and goodbye

Make sure to ask interviewees to elaborate, explain, and most importantly, ask them to provide examples and illustrations to what they mean!
### Phase 1: Framing the interview

1. **Informal talk (2-3 min)**

2. **Information (5 min)**

   Brief background to my thesis; objectives for interview (underlining that the focus interview is meant to produce data that can answer research questions – it is not the place to discuss the theoretical framework or principles etc of the thesis. I’d be happy to discuss these outside the focus interview).

   How answers will be used; anonymity.

   Clearing up any questions.

   Informing that the interview will be recorded; securing agreement to record.

   Starting the recording.

### Phase 2: Opening question

3. **Opening question (10-20 min)**

   The Directorate is a young organisation and there has been a continuous development these years, also regarding size and competence of staff. In its staff policy the Directorate states that it wants 25% of its staff to be of immigrant origin. Today some 30% of your colleagues in The Directorate are of immigrant origin, and the number is growing. These numbers are much higher than with most organisations (10%), especially State organisations (2-3%). You have witnessed this development.

   **Most State organisations say that the reason for their low numbers is that they have high entry requirements (university degree, high demands on Norwegian language skills, high demands on understanding a complicated public system). How come the Directorate has managed to transgress these difficulties?**

### Phase 3: Key questions

4. **Key questions (50-60 min)**

   I would like you to reflect on the learning environment and organisational culture of The Directorate, both overall and regionally (in this office), and pay special attention to your immigrant colleagues. I’d like you to reflect on some statements that are commonly heard when discussing diversity/the inclusion of immigrant workers in the workplace:

   **Immigrants are part of the diversity of the organisation. Diversity is positive because it leads to more innovation as new ideas/KCS are added into the existing organisation.**

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3 Most information will be provided in the preparation sheet to be handed out before the interview
(if agreement: name some innovative practices in the Directorate that have resulted from the adoption of ideas/the use of KCS of immigrant colleagues).

(if agreement: explain how the Directorate manages to accept and adopt new ideas/KCS and make productive use of them – what is done to encourage immigrant colleagues to share their knowledge and expertise/how does this KCS become beneficial to other colleagues in their work or in new projects/focus on the receiving end and on production).

(if disagreement: expected answers:

d) There is no difference between immigrants and other new employees regarding the infusion of new ideas/KCS. They all contribute to innovation and new ideas.
e) We treat them similarly to other newcomers.
f) It’s their personal attributes/KCS that are beneficial, not where they come from or where they have been obtained.

=> Does this mean that

a) there is no use hiring immigrant employees and expecting a higher level of innovation than with hiring a Norwegian = disagreement with current research.

b) The Directorate is colour-blind to diversity and treats all employees in the same manner = no discrimination but also no benefits from diversity.

**Immigrants and other minority groups are beneficial to the organisation because they make us reflect on our orthodoxies/our existing notions/our values and ideals and maybe even challenge our practices.**

(if agreement: in what way has the inclusion of immigrants been beneficial for the organisation/ how has the Directorate changed/developed its practices, values, notions, ideals, orthodoxies as a result of this diversity).

(if disagreement: expected answers:

b) All newcomers may make us reflect on our orthodoxies and challenge our practices. There is no difference between immigrants and Norwegians.

⇒ Does this mean that
d) The Directorate is consistently hiring immigrants who are deeply integrated into Norwegian society and have internalized Norwegian
workplace practices and values before they start working at the Directorate.
e) There is no room for voicing severe disagreement with the Directorate orthodoxies.
f) The Directorate is colour-blind to diversity and treats all employees in the same manner = no tension from diversity but also no benefits.

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<td>5. Conclusions (10 min)</td>
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<tr>
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Make sure to ask interviewees to elaborate, explain, and most importantly, ask them to provide examples and illustrations to what they mean!