

**Dutch Views on the American Dream:**  
*Cultural differences in the workplace experienced by the Dutch  
in the United States*

by

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## ABSTRACT

Today's marketplace is increasingly global. A significant number of driven individuals are crossing national borders to work and live abroad. However, it can be challenging to adjust to cross-cultural differences. Cross-cultural differences can lead to conflicts, misunderstandings and frustrations. Expatriates face significant cultural challenges when adapting to a foreign work environment. Therefore, this study investigates the cultural differences in the workplace experienced by the Dutch in the United States.

This research is part of the research project 'one market, many cultures' and focuses on the American culture from a Dutch perspective. The goal is to find underlying values that explain the typical behavior (cultural standards) of Americans. Hence, the research question addressed in this study is: *"Which cultural differences do Dutch individuals living and working in the United States perceive in the workplace?"*

An inductive qualitative research approach was used to answer the research question. Sixteen Dutch individuals residing and working in the United States were interviewed based on a semi-structured interview guide. Based on the Critical Incident Technique, interviewees were asked to describe experiences in which the Dutch and the Americans clashed in the working environment. Afterwards, the critical incidents have been analyzed using the Thematic Analysis and structured based on the Gioia method to identify American cultural standards.

The conducted data resulted in twenty cultural standards which are connected to five underlying values: Achievement, Order, Leadership, Responsibility & personal accountability and Optimism. These underlying values explain the cultural logic behind the cultural standards, forming a thick description of the American culture. This thick description explains the behavior of the Americans which may help to improve cross-cultural collaboration on the work floor.

**Keywords:** Critical incidents, Cultural Standards, American cultural standards, Underlying values, American culture

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Today's marketplace is increasingly global and the United States is the player with the largest economy in the world (World Bank, 2022). The United States has an important trade relationship with the Netherlands. This relationship goes back to the early 17<sup>th</sup> century when New York was still New Amsterdam (Krabbendam et al., 2009) and functioned as an important trading post for the Dutch. This historical relationship opened the trade doors for Dutch import and export in the United States. Beyond the European Union, the United States is the Netherlands' most important economic partner. In 2020, the Netherlands exported €68.3 billion worth of goods to the United States and imported €41.9 billion worth of goods from the United States (RVO, 2023).

Next to the trade of goods and services between the United States and the Netherlands, a significant number of driven individuals are crossing national borders to work and live in the United States. According to CBS (2019), 5.3% of Dutch expatriates have chosen the United States as their (temporary) new home. However, it can be challenging to adapt to the cultural differences of a foreign country (Pike, 1967). Cultural differences, ranging from communication styles and work etiquette to social interactions and the everyday aspects of life, can lead to misunderstandings and frustrations (Søderberg & Holden, 2002). Lems (2022) revealed that Dutch professionals face significant cultural challenges when adapting to the American work environment, especially due to differences in hierarchical structures and communication styles.

According to the Dutch stereotype, the United States is the country of the big and exaggerated (Tervooren, 2023). However, some might consider the American culture<sup>1</sup> as a 'melting pot' since many cultures come together in this society (Apker, 2022). Weaver (1999) states that all subcultures will integrate into the dominant American mainstream culture. Although the cultures of the Netherlands and the United States have some similarities, there are also significant differences (Enklaar, 2007). Phillips (1985) criticized the Netherlands from his American perspective, thereby revealing some different American values as well.

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<sup>1</sup> 'American culture' refers in this context only to the United States of America.

The Dutch and American cultural differences in the workplace have been compared using scores on dimensions or values by Hofstede (1980), Hall (1966), Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998), Schwartz (2006) and Meyer (2014). However, Berry (1999) and Helfrich (1999) state that scores and dimensions of the etic approach are not properly defined or reliable. This etic approach would be too simplistic and there would be no logic behind the behaviors which are described<sup>2</sup>. Therefore an emic approach is preferred for cross-cultural research (Helfrich, 1999; Lu, 2012). The emic approach tries to find unique characteristics of a culture to understand it from the inside; this approach is used in this research.

The existing qualitative and emic studies on American culture, however, both written by Americans or by non-American scholars, usually lack a strict systematical and empirical underpinning. These studies are more impressionistic and written from the perspective of the scholars in a self-selected order. Consequently, it is not a result of an empirical research. Such an empirical method was provided by Thomas et al. (2010) who studied the cultural differences by using the Critical Incident Technique and coined the concept of ‘cultural standards’. Enklaar (2024), building further on this method, established the Grounded Interpretive Model, which neatly distinguishes typical behaviors (cultural standards) and values. This model is used to explore how the American culture is perceived by the Dutch, aiming to provide a ‘thick’ description of the American culture by describing both concrete behaviors and the cultural logic behind these behaviors.

This thesis focuses on the experiences of Dutch expatriates residing and working in the United States. The following main research question is addressed in this study: ***“Which cultural differences do Dutch individuals living and working in the United States perceive in the workplace?”*** Qualitative research is done using the Critical Incident Technique and Grounded Interpretive Model to determine the cultural differences between the Dutch and the Americans. The main research question is divided into sub-questions:

1. What different American cultural standards are perceived by Dutch expatriates?
2. What is the cultural logic behind the American cultural standards?
3. How can Dutch expatriates in the United States bridge these cultural differences?

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<sup>2</sup> The limitations of the etic approach will be discussed in Chapter 2.1.



The aim of this study is to determine the different concrete behaviors of the Americans that are perceived by Dutch expatriates who are living and working in the United States by using the Critical Incident Technique and Grounded Interpretive Model. A thick description of the American culture will be provided. A thick description encompasses the cultural logic of the Americans behind their concrete attitudes (Geertz, 1973). This study provides recommendations to strengthen collaboration and communication between the Dutch and the Americans which can result in more efficient and smooth cooperation and reinforcing good business relationships (López-Duarte et al., 2019).

### **1.1 Academic relevance**

This study contributes to the literature on cross-cultural differences between the Netherlands and the United States. The research is part of the project ‘one market, many cultures’ (Enklaar, 2024). It is based on qualitative research by focusing on the following research gaps.

***Gap 1: there is no detailed and empirical comparison of the cultural differences between the Dutch and the Americans.***

First, this study enhances academic literature by providing a detailed, qualitative, empirical comparison that explores the cultural differences between the Dutch and the Americans using the Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954; Thomas et al., 2010) and the Grounded Interpretive Model (Enklaar, 2024). Particularly, quantitative research has been done by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998), Hofstede (2009) and Meyer (2014) who compare cultures from an outside perspective. However, these descriptions are quite general and fail to provide the underlying cultural logic (thick description).

***Gap 2: there is no consistent description of the American cultural values that constitute the cultural logic behind concrete behaviors.***

Second, this study enhances the scientific literature with a thick description of Americans’ typical behavior including its underlying values. Kohls (1984) has found thirteen American values and Slate and Schroll-Machl (2003) have found nine American standards but did not explain why Americans behave based on these values<sup>3</sup>. This qualitative approach uses the concept of cultural standards (Thomas et al., 2010). Next, the Grounded Interpretive Model (Enklaar, 2024) is used to identify the cultural logic behind the typical behavior to form a thick

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<sup>3</sup> The values and standards are expanded in chapter 2.2.2.

description of cross-cultural interaction between people from the Netherlands and the United States (Geertz, 1973). This thick description makes it possible to understand how and why Americans behave the way they do, which contributes to a more systematic and consistent description of American values.

## **1.2 Practical relevance**

This study provides the reader and especially Dutch expatriates, already working or going to work in the United States, with a proper understanding of the cultural differences between the Dutch and the Americans from a Dutch perspective. It describes what Dutch expatriates can expect in the workplace in the United States. Knowledge about the how and why of American behavior can improve the quality of the interactions between these two cultures. Understanding cultural differences helps to cooperate and communicate more efficiently and builds trust in mutual relationships which is essential for successful, international collaborations (López-Duarte et al., 2019).

## **1.3 Outline of the thesis**

In the remainder of this study, the following chapter presents the theoretical background where the literature is reviewed. Chapter three presents the methodology including the research design, data collection and data analysis. Chapter four presents the results which are collected during the research. In chapter five, the results are compared against the existing studies on the American culture. In addition, the theoretical and practical contributions are included followed by its limitations and recommendations for future research. Lastly, an answer to the research question is given as conclusion.

## **2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

This chapter reviews the literature on cross-cultural management concerning the Netherlands and the United States. First, the two different approaches to the description of cultures (etic and emic) are explained. Second, the Critical Incident Technique, the definition of cultural standards and the Grounded Interpretive Model are discussed. Finally, the literature on Dutch culture and American culture are separately examined and compared.

### **2.1 Etic approach**

The etic and emic approaches are two contrasting approaches to describe differences between cultures (Pike, 1967).

The etic approach applies a descriptive system that is equal for multiple cultures that shows similarities as well as differences between individual cultures. Culture is studied from the outside perspective where two or more cultures are compared (Helfrich, 1999). The etic approach seeks to describe a culture objectively and therefore compares cultures through a standard number of dimensions or values (Schwartz, 2006). In other words, the etic approach searches for universal laws in order to identify generalizations that can be applied across cultures. It presents both the differences and similarities between multiple cultures. This approach does not examine the underlying reasons for cultural practices. Instead, it focuses on identifying influences of culture based on individual thoughts, behavior and learning.

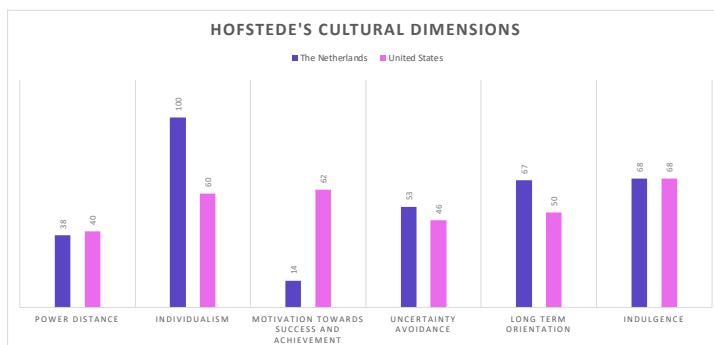
The etic approach can use both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Several frameworks and theories are established on the etic approach to explaining the cultural differences between nations. Frameworks and theories are created by Hall (1966), Hofstede (1980), Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998), Schwartz (2006) and Meyer (2014). The framework of Hofstede (1980) is considered as a significant contribution to research in a cross-cultural context (Kirkman et al., 2006). Hofstede pioneered this field with his dimensions and is still the most widely used model. The cultural dimensions of Meyer (2014) build upon the framework of Hofstede (1980) with practical insights for business contexts (Browaeys & Price, 2008). Meyer (2014) is the most recent and does not use a quantitative method. Therefore, a closer look will be taken into the cultural differences between the Netherlands and the United States based on Hofstede's (2005) and Meyer's (2014) cultural dimensions.

### ***Hofstede's cultural dimensions: Dutch versus American culture***

Hofstede's cultural model consist of six dimensions: high vs low power distance, individualism vs collectivism, high vs low uncertainty avoidance, motivation towards achievement and success, short-term vs long-term orientation and indulgence vs restraint. For each dimension a country can have a score ranging from 0 to 100. Figure 1 presents the scores of the Netherlands and the United States (Hofstede, 2024). The Netherlands and the United States have quite similar scores in the country comparison tool. Both the Netherlands and the United States score relatively low on power distance (38 and 40) and the indulgence score is identical (68). The uncertainty avoidance level (53 and 46) and long-term orientation (67 and 50) score on average but the Netherlands is ranked slightly higher in these two dimensions.

According to Hofstede's country comparison tool (2024)<sup>4</sup>, the major differences between the Netherlands and the United States are in the dimensions of individualism and motivation toward success and achievement. The Netherlands scores 100 for individualism while the United States scores 60. Individualistic nations are especially concerned with their own interests and the interests of their immediate family, the individual is centered (Hofstede, 1980). People emphasize their individual needs over group interests. Personal freedom and responsibility are important values within an individualistic culture. However, the description of the American culture as a less individualistic country is questioned by Enklaar (2007). Regarding the dimension of motivation towards success and achievement, the United States (62) scores significantly higher compared to the Netherlands (14). A high score on the dimension of motivation towards success and achievement indicates a competitive society that is driven by success and performance (Hofstede, 1980). Behavior in school and career is based on pursuing the best, 'the winner takes it all'. For a culture that is more consensus-oriented in this dimension, quality of life and liking what one does is preferable to be competitive.

Figure 1 Hofstede's cultural dimensions, NL vs US (Hofstede, 2024)



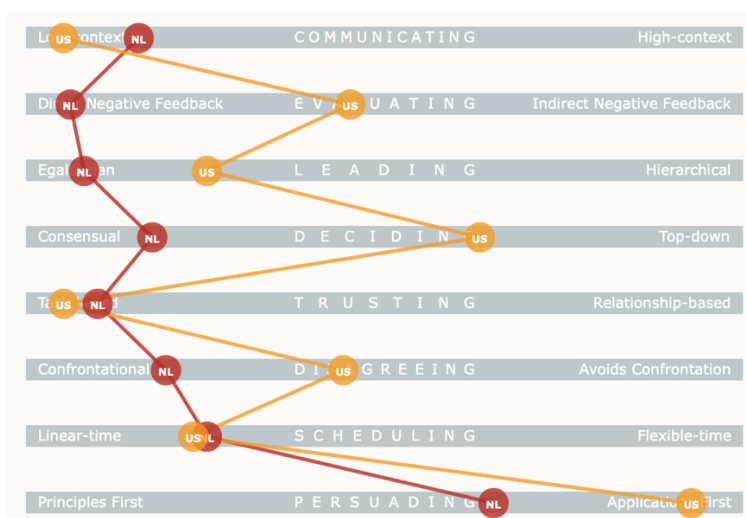
<sup>4</sup> Retrieved on June 20,, 2024 from <https://www.theculturefactor.com/country-comparison-tool>

### *Meyer's cultural dimensions: Dutch versus American culture*

Meyer's cultural model consists of eight dimensions: communicating, evaluating, leading, deciding, trusting, disagreeing, scheduling and persuading. The dimensions are not graded from low to high; each endpoint has a value from its own perspective (Meyer, 2014). Meyer's framework is focused on business and workplace behaviors while Hofstede's framework provides attitudes of workers. Figure 2 presents the scores of the Netherlands and the United States (Meyer, 2024).

The Netherlands and the United States have similar perspectives on the dimensions of communicating (low-context), leading (egalitarian), trusting (task-based), scheduling (linear-time) and persuading (application first). Regarding the dimensions of evaluating (direct negative feedback vs. indirect negative feedback) and deciding (consensual vs. top-down), more contrast and differences can be seen. The Dutch tend to give direct negative feedback whereas the Americans are in the middle of the scale. Americans give feedback more indirectly and tactfully. Criticism is often wrapped up in compliments or suggestions. The biggest contrast between the Netherlands and the United States is in the dimension of deciding. The Netherlands has a consensual perspective which means that decisions are made in groups by unanimous agreement Enklaar (2007). The American tend to be more top-down, decisions are made by executives at the top, with input from team members (Meyer, 2024).

Figure 2 Meyer's cultural dimensions, NL vs US (Meyer, 2024)



Etic approaches are based on the assumption that cultures can be compared using a universal framework and that general conclusions can be drawn from them. This approach was criticized

by other scholars. Scores and dimensions would not be properly defined or reliable (Berry, 1999; Helfrich, 1999). The use of universal dimensions would be too simplistic and schematic. Describing culture by using universal dimensions may result in impressions that these limited dimensions can capture a complete culture. Also, the etic approach considers culture as a static phenomenon and does not take cultural change into account. Lu (2012) argues that researchers employing the etic approach presume culture to be objective, despite its subjective nature. In addition, it describes behaviors or attitudes but it does not explain the logic behind them. The emic approach is the alternative of the etic approach, this approach will be discussed in the following section.

## **2.2 Emic approach**

The emic approach can be utilized to counter the constraints of the etic approach. The emic approach aims to give a subjective description of a culture, to discover the reasons why people in a country behave in the way they do. Culture is studied from the inside perspective (Helfrich, 1999). There is no comparison since there is only focus on one culture. The emic approach tries to find unique characteristics of a culture to understand it from the inside, searching for peculiarities. According to Gergen (1985), culture has to be studied by reasons rather than causes since it is not an external component but an integral part of human behavior. According to Helfrich (1999), by utilizing the emic approach within cross-cultural research, self-determination and self-reflection are necessary. In addition, one has to be aware of systematic bias and arbitrariness. Systematic bias could arise by misinterpreting behavior or attitudes, this can lead to wrong conclusions and implications (Boer et al., 2018). Arbitrariness indicates the absence of a connection between a form and its meaning.

In terms of cultural differences between the Dutch and the Americans, there are only a few relevant qualitative emic studies that have explored the differences on the work floor in-depth. Some qualitative studies have discussed differences between the Netherlands and the United States, but did not focus on business relationships. Edkins et al. (2015) explored the experiences of wives and girlfriends of child molesters in both countries, a cross-cultural comparison but not the field that this study is looking for. Factors that motivate Americans to learn Dutch and their evaluations of interactions with Dutch people are researched by Steele (2021), but this study has been done from an American perspective. Gordon et al. (2020) examined the difference in mindfulness between the United States and the Netherlands, which is also not related to the work floor.

Phillips (1985), an American sociologist who was a professor at the University of Amsterdam, when critically analyzing the Dutch in his book, reveals much about American values. Phillips (1985) criticized the Dutch for ‘lack of individualism’, ‘strong group behavior’, ‘limited taking of responsibility’ and lack of good manners which also reflect American values (Enklaar, 2007). Phillips states that the Dutch are very collectivistic compared to the ‘individualistic’ American. In addition, the Dutch are sensitive to group pressure according to Phillips, which indicates that the Americans are more individualistic. In the eyes of an American, the human being is an autonomous individual who is responsible for one’s own deeds. If there is a conflict, the Dutch will seek consensus, whereas the Americans strongly defend their deviating opinion. Phillips believes the Dutch have an unwillingness to hold the individual accountable. Americans tend to attribute success and failure to their personal effort, Americans more readily give compliments while also more easily criticizing weaknesses (of others) and acknowledging failures. Besides, Phillips criticizes the lack of good manners of the Dutch. The Americans value small signs of spontaneous attention and consideration for others.

Moreover, there are blogs and books about the United States and the cultural differences between the Dutch and the Americans, but those are not based on scientific research or not focused on the American culture from a Dutch perspective<sup>5</sup>. This information can be used as additional information to understand the underlying values of typical American behavior. For the emic approach, it is important that qualitative research goes into detail and is interpretive. Not only the typical behavior needs to be described but also try to understand ‘why’ people are behaving like this.

This section reviewed the different approaches in cross-cultural literature. The etic approach as well as the emic approach have advantages and limitations. Notably, limited research has been done based on the emic method. In the next section, different literature about the Dutch and American cultures will be discussed.

### *2.2.1 Dutch cultural values*

Cultural values are tacit assumptions and moral principles (Enklaar, 2007). They represent the cultural logic of a specific culture. A thick description, describing both behaviors and values,

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<sup>5</sup> Some books will be discussed at the end of chapter 2.2.2.

can be used to understand and explain the deeply layered behavior of an individual in order to prevent misunderstandings and clashes (Geertz, 1973).

The Dutch cultural values have to be taken into account since this could influence the perceptions of the Dutch expatriates who are living and working in the United States. Enklaar (2007) has found twelve values of the Dutch culture that influence the behavior and attitude of individuals. The values are divided by origin: Christianity, Protestantism and Holland. First, the Christian values are described which are shared with other European countries. However, the Christian values which are mentioned below have been shaped by Dutch fulfillment.

1. **Salvation** (heil): by making good choices and acting properly, the future will bring rewards. Believing in progress and innovation offers a better world; to stand still is to regress. It is good to sacrifice for ideals. There is a strong future orientation by neglecting the present and believing that 'new is good'.
2. **Guilt & remission** (schuld & vergeving): One is responsible for mistakes and deeds. If one is guilty, one should be punished. In addition, people expect the one who made mistakes, admits guilt and expresses regret. Apologies will be accepted and trust will be rebuilt. By not taking responsibility, it is seen as childish behavior.
3. **Charity** (naasteliefde): everybody should take care of others who are in sorrow, pain or need. Treat someone how you would like to be treated yourself. It is essential to prioritize the interests of the poor rather than your interest, do not prioritize your benefit.
4. **Truth** (waarheid): Dutchmen say the truth rather than being polite, even if the truth is painful. Being honest, critical and open is appreciated instead of circling the matter or avoiding information. When one is lying, it harms trust and loyalty. Furthermore, the Dutch like to be open about personal life and feelings.

The next four values are based on Protestantism, also referred to as 'Weberian values' based on the theory of Max Weber. Despite the fact the values are rooted in Protestantism, Enklaar (2007) states that the values are not only held by people who are Protestant but also related to the rise of an urban middle class.

5. **Work** (arbeid): to work is good while doing nothing is not. People who are working hard are highly valued. A full agenda is considered positive, particularly for highly educated people. However, the work must be done correctly.
6. **Order & neatness** (orde & netheid): all tasks must be done properly and orderly. The Dutch prefer order and neatness as time is scarce. Without overview and rules, things go wrong



and there is no orderly existence. Someone who is disorganized and chaotic is seen as irresponsible or antisocial.

7. **Utility** (nut): everything that will be done has to be useful. There should be no waste, most commodities are scarce and must be used efficiently. One needs to get better from efforts. In addition, resources, especially money, must be used sparingly.
8. **Reliability** (betrouwbaarheid): words and actions must be in accordance with each other. If one does not keep one's agreements, the person is seen as unreliable. Dutchmen take literally what you are saying, this also applies to coming in time. In business, a verbal 'yes' means there is a deal. The Dutch culture is a high-trusted society.
9. **Moderation** (matigheid): do everything in moderation because violence harms. One must be able to control oneself and be patient, too much is bad. It is perceived as immature to show that one cannot control oneself.

The three values that are remaining are typically Dutch values. The values arose in the Holland district and later on scattered across the full country. Particularly, the combination of these three values is significantly unique for the Netherlands which distinguishes them from the rest of the world.

10. **Consensus** (overeenstemming): the Dutch decide together. Differences of opinion must be resolved peacefully because aggression and violence must be prevented. Discuss everything together and find a solution that pleases everyone. A compromise must be found jointly and a pleasant atmosphere maintained.
11. **Equality** (gelijkheid): inequality is not fair. Do not think you are superior to anybody else; everyone should be treated equally. Modesty graces the human being. Besides, do not give orders to people but instead ask them kindly.
12. **Self-determination** (zelf-beschikking): do as you want, as long as one leaves another in peace. One should have the freedom to make their own choices based on their own opinion. Another person has no right to force what one should do. One must take initiative oneself instead of waiting for others.

A summary of the Dutch cultural values is captured in Table 1.

Table 1 Values of the Dutch culture (Enklaar, 2007)

Nr.	Cultural value	Origin
1.	Salvation (heil)	Christianity
2.	Guilt & remission (zonde & schuld)	Christianity
3.	Charity (naasteliefde)	Christianity
4.	Truth (waarheid)	Christianity
5.	Work (arbeid)	Protestantism
6.	Order & neatness (orde & netheid)	Protestantism
7.	Utility (nut)	Protestantism
8.	Reliability (betrouwbaarheid)	Protestantism
9.	Moderation (matigheid)	Protestantism
10.	Consensus (overeenstemming)	Holland
11.	Equality (gelijkheid)	Holland
12.	Self-determination (zelfbeschikking)	Holland

The next section will discuss the American values described by Kohls (1984) and the cultural standards by Slate and Schroll-Machl (2003). In addition, elements of the books from Gorer (1948), Stewart and Bennett (1991), d'Iribarne et al. (1998), Althern and Bennett (2011) and d'Iribarne et al. (2020) will be discussed as well.

### 2.2.2 American cultural values and standards

The United States is a diverse society where many cultures come together, some might consider the culture of the United States as a 'melting pot' (Apker, 2022). However, the United States has a dominant culture where immigrants integrated into the mainstream culture, immigrants gave up their differences in order to fit into typical American society (Weaver, 1999).

Kohls (1984) formulated thirteen American values based on his experience as Director of International Programs at San Francisco State University by working with international visitors and looking at Americans through the eyes of these foreign visitors. Kohls calls his principles 'values', however, they appear to represent concrete behaviors than real values, the cultural logic that explains these behaviors, as in Enklaar's cultural values. Kohls (1984) has found the following values for the United States:

1. **Personal control:** do not believe in the power of fate. One should control the environment instead of the other way around. One is responsible for pursuing a better

life, looking for one's individual interest is considered normal. Everyone has to do the best he or she can do.

2. **Change:** development, growth and improvement are strongly related to change and considered positively. Change is not seen as a disruptive force like other traditional cultures do. Science and innovation are more relevant than history and tradition, change is seen as positive progress.
3. **Time control:** Americans are concerned with getting things done (on time) rather than developing deep relationships. Schedules are highly valued and strictly followed, time is a precious resource. Time should be used wisely.
4. **Equality:** equality is seen as a social goal in the United States. No one is born superior to anyone else. Although this value is rather an ideal than a realized state, everyone deserves to be treated equally and fairly.
5. **Individualism:** One considers oneself as an individual who is responsible for one's situations and destinies. Americans must make their own choices on an individual base and be responsible for the consequences. Each individual is unique. Privacy is related to individualism and is considered as a positive aspect and requirement for all humans.
6. **Self-help & initiative:** it is highly valued to accomplish success without any assistance. One can take credit and pride one selves by working hard and making sacrifices all by oneself. It is important to be aware and responsible for one's actions and take the initiative to make progress.
7. **Competition:** to bring out the best in people, competition is necessary. Competition is highly valued rather than collaboration among individuals. The strong emphasis on individualism pushes the individuals in the United States to be competitive.
8. **Future orientation:** one should focus on the future rather than the past. Americans strive for a future that brings even greater happiness. One is optimistic and is looking forward.
9. **Action & work:** the United States is action-oriented and result-oriented. Americans value much effort, particularly when hard work results in achievement or progress. Action is seen to be superior to inaction. Life is related to action; leisure activities should just assume a little part. Americans have a no-nonsense attitude. People work a lot, also known as 'workaholics'
10. **Informality:** social behavior within the United States is marked by informality. There are not many rules and restrictions for correct behavior. One may call others by their first names and dress casually, even in business.

11. **Openness & honesty:** Americans consider oneself as open, honest and direct. One prefers the most direct approach possible, laying all the cards out on the table. Americans do not have issues being honest in negative evaluations. Opinions what one thinks or what some feel, are expressed explicitly.
12. **Efficiency:** one tends to be realistic in order to be efficient and practical. Americans are pragmatically oriented; time is highly valued. Things should be getting done fast and efficiently.
13. **Materialism:** Americans value material comfort and collect many material objects. Success is often associated with having nice things. Materials are seen as the benefits that result from work and effort.

An overview of Kohls' American cultural values is captured in Table 2. In the following paragraphs, the American cultural standards found by Slate and Schroll-Machl (2003) will be discussed to verify and expand the information above.

*Table 2 American cultural values (Kohls, 1984)*

Nr.	Cultural value
1.	Personal control
2.	Change
3.	Time control
4.	Equality
5.	Individualism
6.	Self-help & initiative
7.	Competition
8.	Future orientation
9.	Action & work
10.	Informality
11.	Openness & honesty
12.	Efficiency
13.	Materialism

Slate and Schroll-Machl (2003), experts in intercultural management have formulated nine cultural standards that are prominent in the United States (Thomas et al., 2009).

1. **Equality:** Americans strive for equality and related opportunities for advancement. 'Hard work brings success' is the belief and how they act. Relations are mainly

horizontal and strive to keep equal. Informal behavior is seen as a sign of equality. The service behavior reflects widespread friendliness.

2. **Action-oriented:** active, pragmatic and energetic. Many activities with a focus on results and effectiveness. Optimism and future orientation are crucial; a situation can be turned for the better by taking action.
3. **Serenity (easy-going):** work is not extensively planned. Americans do not have the requirement of complete quality. The lack of detailed planning allows for flexibility in responding to disruptions. As a result, improvements can be made easily. When problems occur, a possible solution is sought instead of having long discussions about the cause of the problem. Americans adopt a relaxed approach that encourages spontaneity and creativity. There is a willingness to take risks and make decisions.
4. **Performance-oriented:** in the eyes of Americans, performance is required next to success. Competition and performance are widely accepted both privately and professionally. Americans see competition as an ingredient for the best results which in addition gives self-confidence and is fun. Winners are admired and recognized rather than envied. Should one lose, this is met by the belief that one learns from one's mistakes. Feedback will motivate one to perform better next time. One competes not only with others but also with oneself to keep getting better and developing yourself.
5. **Individualism:** Americans have a strong sense of personal responsibility, independence and initiative. Everyone must feel responsible for one's own life is central in the United States. Freedom means to manage your own luck and objectives. In groups, all participants have to provide input and individual presentations are emphasized. Group interest is not an issue because everyone must pursue their own interests.
6. **Need for social recognition:** to manage one's self-esteem, social feedback is essential. One gives feedback to one's environment and vice versa in a friendly and carefully manner. One should always behave composed and friendly to remain pleasant atmosphere. A good mood should be spread and one should pay attention to others.
7. **Interpersonal distance minimization:** Extravert personalities including sociability, openness and ability to work in groups are easily accessible and assessed as positive and interested. In an informal atmosphere, hospitality and helpfulness are essential. However, intimate areas are closed. Americans avoid deep and personal topics in conversation, careful attention is paid to share personal problems. One does not want to inconvenience the other person and reserves these personal conversations with real friends. Superficial friendships are made quickly but it takes a long time to build real,

deep friendships. The behavior offered during introductions is extroverted but does not guarantee trust and actual, deep friendship.

8. **Intersex relation patterns:** In the United States, sexual harassment and discrimination is a major issue between men and women. There are rough guidelines that there should be no physical contact between the sexes. Also, no comments about clothing or physical attributes should be made.
9. **Patriotism:** the country is very loved by the Americans. Americans are proud of their heritage and constitution and expect respect and recognition, the values are considered exemplary.

An overview of the cultural standards of Slate and Schroll-Machl (2003) which are discussed above is captured in Table 3.

*Table 3 American cultural standards (Slate & Schroll-Machl, 2003)*

Nr.	Cultural standards
1.	Equality
2.	Action-oriented
3.	Serentiy (easy-going)
4.	Performance-oriented
5.	Individualism
6.	Need for social recognition
7.	Interpersonal distance minimization
8.	Intersex relation patterns
9.	Patriotism

The information above provided an impression of the American culture in terms of a list of ‘cultural values’ and ‘standards’. The following sections include books of Gorer (1948), Stewart and Bennett (1991), d'Iribarne et al. (1998), Althern and Bennett (2011) and d'Iribarne et al. (2020). This information comes from a more narrative and impressionistic source that is not related to systematic empirical research.

Gorer (1948) analyzed the American culture from a British perspective. The book emphasizes that Americans are very individualistic, meaning personal responsibility and independence are important. This is related to informal relationships and equality regardless of hierarchical

differences. The American work culture places a great emphasis on hard work and productivity which encourages employees to constantly improve.

Stewart and Bennett (1991) have explored the cultural patterns in American society and confirm that Americans highly appreciate action and achievement, this shapes their identity. Efficiency is taken into account and there is a high focus on the individual. Americans believe strongly in personal responsibility and personal initiative to set future directions. Americans hold the conviction that goals can be achieved through hard work, this is often rewarded with success. Moreover, challenges and obstacles are not viewed as setbacks, but rather as opportunities for achievement and personal improvement. In this cultural context, the competition that naturally arises is seen as a motivator. Besides, Americans prefer individual autonomy rather than groups in social relations. Nevertheless, equality in social interactions is highly valued and hierarchy is tried to avoid. This can be seen in the informal way people address each other, regardless of status or title. As d'Iribarne et al. (1998) pointed out, a 'contract' is an important principle. Many relationships are established based on mutual benefit, with agreements and expectations clearly communicated. Although Americans are often seen as competitive, the book emphasizes that strong cooperation can also exist within social structures. However, this cooperation is based on individual contributions.

In addition, Althern and Bennett (2011) stated that the American business world admires the values of working hard, achievement, competition, materialism, rationality, perseverance and building toward the future. These values are reflected in the general status and the operations of a business. Americans are seen as 'workaholics' since they might consider work more important than social relationships with friends and family. While working, being punctual is important whereas delays cause frustration and waste time. Americans are not interested in personal relationships with colleagues or other business relationships. However, they act and do business in an informal and impersonal manner. Nevertheless, Americans tend to make decisions based on quantitative, objective data. In decision-making, personal feelings and social relationships are not considered. Also, all important agreements and conversations are written down since every written word is important for Americans in business. Americans would like to know the purpose of doing business with a particular party, this is also seen in its behavior in meetings. Meetings must go according to a punctual agenda and a leader is involved. The leader in a meeting encourages participation, and keeps control over the topics or eventually looks after settling disagreements. If an issue arises within an American meeting, it will be

solved by voting. Overall, Americans change jobs quite fast, there is a weak sense of company loyalty. However, diversity within the work floor is highly valued in the United States.

d'Iribarne et al. (2020) wrote a chapter about *fear* within American society. He states that Americans have fear finding oneself on the will of others or being dependent on others (d'Iribarne et al., 2020). Safety is important to achieve to protect oneself. In addition, d'Iribarne et al. (2020) discusses the roots of American management, such as management by objectives, lean management or reengineering, which is worldwide implemented as a managerial standard based on American effectivity and acceptability as well on the principles of autonomy and accountability. The chapter describes that *work*, already in the beginnings of American democracy, was seen as a commodity and that the employment relationship is based on these democratic ideals. This involves the American norm of careful respect, workers have to be treated based on equal rights, even though it does not always work out that way in practice. Besides, d'Iribarne et al. (1998) comparing France, the Netherlands and the United States on management and national traditions in one of his previously written books, the importance of a contract (written agreement) for the Americans is highlighted. d'Iribarne et al. (1998) state that a contract is a moral principle for Americans. Relationships between Americans are often formal and based on mutual benefit where communication is direct and explicit. Americans do not want to deviate from their job function in their contract. Contracts provide a sense of security and protection.

The above values and standards give an indication of the American culture. It describes the aspects of the American culture that the authors consider important which makes them relatively impressionistic. A completely consistent perspective of the American culture does not emerge, the authors highlight different aspects. It is important to note that these studies are not based on systematic empirical research. In the next section, the Dutch cultural values and the American cultural values will be compared.

### *2.2.3 Critique on the Dutch and American cultures & its comparison*

The Dutch cultural values found by Enklaar (2007) and the American values (Kohls, 1984) and cultural standards (Slate & Schroll-Machl, 2003) which are described in the previous sections show both similarities and differences. However, the American values and standards described are heterogeneous characterizations that may involve misinterpretations because the underlying cultural logic has not been included. Kohls (1984) and Slate and Schroll-Machl (2003) have



written from an American perspective, while d'Iribarne et al. (2020) has written from a French perspective which is not equal to the Dutch perspective on American culture. There is a lack of conceptual clarity and it does not meet the requirements of a thick description (Geertz, 1973). It is important to remark that these cultural values and standards are generalizations. It may apply that there will be variations within each culture. However, this comparison highlights some remarkable insights about the values and standards between the Netherlands and the United States. Looking at the values and their definitions, some values are shared, however, they take on a different interpretation and meanings per country (Enklaar, 2007). After examining the various definitions of Dutch and American values, a comparison was conducted in a structured manner. Table 4 below provides this overview that compares the values and standards from Enklaar (2007), Kohls (1984) and Slate and Schroll-Machl (2003), showing the similarities and differences. Please note, the Dutch values (Enklaar) are compared with American concrete behaviors (Kohls and Slate and Schroll-Machl).

*Table 4 Comparison of American cultural values and standards*

Cultural values by Enklaar (2007)	American values by Kohls (1984)	American standards by Slate and Schroll-Machl (2003)
Work	Action & work	Action-oriented
Utility	Efficiency	
Equality	Equality	Equality
Salvation	Change Future orientation	
Guilt & remission	Personal control	
Self-determination	Self-help & initiative	
Order & neatness	Time control	
Truth	Openness & honesty	
Charity		
Moderation		
Reliability		
Consensus		
	Competition	Performance oriented
	Informality	Interpersonal distance minimization
	Individualism	Individualism
	Materialism	
		Intersex relation patterns
		Patriotism
		Serenity (easy-going)
		Need for social recognition

The American cultural values of action & work, efficiency and equality could be directly compared to the Dutch cultural values of work, utility and equality. Both cultures emphasize working hard, not wasting time but being effective and treating people equally (Enklaar, 2007; Kohls, 1984; Slate & Schroll-Machl, 2003). Regarding equality, the Dutch are struck by the great differences in power and wealth in the United States, but all authors emphasize that for Americans, equality is paramount (Kohls, 1984; Slate & Schroll-Machl, 2003). Even though both cultures value work, the Americans are more competitive-oriented (Kohls, 1984). In the Netherlands, people are not that competitive considering that this is at the expense of others while everyone should be equal and might arouse conflicts (disrupting 'gezelligheid' (cozy, enjoyable atmosphere)). In addition, both cultures are forward-looking, salvation (Enklaar, 2007) is quite similar to change and future orientation (Kohls, 1984). The American value informality and standard about interpersonal distance minimization have a slight connection to equality as well (Kohls, 1984; Slate & Schroll-Machl, 2003). Overall, Americans are easily accessible and there are not many rules and restrictions for correct behavior.

Despite observations that Americans tend to be more individualistic than the Dutch (Enklaar, 2007; Kohls, 1984; Slate & Schroll-Machl, 2003), the framework of Hofstede (2024) suggests that the Netherlands is significantly more individualistic than the United States. However, according to Kohls (1984), even though one of the values is individualism, Americans think they are more individualistic than they really are. Americans like the idea of being independent and see themselves as unique, but the system pushes them toward conformity when it comes to major decisions (Kohls, 1984). In addition, Phillips (1985) has critical comments in his book about the lack of individualism in the Netherlands, he experiences the Dutch as very collectivistic. Phillips (1985) also indicates critically the strong group behavior and limited taking of responsibility in the Netherlands. The Netherlands possesses a form of group centrism, which is not found in the United States (Enklaar, 2007). This Dutch behavior is a consequence of the Dutch value 'consensus' (Enklaar, 2007) which is absent in the American culture. Dutch people value deliberation and agreeing things with each other. Joint decision-making and compromise are not components of the American culture. Americans are easy-going (Slate & Schroll-Machl, 2003) and prefer personal control (Kohls, 1984). Personal control from the Americans is quite similar to the Dutch guilt and remission. One is responsible for one's own deeds. If a conflict arises in the United States, there will be searched for a possible solution rather than having long discussions about the cause of the problem. For Americans, failure or success always depends on an individual. While in the Netherlands, failure is often blamed on

the system or culture of the organization. Dutch people decide together and strive to reach a consensus, different opinions and conflicts must be resolved peacefully and solution that pleases everyone have to be found (Enklaar, 2007).

Another notable value is the value openness and honesty. Kohls (1984) states that Americans prefer the most direct approach possible. Enklaar (2007) can confirm that Americans clearly and emotionally express their opinions. The Dutch value of truth aligns with this, being honest and open is appreciated in the Netherlands. In contrast, Meyer (2024) indicates that Americans are in the middle of the scale between direct and indirect evaluations (sandwich feedback).

In both cultures, it is appreciated to take initiative by oneself instead of waiting for others. This is reflected in the Dutch value of self-determination and the American value of self-help & initiative. Besides, time control from the Americans has similarities with the Dutch value of order & neatness. The Dutch and the Americans value finishing tasks on time in a proper and orderly way. This also interfaces with the values of utility and efficiency.

The American authors do not precisely state the Dutch values of charity and reliability (Enklaar, 2007) but are most likely also influential in American culture. The value consensus (Enklaar, 2007) which is highly present in the Dutch culture cannot be found in the American culture, this is probably contrasted by competition (Kohls, 1984). The Dutch strive for moderation (Enklaar, 2007), it is questionable whether this principle is present in the United States. The American values and standards of competition, performance oriented, patriotism and need for social recognition (Kohls, 1984; Slate & Schroll-Machl, 2003) are linked to achievement. The Dutch do not share these typical American principles, likewise the values and standards about materialism, intersex relation patterns and serenity (Kohls, 1984; Slate & Schroll-Machl, 2003).

Overall, it seems that Americans and the Dutch are closely similar culturally speaking. The expectation is that most conflicts between Americans and the Dutch will be about consensus and achievement. However, the information from these books is based on literature and personal observations. There is no systematic empirical research done, therefore this study will conduct empirical research based on the Critical Incident Technique. The next chapter will dive into the qualitative approach of Thomas et al. (2010), the Critical Incident Technique and the Grounded Interpretive Model.

### **2.3 Thomas' qualitative approach**

Thomas' study underlines the importance of understanding cultural differences in intercultural communication and cooperation (2010). According to him, culture "allows us to find meaning in the things, people and objects around us, as well as in complex processes and the consequences of our behavior" (Thomas, 2010, p. 17). Culture is seen as a system of orientation where all members have a sense of belonging to be integrated within a society or group. For instance, particular language, body language, clothing, rituals or greetings are included in a system of orientation. However, interactions between individuals from different countries or cultures can lead to unexpected situations and reactions because of different norms and values. In the methodology by Thomas, two factors are essential to describe cultures: cultural standards and the Critical Incident Technique (Thomas, 2010).

Cultural standards are forms of perception, thought patterns, judgments and interactions which are formed by members from a specific culture, these participants consider its behavior as normal and typical (Thomas et al., 2010). These cultural standards serve as guidelines for individuals to navigate social interactions and situations. The participants within a specific culture accept and practice based on the cultural standards, in other words, there are shared behavior patterns. Behavior can vary within a range of tolerance; this refers to the extent to which deviations from the cultural norms are accepted or tolerated within a given culture. When the limitations are surpassed, society will not accept the behavior since the situation is reviewed as unusual or strange. The Critical Incident Technique will be discussed in the following section.

#### *2.3.1 Critical Incident Technique*

Flanagan (1954) introduced the Critical Incident Technique. People could have interactions with people from other cultures or countries that are unexpected, strange or embarrassing to them. These recurring situations where cultural standards clash, are called critical incidents (F. Fiedler et al., 1971; Hiller, 2023). With the support of the Critical Incident Technique, these moments help to find out what standards are mostly applied by individuals in each country and culture.

The flexible approach of the Critical Incident Technique can be adapted to the specific requirements of the researcher's situation. Thomas (2010) stated five requirements to consider a situation as a critical incident in cross-cultural cooperation. First, the situation must be an

everyday, interactive encounter between a foreign visitor and a non-foreign member of a given host country. Second, the foreign visitor should perceive the situation as conflict-sensitive and confusing. Third, the cultural aspects inherent in the encounter will probably be misinterpreted by the foreign visitor to the host country. Fourth, with sufficient background information about the host country and its culture, the encounter should lend itself to a culturally appropriate interpretation. Lastly, the situation should be relevant to the foreign visitor's tasks and requirements.

Most critical incidents in interactions between two individuals of different cultures can be explained by contrasting cultural standards. The cultural standards can be extracted from cross-cultural clashes and interactions with the use of the Critical Incident Technique. Herewith, a deeper understanding of a culture's values, norms and beliefs can be developed. An important note is that cultural standards cannot generalize an entire culture or country, it does not provide insights into how a culture is generally structured. However, cultural standards can give a proper indication as fundamental guidelines. It helps to explain behavior from individuals within societies.

This section discussed the qualitative approach of Thomas et al. (2010), a practical method within emic research. While Flanagan (1954) introduced the Critical Incident Technique, (F. Fiedler et al., 1971) adapted it to cross-cultural contexts. Thomas's qualitative approach focuses on cultural standards guiding cross-cultural communication and collaboration. However, this approach lacks the description of the typical, concrete behavior (thick description). Therefore, the Grounded Interpretive Model will be explained in the next paragraph.

#### **2.4 Grounded Interpretive Model**

Since this study contributes to the project 'one market, many cultures', the Grounded Interpretive Model will be used (Enklaar, 2024). This model uses a qualitative approach and aims to create a thick description of cultures (Enklaar, 2024). It combines the strengths and avoids the weaknesses of the French (Phillipe d'Iribarne) and German (Alexander Thomas) schools in order to identify the cultural logic behind typical behaviors. The Critical Incident Technique will be used to identify the cultural standards.

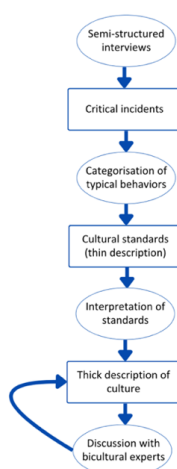
The Grounded Interpretive Model defines 'cultural standards' as 'concrete typical behaviors or attitudes that were observed' which are distinguished from 'values' which are defined as

‘abstract moral principles or strong ideals that can explain the observed behaviors’ (Enklaar, 2024). These definitions indicate a different meaning of ‘values’ in contrast to universal values which are used in quantitative research (Schwartz, 1992).

A two-layer description of (1) cultural standards and (2) underlying values is essential to understand different cultural characteristics according to Enklaar (2024). It is stronger than a one-layer description due to its stronger explanatory power of cultural change, the acculturation process and national cultures. In addition, it has practical advantages to prepare individuals who are going to live and work abroad.

This chapter reviewed the literature on the etic and emic approaches in cross-cultural research. It discussed various frameworks and theories looking at the Dutch and the American culture. In addition, Thomas’ qualitative approach is discussed considering the Critical Incident Technique and cultural standards. Currently, there is no systematic, empirical or qualitative research about the cultural differences between the Dutch and the Americans in the workplace. Besides, an interpretive approach in which not only typical behavior (standards) but also the underlying logic is described is lacking. Therefore, the cultural differences and similarities will be researched in this study based on the Grounded Interpretive Model to determine the concrete behaviors of the Americans perceived by Dutch expatriates. A thick description will be provided which includes the cultural logic of the American attitudes. Figure 3 represents the research procedure of the Grounded Interpretive Model. The steps will be clarified in the next chapter, the methodology.

Figure 3 Grounded Interpretive Model - research procedure



### 3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research design, data collection and data analysis procedures in order to maintain valid and reliable research. In addition, other considerations regarding the chosen approaches are explained.

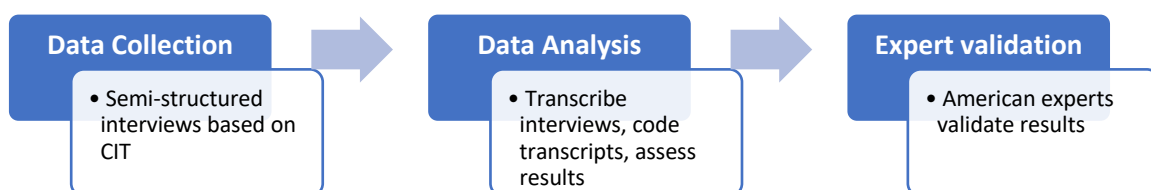
#### 3.1 Research design

This qualitative study aims to explore concrete situations between the Dutch and the Americans when misunderstandings are perceived due to cultural differences, what these cultural differences consist of and how this gap can be bridged. An inductive qualitative approach is used to search for critical incidents between the Dutch and Americans.

A qualitative study is chosen instead of a quantitative study. A qualitative study gives the possibility to explore deeply cultural beliefs, experiences and interactions that quantitative studies may miss (Wagner et al., 2014).

The visual representation of the research design and its methodology can be found in Figure 4 below. Semi-structured interviews are conducted as the primary data collection approach, followed by data analysis through Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) that is displayed according to the Gioia method (Gioia et al., 2013). Afterward, intercultural experts have validated the results of the study. The next sections describe the processes of these actions, starting with data collection.

Figure 4 Research design



#### 3.2 Data collection

Data is collected by conducting semi-structured interviews. Conflicts between the interests of the human beings studied, the interests of the researcher and the value of science may arise (University of Twente, 2024). Therefore, an ethical assessment of the Ethics Committee BMS

of the University of Twente was necessary. This research proposal and interview questions has been approved by the Ethics Committee BMS in July 2024.

### *3.2.1 Sample requirements and research procedure*

After the approval of the ethical review, the researcher searched for participants. This was done through the social media platforms Facebook and LinkedIn. Also, institutions like the U.S. Embassy in the Netherlands or the Dutch Embassy in the United States were consulted. This means that purposeful sampling was applied since interviewees were selected based on characteristics stated by the researcher (Koerber & McMichael, 2008; Suri, 2011). Furthermore, snowball sampling was used as well since the interviewed Dutch individuals suggested potential participants.

For this study, the sample had to fulfill specific requirements. Only Dutch individuals who live and work for at least six months were selected. After six months of behaving in a foreign country, the honeymoon phase is fulfilled. The honeymoon phase refers to the first stage when individuals are exposed to a new environment and culture (Ward et al., 1998). This period is mostly covered by the positive elements of a cultural shock. After six months, this phase fades away whereas the individual will notice challenges and difficulties of adapting to the new culture. The next requirement is that the Dutch individual should be fully integrated into a team with American colleagues with collaboration on a regular base and multiple interactions. This requirement is set as the Dutch individual may have had opportunities to explore any cultural differences within its integration. The last requirement involves that the researcher had to try to find Dutch individuals living and working in the United States with preferably mixed demographic characteristic aspects like gender, age, occupation, state and duration of stay. This is complementary to the specific requirements based on purposeful sampling which are indicated above.

It is essential to achieve data saturation in qualitative research to maintain content validity (Saunders et al., 2018). Data saturation indicates the moment at which no new information is acquired and additional data collection becomes unnecessary (Hennink et al., 2016). Thesing (2016) found that around eleven interviews based on the Critical Incident Technique are needed to achieve data saturation. To ensure optimal data saturation, the researcher interviewed sixteen Dutch individuals who are living and working in the United States. Table 5 presents the characteristics of the interviewees.



Table 5 Interviewees' characteristics

Nr.	Gender	Age	Years working in USA	State	Supervisor
1	Female	55	18	California	No
2	Female	26	1.5	Florida	No
3	Female	23	0.5	New York	No
4	Female	45	6	Colorado	Yes
5	Female	23	1	Idaho	No
6	Male	24	1	Pennsylvania	No
7	Female	38	7	New Jersey	Yes
8	Male	36	2	Arizona	Yes
9	Male	35	5	Oregon	No
10	Female	58	14	California	Yes
11	Male	21	0.5	Illinois	No
12	Female	44	8	New York	No
13	Male	32	6	Nevada	No
14	Female	41	1.5	Texas	Yes
15	Female	47	4	Texas	Yes
16	Male	32	3	California	No

All the requirements were met by the attending participants and the interviews were conducted through video calls on Microsoft Teams from October until November 2024. The aim of the interviews is to gain as many details as possible of typical American behavior. Since the presence of other and multiple people could influence responses, there was a closed one-on-one setting. The interview guide can be found in Appendix B. It was a semi-structured interview, having a proper foundation for the questions but still being flexible to ask follow-up questions or elaboration (Kallio et al., 2016). Before the interview started, first the interviewee was asked for written consent, see Appendix A. Interviews were conducted in the native language (Dutch) of the Dutch expatriates. The interviews were recorded and transcribed through Microsoft Teams as well. To delete the transcribing errors, the transcripts were reviewed manually and adjusted if necessary. After finalizing the transcripts, the results and quotes were used for analysis. In the following section, the process of data analysis is described.

### **3.3 Data analysis**

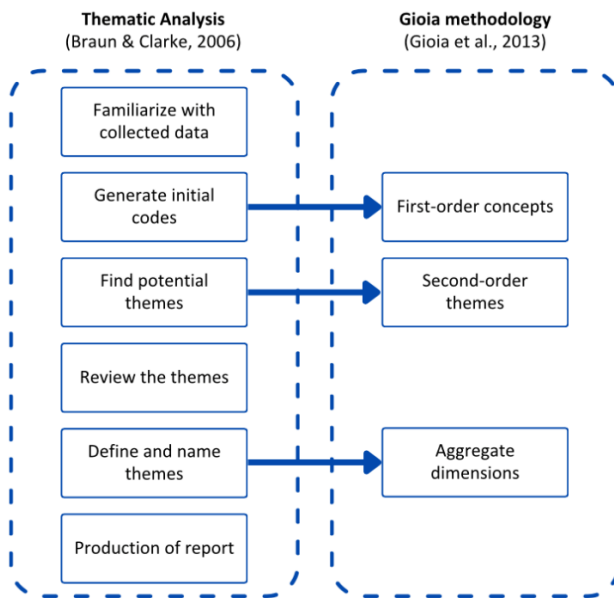
To collect data, Dutch expatriates were interviewed based on a semi-structured interview guide. The interviewees were asked to recall experiences where there was a friction or surprise of the Dutch when interacting with Americans at work. Thereafter, these experiences were analyzed based on Thematic Analysis.

The flexible Thematic Analysis organizes and describes the dataset to identify, analyze, and report patterns within the data matrix to capture important details (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), there are six different phases in Thematic Analysis. The first step involves familiarizing oneself with the collected data. This includes transcribing the data and reading the transcripts for inspection. In the second step, initial codes are generated. Initial codes are created to highlight interesting features of the data. The third step involves finding potential themes on different levels within the data based on similar features. The fourth step includes reviewing the themes of the extracted codes and the data. The themes that will be used in the analysis will be refined with a definition and a name in the fifth step. The last step concerns the production of the report. In this step, the reader is convinced with a valid analysis and the researcher provides sufficient evidence to answer the research question.

After the Thematic Analysis, the Gioia method is followed in order to present the data. This method brings ‘qualitative rigor’ (Gioia et al., 2013). The inductive research method is based on first-order concepts, second-order themes and aggregate dimensions which enhances the validity of the findings. First-order concepts involve the transcripts which are coded based on the quotes of the interviewees. The second-order themes consist of the first-order concepts which are rephrased by merging similar codes and linked to the ‘cultural standards’. The aggregate dimensions are the second-order themes which are analyzed and aggregated into dimensions, this can be seen as the ‘cultural values underlying the cultural standards’.

Some commonalities exist between these two methodologies. For instance, step two of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) can be compared to the first-order concepts of Gioia et al. (2013). Step three of Thematic Analysis can be perceived as the second-order themes of Gioia’s methodology and step five as the aggregate dimensions. These commonalities are visualized in Figure 5 below. The next section discusses the validation of experts.

Figure 5 Visualization of commonalities between methodologies



### 3.4 Expert validation

The results of the study were presented to two experts on the American culture to maintain the reliability of this research and avoid misinterpretations. After the validation of experts, cultural bias of the interviewees and the researcher is eliminated.

The experts are two American individuals who grew up in the United States. Since the individuals are native, both are considered as experts within the American culture. Although ‘fishes cannot see water’ and the Americans may not be aware of their cultural values, it may be assumed that they recognize typical American behavior. In addition, the feedback of the experts evaluates the critical incidents and cultural values to enhance reliability.

The experts were acquired through the network of the researcher. The experts are working with both American and Dutch people. Therefore, both the American and the Dutch cultures could be recognized. This made them able to check the analysis based on correctness and reliability in order to avoid bias. The feedback from the experts is used to improve the overall quality of the research.

## 4. RESULTS & COMMENTS

This chapter presents the results of the study. The American cultural standards, its definitions and its frequency which have been identified are presented. This is followed by a clustering of the cultural standards and connecting them with cultural values that explain the concrete behaviors of the Americans observed by the Dutch. This chapter does not only present the findings but also comments on the differences between the Dutch and the American. This is based on personal experiences of the Dutch interviewees and previous literature.

### 4.1 Cultural standards

Twenty cultural standards through an in-depth analysis are identified. The cultural standards are summarized in Table 6. When three or more interviewees mention a particular behavior, the behavior is qualified as ‘typically’ American. If less than three interviewees mention behavior, the behavior is not taken into account as it is not considered as ‘typical behavior’.

*Table 6 American cultural standards*

Cultural standards	Definition	Frequency
<b>1. Enthusiasm</b>	Strongly expressing positive emotions.	12
<b>2. Sticking to procedures</b>	Strict adherence to rules, agreements and procedures.	12
<b>3. Top-down decisions</b>	Decisions are taken by supervisors.	12
<b>4. Being nice</b>	Acting in a very kind and polite way.	9
<b>5. Work-life unbalance</b>	More emphasis on work performance than private time.	9
<b>6. Sugar-coated feedback</b>	Giving feedback in a positive way.	8
<b>7. Performance</b>	Admiration of high performance.	8
<b>8. Indirectness</b>	Circling around the message.	7
<b>9. Rewards</b>	Working for rewards.	7
<b>10. Autonomy</b>	Focused on personal tasks and responsibilities.	7
<b>11. Obedience</b>	Employees follow instructions from supervisor.	6
<b>12. Limited input</b>	Employees give little input.	5
<b>13. Authority</b>	Supervisor controls and decides.	5

<b>14. Self-profiling</b>	Putting oneself in the spotlight.	5
<b>15. Moral behavior</b>	Strict standards of moral behavior.	4
<b>16. Separate responsibilities</b>	Everyone works for one's own purpose.	4
<b>17. Advancing career path</b>	Taking self-initiative for one's own career.	4
<b>18. Trial and error</b>	Trying new methods to make progress.	4
<b>19. Competition</b>	Competing with teammates.	3
<b>20. Dealing with negative feedback</b>	Negative feedback is taken personally.	3

A detailed description of the cultural standards is provided below. First, a description of the American cultural standard is given. The description is followed by quotes from the interviewees, which illustrate the criteria for matching to the cultural standard. The section closes with an explanation of why Dutch behavior may conflict with the American cultural standard using Dutch cultural values (Enklaar, 2007) and the comments of the Dutch interviewees.

### ***Enthusiasm***

In the eyes of the Dutch, Americans express ideas, feelings and beliefs explicitly and positively. Strong engagement and enthusiasm are shown in conversations. Messages are reinforced by open body language, hand gestures and strong words like “fantastic” or “amazing”. This cultural standard reflects an optimistic attitude, which is often seen as a valuable trait in professional and social settings.

*“Americans are very warm and very jovial. I think we Dutch always experience it a little bit as a kind of exaggerated play that they do. It is all very **positive**. So, it is often not as cold as the Dutch can be. Dutch are often a bit more reserved for my feelings.*

*And Americans are **very happy and jovial**.” – Interviewee 11*

*“I think as a down-to-earth Dutchman, Americans are emotional when talking. Everything is always rather big. There is **a lot of drama** in everyday life.” –*

*Interviewee 14*

Although enthusiasm in the American culture is associated with authenticity, expressive emotions are considered too much, over the top by the Dutch (Moderation). The Dutch may interpret it as exaggerated or inauthentic. Dutch people may find an American too outgoing (while Americans may find Dutch people too reserved).

### ***Sticking to procedures***

The Americans have a strict adherence to rules, agreements and procedures in work processes. Every step and action in a procedure tends to be followed by the Americans. By following procedures strictly, consistency and transparency will be ensured. Procedures are seen as tools for carrying out tasks effectively and systematically in order to achieve high quality and performance. Procedures are usually clearly defined in manuals, policy documents and standard operating procedures so that everyone knows what is expected and who is accountable when things go wrong. One may face consequences for not following the rules and procedures.

*“Actually, you should read through the policies and procedures every year again. And then you have to say; ‘mark as read’, to assign that you have read it. They can also come back to that if there is a problem, like: ‘Hey, there is a policy and we can see that you have read it on that date’. So, **you are expected to adhere** to that. This was never that strict in the Netherlands with my employer, here it is very strict.” – Interviewee 1*

*“Regulations must be followed **very strictly**. It is always, if something goes wrong, the first question is ‘What is the SOP?’ The Standard Operating Procedure. That is always the first question in our factory.” – Interviewee 8*

In the Netherlands there are clear rules in work processes as well, however, the Dutch do not appear to follow them as strictly as the Americans. The Dutch value the freedom to make independent decisions and choose their working methods if it does not harm others (Self-determination). The American emphasis on strictly following procedures can be seen as limiting this, which can be frustrating for Dutch people because it undermines their freedom to judge and decide for themselves. The Dutch want more flexibility to choose the most efficient method rather than a standard procedure (Utility). In the Netherlands, people would like to give their own interpretation of tasks and procedures instead of working according to fixed processes.

### ***Top-down decisions***

Top-down decisions is about how are decisions made. The Dutch interviewees report that decisions in the American work environment are mostly initiated by people in higher positions within the organization or hierarchy. This approach assumes that those at the top of the hierarchy have the overview and possess the knowledge and authority to make decisions. The decision can hardly be influenced by lower layers. The process is action-oriented, emphasizing efficiency and result orientation.

*“In the United States, it is very clear. **Whoever has the highest rank, ultimately makes the decision.** You do not discuss over and over again till everybody agrees. The boss is just the boss and he makes the decision. Everyone accepts that, whether they agree or not” – Interviewee 4*

The Dutch prefer a more collaborative decision-making style, where everyone gets a chance to contribute to the decision. In the end, a compromise will be reached collectively to make sure that everybody agrees (Consensus). The American emphasis on hierarchy and clear leadership may therefore clash with the Dutch expectation that decisions are made collectively and based on mutual respect.

### ***Being nice***

It is important to act in a very kind and polite way during social and professional interactions with Americans. Kindness and politeness express themselves in the way they speak, such as the frequent use of words like “please,” “thank you very much,” and “my pleasure.” Compliments are often given to support a positive interaction. Interviewees cited that despite the politeness and easy accessibility, it takes a long time to build real and close relationships because Americans tend to avoid personal topics and problems in conversations. The first contact points are extroverted but do not guarantee deep friendships or relationships.

*“If you have a request, you must ask **very politely.** Like, ‘Hey, might it be a good idea if you could see if this...,’ but then you are actually saying, ‘Hey can you do that?’ It is always so enormously polite here.” – Interviewee 7*

*“It is **very friendly to the outside.** It is very... polite is always the word used here. They will say sorry for you. If you have done something wrong, they will say ‘Sorry, I could have explained that better to you’.” – Interviewee 9*

Dutchmen like to be open about personal life and feelings. In the first contact, Dutchmen use formal and polite language as well. However, the Dutch will quickly transfer to informal addresses since a created distance does not feel comfortable. For the Dutch, it feels right to have personal contact and share intimate matters. Dutchmen say the truth rather than being polite, even if the truth is painful (Truth). In addition, in the Netherlands, people believe that everyone is equal and therefore should be treated the same (Equality). Hence, the Dutch prefer informal communication to eliminate rank or age differences to create a pleasant atmosphere.

### ***Work-life unbalance***

What struck the Dutch was the strong work ethic in the United States, even compared with the Netherlands. There is more emphasis on work performance than private time where results and effectiveness are highly valued. Americans are action- and results-oriented. Effort is appreciated, especially when hard work results in achievement or progress. There is a willingness to work long hours, often outside regular working hours, to achieve goals. Showing dedication to work, by working overtime or always being available, is valued and sometimes even expected. Hence, private life comes in second place.

*“It is really hard working and that is **the primary process in your life**. And we, the Dutch, are more focused on the social side and work so we can fulfill our wishes and have a good time. In the United States, you really must keep working or it will not work out.” – Interviewee 6*

*“I had days when my calendar was blocked from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. with back-to-back meetings. With not even a break, I would have to say ‘Oh, I am 5 minutes late because I am just warming up my soup.’ But then there was still **no time to breathe** or go to the toilet.” – Interviewee 10*

In the Netherlands, work is seen as important but not dominant. The emphasis is on working efficiently during office hours (Utility), allowing sufficient time for personal leisure, family, and social activities after work. The idea that private life should be sacrificed for work performance does not fit within the Dutch sense of a well-balanced and meaningful life. After work, people have the freedom to choose what to do in their leisure time (Self-determination), one’s day is not determined by their boss.



### ***Sugar-coated feedback***

Feedback is given in a positive and friendly manner by the Americans, even if it includes criticism. Direct negative feedback is avoided to keep up and stimulate motivation. Feedback is often wrapped in a friendly tone and combined with compliments or positive comments. Also referred to as the “sandwich feedback,” it often begins and ends with something positive, while criticism is subtly incorporated in the middle. This way, the receiver feels less attacked and therefore does not damage their confidence or enthusiasm.

*“I think Dutch people are incredibly direct. If it is not good, that is said. We find that the most efficient way. So, the fact that **Americans circle around the message**, I had to get used to that approach.” – Interviewee 10*

*“In terms of feedback, Americans are more polite. They **wrap up what they are going to say**. In the Netherlands, we start with the core first and then a little context follows. The United States also does that, but that context is... Suppose I write an article and it is a really bad article. Then my supervisor will never say ‘What did you do?’ Then she will say, ‘Well, very good first draft. Thank you for working on this. I made a few edits.’ And then you get back a completely red list. So, they try very hard to **make you feel like you belong and that you are appreciated**. There is a lot of emphasis on that.” – Interviewee 14*

The Dutch prefer direct communication to know what is expected and to provide clarity. Saying the truth and being critical is more important than being polite (Truth). Dutchmen consider the Americans as circling the matter and too positive which makes it vague, the criticism is not sufficiently explicit. This makes giving feedback time-consuming instead of efficient (Utility). Vice versa, people in the United States may perceive the directness of the Dutch as rude and harsh.

### ***Performance***

High performance is admired in the United States. People strive to be the best. Therefore, a lot of attention is paid to work. Every task is important whereby ambitious targets are set, these must be carefully executed. Consequences exist if performance is not achieved. Vice versa, high performance is highly rewarded and appreciated.

*“If you went to college or university, it is really **admired** like ‘Wow, did you go to college?’ That is so glorified here.” – Interviewee 1*

*“There is a lot of focus on **being the best** at something. And that you get a certificate just for participating. So, there is much more focus on naming accomplishments, naming what you do, naming where you score. **Giving yourself an identity** I think.” –*

*Interviewee 4*

In the Netherlands, work is also considered an important thing in life, it shows what a person is capable of (Work). However, the work ethic in the United States is often experienced as more extreme. Americans often work outside regular working hours and they are used to showing off performance. The Dutch do not like to show off because no one is seen as better than another (Equality). In addition, Dutch people are less judged on performance when targets are not met, which is the case in the United States.

### ***Indirectness***

It is common in the United States to circle around the message. A message is often conveyed subtly or implicitly rather than directly and explicitly. Politeness is aimed at. Indirectness in American culture is often used to maintain a good relationship. Also, doubts are expressed in a subtle indirect way. Directness would detract from someone's politeness.

*“They try to talk a little around it, **make it a little nicer and softer**. There are lots of words to soften it. My colleagues then say, for example: ‘I would really appreciate if you have some time to have a look....’ And in the Netherlands, you would say, ‘Do you want to help me?’.” – Interviewee 5*

*“I think it is just less direct. It is all a little more hesitant. I never heard, ‘Oh, this is really a very bad idea’. Whereas in the Netherlands we might say, ‘This is nothing at all, this is not going to work’. **It is always like, ‘we are going to look at it’.**” –*

*Interviewee 11*

The Dutch have a very direct communication style, which may clash with the indirectness of the Americans. The Dutch say things as they are, they say what they think or what they think is true (Truth), even if the message is negative. The directness of the Dutch may be perceived by Americans as rude and blunt. However, the Dutch indicate that they find the Americans' indirect communication style vague and inefficient.

## **Rewards**

Americans work primarily for personal rewards rather than exclusively for the organization. They are convinced that good performance and commitment should be rewarded. In addition, rewards are a powerful motivation for employees to put a lot of effort into their work to achieve goals and deliver results. Proper performance will often be rewarded with financial incentives such as bonuses or salary increases or non-financial recognitions such as promotions, awards, or public recognition. Employee loyalty tends to focus on personal growth and rewards rather than on the emotional connection to the organization itself.

*“The working days are extremely long, but you are very much rewarded for that so you just **stay in that bubble of hard work**. For example, if you are still in the office after 8 in the evening, you get good food for it. You also get your cab refunded after a certain time because they want you to get home safely. You just get so comfortable with all kinds of things in exchange for hard work and motivation.” – Interviewee 3*

*“If we delivered our goals, both team goals and individual goals, sometimes we received bonuses that were double salary. It really focused on **monetary reward**. Everyone tried very hard for that. In the Netherlands, I experienced that less, but this does keep everyone motivated.” – Interviewee 10*

In the Netherlands, people mainly work for the organization; personal rewards are less in the foreground. For the Dutch, it is about intrinsic motivation for the work and loyalty to the organization in which everyone should be treated equally (Equality). Success is often seen as a collective achievement. Excessive emphasis on individual rewards as in the United States can be interpreted by the Dutch as competitive, unsympathetic and selfish.

## **Autonomy**

The Dutch interviewees observe that employees in the United States are strongly focused on personal tasks and independence. Each person is responsible for their own work, decisions and success. Employees are often assigned clear responsibilities and job descriptions that they must carry out independently and effectively. Everyone is expected to solve problems and take initiative independently within their domain. That means collaboration or helping each other are not common.

*“In general, they really do try to encourage people at every level **to work and operate independently**. We are really trying to do the business super fast and that is only*

*possible if you do indeed allow people to make decisions a little bit autonomously.” –*

*Interviewee 10*

*“It really is **every man for himself**. We in the Netherlands are often too modest and often try to help each other. In the United States that is not common.” – Interviewee 15*

The importance of cooperation and sharing responsibility is high in the Netherlands. The Dutch have an emphasis on the overall process and the cooperation among colleagues within teams, believing that consultation and everyone's voice will lead to better results (Consensus). Before a decision is made, everyone's opinion is weighed, leading to a shared sense of responsibility. Also, people are not just focused on their own tasks but look at the big picture in which collaboration plays a big factor.

### ***Obedience***

Different from decision-making is how the employees in the United States are expected to follow instructions from the supervisor strictly. The instructions are followed regardless of one's personal opinion. Discussions with the supervisor or management team are avoided and questioning the final decision or instruction is inappropriate.

*“**When the boss says you have to do something, you really have to do it**. Even if it would be very stupid. In the Netherlands, I would still say; ‘Hey, should we do that? Should not we do this?’ I can do that carefully in my role as supervisor, but for the operators, if we say it has to be done this way, then you have to do it that way.” –*

*Interviewee 8*

*Who is the boss and what he says, is taken as real; ‘Okay, this is it.’ Versus everything is challenged like in the Netherlands. So, it is **less consensus driven** here.” –*

*Interviewee 12*

Employees in the Netherlands value participation in decision-making. Instructions are often not simply followed but discussed and adjusted where necessary based on input from those involved (Consensus) which leads to new insights. This reflects a shared responsibility within organizations. It is appreciated when Dutch people come up with initiatives to improve the process; this is considered proactive. The Dutch like to influence what they do (Self-determination) and are motivated by this freedom.

### ***Limited input***

Employee input is relatively limited, especially when it comes to strategic or organizational issues. Only supervisors are responsible for making important decisions. Consequently, employees are not expected to voice their opinions or make counterproposals. Employees are more often valued for their executive abilities than for their contribution to shaping policy or strategy. Their input is often restricted to defined areas directly related to their responsibilities. Any input must first be approved. As an employee, it is not done to contradict or surprise your supervisor in public, like “throwing someone under the bus”. Strategic decisions are usually considered the responsibility of management, which creates a clear separation between the roles of supervisors and employees.

*“I think, I personally get more space in a Dutch company to say how I think about certain things and what I would change for example. There is much more focus on what can we change and what can we do even better. While I feel in the United States it is often like; ‘This is just what we are going to do’. That could be the business goals, marketing, whatever... **Less open to change so far and less open to feedback** as well.”*

*– Interviewee 3*

*“I think the biggest difference is the **hierarchy**, how the hierarchy determines how someone reacts in a meeting versus in the Netherlands where it is a little more equal and where people are a little more empowered in a meeting regardless of the experience they have. In the past, if I took somebody to a meeting in the Netherlands, they knew that they were in that meeting to add something to the meeting, as being indeed adding something. And here, you really have to permit them. Someone on my team would like to have permission to indeed speak and make sure it is something that*

*I as a supervisor approve.” – Interviewee 4*

This American cultural standard might be considered as restrictive because it suppresses the Dutch need for participation and collaboration. The Dutch are used to having an opinion and expressing it (Self-determination). The lack of employee input can lead to decisions that lack support among the team according to the Dutch. On the contrary, participation is valued in the Dutch work environment. In the Netherlands, employees at all levels are expected to actively contribute to come to an action or decision together (Consensus). It is considered standard to have open discussions in which all stakeholders can share their opinions, regardless of their position in the organization.

### ***Authority***

Authority is about who gets to make the decision, rather than how the decision is made (Top-down decisions). The supervisor controls and makes decisions. There is a clear hierarchy focused on responsibility and authority. The supervisor will set the direction and monitor it. Because of his or hers position, he/she has the role of making decisions and therefore the ultimate control lies with the supervisor. This creates a clear division of labor in the organization.

*“A manager is really a manager. That is the boss of an entire group and you have to follow that. That is the hierarchy, you really see that clearly. And in the Netherlands, you often have several managers in your team and that does not always mean anything in terms of hierarchy, in terms of status, as much as in the United States. In the United States, you really do have **a status position towards your employees**. I think that threshold is lower in the Netherlands.” – Interviewee 6*

*“You have **very little responsibility as an employee** here, none really. There are a lot of layers compared to Dutch companies, I think. A lot of layers and lower layers are absolutely not allowed to make decisions. They are not authorized to do so and are not responsible for it.” – Interviewee 14*

In the Netherlands people are used to the idea that everyone is equal and therefore deserves equal treatment (Equality), no one is better than another. Leadership is perceived to be less hierarchical in the Netherlands and more participative in nature. The supervisor is seen as a sparring partner rather than a decision maker, the Dutch are used to be involved in decisions or even decide together (Consensus).

### ***Self-profiling***

According to the Dutch interviewees, Americans tend to put themselves in the spotlight. This emphasizes personal visibility and self-promotion to achieve success and gain recognition. In the United States, it is considered normal and even desirable to actively highlight accomplishments, skills and successes, the “elevator pitch” is a proper example of this. Profiling is often seen to build trust and credibility. People are encouraged to highlight unique qualities, there is no need to restrain yourself from this. Making yourself visible as a valuable professional can lead to more opportunities or recognition. This gives people an identity and pride. What matters most is what experience you have and where you gained it.

*“It is **very important that you are seen at work**. In the Netherlands, you have a role and based on that role you are seen and you are included. And I think in the United States, you have to **prove yourself**. You really have to put energy into that to make sure you are seen.” – Interviewee 4*

*“It is very common for people to put all kinds of things on their resume that are not actually true, just to **sell yourself better and get noticed**. And also say ‘Okay, I have experience with...’. So, when I started doing job interviews and hiring people, I kind of took things that they said at face value because I thought ‘Wow, I really have the perfect candidate’. And that is not even a tenth true and I found that very confusing. But in the United States, that is very normal. Very exaggerating and turning things on.” – Interviewee 12*

In the Netherlands, one should not think that one is better than another (Equality). Therefore, there are no different status classes because everyone is seen as equal. It is not done to brag about one’s achievement and experience.

### ***Moral behavior***

The Dutch observe that in the American work place strict standards of moral behavior are maintained, since sexual harassment, safety and discrimination are major issues between men and women in the work environment. High standards about what is considered right or wrong are present to ensure safety. There is a strong emphasis on ethical behavior.

*“They are super focused on sexual harassment here, especially now after ‘Me too’. Certain things you cannot ask in interviews. My supervisor had an interview here with a female person who wanted to hire. And then he asked her; ‘when are you going to have children?’ Those are absolute no-no’s. **You cannot ask anything about religion, about politics, about personal things.**” – Interviewee 10*

*“Very **strict procedures when it comes to anti-discrimination law and rejections of candidates**. That is very strict there, how the staff is treated and the whole onboarding. Drug tests are taken here very frequently. Well, you really could not imagine that in the Netherlands.” – Interviewee 11*

In the Netherlands, less absolute general rules of conduct are applied. Morality depends on its context, giving it a more flexible approach. Controlling each other is sensitive because freedom

and personal choices are central if others are not harmed. Everyone must decide for themselves what to do as long as others are not bothered by it (Self-determination). This relative approach can clash with the American tendency to have strict general moral standards.

### ***Separate responsibilities***

The Dutch interviewees state that Americans work for their own purposes. It is believed that each individual is responsible for one's success and that this success can be achieved through hard work and dedication, without help from anyone else. They are expected to act responsibly within their own job description and are not likely to perform tasks outside it. One is focused on the task for which they are responsible. As a result, there is assurance that everyone is performing their own tasks and it is easy to keep track of who was responsible for certain tasks.

*“In the Netherlands, I was always used to helping each other. It is not so much like ‘These are your patients and the others are mine’. You were responsible for a department together. What one could not do, the other helped with that. Here it is more like, the patients will be divided and you are just focused on your own patients. I was always used to helping someone else when working in the Netherlands. **It is not like that here.**” – Interviewee 1*

Dutch people are also used to having their own duties and responsibilities at work. However, they consider it normal to cooperate and spontaneously help each other without reward. The Dutch are focused on the shared responsibility of the organization. It is essential to prioritize the collective interests instead of prioritizing your own benefit and tasks.

### ***Advancing career path***

According to the Dutch in the United States, everyone is responsible for one's career success and taking the necessary steps in their career. Individuals are expected to set their own goals, seize opportunities, and continually improve themselves. Americans believe that everyone can make progress as long as they work hard and take on challenges. This can be expressed in taking courses, networking or even changing jobs to get better opportunities. Loyalty to an organization is often less important than personal progress and achieving individual goals.

*“If you want to work yourself up to something and indicate ‘Hey, I would like to get a different position’. Then it is a kind of ‘good luck with it’ and **you must take care of it yourself.**” – Interviewee 2*



Dutch employers are generally more active in guiding employees in their careers. There is a more collective approach (Consensus) instead of the employee completely directing this himself. Achieving success should not be at the expense of others since team spirit and cooperation are important in the Netherlands (Equality).

### ***Trial and error***

The Dutch interviewees think that in the United States, experimentation and risk-taking are encouraged to make progress<sup>6</sup>. New plans are not extensively filled in detail which allows for flexibility in responding to situations and easily adapting improvements. When a project does not succeed immediately, Americans strive to find solutions quickly. This is seen as positive progress rather than a disruptive force. There is room for spontaneity and creativity for the supervisor. Mistakes are seen as a necessary step toward success. It is a flexible and dynamic work style, where speed and action are often considered more important than perfecting plans in advance.

*It is a **can-do attitude**. In the Netherlands, it was always when we wanted to start something new.... I was working on children's products and we had so many roadblocks. It was like; 'oh this may not be possible and this may not be possible, just write a plan first and work it out.' And you come here in the United States and there is, especially here in Silicon Valley, a startup mentality, it is like; 'well, if you have an idea, **just do it**, we will see what comes up' and otherwise we will fix it." –*

*Interviewee 10*

Dutch prefer a more structured and careful approach. Before action is taken, thorough analysis and planning take place collectively (Order & Neatness). The Dutch emphasize “getting it right the first time” and not wasting resources or times on failures (Utility), which can clash with the American willingness to take risks. In the Netherlands, risks are rather avoided and people like to be sure of stability which can be created by proper research and planning.

### ***Competition***

The Dutch interviewees highlight the competitive spirit in the workplace in the United States. Americans tend to compete with teammates if that will improve their performance as well as the overall team performance. Competition is often seen as a healthy incentive to perform better

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<sup>6</sup> This cultural standard will be further explained in Chapter 4.2.

and maximize one's effort. Competition not only promotes personal progress but also contributes to the success of the organization. Achieving success is seen as a personal responsibility that encourages people to excel. This increases motivation and productivity of the employee, to ultimately be rewarded for efforts.

*“With Americans, the **competition against each other is present**. Everyone really wants to make a career and that is really important. So, you will see that you are always fighting each other to get more contracts or to earn more profit for the company.” – Interviewee 6*

*“In the company, employees really have that **winner's mentality**, everything is a competition there. I think we Dutch, we do want to win but with limits, if you know what I mean. **Everything is a competition** here sometimes. There is then a competitive element in everything of 'Hey, I want to be better than you'.” – Interviewee 13*

It is important to work together in the Netherlands. You achieve success with your team instead of as an individual, success is considered a collective achievement. In teams, everyone's input is valued and usually everyone's share is valued equally (Equality). There is no competition for individual recognition. Competition which produces winners and losers goes against the ideal of equality.

### ***Dealing with negative feedback***

The Dutch interviewees experienced that negative feedback can be taken personally by Americans. It is common to soften feedback (sugar-coated feedback) and formulate it positively to avoid confrontation. As a result, direct negative feedback can be interpreted as a personal attack rather than a businesslike assessment. Sensitivity to negative feedback is linked to politeness and enthusiasm. Negative feedback can be experienced as damaging to the harmony or self-confidence of the individual.

*“My American colleagues do **take it a bit more personally** than the Dutch colleagues I had. And Dutch people can also just growl back, they will bite back too. In the Netherlands it is a bit more like it goes in one ear and out the other again.” – Interviewee 2*

The communication style of the Dutch is experienced as very direct. This is because honesty is highly valued. Even if the truth is harsh, people will speak honestly (Truth). Feedback is given

without beating around the bush. Criticism is usually experienced as an efficient way to realize improvements. Due to their directness, the Dutch also know how to speak out if they experience it as annoying where an American would not quickly speak out because of their politeness.

#### **4.2 Additional commentary on cultural standards**

This section provides additional commentary on the apparent contradictions and exceptions of cultural standards. Explanations are given to the cultural standard Trial and error and to the institutional environment in the United States.

##### ***Trial and error***

The cultural standard Trial and error is exceptional given that this seems an apparent contradiction to the cultural standard Sticking to procedures. According to the Dutch interviewees, American employees adhere strictly to procedures, rules and prescribed methods. There is less room for deviating from them than the Dutch are used to. However, there is a difference in roles and levels, whether one is an employee or a supervisor. In the lower ranks everyone is expected to follow regulations and methods, at higher levels, there is more freedom to choose their own path and take risks. There is tension as there is a contradiction here between the cultural standards. A supervisor can take more risks and experiment but the subordinate employees should follow the rules and follow the directions of the supervisor.

##### ***Institutional environment***

The institutional environment in the United States is significantly different from the Netherlands by its different common law system and especially the labor laws. This is expressed in for instance restricted employee rights, limited number of holidays and simple termination procedures. Two quotes are given to show institutional differences:

*“If someone is fired, they are not allowed to enter the premises after that. So, you are not allowed at work anymore. In the Netherlands you can be fired, but you are still allowed to say goodbye. **If they are just not satisfied with you, then you are just out.***

*In the Netherlands you often have progress meetings and you see how someone is performing. But if they are not satisfied here, then you are just gone.” – Interviewee 2*

*You have **zero rights here as an employee.** If I do something that is not right, they can just fire me right away and it is just done. There is no social safety net. In the*

*Netherlands, your rights as an employee are very much protected. An employer must warn you several times first. And even then, suppose they want to fire you, then there is a whole system that is going to take care of you. That is not here, **you are 100% on your own here.***” – Interviewee 14

Many Dutch interviewees referred to these institutional labor conditions which deviate from the more generous welfare state arrangements and legal protection of the employee in the Netherlands. Although the institutional environment is a product of American culture, we have not included cultural standards connected to them because the regulations are well-known and explicitly mentioned in labor contracts. We concentrate here on the ‘tacit assumptions’ (Schein, 1990) that guide the behaviors and collaboration in the workplace.

### **4.3 Underlying cultural values**

This study aims to identify the underlying cultural values of typical American behavior on the work floor. It aims to find the cultural logic that explains the behavior, offering a thick description of the American culture perceived by the Dutch. The different American cultural standards are connected to the cultural values. Values are defined as ‘abstract moral principles’ (Enklaar, 2024). The values are at origin of the cultural standards that have been found. Five underlying values were found in this study: *Achievement, Order & consistency, Leadership, Responsibility & personal accountability* and *Optimism*. These cultural values reflect why Americans behave in a certain way. Two experts have reviewed the cultural standards combined with the underlying values to ensure the reliability of this research and avoid misinterpretations. The relationships are outlined in figures below that center the underlying value positioned at the right. Next, the connected cultural standards are presented in the middle column, followed by paraphrased quotations from the interviewees in the column positioned at the left.

#### ***Achievement (success)***

A person is characterized by what he has achieved in life and success deserves admiration. Success is achieved by hard work and the willingness to seize every opportunity. The cultural standards Self-profiling, Performance, Work-life unbalance, Trial and error, Rewards and Competition are linked to the underlying value Achievement (success). This value reflects the belief in success through measurable effort. Americans are result-oriented, believing that hard work leads to achievement and growth. Achievement is not just reaching goals, it gives an indication of capability and the ability to excel within a competitive environment. The

‘American Dream’ considers success as attainable for anyone who is willing to work hard and seize opportunities.

A high level of performance is essential for tangible results and efficient productivity. Work-life unbalance supports this by prioritizing long working-hours and giving all energy to work, it is their primary process in life. Rewards are key to the motivation of achievement for Americans, it serves as validation of effort through promotions, bonuses or public recognition. ‘Winners’ are highly admired representing the emphasis on ambition and excellence. Competition is necessary to bring out the best in individuals. It drives individuals to excel in personal progress as well as the success of the organization. Self-profiling ensures the visibility and recognition of one’s achievements. This shapes a person’s identity. Successes should not only be achieved but also celebrated to gain acknowledgment and stimulate future opportunities.

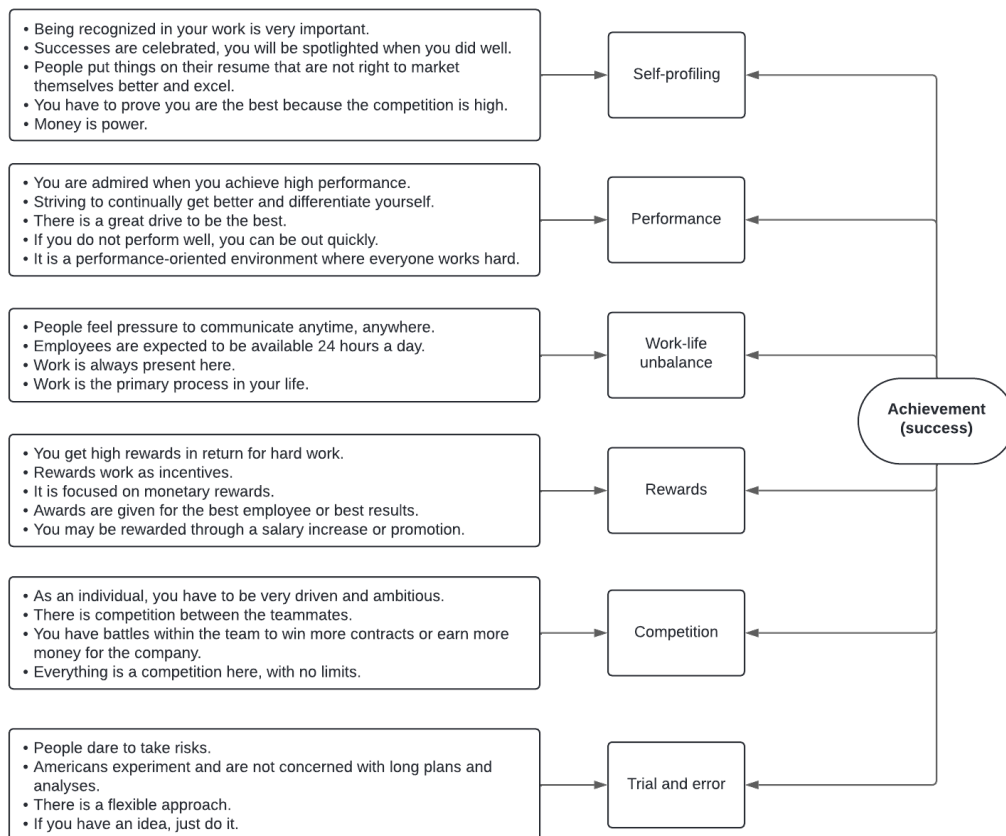
Trial and error are a side effect of the drive for achievement<sup>7</sup>. Managers are under pressure to deliver exceptional performance. Therefore, there is much experimentation and great risk-taking in hopes of success and reward. This trial and error approach encourages supervisors to respond quickly to new situations to tackle problems along the way. “Fake it till you make it” by pretending that you have already mastered something, where in the meantime you are going through developments to become successful (Althern & Bennett, 2011).

Achievement highly emphasizes measurable results, success, recognition and remuneration which are driven by performance, motivation and visibility. Americans believe that anyone can reach their goals and make a meaningful impact. The relationship between these cultural standards and the underlying value is presented in Figure 6.

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<sup>7</sup> Only applicable at management level, see Chapter 4.2.

Figure 6 Underlying value of Achievement



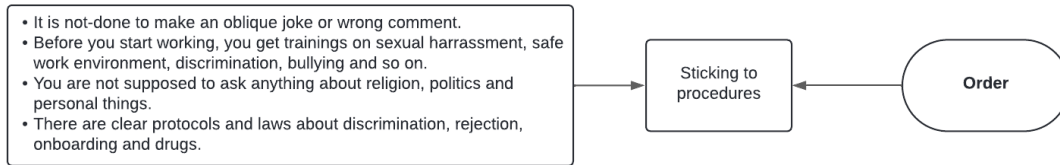
### Order

Clear rules and agreements are the essential frameworks to ensure stability where everyone knows what to expect and what to do. Sticking to procedures is the cultural standard that is linked to the underlying value of Order. This value reflects the belief that following structures and predictability is fundamental to a functional society. Americans consider clear guidelines of high importance. These established norms and expectations create stability and trust in the professional context which are clearly communicated.

Procedures are seen as a way to maintain consistency and ensure efficiency. Therefore, there is a strict adherence to rules, agreements and procedures which makes standardization in organizations possible. Usually, these norms and rules are clearly defined in manuals and policy documents.

Sticking to procedures encourages predictability and reliability. There are consequences if procedures are not followed. Order creates a sense of stability and shared understanding which stimulates trust. The relationship between the cultural standard and the value Order is shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7 Underlying value of Order



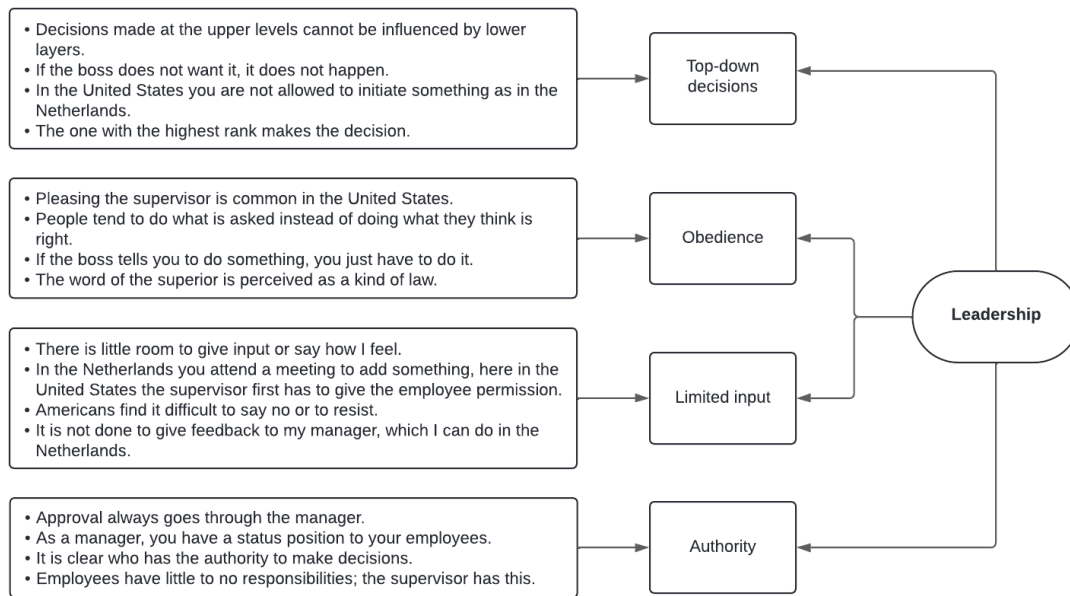
### ***Leadership***

The success or failure of an organization depends on the vision of the leader and therefore the leader must have strong powers and authority. The cultural standards Top-down decisions, Obedience, Limited input and Authority are connected to the underlying value Leadership. This indicates that there are clearly defined hierarchies and authorities in the United States.

Decisions are initiated from the top by management or supervisors. It reflects the clear chain of command in which supervisors are responsible for making decisions on behalf of the group. It is hard to influence these decisions from lower layers. Employees are obedient and follow the directions given by supervisors who have authority. This indicates that the roles and responsibilities are clearly defined by the hierarchical structure. The supervisor is the one who controls and decides, where the employee is not involved. It is not tolerated to contradict the supervisor, the leader's decision must be respected and followed. Leadership is essential, it underlines the importance of control and decision-making. Leaders are expected to set and communicate vision followed by motivating their teams to achieve objectives.

Leadership emphasizes hierarchy and authority in American culture. This ensures clarity and accountability in organizations. Figure 8 presents the relationship between the cultural standards and the value Leadership.

Figure 8 Underlying value of Leadership



### ***Responsibility and personal accountability***

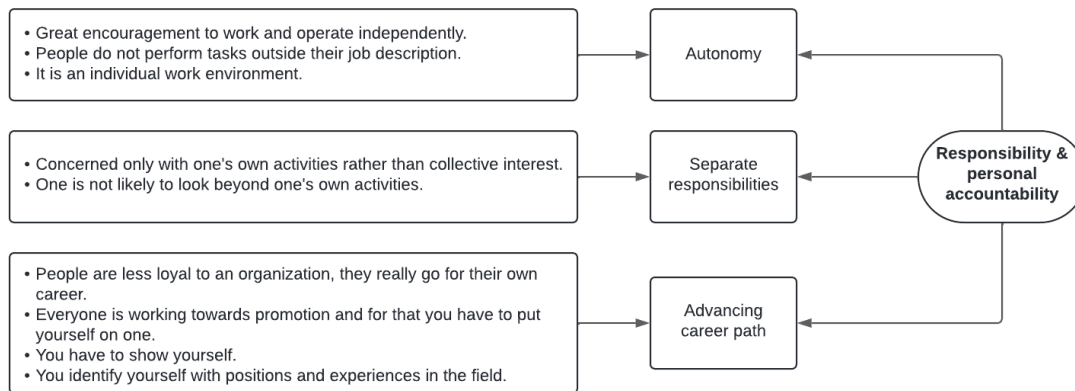
Success or failure lies in your own hands, you are personally responsible and accountable for it. Autonomy, Separate responsibilities and Advancing career path are connected to the underlying value Responsibility and accountability. Americans believe that everyone is responsible for pursuing a better life themselves. Therefore, one must make their own choices and take initiative without any assistance from others.

Autonomy is essential in the American culture by having an individual work environment where individuals have ownership of their work and decisions. Americans have a strong sense of personal responsibility and initiative to set future directions. Given the high degree of individuality, there is little cooperation among colleagues. Employees are very focused on separate tasks and responsibilities where the individual operates within its own defined scope. People are encouraged to advance career paths individually as well. Individuals are expected to set their own goals and steps within their careers to improve themselves. Personal growth and individual initiative are more important than loyalty to organizations.

This underlying value underscores the importance of self-initiative and responsibility in an autonomous work environment. It fosters the empowerment of the individual and shaping their own future. Individuals are the cause of success or failure rather than the system. The relationship between the cultural standards and the underlying value Independence is shown in Figure 9.



Figure 9 Underlying value of Responsibility & personal accountability



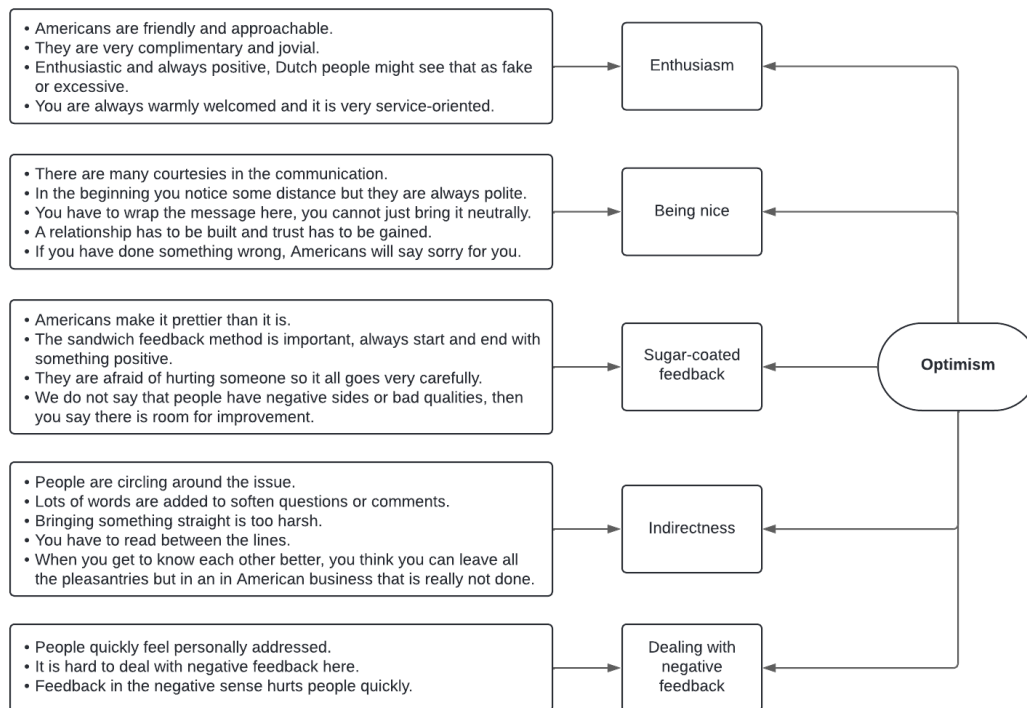
### **Optimism**

Optimism and hope pave the way for success, worries and fear demotivate and lead to failure. Stay positive and trust that everything will work out in the end. Enthusiasm, Being nice, Sugar-coated feedback, Indirectness and Dealing with negative feedback are the cultural standards that are connected to the underlying value Optimism. This underlying value is not merely about avoiding negativity but it emphasizes motivation and maintaining an optimistic outlook, even in challenging situations. It aligns with the habit of using pep talks and motivational words to encourage engagement. There is a belief that everything will work out, this provides motivational communication and positivity. “The future is hopeful” and things will work out for the best (Kohls, 1984).

Americans express their emotions explicitly and positively. Strong enthusiasm is shown in conversations. A positive attitude inspires confidence and creates a motivating atmosphere. Besides, kindness and politeness are very important in professional interactions. Despite acting nice, personal topics and problems are avoided. It is not an intimate relationship as it might look, there remains distance despite the courtesies. Feedback is often sugar-coated to highlight the positive, even if it includes criticism. It is wrapped in a friendly tone combined with compliments to avoid damage to confidence or enthusiasm. This is related to indirectness which means that Americans often soften the impact and maintain a positive tone. Also, negative feedback may be received as personal attack. It can be experienced as damaging to the harmony or self-confidence of the individual.

The Dutch perceive the Americans as optimistic. This underpins positivity and encouragement to create a sort of buffer with aloofness and politeness. The relationship between the cultural standards and the underlying value is presented in Figure 11.

Figure 10 Underlying value of Optimism



#### 4.4 Additional commentary on underlying values

Moral behavior is identified as a cultural standard within the American work culture. However, there is no direct link to a specific underlying value established. While other cultural standards are associated with underlying values, Moral behavior appears more complex.

Strict standards of moral behavior are valued by Americans to emphasize ethical accountability. This cultural standard reflects that moral behavior fosters what is right or wrong which is integral to maintaining safety. It involves, for instance, guilt over superiority thinking, discrimination against women and minorities and the extermination of indigenous peoples.

It is discussable where the cultural standard Moral behavior belongs in the American culture. In the Netherlands, it is related to Equality. However, this differs from the American approach, where the emphasis is often placed on individual responsibility. The complexity of Moral behavior indicates that there are different perspectives. Therefore, further research is needed into the connected underlying value that drives this standard.

#### 4.5 Feedback of experts

A final review is conducted with two American experts to ensure the validity of the identified cultural standards and underlying values. Feedback from the experts highlighted nuances within

some findings, indicating that cultural norms are not absolute, but depend on specific organizational contexts and regional variations.

The first comment was on the cultural standard Rewards. The experts noted that as identified in this research, financial incentives play a role, while acknowledgement and appreciation are also important in motivating employees. This suggests a broader perspective on what drives performance in the American workplace.

Second, the cultural standard Sticking to procedures is commented on by the fact that American procedures are primarily used as a method to cover their liability and avoid the legal consequences. This matches the institutional environment in America.

Followed by the feedback on Top-down decisions. The experts underscored that it does depend on the culture within an organization. Some are strictly top-down, but many are collaborative in nature. Some organizations and departments actively seek input from employees before making any substantive change, although the final decision does rest with the supervisor. Like Limited input from employees as well, this can vary greatly by company. It boils down to the internal culture of an organization. Some organizations thrive on asking for and applying employee input.

Fourth, the perception of Being nice was contextualized within the diversity of American regional cultures. The experts mentioned that kindness and politeness are widely practiced, however, micro-cultures exist within different states. People native to large cities, for example, New York, are known for being rude, in a hurry and blunt. Some of the remote western states such as Montana and Idaho, are suspicious of strangers, and it takes time for them to trust and accept new people. The Midwest and Southern states, though, are welcoming, friendly, kind and helpful. These are generalities and exceptions can exist anywhere.

Finally, the experts agreed that it is expected that people take responsibility for their work and actions. However, teamwork may be emphasized and encouraged in most organizations. In some organizations it may be understood that much more can be accomplished as a team than as individuals and supporting one another is supported.

## 5. DISCUSSION

This chapter presents an overview of the American cultural standards perceived by the Dutch. Besides, it discusses the theoretical and practical contributions of this study. This is followed by considering the limitations of the research and the suggestions for future research.

### 5.1 American cultural standards as perceived by the Dutch

Cultural standards and underlying values of the United States perceived by the Dutch are discovered in this research. Twenty American cultural standards were found. The detailed description of these standards can be found in Chapter 4.1, below an overview is presented:

- |                           |                                    |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Enthusiasm             | 11. Obedience                      |
| 2. Sticking to procedures | 12. Limited input                  |
| 3. Top-down decisions     | 13. Authority                      |
| 4. Being nice             | 14. Self-profiling                 |
| 5. Work-life unbalance    | 15. Moral behavior                 |
| 6. Sugar-coated feedback  | 16. Separate responsibilities      |
| 7. Performance            | 17. Advancing career path          |
| 8. Indirectness           | 18. Trial and error                |
| 9. Rewards                | 19. Competition                    |
| 10. Autonomy              | 20. Dealing with negative feedback |

The cultural standards were connected to underlying values as described in Chapter 4.3. The values describe why Americans behave in a specific manner. In addition, the reasons why there are clashes between the Americans and the Dutch in the workplace are described as well. The five cultural values that are established are 1) Achievement, 2) Order, 3) Leadership, 4) Responsibility & personal accountability and 5) Optimism. The cultural standards combined with these underlying cultural values provide a thick description of the American culture.

Nevertheless, the findings of this study are not a complete description of the American cultural standards and values. It is a description of the differences that were discerned by Dutch individuals who are living and working in the United States. Therefore, they provide a Dutch perspective on American culture. This means that behaviors and values that are closely similar

between both do not become visible. Similar studies from other countries' perspectives are needed to encompass the whole American culture.

## **5.2 Theoretical contributions**

In this section, the theoretical contributions are discussed by comparing the findings with the existing literature. This study aimed to identify typical American behavior and provide a thick description of the American culture in the workplace. The results provide new insights into how Dutch expatriates perceive the American culture in the workplace. New insights would enhance more efficient cooperation and communication between the Dutch and the Americans (López-Duarte et al., 2019). In Chapter 1.1, two research gaps were identified. This study contributes to the literature on cross-cultural differences between the Netherlands and the United States by bridging these research gaps.

***Contribution 1: The cultural differences between the Dutch and the Americans in the workplace have been compared in a detailed and empirical way.***

This study provided a detailed, systematic, qualitative and empirical comparison of the cultural differences between the Netherlands and the United States. To achieve this, the Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954; Thomas et al., 2010) and Grounded Interpretive Model (Enklaar, 2024) were applied. Dutch people who are living and working in the United States were interviewed to describe the American culture perceived by the Dutch. This resulted in a thick description of the American culture in the workplace which is derived from real-life encounters.

***Contribution 2: A consistent description of the American cultural values that constitute cultural logic behind concrete behaviors is given.***

Scientific literature about American culture is expanded by the results of this study. This research identified twenty cultural standards that describe typical American behavior including its underlying values. These cultural standards were based on stories of Dutch interviewees describing American culture from a Dutch perspective. Below, the remarkable differences from Hofstede (1980) and Meyer (2014) will be discussed. Followed by discussing the similarities and differences with existing emic literature regarding American cultural values and standards identified by Kohls (1984)<sup>8</sup> Slate and Schroll-Machl (2003).

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<sup>8</sup> Kohls calls his principles 'values', however, they appear to represent concrete behaviors than real values.

The country comparison tool of Hofstede (1980) indicates that the Netherlands and the United States have quite similar scores on power distance. However, the Dutch interviewees noticed a difference in this. The Dutch perceive a high degree of authority and more top-down decision making in America, while it is more consensus-oriented in the Netherlands. Notably, the Netherlands scores significantly higher on individualism, while the interviewees indicated that they find Americans very individualistic. It turns out that interviewees find that Americans emphasize their individual needs over group interests. Enklaar (2007) questioned the description of the American culture as a less individualistic country already, this study shows that Dutch people indeed find Americans more individualistic than they are themselves. Besides, the score of indulgence is identical for the Netherlands and the United States. Nevertheless, the Dutch interviewees often perceive Americans as workaholics who prioritize work over leisure time, leading to a work-life unbalance.

Meyer (2014) indicates that the Netherlands and the United States have both a low-context communication, even the United States would be more extreme. Although both countries are low-context, Americans use softer and less explicit communication, based on the findings in this study. The Dutch interviewees perceived Americans as indirect and very polite. Regarding trusting, Meyer (2014) highlights that both countries are more task-based. This study is in line with the American perspective on that who prefer achievement over personal relationships. However, it appears that the Dutch interviewees find Americans very performance-oriented and difficult to build deep relationships with, therefore the Netherlands could be more relationship-based.

The first remarkable difference between this study and the findings from Kohls (1984) and Slate and Schroll-Machl (2003) is the number of cultural standards identified. Whereas Kohls (1984) outlined thirteen values and Slate and Schroll-Machl (2003) have identified nine standards, this study found twenty cultural standards. It is important to note that Kohls examined 'values' and Slate and Schroll-Machl focused on 'standards', both have another definition. However, the frameworks remained relatively general instead of revealing concrete behaviors. Both did not explain why Americans behave based on these values. Therefore, this qualitative study identified the cultural logic behind typical American behavior to come up with a thick description of the interaction between the Dutch and Americans contributing to a more systematic and consistent description of American cultural values.

Most cultural values identified by Kohls (1984) align with the findings of this study. Although, some of his values are similar to the Dutch values. For that reason, the Dutch interviewees experienced no discrepancies in this, comparing the Dutch behavior with the American behavior. The values of Kohls such as 'Equality', 'Efficiency', 'Honesty' 'Change' and 'Time control' indicates a shared cultural foundation with the Dutch. The Dutch and Americans behave similarly in this.

The value 'Openness' identified by Kohls (1984) refers to the ease of making contact on a superficial level and explicitly expressing opinions. While this may seem contrasting with the directness of the Dutch, it aligns with the cultural standards *Being nice*, *Indirectness* and *Enthusiasm*, as identified in this study. Kohls' value 'Personal control' describes the fact that one is accountable for pursuing a better life themselves. This behavior matches with the cultural value *Responsibility and personal accountability*, which indicates that success or failure is your own responsibility. The value 'Individualism' matches with *Autonomy* where one is focused on individual tasks and responsibilities rather than the collective interest. 'Self-help & initiative' has interfaces with the underlying value *Responsibility and accountability* as well. Kohls (1984) indicate that it is highly valued to achieve success without any support or assistance, The underlying value underscores this importance as well by empowering that the individual is the cause of success or failure instead of systems.

Behind Kohls' value 'Competition' is a goal to achieve success. This fits the underlying value *Achievement*; Americans compete with teammates to bring out the best in people. 'Action & work' has interfaces with *Work-life unbalance* since people in the United States are known as workaholics, work is the primary process in life and leisure activities assume just a little part. Dutch interviewees reported no significant difference in the meaning of work, only that Americans work much more extreme hours. Hard work pays off in *Rewards*, this is a powerful motivation to achieve goals. Success is often associated with having material signs of opulence and success, such as a high income, living in a luxurious house in a famous neighborhood and an expensive car. Kohls (1984) indicates this by his value 'Materialism'.

As mentioned, Kohls (1984) made no distinction between standards and values in his principles. Looking at his value 'Future orientation', it matches with the underlying value *Optimism* from this research. He states that striving for a hopeful future is motivating and brings happiness.

This is equivalent to the definition of the cultural standard by staying positive and trusting that everything will work out in the future.

Regarding the value ‘Informality’: there are not many rules and restrictions for correct behavior and forms of addresses (Kohls, 1984), does not fully match the cultural standards found in this study since the Dutch behave informal as well. This study rather focused on the cultural standard *Being nice* where it is valued to act in a kind and polite way.

The cultural standards discovered in this study also have some similarities with the American standards founded by Slate and Schroll-Machl (2003). The standard ‘Equality’ is identical to the Dutch value; there are no differences comparing the Dutch and American behavior regarding equal treatment. Coming to ‘Action-oriented’ means that there is a high focus on results and effectiveness. The underlying value *Achievement* covers the pursuit of results. Effectiveness is invisible in this research since it is linked to value ‘Utility’ which Dutchmen have similarly. A value close to this is ‘Performance-oriented’, which is linked to *Performance* and *Competition* since the description of Slate and Schroll-Machl (2003) has two aspects. The first one is performance, which is essential for success. This goes hand in hand with the second aspect, which indicates that competition is the ingredient for the best results. One competes not only with other parties but also with oneself to keep developing. Besides, ‘Serenity’ indicates that Americans allow a flexible planning approach in order to respond quickly to disruptions (Slate & Schroll-Machl, 2003). This standard interfaces with *Trial and error* found in this study, indicating that supervisors are able to take risks and experiments when procedures are not present. This flexible approach is applied to easily make improvements and tackle problems along the way.

‘Individualism’ stands for a strong sense of personal responsibility, according to Slate and Schroll-Machl (2003). This is reflected in the cultural standard *Autonomy* where one is focused on personal tasks and responsibilities. The ‘Need for social recognition’, giving feedback in a friendly and careful manner, is reflected in the cultural standard *Sugar-coated feedback*. Feedback is given positively to maintain a pleasant atmosphere. Also, *Being nice* is part of this, where it is essential to act in a kind and polite way. Slate and Schroll-Machl (2003) indicate the value ‘Interpersonal distance minimization’ where it is important to have an extroverted personality focusing on sociability, openness and being easily accessible. However, the relationships are just superficial and personal topics are avoided. It is just a superficial



friendship. This is reflected in the cultural standards of this study *Enthusiasm*, *Being nice* and *Sugar-coated feedback*. People behave in an extroverted way but do not guarantee deep relationships. These aspects of *Optimism* underpin positivity and encouragement to create a sort of buffer with aloofness and politeness.

The standard 'Patriotism' from Slate and Schroll-Machl (2003) was not found in this analysis since this is not considered as a cultural standard in this study. Although some interviewees indicated that Americans are very nationalistic and proud of their country, 'Patriotism' is not a typical concrete behavior.

The emphasis of Gorer (1948) that Americans are individualistic and value hard work is equivalent, it matches with the cultural standards *Autonomy* and *Work-life unbalance*. The fact that equality regardless of hierarchy is not pointed out in this study is that it is similar to the Netherlands. However, informal relationships are not noticed, contrasting that the Dutch feel that the Americans behave very politely; *Being nice*.

Attaining an identity by action and achievement (Stewart & Bennett, 1991) is recognized in the results by the underlying value of *Achievement*. Goals can be achieved through hard work that will be rewarded by success is part of the cultural standards *Performance* and *Rewards*. In addition, the strong believe in personal initiative and the high focus on individual is reflected in the underlying value *Responsibility and personal accountability*. According to Stewart and Bennett (1991), challenges are seen as opportunities for achievement and improvement rather than setbacks. This corresponds with *Trial and error*, the can-do mentality of the Americans. The principle of d'Iribarne et al. (1998) applies as well, saying that a contract is an important matter. One does not deviate from their job description which is reflected in the cultural standards of *Separate responsibilities*. This means that employees work for their own purpose rather than the collective. The fact that Stewart and Bennett (1991) say that equality is valued looks similar to the Netherlands. However, its description where it is mentioned that hierarchy is tried to avoid by informality is not experienced by the Dutch living and working in the United States. This study reveals that hierarchy is highly present in business which is reflected in underlying value *Leadership*.

Althern and Bennett (2011) are aligned with the underlying value of *Achievement*, work is considered more important than leisure time in order to build a strong future. Also, the principle

that Americans are not interested in personal relationships is recognized in this study. However, this study does not indicate purely informal contact moments but rather very polite; *Being nice*. The fact that Americans are very punctual corresponds with the punctuality of the Dutch. What the Netherlands has but America does not is consensus, as both Althern and Bennett (2011) and this study confirm.

Six cultural standards identified this study - *Self-profiling, Sticking to procedures, Top-down decisions, Obedience, Limited input and Authority* –were not recognized in the existing emic literature. Despite the fact that many cultural standards are recognized in the existing literature, the added value of this research lies in its systematic approach. By focusing on concrete behaviors and their underlying values, this research provides a more structured understanding of American culture from a Dutch perspective. This structured approach allows for a deeper exploration of how these cultural standards shape workplace dynamics and how they contrast with Dutch expectations.

### **5.3 Practical contributions**

One of the major reasons why cross-cultural collaboration may fail is the lack of cultural awareness (Pike, 1967; Söderberg & Holden, 2002). The twenty cultural standards of this study give valuable insights for Dutch expatriates what typical American behaviors deviate from Dutch practice. Taking these into account may help to improve cross-cultural interactions in the United States. With the support of these results, Dutch individuals can prepare themselves for doing business and communicating with Americans by being aware of the cultural differences. It gives Dutch businessmen collaborating with Americans a better understanding of the expectations of the workplace in the United States. This might help to reduce possible friction coming from these differences leading to a better understanding of the American behavior.

Dutch expatriates can bridge the cultural differences by training where real cultural frictions are simulated to reduce the misunderstandings and increase the cultural awareness (Hurn, 2011). The findings of this research can be used as input for the culture assimilator, a programmed learning technique to expose participants of a culture to the basic concepts, attitudes, perceptions and values of another culture (F. E. Fiedler et al., 1971). The real-life scenarios identified in this study are more attractive and challenging than general overviews from the literature (Hurn, 2011). The critical incidents allow Dutch expatriates to learn about

the American culture playfully. At first, Dutch people must become familiar with and create awareness of the cultural values of the Netherlands, these are described in Chapter 2.2.1. Following in discovering the American cultural standards described in Chapter 4.1 and the five underlying values described in Chapter 4.3. Herewith, the Dutch expatriates become aware of the different behaviors from different cultures and what is considered appropriate or not.

#### **5.4 Limitations & suggestions for future research**

Sixteen Dutch individuals living and working in the United States were interviewed for this study. Cultural standards were established by analyzing the Critical Incidents of the Dutch with their American colleagues. While this study provides valuable insights, it comes with limitations as well. In the following section, the limitations are discussed and suggestions for future research are given.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, this study does not give a complete description of American cultural standards and values. It only highlights the areas in which the Dutch and the Americans differentiate. This means that the similarities between the Netherlands and the United States are not discussed. Only the American cultural standards that stand out from a Dutch perspective are considered in this study. People from other cultures have to be aware of this before taking the results into account. Other cultures may perceive the American culture differently hence it is suggested to study the American culture from other cultural perspectives as well.

Second, this interview covered sixteen interviews. Even though data saturation has been reached, a suggestion for future research could be to do additional research. This may provide more data and accuracy which would improve generalizability. In addition, special sectors and industries can be focused on, given that interviewees indicated that this could make a difference.

Third, social desirability bias may play a role in this research. Interviewees may give answers that are socially accepted or desired rather than how they see or feel it themselves (Grimm, 2010). Social desirability may become a problem when collecting data that is sensitive to personal or social issues. This could affect the outcome of the study negatively. However, to minimize the negative effects, the interviewer made clear to the interviewees that all answers are anonymized and that it could not be redirected to them. These actions are written down in the written consent in order to remove barriers and encourage the interviewees to speak freely.

Fourth, the researcher coded and interpreted the results by herself. The results and interpretation were discussed with her supervisor and two experts. However, more experts could have been consulted to improve the reliability of the American cultural standards. Nevertheless, the results have been compared with existing literature, which tested the validity of the research.

Fifth, the cultural standard Moral behavior is difficult to connect directly to an underlying value. The complexity of Moral behavior indicates that there are different perspectives. Therefore, further research is needed into the connected underlying value that drives this standard.

Finally, the twenty cultural standards that are retrieved in this study may support Dutch expatriates in doing business in the United States by being more aware of the cultural differences. However, the Dutch should realize that generalization is not possible since not all Americans may behave similarly. One must keep in mind that these results cannot be used to state biases. Overall, this study helps Dutch expatriates gain insight into the cultural logic to understand American behavior in the workplace.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The main research question of this research was: “*Which cultural differences do Dutch individuals living and working in the United States perceive in the workplace?*” First, empirical data is collected through Dutch interviewees which made it possible to identify cultural standards. Twenty cultural standards have been identified: Enthusiasm, Sticking to procedures, Top-down decisions, Being nice, Work-life unbalance, Sugar-coated feedback, Performance, Indirectness, Rewards, Autonomy, Obedience, Limited input, Authority, Moral behavior, Separate responsibilities, Advancing career path, Trial and error, Competition and Dealing with negative feedback.

Second, the above-mentioned cultural standards are connected to underlying values of these ‘typical’ American behaviors. Five underlying values are identified in this study:

1. **Achievement (success):** Self-profiling, Performance, Work-life unbalance, Rewards, Competition, Trial and error.
2. **Order:** Sticking to procedures
3. **Leadership:** Top-down decisions, Obedience, Limited input, Authority.
4. **Responsibility & personal accountability:** Autonomy, Separate responsibilities, Advancing career path.
5. **Optimism:** Enthusiasm, Being nice, Sugar-coated feedback, Indirectness, Dealing with negative feedback.

The cultural standard Moral behavior is not directly associated with the above mentioned underlying values. This cultural standard is more complex and therefore indicates that there are different perspectives. Future research is recommended to investigate the connected underlying value that drives this standard.

With this retrieved information, the main research question is answered. The underlying values describe the cultural logic behind American cultural standards and typical American behavior. This provides valuable insights with thick descriptions of the American culture and how Americans behave. As a result, Dutch people can become familiar with these cultural values to avoid misunderstandings and confrontations while doing business with Americans.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: written consent (Dutch)

**Naam:** .....

### **Onderzoeker**

Roby Slaghekke

Student op Universiteit Twente (Master Business Administration)

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### **Achtergrond informatie**

Globalisering leidt tot een aanzienlijke toename van het aantal expats. Deze studie onderzoekt de ervaringen over de Amerikaanse cultuur van de Nederlandse expats die wonen en werken in de Verenigde Staten. Waardevolle inzichten over cross-culturele verschillen worden onderzocht. Om de culturele verschillen te onderzoeken zal gebruik worden gemaakt van kwalitatief onderzoek. Deze kwalitatieve studie verklaart naast 'hoe' mensen zich gedragen ook 'waarom' mensen zich zo gedragen. Het doel is om de volgende onderzoeksvraag te beantwoorden: "Hoe ervaren Nederlandse expats de Amerikaanse cultuur wanneer ze wonen en werken in de Verenigde Staten?". Aanbevelingen voor Nederlandse expats die actief zijn in de Verenigde Staten zullen worden gegeven om de samenwerking en communicatie te versterken en zakelijke relaties te creëren.

### **Beschrijving**

Wilt u deelnemen aan mijn online interview? De vragen gaan over je ervaringen in de Verenigde Staten met een focus op culturele situaties en conflicten tussen Nederlanders en Amerikanen. Het interview duurt ongeveer 60 minuten. Het interview wordt opgenomen als u daar toestemming voor geeft.

### **Doel van het interview**

Deze sessie zal plaatsvinden om gegevens te verzamelen voor mijn master thesis.

### **Deelname en terugtrekking**

Uw deelname is volledig vrijwillig. Als u zich niet op uw gemak voelt, hoeft u de vraag niet te beantwoorden en kunt u het interview op elk moment verlaten als u dat wilt. Alle informatie zal worden geanonimiseerd, wat betekent dat alle informatie die naar u zou kunnen leiden niet zal worden gepubliceerd in de resultaten van de master thesis. Het is mogelijk om de vragen vooraf te lezen voordat het interview begint.

### **Informatie en beheer**

Microsoft Teams wordt gebruikt om het online interview te organiseren. Als je toestemming geeft, wordt het interview opgenomen en getranscribeerd door Teams. De opnames worden opgeslagen op mijn laptop totdat ze zijn uitgeschreven. De opnames worden verwijderd zodra de transcripties klaar zijn. De transcripties worden gebruikt om de verzamelde gegevens te analyseren en te coderen. Als het onderzoek klaar is, worden de transcripties ook verwijderd.

Ik heb de verstrekte informatie gelezen. Ik geef toestemming om deel te nemen aan dit onderzoek onder deze voorwaarden.

Ja       Nee

**Datum:** ...-...-.....

**Handtekening deelnemer:** .....

## **Appendix B: interview guide (Dutch)**

### ***Introductie***

Mijn naam is Roby Slaghekke, MBA student aan de Universiteit Twente. Ik onderzoek hoe Nederlandse expats de Amerikaanse cultuur ervaren om waardevolle inzichten te krijgen in cross-culturele verschillen tussen Nederland en de Verenigde Staten. Uw antwoorden in dit interview zijn vertrouwelijk en worden niet gedeeld met anderen, het is volledig geanonimiseerd zodat het niet naar u te herleiden is. Als je je niet op je gemak voelt, hoef je de vragen niet te beantwoorden. Je hebt altijd de mogelijkheid om het interview te verlaten. Het interview duurt ongeveer 60 minuten. Geeft u toestemming voor deelname aan dit interview, wat betekent dat uw antwoorden gebruikt zullen worden in dit onderzoek? Geeft u toestemming dat dit interview wordt opgenomen en getranscribeerd? Als u hiermee instemt, kunnen we beginnen met het interview.

1. Kun je jezelf voorstellen; naam, leeftijd, woonplaats?
2. Hoelang woon en werk je al in de Verenigde Staten?
3. Wat is je functie/positie?

### ***Communicatie***

4. Hoe vaak heb je contact met Amerikaanse collega's?
5. Wat voor soort contact hebben jullie? (Telefoon, e-mail, persoonlijk)
6. Waar praten jullie over? (Werk of privé?)
7. Wat is jouw positie binnen het bedrijf en wat is de positie van je collega?
8. In welke taal spreken jullie?
9. Hoe beoordeel/evalueer je de communicatie?
10. Hoe zou je de sfeer tussen de Nederlanders en de Amerikanen beschrijven?
11. Is er volgens jou sprake van een goede samenwerking? Of is er ruimte voor verbetering?
12. Is er naar uw mening sprake van een goede persoonlijke relatie? Of is er ruimte voor verbetering?

### ***Hoofd vragen en 'critical incidents'***

13. Hoe beoordeel je jouw ervaringen met de Amerikanen in het algemeen?
14. Wat zijn volgens jou de meest opvallende verschillen tussen het gedrag van Nederlanders en Amerikanen?

### ***'Critical incidents' (situaties)***

15. Kan je een voorbeeld geven van een bepaalde situatie?

16. Wat is er precies gebeurd?
17. Hoe heb je gereageerd?
18. Hoe is het afgelopen?
19. Waarom denk je dat jouw Amerikaanse collega zich zo gedroeg?
20. Heb je meer van dit soort voorbeelden?
  
21. Stel je voor dat een vriend naar de Verenigde Staten komt. Wat moet hij/zij absoluut weten over het werken in de Verenigde Staten?
22. Hoe is het om te werken met mensen in de Verenigde Staten?
  - a. Hoe zijn de meetings?
  - b. Hoe is de relatie met je leidinggevende?
  - c. Hoe gaan zij om met deadlines?
  - d. Hoe reageren zij op feedback?
  - e. Hoe is de relatie met je collega's?
  
23. Heb je wel eens misverstanden meegemaakt tussen Nederlanders en Amerikanen?
24. Ben je ooit verrast door het gedrag van een Amerikaan?
25. Heb je wel eens een situatie gehad waar je de Amerikaan niet begreep?
26. Heb je wel eens een situatie gehad waar je het niet eens was met je Amerikaanse collega's?
27. Heb je wel eens een conflict gehad met een Amerikaanse collega?
28. Heb je ooit andere problemen gehad met Amerikanen?
  
29. Hoe zou een goede manager zich moeten gedragen?
30. Verschillen Nederlanders en Amerikanen hierin?
  
31. Hoe zou een goede collega zich moeten gedragen?
32. Verschillen Nederlanders en Amerikanen hierin?
  
33. Hoe zou een goede werknemer zich moeten gedragen?
34. Verschillen Nederlanders en Amerikanen hierin?
  
35. Hoe gaan de Amerikanen om met procedures en hoe controleren ze deze?
36. Hoe is het besluitvormingsproces in een Amerikaans bedrijf gestructureerd?

37. Wie neemt de beslissing en hoe werkt dat?
38. Worden de beslissingen door iedereen gerespecteerd?

**Stelling:** het is gemakkelijker om samen te werken met een Nederlander dan met een Amerikaan.

39. Wat is jouw mening en waarom?

**Einde**

40. Is er nog iets wat je graag wil delen over jouw ervaring in de Verenigde Staten gerelateerd aan de Amerikaanse cultuur?

Als er iets naar boven komt over je ervaringen in de Verenigde Staten en de culturele verschillen, of als je nog vragen hebt, neem dan gerust contact met me op. De resultaten zullen worden toegepast in mijn master thesis van de Masteropleiding Business Administration. De resultaten van dit onderzoek zullen worden gebruikt voor wetenschappelijke publicatie.

Ken je eventueel andere Nederlanders die op dit moment wonen en werken in de Verenigde Staten? Zou ik hen mogen benaderen voor een interview?

Bedankt voor je tijd en medewerking!