

Intercultural Collaboration in European Business

Cultural differences between the Dutch and Irish on the work floor

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Abstract

Globalisation has transformed European business interactions, highlighting both the benefits of cross-cultural cooperation and the challenges inherent in diverse workplace cultures. Although the Netherlands and Ireland share economic ties and both belong to the European Union, cultural differences persist, particularly in professional settings. This study explores these differences as perceived by Dutch professionals working in Ireland, aiming to identify Irish cultural standards that may influence workplace collaboration.

Employing an inductive qualitative approach, this research applies the Critical Incident Technique in combination with the Grounded Interpretive Model to analyse culturally significant experiences. Participants were asked to recount specific moments that stood out to them as culturally surprising or confusing. Through thematic analysis of these critical incidents, thirteen Irish cultural standards were identified, which were then grouped into four underlying values: *Cúram* (care/caution), *Craic* (friendliness/humor), *Solúbthacht* (flexibility/adaptability), and *Údarás* (authority). These values provide a culturally grounded explanation for Irish workplace behaviours as perceived by Dutch expatriates.

Findings from this study contribute to the field of European intercultural management and offer practical insights for professionals operating in Dutch–Irish contexts. By understanding the underlying logic of Irish cultural norms, Dutch professionals can improve their cultural awareness, adapt their expectations, and enhance cross-cultural collaboration in the workplace.

Keywords: Irish Culture, Dutch Culture, Cultural Differences, Critical Incidents, Cultural Standards, Irish Cultural Standards, Cultural Values

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1. Introduction

The European Union has established one large common market by removing trade barriers and border restrictions among its member states and introducing uniform standards. This has led to increased trade within the European Union and a rise in GDP for several member states. For example, the Netherlands has benefited significantly, with an estimated 3.1% GDP increase due to EU trade (Freeman et al., 2022). However, Europe still has one disadvantage compared to other major economic blocs such as the United States and China, namely language and cultural differences between member nations. Research on cultural differences within Europe is thus immensely useful, since it may aid in the improvement of economic connections across nations, hence boosting trade and industrial cooperation within the union.

In 2020, the Netherlands imported goods from Ireland worth 10.32 billion dollars, making Ireland the 9th largest exporter to the Netherlands (TRADING ECONOMICS, n.d.-b). Conversely, Ireland imported 3.46 billion dollars' worth of goods from the Netherlands, placing the Netherlands 7th among Ireland's top import partners (TRADING ECONOMICS, n.d.-a). Despite these strong trade relations, there is a notable lack of qualitative research examining the cultural differences between these two countries, particularly in the workplace. According to Gerhards (2007), significant cultural variation still exists between European nations, reinforcing the relevance of studying Dutch-Irish cultural interaction in a professional setting.

Although the Netherlands and Ireland share a Western European context, democratic institutions, and a market-oriented economy, their cultural development has followed different historical paths. Ireland's national identity has been shaped by a long history of British rule, its struggle for independence, and deep-rooted Catholic traditions. In contrast, Dutch culture has developed around maritime trade, Protestant values, and a long-standing history of independence. These contrasting historical experiences have contributed to differences in societal norms, values, and professional behaviours in both countries, differences that continue to influence modern intercultural interactions in the workplace.

There is limited academic research specifically focused on cultural differences between the Dutch and Irish in professional settings. A recent study by Bezcioglu-Göktolga et al. (2021) identified key differences in communication styles: the Dutch favour direct communication, whereas the Irish often use a more indirect approach. This contrast, rooted in differing levels of cultural context, can influence workplace interactions and create misunderstandings if not properly understood.

While Bezcioglu-Göktolga et al. (2021) provide valuable insight, their study also presents certain limitations. It relied on a relatively small group of mostly highly experienced professionals and primarily focused on communication styles and language barriers. Other intercultural dynamics, such as values, expectations, and workplace behaviours, were not explored in depth. They called for further research using more diverse groups and alternative methods to gain a deeper understanding of Dutch-Irish workplace interaction. Responding to that call, the present study employs the Critical Incident Technique (Thomas et al., 2010) in combination with the Grounded Interpretive Model developed by Enklaar (2022), enabling a deeper, qualitative exploration of culturally significant moments as experienced by Dutch professionals in Ireland.

These methods aim to uncover recurring patterns in Dutch professionals' experiences and to identify the underlying cultural standards that inform Irish workplace behaviour. The approach goes beyond identifying observable differences by exploring the deeper values that explain them. Through this, the study provides insights into how Dutch professionals perceive Irish culture in daily professional life. This led to the following research question: *"Which cultural differences are perceived by Dutch expats working in Ireland?"*

The following sub-questions are formulated based on the main research question:

1. What are typical Irish cultural standards perceived by Dutch expats working in Ireland?
2. What is the cultural logic underlying these Irish cultural standards?
3. How can Dutch expats working in Ireland bridge these cultural differences?

1.1 Academic relevance

This study is part of the One Market, Many Cultures project, which aims to qualitatively analyse and define various European cultures. By examining cultural differences between the Dutch and the Irish, this study contributes to a broader understanding of cultural diversity within Europe and its historical development. While both countries are acknowledged in general comparative studies, such as those by Hofstede (2010) and Gerhards (2007), there remains a notable lack of research that specifically examines the workplace dynamics between Dutch and Irish professionals. The growing importance of international collaboration within the European Union makes such research particularly relevant, as cultural misunderstandings in the workplace can hinder the effectiveness of cross-border cooperation.

This study employs the Grounded Interpretive Model developed by Enklaar (2022), which builds on the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) as elaborated by Thomas et al.'s (2010), to analyse key cultural interactions that reveal underlying values and behavioural norms. The model combines the structured analysis of CIT with interpretive depth, enabling the capture of nuanced cultural differences. This approach addresses the limitations highlighted by Bezcioglu-Göktolga et al. (2021), whose findings were constrained by a narrow and specific group of respondents. By incorporating a broader range of perspectives, including diverse industries and roles, this research enhances the validity and applicability of its findings.

Furthermore, this study responds to the recommendations made by Bezcioglu-Göktolga et al. (2021) for replicating their methodology in different cultural contexts. By applying their framework to the Dutch-Irish context, this research not only tests the robustness of their approach but also refines it, contributing to the theoretical understanding of European workplace cultures. In doing so, this study provides a foundation for addressing practical challenges in cross-cultural collaboration, offering actionable insights for professionals working in Dutch-Irish settings.

Ultimately, this research bridges a critical gap in the literature, offering both theoretical and practical contributions to the study of European workplace dynamics. It highlights the importance of understanding nuanced cultural interactions and lays the groundwork for further exploration of how cultural differences can be navigated effectively within the context of the European Union.

1.2 Practical relevance

The economic relationship between the Netherlands and Ireland is strong and continues to grow, with numerous business connections between the two nations. As Dutch professionals increasingly collaborate with Irish colleagues, understanding and navigating cultural differences has become essential. This study provides valuable insights into the most significant cultural differences between the Dutch and the Irish, offering practical tools to enhance professional relationships and workplace dynamics.

Dutch expatriates working in Ireland may benefit from the findings of this research in several ways. By gaining a deeper understanding of Irish cultural norms, values, and communication styles, they can build stronger connections with their colleagues, reduce misunderstandings, and foster a more inclusive and harmonious work environment. These insights can also help expatriates feel more at

home in their professional and social settings, enabling them to adapt more effectively to Irish cultural practices and expectations.

Additionally, the critical incidents and their interpretations can serve as the foundation for practical training tools, such as culture assimilators. These tools are designed to help Dutch professionals working in Ireland prepare for real-world scenarios by offering culturally appropriate strategies for interaction and collaboration. Such resources empower individuals to navigate cultural differences with confidence and build trust in multicultural workplaces.

This study also holds broader relevance for businesses and teams operating in international contexts. The findings can be used to strengthen cross-border collaborations, avoid cultural misunderstandings, and enhance the overall success of joint ventures between Dutch and Irish organisations. By bridging cultural gaps, professionals at all levels can contribute to more effective and productive partnerships, both within Ireland and across the European Union.

1.3 Outline of the study

This thesis starts with an introduction section containing the research goal and the research questions, in order to clarify the objectives of this study. The introduction is followed by a theoretical framework that reviews previous work on the topic and explains how this thesis contributes to the understanding of cultural differences as perceived by Dutch professionals working in Ireland. After the theoretical framework, the research methodology follows. The research design, data collection, research tool, data analysis, and expert commentary are all included in this chapter. The description of the research and its results follows after the methodology chapter; in this part, the cultural standards identified through the interviews are presented and interpreted. The thesis concludes with a discussion of the main findings, practical implications, limitations of the study, and suggestions for further research.

2. Theoretical background

This chapter attempts to define the term "culture" and provides the reader with an overview of prior studies on the cultural differences between the Dutch and the Irish. Additionally, the concepts of critical incidents and cultural standards, and the theory of Thomas et al. are discussed, along with information on Dutch and Irish cultural values discovered via earlier studies.

2.1 Defining culture

One of the major concepts in this research is "culture." Therefore, it is crucial to understand how the term "culture" is defined. Since the research methodology of this study is based on the theory developed by Thomas et al., this study adopts his definition of culture. Thomas et al.'s (2010) succinctly defines culture as "the shared orientation system of a society, organisation, or group that provides its members with identity, guidance for behaviour, and structure for perception and evaluation" (p. 19). This definition highlights the shared nature of culture as a framework that informs individual and group behaviour.

In addition to Thomas et al.'s definition, the definition offered by Spencer-Oatey is also integral to this study. Spencer-Oatey (2008) describes culture as:

"A fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member's behaviour and his/her interpretations of the 'meaning' of other people's behaviour" (p. 3).

Both definitions are complementary, as they underscore the role of shared values and behaviours in shaping cultural norms. While Thomas et al. emphasises the structural and functional aspects of culture as an orientation system, Spencer-Oatey focuses on its dynamic and interpretative nature. Together, these perspectives provide a comprehensive foundation for exploring cultural differences.

This study utilises these definitions to identify and analyse the cultural differences between Dutch and Irish professionals, focusing on their behaviours and underlying values. In line with Thomas et al.'s concept of culture, this research seeks to examine how Irish cultural norms guide individual and group behaviour and how these norms differ from Dutch cultural standards. Furthermore, understanding the cultural logic underlying these behavioural differences will help to contextualise and explain the observed cultural patterns. This will be achieved by identifying the values that underpin Irish cultural standards, enabling a deeper appreciation of Irish workplace culture from a Dutch perspective.

2.2 Previous research into intercultural differences

Globally, in the field of international business and consulting the etic approach to describe intercultural differences is most popular. These etic approaches use various dimensions to account for cultural differences. Well-known are the models of Hofstede and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, which centre their research on quantitative, survey-based methods, and Erin Meyer, whose framework is based primarily on qualitative insights drawn from interviews, case studies, and executive experience.

Although these cultural dimensions models are useful for a quick check of cultural differences between countries, they do not give managers and consultants concrete clues on how to act effectively in a foreign cultural environment. In contrast with the exact numerical scores for each dimension, which suggest exactness, these models are too coarse, abstract, and not precise enough for practical use and produce the most generalizations about cultures. Finally, they focus only on a few aspects of cultures, but the internal coherence within one culture remains unclear.

2.2.1 ETIC approaches

All of the models listed above adopt an etic approach to culture. The etic approach requires a descriptive framework that is equally valid for all cultures and that allows for the representation of both cultural similarities and variations (Helfrich, 1999). The etic approach means that the research is about cross-cultural differences (Fetvadjiev & van de Vijver, 2015).

2.2.1.1 Hofstede's model

Figure 1 demonstrates the model of Hofstede with its six dimensions and the comparisons between Ireland and the Netherlands (Hofstede Insights, 2023). Hofstede's model was chosen for its systematic framework, which provides insights into national cultural differences. Its focus on dimensions such as "individualism vs. collectivism" and "power distance" is particularly relevant to this study's aim of analysing Dutch-Irish workplace dynamics. Additionally, the model has been widely applied in cross-cultural research, offering a reliable foundation for comparing cultural behaviours in professional settings (Hofstede, 2001).

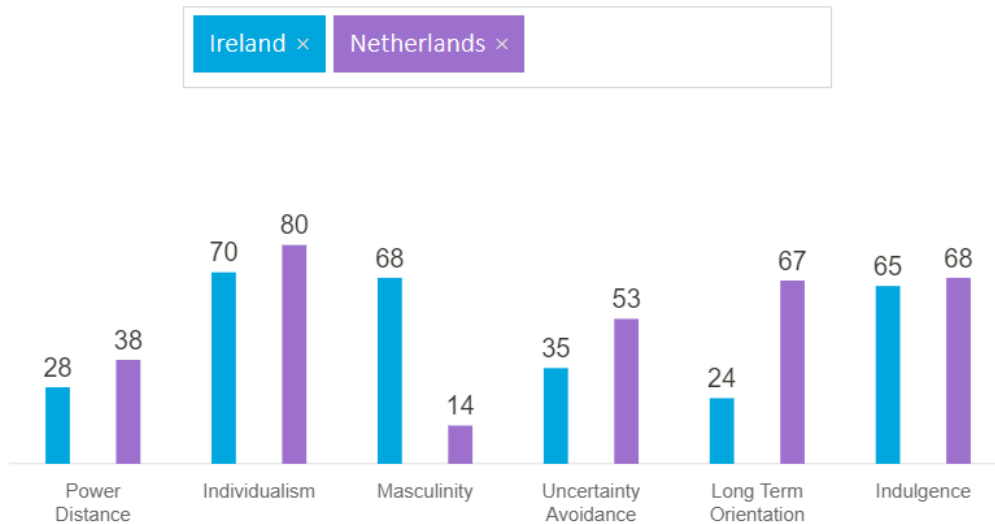


Figure 1. Model of Hofstede for cultural differences between the Netherlands and Ireland

Looking at the cultural differences between the Dutch and the Irish, Hofstede distinguishes six dimensions in his model of national culture: power distance index, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty avoidance index, long-term orientation versus short-term normative orientation, and indulgence versus restraint. Between the Dutch and the Irish, there is a clear difference in the following two dimensions: masculinity versus femininity and long-term orientation versus short-term orientation.

Ireland is a rather masculine culture with a score of 68, one that according to Hofstede values achievement above all else. The common beliefs that one should "strive to be the best one can be" and that "the winner gets all" guide behaviour in all settings, including school, job, and recreation. Irish success and accomplishments serve as a foundation for employment and advancement choices at work because the people who make them are so proud of them. Individual disputes are settled with the intention of winning (Hofstede Insights, 2023). The Netherlands has a value of 14 on this dimension, making it a feminine culture. In feminine countries, it's crucial to maintain a healthy work-life mix and make sure everyone is involved. A successful boss encourages employees, and decision-making is accomplished through participation. People value equality, solidarity, and quality in the workplace, and managers work to achieve consensus. Conflicts are settled through bargaining and compromise, and the Dutch are renowned for their protracted talks that last until an agreement is made (Hofstede Insights, 2023b).

Ireland's society is rated as conventional with a low score of 24 on the long-term orientation dimension. People in these cultures are conventional in their reasoning and strongly concerned with discovering the unchanging truth. They show a high regard for customs, a low tendency to save for

the future, and a concentration on getting things done quickly (Hofstede Insights, 2023). The Netherlands scored high in this dimension (67), indicating that it is pragmatic by nature. People in pragmatic cultures hold the view that reality is highly situational, contextual, and temporal dependent. They exhibit a natural ability to alter customs to fit new circumstances, a strong tendency to save and invest, frugality, and persistence in getting things done (Hofstede Insights, 2023b).

2.2.1.2 Meyer's framework

In addition to Hofstede's framework, the Culture Map developed by Meyer (2014) compares national cultures across eight behavioural dimensions. The framework identifies eight dimensions that describe how cultures differ in their communication and collaboration styles. Each dimension is presented as a spectrum between two opposites. Figure 2 shows how the Netherlands and Ireland are positioned across these scales.

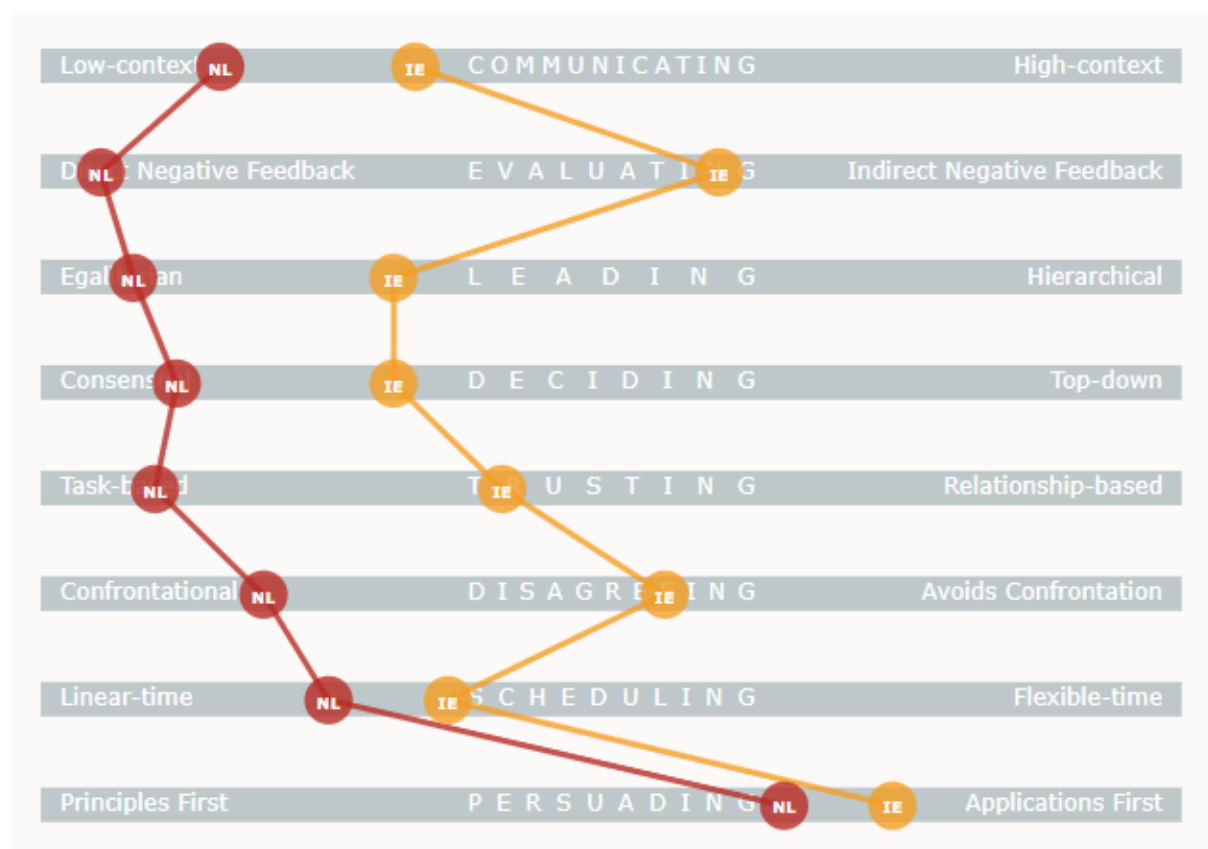


Figure 2. Meyer's culture map scales comparing the Netherlands and Ireland

On the leading scale, both the Netherlands and Ireland lean towards an egalitarian management style. This means that the ideal distance between a manager and an employee is relatively small. Leaders are expected to be approachable and to act as facilitators rather than authoritative figures. The Dutch

prefer a consensual approach for the deciding scale, meaning decisions are usually discussed and agreed upon as a group. Ireland is positioned closer to a top-down approach, where final decisions are more often made by individuals in leadership roles, even though group input may still be valued. On the trusting scale, the Netherlands builds trust in a task-based way. Professional trust depends on reliability and performance. In Ireland, trust also develops through task-based cooperation, but relationship-building plays a slightly larger role. Personal interactions and informal contact contribute more to trust in Irish workplaces. Both countries are linear-time oriented on the scheduling scale. Tasks are approached sequentially, and punctuality, structure, and planning are valued. Similarly, both the Netherlands and Ireland are applications-first cultures when it comes to persuading. This means that arguments usually begin with concrete examples or practical points, rather than abstract theories.

More striking differences appear on the communicating, evaluating, and disagreeing scales. On Communicating, the Netherlands is more clearly low-context, which means that messages are expected to be clear, explicit, and direct. In Ireland, communication is still relatively low-context, but more layered and nuanced, and meaning is sometimes implied rather than directly stated. The evaluating scale shows that the Dutch are more comfortable giving direct negative feedback. Criticism is often given openly, without needing to wrap it in positive language. Irish professionals, on the other hand, give indirect negative feedback, often using more careful and diplomatic wording. Negative messages are softened or balanced with positive ones to reduce the risk of embarrassment. Lastly, on the disagreeing scale, Dutch professionals tend to be confrontational. Open disagreement is accepted and seen as part of healthy discussion. Irish professionals are more likely to avoid confrontation, as open disagreement can be seen as damaging to relationships or team dynamics.

In conclusion, Meyer's framework shows that while there are similarities between the Netherlands and Ireland in areas such as leadership style and time orientation, there are also clear differences in communication, feedback, and conflict management. These differences can lead to misunderstandings if professionals are not aware of the cultural logic behind each approach.

2.2.1.3 Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner

Figure 3 demonstrates the model of Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, which compares the Netherlands and Ireland across seven dimensions (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2022). This model was chosen because it complements Hofstede's framework by focusing on the cultural dimensions that shape interpersonal relationships and workplace behaviours. While Hofstede's model

primarily provides a macro-level analysis of cultural values, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's dimensions explore how these values translate into everyday practices and social interactions.

The dimensions "specific/diffuse" and "neutral/affective" were selected for detailed explanation as they highlight the most pronounced differences between Dutch and Irish cultures. These differences provide crucial insights into how cultural norms influence professional relationships and communication styles, which are key to understanding workplace dynamics in an international context.

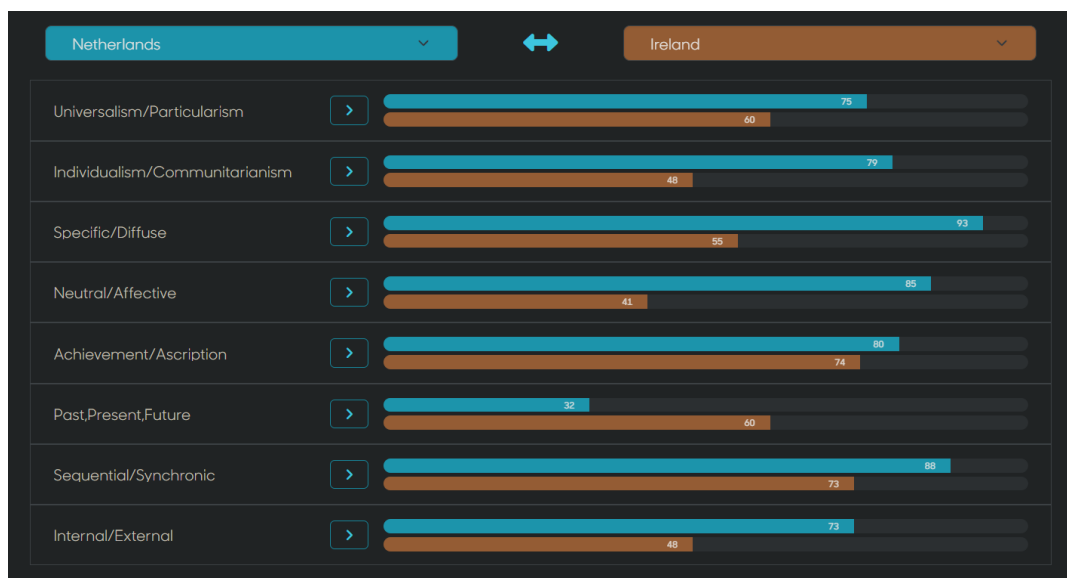


Figure 3. Model of Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner for cultural differences between the Netherlands and Ireland.

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner distinguish seven dimensions in their model: universalism/particularism, individualism/communitarianism, specific/diffuse, neutral/affective, achievement/ascription, past/present/future, sequential/synchronic and internal/external. Between the Dutch and the Irish, there is a clear difference in the dimensions: specific/diffuse and neutral/affective. Besides these major differences, there is also a slight difference in the dimensions: individualism/communitarianism, past/present/future and internal/external.

The dimension of "specific/diffuse" highlights how cultures approach relationships, tasks, and responsibilities in professional and personal contexts. People from specific-oriented cultures, such as the Netherlands, typically begin by analysing each element of a situation individually. They focus on hard facts, examine details in isolation, and then reassemble them, viewing the whole as the sum of its parts. In these cultures, there is a clear division between personal and professional spheres, with relationships and interactions often confined to specific areas of life. As such, Dutch professionals tend

to adopt a low level of personal involvement in business, prioritising objective reasoning over relational considerations (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2022). Managers in specific cultures also separate work relationships from private ones, ensuring minimal overlap between these domains.

In contrast, diffuse-oriented cultures, such as Ireland, take a more holistic approach. People from these cultures see each element in the context of the overall picture, integrating personal and professional spheres more seamlessly. Relationships tend to span multiple areas of life, reflecting higher personal involvement. This means that Irish professionals may involve more levels of personality and context in workplace interactions, such as considering an employee's personal circumstances alongside business performance. While Ireland scores closer to the middle of this dimension, this suggests a cultural balance that incorporates both relational and task-oriented approaches to business interactions.

Dutch professionals may come across as more task-focused, objective, and compartmentalised in their dealings. Meanwhile, Irish professionals may appear more relational, holistic, and contextually adaptive.

The neutral/affective dimension examines the extent to which emotions are expressed and the interplay between reason and emotion in human relationships. In affective cultures, such as Ireland, emotions are openly displayed, and moods and feelings are not hidden or suppressed. Expressing emotions is considered a sign of sincerity, commitment, and trustworthiness. Irish professionals often integrate emotional expression into their interactions, using gestures, facial expressions, and even physical contact to convey their thoughts and feelings. This approach can create a warm, enthusiastic atmosphere that focuses on building personal connections.

In contrast, neutral cultures, such as the Netherlands, encourage emotional restraint. Dutch professionals typically avoid outward displays of emotion, as such expressions may be viewed as improper or unprofessional. Instead, emotional reserve is seen as a sign of self-control, with reason dominating interpersonal interactions. This often results in a more measured, detached approach to communication, where logic and objectivity take precedence.

The difference between these two approaches can lead to challenges in cross-cultural interactions. Dutch professionals may perceive Irish emotionality as overwhelming or overly dramatic, while Irish professionals might interpret Dutch emotional reserve as cold or indifferent (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2022).

2.2.1.4 Boyd examines the British and Irish

Boyd (1994) examined work-related values and attitudes between the British and the Irish and whether those findings conform to what would be expected from Hofstede's indices. According to Boyd (1994), Hofstede's indices have not proved very reliable predictors of work values and attitudes in Great Britain and Ireland. The reason may be because the sampling was different and the data was collected two decades later, which may be the cause for a change in values and attitudes. The findings of this study imply that work effort and values are not the same in Ireland and Great Britain. For instance, in Ireland, the work goal of employment stability is statistically significant and favourably correlated with dedication to rigorous work, whereas, in Great Britain, the work goal of leisure time is statistically significant and negatively correlated with work effort.

2.2.1.5 Conclusion on etic approaches

Cross-cultural management studies that utilise models such as those developed by Hofstede, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, and Meyer are considered "generalization studies" (Clausen, 2010). While these models and their cultural dimensions are useful for quickly identifying differences in behaviour and attitudes between nations, they do not delve into the underlying values or processes that explain these differences. As a result, they provide limited guidance for business professionals or expatriates seeking actionable advice on how to navigate intercultural settings effectively.

Carminati (2024) highlights the limitations of applying national culture models in an uncritical manner and proposes a dialectical approach that integrates cultural-general dimensions with cultural-specific practices. Such an approach encourages scholars to move beyond rigid cultural categories and instead consider how culture emerges in context, through interaction and interpretation. A core strength of this approach is its ability to combine the breadth of etic frameworks with the depth of emic insights, resulting in a more holistic understanding of culture. At the same time, Carminati points out that this synthesis requires an agentic and interpretative effort by individuals, who must construct their own situated cultural perspectives rather than rely on fixed frameworks.

Furthermore, these etic approaches often lack the depth needed to explain why individuals from different cultures act or think in specific ways. For instance, while they may highlight that Dutch professionals value directness, they do not explain the cultural logic or historical context behind this preference. Recognising this limitation, Fink et al. (2005) argue for a shift away from purely comparative studies like those of Hofstede. Instead, they advocate for methodologies such as critical incident studies, which focus on intercultural encounters to uncover the processes driving interactions

in international business settings. These approaches provide a more nuanced understanding of the cultural dynamics at play, offering both explanation and actionable insights.

2.2.2 EMIC approaches

The emic and qualitative methods can be used to get around the etic approach's drawbacks. For the emic approach, people's actions cannot be separated from their cultural setting, as Helfrich (1999) claims. They are decided by reasons that are controlled by the person acting and must be understood through the views of the people being investigated, not by causes that can be studied using the techniques of the natural sciences (Helfrich, 1999). According to Fetvadjiev and van de Vijver (2015), the emic approach refers to research that exclusively examines one culture with no (or only a secondary) cross-cultural emphasis. The emic approach has been used in all of the studies that are listed below.

2.2.2.1 Binational cultural studies

To our knowledge, there has been very little qualitative research conducted on the cultural differences between the Dutch and the Irish, with the exception of the study by Bezcioglu-Göktolga et al. (2021). In broader cross- and intercultural research, it has become clear that etic approaches often fall short of providing a deeper understanding of cultural values and behaviours in actual intercultural encounters. The arguments presented above demonstrate the limitations of these approaches, particularly when they attempt to explain specific behavioural patterns in concrete workplace situations.

2.3 Previous research into Dutch-Irish cultural differences

To our knowledge very few qualitative study specifically addressing Dutch-Irish cultural differences in the workplace have been conducted. Bezcioglu-Göktolga et al. (2021) aimed to explore these differences to better understand Irish workplace behaviour while providing managers and consultants with insights into navigating such intercultural dynamics.

The study involved a specific group of 19 respondents: 13 Irish and 6 Dutch professionals, of whom 11 Irish respondents lived in the Netherlands and 2 in Ireland, while 3 Dutch respondents lived in the Netherlands and 3 in Ireland. These participants were highly experienced professionals, which,

according to the researchers, may have influenced the findings due to the participants' developed perspectives based on prior interactions. The authors acknowledge that replicating the study with less experienced participants could produce differing results.

Bezcioglu-Göktolga et al. found that respondents' statements aligned with Hofstede's findings on uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation. Both Irish and Dutch respondents agreed that the Netherlands scores low on uncertainty avoidance, indicating a preference for flexibility and tolerance for ambiguity, while Ireland scores higher, reflecting a greater need for structure and predictability. Similarly, in long-term orientation, Irish respondents exhibited a more short-term focus on immediate gains, while Dutch participants leaned toward long-term planning and perseverance.

However, the study highlighted contradictions regarding individualism versus collectivism. Hofstede's model suggests that Ireland and the Netherlands are similar in this dimension, both scoring high on individualism. Yet, respondents reported notable differences, with Irish professionals valuing community and relational ties more strongly than their Dutch counterparts. This discrepancy raises questions about the applicability of Hofstede's dimensions in nuanced cultural contexts.

While the study provided valuable insights, its reliance on Hofstede's framework limits its depth. The use of experienced respondents, although insightful, introduces potential bias, as their interpretations may reflect individual perspectives rather than broader cultural realities. A broader respondent pool and alternative theoretical frameworks might have yielded a more comprehensive understanding.

Bezcioglu-Göktolga et al. recommended replicating their study with different participants. While this research does not replicate their work, it builds upon their findings using a different qualitative methodology: the Critical Incident Technique (Thomas, 2010). This approach is designed to generate a thick description of cultural behaviours and the underlying values that drive workplace interactions. By addressing the gaps in Hofstede's model and incorporating critical incidents, this research aims to provide a richer understanding of Dutch-Irish cultural dynamics, moving beyond comparative models to explore the deeper cultural logics influencing professional behaviour.

2.4 Critical Incident Technique and cultural standards

This study intends to describe concrete situations on the work floor in which Dutch and Irish have problems in communication and collaboration due to cultural differences, to find out what these cultural differences consist of, and to offer managers and consultants concrete clues on how they can

be bridged. An emic interpretive approach, which is rooted in anthropology, has the disadvantage that it is more difficult to validate than etic studies.

Thomas' approach is based on earlier American research, particularly on the Critical Incident Technique. This method was originally developed to reduce errors in military aviation, but Fiedler et al. (1971) started to apply it to intercultural interactions. They collected as many stories as they could about situations where Americans and people of a foreign country clashed and used these for making a 'culture assimilator'. This is a (computer) program in which participants are confronted with about 50 different situations including a cultural clash. For each situation, four different interpretations are offered, from which participants have to choose the right one. Every time they choose a wrong interpretation, they receive an extensive explanation of why this is not working in the specific culture until they choose the right answer. The assimilator can be used for sensitizing people to the culture of the foreign country where they are being sent. The intention is to have them make isomorphic attributions, i.e., to interpret situations in the same way as the locals.

Thomas et al.'s (2010) defines culture as an 'orientation system' which gives structure and sense to men's environment. This sense-making structure takes shape in a number of 'cultural standards' (behaviour that is considered to be normal) that are typical for each country. He uses the Critical Incident Technique to find out where the cultures of two countries clash and from these incidents, he tries to deduce the conflicting 'cultural standards' of both countries. The cultural standards in a country explain why people in that country behave in a specific way and not otherwise, and they explain why they clash with foreigners who have one or more different cultural standards. Thomas et al.'s (2010) only describes cultural standards and behaviour, which results in a thin description. With the use of a broader model which does not only include cultural standards but also cultural values, this research tries to establish a thick description.

2.5 Irish cultural values

Although there are many popular guides to Ireland and Irish cultures, there is little scientific literature to be found on Irish cultural values. Here the book "How to be Irish" by anthropologist David Slattery is used as a guide for understanding Irish behaviour though this book has a somewhat funny undertone. For his research, David Slattery canvassed undercover at political parties, attended opportune weddings and funerals, interviewed doctors, psychiatrists and builders and drank in many pubs, all in the interest of science.

In his book, Slattery (2011) described how to be Irish in different areas of life. We made here mainly use his chapter about business since the research is focused on culture in the workplace. It all starts with acquiring a proper job, a career with a set rank progression in which you would favourably be staying for at least 40 years. According to Slattery, being Irish means aspiring to do what you love for a job, instead of doing what you are good at. When invited to an interview, it is important, to be honest. According to Slattery, the potential employer is looking for honesty and the truth, especially when asked about weaknesses. Furthermore, Slattery explains that the Irish have a national weakness for bureaucracy, so titles in the workplace are important. In addition to the national weakness for bureaucracy, the Irish managers hate confrontation. A boss will almost do anything to avoid confrontations that will lead to a scene.

David Slattery uses a satirical style of writing which makes it difficult to discover the underlying values of the story. However, some typical Irish cultural logic can be derived from the chapter relating to business. Rank progression, titles and bureaucracy are important according to him. There is value in an apparent status. Furthermore, honesty and truth are highly valued.

2.6 Dutch cultural values

For comparing Irish culture with Dutch culture it is useful to consider literature on Dutch cultural values. According to Enklaar (2007), there are twelve unique Dutch cultural values that describe the normal Dutch way of thinking and behaving. These twelve cultural values are: guilt, charity, truth, labour, order and tidiness, usefulness, reliability, moderation, agreement, equality, and self-determination. The way of thinking behind these Dutch values is explained in table 1. The research by Enklaar (2007) is not cross-cultural either, it describes a single culture.

1.	Salvation	If we make the right choices, a happy future (paradise) awaits us; to have higher purpose in mind
2.	Guilt (and penance)	You must acknowledge your guilt / responsibility for your mistakes / actions
3.	Compassion	Love thy neighbour as thyself
4.	Truth	You must always speak the truth (even if it is painful)
5.	Labour	To work is good. There is nobility in labour.
6.	Order and neatness	You have to have your affairs neatly organized

7.	Utility	Everything you do must yield something (not just for pleasure); you should not waste
8.	Reliability	You have to stick to your word
9.	Moderation	You have to control yourself, to be sensible
10.	Consensus	You have to meet each other halfway, make a compromise
11.	Equality	You should not think that you are more important than anyone else
12.	Self-determination	Everyone must decide for himself what he does (if only he does not bother me)

Table 1. *The underlying values of the Dutch Culture.*

2.7 Research gap

While Bezcioglu-Göktolga et al. (2021) conducted qualitative research into the cultural differences between the Irish and Dutch in the workplace, their study highlights several limitations that point to gaps in the broader body of research on this topic. First, the sample size was very small, and the use of highly experienced professionals as respondents introduces potential bias, as their perspectives may not represent the broader population of Dutch expatriates in Ireland. This lack of saturation and representativeness underscores the need for further qualitative research involving a sufficient number of respondents from one group, such as Dutch professionals working in Ireland, to capture a more comprehensive range of experiences.

Beyond the specific limitations of this study, there is also a broader gap in comparative intercultural research between Ireland and the Netherlands. Although studies such as those by Hofstede, Trompenaars, and Meyer provide generalised insights into cultural dimensions, they often fail to account for the nuanced behaviours, values, and interactions that arise in real-world workplace settings. Current literature rarely delves into the underlying cultural logic that drives these differences or provides actionable insights for expatriates and managers operating in cross-cultural environments.

Furthermore, while focus groups have been widely used in intercultural studies due to their cost-effectiveness and ability to highlight unanticipated social phenomena (Acocella, 2011; Morrison, 1998), they also come with limitations. Group dynamics, such as dominant participants or groupthink, can overshadow individual perspectives (Stokes & Bergin, 2006), potentially skewing findings. This makes focus groups less suitable for capturing detailed, individual accounts of intercultural interactions.

This study addresses these theoretical and practical gaps by using the Critical Incident Technique (Thomas, 2010), which enables a detailed examination of specific interactions between Dutch and Irish professionals. This method contributes to the literature by providing a thick description of the underlying cultural logic driving observed behaviours. Unlike previous studies, this approach goes beyond describing cultural differences to uncover the values and assumptions that underpin them, offering deeper explanatory insights.

Lastly, this research contributes to the broader “One Market, Many Cultures” project by maintaining methodological consistency with other studies in the project. This consistency enhances comparability across studies, creating opportunities for cross-country analyses of cultural dynamics within the European Union. By combining a rigorous methodology with a focus on actionable insights, this study provides both theoretical advancement in understanding cultural logic and practical recommendations for professionals navigating Dutch-Irish workplace interactions.

3. Methodology

This chapter explains the research methodology used for this study and discusses relevant methodological considerations. It is structured into four sub-chapters: research design, data collection, research instrument, and data analysis.

3.1 Research design

This research aimed to illustrate specific scenarios in the workplace in which Dutch and Irish professionals experienced difficulties in communication and collaboration due to cultural differences, to determine the underlying cultural standards, and to provide managers and consultants with concrete suggestions for addressing these. An inductive qualitative approach was used, as the emphasis lay on participants' personal experiences. Since this form of empirical research concerns individuals' lives, beliefs, experiences, behaviours, emotions, and feelings, as well as organisational functioning, cultural events, and international relationships, it was most appropriate to apply a qualitative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

This study applies the Grounded Interpretive Model developed by Enklaar (2022), which builds on the Critical Incident Technique and the cultural standard method introduced by Thomas et al. (2010). Enklaar's model combines the structured identification of critical incidents with interpretive depth by clustering incidents into broader patterns and connecting them to underlying cultural values. This approach makes it possible to construct a thick description of cultural behaviour, revealing not just what happens in intercultural interactions, but why it happens from the perspective of those involved.

Thomas et al. (2010) addressed concerns about the reliability of qualitative research by integrating personal narratives with a structured methodology, increasing replicability and validity. Instead of relying on a statistically significant sample, this research used the principle of saturation to demonstrate the validity of the findings. To determine the Irish cultural standards as perceived by the Dutch, the Critical Incident Technique was applied. This technique provided detailed descriptions of cultural standards observed in Irish workplaces from a Dutch perspective.

3.2 Data collection

Data were collected from 16 Dutch professionals living and working in the Republic of Ireland. LinkedIn, Facebook Groups for Dutch expatriates in Ireland and online forums were used to identify and contact potential participants. A purposive sampling strategy was applied, meaning that participants were deliberately selected based on specific characteristics relevant to the research aim (Makwana et al., 2023).

First, only individuals who had lived and worked in Ireland for at least six months were selected, as the 'honeymoon phase' of expatriation typically fades after this period, increasing awareness of societal and cultural differences (Pedersen, 1995). Second, participants needed to be fully integrated in the Irish workplace and in regular contact with Irish colleagues. Third, diversity in demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, geographical location, and length of stay, was considered to account for variation in cultural perception.

Participants who met all selection criteria were invited to take part in a virtual interview via Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or Skype.

3.3 Research tool

Dutch participants were interviewed using semi-structured interviews about their experiences collaborating with Irish colleagues. This method was chosen for its ability to generate in-depth and context-rich insights, as it allows participants to narrate their experiences in their own terms (Brinkmann, 2013). The researcher focused on identifying typical situations (critical incidents) in which cultural expectations or behaviours diverged from Dutch norms. The use of critical incidents enables the researcher to examine concrete, memorable events that reveal underlying cultural assumptions (Thomas et al., 2010).

The interviews were conducted via video call, one participant at a time. A semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions was prepared to keep the conversation focused while allowing flexibility for follow-up questions (Bryman, 2016). This approach also facilitated coding and comparability across interviews. All interviews were conducted in Dutch, so that participants could express themselves fluently and with nuance this resulted in greater detail. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher explained the purpose and procedures of the study. Participants provided written informed consent, agreeing that the interview would be recorded and that all data would be

anonymised, in accordance with ethical guidelines for qualitative research. The interviews were transcribed using Amberscript, a transcription tool. Only those quotes that directly supported the analysis were translated into English for inclusion in the results section.

3.4 Sample description

Sixteen Dutch expats living and working in Ireland were interviewed for this study. An overview of their demographic characteristics is presented in table 2.

Nr.	Gender	Age	Location	Occupation	Years in Ireland
1	Woman	45	Dún Laoghaire	HR Business Partner	5
2	Woman	51	Dublin	Project Facilitator	1
3	Woman	38	Cork	District Superintendent	14
4	Woman	31	Dublin	Academic Manager	7
5	Man	30	Cork	Lead Software Engineer	4
6	Man	45	Dublin	ESL Teacher	6
7	Man	25	Dublin	Early Solution Engineer	1,5
8	Woman	30	Galway	Critical Case Manager	5
9	Man	33	Dublin	Corporate Account Executive	6,5
10	Man	28	Dublin	Project Engineer	2
11	Man	50	Dublin	Head of IT	7
12	Woman	27	Dublin	Manager Sales Development	4
13	Woman	27	Dublin	Design Engineer	2
14	Woman	33	Dublin	Content Policy Manager	6
15	Woman	32	Kerry	Veterinary Nurse	7
16	Man	36	Clare	Translator / Copywriter	5

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of the interviewees

3.5 Data analysis

Thematic Analysis was used to analyse the data. As a flexible and widely accepted qualitative method, Thematic Analysis enabled the identification, evaluation, and interpretation of patterns (themes) within the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To structure the analysis, the model proposed by Gioia et al. (2012) was applied, using first-order concepts, second-order themes, and aggregate dimensions.

The analysis followed the six-phase process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). First, the researcher became familiar with the data through repeated readings of the interview transcripts. Second, initial codes were generated by identifying relevant moments in the transcripts and categorising them as

first-order concepts, using participants' own words where possible. Third, these codes were grouped into broader themes, forming second-order constructs based on similarity and conceptual relevance. Fourth, these themes were reviewed and refined, ensuring they accurately reflected the data. In this phase, premature comparison with literature was avoided to reduce confirmation bias (Gioia et al., 2012). Fifth, the final themes were clearly defined and labelled, with the corresponding aggregate dimensions added. Sixth, the report was written to present the findings in a clear and structured manner.

4. Results

The results of this study are presented in this chapter. First, an overview is provided of the Irish cultural standards as identified by Dutch professionals working in Ireland. Each cultural standard is described, accompanied by selected quotes from the interviews to illustrate specific behaviours and perspectives. Additionally, the Dutch viewpoint on these Irish cultural standards is explored, highlighting where cultural frictions or misunderstandings may arise. Following this, the Irish cultural standards are connected to broader underlying values to offer insight into the cultural logic driving these behaviours, providing a comprehensive understanding of the Irish workplace culture from a Dutch perspective.

4.1 Irish Cultural Standards

Nr.	Cultural Standard	Definition	Frequency
1	Conflict avoidance	Avoids addressing issues to prevent conflict, especially with negative topics	10
2	Helpfulness	Readily assists others to support their needs or objectives	7
3	Guarded openness	Prioritizes surface-level interactions over deeper connections	7
4	Indirectness	Avoids direct responses, often to sidestep responsibility or confrontation	7
5	Pleasing	Strives to be well-liked by others	7
6	Exclusive community bonds	Forms strong in-group bonds, often limiting openness to outsiders	7
7	Sociability	Easily engages in conversation with strangers	6
8	Modesty	Displays reserved humility, often avoiding self-promotion and direct expression of opinions	6
9	Boss decides	Centralized decision-making, with authority figures making final calls and subordinates expected to follow	6
10	Banter	Uses humour in regular communication	5
11	Welcoming	Warmly receives guests and newcomers with open, friendly communication	5
12	Relaxed with time	Focuses on the present with a laid-back attitude toward responsibilities	4
13	Flexibility	Displays flexibility with work hours and structure	3

Table 3. Irish Cultural Standards

In the following section, a detailed overview of the Irish cultural standards identified by Dutch professionals working in Ireland is provided. Each cultural standard is first introduced with a neutral description, highlighting the behaviours that Dutch interviewees observed in their Irish colleagues. This is followed by selected quotes from the interviews, illustrating specific situations (critical incidents) where these cultural standards played a role. Lastly, a Dutch perspective on each Irish cultural standard is offered, explaining why these behaviours may appear unfamiliar or surprising to Dutch professionals.

1. Conflict avoidance

Irish colleagues often demonstrate a preference for indirect approaches to conflict, refraining from addressing disagreements or negative topics directly. Rather than openly confronting issues, they may downplay or sidestep potential conflicts. This behaviour often leaves certain tensions or misunderstandings unresolved, prolonging discussions without explicitly addressing the root cause of the disagreement.

“Then people are actually very angry with each other or don’t like each other, but they just keep saying, ‘this is not good, and that is not good,’ without directly addressing what’s actually going on. And then the meeting just drags on and on. Those two are essentially arguing with each other, but they don’t say what’s really happening, and that’s just very annoying.” - Interviewee 3

“There have been people in the past, one from Spain, for example. That person was really a problem because they didn’t respect others, saying things like that, and little was done about it. It gets swept under the carpet a bit. Nothing is really done, even though everyone is bothered by it. The Irish aren’t necessarily like, ‘oh yeah, let me deal with this,’ whereas I’m like, ‘why isn’t anything being done about this?’ I try to bring it up and raise it with my managers, who have generally all been Irish, but I see very little change. I guess that comes back to them not daring to confront people.” - Interviewee 5

The Irish tendency to avoid conflict can feel unfamiliar and even frustrating to Dutch professionals, as it contrasts sharply with the Dutch cultural value of ‘truth’ (Enklaar, 2007). Dutch culture emphasises clarity and honesty, particularly in communication, where speaking openly about problems is seen as essential to resolving issues effectively. For the Dutch, avoiding difficult conversations or leaving conflicts unresolved can create confusion and hinder trust-building.

The first quote illustrates this difference vividly: Dutch professionals expect others to “say what’s really happening” and find prolonged indirect discussions “very annoying.” This expectation stems from

their belief that transparency and directness are fundamental to fostering mutual understanding and accountability. The Dutch regard withholding the truth or avoiding confrontation as counterproductive, as it obscures the path to clear and actionable resolutions.

In contrast, the Irish approach may prioritise sidestepping confrontation to maintain relationships or avoid uncomfortable situations. While this behaviour might be rooted in a different cultural logic, Dutch professionals often interpret it as a lack of commitment to addressing the issue. Understanding this divergence can help Dutch expatriates navigate workplace interactions more effectively by recognising that indirect communication may serve a relational purpose rather than a disregard for the truth.

2. Helpfulness

The Irish workplace is often characterised by a strong inclination toward helpfulness, where colleagues readily offer assistance and support to others. This cooperative spirit fosters a collaborative environment, with Irish employees frequently going out of their way to meet the needs of their team members. The level of spontaneous help offered may seem unexpected to Dutch professionals, as such behaviour is less prevalent in the Netherlands, where help is typically provided only upon explicit request.

“I just moved here about two months ago. In the Netherlands, I’ve moved quite often, and you really have to ask people for help, but it’s usually not possible. You also feel like a burden when you ask someone to help you move. But here in Ireland, people knew I was moving, and everyone offered to help—even my colleagues—without me asking. Everyone made their cars available. I ended up having to choose who was going to help me move, which I found really bizarre.” - Interviewee 10

“People here just have a lot of compassion for each other, and that’s really great. If someone isn’t doing well, people take a lot of time for them, whereas in the Netherlands, we might be more likely to say, ‘yes, that’s very annoying, but we also have to move on.’ Here, people really make time for each other. Whenever a colleague has a problem, there will even be a fundraiser to help pay hospital bills or whatever else is needed.” - Interviewee 16

The Irish emphasis on helpfulness, as described in the quotes, may feel unusual to Dutch professionals, who are accustomed to a workplace culture that prioritises ‘self-determination’ (Enklaar, 2007). In the Netherlands, offering help is typically more reserved and occurs only when explicitly requested. This aligns with the Dutch preference for individual responsibility, where people are expected to manage

their own challenges independently, as seen in the first quote: “In the Netherlands, I’ve moved quite often, and you really have to ask people for help, but it’s usually not possible.”

While Dutch culture values ‘compassion’, which supports helping those in need, it is often balanced with the value of ‘utility’, ensuring that actions are purposeful and outcome-oriented. The level of spontaneous assistance described in the second quote, where colleagues organise fundraisers or spend significant time supporting others, might seem excessive to Dutch professionals. This highlights a subtle cultural difference: while Irish workplaces prioritise collective well-being and unprompted acts of kindness, Dutch professionals may focus more on maintaining autonomy and ensuring that help is directly aligned with practical outcomes.

3. Guarded openness

Relationships in the Irish workplace are often maintained at a polite and surface level, focusing on pleasant interactions rather than delving into deeper personal connections. Conversations typically revolve around general topics, with Irish colleagues displaying a preference for pleasant exchanges that steer clear of personal depth. This approach can be perceived as professional and boundary-maintaining, keeping a clear distinction between work and private life.

“You often have good conversations with someone, but they’re never really personal. I do have a few friends here who I see as just friends, and we do things together on weekends, but it really depends on the person. In that sense, it can sometimes be harder to create a deeper connection. And yes, if at some point you haven’t done anything together for a couple of weeks, it can sort of fade away. You’re still friends, there’s no conflict or anything, but you just end up speaking to each other less often over the weekends.” - Interviewee 7

“One thing I really noticed, and it’s something you see at work as well—I mentioned this earlier—is the ease with which people talk. They’re very social, but they don’t go into depth. Is it really a culture shock? I don’t know. But because you expect that, since ‘everyone is very open,’ you’d assume it might also lead to deeper conversations. But with Irish people, that doesn’t happen. They don’t talk about how they feel, what they find difficult, or what they’re struggling with. And that’s quite the opposite of what you might expect.” - Interviewee 12

For Dutch professionals, the Irish tendency to maintain surface-level relationships can feel impersonal or distant, as Dutch culture places importance on fostering deeper connections in both personal and professional settings. In the Netherlands, such depth is often seen as a foundation for building trust

and mutual respect. The second quote illustrates this difference: Dutch professionals might interpret the lack of deeper conversations as a missed opportunity for creating authentic and meaningful relationships.

What Dutch professionals miss in these interactions is a sense of vulnerability or openness, which they associate with genuine connections. For them, discussing personal challenges or emotions, even within professional relationships, signals sincerity and creates a bond of mutual understanding. The first quote highlights this difference, where relationships that “fade away” due to limited interaction might seem superficial by Dutch standards.

While Irish politeness and inclusivity contribute to a harmonious workplace, Dutch professionals may initially feel that such interactions lack the transparency and authenticity they value. Over time, however, they may learn to appreciate the Irish approach as fostering a respectful and inclusive environment, even if it does not align with their expectations of depth in relationships.

4. Indirectness

Irish employees often communicate in an indirect manner, particularly in situations where a direct response might cause discomfort or tension. Instead, they tend to use indirect language or shift the focus of the conversation, which can leave issues unresolved or unclear. This behaviour is commonly observed in workplace interactions, where discussions may deviate from the main issue or lack explicit resolutions.

“The Dutch approach is very direct, almost destructive. You notice that people here feel attacked more easily because they’re not used to that level of directness. I’ve also noticed that some of my Irish colleagues, even if they won’t say it outright, seem to prefer avoiding me sometimes—especially if they’re already irritated—rather than coming up to me and saying, ‘hey, this is what’s going on, can you help me with it?’” - Interviewee 7

“They’re now used to the fact that if something needs addressing, I just bring it up directly. But it’s true—they prefer to talk about other things. Actually, I have an example. My colleague asked our boss for a pay raise, and instead of giving a straight answer, the boss started making small talk. My colleague really had to steer the conversation back, saying, ‘but I’m asking you about this.’ He found it really difficult, but I’m not sure if that’s just my boss.” - Interviewee 15

Indirectness in Irish communication contrasts sharply with the Dutch cultural values of ‘truth’ and ‘reliability’, which place a strong emphasis on directness and transparency (Enklaar, 2007). For Dutch

professionals, sidestepping a topic or providing an indirect response can feel ambiguous or even evasive, as it may be perceived as inefficient or lacking accountability. This divergence often leads to frustrations, as Dutch professionals prefer clear discussions to address and resolve issues effectively.

However, the Irish tendency to use indirect communication can be understood as a strategy to preserve relationships and avoid any potential embarrassment or discord within the team. This approach reflects a high-context cultural style, where maintaining harmony takes precedence over direct confrontation. While the Irish strategy aligns with the Dutch value of 'consensus', it differs in execution, focusing more on avoiding conflict than on reaching explicit agreement. Understanding this nuance may help Dutch professionals adapt their communication style, balancing their preference for clarity with an appreciation for the Irish emphasis on maintaining interpersonal harmony.

5. Pleasing

Many Irish professionals exhibit a noticeable tendency to seek approval and adapt their behaviour to be well-liked by colleagues. This emphasis on likeability is reflected in their preference for positive social interactions, which may take precedence over addressing difficult or critical issues directly. In workplace communication, this often manifests in a polite and accommodating style that aims to avoid conflict and maintain harmony.

"Something I still struggle with and find really uncomfortable, and this applies at work but also outside of work, is when you go somewhere, and someone says, 'Hey, how are you?' And I think, 'Yeah, good, how are you?' But then I wonder, how much am I supposed to share? Because I don't think the person at the cash register is really interested in how I'm doing. And with colleagues, you often see that instead of just saying 'hey,' it's 'hey, how are you?' And I think, 'Do I stop and have a conversation now? What am I supposed to do?'" - Interviewee 14

"Well, the whole 'people pleaser' thing again. Sometimes it's just too much, and they all just don't want to be seen as unfriendly. Then they'll skirt around things, saying, 'Oh yeah, we really should do this and that because it's better for the animals or something like that. But if it doesn't work out, that's okay too.' They just don't want to upset anyone. I know how the Irish are, so I don't take it personally when they say things that way." - Interviewee 15

The Irish tendency to prioritise being liked may puzzle Dutch professionals, who place a stronger emphasis on 'truth' and 'self-determination' (Enklaar, 2007). Dutch culture encourages individuals to express opinions openly, even if they might not be well-received, as this is viewed as a path to

authenticity and problem-solving. The first quote highlights how Dutch professionals tend to value directness, skipping small talk to focus on the task at hand. This contrasts with the Irish approach of beginning conversations with pleasantries to maintain a friendly tone, which may appear unnecessary to Dutch professionals. Similarly, the second quote reflects the Dutch preference for clear, straightforward feedback, rooted in the value of 'self-determination', which contrasts with the Irish tendency to soften critiques to avoid upsetting others.

While the Irish approach aligns with the Dutch value of 'moderation', as it avoids unnecessary confrontation, it may feel counterproductive to achieving 'consensus', where open exchanges are key. Dutch professionals may need to adapt their communication style to account for the Irish preference for politeness and harmony, recognising it as a strategy to preserve positive social dynamics while encouraging honest dialogue.

6. Exclusive community bonds

In Irish workplaces, social dynamics often feature tightly-knit social circles where individuals form strong bonds based on familiarity and shared experiences. These connections are typically built over time and emphasize loyalty and trust within the group. For newcomers, particularly expatriates, integrating into these established networks can be challenging. While Irish colleagues are often friendly and welcoming on the surface, their deeper social connections may remain reserved for those they already know well. This dynamic reflects a cultural emphasis on fostering relationships that are cultivated carefully and maintained with mutual respect and support.

"Oh, definitely 100%. The Netherlands is much more individualistic, and the Irish are far, far more focused on collectivism. If you look at it, I think the pandemic was a real eye-opener for me, and it made me realize that, despite the Irish being a bit less accessible, they really do show up for one another. At my work, everyone just went home straight away. We all followed the rules together. Even when we were allowed to return, we worked half days, and no one complained. We weren't allowed to sit directly next to each other, so there was always a desk in between. Everyone followed the rules without any complaints. Sure, it was inconvenient, but it had to be done. 'You protect me, I protect you'—that's how we protected our work and all the people who had to be there as well. In the Netherlands, I followed how things were going, and all the complaining there. Here, we had a much stricter lockdown, much stricter. At one point, I wasn't allowed to go more than one or two kilometers from my house. And yet, everyone just did it—no whining, just getting on with it." - Interviewee 14

“Everyone listens, you know. There’s a very strong sense of community here. There’s always a fundraiser for something, and people really know each other. We moved a few months ago, and the other day I bumped into the postman, and he said, ‘hey, you used to live there and there.’ He knew exactly where we used to live! I said, ‘that’s right, we live here now,’ and he replied, ‘oh, great, I’ve got something for your wife too.’ I was thinking, ‘wow, I don’t even know who this guy is,’ and he knows who my wife and kids are. It’s kind of unsettling but also nice, especially with small children. Everywhere we go, at least 10 people know our kids. So if I’m not paying attention and one of them starts walking toward the street, someone is always there to say, ‘hey, come back.’ It has its good and bad sides, but it really shows the strong sense of community here.” - Interviewee 16

While the second quote is not directly related to workplace dynamics, it highlights the strong sense of community inherent in Irish culture. This mindset extends to the workplace, where loyalty and trust are central to relationships. However, for those new to the environment, the deep connections among colleagues can sometimes feel exclusive, making it harder to integrate or form closer bonds.

From a Dutch perspective, this tendency can contrast with the cultural value of ‘equality,’ which emphasizes inclusivity and open relationships where everyone feels equally valued. Dutch professionals, who often prioritize openness and straightforward interactions, may find it challenging to navigate these closely-knit circles. Additionally, the Dutch value of ‘self-determination’ encourages independence and broader social networks, which may conflict with the Irish approach of building trust gradually within smaller, established groups. Despite this, Dutch professionals may come to appreciate the Irish focus on ‘compassion,’ as it reflects genuine care and support within their trusted circles, even if acceptance into these circles takes time and effort.

7. Sociability

Irish colleagues are often highly sociable, engaging in friendly conversations and showing genuine interest in casual interactions. This approachable demeanour contributes to a welcoming and relaxed work environment, with Irish professionals frequently initiating informal conversations with both colleagues and strangers. Whether in workplace corridors or on public transport, the Irish tendency to chat easily and openly creates an atmosphere of accessibility and approachability. These casual exchanges often serve to build rapport and foster positive relationships, reflecting the cultural importance of sociability in Irish workplaces.

“Our company also has an office in Amsterdam. I worked there for two weeks over the summer, and it’s nice to be home for a while. Around Christmas, I might work there for a few days again. When I

was there, I really noticed how different the conversations between the teams are. I'm always thinking, 'if I worked here, how would it be in the Netherlands?' But sitting in that office, hearing the chatter around me, it's really different. I realised the Irish working environment suits me much better—it's more relaxed and pleasant. For example, here in Ireland, saying hi in the corridor is quite an elaborate thing. At the Amsterdam office, hardly anyone says hi unless they know each other. I find the Amsterdam office much less sociable. At lunch, it's almost always just about work." - Interviewee 10

"The Irish are very, very sociable and approachable people. They're always up for a chat. If you sit next to an Irish person on a train or bus, they'll likely start a conversation. That's not the case at all in the Netherlands. There, I'd prefer to sit in a silent compartment, which I think is very typically Dutch—you think, 'leave me alone, I'm doing my own thing.' Sometimes here, when I'm on the train, I think, 'oh, if only there were a silent compartment,' because everyone talks to each other. But it's really nice, though. I've come to realise that Irish people are naturally sociable." - Interviewee 14

From a Dutch perspective, this level of sociability may initially feel excessive or unstructured. Dutch culture places a strong emphasis on 'order and neatness', often resulting in more reserved workplace interactions, particularly in professional settings (Enklaar, 2007). For Dutch professionals, social interactions are frequently compartmentalised, with clear boundaries between casual conversation and work tasks to maintain efficiency. While the Irish emphasis on sociability may seem overwhelming, it aligns with the Dutch value of 'moderation', which promotes balanced and respectful interactions. Over time, Dutch professionals may come to appreciate the warmth and inclusivity of Irish sociability, even if it contrasts with the more task-focused Dutch approach.

8. Modesty

In Irish workplaces, humility and modesty are deeply ingrained values. Irish professionals often refrain from openly showcasing their achievements or expressing strong opinions, even when they hold valuable insights. This behaviour reflects a preference for self-restraint and a desire to avoid drawing undue attention to oneself. Such modesty fosters a harmonious and inclusive work environment, where colleagues can collaborate without the pressure of individual competition or overt self-promotion.

"At work, Irish colleagues rarely highlight their own accomplishments or openly criticize others. For instance, during code reviews, they won't outright say, 'this is wrong' or 'this is great.' Instead, they tend to phrase feedback more cautiously or even avoid direct opinions, leaving it up to interpretation.

It reflects their tendency to downplay personal judgments and maintain a humble approach." - Interviewee 5

"I was training an Irish colleague who was a bit younger than me. When I gave her feedback, I tried to be clear but also polite. However, she took it very personally, and rather than addressing it with me directly, she shared her feelings with another colleague, who then informed the manager. It made me realize that Irish colleagues often avoid drawing attention to themselves, even when they feel uncomfortable, as they seem to prioritize modesty and maintaining a low profile." - Interviewee 8

The Irish emphasis on modesty can feel unfamiliar to Dutch professionals, who value 'truth' and 'self-determination' (Enklaar, 2007). Dutch culture encourages open discussions of personal achievements as a way to establish credibility and build trust. For the Dutch, modesty in the workplace is typically expressed through balanced behaviour rather than avoiding recognition altogether. In contrast, Irish professionals may avoid self-promotion altogether, aiming to maintain harmony and avoid being perceived as boastful.

This modest approach can initially lead Dutch colleagues to misunderstand or underestimate the contributions of their Irish counterparts. For instance, the first quote illustrates how feedback is often softened or left open-ended, reflecting humility in communication. Similarly, the second quote highlights the reluctance to address interpersonal discomfort directly, which aligns with the Irish value of maintaining a low profile. Over time, Dutch professionals may come to appreciate this behaviour as a genuine reflection of humility and inclusivity, recognising its role in fostering respectful workplace dynamics.

9. Boss decides

Decision-making in the Irish workplace tends to follow a hierarchical model, where authority figures make the final choices and employees are expected to implement them without extensive discussion. This top-down approach reflects a cultural respect for leadership and the belief that managers hold the responsibility to guide the team's direction. Direct communication across different departments often requires managerial approval, emphasizing the structured chain of command prevalent in Irish workplaces.

"There really is a hierarchy here. For example, you're not allowed to contact someone from another department directly, like sending an email, without their boss knowing about it. I did struggle with that a bit." - Interviewee 3

“I gave that feedback and asked some other managers what they thought about it. Then I proactively approached the director and said, ‘I’ve done some research, spoken to the managers, and based on reason XYZ, we don’t think it’s useful to do it this way. I suggest we do it this way instead.’ I remember the look I got from her—it was clear she wasn’t used to getting pushback on her decisions. In the end, to be honest, she didn’t do anything with it either.” - Interviewee 12

The Irish hierarchical decision-making style can feel restrictive or inefficient, as it contrasts with Dutch cultural values such as ‘equality’ and ‘self-determination’ (Enklaar, 2007). Dutch professionals generally expect collaborative decision-making processes, where all team members contribute and consensus is prioritized. For instance, as highlighted in the second quote, the Irish reluctance to accommodate input from employees after a decision has been made can surprise Dutch colleagues, who might expect more dialogue and flexibility in leadership styles. Additionally, this hierarchical approach could challenge the Dutch value of ‘reliability,’ as seen in the experience shared by the interviewee where their well-researched feedback was neither acted upon nor addressed further, potentially undermining trust and transparency.

While Dutch employees might initially interpret this structured chain of command as overly rigid, understanding the Irish respect for authority and their view of managerial responsibility can help bridge these differences. Appreciating the cultural emphasis on leadership as a guiding force may also aid Dutch professionals in navigating and adapting to this decision-making dynamic.

10. Banter

Humour, often expressed through playful banter, is a prominent feature of Irish workplace communication. Light-hearted jokes and humorous remarks are frequently interwoven into professional interactions, contributing to a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Irish colleagues often use humour not only as a conversational tool but also as a means of building rapport and diffusing tension, making it an integral part of daily interactions.

“They really try to solve everything with a joke. If you ask someone about their feelings, they’ll often respond with a joke, an anecdote, or a comment that shifts the conversation. And then the conversation doesn’t come back to the original topic. A lot of things here are dismissed with a joke, even more so than in England or the Netherlands.” - Interviewee 7

“What really stands out culturally here is how easily people make jokes. In the Netherlands, you might just chat casually, like when you’re standing at the bar and say, ‘oh, it’s raining outside.’ Here, they

turn it into a joke, like, 'yes, slow down here, please, huh?'—always very friendly. It's about joking around, a bit of 'slagging,' 'pulling someone's leg,' or doing it 'for the craic.' Those are the kinds of expressions people use, and I actually enjoy it. It makes conversations feel more engaging.” - Interviewee 11

The frequent use of humour and banter in Irish workplace communication may initially feel unprofessional or difficult to interpret for Dutch professionals, who value 'moderation' and 'labour'. However, a key difference lies in how humour is used within professional settings. While Dutch professionals use humour sparingly and often keep it separate from task-focused discussions, the Irish integrate it seamlessly into all aspects of communication, including formal exchanges. As interviewee 7 mentions, humour in Ireland is sometimes used to sidestep serious topics or emotional discussions, a practice that may feel counterproductive to Dutch professionals who value directness and transparency. Interviewee 11 highlights the distinctly Irish style of humour, which often involves friendly teasing or "slagging," adding a layer of complexity that Dutch professionals may initially find challenging to interpret.

Over time, Dutch professionals may come to appreciate the Irish reliance on banter as a cultural tool for creating an approachable and harmonious work environment. Understanding this difference can help bridge the gap between Dutch task-oriented communication and the Irish emphasis on relationship-building through humour.

11. Welcoming

Irish workplace culture is characterised by an intentional effort to make newcomers feel accepted and valued. This welcoming behaviour extends beyond general friendliness, focusing on integrating new colleagues into the team and creating a sense of belonging from the start. Irish professionals often make a concerted effort to include newcomers in social and professional settings, ensuring they feel part of the community early on.

“I felt very welcome and never felt like an outsider. It was very much like, 'well, she lives here too, so she's just part of the community.' That's pretty crazy because in the Netherlands, when immigrants come, they're still seen as a bit of an outsider. I never experienced that here. People are very friendly, very warm, and they start talking to you quickly about anything and everything, even if you've just met them on the bus or at the bus stop.” - Interviewee 8

"I wasn't sure how it would be in a business setting, but as soon as I arrived, I was welcomed with open arms. You could really see it that way. The office here is very open. We all sit together on the shop floor, and as soon as I came in, I was introduced to everyone. That same evening, the Irish colleagues invited me to the pub with them." - Interviewee 12

The cultural standard of "welcoming" focuses on the deliberate inclusion of newcomers, which differentiates it from general sociability. While both reflect warmth and friendliness, "welcoming" is about creating a positive first impression and ensuring that individuals feel immediately at ease within the group. This behaviour aligns with the Dutch value of 'compassion,' which highlights helping others and creating inclusive environments. However, Dutch professionals, who are often more reserved when forming new connections, may initially find the enthusiastic and immediate nature of Irish hospitality surprising.

This cultural standard highlights the Irish emphasis on fostering immediate connections, particularly for newcomers, making them feel valued both professionally and socially. For Dutch colleagues, understanding this approach can enhance their appreciation of how a welcoming atmosphere strengthens team cohesion and interpersonal trust.

12. Relaxed with time

Irish professionals often display a present-focused mindset, embracing a relaxed approach to timelines and work responsibilities. This attitude prioritises maintaining a calm and balanced environment, often favouring adaptability over rigid adherence to deadlines. By focusing on the present moment, Irish workplaces cultivate an atmosphere of flexibility and reduced stress, where maintaining well-being is balanced with professional duties.

"I notice that as well. I work in a government organisation and I only work three days at home and two days in the office, but it's just seven hours a day. The pace of work is slower here, even though it's a professional organisation. I really had to slow down because I was working way too hard in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, there's this mentality of, 'oh, I hear you can do that, you can take it on as well.' But in Ireland, it's more like, 'this is your job description, and this fits within it.' They're not going to ask you to do things that aren't part of your job description." - Interviewee 2

"Last year at Christmas, I was flying back to the Netherlands, and at the airport in Dublin, everything just took a little longer. We were delayed by half an hour, but the sun was still shining, and everyone was quiet, relaxed, chatting a bit, and then we got on the plane. When we landed in the Netherlands

and got onto the runway at Schiphol, it was completely different—people honking and cursing at each other, everyone in a rush. For me, it was so striking to see that big difference. Everything here is at a slower pace, more relaxed, and people just get along better with each other.” - Interviewee 7

The Irish cultural standard of maintaining a relaxed approach to work and time may initially frustrate Dutch professionals, whose work culture heavily emphasises ‘order and neatness’ (Enklaar, 2007). In the Netherlands, schedules, efficiency, and clear task ownership are central to maintaining productivity and ensuring structure. The Irish emphasis on balance, however, is rooted in a cultural appreciation for well-being, where work responsibilities do not overshadow the importance of the present moment.

For Dutch professionals, this divergence may appear at odds with their value of ‘utility’, which focuses on maximising outcomes and efficiently utilising time. Over time, however, Dutch colleagues may come to view this relaxed approach as a beneficial way to alleviate stress and improve work-life integration, offering insights into alternative ways of fostering a positive and adaptable work environment.

13. Flexibility

Irish workplaces often demonstrate a high degree of adaptability in areas such as work hours and task management. Employees are frequently afforded the autonomy to navigate their responsibilities in a way that suits their individual circumstances. This flexibility often fosters a more fluid and relaxed work environment, where achieving work goals is balanced with maintaining a positive workplace atmosphere.

“It’s very flexible—you get to choose what you do. Basically, everyone starts at 9:00, and then at 11:00, we have a coffee break. We always make time for it, and it’s a proper half-hour coffee break, which shocked me at first—that’s really long! But it’s nice. Then from 11:30 to 13:00, we’re back to work, followed by an hour lunch break from 13:00 to 14:00. After that, it’s back to work until 17:30, and then we’re done. Sometimes I work a bit longer, sometimes a bit shorter. None of that really matters much. What stood out to me, and what I still enjoy, is how relaxed it all feels. I didn’t expect that at all, especially in the first few months. It’s such a distinct difference from the general working culture I was used to.” - Interviewee 10

“I think it’s part of Dutch culture to be more direct. Dutch people are generally a lot more direct than Irish people, and with that directness comes a kind of ‘strictness.’ There are more rules, whether written

or unwritten. For example, in the Netherlands, working hours are very fixed. You start at 9:00, lunch is at 12:00, and at 17:00, everyone leaves. That's not the case here, at least where I work. I usually start around 9:00, but if I want to avoid rush hour, I'll start earlier. I don't eat lunch until 2:00 p.m., and sometimes I work until 6:00 p.m. The next day, I might work less. I also spent two days at the Amsterdam office of this company, and it was so funny—at 12:00, everyone got up with their sandwiches and went to the canteen to eat. I wasn't hungry at all, but I didn't want to sit alone, and I hadn't brought a sandwich. That was my own fault, because in Ireland, when I'm at the office, I might have a sandwich, noodles, or something else. But it was nice being at the Amsterdam office for a change.” - Interviewee 13

The Irish emphasis on flexibility in work schedules and task management can initially feel unstructured or inefficient to Dutch professionals, who value ‘order and neatness’ (Enklaar, 2007). Dutch workplaces often prioritise clear routines and predictable workflows to ensure accountability. This difference also touches on the Dutch value of ‘labour’, as structured work is associated with productivity and diligence in the Netherlands. However, the Irish approach highlights adaptability as a means of balancing professional and personal priorities. Over time, Dutch professionals may come to view this flexibility as a strength in dynamic and fast-changing environments, fostering resilience and creativity in the workplace.

4.2 Underlying Cultural Values

This chapter examines the underlying cultural values that shape workplace behaviour in Ireland. These values help explain how various cultural standards interconnect and provide deeper insights into behaviours commonly observed among Irish professionals. While existing literature, such as Hofstede’s dimensions (Hofstede, 2010) and Hall and Hall’s (2001) framework of high- and low-context communication, offers general insights into Irish culture, research explicitly identifying the underlying cultural values driving workplace behaviours, particularly in Dutch-Irish interactions, remains limited. Therefore, this chapter primarily draws on empirical findings from interviews conducted with Dutch professionals working with Irish colleagues, contributing to filling this research gap by providing context-specific understanding of Irish workplace behaviour.

Through clustering identified cultural standards, four key underlying Irish values emerge: Cúram (care/caution), Craic (friendliness/humour), Solúbthacht (flexibility/adaptability), and Údarás (authority). These Gaelic terms were deliberately selected to authentically capture and communicate

the essence of the Irish cultural standards observed in the workplace. Each Gaelic term carries a rich cultural connotation that English translations alone might fail to fully convey, allowing for a more nuanced and culturally accurate interpretation of the standards. Each cluster represents specific attitudes and behaviours that reflect broader societal values, influencing communication styles, decision-making processes, and collaborative interactions in Irish workplaces. By using these Gaelic terms, this study emphasizes the culturally specific nature of these values, highlighting their significance and embeddedness within the Irish cultural context.

It is important to recognize that, although Irish professionals may initially appear highly sociable, humorous, and approachable in informal contexts, their behaviour often becomes more guarded and cautious within professional settings. On the work floor, the underlying cultural value of *Cúram* (care/caution) emphasizes avoiding conflict, preserving emotional harmony, and using indirect, careful communication to prevent emotional discomfort. Simultaneously, the cultural value *Craic* (friendliness/humour) reinforces the importance of maintaining a positive, friendly atmosphere through humour and informal interactions, while also preserving deeper personal boundaries reserved for close-knit social groups.

The cultural value *Solúbthacht* (flexibility/adaptability) highlights the flexible and adaptable nature of Irish professionals, prioritizing balance between professional responsibilities and personal well-being over rigid structures or strict schedules. Lastly, *Údarás* (authority) underscores the Irish respect for authority and clearly defined hierarchical roles, shaping decision-making dynamics and interactions between managers and employees, despite often informal and approachable management styles.

The following sections will elaborate on these underlying values in detail, providing illustrative examples to clarify how they shape daily workplace interactions and enhance the understanding of Irish professional culture.

1. *Cúram* (care/caution)

You should always avoid causing discomfort or emotional harm to others. The underlying cultural value of *Cúram* (care/caution) reflects the moral obligation within Irish workplace culture to protect both oneself and others from emotional harm, discomfort, or embarrassment. This value explains the careful and indirect approach to communication that characterizes Irish professionals, especially when dealing with potentially sensitive or negative topics. It encompasses behaviours such as guarded openness, cautious phrasing, and subtle expressions of criticism, which collectively aim to protect interpersonal harmony and emotional well-being.

Irish professionals often avoid openly addressing negative matters or conflicts. Feedback is typically softened or presented in ways emphasizing positives, with suggestions for improvement implied rather than directly stated. For example, instead of explicitly stating dissatisfaction, Irish professionals might phrase criticism indirectly, implying their meaning through subtle cues rather than explicitly expressing dissatisfaction or blame.

For instance, when discussing performance, an Irish colleague might say, "It might be worth reconsidering that approach," rather than openly stating that the current approach is incorrect or insufficient. Such phrasing prevents embarrassment or defensiveness, maintaining an environment of respect and emotional safety. In addition, Irish professionals may display guarded openness at work, engaging in friendly but non-personal interactions to avoid emotional vulnerability and prevent situations that could lead to discomfort or tension.

While Dutch professionals may initially perceive this approach as indirect or unclear, within the Irish cultural context, it is seen as an expression of empathy and politeness. The underlying logic of *Cúram* (care/caution) prioritizes relationships, emphasizing emotional sensitivity over blunt truths. Although this might slow down problem-solving or create ambiguity, the intention is deeply positive: it protects relationships and ensures everyone feels respected and included.

Ultimately, *Cúram* (care/caution) significantly influences communication and conflict resolution styles in Irish workplaces by promoting indirectness, emotional caution, and relationship preservation. For example, when giving feedback, Irish professionals tend to soften critical remarks or reframe negative issues positively to avoid causing embarrassment. In conflict situations, they may avoid direct confrontation, opting instead for non-verbal cues, postponement, or private discussions to maintain harmony. This contrasts with the Dutch preference for open, direct dialogue. Appreciating *Cúram* (care/caution) can help Dutch professionals understand that indirectness is not avoidance or inefficiency, but rather a culturally embedded strategy to protect relationships and avoid emotional discomfort, thereby improving cross-cultural collaboration and mutual understanding.

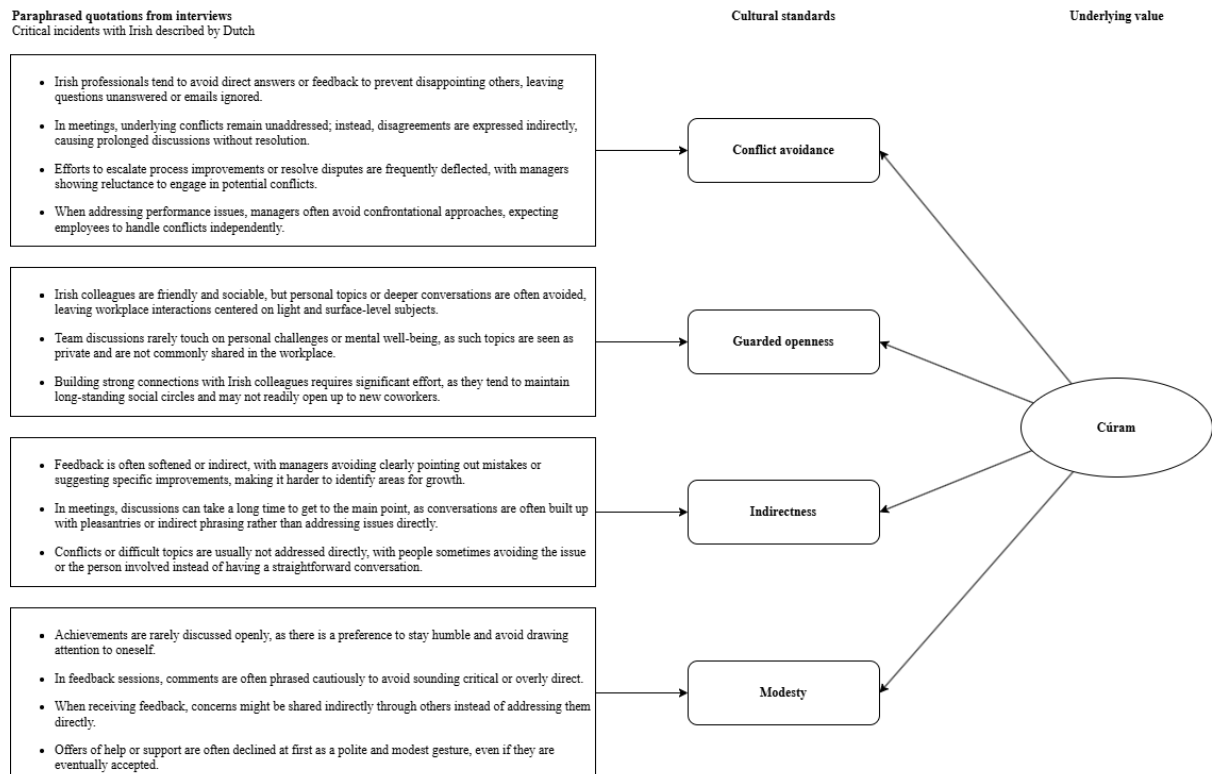


Figure 4. The underlying value of Cúram (care/caution)

2. Craic (friendliness/humour)

You should always engage with others in a friendly, open, and good-humoured manner. The underlying cultural value Craic (friendliness/humour) reflects the moral ideal that interactions in the workplace should be enjoyable, sociable, and characterized by humour and a positive atmosphere. “Craic” an Irish term without a precise equivalent in English, encapsulates the importance of warmth, fun, and informal interactions within Irish culture, extending into professional environments. This value helps explain why humour, sociability, and playful communication are considered essential for fostering a positive working environment among Irish professionals.

A defining feature of this value is the balance between openness and exclusivity. Irish professionals are typically approachable and eager to engage in friendly exchanges, particularly in informal or relaxed settings. Humour and playful conversations ("banter") are central to daily interactions, creating a relaxed atmosphere that can ease workplace tensions and promote inclusivity. For example, humorous exchanges during meetings or casual conversations during coffee breaks are common ways to build connections and lighten the mood, even when discussing serious topics. The cultural standard of sociability, observed through consistent friendliness and conversational ease, reinforces this value and helps maintain an approachable and light-hearted professional climate.

However, there is also a nuanced element of exclusivity embedded in the idea of Craic (friendliness/humour). While openness and warmth are integral, genuine trust and deeper inclusion in social networks are built gradually through repeated informal interactions. Newcomers or colleagues from cultures less familiar with such informal, humour-based interactions might initially struggle to fully understand or participate effectively. Trust and comfort within the group are typically developed through prolonged and consistent engagement in these informal interactions. This gradual deepening of relationships can be seen as the other side of the tendency to display guarded openness, which initially serves to protect emotional boundaries before stronger bonds are formed.

Workplace rituals, such as shared lunches, coffee breaks, and after-work social events, strongly reflect the spirit of "craic," serving not merely as breaks from professional tasks but as deliberate opportunities to solidify interpersonal bonds. Dutch professionals, accustomed to a clearer boundary between work and personal time, may initially find this blending unusual, yet recognizing its social function can lead to a more effective and harmonious professional integration.

In conclusion, the cultural value of Craic (friendliness/humour) shapes workplace dynamics significantly by emphasizing humour, sociability, and informality. Understanding and appreciating this value can facilitate smoother intercultural interactions, helping newcomers navigate the subtle social dynamics present within Irish workplace culture.

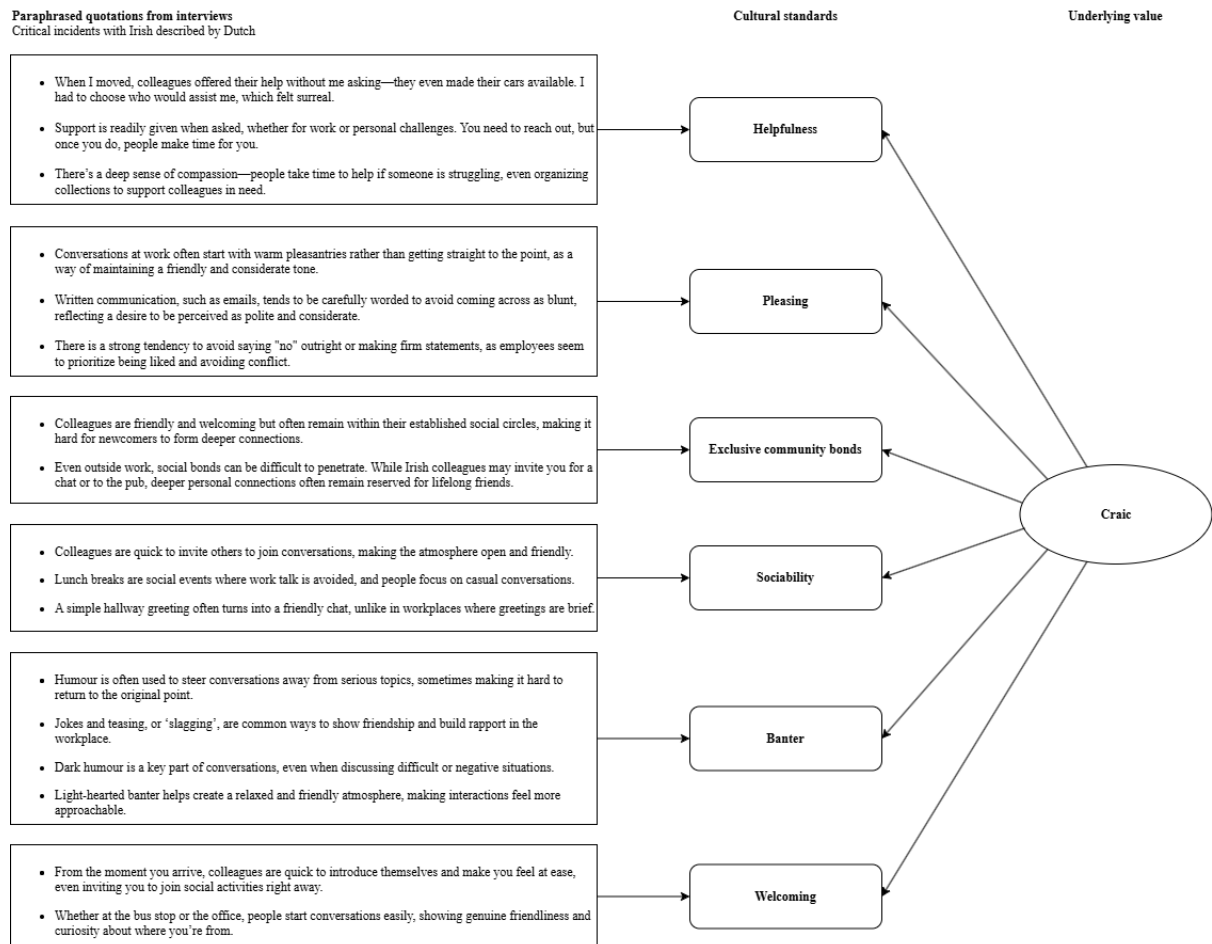


Figure 5. The underlying value of Craic (friendliness/humour)

3. Solúbthacht (flexibility/adaptability)

You should be flexible and responsive to changing circumstances. The underlying cultural value Solúbthacht (flexibility/adaptability) reflects a cultural mindset that prioritizes flexibility and well-being over rigid adherence to structures or strict routines. This value emphasizes the importance of adaptability, spontaneity, and the recognition that circumstances can and will change, requiring people to adjust accordingly. Irish workplace culture embodies this adaptability by allowing professionals the space and trust to respond flexibly to both personal and collective needs.

The value of Solúbthacht (flexibility/adaptability) becomes particularly evident in the way Irish professionals handle time management and deadlines. Timelines are typically approached with a degree of leniency, accommodating spontaneous adjustments and individual or team requirements. For instance, work schedules often display flexibility, such as allowing varying start and end times or extending deadlines if unexpected situations arise. This contrasts significantly with more rigid and efficiency-oriented cultures, such as the Dutch, where deadlines and schedules tend to be strictly adhered to, and flexibility might be viewed negatively or associated with a lack of professionalism.

However, this more relaxed attitude toward scheduling and planning does not indicate a lack of commitment or effort from Irish professionals. Instead, it reflects the deep-rooted Irish belief that work is simply one aspect of a balanced and fulfilling life, which includes equally important personal and social dimensions. By accommodating individual circumstances, such as family needs or unexpected life events, Irish workplaces foster environments where employees feel valued and respected beyond their professional roles.

For example, work hours might be adjusted to fit around personal responsibilities or unforeseen events, reflecting a cultural understanding that flexibility contributes positively to both individual well-being and team morale. This practice contrasts strongly with more structured, efficiency-focused cultures, where precise planning and punctuality are linked closely to perceptions of diligence and success.

Dutch professionals, accustomed to stricter planning and punctuality, may initially perceive this flexible approach as challenging or inefficient. Over time, however, they often begin to appreciate the positive effects of Solúbthacht (flexibility/adaptability) in creating a trusting and supportive environment, where professionals can comfortably balance their responsibilities without excessive pressure.

In conclusion, the cultural value of Solúbthacht (flexibility/adaptability) promotes a working environment in Ireland where adaptability and responsiveness to changing circumstances are valued and encouraged. Recognizing and understanding this underlying value can greatly facilitate intercultural collaboration by helping professionals from more structured cultural backgrounds appreciate the intention behind this adaptability.

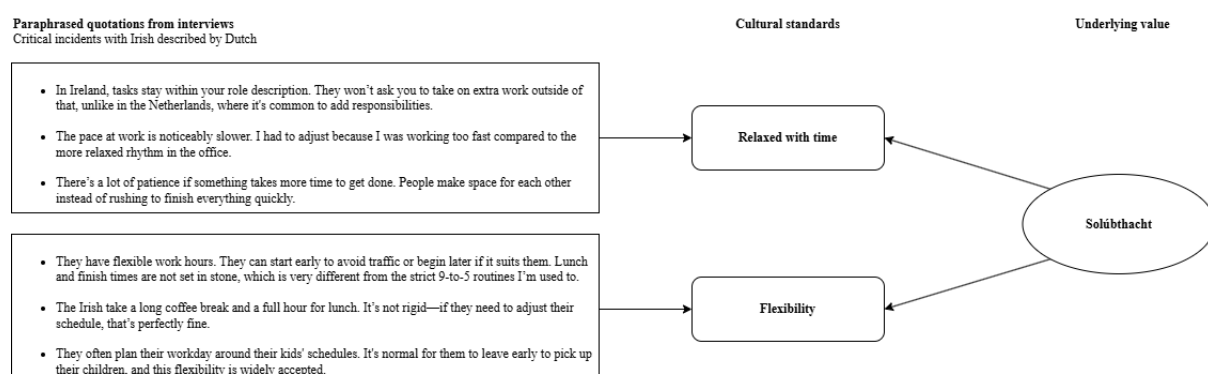


Figure 6. The underlying value of Solúbthacht (flexibility/adaptability)

4. Údarás (authority)

You should respect authority and clearly defined roles, as they ensure order and stability. The underlying cultural value Údarás (authority) reflects a deeply ingrained cultural belief in the importance of clear leadership, well-defined roles, and hierarchical relationships within the workplace. This value emphasizes respect for those in positions of authority, promoting adherence to established roles and responsibilities as essential for ensuring harmony and organizational order.

The Irish preference for structured hierarchies and clearly defined roles is evident in their workplace behaviour. Professionals generally defer to those in higher positions, expecting managers to provide guidance and direction. Irish employees typically do not openly challenge or question the decisions made by their superiors. Instead, they tend to accept and trust leadership decisions, viewing managers not as dominating figures but as trusted individuals who are responsible for providing clear direction and support.

For example, it is customary in Irish organizations to seek approval or inform one's immediate supervisor before directly contacting individuals in other departments. Circumventing one's manager or not following the chain of command is perceived as disrespectful or disruptive. This differs significantly from Dutch workplace culture, where hierarchy is typically flatter, and professionals may freely approach colleagues across various levels without always consulting a manager.

However, the respect for authority in Irish workplaces does not necessarily translate into formal or distant relationships between managers and employees. Rather, Irish leaders are often approachable and maintain strong interpersonal relationships with their employees. Casual conversations and genuine interest in employee well-being coexist harmoniously with clear hierarchical roles, resulting in a workplace atmosphere where respect for authority is balanced with interpersonal warmth and accessibility.

This structured yet personable approach can initially confuse professionals accustomed to more egalitarian and informal organizational cultures, such as the Dutch. For the Dutch, hierarchical boundaries may appear unnecessary or restrictive, potentially limiting efficiency or communication. However, once the underlying value Údarás (authority) is recognized as a facilitator of organizational stability and clarity, it can become appreciated as a mechanism that enhances role clarity, accountability, and trust within the organization.

Ultimately, the Irish value of Údarás (authority) fosters organizational stability and clarity through structured leadership, while simultaneously preserving a supportive and interpersonal workplace dynamic. Understanding and respecting this underlying value can significantly enhance intercultural

cooperation, particularly for professionals accustomed to less hierarchical organizational environments.

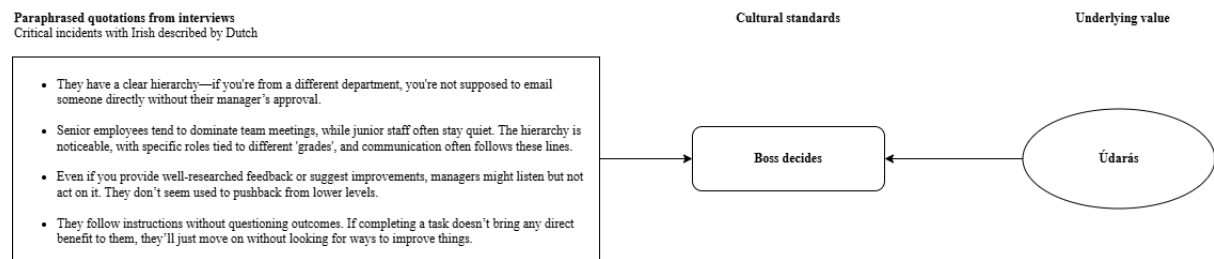


Figure 7. The underlying value of Údarás (authority)

5. Discussion & Conclusion

In this final chapter, the discussion and conclusion of this research are presented. The chapter begins with an overview of the Irish cultural standards as perceived by Dutch professionals, based on the findings of this study. This is followed by a reflection on the academic and practical relevance of the research. Additionally, the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research are discussed. The chapter concludes with a final summary of the main insights derived from this research.

5.1 Irish cultural standards as perceived by the Dutch

The goal of this study was to identify Irish cultural standards from a Dutch perspective and to explore the underlying Irish values that shape these typical behaviours. In total, 13 Irish cultural standards were identified, as discussed in section 4.1. These cultural standards are outlined below.

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Conflict avoidance | 7. Modesty |
| 2. Helpfulness | 8. Boss decides |
| 3. Guarded openness | 9. Banter |
| 4. Indirectness | 10. Welcoming |
| 5. Pleasing | 11. Relaxed with time |
| 6. Exclusive community bonds | 12. Flexibility |

The 13 Irish cultural standards were grouped into four underlying cultural values: Cúram (care/caution), Craic (friendliness/humour), Solúbthacht (flexibility/adaptability) and Údarás (authority). These values, discussed in section 4.2, provide a detailed understanding of Irish culture. Together, the cultural standards and their corresponding values offer an explanation of behaviours that can be expected when collaborating on the Irish work floor.

5.2 Academic contributions

This study conducted qualitative, in-depth research into the cultural differences between the Dutch and the Irish, using the Grounded Interpretive Model developed by Enklaar (2022), which builds on Thomas et al.'s (2010) Cultural Standards Method. Sixteen Dutch professionals working in Ireland were

interviewed to explore their workplace experiences, with a particular focus on critical incidents, specific moments they found unusual or surprising. By analysing these incidents, Irish cultural standards were identified from a Dutch perspective, offering a nuanced understanding of intercultural interactions in professional contexts.

One of the main contributions of this study is addressing the gap in research on Dutch–Irish workplace dynamics. While existing frameworks such as those by Hofstede (2010), Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2022), and Meyer (2014) provide useful overviews of general cultural tendencies, they often fall short in capturing the complexity and contextual variation of actual workplace interactions. This study expands the existing body of knowledge by offering a richer, context-specific explanation of Irish workplace behaviour and clearly articulating the underlying cultural logic driving these behaviours.

For example, Hofstede’s (2010) widely cited cultural dimensions characterise Ireland as highly individualistic, relatively low in uncertainty avoidance, and low in power distance. However, the findings of this study nuance these broad dimensions by identifying deeper underlying values such as *Cúram* (care/caution), *Craic* (friendliness/humour), *Solúbthacht* (flexibility/adaptability), and *Údarás* (authority), which influence specific workplace behaviours. For instance, although Ireland is considered individualistic, this study finds a strong emphasis on social interconnectedness, as reflected in *Craic*. The Irish cultural emphasis on friendly and humorous interactions reveals a stronger sense of community than the individualism dimension alone would suggest.

In terms of uncertainty avoidance, Hofstede’s model suggests Irish professionals are relatively comfortable with ambiguity. This aligns with the value of *Solúbthacht*, which emphasizes adaptability and flexibility not as tolerance for chaos but as a deliberate and culturally rooted response to change and interpersonal needs.

Similarly, Hofstede’s low power distance rating for Ireland is enriched by this study’s identification of *Údarás*. While Irish workplaces appear informal and approachable, clear hierarchies are respected and managerial authority is maintained, an important nuance not captured in the quantitative dimension alone.

Meyer’s (2014) Culture Map adds practical, business-focused insights to intercultural management, offering accessible tools for navigating differences in communication, feedback, and leadership styles. However, like Hofstede and Trompenaars, Meyer’s model relies on generalisations that are not always grounded in specific cultural logics. This study complements and deepens her framework by revealing the moral and relational motivations behind observed behaviours. For instance, Meyer notes Irish indirectness in feedback and conflict, but this research contextualises such behaviour as grounded in

Cúram, highlighting the intentional avoidance of emotional discomfort and emphasis on preserving harmony.

In addition, when compared to Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's (2022) model, several insights are confirmed and elaborated. The specific/diffuse dimension describes Dutch culture as separating personal from professional contexts, while Irish culture integrates these more holistically. This study illustrates how Irish sociability and informal interactions (Craic) coexist with guarded personal boundaries. Moreover, while Trompenaars describes Ireland as affective, this study clarifies that emotional expression is situation-dependent, and in sensitive situations, restraint is guided by Cúram.

The findings from Bezcioglu-Göktolga et al. (2021) also provide a foundation upon which this study builds. While their research categorises behaviours such as indirectness or conformity, it does not fully explain the underlying logic. This study deepens their work by identifying cultural values that explain why such behaviours occur.

Ultimately, this study contributes academically by going beyond existing generalised frameworks to provide deeper explanatory insights into the cultural logic underlying observed behaviours. By explicitly identifying and defining cultural values such as Cúram, Craic, Solúbthacht, and Údarás, this research offers a culturally grounded and context-specific understanding of Irish workplace culture from a Dutch perspective, enriching the broader field of intercultural management.

5.3 Practical contributions

This study offers practical insights and actionable recommendations for professionals working in Dutch-Irish environments, specifically by identifying and explaining Irish cultural standards and the underlying values that influence workplace behaviours. By understanding these core values—Cúram (care/caution), Craic (friendliness/humour), Solúbthacht (flexibility/adaptability), and Údarás (authority)—Dutch professionals can better interpret their Irish colleagues' behaviours and more effectively adapt their own communication and working styles to enhance intercultural collaboration.

The value of Cúram (care/caution) highlights the Irish moral ideal of protecting interpersonal harmony and avoiding emotional discomfort. Dutch professionals, accustomed to direct and explicit communication, can benefit practically by adopting more cautious phrasing and using indirect methods of feedback. For instance, rather than openly criticizing or confronting an issue, Dutch professionals could phrase feedback diplomatically, softening critiques to protect colleagues from embarrassment. Recognizing that direct confrontation may create emotional discomfort for Irish

colleagues can help Dutch expatriates deliver feedback effectively while maintaining positive workplace relationships.

The cultural value of *Craic* (friendliness/humour) emphasizes the importance of friendliness, humour, and informal interactions within Irish workplaces. Understanding this can help Dutch professionals to actively engage in informal conversations and workplace social rituals, such as collective lunch breaks and after-work gatherings. By participating in these interactions, Dutch expatriates can more easily build rapport, foster trust, and overcome initial barriers to social integration. Similarly, Irish professionals working with Dutch colleagues should recognize that the Dutch may initially prefer clearer boundaries between personal and professional life, so gradual and balanced social integration may enhance mutual understanding and trust.

Solúbthacht (flexibility/adaptability) underscores the Irish emphasis on adaptability and a balanced approach to time management and work-life integration. Dutch professionals, who typically prioritize clear structure and precise planning, can adjust their expectations by becoming comfortable with flexible scheduling and spontaneous adjustments. Conversely, Irish managers can support Dutch team members by clearly outlining expectations, deadlines, and tasks while remaining receptive to occasional adjustments. Appreciating the intentional and positive nature of Irish flexibility can facilitate greater trust and mutual understanding between colleagues from these distinct cultural backgrounds.

Finally, the cultural value *Údarás* (authority) reflects the Irish respect for clearly defined roles and hierarchical decision-making processes. While Dutch professionals are often accustomed to more egalitarian workplace dynamics, recognizing the Irish respect for leadership roles and hierarchical decision-making can aid in reducing misunderstandings or frustrations. Dutch professionals may benefit from following established chains of command and respecting managerial decisions, even when these seem more centralized than they're accustomed to. Irish managers, meanwhile, could further enhance workplace dynamics by inviting input and creating structured opportunities for bottom-up feedback and suggestions from their Dutch team members.

Overall, this study provides actionable recommendations that empower professionals working in intercultural settings. By explicitly linking observable behaviours to deeper cultural logic, the findings of this research help Dutch professionals anticipate and navigate potential workplace frictions. The following sections detail practical recommendations based on each of the identified underlying Irish cultural values.

Irish cultural standard belonging to the underlying value Cúram (care/caution)	Recommendations for the Dutch to improve collaboration with the Irish regarding this cultural standard:
Conflict avoidance	1. Avoid direct confrontation; address issues in a diplomatic and solution-oriented manner.
Modesty	2. Refrain from openly showcasing your achievements; let your work speak for itself.
Indirectness	3. Phrase feedback carefully and avoid strong criticisms; opt for subtle suggestions to convey your points.
Guarded openness	4. Respect the fact that deeper personal connections may take time and may not always develop at work.

Irish cultural standard belonging to the underlying value Craic (friendliness/humour)	Recommendations for the Dutch to improve collaboration with the Irish regarding this cultural standard:
Banter	5. Participate in informal conversations and humour but be mindful of local customs around "slagging" or teasing.
Welcoming	6. Accept invitations to social events as they are important for team bonding and feeling included.
Helpfulness	7. Be open to receiving and giving help, even if it goes beyond formal work tasks; this strengthens mutual respect.
Sociability	8. Take time for informal conversation and small talk, as this helps build trust and strengthen workplace relationships.
Exclusive community bonds	9. Be patient and consistently engage in informal interactions to gradually build trust and enter established networks.
Pleasing	10. Recognize and appreciate efforts aimed at harmony and approval; avoid interpreting agreeable behaviour as full agreement or commitment.

Irish cultural standard belonging to the underlying value Solúbthacht (flexibility/adaptability)	Recommendations for the Dutch to improve collaboration with the Irish regarding this cultural standard:
Relaxed with time	11. Be patient with timelines and allow for a more flexible approach to deadlines.
Flexibility	12. Adapt to changes and last-minute adjustments; avoid rigidly sticking to set schedules.

Irish cultural standard belonging to the underlying value Údarás (authority)	Recommendations for the Dutch to improve collaboration with the Irish regarding this cultural standard:
Boss decides	13. Respect hierarchical decisions and understand that managers may make final calls without group consensus.

5.4 Limitations & future research

This study explored the perspectives of 16 Dutch professionals working in Ireland, identifying thirteen distinct Irish cultural standards based on their workplace experiences. However, several limitations should be noted. First, the findings represent only the perceptions of Dutch professionals and therefore do not encompass the full complexity of Irish workplace culture. Since only Dutch interviewees participated, certain cultural similarities or nuances may have been overlooked. Additionally, professionals from different cultural backgrounds might perceive and experience Irish workplace culture differently. Future research could broaden this scope by including participants from a variety of nationalities to provide a more comprehensive and inclusive representation of intercultural dynamics in Irish workplaces.

A second limitation pertains to the geographic distribution of the participants. Most interviewees were based in or around Dublin, a hub for international companies. As a result, the cultural standards identified may predominantly reflect workplace dynamics characteristic of urban or corporate environments. Professionals working in rural areas or smaller towns might experience different cultural interactions shaped by local traditions and social norms. Future studies could address this limitation by recruiting participants from various regions throughout Ireland to explore potential geographical variations in perceived cultural standards.

Additionally, this study examined cultural differences exclusively from the Dutch perspective, leaving the perceptions and experiences of Irish professionals unrepresented. Including the views of Irish employees on their interactions with Dutch colleagues would offer a more balanced and reciprocal understanding of the intercultural dynamics between the two groups. This broader perspective would strengthen future research and support the development of more tailored and culturally sensitive recommendations for both sides.

The methodological approach, semi-structured interviews, also introduces a potential limitation: social desirability bias. Participants may have modified their responses to appear socially acceptable or to avoid discomfort, particularly when discussing sensitive topics such as workplace conflict or authority. While efforts were made to maintain a confidential and open interview environment, the

risk of such bias cannot be fully excluded. Future studies might address this by incorporating additional methods such as anonymous surveys or observational research, increasing the reliability and depth of the findings.

Finally, data interpretation in this study was conducted primarily by a single researcher, which may have introduced subjectivity into the analysis. Although supervisory discussions were used to verify interpretations, involving multiple researchers or conducting inter-coder reliability checks could further enhance the credibility of the findings. Future research could benefit from collaborative analysis and methodological triangulation to increase analytical rigour.

It is also important to note that this study presents generalised descriptions of typical workplace behaviours to foster intercultural understanding and improve practical collaboration. While the insights provided are based on recurring patterns in participant experiences, individual behaviours and interpretations will naturally vary. The aim of this research is to contribute to greater cultural awareness, not to reinforce cultural stereotypes.

5.5 Conclusion

The primary objective of this research was to explore the cultural differences as perceived by Dutch professionals working in Ireland, with the aim of understanding how these differences shape workplace interactions and expectations. To address the central research question "Which cultural differences are perceived by Dutch expats working in Ireland?", 16 in-depth interviews were conducted with Dutch professionals currently living and working in Ireland. These interviews revealed thirteen distinct Irish cultural standards: Conflict avoidance, Guarded openness, Indirectness, Modesty, Helpfulness, Pleasing, Exclusive community bonds, Sociability, Banter, Welcoming, Relaxed with time, Flexibility, and Boss decides.

These cultural standards illustrate how Dutch professionals experience Irish workplace behaviour in practice. While some of these differences may lead to misunderstandings, such as the Irish preference for indirect communication or more relaxed attitudes toward time, others were perceived positively, such as sociability, helpfulness, and inclusivity. The findings reveal not only moments of friction, but also areas of cultural contrast that can be understood and adapted to.

Beyond identifying these cultural standards, this study also explored the underlying cultural logic by grouping these standards into four foundational cultural values:

1. Cúram (care/caution): Conflict avoidance, Guarded openness, Indirectness, Modesty
2. Craic (friendliness/humour): Helpfulness, Pleasing, Exclusive community bonds, Sociability, Banter, Welcoming
3. Solúbthacht (flexibility/adaptability): Relaxed with time, Flexibility
4. Údarás (authority): Boss decides

These underlying cultural values provide deeper insights into Irish workplace behaviours, clarifying why certain actions and approaches occur. For example, the value of Cúram explains the Irish preference for indirect communication and reluctance to openly address challenging topics, aiming to preserve interpersonal harmony. Similarly, the value of Craic highlights the importance placed on friendliness, humour, and social connections in Irish professional settings, often contrasting with the Dutch task-oriented communication style.

By recognising and understanding these cultural values, Dutch professionals can more effectively navigate potential misunderstandings and improve collaboration with Irish colleagues. Practical recommendations from this study encourage Dutch professionals to adjust their communication style, embrace flexibility, and respect hierarchical structures, thereby promoting positive intercultural interactions.

In conclusion, although cultural differences can initially lead to misunderstandings and workplace friction, they simultaneously offer significant opportunities for intercultural learning, adaptation, and relationship-building. Successful collaboration in cross-cultural teams depends on awareness, adaptability, and mutual understanding of different cultural perspectives. By fostering such understanding, Dutch and Irish professionals can create more cohesive, inclusive, and productive workplace environments.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Questions used in interviews

Leeftijd?

Hoeveel jaar ben je al in Ierland?

Geslacht?

Woonplaats in Ierland?

Baan positie bedrijf?

Interview vragen

1. Waarom/hoe heb je besloten om in Ierland te gaan werken?

2. Hoe stelde u zich de Ierse-cultuur en bevolking voor, vóór uw eerste contact met een Ier?

- Waarom dacht je dat?
- Veranderde dit snel na de eerste ontmoeting/gesprek met een Ier?

3. Wat was het meest positieve en verrassende gedrag dat je hebt ervaren van de Ierse-cultuur tijdens een interactie met Ier?

- Waarom was dit een positief aspect in jouw perspectief?
- Wat is volgens jou de reden hierachter?
- Heb je nog meer van dit soort voorbeelden?
- Was het tijdens werk? Zo, ja? Leidde dit tot een goede samenwerking

4. Wat was het meest negatief en verrassende gedrag dat je hebt ervaren van de Ierse-cultuur tijdens een interactie met Ier?

- Waarom is dit een negatief aspect in jouw perspectief?
- Wat is volgens jou de reden hierachter?
- Heb je nog meer van dit soort voorbeelden?

- Was het tijdens werk? Zo, ja? Leidde dit tot een slechte samenwerking

5. In welke aspecten vindt u dat de Nederlandse cultuur vergelijkbaar is met de Ierse-cultuur?

- Waarom denk je dat?
- Kunt u voorbeelden geven van vergelijkbaar gedrag van Nederlanders en Ieren in bepaalde situaties die hetzelfde culturele aspect hebben?

6. Op welke punten verschilt volgens u de Nederlandse cultuur met de Ierse-cultuur?

- Waarom denk je dat?
- Kunt u voorbeelden geven van niet vergelijkbaar gedrag van Nederlanders en Ieren in bepaalde situaties die niet hetzelfde culturele aspect hebben?

7. Heb je ooit een cultuurschok gehad met de Ierse-cultuur? Zo ja, kunt u dit aangeven? (gedrag)

- Waarom denk je dat dit is gebeurd?
- Hoe gedroeg je je tijdens deze situatie?
- Hoe zou je je nu gedragen?

8. Kunt u een of meerdere gebeurtenis aanwijzen waarop een Ier uw gedrag niet leek te begrijpen of er verontwaardigd op reageerde?

- Waarom denk je dat dit is gebeurd?
- Hoe gedroeg jij je tijdens deze situatie?
- Heeft zo'n situatie ooit tot conflict geleidt?
- Hoe zou je je nu gedragen?

9. Hoe ervaar je de communicatie met Ieren? (direct/indirect. Feedback)

- Welke taal gebruik je om te communiceren?
- Heeft u taalproblemen?

10. Wat zou je in de communicatie met Ieren willen verbeteren tijdens een zakelijke vergaderingen?

- Waarom zou dit aspect volgens u verbeterd moeten worden?
- In hoeverre beïnvloedt dit aspect de communicatie met Ieren?

11. Hoe vond je de Ierse werkcultuur voordat je verhuisde en hoe vind je het nu?

- Stelling: Is het makkelijker om met een Ier of met een Nederlander samen te werken?

12. Hoe onderscheidt u een Ier van een persoon met een andere nationaliteit?

- Welke kenmerken/eigenschappen herken je gemakkelijk in een Ier?
- Wat zijn de belangrijkste waarden volgens u van een Ier?

13. Hoe onderscheidt u een Nederlander van een persoon met een andere nationaliteit?

- Welke eigenschappen herken je gemakkelijk in een Nederlander?

14. Als je één cultureel aspect van je eigen cultuur kunt omwisselen met de Ierse-cultuur, wat zou je dan kiezen en wat zou je geven en waarom?