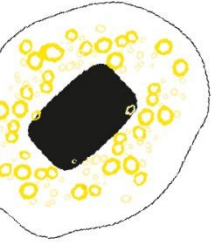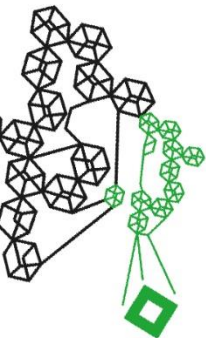**UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE.**

Intercultural Collaboration in European Business

Cultural Differences Between the Dutch and the French on the Work Floor

23 May 2022

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Acknowledgments

I would like to say a sincere thank you to my first supervisor Dr. Arnold Enklaar for his assistance during this master Thesis. I found it a great pleasure to work together on finalising this paper. With constructive feedback I was able to write this report. I would also like to thank my second supervisor, Dr. Lara Carminati. She was positively involved in providing structure and logic to the writing of this report. I would also like to acknowledge and thank the participants of this study. This result would have been impossible without them. I appreciate all the participants for taking their time to provide me with valuable and interesting information. Once again, thank you for contributing to this study. In addition, I would like to thank the focus group, who provided me with valuable feedback on my result which has improved this thesis. And finally, I would want to say a big thank you to all friends and family who have supported me during this research.

Abstract

Nowadays, working and communicating across linguistic, cultural and national borders is part of everyday life for a lot of Europeans because of high levels of cooperation between member states of the European Union. Cooperation does not always go smooth because of differences between members from different countries and cultures. Therefore, Therefore, research on cultural differences within Europe is extremely valuable to help improve business relations between various countries and boost trade and industrial collaboration within the European Union.

For these reasons, this master thesis aims to identify French typical behaviour, known as cultural standards, as seen from a Dutch perspective. An additional aim of this thesis is to find underlying values able to explain French cultural standards. To help guide this process, the following research question was used: "How is the French culture perceived by Dutch individuals living and working in France?"

The research question was answered by performing an inductive qualitative study based on interviews with Dutch individuals living and working in France. During the interviews, participants were asked about situations where the Dutch and France cultures clashed. These situations, described as critical incidents, were analysed to establish the French cultural standards, and later identify the underlying values of the typical behaviours.

In total, this study has identified sixteen French cultural standards, namely: Respect, Acquired rights, Relations, Status showing, Power division, Hide problems, Verbal aggression, Elegant communication, Control, Relational exercise of power, Cooperation, Truc, Network, Obedience, Formality, and lastly, Verbal ability. These cultural standards were linked to four underlying values, being: Hierarchy, Competence, Débrouiller and Friendship. The cultural standards and underlying values provide a thick description of French culture, as perceived by the Dutch, and can be used to describe and explain French behaviour.

Keywords: French culture, cultural standards, critical incidents, French behaviour

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1. Introduction

By removing trade barriers and border controls among its members states and the introduction of uniform standards, the European Union has created one big common market. But the common market of the European Union consists of many countries with linguistic and cultural differences between the constituent countries (Hofstede et al., 2010; Meyer, 2014; Schwartz, 2012). Working and communicating across linguistic, cultural and national borders is currently part of everyday life for many Europeans. The cross-cultural meetings they have are key to make business deals between countries (Raju, 2017). Therefore, research on cultural differences within Europe is extremely valuable. It can help to improve business relations between various countries and boost trade and industrial collaboration within the European Union (Kónya, 2006).

Among such countries, the Netherlands and France have long standing business relationships. There are numerous business connections between the Netherlands and France. The Netherlands is the eight most important export partner for France, whilst France is the fifth most important export partner for the Netherlands (Statistics Netherlands, 2020). Both were among the first six countries to form the European Union (Vătăman, 2010). But despite being close in proximity, collaboration between the various production sites or business partners does not always go smoothly. This is due to differences in culture, which may hamper productivity and profitability or communication between partners. Cultural differences between France and the Netherlands are the subject of this thesis.

More specifically, the goal of this research is to assess in what situations Dutch and French experience problems in communicating and collaborating with each other and to identify the cultural reasons that are at the origin of these cultural frictions. The typical behaviour of the French, described as cultural standards, found in this research are compared with the Dutch cultural values as described by Enklaar (2007) to highlight differences and similarities. The outcome of this thesis should give clues and solutions to improve communication and collaboration between Dutch and French in order to optimize productivity and profitability of business relations. This leads to the following research question and sub-questions to guide this process:

Research question:

"How is the French culture perceived by Dutch individuals living and working in France?"

Sub-questions:

1. *"When do Dutch experience frictions in business communication and collaboration with the French?"*

2. *"What does this reveal about the French cultural standards?"*

3. *"What are the underlying values of the French cultural standards?"*

1.1 Academic Relevance

Most studies on cultural differences are impressionistic or anecdotical in character or use quantitative models (Fink et al., 2005). Consequently, they are either lacking a proper scientific basis or they are so general in their description that they give no clear clues on how to act in daily situations on the work floor. Furthermore, previous studies generally provide a superficial differentiation but no clear distinction of cultural levels. They provide a thin description of culture rather than a thick description (Kutschker & Schmid, 2012). A thin description consists of a description of behaviour as seen from the outside. But to really understand culture, this behaviour must be further interpreted in order to provide a thick description (Geertz, 1973). This study, applying Thomas et al.'s (2010) as well as Gioia et al.' (2012) rigorous methodologies, is meant to cover both these needs to avoid the risk that people are guided more by stereotype than by knowledge. Furthermore, this thesis focuses on two countries, namely France and the Netherlands, and analyses these in depth, providing thick descriptions (Smith, 2006) of French cultural standards as seen from a Dutch perspective, including the cultural values behind these standards. This will improve the understanding of cultural standards that play an important role in bicultural situations and the underlying values (principles and beliefs) that drive people's behaviour (Thomas et al., 2010). In addition, this research can help to extend existing literature regarding the French culture.

1.2 Practical Relevance

Dutch businessmen, managers and expats who are working on a regular basis with colleagues in France can benefit from the insights this study will bring on the most important cultural differences between Dutch and French. The results of this study may enhance the cultural knowledge of Dutch people working with French people. Consequently, it may help

Dutch managers in France to improve their relationship and collaboration with French employees in order to enhance productivity. Furthermore, it may help Dutch expats to feel more at home between people in France by better understanding how they tick and what is important to them. Businessmen who want to trade with France are likely to more easily build up a relationship with partners from France by using the insights from this study (Van Dyne et al., 2010). The cases, described as critical incidents, and their interpretation may be used to construct a culture assimilator, a training tool for Dutchmen who want to do business in France.

The thesis begins with a theoretical framework in chapter two, which reviews previous work on the topic and how this thesis aims to contribute to the knowledge of cultural differences, especially between Dutch and French. In chapter three, the research method is explained. After this, the description of the research and its results, presenting the cultural standards that were found and their underlying values, are discussed in chapter four. The fifth and last chapter of the thesis present the conclusion, discussion and suggestions for further research.

2. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, the reader is provided with a definition of culture in general. This is followed by outlaying quantitative models of cultural differences and the choice for a qualitative approach in this research. After this, the critical incidents technique is explained, and the concept of cultural standards is defined. This chapter ends with an explanation of the Dutch culture.

2.1 Defining Culture

As this study is about cultural differences, the term culture needs to be defined. Schein (2010) defined culture as: "*[…] a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems*" (p. 17).

He distinguishes three levels to understand and analyse culture. The first is the level of artefacts. The second is the level of espoused beliefs and values. The third is the level of basic underlying assumptions (Schein, 2010). The first level is the most basic. Here, culture is understood through artefacts and behaviour that is observable on the surface like clothes

and rituals. The second level is about certain feelings regarding how things need to be done. This includes certain ideals, visions, values and behavioural patterns. The final level is about things that are seen as normal when reacting to the environment. These basic underlying tacit assumptions are deeply rooted in the minds of people in a culture and are never questioned or discussed. Often, members of a culture are unaware of their existence (Schein, 2010).

When looking at these levels, they are comparable to a collective programming of the mind. This collective programming is what differentiates one group from another and so a culture can be seen as a collective of values typical for a specific group (Hofstede et al., 2010). The level of difference between two (or more) culturally different people can be a significant barrier to successful intercultural collaboration and interaction (Kim & Gudykunst, 1988). Cultural differences can be displayed through actions and thus be visible on the surface. But differences can also be displayed through differing values norms and patterns of thinking. These are less visible and so are at a deeper level of cultural difference (Schlizio & Thomas, 2009). Different models have been developed in order to capture these cultural differences. Those models have mostly been developed from the etic perspective that aims to explain cultural differences through surface-level comparisons, instead of the emic approach that aims to explain culture on a deeper level.

2.2 Quantitative Models of Cultural Differences

Indisputably, in the field of international business and consultancy the etic approach of cultural differences is dominant worldwide. Since the 1980's the models using (so-called universal) cultural dimensions are tremendously popular. The most famous is the model of Hofstede et al., (2010). But internationally also the model of Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) has many adherents. More recently Erin Meyer (2014) added her own dimensions model. To this type of approach one can also classify Schwartz' cultural model (2012), which is based on a number of (so-called universal) values, and the GLOBE project, using 6 different leadership styles (House et al., 2004).

2.2.1 Cultural Difference between the French and the Dutch Based on a Quantitative Model

Among the above frameworks, many cross-cultural studies are built on the model by Hofstede et al. (2010). This model uses six dimensions of culture namely, (1) power distance, (2) individualism versus collectivism, (3) masculinity versus femininity, (4) uncertainty

avoidance, (5) long term versus short term orientation, (6) indulgence versus restraint. The comparison of the index scores for France and the Netherlands are shown in figure 1.
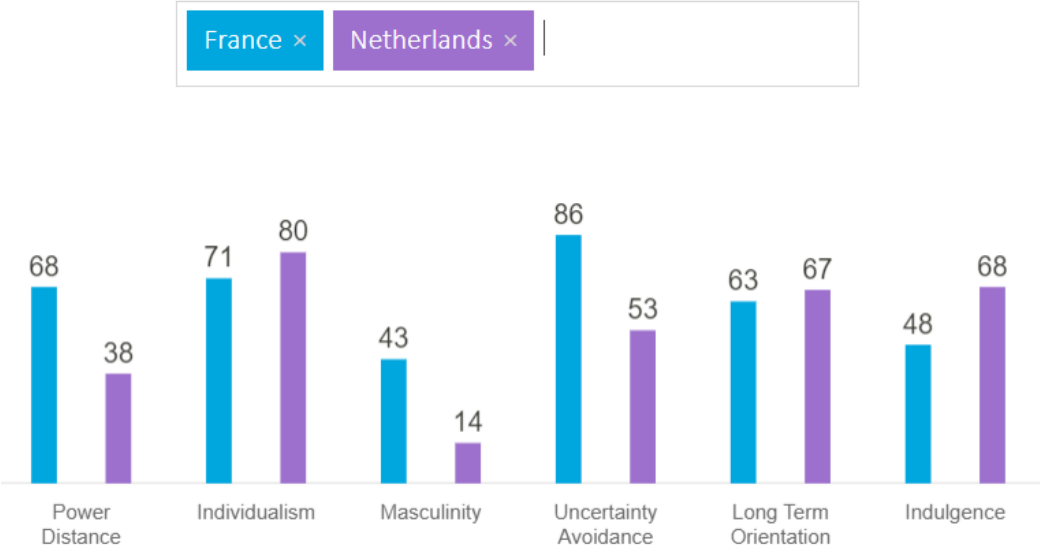
Figure 1 Index scores for France and the Netherlands on the cultural dimensions by Hofstede et al. (Hofstede-Insights, 2021)

France scores high on power distance when compared to the Netherlands. This indicates that the French expect and accept that power is unequally distributed in society, more than in the Netherlands. Both France and the Netherlands score high on individualism, indicating a low degree of interdependence, albeit that the Netherlands scores higher. France scores slightly on the low side when it comes to masculinity, but when compared to the Netherlands they score very high. This points towards the Netherland being a more feminine society where caring for others and quality of life matter a lot, whereas France is more masculine. The French are thus more driven by competition and success, and constantly want to be the best or the winner. France scores very high on uncertainty avoidance in the comparison, meaning they tend to avoid ambiguous situations and do not like surprises. Structure and planning are required way more in France than in the Netherlands. On the dimension of long term versus short term orientation, France and the Netherlands score very similar and both relatively high. This means both the French and the Dutch people are pragmatic and can alter their traditions when conditions change. Lastly, France scores relatively in the middle on the dimension of indulgence, whereas the Netherlands scores relatively high. Indulgence has to do with how much people want to control their desires. When one combines this value with the high uncertainty avoidance

value, it implies that French people are not relaxed and do not enjoy life as much as is regularly assumed (Hofstede-Insights, 2021).

2.2.2 The Limitations of the Quantitative Models

The cultural dimensions models are very useful for a quick check of cultural differences between countries. Someone can rapidly gain a general overview of differences between two or more countries (Adler, 2007; Fang, 2005). This is useful when only limited information is needed or when exactness is not required. However, these models are of quantitative nature and do not give managers and consultants concrete clues about how to act effectively in the foreign cultural environment. And whilst the exact numerical scores for each dimension suggest exactness, the models are too coarse, abstract and not precise enough for practical use and really produce generalizations about cultures. Finally, they focus only on a few aspects of cultures, but the internal coherence within one culture remains unclear. Hence, to gain more in-depth knowledge, a different approach is needed (Claussen, 2010), and emic approaches can help.

2.3 Previous Qualitative Studies to French Culture

Although there have only been a limited number of studies that dive deep into French culture, there have been some studies that can provide some more in-depth insights into French culture. Peyre (1966) noted that French people have an urge to resist change and thereby keep things as they are in a traditional and stable manner. He also claimed that the French have a deep-rooted anxiety for losing their individuality, meaning they do not like striving for consensus but rather act individually. This anxiety seems to be present in the collective subconscious of the people of France (Peyre, 1966).

A study by Antal and Sobczak (2007) explored instead French national traditions, which can be helpful to partially describe the French culture. First, it seems that in France there has traditionally been a strong role of the state, with governments having the right to both influence and, if necessary, intervene in an effective, but quiet, way in the background (Halba, 2003). This role of the state can be translated to the work floor when looking at both the state and supervisors as authorities. This is both expected as well as respected and may even be admired (Charkham, 1995). Consequently, this centralised power and faith in societal changes through legislation makes the French rather prone to accept things form the state, or any authority, much more compared to other cultures, for whom this approach

could be seen as intolerable interventionism (Antal & Sobczak, 2007). Perhaps as a consequence of the importance of institutional roles, mistrust towards private actors that provide general goods seems to be quite present. This might be explained by the fact that all forms of self-regulation when it comes to labour relations exploited without the state are traditionally seen as privatizing the law. Since this is unaccepted, it is hard for French businesses to take a proactive position in social affairs when the government is not involved (Antal & Sobczak, 2007). Lastly, there exists a French tradition of being sceptical towards transparency. This is rooted in French catholic culture. For both individuals and companies, being discreet about good deeds is regarded as being a sign of sincerity and disinterestedness. So traditionally it is not appropriate to publicly report good deeds in France (Segal, 2003).

Perhaps the most complete description of French culture is provided by Philippe D'Iribarne (1989). The findings of his study are valuable as they provide inside and context to interpreting French behaviour. He has found that French people tend to decide their responsibilities on the bases of their own judgement. This includes following rules and procedures whenever it fits them. It also includes following orders from a supervisor for a little while, after which they come up with a trick to get out of it. However, the French do have a strong sense of duty that is derived from their position and the traditions of their profession. They use this to determine what is important and strongly tie this to their pride. In addition, D'Iribarne states that heated discussions where people become verbally aggressive are useful ways to get a point across in France. The relationship is not damaged when this behaviour occurs. He further states that it is important to have a clear hierarchy to determine one's position in society. This is reflected in distanced behaviour between hierarchical groups where a supervisor generally makes decisions, and the subordinates carry them out. The final important finding of his research is about the relationships between French people. The stronger the relationship, the more information is shared. This includes arranging all sorts of things for people with whom one has a strong relationship. Positive and strong relationships are key to form proper and fruitful business relationships (D'Iribarne, 1989).

From the aforementioned part, it is evident that some research has explored French culture. Yet, these studies do not all provide rigorous, clear and concise descriptions of

typical French behaviours and do not include an external perspective on the French culture based on narratives.

2.4 Thomas' Qualitative Approach to Culture

An altogether different and more rigorous qualitative approach to culture research is provided by Thomas and colleagues (2010). They define culture as a "system of orientation" (p. 19). This orientation system is formed by cultural standards (typical behaviour). A culture is reflected by certain values, norms and practices and is manifested in a system of orientation unique to a group, organisation, country or society. Additionally, the system of orientation helps members to feel a sense of belonging within a group and there is room for individuals to create a unique self-sense and to function effectively. Furthermore, culture is seen as a universal phenomenon because all humans live within and develop a culture. A system of orientation consists of unique symbols like body language, spoken language, mimicry, greetings and clothing. It is passed on to next generations by the group. Culture influences thought patterns, perceptions, actions and judgements by all members of a group (Thomas et al., 2010).

This thesis follows the approach of Thomas et al., (2010) since it is a thorough and rigorous methodology combined with narratives. Two concepts are central in their study: critical incidents and cultural standards. These concepts are discussed below.

2.4.1 Critical Incidents Technique

The term critical incidents can be defined as: "*Any observable human activity that is sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences and predictions to be made about the person performing the act. To be critical, an incident must occur in a situation where the purpose or intent of the act seems fairly clear to the observer and where its consequences are sufficiently definite to leave little doubt concerning its effects*" (Flanaghan, 1954, p. 1). The Critical Incidents Technique can thus be used to find out if a person's specific behaviour is a success or a failure in an intercultural situation.

Following this, Thomas et al. (2010) use the Critical Incident Technique to find out where the cultures of two countries clash. From these incidents they deduce the conflicting 'cultural standards' of both countries. This approach is based on American research. The Critical Incident Technique was originally developed by American Psychologist Flanaghan (1954) to reduce errors in military aviation, but Fiedler, Mitchell and Triandis (1971) started

to apply it for intercultural interactions. They collected as much 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)programme 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 less accurate interpretation, they receive an extensive explanation 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. The critical incidents technique can be used to describe situations where behaviour of others is different from own behaviour.

2.4.2 Cultural Standards

In addition to using the critical incidents technique, the German researcher Alexander Thomas introduced the concept of cultural standards (Fink et al., 2005). This concept is closely related to the definition of culture as a system of orientation and is based on developmental psychology by Piaget (1962 and 1976), and on the concept of cultural psychology and the concept of action by (Boesch, 1987). A system of orientation allows people to make sense of the world around them. This sensemaking structure takes shape in a number of cultural standards that are typical for each country and culture. According to Thomas et al. (2010) cultural standards can be defined using five indicators:

1. Cultural standards encompass perceptions, judgements, thought patterns and interactions that are similar in a majority of members from a culture who all view their behaviour as standard, typical and also binding.
2. People direct, regulate and judge both own and other unfamiliar behaviour based on a cultural standard.
3. Cultural standards can be used to master a situation and deal with people accordingly.
4. When applying cultural standards, behaviour may fluctuate within a range of tolerance.

5. When behaviour exceeds the boundaries of the range of tolerance, it is not accepted by the group and may even be sanctioned.

Cultural standards in each culture are derived from the cultural values that underly them. Moreover, the cultural standards can be determined from situations of intercultural interactions. This requires both self-awareness and awareness of others when examining a culture through the lens of another culture (Demorgon & Molz, 1996).

Cultural standards can be structured following a hierarchy of levels of abstraction, ranging from specific behavioural rules to general values (Kühnel, 2014). Whilst some cultural standards can be at the centre in one culture, they may be absent in another. In different cultures, differing cultural standards lead to different behaviour. Furthermore, in different cultures with similar cultural standards, values with regard to the mentioned range of tolerance can differ or the significance of the cultural standard all together. Perception and assessment of behaviour depends on the cultural standards of both persons involved in an interaction (Thomas & Utler, 2013). When behaviour complies with cultural standards, it is judged as correct by members form the society applying the cultural standard. When behaviour deviates from the cultural standard, it is judged as negative (Kühnel, 2014).

Cultural standards are visible when critically experiencing intercultural interactions and of subjective nature. They always depend on experiences of individuals (Schlizio, et al., 2009). Moreover, they describe key points of specific behaviour in intercultural situations because they are assessed by people affected in the intercultural situation. This means cultural standards only become visible in intercultural interactions between people who adhere to different cultural standards. Schroll-Machl (2002) stated that cultural standards can be deduced from empirical and scientific research through analysis and reflection. Cultural standards are not meant to compare universal aspects of culture. This is an important difference compared to the previously mentioned cultural models and dimensions. Cultural standards can be used to predict the most likely behaviours of people (Thomas et al., 2010).

However, Thomas et al. (2010) do not make a distinction between the more concrete behaviours and the more abstract values, calling them both cultural standards. This leads to conceptual unclarity and hampers an accurate description of cultures. This can be solved using the theory of Geertz (1973). According to this theory, by merely observing and

describing behaviour from the outside one produces a thin description. But such a description is incomplete. For really grasping the character of a culture one must make a thick description by further interpreting the observed behaviours. Hence, it is crucial to distinguish between a thin description (concrete behaviours) and a thick description (including underlying values) (Geertz, 1973). For the current research, this means that cultural standards are seen as concrete behaviour and this behaviour needs to be interpreted or explained through underlying values. Since this study looks at French Culture from a Dutch perspective, the Dutch cultural values are discussed below.

2.5 Dutch Cultural Values

The underlying values for the Dutch culture have been researched before (Enklaar, 2007). It is important to illustrate them since they will function as the baseline to which the French values explored in this thesis will be compared in order to highlight similarities and differences. It was found that Dutch culture rests on twelve underlying values or ideals. These values influence people's attitudes and behaviours. The cultural standards form the concrete behaviour that is derived from these values. The following table depicts the twelve underlying values of the Dutch culture and their origin as described by Enklaar (2007).

Table 1 The Underlying Values of Dutch culture (Enklaar, 2007)

Number	Underlying Value (Dutch Translation)	Origin
1	Salvation (Heil)	Christianity
2	Guilt and remission (Schuld)	Christianity
3	Charity (Naastenliefde)	Christianity
4	Truth (Waarheid)	Christianity
5	Work (Arbeid)	Protestantism
6	Order and Neatness (Orde en Netheid)	Protestantism
7	Utility (Nut)	Protestantism
8	Reliability (Betrouwbaarheid)	Protestantism
9	Moderation (Matigheid)	Protestantism
10	Consensus (Overeenstemming)	Holland
11	Equality (Gelijkheid)	Holland
12	Self-determination (Zelfbeschikking)	Holland

The Dutch value of *Salvation* is about general thought pattern in which making the right choices in the present, results in a better future. This strongly ties to believing that 'new is good' regarding for example policies, welfare systems and educational ideas. Furthermore, this Dutch value makes the Dutch likely to sympathise with those who fight for

ideals like fighting poverty and saving nature. The next value of *Guilt* and Remission is about admitting mistakes and saying sorry. After this, people will be forgiven. It is about taking responsibility. Irresponsibility is seen as childish. *Charity* is about taking care of those in pain and sorrow. This is reflected in the Dutch social welfare system, in fundraising for charities and in development aid for other countries. The fourth value *Truth* is about always telling the truth. It is not about being polite, but about telling the truth. Being critical is seen as positive behaviour. Also, the Dutch are very open about their personal life and their feelings. These first four underlying values stem from Christianity and are shared among all dominantly Christian countries. This indicates that these values are present throughout Europe, including France (Enklaar, 2007).

The value *Work* is about valuing work and working hard. Being a busy person is seen as positive. It is tied to a strong believe in aiming for the highest education possible. Value number 6 in the table above is about *Order*. It is about doing every task orderly and properly. This is reflected in clean homes, factories and offices, but goes beyond. This value is also about doing things in a timely manner and having regular hours for activities. When there is confusion or disorder, Dutch people associate this with irresponsibleness or being antisocial. Next is the value of *Utility*. This is about not wasting anything, be it energy, food, money or talent and being very pragmatic. It is about using resources efficiently, and always looking to buy resources at the lowest price, even when people are rich. The value of *Reliability* indicates that Dutch people should always do what they promise. In business, a verbal yes means there is a deal. This value also entails that Dutch people take the literal meaning of a verbal message and do not take much context into account. This is because the Dutch society believes in high-trust. The ninth value is that of *Moderation*. This is about not exaggerating and not showing to much emotion (nor should one show too little emotion). It is about not being extreme and not voicing extreme opinions. Too much of anything is seen as a bad thing. These previous five underlying values are from Protestant heritage and are shared among all countries with a dominant Protestant majority. France has not had this Protestant dominance which makes it unlikely for these values to be typically French (Enklaar, 2007).

The final three Dutch values are those of Consensus, Equality, and Self-determination. The value *Consensus* is about finding compromises and avoiding clashes. The

Dutch do not like conflicts and aggression. For this reason, they discuss things in large groups to make sure everyone is pleased with a decision. *Equality* is about viewing everybody as equals, regardless of rank. Nobody must think he/she is superior to anyone else and one must not order people to do stuff. Instead, orders are framed as questions. The twelfth, value is *Self-determination*. Dutch people have their own opinions and express these. Also, according to this value, they should take initiative and not wait for others. Furthermore, it indicates people need to make their own choices, both in private life and in their carrying out their job. The Dutch think that people can do whatever they want, as long as it does not have consequences for someone else. This is reflected in freedom of personal choices regarding homosexuality, euthanasia, abortion, and the use of soft drugs. The last three underlying values stem from Holland (Enklaar, 2007). Knowledge of the Dutch culture is important to be able to understand how the Dutch and French cultures differ.

3. Methodology

In this chapter the research design, data collection and data analysis are discussed and justified. The methods used in this research are explained and an overview of the sample of interviewees is given.

3.1 Research Design

This study intends to use concrete situations on the work floor in which Dutch and French people encounter problems in communication and collaboration due to cultural differences to explore the French cultural standards. For this kind of concrete empirical research, a qualitative approach is most suitable because qualitative research is used when it is about *"…persons' lives, lived experiences, behaviours, emotions, and feelings as well as about organizational functioning, social movements, cultural phenomena, and interactions between nations"* (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 10-11). Contrary to quantitative researchers who look for causation, predictions and generalisations, qualitative researchers aim to explore, report and comprehend phenomena in context and with interpretation (Hoepfl, 1997). The research design shown in figure 2 explains the method that is used to identify the French cultural standards.
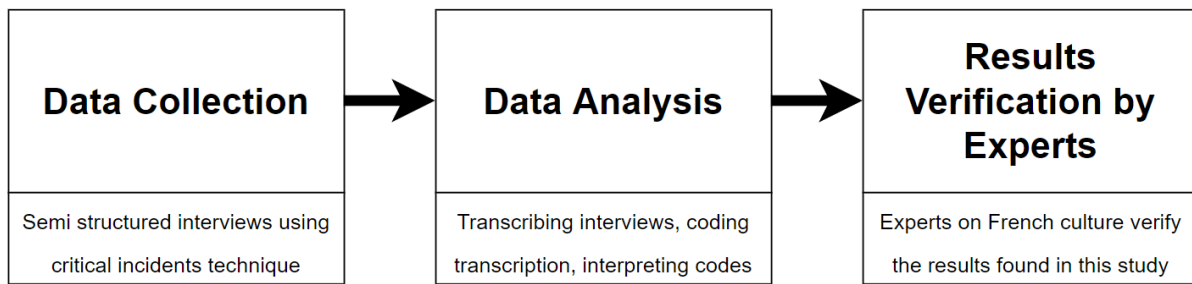
Data Collection	Data Analysis	Results Verification by Experts
Semi structured interviews using critical incidents technique	Transcribing interviews, coding transcription, interpreting codes	Experts on French culture verify the results found in this study

Figure 2 Visual Representation of the Research Design

3.2 Data Collection

The data were collected by semi-structured interviews because these are structured with predetermined open-ended questions, but also allow for follow up questions when the situation is not completely clear (Adams, 2015). During the interviews, the critical incidents technique was applied. This technique describes situations where behaviour of others either positively or negatively differs from own behaviour. It makes it very useful in establishing cultural standards. In particular, the technique is suitable for interview questions regarding intercultural differences. This is because actions shaped by culture are not reflected in an intracultural situation, but merely reveal themselves during critical situations (Schroll-Machl & Nový, 2003). The critical incidents technique leads to more detailed outcomes, unable to obtain by using a survey or questionnaire, reducing the risk of bias (Yukl & van Fleet, 1982). More recently, it was emphasised that that using the critical incidents technique leads to more complete descriptions and can uncover differences to expand current literature (Bott & Tourish, 2016).

The participants in the interview had to meet two requirements to be interviewed. Firstly, interviewees must have been working in France for at least six months. This is because after this period, the inceptive euphoria regarding the new country is over and larger efforts must be made to integrate in the culture (Bhawuk, 1998). The second requirement is that the interviewees need to be working with French colleagues. This ensures a certain amount of integration and intense contact with the French culture, making it possible to identify cultural differences. The interviewees were asked for their experiences in communicating and collaborating with French people and to give typical examples regarding where things went different from what Dutchmen are used to, described as critical incidents in this study. After the interviews were conducted, the researcher also considered if the interview was worth including in the study. The criteria used here were that the

interviewee must have experienced something, remember it, find the story worth telling, be willing to tell the interviewer and the incident had to be work related.

3.2.1 Research Instrument

The interviews were held by the author. Potential interviewees were found via social media platforms LinkedIn and Facebook, as well as via the forum on Nederlanders.fr. After contact was established and interest was shown, the interview partners were provided with additional information regarding the study. They also had to fill out an informed consent form and answer eight general demographics questions. After successfully completing this process, online interviews were organized via Zoom.

All the interviews began with the researcher introducing himself and explaining what critical incidents are. After the opening statements, the interviewee was asked questions about situations where he or she experienced critical incidents. Follow-up questions were asked to make sure the researcher understood the situation properly. The questionnaire used for the interviews is included in appendix A.

The critical incidents mentioned by the interviewees were examined with these follow-up questions to gain knowledge about, personal evaluation of the critical incidents, value perceptions, stereotypes, coping strategies, and learning behaviour of the interviewee. This additional information can reduce the risk of possible bias in data collection, as well as improve the interpretation of the gathered data by the researcher (Fink et al., 2005).

Interviews with the Dutchmen living and working in France were held in Dutch, as the researcher is also Dutch. This follows the recommendation by Fink et al. (2005, p. 14) who stated that "to deal with interviewer bias and construct bias it is strongly recommended that interviews are undertaken by members from the same culture as the interviewed persons". After the interviews, transcripts were made with the software "AmberScript" that uses speech recognition to transcribe audio files into text. After AmberScript produced the initial transcript, refined, and improved the transcripts. Only the passages and quotes necessary to support the analysis were translated in English by the author, who is a Dutch native speaker and proficient in English.

3.2.2 Sample Description

In total, fifteen individuals were interviewed and selected for this study. More potential interviewees had shown interest in participation. However, these people were not interviewed and not included in this study because after fifteen interviews themes were starting to repeat and thus, saturation was reached. Interviews lasted between 45 and 87 minutes. Table 2 presents demographic information about the selected interviewees.

Table 2 Demographics Information Interviewees

Interviewee No.	Gender	Age	Total years working in France	Current Company type	Current Position
1	Man	64	25	Language institute	Managing Director
2	Man	61	30	Bank	Managing Director
3	Man	59	25	Management advice	CEO
4	Man	31	7	Investment bank	Compliance Risk Officer
5	Man	65	44	Retail sale of bread	Control Manager
6	Woman	56	35	Pharmacy	Executive Secretary
7	Woman	32	6	Shoe stores company	Account Manager
8	Man	68	41	Founding	Managing Director
9	Woman	44	10	Educational institution	Pedagogical Counsellor
10	Man	67	20	Hotel	Owner
11	Woman	74	26	Accommodation and educational support	President
12	Man	67	4	School bus company	Driver
13	Woman	52	18	Clinical research	Clinical Research Associate
14	Man	52	23	Airport Taxi and Greenhouse Horticulture	Driver and Entrepreneur
15	Woman	56	20	Catering Company	Administration

3.3 Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted using both Gioia et al.'s Methodology (Gioia et al., 2012) and Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The gathered data were organised in a structured way by using first order concepts, second order themes and aggregate dimensions as described by Gioia et al., (2012). Thematic Analysis is applied to analyse the data. It is "… a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). The process used in Thematic Analysis consists of six steps. The first step is to become familiar with the data. By conducting the interviews, transcribing them and re-reading the gathered data. The second step in the process is to generate initial codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which is similar to the first-order themes described by Gioia et al., (2013). It was done by first highlighting specific parts, critical incidents, of the transcript and categorising these as specific concepts. In categorising the concepts, the exact words of the interviewee were used as much as possible. When codes overlapped with each other a lot, they were grouped together in the same theme. Indeed, the third step is the search for themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This step shows a lot of similarities with the development of second-order themes used in the Gioia Methodology (Gioia et al., 2013). By comparing the concepts and looking for similarities between them, these second-order themes were established. Step four in the process is to review the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This was done by checking whether the themes relate to the codes and transcripts. Up to this phase in the research, data and themes were not compared with existing literature. This is because having intimate knowledge of the literature too early can lead to forming prior hypothesis and can make the researchers blind to other outcomes (Gioia et al., 2012). In other words, conformation bias is avoided as much as feasible. The fifth step in Thematic Analysis consists of giving names to the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After this step, the aggerate dimensions of the Gioia methodology were included (Gioia et al., 2012). Here, the second order themes are further generalised into the third order aggerate dimensions to arrive at the overarching cultural standards. The last step in the Thematic Analysis is to produce the report.

3.4 Results Verification by Experts

The results, i.e., the French cultural standards, were submitted for assessment to a number of experts in the field of French culture. This is because according to Fink et al., (2005) a central problem in establishing cultural standards is cultural interpretation bias. It

means that the researcher's culture, experiences, stereotypes, and prejudices can influence the classification of cultural standards. The experts were asked to review the critical incidents and the cultural standards deduced from these critical incidents. The inclusion of experts helps to strengthen this qualitative research because of more in-depth interpretation of results, leading to a more reliable outcome (Nyumba et al., 2018).

The experts referred to are one French citizen and one Dutch citizen. These individuals are chosen as experts because people use their own culture-specific orientation system to interpret the world around them (Thomas, 2010). The French thus use a French culture orientation system to interpret and act upon the situations they engage in. Even though not every French person is aware of cultural standards and values, it can be assumed that they do know what typical French behaviour is, and what is not. Therefore, it can reasonably be assumed that the comments made by the French experts in essence make the critical incidents and cultural standards found concrete.

With the knowledge of the experts some incidents or cultural standards were dropped because they were considered not typical enough, and the description of the remaining cultural standards was completed and refined. In addition, the underlying values were also assessed by these experts. Lastly, the experts were asked to comment on a correct way to deal with the critical incidents to avoid clashes. The steps taken in this research have resulted in a clear description of French cultural standards with a description of how the Dutch and the French differ. This is supported with a catalogue of concrete situations which illustrate the cultural frictions.

4. Results

In this chapter the results of the study are presented. The French cultural standards that were identified during this research are described by a definition, quotes form the interviews and the opposing Dutch perspective. In addition, the cultural standards are grouped together under cultural values.

4.1 Cultural Standards

Following a thorough analysis of the interviews and additional evaluation by the focus group, sixteen French cultural standards have been identified. These French cultural

standards are presented in table 3. Cultural standards that were mentioned by fewer than three interviewees are not included in the table as they are seen as not typical enough.

Table 3 French Cultural Standards

Cultural Standard	Description	Mentioned by interviewees
Respect	You show respect to a superior, someone who is higher (Age, Position, Social status, Seniority, Education)	9
Acquired rights	You defend the honour and the acquired rights belonging to your position and profession	8
Status showing	Professional pride and status are openly shown and higher status individuals are taken more seriously	8
Relations	People distance themselves from strangers with whom they have no relationship	7
Power division	You must respect the hierarchy (ranking) in organisations and society	7
Hide problems	Mistakes are not admitted. Apologies not offered. Problems are not reported.	7
Verbal aggression	It is normal to express your anger and aggression	6
Elegant communication	(Difficult) messages are communicated in an elegant way	5
Control	The authority checks and intervenes when (he thinks) things go wrong	5
Relational exercise of power	An official decides for himself whether he follows the procedure or not	4
Cooperation	Cooperation requires an established relationship between people were the two parties trust each other	4
Truc	Reaching your goal through non-standard or unofficial ways passing rules, procedures, and assignments by drawing your own plan	4
Network	Involving friends to fix something or get something done or get relevant information	3
Obedience	Subordinates carry out assignments, without questioning what the chief has ordered	3
Formality	In a business context you stay formal and distanced from the other party	3
Verbal ability	High verbal ability is a sign of high civilization and intelligence, increasing one's status	3

The French cultural standards from a Dutch perspective are described more extensively in the text below. First, a neutral description of the cultural standard is given. This is followed by a few quotes from the interviews, which show critical incidents where this cultural standard is involved. Each section ends with the Dutch perspective on the French cultural standard, explaining what Dutch cultural standards are likely to clash with this French standard.

Respect

The hierarchy in France is well-respected by French individuals, especially when a higher ranked individual is present. When this is the case, they look up to the higher ranked individual. However, they may gossip about him/her behind his/her back. Again, this can be work-related, but this also happens to authorities outside of work like the police and the state. One must always show respect to a superior by acknowledging his/her authority. You should never question his/her status by behaving like you know better. This comes across as disrespectful. Self-initiative of subordinates must be tactically and submissively communicated, considering authority and loyalty so as not to infringe on the authority of the boss. Also, self-initiative should be brought up in a private setting with the boss only and not in front of others. If the boss thinks it is a good idea, he takes credit for the work.

One of the interviewees noted: *"In the afternoon we left that place, we went to eat in another place. Well, I was doing something I wasn't done with yet. And then I said to my supervisor: I'll finish it first and then I'll go there. That was impossible. I had to go with him now. I said no, I'm going to finish this and then I'll come. No, I had to come. I say: I'm going to finish this. You go, I'll come. Well, he was just fuming when I didn't drop it and went with him (Interviewee 12)."*

Another said: *"They also really look up to their boss. But I think they are sneaky. When they talk to their supervisor, they are very nice. They say, yes, sir, yes sir, good idea sir. And as soon as he turns his back, he is gossiped again. That is how it was in those greenhouses too. It was always chatting and acting crazy. And whenever one of those chiefs from that department came and walked into that greenhouse, there was silence (Interviewee 14)."*

To the Dutch, always acting in a nice and overly respectful manner to higher ranked individuals is seen as hypocritical. Especially if this person is gossiped when not present. This goes against the Dutch value of telling the truth. In addition, this hypocritical behaviour in the eyes of the Dutch goes against the Dutch values of moderation and equality. It is viewed as overdoing something which has no purpose in the mind of the Dutch and also assumes that people are unequal. In the Netherlands, you should be honest and moderate, and everybody is seen as equal. Opinions about someone must be told straight but should not be overly positive or negative. When Dutch people feel they cannot be open and honest about someone and instead have to be respectful, they might feel repressed as they cannot openly express their opinion and do whatever they think is best themselves.

Acquired rights

The French have a strong tendency to defend the honour and the acquired rights that belong to certain positions and professions. This means the French strongly adhere to these principles, even if they may seem outdated to members from other cultures. Adhering to these principles also entails that the French have a strong sense of duty derived from their position and the traditions of their profession. Using this sense of duty and the customs of their position, a Frenchman determines where he is or is not responsible for and what he has the right to or is entitled to. For example, this means that they can leave their job when the clock says they can, even if the tasks are not finished yet, simply because they have the right to leave. It can also entail that a Frenchman can refuse to carry out assignments that do not fall within the traditions of his profession. These tasks might lower their status if they are less honourable than the tasks their current position requires them to perform.

For example, a participant noted: "*I once stood here in my own village at the post office. I will never forget it. It was one minute before 12 or 12 o'clock exactly. And the postman, he stood in front of me with a smile on his face and closed the door. For a while I have shunned the post office here in my village. Such a village is dependent on these kinds of small amenities. I just thought, why not be a little friendly to your customers? But well, that gentleman, let me put it very carefully, very neatly. He shut the door with a smile on his face because it was noon so he could have lunch (Interviewee 12).*"

Someone else said: "*Those French, they only do what is stated in their job description. And four o'clock is four o'clock for them. And they don't work in the rain either. So, there we were, we were busy, it was 30 degrees, very warm. Then two drops of rain fell, and the French ran inside where they would stand with their arms folded and look from behind the window, waiting for those drops to disappear. We just thought they were crazy. You must go on and if it rains too hard, you put on a raincoat. But they don't. Or in the afternoon at four o'clock when we were still busy. And then the forklift, which had become entrenched in the earth, was dug in. We were looking for the forklift driver. The thing was completely entrenched but the driver just went home. Because four o'clock is four o'clock (Interviewee 14).*"

To a Dutchmen, this behaviour is very strange as it comes across as if the French do not care about the work they do. A Dutch person could say that they only care about themselves and not about the work, indicating they think the French cannot be trusted to properly do their work and are irresponsible. A Dutch employee would likely feel responsibility for the results

of their actions and would try to solve problems. This is connected to the Dutch value Guilt. This Dutch would feel guilty if they are seen as irresponsible. The Dutch are surprised that the French put their personal interests ahead and do not aligning them to the interests of the company.

Status showing

French people openly shown their status and their professional pride all the time. All sorts of material and immaterial attributes can raise your status. This includes seniority, authority, titles, degrees, education, work experience, position, rank, and knowledge. People constantly enforce and show their status. In meetings, French people like to speak a lot about everything they know because this shows their knowledge and competency which increases one's status. Once or twice a year, bosses might come down from their desks to the work floor to shake hands with their employees and thank them for their efforts. This confirms the status of the boss. Higher status individuals are taken more seriously than lower status individuals and people with a permanent contract are taken more seriously than those with a temporary contract. This also means that ideas or complaints from lower status individuals are rarely acted upon.

One of the interviewees said: *"The boss had hired a salesperson and at a certain point that salesperson comes to me and says: may I call myself commercial director? On my card. Can you put that on my card for me? The boss asked her why and she responded: Then I can sell much more because I am more important. But that salesperson did not have that position. We had the same thing with the secretary. At a given moment she said: I am an assistant director. Well no. You're the secretary, that's all (Interviewee 5)."*

And another said: *"I worked at BNP for two and a half years at a location with about 3000 employees. And during Christmas, the second highest boss who I had never seen came by. He usually spent a lot of time in London. He had his office inside the office building where I worked. But he was kind of a ghost. I really had never seen him. And then at Christmas, we received a message from our manager stating that at Christmas, during a certain time we had to be ready because the boss comes to shake hands. We were all neatly lined up and then the big boss came by at a time, just to shake hands. He thanked us for all our efforts that year. But he had no idea who we were. Just a nod and a hand. Then he's gone and you won't see him again for a year. I had never experienced anything like it (Interviewee 7)."*

This behaviour of constantly showing your status can come across as bragging to Dutch people. If people would constantly show their knowledge, abilities, and titles in the Netherlands, they would be viewed as annoying and thinking they are better than someone else. The Dutch like to view everybody as equal and this French behaviour contradicts that Dutch belief. In the Netherlands, you must not think you are better than someone else and everybody should be treated as equals. One must not show that he is superior to another person. Also, when ideas from people with lower status are not taken seriously, you are not striving for the best result. That is not only an unfair and unequal way to treat others, but also a waste of potential as explained by the Dutch value 'Utility'.

Relations

It is very important to have strong personal relationships in France to be trusted. Family and friends form the inner circle of a person's social space. People within the circle are trusted and helped wherever possible. People outside the circle are distrusted and not given much help or attention. The French behaviour may appear formal and aloof to outsiders. For example, they will not ask outsiders how their weekend was or what they did the prior day, and they will not share personal or other important details with outsiders. Only minor attention is given to these people. As time progresses and people share more time or become more dependent on each other, a personal relationship is formed, and more intimate questions may be asked. This relationship is formed in non-work-related situations, for example over lunch or dinner.

One of the interviewees said: *"When I lived in Paris, I knew nobody. And well, I've been invited to birthday parties. If you are new to a group in the Netherlands, you are the centre of attention. Everyone is interested in you. In France it is very different. You really feel like an outsider. If you don't speak French, you aren't really looked after. In the Netherlands you get the benefit of the doubt. You will be immediately included in the group. People trust you directly. It takes a lot longer to be trusted by the French You really have to win their friendship (Interviewee 4)."*

And another said: *"Every year, at the end of the year, we got a dinner from the boss. And then I spent an entire evening sitting next to the financial director of Center Parcs. What struck me; I'd come in and then I'd just sit down at the table. The financial director came to see me. He wanted to know more about me. So he just sat down next to me. He asked, can I sit next to you? Yes, you can. He just wanted to sit next to me, he wanted to know more. Not work related. He wanted to know how*

my wife was and if I had children, and so on and so forth. "What do you think about your son doing this and that?" Then I just invited him to answer some questions too. I also know something about him. He personally had a lot of difficulties, with one daughter and one son. But that information is only shared at that point. Not before. Not in the workplace. (Interviewee 5)."

This French behaviour can be perceived as unfriendly by the Dutch. It can seem like the French are unapproachable and very difficult to get acquainted with. To Dutch people, it is like the French do not care at all about others. For example, the French do not ask their colleagues about what they did on the weekend. This is unfriendly in the eyes of the Dutch because everybody should feel welcomed in Dutch society. The process of making friends in France takes a lot longer than in the Netherlands. To get into the inner circle of a French person, you have to put in time and effort to show them you can be trusted. This is a long process but once you get there, the French will treat you like family. On the contrary, Dutch people rather quickly behave like friends, but this is more superficial than the friendships of the French. There is no need to establish trust, as people are trusted by default. In the Netherlands, everyone tries to keep harmony and avoid conflict. They strive for 'gezelligheid' (to have a friendly atmosphere) in every situation, including work. This entails colleagues can be friends or at least behave like friends. Informal language is used between colleagues.

Power division

There a very clear hierarchy in France and between the hierarchical layers or groups, there is great power division. These different groups can be bosses and subordinates in companies, but also authorities like the police, the state, or someone's parents belong to a higher hierarchical group. When people have contact outside their hierarchical group, communication is very formal and distanced. The hierarchy has to be respected at all times. In general, the boss decides what should happen and his subordinates carry out the assignments. When a subordinate has an initiative, it is not allowed for him to present this to the boss of your own boss. They have to respect the hierarchical order. He has to talk to his own direct boss, who then presents the idea to his own boss. He does that in such a way to make it look like it was his own idea.

One of the interviewees noted: *"The managers ate separately in the cafeteria, they didn't mix with the others. I sat with the CRAs and the managers with the managers. And sometimes project managers or CRAs get promoted. So, they become managers. And they may no longer eat with the*

CRAs. Some pressure is applied, I think. I had that impression. That's how I understood it. That it was expected that when you became a manager, you would no longer eat with the CRA's. That was not accepted. Really divided. I had never seen anything like it (Interviewee 13)."

And another interviewee noted: *"In France we call our direct manager n+1. I am "n", and then +1 is my direct manager. His manager is then n+2. Sometimes, n+2, that manager of my manager. He wants us to present our progress. Well, that will be prepared. And eh. My manager is also a bit afraid of his manager. My manager then wants to present everything to his manager, even if he does not necessarily know what all the details are. If n+2 asks a question and I know the answer and my manager doesn't, my manager will answer anyway. Because he is the manager of the team (Interviewee 4)."*

To Dutch individuals, this power distance and strict hierarchy can come across as unequal and very inefficient at times. The Dutch treat everybody equal, regardless of rank and power as described by the Dutch value 'Equality'. In the Netherlands, it is accepted and even normal to discuss ideas about strategies or best practices with everyone, regardless of hierarchical position. Decision making in the Netherlands is decentral, because it is believed that the workers are the experts in their respective field and the manager acts more like a facilitator. The Dutch could also view the French way of working as inefficient, because well-educated people are not involved in the decision-making process. A Dutch boss would want his employees to think for themselves, not just perform a task. This would be seen as wasted potential because they do not utilise the full potential. This goes against the Dutch value 'Utility'.

Hide problems

The French always want to be seen as competent people who are excellent at whatever they do. In this fashion, mistakes or problems are signs of incompetency. In order to not be viewed as incompetent and to avoid involvement from their superiors, the French tend to not admit mistakes to their superiors. They try to fix the situation themselves. They also tend to not offer apologies, not report problems, and shift their own responsibility to others if that prevents them from being blamed. Especially if you have a temporary position instead of a permanent position because people with a permanent position are more protected by their status. At the same time, French employees like to have decision-making power as this increases a person's status, making them more important. So, when someone needs your

signature to get a 'go' for a procedure, you are important. However, if something goes wrong in the procedure but you signed off on it, you make every attempt possible to not get blamed for the mistake as this would decrease your level of competency and greatly harm your honourable position and power.

A participant said: *"A fellow student (Thierry) of my employer came to work as an assistant in our pharmacy when he was on holiday. In the beginning there was a little bit of scanning. Later, I asked him how I should do a certain task. He explained to me how I should do it. A little while later, my boss came back from vacation. I found out that it was not the right method that he taught me. I explained to my boss that Thierry explained to me that the task should be done like that. And Thierry just said, crystal-clear. No, I didn't say that at all. It wasn't important at all, but it was the fact that he could lie like that. I went to my boss the next day and I said fine, I get that he's your friend, but I've noticed how easily he lies, and I'll tell you now that no matter what happens, I don't trust him anymore. Whatever happens. If ever there is a conflict, I have now seen how it can lie. So, I just don't believe him anymore and I don't trust him anymore. Thierry never came back to me about it and still behaves friendly towards me (Interviewee 6)."*

Another participant said: *"We were in a meeting with my bosses' boss, and we had more information than my direct boss. I had just been honest about what the situation is like. While my boss was covering it all up a bit. And I think that's a bit French too. Saying things like everything is going well and prospering. But no one knows exactly what is going well, what is prospering. My boss was covering it up and we were just being honest (Interviewee 4)."*

This behaviour comes across as irresponsible to the Dutch. In the Netherlands it is normal to make your own decisions and take responsibility for your actions. It is also appreciated to express feelings of guilt or remorse when you have done something wrong. This is something the French do not do. They will also not apologise for their actions. When French people cover up mistakes or make it look like things are better than they truly are, the Dutch might easily look at that as lying because they do not like pretending things are better than they are. Furthermore, in the Netherlands, it is a good thing to be honest about situations and take responsibility for your actions. This makes things clear and allows for progress to be made towards a better future.

Verbal aggression

In French society, verbally expressing anger and aggression is part of daily life. People quickly raise their voice, swear, or use aggressive and intimidating language. This behaviour is normal. These heated discussions are honourable and effective ways to get attention for your argument or to show your power. The French can express their anger or yell at each other rather quickly. Especially, this is by people who are higher in the hierarchy to their subordinates, but not the other way round. In traffic, French people can be passionate and even verbally violent towards other drivers. This is done to show your power and confirm your position in the situation. In business, becoming angry can result in getting the attention you want if you are not immediately taken seriously. It is not necessarily a sign of conflict. This behaviour is not meant to be overly aggressive or intimidating and only rarely has serious consequences for the relationship. These arguments are simply forgotten about, and after a little while everything returns to a non-heated state.

One of the interviewees said: *"I was literally called to my boss like a little kid. It is true, he was so savage and devilish, how I had gotten it into my head to pass over him, that was the feeling he had. I've never experienced anything like it. But I just let him rage. The foam was on his lips, he was that angry. He turned red. I was like, is there something wrong or something? I thought he wasn't well. I just let him rage. I thought it was pathetic, I really thought it was. I almost felt sorry for him. And he is a man that I appreciate and respect very much. It is someone who has heart for the cause. But I thought, he also has to participate in the modern world and that also means that there are more and more employees with initiatives and ideas, and you name it. And then I got the response, literally. Emma, he said. Do you know Asterix and Obelix? Of course, I know that. He says, they are in a village, and we are now the village, you are now outside the village. And the whole village is against you. I thought it was such a weird comparison, I almost laughed, I thought it was a joke. But that's serious, that was really serious. It was as if he said you go back into your cage (Interviewee 7)."*

This interviewee also said: *"I found out that I just need to scream more often. So yes, I came to our car dealer in Marseille when I made an appointment, because something with the car needed to be repaired. I showed up at that time and was put in a kind of waiting room and no one showed up. You have to stand up for yourself everywhere, you have to stand up for yourself here every time, every day, have a big mouth. And that's not in my nature. But I did learn that, especially in Marseille. At a certain point I really just started screaming. 'I want this now and I want to see that*

man now!' And that's a language they understand. It was like oh okay, madam is angry, well, then we're going to do something about that. But you have to get angry first (Interviewee 7)."

Whilst another interviewee said: *"I had a boss who, for example, did not trust his staff. That that was part of it and that is why there was constant yelling. It was one of the first times I worked in France, so I was shocked by that. I mean, I wasn't used to people yelling at me. Especially since he wasn't always right. So yeah, that was a bit. But he could just really scream. Just instead of saying: Can we see how we're going to solve this; he just yelled and swore (Interviewee 15)."*

In the Netherlands, one should always try to avoid loud speaking which is interpretated as a form of aggression. In the eyes of the Dutch, showing aggression and shouting is interpreted as conflict. After a conflict, the relationship is damaged and must be repaired. Dutch people only raise their voice or swear when they are extremely angry and have tried all other means to reach their goal. To get attention, the Dutch would simply say things like 'we have a problem' or 'please listen because I have an important message'. This will result in everyone listening to the speaker. And when a Dutch person becomes really angry, they will usually apologise for their behaviour afterwards because they feel ashamed of what they did. The Dutch would say that the French quickly lose their temper, which is a bad thing in the Netherlands. Losing one's temper can result in loss of respect or loss of relationship. Problems are solves using a normal tone of voice and by reaching consensus among all participants.

Elegant communication

French people tend to communicate messages, especially difficult ones, in an elegant way. This means they do not directly speak about what truly happened or what they truly think, but they indirectly talk about this. If small mistakes occur, like arriving too late to an appointment or forgetting to do something, they will not just say this. They will likely come up with some form of a plausible explanation to not lose face and to not be seen as incompetent. It also works the other way around. If a French person has to communicate a difficult message to someone, they will either say this in an indirect but respectful and elegant way or they will show it with their actions. If someone does not like a gift, he or she can either say this indirectly and elegantly or the person can choose to use it once or twice and the never look at it again. That will then be the message to the other person that the gift may not have been the right one.

A participant noted: *"I've noticed that the French lie a lot. Even about things that just do not matter. I think, just tell the truth for once. You can make a mistake. Just say that something went wrong somewhere. And when something has gone wrong, they have to come up with some excuse. Why don't you just tell me what happened? That's normal. They have to come up with some other crap like, 'a mail bag has been stolen.' Something just went wrong. I've never understood why that is necessary, giving excuses about every small thing that goes wrong. Incomprehensible. But I think that's ingrained in them (Interviewee 1)."*

And another participant said: *"During my first birthday in our relationship, he was still living in Marseille. He is French, I am Dutch. And I lived in Paris and then I got a gift in the mail. So, I opened the gift. It was obvious it was his. It was a watch. Pretty nice watch, but I never wear watches myself. But I thought well, I'm probably never going to wear that watch. I thought, should I be honest and say 'I think I think it's very beautiful, but it's not quite my style and I don't wear watches.' Or should I just do him a favour and wear it every now and then? My Dutch friends were very resolute, they said if you want your relationship to last, you have to be honest from the start and say: 'I think the gesture is very beautiful, I really like it, but I'm not going to wear it.' My French friends said: you should do him a favour, wear it a few times and then it ends up in a drawer and you never wear it again. That is the signal for him to understand that it may not have been a very good present. In the end I stayed true to my Dutch roots. I just had to be honest. And that was very hard for him to hear. He really thought: 'It's all wrong, why does she say that?' He was really disappointed in my response. He was a little offended because he obviously spent a lot of time and attention to pick out the present. He really took it the wrong way (Interviewee 7)."*

In the Netherlands, people are very direct in their communication. The Dutch are generally open and honest about everything and everyone. This is appreciated as it is a quick way to get to the truth, which is believed to eventually come out anyway. This elegant way of communicating by the French is thought of as indirect and inefficient. The Dutch could say things like 'The French always beat around the bush and never speak directly.' When people do not speak the truth, even if it is only to cover up small things, this is quickly seen as lying in the Netherlands. Lying is irresponsible behaviour because it is in direct conflict with the truth, one of the cornerstones of Dutch behaviour.

Control

Strict control by French bosses, as well as the state, is an important cultural standard in France. It entails the authority regularly checking up on the subordinates/citizens to make

sure they properly perform their tasks. This is normal because people do not always feel responsible for their results performing tasks they like and doing as little work as possible when the boss in not around. However, an important note here is that the boss only intervenes when he knows for sure that things do not go right. When the boss is wrong, this leads to a reduction in his perceived competence, which is very unwanted. So, as long as the result is good, a French boss will not show his micromanagement or intervene. This lowers his status and shows distrust in his employees. Only when the situation is out of control, will a French boss intervene and give strict orders on how things need to be done. This happens in a very authoritarian way. The subordinates will then obey without question.

A participant told the following story: *"I declare my expenses and they check this. The cost of the train tickets, what time I bought them, etcetera. Well, I'll get to a hospital at ten o'clock or so. I usually buy my lunch when I arrive. But then they said, you bought your lunch at half past ten. Suggesting I had already quit or something. Saying I won't arrive until 10 o'clock so why would I already have bought lunch? What's up with that? And then I think, that's none of your business. He had very specific questions about how I organize myself on the site. He checked my receipts and stuff. The time I arrived and the time I bought something. He looked at the receipt. Things like that just go too far for me (Interviewee 13)."*

Another interviewee said: *"In France, people are terrified of checks by the state, where you are ticked off. And those state checks are not the same as in the Netherlands. I can give you that in a note. That's straight forward and strict here. In France it is, let's say, as if the Stasi is passing by. In the Netherlands, I have never had that feeling because we are jointly looking for a solution to problems. You don't have that in France. You are wrong, without question. You caused things to not go well (Interviewee 3)."*

And yet another said: *"For employees, the goal is: How do I do as little as possible? But in a way that it is not seen that way. So as soon as we can sit down, we sit down, as soon as we can talk about what I saw on television yesterday and what we ate yesterday, we will. And the customers can wait. They are not important (Interviewee 9)."*

If a French boss would treat a Dutch employee in this controlling way, the Dutch would perceive this as annoying because they feel the boss does not have confidence in them or their ability to fulfil their responsibilities themselves. The Dutch have a strong sense of self-determination and believe they can do tasks themselves. Dutch people do not like the idea of someone controlling and checking them all the time. This makes them feel very repressed.

The Dutch naturally have a desire to decide for themselves and take responsibility for their actions. It includes receiving recognition for a job well done. This leads to a feeling of accomplishment which motivates them to even improve their work next time. Dutch people can get very annoyed when Frenchmen do not take responsibility for their work. They find it unbelievable that people do not work when the boss is not checking up on them. Doing tasks properly is what every Dutchmen strives for all the time. They feel like the French should be ashamed because they do not properly perform their tasks.

Relational exercise of power

This French cultural standard is about officials who exercise their power by making decisions about someone else's situation. When a certain procedure is in place, officials can decide for themselves whether to follow the procedure or not. The French do this at their own discretion. The mere fact that a procedure exists, does not mean that people have to act accordingly. This can happen as long as there is no superior ordering the official to act differently. It is important for these officials to show their power, even if they only possess minor power. For example, a police officer can decide to enforce a certain rule as he sees fit. This means, for example, that police officers decide in the moment whether to give a ticket or not, based on their own judgement of what is appropriate. If people show respect towards the official, this can very well result in a better outcome for the person being addressed by the official. The outcome of the situation is in the hands of the official.

A participant said: *"I've been pulled over by Gendarmerie a few times, and they just overlook certain offences. I drove like 40 kilometres an hour too fast or so, in my taxi bus. They just checked my papers and then they said, watch out a little because you were speeding 40 kilometres, but we're condoning it now. Or when I did not have my seat belt on. They would just ride next to me and honk their horns. And then they were pointing to seat belt. But they did not stop and fine me. That is very strict in the Netherlands. You immediately get a fine. Here they are a bit, a bit more lenient, you know. The rules are not complied with. I think they just make up their own mind. That they decide for themselves. An officer decides for himself at that moment. And if he doesn't like your face or you disrespect him, you will be dealt with severely. Then you do get that fine and they even take you to the police station if you are unlucky (Interviewee 14)."*

And someone else said: *"My first job was over. I had to search for a few months before I finally got a job in the social sector, because that takes a while, you know. And I had a residence permit. At the time we still had residence permits, but that is no longer the case. And it passed. I had*

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to go to the prefecture and got a stamp. And there it was like 'your residence permit is valid for six weeks'. I said thank you, thank you. You really have to be friendly to those people, because otherwise you just won't get the stamp, while you are entitled to it. And at one point I went there because after my second stamp I still had no work. And then she said: no, you won't get a stamp anymore. You go back to the Netherlands. But I was aware of the legislation. I was entitled to an extension, but she just didn't give it. She just didn't give it. She didn't feel like it. She said: 'go back to the Netherlands.' That is the individual freedom of the official. But there was a foundation where you could go for things like that. So, I called them up, said well, I've got a problem. I almost have a job, but they don't want to renew my residence permit. And if I don't have a residence permit, I won't get a job at all. The person said wait a minute, I'll give them a call. And I waited an hour. Then I got a call back from the foundation saying I could go back to the prefecture. So, I went to the prefecture. Met that same official. And then I got a stamp. She even smiled at me (Interviewee 8)."

In the Netherlands it is not accepted to disregard procedures. Rules and procedures allow for order and structure to exist. Without rules and procedures, the Dutch would think there would be chaos. This individual freedom of people who decide for themselves whether to follow the procedure is strange for Dutch people. It is an unequal way of treating people, something that is unacceptable in the Netherlands. In the example of the prefecture, Dutch people would view it as a massive waste of time and find that very annoying because it goes against the Dutch value of 'Utility'. They might also feel that you need to be overly nice to officials, because if you do not do that, you can deal with the consequences. Being overly nice conflicts with the Dutch value of 'Moderation'.

Cooperation

It is very important to have strong personal relationships in France to be trusted. To cooperate well, personal relationships are necessary. These are regularly found between friends and family, but also sometimes between business relations. In business, an established relationship with a seller or a buyer is strong. This relationship is hard to be broken. You will not give up a strong relationship with a seller when an unknown seller is cheaper. They too first need to earn trust to enter someone's inner circle. If there is no relationship, people are not willing to do business.

A typical example was given by someone: *"I went to the market with plants. I had the best plants because I picked the best quality plants from the greenhouse. I was allowed to pick them myself. And I had them for a bargain price. So, you would say: you will sell out in no time. But that's*

not how it works in France. These people are very suspicious. They simply have regular contact with someone, their florist or with a horticulturist in the area. It's very much favouritism. Also, for example, I wanted to deliver to flower shops. So, then I took a bus to all those flower shops. I said: well, those plants that you have, I can deliver them for half the price of the wholesaler where you buy now. They didn't take it. Maybe 1 in 20 stores I went to, wanted to buy a few plants to try. But they just have relations with dealers. And whether that dealer sells expensive plants of poorer quality, it does not matter (Interviewee 14)."

Another typical example is: *"At one point I wanted to have a pump in my pond. And I had no idea how much those things cost. And then I found a company about 60 kilometers from here. And then I called. I say: I see you have such a pump, but I do not see a price. Can you tell me how expensive that pump is? And then the man said: no, I'm not going to say that, you should come by. Really. It is true. I say, sir I live 60 kilometers away. I say, that means driving 120 kilometers to hear from you how much that pump costs. I said, just tell me. He would not tell me. Well, then I'm not going to buy a pump from you. That was good. He did not care. It's unbelievable, isn't it?! (Interviewee 12)."*

This behaviour of the French can be perceived as unhelpful by the Dutch because people do not help someone when there is no established relationship. And when the French are unwilling to drop a relationship for a better deal, the Dutch might even see this as stupidly inefficient because the Dutch focus more on utility and find relations irrelevant. In the example by interviewee 12 above, a Dutchman would view driving to form a relationship as a waste of time and he sees no use in doing that. Also, forming a solid relationship in France takes a lot longer than in the Netherlands. You have to put in time and effort and show you can be trusted to get into the inner circle of a French person. This process takes time, but once you get into the inner circle, the French will treat you like family. This process is very different in the Netherlands. Dutch people establish friendships and relationships quickly. However, these are more superficial than the French relationships. It is not necessary to establish trust in a Dutch relationship because everyone is trusted by default.

"Truc"

This French cultural standard entails that it is normal for French individuals to reach certain goals through non-standard or unofficial ways. They tend to draw their own plan to get the result they want themselves. In certain situations, people can choose to ignore the formal procedure to avoid inefficiencies. A French doctor who does not speak a foreign language

can choose to tell detailed and personal information to a bystander who does speak the language. He is then asked to translate that information to the foreign patient. To the French doctor, this is an effective and efficient approach to get the information across to the patient. This behaviour is also used to stop carrying out unwanted assignments. First, assignments from superiors are shortly obeyed, after which they come up with a trick (Truc) to get out of it. This is done because the French employees themselves always think they know the best ways to perform certain tasks. They do make sure that their boss does not find out that they did things differently from what was ordered.

It was noted by an interviewee that: *"There is an awful lot of regulation. There are an awful lot of procedures. But there is also a lot of individual freedom, because otherwise you cannot live in France. As a result, there is a difference between what should happen, and what people think about it. I can give one, one example of that. I do a lot of volunteer work. I often meet people who are in hospital. Thus, I also encounter doctors. All the things these doctors tell me, it is unbelievable. Unbelievable. Yes, incredible. For example, I was asked to translate, as a translator. But I'm not an official translator. And well, this and that happened to this patient, sharing all medical details. He is not really allowed to do that of course but he does it anyway because it is important for the patient to know. The people are very pragmatic (Interviewee 8)."*

Another said: *"I thought at the very beginning. I explain what I want, and then people say they understand. And afterwards I would check up on them. When it comes to cleaning or making the beds. I want that done in a certain way. I explain that. But all rooms look different, just what I don't want. Then you almost have to show it to them. And after that it works fine, of course. They then do five rooms and then you come by and see that it is not at all the way you want it. Those are futile details, but if you have a lot of stars, then it just has to be very good. All equally beautiful. All towels should be folded up in the same way with one thing folded this way and one thing folded the other way. The guests think that's wonderful. But you have to explain that over and over. You have to keep chasing that, because if you're not, it will be a mess again after four weeks. I think you should check a lot and be very strict because the people make it easy for themselves and ignore what I want. I think that is a characteristic that I have come across much more here than in the Netherlands. On all levels (Interviewee 10)."*

The Dutch perspective on this French behaviour includes thinking the French always bend the rules and make their own plans to get something done without informing others and especially not the boss. Drawing your own plan at work to avoid doing somethings seems counterproductive to the Dutch you do not do what is required from you. Sharing someone's

medical information with outsiders is also not done in the Netherlands because you do not respect that person's privacy. Furthermore, the Dutch believe rules and procedures are made to provide structure and order to society. When rules are consistently broken, the Dutch question the usefulness of the rule. When procedures and rules are not followed at all, this results in chaos in the mind of the Dutch.

Network

Having a network is of great importance in France. Outsiders are distrusted and need to develop their network in order to get things done. Friends and family are trusted, and they help each other to get things done and get introduced to high-ranking individuals. People help each other in all sorts of ways, including getting medical care or getting through long and tedious governmental procedures. Furthermore, certain jobs can only be gotten if you can use your network, and you know the right people. This is normal practice in France. It is normal for certain high-ranking positions to be filled by people within the same network. Sometimes, positions are occupied by people who do not necessarily have the knowledge or skills but just have the right network. This means people are not always hired based on their capabilities but based on the people they know and the network they have.

One of the interviewees noted: *"And the French also have what they call système D. D comes from débrouiller. Débrouiller is like, uh, arranging things. The French often say things like, I have a friend at the ministry who can help. Just a little snooping. The French are good at that. Still within the legal rules, but always just finding their way. For example, when the vaccine just came on the market, a friend of mine called saying, I know where you can get a vaccine very quickly if you want. Like getting through a backdoor and taking advantage of your network. Nothing illegal. So, it is not like something illegal happened. But that's getting things done (Interviewee 2)."*

Another interviewee noted: *"Often, you can't get certain jobs because you don't have someone who nominates you. Even if you have 20 degrees and a much better resume, when someone comes who is a nephew, or a relative or an acquaintance, they just take the position, and you can forget about it. That is how it works here. If you don't know someone, you just can't get in. I've noticed that quite often. And people have said that too. 'You don't have to try to apply there, because you only get in there if you know someone.' It is a closed off circuit (Interviewee 14)."*

The Dutch may view this as unequal or unfair treatment of people. This conflicts with the Dutch value of 'Equality'. In the Netherlands, people are treated equally and not based on

their network. In France, your network determines your success. The greater your network, the greater your chances of success. Friends help each other to get things done and this does not necessarily always go by set rules or procedures. This is strange to Dutch people as they believe rules and procedures are necessary to maintain order in society. Furthermore, it can feel like hard work and studying for a diploma do not pay off because people get into positions based on who they know and not based on their skills and abilities. This can be unsatisfying and even demotivating for Dutch people. They may feel their talents are wasted when less capable people are hired to do the job they applied for. Wasting potential goes against the Dutch value of 'Utility'.

Obedience

For French employees, it is normal to do exactly what your boss tells you to do. They obey their boss when given an order and never discuss or argue with their boss as he knows best. Orders and instructions are strictly followed, even when they know the given order is a terrible idea to execute. From a young age, French people are thought to show respect and obedience towards someone with authority, in the first place the parents. Furthermore, if you openly suggest performing tasks differently, you take the boss's chair. This is considered inappropriate as you question the authority of the boss. Furthermore, when given an order, saying 'no' is out of the question. This results in the French employee carrying out their assigned tasks, but they complete it with minimum effort. Once completed, French employees will simply wait for the boss to assign them a new task. They see no point in making extra effort or challenging the status quo. Keeping work as simple as possible is good, while working harder or more efficient is bad and unwanted. However, if an authority asks an employee to work overtime, they will obey because they have no choice. And it is an opportunity to impress the boss.

For example, a participant said: *"That's one of the things I struggled with when I took over a research lab, where I thought people were paid to think. If I got into a discussion with someone, they would do everything I said and that sometimes failed. They then said very kindly, but we could have told you that in advance. I said well, then you are stupid. You should have told me in advance, I would have taken it from you. You do this every day, I don't (Interviewee 3)."*

And another example by a different participant: *"What I also find very strange is that people just sit and wait. When you're not there, they walk in circles, so to speak, waiting for orders.*

While you can also use your own imagination to solve things. I mean, the boss isn't the one who has to find all the solutions. The manager is not the one who always knows best. He is the one who organizes everything. Creatively looking for a solution yourself, that's something I miss very often. People are waiting for orders. Sometimes it feels like the military. The people are very clever with their machines. But when it comes to the finish, it's up to the boss again to say: You have to do it this way. Even though they've done it so many times before. Same idea again: waiting and not being creative (Interviewee 10)."

This French behaviour can be perceived as passive and lazy by the Dutch. In the Netherlands, you are expected to take initiative and to always look for and suggest improvements. If a Dutch employee would merely follow orders, this person would be seen as unvaluable as he is not trying to improve business processes. Opposite to the French norm, giving your opinion and challenging the status quo is positive as this can be a fruitful way initiate discussion to improve efficiency for the Dutch. Also, Dutchmen might feel repressed if they cannot speak their mind because it is important to have discussions to find the best solution, represented by the Dutch cultural value of self-determination.

Formality

To French people, it is normal to act in a formal and professional way when in a business context. Even when people have known each other for years and are good friends, in a business context the French behave formal. They speak in distanced language. For example, people are addressed with monsieur/madame followed by their last name and people use 'vous' instead of 'tu', Especially to their boss. However, the boss can say 'tu' to his subordinates whilst the subordinates say 'vous'. This formality continues until the highest ranked individual decides it is okay to be a bit more informal and start using first names and/or 'tu'. Even then, it is possible the subordinate feels uncomfortable saying 'tu' to their superior because they have a lot of respect for him or hir. Moreover, they do not discuss personal details with each other. Conversations are limited to work related subjects and maybe a few superficial personal details. Conversating about personal details only happens outside of work. This can be seen as a form of respect or politeness towards each other on the work floor. But this formality and communication style is also present outside of work. When French people have contact with others outside their direct social circle, this same style of communication is applied. They will not have in-depth conversations with strangers on a party. Instead, they will stay formal and only make small talk.

One of the participants said: *"When I set up the office in France for ABN AMRO, I implemented the Dutch corporate culture. That was possible because it was a new company. I said, we just say 'tu' and the first name. But there were a lot of people who said, I can't say 'tu' to the general manager. So, they would call me by my first name, but then they would say 'vous' to me. It is a form of politeness. And some employees just find it pleasant that it remains just 'monsieur' and 'vous' (Interviewee 2)."*

With another saying: *"That's weird again. In the work setting I do say 'vous' to my boss. I do address him by his first name. But if we meet in private, I just say 'tu''. It's part of work here. In the beginning I was bothered by the this because I think people do not have to say 'vous', but it is a form of politeness. And only if someone tells you that you can say 'tu', then you do that. But in the work setting and to customers, it is always 'vous'. Especially if you don't know them. Only if they are much younger than me, I will use 'tu' (Interviewee 6)."*

To the Dutch, being overly polite is unnecessary and may even be seen as flattery or playing up to the boss. Dutchmen do not use a lot of polite language. To them, it can come across as cold and unfriendly because they feel people create a lot of distance, and thus inequality. The Dutch always strive for 'gezelligheid' (to have a friendly atmosphere) in every situation, including work. Distance between people opposes this Dutch norm. This form of speaking is only used at the very beginning of relationships with people who you respect much. However, this very quickly changes to informal communication as this is considered more friendly (gezellig).

Verbal ability

For the French, proper use of language, both spoken and written, is important. It shows that you are a capable and competent person. It is a sign of high civilization and intelligence, increasing one's status. Since a French person wants to be seen as competent, they will use proper and refined language. When French people need to speak in a foreign language, they are afraid to make mistakes. In France, making mistakes is seen as being incompetent and that is unwanted. Therefore, French people try to avoid speaking in foreign languages whenever possible. In speaking, the proper use of language is equally important to getting your point across. The French use logical and precise language and always avoid contradictions.

An example by an interviewee is: *"In France you are heavily judged on your language use and on your command of the language. If you do not master the language and make a lot of mistakes, you will immediately be put in a corner. This not only reflects on you, but also on whatever product you try to sell. They will not take you or your product seriously. If you just don't master your language well, can't write well, that's just a handicap. And so, when French people need to speak in another language like English, they're afraid they'll be mistaken for stupid. They say, 'then I'm all going to make mistakes and then people think I'm not serious.' The Dutch are easily inclined to think, 'those French don't speak English, et cetera.' But it's not that the French can't speak English, but that they have a bit of shame for their level of English. So you have a lot of French who express themselves very well in French, also in writing. But they say, 'if I do it in English, people will think I'm not intelligent, that I'm stupid. I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to try to express myself in English (Interviewee 2)."*

Another interviewee said: *"It's not that they are proud of their own language. They do carry that out, but in fact they are just ashamed of the level of English they have. So that's also just one reason why they might not dare to talk to foreigners easily. And then they often come across as arrogant (Interviewee 4)."*

And yet another interviewee noted that: *"The level of English is a bit of a tragedy. They can't figure it out. I really feel shame in my husband. He really wants to say things, but he doesn't dare to go off. He's just afraid to, eh. He is not afraid to be laughed at. It's not a loss of face either. But there's something in it. (Interviewee 7)."*

In the Netherlands, the content of the message matters a lot more than the way it is conveyed. In general, if a salesperson has a good product for a good price, he or she can get a deal regardless of (im)proper use of language. The quality of the product and the price matter more than the person you are buying it from. The Dutch are also not afraid to speak foreign languages. They might know they make mistakes, but they care more about saying what they want to say then about the way in which they say it. Getting the message across is the most important factor for the Dutch.

In addition to the cultural standards mentioned in above, three more French cultural standards were discovered. However, these are not included because they were mentioned only once or twice by interviewees. Therefore, they are considered not typical enough. A short description of these three cultural standards is provided here.

The first is called '*Own area of expertise*'. French people possess a strong sense of duty derived from their position and the customs of their profession. They all believe that they themselves know the best ways to perform tasks that belong to their profession and do not like being told to do things differently by others. One must not interfere with a professional's own area of expertise. The second is '*Rivalry*'. This French cultural standard is about seeing professional life as a match where you compete with rivals. Business is viewed as a match too. In business, French people do not help their competitors because this makes them stronger. One must constantly make sure that they are better than their rivals. The third is called '*Plan*'. It involves the French desire to have a complete and logically set up plan before they start doing anything. This is important for the French because they think in a deductive way, using logical arguments to arrive at their goal.

4.2 Underlying Values: Associations Among Cultural Standards

As mentioned previously, this study will not only discuss French cultural standards, but will also uncover underlying values, the cultural logic, to provide a thick description of French behaviour on the work floor from a Dutch perspective. Not all cultural standards can be regarded as independent. There are many cases where cultural standards overlap or are related to each other. They can be clustered into a number of groups of cultural standards that derive from the same cultural logic or values, so moral principles or ideals that are important for Frenchmen. These values underlie the behaviours that belong to the cultural standards. They can be used to explain the cultural standards and thus why French people behave the way they do. After studying the literature, the transcripts of the interviews and the input from the focus group, four underlying values of the French culture have been found. They are described in the following paragraphs.

Hierarchy ('*hiérarchie*')

The first underlying value that was found was that of *Hierarchy* where people must respect the hierarchy. The underlying value of Hierarchy is made up of five French cultural standards. Namely, Respect, Power division, Control, Obedience and Formality. It includes that the French expect and accept that there is a pyramidal hierarchy. This is used to determine an individual's position with society. People are paying respect to those who are of a higher rank than they are themselves because these people have authority over them and expect respect from people who are lower. They accept that decision making power lies

with the highest ranked individual and when they give orders, the lower ranked people obey them. People who belong to the same hierarchical group can be somewhat informal with each other at times. However, when a French person interacts with someone who is higher or lower than they are, communication because formal and distanced. This is done to show respect to higher individuals and to not lower oneself to lower individuals. In this hierarchy, higher ranked individuals constantly check and control the lower ranked individuals. Figure 3 represents the connection between the cultural standards and the underlying value Hierarchy.
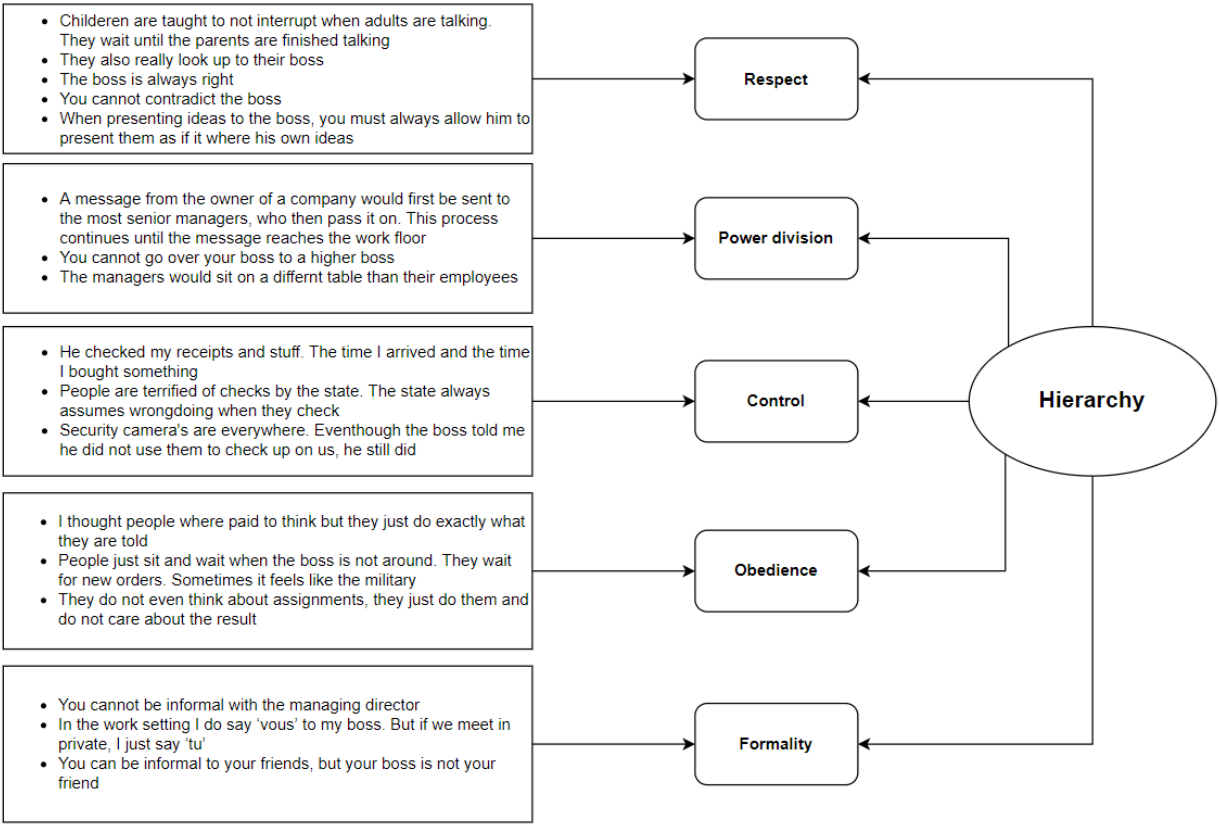
Figure 3 Hierarchy as Underlying Value

Competence ('*compétence*')

The next underlying value that was found was that of *Competence* where people must defend both their own honour and the privileges of their (professional) group. it can be explained by describing the French people as nobleman who feel the need to carry out and defend their honour of being competent. This value explains seven French cultural standards. Namely, Acquired rights, Status showing, Hide problems, Verbal aggression, Elegant communication, Relational exercise of power and Verbal ability. Every French person sees him or herself as competent at whatever they do and no matter what their hierarchical

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position is. They also want others to see them as competent. The French have a sense of self-esteem that is tied to their perceived competence. They also have a strong sense of duty that is derived from the traditions of their profession or social status. This also comes with certain acquired rights that the French always defend. Furthermore, they like to do whatever they themselves think is best. They do this unless they are told otherwise by a superior. In addition, the French like to show their competence or status in many ways. On the other hand, the French want to avoid being seen as incompetent. Therefore, they can hide problems or mistakes. The French can defend themselves to be seen as competent and honourable by becoming verbally aggressive towards others to get their point across. Becoming verbally aggressive during meetings or discussions can be honourable means to get attention for what you want. Opposite to being verbally aggressive, they can also be elegant in their communication. This behaviour is often shown when French people have done something that has a negative impact on their perceived honour. Instead of saying straight and direct what happened, the French come up with an elegant way of getting the message across as to not be seen as incompetent. This also goes for their verbal ability. One must speak properly to be seen as competent. Here too, making mistakes makes one look incompetent. Figure 4 represents the connection between the cultural standards and the underlying value Competence.

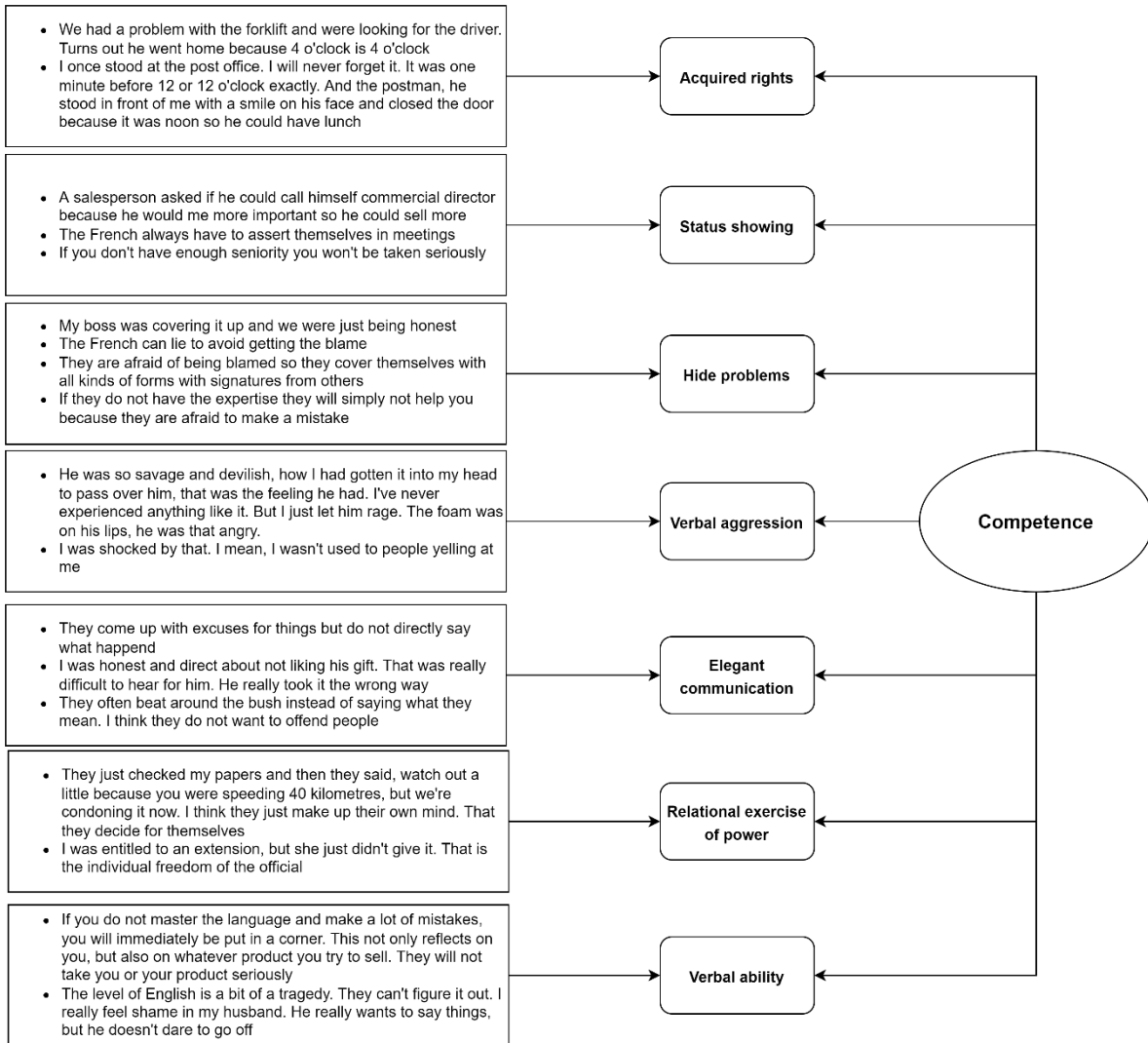- We had a problem with the forklift and were looking for the driver. Turns out he went home because 4 o'clock is 4 o'clock
- I once stood at the post office. I will never forget it. It was one minute before 12 or 12 o'clock exactly. And the postman, he stood in front of me with a smile on his face and closed the door because it was noon so he could have lunch

→ **Acquired rights**

- A salesperson asked if he could call himself commercial director because he would me more important so he could sell more
- The French always have to assert themselves in meetings
- If you don't have enough seniority you won't be taken seriously

→ **Status showing**

- My boss was covering it up and we were just being honest
- The French can lie to avoid getting the blame
- They are afraid of being blamed so they cover themselves with all kinds of forms with signatures from others
- If they do not have the expertise they will simply not help you because they are afraid to make a mistake

→ **Hide problems**

- He was so savage and devilish, how I had gotten it into my head to pass over him, that was the feeling he had. I've never experienced anything like it. But I just let him rage. The foam was on his lips, he was that angry.
- I was shocked by that. I mean, I wasn't used to people yelling at me

→ **Verbal aggression**

- They come up with excuses for things but do not directly say what happend
- I was honest and direct about not liking his gift. That was really difficult to hear for him. He really took it the wrong way
- They often beat around the bush instead of saying what they mean. I think they do not want to offend people

→ **Elegant communication**

- They just checked my papers and then they said, watch out a little because you were speeding 40 kilometres, but we're condoning it now. I think they just make up their own mind. That they decide for themselves
- I was entitled to an extension, but she just didn't give it. That is the individual freedom of the official

→ **Relational exercise of power**

- If you do not master the language and make a lot of mistakes, you will immediately be put in a corner. This not only reflects on you, but also on whatever product you try to sell. They will not take you or your product seriously
- The level of English is a bit of a tragedy. They can't figure it out. I really feel shame in my husband. He really wants to say things, but he doesn't dare to go off

→ **Verbal ability**

Competence

Figure 4 Competence as Underlying Value

Débrouiller ('*débrouiller*')

The next underlying value is called *Débrouiller*. This value is made up of two cultural standards. Truc and Network. It entails that people arrange things for themselves and for their friends or family through unofficial or non-standard ways. People might help their friends or family by arranging certain things for them that are unavailable to others, and vice versa. Have a strong and large network helps to get things arranged for yourself or your family. The French might also use this tactic to get out of situations they do not want to be in. For example, when a boss orders a subordinate to perform a certain task. At first, they will obey their superior. After a while they can do one of two things. The first is simply stopping what they were ordered once the boss is out of sight. The second is coming up with

a trick (Truc) to avoid doing what was ordered. This way, they have arranged that they can do what they themselves think is best. The connection between the cultural standards and the value is shown in figure 5.
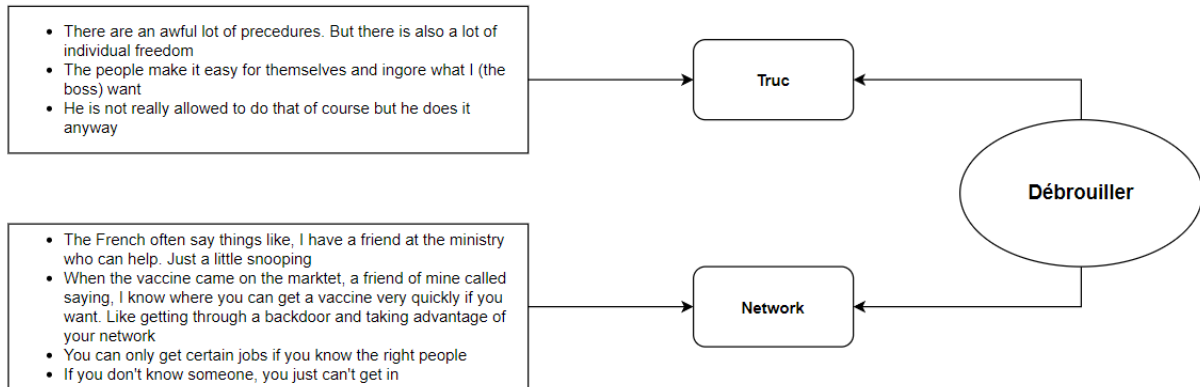

Figure 5 Débrouiller as Underlying Value

Friendship ('*Amitié*)

The final French value that is described in the current study is that of Friendship. It is made up of the cultural standards Relations and Cooperation. The French cherish their personal relationships and especially friendships very much. A strong relationship that can be seen as a friendship is needed in to trust people and to work together. When there exists a strong friendship between two French people, they will do almost anything for each other. However, when no such relationship exists, the French will not help or involve the other. There is a strong sense of in-group and out-group. A person's in-group or inner circle usually consists of family and friends. Other people can also enter the in-group once they are trusted. This does however take a long time. The relationship between the cultural standard and the cultural value is shown in figure 6.
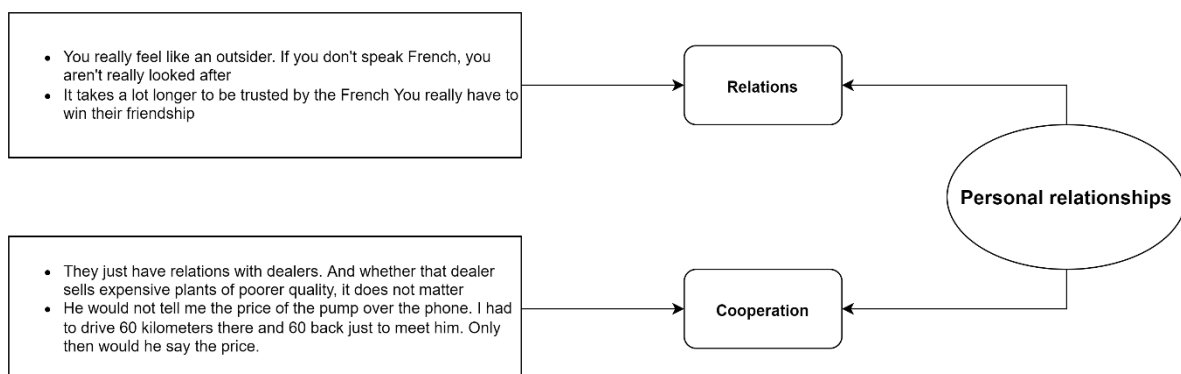

Figure 6 Friendship as Underlying Value

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In this final chapter a discussion about the study is presented. First, a quick overview of the results will be presented, after which they will be compared to previous literature. Next, the academic and practical relevance of the study will be discussed, followed by the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research. This chapter will end with a conclusion about the study.

5.1 French Cultural Standards as Perceived by the Dutch

The main goal of the current study was to identify French cultural standards as perceived by Dutch individuals. The research uncovered sixteen French cultural standards in part 4.1. These are listed below.

1. Respect
2. Acquired rights
3. Relations
4. Status showing
5. Power division
6. Hide problems
7. Verbal aggression
8. Elegant communication
9. Control
10. Relational exercise of power
11. Cooperation
12. Truc
13. Network
14. Obedience
15. Formality
16. Verbal ability

The cultural standards were later linked to four French underlying values as described in part 4.2. Together, the cultural standards and values provide a thick description of French culture and may be used to both describe and predict behaviour by French people in Dutch-French encounters.

5.2 Academic Relevance

Regarding the academical relevance, this study has provided a thick description of the French culture as seen from a Dutch perspective. French cultural standards were discovered and later linked to four underlying values that explain French behaviour which together make up for an extensive description about French behavioural patterns in Dutch-French encounters.

The more rigorous methodology by Thomas and colleagues (2010) that was used during this research has expanded the literature by using narratives from Dutch individuals to describe the French culture from the Dutch perspective. Some of the cultural standards found in this research were also described in the previous qualitative literature on French culture, albeit that the behaviour was not named as a cultural standard in those studies. Therefore, this study contributes to the existing literature by validating the previous studies on French culture by Peyre (1966), Antal & Sobczak (2007) and D'Iribarne (1989).

When comparing the results of the current study to previous qualitative studies on the subject, similarities arise. Peyre (1966) described the French are anxious about losing their individuality and do not like striving for consensus. This behaviour is affirmed in the current study. It was found that the French do not like to change their behaviour when someone tells them to do something in a different way to their own, which is reflected in Truc. The cultural standard Relational exercise of power is also strongly connected to keeping one's individuality. Other research suggested that the French have a high tolerance to accept things from the state. Influence and interference by the state is both expected and respected when done in a quiet but effective way (Antal & Sobczak, 2007). This role of the state can be translated to the work floor when looking at both the state and supervisors as authorities. In this way, this behaviour is supported. The cultural standards Respect, Control and Obedience align with this behaviour. The research by D'Iribarne (1989) has in large been affirmed by the current study. He claimed the French follow rules and procedures whenever it fits them, which is reflected in the cultural standard Relational exercise of power and also claimed the French follow orders for a while, after which they come up with a trick to get out of it. This behaviour belongs to the cultural standard Truc. Furthermore, the French do have a strong sense of duty that is derived from their position and the traditions of their profession according to D'Iribarne (1989). This is reflected in the cultural standard acquired

rights. Moreover, his statement regarding verbal aggression to get a point across was also found in this study and was named Verbal aggression. Another claim by him, stating that supervisors generally give orders that subordinates carry out, was confirmed through the cultural standard Obedience. Additionally, he stated that the French arrange all sorts of things for people with whom they have a strong relationship. This behaviour is reflected in the cultural standard Network. Finally, he stated that positive relationships are key to a fruitful business relationship. This is confirmed through the cultural standard Cooperation.

Seven extra cultural standards as seen from the Dutch perspective were discovered in the current study, being Relations, Status showing, Power division, Hide problems, Elegant communication, Formality and Verbal ability. Additionally, the cultural standards found in this research were further explained through underlying values.

5.3 Practical Relevance

The description of French culture provided through cultural standards and underlying values in this study helps the reader get insights into French behaviour. People in general, but especially the Dutch, now have an improved understanding regarding French behaviour. This can result in a higher degree of tolerance towards members of other cultures in order to avoid conflict, because people are more aware of and can better interpret French behaviour. Thus, the results of this study can help to reduce barriers in bicultural encounters and enhance cooperation between cultures, especially in Dutch-French situations.

5.4 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The main goal of this research was to identify when and why Dutch individuals experience cultural differences with French individuals, to later establish French cultural standards and underlying values. This goal was obtained by interviewing fifteen Dutch people who live and work in France. After these interviews, theoretical saturation was reached. This resulted in descriptions of critical incidents from which cultural standards were established from a Dutch perspective. This does provide an insight into people's experience in bicultural situations, but the French cultural standards were only described from a Dutch perspective. They can therefore not be generalised. Hence, additional research is needed to look at the French culture from other culture's perspective.

Furthermore, the data suggests that a possible difference exists between an individual's demographic background and their perceived differences. Possible factors that influence this are time working in France, level of education and managerial position or not. These factors were not researched because of the limited number of interviewees and limited time. These factors could be researched in the future. There could also be a cultural difference between the people living in the north and south of France. This too would make for an interesting topic for future research.

In addition, the coding in the research has only been done by one single person. Even though discussions regarding the interpretation of the data were constantly held with two supervisors, an additional coder could improve the reliability of the themes found during this research. Hence, future research could benefit from this double check when exploring similar topics.

5.5 Conclusion

The main research question that was leading during this research was: *"How is the French culture perceived by Dutch individuals living and working in France?"* This was answered by description of the sixteen French cultural standards that were found in this study: Respect, Acquired rights, Relations, Status showing, Power division, Hide problems, Verbal aggression, Elegant communication, Control, Relational exercise of power, Cooperation, Truc, Network, Obedience, Formality, and lastly, Verbal ability. In the descriptions of these cultural standards in part 4.1 the Dutch perspective on the French behaviour is also discussed.

An additional goal of the study was to link the cultural standards to underlying values of French culture. Four of these underlying values were discovered that together explain the French cultural standards found in this research:

1. **Hierarchy**, explaining Respect, Power division, Control, Obedience and Formality
2. **Competence**, explaining Acquired rights, Status showing, Hide problems, Verbal aggression, Elegant communication, Relational exercise of power, Verbal ability
3. **Débrouiller**, explaining Truc and Network
4. **Friendship**, explaining Relations and Cooperation

After comparing this study to the previous literature, some overlap was found. This validates previous literature as well as this study. In addition, extra French behaviour is described. All French behaviour that was described by the Dutch interviewees was labelled using cultural standards and further interpreted by underlying values. This provides a thick description of how the French culture is perceived by Dutch individuals living and working in France.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Questionnaire Used During the Interviews (in Dutch)

Vragenlijst Critical Incidents van Nederlanders in Frankrijk

Voorstellen.

Het onderzoek is bedoeld om uit te vinden hoe de samenwerking tussen Nederlanders en Fransen verbeterd kan worden.

Ik zou u willen vragen om toestemming te geven voor opname van het interview. Het interview is vertrouwelijk en de inhoud wordt niet gedeeld buiten het onderzoeksteam. Dus ook niet met uw collega's of leidinggevende.

Ik begrijp dat u regelmatig contact hebt met Franse collega's.

Hoe vaak heeft u contact met Franse collega's?

Waaruit bestaat het contact? (*Telefonisch, e-mail, in persoon*)

Wat bespreekt u met elkaar?

Wat is uw positie daarbij en wat is de positie van de Franse persoon/personen? (*rang, taakverdeling*)

In welke taal spreekt u met Fransen?

Is de communicatie goed te noemen?

Hoe zou u de sfeer tussen Nederlanders en Fransen beschrijven?

Is de samenwerking volgens u goed of kan hij beter?

Zijn de persoonlijke relaties volgens u goed of kunnen ze beter?

Ik wil graag over uw ervaringen met Fransen spreken.

Hoe zijn uw ervaringen met Fransen in het algemeen?

Wat zijn de meest opvallende verschillen tussen Fransen en Nederlanders?

Wat mist u vaak bij Fransen?

(Als hij/zij specifieke eigenschappen van Fransen noemt) Kunt u daar een voorbeeld van geven?

(Als het om een Nederlands persoon gaat die de Franse vestiging/hoofdkantoor kent) Welke verschillen ziet u tussen de Nederlandse en de Franse vestiging/hoofdkantoor (gedrag van medewerkers, manier waarop het werk georganiseerd is)?

Wat was de meest positieve ervaring die u had met Fransen? Wat gebeurde er precies? Wat maakt dit voor u tot zo'n positieve ervaring?

Wat was de aanleiding voor die gebeurtenis?

Op welke manier droeg deze gebeurtenis bij aan een succesvolle samenwerking?

Hebt u nog meer van zulke voorbeelden?

Kunt u ook een minder prettige ervaring noemen die u had met Fransen? Wat gebeurde er precies? Wat maakte dit voor u tot een onbevredigende ervaring?

Wat was de aanleiding voor die gebeurtenis?

Op welke manier belemmerde deze gebeurtenis de succesvolle samenwerking?

Hoe reageerde u?

Hoe is het afgelopen?

(Als positief resultaat, hoe bent u hiertoe gekomen?)

Waarom gedroeg de Franse collega zich op die manier, denkt u?

Hebt u nog meer van zulke voorbeelden?

Hebt u wel eens misverstanden tussen Fransen en Nederlanders meegemaakt?

Hebt u wel eens meegemaakt dat u verrast werd door gedrag van Fransen?

Hebt u wel eens meegemaakt dat u Fransen niet begreep?

Hebt u wel eens meegemaakt dat u het oneens was met uw Franse collega?

Hebt u wel eens een conflict gehad met een Franse collega?

Hebt u wel eens andere problemen gehad met Fransen?

Een goede leidinggevende: Hoe moet die zich gedragen? Verschillen Nederlanders en Fransen daarin?

Een goede collega: Hoe moet die zich gedragen? Verschillen Nederlanders en Fransen daarin?

Een goede werknemer: Hoe moet die zich gedragen? Verschillen Nederlanders en Fransen daarin?

Hoe wordt er door de Fransen omgegaan met procedures en de controle daarop?

Hoe gaat het besluitvormingsproces in het Fransen bedrijf? Wie neemt de beslissingen en hoe gaat dat in zijn werk? Worden de besluiten door iedereen gerespecteerd?

Stelling: Het is makkelijker om samen te werken met een Nederlander dan met een Fransman.

Wat is uw mening en waardoor komt dat?

Twee anekdotes vertellen: Heb u wel eens zoiets meegemaakt? Waarom gedroeg de Fransman zich op deze manier?

Wilt u nog meer vertellen over uw ervaringen met Fransen? Hebben we alles besproken?

Met de resultaten maken we een wetenschappelijk rapport voor een Master Thesis. Uw naam zal niet vermeld worden en we zullen ervoor zorgen dat uitspraken niet tot u te herleiden zijn. Als u geïnteresseerd bent in de uitkomst, kan ik die naar u toesturen.

Dank voor uw medewerking!