

The Dutch perception of decision-making in the US

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ABSTRACT,

Previous studies suggests that the US and the Netherlands have the same approach towards authority, an egalitarian attitude. But what is considered egalitarian in one country does not have to be considered egalitarian in another country. In addition, theory suggests that the US and the Netherlands have a contrasting attitude towards decision-making: consensual vs. top-down. However, the theory does not specifically focus on how the Dutch actually experience and cope with this different attitude. Therefore, an inductive qualitative study using semi-structured interviews was carried out on the differences in decision-making Dutchmen experience in American organizations. This study found that the Dutch do not actually perceive the American work culture as egalitarian, but rather use the word hierarchical to describe it. Next to that, interviewees experience many differences between the decision-making process in the US and the Netherlands. Such differences include the importance or non-importance of consensus and communication and the difference in power of the manager. The general advice to cope with the different American work culture that was proposed by the interviewees was to adapt and let go of the Dutch way of working to avoid any problems and potentially lose your job.

Keywords

Authority | Decision-making | Eight-scale model | Leadership | Meyer | Netherlands | United States

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1. INTRODUCTION

Internationalization and globalization have become increasingly important over the years and can be considered fundamental in today's society. Not only do we come into contact with people from different cultures in our daily lives and in educational institutions, but it has also become common in the workplace (Thomas et al., 2010). For a person in a global team or someone who moves to a different country to work there, it can be difficult to adjust to a different business culture as every country has its own informal rules and cultural environment that affect its leadership style and the way business is done (Stoop, 2022). These cultural differences can lead to misunderstandings, inefficiency, and frustrations (Meyer, 2015).

According to Meyer (2017), the problems that arise due to cultural differences are widespread and are often a result of managers failing to distinguish between two important dimensions of leadership culture: authority and decision-making. Next to these two dimensions, Meyer identified six other dimensions concerning cultural differences that can lead to misunderstandings, inefficiency, and frustrations in the working environment (Meyer, 2015). However, the dimensions on authority and decision-making are according to Meyer (2017) the most important in the leadership context.

Many executives and managers assume that a country's attitude towards authority and decision-making are correlated. They expect that in a more-hierarchical society, the decisions are made by top management/the boss and in more-egalitarian societies, decisions will be made by the group/team based on consensus. Meyer (2017) states that this is not always the case and that this can lead to having false expectations. In the Netherlands, these attitudes are correlated, but this is not the case in the United States. Both countries have an egalitarian approach towards authority, according to Meyer, meaning that all people are considered equal and worthy of having equal opportunities and rights. In the Netherlands, however, there is a consensual attitude towards decision-making and in the US, there is a top-down attitude. This top-down attitude seems to contradict what Meyer says about an egalitarian approach towards authority. It is interesting to find out whether Dutchmen and Americans mean the same thing when they speak of an egalitarian attitude.

The different attitudes towards decision-making in the Netherlands and US make it more difficult for a person with a Dutch background to adjust to the American business culture. For a Dutch person, a decision is a final commitment to start a plan, but for an American, a decision is simply an agreement to continue discussions. This can lead to a Dutch person feeling that Americans are not candid or sincere (Meyer, 2017).

Meyer (2015; 2017) is the only scholar who explicitly addresses these differences between the Dutch and American work cultures in a leadership context. No other studies or articles could be found on Google (Scholar), Web of Science, or Scopus that focus specifically on how Dutchmen perceive leadership authority in the US and how they experience and cope with a different attitude towards decision-making. This indicates that more research is needed to clarify Dutch-American differences in this field. The goal of this study is, therefore, to explore Dutch-American differences as to leadership authority, decision-making, and an egalitarian attitude. To achieve this goal, the following research question has been formulated:

What differences in decision-making do Dutchmen experience in American organizations?

To fully address the overarching research question, the following subsequent questions are formulated:

1. *To what extent do Dutchmen view the American leadership style as egalitarian?*
2. *How do Dutchmen working in the US experience decision-making? In what respect does this differ from the way of decision-making that is usual in the Netherlands?*
3. *How do Dutchmen cope with the different decision-making attitude in the US?*

2. ACADEMIC RELEVANCE

As there is little to no research on how the Dutchmen perceive leadership authority and how they experience and cope with a different attitude towards decision-making in the US, this study may fill the research gap. Meyer's theory proposes that countries (including the Netherlands and the US) can be characterized by different dimensions of leadership. Both the Netherlands and the US can be considered egalitarian countries regarding leadership authority, but it is not clear whether the Dutch actually view the American attitude towards authority as egalitarian. Also, there is a difference in attitude towards decision-making. The Netherlands can be considered consensual, while the US can be considered as deciding top-down. For these reasons, the study will add to the existing literature and theory by exploring Meyer's theory and see if it is empirically confirmed.

3. PRACTICAL RELEVANCE

The thesis can give Dutchmen who are going to work in the US some insights into the American attitude towards leadership, authority, and decision-making. It helps them better prepare how to act on the work floor, shows in which situations they could expect to experience differences, and shows how Dutchmen in the US cope with these differences. The analyses also provide the Dutchmen with practical tips on how to best cope with these differences. These insights and tips help prevent future misunderstandings, inefficiency, and frustrations of the Dutch and guide them when working in American organizations.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, the key concepts of this study and relevant literature will be discussed. This involves a review of existing literature on the eight-scale model by Meyer, egalitarian leadership, and the different attitudes towards decision-making in the Netherlands and the US combined with known characteristics of the Dutch and American management styles.

4.1 Meyer's eight-scale model

To describe cultural differences between countries Meyer (2017) came up with an eight-scale model, identifying eight key areas that managers must be aware of. The two scales, also known as dimensions, that Meyer considers most important in leadership culture are leading and deciding. Applied to this study, the main focus will be on the different attitudes towards decision-making. She distinguishes two different attitudes towards decision-making: consensual and top-down. In addition, this study will focus on whether the Dutchmen actually perceive the American leadership style as egalitarian.

4.2 Approach towards authority

Both the Netherlands and the US are suggested to have an egalitarian approach towards authority, according to Meyer (see figure 1). This means that all people are considered equal and worthy having equal opportunities and rights. However, Meyer states that what is considered egalitarian in one country does not have to be considered egalitarian in another. As the Netherlands is placed at the end side of the egalitarian attitude towards authority and the US is placed more towards the hierarchical side, it can be expected that the Dutchmen view American leadership

as less egalitarian than Dutch leadership (Meyer, 2015; Lubin, 2015).



Figure 1. Leading: Egalitarian vs. Hierarchical (Meyer, 2015)

4.3 Attitude towards decision-making

The attitude towards decision-making that Meyer suggests best fits the US is top-down (see figure 2). A top-down attitude indicates that one person – generally, the person in charge – makes decisions quickly on behalf of the entire group (Meyer, 2015). These quickly made decisions by the Americans are subject to change as new arguments or inputs arise (Meyer, 2017). According to Warburton (2022a), important decisions in the decision-making process might be discussed together, but eventually, the responsibility lies with the boss. Support or seeming consensus is only applied when things go wrong. An American manager is, therefore, more likely to disregard the opinions of others. This can lead to frustrations, especially for those that are used to a more consensus or compromise-oriented business culture (Warburton, 2022a). The top-down driven business culture in the US is characterized by its focus on individual freedom and furthering own career (Lubin, 2014). However, Lubin (2014) states that Americans are capable of teamwork and corporate spirit.

In her book and in several articles, Meyer suggests that the attitude towards decision-making that best fits the Netherlands is consensual (see figure 2). A consensual attitude indicates that a considerable amount of time is spent soliciting group feedback and coming to a group agreement (Meyer, 2015). Stoop (2022) adds to this by stating that to the Dutch, it does not sit easily if a policy has been imposed from above with little or no consultation. A Dutch manager would therefore seldom take on an authoritarian approach to the team. The manager is rather seen as the facilitator and the ultimate arbiter on all decisions (Stoop, 2022; Warburton, 2022b). According to Lubin (2014) and Stoop (2022), managers are considered the key players in the decision-making process. However, consensus is mandatory (Lubin, 2014; Stoop, 2022). The consensus-driven business culture in the Netherlands is characterized by its many meetings involving negotiations at a rapid pace. Directness and clearness are important in these meetings (I amsterdam, 2022).



Figure 2. Deciding: Consensual vs. Top-down (Meyer, 2015)

4.4 Proposed techniques for working in a top-down country

Meyer (2015) proposes several techniques that one could apply to cope with situations that occur when working in a country where a more top-down approach to decision-making is favored. These techniques are (1) expect decisions to be made by the boss with less discussion and less soliciting of opinions, (2) be ready to follow a decision even if your input was not solicited or was overruled (3) strive to make decisions quickly when in charge, (4) suggest a vote if the group is divided and no leader is present, and (5) remain flexible. However, these techniques are very general, and it is unclear whether these techniques are applicable to Dutchmen working in the US.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research design

For this study, a qualitative interpretive approach was chosen as the point of the research is to gain in-depth insight into how the Dutchmen experience leadership, authority, and the different attitude towards decision-making, which are complex concepts (Thompson, 2015).

5.2 Data Collection

Data for this qualitative study has been collected by carrying out five qualitative interviews with Dutchmen working in various parts of the US to get a clear overview of the American work culture across the country. The interviewees consist of Dutchmen that have been working in the US for at least six months to a year, but the length of working in the US varies from 3 to 20 years. They are all collaborating on a daily basis with Americans on the work floor. The demographics of the interviewees can be found in table 1.

The interviewees were acquired through acquaintances and Facebook groups and further communication was done through WhatsApp or email based on their preference. The interviews took place online using Microsoft Teams as it was impossible to meet up in person.

Interviewee	Age	Gender	State	Job description	Industry	In the US since
1	49	Male	Arizona	Senior training and development specialist	Chemical hazards	1997
2	45	Female	Florida	Chief operating officer (COO)	International consultancy in culture	2001
3	46	Male	Massachusetts	Head of sales Europe, Middle East & Africa (EMEA)	ICT	Goes back and forth
4	47	Male	Arizona	Senior Vice President sales & marketing	Electronics	2019
5	38	Female	Texas	Staff attorney	Legal aid organization	2019

Table 1. Demographics of the interviewees

5.3 Research Instrument

The type of interviews that have been used are semi-structured interviews. In this type of interview, a few predetermined open-ended questions are asked while the rest of the questions are not planned in advance. Semi-structured interviews allow for an objective comparison between the interviewees, while also having the opportunity to explore topics on the spur of the moment that are relevant to a particular interviewee (Pollock, n.d.). Therefore, the focus was on letting the interviewees speak spontaneously and let them tell their stories. The predetermined questions can be found in Appendix A. The interviews have been recorded (with permission granted) and automatically transcribed using Microsoft Teams. The transcriptions have been corrected after they were finished.

5.4 Data Analysis

To analyze the interviews, an inductive coding method has been used. This type of method is a data analysis process whereby raw data is read and interpreted to develop concepts, themes, or a process model (Chandra & Shang, 2019). The inductive coding method that has been used for this study is Thematic Analysis. Thematic Analysis is a qualitative data analysis method in which patterns in meaning across a data set are identified to derive themes (Delve et al., 2020). In this case, the data set consisted of transcripts of the interviews. First, the passages from the conducted interviews that are relevant to the research questions

have been coded. Next, these passages were collected and labeled in an Excel file. Eventually, the overarching themes from all interviews had been identified and described. All these findings have been combined in the result section and interpreted, explained, and compared with existing literature in the discussion section.

6. RESULTS

In this section, the results of the five interviews will be presented. It mentions recurring points of agreement or disagreement, patterns, and trends of the Dutch perception of the American approach towards authority and the American attitude towards decision-making while comparing them to their perception of the Dutch approach and attitude. It will also mention individual responses that are significant to the research question and sub-questions.

6.1 Dutch perception of the American approach towards authority

To what extent do Dutchmen view the American leadership style as egalitarian?

From the questions asked in the interviews on the American approach towards authority, it became clear that almost all Dutch interviewees experience a difference regarding how people in various positions are treated. They recognized a hierarchical structure in which Americans expect that you look up to people in leadership positions. Interviewee 4 even indicates that the boss' word is the law. Interviewees 2 and 3 add that they feel like what happens in the top layer of the hierarchical structure is very secret. "There is a large difference between what is said in public and what is said behind closed doors," says interviewee 3. In contrast, interviewee 1 states that in the organization he works for, everyone is treated equally, regardless of position, and no hierarchical structure can be identified. He adds to this by saying "Our company functions according to the Dutch norms and values of someone in a leadership position.". This in contrast with his past experience at an American multinational where he encountered a very hierarchical structure, just like the other interviewees currently do. All interviewees, except for interviewee 2, state that this kind of hierarchical structure cannot be found in the Netherlands, and everyone is more treated as equals there. Interviewee 2 does also experience this hierarchy in the Netherlands as well.

When looking at the Dutch perception of the American approach towards authority from an informal and off duty point of view, the interviewees are more divided. Interviewees 1 and 3 state that they do not experience any differences in treatment of people from various positions off duty. For interviewee 1 this goes hand in hand with how everyone is treated while on the job. But for interviewee 3 this means he experiences a difference in treatment on and off duty. In contrast, interviewees 4 and 5 state that they still experience a difference in treatment of people in various positions when they are off duty. They say that management often isolates themselves from the "lower" positions. An example of such a situation was given by interviewee 5. "When our CEO was in town, we went out for dinner. Supporting personnel was not invited although all other positions were.". In the Netherlands, the interviewees did not recognize any differences in the treatment of people in various positions when being off duty. This means that both on and off duty the interviewees feel like everyone is treated as equals in the Netherlands.

Regarding opportunities for personal growth and development, every interviewee indicated that the possibilities are endless for everyone, but that you have to specify that you want to make use of those yourself. Interviewee 5 considers this to be a negative

aspect because if you are not good at pointing it out yourself, you will miss out on the endless opportunities. She also specifies that she feels like there are not many possibilities for supporting personnel to grow and develop as not many or maybe even no development courses for them exist in the US. On the other hand, she specifies that in the Netherlands personal growth and development courses are a once-a-while mandatory thing that you cannot miss out on.

6.2 Dutch perception of the American attitude towards decision-making

How do Dutchmen working in the US experience decision-making? In what respect does this differ from the way of decision-making that is usual in the Netherlands?

Regarding the American attitude towards decision-making, the interviewees stated different things regarding who makes decisions in the organizations they work for. Three out of the five interviewees indicate that they can make decisions themselves up to some extent. Interviewee 1, for example, has to do this in consultation with his supervisor. Interviewees 3 and 5 even experience much autonomy in their organizations, meaning that they receive a lot of freedom to work on what they want. Individualism – being independent and self-reliant – is very important in their organizations. On the other hand, interviewees 2 and 4 indicate that management makes the decisions, sometimes even without communication and/or consultation. They state that during the decision-making process, the employees are not aware of the ongoing conversations of management and usually only receive an email with the made decision at the end of the process. All interviewees explicitly state that the final decision will be in the manager's hands. In contrast, the interviewees indicate that in the Netherlands consensus is very important. Collaboration and communication are key in the decision-making process there.

After a decision has been made it is uncommon in the US that it changes afterward according to the majority of the interviewees. This is comparable to the Netherlands. Only two interviewees, interviewees 3 and 5, say that it is normal in their organizations for decisions to modify after changing insights or circumstances occur. Interviewee 1, however, does say that if a project is not going in the right direction the plug can be pulled out very easily.

6.2.1 Opinions of others

The interviewees indicated that the opinions of others, apart from the manager, are not really taken into account in the decision-making process. Sometimes their opinions are asked but that feels more like a formality than it being taken into consideration. Opinions of others are also usually only seen as accurate when you have proven yourself within the organization. For Americans, it is considered quite normal when their opinions are not asked or taken into consideration. According to interviewees 3 and 5, they do not even expect differently. Interviewee 1, however, does say that if the impact on the employees is big, they do find it odd that they have not been kept in the loop. But "The show must go on." as interviewee 3 says. According to interviewee 2, many employees are also scared to share their opinions as they do not want to upset their manager. In the US, hardly any formal procedures are required for firing someone, which means that tomorrow can be your last day, says interviewee 3. As a result, a culture of fear exists and, therefore, many employees keep their thoughts to themselves. Interviewee 2 also states that Americans are lawyer-happy. When things do not go as they are supposed to or you say the wrong thing, you should not be surprised to get involved in a lawsuit. In the Netherlands, though, all interviewees state that opinions of other people than the manager are considered important, and

employees also expect to be included in the decision-making process.

6.2.2 Management and responsibility

From the interviews it became clear that all interviewees suggest that it depends on the manager whether he/she is interested in just the main lines or also the details of their employees' work. However, most of the interviewees say that when things go wrong, the details will be under extensive investigation. "Everything will then be put under a magnifying glass." says interviewee 3. They also state that in the US the work procedures are more of a guideline, while in the Netherlands employees try to stick to them as much as possible

Regarding responsibility, the interviewees are once again divided. Two of the interviewees, interviewees 3 and 5, are very clear about the fact that the responsibility lies with the individual and that the individual will also be judged for his/her mistakes. In contrast, two other interviewees, interviewees 1 and 4, say the complete opposite and state that the responsibility lies with management. The individual employee will be involved in solving the issue, but it will stay the ultimate job of the manager. The last interviewee, interviewee 2, states that the responsibility lies with both the individual and the manager and they will tackle and solve the problem together. "No fingers are pointed." says interviewee 2, meaning no one person is blamed for mistakes or errors, which is comparable to how it is done in the Netherlands.

In general, the interviewees indicate that American managers are not very open to comments and feedback. Doubting them or going against them can even have far-reaching consequences. Only one interviewee, interviewee 1, who also reported on the very egalitarian attitude in his company, mentioned that in his organization giving feedback to the boss will not be an issue. Just as in the Netherlands this is not an issue. It can, therefore, be recognized that the organization interviewee 1 works for has a very different character than the organizations of the others. Because of these far-reaching consequences, interviewees 2 and 5 state that you should watch out what you say as there are many unwritten rules of what you can and cannot say to someone in a leadership position in the US.

6.2.3 Meetings

The interviewees characterize meetings in the US as straight to business, one-sided, and short and sweet (see figure 3). This means that no time is wasted on niceties and only management has the word during meetings. Half of the interviewees state that they have just as many meetings in the US as they did in the Netherlands, while the other half state that they have way more meetings in the US. Interviewee 4 indicates that there are a lot of escalations in the US that call for additional meetings next to the already planned ones. Interviewee 2 adds to this by saying that the US is meeting-happy and that they plan meetings for everything. Including things that could have been resolved with a simple email. The interviewees indicated that the meetings in American organizations do not have much interaction and are usually led by management. Interviewee 5 states that management usually feels like they know enough to be the only one talking. While in the Netherlands the interviewees state that the person who has the most knowledge about the subject leads the meetings. Interviewee 3 describes the meetings in the US as broadcast meetings and the ones in the Netherlands as consultation meetings. He states that in the broadcast meetings in the US actualities are presented by management and little to no interaction exists. While in the consultation meetings in the Netherlands the main focus is on interaction and discussing actualities with the whole group.

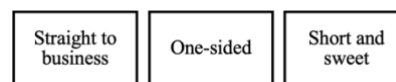


Figure 3. Characteristics of meetings in the US

6.2.4 Process characteristics

In the decision-making process in the US, all interviewees state that money is the number one priority. According to interviewee 2, the focus is on how much money every individual brings in. This pressure of reaching your target is pushed throughout the whole organization says interviewee 3. As interviewee 4 says "It is all about the results for the Americans, it does not matter how you get those. You will not be judged for your leadership style.". Interviewee 5 affirms this by saying "There is no specific work culture in the US, meaning having a different work culture does not come with complications.". In the Netherlands, they state, money is also important but the Dutch are more conservative. The Dutch focus on what the return on investment will be while the Americans look at what the opportunity can bring in. This means that the Dutch are more cautious with their investments, which can result in missing out on the opportunities that the Americans do take on. In the US, there is no need for consensus, communication, and collaboration which are normal in the Netherlands. The interviewees, therefore, find the American decision-making process faster and more efficient. As interviewee 1 says "In the Netherlands, a lot of things are happening around the decision-making process.". In addition, the interviewees state that the American process is more opportunistic than in the Netherlands. According to interviewee 3, the Americans take more risks, while the Dutch do not want to take on new things while still being busy with other things or not being 100% sure the opportunity will bring in money says interviewee 4.

To finalize, according to the interviewees the American decision-making process is characterized by its individualistic and opportunistic approach and its focus on the short term, money, and results (see figure 4). Interviewee 2 also considered the decision-making process in the US to be isolating as only management is involved, which interviewee 3 complements by saying it is one-sided (see figure 5). On the other hand, the Dutch decision-making process is characterized by the interviewees for its communication, consensus, and interaction (see figure 6). Meaning that general agreement is considered important.

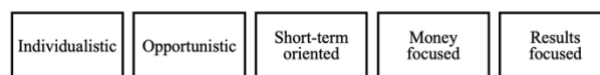


Figure 4. General characteristics of the American decision-making process



Figure 5. Additional characteristics of the American decision-making process

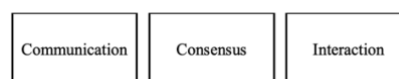


Figure 6. Characteristics of the Dutch decision-making process

6.3 Preparation, discoveries, and advice

How do Dutchmen cope with the different decision-making attitude in the US?

At the end of the interviews, the interviewees were asked about their preparation before going to work in the US. They all indicated that they did not prepare for the American work culture as they all felt that they already knew the most important aspects because they either had an international educational background, affection for the US, and/or an American spouse. However, after arriving in the US, they realized the American work culture was not as they imagined it to be which resulted in a few discoveries. Almost all interviewees state that Americans look very enthusiastic and interested but are not in general. For example, interviewees 1 and 5 state that most Americans do not expect a real answer to “Hi, how are you?” and that it is more used as a greeting and nicety than a question. Next to that, interviewee 2 stated that she was too direct for the American standard, and interviewee 4 was too critical. In addition, multiple interviewees state that there is no harmonization between the different departments. Interviewee 4 explains this by stating that he feels like his department is in a silo. Every department is responsible for its own tasks and little to no collaboration takes place. “You can have an opinion about a different department, but they do not like it when you express it.” says interviewee 4. Interviewee 5 adds to this by saying “The company prefers you sticking to the range of tasks within your department and not interfering with other things”.

The general advice from the five interviewees is to let go of the Dutch way of working. This means saying farewell to the collaboration and consensus work culture. The future Dutchmen working in the US have to be prepared for opportunism and individualism. And also, they should be aware that they cannot say everything that pops up in their mind. Next to that, the interviewees state that going against the American work culture is not a smart thing to do as this will not make any difference and just causes problems. Adjusting is, according to the five interviewees, therefore, the best solution. Some of the interviewees learned to do this themselves, others had the help from a coach, European colleagues/friends, or American spouses.

7. DISCUSSION

In this section, the results of this study will be interpreted, explained, and compared with the existing literature. The main focus will be on exploring Meyer’s theory and seeing if it is empirically confirmed. The discussion also focuses on how relevant and/or significant the findings are to the field of research.

7.1 Dutch perception of the American approach towards authority

From the results, it became clear that on the American work floor the Dutch experience a hierarchical structure and differences in how people from various positions are treated in the US, at least when being on duty. While some Dutchmen still experience these hierarchical differences when being off duty, others say that they feel like everyone is being treated equally in such situations. In contrast, interviewee 1 indicated that his organization is moving more toward the norms and values of the Dutch work situation, and everyone is treated equally both on and off duty. A reason for this contrast could be that this Dutchman had worked for an American multinational before where an almost extreme hierarchical structure exists and, therefore, considers the organization he works for nowadays to be very egalitarian. The results show no hierarchical structure has been experienced while working in the Netherlands, and everyone was being treated

equally both on and off duty. The theory by Meyer (2015) suggests that both the US and the Netherlands have an egalitarian approach towards authority. As the Dutchmen in the American organizations still experience a strong hierarchy to some extent it can be concluded that the Dutch do not perceive the US as egalitarian, as they do the Netherlands. This is not because they have different ideas about what egalitarian conditions are, but from their experiences and stories it can be objectively concluded that managers and subordinates do not have equal rights nor are they treated as equals on the work floor. The outcome of this study, therefore, suggests that Meyer is wrong in ascribing an egalitarian approach towards authority to the American work culture and proposes to place the US more on the hierarchical side of the leading scale.

7.2 Dutch perception of the American attitude towards decision-making

The results showed that the Dutchmen did not have the same experience regarding who makes decisions in their organization. Interesting here is that interviewees who indicated to receive a lot of freedom do not have a position in the executive management of the organization, while the ones that mentioned everyone is bound to management do. This may indicate that the interviewees active in “lower” positions are not aware of how much power executive management has. Communicating about said decisions is not considered important for Americans. This aligns with Meyer’s (2015) theory and Warburton’s (2022a) statements concerning the American decision-making process to some extent as they state that the person in charge makes quick decisions on behalf of the group and only important decisions might be discussed. From this, it became clear that communication is not meant to share thoughts and involve people, but to propagate the vision of the leader.

The results also show that, in contrast, in the Netherlands collaboration and communication are important aspects of the decision-making process. This aligns with Meyer’s (2015), Lubin’s (2014), and Stoop’s (2022) theories and statements indicating that the Dutch decision-making process is consensual and a considerable amount of time is spent soliciting group feedback and coming to a group agreement.

Looking at whether decisions are subject to change after being made, the results also show deviating experiences. Half of the interviewees confirm Meyer’s (2017) theory stating that decisions are subject to change as new arguments or inputs arise. The other half said that decisions are set in stone after they have been made, which is in contrast with Meyer’s theory. No explanation for these different perspectives can be found in the interviewees’ background information, which indicates there is no set cultural standard for this in the US.

7.2.1 Opinions of others

In the results was stated that the Dutchmen indicated that, just as Warburton’s (2022a) statement proposes, the opinions of others, apart from the manager, are not really taken into account. Meaning that consensus is not important in American organizations and Americans do not expect to be involved in the decision-making process. This results in American employees keeping their opinions and ideas to themselves. According to the interviewees, this is the complete opposite of the Netherlands where consensus is not only important but also expected, which aligns with Stoop’s (2022) statements. A reason for this lack of importance and low expectancy of consensus in the American decision-making process that is proposed by three interviewees is the existing culture of fear that prevails in the US. In this culture of fear people are afraid to lose their jobs and are, therefore, hesitant to share their opinions with their supervisors.

Another reason could be that Americans are so used to this situation that being involved is uncommon and, therefore, odd to them. A third reason, proposed by interviewee 2, for Americans keeping their opinions to themselves could be the lawyer-happy culture that exists in the US. It is not uncommon to be sued when having a run-in with someone.

7.2.2 Management and responsibility

In the results was stated that American managers are mostly only interested in the main lines of their employees' work. However, all Dutchmen state that when something goes wrong all work will be put under a magnifying glass. This would suggest that the responsibility will then also lie with the manager, which is in line with Warburton's (2022a) statements. However, this is not the case for every Dutchmen. Interesting here is that both interviewees who do say that the responsibility lies with the manager live in the western part of the US, which could indicate that the differences in where the responsibility lies depends on which part of the US one lives.

The results also show that the Dutchmen, except for one, made clear that the American managers are not open to comments and feedback. In contrast, they all said that this is not an issue in the Netherlands. As Warburton (2022a) states that American managers tend to disregard opinions from others, it can be concluded that the Dutch perception of how American managers respond to comments and criticism aligns with the theory.

7.2.3 Meetings

The statement by I amsterdam (2022) suggests that the Netherlands is characterized by its many meetings at a rapid pace, which fits a consensus-driven business culture that the US is not. However, the results show that American organizations have many meetings. A reason for this can be that due to the lack of consensus, collaboration, and communication in the US, many escalations occur that need to be resolved. Such escalations consist of conflicts and things that did not go according to the initial plan. These meetings are characterized by their straight to business attitude, one-sidedness, and short and sweet length.

The biggest difference between American and Dutch meetings that the results show is that in American meetings the manager will lead the conversation while in the Netherlands the individual with the most knowledge will lead the conversation and everyone else is also included to have a say and give their opinion. The Dutchmen stated that the managers in the US feel like they know everything, which can be seen as a reason for not giving the lead in meetings to someone else.

7.2.4 Process characteristics

Lubin (2014) proposed focusing on individual freedom and furthering own career to be the characteristics of the American decision-making process. Although these characteristics did come up in the results, other more elaborate characteristics were considered more fitting by the Dutchmen. These characteristics include (1) individualistic approach, (2) opportunistic approach, (3) short-term orientation, (4) focus on money, and (5) focus on results. The results also show the American decision-making process to be fast and efficient.

For the Dutch decision-making process, the Dutchmen used the following words to characterize the process: communication, consensus, and interaction. I amsterdam (2022) characterized the Dutch decision-making process by its many meetings involving negotiations at a rapid pace. Here can be concluded that the proposed characteristics of the interviewees overlap with the theory.

In sum, a comment made by one Dutchman should be highlighted. Interviewee 5 states that there is no specific work

culture in the US and having a different work culture is not an issue. This can explain the diverse responses from the different interviewees.

7.3 Coping mechanisms for working in the US

The results show that no Dutchman prepared for working in the US which resulted in them finding out the American work culture is not what they expected it to be. The general advice stated in the results and given by the five interviewees was to let go of the Dutch way of working, be prepared for the opportunism and individualism, and do not go against the American work culture to avoid problems. Meaning that adjusting is, therefore, the best option. Meyer (2015) proposed several techniques that Dutchmen can use to adapt to the American top-down work culture. These techniques are (1) expect decisions to be made by the boss with less discussion and less soliciting of opinions, (2) be ready to follow a decision even if your input was not solicited or was overruled (3) strive to make decisions quickly when in charge, (4) suggest a vote if the group is divided and no leader is present, and (5) remain flexible. These techniques all align very well with how the interviewed Dutchmen perceive the American decision-making process, which suggests that these techniques can be considered very valid and useful when going to work in the US as a Dutchmen.

7.4 Practical implications

This study shows Dutchmen who are going to work in the US that a hierarchical approach towards authority and an opportunistic, individualistic, fast, efficient, short-term oriented decision-making process with the focus on money and results can be expected. Knowing what approach towards authority and attitude towards decision-making can be expected helps them better prepare how to act on the work floor. This study also shows that, in contrast, in the Netherlands, an egalitarian approach towards authority and a decision-making process with the focus on communication, consensus, and interaction is recognized. This exhibits what differences the future Dutchmen should expect. As the study shows that the best way to work in the US is to adapt to their work culture, the practical tips proposed by Meyer can be used by the Dutchmen to best cope with the proposed differences. Having this clearer overview of the American work culture regarding leading and deciding helps prevent future misunderstandings, inefficiency, and frustrations of the Dutch.

8. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In this section, the possible flaws, shortcomings, and factors that may have impacted the findings of the study are presented.

The first limitation is the small sample size of five interviewees. To draw valid conclusions, a sufficient sample size is needed. The bigger the sample, the more accurate conclusions can be drawn. The small sample size resulted in only having one (or in one case two) representative(s) of a certain part of the US. This means that regional factors could have influenced their experiences. The same applies to the variety of types of companies. With the small sample size, only one representative of a specific type of company was interviewed. It is therefore unclear whether other people working in the same industry have the same experience.

The second limitation concerns the subjectivity of this study. Although qualitative research requires some level of subjectivity as researchers need to rely on their personal cognitive frameworks to identify patterns and themes across the data, the interpretation of the data can be largely influenced by the

subjectivity of the researcher (Davis, 2017). To minimize this subjectivity a second coder could be added. This second coder can bring in a different perspective to the data, interpret the data in a different way, and therefore expand the range of concepts that are developed and the understanding of the data (Keene, n.d.).

For further research, it is suggested to use a bigger sample size with either more representatives of each part of the US or to focus on one single part or state. It is also suggested to include more representatives of various types of companies or focus on one single industry. Adding a second coder will help bring in different perspectives and interpretations which minimizes the subjectivity of the researcher. An important note here is that more time is needed to perform such research.

9. CONCLUSION

By combining the experiences of the interviewees, it can be concluded that Dutchmen experience the American work culture as hierarchical where the boss' word is law and communication, consensus, and interaction are not common or expected. While in comparison they experience the Dutch work culture as egalitarian where communication, consensus, and interaction are not only common but also expected. The theory by Meyer (2015) proposed the American work culture to be egalitarian (while keeping in mind that the Dutch might not consider the US to be as egalitarian as the Netherlands) where the person in charge makes decisions on behalf of the group and support or consensus only rarely occurs. Meyer (2015) proposed the Dutch work culture to be egalitarian where the focus is on soliciting group feedback/agreement and consensus is mandatory. Therefore, it could be concluded that Meyer's theory for both the US and the Netherlands regarding the decision-making process is confirmed to a great extent. However, Meyer's description of the American approach towards authority needs revision as the study shows that the American is described as hierarchical rather than egalitarian and it could be wondered if the US should be placed more towards the hierarchical side of Meyer's leading scale.

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12. APPENDIX

12.1 Appendix A - Interview questions

12.1.1 *Permission*

1. Do you give permission to record this interview?
2. Do you give permission to automatically transcribe this interview?
3. Are you familiar with the purpose of this interview and the research?
4. Do you give permission to use this data for the research?

12.1.2 *General*

1. What is your age?
2. What is your job description?
3. For how long have you been working in the US?
4. In which state in the US do you work?
5. Until when have you worked in the Netherlands? For how long have you worked in the Netherlands?
6. What are the nationalities of the people you are surrounded with on the work floor?
7. How many employees does the company you work for have?
8. Are you a boss/manager? Do you work under/for a boss/manager?

12.1.3 *Leadership authority*

1. Do you feel like all people are considered equal in American organizations (looking at the position of someone while being on duty)?
 - a. Do you feel like this is similar to the Netherlands?
 - i. Why (not)?
 - b. Can you give an example?
2. Do you feel like all people are considered equal in American organizations (looking at the position of someone while being off duty (meetings – lunch break))?
 - a. Do you feel like this is similar to the Netherlands?
 - i. Why (not)?
 - b. Can you give an example?
3. Do you feel like all people get equal opportunities in American organizations (looking at the status of someone)?
 - a. Do you feel like this is similar to the Netherlands?
 - i. Why (not)?
 - b. Can you give an example?
4. Is there room for personal growth and development in American organizations?
 - a. Do you feel like this is similar to the Netherlands?
 - i. Why (not)?
 - b. Can you give an example?

12.1.4 *Decision-making*

PROCESS

1. What is the decision-making process in American organizations like?
 - a. Do you feel like this is similar to the Netherlands?
 - i. Why (not)?
 - b. Can you give an example?
2. Are decisions likely to change after they have been made? Or does the rest of the process start immediately after the decision has been made?
 - a. Do you feel like this is similar to the Netherlands?
 - i. Why (not)?
 - b. Can you give an example?

ROLE OF THE MANAGER / RESPONSIBILITY

3. What is the role of the manager in American organizations?
 - a. Do you feel like this is similar to the Netherlands?
 - i. Why (not)?
 - b. Can you give an example?

4. Who has the responsibility?
 - a. Do you feel like this is similar to the Netherlands?
 - i. Why (not)?
 - b. Can you give an example?
5. Is the manager/boss only interested in the main lines or the details as well?
 - a. Do you feel like this is similar to the Netherlands?
 - i. Why (not)?
 - b. Can you give an example?

GROUP AGREEMENT / CONSULTATION / OPINIONS OF OTHERS / FEEDBACK

6. Are the opinions of people other than the manager/boss taken into account?
 - a. Do you feel like this is similar to the Netherlands?
 - i. Why (not)?
 - b. Can you give an example?
7. Is coming to a group agreement considered important?
 - a. Do you feel like this is similar to the Netherlands?
 - i. Why (not)?
 - b. Can you give an example?
8. What does an American manager think if his opinion/view is being contradicted or criticized?
 - a. Do you feel like this is similar to the Netherlands?
 - i. Why (not)?
 - b. Can you give an example?
9. How does it feel for an American if no consultation has taken place?
 - a. Do you feel like this is similar to the Netherlands?
 - i. Why (not)?
 - b. Can you give an example?

MEETINGS

10. Do you have many meetings?
 - a. Do you feel like this is similar to the Netherlands?
 - i. Why (not)?
 - b. Can you give an example?
11. What are the meetings like? (slow – rapid – who speaks?)
 - a. Do you feel like this is similar to the Netherlands?
 - i. Why (not)?
 - b. Can you give an example?
12. Is there room for social talk during meetings?
 - a. Do you feel like this is similar to the Netherlands?
 - i. Why (not)?
 - b. Can you give an example?
13. What are important characteristics of meetings? With what words would you describe the meetings?
 - a. What would you consider important characteristics of meetings in the Netherlands?

OVERALL

14. What words would you use to characterize the decision-making process in the US?
 - a. What words would you use to characterize the decision-making process in the Netherlands?

12.1.5 Techniques

1. Did you prepare for a different work culture before you came to the US?
 - a. What did you do?
 - b. Was it useful?
2. What do you do if you don't agree or don't feel comfortable with the way Americans do things?
3. What advice would you give future Dutchmen who are going to work in the US?