

The influence of Romanian culture on top leaders working in The Netherlands: An inductive qualitative study

Daria Gabriela Lungu
University of Twente
P.O. Box 217, 7500AE Enschede
The Netherlands

This paper aims to present a comparison of Romanian and Dutch leadership. Six Romanian professionals were interviewed about their work experience both in Romania and in the Netherlands and about their interactions with their managers. Dutch leadership characteristics, cultural background and acculturation, values, working environment and working experience in Romania were the main themes identified. Findings show that the most predominant leadership style in the Netherlands was the democratic one and that there is an overall positive sentiment towards Dutch management and the way of working. The results show both confirmation and contradictions of previous studies. The acculturation and adaptation processes are described, with the main differences experienced by the interviewees being shown.

Graduation Committee members:

Dr. Arnold H. Enklaar,

Dr. Lara Carminati

Keywords

Leadership, Cultural background, Romanian, Cross-cultural leadership, Leadership differences, Management, Dutch

1. INTRODUCTION

A hot topic for the management field and the organizations in general is represented by leadership (Dulewicz et al., 2005), as it is one of the most decisive components of a successful company (Landis et al., 2014). Leadership can be defined as “a process, in which a person influences other members of a group to achieve the goals of a group or organization” (Safonov et al., 2018, 304). When thinking about the individual that has the leader position, multiple theories have been developed and debated so far: The Great Man Theory, which postulates that leaders can only be born, not everyone can become a leader; the Trait Theory, which states that certain personality traits are characteristic for leaders and the Theory of Charismatic Leadership that suggests that there is only one quality that can make a person a leader, and that is charisma (Safonov et al., 2018). Therefore, there are many facets of leadership to be explored, but apart from these theories, there are other aspects that can also have a significant impact on leadership, such as the **culture**.

When looking at how **cultural** background can influence the leadership style, according to van Emmerik et al. (2008), the culture of a country can be used to explain leadership behaviour. Diverse cultural backgrounds can have a substantial influence on the leadership style adopted by a person, as in some cultures it is preferred to have an authoritative style, while in others a more democratic one is encouraged (van Emmerik et al., 2008). In addition, cross-cultural leadership also plays an important role when trying to understand what and how the country of origin, the values and attitudes can have an influence on the leadership style. According to Zander (2020), cross-cultural differences in leadership have been reported in different countries, but there was no clear preference established that shows that a country can be associated with only one type of leadership, or that there is a uniformity regarding the leadership style that is applied in a country.

Research has been done about the influence of culture on leadership and how a manager's style can vary in relation to a person's background (Zander, 2020). However, there is scant research on how the cultural aspects can influence the way people from Eastern Europe behave as managers in a company in the Netherlands and how the Dutch leadership style is perceived by skilled employees originating from countries in Eastern Europe. In a short literature review, only two studies were found that compare the leadership styles of Dutch and Romanian managers. In recent times many Romanians have come to the Netherlands for work, both as managers or as subordinates, it is imperative to know more about how they deal with the Dutch leadership style on the work floor. One of the studies found does not take into account at all the cultural aspect, but rather focuses on the company's age and owner's gender, and therefore correlates these two dimensions with the leadership style (Mihai et al., 2017). The other study considers the cultural aspect, but the sample population is not representative because it only takes into account first and second-year psychology and information technology students that worked either part-time or full-time and the employees of a multinational bank that had subsidiaries in both countries (van den Berg, 2010). Decision-making and cross-cultural leadership can also influence how employees experience their work at a certain company and to what extent the cultural aspects are taken into consideration or not (Thomas et al., 2010, p. 298).

Central to my research is how educated Romanians working in the Netherlands experience Dutch leadership and how their cultural background can influence both their perceptions and the

styles they adopt. Understanding cultural differences and adjusting to the Dutch leadership style might be key in experiencing a high work satisfaction and in having a positive impact on performance. Additionally, I will also investigate if the most common values of their country of origin are still present after moving abroad and the degree to which they have been influenced by Dutch culture or not.

This thesis extends the current literature on how cultural background can influence the perception of Romanians about Dutch leadership in two ways while also representing the base for further research. Firstly, by exploring the cultural differences experienced by Eastern Europeans managing or undergoing management in a company in the Netherlands, this study sheds some light on the most important differences in leadership styles between Romania and the Netherlands. Secondly, by analyzing how the Dutch leadership styles are perceived by educated people from those countries, it addresses a topic that has not been properly explored so far, fulfils the gap in the literature and helps contribute to understanding these differences in leadership between an Eastern European country and a Western European one. It also investigates how culture shapes the perception of the leadership styles that are practiced and to what extent foreigners in another country stick to the values of their country of birth or (start to) embrace the ones from The Netherlands.

Given the current gap in literature and all the information mentioned above, the following research question has been developed:

What is the perception of Dutch leadership from the perspective of Romanian professionals working in the Netherlands?

To unpack the above research question, the subsequent research questions are also formulated:

1. *Are there differences perceived by Romanians and how can they be explained by cultural differences?*
2. *How do Romanians deal with this difference in leadership style?*
3. *To what extent have Romanian professionals adjusted to Dutch leadership?*

Different theories on leadership do exist, but the way that they are put into practice can differ from culture to culture. Therefore, the research will also analyze if the three leadership styles developed by Lewin (1939) have the same meaning and expression in different countries and will provide more insights into this topic, therefore contributing to the existing body of knowledge.

This paper and the insights that it will bring, will be valuable for Romanians with a leading position in the Netherlands to avoid friction with Dutch subordinates and also it will be interesting for Romanian employees dealing with a Dutch leader. The observations might even prove to be useful for Dutch people working in Romania, as it can offer an insight into what to expect when managing a company there.

In the following chapters of this paper, the theoretical framework focusing on concepts such as leadership styles, cultural background, cross-cultural leadership, and multicultural leadership will be presented. The paper will continue with the methodology part which includes the research design, data collection, research instrument and data analysis. The results will also be presented, and a discussion will follow about the insights

that have been discovered. Limitations, recommendations for future work and the conclusion will be the last sections of this paper.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, the relevant literature for this study will be discussed. The literature that has been explored includes papers on leadership styles, culture, cultural background, and values. Then an analysis of leadership across cultures is discussed, focusing on both differences and similarities between Romanian and Dutch leadership.

2.1 Leadership Styles

As described in the introduction, leadership is a trending topic nowadays. Even though it has been present for a long time, not all the facets of leadership have been discovered completely, as on a theoretical level, all concepts of leadership are related but their application can differ from one culture to another. (Lee et al., 2014). To see how the leadership style is influenced by the cultural background of managers, Lewin's framework will be used. According to Lewin et al. (1939) cited by Martin & Edwards (2016), there are three leadership styles when it comes to decision-making, which are described below. The choice for using Lewin's framework was made because there is a clear delimitation between these three styles and their characteristics are clear and different, therefore it is easier to see when analyzing in practice in which of these styles the leadership of a company can be framed.

2.1.1 Authoritarian Style

The authoritarian style is the one which puts emphasis on the leader making important decisions by himself and not consulting with other people. On one hand, this style is especially useful during crises because it can facilitate rapid decision-making and help set clear tasks and deadlines. On the other hand, due to the rigor of this style, it does not encourage employees to be creative, decreases performance, leads to a negative perception of the leader, animosity towards that person and towards colleagues and in the end even to employees leaving the company (Martin & Edwards, 2016). According to Wang & Guan (2018), even though previous studies have shown that this style has mainly negative effects, there is still a positive influence that is experienced by the employees when putting this style into practice such as increasing employee's performance and motivation. Though there are some disadvantages to this style which can lead to it being considered ineffective, many companies worldwide still choose to use it as its perception can differ from one culture to another (Pizzolitto et al., 2022).

What is more, it has been proven that this style limits the amount of autonomy that the employees have but promotes the level of alignment that is present among them (Gutierrez et al., 2022). Therefore, it will be interesting to gain more insights into how highly educated Romanians working in the Netherlands experience this style and if they consider that they are limited by it.

2.1.2 Democratic Style

The democratic type of leadership takes into consideration the opinions of team members and encourages equal participation, but the final decision is still made by the leader. The quality of work and the commitment to achieve the goals that are set are improved when using democratic leadership. A downside of this style is that managers must consider that the quantity of work can decrease as employees do not feel the pressure to get everything done at a fast pace (Martin & Edwards, 2016).

By using this style, a higher degree of autonomy is given to the employees, which helps them be more motivated to work and feel more in control of what they are doing (Bhatti et al., 2012). What is more, a democratic leader takes into consideration the opinions of all the people involved in order to be able to facilitate reaching the end goal (Gutierrez et al., 2022).

2.1.3 Laissez-faire Style

The laissez-faire style encourages a laid-back leadership process, where the leader is relaxed about having minimal input in the process of making decisions, even though he is still the person that will take responsibility for the final output. The laissez-faire leadership encourages people to increase their critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as it gives them the freedom to make rational decisions. However, the absence of these skills can lead to higher costs, failing to get the work done on time and decreased control and productivity. (Martin & Edwards, 2016).

2.1.4 Decision-making and Leadership Styles

When making decisions for a company, the degree to which people are involved can contribute to how responsibility is distributed. As people come from different backgrounds and cultures, their decision styles can also be different. When a consensus-oriented approach to decision-making is practiced, people tend to share only the ideas that would fit the pattern and that are highly likely to happen. If a dissent oriented decision-making approach is taken, the focus shifts from the predominant view to expressing opposing ideas and suggestions. In both cases, all the ideas should be put together in order to reach a compromise that is accepted by everyone and that fits the organization's goal (Thomas et al., 2010, p. 60).

What is more, decision-making is in close correlation with the style a leader adopts, and different problem-solving concepts can be discussed. The dominance concept, where the values and norms from one's culture are considered superior to others, the assimilation concept which states that the acceptance and integration of other cultural values are implemented into the manner of working, the divergency concept where both own culture and other cultural norms and values are being considered and the effective and synthesis concept that puts the emphasis on considering all the values equally important (Thomas et al., 2010, p.88). By analyzing the answers provided by the participants in the interviews, it will also be possible to discover in more detail this connection.

Finding out more information about the decision-making process present at the companies where educated Romanians who will be interviewed are working will help in understanding more about their choice regarding the leadership styles that are used.

2.2 Cultural Background

This paper will also focus on finding out if the leadership styles are culturally linked and to what extent a person's cultural background can influence the type of leader an individual is. Differences between cultures are visible, as these impact the attitudes, behaviours, and thoughts of people, which combined also have an influence on the style a leader adopts (Jogulu, 2010). According to Offerman et al. (1997), to be able to understand leaders' behaviour, cultural differences are important aspects to be considered also because the management and the techniques used are also becoming more diverse as organizations become increasingly global.

2.2.1 What is Culture?

To be able to understand the degree to which cultural aspects can influence the leadership styles exerted by managers and how this

influence is experienced by foreigners, it is necessary to first determine what culture is. It is not simple to define culture, but Hofstede states that it is “the collective mental programming of the mind which distinguishes one group or category of people from another” (Fang, 2003). According to Enklaar (2007, p. 18), people should not only focus on the external culture, which is represented by the visible aspects, but also on the mental aspect of culture. The latter can help understand where people’s attitudes and values come from, based on their behaviours and statements. However, culture is not a fixed concept, and even though culture can be inherited from one generation to another, it can also change as it is a dynamic construct (Enklaar, 2007, p. 20).

2.2.2 *Cultural Values and Acculturation*

When looking at culture in general regardless of the country of origin of the person that is analysed, a kaleidoscopic approach should be used (Enklaar, 2007, p. 23). This is due to the fact that looking at aspects only from one angle is not enough to understand the values, attitudes, habits, experiences, and the true impact these have on a person. Even though it cannot be strictly said what would be the values that best describe Dutch people, according to Enklaar (2007, p. 23), some of the most defining aspects are salvation, guilt, compassion, truth, and labour. Looking at the most common Romanian values, according to ISRA Centre (2018), these are: family, honesty, health, respect, and labour. What is more, the perception of the employees regarding the leadership style can be affected by their cultural values (Koveshnikov et al., 2022).

People can consciously or unconsciously identify themselves as part of a culture based on the values that they share, as these values are communicated from generation to generation as a legacy of that country. However, these values can shift as individuals emigrate and they come into contact with other cultures. In this case, acculturation plays an important role in the process of maintaining the same values or adapting to the ones of the country of destination. (Arends-To ‘th & van de Vijver, 2009). From an early age, children absorb the cultural values and as a consequence the adult does not perceive them as something inherited from the cultural environment, but rather as part of themselves. However, we can not talk about a homogeneous culture, because differences have been found between the inhabitants of a single country in terms of thinking and behaviour. (Enklaar, 2007, p. 21). The decision to make a change, adopt and adapt to values from another country can be a mindful one or can happen without the person being directly aware of this adjustment as this process can be influenced by different internal and external factors.

This study will analyze if the values of educated Romanians working under Dutch leadership change or remain the same as the ones of the people from their home countries. What is more, it will also analyze if the current values that they have are aligned with the ones of their managers and if they perceive to be closer to the values from Romania or to the ones from the Netherlands.

2.3 Cross-cultural Leadership: A Dutch-Romanian Perspective

2.3.1 *Cross-cultural Leadership Theories*

When managing people from diverse cultural backgrounds, it is important to be able to understand the cultures you are working with and to be aware of how people from other cultures may perceive your behaviour, actions, and attitude (Deng & Gibson, 2008). As a manager, it is essential to be able to adapt and work with people that come from different cultural backgrounds.

Closely connected to the cultural background of a person is how that person makes decisions, chooses strategies, and decides on which approaches to take. Having managers and employees that come from different cultures can represent both an advantage and a disadvantage, therefore it is important to select leaders that are willing to learn more about interculturalism and think how it can be put into practice. On the one hand, a positive aspect is represented by the fact that having people from different backgrounds can also mean different experiences, attitudes, behaviours, and ways of working which can help offer a diverse perspective of things and can be combined to develop an inclusive, diverse, and efficient working model. On the other hand, if the people that are involved in the interaction are not able to understand that there are cultural differences that are present and what does this involve, this can lead to conflicts, bad experiences, and a lack of integration of diversity (Thomas et al., 2010, p. 298).

2.3.2 *Cross-cultural Leadership in Practice*

Findings from different studies have shown that countries can be grouped into clusters based on their beliefs and cultural values and that people from the same cultural cluster have aligned mentalities about leadership behaviours. Romania has been assigned to the Eastern-Europe cluster and the Netherlands to the Germanic-Europe one (van Emmerik et al., 2008). This means that Romanian managers value more than Dutch managers do a leadership approach that encourages change in individuals and transforms them into leaders (van den Berg, 2010).

In a short literature review, only two papers were found dealing with how highly educated Romanians in The Netherlands perceive Dutch leadership and how the cultural differences impact this perception. This study focuses only on highly educated Romanians and does not consider unskilled workers at the low end of the Dutch labour market because they are often managed in a way that is atypical for the average Dutch work floor.

The first paper does not take into consideration cultural aspects, the comparison is done based on the influence of the company’s age and the owner’s sex (Mihai et al., 2017). Moreover, this was a quantitative study that does not consider Romanian managers in the Netherlands or skilled professionals working under Dutch leadership. It showed that the style that predominated the most was the democratic one for both countries, with females being more inclined to adopt a democratic leadership style while males preferred the autocratic one (Mihai et al., 2017). The second paper focuses on the cultural side. It uses Hofstede’s framework and dimensions to compare the behaviour of people from the two countries and the effectiveness of transformational leadership. This is a quantitative study directed at first and second-year psychology and information technology students that worked either part-time or full-time and the employees of a multinational bank that had subsidiaries in both countries. The study concludes that the two countries culturally differ in many respects, including organizational culture and leadership styles. It concluded that a transformational style is more preferred in Romania than in the Netherlands. However, the sample is only representative for these two groups, but cannot be generalized, because only employees from a specific bank and students were used, which is also mentioned as one of the limitations by the author. (van den Berg, 2010). While this is a surprising result, it would be useful to refine research on this topic with a qualitative approach.

2.2.3 *Adapting to a Foreign Culture*

The influence that culture has on the behaviour of individuals does not represent an aspect that can be neglected as it can manifest at a high level. What is more, cultural differences are always present to a certain degree in the case of immigrants. Being able to grasp a better understanding of these differences and cultural views plays a fundamental role when people try to adapt to different cultures, both from a manager's perspective and from an employee's one (Forster, 2000; Deng & Gibson, 2008). There is no current information that shows how Romanians working under Dutch leadership adapt to the working environment, the work structure and the values shown by their work colleagues, therefore, by collecting and analyzing the data more light can be shed on this topic.

3. **METHODOLOGY**

3.1 **Research Design**

This research is a qualitative one, because this type of study does take into consideration how the participants perceive certain events, and how these can influence their behaviours and it does not only focus on the event itself (Bickman & Rog, 2009). The choice for a qualitative method is due to the fact that this research aims to explore how the cultural background of a person can influence the perception of leadership, therefore interviews were needed in order to better understand the participants' experiences. Since a relatively small number of individuals has been studied for this research, qualitative methods are appropriate in order to "preserve the individuality of each of these in their analyses, rather than collecting data from large samples and aggregating the data across individuals or situations" (Bickman & Rog, 2009, p. 221). Since the study is qualitative, the nature of this research is inductive, subjective, and interpretive (Liu, 2016). It is an inductive study, because it aids to understand raw and complex data by grouping them into summaries and categories and because a theory can be developed at the end of the study based on the experiences of the participants (Thomas, 2003).

3.2 **Data Collection and Sample Characteristics**

The data for this research was collected during interviews and this process had three stages: preparation of the interviews, conducting interviews and transcription. When collecting data during a qualitative study, the scope is to collect various data to be interpreted, to the point where there is a saturation and the information that is collected becomes repetitive and no new findings can be discovered by conducting more interviews. (Liu, 2016). For this research, the data was collected by conducting semi-structured interviews which lasted between 30 and 45 minutes with highly educated Romanians who work under Dutch leadership or who themselves are in top management positions at a company in the Netherlands.

Due to the scope of this study, the participants needed to be Romanian born and raised, highly educated, have work experience in The Netherlands and preferably be located in different regions, so the information that is gathered and the results are not only relevant for a specific region. The inclusion and exclusion criteria did not consider the gender of the person or the age, so these were not requirements for this study due to the low number of interviews. Uneducated Romanians were not included because they work in blue collar jobs which might not be representative of the Dutch work environment and because they are not so much able to reflect on the cultural differences as uneducated.

In total, a number of six interviews were conducted. Even if the participants were not selected based on the criteria mentioned above, the sample entails six highly educated Romanians of which three of them (50%) were men and the other three (50%) were women. All of them have Romanian nationality and their native language is Romanian, therefore the interviews were conducted in this language, but all of them are also fluent in English. Their age varies between 25 and 40 years old, and they live in different regions of the Netherlands, predominantly in the West part of the Netherlands: 4 in North Holland, 1 in Twente and 1 in 'North Brabant. They have been living in the Netherlands between 1.5 and 6 years with an average of 4.75 years and have been working in the Netherlands between half a year and five years with an average of 2.3 years. Participants were contacted through LinkedIn and all of them agreed to be part of this study. They occupy different positions in the companies where they are working, such as: Health&Sustainability Associate, Engineering Manager, Marketing Data Analyst, Sustainability Developer, Charging Intern in the Deployment Management and Team Lead Credit Risk Modelling. Their level of professional diversity is high for a sample like this one, as the participants work in companies from various sectors: Automotive Engineering, Banking, Food Retail, High Tech and Fashion Industry Licensing. There is a certain degree of diversity present in terms of people at their jobs, the participants declaring that there is a mix between Dutch and international employees.

3.3 **Research Instrument**

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the research instrument because they provide a degree of flexibility for the participant who has to answer open-ended questions. From an analytical perspective, semi-structured interviews are characterized by a comparison of the responses of the people who participate in the study who are all asked the questions in the same order which makes the data that is collected ready to be transcribed, transformed, and quantified. (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). The aim of the research was to have around 4-5 interviews conducted either online or face to face if possible. However, from all the people that I contacted, six interviews were scheduled and held, therefore increasing the number of participants for this study. Conducting semi-structured interviews in this manner has certain advantages such as giving the interviewer the possibility to improve the communication process, observe the verbal and non-verbal communication, clarify certain questions, and overall have more complex interviews. Some disadvantages could be that the presence of the interviewer can affect the way respondents answer the questions and that the participants might feel uncomfortable answering sensitive questions face to face (McIntosh & Morse, 2015).

The recording, transcription and translation of the interviews were done by the researcher herself who is a Romanian native speaker and proficient in English. The identity of the people who were interviewed will not be disclosed without their consent, but certain data such as their function or the industry sector where they are working was used for the analysis of the result to get more insightful information.

3.4 **Data Analysis**

To be able to analyze the data, main categories and subcategories were established based on the data from the interviews and the amount of information was reduced. The method that was used was thematic analysis.

3.4.1 Thematic Analysis

According to Boyatzis (1998) cited by Alhojailan, 2012, 40) thematic analysis “is used to analyse classifications and present themes (patterns) that relate to the data. It illustrates the data in great detail and deals with diverse subjects via interpretations”. This type of analysis is very important for qualitative studies, because in this case, the researcher needed to be able to draw conclusions and interpret the data that was collected in order to find explanations for the interviewees’ actions. It is also appropriate for inductive research because the collected data was analyzed with precision in the beginning, and then a broader generalization was done that could in the end lead to theories.

In theory, thematic analysis offers a certain degree of flexibility and freedom which can lead to having complex and detailed data gathered that can be analyzed, which is grouped into themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). For this research, a deductive approach was used when analyzing the data, as the coding was made around the main research question and the sub-questions.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), six steps needed to be considered when doing thematic analysis:

1. Familiarizing with the data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the report

Giving voice to the participants and making sure that throughout this research their voices are represented properly and that the terms they used are presented as accurately as possible are also some important aspects that need to be considered, according to Gioia et al. (2012). All of the steps mentioned above were followed in this research paper.

Apart from the main six steps mentioned in the paper of Braun and Clarke (2006), the data structure for thematic analysis suggested by Gioia et al. (2012) was used. Relevant quotes from the participants were coded into 1st-order categories, and a number of 186 categories was found in total. These concepts were grouped together into 2nd-order themes that represent concepts that were further grouped together into 3rd-order themes or aggregated dimensions. During the last two steps mentioned by Gioia et al. (2012), the themes that were emerging could be already used to explain the observations.

The results of the thematic analysis are presented below, as the 1st-order concepts were grouped into 2nd-order themes which in the end were put together in 3rd-order themes or aggregate dimensions.

4. RESULTS

As a result of the thematic analyses of the transcriptions, several codes and second-order themes emerged that help answer the main research question and the sub-questions and explain what differences in leadership Romanians perceive in the Netherlands compared to Romania and how their cultural background and values contribute to this experience. The main five 3rd-order themes that were identified and which can be seen in Figure 1 are *Dutch leadership characteristics*, *cultural background and acculturation*, *values and value alignment*, *employee characteristics and work experience in Romania*, all of them having several 2nd-order themes that contribute to an insightful perspective about this topic. Furthermore, a more comprehensive scheme also including the 1st-order concepts can be seen in Figure 1 in Appendix 1 (9.1). In this section, all the findings

from the data analysis part are reported, including some representative quotes that have been taken from the transcripts in order to better illustrate the connection between the results and the experience of the participants.

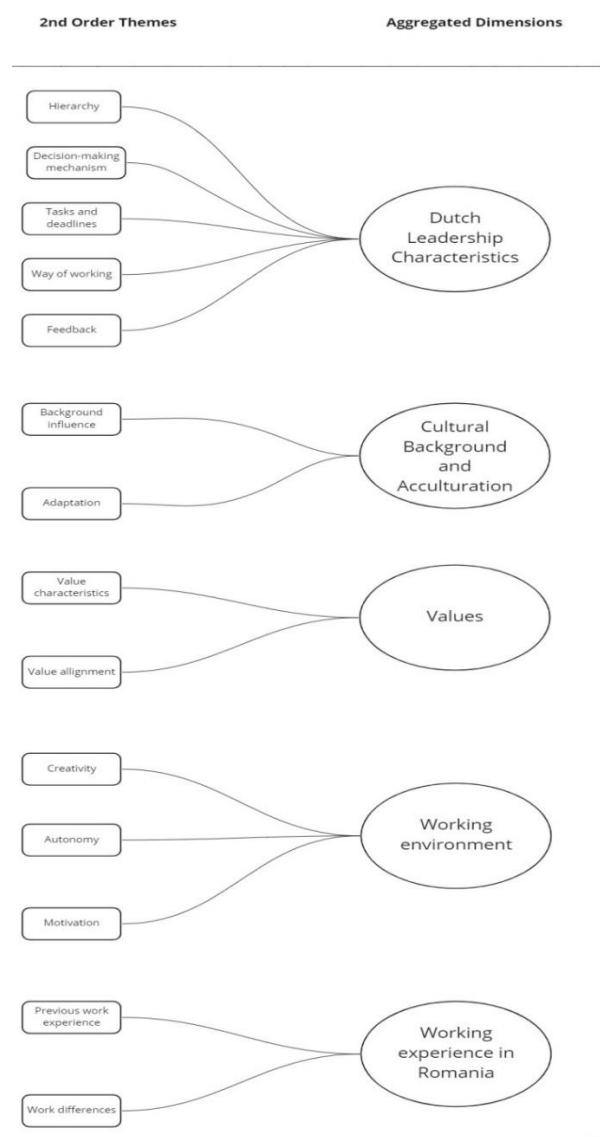


Figure 1

4.1 Dutch Leadership Characteristics

The first 3rd-order theme that was identified and is related to answering the research question is represented by Dutch leadership characteristics, with five main 2nd-order themes. The most predominant findings from the thematic analysis regarding the characteristics of Dutch leadership from the eye of Romanians are represented by *organizational hierarchy*, *decision-making mechanism*, *tasks, deadlines and rules*, *way of working* and *feedback and communication*.

4.1.1 Hierarchy

Hierarchy was used to analyze the leadership style of a company and was identified as a recurring topic among the people who were interviewed, as some of them work at big organizations. During the interviews, four out of six interviewees stated that hierarchy is not present that much in the Dutch companies where they are working. They characterized it as rather flat, with little

emphasis being put on this: “there are no clear hierarchical management layers in the company” (interviewee no. 2). The others said that a clear hierarchy is present and there is a well-defined chain of command, but people are encouraged to treat each other as equals.

4.1.2 Decision-making Process

The *decision-making* process is an important aspect in the way Dutch managers manifest their role. All of the participants declared that they are either involved in the decision-making process of their department, “everybody has the same weight in the decision-making process” or that there is a certain level of consultation with all the employees before making a decision: “When it comes to decisions that have a direct impact on us or our team, there is a discussion that takes place among us first” (interviewee no. 1). Two participants stated that there is a combination of the bottom-up and top-down approaches, while half of the interviewees said that the most important decisions are definitely made by the top managers and come from the top-down, with the main direction being set by the leaders. One participant stated that “in the Dutch work environment there is a lot of transparency in the decision-making process” (interviewee no. 6), while another two said that they are often involved in making decisions.

4.1.3 Tasks and Deadlines

One aspect where big differences were experienced by the participants is represented by the way in which *tasks and deadlines* are set. Most participants mentioned that there is a high level of flexibility in organizing their tasks and setting personal deadlines in the departments where they are working: “Deadlines are flexible, there are even deadlines that can be negotiated” (interviewee no. 1). However, this flexibility is reduced when it comes to deadlines set by top management. “Deadlines set by the Board of Directors Executive Committee have priority over the others.” (interviewee no.4). The topic of rules was also present in the interviews, some interviewees said that there are rules, but they only need to be followed precisely for technical problems.

4.1.4 Way of Working

The *way of working* is another 2nd-order theme that was identified from the interviews. Qualitatively, it seems that people perceive the Dutch management as being more relaxed, with not a lot of pressure on employees and with a lot of emphasis on empowering them. The overall feeling of the participants was a good one, people stated that they have nothing bad to say about Dutch leadership and that they did not perceive that differences were made in the way they were treated between themselves and their Dutch colleagues. Participants felt like the leadership style adopted shapes them into more responsible persons and gives them the opportunity to make mistakes and learn from them: “You are encouraged to try and even if you fail it is okay, because they see it as an opportunity for you to grow and to learn what mistakes you should avoid next time.” (interviewee no. 5). One participant thought that Dutch managers were sometimes too slow, and they had the tendency to spend too much time on planning, rather than start working directly: “Dutch people feel the need to over plan, to over schedule before they begin a project, while sometimes I feel like there are projects which could advance faster.” (interviewee no. 6).

Most participants stated that there is a high degree of flexibility regarding the *way of working* at their companies, which also implies being able to influence the projects they are working on. The main direction is indeed set by the management, but the way in which they are organizing their work is their decision. Freedom of speech is another aspect that was identified during the analysis as recurring, as people can work in groups and share

their results with others, opposing to Romania where employees are used to operate in a more individualistic way and not sharing their honest opinion. “Here, everyone is free to share their opinion, and no one is *crucified* for being honest.” (interviewee no. 1). Furthermore, a clear working time delimitation was mentioned by 2 of the participants, as they mentioned that there was a clear working schedule and that they were not encouraged to stay overtime unless they want to: “The working hours are very clear, no one expects you to stay overtime” (interviewee no. 4).

4.1.5 Feedback and Communication

Feedback was also a recurring subject, with one participant saying that she appreciated the fact that the feedback given by the employees was always considered and appreciated: “You can see that they take into consideration the feedback that you are giving, and you can see the impact” (interviewee no. 5). Another one stated that even though Dutch people were more direct when giving feedback, he feels that in multicultural teams, internationals have also borrowed this feedback approach. “Some people who were very direct now are a bit more forgiving, while the ones that were more cautious about giving feedback are now more direct, which is a good thing for everybody” (interviewee no. 2). In terms of *communication*, most of the interviewees had a positive experience when communicating with managers or other colleagues, as the business language was English. However, there was one participant who complained that there are Dutch employees who do not speak English very well and who ask for translations for their main tasks and responsibilities.

4.2 Cultural Background and Acculturation

This overarching theme describes the influence of the *cultural background and adaptation process* which represent the two 2nd-order themes that are put together to make the 3rd-order theme.

4.2.1 Cultural Background

Most participants agreed that there was a certain level of cultural influence affecting their perceptions, but some of them stated that it was not clear to them if this was present in a positive or in a negative way. “The influence of my cultural background is definitely present, but I could not say if this is manifesting in a good or bad way.” (interviewee no. 6). ‘*Positive bias*’ was the term used by some participants to describe their experience, as they said that due to the influence of their Romanian background and past experiences, they might forgive certain mistakes or errors made by Dutch leaders as they compare it both consciously and unconsciously with the less favourable situation in Romania. One of the participants also stated that she appreciated the flat hierarchy that was present in the Netherlands and that comparing the working systems of these two countries it would seem ‘unfair to go back to the Romanian system’ (interviewee no 6).

4.2.2 Adaptation Process

Many participants noted that the more work experience they had back in Romania, the longer it took and the more difficult it was for them to adapt in the Netherlands. The participants who had the most work experience in Romania, stated that conscious and long-term effort was needed to adapt to management characteristics that for Dutch people are the regular standard. “Coming from a foreign country, a conscious effort is needed to adapt to the Dutch way of working” (interviewee no. 1). The participants with less working experience and who had also studied in the Netherlands (3) stated that they did not have difficulties adapting to the Dutch way of working. “You can even consider that the Dutch culture reshapes you”, said interviewee no. 6 when asked about how the person adapted to the Dutch work environment.

4.3 Values

Presented in this 3rd-order theme are the top three values mentioned by the Romanians during the interviews as being the most important ones for them and how and if these values are aligned with the other values of their colleagues and of the leadership.

4.3.1 Value Characteristics

In order to see to what degree participants, stick to the values from their country of origin or if their values are reshaped by the Dutch culture, they were asked to name their top three values. It should be taken into consideration the fact that they might have named some principles they like and not their true values as they might not be aware of them, but it was interesting to see their perceptions about what they consider to be values. The most predominant *value* that was present among all the participants was honesty (all), followed by accountability, responsibility, generosity, fairness, empathy, encouragement, transparency, kindness, extroversion, and productivity.

4.3.2 Values Alignment

Values alignment was identified as present for all the interviewees, as they felt that their personal values were aligned with the ones of the leadership from the companies where they work: "It is very nice and motivating to see that myself and the management team are on the same page in terms of values." (interviewee no. 3); "Values alignment is clearly present" (interviewee no. 5). Another interesting fact that was discovered during one of the interviews with a top manager was represented by the fact that even though the individuals from the teams this person was coordinating were very diverse, they shared the same values. "I find it very interesting how people with different personalities, hobbies and even different passions share the same values" (interviewee no. 2). The power of the Dutch culture reshaping you was also a concept brought up by one of the participants, as the person felt that the way of working, and her personal beliefs were influenced by the Dutch culture. On the other hand, another participant affirms that values were not something you can change, but they are rather an aspect that once present stays with you your entire life "When I think about values, I think of something that does not change during your life. If you have a value, you should have it for the rest of your life" (interviewee no. 2).

4.4 Working Environment

The main findings that were identified after talking with Romanian professionals can be grouped into three 2nd-order themes: *creativity, autonomy, and work motivation*.

4.4.1 Creativity

Five out of six participants mentioned that *creativity* was encouraged in the work environment and that employees are encouraged to come up with ideas and find creative ways of getting their tasks done: "The more creative you are, the better" (interviewee no. 1); "You can be as creative as you want" (interviewee no. 5). One person mentioned that due to his work being repetitive, creativity was not something that is present in his workplace, and another professional stated that there were employees who do not like the idea of being creative, their focus is just to get work done. "I have observed that some employees do not want to be involved in the creative process" (interviewee no. 2).

4.4.2 Autonomy

Most people interviewed said that they consider they have enough autonomy." I have observed that the employees have enough freedom and autonomy" (interviewee no. 6); "for sure you are given autonomy" (interviewee no. 1); "the level of

autonomy differs from one project to another, but in my case, I can say that I really do have enough autonomy" (participant no. 5). The remaining participant admitted to having a certain level of autonomy, proportionate with the experience she has in the company. One of the participants who has started from a lower position, and has now a management role declared that he was able to move up in the hierarchy in a way that allows him to have the highest level of autonomy that is possible. Overall, Romanians consider that the level of autonomy they have was enough compared to the situation in Romania and to their expectations, and that they do not feel micromanaged.

4.4.3 Work Motivation

Work motivation had also an influence on the perception of the leadership style. All the participants declared that they feel motivated at work, both because they enjoy the work that they are doing but also due to the work environment and the practices that are put into place "the work environment is important to feel motivated" (interviewee no. 5); "I feel very motivated due to the people that work at the company. They represent role-models for me" (interviewee no. 3); "definitely a work environment where you have autonomy, and you are encouraged to be creative is a motivating one" (interviewee no. 1).

4.5 Working Experience in Romania

The last theme that was identified refers to the work experience that the participants had in Romania. One of the main aspects mentioned was the fact that they were not being encouraged to say what they think, as employees were afraid that there might be consequences "In Romania, you are not supposed to ask too many questions or to say what you really mean, more subordination is required" (interviewee no. 5); "You are used to the possibility of having consequences if you say what you really mean, which is not the case here" (interviewee no. 1). A steeper hierarchy was present in the Romanian work environment, as according to two of the participants, managers were stricter and did not give the employees the same level of trust and freedom as it happens in the Netherlands. The overtime working hours was an aspect mentioned by some participants. They stated that in the Netherlands you are not expected to work overtime, which in Romania is something normal. Overall, the participants have stated that there are many aspects from which the Romanian managers could learn when looking at the Dutch management.

One participant also stated that she was surprised by how much time and resources Dutch management is willing to invest in their employees compared to Romania. "Sometimes I am surprised by how many learning opportunities you are given here and by how much they are willing to invest in me" (interviewee no. 6).

When working in a foreign country, it is normal to experience some differences when it comes to the way of working, especially when you come from a different background and culture. Another aspect that was mentioned by the people who were interviewed as being a characteristic of Dutch management that they appreciate compared to Romania is transparency, which refers to communicating the decisions that are made by management to the employees, sharing what you work on with other colleagues and not having to keep things secret from others. In their home country, the management style involves less transparency and more control from the management's side.

5. DISCUSSION

This study aimed at exploring what is the perception of Romanian professionals who work in the Netherlands on Dutch leadership and how the cultural background influences it. To do so, this study has analyzed the experience of Romanians working under

Dutch leadership and how some of the differences felt can be explained by cultural aspects. All the participants had grosso modo similar experiences, but their perceptions varied based on some factors such as age, time spent in the Netherlands, number of years of working experience in Romania and number of years spent working in the Netherlands.

As presented in the theoretical framework, to identify which one of Lewin's (1939) leadership styles is perceived by the Romanian professionals, some aspects need to be considered. For instance, in line with the literature underlying the importance of the decision-making process (Thomas et al., 2010), the results of this thesis also pointed to the fact that this process was an important element since it boosted a feeling of inclusion, value and appreciation in the workplace. Therefore, a combination between dissent-oriented and consensus-oriented approaches was identified, based on the research of Thomas et al. (2010) as being used when making decisions. The hierarchy in their companies was not very layered and they had a high level of flexibility in solving their tasks and meeting deadlines. According to Martin and Edwards (2016), creativity, employee motivation and the level of autonomy are important aspects when identifying a leadership style, because they are good indicators that help classify what type of leadership from Lewin's framework is put into practice at the company. From the findings of this work, creativity played a crucial role and was clearly encouraged together with autonomy. The majority of the interviewees said that they were satisfied with the level of autonomy they had, while all of the participants stated that they feel motivated at the workplace. According to the literature which includes the framework developed by Lewin et al. (1939) and to the aspects mentioned above, all of the characteristics fit the description of the *democratic leadership style*, therefore it is a close relation between what is stated in the literature and the findings from this research.

Another interesting finding which is tightly related to the literature is represented by the influence of the cultural background which can impact how employees adapt to a foreign work environment, as described by Offerman (1997). The results also highlighted the importance of *positive bias* as the phenomenon whereby participants tended to perceive their boss leadership through more lenient lens. Even though this was not expected in the literature, it shows that even though there are differences perceived by the participants, they are mostly positive. This concept can be explained by the fact that according to the participants, the Romanian working environment tends to be stricter, with more restrictions in what someone can say and do, more rules present, a layered hierarchy and in general as more limiting in terms of different aspects. Considering the aspects mentioned above and based on Lewin's framework (1939), these Romanian characteristics would fit the autocratic style. In the study by van den Berg (2010), the results showed that in Romania, the transformational leadership style is more present than in the Netherlands, but this is not in line with what was found in this study, as looking at the past experience of the participants. The characteristics of the Romanian work environment shown by them do not suggest the presence of a transformational style. As expected in the literature part, some clear differences were indeed present, as interviewees stated that they felt more freedom, transparency and autonomy in the Netherlands compared with Romania. Being able to adapt to a foreign culture and to a different work management style is a big step that needs to be made by people who decide to work or manage a company in another country, a common know fact which is also backed by literature, according to an article by Deng and Gibson (2008). This could explain why some

participants have considered the process to be a difficult one, as it was found that the more experience the participants have working in Romania and the more time they have spent living there, the more difficult it is, and more effort is required for them to adapt to the Dutch management style. This could be due to the cultural aspect being embedded into people's minds, as the more time someone spends in one country, the more that person is consciously or unconsciously influenced by that culture. On the other hand, the individuals that have also studied in the Netherlands and had more experience with living and even working in this country mentioned that they did not have difficulties to adapt and little to no effort was required from their side. This means that when they start working, they had already started the acculturation process, since they had previous contact with the Dutch culture during their studies.

In terms of cross-cultural leadership, previous studies tend to neglect information regarding the experiences of highly educated Romanians working in the Netherlands, therefore, this research pays more attention to this aspect. The literature noted that Romanian managers are more supportive of their employees compared to the Dutch ones (van den Berg, 2010). Yet, this was not confirmed by the results of this thesis in which it was underlined a constant support from the management. Moreover, an aspect that was appreciated by the participants in terms of the management characteristics is represented by a lot of transparency and less control, participants being delighted by the fact that more freedom is given to them compared to their native country, not only in terms of being able to organize the work how they want, but also in terms of freedom of speech, which they felt is more encouraged in the Netherlands. According to the literature, these are also characteristics of a democratic style being present in the Dutch work environment. The diverse work environments the participants work in have contributed to not facing direct problems regarding communication. However, some of the interviewees also stated that their colleagues talk in Dutch among themselves, but if internationals are involved the switch to English is made. The aspects mentioned above can also contribute to the adaptation process, because talking in a different language that is not understood by everyone can make people feel excluded.

Another interesting aspect refers to the fact that during the interviews individuals said that they feel encouraged by the management to learn from new experiences even though that means to try and fail, compared to their native country where this was not emboldened. In terms of differences regarding how the management deals with them compared to their Dutch colleagues, all the participants have declared that they do not perceive any differences and that they feel equal in the workplace to their Dutch colleagues. Although some challenges or differences are present as expected in the literature part, most of the participants have declared that their experiences with the Dutch management and work environment are mainly positive, as they have not felt striking difficulties and in consequence had no critical remarks. They mentioned that the experience with working under Dutch leadership was a good one.

Looking at how rules are implemented, and analyzing what the interviewees said, the democratic leadership style is still present, even though, two participants stated that there are some strict rules and procedures to be followed at work, the others said that a more relaxed approach is preferred. In the literature part, the most common aspects of both countries have been presented. According to Enklaar (2007), some of the values of Dutch people are salvation, guilt, compassion, truth, and labour, while according to a study done in Romania presented in the theoretical framework, family, honesty, health, respect, and labour are the most common ones. As value is a broad term, in this study there

was no way of setting a clear definition of this concept, but instead, an assumption was made that people in the two studies mentioned above have a similar understanding of such a commonly known concept. What is more, here is chosen not to give definitions or to name some values for my participants during the interviews in order to avoid bias, because terms such as honesty for example are known worldwide and clear definitions are present for terms like this one. By looking at the thematic analysis findings, it can be said that people do not only maintain the values they had from their native country, but also try to implement and adapt to the ones of the country where they are living. Participants have kept values such as honesty, as all of them suggested this is a clear value for them, but they have also borrowed values from the Netherlands, such as compassion, truth, and empathy. In terms of values alignment, all the participants have agreed that from their personal working experiences they feel that their values are aligned with the ones of the management. This means that no big differences are experienced at work and that since they share similar values and the alignment is present, they feel part of the work community, feel included and appreciated as both individuals and employees. The qualitative findings regarding the values and values alignment part help explain certain perceptions and shed some light on the topic of acculturation as well, as according to Arends-To'th & van de Vijver (2009), the change of values after moving to a different country is part of the acculturation process presented in the literature part. Work practices mentioned by the participants, as being predominant, are also some of the characteristics of the democratic style presented in the theoretical framework, which reinforce the fact that the predominant leadership style as experienced by Romanian professionals and according to Lewin's framework is the democratic one.

The findings of this qualitative study contribute to narrowing the existing gap in the literature on the topic of the perception of Romanian professionals about Dutch leadership. A valuable aspect of this research paper is the fact that among the people who were interviewed, there are both regular employees and a Romanian employee who started as a part-time student and who has managed to work his way up to the top, getting even to manage other Romanian employees himself. These aspects offer a double-sided and insightful perspective on this topic. Therefore, by looking at all the aspects mentioned in the results and discussion sections, it can be said that the predominant leadership style is the democratic one based on the characteristics described by the interviewees and the literature review done. The overall perception of Romanians about Dutch management is a positive one and even though there are still cultural differences present, the acculturation process does not require that much effort for the majority of the participants. Since they identify the Dutch leadership style as being overall a good one, there is no surprise that most of the differences that were presented in this study are positive and that only small negative things were mentioned. This aspect does not diminish the findings of this research paper, as no matter if positive or negative, differences are still differences.

5.2 Practical Implications

What is more, apart from the theoretical implications they also have some practical ones, as the differences experienced by Romanian professionals working in the Netherlands can give insightful information in order to understand their struggles and how the process can be improved. The practices shown in this study are not necessarily present at all the companies in the Netherlands, therefore managers who work with Romanian employees in organizations where these practices are not the standard could use the results from this survey to understand how they should approach their employees, how to motivate and

encourage them and what type of support they might need. What is more, Human Resource managers could use the findings of the struggles that Romanians might face and how they adapt to a new culture and way of working to implement appropriate trainings and workshops to raise cultural awareness and emphasize how foreign employees can be properly integrated into companies from the Netherlands. Even though the main focus of this study is on Romanians working in the Netherlands, some of the findings could prove to be useful when trying to understand other East European nations as well.

6. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

As in all research papers, there are some limitations to the findings presented above. Firstly, the number of years people have spent in the Netherlands varies and the number of years they have worked at those specific companies is not the same. Some of the differences experienced in terms of leadership could be related to this aspect, as people who have been in the Netherlands for a longer period might have been through the process of adapting to the Dutch culture a long time ago and they might not remember certain challenges that they have faced. Furthermore, since the number of years worked at a company is not the same, some participants might be at the beginning of the acculturation process in that company while others are already used to the way of working and to the Dutch leadership. Hence, future research where the participants have the same work experience in terms of years would prove to be useful.

Secondly, even though the sample was very diverse, in this research the sample size (six people) was relatively small, and this could impact the generalizability of the results. Further research that includes more participants and even a combination of qualitative and quantitative data would be thus recommended.

Lastly, this thesis was conducted in a rather limited time frame, of only ten weeks. Therefore, due to the time constraints, only a limited number of participants was contacted, and also a very thorough selection of the participants was not possible. For further research, a longer period would be recommended, as more interviews can be done, and more data can be gathered and analyzed.

7. CONCLUSION

This research examines how Romanian professionals experience the Dutch leadership styles and how Romanians in management positions perceive the Dutch management characteristics. Moreover, it also analyzes how a person's cultural background contributes to the individuals' perception about leadership in a foreign country and how powerful is the influence of culture on their experiences and perception of the style. Five big themes were identified when analyzing the data that was gathered. The main leadership style as seen by the Romanian professionals and by correlating what was declared in the interviews with the literature from the theoretical framework part to be the most predominant one was the democratic style. Additional findings of this research show that even though cultural background does not have a direct influence, some aspects still affect the way in which Romanians perceive Dutch leadership. Lastly, looking at the values of the people, they do not only remain the same of their native country, but they also embrace some new values from the country and from the people where they work. As for practical implications, this research can prove to be useful to bona fide companies and more specifically to HR managers or to managers in general, as it can help understand some of the struggles and

challenges that their employees are facing in terms of adapting to the Dutch way of working for example. Also, it illustrates aspects that are highly valued by these employees such as implication in the decision-making process, freedom of speech, autonomy, flexibility, and management characteristics. It can also be used to

raise awareness about cultural differences and the integration of foreigners in companies, which can help employees feel even more included in the companies where they are working in the future.

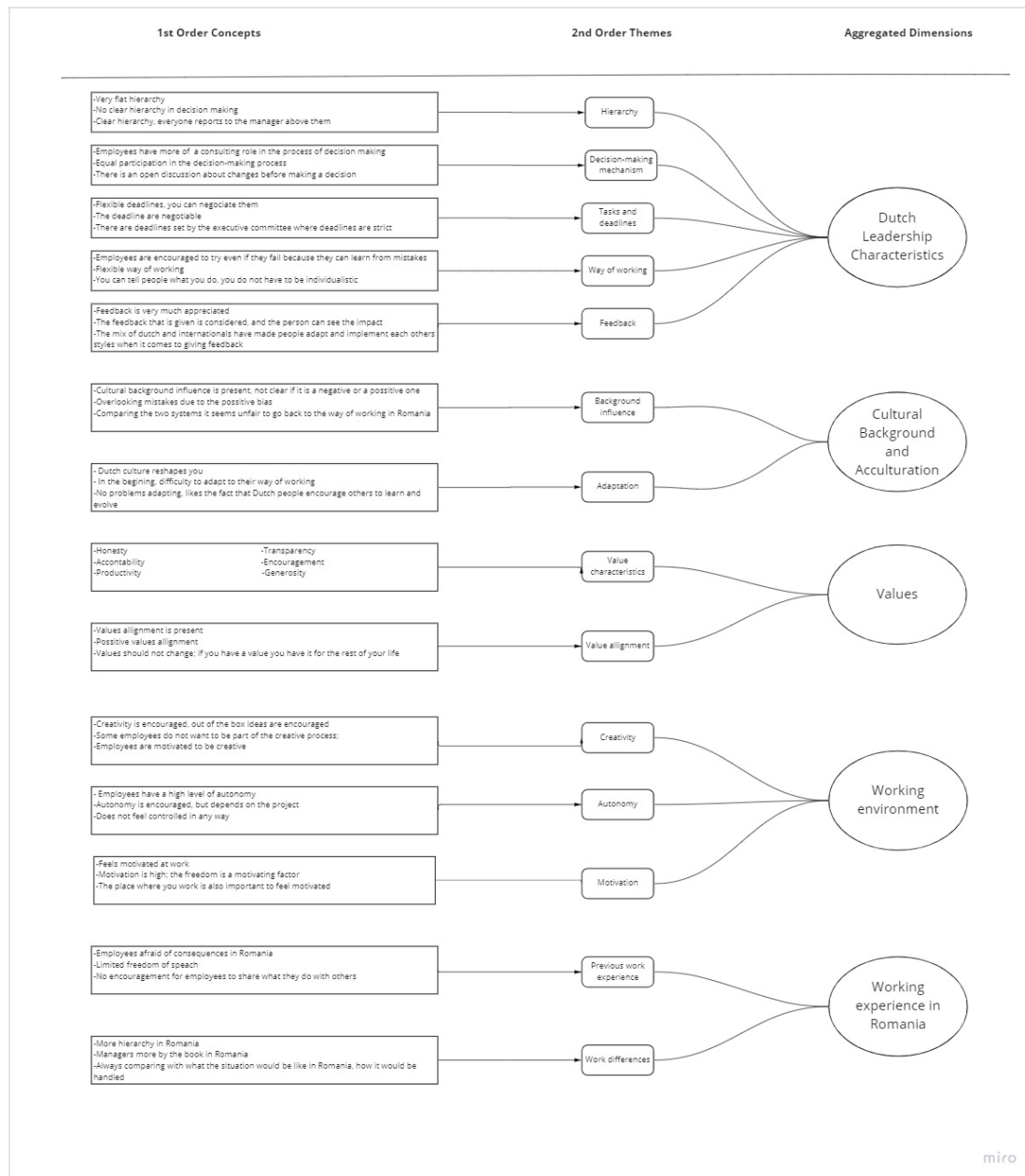
8. REFERENCES

- Alhojailan, M. I. (2012). Thematic analysis: A critical review of its process and evaluation. *West east journal of social sciences*, 1(1), 39-47.
- Arends-Tóth, J., & van de Vijver, F. J. R. (2009). Cultural differences in family, marital, and gender-role values among immigrants and majority members in the Netherlands. *International Journal of Psychology*, 44(3), 161-169. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207590701545676>
- Bhatti, N., Maitlo, G. M., Shaikh, N., Hashmi, M. A., & Shaikh, F. M. (2012). The Impact of Autocratic and Democratic Leadership Style on Job Satisfaction. *International Business Research*, 5(2), 192-201. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ibr.v5n2p192>
- Bickman, L., & Rog, D. J. (2008). *The SAGE Handbook of Applied Social Research Methods* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>
- Deng, L., & Gibson, P. (2008). A qualitative evaluation on the role of cultural intelligence in cross-cultural leadership effectiveness. *International journal of leadership studies*, 3(2), 181-197.
- Dulewicz, C., Young, M., & Dulewicz, V. (2005). The relevance of emotional intelligence for leadership performance. *Journal of General Management*, 30(3), 71-86. doi:10.1177/030630700503000305
- Enklaar, A. (2007). *Nederland, tussen nut en naastenliefde / druk 1: op zoek naar onze cultuur* (1st ed.). Scriptum.
- Fang, T. (2003). A Critique of Hofstede's Fifth National Culture Dimension. *International Journal of Cross Cultural*
- Forster, N. (2000). Expatriates and the impact of cross-cultural training. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 10(3), 63-78. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1748-8583.2000.tb00027.x>
- Gioia, D. A., Corley, K. G., & Hamilton, A. L. (2012). Seeking Qualitative Rigor in Inductive Research. *Organizational Research Methods*, 16(1), 15-31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428112452151>
- Gutierrez, G., de Lena, M. T. G., Garzas, J., & Moguerza, J. M. (2022). Leadership Styles in Agile Teams: An Analysis Based on Experience. *IEEE Access*, 10, 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1109/access.2022.3151314>
- ISRA Center (2018). Romanian Values 100 Years After the Great Union Day. https://www.isracenter.com/doc/ISRA%20Center_Valorile_Romanilor.pdf
- Jogulu, U. D. (2010). Culturally-linked leadership styles. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 31(8), 705-719. <https://doi.org/10.1108/01437731011094766>
- Kinast, E., SchrollMachl, S., Thomas, A., & Weston-Horsmann, C. (2010). *Handbook of Intercultural Communication and Cooperation: Basics and Areas of Application* (2nd ed.). Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Koveshnikov, A., Ehrnrooth, M., & Wechtler, H. (2022). Authoritarian and benevolent leadership: the role of follower homophily, power distance orientation and employability. *Personnel Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/pr-02-2021-0097>
- Landis, E. A., Hill, D., & Harvey M.R. (2014). A synthesis of leadership theories and styles. *Journal of Management Policy & Practice*, 15(2), 97-100.
- Lee, K., Scandura, T. A., & Sharif, M. M. (2014). Cultures have consequences: A configural approach to leadership across two cultures. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 25(4), 692-710. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2014.03.003>
- Lewin, K., Lippitt, R., & White, R. K. (1939). Patterns of Aggressive Behavior in Experimentally Created "Social Climates." *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 10(2), 269-299. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.1939.9713366>
- Liu, L. (2016). Using Generic Inductive Approach in Qualitative Educational Research: A Case Study Analysis. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 5(2), 129. <https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v5n2p129>
- Management, 3(3), 347-368. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470595803003003006>
- Martin, H., & Edwards, K. (2016). The interaction between leadership styles and management level, and their impact on project success. *Proceedings of International Structural Engineering and Construction*, 3(2), 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.14455/isec.res.2016.162>
- McIntosh, M. J., & Morse, J. M. (2015). Situating and Constructing Diversity in Semi-Structured Interviews. *Global Qualitative Nursing Research*, 2, 233339361559767. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2333393615597674>
- Mihai, L., Burlea Schiopoiu, A., & Mihai, M. (2017). Comparison of the leadership styles practiced by Romanian and Dutch SME owners. *International Journal of Organizational Leadership*, 6(1), 4-16. <https://doi.org/10.33844/ijol.2017.60262>
- Pizzolitto, E., Verna, I., & Venditti, M. (2022). Authoritarian leadership styles and performance: a systematic literature review and research agenda. *Management Review Quarterly*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11301-022-00263-y>
- Safonov, Y., Maslennikov, Y., & Lenska, N. (2018). Evolution and modern tendencies in the theory of leadership. *Baltic Journal of Economic Studies*, 4(1), 304-310. <https://doi.org/10.30525/2256-0742/2018-4-1-304-310>
- Thomas, D. R. (2006). A General Inductive Approach for Analyzing Qualitative Evaluation Data. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 27(2), 237-246. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214005283748>
- van der Berg, P. (2020). Comparing the Cultures of Romania and The Netherlands: When East Meets West. *Psihologia Resurselor Umane*, 8(2), 30-41. <https://doi.org/10.24837/pru.v8i2.416>
- van Emmerik, I. H., Euwema, M. C., & Wendt, H. (2008). Leadership Behaviors around the World. *International Journal of Cross-Cultural Management*, 8(3), 297-315. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470595808096671>
- Wang, H., & Guan, B. (2018). The Positive Effect of Authoritarian Leadership on Employee Performance: The Moderating Role of Power Distance. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00357>
- Zander, L. (2020). Interpersonal leadership across cultures: a historical exposé and a research agenda. *International Studies of Management & Organization*, 50(4), 357-380. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00208825.2020.1850980>

9. APPENDIX

9.1 Thematic Analysis Representation

Figure 1



9.2 Interview questions

9.2.1 Introduction

1. How would you describe the company relating to the company's size, company age, company background, values?
2. How long have you been working for this company and in what position?
3. How long have you been living in The Netherlands?
4. Do you have any previous work experience in Romania?
5. Why did you decide to come to the Netherlands?
6. Why did you decide to work in this sector?
7. Would you say that your work environment is a diverse one in terms of having people from different backgrounds and nationalities?

9.2.2 Leadership and Cultural Differences:

1. How would you describe the current way that your company is managed?
2. When making important decisions, are all the opinions considered or only the one of the leaders? Do employees get involved in this process?
3. To what extent are you encouraged as an employee to be creative? Can you freely express your opinion? Would you like to have more autonomy? Why?
4. Considering the aspects mentioned above, would you say that you feel motivated at work?
5. How are tasks distributed and deadlines set at your workplace?
6. What did you find the most difficult thing in dealing with a Dutch manager (did you have any problems/conflicts)? Can you give an example? How did you solve this problem?
7. Have you had many problems adjusting to the Dutch working environment?
8. To what extent would you say that the leadership style at your current company has a different impact on you compared to your Dutch colleagues? Why?
9. Can you name 3 of your personal values?
10. To what degree do you believe that the values of your leader are aligned with your values?
11. Do you believe that your cultural background influences your perception of leadership?
12. Do you have any previous work experience in Romania? Have you experienced any differences in the leadership style compared to Romania? Are there many differences in how managers operate here and in Romania?
13. Is there anything I haven't mentioned but would like to add or discuss?