CULTURAL DIFFERENCES ON THE WORK FLOOR BETWEEN THE DUTCH AND THE GERMANS

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Abstract

The purpose of this master thesis was to examine the differences between the German and Dutch business culture, seen from a Dutch perspective. An additional aim of the research was to discover the values behind these cultural differences and thus to explain the behaviors. In this way it is possible to understand why the other party reacts in a certain way and this ensures a higher understanding. The research question of the project is: "How is the German culture on the work floor perceived by Dutch individuals living and working in Germany?". The answer to this research question has been determined by means of an inductive qualitative research method. Sixteen different interviews were conducted with Dutch individuals who work and live in Germany. Through the Critical Incident Technique, they were asked about situations in which German and Dutch culture clashed and why this happened to identify cultural standards. These German cultural standards are clustered together and provided with the underlying value of the behavior. In total, sixteen cultural standards have been identified and linked to three different underlying values. The cultural standards and underlying values provide a thick description of the German culture, as perceived by the Dutch, and can be used to understand and explain the German behavior.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Due to the globalized world, people from all over the world come into contact with each other and many people of different nationalities work together. The professional encounters between people of different countries and cultures have become an integral part to close important business deals as well as working in culturally diverse teams (Raju, 2017).

Over the past centuries countries have developed their own culture and cultural differences have arisen from this: What is very normal in one culture may be experienced very differently in another one. This even applies to countries that border each other. The differences between neighboring countries is most likely be less big and clear than with countries from other parts of the world, but differences are almost always there. This research has therefore focused on two neighboring countries and very important European business partners (Statista, 2021), namely the Netherlands and Germany.

In recent years, various cultural frameworks have been developed that provide information about a country and culture based on quantitative data, examples of which are Hofstede (2010), Trompenaars (1996), and Hall (1976). But contributions to cross-cultural research have also been made through qualitative research methods. For example, research has been done on the German-Dutch interaction by Thomas (2009) and Schlizio (2009), who studied the Dutch cultural standards perceived by German professionals working in the Netherlands. Qualitative research has also been done in the opposite direction, by Thesing (2016), who studied the German cultural standards perceived by Dutch people working in Germany. This study is a replication of Thesing's study. The reason for this is that Thesing groups various rather different concepts under 'cultural standards' and makes no clear distinction between the cultural standards and the value behind it. Thesing only provides a behavior with an accompanying description. Take for example "separation of living spheres", here he only offers a meaning of the behavior and then whether this is correct according to the experts he uses. He therefore offers no information about why a German wants a separation between private and work life, only that Germans do so. For that reason, Thesing did not produce a reliable thick description of the German behavior. Hence, the current thesis focuses on the German cultural standards perceived by Dutch professionals and tries to repair the shortcomings of Thesing's study and tries to improve it in terms of rigor and depth of description.

In this study a clear distinction between cultural standards and values is made. Cultural standards have been defined as 'forms of perception, thought patterns, judgment and interaction that are shared by a majority of the members of a specific culture who regard their behavior as normal, typical, and binding". (Thomas, 2010, p. 22) which makes it a rather hybrid and vague concept. In this study we define 'a German cultural standard' as a typical German behavior as seen from a Dutch perspective. This study aimed to describe not only the observable typical behavior of Germans but also the motives of that lead to differences in behavior, establishing a thick description (Geertz, 1973). Through thick descriptions, it is possible to provide the reader with concrete, practical clues for solving the intercultural issues within an intercultural organization.

The result of this research provides richer and thorough information for the Dutch on how to communicate with, deal and manage Germans and understand their culture better, to ultimately improve their relationship and collaborate more smoothly. To investigate the cultural issues and their causes, the following research question was formulated:

"How is the German culture on the work floor perceived by Dutch individuals living and working in Germany?"

To provide a clear and specific answer to this research question, the central research question was divided into several sub-questions:

> 1. "When do Dutch experience frictions at work in communication and collaboration with the German?"
> 2. "What does this reveal about the German cultural standards?"
> 3. "What are the underlying values of the German cultural standards?"

1.1 THEORETICAL RELEVANCE

To date, most of the cross-cultural studies conducted have made use of quantitative models, such as Hofstede (2010) and Hall (1976), to substantiate and explain cultural differences. Because of this they are quite general in the description and there is a lack of depth of information (GWI, 2022). By using qualitative research methods, it is possible to provide detailed information and to investigate the underlying ideas of the German behaviors (Skinner, 2000). According to Smith (2006), it is also recommended to focus on small number of countries, to analyze them in depth and come up with a thick description. This study adds

value to the already existing qualitative literature, such as the studies of Thomas (2010) and Thesing (2016), using the same Critical Incident Technique but improving the conceptual basis. The aim of this research is to replicate Thesing's study to achieve a better understanding of the motives of different nationals that lead to differences in behavior, establishing a thick description (Geertz, 1973). This study therefore looks for the idea behind German behavior, which is missing in Thesing's study. This is done by looking for similarities within the cultural standards, clustering the standards, and finding German values in existing literature that are related to these behaviors. It is then clear not only how Germans behave but also why they behave themselves. Within this research, we took a critical look at previous results by separating the cultural standards and values, and first coming up with observations followed by the theory instead of the other way around.

1.2 PRACTICAL RELEVANCE

This study provides the reader and businessmen doing business in Germany a better understanding of the cultural differences between the Germans and the Dutch, seen from the Dutch perspective. It shows what people can expect when they have to work in a bicultural situation and doing so sensitizes them for bicultural situations, because German culture will be better understood. This study can lower the barriers that may have arisen in bicultural situations and increase trust in mutual relationships between Germans and Dutch. According to Thomas (1996), "a successful cooperation lies in the development of a higher degree of tolerance towards culturally determined behavior, which may not easily be brought into agreement with one's own cultural standards".

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This section provides the reader with the definition of culture and information on previous research on intercultural situations. In addition, a definition is given to cultural standards based on literature and examples are given of both German and Dutch cultural standards.

2.1 DEFINING CULTURE

To be able to conduct research in intercultural situations, it is very important to know what culture means. Alexander Thomas (2009, p. 22) analyzed culture from a psychological perspective. Thomas describes culture as "a system of orientation". According to him, "*culture are certain norms, values and behavior that are reflected by a group of people, it*

serves to avoid misunderstandings in case of incorrect interpretation". Culture creates and structures an environment in which people can function and encompasses shared values and ideas (Thomas, Kinast, & Schroll-Machl, 2010). Cultures are manifests in a system of orientation and are typical of societies, groups, countries, or organizations. These orientation systems consist of visible aspects, e.g. (body) language, rituals, clothing, greetings, as well as underlying norms and values. Culture provides people with a feeling of belonging and inclusion to a certain group or society. In summary, Thomas (2005) sees culture as a national entity that provides members with a system of orientation. A person within this cultural system is most likely be understood by another person within this cultural system, as they share the same norms, values, and thoughts.

The definition of culture by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's (2012) does not differ considerably from Thomas' definition. According to him, "culture is the way in which a group of people solve problems and reconciles dilemma's". Similarly, according to Edgar Schein (2010), culture can be analyzed and understood in three different levels: the level of artefacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions. The first level, the artefacts, is a very visible one, examples are clothing and certain rituals of a group. The second level, espoused beliefs, and values are about the feelings how things should be done; certain patterns or ideals which results in attitudes that determine the behavior of an individual. And at the deepest level of culture, basic underlying assumptions, are the things taken for granted in the way of reacting to the environment. These basic assumptions are so deeply rooted in the behaviors and thoughts of members of a culture, that they are not even aware about it. According to Shein (2010), these cultural levels distinguish the members from one cultural group from those from another, these levels can be seen as "the collective programming" of the human mind. Culture is a system of collectively held values (Hofstede, 2001). Norms and values of people from other cultures can differ from each other, which can be a significant obstacle for intercultural interactions and cooperation (Kim & Gudykunst, 19988). Some cultural differences are very easy to notice and visible, these differences are often expressed through language and actions. But there are also several cultural differences that are more difficult to notice, these are the way of thinking, norms, and values (Thomas & Schlizio, 2009).

The most important aspect of culture for this research is the behaviors and values that are reflected by a certain group, in this case the Germans. Because the aim of this research is to

find out the German behavior with associated values and how these clashes with Dutch behavior and values. To enable a better understanding of Germans and to improve mutual cooperation. Some researchers across the world already published research and developed theories to understand these intercultural differences, but this will be discussed in the next session.

2.2 ETIC LITERATURE ON (INTER)CULTURAL RESEARCH

To properly handle intercultural differences, it is important to understand the norms and values of other cultures. In the Cross-cultural literature, scholars have introduced two approaches to understand intercultural differences: ETIC approach (Fink et al, 2005). An ETIC approach refers to the research that studies cross-cultural differences (Helfrich, 1999).

Several frameworks and theories have been developed to understand cultural differences based on an ETIC approach, for example, the frameworks of Hofstede (2010), Trompenaars (1996), and Hall (1976). Among the different frameworks named above, the framework of Hofstede et al. (2010) is used for many cross-cultural studies. This framework uses six different dimension, namely power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long term orientation, and indulgence. Figure 1 shows the differences in the dimensions between Germany and the Netherlands according to Hofstede (2021).
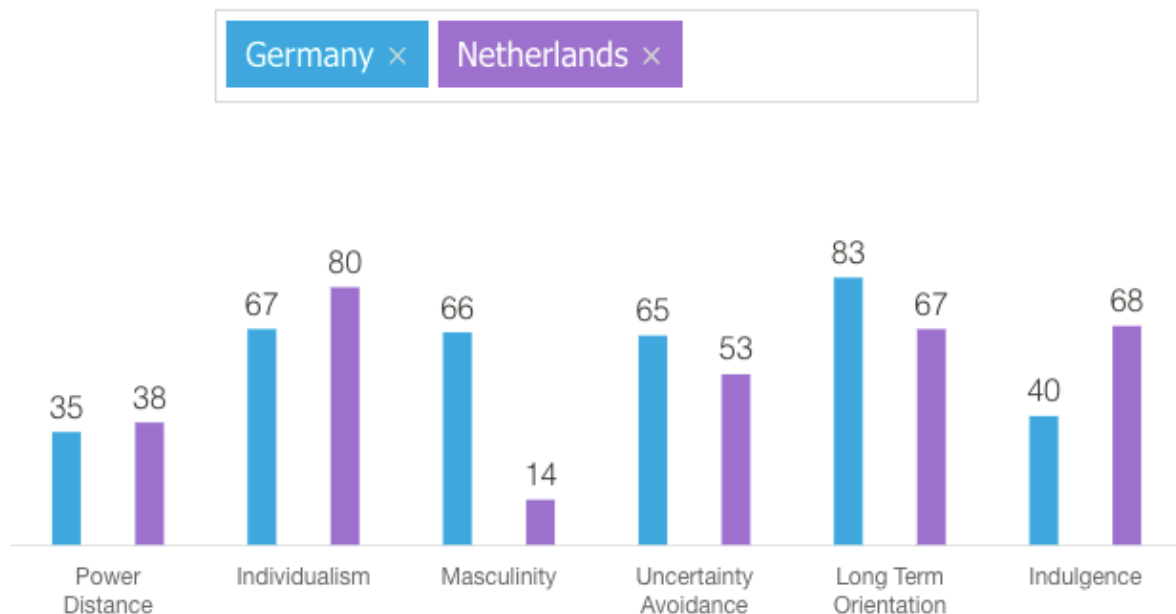

Figure 1, Scores for Germany, and the Netherlands on the cultural dimensions by Hofstede-insights (2021)

According to this framework, Germany is perceived as a country with a high level of masculinity compared to the Netherlands. This indicates that the German society is driven by competition, achievement, and success. This means that German people want to be the best in their field, starting at school and continuing during organizational life. In addition, the biggest difference is in indulgence. According to Hofstede (2021), indulgence is about the extent to which people try to control their desires and impulses, based on the way they were raised. Relatively weak control is called "Indulgence" and relatively strong control is called "Restraint". The low score of Germany indicates that the German culture is restrained. Restrained cultures do not put emphasis on leisure time and control gratification of their desires (Hofstede, 2010). Besides, the German people try to avoid uncertainty a little more than Dutch people do and are more long term oriented. Germans try to stick a little more to planning and rely on expertise.

According to the framework of Trompenaars (1993), Germany is a country high in universalism. This means that they believe they can develop rules and standards that can be applied to everyone and in every situation. The Germans tend to use contracts, formal systems, and procedures. In addition, Germans are neutral according to Trompenaars (1993). This means that they tend not to share their emotions. German professional roles are so much separated from personal emotions that the expression of feelings has no place in German business life. This is also apparent from the third dimension of Trompenaars, in which Germans are described as "specific". Which also means that within specific cultures work and private life are kept separate. Finally, Germany is described as an achievement culture in which social status can be derived from (professional) achievements.

The last framework is that of Edward Hall (1976). According to Hall (1976), Germany is a bit of a low distance land. This means how close people are to each other and how they define their own territory. In Germany, social distance is therefore valued, but at the same time it is not an issue if it is not present. In addition, Germany is very monochronic according to Hall (1976). This means that people like to do one task at the same time, stick to a strict schedule, and people have to be on time for appointments. Finally, according to Hall, Germans are very low context in communication. This means that they use direct language and what they say is what they mean.

These frameworks have been criticized because they aim to describe a culture with only five or six dimensions, which creates a rather gross picture of a culture and gives no explanation of

the logic behind the behavior (Kuchinke, 2002). Besides, these frameworks are too focused on establishing a theory first and then explain certain observations (Glaser and Strauss, 2008). To address these issues, Fink et al. (2005) points out that a shift from comparative studies on intercultural difference to research on intercultural interaction was needed, to understand the dynamics of international encounters.

This was done by the German researcher of culture, Alexander Thomas. He developed concept of 'cultural standard' that refers to cultural thinking, perceiving, and behaving (2012). Differences between cultural acting can cause critical situations or incidents in intercultural interactions (Fink et al., 2005). The approach of Thomas refers to cultural characteristics that become apparent as soon as people come into contact with another culture. In order to identify cultural standards, critical situations between people of different cultures are therefore a good place to find them. This method of investigation is also called the critical incident technique (CIT), which is explained in more detail in section "methodology".

A qualitative research approach to investigate cultural differences has several advantages. It is detail oriented and descriptive in nature due to specific experiences from individuals that lead to cultural standards. Besides, it has the possibility to uncover the underlying values behind the cultural standards. This provides an explanation where the behavior of the Germans comes from. The concept of cultural standards is discussed in the next part.

2.3 DEFINING CULTURAL STANDARDS

Cultural standards are ways of thinking, acting, and perceiving things used by the biggest part of a culture. Behavior of people is judged and regulated based on these cultural standards. According to Krewer (1996), cultural standards on the one hand show the cultural differences between countries concerning thinking, acting, and feeling. On the other hand, the cultural standards can indicate challenging situations or clashes in intercultural interactions. Cultural standards are typical orientation systems for groups, organizations, and nations (Thomas, 1996). Because of these cultural standards, it is possible to meet the rules, values, and standards of a specific culture.

According to Thomas (1996), cultural standards control the way of behaving, perceiving, and attitudes of groups, environments, and individuals. Cultural standards represent a common way of thinking, which guarantees other people that they will be understood by fellow human

beings in the same culture. Routine in persons behavior is created because of the cultural standards, these standards are perceived as normal. As soon as people from different cultures, and thus different cultural standards, come into contact with each other, this can cause conflicts and irritations. Because they both perceive their way of behaving and thinking as "normal" but may consider the other's behavior as "strange" (Thomas & Utler, 2013). Behavior that corresponds to, for example German cultural standards (e.g., status and order), is judged as correct by German people. Behavior that deviates from their cultural standards are probably seen as weird and incorrect (Kühnel, 2014). Because every culture has its own way of thinking and behaving, there is no right or wrong. However, this research has done something different than Thomas. While Thomas only described culture on the basis of cultural standards (one-step description), this research examined the underlying thought in addition to cultural standards (two-step description).

In a previous study, Thesing was able to discover several cultural standards based on qualitative research. But as mentioned, Thesing ignored the differences between a thin and thick description. He categorized both concrete behaviors and abstract values as 'cultural standards', this does not meet the standards of a good interpretive study. For this reason, this study replicated here and came up with more accurate results and separated the standards and values.

2.4 GERMAN CULTURAL STANDARDS

In this section, several German cultural standards that emerged from earlier research by Thesing (2016) are discussed. These German cultural standards are discussed because this study examined the intercultural differences between the Germans and the Dutch. That is why it is important to provide prior knowledge of both the German as the Dutch culture.

Separation of living spheres
Germans seem to have clear boundaries between work and private life, good personal relationships are appreciated but not priority. At work the motto "work comes first" and humor and feeling are part of private life.

Fear of losing control
Germans take their work and the associated responsibilities very seriously. You are expected to handle your tasks responsibly and to complete them properly and according to agreement,

so you cannot afford to lose control. Uncertain situations and risks are therefore like to be avoided by Germans.

Rules and structure

In Germany great value is attached to structure, rules, and regulations. Clear rules prevent disagreements and ambiguity and maintain control over each step. In Germany, rules are interpreted very strictly, violation will be punished. Besides, German people like to have structure in their life, this with the aim to prevent losing control and keep the living quality standard very high.

Time planning

German tends to plan their future as far as possible, appreciate punctuality and avoid multitasking to minimize uncertainty. They want to keep the control over their work and their personal life. Reliability in time is very important for building trust and to create a positive image as a reliable and professional person.

Directness and straightforwardness

Germans tell others directly and outright if something bothers them or something is not right.

Task orientation

German people add big value to task-oriented behavior. At work, they are very concentrated on the task; everything is subordinated to the objectives at work. Working together with other people does not require social relationships with that person, and establishing relations is also not important. German people usually put less effort in creating friendly atmospheres and getting to know their business partner. In Germany, the boss makes decisions, the workers carry them out with discipline.

Status orientation

In Germany, much value is still attached to status and ranks. Personal relationships at work with higher-ranking colleagues are addressed with "Sie". In Germany, the emphasis is also on titles and functions, in the Netherlands this is much less the case and there is a flat hierarchy.

As mentioned by Schein (2010), the behavioral patterns (cultural standards) are one of the three levels of culture. Misinterpretation of culture or behavior occurs when the researcher does not distinguish between the three levels. Take, for example, appreciation for rules and fear of losing control. These two standards are very similar, but they are not the same. Fear of

losing control is the motivation/fear of appreciation for rules (the observable behavior). The same applies to Calvinistic modesty (value) and flat hierarchies (the observable behavior). So, in both the study of Schlizio (2009) and the study of Thesing (2016) no distinction is made between the observable behavior and the value/reasoning behind the behavior. This means that the studies of Schlizio and Thesing have been provided with a thin description (Geertz, 1973). What this research aimed to achieve is to provide the cultural standards with a "thick" description, a clear distinction between cultural standards and values. Cultural standards can be defined as 'specific concrete behaviors that are normal in one culture' and values as 'tacit assumptions, general abstract moral principles or ideas that can explain the cultural standards' (Geertz, 1973). Research has also been done on German culture by Schroll-Machl (2016). As an intercultural trainer, she has conducted research into German culture on the basis of intercultural differences with all over the world. So how do other cultures view German behavior? Based on these different experiences, she has given a neutral description of a behavior. The results of her research will be compared with this research for confirmation and reliability.

2.5 DUTCH CULTURAL STANDARDS

In this section, several typical Dutch cultural standards are discussed that emerged from earlier research by Rosemann (2021). Roseman (2021) has conducted research into Dutch culture from a German perspective. In contrast to the previous study of Schlizio (2009), she has also been able to identify the underlying value of cultural standards. The same has been done in this study. Although the research only examines German cultural standards, Chapter 4 "Results" does deal with why German behavior clashes with Dutch behavior, so it is useful to have prior knowledge about Dutch culture.

Flexibility
People easily change plans, methods, or the organization in order to improve results, are open to changes.

Collective decision-making
Decisions are being made in the team, everybody is involved and has a say. People in The Netherlands like to contribute in discussions, which might be nurtured by the friendly atmosphere and less hierarchical structures, since people feel comfortable enough to speak up and voice their opinions.

(Technological) innovativeness

Always in for (technological) innovations. Dutch are very future-oriented and that
the urge to change is strong. They do not use outdated systems or approaches, instead
examining what can be adjusted and improved to work most effective. Dutch people are
change oriented and eager to develop further due to the small country size, to stay competitive
and go with the changes, including technology.

Friendly atmosphere (Gezelligheid)

The work atmosphere in The Netherlands is friendly and welcoming. People behave like
actual friends to create an open atmosphere in which a close partnership can be shaped. In this
context, the focus group also mentioned Dutch humbleness, which can contribute to a
welcoming and friendly atmosphere.

Flat hierarchy

Dutch culture includes a flat hierarchy. People of diverse positions and levels in the hierarchy
treat each other's as equals and even subordinates can criticize superiors and their decisions in
a constructive manner without the fear of consequences. Everyone is seen as equally
important for the team, as goals can only be reached together.

Freedom of action

the Dutch urge to work independent. The appreciation to decide how to accomplish a task or
handle a case without a manager involved, seems to be very important for the Dutch. Dutch
people value freedom of action and superiors trust employees that they are capable to decide
by themselves and value their ability.

Work-life-balance

Private life is considered just as important as professional life and needs to be in balance. It is
more common to work part-time in The Netherlands in order to have time for hobbies and
family.

Informality

Dutch are more informal compared to the German culture. Many Dutch people do not behave
according to formal roles or positions in the hierarchy and fulfil a status role. This also
influences the use of informal communication channels and to call colleagues, superiors
and business partners by first name without the use of any formal titles or the last name.

Directness

Dutch just say directly what they think in that moment to communicate their opinion on a topic. It is expected that one is open and sometimes a bit confrontational in negotiations. If the opposite does not say anything, it is assumed that everything is okay.

Approximate planning

Dutch people are not as strict when it comes to the time management, as meetings often start five to ten minutes later because people took their time to get a coffee. Dutch plan ahead and stick to deadlines, but if something important comes up, they do not fear to divert from the initial deadline.

Anti-authoritarianism

Dutch do not tolerate that orders are simply being imposed from above.

Pragmatism

Acting according to what is opportune now without using a plan or procedure is common in The Netherlands. The effort should be relatively simple and involve little obstacles to reach a goal, it must be feasible and realistic to achieve.

Solution orientation

People in the Netherlands tries to solve the problem as soon as possible instead of looking at the causes or who was responsible.

Job Opportunity

There is a higher change to get hired for a job, even though you do not fully meet the necessary criteria, such as speaking the language or relevant experience, as the opposite rather gives the applicant the chance to proof his or her ability to develop and acquire the missing skills.

The previous two subchapters have presented the cultural standards that have emerged from previous studies. This research will focus entirely on researching German cultural standards, confirming previous research, and investigating underlying values behind the cultural standards because this was lacking in previous research.

3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter will deal with the method used to conduct the research and will explain other considerations regarding the chosen methods.

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

For this study, an inductive qualitative approach was chosen. Since the aim is to find out German cultural standards and values through personal experiences, a qualitative approach is used. Qualitative research is known for the richness of information it can provide and the potential to provide in-depth information on a subject (Gioia et al., 2012). Besides, since we want to answer "what" questions, qualitative research allowed us to interpret the subjects' stories and obtain a thick description of the values driving the subjects' behavior (Gioia et al., 2012). The inductive approach means that the research involves the search for patterns from observations and theories are proposed towards the end of the research (Goddard et al., 2004). This inductive approach aims to generate meanings from the data set collected to identify patterns and relationships to build a theory; however, inductive approach does not prevent the researcher from using existing theory to formulate the research question to be explored (Saunders et al., 2012). As it is illustrated in figure below, "inductive reasoning is often referred to as a "bottom-up" approach to knowing, in which the researcher uses observations to build an abstraction or to describe a picture of the phenomenon that is being studied" (Lodico et al., 2010).

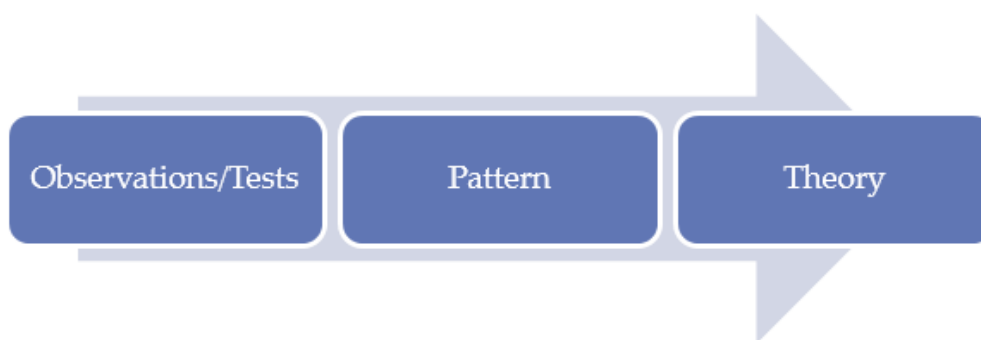*Figure 2, visualization of inductive reasoning*

The main feature and a positive aspect of an inductive approach is methodological flexibility (Creswell, 2009). According to Thomas (2003), the purposes of using an inductive approach are (1) to condense extensive and varied raw text data into brief, summary format; (2) to establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings derived from

the raw data and (3) to develop a model or theory about the underlying structure of experiences or processes which are evident in the raw data. The inductive approach reflects frequently reported patterns used in qualitative data (Thomas, 2003).

3.2 DATA COLLECTION

The potential respondents were approached via online platforms, such as Facebook and LinkedIn. These platforms were searched for "Dutch experts working in Germany" and "Dutch people living in Berlin / Munich / Hamburg". The choice for these three cities is because these cities represent North and South Germany. The aim of involving different regions in the research is to increase reliability and to prevent the focus from not being on just one part of the country. Research has been done on German behavior and not just Northern or Southern German behavior. To be eligible for participation in the study, one must have lived in Germany for more than six months, work for a German company, and mainly with German colleagues. In addition, the person must be working in an intermediate or higher position. The respondents were contacted in advance and had to give their consent to participate in the study. These interviews were be carried out by one person, in this case the author. The interviews were conducted in line with the recommendations of Fink et al. (2005, p.13) who noted that "to deal with interviewer and construct bias, it is strongly recommended that interviews are undertaken by members from the same culture as the interviewed persons". Besides, during the interviews, the native language was spoken, in this case Dutch. The reason for speaking Dutch among each other is because the conversation takes place between Dutch people, so speaking your own language is easier and feelings can be more easily substantiated.

3.2.1 SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

Fifteen individuals living and working in Germany were interviewed for the research. The respondents are from Hamburg, Munich, and Berlin to avoid focusing too much on one region and affecting the validity of the results. Table 1 shows the information about the respondents.

Interviewee No.	Gender	Age	Total years of working in Germany	Location	Position
1	M	28	3	Berlin	Sales Manager
2	W	33	7	Berlin	Controlling
3	W	27	3	Berlin	Art Researcher
4	W	35	11	Munich	Marketing Manager
5	M	52	26	Munich	Sales Manager
6	M	37	14	Munich	Recruiting consultant
7	W	29	8	Berlin	Logistic Manager
8	M	31	8	Munich	Administration
9	M	44	21	Hamburg	Office Manager
10	W	32	9	Munich	Chef de Partie
11	M	28	4	Hamburg	Data Analyst
12	M	36	7	Munich	Managing Director
13	W	35	13	Munich	Ecological Advisor
14	W	26	3	Hamburg	Marketing Manager
15	W	29	7	Hamburg	Salesperson
16	W	57	23	Munich	Supply Chain Manager

Table 1, Information of the interviewees

3.2.2 RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

To provide answers to the research questions, semi-structured interviews were used. Conducting semi-structured interviews offers the opportunity to gather more in-depth information than with a survey (Wholey et al., 2015). Another advantage of conducting semi-structured interviews is that the researcher can ask follow-up questions, both spontaneously and according to the predetermined interview protocol, which results in more detailed information (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

This study used purposive sampling, also known as selective sampling. 'This is a form of non-probability sampling in which the researcher relies on his own judgment when choosing

participants for the study' (Saunders et al, 2012, p. 10). Sixteen people were interviewed, since from experience of other researchers it is known that from around 11 interviews onwards saturation occurs (Thesing 2016, p. 25). The number of respondents within the research were distributed as evenly as possible, so as many men as women and as many from northern Germany as southern Germany. This last condition was added with the aim of having a balanced geographical spread of respondents over Germany and comparing the experiences of Dutchmen working in northern and southern Germany. So, eight people from Northern Germany and eight people from Southern Germany were interviewed, per region four men and four women. As last, to create an ideal situation, it was effective to interview Dutch people who have lived in Germany for more than six months. The reason for this is that the honeymoon period is over and greater efforts towards cultural integration must be made (Bhawuk, 1998). The names of the participants and their organization were anonymized and replaced by pseudonyms.

The interviews lasted approximately one hour and were translated and recorded, to allow transcribing and extensive analysis. After an interview was recorded, it was transcribed using software Amberscript. After transcribing, the transcript was checked for possible errors. Personal data that was part of quotes was adjusted to make sure that the identity of the participants could not be traced from quotes. After this was done, the text was ready for analysis.

Since qualitative research cannot be expressed in numbers, the question of its correctness is critical and qualitative research is harder to validate. Validity relates to the suitability of any research tools, techniques, processes, and value, including the collection and validation of data (Mohamad et al., 2015).

To fix the disadvantage of being hard to validate, the critical incident technique (CIT) (Thomas, 2010) was used. This approach is based on American research and especially for reducing errors in military aviation. But Fiedler, Mitchell and Triandis (1971) started to use this method for intercultural interaction. The three researchers began collecting diverse stories about cultural clashes between foreign cultures and America. These cultural clashes were described and processed in a 'culture assimilator', a program in which the participant is shown 50 cultural clashing situations. The participant must then choose the correct one from four different interpretation options. After this, the participant will then receive a detailed explanation of why this will or will not work in that culture. The CIT itself is useful to find

out how, when, and where people from two different countries experience conflicts, the so-called "critical incidents" (Thomas, et al. 2010). From these incidents he tries to deduce conflicting 'cultural standards' of these countries. In this research, the respondents were asked for their experience in collaboration and communication with German co-workers. They were asked to give typical examples (critical incidents) where things were different from what Dutchmen are used to. Because a critical incident arises when to cultural standards from different countries clashes with each other. A characteristic of the CIT is that it is an inductive approach of reasoning, looking for patterns and come up with a theory. (Gremier, 2004).

3.4 DATA ANALYSIS

Given the freedom and flexibility of the inductive approach, we have chosen to analyze the data using the Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To organize the data in a structured way, this research made use of Gioia's first order concept, second order / third order themes, and aggregate dimension (Gioia et al., 2012). Thematic analysis is a method for "identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). This thematic analysis follows 6 different steps. The first step is getting familiar with the obtained data, this is done while transcribing and reading the transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The second step is about generating initial codes in a systematic fashion way (Braun & Clarke, 2006), what can be seen as the first order concept of Gioia et al. (2012). The codes were formed by using the quotes and words of the participants of this study. After the first round of coding, a second round followed to check which codes were more or less the same. The third step was about searching second order and third order themes by checking the codes on similar features (Braun & Clarke, 2006), what could be seen as forming second order themes in Gioia et al. (2012). The fourth step was about reviewing the themes and check their relation to the extracted codes and entire data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The fifth step was about defining and naming the different themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). And the final sixth step was about producing a report by analyzing data, selecting examples supporting codes and themes, and providing an answer to the research question.

Hence, the data was be structured in first order codes, second order themes, and third order teams. The first order codes are words or quotes of the participants, the second order themes are "cultural standards" that could be linked to these quotes, and the third order theme is the value behind these cultural standards (why do German people behave in this way).

3.5 FEEDBACK FROM EXPERTS

The thick description of German behaviors, cultural standards, and values were presented to German experts. The German experts were German teachers, students or people who have worked in the Netherlands as well as in Germany. It makes them an expert because they grew up within the culture or have lived there for quite some time. These people know how to recognize behavioral patterns since they regularly encounter the behaviors. Feedback from the focus group was used to enhance the quality of the research, to check for obvious errors and misunderstandings, and to obtain a reliable outcome. The focus group, consisting of several Germans, have check the results and interpretations. They also know the most about their own culture and checked the analysis for reliability. The research was also presented to a field expert, in this case Dr. A.H. Enklaar.

4. RESULTS

In this part, the results of the research are presented. German cultural standards that were identified during the research are described by a definition, quotes from interviews and the Dutch perspective. After this, cultural standards are grouped together under cultural values, providing the cultural logic behind the cultural standards.

4.1 GERMAN CULTURAL STANDARDS

After extensive interviews, sixteen German cultural standards could be identified. These German cultural standards are shown in Table 2.

Cultural Standard	Definition	Mentioned by interviewees
Sticking to structure & rules	One should strictly follow the rules.	15
Formality	You must stay formal and distanced towards colleagues and clients.	13
Power division	Not everyone is equal within a company. Higher ranks have more power and exercise it.	12
Fachkompetenz	It is important to be a specialist in your field.	10
Pünktlichkeit	People proceed according to a strict planning and being on time is important.	10
Risk avoidance	Avoidance of risk and sticking to procedures which were used in the past.	9
Obedience	One should carry out what the boss ordered without questioning.	9
Separation of living spheres	Strong separation of private and professional life.	8

Social control	Keeping an eye on each other and ensuring that rules are followed.	8
Zuständigkeit	Everyone is responsible for their own tasks.	7
Sachlichkeit	The most important things are the objectives at work.	7
Respecting Hierarchy	You show respect to a superior.	6
Distanced	Closed attitude and less likely to release personal information to people who are not real friends.	6
Mistakes	Not admitting mistakes	6
Status showing	You show it when you are successful.	6
Feierabend	Strictly respecting leisure time after work	5

Table 2, German Cultural Standards

In the section below, the German cultural standards seen from the Dutch perspective are described in more detail. First, a description of the cultural standard is given, followed by a number of quotes that describe the situation in which the Dutch experienced the cultural standard. Finally, it is explained why this cultural standard may clash with the cultural standards of the Dutch.

Sticking to structure & rules

In general, there are not necessarily more rules in Germany. But Germans appreciate the rules that have been set up for them much more than Dutch and will almost never question them. The Germans are expected to stick to structures and rules, and processes are much more detailed than in the Netherlands. The rules provide a clear description of how one should behave, and strict rules can be found in all German living environments (public, private, and professional). Remarkable in Germany is the respect for the law, for the representatives of the law, for traffic signs and for all kinds of signs with whether or not gratuitous, imperative messages. Prohibition signs are accepted almost uncritically. People assume that such signs are there for a reason. Structure and rules must safeguard order and peace within society, but also ensure that tasks can be performed effectively, and risk is minimized. So, rules are there to be followed, and offenses must be prosecuted because the law requires it.

> Quote 1: *"When I went to Dortmund by train… then some did not have a face mask on (which was mandatory according to the rules). It was then immediately called that if one more person took off his mask, the train would be stopped. The rest of the ride, no one really took it off. Germans follow the rules extremely well to maintain order and peace in society. There are still rules for face masks here, which we just follow strictly. I also notice that I have become more German in this. For me, following a rule is now*

very normal, where I normally still wanted to give it my own interpretation (Interviewee 1)."

Quote 2: *"During the corona pandemic, for example, we had fixed walking routes across the corridor that we had to adhere to so that the one and a half meters could be complied with. So, when I walked out of my office there was an arrow pointing left towards the stairs. Then I just turned right once to the other stairs because there was no one else there anyway. Then my colleagues corrected me right away. And when I asked them "why can't we take the fastest route?" I got the answer "because that's not the rules". Following rules is really all in their system (Interviewee 2)."*

Of course, there are also rules and laws in the Netherlands that have been drawn up and which apply to all citizens. Only in the Netherlands the rules and laws are followed less strictly than in Germany. As one interviewee said, "Rules are like guidelines for how to live but don't have to be strictly followed". The German and Dutch clash in this case because in Germany the rules are sacred and there is absolutely no deviation from them. In the Netherlands, situations are interpreted in their own way and rules are less strictly followed, something that is very non-German. According to the Dutch value of self-determination, people have to decide for themselves what they do. Self-determination refers to a person's ability to make choices and manage their own life. Another value that plays a role in this Dutch behavior is utility. Everything that the Dutch do must be useful, yield something. A goal must be executed in the most efficient and least time-consuming way, the fastest route. So, a small rule can also be broken to reach the goal in a faster way. The Dutch therefore make their own choices from the point of view of "utility".

Formality

For Germans it is very important in business context to behave in a formal way towards each other, as a sign of respect. They use formal language to create a respectful distance. For example, people address each other by title and gender followed by their last name (Example: Herr Dr. Schmidt, Frau Professor Englert. In addition, people address each other with "Sie" instead of "Du", especially to your superior. However, the boss is allowed to address his staff as "Du", but he is unlikely to do so as a sign of unprofessionalism. The formal addressing continues until the superior gives permission to name each other by their first name or say "Du" instead of "Sie", but in the presence of customers or business relations the formal way

of contact is mandatory. Respect and respectful treatment towards superiors, older people, officials, and people with a (academic) title is very important.

> Quote 3: *"I notice that Germans are very formal. I am used from my student days that I can even address my teacher with "you" and here everyone addresses each other with "Sie" and their title. As a psychologist, I really got a high title here and am high up the pecking order in social circles. So, people address me very politely, but as a young man of 40 I don't want to be treated that way at all. So, I immediately stated very clearly in my first working week that "you really don't have to address me with 'Sie' unless you really want to". Then you notice that quite a few people switch to just 'you' or first name, but others also stay very much in that polite form (Interviewee 9)."*

> Quote 4: *"In Germany it is very much appreciated if you address people with "Sie". It is a form of courtesy and a sign of respect towards the other party. This is something I was not used to from the Netherlands, but I think it has something very beautiful. Partly because of this, people come across as extra polite (Interviewee 7)."*

For Dutch people, it is unnecessary to be overly polite to colleagues and can even be seen as annoying or flattering the boss. The Dutch do not often use formal or polite language. They see this form of communication as distant, and it does not contribute to a pleasant amicable atmosphere in the workplace. Dutch people value a pleasant working atmosphere and Dutch "gezelligheid" (friendly atmosphere). Besides, they are convinced that in principle everyone is equal and should be treated in the same way. Formal language, mutual distance, and hierarchy go against these principles. The Dutch only use formal language towards older people and on first acquaintance or when they want to keep a person at distance.

Power division

In Germany there is a very clear division of power, and this is determined by the function or work experience one has. Contact with higher placed persons is very formal and distanced, the hierarchy should be always respected. The boss decides what happens in a company and everyone else must listen to it and do their job. Direct contact with the highest boss is not appreciated and should go through your direct supervisor. In German companies, information flow is structured vertically. If you skip your immediate supervisor, it is a sign of disrespect towards the hierarchy and your superior. Taking the initiative yourself is not appreciated.

Quote 5: *"There is an obvious hierarchy in the German workplace. I got an example about students working at our office. I am one of the three managers and even though I treat students as equals, I notice a big distance. For example, I always schedule a monthly meeting with them to discuss progress and provide them with feedback. During this conversation I also ask if they can provide me with feedback. But then they say, "yes I'm just a working student, I don't think I'm allowed to provide you with feedback.". While I like to receive feedback so that I can improve myself. As a result, you really notice that people rank themselves lower purely because you have the title of manager and they do not, while I want to treat each other as equals. There is change in our workplace, but that is because I really insist that we are equal, and everyone can say anything. But it's still going pretty rough (Interviewee 12)."*

Quote 6: *"Within our organization there is also a clear distribution of power, but less quickly based on function. The functions are generally quite flattened, but the hierarchy is determined by work experience, you see. It sounds quite non-German because titles are quite important here. But we just have to listen to those who are more experienced in the field, because they will know better. I have almost the most experience and I notice that people build on my experience. While I prefer that everyone thinks along about the problem, because I don't always know either (Interviewee 2)."*

In contrast to Germany, there is much less hierarchy and division of power in the Netherlands. For the Dutch, everyone is equal and should be treated equally, regardless of your position or status within the company. This is inspired by the Dutch value "Equality". The value of equality is therefore the reason that the Dutch usually have difficulty with unequal positions of power, because this goes against their morale. The mutual contact in the Netherlands is very informal and there is little distance between each other. In the Netherlands it is very much appreciated if you show initiative and think along in business processes. Because the managers themselves do also not always know what is best, it is useful to get everyone to contribute ideas in order to arrive at new insights together. So, you are allowed to contribute your own opinion and participate in discussions about strategies, regardless of your hierarchical position within the company. Decisions are made centrally and in a consensual way, workers are seen as experts in their field and managers as facilitators. Dutch bosses give

their staff freedom and the space to give their own interpretation to their job, this comes from the Dutch value of "self-determination".

Fachkompetenz

Germans attach great value being real specialists in the field and that is why it is very important to have all the expertise. German professionals want to be seen as brilliant and skilled in the job they do. 'Fachwissen' and 'fundierte Kentnissen' are of vital importance to disseminate your expertise and knowledge and to be credible as a professional. You are an expert, and you have actually studied for the profession you practice. You must have all the knowledge and be highly skilled. This also applies to business partners. As soon as you do not have the answers to very specific questions during presentations or do not speak in the professional terms, you will not leave a good impression. According to the Germans, it is important to be competent to respond quickly, adequately, and effectively to business situations and problems.

> Quote 7: *"The focus here is on working people to accelerate tremendously. People here really understand what they are doing and are real experts. You can't just apply for a position here; you really must have learned for it. They are very afraid of image damage when making a mistake or think they have failed if they made a mistake. So, Germans specialize in a certain area and want to focus on it and be good at it. (Interviewee 16)."*

> Quote 8: *"You are expected to have all the knowledge as a manager, because the people below you will listen to you. In Germany you are more likely to be a manager because of expertise, in the Netherlands also faster because of how you lead a team (Interviewee4)."*

Dutch business culture is more focused on interesting business opportunities. The Dutch are flexible and know something about many subjects but are not always expected to be specialized in detail in a subject. Therefore, it is no shame not to know the answer to a question and to have to call in an expert in the relevant field. In the Netherlands, the focus is on a wide range of knowledge and services to be offered. For this reason, the Dutch business culture also clashes with that of Germany. In the Netherlands, for example, being a manager is not just about the expertise you have. In the Netherlands it is also more about how you lead

a team and organize work. You do not need all the knowledge for this, but it is also mainly about how you deal with people.

Pünktlichkeit

Germans attach great importance to a clear schedule and adhere to it strictly. Germans arrive at the mutually agreed time, neither sooner nor later. Tight and clear schedules offer peace and structure in both their private lives and their professional activities. To avoid undesirable situations, the appointments are planned well in advance in the agenda. As soon as both parties have arrived at the agreed time, they immediately switch to doing business and not a minute is wasted on unnecessary conversations that have nothing to do with the agenda item. If you do not manage to arrive at the agreed time, you are expected to inform the other party in front of the meeting. Failing to hear from you or being late for no valid reason is seen as a sign of disrespect and unreliability. Time is very important in Germany, and you should not waste each other's time. In Germany there is a conviction that systematic and structured planning is the best way to keep everything under control – a preference closely related to the preference for rules and structures

> Quote 9: *"I really like the fact that Germans are so on time! You don't have to expect them ten minutes earlier, but certainly not ten minutes later! It also gives me clarity and peace. If we schedule a meeting for an hour, it often ends ten minutes earlier so that my colleague still has time to arrive on time for the next meeting. In the Netherlands I often noticed that people had no trouble calling that they were a few minutes late or did not even come anymore. I found it very annoying and to me personally it came across as disrespect (Interviewee 8)."*

> Quote 10: *"In the company where I work, people really have fixed schedules and times when they are free. We work in shifts from eight to five and from nine to six. But you don't have to expect from a German, for example, that he will be there fifteen minutes before the start, but also not fifteen minutes after he is free. It is very much a time is time principle. It makes them very reliable in appointments and scheduling meetings. But it also makes them very inflexible when it comes to overtime. five o'clock is five o'clock, if they have forgotten something, they leave a note and they will solve it the next day. While I always stay fifteen minutes or half an hour longer if something is not yet completed. I notice that the customer finds this very pleasant, and I receive*

grateful responses. I find the Dutch more flexible and easier to work with (Interviewee 11)."

In the Netherlands, people are also considered to keep to appointments and to keep a clear agenda for themselves. Only this is less strict than in Germany. In the Netherlands it is quickly accepted when someone is five minutes late and arriving late is easily dealt with a quick message or phone call, the Dutch accept being late more easily. Being a little late (5 minutes) is not a big issue, as long as it doesn't hinder the other party too much. In the Netherlands, people work with a slightly less strict schedule so that they are not prisoners of their own schedule and can respond flexibly to changing situations. As soon as an appointment starts in the Netherlands, there is first fifteen minutes of room for a so-called small talk, after which business is discussed. The reason for this social talk is to create a nice atmosphere and to ensure that everyone is comfortable during the meeting. Even though the Dutch value being on time, the Germans are more linear to time.

Risk avoidance

A striking cultural behavioral difference between Germany and the Netherlands is how to deal with risks. Germans have a strong need for security and try to limit risks as much as possible. Germans adhere to structure and well-proven business procedures, from which the outcome can be guaranteed. They strive for security and stability in business systems as much as possible. In a business context, for example, they prefer to choose the path that involves less risk with a lower result to a path with higher results and a higher risk. Something typical German is the term "Gründlichtkeit" (carefulness), which means that everything should be good and handled with care. Cases are checked a number of times and only handed in once they are free of errors. According to the focus group, the same applies to promotion within a company. Despite the fact that Germans are so focused on the work and want to be very good at it, they are surprisingly not eager to promote. After all, a promotion means a new challenging situation with other responsibilities that are unknown to them yet. Unfamiliar situations whose outcome is uncertain means taking a risk and a possibility to fail, something that Germans are not very fond of. According to the respondents, Germans also show risk aversiting by their late adoption of digitization and their penchant for cash payments. Especially, Germans are very careful about personal data storage. Digitization entails risk, since personal data can be made abuse of as soon as there is a major data breach, and via debit cards one runs the risk that the state or criminal organizations can track your movements

exactly. In addition, there is also a fear among the Germans that the state will gain too much power over the citizens, as in the times of National Socialism and more recently the Stasi in the GDR (German Democratic Republic).

> Quote 11: *"Last summer, the manager wanted to promote someone to a branch manager. And I expected that Germans would be very proud and seize such an opportunity, but this did not happen. He turned down the offer and so did the next employee. Both with the reason that they felt in the right place and did not know what would come their way in that position, also more responsibility. I notice very much in German colleagues that they choose the safe route and like to avoid risk. Personally, I would have liked to give the function a chance and if it went wrong, I would go back to the old function. Unfortunately, I have not yet been employed for a short period of time to be considered for the position. But yes, Germans do not like to make mistakes and choose safe (Interviewee 11)."*

> Quote 12: *"Germans are reserved and cautious about new things. You notice this at work with different working methods. But in private life you notice that with things like debit card payments. I live in a small village just outside Munich and I can't even pay by card everywhere. I find it very strange because I was used to being able to pay by card everywhere. But the Germans I speak to about this say it has to do with the fear and risk of being traced. They don't want the government to know everything about them and know what they are doing. They prefer to avoid leaving data behind (Interviewee 4)."*

The Dutch, on the other hand, are more open to risk and change. If something goes wrong, they just try again in a different way until it goes right. A riskier road is also not a bad thing, as long as it yields a higher result. The Dutch see much more room for innovation and encourage entrepreneurship. Taking a little more risk for more results is very common. According to the respondents, the Dutch are more innovative and think more out of the box. They are more enterprising and see an opportunity in a situation rather than a danger. According to the Dutch, Germans are afraid that change will lead to mistakes and the Dutch see it as an opportunity for development. They think that the Dutch think more in solutions and opportunities because they are used to giving their own interpretation to their job instead of always having thought according to fixed structures and processes. In addition, the value of "utility" again plays a role: for the Dutch, the ultimate result and efficiency are the most

important, more important than procedures to be followed. The Dutch attach more value to personal autonomy and the ability to make choices for themselves, while the Germans value structure, distribution of power, and stability to avoid risks.

Obedience

For German employees, it is expected of you to listen to the boss and do exactly what he tells you. Instructions from the boss are strictly followed, regardless of what the employees themselves think. Colleagues give each other their opinion about his orders, ideas, and instructions, but avoid discussions with the boss. Openly questioning your boss is seen as inappropriate, it would suggest that you doubt your boss's capabilities. German people look up to the boss and are used to showing respect to people with title or authority. So, everything he says is executed and in the best possible way. There is a kind of fear among Germans about making mistakes, losing face, or even being fired.

> Quote 13: *"If I compare Germany and the Netherlands a bit, making decisions is different in Germany. Here it is mainly the boss who determines what happens and everyone else listens to it. In the Netherlands, employees simply have much more responsibility and control, which suits me much more because we are old and wise enough. This approach doesn't bother me personally because I am a manager and only have to give accountability to the boss. But I would understand if employees below me find it annoying that they are not allowed to make many decisions themselves. I also experience the hierarchy clearly during meetings. Colleagues discuss things among themselves before meetings. But as soon as the boss walks in, everyone sits still, and nobody says anything (Interviewee 5)."*

> Quote 14: *"There is a clear division of roles in my workplace. For example, we are not allowed to give a discount on furniture, and we must ask for permission in advance from our "Vorgesetzter" (manager). There are coupons that we can give away as standard, but we have to discuss a real discount. If I don't, then I really do have a problem. You should always ask "May I do this and that or not?", own decisions are not actually made here. On the one hand, it offers a lot of clarity and prevents problems. But on the other hand, I do enjoy the freedom at work in the Netherlands. There is not much attention paid to you and you can make your own decisions (Interviewee 11)."*

The Dutch are used to working autonomously and to give their own interpretation to their job. People are allowed to think along and come up with initiatives to improve processes. This is much appreciated and seen as proactive. In addition, in the Netherlands people are also involved in making decisions or at least in the process. As soon as a Dutch person only follows instructions and does not proactively think along, it can be seen as a sign of passivity or even incompetence. In the Netherlands it is even positive to always express your opinion against the status quo and have discussions, this can lead to improvements and new insights. It shows that you are really committed to you job. When the Dutch only carry out instructions and are not allowed to give their own interpretation or have a say, this can lead to strong frustrations. For Dutch workers it is important to have a say and to be able to act freely, which is inspired by the Dutch value of "self-determination". This is a very strong source of motivation in the job, and when this freedom is missing, Dutch workers will be quickly demotivated.

Separation of living spheres

Germans tend to have a very strict separation between their different living spheres, especially between work and private life. Germans adapt their behavior to the environment in which they find themselves at that moment. At work they focus very much on their task: work comes first and there is no room for chatting. Humor, intimacy, and feelings are part of private life and will (for most) not occur in professional work life. You come to work to perform, not to make friends. So, they do not talk about each other's private lives at work. The focus group reported that when they met their colleague in their leisure time, they felt that they were dealing with a completely different person. In Germany colleagues meet at work-related level and remain properly in their role within the formal structure of the company. When colleagues become friends, there is a risk that the mutual distance decreases and with it the degree of professionalism. This means that the focus on their work and their own task decreases, which Germans absolutely do not want. So, Germans see their colleagues as colleagues and their friends as friends. For many Germans it is therefore not normal to be friends with your colleague, this is seen as unprofessional.

> Quote 15: *"People don't like to talk about their private lives with colleagues. For example, I am a team coach and people have to report their time off to me. At one point, someone took half a day off for a doctor's appointment. He himself did not indicate that he had a doctor's appointment, but a colleague of mine had caught that*

during the telephone call. I then said to him: "Hi, if you have to go to the doctor, you don't necessarily have to take vacation days." And I noticed from his reaction that he didn't like talking about private matters in the workplace. While I really think we should also be a bit human and know other things about each other besides work. Another example is a female colleague whom I sometimes see outside of work and who regularly drinks coffee with me. One day a new colleague asked us if we are friends. To which she replied "No, we cannot be friends, because we are already colleagues". Although I would like to call it a friendship. You really notice the separation here between what is business for them and what is private for them. In the Netherlands, office relations were more personal and pleasant (Interviewee 7)."

Quote 16: *"During my first job interview in Berlin, I talked about my hobbies. Then I got feedback that I shouldn't do that in a next meeting, because that is unprofessional, and they are not interested in what I do outside of work (Interviewee 1)."*

In the Netherlands there is no strict separation between work and private life. It is much more normal to get to know each other in private as well and not just to focus on work. There is a much more informal setting and conversations about private life contribute to the well-known Dutch "gezelligheid". Anyone who does not do this is actually seen as an outsider. Dutchmen think that creating a better atmosphere will improve business performances. Colleagues make time to play sports together in their spare time, organize company outings, or go out on the terrace together for the well-known "Vrijdagmiddagborrel" (Friday afternoon drink).

Zuständigkeit

In Germany people are very focused on their own work. They are expected to act responsibly within their own job description but are not likely to perform tasks that fall outside the job description. One is focused on the task for which he is responsible (zuständig) for. With this way of working there is certainty that everyone is performing a task and it is easy to find out who was responsible for the work. All tasks are very separate from each other, and everyone has to complete his or her work separately from each other. In this way everyone has a clear idea of what his or her responsibilities are, and all attention and expertise can be used in a targeted manner.

Quote 17: *"From the Netherlands, I'm used to doing it together and everyone within a startup also has to do odd jobs that don't fall within their scope. You are jointly responsible for making it a success. Here it is very much like "this is my job and this is what I do". At a certain point I really had to say, "Guys, I've now taken on so many extra tasks, I can't handle it anymore". People carry out their own work and therefore do not deviate from this (Interviewee 14)."*

Quote 18: *"People do not easily deviate from their own package of tasks. When a customer calls us to ask about the status of their order, my colleague always answers: "You should ask customer service because that's not my job". While I still have a look for the customer because it is a small effort. People are not quick to step outside their own job (Interviewee 11)."*

Of course, people in the Netherlands have their own set of tasks and responsibilities. But the Dutch are more inclined to also perform tasks that fall outside their job description. When a person has finished his own task, he is expected to look for opportunities to help his colleague further. When something goes wrong within a company, it affects everyone. People therefore feel much more responsible for the group result as a whole than for their own results alone. Mutually consulting and working together in project groups are very normal. The quotation indicated that Germans mainly stay within their own tasks, whereas the Dutch are more focused on the entire task that that the department has to carry out. In addition to their own tasks, they also like to do other things for a change. According to the focus group, Germans are very focused on delivering their own quality and do not quickly take on other tasks because this falls outside their job. This is where the Germans and the Dutch clash.

Social control

There is strict social control because Germans expect everyone to abide by the rules and hold each other accountable when breaking the rules. The community keeps an eye on each other and feels responsible to monitor and improve the behavior of others where necessary.

Quote 19: *"An old operator of ours was very fond of controlling others. One day I would receive a new car and have to hand in my old one. Well, I was half an hour late and this was immediately reported to managers. And when I asked why she immediately reported that, I got the answer: the rule is that you have delivered the car before 12 noon, so you should do that. According to her, it started with adhering to*

small rules to arrive on time so that you also fulfill large agreements. (Interviewee 5)."

Quote 20: *"During the corona pandemic, it was mandatory to wear a face mask here. If you didn't do this, you were seen as a danger to society because you could infect people. They really urged you to wear a face mask. Not only because this had to be done according to the rules, but also so that you protected others. They don't shy away from correcting each other where necessary (Interviewee 11)."*

In the Netherlands there is much less social control and correction. One of the Dutch cultural values is "self-determination" and means that everyone should know what they are doing (if they are not a burden to others). You should be able to go your own way in the Netherlands, without others getting involved. The Dutch prefer to decide for themselves what they do and not to depend on others, their parents, the government, or church. When the Dutch call each other to account about their behavior, the first reaction will often be something like "mind your own business!". Controlling each other is sensitive in the Netherlands because this goes against the principle of self-determination. The Dutch will also not quickly control and address each other because this can lead to conflicts (and break the "gezelligheid"), but also do not want to be controlled themselves.

Sachlichkeit

When people meet, they always meet on different levels: the task level and the social-emotional level which deals with emotions building relationships. Germany clearly has a preference for meeting each other at the task level. At work, everything is subordinated to the good performance of the work and the personal task. For Germans it is very important to be good at what they do, to be objective, to show enthusiasm in the work, and to put in a lot of effort to get the most out of their task. German people want to be goal-oriented, and they do this by working in a structural way. In business meetings, German people always come to the point and keep to the point. Private matters are less welcome in business situations. Germans thus focus completely on their task and put aside the social-emotional aspects of the work. According to them, it is not important to rely on each other through a social relationship. According to the Germans, you create trust by delivering quality and meeting your agreements. It is therefore better for a visitor to prepare thoroughly for the negotiation, because a German negotiator hates unprepared, sloppy, and undetailed negotiations. Clear and sound documentation must be brought in, of course preferably in German.

Quote 21: *"Well it is very important here to gain trust by delivering quality. Customers here don't care much about what you do in your spare time or who you are. You gain trust by keeping to agreements and not by building personal relationships (Interviewee 6)."*

Quote 22: *"I have quite a few large customers that I have a lot of contact with because of the amount they purchase from us. Only I think there is only 1 customer with whom I have good personal contact and can chat with. The other contacts are very straight to the point of "How is it? Great" and then immediately followed by an order that wants to plan it and what specifications it then wants. Oh, and also whether it can be delivered quickly. While I really think of going that little bit harder for each other and delivering faster, I would rather do it if we personally have a better relationship. Anyway, I have the feeling that you will not easily find personal things here in business (Interviewee 13)."*

The Dutch attach equal importance to both the task level and the social-emotional level. It is very important that the tasks are taken on and completed in a responsible way, because you have to be reliable towards each other. However, at the same time the Dutch find it pleasant to have a friendly relationship with their business partner to create a relaxed atmosphere and way of working (gezelligheid). This is the collaboration climate in which they most thrive, both with clients and with colleagues. It is not necessary to build up a strong personal relation to do business. The Dutch like to come to a compromise jointly in order to maintain a pleasant atmosphere with business relations: it must remain "gezellig".

Respecting hierarchy

In Germany, the hierarchy within companies is highly respected, especially if a higher ranked person is present in the room. In Germany people are expected to look up to higher ranked individuals with power and status. However, if the person is not present, people may gossip behind his or her back. One should be respectful to the superior at work as well as authorities and the state or police. In addition, one should not question their status by acting like you know better, as this can be seen as a sign of disrespect. Proposing your own ideas should be communicated in a tactical and submissive way to your boss, to show respect and show that this person is higher in rank than you. In addition, you should show your own initiative in a case that you are alone in a room with the boss, not in the presence of other colleagues. It

should not become a habit for everyone to show open initiative as this can diminish the authority of the boss.

> Quote 23: *"As I have indicated, Germans show respect to their superiors. In addition, they also carry out what their boss instructs them to do. This is done without too much contradiction, again they do not immediately report things if they do not agree (they do this among themselves when the boss is absent). Then they gossip and show their dissatisfaction and true opinion about the boss. So, I think Germans are very respectful, but some are also a bit fake. They listen to the boss and people with a title. While in the Netherlands there is much more culture that everyone is allowed to give substance to his or her work. The boss has much less said in this and gives the employees freedom. Here in Germany, you just have to listen to someone with a title (Interviewee 1)."*

> Quote 24: *"At my job, for example, I am not allowed to speak directly to the department manager, I have to do this via my team lead. If I don't do this, I got a sermon. My department manager would feel passed over if I skipped him in the hierarchy (Interviewee 7)."*

In the Netherlands you are expected to respect and treat each other correctly. But always behaving in an over-polite and very nice way towards your superior can be perceived as hypocritical and fake, because the norm is to treat each other as equals and even in an amiable way. Instead of gossiping behind someone's back, one should dare to say that directly to his or her face. This implies that the Dutch are allowed to be very direct in what they think and certainly dare to express this, regardless of someone's rank. In the Netherlands people see each other as equals and you should not consider yourself better than anyone else. The Dutch take each other's feelings into account, because they want to avoid conflicts (keeping gezelligheid), but do not like the feeling that they are not allowed to say certain things.

Distanced

Germans are very on their own at work and don't like to stand out, especially when they are part of a large group. They attach great value to their (small) circle of friends and their family. Germans rely a lot on their inner circle and prefer to keep it small, because you can't be good friends with everyone. According to the focus group, it really takes years before a German will see you as a friend. Germans do not like to open up to strangers and only loosen up after

a while, so it takes a long time to gain the trust of a German. But as time progresses and trust is gained, more intimate relationships develop, and a German also asks more personal questions. It is not that a German distrusts everyone, but people with whom they have no relationship are simply paid less attention. In addition, the Germans at work are also a bit more distant to each other and, according to the focus group, they often have their own groups of colleagues with whom they spend lunch. As a newcomer it is difficult to get involved in this.

> Quote 25: *"The Dutch are much more open and less reserved than Germans. I notice this especially during lunch. In the Netherlands, you sit down at the table with your colleagues and have a chat during lunch, or even go for a walk afterwards. In Germany many have only 1 or 2 colleagues to do this with and nothing else. It is also very difficult to join an "existing" group at the table, because they are closed people. A little distanced, that's what I want to call them! And what do I think of that? I had trouble with it at first, but now I think oh well, it's just the lunch break (Interviewee 8)."*

> Quote 26: *"German people are friendly but more distant than Dutch people. They would ever be quick to tell you things about themselves, first you have to gain their trust. When I look at German friends of mine, they are also very calm of themselves and very busy with their own clique, it also took me a long time before I became friends with them. It's not that they, as I sometimes do, have a chat with a stranger. They are very reserved and prefer to wait to see how situations unfold. I actually find it pleasant for myself because in the Netherlands I experienced very much that a whole group of extroverted people did not work. But as I say, very friendly yet distant (Interviewee 4)."*

The Dutch may believe that the Germans are very difficult to approach. In the Netherlands people are a lot more extroverted and open to new contacts at work. Everyone should be able to feel welcome in the organization. It therefore takes less time to make friends with Dutch people than with Germans. In the Netherlands people therefore call each other friends more quickly than they do in Germany. In Germany you must put effort into the relationship and try to gain each other's trust before calling each other a friend, this can sometimes take years. In the Netherlands, on the other hand, people behave more quickly towards each other as friends and people are easily trusted. The accessible extroverted behavior of the Dutch and easily

making friendships comes from the striving for "harmony" and "sociability". In the Netherlands people try to avoid conflicts as much as possible and to make everyone happy in every situation. This also means that colleagues can be friends of yours besides work or at least behave like friends. There is much less of a separation between work and private life.

Mistakes

To avoid being seen as ignorant, for Germans it is very important not to make mistakes. Mistakes can lead to negative reactions, loss of face among colleagues and in extreme cases even dismissal. To avoid this, Germans tend not to admit mistakes or show that they are responsible for the mistake made. According to the focus group, people with a temporary contract within a company are afraid of making mistakes because of the possible missing out on a permanent contract and are therefore less likely to admit their mistakes. While people with a permanent contract and higher status are afraid of being seen as incompetent.

> Quote 27: *"Last year an order was booked incorrectly, resulting in a negative result that month, while in reality this was not the case. So, there was a mistake made by a person. This was discussed extensively during a meeting and asked who was responsible for this, but no response. In the end, the manager discussed this 1 on 1 with everyone separately and only then did someone admit that he / she had done that. But he didn't want to openly admit his mistake because it could be seen as a sign of weakness and failure by colleagues. Germans don't like to admit mistakes, I've noticed because it can be seen as ignorant and lack of knowledge (Interviewee 3)."*

> Quote 28: *"I think we admit mistakes quite quickly in the Netherlands, because making a mistake is human after all. If something goes wrong in the Netherlands, you just sit around and analyze the error. If you ask who is responsible for the mistake, someone quickly admits it and you just get on with each other. In Germany you gather your colleagues together to see what went wrong and how it can be improved next time. Then they are very much involved in thinking along and preventing a mistake in the future. But as soon as I ask who was actually responsible for the mistake they all remain remarkably silent. It seems that making mistakes is not allowed and they feel very guilty. I already noticed that being very good at your profession is super important when hiring an intern. I wanted to invite someone with a lot of sixes to a job interview and got the response "why would you want to work with someone with so*

many sixes?". While I want to give such a person the opportunity to develop (Interviewee 9)."

In the Netherlands, concealing mistakes is seen as wrong and irresponsible. Making mistakes is human and can happen to anyone. The Dutch are therefore easier to express self-criticism and admit mistakes. Admitting a mistake or lack of knowledge is a sign of professional sense of responsibility. It strengthens mutual trust because of the honesty towards the other. Colleagues will help you avoid making the same mistake next time. You don't have to be ashamed of a mistake you made. If it's not right, just keep going until it's right. But in the Netherlands, it is very important that you admit your mistakes and see what you have done wrong. This again comes from the Dutch value's "truth" and "reliability". It's better to tell the truth openly and honestly than to keep something a secret and get caught lying later. Honesty is more important than politeness. Because whoever lies loses, if it is discovered, the trust of the rest. So, the Netherlands and Germany clash in this regard because making mistakes in Germany is much worse. In Germany, staff are often expected to adhere to established processes in order to avoid errors. So, mistakes shouldn't happen if professionals stick to the process and do what they're supposed to do. Hence, one can then be considered incapable.

Status showing

In Germany it is quite accepted to openly show your status in private and professional situations. It is seen as a sign of success. A large proportion of the interviewees agreed and believe that status is important in Germany. Status is shown by expensive cars and big houses, in private life. In professional life, status is shown by high positions, titles, expensive company cars, their own large office, and work experience. Within the hierarchy applies; the higher the position, the more power and status the person has. In Germany people with high positions are looked up to, they make the decisions within the company and people with less status should listen to this.

> Quote 29: *"What also made a difference for me, and that may also have to do with hierarchy: is how the boss shows himself at work. In the Netherlands people quickly think "What will the employees think?" as soon as you come to work with an expensive car. That's not a problem here, here the boss can just fine come to work with a Bentley and park right in front of the door. I once asked a German colleague how they view this and he thought that the boss should be allowed to show his success. After all, he worked hard for it. In the beginning this took some time to getting used to it, and I also*

thought "well, this is very unnecessary". But now I think indeed, what's wrong with
showing what you've worked for and achieved in life (Interviewee 5)."

Quote 30: *"As I mentioned, we have a hierarchy in the workplace. But it is also very*
clear who owns the company. The boss is not there very often, but he has his own and
also the largest office of the building. With his title, "Herr" and surname on the door.
He definitely shows who's boss. It doesn't irritate me, but my bosses in the Netherlands
were all very modest and accessible. The hierarchy has gone a bit too far here, they
really must show who is above whom (Interviewee 11)."

In contrast to Germany, it is not common in the Netherlands to show that you are in a higher
than another and bragging and boasting is strongly condemned. If you do, you will be seen as
annoying and arrogant. Showing riches and status is undermining the carefully maintained
fiction of a society of equals. The strong Dutch value 'equality' implies that everyone is
equal, and one should definitely not think to be superior to anyone else. It is bad to look down
on someone else. Don't let playing the gentlemen go to your head; modesty is good for
people. It is a great compliment in the Netherlands if they say of a prominent person that he
had stayed "like the ordinary people".

Feierabend

Germans are very attached to their leisure time after work, so-called "Feierabend". During
their work, Germans are expected to be fully committed to their tasks and let no private
matters interfere. But once they are off, they really want to dedicate themselves fully to their
private life. Feierabend is about the mindset that companies get more productivity, and thus
more value, out of their workforce if employees are given clear rest periods after work. As
soon as the clock strikes five, people stop working and finish what is not finished the next
day.

Quote 31: *"My employer really instructed us to enjoy leisure time and evenings with*
our families instead of working after five. He said this for the reason that if we are
constantly looking at our work laptop at home, we cannot enjoy our leisure time
properly, so he attaches great importance to it. Because according to him, you can
also focus better on your work if you have been able to relax well in your free time.
I've never thought about it that way, but I do stand behind his principle. It's also quite

fun because you don't see anyone at work on their private phone and fully
concentrated on their work (Interviewee 9)."

Quote 32: *"Because people are so tied to their time and see "Feierabend" almost as a*
religion, I miss the flexibility. I still work overtime until half past five, six o'clock or at
the weekend. But my colleagues who really just stop at five o'clock and after that I
can't approach them anymore. So, I do miss a bit of flexibility that I did have with
colleagues in the Netherlands, working overtime or answering a question during the
weekend was not an issue (Interviewee 8)."

In the Netherlands, people naturally also value their leisure time, but it is not important
enough to attach a label to it. People in the Netherlands just know that higher positions entail
more responsibility and responsibility includes working overtime sometimes. So, the Dutch
are used to working overtime. These hours are simply paid or at another time the employee
may leave earlier. People often don't go home until the work is done. It is quite normal in the
Netherlands when you still spend time on work in the evenings or on weekends. For the Dutch
there is therefore less structuring of time. It is more important that the work is completed
efficiently than that one adheres to tight time schedules. According to the focus group,
overtime is part of carrying responsibilities and higher positions within companies. It is also
not strange to receive and answer e-mails from colleagues during the weekend. The division
between work and private life is much less clear in the Netherlands. Private emails or phone
calls are sometimes made during working hours, and this is very normal. Because the working
time is not completely the boss's time, the private time does not always have to be completely
private. The Dutch are very flexible in that respect compared to Germans.

4.2 UNDERLYING VALUES: ASSOCIATION AMONG CULTURAL STANDARDS

As indicated above, in addition to cultural standards, this study also tries to identify the
underlying values of the typical German behaviors on the work floor. The goal is to find the
cultural logic explaining the behaviors, thus offering a so-called thick description. Not all
German cultural standards can be seen independently of each other. Some standards overlap
and others are related. In this section, the different German cultural standards will be
classified into clusters deriving from the same cultural values. These values reflect the reason
why Germans behave in a certain way.

Order (Ordnung)

The first underlying value found is Order. This value can be directly linked to the German saying: "Ordnung muss sein". The value consists of several different cultural standards: Sticking to Rules & Structure, Pünktlichkeit, Risk Avoidance, and Social Control. Order revolves around shaping and maintaining a well-structured predictable environment. Within Germany strict and above all clear rules have been devised so that it is immediately clear to everyone how they should behave. Germans respect these rules and strictly adhere to them. Also, out of their sense of responsibility, they will point out to people that they do not adhere to rules. Everyone therefore adheres to the rules or ensures that others continue to adhere to them. In this way every effort is made to maintain stability in society. In addition, there is "Pünktlichkeit" within German society, which means that people stick to fixed agendas. One should not be too early and certainly too late. You show in this way that you are reliable and, in addition, respect, you don't waste other people's time. Finally, risky situations are avoided because this can endanger the stability and security from which the Germans greatly benefit. Rather, they choose the path that was successful, building on the structure that was already laid down by experienced predecessors. For the Germans it is important that risk is avoided, and stability ensured. In short, the value Order encompasses maintaining stability and predictability for the present and the future ("Alles im Griff", everything under control).. The figure below shows the relation between the different German cultural standards and the underlying value Order.
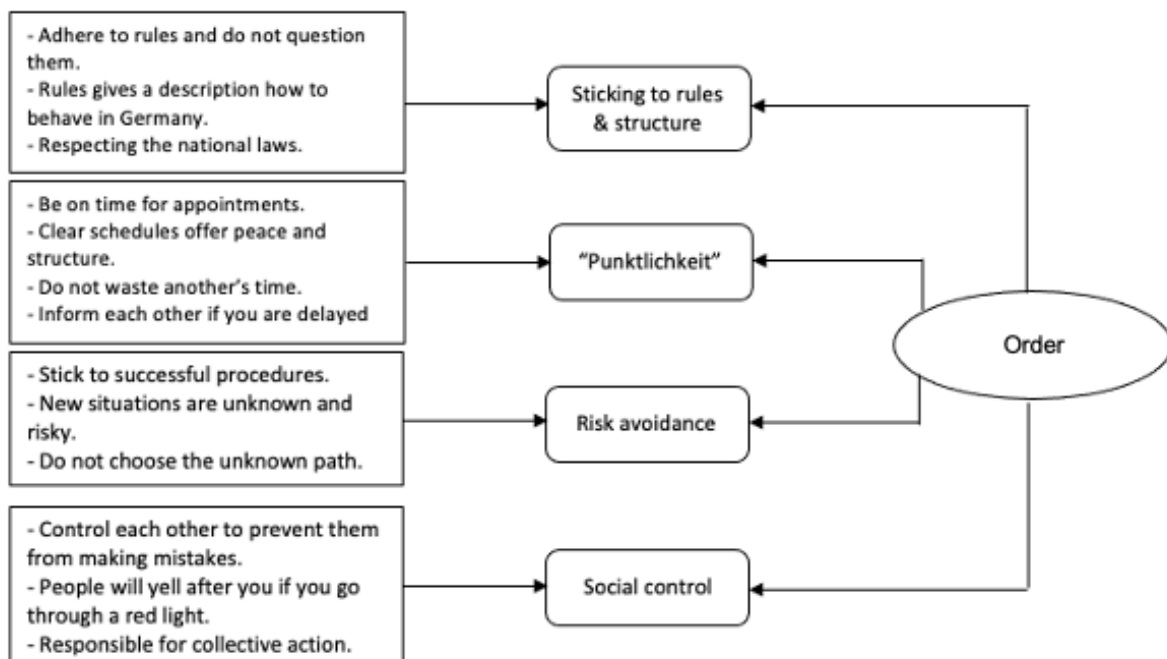

Figure 3, Order as Underlying value

Hierarchy

The second underlying value that was found was Hierarchy. This value is made up of several different German cultural standards. Namely, respecting hierarchy, formality, power division, obedience, and status showing. The value Hierarchy can be described as attaching much importance to the position of an individual within society. It is a way of arranging persons according to an asymmetric mutual relationship. That means that, a person who is higher in the ranking is in charge of several others who are lower in the ranking. People from the lower rank look up to people who are higher in the rank order. These are often the people with a lot of status and positions of power within companies. People show respect for these high-ranking persons because they have authority and therefore also expect respect from lower-ranking persons. Therefore, decision-making is done by the higher-ranking persons and the lower-ranking persons should obey and carry out the assigned tasks. The communication from lower-ranking persons to higher-ranking persons is very formal and distanced, underlining this hierarchical relationship. This is done to show respect and show that this person is above you. Within hierarchy, the higher-ups determine what happens and they constantly check whether their decisions are being implemented correctly. The figure below shows the relation between the different German cultural standards and the underlying value hierarchy.
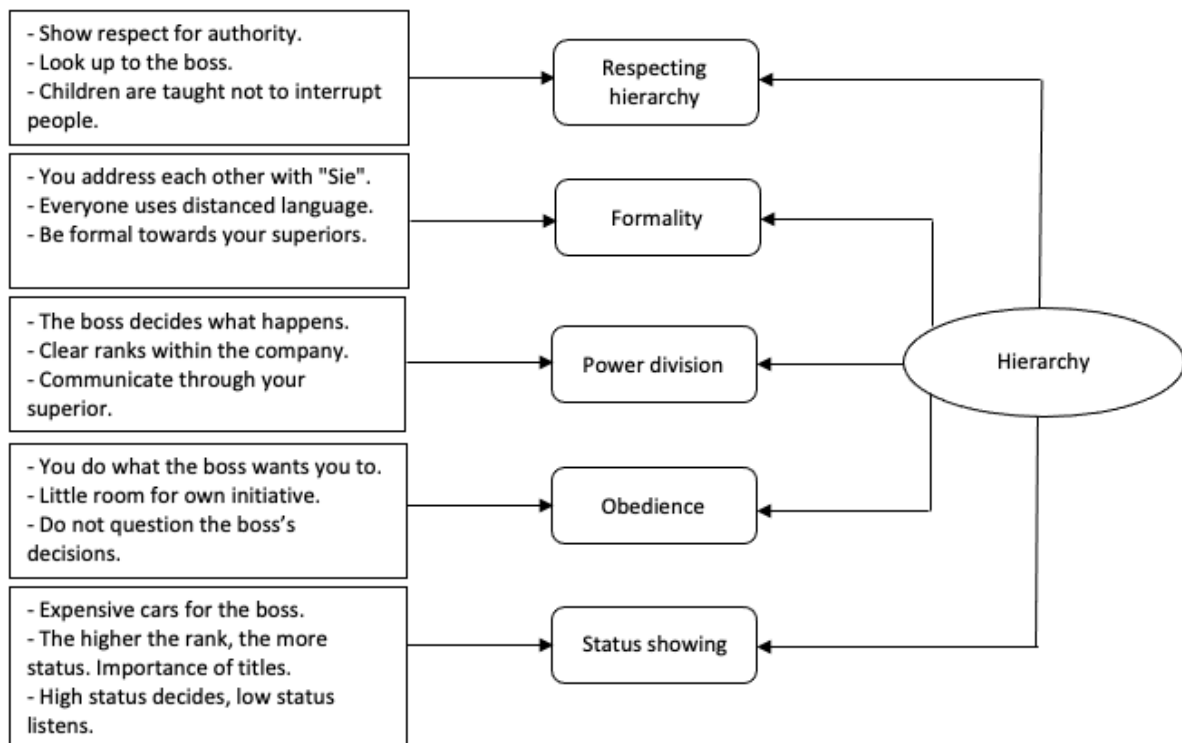

Figure 4, Hierarchy as Underlying Value

Professionalism

The third and final underlying value is professionalism. This value also consists of a number of cultural standards. Namely, Separation of Living Spheres, "Zuständigkeit", Mistakes, "Fachkompetenz", "Feierabend", "Sachlichkeit", and Distanced. Professionalism often revolves around the image that one shows towards colleagues or business relations. An employee is expected to act professionally and behave according to his role. The employee must be serious and competent, so not amical and least of all irresponsible. It is very important that you have the knowledge required for the profession you practice. You have to show that you master the matter and can make the right choices that are of value to the company. Especially people in higher positions with more responsibility, are assumed to know best. One should come well prepared to meetings and speaking in professional terms demonstrates that one knows what one is talking about. Mistakes are a sign of ignorance and are quickly concealed to avoid loss of face or even worse, dismissal. One is expected to be able to carry out the work in a good way. In addition, there is a strong separation between work and professional life. At work one is there to perform and be of value to the company, enjoying one's family should be done in free time. In Germany, great value is placed on delivering quality and meeting agreements. Trust is therefore also based on task level and doing business does not require mutual personal relationships. Germans are used to more distant dealing with clients and gaining their trust can take a long time. One has to prove oneself as a professional before a German can trust your word. In short, Germans focus a lot on the work and quality of it. Humor, intimacy, and relationships are fringe matters and belong to private life. If a person does not make a clear distinction, he or she will fall out of his professional role. In the table below, the interconnection between the different cultural standards is shown.
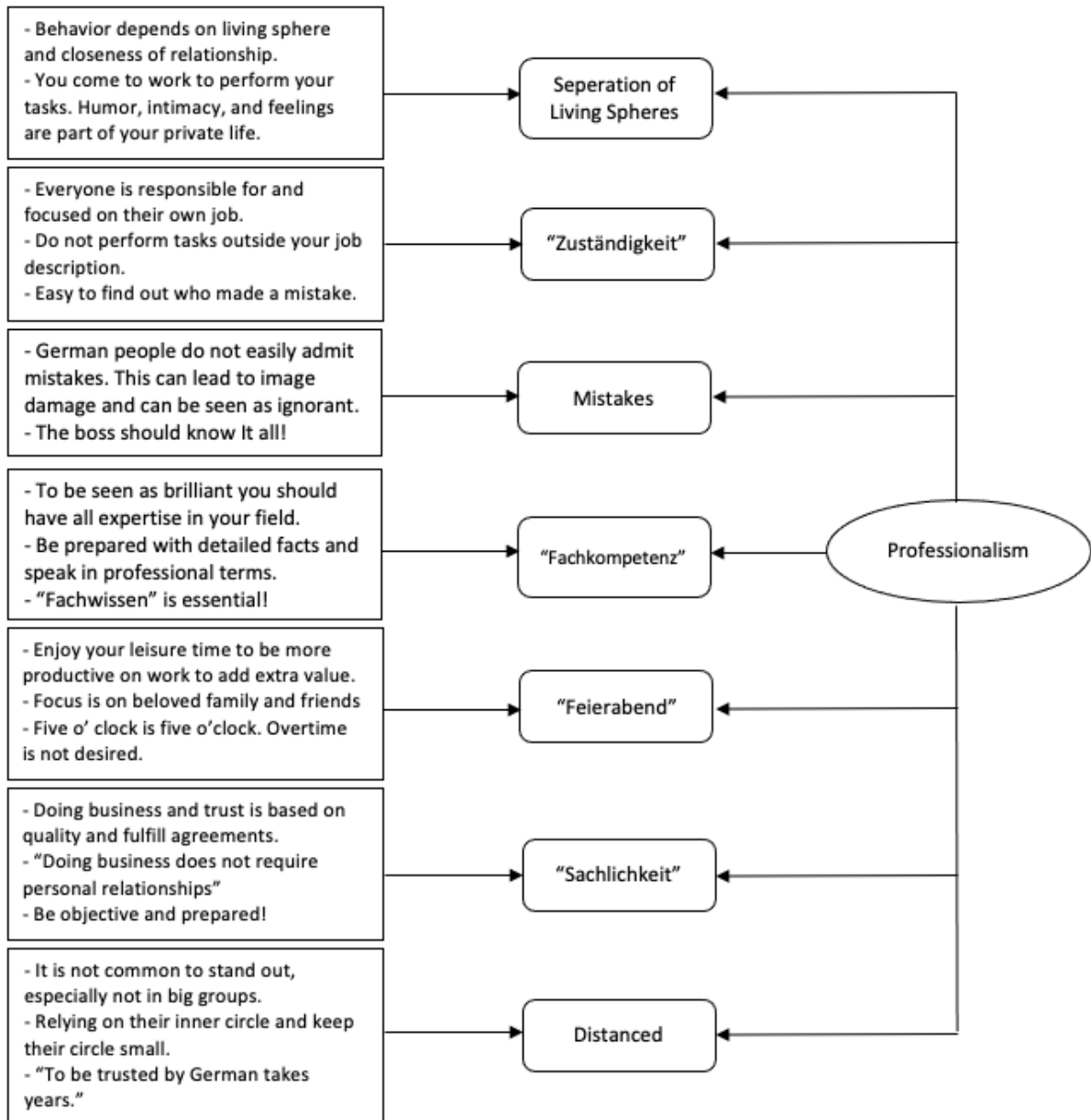
- Behavior depends on living sphere and closeness of relationship. - You come to work to perform your tasks. Humor, intimacy, and feelings are part of your private life.	Seperation of Living Spheres	
- Everyone is responsible for and focused on their own job. - Do not perform tasks outside your job description. - Easy to find out who made a mistake.	"Zuständigkeit"	
- German people do not easily admit mistakes. This can lead to image damage and can be seen as ignorant. - The boss should know It all!	Mistakes	
- To be seen as brilliant you should have all expertise in your field. - Be prepared with detailed facts and speak in professional terms. - "Fachwissen" is essential!	"Fachkompetenz"	Professionalism
- Enjoy your leisure time to be more productive on work to add extra value. - Focus is on beloved family and friends - Five o' clock is five o'clock. Overtime is not desired.	"Feierabend"	
- Doing business and trust is based on quality and fulfill agreements. - "Doing business does not require personal relationships" - Be objective and prepared!	"Sachlichkeit"	
- It is not common to stand out, especially not in big groups. - Relying on their inner circle and keep their circle small. - "To be trusted by German takes years."	Distanced	

Figure 5, Professionalism as Underlying Value

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this final chapter, a discussion of the study is presented. First, an overview is shown of the discovered German cultural standards, seen from the eyes of Dutch people working in Germany. In addition, the academic and practical relevance of this research is discussed followed by suggestions for future research. Finally, this research ends with a conclusion about the research conducted.

5.1 GERMAN CULTURAL STANDARDS AS PERCEIVED BY THE DUTCH

The stated aim of this research was to discover German cultural standards and underlying values, seen from a Dutch perspective. Sixteen German cultural standards were discovered during the study as described in section 4.1 of the study (German Cultural Standards). Below is a list of the different cultural standards.

1. Sticking to structure & rules
2. Formality
3. Power Division
4. "Fachkompetenz"
5. "Pünktlichkeit"
6. Risk avoidance
7. Obedience
8. Separation of living spheres
9. Social control
10. "Zuständigkeit"
11. "Sachlichkeit"
12. Respecting Hierarchy
13. Distanced
14. Mistakes
15. Status showing
16. "Feierabend"

In section 4.2 of the study (Underlying values: association among cultural standards), the cultural standards are linked to their respective value, each one of which should explain why Germans behave in a certain way; this forms a thick description. The behavior is explained

and creates an expectation of how Germans can behave. Three clear values emerged from the research: Order, Hierarchy, and Professionalism.

5.2 ACADEMIC RELEVANCE

The contribution of this research lies in the field of validation of previous studies comparing German and Dutch culture. This study also serves as a replication of Thesing's study, which made no distinction between cultural standards and values, and therefore did not give a thick description of German culture from the Dutch perspective. This research not only found sixteen different German cultural standards and behaviors that reflect a good picture of Germans in business life. But the underlying values and explanation for this behavior are also provided. In this way it is shown why Germans are expected to behave in a particular way. Compared to previous studies, many similarities have been found.

Thesing proposes 'a fear of losing control' as one of the German cultural standards. But this is not a cultural standard itself. Fear of losing control is not concrete (observable) behavior but an emotional cause of behavior. It is a fear associated with the German value named Order (Ordnung). All order and striving for peace within German society is explained by the fear of losing control over situations. From this value the following behaviors come according to Thesing: Germans like to avoid uncertain situations, adhere to rules and structures, and plan the future according to a schedule as much as possible. They are looking for certainty and do not want to do several things at the same time. These behaviors are reflected in the following cultural standards that this research has identified, namely: Risk Avoidance, Sticking to Structure & Rules, and Pünktlichkeit. In addition, Thesing also claims that Germans value their free time and separate professional life from private life in order to perform at work. According to him, it is important that German employees focus on work, behave responsibly, and act formally towards colleagues and superiors. This corresponds to the outdated cultural standards: Separation of Living Spheres, Sachlichkeit, Zuständigkeit, and Formality.

On the other hand, it appeared that certain behaviors that were detected by Thesing (2016), such as "directness and straightforwardness" were not directly found within this study. But as can be seen from the quote from Thesing (2016, p. 49), the directness and straightforwardness described by Thesing is the same as the cultural standards "social control" of this study. Social control involves pointing out others if they do not violate these rules, which can be experienced as direct by the Dutch. There is therefore no reason to assume that the concept of

cultural standards is limited, as Thesing points out in his study, after the experts cannot agree on directness between the Germans and the Dutch (2016, p. 50).

Compared to Schroll-Machl's previous study of German culture, this study is very consistent with its results. For example, she speaks of "Regelorientierung" with the aim of exercising centralized control over the population and preserving peace in society. According to Schroll-Machl, Germans attach great importance to rules and take their assigned responsibilities in society and at work very seriously. Germans are very performance-oriented, and they want to do what they do well. Another point that Schroll-Machl raises is the so-called "Zeitplanung". According to her, Germans are tied to their agenda and there is little room for change in a German's schedule. Work life is tightly planned, and work-related matters do not appear in the German private agenda. This is also apparent from the "Trennung von Persönlichkeits- und Lebensbereichen" that Schroll-Machl has discovered. For example, Germans very strictly separate work and private life and a distinction is made in behavior. They distinguish between work & private, rational & emotional, Rolle & Person, and formal & informal. According to Schroll-Machl, Germans are also individual and detached. Germans don't like to be in groups and value their small familiar circle.

Thus, Schroll-Machl's study aligns with the following cultural standards: Sticking to Structure & Rules, Social Control, Fachkompetenz, Sachlichkeit, Zuständigkeit, Separation of Living Spheres, Pünktlichkeit, Formality, and Feierabend. Just like Thesing, Schroll-Machl also admits that Germans are Germans in communication and say exactly what they think. However, the focus group of this study was unable to confirm this the reason for this is because the Dutch themselves are also very low context and direct, so the directness of the Germans is not noticeable. Compared to the study of Schroll-Machl, this study differs on that from a Dutch point of view, Germans avoid risk, like to show status, and title, and have difficulty admitting mistakes. Perhaps they did not emerge very prominently in her trainings where foreigners (from all over the world) talked about their experiences with German culture. But in this study, they came to light because they specifically contrast with Dutch cultural standards. In this way this study enrichens the literature on German culture.

In addition, differences have been discovered compared to the quantitative cultural models of Hofstede, Trompenaars, and Hall. According to Hofstede, Germany is a country with a lower score in power distance than the Netherlands. Which means that power and control is distributed fairly, control is disliked, and a participative meeting style is common. This is

completely contrary to what this research has discovered. According to the results of this research, power within German companies is very divided and only a few people are in control. The lower ranked people are expected to listen to the superiors and do what they are told. The frameworks and this research, on the other hand, agree quite well on the fact that Germany is driven by success and achievements, values rules, separates work and private life, and is very linear to time.

The study of national cultures is often criticized as underrating the cultural differences within a country and overrating the cultural commonalities on a national level. An additional idea behind this study was to examine whether there could be identified cultural differences between Northern and Southern Germany or virtually the same cultural standards (and values) were observed in both regions. For that reason, respondents were selected from Hamburg and Berlin (Northern Germany), and Munich (Southern Germany). But no differences whatever were found, and the same cultural standards were observed by the Dutch in equal measure in both regions. This shows that it is possible to identify a consistent and shared national culture. Of course, this does not mean that there are no regional or social cultural differences within a country like Germany. But at the same time times Germans share a lot of cultural commonalities that can be brought to light by an outsider view, as was done in this study.

Overall, this study adds value to the existing literature by validating and enriching previous results, providing a thick description of both the cultural standards and the underlying values, and offers a comprehensive analysis of behaviors within intercultural situations.

5.3 PRACTICAL RELEVANCE

This research and the sixteen different cultural standards provide insight into German behavior seen from the Dutch perspective. It gives the reader, businesspeople, and managers a better understanding of what to expect when working in a bicultural situation. This also ensures a higher tolerance in these situations because the behavior of the German can be better understood and interpreted. The research can therefore be used to lower the barriers that arise in bicultural situations and improve the mutual quality of cooperation between the Germans and the Dutch.

5.4 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study showed an insight into the experiences of these people that arose in the bicultural situation, but these insights are only seen from a Dutch perspective. Therefore, this is not a complete description of German cultural behavior since it only focuses on the cultural differences between the Germans and the Dutch. Additional future research is therefore also important to investigate German culture from other cultural perspectives. Nationals from other countries will no doubt highlight other German characteristics than the Dutch do. Countries with a still stronger hierarchy, for example, might see Germany as a country with a rather flat hierarchy, while the Dutch see it as a hierarchical country. This study offers an even more specific picture of German cultural behavior. In this study, despite a proportional distribution between different areas within Germany, no cultural differences were found between these areas. Future research could look for demographic cultural differences within German. This can be done by interviewing southern Germans living in the north and vice versa. The Dutch are too far removed from German culture to be able to discover and experience the profound cultural differences, but they can distinguish gross differences.

A limitation within the study is the social desirability bias. This means that people can answer questions in a way that is perceived as favorable by the interviewer. This allows interviewers to give answers that are in fact incorrect or untrue (Crowne and Marlowe, 1960). This can be at the expense of the reliability of the research. This might be counteracted by clearly stating in advance that no personal data will be used in the research and answers to questions are anonymized in the research. This may give people a feeling that they can speak more freely.

5.5 CONCLUSION

The main research question of this study was: "How is the German culture perceived by Dutch individuals living and working in Germany?". This question has been answered based on the following sixteen different German cultural standards that have been identified: Sticking to Structure & Rules, Formality, Power Division, Fachkompetenz, Pünktlichkeit, Risk Avoidance, Obedience, Separation of Living Spheres, Social Control, Zuständigkeit, Sachlichkeit, Respecting Hierarchy, Distanced, Mistakes, Status Showing, and Feierabend. A more detailed description of these cultural standards is given in chapter 4.1 (German Cultural Standards).

In addition to identifying cultural standards and validating previous research, the aim was to find out the underlying value of the behaviors. So, the reason why people behave in a certain way. During the research, three different values were discovered:

1. **Order:** Sticking to Rules & Structure, Pünktlichkeit, Risk Avoidance, Social Control
2. **Hierarchy:** Respecting Hierarchy, Formality, Power Division, Obedience, Status Showing.
3. **Professionalism:** Separation of Living Spheres, Zuständigkeit, Mistakes, Fachkompetenz, Feierabend, Sachlichkeit, Distanced.

After comparing the studies with previous literature, many similarities were found. This validates both the literature and the study. But in addition to the existing cultural standards, a number of new German cultural standards were also discovered during the study, and all provided with a reason behind it. This provides a thick description of how Germans behave from a Dutch perspective.

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Appendix A – Questionnaire Used During the Interviews

1. Geeft u toestemming dat het gesprek wordt opgenomen om vervolgens te kunnen transcriberen? Na transcriptie zal de opname onmiddellijk worden verwijderd. Tevens kunnen quotes worden gebruikt maar uiteraard wordt uw naam ivm privacy verborgen gehouden.

2. Zoals u wellicht heeft vernomen is het onderzoek bedoeld om verscheidene Duitse culturele standaarden en de hiervan achterliggende gedachte te ontdekken.

3. Zou u zichzelf kort kunnen introduceren? Zoals wie bent u, wat is uw beroep en wat was uw reden om naar Duitsland te verhuizen.

4. Zoals ik begrijp heeft u met regelmaat contact met Duitse collega's.

   - Hoe vaak ongeveer? Op welke wijze heeft u contact, fysiek of per telefoon?
   - Wat is de positie van u en de positie van deze Duitse collega?
   - In welke taal voert u voornamelijk gesprekken met Duitse collega's?
   - Is communiceren met Duitse collega's eenvoudig?
   - Hoe zou u de sfeer tussen Nederlanders en Duitse collega's beschrijven?
   - Is de samenwerking goed? Of kan deze worden verbeterd? Zo ja, hoe?
   - Zijn relaties met Duitse werknemers vaak persoonlijk of zakelijk?
   - Wat is uw ervaring met Duitse collega's in het algemeen?
   - Welke grote verschillen ziet u vooral tussen Nederlanders en Duitsers?

Dan zou ik het graag met u hebben over uw verdere ervaring met Duitsers. Hoe zijn uw ervaringen met Duitse mensen in het algemeen? En wat is volgens u het grootste verschil tussen Duitsers en Nederlanders?

   - **Heeft u een voorbeeld om dit verder te kunnen uitleggen?**

(Zodra een concreet voorbeeld wordt gegeven of iets op de werkvloer, bijvoorbeeld een critical incident)

1. Hoe gebeurde dit? (Kunt u dit nader uitleggen)
2. Vond u dit leuk of niet? En waarom?
3. Hoe reageerde u op deze situatie?
4. Hoe is dit geëindigd?
5. Waarom denkt u dat Duitse collega's zich op deze manier gedroegen?

Heeft u nog meer vergelijkbare voorbeelden?

Op dezelfde manier:

1. Bent u ooit verrast of verbaasd geweest door gedrag van Duitse collega's?
2. Heeft u ooit iets ervaren wat u niet begreep van uw Duitse collega's?
3. Heeft u ooit onenigheden ervaren met uw Duitse collega's? En op welke wijze heeft u dit opgelost?
4. Heeft u ooit een echt conflict gehad met Duitse collega's? Hoe is dit ontstaan?
5. Heeft u ooit andere problemen gehad met Duitse collega's vanwege cultuurverschillen?

Als u moest bepalen waarin u de laatste jaren bent verduitst, wat zal dit dan zijn? En waarom? Vond u uw Nederlandse karaktereigenschap niet passen in deze situatie?

Een aantal laatste vragen:

1 Een goede manager: hoe moet deze zich gedragen? En verschillen Nederlanders en Duitsers hier heel erg in?

2 Een goede collega: hoe moet deze zich gedragen? En verschillen Nederlanders en Duitsers hier heel erg in?

3 Een goede werknemer: hoe moet deze zich gedragen? En verschillen Nederlanders en Duitsers hier heel erg in?

Een stelling: "Het is gemakkelijker om met een Duitser samen te werken dan met een Nederlander."
Eens of oneens en waarom?

Heeft u nog meer ervaringen met Duitsers waarin zij qua gedragingen ontzettend verschillen van de Nederlanders?

Mocht u zich nog interessante ervaringen te boven schieten schroom dan niet om mij te contacten en dit alsnog te delen. U kunt mij altijd per email of whatsapp bereiken! En nogmaals, dit onderzoek is volledig vertrouwelijk en uw naam zal niet openbaar worden gebruikt in het verslag!

Dan dank ik u bij deze voor uw genomen tijd en moeite!!