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Intercultural Collaboration in European Business

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

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Abstract

Working with different nationalities and cultures is something that we have been dealing with more frequently and will probably continue to increase due to ongoing globalization. In these cross-cultural interactions and collaborations, cultural differences can lead to misconceptions in communication and issues could quickly arise. For this reason, doing business and working with different cultures can be quite challenging which makes research on cultural differences within Europe extremely valuable.

Therefore, focusing specifically on the Spanish culture, this master thesis aims to identify typical Spanish behaviour, known as cultural standards, as seen from a Dutch perspective. This research provides a thorough analysis of the cross-cultural interaction between the Dutch and the Spanish in the working environment. The research question that is formulated is the following: “What cultural differences in the working environment are perceived by the Dutch working and living in Spain?”

To answer this question, qualitative research was carried out by the means of interviewing 13 Dutch individuals who have been living and working in Spain for at least 6 months. During the interviews, participants were asked about situations where the Dutch and Spanish cultures clashed in order to collect critical incidents. The results were analysed using the Thematic Analysis and structured by using the Gioia method.

The information retrieved from the interviews was examined and 17 cultural standards were discovered. These cultural standards were explored in more depth, and four Spanish underlying values (from a Dutch perspective) were brought to surface, namely: Honor, Autoridad, Seguridad and Relaciones interpersonales. These underlying values are supported by Spanish literature including sayings and proverbs which together provide a thick description of Spanish cultural standards from Dutch perspective. The results of this research can be used to prepare better Dutch people who are going to work and live in Spain and this knowledge will prevent people from making cultural misconceptions

Keywords: Critical Incidents, Cultural standards, Dutch cultural standards, Dutch culture, Spanish cultural standards, Spanish culture, Underlying values

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1. Introduction

By removing trade barriers and border controls among its member states and introducing uniform standards, the European Union has created one big common market. But Europe still has one disadvantage compared with other big economic blocks like the U.S. and China, which is the linguistic and cultural differences between the constituent countries (Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China & DG Education and Culture of the European Commission, 2015). As companies continue to expand across borders and the European marketplace becomes increasingly more accessible for small and large businesses alike more opportunities to work internationally arise. Multinational and cross-cultural teams are likewise becoming ever more common, meaning businesses can benefit from an increasingly diverse knowledge base and new insightful approaches to business problems (Reynalds, 2017). This means that being able to deal with cultural differences is becoming increasingly important to e.g., work together internationally, close important international business deals, as well as being able to spot and seize opportunities within the international markets. Therefore, this research on cultural differences within Europe is extremely valuable since it can help to improve business relations between various countries and in that way boost trade and industrial collaboration within the union.

This research is focused on the cultural differences between Spain and The Netherlands which are two countries with long-standing business relations. In 2020, the Netherlands was the 7th largest importer in the trade of goods and services with 14,436 million for Spain. This consisted of the largest part of products from within the chemical sector, fabricates and machines (Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend Nederland, 2021). Spain on the other hand, exported 9,903 million euros worth of goods and services to The Netherlands, which consisted mainly out of food, animals, and chemicals as well (Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend Nederland, 2021). Furthermore, the two countries “exchange” many immigrants back and forth. Within Spain there are currently 46.406 registered native Dutch, which is slightly less than the number of Spanish immigrants that chose to live in The Netherlands (49.116) (Nationmaster, 2022). The main reasons for many Dutch people to go to Spain are because of the warmer climate, a job or business in the tourism sector or to enjoy retirement (Gehring, 2015). While Spanish immigrants more often migrate to The Netherlands for personal development of their education or career. The Dutch and Spanish have culturally many similarities as well as differences. Hence, collaborations between various production sites/business partners do not always go smoothly which may hamper productivity and profitability or lead to problems in communication and building business relationships.

Existing research on cultural differences is between Spanish and Dutch within the working environment is limited, mostly impressionistic, general described and not researched in a systematic way. Therefore, this study intends to describe concrete situations within the working environment in which the Dutch and Spanish have problems in communication and collaboration which arise due to cultural differences. This is done by conducting 13 interviews with Dutch people who are working in and living in Spain. The outcome gives additional insights into existing literature about cultural differences between Spain and The Netherlands which largely consists of quantitative research and is described along dimensions. It is expected that the insights obtained from this research can help managers and workers to bridge the cultural differences between the two countries.

The aim of this research is to establish Spanish cultural standards perceived by the Dutch and to establish cultural values through combining cultural standards. The results should give insights and solutions to improve communication and collaboration between Dutch people and Spanish people in order to optimize productivity and profitability of business relations.

1.1 Academic relevance

In this study, in order to understand the dynamics of international business encounters between the Spanish and Dutch as thorough as possible, the critical incident method is used. With this method cultural clashes are collected, analysed, compared. Together these critical incidents can show thorough behavioural patterns of a culture. This study provides more specific insights and thick descriptions with a clear distinction of the differences of the cultural standards between the two cultures. This means that concrete behaviour is described of the Spanish culture in the working environment, that is additional to literature that describes the culture in general. Furthermore, this research is also an addition to the literature because it focuses on the two countries the Netherlands and Spain and the Spanish culture is described from the Dutch perspective. The results will therefore be additional on the existing literature existing from comparative studies of cultural differences.

1.2 Practical relevance

Nowadays there are numerous business connections between The Netherlands and Spain. Dutch businessmen, managers and expats working on a regular basis with counterparts in Spain can profit from the insights obtained from this study. Having a better understanding of cultural differences between the cultures may help Dutch managers in Spain to improve their relationship and collaboration with Spanish employees in order to enhance productivity. It may also help Dutch expats to feel more at home with people in Spain by having a better understanding of how the Spanish feel about things and deal with situations. Businessmen that want to trade with their Spanish counterparts will build up more easily a relationship with partners from Spain using the insights from this study. Lastly, the cases (critical incidents) and their interpretation may be used to construct a culture assimilator, a training tool for Dutchmen who want to work or do business in Spain.

1.3 Outline of the study

The remaining of the study is organized as follows. In the second chapter, a theoretical background will be given where concepts regarding the study will be explained and previous research will be discussed. After that, the research design, data collection and data analysis are presented in the research methodology chapter. Followed chapter four in which the findings are presented, there the cultural standards found are in the first instance described in a short and concise manner followed by a more thorough explanation including quotes from respondents and an explanation of how the Dutch cope with these differences. In the second part of the results, the underlying cultural values are shown supported by findings and proverbs out of the Spanish literature. The last chapter of this study will contain a discussion and conclusion.

2. Theoretical background

This chapter provides an overview of the concepts related to this research and the existing literature regarding Dutch-Spanish cultural research. At first, the definition of the concept of culture will be explained, followed by the definitions of cultural standards and cultural values. After that, cultural values of the Dutch culture from the literature are provided. Then the cultural differences based on the Hofstede model will be shown and discussed. Lastly, some existing literature on intercultural Dutch-Spanish research will be discussed.

2.1 Defining culture

Culture is a complex concept that covers a broad field and has many different definitions. Regarding this intercultural study, an accurate and comprehensive description was made by Thomas (2003) who describes culture as a system of orientation typical to a country, society, organization or group. This system of orientation consists of specific symbols such as language, body language, mimicry, clothing and greeting rituals and is passed on to future generations from the respective society, organization or group. It provides all members with a sense of belonging and inclusion within a society or group and creates an environment in which individuals can develop a unique sense of self and function effectively. Culture has an influence on the perception, thought patterns, judgment and actions of all members of a given society. The culture-specific system of orientation creates possibilities and motivation for action, but also determines the conditions and limits of the action

According to American anthropologist Hall (1976) culture affects everything people do in their society because of their ideas, values, attitudes and normative or expected patterns of behaviour. Culture is not something that is genetically inherited, and cannot exist on its own, but is always shared by members of a society. Individuals in different cultures communicate and behave in different ways. In some cultures, words are very important as means of communication whereas in other cultures nonverbal communication plays a more important part. Also touch behaviour and facial expressions can vary from culture to culture as does paraverbal communication like voice volume, the use of silence and conversational overlap.

Hofstede (1980) defines culture as the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the member of one group from another, which is passed from generation to generation, it is changing all the time because each generation adds something of its own before passing it on. It is usual that one's culture is taken for granted and assumed to be correct because it is the only one, or at least the first.

According to Hofstede insights (2022), a distinction can be made between national culture and organizational culture. National culture is the term we use to refer to a group of people who have been brought up within a given country. In this study we define culture as described by Shein (2010), who states that culture can be seen as the pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, and that have worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. In this research, the organizational culture is mainly examined, to which is referred to how the members of the organization relate to each other, to their work and to the outside world. Like with National Culture, this becomes more relevant when comparing organisations and observing how one group of people distinguishes itself from another. Organisational Culture is a phenomenon that is measured by looking at the practices within organisations, and how those practices differ from organizations in other countries.

2.2 Defining cultural values and cultural standards

Cultural values

Cultural values are basic beliefs that guide a person's behaviour and thinking. They are principles that are highly valued and so deeply ingrained that people are hardly aware of them. They are moral views within a particular culture about things that are by themselves good and need no explanation or defence. The contrary of a cultural value is obviously bad and undesirable. When cultural values are ignored or compromised, people tend to become angry or emotional. Examples of cultural values are reverence, guilt, utility, authority, liberty and loyalty. The extent to which different cultural values are considered important differs per culture, one culture can place great value on honor and patience while the other culture is guided by usefulness and precision. (Enklaar, 2007)

Cultural standards

Cultural standards are the underlying norms of thinking, sensing, perceiving, judging, and acting that the vast majority of individuals in a given culture is considered normal for themselves and others (Fink, Kolling, & Neyer, 2005). Cultural standards are derived from cultural values and can be defined as behavioural patterns or culture-specific orientation signals which are observable within members of a national and linguistic entity or culture. These norms of behaviour can differ across societies even if the underlying values are the same and can cause critical incidents to emerge (Thomas, 2003). Examples of cultural standards are Task orientation, uncertainty avoidance, individualism and flexibility. According to Thomas (2003) the most effective approach to identifying cultural standards is by analysing critical incidents that come into play during intercultural encounters. The most practical manner to do this is by conducting interviews with a large pool of candidates with experience in diverse encounter situations.

According to Thomas et al. (2003) cultural standards can be defined and recognized based on the following five indicators:

1. Cultural standards are norms of perception, thought patterns, judgment and interaction that are shared by a majority of the members of a specific culture who regard their behaviour as normal, typical and binding
2. Own and other unfamiliar behaviour is directed, regulated and judged based on a cultural standard
3. Cultural standards can be used to master a given situation and deal with people accordingly
4. When cultural standards are applied, behaviour can fluctuate within a range of tolerance
5. Forms of behaviour that exceed the range of tolerance are not accepted or sanctioned by the respective collective

2.3 Dutch cultural values according to Enklaar

In order to compare the Spanish culture to the Dutch culture, and vice versa, the Dutch culture also needs to be elaborated into more depth. According to Enklaar (2007) the dominant Dutch culture, which means the way of thinking and reasoning which is considered normal by most people, has twelve cultural values that are: *salvation, guilt, charity, truth, labor, order and tidiness, usefulness, reliability, moderation, agreement, equality, and self-determination.*

The thinking pattern of these twelve cultural values are concisely explained below:

Salvation - The value of salvation is about making the right choices and acting well, by doing this a happy and better future will await. Even though when someone is not satisfied with everything in life,

he/she must keep trying to do it the right way. All problems can be solved in the short or long term, as the Dutch believe there is always room for improvement. Renewal leads to improvement and progress, stagnation is seen as similar as a regression, and a current situation is not seen as the endpoint. Therefore, the Dutch think it is good to sacrifice yourself for your ideals.

Guilt - The value of guilt means that when someone makes a mistake such as a transgression or misdemeanour, a person should be punished for it. The Dutch expect someone to plead guilty and apologize. After this, it is expected that the person would not do it again and he will be trusted again. The essence is that everyone is responsible for his own actions and that someone cannot run away from the consequences, but that must be acknowledged. Mistakes and faults are therefore better admitted than concealed.

Charity - The value of charity within the Dutch culture means that it is normal to support people who are weak, suffering or in need. You cannot do something to someone which you do not want to experience yourself because another person can do this to you on another day. It is better to think in the interest of others than of your own interests. Therefore the Dutch have a very good social support system which means that people do not have to end up homeless on the street when they have bad luck in life.

Truth - The Dutch think it is better to tell the truth openly and honestly instead of keeping something a secret to get caught lying later. When it is discovered that someone is lying, confidence in that person is lost. Honesty and openness are more important than politeness, it is therefore better to say how something really is, instead of making things more beautiful or nuance it. The Dutch like to stay modest and keep their feet on the ground. For them it is very important to find out the truth and to have certainty.

Labour - The Dutch generally like to work and feel good when they are productive, they think doing nothing is useless. Work and career have a lot of influence on happiness in life and it is appreciated when someone works hard. Working makes the Dutch feel useful and gives them the opportunity to develop talents and establish status.

Order and tidiness - The Dutch tend to have order, tidiness and rules which are necessary to prevent things from escalating. Having a regular well-organized life with tight planning is considered very important. The environment should be orderly, clean and tidy, to show that civilized life is being led.

Usefulness - In the Dutch culture it is important that the things done must be useful or profitable. It is the intention that something leads to demonstrable progress or improvement. Efforts or work of resources that yield nothing is wasted. All possibilities must be exploited and resources, especially money, must be handled carefully.

Reliability - The value reliability means that an appointment that is made is fixed and not something you just can deviate from. This means that people must be punctually present at the agreed time. When something is promised, it is expected to be delivered. Words and deeds must be the same, whoever does not keep to his agreements is unreliable. If an agreement is not kept, a Dutch person feels guilty about this.

Moderation - Dutch people do value moderation, expressing emotions should not be done too loud, otherwise it will be seen as uncivilized. Control yourself, do not exaggerate and be patient, because uncontrolled wild behaviour is immature and it shows that someone does not have the control. So do everything in moderation, otherwise things will go wrong.

Agreement - The Dutch value agreement means that differences of opinion must be resolved in a peaceful manner and situations should not escalate. Aggression and violence are not accepted and should be avoided as much as possible. Instead of offending and provoking each other, it is good to consult and come to an agreement. It is better not to push an opinion or will through to maintain a pleasant atmosphere instead of hostility between people.

Equality - According to the Dutch value of equality everyone should be treated equally and inequality is unjust. It is uncommon to favour one over the other or give the impression that you consider yourself better than another and that another is less than you. Behave modestly is perceived as good, and it is therefore bad to look down on another.

Self-determination - The Dutch value self-determination means that everyone has the freedom to do what they want without meddling, as long as it is not a burden to others. So, people are allowed to make their own choices and no one has the right to tell or force them what to do. Every individual can be independent of others and not accept coercion or things that affect freedom of choice

2.4 Cultural differences based on Hofstede model

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory is a framework used to understand the differences in culture across countries and is established through quantitative research into organizational cultures across different countries. The model of Hofstede (1980) consists of the following six entirely different dimensions: *small power distance* versus *large power distance*, *weak uncertainty avoidance* versus *strong uncertainty avoidance*, *individualism* versus *collectivism*, *masculinity* versus *femininity*, *long-term orientation* versus *short-term orientation* and *indulgence* versus *restraint*. See in figure 1. the differences between Spain and the Netherlands.

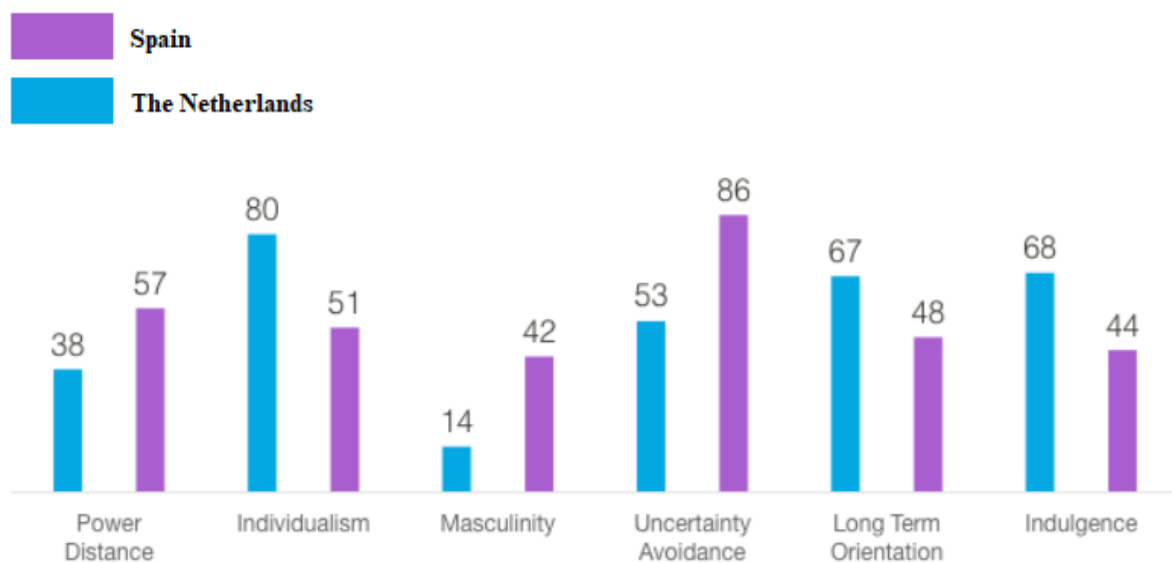


Figure 1 The six dimensions of Hofstede on the Netherlands and Spain (Hofstede Insights, 2022)

Power distance

The first cultural dimension described by Hofstede is power distance. The Netherlands has a low score of 38 points compared to Spain with 57 points. This means that in the Spanish culture it is more accepted and expected that there exists a high level of inequality between the higher and lower positions in a company compared to the Netherlands. Compared to the world average the Dutch are predominantly lower, while Spain is slightly below average.

Individualism

The second cultural dimension of Hofstede's model is individualism, on which The Netherlands scores 80 points. This means that the Dutch have a very individualistic culture. This is expressed in a high level

of self-care and a lower level of loyalty. The Spanish scores on the other hand with 51 points considerably lower than the Dutch.

Masculinity

The third cultural dimension is masculinity, which is described by Hofstede (1980) as the representation of a preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material rewards for success. Spain has with 42 points a considerably high level of masculinity compared to The Netherlands with 14 points.

Uncertainty avoidance

The fourth cultural dimension is uncertainty avoidance, which is described by Hofstede (1980) as the degree to which the members of a society feel uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity. The fundamental issue here is how a society deals with the fact that the future can never be known: should we try to control the future or just let it happen? On this aspect the Spanish scores highest with 86 points 15 points above the world average, which means that the Spanish people in general have a higher-than-average need for predictability. The Dutch on the other has with 53 points a considerably lower level of uncertainty avoidance than the Spanish.

Long term orientation

The fifth cultural dimension is long-term orientation, on this dimension, The Netherlands has a score of 67 points and Spain has a score of 48. This means that the Spanish culture is more focused on maintaining time-honoured traditions and norms while viewing societal change with suspicion. On the other hand, have the Dutch with a high score a more pragmatic approach where they encourage thrift and efforts in modern education as a way to prepare for the future.

Indulgence

Lastly, the sixth cultural dimension is indulgence, which is described by Hofstede (1980) as the level of society that allows relatively free gratification of basic and natural human drives to enjoy life and have fun. Restraint, the opposite, stands for a society that suppresses gratification of needs and regulates it by means of strict social norms. The Netherlands scores 68 points high on indulgence, which means there is a high level of encouragement to free gratification of people's own drives and emotions. Spain scores 44 points which mean there is more regulation of people's conduct.

2.5 Spanish cultural standards according to Meaney

In 2010 did Marian Meaney published a book in which she described culture based on qualitative and emic research. In this book she describes the following non-business-related cultural standards: Mañana, the family, friends and acquaintances, pride and honour, beating the system, sense of self-esteem, tolerance and prejudice, living in the moment and manners. Also did she describe cultural standards related to the business culture which are: Leadership and hierarchy, personal charity, business-like style, traditional towards woman in business, business relations, flexibility, making appointments, communication style, meetings, planning and control.

Below the cultural standards as described by Meaney (2010):

Mañana - Mañana literally means tomorrow for the Spaniards but can be better interpreted as somewhere in the future. Things always happen later than announced, so it is important never to inform a Spaniard of your real deadline. For Spaniards, the future is a confused concept in which there are enough days to do business

The Family - In Spain everything revolves around the family and the family ties that are very strong. Elderly people often live with relatives and are respected and maintained by the family. Children are an integral part of the community. They are not pushed into the background but taken everywhere regardless of the time. Everyone pays attention to children and little attention is paid to teaching discipline. The emphasis is on parental love and corrective action is secondary.

Friends and Acquaintances - Spanish people are very friendly and welcome foreign visitors warmly in general. However, Spaniards are less enthusiastic about getting to know other Spanish people, so that most Spaniards have many acquaintances but few friends. As a result, Spaniards are not quick to talk to people outside their own circle about personal problems. If you do manage to form a deep friendship, you are truly considered family.

Pride and Honour - Spaniards are proud of their region and their way of life in general, but they also bring up the negative aspects. Also, the honor of the family is very important which means, for example, that an unfaithful husband brings shame on the whole family.

Beating the system - Spaniards feel that they are being short-changed by the system, including the government. For example, many Spaniards are convinced that taxes are levied to supplement the state treasury instead of communal investments. Because many Spaniards also suspect corruption, they also try to circumvent the law as much as possible.

Sense of self-esteem - Spaniards have little involvement with the community unless it benefits themselves or friends, otherwise little is done or supported to make the community better. Spaniards are suspicious by nature and assume that everyone acts out of self-interest.

Tolerance and Prejudice - Spaniards see themselves as tolerant, because it is possible for friends to have completely contradictory political views and to have very heated discussions about it without affecting the friendly ties.

Living in the moment - Spaniards are open-hearted, self-assured people with a zest for life where every moment of the day should be enjoyed. They think less about what tomorrow will bring. It is appreciated when you are present somewhere and leaving a company is not done when it is still pleasant.

Manners - Spaniards can be quite formal until they have been officially introduced to the other. If this has happened subsequently, they are considerably looser. The manners of the elderly are often a bit more formal and people talk and treat each other nicely.

Leadership and hierarchy - The Spanish management style is vertically divided, with the director making all decisions. This is mainly in older companies and family businesses where the CEO has absolute power and subordinate key positions are held by family members.

Personal charity - If a Spanish employee approaches his employer with a personal problem, it is important to immediately pay attention to it, as the personal approach is always preferred. It is important to be able to deal well with people and that is why loyalty, friendliness are often more important than knowledge.

Business-like style - It is important in Spain to be well dressed, which is why many men still wear a suit and tie despite the often-high temperatures. Spaniards attach great importance to possessions and have an eye for quality and taste. The way in which, for example, the director is addressed is also very polite.

Business relations - In order to do business in Spain, it is important that the trust of the Spanish contact person is first gained by developing a personal relationship. Business partners are hospitable and every invitation should be seen as an investment in building a close relationship.

Flexibility - Spanish businesspeople with an agenda and timetable generally have the characteristic of being flexible. This means that the planning often does not go according to plan or is completed on time.

Making appointments - Appointments are often made well in advance by Spaniards and are confirmed later the day before or even again. Although it is expected to be on time, it is not unusual that the person you agreed with is half an hour late.

Communication style - The Spanish style of communication is calm and friendly where people are central. Phone calls are friendly and often last longer than necessary.

2.5 Current state of the literature

Most literature on cultural differences is impressionistic or anecdotal in character or use quantitative models. These are either lacking on a proper scientific basis or are so general in their description that they do not give clear clues on how to act in daily situations on the work floor. According to (Fink, Neyer, & Kolling, 2006) there are two major strands in cross-cultural literature which are:

- a) **Comparative studies of cultural differences**, these studies describe culture in a general sense in which differences are described and measured along cultural dimensions. Used by well-known cultural researchers like: Hofstede, Hall, Schwartz and Trompenaars/Hampden turner.
- b) **Studies of intercultural interactions**, these studies describe culture in a more detailed manner and more descriptively by using the cultural standard method. With this method differences within kinds of perceiving, norms of sensing, thinking, judging and acting which can cause critical incidents in cross-cultural encounters, are being described in a more thorough manner. Used by well-known cultural researchers like Thomas and Fink/Meierewert.

The comparative study between Spain and the Netherlands executed through (Hofstede Insights, 2022) as shown above gives an indication of the cultural differences between the two countries through the analysis of six dimensions. This analysis shows certain parts of the observable cultural differences, however, studies like these are very superficial and do not go into depth. The good aspect of the research is that the Dutch and Spanish cultural dimensions can be compared, rather than the Spanish culture itself. A less positive aspect of the research is that the results do not reveal concrete behaviour. They do not research interactions between cultures and the same underlying cultural values can mean different norms of behaviour across societies. Literature published by Meaney (2010) is more impressionistic in nature and is a general overview of Spanish culture what makes is superficial. Existing studies of intercultural interactions which are focused on the working environment and describes cultural differences between the Dutch and Spain is currently missing.

2.6 Research questions

With the aim to fill the currently existing gap in the literature, the following research question was formulated to guide this process:

''What cultural differences in the working environment are perceived by the Dutch working and living in Spain?''

Based on the formulated central research question the following sub-research questions are formulated:

- *Which Spanish cultural standards are perceived by Dutch individuals?*
- *What is the cultural logic behind these Spanish cultural standards?*
- *How did the Dutch work in Spain cope with the cultural differences?*

3. Methodology

This chapter introduces and justifies the research design and explains other considerations regarding the methods chosen to conduct this research. An overview of the sample of interviewees is given as well.

3.1 Research design

The research design describes the method used to study intercultural interactions and to identify cultural standards. It is organized as follows:

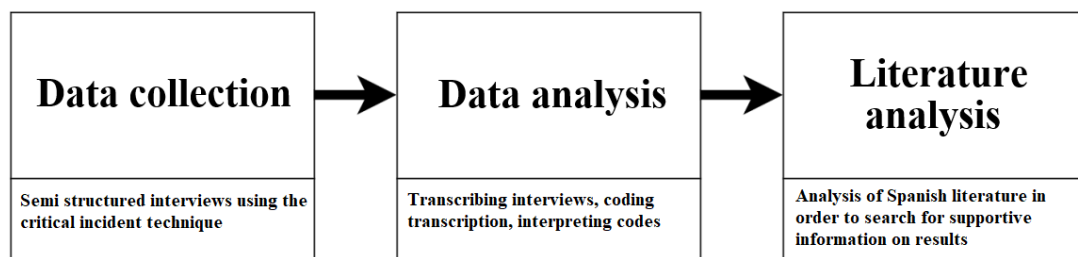


Figure 2. Visual representation of the research design

This research intends to use concrete situations in the working environment in which the Dutch experience cultural differences while communicating and collaborating with the Spanish, with the aim, to establish Spanish cultural standards in perspective of the Dutch. Therefore a qualitative research inductive research method, which in this research are interviews, is used since it collects detailed data from a holistic and natural perspective which is most valuable in describing cultural standards and values in a thorough manner. Through using interviews it is possible to collect a sufficient amount of general information with which it is possible to develop concepts, insights and understandings from patterns in the data.

3.2 Data collection

3.2.1 Conducting interviews using the critical incident method

In this research, the critical incident technique is used as described by Thomas (2003). This method consists of in-depth semi-structured interviews in which concrete situations are discussed in order to collect critical incidents. These are moments like conflicts, misunderstandings, frictions and wrong impressions that are experienced within their cross-cultural environment or during intercultural encounters. During the interviews, the research participant is asked to recall these intercultural encounters and describe a time when a behaviour, action or occurrence impacted, either positively or negatively. Thomas (2003) found that with the collection of these critical incidents or cultural clashes out of the interviews cultural standards can be established. Therefore, the aim was to collect as many critical incidents as possible and to let the interviewee explain as many details as possible in order to be able to describe the cultural standards as good and as clear as possible and that the cultural values could be established in a thorough manner. The benefit of this technique is that the systematic procedure obtains rich, qualitative information about significant cultural incidents from observers with first-hand experience. This information can be used to find out if a person's behaviour in an intercultural situation is a success or failure. The cons to this research method is that the memory of the participants can be fallible which means that details can be forgotten and are missing. Besides that do participants mostly recall big events and are small incidents less mentioned, which could cause an extreme picture.

3.2.2 Procedure for data collection

The contact with potential participants was established through social media platforms Facebook and LinkedIn through the groups: Wonen & Werken in Spanje, Nederlandstaligen in Spanje & Ondernemen in Spanje and the platform Spanjeforum.nl was used as well. People with (interesting) work experience in Spain in their LinkedIn bio were approached and people responded on a Facebook post that was made. An appointment for an interview was planned when a person met the following requirements: at least a half year of work experience in Spain and they had to work with Spanish colleagues.

The participants received an email with extra information about the research topic, the concept of critical incidents, the procedures and a link to a virtual Zoom conference. The interviews took between 50 and 90 minutes and were conducted by the author of this thesis. At the start of each interview an introduction was made to meet each other and to make the participant feel comfortable. After the introduction, the aim of the research and the concept of critical incidents was explained to make the aim of the study clear. Subsequently, questions were asked about their experiences in communicating and collaborating with Spanish people and to give typical examples of moments in which things went different compared to the Dutch culture. When a critical incident was illustrated by the interviewee, the researcher asked further questions in order to gather as many details as possible about the incident. (The catalogue of these questions that were asked during the interviews can be found in appendix 1). The respondents were interviewed in their native Dutch language. The interviews were recorded and the audio files were saved and transcribed with the help of the software called "Amber Script" which is a speech recognition software. When the transcript files were established, the transcriptions of the interviews were refined and improved to an appropriate level of detail.

3.2.3 Sample description

In order to collect critical incidents to recognize Spanish cultural standards, 13 interviews were carried out with Dutch interviewees who work and live in Spain. The research group had to meet the

requirements that the interviewees had to work and live for at least 4 months in Spain. The aim was to have diversity among participants in the length of which they live and work in Spain.

To goal was to find people who are still adapting to the Spanish culture and people slightly more integrated to have different degrees of cultural understanding of the Spanish culture among the participants. Though must be mentioned that in this research group the participants mainly have a wide experience of working in Spain with approximately an average of 6 years. The research group has a large degree of variation in the type of profession which helps to examine the working environment from a broad perspective. Finally, the distribution between men and women was proportional.

Interviewee	Gender	Age	Duration of time working in Spain	Location of work in Spain	Occupation/ industry
1	Man	71	14 Years	Salamanca	Former university teacher
2	Woman	41	0,5 Year	Torreveja	Administrative employee
3	Man	44	7 Years	Barcelona	Entrepreneur - Baja bikes
4	Woman	56	10 Years	Barcelona	Wine export manager
5	Man	55	7 Years	Madrid	Mergers & acquisitions
6	Man	41	2,5 Years	Valencia	Content specialist
7	Woman	43	5 Years	Alicante	Real estate
8	Woman	46	8 Years	Salamanca	Supply chain manager
9	Man	45	4,5 Years	Calafell	Emigration consultant
10	Man	38	8 Years	Gijón	Data entry specialist
11	Woman	36	3 Years	Malaga	Accountmanager
12	Man	62	12 Years	Algorfa	Mechanic
13	Woman	47	5 Years	Hondón de las nieves	Hospitality business

Table 1. Demographic data of the interviewees

3.2.4 Data analysis

The data analysis was conducted using the methodology of Gioia et al. (2012) and through the Thematic Analysis of Braun & Clarke (2006) The data gathered from the interviews were organized in a structured manner using first-order concepts, second-order themes and aggregate dimensions according to Gioia et al.'s (2012)method. The Thematic Analysis was consequently used to identify, analyse and report patterns (themes) within the data. The benefit of this method is that it offers an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analysing qualitative data and has benefits in the way it can usefully summarize key features of a large body of data, and/or offers a thick description of the data set.

The Thematic Analysis consists of six phases (see figure 3.) The first step was transcribing all interviews and improving them to an appropriate level of detail in which de data was familiarized. When this was realized, the researcher had already noticed patterns of meaning and issues of potential interest in the data. Then, the second step of the process was to generate initial codes (Braun & Clarke , 2006), these general codes can be seen as similar to the first-order themes described by Gioia et al. (2012). While the transcripts were carefully read, valuable information and critical incidents significant for the research

were highlighted. These data extracts were coded directly in an open manner and were assigned a category that characterized the content. Codes that had similarities with each other were grouped together in the same theme. The third step was searching for themes (Braun & Clarke , 2006), which has many similarities with the development of second-order themes used in the Gioia (2012) methodology. By comparing the concepts and searching for similarities, it was possible to establish second-order themes. Then in step four, the themes had to be reviewed (Braun & Clarke , 2006). This was done by checking whether the themes did relate to the codes and transcripts. At step five the cultural standards were defined, after this step, the aggregate dimensions of the Gioia methodology (2012) were included. Here, the second-order themes were further generalized into the third-order aggregate dimensions to arrive at the overarching cultural standards. The final step of the thematic analysis was to produce a report.

The number of themes/cultural values that emerge or are being discovered depends on the active role the researcher plays in identifying, based on selecting which are of interest. The thematic analysis is not wedded to any pre-existing theoretical framework, which offers an accessible form of analysis. A theme is counted when it captures something important about the data in relation to the research question. In this research, a theme was counted when it said something important about a Spanish cultural standard perceived by the Dutch interviewees and represented some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set. In this research there was no real or hard proportion of the data set needed to display evidence of the theme to be considered a theme. Although it was considered to have at least three critical incidents to name a cultural standard. The cultural standards are identified in an inductive way, which means the cultural standards are strongly linked to the data itself. Therefore, the process of coding is executed without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame. The themes were slightly identified at a latent level where underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualizations and especially values are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data.

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarizing with the data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic map of the analysis
5. Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis

Figure 3. The six steps of the Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke , 2006)

3.3 Analysis of Spanish literature

When the results of the interviews were processed and the underlying cultural values were established, a literature analysis has been conducted in order to see if the Spanish the Spanish vision on their culture have alignments with our vision on the Spanish culture and to collect information to get a better and deeper understanding of the Spanish cultural logic and to search for proverbs that can enforce and deepen the findings. Therefore two Spanish books have been analysed which describe Spanish culture from a Spanish perspective, the first book is: ‘‘Los Espanoles’’ from author Armando de Miguel (1990). In this book, the author aims to give answers to the question: Who are the Spanish and what distinguishes them? Through focussing in-dept on cultural traits and behaviour. Although the author acknowledges that there exist cultural differences within Spain, he tried to describe the average and most characteristic Spanish culture and the behaviour of the representative Spanish people in the era of 1990. The second book was ‘‘Ser Espanol’’ From author and philosopher Julián Marias (2000), discussing Spanish history and the formation of the ideas and beliefs in the Spanish world. Through reading these two books carefully, additional information on the cultural values established could be shown in the result section. Which made it possible to give an even clearer impression of Spanish culture

4. Findings

In this part, the findings of the study are shown. First, the cultural standards are presented and a short objective definition is given in table 2. Subsequently, the cultural standards are explained more clearly accompanied by striking quotes from respondents. Then an explanation of the Dutch perspective toward the cultural standard is given and it is explained why it could lead to clashes.

4.1 Cultural standards

Cultural standards	Definitions	Numer of interviews that mentioned cultural standard
Tight with family	The group affiliation with family is deeply valued	13
Personal ties	Building a friendly relationship and meeting people face to face is highly valued before doing business	13
Respect for authority and power	Respect for authority is acknowledged and valued	13
Flexible with time	Meetings, appointments and planning are perceived as flexible	12
Criticism is perceived as personal offense	Critics or feedback is seen as offence which insults the personal status	11
Personal pride	Spanish people have a strong awareness of their personal honour and pride	11
Certainty	Stable and secure situations are preferred rather than uncertain circumstances	10
Value attached to personal life	Spanish people tend to value personal life more than ambition and career development	10
Bureaucracy	Governmental officers strictly follow bureaucratic procedures	10
Distant relationship employer-employees	There is a dependency relationship between employer and employee	9
Conservativeness	Spaniards are less likely to see the benefit of changing a situation or process that still works	9
Responsibility	The boss holds responsibilities	9
Indirect communication	Spanish people tend to speak high context, in a direct way saying what you think is perceived as rude	8
Not admitting mistakes	Spanish people find it hard to admit that they did something wrong	8
Decision making	Decisions within a company are being made exclusively by the boss or high managers	8
Distrustful/Being closed of	Spanish people have an initial level of distrust for unknown people and are therefore closed of in the beginning	7
Favouritism	Preferential treatments will go to people close at the expense of others with better qualifications	6
High control littly autonomy	It is common that bosses and managers check the work of his/her subordinates	6
Loyal to the job	People stay a long time at the same firm at the same function, without promotion or change	5

Table 2. Cultural standards

Distant relationship employer-employee

Within Spanish organizations exists a distant relationship between employer and employees, as well as between the hierarchical layers of departments within organizations. Spanish employers have a low level of employee engagement where there often is no personal connection. Employers tend to look down on employees and see them as less skilled subordinates who must listen to instructions given. Good performances are easily claimed by the management or boss, instead of giving credit to employees. Investing in employee development like training is not likely to be done. Nevertheless, Spanish employers often have high expectations of employees, while the work circumstances are not always that good. Due to the high unemployment rate within Spain, Spanish employers have fewer problems finding new staff, which gives them a good negotiation position in contract discussions and makes that Spanish employees are in a bad position to demand better. The employees on the other hand feel little empathy for their boss, who is seen as a high-status figure. Often employees in awe of their superior resulting in that they do not dare to approach employers to raise problems or to ask for training or salary increase. Thus, there is a low level of involvement and degree of participation among employees within Spanish companies

Quotes from interviewees:

“Once the Spanish wine export company I was working for made a new canteen for people from the production, even though I worked upstairs at the office department, I thought it would be nice to eat with the production workers instead of behind my computer. When someone from the management got aware of this, I was told that it was not appreciated that someone from the office mixes with the people from the production, which meant I had to leave.”

“I recently realized that there is not much understanding and empathy for employees. A colleague was told last week that her father was doing very badly and that she had to come to the Netherlands to see him. When she explained this, she got a speech from the boss where he told her that she could not just leave and that he did not agree, and he made it clear that he expected that she would just go to work. I had a kind of similar incident last year. I worked since June for an administration office which meant that I had half of the number of spare days. But the company was more days closed than the number of spare days I had left. So, at the end of the year during the Christmas holidays, the boss told me that he expected I took unpaid free days. As well as last week when I had Corona and was sick at home, despite that I had to work and do tasks continue to work, which showed he had little understanding for me.”

In the Dutch working environment, a more equal relationship between the employer-employee is common. A boss occasionally interferes with his staff to get a good insight and have a personal connection with employees. A Dutch employee with a contradictory opinion or vision about a way of working will likely start a conversation with the employer. In that case, the employee can and will give his/her opinion about a situation without any problems. This is possible because there is a higher level of mutual respect, which means that the two parties can be honest and direct with each other. This Dutch behaviour is motivated by the value of equality. Spanish bosses who are more distant and superciliously are therefore often not well appreciated by the Dutch. Besides that, do the Dutch value a friendly atmosphere at work because they believe that this leads to better work performance. This is prompted by the value consensus which is the reason why Dutch employers are strongly focused on the well-being of their employees, because they assume that satisfied healthy employees are capable of higher work performance. This is contradictory to Spanish working atmospheres because Spanish employers think the employee well-being is less important. This causes that Dutch people working in Spanish will experience clashes because they do not feel valued and heard. This in turn leads to a lower level of

motivation and job satisfaction. Dutch people also clash on the associated distant communication of Spanish bosses where it is expected to obey without being able to mind the way of working.

Personal ties

The Spanish have an extensive need for personal ties in private life as well with potential and existing business partners. Spaniards prefer to get to know the people with which business is (possibly) done, on a personal level. The personal impression is so decisive, that in some situations it could be more important than the professional experience or business success of the counterpart. Thus, the Spanish are not afraid to spend a couple of hours to go for dinner at a restaurant to discuss non-business-related topics to get a better idea of a person. When Spanish people have a good impression and think a person is a ‘Buena persona’ i.e., a good person, they have trust and the conversation about business can start. If there are doubts, which can be caused by bad manners or bad clothing, a Spaniard will think twice before doing business. Even when there is an existing business relationship, personal contact is still valued, this means that agreements of a certain magnitude are preferably being made by appointment and not by mail or over the telephone.

Quotes from interviewees:

“If you want to do business with a Spaniard, it is useful to invest time in it, so you go eat. While eating you talk about a lot of things besides your work. You do indeed get to know each other, you build a certain relationship of trust and when you have that, you start talking about business, but then you are already a few hours further. If make your proposal about business earlier, you do not get an answer.”

“Communication with Spanish business partners is not always very practical. Although it is always an enjoyable conversation, they talk about anything and not much business. When a bigger decision must be made, they prefer to meet in person and discuss it while having a cup of coffee. Last week I was occasionally on a call with a supplier, then I thought: I can also discuss some delivery terms for the transportation of next week. By doing this we could prepare better which made the transport more efficient. Despite that, he wanted to wait till the beginning of next week to discuss it in person since I had a visit to the company planned anyway.”

Dutch people have less tendency to build a personal tie before doing business, it is more common to focus on the product or service that is offered. Therefore, business meetings in the Netherlands can take one hour, just to discuss business and make deals, because that is the most efficient way. A Dutch man could say: I do not care that a person is not likable, I am satisfied if I get a good product or price. Spending too much time to know the persons behind the company is seen as useless and a waste of time, in which other things can be done. This behaviour can be derived from the Dutch value usefulness, because having a dinner for a couple of hours is not seen as an efficient way of spending time. It is more common that a personal tie/relationship grows naturally in the period in which business is done. The Dutch have a high level of initial trust and attach great value to a company's good name or credentials which are generally objective in the Netherlands. This behaviour can be explained by through the value reliability, which is a strong value in Dutch society and causes that the Dutch think that generally most people can be trusted. The differences in the importance of a personal tie can lead to critical incidents, especially from the Dutch side where they see extensive acquaintance and contact as an inefficient use of time. The Dutch will think about all the other work he can do at the same time instead of eating at a restaurant. The Spanish contrary will perceive the impatience behaviour as suspicious.

Criticism is perceived as personal offense

Expressing criticism or feedback Spaniards find hard to deal with. When criticism, feedback or even a different opinion is expressed, Spanish may feel offended and experience a dent in the ego or loss of face. Criticisms are perceived as very personal, especially in the presence of other people or when a higher-ranked person is being criticized. Employees do therefore not get the chance to give tips for improvements or feedback about for example processes they work with. In order to give critics, the Spanish often take people separate where critics are expressed in a careful manner. Spanish people on the work floor do not interfere with the work or tasks of others, when they see someone working in an inefficient way to give improvements. Performance appraisals and meetings are held on a very small base and are dodged since they are situations in which critics and feedback must be given. When there are opposing opinions in a meeting and the tension about it rises, a common consequence is that like-minded people form a group and go talk separately about it and see if they can have influence in another way instead of discussing it in the meeting. When a point of feedback/critique given to an employer is actually a good or ingenious idea/suggestion, the employer will receive it but will not easily give away the credits. Criticizing people for bad behaviour, personality or work is the worst type of criticism and is even seen as rude, therefore it is common to keep it to yourself.

Quotes from interviewees:

“I once attended a congress as a chairman at the University of Navarra in Pamplona where there was an assignment for students in which they had to describe their ideal University. So, there was a student who had prepared the presentation very carefully and he had exceptionally good points, it was a great story in my opinion. Even the way in which he described the points for improvement was very neat. When I came to the coffee machine and saw this student, I realized that the university faculty director was talking angrily to that student on how he dare to criticize the university so much and explained that the student was close to a suspension.”

“At our office there was a customer who planned to leave Spain and wanted to cancel his insurance. When I wanted to arrange this for the customer, my boss said that I should not do this and that the customer should arrange it himself as this costs us time and money. I told him that this would make the customer very dissatisfied and could lead to negative influence on the company's name. I explained to him that it is not the right way of dealing with customers and that I can help the customer better in order maintain happy customers. My boss reacted angrily to this and told me not to criticize his way of working and that I had to follow his orders.”

In Dutch culture, giving criticism or feedback is something that is not avoided. The Dutch tend to say what they think, so if they do not think something is beautiful, tasty or useful, they do not keep it to themselves but give their real opinion. This is due to the value of honesty, which is very important for the Dutch. It means that Dutch people rather say the thing they really think instead of being polite. Within the working environment the Dutch see critics and feedback as very valuable, because through expressing critics and feedback improvements can be made and better results can be achieved. The Dutch behaviour therefore exists from the value utility. Dutch people know how to handle critics and do not take it very personally, while the Spaniards on the other hand do take it personal which causes conflicts. Critical incidents regarding to this difference in cultural standard happen because the Dutch think they can say what they think and therefore give their honest opinion, even when this does not align with the opinion or vision of the Spanish counterpart. Spanish people feel at that moment insulted and perceive the critics or feedback as a personal offense even though it is not the intention of the Dutch.

Respect for authority and power

Within the Spanish culture there is much respect for authority and power of people with higher status like bosses, police officers, doctors, office holders, university teachers and even parents. People with authority are being addressed and treated in a respectful manner. Contradicting or doubting people in these positions is not common as everyone is focused on maintaining these positions of authority. This means that ideas, decisions, or opinions of people with authority are hardly challenged, questioned or improved.

Quotes from interviewees:

“In The Netherlands I was used to having regular smooth communication with police officers, but in Spain it is really different for example: Yes officer and no officer. So, I was once stopped by a police officer while riding my motorcycle. When checking the paperwork, they discovered it had expired which they made clear to me. My response was: Yes, you could be right officer. To which they responded in a direct manner: Of course, I know I am right! Like that is not something I never should doubt.”

“My Spanish friends have lots of respect for me because I am a businessperson having my own company. That is something they really look up to but in an exaggerated manner in my opinion. They said sometimes ‘Tu eres un crack!’ i.e. you’re champion like I am Bill Gates himself or something.”

In the Netherlands there is respect for authority and power, although the value of equality important in Dutch culture. This means that it is not appreciated to show that you are more important than someone else. People do recognize status but the essence is that policemen, doctors or bosses are just people as well. The Dutch value equality, which means that you cannot give someone the impression that you are better or look down on someone. It is valued when people act normal and down to earth despite differences exist degrees or achievements, as there is no difference between a businessman or a cleaner. This means that people with authority can be contradicted in a neat way and can start a conversation based on arguments without being put away based on authority. In the Spanish culture it is not tolerated to go against authority and not recognizing it, this leads easily to cultural clashes.

Bureaucracy

Within Spanish society as well as within Spanish organizations the level of bureaucracy is high. This comes up when handling documents at hospitals or public institutions. These often consist of procedures which may often be performed by a limited number of authorized persons and therefore take more time. Procedures are rigid and the rules are followed as described, which means that there is no space for flexibility. If a single document is missing, it is possible that a whole procedure must start over again. Furthermore, it is hard to make appointments and there appears to be a low level of accountability from lower the administrative employee up to the higher supervisors. The same way of working can also be seen in Spanish companies, in the form of many control forms of processes or quality, which must be checked by different responsible employees, of which there is often only a limited number.

Quotes from interviewees:

“Normally when a go to a public institution I bring a really big file along with all the documents because I want the chance as slight as possible to be sent back by the administrative officer. This happened namely for a couple of times because of a missing part of a document for a residency request. The problem is that the planning of a new appointment could easily take a

week or two. When later all the documents were complete, the inquiry took a couple of days as well which was frustrating.”

“I came to exchange my driver's license for a Spanish driver's license. That would be ready after a certain time. I go there to pick it up, but it wasn't ready yet, so I asked: how can that be? Then the lady said: that the director did not have time to sign. I laughed out loud, exchanging the driver's license is a matter of a few steps. There has probably been someone who did not do their job or left it somewhere.”

The Dutch are very keen on efficiency, this means that bureaucratic procedures are reduced to the minimum. There are many diverse bureaucratic processes that prevent long waiting times and compulsive equal treatment of unequal cases. Bureaucracy is not so much a means of exercising power, but more to deliver services for the common good. This means there is a broad and clear distribution of authority, which ensures that the authority to start processes is often present. Due to the Dutch value equality, it is usual that everyone gets an equal and fair treatment without preferences or abstentions. The difference in efficiency and length of bureaucratic processes between the Dutch and Spanish culture leads to frustrations. The long waiting time and many procedures in Spain, where it is sometimes difficult to make an appointment, is something the Dutch cannot understand, because they quickly wonder how a seemingly simple administrative act can take so long.

Conservativeness

Spanish people tend to have a high level of conservativeness. Several classic examples became clear like the conservative man-woman relation, not wanting to learn English and the formal way of dressing for example. But the Spanish mainly have a conservative way of working. This means that they like to continue to work in a way that they think is going well despite it may not be the most efficient way. If they work in a way they like and are used to, they are less interested in improvement, because the change takes effort and they do not feel like it. Therefore, changes are not easily made, which makes the Spanish less innovative. The reasons why the Spanish are lacking in innovation and change is because it involves work, risks and uncertain outcomes which could lead to unforeseen problems. The Spanish tend to cherish certainty, this does not mean that the Spanish do not change things at all, but it just takes more time to for them see or to convince them to see the benefits of a new/modern way.

Quotes from interviewees:

“At our administration office we still use a lot of paper and everything still has to be copied by hand. For the documents we use the same achieve system for about 10 years, which is nowadays illogical and outdated. So, when I need a document, I have to search for five different spots which take me minutes. Therefore, I mentioned that we should change that because it is inefficient and suggested that it should be rearranged. To which my boss and colleagues responded that it was too busy to change and that they did not see the benefit because they were already working for a long time like this, and it did not cause any problems.”

“At the Spanish wine export company I worked came an open spot because the department manager left. So, I could make a promotion to that position. When de direction announced this to me, they told me not to worry about anything, because it was not frightening or scary because I just had to do the exact same as my predecessor, which consisted of the same simple promotions and fairs because they did well. Although I was glad that I could make the promotion, I found it hard to do it the same way because I was enthusiastic to try new things and experiments. In the beginning, I did not receive support from the director, but when they later found out it was a success, they agreed with it.”

The Dutch tend to be focused on utility and efficiency. Therefore, they are open to change, like to see progress or improvement and tend to be frustrated if something proceeds in an inefficient manner since it is a waste of money and time. This clashes with the conservative attitude of Spaniards who prefer to stick to well known methods that are until now running smoothly.

Tight with family

The Spanish are very attached to the relationship with family, which sometimes can include friends as well. Spanish families often form a network of support where members rely on each other and give protection and support. Within the working environment it is common to know things about the family members of colleagues as well because it is usual that colleagues to ask how your family is doing. The Spanish people tend to grand family members job opportunities within the company they work for or within the family business. That these family members do not have the right qualifications or capabilities is often not an issue. This *favouritism* has a consequence that many (family) companies have unqualified people on positions who do not perform well. When this is reported to, for example management, it is often waved away because the person ‘*es de la casa*’ i.e., he/she is from the house. Since many (family) companies have dealt with the bad consequences of favouritism, some companies introduced policies that no family members can be introduced for job vacancies.

Quotes from interviewees:

“Once the manager and his daughter thought I made a mistake which was not the case, despite that they became angry with me. So, I explained the situation to her brother who was my direct boss within the company and showed I was right. Despite that, I was the one that had to be more careful because his sister was responsible for the department and I should listen to her. Therefore, in Spain they often say, ‘La familia es como una piña’ i.e., the family is like a pinecone which is completely closed to which you cannot intervene as an employee, not even with a needle.”

“In Spain there is a quote which says: The most family companies are sold or bankrupt in the third generation, because the first generation does work hard and builds the company. The second generation can continue the company in a decent way, but in the third generation the number of unqualified family members on positions so high that the company does not function well anymore.”

The family bonds that exist within Dutch families are considerably less tight compared to Spanish families. While Spanish families have gatherings on a regular base, Dutch families only come together at special events such as birthdays. While the Spanish bonds with uncles, aunts, nephews and nieces are tightly knit and are seen as brothers or sisters in Dutch terms, are these bonds in the Netherlands more superficial. In the Netherlands it is uncommon that an uncle asks if a nephew would come work at his company, since they are afraid this could cause problems that would have an influence on family relations. Besides that, children leave the parental house at a younger age to live with more independence. Furthermore, is it uncommon for the Dutch to take in their parents when they are old, the Spanish just cannot understand people let their parents live in an elderly house. This cultural difference can lead to conflicts when family members do not get an equal treatment within a company, for example when a family member does not get blamed for mistakes or arrive at work later. According to the Dutch value equality it does not matter if someone is a family member and do apply the same rules for everyone.

Pride

The Spanish people have a strong awareness of honor and pride. This means that Spaniards are proud of what they have and what they stand for which could be achievements, local culture/products or a soccer club. Spanish people enjoy appreciation and personal pride which is something they do not like to be touched. Spaniards therefore have less sense of self-mockery and would not easily admit that they are wrong in a situation. Instead of offering excuses they prefer to blame it on something else to prevent loss of face. Honour and pride feeling is also the reason why the Spanish do not criticize each other much as well.

Quotes from interviewees:

"I once organized a birthday party and one of my friends misbehaved a bit and the next morning, he at once sent a message in the WhatsApp group where he said: "Good morning I don't remember anything that happens." Where I thought: That is easy, just saying you can't remember, I thought that you could just say: good morning it was nice yesterday, sorry that I misbehaved a bit, I had too much to drink, that's also possible, you know, I would do that. So, I asked my Spanish wife what she thought to which she responded: yes of course he does it like this because he is ashamed and saying this is way easier than making excuses. Spaniards think it is important to keep the peace and a kind of respect for each other, so they let it go."

"I currently have problems with a supplier about an important delivery which I had ordered three weeks ago. I was already in doubt if they were going to make it, so I called last week to check it. They said they would call me back which they haven't done till today and they do not even pick up the phone. They just don't dare to say no and honestly admit that they didn't make it, so they say nothing because they are ashamed."

The Dutch tend to be more straightforward and have fewer problems with saying the truth to each other because being honest is more important than being polite. Due to the values guild and honesty they prefer to hear the truth instead of being fooled, so honesty is more important than turning things around and hiding unpleasant things. The Dutch appreciate it when someone apologizes and admits a mistake or misconception, this does not undermine someone's pride but shows maturity. Moreover, the Dutch are less easily insulted because they take things less personally. This difference in culture could lead to conflicts where the Dutch honesty is interpreted as an insult while the Spanish experience a dent in the ego.

Flexible with time

The Spanish people see less of the importance of time management. Firstly, the Spanish people see the time of an appointment not as a hard time, which means that they easily come 15-20 minutes later than agreed, although this seems to be less common as the professional atmosphere gets higher. This is the same with the payment of bills over the prompt. Secondly, the Spanish people are less concerned with the efficiency of time. This means that they can have an extensive lunch and have long conversations with colleagues or clients during work time. To compensate for this, they have working hours that can last up to 8 pm. Besides that, the Spanish prefer not to plan in the long term and often do not use their agenda that much. They have less ability to plan and tend to put things off. Therefore, the classic statement "mañana" is well known, which literally translated means tomorrow but can rather be interpreted as not today. If a long-term appointment is scheduled, it must be reconfirmed the same day or a day earlier. Although Spanish people do not like planning, they are able to be flexible and responsive, which means that they are good in finding solutions for last-minute problems.

Quote from interviewee:

“In Spain I am used to the fact that I have to wait for people when I have an appointment. Besides that, I wanted to have business cards one day, so I send my design to the printing house and I say I have to have them by the 19th of Dec because then I am standing at a trade show, to which they agreed. So, I'm going to the company on Dec 18 to pick up those cards, but they weren't printed yet. So, I say I must have them tomorrow at 9 o'clock. Yes, that is no problem, we're going to print them this afternoon. So, I go there later that day to pick it up. Were the cards in A4 format? I had to cut them myself.”

The Dutch work with vast time schedules, like to plan and tend to pursue a high degree of time efficiency. So, when a meeting is appointed at nine o'clock the Dutch expect everyone to be there at nine o'clock and the meeting can start. Someone who is late is seen as rude as it takes other people's time and apologies are owed to the waiting people. Deadlines and appointments set are expected to be fulfilled or have to be cancelled well ahead and with a good excuse. Not meeting the deadlines means that a person is unreliable and when this happens a person will lose credibility as a professional. The conflicts that occur due to the difference in time management between the Dutch and Spanish lead to frustrations mainly from the Dutch side since they have a high focus on work and efficiency.

Value attached to private life

The Spanish are focused on their private life and therefore are less focussed on work or the development of a career. Spanish people attach much value to spending free time with family and friends. When a Spaniard has a permanent contract and therefore is secure of the job, the motivation often decreases. In this situation they are less motivated to develop their self to make a promotion or find a better job. This is because in Spain most people do not identify themselves with their profession where it is uncommon to ask each other about work as well. Although this lack of ambition of course does not apply to all Spaniards, many people are focused on doing their work in the easiest way and make an income to provide enough and have a good private life. This could be one of the reasons why the burnout rate is very low in Spain. Spanish people with many ambitions often want to become a civil servant which is a job with many benefits.

Quotes from interviewees:

“I have a Dutch friend who is an IT consultant as a freelancer and who works for Spanish and Dutch companies and then I have a Spanish friend who also works in IT and he does more or less the same job for a company and at a certain point we talked about their salary, but the Dutchman earns two and a half times as much and to which my Spanish friend said: I didn't even know those kinds of salaries existed in our field. And then he asks: How is it possible that you get that salary, you probably have extra certifications. My Dutch friend said no: I don't have that, I just worked hard for 15 years, and I realized the market has a shortage. Then I found out that as a freelancer, you can earn quite a lot of money. And he said to the Spanish friend that he could do it too, to which he responded: Yes, I will think about that! So, later I asked: how's your career going as a freelancer, but he was not going to do it anyway. He finds it more pleasant to be in his safe situation with a relatively low salary for his work than to take the step and accept a little more uncertainty, but simply earn two and a half times as much.”

The Dutch people are attached to private life but tend to be career-minded and think that work is an important aspect of life, instead of just an instrument to make money to be able to live. For many Dutch people, work is of great importance to their happiness and fulfilment in life. People identify themselves with their profession and are often motivated to invest in themselves by following training and courses.

This motivation and urge to improve and work hard to reach higher levels of skills makes that enjoying private life is not the one ultimate goal in life like in Spanish culture. This could lead to conflicts in the working environment where Dutch may be frustrated by the lack of motivation and ambition of Spanish.

Top-down decision making

In Spanish companies decisions are made in a top-down manner. This happens namely most of the time exclusively by the boss or directors who are not delegating decision-making power to employees. The consequence is that when business is talked, this is often done by employees who do not have the authority to make the decisions of agreements. It is not uncommon that the company sends a colleague to collect information for the decision maker which can lead to long negotiations. Another consequence is that commitments are being withdrawn because the boss did not agree. Decisions within the company for example about processes or strategy are exclusively made high in the hierarchy without the voice of employees.

Quotes from interviewees:

“To build a relationship you must put in the time, and that takes a lot of time because very often the person you talk to is not the one who makes the final decision. This also has to do with the hierarchy, for example purchasing director in Spain. He has much less decision-making power than a purchasing director in the Netherlands. Ultimately, the buyer in Spain just has to go to the big boss and he decides, while the buyer in the Netherlands decides for himself. And so the Dutch also expect that Spaniard the same decision-making power, but that is very often not the situation”

“A problem in Spain is that it is still very hierarchical, the boss is the boss and there is actually not a second boss. The decisions are made, high in the hierarchy and so if you want to do business there, you must talk, directly with the people in the hierarchy, there is also little delegation and there are also decisions that are made lower in organizations that become easy reversed. I have often had agreements that were later reversed because the boss did not agree.”

Within Dutch organizations the decision power is normally vested at a low level in the organization. The value self-determination is important within the Dutch culture which means everybody can make decisions on its own so as well within the working environment. Dutch employers expect their employees to work for a large part autonomously. It is common that teams have the autonomy to reach decisions jointly through consultation and that only results are presented to the boss. This freedom ensures that employees feel valued and motivated to work. Dutch people working in Spain experience frustrations the top-down way of decision-making is not giving them space to take decisions or to work the way they want.

Responsibility

According to the Spanish, the employer the person who bears responsibility within a company and are the employees the people who follow orders. This was mentioned multiple times by respondents that Spanish people tend to avoid responsibility because they do not like to put pressure on themselves. Spanish employees feel less connected to the company they work for. This mainly applies to workers lower in the hierarchy of a company and the people with a permanent contract, who are preferring to abdicate responsibility instead of taking it. Spanish people prefer to be occupied with their own tasks and responsibilities at work. Therefore, it is less common to ask colleagues about their responsibilities and interfere with them as well.

Quotes from interviewees:

“You are expected to keep yourself busy with your own duties and responsibilities, sometimes wine tastings are also held here of the own wines in production, and in the first week the manager said that they have different wines went to test on Thursday, then I asked if I could join them because I wanted to make an offer for a customer of mine. Then she looked like; what do you think you can taste with us, that is 100% our job and not your responsibility.”

“If the real problems are in a certain situation, then suddenly no one is responsible. I remember this with a food scandal at an elderly house.”

“Two parties were responsible for a partial renovation of my house, the architect for the construction and the municipality for a partial implementation. The renovation was successful except for 10%, such as the small things in the finish. So, I asked the architect, do you think it's done? Well, I think I've done my job, says the architect. Okay, but is it finished, that was my question and then he says: My responsibility ends here. So, I see that those pieces are not finished after all. He says: well, I can also see that it is not finished, but I do not think that is my responsibility, because that is their job. So, I say: But you are still the director of the implementation, it is still your job to talk to them and make sure it is solved. And then he responded: But I can't order someone else to do something that doesn't work for me. Up to this point it is my responsibility and I will not/cannot be held accountable for the rest.”

The Dutch have in general a sense of responsibility in a way when something has to be handled, the Dutch like to take care of it instead of leaving it to another. It is appreciated when someone takes responsibility to do something or admits to being wrong. This is derived from the cultural value of Guilt and remission. Admitting your mistake makes it possible to be reconciled with your colleagues or company, who were harmed by the mistake, and find a solution. The Dutch see taking responsibility as something good which will eventually lead to a better situation.

Closed off

Spanish people tend to be closed off or distrustful to people they do not know. This means that there is a lower level of initial trust and the Spanish take a wait-and-see position to new people who must do their best to gain a sort of approval. This is especially the situation when there is a gathering of close friends or family which is sometimes seen as a closed network or clique. This seems one of the reasons that many people first want to have a personal tie with a business counterpart before doing business. The Dutch would say: that a Spaniard will not easily show the backside of his tongue. This means that not everything a Spaniard has or knows would say or give. Although when trust and approval are then gained, the relationship is taken seriously. That means that when you do business with a Spaniard once, he expects you to visit him the second time, if not he will be indignant.

Quotes from interviewees:

“I used to go to a bar with a colleague to have a beer then very often someone from his group paid for me. This has a double meaning I found out. It's because strangers or outsiders who cross your path in the bar, you should treat them, that's a way to let you know that you don't belong. If you are not allowed to give a round to someone, even after insisting, then you are not really part of it yet. When you are allowed to give a round, then you belong and then they also start to tell more things that they keep to themselves from outsiders.”

The Dutch have a high level of initial trust when meeting people they do not know, which means that they have trust in what a new business partner tells them and no long acquaintance period is needed.

Moreover, the Dutch have often a more intertwined personal relationships network, instead of groups/cliques. This means that there are not much of isolated groups of people but that social networks overlap. Due to this difference in culture the Dutch take less time to open compared to the Spanish.

Indirect communication

The Spanish communication style is perceived as formal and indirect. The Spanish do this by using a communication style that is more focussed on the underlying context, meaning and tone in the message and not only the words themselves. Especially negative news like disagreement and rejection as well as confrontation is avoided as much as possible. Besides that, they do talk around or change subjects to prevent personal pride or honor is being touched.

Quotes from interviewees:

“I recently asked a Spanish friend to watch football in the evening and he said something like, we’ll call later and I will let you know, but he did not say no and did not call back. He probably doesn't feel like watching football, my Spanish wife said. But then. I do not understand that. Why don't they just say no But the Spaniard doesn't want you to lose face, so he tries to prevent that. And they do that by not saying no, but they talk around it and that's a way for them to show you respect. And for you as a Dutchman that is a pitfall and then you think that guy is playing a game with me.”

“Once I was too honest in a meeting and then I really thought the whole building was collapsing. I organized a promotion group for cheese farmers in the region. In that meeting, the biggest cheese farmer was talking a lot about how fairs would be of no use while I knew he would go there himself. And then I just could not hold back anymore and then I said: I'm sorry, but you also registered for the fairs in Tokyo and in Paris. So, I don't understand why you're telling the rest of the companies that those fairs don't make sense. He then got really mad, got up and told my boss I had to be called to order because this was ridiculous in front of other companies. And he walked away, all mad and out the door. Then the rest really looked at me like, what are you doing? But later on, my boss came back and said: you should never do that again, but well done.

In contrast to the Spaniards, the Dutch have a very direct way of communicating speaking quite frankly in a straightforward manner. Direct communication is important for the Dutch because they literally want to hear the truth, honesty and knowing someone’s real opinion is more important than receiving kindness. For the Dutch it is a well-appreciated form of openness but is often understood as rude by Spanish people. Dutch people would rather ask what they want to know or say how they think or feel than speak in a high context way. This is a great cause of critical incidents since the Dutch are not aware of their directness and the way it is interpreted, while the Spanish are easily insulted.

Loyal to the job

The Spanish people often stay for a long time at the same company, on the same function without a promotion or change. The Spanish people value stability in their career, so they can focus more on their private life and therefore do not like changes in their work. Having a permanent contract is something that is cherished by Spaniards. Besides the work-life balance of Spaniards the poor job market has an influence on this behaviour as well because many people are happy to have a job at all.

Quote from interviewee:

“I had a job where I performed very well but earned relatively little, so I had asked for a raise on several occasions. But the management refused and thought I liked it here enough to stay.

Later I got a good offer from a company and then said in the next meeting that I was leaving next month, then they all stood in amazement. They absolutely did not expect that. the boss who says: Yes, I think it's because you're Dutch because they always want to go higher and always more. And they are not loyal to their companies, Spaniards, they stay all their lives and work in the same company and you leave for bit higher salary. It was also more responsibility as well and I was really looking forward to it. For my personal development it is also much more fun to change the company and do other things. But they did not understand it or see it in that way.”

The Dutch are career minded and want to continue growing their career, therefore the loyalty toward their job and employer is less important. This is due to the Dutch value of labour which makes people tend to pursue challenges and will look for a new job when they are unsatisfied with their work, salary or the atmosphere. They do not have many problems with leaving a company. Especially young people do change a lot of jobs, which is possible through the high demand for skilled workers. Workers in their professional career tend to be tempted and grow into better jobs due to the motivational and financial aspect and high ambitions.

High control

There is a high level of control within Spanish organizations. In Spain there is a lower level of trust in employees, therefore employers tend to give instructions that must be followed, instead of giving autonomy. Also, how the work is going and whether the procedures are followed is being strictly controlled by the manager. In Spain it is often the case that the boss determines the objectives and how they must be achieved as well, instead of giving employees the responsibility and freedom of how to reach them.

Quote from interviewee:

“It is quite traditional and quite hierarchical, the boss has the knowledge and he follows training courses and the staff gets a date and must do the work that way and I stay until the boss says it has to be done differently, employees are really just executives of the tasks. So, when I have executed some task or project, I must show the result or progress, which is controlled and then I can go on. I have a higher education myself in marketing, so I thought I could transfer that knowledge nicely to Spain and share my insights and work independently, but instead I came into a situation where the boss decides how it is done. So, I could go translating websites and make brochures.”

Within Dutch organizations there is in general a higher level of autonomy because employees have trust in staff on how to execute the work. This can be explained by the Dutch value self-determination. Instead of controlling the staff, is expected that the employees inform the employers/managers about progress and results. In the Netherlands people do not like to be controlled because it gives a sense of distrust which will work contra productive. A Dutch will be more creative and productive when having freedom in work.

4.2 Underlying values: associations among cultural standards

In this chapter the established the cultural values underlying the cultural standards are being presented and analysed. In total four underlying values were established, these cannot all be regarded independently but could have overlap in some cases. Values are tacit assumptions, often moral principles, or ideals, that are used by members of a cultural community to justify their behaviour. It is not possible to observe and directly deduce cultural values directly from behaviour on the work floor. They can be derived indirectly from statements referring a cultural standard and cultural standards can often be clustered into a group with the same underlying value, which will be done in this chapter. For each cultural value a number of proverbs, reasonings and sayings in Spanish language are given that are connected to this particular cultural value.

4.2.1 Honor

The cultural value *Honor* enables one to behave with respect for others and oneself. It is about having proper manners and accepting people as they are. Honor is a human quality related to virtue and merit through which an honourable person deserves respect and admiration and expresses it to others as well. The use of the word honor is associated with the good reputation of a person and the characteristics loyalty and dignity to a person.¹ The interviewees uncovered the following cultural standards that could fit with the underlying value of honor: *Criticism is a personal offence*, *Pride* and *Not admitting mistakes*. Figure 4 represents the link to the phrased quotations from interviews, the cultural standards and the corresponding underlying value. The Spanish have a feeling of personal pride and value personal status, which is seen as very important and must be preserved to all costs. Spaniards care a lot about how they are seen and worry about opinions of others. They tend to speak openly about the things they are proud of which can be food, their region, family or a sports club. Meanwhile problems or failures are not being discussed. The Spanish tend to avoid these topics as much as possible since it will diminish the personal pride/status. Spanish do not easily express critics or talk about a personal problem of others to maintain respect and not to affect each other's personal status as well. The failure of admitting mistakes can as well be explained through the value of honor, because a personal mistake will lead to decrease of the personal status so when this can be prevented and mistake is easily denied or blamed on something else. It is an ideological concept that justifies behaviours and explains social relationships. A person with honor shows dignity to the moral qualities of a person.² There are a number of shared rules based on ideals that constitute honourable conduct within the Spanish culture. Honourable behaviour means having respect, humility, helpfulness, wisdom and have respect for parents and the elderly.

¹ <https://conceptodefinicion.de/honor/>

²

<https://definicion.de/honor/#:~:text=El%20honor%20es%20una%20cualidad,conductas%20y%20explica%20relaciones%20sociales.>

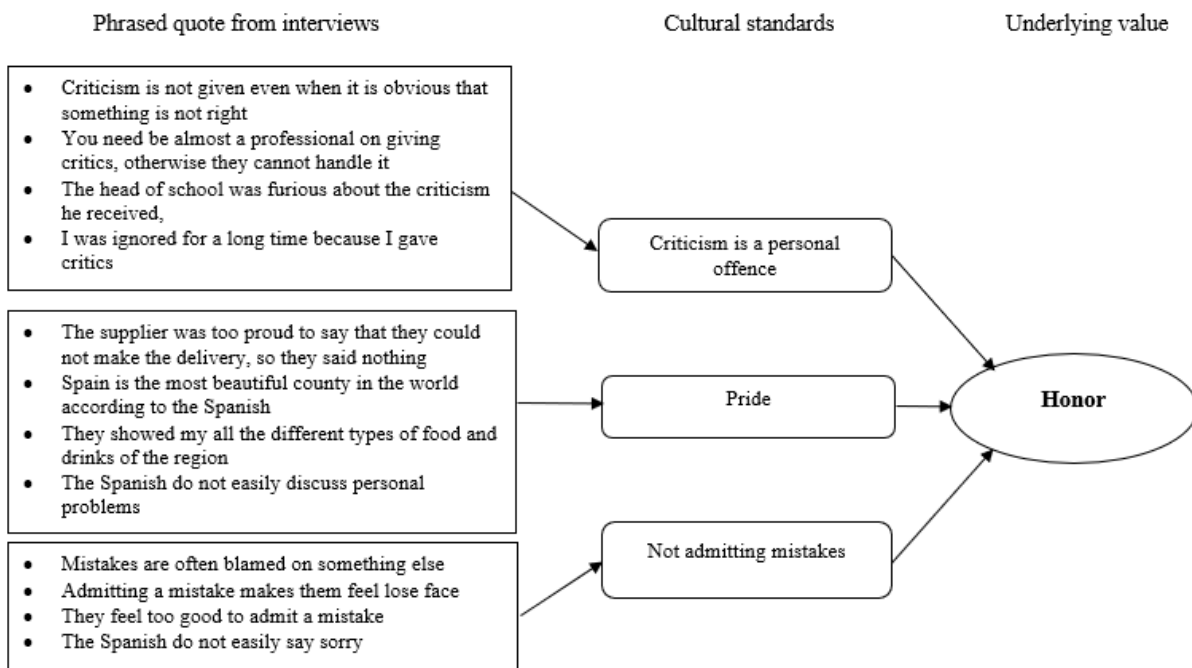


Figure 4. The underlying value of Honor

According to Maiza (1995) the concept of honor seen is as a feeling and manner of conduct toward each other. The Spanish sayings below are examples of how the Spanish see the value honor especially related to the cultural standard of not criticizing each other. The core of the sayings is that Spanish do not criticise or talk badly and be respectful to each other.

- *Aquel día perdí mi honor, que hablé mal y oí peor – The day I lose my honour, is the day I talk badly (about others) of hear worse (about myself)*
- *Al mayor, guardalle su honor – You do not touch the honour of an older person*
- *Allí perdió la dueña su honor, donde habló mal y oyó peor – The owner of honour loses it, when he speaks badly about someone or hears someone is speaking badly*

According to Miguel (1990) the high sense of honor is one of the most typical Spanish cultural traits and is the reason why Spanish are afraid of being ridiculed, because in that case personal dignity is being lost which is perceived as an important aspect in live. Therefore they value good relationships with people within Spanish society where admiration and appreciation is given to each other. This means they are also very sensitive to the applause of people around them.

To maintain the sense of honor the Spaniards can be passionate actors and can act self-confident while actually dominated by shyness. A quote was given by Miguel (1990) that explains well the the Spanish culture of pretending which goes as follows: “The work may be tedious, the family life feel like a hell and the house situations be unliveable, but when a visitor comes over, you have to give them the feeling of peace, decorum and contentment in order to give a good appearance. There is nothing mysterious, much less biological, behind this trait that are attributed to the Spaniards. In Spanish society they simply admire, and value and it is logical that people try their best to maintain honor.

Another cultural feature of the Spanish according to Miguel (1990) regarding honor is the sense of resentful pride towards wealthy people. Miguel describes that when a Spaniard has himself earned a lot of money and succes, this is due to hard work and persistence. When someone else is succesfull in life and enjoys great wealth this is due to luck. The value of honor make the Spanish compare themselves with others and resenting to be inferior. Spaniards from the lower class therefore strive to be recognized as equals and have feelings of contempt for rich people, which is caused by the fact that in every era of

Spanish history the riches were in the hands of a few and there were limited resources in society so there always existed differences between poor and rich (Miguel A. d., 1990).

The Spanish are a nationalistic people and have a collective trait, which is that they are convinced to be unique. They have often the sense of being the best or that they are better than others which whom they compare themselves. The consequence of this trait are ever lasting conflicts between villages or regions about different perspectives to national affairs.

The sense of honor makes Spaniards want to look good and presentable. The Spanish culture is sometimes called: ‘*una cultura de apariencias*’. That is why Spaniards spend relatively much on good clothing in order to show themselves not to be inferior to others.

A well-known event in Spanish history which at the same time reflects a value of Spanish culture is the night of February 23, 1981. During a frenzied vote in the Spanish parliament, a group of rebels stormed into the place with gunshots demanding that everyone must lay down. This is obeyed by everyone except by Adolfo Suarez the Prime Minister of Spain. Despite seeing the bullets fly past him, he did not obey the orders and kept standing despite them trying to push to the ground. The incident was coincidentally filmed and the president received a lot of admiration from the Spanish population. It was a representation of a Spanish value that goes as follows; ‘*sentirse fuerte cuando se es debil*’ which means: you have to pretend strong even if you feel weak.

4.2.2 Autoridad

Authority is that attribute that a person has, which is directly linked to the position or profession that someone exercises, being in all senses the power to give orders, for having the right to do so, and in the same way being paid with the observance and fulfilment of said orders. At all times it must be based on the existing relationship between the superior and the subordinate, where both must be clear about the role of each one.³ The interviewees uncovered the following cultural standards that could fit with the underlying value of *autoridad*: *Control, Respect for authority and power, Top-down decision making, Bureaucracy* and *Hierarchy*. Figure 5 represents the link to the phrased quotations from interviews, the cultural standards and the corresponding underlying value. The Spanish have high respect for people who exercises or possesses any form of authority. This means that it is not common to contradict people with authority and power; and when this is done, the person with authority will clearly show that this behaviour is not accepted. Authority in Spanish organisations is located at the top of the hierarchy and is barely distributed to the lower levels of the hierarchy. Spanish companies have often a high and clear hierarchical structure and work with many and rigid rules and procedures that must be followed, where it is common for instructions to be given by the people with authority to be carried out by workers who possess little autonomy and look up to their employer. The strategy and decision-making in the company is usually directed by senior management in a centralized manner. Due to the structure of the company, lower positions usually have little power of influence.

³ <https://conceptodefinicion.de/autoridad/>

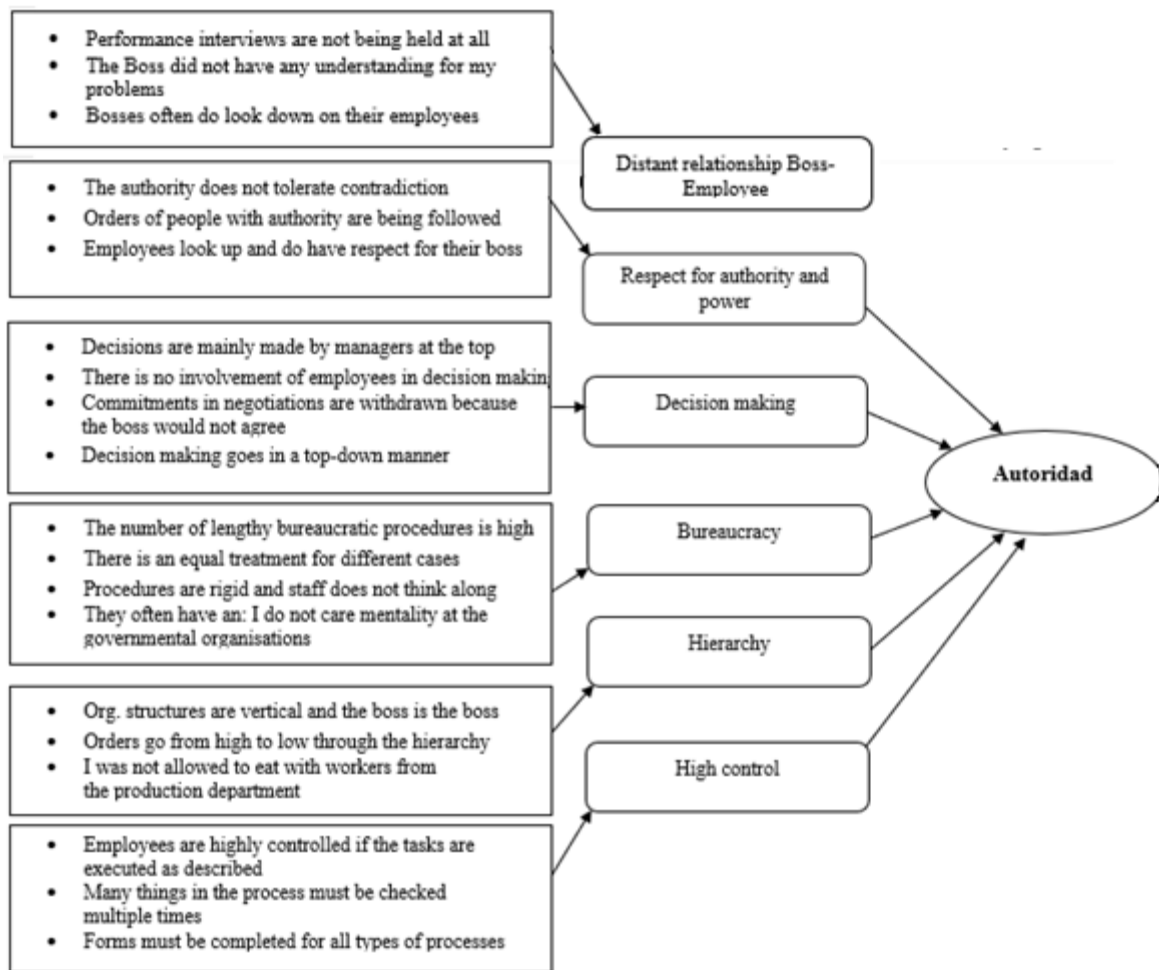


Figure 5. The underlying value of Autoridad

According to Marias (2000) the Spanish do make use of the name of Spain in order to add a factor of authority to their position. This can be a school teacher, the colonel of the regiment or a politician. Beside the pride the Spanish have for their country do they tend to express some form of authority while speaking to ensure that they are better listened to. This authority can be derived from various things which enhance the sense of honor.

The three proverbs below are characteristic statements for a Spanish boss to show authority:

- *Aquí el que manda soy yo – I am the one in charge here*
- *No te pago por pensar, te pago por hacer – I pay do not pay you to think, I pay you to work*
- *Sustituye esto es así porque lo digo yo – You need to change this, because I say so*

According to Miguel (1990) does the Spanish language have several statements that include possibility, necessity, desirability, morality that can be interpreted in different ways as a result of which agreements are consciously or unconsciously not fulfilled. Spaniards sometimes make good use of this by pretending they have not understood it correctly. Therefore is the communication in daily life regularly conducted in a more authoritative tone where often expressions are used that have a double effect. An example is the following statement: "*Mañana le quiero ver a usted a las ocho en punto*" Translated as: Tomorrow I want to see you at eight o'clock punctual. This sentence contain the words "*le - usted*", these words both make it clear that it is about the person it is being said to and "*a las ocho – a punto*" these words both make a clear clear indication of the time. Through using the double effects there is no space for an

different interpretation. According to Miguel (1990) the sentence emits simultaneous four signs and the mixture of the four is what determines that the expression that the expression is an order.

1. Being punctual is a moral obligation
2. It is expected the standard will be met
3. That it is necessary to comply
4. That what must be fulfilled is a wish

Another famous Spanish expression is: "*Ordeno y Mando*" a classic military expression which means I order and impose. The expression indicates that the command must be executed and that the authority is so great that contradicting is not an option even though the executor disagrees with the task. This indicative and authoritarian way of speaking is in contemporary Spain, in a slightly less extent, visible within different layers of society.

According to Miguel (2004) are the personal character traits of being submissive and obedient frequent occurring within the Spanish population and is there a predominant share of Spanish population with a silent and introvert character. These character properties enable more dominant figures to act authoritatively. Nevertheless, many Spaniards resent the power differences and authority between people because it suppresses their feeling of dignity. The battle between the two values of authority and honour resulted in a saying coming from people of lower classes or subordinates on the workforce: "*Nadie es mejor que nadie*" which means no one is better than someone else. The proverb indicates a stubborn rejection of the hierarchies, and showed resentful hostility from the people who live and work under authority towards the people with authority.

4.2.3 Seguridad

The cultural value *Seguridad* is described as a feeling of safety, that nothing bad will happen and that and that everything is on its place. The interviewees uncovered the following cultural standards that could fit with the underlying value of seguridad: *Loyalty to the job, Certainty, Conservativeness, High control*. Figure 6 represents the link to the phrased quotations from interviews, the cultural standards and the corresponding underlying value. The Spanish value security and stability and therefore avoid situations or decisions that carry insecurity or risks. By living this way, they feel most comfortable, although this has the consequence that the Spanish do not always get the most out of something or work in an inefficient way. The Spanish therefore prefer security and certainty to efficiency and improvement. The Spanish are loyal to their job, this is partly because of the poor labour market. But Spanish often do not leave to bigger companies and better functions if they can. Changes in career or in type of work is often seen as steps that involves risks with unknown outcomes. Due to the value seguridad, the Spanish tend to avoid these changes.

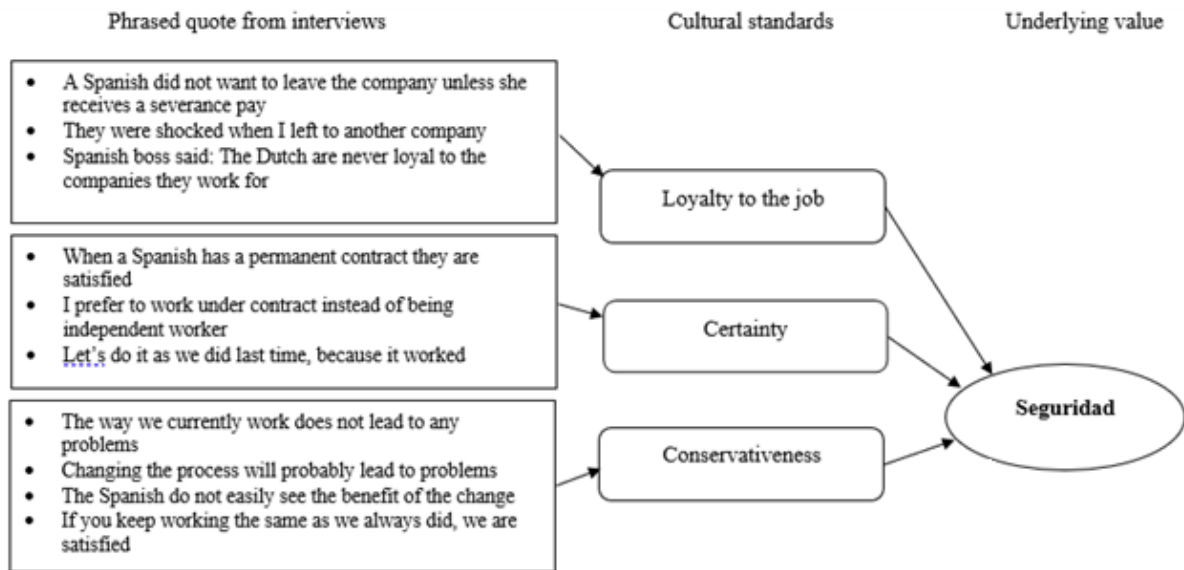


Figure 6. The underlying value of Seguridad

According to Miguel (1990) the Spanish society can be seen as traditional, and this is due to the high level of migration of people from the rural area to the cities in the second half of the 20th century. Within this rural culture the people have have a high resistance to change. The perspective of these people is that new things mean bad things. Miguel (1990) described that change is increasingly seen as a good thing and is valued as positive. He describes that when some product or service has the label new on it, even when it is the same as it was, it is appealing. Although it seems that the rural character still is part of the Spanish culture since the following proverb is still commonly used.

- *Así se han hecho siempre las cosas – This is how things have always been done*

4.2.4 Relaciones interpersonales

The cultural value *relaciones interpersonales* involves social associations, connections or affiliations between two or more people. These affiliations can vary in their degree of intimacy or self-disclosure, but also in their duration, in their reciprocity and their power distribution.⁴ The interviewees uncovered the following cultural standards that could fit with the underlying value of *relaciones interpersonales*: *Personal ties, Favouritism, Tight with family, Being closed off* and *Distant relationship boss-employee*. Figure 7 represents the link to the phrased quotations from interviews, the cultural standards and the corresponding underlying value. A distinction can be made between the cultural standards found, *Personal ties, Favouritism* and *Tightly to family* are concerned with close interpersonal relationships either relationship with people who are well-known and valued. The Spanish personal character values having tight relations with people within their personal circle, which are family and friends. Within these kinds of networks integrity is valued, which means that people are reliable, honest, polite and loyal are to each other. As a result, is there a strong degree of *Favouritism* as well. Unknown people outside these circles or networks are seen as outsiders and strangers, potentially unreliable because they will be loyal to their own circle of friends. The Spanish tend to have a low level of initial trust towards outsiders and therefore can be closed off. For this reason, the Spanish prefer to build a sort of personal relationship and bond before doing business.

⁴ <https://artsandculture.google.com/entity/interpersonal-relationship/m015fwp?hl=en>

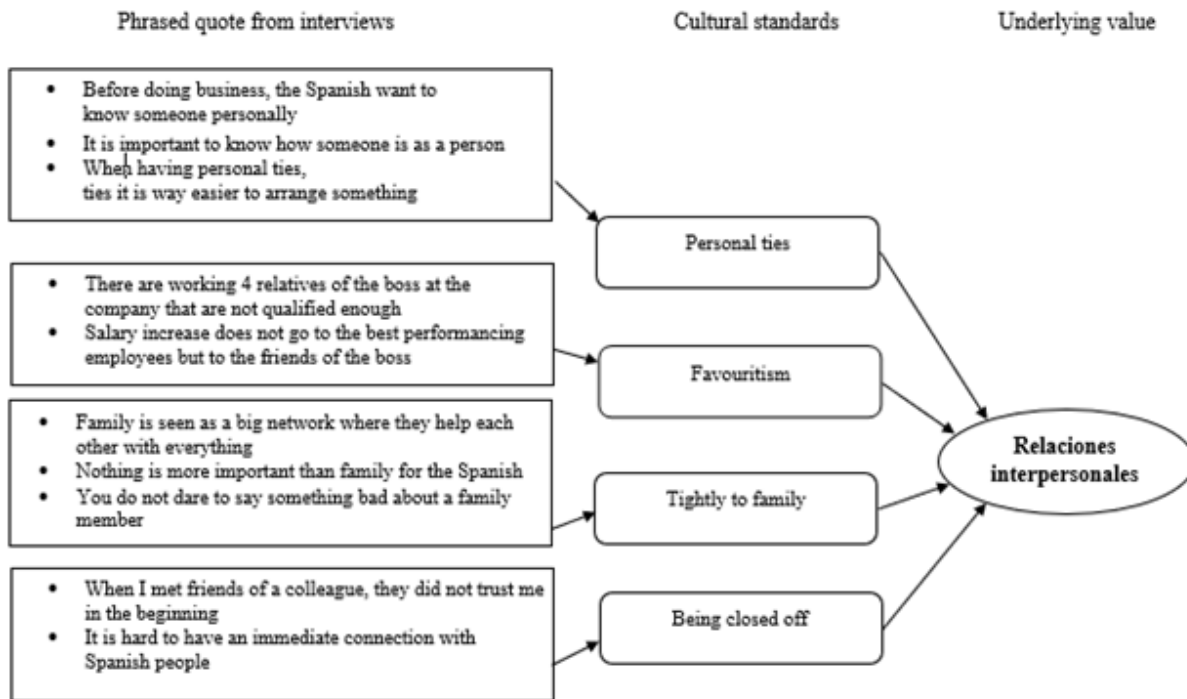


Figure 7. The underlying value of Relaciones interpersonales

As said above, within the cultural standard of *relaciones interpersonales* a distinction can be made between close and distant connections/people. As described above do the Spaniards value close relations with family and friends that seem unbreakable and highly appreciate life in social clans in which friendship and warmth exist. Besides that Spanish have the stereotype of being very friendly and open to foreigners. Despite that distrust to strangers is a dominant Spanish characteristic according to Miguel (1990). In two studies executed by CIS (Centro de Investigaciones Sociologicas), Spaniards were presented with two propositions:

- a) You can trust people / You have to be careful trusting people
- b) The human being is basically good / In every human being there is a good part and a bad part

The results explained that 32% of the Spanish considered it possible to trust people in general and 25% considered that the human being is basically good in 1981. These rates decreased in 1987 to 26% and 20%. These scores of trust are surprisingly low since many people see the Spanish as open and gallant. This can be explained through distinguishing two sort of outsiders. The first one are people outside their circle but seem to live in the same region, to which Spaniards conduct themselves with great caution and aloofness because of a sense of suspicion and mistrust. In contrast, visitors and strangers who come from another place or country receive all sympathy people from Spaniards. The tourists and passers-by receive due to economic reasons a lot of kindness and openness, while on the other hand, a disproportionate harshness is maintained to Spanish people that are not in their so-called clan or circle. Hence the traveler or tourist is grateful for that sympathy without realizing that he is dealing with something artificial.

Spaniards, mainly men among themselves, do not have open conversations easily. Often, apparently close friendships or relations are very superficial. This is because the Spaniards are simply not good at communicating, which makes it difficult to form a deep relationship with a Spaniard. According to Miguel is not acknowledging problems one of the reasons which can be derived from the value honor. As said they do not bother about making up a lie. Spaniards are generally too proud to have problems.

It is unapropriate to ask a friend about his problems or difficulties which would cause that the sense of honour will be touched and sympathy will be lost.

A strong habit of Spanish is a preference for friends and family. According to (Marías, 2000) this is expressed by the Spaniards as "*Trafico de influencias*" which is used to critically describe the social climate for favoritism. This means that things like jobs and tenders are given back and forth to each other by the people within a social circle and that when someone grants you something, you also make up for it by giving that person something in return. The expression: "*Favor con favor se paga*" therefore means that you pay each other back by giving a favor in return. In Spain they often say that everything is obtained thanks to friends that give things to each other as a favour.

The following, commonly used statements, give an characteristic view of the employer-employee relationship on the Spanish workforce

- *Tienes suerte de trabajar aquí, en otros lados... – You must be glad to work here, because somewhere else...*
- *Los problemas personales no los traigas a la oficina – Do not bring personal problems to the office*
- *En nuestra familia somos como una piña – In our family we are like a pineapple*⁵
- *Es de la casa - He is from the house*

The first expression indicates that a Spanish boss is not expressing much appreciation towards employees and that that employee must be glad they have their job. The second expression represents the distance between the boss and employee, it shows that the boss does not care about the personal life and that work must be done. The third expression explains the tightness of Spanish families, being like a pineapple is an expression that is used when people want to express that a group of people get along very well, they are a very closed group, with great internal solidarity and loyalty. The last expression "*Es de la casa*" indicates a sort of inherency because a person is from the house or family. So, when a family member is working within a company it means they are blamed less for faults or receives no consequences for mistakes.

5. Discussion

5.1 Results compared to existing literature

The aim of this paper was to give a thorough analysis of the Spanish cultural values and standards of the Spanish culture in perspective of the Dutch through researching the differences in a qualitative manner by conducting interviews. With this research method it was expected that the data collected could give a clearer and deeper insight of the Spanish culture. When the results of this research are compared to the dimensions of Hofstede insights (2022) it is interesting to see the cultural standards and values found can be linked to a dimension. As shown in the theoretical background, the Spanish have a higher level of power distance. Cultural standards found in this research on the cultural difference related to this dimension are respect for authority and power, bureaucracy, high control-little autonomy, distant relationship employer-employee. These cultural standards confirm the difference in power distance between the Spanish and Dutch. According to Hofstede insights (2022), the Spanish are more collectivistic compared with the Dutch. The cultural standards: Tight with family and personal ties, found in this research, are related to this dimension as well, which confirms this Spanish cultural standard. This is the same with the cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance of the Spanish and the cultural standard conservatism, found in this research. Also can the high level of

⁵ <https://www.cam.tv/cafetitoespanol/blog/expresiones-coloquiales-ser-una-pina/CNT0005C8>

masculinity of the Spanish, described through Hofstede insights (2022), be related to the value of personal pride which was found in this research. On the other hand, there are not really clear Spanish cultural standards that have to do with the difference in the dimension of indulgence, but this could be explained by the fact that both countries score fairly high or because the cultural characteristic does not lead to conflicts.

When the results of this research are compared to the literature of Meaney (2010) it can be noted that many of the cultural standards mentioned in the literature are reflected in the results of this study, although must be mentioned that the cultural standards as described by Meaney are less detailed and specific. In addition, Meaney has described less cultural standards and the most of them are described in other words, despite that are the meanings similar. Some of these cultural standards could therefore also be linked to the cultural values that were established in this research. The cultural value friends and acquaintances, personal charity and business relations can be connected to the cultural value relaciones interpersonales. These explanations namely describe the Spanish need for personal relations as well. Besides that, do the cultural standards: sense of self-esteem and pride and honour support the finding of the cultural value honor in this research. The results of this research did not have major contradictions compared to the superficial and limited existing literature of the topic. From the corresponding results there are only differences in the way it is worded.

5.1 Different values and cultural clashes

In this section the main differences of cultural values and standards between the two countries found during this research are discussed. For this purpose, the results of the research and the Dutch values from the theoretical background part were used, in order to expose the greatest cultural differences between Dutch and Spanish culture.

5.1.1 Honor

The value of honor is explained in the results section as the value that plays a big part in Spanish culture. The value causes the Spanish to have a high sensitivity to their personal status and dignity. This cultural value entails some cultural standards that differ from Dutch standards. A difference between the Spanish and the Dutch regarding the value of honor is that Dutch people have a higher sense of self-mockery and are less sensitive about the opinion of others. That is why Dutch people are more open about their personal life and the things they have problems with or find difficult. The Spanish are on the other hand more closed about these things because they are afraid that people look down on them which would lead to a reduction in personal status. Dutch people see sharing their personal life as normal, which can lead to compassion in which they find support. Making a mistake is something that can happen and is something to be learned from instead of something to be ashamed of. While it is not common in Spanish culture to admit mistakes since it could cause a dent in the ego. Criticizing others is common to do within Dutch culture and is done to improve the work, meanwhile the Spanish perceive critics as a personal attack, which will again, diminish personal status. Within the Dutch working culture it is less important to be tightly dressed, the Dutch think it is more important to feel good instead of being very well dressed. In the Spanish culture appearance and especially clothing are very important to show status and dignity. The difference in this value between the two cultures lies in how the people think about their self and their personal status and dignity and the fear of the opinion of others. This can lead to situations in which the Spaniard feels insulted or ridiculed when the Dutch give his opinion on for example a product or work. Contrary a Spaniard can act interested and positively in the occasion of a sale and then let you know via email that he does not want to buy the product.

5.1.2 Autoridad

The value of *autoridad* is as explained in the result section as a typical Spanish value. Within Spanish companies there is a high level of authority which means that people with higher ranked positions like managers and employers pose a high level of power and that there is little contradiction and participation of employees. The Spanish cultural value ensures that there is a high degree of hierarchy, it is common for authoritarian to people give clear orders and instructions which makes them responsible for the working process, which is why there are many controls. In the Dutch culture, it is more common that the employees have responsibility for their own tasks and that there is more space to decide on how tasks are carried out based on trust and responsibility. The respect for people with higher positions is in the Dutch culture not different but the behavioural norms are. In the Netherlands, the value equality is very strong which leads to a high level of mutual respect. That causes the equal relationship between boss and employee where it is possible to share your vision or opinion which may not be the same as the higher placed. The Dutch organizational structure is more horizontal compared to the Spanish vertical and hierarchical structure. The Dutch sense to strive to consensus is strong anchored in society, this means that all stakeholders are being involved into decision-making in order to compromise, instead of the Spanish top-down decision-making where only employers or managers make decisions. The differences regarding this cultural value can lead to frustrations mainly existing from the people without authority. This could be a situation where employees are not involved in decision making although they do have to deal with the consequences of the decision.

5.1.3 Seguridad

The Spanish cultural value *seguridad* exists in Spanish culture and expresses itself through a higher level of risk avoidance where people prefer to choose for certainty. The Spanish are less likely to think that something needs to be changed or improved and appreciate something if it still works. The Dutch on the other hand are more innovative and like to see progress. They strive for efficiency, they do this by changing production processes and implement changes in order improve the way of working. The Spanish are more afraid of the possible consequences and the effort that it takes to change. Spanish people have less urge to make promotions or go to a different/better job because they are satisfied with a stable and current situation. The Dutch are more focussed on improving their career and keep developing. Dutch business tends to take bigger risks in entrepreneurship, while Spanish companies will focus more on an existing client base. The cultural differences in the value *seguridad* between the two cultures can lead to cultural clashes in the working environment. Dutch people want for example improve business processes that could be better or do not work effectively or efficiently while the Spanish want to keep working the same as always.

5.1.4 Relaciones interpersonales

The cultural value *relaciones interpersonales* is more complicated than the values discussed before. This is because the Spanish have certain different cultural standards regarding social associations and connections. Spanish people have networks or clans of people close to them like family and friends and every outsider are being mistrusted. The Dutch on the other hand has a more open social life with connections that intertwine with a lower level of mistrust. Spaniards have very close relationships with all family members from nephews to nieces, which they do support and help with for example finding a job, house or loan. The Dutch do find family important but to a less extent. When doing business, the Spaniard likes to personally know someone with whom he does business. The Dutch are less relation oriented in these occasions and are more focussed on the deal itself. In Spain the level of favouritism is high and jobs, tenders and contracts are granted to each other. While in the Netherlands the level of favouritism is lower and things have to be worked for to earn them. The cultural difference regarding *relaciones* can lead to cultural clashes although must be said that people from the Netherlands, in general, can expect a friendly and open side from the Spanish. As explained in the results have the

Spanish a sense of mistrust for outsiders except for people coming from other places. This means that the Spanish normally will be interested in you and would like to establish a personal band.

5.2 Theoretical implications

This study has deepened the existing literature on Spanish cultural research, firstly because the study was executed from a Dutch perspective towards the Spanish culture while most studies are in general nature. Secondly, is the focus of the research on the Spanish working environment valuable because the combination of the focus and the perspective until recent an uncovered research field. Moreover, the results are not presented with the help of cultural dimensions, as done in most cultural studies, but through describing concrete behaviour with the help of cultural standards. Existing literature regarding the research topic originates from Dijkhuis (2022) who conducted the research in largely the same time period. Results from this study show a lot of similarities, although could this study add six different cultural standards and one cultural value.

5.3 Practical implications

The goal of this research was to gain insights on cultural differences within the working environment between the Spanish and the Dutch to be able to improve understanding and communication between the two cultures. This has been done through analysing concrete situations of Dutch people working and living in Spain. Therefore, the obtained results are mainly interesting for Dutch people with the ambition to work in Spain. The results are presented in the form of cultural standards, cultural values and typical proverbs and sayings with their explanations. These can help people who are preparing to live or do business in Spain. By considering the cultural standards that have emerged in this research, Dutch professionals can better prepare for cultural interactions with Spaniards to ensure that cultural differences have a reduced negative impact on doing business. With the knowledge, social situations can be better estimated and ambiguities in communication will occur less. As a result, there will be fewer frictions caused by cultural differences, which will make dealing with Spanish counterparts more pleasant.

5.4 Limitations and suggestions for further research

As in all studies, there are limitations to this research. A limitation of this research lays in the generalizability of the findings. There is only a specific part of the population researched which means that the results do not fully relate to all Spaniards. There are for example considerable cultural differences between regions within Spain, which makes it hard to draw conclusions over a whole nation. In particular, in our sample, there was also no proportionality of respondents from the different regions in Spain, which could lead to a higher input in the results of cultural values from certain regions. Besides that, there was a varied distribution of respondents' professions, although that there could be typicality's for specific sectors or industries, and this could be accounted for by future research. The respondents also consist of people in the age group between 35 and 71 which means only adults were interviewed, including younger people could possibly have influence on the results as well due to different intercultural capabilities.

Further research could be done to the relation between the cultural values and standards that were found in this research and how they influence each other. Besides that, there were many more cultural standards found that were not connected to a cultural value. Through conducting further research more cultural standard possibly be connected in order to form additional cultural values. Further research can also be done through putting focus on some cultural standards through conducting interviews with these standards as main topics to deepen them out.

6. Conclusion

The goal of this paper is to investigate the Spanish cultural standards as perceived by the Dutch within the working environment. To accomplish the goal of this study, the following research question was formulated:

''What cultural differences in the working environment are perceived by the Dutch working and living in Spain?''

Through conducting 13 interviews a total of 193 critical incidents were collected. Out of these, 17 cultural standards and 4 underlying values could be established which are described in a detailed manner, supported by quotes of respondents and expressions out of the Spanish literature.

Cultural standards found:

1. Distant relationship between employer and employee
2. Personal ties
3. Criticism is perceived as personal offence
4. Respect for authority and power
5. Certainty
6. Bureaucracy
7. Conservativeness
8. Tight with family
9. Honour and pride
10. Flexible with time
11. Value attached to private life
12. Decision making
13. Responsibility
14. Indirect communication
15. Loyal to the job
16. Favouritism
17. High control

Underlying values found:

1. **Honor**, explaining, Criticism perceived as personal offence, Pride, not admitting mistakes
2. **Autoridad** explaining, Respect for authority and power, Top-down decision making, Bureaucracy and Hierarchy
3. **Seguridad** explaining, Loyalty to the job, Certainty, conservativeness, High controls
4. **Relaciones interpersonales** explaining, Personal ties, Favouritism, Tight with family, Being closed off and distant relationship between employer and employee.

Together, the cultural standards, values and Spanish expressions provide a thick description of the Spanish culture perceived by the Dutch.

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Appendix

VRAGENLIJST CRITICAL INCIDENT ANALYSIS

- Hoe lang bent u al werkzaam in Spanje?
 - Wat voor werkzaamheden doet u?
- Ik begrijp dat u regelmatig contact heeft met Spaanse collega's.
 - Waaruit bestaat het contact (telefonisch, e-mail, in persoon)?
 - Wat bespreekt u met elkaar?
 - Wat is uw positie daarbij en wat is de positie van de Spanjaard(en) (rang, taakverdeling)?
 - Is de communicatie goed te noemen?
 - Hoe zou u de sfeer tussen Nederlanders en Spanjaarden beschrijven?
 - Is de samenwerking volgens u goed of kan hij beter?
 - Zijn de persoonlijke relaties volgens u goed of kunnen ze beter?
- Ik wil graag over uw ervaringen met Spanjaarden spreken. Hoe zijn uw ervaringen met Spanjaarden in het algemeen?
 - Wat zijn de meest opvallende verschillen tussen Nederlanders en Spanjaarden volgens u?
 - Wat mist u (vaak) bij Spanjaarden?

(Als hij specifiek eigenschappen van Spanjaarden noemt) Kunt u daar een voorbeeld van geven?)

Standaard format voor critical incidents

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Wat was de meest positieve ervaring die u had met Spanjaarden?- Wat gebeurde er precies?- Wat maakt dit voor u tot zo'n positieve ervaring?- Wat was de aanleiding voor die gebeurtenis?- Op welke manier droeg deze gebeurtenis bij aan een succesvolle samenwerking? |
|--|

Heeft u nog meer van zulke voorbeelden?

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kunt u ook een minder prettige ervaring noemen die u had met Spanjaarden?• Wat gebeurde er precies?• Wat maakte dit voor u tot een onbevredigende ervaring?• Wat was de aanleiding voor die gebeurtenis?• Op welke manier belemmerde deze gebeurtenis de succesvolle samenwerking?• Hoe reageerde u?• Hoe is het afgelopen?• Waarom gedroeg de Spaanse collega zich op die manier, denkt u? |
|--|

Heeft u nog meer van zulke voorbeelden?

Heeft u wel eens misverstanden tussen Spanjaarden en Nederlanders meegemaakt?

Heeft u wel eens meegemaakt dat u verrast werd door gedrag van Spanjaarden?

Heeft u wel eens meegemaakt dat u Spanjaarden niet begreep?

Heeft u wel eens meegemaakt dat u het oneens was met uw Spaanse collega?

Heeft u wel eens een conflict gehad met een Spaanse collega?

Heeft u wel eens andere problemen gehad met Spanjaarden?

Een goede leidinggevende:

- Hoe moet die zich gedragen?
- Verschillen Nederlanders en Spanjaarden daarin?

Een goede collega:

- Hoe moet die zich gedragen?
- Verschillen Nederlanders en Spanjaarden daarin?

Een goede werknemer:

- Hoe moet die zich gedragen?
- Verschillen Nederlanders en Spanjaarden daarin?

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

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

Wat is uw mening en waardoor komt dat?

(Je vertelt twee anecdotes): Heb u wel eens zoiets meegemaakt? Waarom gedroeg de Nederlander zich op deze manier?

- In uw periode van werkervaring met Spanjaarden, had u wel eens momenten waarbij er incidenteel of misschien structureel fricties waren in sommige situaties bij het samenwerken of bij de communicatie?
 - Zou dit kunnen komen door de culturele verschillen tussen u en u collega?
 - Welke culturele verschillen zouden dit eventueel hebben veroorzaakt?

Manier van discussiëren

- Bij situaties dat u en uw collega of baas het niet eens waren, hoe verliep dat?
 - Wordt dit normaal uitgesproken of vermeden?
 - Wordt er ongelijk toegegeven of was er sprake van dat de collega op zijn tenen was getrapt?
 - Wat is u in uw ervaring opgevallen in de manier van werken en communiceren met Spaanse collega's
 - Wordt er gediscussieerd op basis van meningen of feiten?

Werknemer/werkgever-relatie

- Hoe zou u de relatie tussen werkgever en werknemer beschrijven binnen de Spaanse cultuur?
 - Is deze close of afstandig?
 - Hoe zit het met waardering richting werknemers
 - Is er wel eens iets gebeurd waarvan u dacht, dit kan niet of misschien wel van, hey wat is dit bijzonder
 - Aanspreken van leidinggevende

Verantwoordelijkheid

- Hoe vindt u dat er om wordt gegaan met verantwoordelijkheid op de Spaanse werkvloer?

- Is het personeel erg betrokken, of vinden ze het prima en doen ze wat er wordt gevraagd?
- Komt personeel veel zelf met nieuwe initiatieven?
- Wordt er controle uit hand gegeven of is dit lastig voor de baas
- Wanneer er iets niet goed gaat, wordt er dan verantwoordelijkheid genomen om er iets aan te doen, of zeggen ze misschien dat het niet onder de verantwoordelijkheid valt.
- Hoe gaat het besluitvormingsproces in het Spaanse bedrijf? Wie neemt de beslissingen en hoe gaat dat in zijn werk? Worden de besluiten door iedereen gerespecteerd?
- Wordt er aan afspraken gehouden

Kunt u nog meer vertellen over uw ervaringen met Spanjaarden? Hebben we alles besproken?

Mocht u nog iets te binnen schieten over de verschillen tussen Nederlanders en Spanjaarden, dan kunt u mij altijd mailen.