Intercultural Collaboration in European Business

Cultural differences between the Dutch and the Italians on the work floor

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Abstract

More and more expatriates are sent abroad, during which they encounter new challenges on a cultural level. Successfully navigating a work-related stay abroad requires a solid understanding of the local culture. Because of this, this master's thesis aimed to compare the Dutch and Italian cultures on the work floor from a Dutch viewpoint and find the values that underlie these cultural distinctions to explain the 'typical' Italian behavior. Therefore, the research question was: *"Which cultural differences are perceived by Dutch individuals living and working in Italy?".*

To answer this question, an inductive qualitative research method was conducted by interviewing sixteen Dutch individuals living and working in Italy for at least six months. Using the Critical Incident Technique, the interviewees were asked to recall situations where the Dutch and Italian cultures clashed. These situations, described as critical incidents, were analyzed to establish Italian cultural standards. Fourteen cultural standards specific to Italy were found: power division, indirectness, time and appointment flexibility, respect, status, relations, unequal treatment of male-female, control, formality, emotional display, conservative, keep the boss happy, favoritism, and (non)verbal expression. Furthermore, these Italian cultural standards have been connected to the underlying values: Hierarchy, Personal Relationships, and La Bella Figura. The cultural standards and underlying values provide a thick distribution through which Dutch expats should be better able to comprehend, accept, and appreciate their Italian interaction partners' surprising or unusual behavior at work and prevent misunderstandings and conflicts from happening.

Keywords: Italian culture, Dutch culture, cultural standards, critical incidents, Italian behavior

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1. Introduction

In the past forty-five years, the European Union, which consists of twenty-seven member states, has established a remarkable set of accords to manage the political interactions of countries across Europe. These accords have resulted in a group of collective rules controlling all types of market transactions, establishing a rule of law that includes a European Court of justice, and promoting increased interactions among individuals living inside Europe's borders (Fligstein, 2008). Moreover, these accords have significantly increased trade, preparing the path for a highly mobile and diversified society, creating the possibility of living and working in the European Economic Area under the same legal conditions (Raju, 2017).

Although the EU has become a common market, each country retains its own distinct national culture, and there are still cultural disparities among member states (Gursoy & Terry Umbreit, 2004). Language, body language, mimicry, attire, and greeting rituals exemplify how culture manifests itself. Culture influences the thought patterns, perceptions, judgments, and actions of the members of society (Thomas, 2003).

Italy has been one of the most important European business partners of the Netherlands (RVO, 2022). Etic researchers have compared the Dutch and Italian culture in terms of generalizable phenomena. For example, according to Hofstede's dimensions (2011), Dutch companies have a small power distance and weak uncertainty avoidance, while Italian companies have a large power distance and strong uncertainty avoidance. The use of cultural dimensions to capture all relevant aspects of culture has been criticized since a single cultural disposition cannot explain many diverse cultural differences (Smith, 2006).

Additionally, etic researchers have discussed some broad cultural differences between the Dutch and Italian cultures. For instance, research results by Remland et al. (1995) showed that the Dutch culture represents a nonculture culture while the Italian culture represents a contact culture. Doorduyn (2011) discovered a difference between the Dutch and Italian business partners during business negotiations in terms of direct versus indirect communication, time-oriented versus relationship-oriented, relatively low degree of politeness and formality versus a high degree of politeness and formality.

Next, there is emic research, such as books on Italian culture that give an impressionistic description of how Italians think and behave, for instance, Pasquale (2021) states that beauty, passion, excellence, resilience, and price are the cornerstones of the Italian character and feature, alongside family and tradition. Furthermore, Abbot (2008) mentioned that the family and organizational structures of Italian businesses have been influenced by the Catholic Church in which the hierarchy of authority is top-down and dictatorial.

According to Leijendekker (2012), the Italian management model shows the inequality between men and women and is focused on competition instead of cooperation. Abbott (2008) mentioned that Italian culture is relationship-based and Italians have a high-context, indirect, and formal communication style. One criticism of qualitative emic research is that it allegedly lacks the scientific rigor and credibility, which are associated with traditionally accepted quantitative models, in which inquire is assumed to occur within a value-free framework and which rely on measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables (Horsburgh, 2003).

An alternative way and a more rigorous emic approach to studying culture is that of Thomas et al. (2010), who defined culture as a "system of orientation" that is formed by cultural standards. Cultural standards are reflected by certain values, norms, and practices within a given country. The Critical Incident Technique is used to look for instances where cultures collide, and the cultural standards of each country can be deduced from critical incidents. Thomas' qualitative approach to culture has been utilized by Neudecker et al. (2007), who identified six Italian cultural standards from the perspective of German expatriates. However, the Italian cultural standards from the point of view of another nation, in this case, the Dutch, can completely shift focus (Neudecker et al., 2007). Hence, a study that applies Thomas' rigorous methodology to the Dutch expats in Italy is still missing.

1.1 Research goal and research question

Therefore, this thesis consisted of an inductive qualitative study aiming at exploring Dutch-Italian cultural differences on the work floor. The main research question for this study is:

"Which cultural differences are perceived by Dutch individuals living and working in Italy?"

This central question has been divided into several sub-questions:
1. What are typical Italian cultural standards perceived by Dutch people working in Italy?
2. What is the cultural logic behind these Italian cultural standards?
3. How do the Dutch in Italy bridge these cultural differences?

This research aims to determine the cultural standards experienced by Dutch expatriates working in Italy. This study will provide a thick description, not only including typical Italian behavior but also the values behind behaviors, explaining and interpreting the critical incidents. It should provide hints and answers to enhance Dutch and Italian collaboration and communication to maximize business connections.

1.2 Academic relevance

This research contributes to the existing literature on cross-cultural differences in three ways.

Gap 1: No qualitative and rigorous in-depth studies have explored the cultural differences between the Dutch and Italian.

Firstly, this study extended the current literature since it is a qualitative and rigorous in-depth research that applied Thomas et al.'s (2010) and Gioia et al.'s (2012) rigorous methodologies to explore the cultural differences between the Dutch and Italian. To date, most cross-cultural studies have used quantitative models to validate and explain cultural differences, such as Meyer (2014), Hofstede (2010), and Hall (1976). However, a limitation of the quantitative approach in cross-cultural research was that it requires standardized measures that provided little insight into participants' subjective experience (Reiter et al., 2010). As a result, the descriptions are pretty general and lack in-depth information. Qualitative research methods provide detailed information because the participants can use their own words to explain how they understood a particular experience (Skinner et al., 2000), and the data collected is unconstrained by predetermined standardized categories.

Gap 2: No qualitative studies have yet explored how Dutch expatriates living and working in Italy perceive the Italian cultural standards ('typical behavior').

Secondly, this qualitative study will be the first one that used narratives from Dutch individuals to explore Italian cultural standards ('typical behavior') from the Dutch perspective. This study added value to the existing qualitative literature, such as the studies of Thomas (2010), using the same critical incident technique but it improved the conceptual basis. Finally, the results of this study will be compared with the results of the qualitative study by Neudecker et al. (2007), who unpacked Italian cultural behaviors from the German perspective.

Gap 3: No qualitative studies provided a detailed and thick description of the Italian cultural standards ('typical behavior') by interpreting the values that underpin the cultural standards.

Thirdly, the current literature is extended by providing a first interpretation of the values that underpin cultural standards. Within this research, the cultural standards and values are separated. Several studies provided thin descriptions of cultural standards (Kutschker & Schmid, 2012) and reported only a few common behaviors without effectively articulating the cultural logic underlying them. Instead, this study gave a detailed and thick description of Italian cultural standards ('typical behavior') and their associated values, helping one understand how and why Italians behave the way they do.

1.3 Practical relevance

To successfully master the job-related stay abroad, it is essential to pay special attention to cultural knowledge (Neudecker et al. 2007). Insufficient understanding of the specific cultural characteristics of the host country can have negative consequences on cooperation. Therefore, identifying Italian cultural standards is helpful for Dutch businesspeople, managers, and expatriates in navigating and accumulating knowledge about the Italian system of orientation since it explains the unexpected and unfamiliar behavior of the Italian individual. Knowledge of the Italian cultural standards and their effectiveness should enable the Dutch expatriates to understand their Italian interaction partners better and avoid misunderstandings and conflicts. Cultural standards can be combined with prototypical critical incident case studies to create intercultural training (Eva-Ulrike Kinast et al., 2010). Such a training tool can help Dutch expatriates understand Italian cultural norms, creating orientations that pave the way for mutual respect and acknowledgment that lay the groundwork for intercultural competence.

1.4 Outline of the thesis

The theoretical framework will be discussed in the next section of the thesis. Then, the methodology is described, followed by the results section, discussion, and conclusion, answering the research question. Finally, this thesis discusses the study's theoretical and practical consequences, strengths and limits, and future recommendations.

2. Theoretical framework

This chapter will start with defining 'culture.' Next, it will discuss previous quantitative and qualitative research on intercultural research. In addition, it will define the concept of cultural standards, and the critical incident technique is explained.

2.1 Defining culture

Culture is a phenomenon that created a structured environment in which individuals can function (Schein, 2010). Schein defined culture as "a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptations and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems" (Schein, 2010, p. 17).

According to Schein (2010), culture can be studied on three levels. The first level of culture is artifacts, the group's visible products that are difficult to interpret (e.g., clothing, manners of address, and emotional display). The second level of culture is the espoused ideas and values. These are the undiscussable assumptions reinforced by established norms, beliefs, and behavior, which serve as a guide and means of dealing with uncertain situations. Finally, the third level of culture is the underlying tactic assumptions, the basic assumptions that are accepted and often unquestionable and govern group members' behavior.

Thus, culture enabled us to derive meanings from objects, people, and things surrounding us. Human interaction evolves along the lines of wholly diverse standards of conduct. The regulations in various cultures are vastly different (Eva-Ulrike Kinast et al., 2010). When the interaction partner came from another country, the partner has adhered to a different system of orientation which includes specific symbols such as (body) language, mimicry, clothing, and greeting rituals. Hence, the interaction partner may have internalized different norms, values, and rules of behavior. In each country, not knowing the rules or understanding how to apply them invariably leads to misunderstandings (Thomas, 2010). Such misunderstandings can result in a "clash of cultures," which is a conflict that occurs when people with different cultural values interact (Guiso et al., 2015). To avoid such conflicts, one must respect and follow a culture's commonly recognized pattern of behavior. Effective communication between people of various cultural backgrounds primarily depends on their knowledge of their respective cultures (Shadid, 2002). Scholars have presented two approaches to comprehending intercultural differences in the cross-cultural

literature. Two approaches that capture cultural differences are the etic and emic approaches, as discussed in the next section.

2.2 Etic approaches to (inter)cultural research

Firstly, there is the etic approach that includes quantitative research (Hofstede 1980, Schwartz 1992, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1997) or qualitative research (Hall 1990, Meyer 2014) that focused on the differences among cultures, many of which can be described and measured along cultural dimensions. The etic approach assumed that generalizable phenomena can be used to compare cultures (Lu, 2012).

This study compared the cultural differences between the Netherlands and Italy using the frameworks of Hofstede and Erin Meyer's Country Tool. The first attempt to understand how a given culture and mentality of a country influenced the behavior of an individual was drawn by Geert Hofstede. According to Hofstede (1980, p. 21), culture is a system of beliefs, values, and conventions specific to one cultural group. He refered to this as the "collective programming of the mind." Hofstede focused on dividing cultural groups into national cultural groups; today, these national cultures have six dimensions. Cross-cultural scholars have favored Hofstede's framework since the data collected was sufficient to derive statistically based insights into a culture that had not been possible before. While these dimensions help understand the cultural differences between the Netherlands and Italy, it is also helpful to consider a more recent framework that tackles culture from a business perspective, like Erin Meyer's Country Tool (Meyer, 2014). Meyer (2014) approached culture from a relative point-of-view, meaning she did not compare cultures on an absolute scale such as, for instance, Hofstede. Instead, Meyer outlines the relative differences on a set of continuums, indicating the agree to which a culture used for instance (in)direct negative feedback. These eight continuums explained how cultural differences impacted international business (Meyer, 2014).

2.2.1 Hofstede's Framework

Hofstede's model compared different cultures and scores on the following dimensions: power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and indulgence. According to Hofstede (Hofstede-Insights, 2021), as seen in *table 1*, the Netherlands and Italy scored the following on the five dimensions:

Hofstede dimensions	the Netherlands score	Italy score
Power distance	38	50
Individualism	80	76
Masculinity	14	70
Uncertainty avoidance	53	75
Long-term orientation	67	61

Table 1. Index scores for Italy and the Netherlands on the cultural dimensions by Hofstede (Hofstede-Insights, 2021)

Using Hofstede's dimensions, insights are gained into the differences between the Italian and Dutch cultures. Italians scored higher on the *power distance dimension* than the Dutch, respectively, with 50 and 38. In Italy, hierarchical roles are more explicit than in the Netherlands. In Italy, decisions are made by the boss, while in the Netherlands, everyone has the right to give their opinion on the decision to be made. Dutch employees can disagree with their superiors openly, but this is unthinkable in an Italian organization. In Italy, power is centralized, while in the Netherlands, it is decentralized. Regarding the *individualism dimension*, Italy and the Netherlands score almost the same, with 76 compared to 80. The Netherlands and Italy are both individualistic societies in which people are expected to care for themselves and their immediate families. However, compared to north Italy, less individualistic behavior can be observed in south Italy. Furthermore, Italy scores higher on the *masculinity dimension* with a score of 70, and the Netherlands scores low with a score of 14 and is a feminine country. In Italy, conflicts happen quite often and are resolved with a good fight, while in the Netherlands, a consensus is valued, and conflicts are rare. The Italians prefer direct confrontation and the Dutch like to resolve the conflict with a debate during which everyone gets time to express their opinion. In Italian culture, material success is admired, and people like to exhibit their wealth by purchasing status symbols, while in Dutch culture, nobody should regard themselves as more important than someone else, and extravagant behavior is frowned upon.

The Italian culture scored higher on the *uncertainty avoidance dimension* than the Dutch culture, with a score of 75 respectively to 53. Italians are uncomfortable with ambiguous situations resulting in much detailed planning. While formality is important for Italians, Italians do not always comply with rules. At the same time, the Dutch have a large need for rules and are intolerant of unorthodox behavior, such as not complying with rules. Lastly, regarding the *longer-term orientation dimension,* the Dutch culture scored slightly higher than the Italian culture with 67 compared to 61. The Italians usually negotiate to gain a short-

term profit, while the Dutch plan on a long-term basis and are geared towards a long-term profit.

Based on Hofstede's dimensions (2011), Hofstede called the organization model of an Italian company the 'pyramid of people' and that of a Dutch company the 'village market.' An Italian company has a large power distance and a strong uncertainty avoidance, while the Dutch have a small power distance and weak uncertainty avoidance. Conflicts are also settled differently; Italian companies are characterized by a clear hierarchical structure in which decisions are referred to the higher person in the hierarchy; instead, Dutch companies settled problems on a case-by-case basis through discussion between those who have a conflict disagreement. Furthermore, the Italian boss makes decisions while the Dutch boss creates consensus among employees to safeguard harmony and not to order people around. However, regional differences exist due to Italian history, during which Italy was a land of separate and warring city-states. Consequently, Italy is a country with distinct regions, which each have its dialects and cultural characteristics. For instance, Northern Italy has a relatively lower power distance than Southern Italy (Hofstede, 1991). Next, the cultural differences between the Dutch and Italian are investigated using Meyer's framework.

However, Hofstede's work was criticized since it relies on surveys among IBM subsidiaries, which is unlikely to be nationally representative (McSweeney, 2002). Another criticism is that the framework assumes that the domestic population is a homogenous whole, while most nations are groups of ethnic units (Jones, 2007). Since Hofstede's work focused on the national level, while in organizations, the reflection of the culture at the individual level is more relevant (Kamakura & Novak, 1992), Meyer's taxonomy provides an individual-level conceptualization, focusing on interactions between individuals, which is crucial to effective business communication. Therefore, Meyer's taxonomy is used to analyze culture in an organizational setting.

2.2.2 Erin Meyer's Country Tool

Next, the Meyer's framework is discussed. According to Meyer's Framework (Meyer, 2014), as seen in *table 2*, the Netherlands and Italy fall on the eight culture map scales as followed:

Meyer scales	the Netherlands	Italy
Communication	Low-context culture	High-context culture
Evaluation	Direct negative feedback	Indirect negative feedback
Leading	Egalitarian style	Hierarchical style

Deciding	Consensual decision-making	Top-down decision-making
Trusting	Task-based	Relationship-based
Disagreeing	Confrontational	Avoid confrontation
Scheduling	Linear time	Flexible time
Persuading	Applications first	Principles first

Table 2. Eight culture map scales comparing Italy and the Netherlands by Meyer (Meyer, 2014)

Based on Meyer's framework, in terms of *communication*, the Netherlands is a low-context culture while Italy is more of a high-context culture. In the Netherlands, good communication is precise and simple, and messages are expressed and understood at face value. In Italy, good communication is sophisticated, nuanced, and layered in which messages are spoken and read between the lines. In terms of *evaluation*, in the Netherlands, they give direct negative feedback, and in Italy, they tend to give more indirect negative feedback. In the Netherlands, negative feedback to a colleague is provided frankly and honestly, and negative messages are not softened by positive ones. In Italy, negative feedback to colleagues is provided softly and subtly. Positive messages are used to wrap up the negative ones. Italians give criticism only in private, while the Dutch may criticize an individual in front of a group. Regarding *leading*, the Netherlands has an egalitarian style, and Italy has a hierarchical style. In the Netherlands, the ideal distance between a boss and subordinates is low, and the boss is a facilitator among equals, while in Italy, the ideal distance is high. The best boss is a strong director who leads from the front. The Dutch have flat organizational structures, and communication often skips hierarchical lines, while the Italians have multilayer and fixed organizational structures. In terms of *deciding*, the Netherlands has consensual decision-making, and Italy has top-down decision-making. In the Netherlands, decisions are made in groups through unanimous agreement, while in Italy, decisions are made by individuals who are usually the boss. In terms of *trusting*, the Netherlands is task-based, while Italy is relationship-based. Trust is built through business-related activities in the Netherlands, and work relationships are built and dropped easily. In Italy, trust is built through sharing emails, drinks, and work relationships build up slowly over time.

Regarding *disagreeing*, the Netherlands is confrontational, and so is Italy, but they tend to avoid confrontation a little more. In the Netherlands, open disagreements and debates are positive for the team or organization and do not negatively impact the relationship. In contrast, open disagreements are inappropriate in Italy, which will break group harmony and negatively impact relationships. Regarding

scheduling, the Netherlands has linear time, while Italy has flexible time. In the Netherlands, project steps are approached sequentially, completing one task before beginning the next without interruptions, focusing on deadlines, and sticking to the schedule. In Italy, project steps are approached fluidly with changing tasks as opportunities arise. The Dutch emphasize promptness and good organization over flexibility, the Italians value adaptability and flexibility over organization. In terms of *persuading*, the Netherlands wants applications first, while Italy wants the principles first. Dutch individuals first develop the theory or concept before presenting a fact, statement, or opinion. At the same time, Italians begin with a fact, statement, or opinion and later add concepts to back it up.

Furthermore, the study by Doorduyn (2012) focused on the influence of cultural differences on communication between the Dutch and Italian businesspeople using the cultural models of Hofstede (1991), Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2006), the theory of Pinto (1994), and the theory of Hall (1990). The following table depicts the findings, see *table 3*.

Main characteristics Dutch culture	**Main characteristics Italian culture**
weak social hierarchy	strong social hierarchy
Consensus-based decision making	top-down decision making
high level of individuality	importance of family and close friends
direct and low context communication	indirect and high-context communication
status through achievement	status through ascription
time- and task-oriented (monochronic)	relationship- and human-oriented (polychronic)
long-term orientation	short-term orientation
adherence to procedures and rules	flexible with regards to procedures and deadlines
focus on content instead of form and ritual	focus on style and form instead of content
low degree of formality (clothing)	high degree of formality (clothing)
Limited forms of politeness (address)	high degree of politeness (address)
specific, universalistic, and neutral	Diffuse, particularistic, and emotional

Table 3. The main characteristics of the Dutch and Italian cultures (Doorduyn, 2011)

While cultural dimensions help understand the cultural differences between Italy and the Netherlands at a glance, these only provide limited information. These quantitative models do not give Dutch expatriates concrete clues on how to act effectively in the Italian business environment. The numerical scores for each dimension suggest exactness, but the models are too abstract and not precise enough for practical use. Instead, these models generalized the Dutch and Italian cultures. A qualitative approach can help gain a more in-depth understanding of the cultural differences between the Dutch and Italians.

2.3 Emic (qualitative) approaches to (inter)cultural research

In terms of cultural differences between the Dutch and Italian, there are no rigorous emic, qualitative studies that explored these differences in depth. Some qualitative studies discussed broad cultural differences between the Dutch and Italian, such as Remland et al. (1995), who examined video recordings of naturally occurring interactions in multiple countries, including the Netherlands and Italy. The results showed that more touch was observed during interactions between the Italians and the Dutch. Dutch culture represented a noncontact culture, while Italian culture represented a contact culture. Furthermore, Doorduyn (2011) conducted a questionnaire to gain insights into the cultural differences experienced during negotiations between Dutch and Italian businessmen. The Dutch businessmen noticed a difference between themselves and their Italian business partners in terms of direct versus indirect communication, time-oriented versus relationship-oriented, and relatively low degree of politeness and formality versus a high degree of politeness and formality. Furthermore, Paglieri et al. (2013) examined whether the Dutch and Italians responded differently to a small immediate reward (such as 25 euros today) and a larger delayed reward (such as 30 euros in 25 days). Catholics in Italy are less patient with delays than Dutch Catholics, whereas Calvinists in Holland are more willing to wait. Another study by Giorgi (2009) found that 16.4% of Italian workers had been bullied, which is higher than the 7.3% reported in earlier European studies. There is still a taboo surrounding bullying in Italy, and few organizations have policies that addressed this issue and seek to prevent it.

Moreover, there are several books on Italian culture, but those descriptions are impressionistic in nature and not scientific, or systematic, and are not obtained through objective methods. These books can be used as test material and for understanding cultural logic to describe and explain the concrete behavior of Italians. Pasquale (2021) explored features of the Italian national identity and the little things Italians do that set them apart. According to Pasquale, beauty, passion, excellence, resilience, and price are the cornerstones of the Italian character and feature, alongside family and tradition. The northerners were

stereotyped as reserved, hardworking, punctual, and affluent. Down south, Italians were stereotyped as boisterous, extremely friendly, superstitious, 'Mafiosi,' and value family above all. Additionally, the intercultural trainer Charles Abbot (2008) mentioned that the Catholic Church consistently shaped Italian society. In the Catholic religion, the hierarchy of authority is top-down and dictatorial. Therefore, Italian businesses' family and organizational structure reflected the country's strongly rooted social hierarchy. Moreover, according to Leijnendekker (2012), Italy is a conservative country; things do not change that fast, and there is distrust in the Italian government. Italians are obsessed with their image and wealth and tend to talk a lot but say little.

Furthermore, the concept of cultural standards has been developed by Alexander Thomas to understand the dynamics of international encounters. This is known as the emic approach, the qualitative research that goes into more detail and is interpretive, i.e., not only describing typical behavior but also trying to understand its meaning. The emic approach seeked to discover features of behavior that are culturally distinctive and therefore incomparable across cultures (Lu, 2012). The concept of "cultural standards" described cultural ways of thinking, perceiving, and acting (Thomas, 2012). Due to the personal experiences of individuals, this type of research is detail-oriented and descriptive. It also enables the researcher to reveal the underlying values of one's culture's "typical" behavior.

2.4 Thomas' Qualitative Approach to Culture

The German psychologist Thomas defined culture as "a system of orientation that provides individuals from the same country with meaning and, to a great extent, defines their sense of belonging" (2010, p. 29). Culture influences the perceptions, thought habits, judgments, and actions of all individuals in a society. An individual's need for orientation is fulfilled when they have sufficient accurate knowledge about the material artifacts and social interaction routines that defined their surroundings and once they have the skill and experience to use that knowledge accurately and thoroughly. However, the culture-specific orientation system with its sense-giving function does not apply if interaction partners were from different countries. Other-culture partners may have acquired different norms and values. In such a case, one or both partners experience unexpected behavior or responses whose meaning is unknown to the partner and cannot be interpreted using their respective familiar cultural orientation systems. Thomas et al. (2010) used the concepts of critical incidents and cultural standards to describe cultures.

2.4.1 Cultural Standards

Thomas established the concept of 'cultural standards' to describe individuals' typical behavior' from different countries. According to Neudecker et al. (2007), cultural standards are central to the culture-

specific orientation system. Cultural standards influence the perception, thinking, values, and actions of all members of a culture so that these cultural standards are considered normal, self-evident, typical, and binding both for themselves and others. There is a tolerance range for cultural standards. Individual and group-specific aspects of cultural standards can differ. Within this tolerance range, deviations from the cultural norm are acceptable. When tolerance limits are surpassed, the social environment reacts with rejection and punishments because activities outside this tolerance range are viewed as strange, deviant, and unusual.

Cultural standards can be different for each representative of a culture. Similar cultural standards can take effect but have different tolerance ranges and meanings. Cultural central standards in one country can also be completely absent in another culture or play only a minor role. Individuals adhere to different orientation systems and have adopted different norms, values, and rules of behavior. The different orientation systems can result in irritations and communication breakdowns, which can be described, explained, and forecasted by cultural standards. According to Thomas, cultural standards can be derived from real-life intercultural interactions, the critical incidents, using the critical incident technique.

2.4.2 Critical Incidents Technique

The critical incident technique was created in the 1950s by psychologist John Flanagan to reduce errors in workplace behavior. A critical incident is defined as "any observable human activity that is sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences and predictions to be made about the person performing the act. To be critical, an incident must occur in a situation where the purpose or intent of the act seems fairly clear to the observer and where its consequences are sufficiently definite to leave little doubt concerning its effects" (Flanaghan, 1954, p. 1).

Fiedler, Mitchell, and Triandis (1971) were the first to apply CIT to the study of cultural differences. According to Neudecker et al. (2007), a critical incident occurs when there are misperceptions and misinterpretations of behavior. For instance, if the partner from another culture does not behave as expected or does not show behavior that is taken for granted. Thomas gathered critical incidents while researching binational differences by interviewing various persons from country A working in a foreign country B and asked them about critical encounters with people from B. This concept offered a good representation of culture since it offered an opportunity to describe and convey the complexity of culture adequately and profitably. However, it inevitably entailed a simplification and reduced representation of a culture. It never described the culture with all its facets, and there is always a dependency on perspectives (Neudecker et al., 2007). Neudecker et al. (2007) used the concept of Thomas to identify Italians 'typical behavior' from the German perspective.

2.4.3 Italian cultural standards

Using the concept of Thomas, Neudecker et al. (2007) conducted research and six Italian cultural standards were identified from the German point of view. *Table 6* depicts the six cultural standards.

Number	Italian Cultural Standard (from the German Perspective)
1	Family orientation
2	Relationship orientation
3	Flexibility around rules
4	Hierarchy orientation
5	Identity awareness (La Bella Figura)
6	Emotionality

Table 6. Italian Cultural Standards from the German Perspective

The first is *family orientation* (familismo), which included the importance Italians place on family cohesion and togetherness. Because of Italy's political history, Italians are not able to identify with the state, and they have discovered that the government is not able to provide for their needs. The Italians felt compelled to find other ways of supporting themselves, resulting in the development of family structures as a means of private protection. Their closest family and friends are the only ones they trust. Within the family, traditional roles are distributed and hierarchical structures are regulated. The second cultural standard is *Relationship orientation*, which means that Italian culture focused on building personal relationships to foster trust, create commitments, and reduce general caution when dealing with strangers. A long-term and equal partnership cannot be achieved without personal contact and getting to know one another. To maintain a positive relationship, direct criticism is avoided to maintain a harmonious and comradely atmosphere. To achieve goals faster and easier, Italians focused on building, expanding, and maintaining a network of relationships. Even though at first glance it may seem that Italians respect both their personal and professional lives equally, this is not the case. Most coworkers are not invited to a family's home until years have passed.

A third cultural standard entails *flexibility around rules*, which means that in Italy, adherence to rules is allowed if it makes sense in a given situation, if it is beneficial to the individual, or if there is a threat of punishment. Nevertheless, an informal, extra-state system of rules has developed. In addition, there is flexible use of time. A value of punctuality does not exist in Italy, for example, chatting, and drinking coffee together is more important than showing up on time to a meeting. In most cases, the other person will not react angrily to an obligatory delay of ten or twenty minutes but will instead take advantage

of it. It is also not uncommon for Italians to plan their days in advance, but rather to be spontaneous in their approach. *Hierarchy orientation* is the fourth cultural standard in Italy, which means managers make decisions, demonstrate power, and exercise control. In Italy, employees follow instructions, do not accept responsibility, or do so reluctantly. Through appropriate manners, employees must show respect for their managers. There is a traditional distribution of roles within the company hierarchy. The fifth cultural standard is *Identity awareness (Bella figura)*, meaning that Italians emphasize outward appearance through good manners, education, behavior, and appreciation of the interaction to express friendliness and hospitality. Italians try to make 'Bella figura' and preserve that of the other. Representation of the 'Bella figuras' of the entire family and the behavior of each member. The sixth cultural standard is *Emotionality,* meaning Italians are impulsive and emotional and have intense emotional outbursts. They are emotion-driven and will show an immediate reaction to a respective situation. They are spontaneous concerning decision-making.

These six Italian cultural standards were identified by Neudecker et al. (2007) using the concept of Thomas et al. (2010). However, the concept of Thomas does not distinguish between concrete behaviors and more abstract values and refers to both as 'cultural standards.' This leads to a lack of conceptual clarity and does not meet the requirements of Geertz (1973) because simply observing and describing behavior from the outside results in a thin and insufficient description. For a complete thick description, the cultural logic behind the behavior should be included in the description. In this study, cultural standards are viewed as concrete behavior that must be evaluated or explained in terms of underlying values. It examined Italian culture through the lens of Dutch culture to identify Italian cultural standards. According to Demorgon and Molz (1996), this required both self-awareness (Dutch culture) and awareness of others (Italian culture). The Dutch cultural values are explored below to create self-awareness of the Dutch culture.

2.5 Dutch cultural values

Enklaar (2007) investigated the Dutch culture's underlying values. The Dutch culture has twelve fundamental values and ideas, which explain the typical Dutch way of thinking and behaving, as shown in *table 7*. Below, the twelve underlying values of Dutch culture, their origins, and a short explanation of each Dutch value are mentioned.

Number	Underlying value (Dutch translation)	Origin
1	Salvation (Heil)	Christianity
2	Guilt and remission (Schuld)	Christianity
3	Charity (Naastenliefde)	Christianity

4	Truth (Waarheid)	Christianity
5	Work (Arbeid)	Protestantism
6	Order and Neatness (Orde en Netheid)	Protestantism
7	Utility (Nut)	Protestantism
8	Reliability (Betrouwbaarheid)	Protestantism
9	Moderation (Matigheid)	Protestantism
10	Consensus (Overeenstemming)	Holland
11	Equality (Gelijkheid)	Holland
12	Self-determination (Zelfbeschikking)	Holland

Table 7. the Underlying Values of the Dutch Culture (Enklaar, 2007)

The first four values have Christian origins, and the Dutch share them with other European countries, although these values have taken their own shape in the Netherlands (Enklaar, 2007). Therefore, it could be the case that the Dutch share these with the Italians. The first value is *Salvation* (Heil) which is about making the proper choices that lead to a happy future. The current situation is not the endpoint, and new ideas are good. The second value is *Guilt and remission* (Schuld), which is about recognizing and accepting responsibility for mistakes and actions. Apologies are accepted, and people may once again be trusted. The third value is *Charity* (Naastenliefde), which is about helping and supporting those in need. Do not do something to someone else you would not want done to you. It is preferable to consider others' interests over your own. The fourth value is *Truth* (Waarheid), which is always telling the truth, even if it hurts, because lying breaks trust. It is a good thing to be critical, and it is beneficial to be open about one's personal life and feelings.

The following five values are also called "Weberian Values" because these values were made known by Max Weber. These values are rooted in Protestantism and are shared by all nations with a predominately Protestant majority. It seems doubtful that these values represent Italian culture as there was no Protestant majority in Italy. The fifth value is *Work* (Arbeid), including that it is excellent to work hard, but it is not good to do nothing. The work that is completed should be of high quality. The sixth value is *Order and neatness* (Orde en netheid), which describes the Dutch wanting order, cleanliness, and rules to avoid confusion and disorder. Things are completed in a timely fashion. Being disorganized and untidy is linked to being irresponsible and antisocial. The seventh value is *Utility* (Nut) which describes that everything the Dutch undertake must be useful and profitable. Otherwise, it is a waste of resources, for instance, a waste of money or energy. The eighth value is *Reliability* (Betrouwbaarheid), mentioning that the Dutch fulfill their obligations if they have made a promise. Anyone who does not follow through on

their promises is untrustworthy. A vocal 'yes' in business indicates a deal has been reached. In Dutch society, there is a high level of trust. The ninth value is *Moderation* (Matigheid), involving that everything must be done in moderation; otherwise, things will go wrong. Be patient, keep composure, and do not exaggerate. Being out of control is immature and demonstrates a lack of self-control.

The last three values originate from Holland and are typical Dutch values spread throughout the Netherlands. The combination of these three values distinguishes the Dutch from others worldwide, probably also from the Italians. The tenth value is *Consensus* (Overeenstemming), which mentions that disputes must be settled peacefully. Aggression and violence must be avoided at all costs. To reach a consensus, the Dutch consult with one another to maintain a pleasant atmosphere. The eleventh value is *Equality* (Gelijkheid), mentioning that everyone should be treated equally regardless of rank. The Dutch do not regard themselves as superior to others and do not impose their will on others. Orders are phrased in the form of questions. The twelfth and final value is *Self-determination* (Zelfbeschikking), which mentions that everyone should be free to make their own decisions and express their opinions if they do not harm others. The Dutch should take the initiative and have personal freedom.

The Dutch cultural values will be contrasted with the Italian cultural values investigated in this thesis to emphasize the parallels and differences between the two cultures. These Dutch values are the cultural logic behind the Dutch cultural standards.

3. Methodology

This chapter will describe the research methodology regarding how the data is collected and how the data is analyzed. The methodology is divided into two phases: data collection and analysis methods. The study is part of the project 'One market, many cultures,' an initiative of the European Institute for Cross-Cultural Studies (CROCUS) and the section of Organisational Behaviour, Change (Management) & Consultancy (OBCC) at the University of Twente.

3.1 Research Design

This study explored Italian cultural standards by investigating concrete situations on the work floor where Dutch and Italian businesspeople encounter communication and collaboration problems due to cultural differences. It is most appropriate to employ a qualitative approach for this type of empirical research because it is concerned with people's lives, beliefs, experiences, behaviors, emotions, and feelings, as well as about organizational functioning, cultural phenomena, and relations between nations (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Researchers who study qualitative phenomena look for context, explanations, and interpretations, in contrast to quantitative researchers who seek causation, predictions, and generalizations (Hoepfl, 1997). *Figure 1* shows the research design used to identify Italian cultural standards.
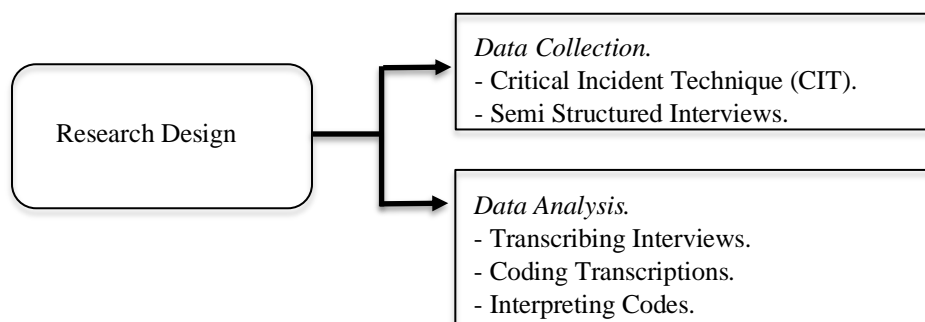
Figure 1. Visual Representation of the Research Design

3.2 Data collection

Interviews with 16 Dutch people living and working in Italy were conducted to acquire data for this study since data saturation is more likely to occur after 11 interviews (Thesing, 2016). The researcher used social media networks like LinkedIn and Facebook to reach potential interviewees, Dutch nationals working in Italy. Interview participants had to meet the following requirements. To begin, only interview participants who had worked in Italy for at least six months were chosen for the interview because then the

'honeymoon phase' of staying in a foreign country is, in most cases, over, and people become aware of cultural differences (Pedersen, 1995). Second, the Dutch interviewees had to be wholly integrated and collaborate with Italian colleagues to guarantee intense interaction with the Italian culture and discover cultural differences. Third, the demographic characteristics of the Dutch interview participants should preferably be varied. This study interviewed people from various economic sectors and regions of Italy to ensure that the participants are from geographically and economically varied areas. Other demographic parameters considered in this study included a diversity of gender, age, and the duration of their stay in Italy. These demographic traits may impact how Italian cultural standards are viewed. When all requirements were met, the researcher conducted a virtual interview utilizing Zoom, Teams, or Skype video call service.

3.3 Sample description

For this study, sixteen individuals living and working in Italy were interviewed. *Table 8* below presents the demographic characteristics of the Dutch interviewees working and living in Italy.

Interviewee no.	Gender	Age	Job title	Duration of time working in Italy (years)	Location
1	Female	40	Recruiter	13	Lake Garda
2	Female	58	Receptionist	20	Lake Garda
3	Female	50	Receptionist	12	Sardinia
4	Female	48	Assistente Defensie-attaché - translator	16	Rome
5	Female	32	Financial services	8	Bologna
6	Female	30	UX researcher	1	Milan
7	Female	52	Activity organizer and receptionist	4	Piedmont
8	Female	65	Receptionist gardening center	26	Vittorio Veneto
9	Female	33	Receptionist camping	10	Lake Garda
10	Female	35	Head of Talent	4	Milan

11	Female	58	Translator	26	Siena
12	Male	62	Gardening specialist	30	Sicily
13	Male	45	Defense material organization	4	Milan
14	Male	57	Head of operations	15	Alassio
15	Male	60	Technical Manager	20	Marano Vicentino
16	Male	57	Key Account Manager of Europe	5	Tuscany

*Table 8. Demographic characteristics of the Dutch interviewees*

3.4 Research Instrument

The data was collected through semi-structured interviews since these are ideal for analyzing respondents' thoughts and opinions on complicated and sometimes sensitive matters. According to Barriball et al. (1994), semi-structured interviews allow for additional information and clarification of replies. The disadvantage of employing semi-structured interviews is that respondents may reply in what they believe is the preferred social response. The semi-structured interviews were conducted by video conference with one person at a time. The interview partners were interviewed in their native language Dutch, by the Dutch researcher. Since being interviewed in one's native language, they can help the interviewee express themselves more directly and freely. Using a standard interview protocol with open questions, the interviewee will be asked to provide typical examples (critical incidents) that show Dutch-Italian cultural differences. The goal was to gather as many detailed stories on typical Italian behavior as possible. Interviewees sometimes preferred to make generalized statements and went from one instance to the next without being specific. Therefore, the researcher did thoroughly describe a situation by asking deepening questions. Successful interviews contained detailed accounts of what occurred on the job site, including how it began, who did what, how one individual behaved towards the other, and the outcome. Each interview was no more than 1,5 hours long. The interviews were converted from audio recordings into text using the program "AmberScript," which recognizes speech. As a result of the software's potential for transcribing errors, the author reviewed, edited, and improved the original transcription. The author, a native Dutch speaker with a strong command of English, translated the texts and quotes required to substantiate the analysis into English. The next step was to analyze the texts and quotes of the interviewees.

3.5 Data analysis

The data was analyzed using the Thematic Analysis. Due to its theoretical flexibility, it is a versatile and valuable research tool that can thoroughly explain data by identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The acquired data is organized using Gioia's et al. (2012) first-order concepts (in this study, the rephrased quotes), second-order themes (in this study, the cultural standards), and aggregate dimensions (in this study, the underlying values). The data analysis, using both the Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and the Gioia et al. Methodology (Gioia et al., 2012), is visualized in *Figure 2*. Afterward, these steps are explained in more detail.
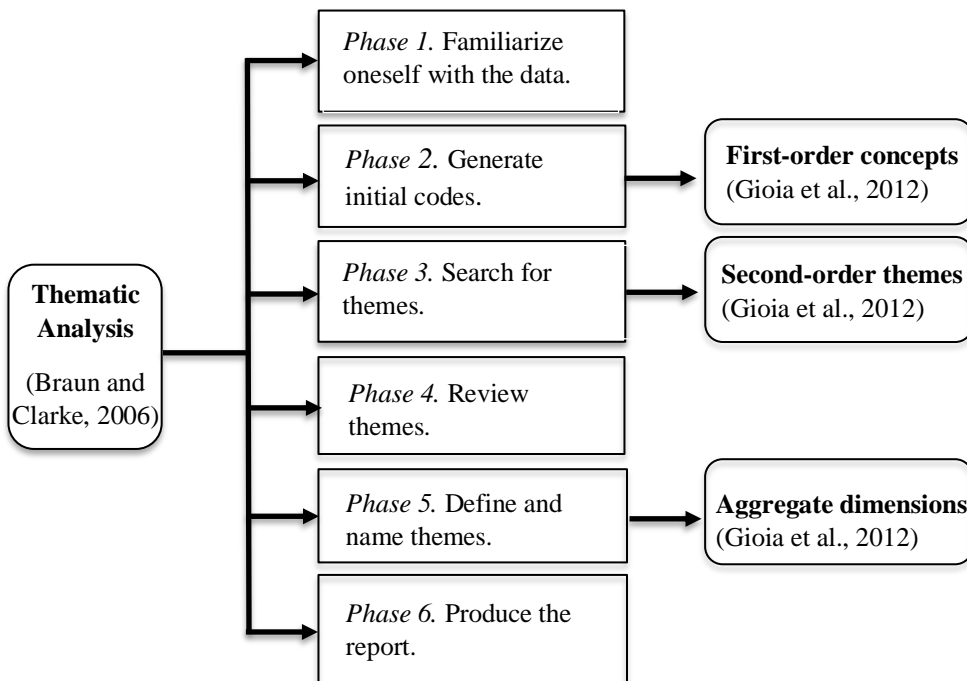
Figure 2. Data Analysis Conducted: Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and Gioia et al.'s Methodology (Gioia et al., 2012)

The thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) has six phases, and the analysis is not a linear process but a recursive process in which one can move back and forth throughout the phases. The first phase was to become familiar with the data by conducting the interviews, transcribing the interviews, and re-reading the gathered data. The second phase entailed creating initial codes, like the first-order concepts described by Gioia et al. (2012), by highlighting critical incidents in the transcripts and categorizing these as a specific concept. When categorizing these concepts, the respondents' precise words were used as much as possible but rephrased where necessary. Codes that overlapped one another were grouped in the same

theme. The third phase entailed searching for themes, accomplished by comparing the concepts and seeking similarities that led to establishing second-order themes, like forming the second-order themes in Gioia et al. (2012). The fourth phase included reviewing the themes and determining how they relate to the codes and transcripts. The data and themes have not yet been compared with existing literature because doing so too soon can cause the researchers to generate hypotheses. At the same time, a confirmation bias should be avoided (Gioia et al., 2012). The fifth phase included defining and naming the themes. After this step, the aggregate dimensions described by Gioia et al. (2012) were included. The sixth phase, and the final stage of the thematic analysis, was the creation of the report.

4. Results

This chapter will present the study's findings. First, there will be a brief description of the Italian cultural standards that were identified during this study, along with quotes obtained from the interviews and commentary on the opposing Dutch perspective. Additionally, these cultural standards are connected with Italian cultural values.

4.1 Italian Cultural Standards

The results of an in-depth analysis of the interviews and an additional evaluation by the focus group have resulted in the identification of *fourteen* Italian cultural standards. A summary of these Italian cultural standards can be found in *table 9*. Although the "frequency of occurrence is not necessarily an indicator of significance" (Saldaña 2016, p. 41), this paper assigned great importance to the frequency of an Italian behavior being mentioned by Dutch interviewees. If a behavior it mentioned multiple times, by different interviewees, it is more likely to be a 'typical' Italian behavior. The table does not include cultural standards mentioned by fewer than three interviewees since they are not considered "typical behavior."

Cultural Standard	Description	Mentioned by interviewees
Power division	The boss makes the decisions – his/her opinion counts	13
Indirectness	You do not clearly expose what you think or want	11
Time and appointment flexibility	Easily change time schedules or appointments.	10
Respect	You show more respect towards someone in a superior position	7
Status	Someone with a higher position shows his/her power and status	5
Relations	Strong personal relationships with those within the inner circle	5
Unequal treatment male-female	Inequality between men and women in a similar situation.	5
Control	The boss closely monitors the employees.	4
Formality	With a superior, you stay formal and distanced	4
Emotional display	Emotions are easily shown	4
Conservative	Keep what one has and what works	4
Keep the boss happy	Do not deviate from what the boss wants	3
Favoritism	You usually get your job based on your connection/relations	3
(non)verbal expression	Love to present themselves (non)verbally	3

Table 9. Italian cultural standards

Detailed descriptions of Italian cultural standards from a Dutch perspective can be found below. As a first step, a neutral description of the cultural standard is provided. Next, a few quotations from the interviews follow, which illustrate the critical incidents where this cultural standard is involved. Finally, at the end of every section, there is an explanation of how Italian cultural standards might conflict with (the) Dutch cultural standards.

Power division

A clear hierarchy between layers and groups within companies results in a great power division that must always be respected. Decision-making power rests with the highest-ranking person, and when they give orders, the lower-ranked people obey them. The boss intervenes when things are done wrong or must be done differently and wants to keep everything under control; if the boss were to delegate the decision-making power, this would diminish the importance of his role. However, the reluctance of superiors to share any information and decision-making power may be mirrored in the reluctance of the lower levels to assume responsibility and independently make their own decision. Another reason could be that employees are scared to do something wrong, which might get them fired, or because other colleagues may think they are trying to seek the boss' favors. Employees feel comfortable knowing where they are in the hierarchy and what can be expected and demanded from them. They do not give feedback on problems because subordinates do not want to contradict the boss; they may grumble about issues behind the boss's back. There is little to no initiative from subordinates because it can be considered disrespectful to bring up ideas that are not in line with the current system. Self-initiatives should be expressed in a one-on-one meeting, not in front of the group.

Quote 1: *"My boss sometimes asks for input and says: 'well, I really want to be the best, I pick a few people from the staff, I put them together, I let them brainstorm and then you will see, then come the good ideas.' He really wants that too. The problem is that people do not want to radically oppose current policies. They often do not dare to do that and much more than a new design for a logo, for a t-shirt you name it, that's what comes out. Well, then everyone starts drawing and the best drawing is chosen for the t-shirts. Yes, that is it (Interviewee 1)"*

Quote 2: *"In Italy, you might be in a meeting, and something is decided and then three days later you get an email saying: we are going to do it a different way because we spoke to a senior manager and he thinks this. So, it is still very controlled. The CEO says this, and then everyone starts running. So, it is still very traditional, you recognize that when the CEO starts to scream. I was not very used to that (Interviewee 4)."*

Quote 3: *"I work there and know a lot, maybe even more than the boss. But still, I have to ask things and ask permission. When the truck arrives with papers to be signed, then every time I have to call and ask: 'can I sign the papers?' the boss replies: 'yes, you can sign.' Tasks are not handed over. The boss always complained that they are so busy, but half the work the boss does I can do too. But yes, they do not want that, because I'm the employer and they are the boss (Interviewee 8)."*

In the Netherlands, employees are believed to be just as important as the boss for keeping the company running because of the strong Dutch value of 'Equality.' Decision-making in the Netherlands is fairly decentral. The employees are expected to work independently and be allowed to take on and realize tasks themselves, without the need for permission from the top, inspired by the strong Dutch value of 'self-determination.' Therefore, the fact that the Italian boss decides everything is tough to accept and swallow for Dutchmen, who are used to deciding for themselves or even when they must consult the boss, could openly discuss issues with their boss. Not being able to express their opinion, Dutchmen perceive this Italian way of working as inefficient because well-educated employees are not involved in the decision-making process by delivering initiative.

Indirectness

Italians do not quickly expose what they think or want; they use implicit language; messages are often hidden between the lines and not clearly expressed. Italians are not quick to say 'no' since they do not want to disappoint their business partners or colleagues, so a 'yes' should more often be seen as a 'maybe', 'no', or a 'yes, but..' Only with people with whom they have a strong relationship do they feel more comfortable telling directly if something is impossible. When employees give feedback or suggestions to superiors, there is often no feedback from the superior on whether (s)he did anything with it. Additionally, professional criticism is expressed indirectly and can be understood as personal criticism, negatively impacting business relationships. If criticism is unavoidable, it is appropriate to do it one-on-one, not in a group.

Quote 1: *"If we as a manager say something, and especially within technology, if we say something that is not entirely true or that someone else has reservations about, then we are actually used to receiving feedback. If we tell a story and it is not true or someone has different thoughts about it, then we expect that he will tell us that. Even if that person is lower in rank. Within technology, that is just a must, it can just be a safety issue. Well, yeah, that is not in Italy. So, if I tell something that is ultimately not executable, yes then I will not immediately receive feedback about this, it turns out later that it did not work and that it was also their expectation that it would not be executable. But they could have said that sooner. But you must be aware that this is not automatic here, that the feedback is not given immediately (Interviewee 13)."*

Quote 2: *"In February a manager came up to me and told me that they had some sort of calibration meeting and I thought: a calibration meeting, I had never heard of that. It is the annual moment when the supervisors discuss the teams with the management. So, I thought: is this some kind of performance appraisal? But it was never with me personally. Then the manager started to explain that they were satisfied and that everything was going well. Then I thought: this is a kind of performance appraisal, but I am not participating in the meeting. The information discussed goes through a lot of layers before I hear about it, or maybe I never hear about it, this is annoying. In the Netherlands, this information would be discussed directly with me."(Employee 6)*

In the Netherlands, it is believed that directness is more important than being friendly. They use implicit language to express criticism and feedback because of the Dutch value 'Truth (Waarheid),' which entails that honesty and openness are better than hiding painful things. The indirect way of giving feedback of Italians is perceived as inefficient and annoying because the Dutch want clarity, want to know where they stand and do not constantly want to be surprised by new facts. The Dutch expect immediate positive or negative feedback, which can be given in a group setting.

Time and appointment flexibility

Italians have a flexible perception of time and agreements. Flexibility is more important than strictly sticking to the planning; hence they quickly change schedules or appointments. Initial decisions can always change later if situational factors require it. Italians accept minor delays in agreements and deadlines and sometimes even expect them. The working hours are more fluid, and it is customary to work overtime when a work task is not finished yet. Italians are less strict with being precisely on time; being a little bit late is met by others with acceptance and does not need an apology. Arriving a few minutes late to the next meeting is often met with acceptance because when you are late due to a previous meeting you show that you value relationships and the person over the time and task. Italians plan shortly in advance, and there is less looking ahead because there is more uncertainty in the long term. This flexibility with time may also be seen in business meetings that lack a formal structure and agenda, where people speak through each other and make no report.

Quote 1: *"Last year black Friday, then you know that all websites have black Friday promotions. But at the last minute they come up with things like: do you want to test this and do you want to check this again? And then I think: yes, if you had asked three weeks ago, I could have planned it in my agenda because I do plan ahead. I told them I do not have time for it anymore and I can't split myself up and work*

overtime. I had reported this to my manager and he passed it on to the rest of the team. Since then, I have not received any new assignments from that specific team (Interviewee 6)."

Quote 2*: "Look, if we have a Teams meeting with a Dutch customer or a German customer, then I'm in the online business meeting ten minutes in advance. My Italian colleague is quietly able to arrive six minutes late and each time the Dutch project leader is annoyed and says: "we have been waiting here for six minutes. Why are you six minutes late" And then my colleague says: "What are you talking about, it is only six minutes.' If you are late, you implicitly say: I am more important than you, you just must wait for me. I also said that to my Italian engineer. I say: 'Alessandro, do you actually know what you're saying to me? That you are fifteen minutes late every time? You say, I am more important than you, you wait.' Now he is finally on time, it took me 5 years. Before, you are with him in a Teams meeting with 10 people and he is late. There are 9 people waiting for fifteen minutes, that is two hours in which you burn 250 euros, right. (Interviewee 16)."*

The Dutch strictly adhere to planning and agreements and value order and neatness. Not making any preparations and improvision is not appreciated in the Netherlands. Appointments and obligations are recorded in the agenda, often long in advance, and the Dutch do not appreciate it if something must be done suddenly at the last minute or when deadlines are not met. Furthermore, the Italian behavior of arriving late can be perceived as unreliable and disrespectful by the Dutch: you are to arrive on time for your appointment. The Dutch perceive time as valuable and worth money that should not be wasted by disruptions in the planning. Moreover, it is considered annoying when meetings are messy because the Dutch are used to having organized meetings with an agenda.

Respect

Showing respect is fundamental in Italian business etiquette, so great consideration is given to someone older, with more working experience, or with a higher position within the company. In Italian culture, paying respect means listening to what the superior has to say and not going into a discussion with a superior. If you are on the same level, you get equal respect; if this is not the case, there is no mutual respect. If someone has a higher rank, (s)he is less likely to be talked over than if people are on the same level. Lower-ranked individuals should show humbleness during an interaction with a higher-ranked individual. Furthermore, one must never question the status of a superior by behaving as if you know better since it comes across as disrespectful. If a superior asks a subordinate to do something, it is immediately executed, and concerns are not expressed.

Quote 1: *"I had to check in German guests who arrived at the hotel. Something went wrong in the check-in process and I asked the boss a question about how to solve it. She answered my questions in a way I disliked in front of the guest. I told her I did not like being treated that way in front of the guests. My boss replied, in front of the guests: 'We have a hierarchy here and you're supposed to respect me and you don't argue with me when I say something to you, don't contradict me.' Then I said to her: 'If you treat me as you do now, I will always contradict you. If you have something to say to me, you do not do it when guests are present.' Then she became even angrier and walked away. Sometime later, I resigned from the job (Interviewee 2)."*

Quote 2: *"I once had a conflict with someone who was higher in the hierarchy, a few levels above me, and I did not understand it. That person was frustrated with me and he also expressed that to me. I asked the other Italians: 'What was the problem? What should I have done differently?' I want to learn from it because I do not want to be in conflict with that person. The conflict was very much about recognizing the position of the person. So, someone standing higher in the hierarchy and me lower in the hierarchy, and I actually put myself on the same level during that meeting, so I suddenly bridged that distance. During the meeting, I was confident and I explained things and I was happy, I was positive about what we had achieved, but I was told: 'yes, you have to maintain that relationship based on hierarchy.' A few years ago, I was really frustrated about that. But now I just position myself lower in the hierarchy and I think: yes, if that helps this person to be satisfied (Interviewee 10)."*

In the Netherlands, people of different hierarchical levels treat each other as equals, regardless of age, experience, or position. They take turns speaking during business meetings and show equal respect to everyone. Furthermore, if the superior tells something incorrectly, immediate feedback is given, even if this is from someone with a lower rank. Among the Dutch, always acting friendly and overly respectful to higher-ranked individuals is considered hypocritical. Hypocritical behavior goes against the Dutch value of Equality since the Dutch believe that inequality is unjust and that everyone should be treated equally. Therefore, those with exceptional achievements or careers should not look down on ordinary individuals and should not feel better than anyone else. As a result, Dutch people are not used to respecting rank differences and have difficulty treating higher-ranked individuals with extra respect.

Status

Italians openly show their status and professional pride at all times. Material attributes such as cars, houses, and clothes can raise status. How you dress speaks volumes about you, and it is essential to dress properly

because Italians place great attention and value on it. A boss can show business success by buying and showing off luxury products. Immaterial attributes such as work experience, position, and rank also increase status. Higher-status individuals are taken more seriously than lower-status individuals. Not everyone is equally important in the workplace; those with a lower rank are less valued. The boss indicates to the employer who is the boss/superior.

Quote 1: *"I was at the business event in Munich last week and then I think: It is too hot. You know, I just go in jeans and it was hot in that hall. But my Italian colleague Allen was in a tight suit. Tie on, not a wrong fold of his shirt. That reflects his status: I am important, you can be my guest, because they are very hospitable, but they position themselves very emphatically. We also have a German client, and the two sisters who are management went out to dinner with the general manager of the German client last Wednesday. Well, everything was perfect, the clothes were bought from the best boutique shop. Yes, they are always very well dressed when they go out to dinner with customers. And the financial director of the family business has an Audi a8. Well, I have not seen it driving in the Netherlands yet. We Dutch then think: hey, just act normal. But they think this is normal. They show with this: look, we are a successful family business, and we can afford this, period (Interviewee 16)."*

Quote 2: *"The boss values high status. Designer clothes and bags, big expensive cars, and houses. As employees, we were given work clothes, a blouse, or a polo shirt, and I was wearing short jeans and Birkenstocks flip-flops. I got to choose what I wore. But you are criticized based on your clothes, sometimes I had to go to the ATM when I was off work, and I had to pass the reception, then they would all check me out. I also have a car, which is important for status, but I do not care. The boss also would make jokes about my dirty car or that I had to sleep in a little tent on the camping, and they would say about it: 'yes, but you sleep in that little tent' (Interviewee 9)."*

In the Netherlands, one should not give the impression that you consider yourself better than someone else or that someone else is less than you based on a function. Everyone is equally important in the workplace. The Italian behavior of status showing through luxury goods can come across as bragging to Dutch people. Dutch businesspeople put less emphasis on material and immaterial attributes. If individuals constantly show their material and immaterial attributes in the Netherlands, they would be viewed as annoying or think they are better than someone else. Dutch individuals value Equality and view everyone as equal; one must not show that (s)he is superior to another person. The Dutch said things such as 'Act normal, that is already crazy enough' when Italians were showing off material and immaterial attributes.

Relations

Italians attach great importance to strong personal relationships with those within the inner circle, such as family, friends, and close colleagues. People within the inner circle are trusted and helped where possible, while those outside the circle are distrusted and not given much help. Those in the inner circle discuss private topics and may gossip about colleagues; with those in the outer circle, little is shared. On the work floor, small talk is essential to establishing business relationships, such as about one's health. Relationships are built through intensive contact and are not easily broken down. People are more willing to do something for you if you have good relationships with them: *"You help me, I help you."* Addressing people in person is more effective than email because they feel more involved with personal contact. There is much direct contact, such as hugging, in the workplace. Colleagues can become friends who also engage in activities outside of work.

Quote 1: *"What I sometimes found difficult with my Italian colleagues is that they treat each other in a very personal and friendly way. They are very close, Italians. Sometimes I also see colleague relationships where I think: isn't that a bit too much? Don't you share too much with each other? Aren't you gossiping a little too much about other colleagues? They go to dinner together, they go to the pool together. That is something that also showed me on the other side that the Dutch are often always seen as very open and friendly and easy to get along with, but they are not that open and are not so quick to share their private lives. I am more used to work and private relationship that does not merge (Interviewee 5)."*

Quote 2: *"People pay much more attention to informal conversations, explain more and take their time. While the Dutch are more about doing business directly and consulting quickly. The Italian talk a lot about their personal health. I am always surprised how many people share their entire medical history, how they feel, and how much fever they have. Here you can ask 'How are you," and then they will tell you how they had a bladder infection, how many paracetamols they had to take, and that they had a fever yesterday night. In the beginning, I used to think okay, okay, and now I am just going with it, but I would not do the same. I often think: I do not want such information (Interviewee 10)."*

Quote 3: *"When they went out to dinner, one employee was asked to join in and the other was not. Sometimes they would go out during work hours to get coffee, because that is what they do in Italy, but then they would not ask me. So, I got the feeling that I was left out (Interviewee 9)."*

In the Netherlanders, colleagues are friendly and open to each other, but to a certain extent. At times, the Dutch may find that Italians tell each other too much private information and that private life and work are

too intertwined; this is perceived by the Dutch as too personal. The Dutch strive for a friendly atmosphere in the workplace but prefer private life and work to be more separated. In Italy, little information is asked for and shared with you when you do not belong to the inner circle. This Italian behavior can appear formal to the Dutch, and they can feel excluded because they are not asked to participate in specific conversations or events. Moreover, the Italian behavior of not always helping someone when there is no relationship can be perceived as unhelpful by the Dutch, who are used to helping everyone regardless of the relationship because the Dutch trust everyone by default. The Italians tend to have small talk during business meetings, to build a relationship, but to the Dutch, this can be perceived as unnecessary and a waste of time.

Unequal treatment male-female

In Italy, there is inequality between a man and a woman in a similar situation. A woman is taken less seriously and has a lower chance of getting a high salary and a promotion than a man. Women are also less likely to be hired if they have not yet had children. In the workplace, men are competitive with one another while women collaboratively communicate more. Men are friendlier and politer towards women and want to do them a favor, but they may also make sexist jokes about women. Yet, the image of women has changed in recent years: *"In Italy, during recent years, the theme of 'Me too' and emancipation is addressed more"* (Interviewee 5).

Quote 1: *"There is a difference in salary for men and women. Coincidentally, I saw the working salary of a man who worked here, and he made much more. And we thought: but why? Is this just because you are a man? I did not understand it because that specific person sometimes says things that make you think: Heh, do you even you know what you are doing? But he earns a lot more than me. This also applies to job promotions (Interviewee 11)."*

Quote 2: *My directors are two women, that is very special in an Italian context, right, because in Italy it is still the case that the man is first, then nothing for a long time, and then the woman. And this I once experienced when one of the male board members came with me to a negotiation in Austria and he was really woman-unfriendly, this was not normal. Then I called my boss and I told him: "I will not accept that behavior from anyone, also not from my fellow colleague". What I also saw, when the female directors came along for a conversation, they are not addressed directly, but then they talk to the male engineer. That is very strange and then I say: "we are emancipated, right" and then they say, while they are women: "Yes, in Northern Europe, but we are not". Masculine Italians behave like this, you can say something about this, but then you will not get very old. In terms of emancipation, a lot still needs to be done in Italy. (Interviewee 16)."*

Quote 3: *"Coincidentally, a few months ago, one of the great designers, a woman, said: 'I only hire women when they are older, otherwise, I will not hire them.' She meant when the women's children are no longer kids and that they are older than twelve years old. I have had several colleagues who came back from maternity leave and went to a lawyer anyway to get their jobs back. On the other hand, I have also had women who were difficult to handle, and whose children are three or four years old. And then, I try to put together a holiday schedule for everyone. Well, the lady, ma'am, had another month of maternity leave, and she went on vacation. Well, I have four men under me. I do not want her to take a vacation and then, when the kids are at school, must go on vacation because she must go in August. I do not think that is fair. But she thinks: but that is no problem; I will take my maternity leave anyway. Yeah bye. They take advantage of the maternity leave, and I have always tried to maintain a collegial atmosphere. But yes, that does not always work (Interviewee 14)."*

The Dutch find it shocking and unacceptable if women are disadvantaged in a company compared to men. They perceive this inequality between men and women as unjust because this behavior goes against the Dutch value of' Equality (Gelijkheid).' The Dutch believe men and women should have the same chance to receive a particular job position, promotion, or salary. Moreover, they believe that women also have an equal voice within a company, which should be listened to directly. Therefore, the Dutch can react fiercely to possible cases of discrimination.

Control

Italian bosses closely monitor workers. Managers want to control everything personally without some delegation of responsibilities. Therefore, the boss gives employees precise instructions and regularly checks on the subordinates to ensure they carry out their tasks correctly to maintain control. The performance level is less strict; the boss must monitor the employees closely; otherwise, they do not perform the work they must do. Procedures are followed strictly by the boss; employees do not decide without the permission of a superior. When a situation is out of control, the Italian boss will intervene and give strict orders in an authoritarian way. The subordinate will have to obey without question.

Quote 1: *"I have worked for an Italian boss who told me to share my location with her, so that she could always see where I was. She also told me to put on the green finks on WhatsApp so that she could see that I received and read her messages. Once, she called me up angrily and asked where I was. I told her that I am getting the materials for an event later that day at the club. She told me to come back to the club immediately. I told her that I put another employee on the job while I am away, and that she should trust*

me and give me some freedom since I am a manager. Again, she told me to come back to the club and get the materials during my break (Interviewee 1)."

Quote 2: *"My boss was a former head of internal audit. Especially in the financial world, these are people who are very concerned with that you have to do everything according to the procedure. As a bank we were 300 people, and I led twelve people. You can't have perfect procedures for the amount of things you do, and those procedures aren't always right. I have taken the position and if you put me in the role of dirigente (director), then I have the right to decide whether a procedure is not right, and then do the right processes. And I report that. Madame disagreed. She thought I should have a meeting about that first and this and that, this, and that. That I had to ask permission. Well, I did not think 'so. Here, in Italy, it is simply: the procedure says this, and if you do not do this, then you are not allowed, you must look exactly at the procedure (Interviewee 14)."*

Dutch dislike possible demands that might have been imposed on dealing with hierarchy. Employees are entitled to a certain degree of privacy at work and are not monitored on their work. Employees show self-initiative, do not constantly have to be told what to do, and are responsible for making their own choices. They value 'Self-determination (Zelfbeschikking)' and do not just accept that someone above them imposes a standard they must adhere to. They find it annoying when a boss is controlling since it would mean that the boss does not have confidence in them or their ability to fulfill their responsibility. Even though everything is well arranged and organized according to procedures, Dutch people tend to break the rules if they do not see the point of following the rule, as described by the value 'Utility (Nut).'

Formality

Italians communicate formally and professionally when in a business context. The people are addressed with 'signor', 'signora', 'Dr.','Ing., and so forth, especially when it is their boss. This formality continues over time since the boss values this way of being addressed. The subordinate may also feel uncomfortable addressing the superior by their first name because they have much respect for them. Hence, they would use surnames, sometimes even between colleagues, especially if they are not close, perhaps from another department or business unit. Furthermore, personal details are often not shared on the work floor. Personal details are often only shared with insiders, people they trust, such as family, friends, or close colleagues. They will not have in-depth conversations with strangers; they will stay formal and make small talk.

Quote 1: *"In the Netherlands, you can be a big boss at a big company. But he was always addressed as 'you'. That is absolutely not done here. They always address someone with 'u' and this keeps the distance*

between employee and employer. You cannot just say 'you' to anyone here." The owners of the campsite were a maximum of 10 years older than me, so not very old. I must address them formally. I find it difficult to address someone formally who is my age and who is a multimillionaire. I understand you own the company, but do not pretend you are better than us. The Dutch mentality is, you can be a multimillionaire and drive the most expensive car, but you treat everyone the same. I treated the boss like a boss but I am not going to worship him and that is what they expect from employees sometimes (Interviewee 9)."

Quote 2: *"The hierarchy is way more present here than in Italy. In the Netherlands, you can be a big boss at a big company. But the boss will always be addressed as 'tu (informal you).' That is absolutely not done here, and employees always address me with 'Lei (formal you),' and this keeps the distance between employee and employer. I have accepted this, but I do not always like this. You cannot just say 'tu' to everyone here. The employees perceive it as comfortable to keep the distance, so I never said something about it to them. I did tell three other colleagues, who also own a company, to address me with 'tu' (Interviewee 12)."*

For the Dutch, being overly polite and formal to colleagues is unnecessary because the formal communication 'u' can come across as cold and unfriendly, creating distance and, thus, inequality. Therefore, the Dutch prefer informal communication, such as 'Jij,' since it contributes to a friendly ('Gezellige') atmosphere. Furthermore, the use of 'Jij' to a subordinate while having to say 'u' to a boss is unacceptable in the Netherlands because formal language goes against the Dutch value of 'Equality (Gelijkheid).' Therefore, Dutch superiors often let their subordinates know that they can address them informally with 'Jij.' The formal way of speaking is only used during the beginning of relationships with people you respect.

High Spirit / Emotional Display

Italians clearly show their emotions to the outside world. For example, high spirits can occur during arguments, such as raising the voice, cursing, and intense emotions. Arguments are often not settled, the individuals involved do not discuss the argument and the argument is left unsolved. The arguments do not impact the relationships, the next day the individuals involved in the argument communicate and act toward one another the way they did before the argument. The emotional outbursts are often quickly forgotten by the individuals involved. During arguments, there is a greater focus on non-verbal communication, such as hand gestures, facial expressions, movements, and speed of interaction during an argument.

Quote 1: *"I had just started working as an animator, and an Easter treasure hunt contest for kids had to be organized. So, I took the lead and started organizing the contest. We were busy from eight o'clock in the morning until 12 o'clock in the evening. At the end of the day, the boss was angry and yelled at the whole group of five animations about poor performance, lazy behavior, and failure. I got super emotional. The same evening, I took my boss aside, and I told him: "what is happening here, I will not allow it. I will not have someone yell at me, not my brother, not my friend, not my parents, and not you." The boss replied: "I did not yell at you; it was meant for someone else who was lazy." It turned out that there was one Italian colleague who had been in the business for much longer, who just sat down in a corner and played games on his phone. I replied: "then you should not have yelled at the whole group." But this is normal in Italy, while I think the boss could have patted me on the back for what I put down that day. It is not easy to guide 90 children on a small budget with a small number of employees. He did not have to scream. I burst into tears, there was a lot of overwhelming crying, and then he said in that group: 'yes, you should not take it personally, and that is why I also knocked on his door in the evening at the bungalow. I said: 'This is not possible.' First, I was very sad, then angry, but we solved the conflict. I said: 'we do it like this; otherwise, you should search for another Dutch individual who wants to do this job,' but most Italians would not dare to say the same (Interviewee 1)."*

Quote 2: *"If I tell my employees something directly, they shut down. If they get angry, they raise their voice, use lots of hand gestures, walk away, and that kind of thing. The Dutch try to reach consensus through talking with one another, they may avoid one another for some time, but an Italian can become angry faster, walk away, and avoid one another, even for years. They will not say easily: let's sit together, and we talk it out (Interviewee 12)."*

In the Netherlands, this emotional display through raising the voice of cursing can be interpreted as aggression, considered abnormal. Dutch hate arguing and openly fighting disagreements, so they try their best to listen to everyone's complaints. Quarrels must be discussed, and the boss is calm when frustrations are outed. If opinions have been heated, people shouted at or called each other names, the relationship is damaged, and the dispute must be settled. Many Dutch people must first talk through a fight before getting along again. The argument is not over if people have not spoken about it because no negative emotions should linger. For the Dutch, arguing is severe and infringes 'Sociability (Gezelligheid)' and a sense of security.

Conservative

In Italy, they tend to keep what they have and what works; the current situation often remains unchanged. Providing input about how things can become more efficient is not appreciated because Italians prefer to choose the trusted method instead of changing it for perhaps a better or more efficient alternative. Even when a procedure can become efficient in many more ways, they will leave it how it is because it simply works. The Italians avoid trying methods that might complicate their work and provide uncertainty. Italians also show conservativeness outside work; local traditions remain and are not easily broken.

> Quote 1: *"If things go and work, although it can be improved in 10 different ways to become effective, they will not be changed. Until 8 years ago, we worked with paper booklets for customer reservations, and fax was still used. Because the fax is there, and it still works. Saying something about it is not appreciated (Interviewee 9)."*

> Quote 2: *"They stick very closely to what others are doing instead of thinking for themselves, instead of thinking: what are those tourists actually going to want? If you take 10 restaurants here, 8 restaurants have the same menu; they just copy that from each other. While as a Dutch person you would think: if I go on holiday as a Dutch person in Italy, what would I like to eat? that is, of course, something typical of where you are going. But no, here they all just do a standard menu with few real Sardinian things on it. I do not like that (Interviewee 5)."*

The Dutchmen are always concerned about how they can do their work more efficiently or achieve better results. When they see a way of doing their work more efficiently, they report it to their superiors, and superiors value such input. Therefore, the Dutch do not understand why Italian superiors perceive their input as rude or unnecessary. For them, not considering employee input is perceived as frustrating because why not improve something that 'can be improved in ten different ways to become more effective.' In the Netherlands, change often takes place, and innovations are valued. The Dutch perceive the Italians as traditional, giving little attention to innovation. The Dutch do not understand the value of having bad and old systems, while a new version could increase work efficiency.

Keep the boss happy

In Italy, employees do not deviate from what the boss wants. Employees are not quick to say no to the boss because they want to keep the boss happy. The boss is very demanding and requires continuous effort. The boss wants employees to work hard and be satisfied that they have a job because: *'for you ten others.'* If you do not want the job, is it easy for the boss to replace you with someone else who can work harder. The

employees also work over hours to keep their boss pleased. Moreover, when performing tasks in the workplace, employees are doing things in a way the boss probably wants instead of providing new ideas.

Quote 1: *"There was an attitude: always work and my boss must be satisfied, even if I must work later in the evening, I will. Sometimes I see this happening, and I also say that to the slightly older employees: 'turn off that computer, it is 7:30 in the evening, we should not be working anymore'. In the Netherlands you have more fixed working hours and you often work from 9 to 5, then you are done."* (Interviewee 5)

Quote 2: *"If my colleague wants a day off or something, then my colleague doesn't dare to ask the boss, and then she says to me: 'Well, just tell me you are off those specific days, then I do not need to work those other days.' But then I think: why do not you ask yourself if you can be free that day. Then I say: 'Why should I do that, do it yourself'. When I tell that to my colleague, she pretends she did not hear me, because Italians would not say that. She takes no initiative; I tell her this every time. At the moment, I have a zero-hours contract, and I should work as much as possible. My colleague has a contract, and the boss makes her work a lot, and she does not want to work that much, but she does not dare to say no. Then she comes to me and says: 'why don't you tell the managers that you want to work more because you have a zero-hour contract'. Then I said to her 'why don't you tell the manager you want to work less because you're tired'. I am not going to do what she asks me."* (Interviewee 8).

For the Dutch, it is normal to speak up when you think your boss is asking things that are not reasonable or when you as an employee have special wishes. Employees can also deviate from the boss's wants and develop their ideas. It is important to show initiative by helping to brainstorm and deliver new ideas (self-determination). The Dutch work their contract hours and often do not work overtime because they tend to keep to schedules and appointments.

Favoritism

In Italy, people usually get their job based on connections or relationships instead of being the most competent person. Establishing an extensive network of relationships is essential in Italy to implement plans and achieve goals more quickly and easily. Outsiders are distrusted and need to develop their network to get things done. Insiders, such as family and friends, are trusted and help one another to get things done. Hence, within companies, family members and close friends often occupy high-ranked positions, even if they do not always have the necessary job skills. When the boss retires, family members will take over the company, whether they can do the job or not.

Quote 1: *"Some people get job positions they are not suitable for, also on important positions such as that of a manager or director, because they are a friend, family member, or an acquaintance. My husband applied for a job and had the highest score of everyone who applied. But another individual, who scored a 6, received the job because he was an acquaintance of the boss. Those who are more competent are set to the side, decreasing the efficiency (Interviewee 1)."*

Quote 2: *"At one point, one of my colleagues was quieter and moodier. I asked her: 'Did I say something wrong because I see you holding me back'. Then she said: 'it has nothing to do with you, more with our manager, but we don't understand why they hired you instead of our colleague who has been working here for some time'. I said to her: 'I understand that you find that difficult, but they wanted to hire someone who speaks English to carry out the project'' She said: 'yes, yes, but it's still not fair, that girl has been working here for a year, and we disagree.' But I can't do anything with this; I didn't like that (Interviewee 7)."*

Quote 3: *"One of the family members, a boy, a very sweet guy. But you should not put him in front of an argument with a customer. He was one of the owners, but he did not have the position of an owner or manager, he worked on the same level as I. He has that position purely because he is family, not because he does his work well or because he is a good owner. If he had nothing to do, he would be playing on his phone or drinking coffee at the bar. He was taking up a position of a colleague, so we were basically working with one less colleague because he was not present. We had to work hard, work over hours because he was always taking his time. He was very nice but unsuitable for the job, but he was the brother of one of the family members (Interviewee 9)."*

In the Netherlands, people usually get their job based on their skills, and everyone has equal opportunities when they apply because they do not get their job based on their network. For the Dutch, it can be frustrating when individuals are hired only because they are family or friends. Then there are people taking up job positions without the right competencies, meaning work may be performed less efficiently. Furthermore, the Dutch may perceive this as an unfair process because if people do not have an extensive network, one is unlikely to get where they deserve to be, even if they have the right diplomas and grades. This corresponds with the Dutch value 'Equality (Gelijkheid)' in the Netherlands; people are treated equally and having a greater network does not increase one's chances of success.

(Non)verbal expression

Italians love to present themselves verbally and nonverbally. Thoughts and ideas are expressed loudly and with many expressive gestures. They have an expressive communication style in which many hand gestures are used, each of which has meaning. Conversations overlap, and people must talk over someone themselves where necessary. Italians like to tell their story and impress the audience. If a colleague cannot speak Italian and only speaks English, they try to avoid communicating with that individual because speaking English forms a barrier to conversations.

Quote 1*: "But they talk a lot, gladly, and for a long time and sometimes it also makes me impatient. They are talking for hours and have numerous PowerPoint slides, explaining this and explaining that, when you can just say it in three minutes. And then you are done. If there are people who know each other well and who are on the same level, then they can also talk through each other (Employee 4)."*

Quote 2: *"When I am with colleagues in person, I notice more that talking over each other. Other than that, I find it quite exhausting, as anyone can imagine when everyone is constantly talking and you are trying to get a word in between. And so, it is tiring, of course. In the Netherlands, as soon as it happens maybe once it is like: 'oh, oh, sorry you wanted to say something' and an Italian just keeps going. I have had meetings for an hour and say nothing there. Sometimes in Italy I really get the idea, as soon as someone does not know what to say for a while, then I directly have to say what I want to say, because otherwise there will not be room for me to say anything (Employee 5)."*

The Dutch do not want to be overly prominent; they talk shortly and direct about something. The Dutch perceive the expressive communication style of Italians as talking too long about something that can be told in short. The Dutch perceive it as exhausting when Italians are constantly talking and conversations overlap, and they sometimes find it difficult to get a word in. The Dutch think it is rude to talk over someone else, and they will give their excuses and let them finish speaking. The Dutch are constantly tuning in to others to see if there is still consensus or can be reached; people expect speaking turns to alternate orderly, and only one person speaks at a time.

In addition to the cultural standards mentioned above, one more Italian cultural standard was discovered. However, this is not included as an Italian cultural standard since one interviewee only mentioned it; therefore, these were not considered typical enough. The first one is called '*Hospitality.*' Italian companies place high importance on giving a royal reception to guests; they pick them up with an expensive car, let them stay the night in the best hotel, and provide food, drinks, or ceremonies. Someone with the same rank

often welcomes a guest with a high ranking, or higher and shows love for protocols. Therefore, it is essential to welcome the guests warmly. Italians want to present Italian excellence; they want to honor the guest and show what they have to offer and who they are.

One interviewee mentioned: *"The general, the chief of the air force, comes to watch an exercise in Italy and he just simply comes to see his people and he really wanted to keep everything pretty low profile and just informal. But then those Italians, at the base where it arrives, will still have an honorary package and another general of the same rank would be waiting for him. And then there is a whole protocol part with what in the Netherlands, which you would simply skip. The Dutch consider this a waste of time, and they do not need it. On the other hand, if it happens, hey, and if our Dutch general chats with the Italian general for a while. In the end, that Dutch general goes back to the Netherlands happier than when he arrived, because he thinks, his mind is just doing business and just doing what I have in mind. But in the end, the Italian charm, the Italian coffee, the Italian chatter, the Italian is something that warms his heart. So, at the same time, he is also happy about it (Interviewee 4)."*

Through the interviews, sixteen Italian cultural standards have been identified from the Dutch perspective. These are certain characteristics of the Italians that the Dutch found outstanding, typical, or just simply different from their own usual behaviors. Next, this study will look at quotes mentioned by an Italian interviewee and classify those quotes with the cultural standards found in this section, and this will serve as a kind of check.

4.2 Italian Interviewee about cultural differences experienced in the Netherlands

Next to the sixteen interviews conducted with Dutch men about Italians, one more interview was conducted with a thirty-year-old Italian man who grew up in Italy, Vedano Olona, who lived in Italy for twenty-one years and worked there for five years. Afterward, the interviewee moved to the Netherlands to work and learn the Dutch language. The interview was conducted in the Dutch language.

According to interviewee 17, Italians have a cautious and indirect language style. They do not quickly say 'no' to their superiors; they obey and carry out the task, even when they do not want to. By obeying a request, they keep a friendly atmosphere. In contrast, the Dutch are not so careful with their words because honor is not easily affected. They quickly say 'no' to a superior and do not feel the need always to obey their superior. This behavior corresponds with the Italian cultural standard 'Indirectness' discovered in section *4.1*, which entails that Italians do not clearly expose what they think or want.

Quote 1: *"I have had difficulty because of your language, for example, you say: 'are you crazy or something' and I had to learn that that is not necessarily a swear word. But it is more of a way of saying something, making a joke, but in Italy you would not tell someone they are crazy as a joke. No, because the meaning of the words is really different. It is a bit more normal here, that is just the spoken language. In Italy, you do not say things like this, then yes, that has led to many clashes. Now I see it as funny, then not."*

Quote 2: *"On the work floor, the Dutchman says: 'I do not feel like doing this now,' and an Italian says: 'Okay, I will do it for you', even if you do not really feel like doing it. Most of the time, you will do the task. You do not want to hurt the other person by saying, 'Hey, listen, I hate to say it, but I don't have time, I will not do that, do it yourself.' Instead, you are actually a bit more empathetic about it or something, more: okay, I will take it over. But in the end, you also have yourself with this. Because occasionally it is not a problem. But well, if you do not dare to say how you see it every time, then that other person will not know either, or that person will probably ask more often if you can help him out, while you do not want this. You do this to keep the peace, friendship, and a friendly atmosphere. We do not say 'no' quickly. We talk around it, and this is exhausting. "*

Quote 3: *"Italians are more obedient in the sense of: the boss told me what to do, I will just go home, angry because I do not agree, but I am not saying this to my boss, I am just going to do it because I have to. And in the Netherlands, they just say: 'no, I do not agree.' They will protest and complain and give their opinion. As an Italian, I just said, 'okay, I will do what needs to be done.' And I think: just leave me alone after this."*

Furthermore, according to interviewee 17, there is a difference in fulfilling agreements between the Dutch and Italians. In Italy, agreements, even those in one's contract, are more flexible. In the Netherlands, an agreement in the contract must be adhered too. This Italian behavior corresponds with the Italian cultural standard 'Time and appointment flexibility' discovered in *section 4.1*, which entails Italians easily changing time schedules or appointments.

Quote 4: *"In Italy, salaries were not paid on time, and sometimes, I had to wait two or three weeks for the salary. That is a really sad story. In my job as a swimming instructor, I sometimes really must wait 2 or 3 weeks for my salary. My father also, who has always worked in Italy, after 2 weeks he just had to ask: 'hey, when will I get my salary? What is the current situation?'. In the Netherlands, I once had my salary paid late. But it was neatly mentioned that there was a system malfunction. That can happen, but in Italy, this was standard."*

Moreover, according to interviewee 17, there is inequality between men and women in Italy regarding which job position they can reach, and there is more equality within the Netherlands. This Italian behavior corresponds with the Italian cultural standard 'Unequal treatment of male-female' discovered in *section 4.1*, which entails that there is inequality between men and women in a similar situation in Italy.

Quote 5: *"Italy lags behind the Netherlands and is still a bit more patriarchal, that the man is more important. The Netherlands is somewhat freer from new thoughts and new movements, etc., more equality. In Italy, most men hold the largest positions in companies and the women struggle to get there."*

Lastly, according to interviewee 17, an Italian manager shows emotions more clearly than a Dutch manager. An Italian manager clearly expresses his anger to an employee, while a Dutch manager will remain calmer. This Italian behavior corresponds with the Italian cultural standard 'Emotional display' discovered in *section 4.1,* which entails emotions are easily shown by Italians.

Quote 6: "*Well, the feedback I got when I was working as a lifeguard was direct and very serious. For example, if I made a mistake, I would be called in the evening with: 'You really made a big mistake. The manager did not wait until the next day, he called me immediately when I was free. He was really angry, yes, I don't think this is professional either. Hey, if you are that angry, that cannot be professional, you must have some control. A Dutchman can be so direct, but he would not show himself so angry in terms of emotions: how strongly he uses his voice."*

The following section will discuss the Italian cultural standards and their underlying values to understand Italians 'typical' behavior.

4.3 Underlying values: Associations Among Cultural Standards

As mentioned before, this study will discuss the Italian cultural standards and underlying values, also known as cultural logic, to provide a thick description of Italian behavior on the work floor from a Dutch perspective. Of course, not all Italian cultural standards can be seen as independent; in many cases, the cultural standards overlap or are related. In such cases, the cultural standards can be clustered into groups of cultural standards that derive from the same cultural values or logic. These values underly and explain the 'typical' Italian behavior that belongs to each Italian cultural standard. After studying the literature, the interview transcripts, and the focus groups' input, three underlying values of the Italian culture have been identified, as described in the paragraphs below.

Hierarchy

The first underlying value (cultural logic) found is that of *Hierarchy*. There is a general thinking pattern: we must pay respect to people with a higher rank, and we like our roles to be clear and explicit: we want to know what we are responsible for and to whom we are accountable. The underlying value of Hierarchy consisted of six Italian cultural standards: power division, keeping the boss happy, respect, control, formality, and unequal treatment of male-female. Italian society is characterized by strong hierarchical thinking; Italian people expect and accept the respect they must have for the pyramidal hierarchy within Italian companies. Decision-making power lies with the highest-ranked individual in the hierarchy; this is often the boss in companies. When (s)he gave an order, the lower-ranked individuals must obey the order without question. Employees should not deviate from what the boss wants and should anticipate the boss's wants or needs. Furthermore, higher-ranked individuals receive respect from those lower in rank, while those with a lower rank often do not receive the same respect back from those with a higher rank. Moreover, when Italians interact with someone lower or higher in rank than themselves, the communication stays formal and distanced to show respect to the higher-ranked individual and not lower oneself to lower-ranked individuals. It is disrespectful to contradict a superior; hence employees should not suggest initiatives for change. Only if the boss demands a change will the change take place. If no change is demanded, the Italian employee will follow the familiar path, and no extra efforts are made. Moreover, the higher-ranked individuals constantly check and control the lower-ranked individuals. Within Italian companies, a female can be taken less seriously by male colleagues, which stems from Italian family structures where men would be the head of the work and to whom other family members must respectfully subordinate themselves. These family structures spread to the economic life and are expressed in the company's strong sense of authority. The relationship between the seven cultural standards and the cultural value hierarchy is shown in *Figure 3.*
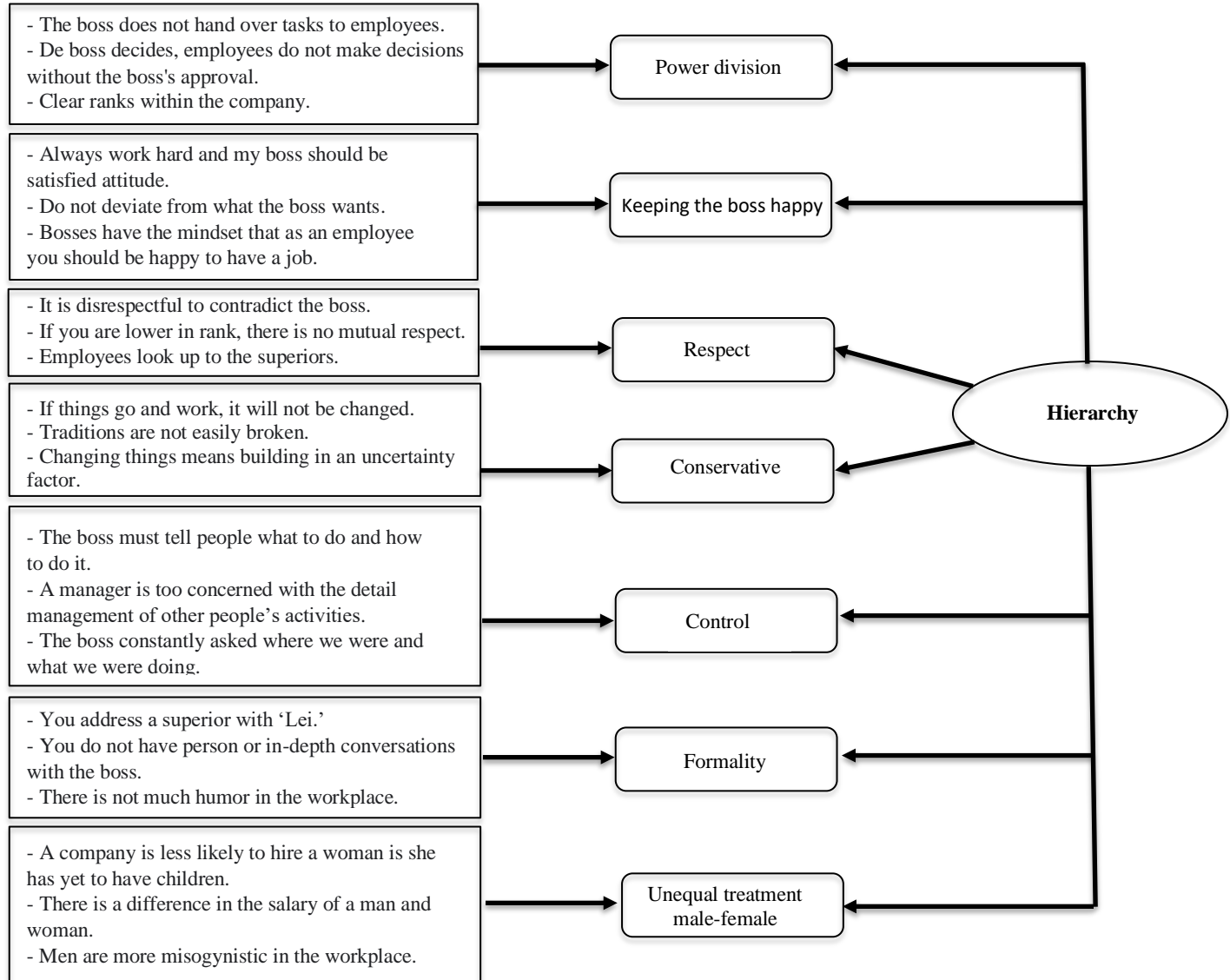
```
- The boss does not hand over tasks to employees.
- De boss decides, employees do not make decisions
without the boss's approval.
- Clear ranks within the company.
```
→ **Power division** ←

```
- Always work hard and my boss should be
satisfied attitude.
- Do not deviate from what the boss wants.
- Bosses have the mindset that as an employee
you should be happy to have a job.
```
→ **Keeping the boss happy** ←

```
- It is disrespectful to contradict the boss.
- If you are lower in rank, there is no mutual respect.
- Employees look up to the superiors.
```
→ **Respect** ←

```
- If things go and work, it will not be changed.
- Traditions are not easily broken.
- Changing things means building in an uncertainty
factor.
```
→ **Conservative** ←

Hierarchy

```
- The boss must tell people what to do and how
to do it.
- A manager is too concerned with the detail
management of other people's activities.
- The boss constantly asked where we were and
what we were doing.
```
→ **Control** ←

```
- You address a superior with 'Lei.'
- You do not have person or in-depth conversations
with the boss.
- There is not much humor in the workplace.
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→ **Formality** ←

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- A company is less likely to hire a woman is she
has yet to have children.
- There is a difference in the salary of a man and
woman.
- Men are more misogynistic in the workplace.
```
→ **Unequal treatment male-female** ←

Figure 3. The underlying value of Hierarchy

Personal relationships

The second underlying value found is that of *Personal Relationships*. There is a general thinking pattern: personal relationships give you emotional and financial support, once you have developed a relationship with someone and trust was built, your life becomes a little easier. It involves doing favors for people, being charming, and remaining flexible. The underlying value of personal relationships comprised the four cultural standards: Relations, Favoritism, Time and Agreement Flexibility, and (non)verbal expression.

Italians emphasize the importance of having strong social relationships with relatives, friends, and acquaintances in their life. Those who belong to the inner circle, often family and friends, offer each other mutual support, and great trust is placed in one another. Conversely, those belonging to the outer circle are often distrusted. Individuals need to build relationships to reach and achieve goals more quickly; one is left in the open without the help of others. There is a moral obligation to help each other often through an act or gesture, a favor for a favor, that informally bounds people. They also help each other achieve something within a company, for instance, acquiring a job. They prefer people who belong to their inner circle working with them because they trust them. Moreover, Italians clearly display their emotions. By displaying your emotions, you show the other person that you care and it helps you understand one another. Depending on your relationship, you are willing to open yourself up, otherwise, emotions are often kept private. During emotionally charged outbursts of emotions, Italians vent their anger loudly. The next day, the argument may be forgotten again and there is no trace of the argument left: the relationship is not negatively affected. The emotional outburst is tolerated and not punished with resentment: the individuals say everything necessary. Hence, there is no reason to let the argument stand and burden the interpersonal climate. Moreover, Italians do not plan everything in detail and are characterized by spontaneity. Relationships are leading instead of time and appointments. Even if there are time limits for business meetings, leaving a meeting earlier could be interpreted as rude. Therefore, arriving a few minutes late to the next meeting is often met with acceptance, because when you are late due to a previous meeting you show that you value relationships and the person over the time and task. However, this also depends on the rank of the individual scheduling the meeting. When colleagues with the same rank have a meeting, and one individual must leave because of a meeting with the boss, there is a level of understanding. On the contrary, when meeting with the boss, one often does not leave the meeting since (s)he does not want to come across as rude. Moreover, Italians prefer not to schedule everything far ahead, because moral obligations may come up along to way to help a close friend or colleague, and relationships and personal connections are considered to be more important than a task. Therefore, to remain flexible they rather do not keep everything organized in an agenda since they cannot predict everything that is coming to them: why plan it now while in the end, one has a better idea of what is going on. Furthermore, when individuals have a good relationship, the other person may be more prone to be on time for their appointments to maintain a good relationship. The relationship between the four cultural standards and the cultural value of personal relationships is shown in *Figure 4.*
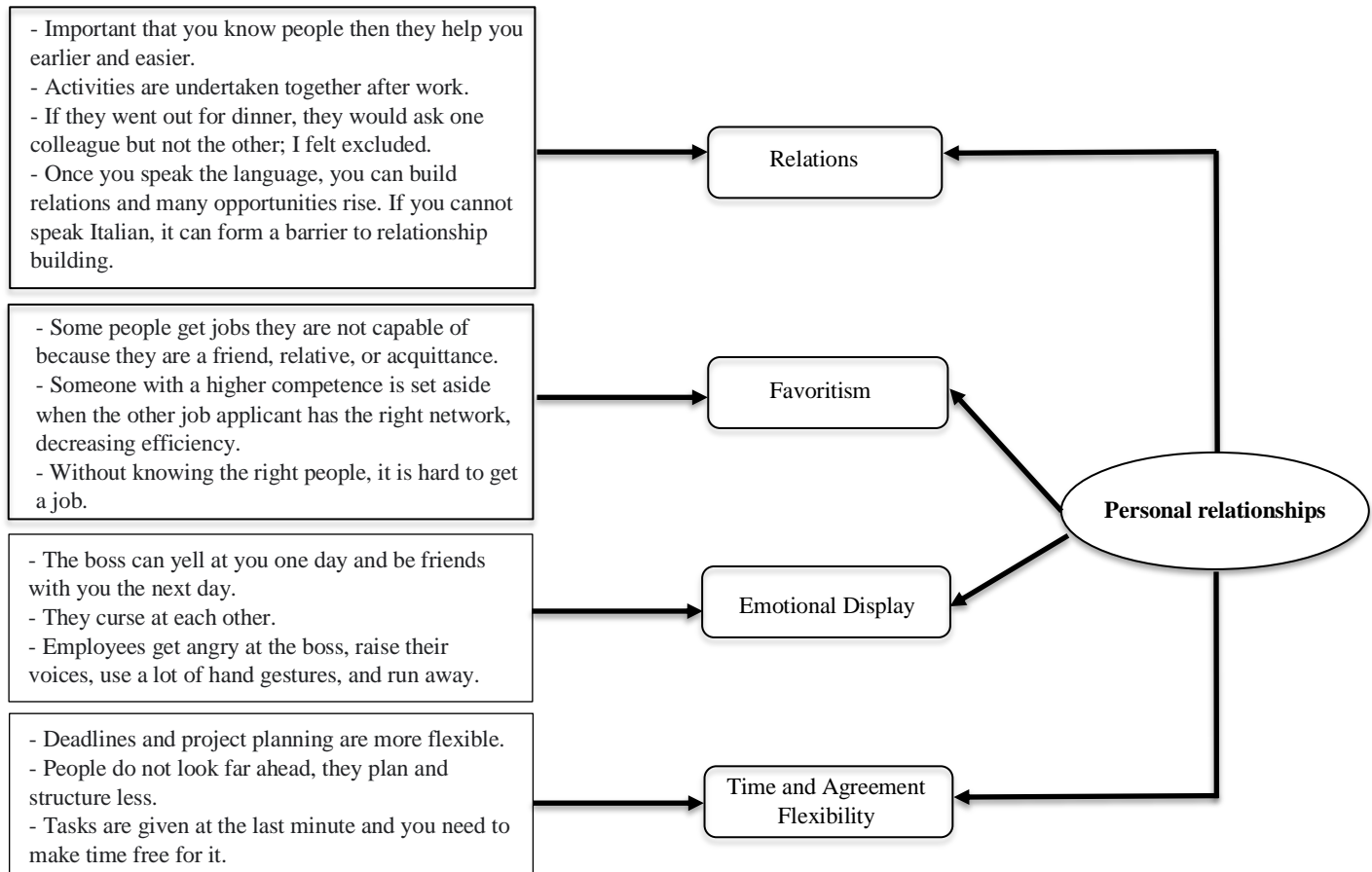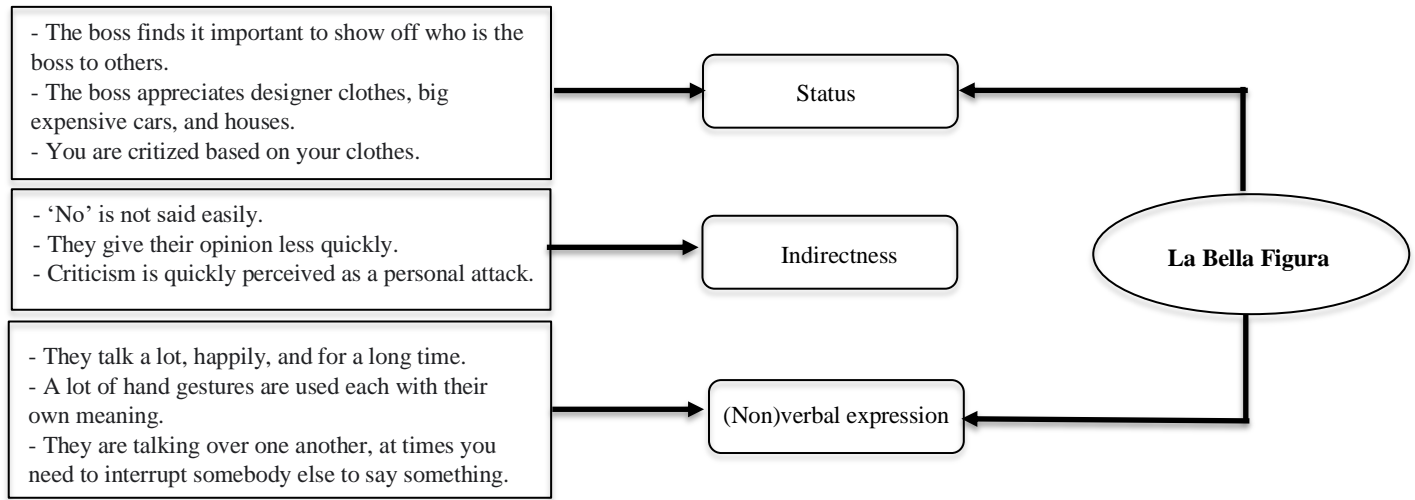
- Important that you know people then they help you earlier and easier. - Activities are undertaken together after work. - If they went out for dinner, they would ask one colleague but not the other; I felt excluded. - Once you speak the language, you can build relations and many opportunities rise. If you cannot speak Italian, it can form a barrier to relationship building.	Relations

- Some people get jobs they are not capable of because they are a friend, relative, or acquittance.
- Someone with a higher competence is set aside when the other job applicant has the right network, decreasing efficiency.
- Without knowing the right people, it is hard to get a job.

Favoritism

- The boss can yell at you one day and be friends with you the next day.
- They curse at each other.
- Employees get angry at the boss, raise their voices, use a lot of hand gestures, and run away.

Emotional Display

Personal relationships

- Deadlines and project planning are more flexible.
- People do not look far ahead, they plan and structure less.
- Tasks are given at the last minute and you need to make time free for it.

Time and Agreement Flexibility

Figure 4. The underlying value of Personal Relationships

La Bella Figura

The third underlying value that was found is *La Bella Figura*, literally translated to the beautiful figure. There is a general thinking pattern: every opportunity is a chance to present the absolute best version of yourself, therefore, it is crucial to convey the right message by placing a high value on your appearance, demeanor, politeness, and pleasant impressions and executing these in a suitable social context. This value comprises four Italian cultural standards—indirectness, emotional display, status, and nonverbal expression. To make a good impression, individuals constantly want to enforce and show their status. People do not want to be in contact with people who make a brutta figura (wrong impression); hence great importance is attached to self-portrayal through material and immaterial attributes to preserve a bella figura (good impression). People avoid direct criticism, and critiquing a superior is socially inappropriate since it causes a person's bella figura to falter. Not giving direct criticism protects the person receiving criticism from losing the bella figura and prevents the person giving criticism from displaying a brutta figura caused

by impolite and disrespectful behavior. Italians also like to express themselves. The relationship between the three cultural standards and the cultural value la bella figura is shown in *Figure 5.*

- The boss finds it important to show off who is the boss to others.
- The boss appreciates designer clothes, big expensive cars, and houses.
- You are critized based on your clothes.

- 'No' is not said easily.
- They give their opinion less quickly.
- Criticism is quickly perceived as a personal attack.

- They talk a lot, happily, and for a long time.
- A lot of hand gestures are used each with their own meaning.
- They are talking over one another, at times you need to interrupt somebody else to say something.

Status

Indirectness

(Non)verbal expression

La Bella Figura

Figure 5. The underlying value of La Bella Figura

5. Discussion and Conclusion

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

5.1 Italian Cultural Standards as Perceived by the Dutch

The main goal of the current study was to identify Italian cultural standards as perceived by Dutch individuals. The research uncovered fourteen Italian cultural standards in *section 4.1*. These are listed below.

1. Power division
2. Indirectness
3. Time and agreement flexibility
4. Respect
5. Status
6. Relations
7. Unequal treatment male-female
8. Control
9. Formality
10. Emotional display
11. Conservative
12. Keep the boss happy
13. Favoritism
14. (non) verbal expression

These fourteen Italian cultural standards were later linked to three Italian underlying values as described in *section 4.2*. Together, the cultural standards and values provide a thick description of Italian culture and may be used to describe and predict behavior by Italian people during Dutch-Italian encounters on the Italian work floor.

5.2 Theoretical Contributions

This thesis aimed to explore (1) the typical cultural standards experienced by Dutch expatriates working in Italy, (2) the cultural logic behind these Italian cultural standards, and (3) how the Dutch in Italy bridge these cultural differences. Earlier in this paper, this study identified three research gaps which are listed in the academic relevance part, *section 1.2*. This section considered each of these gaps, and thereby, this thesis contributed to the literature on cross-cultural differences in three ways:

Contribution 1: A qualitative and rigorous in-depth study that explored the cultural differences between the Dutch and Italian.

The first research gap is addressed since this qualitative study applied the rigorous methodologies of Thomas et al. (2010) and Gioia et al. (2012) to explore the cultural differences between the Dutch and Italian by using narratives from Dutch individuals to describe the Italian culture from the Dutch perspective. Using qualitative research methods, it is possible to provide detailed information because the participants can use their own words to explain how they understood a particular experience (Skinner et al., 2000), and the data collected is unconstrained by predetermined standardized categories. This emic qualitative study used the approach of Thomas et al. (2010) to study culture since it goes into more detail as it is interpretive, describing not only the typical behavior of Italians but also trying to understand its meaning. The Italian cultural standards are derived from real-life encounters, the critical incidents, using the critical incident technique.

Contribution 2: Explored the Italian cultural behaviors and standards from the perspective of Dutch expatriates living and working in Italy using a qualitative research approach.

Regarding the second research gap, this research discovered fourteen different Italian cultural standards that explain Italians 'typical behavior' using narratives from Dutch individuals to describe the Italian culture from the Dutch perspective. Furthermore, this study discovered similarities and differences when comparing it with existing qualitative literature regarding Italian cultural standards from the German perspective established by Neudecker et al. (2007). *Table 10* compared the Italian cultural standards identified by Neudecker et al. (2007) with the Italian cultural standards perceived by the Dutch interviewees in this study.

Italian cultural standards by Neudecker et al. German perspective (2007)	Italian cultural standards from the current study Dutch perspective	Underlying values from the current study
Family orientation	Relations	
Relationship orientation	Favoritism	Personal relationships
	Emotional display	
Flexibility around rules	Time and appointment flexibility	
Hierarchy orientation	Power division	
	Control	
	Respect	
	Formality	Hierarchy
	Unequal male-female treatment	
	Keeping the boss happy	
	Conservativeness	
Identity awareness (La Bella Figura)	Status	
	Indirectness	
Emotionality	(non)verbal expression	La Bella Figura

Table 10. Comparing the results with the qualitative study by Neudecker et al. (2007)

When looking at *Table 10,* the first noticeable difference is that this qualitative study identified a total of fourteen Italian cultural standards. This is a larger number of Italian cultural standards than Neudecker et al. (2007) identified, who identified six Italian cultural standards. Neudecker et al. (2007) used a different definition of cultural standards, not separating cultural standards and underlying values. This study did separate the cultural standards and underlying values and thereby providing a precise description of how and why Italians behave the way they do.

Moreover, similarities and differences have been discovered when comparing the current study's results to Meyer's (2014) framework, Hofstede's framework (Hofstede-Insights, 2021), and Doorduyn (2011), as shown in *Table 11*.

Italian cultural standards from the current study	Meyer's (2014) findings on Italian culture	Hofstede's findings Italian culture (Hofstede-Insights, 2021)	Main characteristics of Italian culture (Doorduyn, 2011)
Relations	Relationship-based trusting	Individualism score of 76	Importance of friends
Favoritism			Relationship- and human-oriented (polychronic)
			Particularism
			Diffuse
Time and appointment flexibility	Flexible time	Long-term orientation score of 61	Flexibility about procedures and deadlines
			Short-term oriented
Power division	Hierarchical style of leading	Power distance score of 50	Strong social hierarchy
	Top-down decision making		Top-down decision making
Control	-	-	-
Respect	-	-	-
Formality	-	-	The high degree of politeness (adress)
Unequal male-female treatment	-	-	-

Keeping the boss happy	-	-	-
Conservativeness	-	Uncertainty avoidance of 75	-
Status	-	Masculinity score of 70	The high degree of formality (clothing) Status through ascription
Indirectness	Avoid confrontation	-	Indirect and high-context communication
	High-context communication		
	Indirect negative feedback		
Emotional display	-	-	Emotional
(non)verbal expression	-	-	
			Focus on style and form instead of content
-	Principles first persuading	-	-
-		Indulgence score of 30	-

Table 11. Comparing the current study's results to Meyer(2014) framework, Hofstede's framework (Hofstede-Insights, 2021), and Doorduyn (2011)

This research assigned different labels to the Italian cultural standards of family orientation and relationship orientation described by Neudecker et al. (2007). Interviewees from this study recognized these behavioral patterns. However, the current study placed it under cultural standard *relations* since the Italian employees showed a solid personal relationship with those in the inner circle (including family, friends, and relatives). Also, it was placed under the cultural standard of *favoritism* since Italians usually get jobs based on their connections/relations. This study aligned with Meyer (2014) that Italians are relationship-based and with Doorduyn (2011) who stated that Italian place high importance on their friends and are relationship- and human-oriented (polychronic) and that building relationship to get stuff done (particularistic culture) is essential. Those relationships are crucial for doing business and achieving goals (diffuse dimension): hence, colleagues also spend time together outside of working hours. However, it partly agreed with Hofstede (2021), who mentioned that Italy is an individualist culture where people are 'me' centered. Hofstede (Hofstede-Insights) focused on the effects of a society's culture on the values of its members and how these values relate to the behavior of employees. Italy could be considered an individualistic culture since Italians felt they could never rely on a functioning state. As a result, Italians organized themselves among themselves without being dependent on the help and interference of an official body (Neudecker et al., 2007). In the workplace, one may argue that individuals are not self-reliant and often depend on their friends, family, and close acquaintances to get a job or get their work done. One may argue that there is more of a collectivist culture in the workplace since relationships with other members and the interconnectedness between colleagues play a central role in one's business life.

Moreover, this research found that Italians have a flexible perception of time and agreement, meaning Italians are less strict with being precisely on time and that initial decisions can always change later, as shown by the cultural standard of *time and appointment flexibility*. This research aligned with that

of Neudecker et al. (2007) who identified the cultural standard of flexibility around rules, that mentioned that punctuality is not a value in Italy. Moreover, it agreed with Meyer (2014) that Italians see time perception as flexible and with Doorduyn (2011) regarding flexibility around procedures and deadlines in which strategic planning is rare.

However, this study did not find the behavior of using rules to one's advantage. Neudecker et al. (2007) stated that rules are followed if it makes sense in a given situation, when it is beneficial to the individual, or when there is a threat of punishment. This difference in findings may be because Neudecker et al. (2007) conducted research from a German cultural perspective, and the current research is from a Dutch cultural perspective. According to Thomas et al. (2010), the culture-specific worldview differs based on the perspective of dissimilar others. Therefore, the cultural standards can only be determined and applied depending on the target and user culture. Hence, specific Italian behavioral patterns may be observed from the German perspective but not from the Dutch perspective, and vice versa. Besides, the Dutch are more flexible with rules than the Germans. In the Netherlands, everything is organized by procedures and the Dutch themselves tend to break rules if they do not see the utility (Nut) of the rule (Enklaar, 2007). Therefore, they may not perceive this behavior of breaking rules as unusual.

Multiple 'typical' Italian behaviors identified within this study were also identified by Neudecker et al. (2007), however, Neudecker et al. (2007) placed all these behaviors under one cultural standard: hierarchy orientation. Instead, this research separated these behaviors under multiple cultural standards: *power division, control, respect, formality, unequal male-female treatment, keeping the boss happy,* and *conservativeness.* Firstly, Neudecker, et al. (2007) discovered that the upper management acts strictly according to the principle that knowledge is power, allowing them to regulate as they wish. This is also discovered by this research, which found that the superior makes the decisions, reflected by the Italian cultural standard *power division.* Therefore, this research agrees with Meyer (2014) and Doorduyn (2011) that Italy has a hierarchical leadership style and top-down decision-making. The current findings also confirm the findings of Charles Abbot (2008), who stated that the hierarchy of authority is top-down and dictatorial. However, this research disagrees with Hofstede (2021) regarding the power distance, that Northern Italy prefers equality and decentralization of power and decision-making. Instead, this research showed inequality and centralized power and decision-making on the work floor. Secondly, Neudecker et al. (2007) mentioned that employees expect detailed elaboration of tasks and verbal instructions from their superiors, which aligned with this study which discovered that the Italian boss closely monitors the employees, reflected by the Italian cultural standard *control.* Thirdly, Neudecker et al. (2007) mentioned that Italians show respect by adapting their manners to the hierarchical structure. This research confirmed

the result since it found that individuals tend to show more respect towards someone in a superior position, reflected by the Italian cultural standard of *respect*. Fourthly, Neudecker et al. (2007) discovered that apparent patriarchal traits in the workplace are noticeable in Italy since family structures spread to economic life, and this is confirmed by the current study that identified an inequality between men and women in a similar situation in the work floor, reflected by the Italian cultural standard of *unequal male-female treatment*. Fifthly, Neudecker et al. (2007) discovered that employees follow their founder without discussion or criticism since it is not beneficial to one's advancement in the company to criticize one's superior. This was also discovered by the findings of this research, Italian employees often do not deviate from what the boss wants, as shown by the cultural standard of *keeping the boss happy*. Lastly, Neudecker et al (2007) discovered that Italians are conservative, which aligned with this research that found that Italians tend to keep what they have and what works, meaning the current working situation often remains unchanged since changing things means uncertainty, as shown by the cultural standard of *conservativeness*. The current results aligned with that of Leijnendekker (2012) in that Italy is a conservative country where things do not change fast. Therefore, this research agreed with Hofstede (Hofstede-insights, 2021) that Italians are not comfortable with ambiguous situations. However, Hofstede also mentioned that this high uncertainty dimension results in much more detailed planning since Italians find flexible planning that changes to the environment. Nevertheless, this behavior has not been observed in this research.

Additionally, this research found that Italians openly show their status and professional pride at all times through material and immaterial attributes, as shown by the cultural standard *status*. Therefore, this research aligned with that of Hofstede in that Italy is a masculine society, which is highly success-oriented and driven and where they show off their success by acquiring status symbols (e.g., car, house). However, Hofstede mentioned intense competition among colleagues for making a career: however, this behavior was not observed in this study. Moreover, this research agreed with Doorduyn (2011) that Italians have a high degree of formality in clothes. Multiple interviewees mentioned that they had to work a work uniform to work or pay attention to how they dressed since Italians place great value on appearance. It also agrees with Doorduyn (2011) one gains status in Italy mostly by ascription rather than achievement, age and experience are highly valued, helping one gain more respect.

Hofstede's study did not investigate communicative factors, such as language, nonverbal behavior, and communication style (Shuter, 1989), one of the limitations of his work. This research did focus on communicative factors and discovered that Italians do not clearly expose what they think or want (implicit language), as shown by the cultural standard of *indirectness*. Thereby it agreed with Meyer (2014) and Neudecker (2011) that Italy is a high-context culture where messages are spoken and read between the

lines, avoid confrontation, and deliver negative feedback indirectly. This research also found that Italians communicate formally and professionally when in a business context, and people are addressed with 'signor(a),' especially when communicating with a superior, which is reflected by the Italian cultural standard of *formality*. Therefore, this research agreed with Doorduyn (2011) that Italians display a high degree of politeness and formality. Moreover, this research discovered that Italians clearly show their emotions to the outside world and express their throughs and ideas loudly with many gestures, as shown by the cultural standard of *emotional display* and *(non)verbal expression*. Thereby, this research aligned with that of Neudecker et al. (2007) who placed these two behaviors under the cultural standard of emotionality, and with that of Doorduyn (2011) who mentioned that Italians focus on style and external appearances and try to make a good impression by the way they dress and speak, reflected by the la bella figura.

Finally, some of the results of Meyer's (2014) framework, Hofstede's framework, and Doorduyn's (2011) were not found in this study. Such as principles first persuading ("why" before moving to action), and indulgence (a society that suppressed needs by strict social norms).

Contribution 3: Offer underlying values that underpin the Italian cultural standard ('typical behavior') to provide a detailed and thick description.

This study addressed the third research gap since it went one step further by delivering a thick description of Italian culture by distinguishing between cultural standards and underlying values, which Neudecker et al. (2007) did not. Neudecker et al. (2007) reported critical interaction situations but did not distinguish between cultural standards and the underlying values and therefore did not provide a thick description of Italian culture. This study identified three underlying values: 1) personal relationships, 2) hierarchy and 3) la bella figura. These three underlying values, as shown in *table 10*, help evaluate and explain the fourteen Italian cultural standards. The Italian value of *personal relationships* can explain group the cultural standards relations and favoritism since Italian emphasize the importance of personal relationships and prefer to work with those in the inner circle because that is whom they trust. The Italian urge for *hierarchy* can explain the cultural standards of power division, control, respect, formality, unequal male-female treatment, keeping the boss happy, and conservativeness since Italian expect and accept the pyramidical hierarchy within Italian companies. The Italian value of *la bella figura* can explain the cultural standards of status, indirectness, emotional display, and (non)verbal expression since Italians attach much importance to appearance. Therefore, they like to express themselves, and their self-portray can turn into an emotionally charged outburst of emotions. Regarding the value of la bella figura, a significant difference was that, in this study, the Italian cultural standard *la Bella figura* was not considered to be a concrete

(observable) behavior but an emotional cause of the behavior. However, Neudecker et al. (2007) considered the la bella figura to be a behavior (showing respect, decency, courtesy, good manners and etiquette, and fashion awareness). However, according to Ramos-Ortiz et al. (2020), the la bella figura emphasizes the importance of appearance, and one's behavior is an example of the la bella figura embodiment. When Italians behave in ways considered improper by others, it can lead to a la bruta figura (bad impression), which influences behaviors to avoid embarrassment and gain social status.

5.3 Practical Relevance

The description of Italian culture provided through fourteen cultural standards and three underlying values helps the reader, especially Dutch individuals, understand Italian behavior. It offered a basis for the Dutch expatriates to develop intercultural competence because people are more aware and can better interpret Italian behavior. Such intercultural competence helps to avoid conflicts, misunderstandings, and carelessness among those Dutch businessmen who work in Italy. Hence, the results of this study can help reduce barriers in bicultural encounters and enhance cooperation between cultures, especially in Dutch-Italian encounters.

Cultural Awareness Training could improve the cross-cultural competence of the Dutch expatriate working in Italy. International business failure is frequently attributed to cultural ignorance and misunderstandings. To lessen these misunderstandings, aid in fostering cultural synergy, and subsequently promote trust and confidence amongst the people involved, training that can replicate the realities of cultural settings can be implemented (Hurn, 2011). According to Hurn (2011), incidents based on real-life scenarios tend to be more interesting, challenging, and inspiring than studying a list of dos and don'ts. By participating in cultural awareness training, Dutch expatriates will learn to recognize their values and culture and the contrast between their own and Italian cultures. The Dutch expatriates should become familiar with Dutch cultural values, as explained in *section 2.4*, to create self-awareness of the Dutch culture. To create awareness of the Italian culture, the Dutch should familiarize themselves with the fourteen Italian cultural standards (*section 4.1*) and the three Italian underlying values (*section 4.3*) to understand which behavior is acceptable and unacceptable on the Italian work floor. Typical behaviors deemed inappropriate are, for instance, (1) showing self-initiative without the permission of a superior or (2) criticizing someone in a group setting. Behaviors that are typically awarded are, for instance, (1) showing respect to superiors, for example, by not talking over him or her, or (2) addressing individuals with the correct academic titles and ranks, for example, addressing them with 'signor' or 'signora.'

The big clashes between the Dutch and Italian that were identified were regarding the underlying values mentioned before, namely: (1) Hierarchy, (2) Personal relationships, and (3) La Bella Figura. Regarding *Hierarchy*, the Dutch could improve their relationships on the work floor in response to the Italian behavior in the following ways:

Italian behavior with the underlying value Hierarchy	Actions that the Dutch could take to improve the relationship on the work floor with Italians:
The boss makes decisions (*'Power Division'*)	1. Do not go into a discussion or do not deliver self-initiative when the boss tells you to do something- the boss may feel threatened. 2. Self-initiatives should be expressed in one-on-one meetings, not in groups.
Do not deviate from what the boss wants (*'Keeping the boss happy*)	3. Understand that it is not customary to speak up when your boss is asking things that are not reasonable in your opinion (e.g., working overtime) – one may get fired when doing so.
You show more respect towards someone in a superior position (*'Respect'*)	4. Do not behave as if you know better than the superior; this can be perceived as disrespectful. 5. Do not talk over a superior; listen carefully.
Keep what one has and what works (*'Conservative'*)	6. Avoid providing input on how current working methods could be changed. It can be perceived as rude or unnecessary.
The boss closely monitors the employees. (*'Control'*)	7. Do not deviate from a task or procedure without the permission of a superior.
With a superior, you stay formal and distanced (*'Formality'*)	8. Speak to everyone older, a superior, or a stranger in the third person using academic titles or ranks. In general, address a man as *signore* (sir), a woman with *signora* (madam), and *signorina* (for young women).
Inequality between men and women in a similar situation. (*'Unequal treatment male-female*)	9. If women perceive inequality, they should not take it personally and be offended

Regarding *Personal Relationships*, the Dutch could improve their relationships on the work floor in response to the Italian behavior in the following ways:

Italian behavior with the underlying value of Personal Relationships	Actions that the Dutch could take to improve the relationship on the work floor with Italians:
Strong personal relationships with those in the inner circle (*'Relations'*)	10. Small talk is essential when establishing relationships. For example, you could talk about local cuisine, history, literature, art, or sports (Abbott, 2008) 11. Be curious, talk, and connect with people over dinner or a coffee. 12. Choose for in-person interaction over phone call conversations or emails. Personal contact is more effective.
You usually get your jobs based on your connection/relations (*'Favoritism'*)	13. Try to build an extensive network of relationships since it provides new opportunities. 14. Accept that family members or friends often occupy high-ranked positions.
Easily change time schedules or appointments ('*Time and Appointment Flexibility*')	15. Accept that plans are frequently and quickly modified in response to circumstances. 16. Accept that people may arrive later to a meeting – Italians are less driven by schedules and value *Tutto con Calma* (everything with calm).

Regarding *La Bella Figura*, the Dutch could improve their relationships on the work floor in response to the Italian behavior in the following ways:

Italian behavior with the underlying value La Bella Figura	Actions that the Dutch could take to improve the relationship on the work floor with Italians:
Someone with a higher position shows his power and status (*'Status'*)	17. Practice the art of *La Bella Figura* – strive to make a good impression, for instance, by dressing up professionally and showing etiquette.
You do not clearly expose what you think or want (*'Indirectness'*)	18. You should avoid giving professional criticism where possible since it is often interpreted as personal criticism, impacting personal relationships. 19. If giving criticism is unavoidable, do it in a one-on-one meeting, not in a group.

	20. Interpret a 'yes' not always as a 'yes.' Instead, it should often be understood as a 'no,' 'maybe,' or 'yes, but…' since Italians are not quick to say no since they do not want to disappoint their colleagues.
Emotions are easily shown (*'Emotional display'*)	21. Remember that Italians may show their emotions more intensely and do not take their emotional outburst (e.g., cursing, raising of voices) personally. Unlike in the Netherlands, arguments often do not directly affect personal relationships.
Love to present themselves (non)verbally (*'(Non)verbal communication'*)	22. Conversations overlap. At times, you may have to talk over someone yourself to get a word in during a conversation. However, when talking over someone, keep in mind your rank and that of the other person. Do not talk over someone who has a higher rank. 23. Learn the Italian language – can help overcome barriers to conversations.

5.4 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study interviewed sixteen Dutch individuals working and living in Italy and one Italian individual working and living in the Netherlands, which resulted in descriptions of critical incidents from which cultural standards were established from the Dutch perspective, providing insights into the Dutch experiences in bicultural situations. Since the Italian cultural standards were only described from a Dutch perspective, these results cannot be generalized. Hence, additional research is needed to examine Italian culture from the perspective of another culture since other countries may point out other Italian cultural differences than the Dutch do.

Furthermore, incidents and frictions from the Italian point of view on the Dutch-Italian collaboration were not taken into account in this study. Therefore, future research should also examine the Dutch culture from an Italian point of view to identify cultural frictions that the Italians perceive that the Dutch do not. Then, more coping mechanisms or interventions can be devised to bridge the cultural friction during the cooperation and communication between the Dutch and Italians.

Future research could try to find out whether Dutch people working in the North of Italy perceive the same Italian cultural standards and Dutch people working in the South of Italy. This study could only interview one person living in the South of Italy since only one person living in Southern Italy expressed interest in participating in this study. This might be because the majority of the industries and job

opportunities can be found in the North of Italy, hence why many Dutch expatriates might have settled there. Therefore, this study could not investigate whether the Dutch identified other Dutch-Italian cultural differences based on their demographic location in Italy, which is worth investigating. Future research could try to interview a more proportional distribution between different areas within Italy by interviewing an equal number of Dutch individuals working and living in the South and North of Italy. This is worth investigating since regional differences and the pronounced north-south divide in Italy may impact the cultural standards discovered. This is because, in the past, Italy was unofficially divided into three parts: upper, central, and southern Italy (Algeld and Lill, 2004). Different rulers ruled each part, and sometimes multiple rulers dominated one part, from the French and Austrian-Ungarian Empires in the North to the Spanish sovereigns in the South and the Vatican City State in the center. The unofficial division of the country means that cultural orientations have also developed in different ways. Even after Victor Emanuel II became the king of a unified Italy in 1861, strong regional differences exist, which made Italians often see themselves as citizens of their region rather than of a unity state (Wieser and Spotts, 1983). Moreover, this research interviewed one interviewee from Sardinia and another from Sicily, the Italian boundary islands. These Italian boundary islands are often culturally distinctive yet close by and within the official national territory (Agnew, 2000). In the past, Sicily and Sardinia were under direct Spanish rule. According to Agnew (2000), after the Italian unification in the 1860s, Sicily was viewed by Northern politicians and a few southerners as the most disturbed and troublesome region of the new Italian Kingdom. The poverty of the population and the predatory nature of the rural landowners were to two most noted characteristics of Sicily. Perhaps Sicily's history, and that of Sardinia, could result in the observation of different 'typical' Italian behavior. Therefore, future research could also interview Dutch expatriates working on the Italian boundary islands to investigate whether similar/different Italian cultural standards are found on the Italian boundary island and the Italian mainland.

Also, the coding in this research was carried out by only one individual (the researcher), and the researcher discussed the interpretation of data with two supervisors. However, future research could use an additional coder to improve the reliability of the Italian cultural standards found within this research since this serves as a double-check.

Another limitation of this study is that social desirability bias is likely to take place. According to Grimm (2010), social desirability bias refers to the propensity of research participants to select replies that they perceive to be more socially desirable or acceptable instead of answers that are indicative of their genuine thoughts or sentiments. The bias often occurs when data is collected where respondents can be easily identified and when collecting data through personal interviews. In this research, the interviewee had

to appear on camera and give the interviewer personal information (e.g., name, age, working location). The interviewee tried to prevent this bias by clearly stating that questions are anonymized in this research. However, in some cases, interviewees may have given incorrect or untrue answers that may impact the reliability of this research.

The last limitation of this study is that the fourteen Italian cultural standards identified in this study should help the Dutch expatriates become more culturally competent when working with Italians. It should increase their knowledge and awareness of the 'typical' Italian behaviors and the values attached to them. This knowledge and awareness about the Italian culture, known as generalizations, can help Dutch ex-pats predict Italian behaviors or to interpret situations. However, one must keep in mind that such generalizations are only clues. These are not entirely representative or even true for every Italian individual living and working in Italy. These cultural generalizations are statements of likelihood instead of statements of certainty. To prevent stereotyping from occurring, which is to create a 'typical picture' about Italians that may be (in)accurate or (un)justified, the reader of this paper should remember that this paper makes generalizations.

Overall, the cultural standards in this research represented stereotyping in the sense of categorizing Italians 'typical' way of behaving. However, this study's aim was not to stereotype Italians; these results should not be used to form prejudices. It is unfair to believe that all Italians behave the same.

5.5 Conclusion

This research aimed to examine the typical Italian behaviors that deviate from Dutch culture, objectively describe the Italian cultural standards ('typical' Italian behavior) and explain the cultural logic behind Italian cultural standards. The following research question was developed to accomplish this goal:

"Which cultural differences are perceived by Dutch individuals living and working in Italy?"

Fourteen Italian cultural standards were found in this study: Power division, Indirectness, Time and agreement flexibility, Respect, Status, Relations, Unequal treatment of male-female, Control, Formality, Emotional display, Conservative, Keep the boss happy, Favoritism, and (non) verbal expression. In *chapter 4.1*, Italian Cultural Standards, a more thorough explanation of these cultural standards is provided.

The next objective of this study was to identify the underlying values of these 'typical' Italian behaviors. As a result, three underlying values were discovered within this research:

1. **Hierarchy:** Power Division, Keeping the Boss Happy, Respect, Control, Formality, Unequal Treatment of Male-Female.
2. **Personal Relationship:** Relations, Favoritism, Time, and Agreement Flexibility.
3. **La Bella Figura:** Indirectness, Emotional Display, Status, Nonverbal Expression

The Italian cultural standards and underlying values with extensive descriptions provide valuable insights into the Italian culture and how Italians think and behave. Together, this resulted in a thick description of how Italians behave from the Dutch perspective. Research into cultural differences is relevant and urgent to study because, in the course of internationalization and globalization, more individuals are going to work abroad, during which they encounter new challenges on a cultural level (Neudecker et al., 2007). Therefore, learning how to relate effectively to people who may behave, think, or feel differently from our cultural expectations is extremely useful. Cultural sensitivity and cross-cultural competence are essential to coexist peacefully and perform well in a global setting because "unless we know how to avoid easy-to-fall into cultural traps, we are easy prey to misunderstanding, needless conflict, and ultimate failure" (Erin Meyer, 2014). When reading this paper, consider both the advantages that the disparities offer and the potential challenges that the cultural differences may present. When handled carefully, cultural differences can become your team's greatest strength.

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7. Appendixes

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

Voorstel ronde: naam, leeftijd, woonplaats in Italie, tijd wonend in Italie, functietitel binnen het bedrijf.

Het onderzoek is bedoeld om uit te vinden hoe de samenwerkingen tussen Nederlanders en Italian verloopt en hoe het verbeterd kan worden.

Ik zou u graag toestemming willen vragen om dit interview op te nemen. Het interview is vertrouwelijk and de inhoud word niet gedeelt buiten het onzoeksteam, dus ook niet met je collega's of leidinggevende.

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

Hoe vaak heeft u contact met Italiaanse 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 Italiaanse persoon/personen? (rang, taakverdeling)

In welke taal spreekt u met Italianen?

Is de communicatie goed te noemen?

Hoe zou u de sfeer tussen Nederlanders en Italianen 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 Italianen spreken.

Hoe zijn uw ervaringen met Italianen in het algemeen?

Wat zijn de meest opvallende verschillen tussen Italianen en Nederlanders?

Wat mist u vaak bij Italianen?

(Als hij/zij specifieke eigenschappen van Italianen noemt)

Kunt u daar een voorbeeld van geven?

Wat was de meest positieve ervaring die u had met Italianen?

Wat gebeurde er precies?

Wat maakt dit voor u tot zo'n positieve ervaring?

Wat was de aanleiding voor die gebeurtenis?

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

Hebt u nog meer van zulke voorbeelden?

Kunt u ook een minder prettige ervaring noemen die u had met Fransen?

Wat gebeurde er precies?

Wat maakte dit voor u tot een onbevredigende ervaring?

Wat was de aanleiding voor die gebeurtenis?

Op welke manier belemmerde deze gebeurtenis de succesvolle samenwerking?

Hoe reageerde u?

Hoe is het afgelopen?

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

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

Hebt u nog meer van zulke voorbeelden?

Hebt u wel eens misverstanden tussen Fransen en Nederlanders meegemaakt?

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

Hebt u wel eens meegemaakt dat u Italianen niet begreep?

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

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

Hebt u wel eens andere problemen gehad met Italianen?

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

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

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

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

Hoe gaat het besluitvormingsproces in het Italiaanse bedrijf?

Wie neemt de beslissingen en hoe gaat dat in zijn werk?

Worden de besluiten door iedereen gerespecteerd?

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

Wat is uw mening en waardoor komt dat?

Hebben we alles besproken?

Met de resultaten maken we een wetenschappelijk rapport voor een Master Thesis. Uw naam zal niet vermeld worden en we zullen ervoor zorgen dat uitspraken niet tot u te herleiden zijn.

Als u geïnteresseerd bent in de uitkomst, kan ik die naar u toesturen. Dank voor uw medewerking.