Culture-Caused Critical Incidents Between German and Dutch:

How to Cope with Them

Author: Justin Ahrens
University of Twente
P.O. Box 217, 7500AE Enschede
The Netherlands

ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes cultural diversity and how to unite beliefs, values, and norms of Germans and Dutch, since they are sometimes resulting in clashes of cultural standards. Its primary objective is to investigate how individuals navigate these clashes, particularly in cross-cultural business interactions between Germans and Dutch. Therefore, the main research questions to be answered are: "Which culture-caused critical incidents happen when Germans collaborate with Dutch in a work environment?" and afterwards "Which coping mechanisms do Germans working in the Netherlands use to overcome those critical incidents?". The thesis identifies key cultural standards, such as Flexibility, Pragmatism, and Gezelligheid, as common triggers of critical incidents. In contrast, cultural norms like Flat Hierarchy, Work-Life Balance, and Technological Innovativeness tend to be less provocative in causing such incidents. The findings will be presented, conclusions be drawn, and recommendations will be offered for those Germans who want to work in the Netherlands, those who have worked there for a while already, and those who aim or struggle to manage a team composing both, the German and Dutch culture.

This research contributes to the field of cross-cultural collaboration and intercultural studies by identifying typical critical incidents, validating existing research, exploring cultural differences, and introducing new coping strategies for Germans. Ultimately this research aims to provide a robust theoretical framework for further research on critical incidents in intercultural collaboration.

Graduation Committee Members:

1st Supervisor: Dr. Arnold H. Enklaar

2nd Supervisor: Dr. Lara Carminati

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1. Introduction

While in the past one could observe a big shift to globalized processes, products, and services in order to save money, recent events like the corona-pandemic and the general movement towards more environmental awareness and protection have made short-distance collaborations attractive again. Sourcing and collaborating nearby makes projects overall simpler, resulting in cleaner, quicker, and less risky processes. Furthermore, due to being neighbors German and Dutch companies tend to collaborate often. The Dutch markets and people are known to be very innovative, providing a good opportunity for German companies to test their newest innovations there. For Dutch companies on the other hand, the German market is often one of the first internationalization steps. Its larger market volume and therefore tempting revenues make it interesting for companies to enter the German market, as visible in figure 1 below (OECD, 2023). In a more and more digitized world, with centralized management, this often implies that the German market is entered without being physically present in Germany. Resultantly, many Dutch companies search for Germans who want to work at their Dutch headquarters in order to serve the German market.
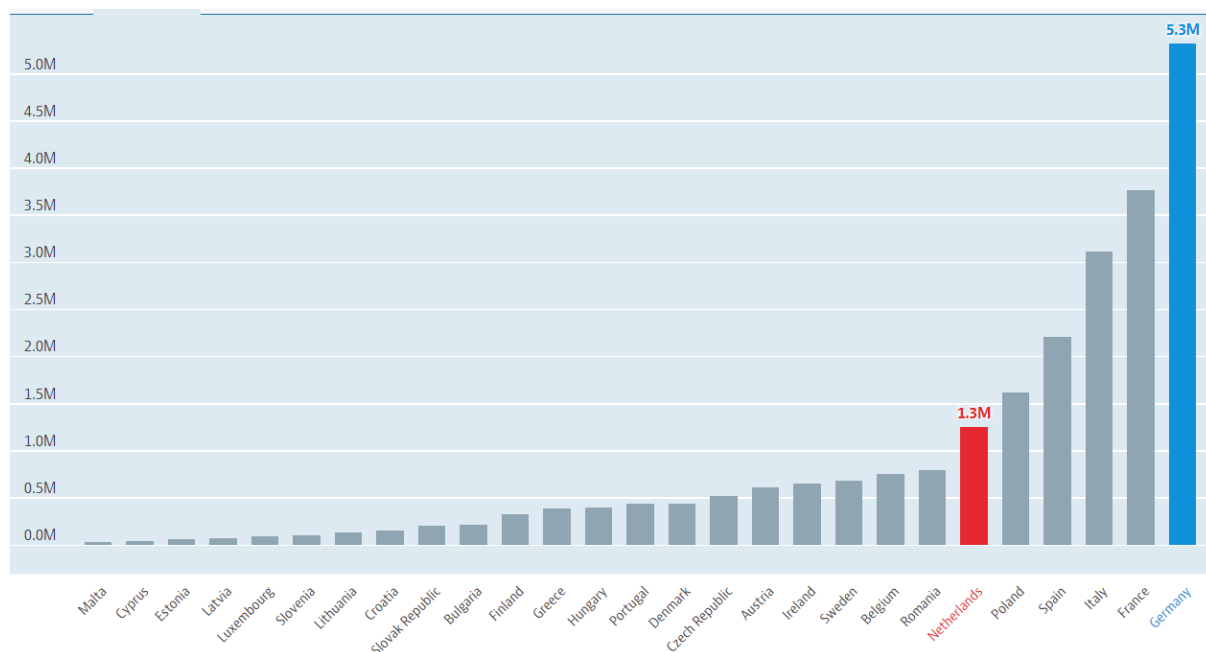
Figure 1: EU Member states compared by 2022 GDP in million US-Dollars (OECD, 2023)

The European openness does accelerate previously mentioned effects. The Schengen Agreement, which is effective since 1995, enables traveling and commuting over the border without border controls or custom issues. Crossing borders in Europe became less special, and enabled people to explore the advantages of being culturally and economically open. In combination those effects make that interaction and collaboration between German and Dutch

happen more often than ever, which is why specifically those countries, and their cultures are being studied in this thesis. But though the countries are geographical neighbors and there are some interferences, that does not automatically mean that they are culturally similar. Several authors have researched the cultural differences between Germany and the Netherlands already, by observing them and trying to understand the underlying cultural characteristics causing the difference. Not only are the underlying cultural characteristics being researched, it is also further very interesting how such a difference appears in reality. Where do cultures comply and where do they clash? What is the effect of such clashes? Should they be avoided and if yes, how can that be done?

The psychologist Schlizio (2008) for example did detailed research on the cultural differences Germans experienced in the collaboration with Dutch and elaborated this into a book with cases for German workers and managing staff, who are going to work in the Netherlands and want to prepare for it. Thesing (2016) in his doctoral thesis researched how Dutch experienced German-Dutch business encounters. Thomas (2010) researched cultural standards and resulting conflicts quite extensively, using the Critical Incident method to identify critical interactions between Dutch and German individuals to understand why the cultures clash and which cultural characteristics are causing the clash.

Even though research on the topic has been started, such as the ones mentioned above, there are still some uncovered areas of interest. Existing research for example does focus on cultural clashes in general and fails to give attention to the influence business objectives might have on critical interactions. The pressure exerted by business targets, the individuals working habits and career intentions might change how both cultures clash with each other. For example, in general a German might enjoy the flexibility of the Dutch, when it comes to spontaneous events or finding solutions quickly. However, when business targets are involved, the German might be unsatisfied with the Dutch flexibility, because the lack of planning could give them a feeling of losing control.

It has been analyzed by several researchers, such as Coleman (1995) and Thomas (2010), how individuals can react to situations that are foreign to them, at least from a cultural perspective. Those reactions have been classified into different types of reaction to intercultural collaboration, but there are only vague statements about the desirability of such situations in certain contexts. Previous researchers have put little focus on how the reaction types show in reality and what they mean to their (cultural) environment. Further, previous work has put little emphasis on analyzing which reaction type is eligible to eliminate cultural clashes, so they will

not happen again. Both insights will be useful to reach the research goal by answering the research questions as they both will be introduced in the following.

The goal of this research is to collect cases of culture-caused frictions (critical incidents), rooted in the respective cultural standards and occurring as critical incidents in collaborations between Dutch and German in a work environment, to identify the conflicting cultural standards from which these frictions originate; and to find mechanisms for coping with and avoiding previously mentioned critical incidents.

RQ1: Which culture-caused critical incidents happen when Germans collaborate with Dutch in a work environment?

RQ2: From which conflicting cultural standards do these critical incidents originate?

RQ3: Which coping mechanisms do Germans working in the Netherlands use to overcome those critical incidents?

The answer to those research questions provides theoretical and practical implications. Theoretical implications are either denial or validation of other coping and reaction types, such as those of Coleman (1995) or Thomas (2010). Additionally, the field of researching cultural interplay between German and Dutch is enriched by the setting of business encounters, which none of the existing research has specifically focused on.

Practical implications for those who are working (or planning to work) in the Netherlands are presented, as well as recommendations for how to cope effectively with the most frequent occurring critical incidents. On the other hand, those who want to set up a mixed-culture team or want to hire Germans for their business can profit from anticipating culture-based critical incidents. They gain the possibility to assign roles within a team regarding cultural strengths. Overall, handling the clash of different cultures well opens many positive opportunities for businesses and can be a key success factor, especially when internationalization is planned.

The thesis begins with an introduction section containing research goals and research questions to make objectives of the paper clear. The introduction is followed by a theoretical framework which will cover previous work on the topic and indicates what this paper will add to existing research. The research method will be drawn from the theoretical framework and explained in the next section. After this, the results of the study will be pointed out and their implications be

discussed in the last section, aiming to come up with practical relevant suggestions for managers and employees.

2. Theoretical Framework

To analyze critical incidents and their implications for cultural assimilation and successful business collaborations, first the concepts of culture, cultural standards have to be defined, building upon those definitions the cultural standards of Dutch as seen by the Germans can be determined.

2.1 Defining Culture

Culture as a concept may appear very abstract to some, due to its untouchable and fuzzy nature. It is something existing, always surrounding us in everything we do, and it somehow is able to explain most of our (rational) actions. As culture does not exist physically, there is no one right description of what it is or what it means. Triandis (1989, p. 306) defines culture as the "fixed human-made part of the social environment.", implying that humans themselves build up culture as fixed part of their environment. When looking at the origin of cultural traits, indeed sometimes they can be pretty old, meaning that societies take a lot of time to establish, reassess, and adjust culture. Thomas et al. (2010) goes beyond this definition and explains why humans make up this part of their social environment. He claims that the ability to orient (or to have orientation through culture) is a basic human need.

As Sigmund Freud stated in his psychoanalytic theory in the early 20th century, an individual's thoughts are always partly conscious and partly unconscious, otherwise human awareness would be overloaded by many small decisions and impulses that can be processed unconsciously. About the conscious decisions and statements we make, one can think actively, reflect, and evaluate the situation. This leads to the assumption that on the contrary, unconscious decisions will be rather 'automatically' made, based upon the norms, values, and beliefs our society told us to be right, and that are rooted in our mind to be "the right thing". According to Thomas (2010) those norms, values and beliefs are nothing less than culture embedded into our unconscious minds. They have been taught to us from other culture members, such as family, or through rewards and punishments of the culture.

According to Thomas (2010, p. 19), "culture is always manifested in a system of orientation typical to a country, society or group. There are specific symbols such as language, clothing, greeting rituals etc. which are passed on over the generations.". This system of orientation gives all members a feeling of belonging and inclusion, and individuals feel that

decisions and actions according to this system of orientation are legitimate and therefore right. The inner need to avoid societal punishment, to comply with the system and act in accordance makes culture something generalizable, and therefore it can be assumed that many members of the same societal structures follow the same cultural patterns. In practice, this means nothing less than that Dutch people mostly behave after what we call 'Dutch culture', and German people mostly behave after what we call 'German culture'.

2.2 ETIC Literature on Culture and Comparing Cultures

Several researchers have attempted to quantify national cultures to make them more comparable and predictable, for example in business contexts. One popular approach to quantifying and analyzing cultures are Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions (Hofstede, 1984) extended by himself in 2011 (Hofstede, 2011). For over 15 years Hofstede has researched for a large multinational business IBM, which wanted to know how culture affects performance. He visited departments in several countries to find basic elements of structure in their cultural systems, in particular those elements which influence the business the most.

In his more recent research Hofstede identified six cultural dimensions to be of importance when it comes to the influence of culture upon business situations: 1) Individualism vs Collectivism, 2) Uncertainty avoidance, 3) Power distance; 4) Masculinity vs. Femininity, 5) Long-term vs. Short-term orientation and 6) Indulgence vs. Restraint. In Hofstede's theory, cultures are characterized by their scores on those dimensions. Interviews with individuals from a certain culture led to different scores amongst the dimensions, which in the end can be compared to make statements about the characteristics of culture.

Table 1

Hofstede's dimensions

Dimension	Description
Individualism vs. Collectivism	Loose social framework in which people care for themselves (Individualism) vs. community orientation and having a group looking after them in return for unquestioned loyalty
Uncertainty Avoidance	The strong or weak pronounced need to reduce environmental uncertainties and reduce risks for the sake of possibility of opportunism and flexibility

Power Distance	The extent to which hierarchy and status have influence upon social and decision power, especially in working environments
Masculinity vs. Femininity	The degree of equality between male and female, can also be seen as task-orientation vs. person-orientation
Long-term vs. Short-term orientation	The time duration for which planning is necessary and valued in a society.
Indulgence vs. Restraint	The extent to which a society allows relatively free gratification of basic and human desires related to enjoying life and having fun

Another quantitative model was created by Trompenaars (1996). He used a similar approach to Hofstede, coming up with certain dimensions that should be used to describe cultures. His seven cultural dimensions are: 1) Universalism vs. Particularism, 2) Individualism vs. Communitarianism, 3) Specific vs. Diffuse, 4) Neutral vs. Affective, 5) Achievement vs. Ascription, 6) Sequential time vs. Synchronous time and 7) Internal direction vs. External direction.

Table 2

Trompenaar's dimensions

Dimension	Conflict
Universalism vs. Particularism	Universalist societies tend to establish and follow rules as they are "a strong source of moral reference". Particular cultures prefer the importance of particular circumstances over rules and regulations
Individualism vs. Communitarianism	Individualism means prime orientation for the self, while communitarianism means a prime orientation to community and common goals and objectives (Parsons, 1955)
Specific vs. Diffuse	The degree of showing emotions in dealing with other people. While specific cultures are task-oriented and separate emotion from professional environments, diffuse cultures are open to mix those spheres.
Neutral vs. Affective	Refers to the level of emotionality in cultures: While people in neutral cultures are "easily accused of being ice-cold, the affective person can be seen to as out of control and inconsistent." (Trompenaars, 1996)

Achievement vs. Ascription	Defines the acquisition of status: While in achievement cultures status can be achieved by performance and results, other cultures ascribe status by virtue of age, class, gender, education.
Sequential time vs. Synchronous time	The perception of time: Cultures with sequential perspective view time as a series of passing events, while synchronous oriented cultures see past, present, and future interrelated
Internal direction vs. External direction	Cultures with internal direction are characterized by valuing a separation of natural and social relationships. In cultures with external direction people tend to be 'other-oriented' and focus on the environment rather than on themselves.

It is observable that quantitative cultural research made culture comparable quite successfully since it has been cited and applied to reality quite often. However, there is strong criticism on generalizing cultures in such a manner. Amongst other possible critique, one problematic characteristic of quantitative research about culture is that it generalizes individuals and creates groups of individuals, for example nations to assign all people in the group the same cultural traits (McSweeney, 2002). The assignment of culture to groups does disregard that culture does largely consist of an individual's behavior and can be very different in between groups. Some nations for example are so large or diverse, they might be home to several subcultures which makes it hard to make cultural assumptions for groups of humans as large as nations. For example, Woordard (2012) in his research elaborates on the eleven historical cultures of the United States of America. How many cultures a country contains is most probably subject to the perspective one chooses to have and hence makes culture a very abstract concept to measure by frequencies or numbers.

McSweeney (2002) for example asks: "Do nations have cultures?". He is convinced, that 'culture can be rather found in individuals as a part of a group', than in the groups themselves. In his research, he questions the plausibility of systematically causal national cultures and states, that quantifying culture 'is an attempt to measure the unmeasurable, something that lies in between humans instead on top of nations.'

2.3. EMIC Literature on Defining and Comparing Cultures
2.3.1. Defining Cultural Standards

Contrary to quantitative research, qualitative cultural research does have a different approach. While quantitative research aims to find and confirm generic assumptions about a population by analyzing quite large sets of data, qualitative research aims to gain a better understanding of individuals, what drives them and how their actions and decisions may be reasoned. Hence, different methods are being used to gain and analyze the data.

When applied to the case of cultural standards, the observation or interrogation of individuals is amongst others a popular qualitative method to gain data. Instead of having a large amount of rather superficial data like in quantitative research, in qualitative research there is often big data too, but this big data is distributed amongst few individuals. The qualitative approach is useful in cultural research: Since culture is sometimes beyond what one may grasp, individuals tend to struggle describing it. In return researchers must interpret sayings, perspectives and opinions of individuals in order to understand their culture (coding).

Cultural standards are important to understand culture in general - One could say that they are the invisible 'theory' behind visible cultural behavior. In most cases observable cultural behavior can be assigned to cultural standards, since especially unconscious behavior is rooted in the norms and values we learned to be 'normal'. In the society this shows as 'forms of perception, thought patterns and judgement.' (A. Thomas et al., 2010)

While interpreting Thomas definitions of cultural standards, one might ask whether those cultural standards are typical behaviors or values. There might a strong connection between typical behaviors and values since typical behaviors do result from shared values. It can be said that the more people share the same values, the more typical a certain behavior becomes. If one applies this pattern to Dutch culture Consensus would be a good example. The more people share the value consensus, the more typical it would be for them to care for harmony and to regard everyone´s opinion in order to decide.

In 1993, Thomas (p. 381) noted: "By cultural standards we understand all kinds of perceiving, thinking, judging, and acting, which in a given culture are considered by the vast majority of the individuals for themselves and others as normal, self-evident, typical, and obligatory.". Cultural standards are somewhat like guidelines to behave in each society, resulting in reward or punishment. If culture was seen as a boardgame, one could say that cultural standards are like the instructions - They provide understanding about the culture and make clear how to succeed. Following certain cultural standards is necessary, because they are shared by a majority of members in the society and this majority sees their behavior as normal,

typical, and binding (A. Thomas et al., 2010). Any action in accordance with cultural standards will be seen as legitimate in the eyes of the society, and often will be rewarded.

On the other hand, behavior which is unfamiliar to the society and does not comply with their cultural standards is judged negatively upon. Such judging behavior can be seen in courts, but it can also take place within societal structures like families or tribes. Judging unfamiliar behavior often results in some kind of sanction and/or correction, such as imprisoning, punishing or teaching the individual which has not behaved in accordance. How sensible a culture is to breaches of their cultural standards is influenced by a rate of tolerance (A. Thomas et al., 2010). Tolerance means to accept deviating behavior to a certain extent and is more pronounced in some and less pronounced in other cultural structures. Behavior is sanctioned if the rate of tolerance is exceeded.

Cultural standards occur in different types: Core cultural standards do comply to a very generic probe of a specific culture and do often overlay with culture-specific stereotypes. They do not apply to specific situations, instead come up frequently in various contexts (A. Thomas et al., 2010). Since core cultural standards occur frequently and without surprising, a culture is often characterized by them. Because they are often observable and highly accepted in the society, core cultural standards make culture predictable to some extent, which is an important insight if a proper reaction to cross-cultural encounters should be prepared, as is the goal of this research (see section 1.2).
Besides the core cultural standards there are domain- and situation-specific cultural standards. Those situation-specific cultural standards do "[…] require a specific task framework in which to operate […]" (A. Thomas et al., 2010). In this research the specific framework will be an organizational encounter with business objectives, such as maximizing profits or minimizing risks (business encounter).

Knowledge of cultural standards and how to comply to them in a business setting can provide useful information for those who want to work in foreign settings. If two cultures clash in a meeting, both parties are likely to sanction each other – with a deal or project that does not happen. But the sanction to unfamiliar behavior does not necessarily need to take place in physical reality, it can also occur in people's minds. They might think: "This foreigner shows some weird behavior, I should rather not make deals with him.". Leung et al. (2005) are convinced that cultural standards offer "[…] new concepts for understanding differences in business practices."

2.3.2. Defining Critical Incidents

To identify cultural standards and how they lead to critical situations, the critical incident technique is used. It was first developed by John Flanagan (1954) during World War II in order "to identify effective pilot performance" (Woolsey, 1986). The critical incident technique is known as exploratory qualitative method. Eyewitness observers of certain behaviors are being asked for situations in which they observed conflicts resulting from differing cultural standards. Such observations are relevant for cultural research if they fulfill two factors: It must be an incident, a situation that "[…] actually happened and was directly observed" (Woolsey, 1986). Further they need to be critical, meaning they "[…] significantly affected the outcome.". In this case the outcome is the working atmosphere that Dutch and German experience when they are collaborating.

A. Thomas applied the critical incidents technique as follows: First, he started to apply the critical incidents technique as initially described by Flanagan. In a second step key cultural standards of the clashing cultures are being identified. Group discussions involving both colliding cultures are then being used to sort out those critical incidents that are unprecise or not suitable to be used in research, for example because they are inappropriate. The idea behind this is to validate a critical incident with the cultural values and behaviors the group members experience in their daily lives. Indeed, in a subsequent step the underlying cultural standards behind critical incidents are being identified. The cultural standards found to be causing critical incidents in the dataset can be confirmed by searching for generic literature on nation-specific cultural standards.

In a next step, the data is then reviewed by members of the researched cultures. Critical incidents are being introduced and the members are being asked to assign a cultural standard to certain situations. The statistical frequencies resulting do further help to identify points of interests, for example cultural standards that often lead critical incidents. In Thomas application of the critical incidents' technique members of the host country are being asked how typical the situation would be in their home culture, aiming to reduce randomness in the sample and exclude situations that are rather linked to individuals than to cultures.

The last step in the critical incidents technique as applied by Thomas in his handbook is to make the findings useful for people who might enter such a cultural encounter in the future, it involves creating training materials. Those training materials can be booklets, reports, journals or whatever else helps people going abroad to prepare for intercultural situations.

This research uses a mix of Flanagans' original theory and Thomas' approach to identify critical incidents as described in the following: According to Flanagan (1954) and Woolsey

(1986) five steps should be followed to employ the critical incidents technique. Firstly, the aim of the activity is determined (Chapter 1). This research aims at identifying business situations in which cultures clash with each other (critical incidents). The next step is to set plans, specifications and criteria for the information to be obtained (Chapter 3.1). In this case, critical incident technique will be used, which is an exploratory qualitative method. Interviewees will be asked for situations in which they observed conflicts resulting from different cultural standards. The incidents must be critical and actually be observed by the interviewees. The third step is to collect data by asking interviewees to provide critical incidents that they have observed (Chapter 3.2). The incidents must have significantly affected the outcome, which is the working atmosphere between Dutch and German observers and the perception of Germans towards Dutch culture. The fourth step is to analyze the thematic content of the collected data (Chapter 4). The incidents provided by the interviewees will be reviewed and analyzed to identify themes to related cultural clashes. The final step is to report the findings (Chapter 5). The themes related to cultural clashes will be presented and discussed, highlighting the situations in which cultural differences caused conflicts in the working atmosphere between Dutch and German collaborators. Ultimately, recommendations will be provided on how to migrate or prevent such conflicts in the future.

Figure 2

Definition of critical incidents
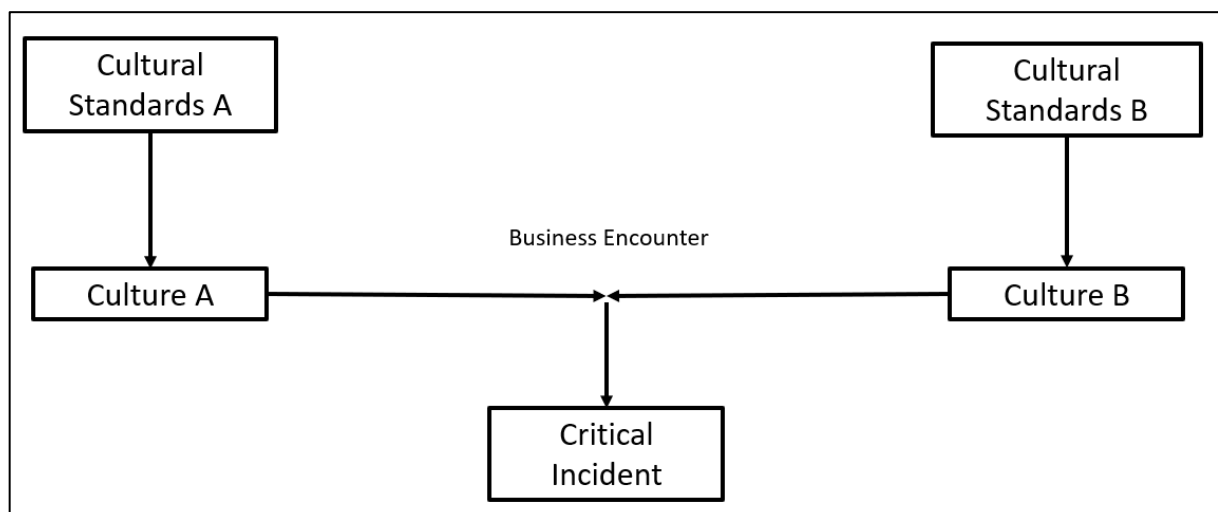
Note. Based on Thomas et al. (2010)

2.3.3. German Cultural Standards

C. Thesing (2016) found six German cultural standards perceived by Dutch people: 1) Fear of losing control, 2) Separation of living spheres, 3) Task orientation, 4) Appreciation for rules and structures, 5) Time planning, 6) Status orientation. Thesing identified that these cultural standards are strongly intertwined and assigned 'Fear of Losing Control' the highest importance. As visible in figure 3, all German cultural standards are somewhat related to fear of losing control.

Figure 3

German Cultural Standards
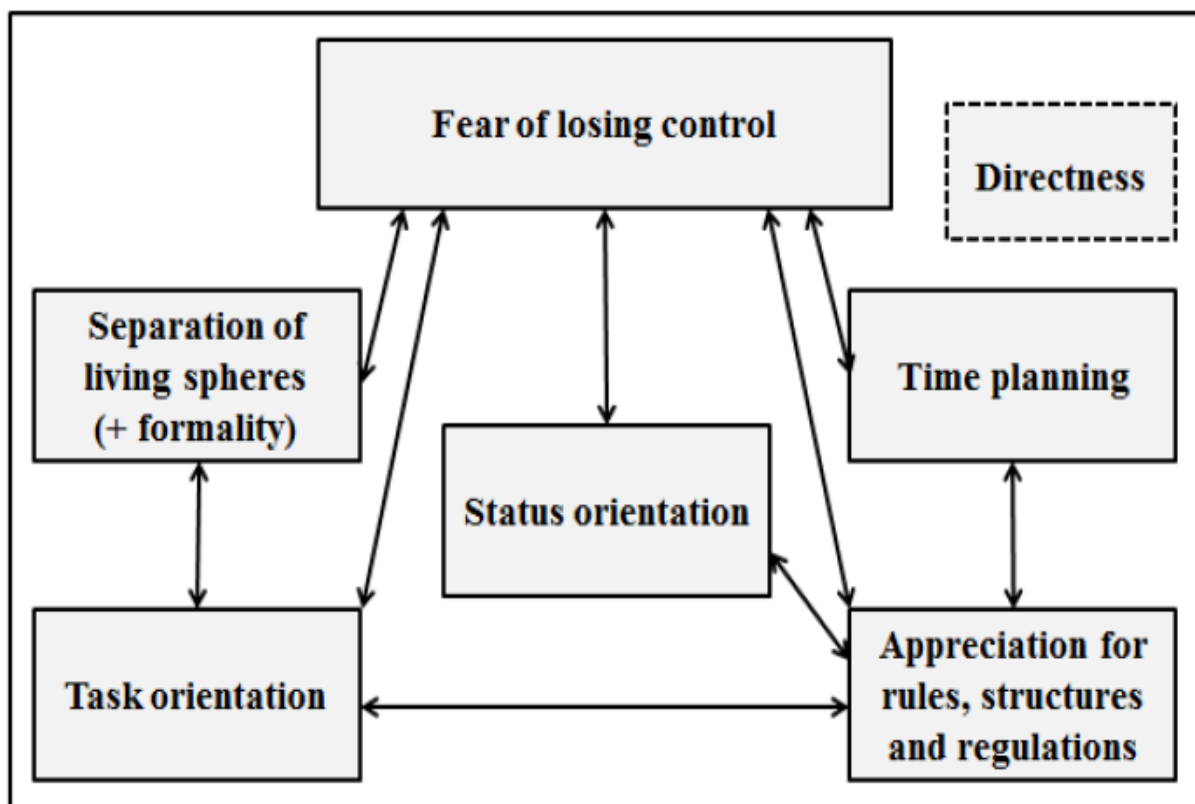
Note. Thesing (2016)

In the following, the meaning of above-mentioned cultural standards will be explained.

Fear of Losing Control

The fear of losing control is on top of the hierarchy of German cultural standards perceived by Dutch. Almost every critical incident or conflict in cross-cultural situations can be explained by a fear of losing control of the German. It is the reason why Germans appear to be obsessed with fixed long-term plans and unchangeable long-term contracts. Germans appreciate certainty a lot, and any uncertainty is eliminated by contracts, documents, instructions and whatever

helps to guide and unify processes. Obedience to those rules is of utmost importance. Not seldomly workers get punished if they appear too late at their workplace or leave it early. The schedule must be kept, and even though keeping schedules and moving within structures might appear useless and ineffective in a moment, it leads to consistency on the long run. Germans accept the bureaucracy and inflexibility of unavoidable structures, in order to deliver consistent quality and experience no surprises. Thesing (2016) described it already, and we will later in this document find confirmation for the fact, that Germans feel insecure and uncomfortable whenever situations are unknown, or there is no certain planning for the coming time period.

Separation of Living Spheres

Germans tend to have no or only little connection between work and life. Often even long-time colleagues do not know much about each other, apart from the formal. Of course, there are cases where colleagues become friends, but if that does not happen there is not much private information shared. A separation of working and living does also mean, that there are little informal conversations at work. Typical questions like "How was your weekend?" or "What's your plan for tonight?" are sometimes appreciated, but sometimes also considered rude. It does barely happen that workers bring their family to work-related events, such as BBQ's or celebrations. In general, those events are seldomly held for fun, usually there is a specific reason to meet colleagues outside of the workplace. Further, children often do not know what the exact work of their parents is if it is not too obvious. Communication does happen vertical mostly, and formal communication channels are chosen to communicate (Thesing, 2016). In Germany it is very unlikely, that employees use the same communication channels than in their private life. In practice this often shows with business phones, or communication in written form.

With this separation of living spheres comes formality at work. As many know, in German there are two different ways to address each other: 'Du' and 'Sie'. Both mean 'You', while 'Du' is informal, and 'Sie' is a formal way to talk to somebody. It is considered disrespectful to approach somebody with 'Du' if both have never met before. Even colleagues after years might still use the 'Sie'-form, and it is used towards those who have higher hierarchy position. The informal 'Du' is usually offered from the older to the younger of both interlocutors, if both agree that they want to go from the formal to the informal communication. The younger could answer in two ways: Either they accept the informal and say:" Oh yes, 'Du' is much more comfortable for me!" and they exchange their first names – or the younger say: "I believe this is not necessary for our task/project/relation.". A declining reaction does happen

seldomly, also out of respect towards the older. Still a declining answer would be legitimate, as it simply appreciates to focus on the task, which is our next cultural standard.

Task Orientation

Task orientation is the basic mode of operation for every employee in Germany. According to Schroll-Machl (2008), meeting and working happens on two different levels: The task-level and the socio-emotional level. Schroll-Machl (2008) and C. Thesing (2016) found out that the task level is more appreciated than the socio-emotional level in Germany, while in the Netherlands both levels more or less share the same importance. Therefore, working in Germany sometimes can appear very harsh. When focusing on the task-level only, the socio-emotional level can be completely disregarded. For example, when a manager gives a task to the employee, he might appear very demanding. There is not much talking around the task to be made, communication is limited to the necessary and anything beyond is not appreciated – interestingly also not from the employee. The employee likes to have instructions, because it gives them clarity about how to succeed the task.

To those who are used to the socio-emotional level, work communication in Germany can appear confusing. When a manager gives feedback to the employee, it is completely task related as well. Because emotions are not regarded, the feedback appears emotionally hurtful to its receiver. The manager or boss might present an employee's mistakes to him in a disregardful manner and explain the consequences as well. Showing emotions during such a process is considered unprofessional. As an example, the feedback might be: "Employee, you have failed to succeed this task the fifth time this month. At the moment you are not capable to fulfill this task in a satisfying manner, which is why you will receive a training on Monday.". Phrases like 'you have failed' or 'you are not capable' could be very hurtful to those who appreciate the socio-emotional level, employees might react sad, disappointed, or just feel hurt. A German however does understand that the task is not about being friends with each other, and it needs to be done according to planning in order to reach a shared goal. Even if the employee disagrees, he will rather use facts, like numbers and documents to defend his work than showing any emotion.

In the Netherlands, and in many other informal cultures as well, meetings often start with some small talk and informal chats to get warm with each other. Germans however tend to have a time planning, in which informal communication is not regarded. The German's schedule is often tight, and so it comes that they get to the point straight away. This complies with the 'Separation of living spheres' cultural standard: If there is nothing informal to talk

about, and work meetings are just for work, then it only makes sense to talk about the task in a meeting.

Appreciation for Rules and Structures

Germans do have a high appreciation for rules and structures, and the root behind that is again the omnipresent fear of losing control. While rules and structures are capable to reduce uncertainty and risk, hence reduce fear of losing control, they do also not comply much with working freely. We will notice this clash many times later in this thesis. As rules and structures are often held in written form, Germans do often rely on documents and contracts. According to Thesing (2016), there are no significant more documents in Germany than in the Netherlands, but those which exist are very extensive, detailed, and certain. The Germans appreciation of keeping rules does further lead to social control: If obeying to public rules leads to personal reduction of fear to lose control, those public rules are not only appreciated, but they are also even enforced by the society. And so, it comes that the German population has a high level of social control. Germans tend to control themselves for the good of the society - Civil obedience is valued and no German risks losing his status in society by being disobedient.

Interestingly, it does not matter a lot whether the regulation or law actually makes sense. A regulation might be not logical, provide no value or seems to make no sense on the first glance. As Germans are long-term oriented, it does not matter to them. They trust that the rules they follow will make sense on the long-run and hence accept, that on the short-term or first glance it might be senseless.

An example are the comparably low fines for traffic rule violations, at least compared to other Western-European Countries. Parking wrong or losing the driver's license is judged by the society and does get penalized invisibly. The German loses some of his status if doing so, and people might say: "This guy is no proper person, and we rather avoid contacting him.". The social punishment is important to Germans, making monetary fines less relevant. Assumingly, in states with less social control and civil obedience, more monetary punishments are needed to keep people from disobeying. Most of the traffic fines are significantly higher in the Netherlands than in Germany.

Time Planning

Many Germans have a tight time planning and we previously figured out this is because Germans want to get surprised seldomly and there is a very little informal part in their working style. Both factors make working predictable and thus, plannable. Not getting surprised and

(time-) planning work reciprocally: If everything is planned properly, nothing will surprise you. And if there are little surprises, ergo little uncertainty, things can be planned. Planning is again much related to the appreciation of structures and routines, but it is even more related to the fear of losing control. Having the coming time period planned is a good sign for a German. It becomes predictable when a project will be done, when the milestones can be reached, if a deadline can be met. In general, it shows the German, that everything is under control.

Due to his rather tight time planning, the German appreciates appointments and coming on time to those a lot. Reaching out to a German flexibly is possible, but rather only to make an appointment. Salespersons will call you and offer their newest products, but as soon as you have a certain interest about the product, they will rather offer you an appointment than a deal. Punctuality regarding appointments is considered extremely important. If somebody does not come on time, it is perceived disrespectful towards the others involved in the appointment. One reason is, that it messes up their schedule and hinders them to be task-oriented, which is very legitimate as we learned before.

During appointments, as mentioned there is almost no informal communication, instead there will most likely be an agenda with topics to be followed. Sometimes those topics are even assigned time frames to discuss, which is much like a time planning within time planning. It shows the importance of not losing control over the meeting, because otherwise the goals for this meeting might not be reached. An agenda does disclose the importance of doing things step-by-step in Germany. Multitasking is considered risky; one might lose his eye for details or outcomes become less predictable. Both can be sources of surprises and uncertainty and so, multitasking is not used much in Germany. The German is often aware that Multitasking is more efficient, but having control is seemingly more important than working efficiently.

Status Orientation

Status orientation is the weakest German cultural standard in the eyes of Dutch, according to Thesing (2016). Expensive assets, like cars, houses and clothing are related to the societal status a lot, as they are seen as 'proof of success'. Also, titles which display a certain position in the hierarchy do play a role, for example being a doctor or professor. Expressing status, in whatever way is necessary to show success, and success will be admired. In the end, status symbols help individuals to be taken seriously and get a voice in the society.

2.3.4. Dutch Cultural Standards

Thomas and Schlizio (2009) found the following Dutch cultural standards identified by Germans:

Informality

Dutch Informality is interestingly opposing to the German appreciation for rules and structures. In the Dutch language, there is formal 'U' and informal 'Je' as well, however the formal u is seldomly used, sometimes in advertisements, in a courtyard or by officers. The informal way to communicate is much more common here and using it without agreement before is normal. Informality, so not following certain structures, rules, agendas etc. does provide the Dutch with the advantage to be flexible and being able to adjust to changing circumstances quick and uncomplicated. At work, being informal means that private and business life are not strictly divided. Colleagues might know each other's family quite well, talk about daily problems, even those a German would consider sensible. They meet colleagues in their free time, usually because some of the colleagues became friends over time, and they like to have lunch together. Birthdays are celebrated, and usually the one who has birthday brings some 'Traktatie' (Some snacks and/or cake to celebrate together). Informality is also visible in meetings, one might talk about the party on the weekend first before the meeting actually becomes serious. Other than Germans, Dutch have no need for communication channels to be professional or formal. It is no rarity that your boss sends you a message in a social network in between, and this message can also contain work-related information.

Pragmatism

Pragmatism means to use a "practical approach to problems and affairs" (Pragmatism, 2021), rather than fixed structures or plans. This also implies to be opportunistic now and then, going for the most practical solution, even though this might not provide the most value on the long run. While Germans tend to walk on a fenced path, wearing blinkers like a horse, and going straight to the objectives, The Dutch sometimes leave their path, or at least have the option to do so. It enables them to see what is left and right of the chosen path, and if there is something promising, they become opportunistic and follow the new path instead of the old. Dutch people do not build fences in which they move, they are open to whatever encounters them on their way. One could say that the Dutch are less focused, but that also enables them to change plans to a better one.

Pragmatism makes the Dutch able to react to complicated situation in a simple way and it makes them open for surprises, since there is no plan that could be ruined. Their planning does not reach far into the future, instead they like to keep things open, so they can spontaneously go for the best option. When Dutch work together with Germans, who tend to plan a lot, this planning can appear like a waste of time: "Why should we make a plan, if it is likely to be changed later?".

Relation-Orientation

The Dutch love to have a harmonic atmosphere and this is even more important to them than reaching maximum efficiency. Much unlike than the German, where emotions are considered unprofessional, in the Netherlands emotions are part of the working. One could say Dutch culture is more human-oriented than task-oriented, and so it comes that for the good of friendship and a friendly atmosphere mistakes are not being penalized and feedback is formulated more careful. Harmonizing with the cultural standard of being informal, the desired working atmosphere for the Dutch should not only be friendly, but also intimate to some extent. Being intimate with each other, having informal talks about things from private life and caring for friendship within the team can ultimately be described with the concept 'Gezelligheid'. 'Gezelligheid' means to have a harmonic and nice workplace at which you feel somewhat home, and it results from celebrating, joking, laughing, and eating with each other. A concept that we meet often in connection to modern working styles is 'Work-Life Balance' and having a good team that is befriended and cares for each other can be a major part of establishing such a balance. Suddenly work and life begin to merge, as you do not only see your friends in free time, but also at work. On the other hand, it also says that some of the work might be taken home, but overall both factors should be balanced. We will later notice that many Germans working in the Netherlands highly appreciate Dutch 'Gezelligheid'.

Flat Hierarchies

Flat hierarchies are symbolic for the Dutch tendency to be egalitarian. Egalitarianism means that all people have the same value, the same voice, the same power. People see each other equal and in return, they should possess the very same right. It implies that the boss is not more important than the cleaning staff, and also that his position is not justification enough to earn more. Furthermore, to be egalitarian means to provide the same opportunities to everyone, which very much applies in the Netherlands. All people have access to the same education and health system, and thus all have the same opportunity to reach their dreams. Regarding

opportunities, it sometimes happens in the Netherlands that people get chance to do a task or job, that does not completely fit to them. Giving them 'job opportunity' however does mean that they can at least try to do the job for some time. It can be a big win for company and the individual if the employee given job opportunity actually fulfills his position well. Germans frequently do not see the sense in giving development chances to employees that do not have the right skill set, and so they often decline those given opportunity by stating they are unprofessional.

Having and claiming freedom of action in how to exactly conduct a work or design a process is part of flat hierarchies as well. Instead of being precisely instructed by their boss, the employee appreciates if he is given freedom and flexibility to find the solution that works out best. Germans often suffer from missing structure and quickly think that the company has no strategy and works clueless into some direction. Quite often Germans misinterpret the freedom they are given as missing structure and strategy.

Flat hierarchies imply, that formalities are often hidden, and so it comes that on the first glance the boss is not to distinguish from the intern. Even though he might have less expertise, the opinion of the intern is seen equally to the opinion of the boss. And further in the Netherlands, managers often do not have such a controlling, organizing, and planning role as they would have in Germany, instead their job is to inspire and motivate the team with a vision. Leaders in the Netherlands give responsibility and power to their team in order to ensure everyone is satisfied, likes his job, and feels empowered in the decisions he or she does.

Calvinistic Modesty

Dutch modesty is the reason why status symbols do not automatically mean success in the Netherlands. While Germans due to their status orientation tend to show wealth, for the Dutch this is more showing off than actually showing to be professional. There is little appreciation for titles and expensive status symbols, they do not play a major role and are seldomly shown. Between Germans and Dutch that often leads to irritation. Because the Dutch bring no status symbols, they are considered unsuccessful and hence not taken professional. The Dutch instead does not want to show off, he does not want to appear arrogant or snooty.

Consensus-Culture

Consensus culture especially is visible when Dutch teams must decide something. As previously discussed, they think egalitarian and have a strong drive to handle everyone equally. That also means that everyone has a voice in a meeting, and things are decided democratically.

On the side of employee's consensus culture means that they feel excluded when decisions are made without them and satisfying everyone is strongly appreciated. Germans often feel annoyed by that, as they believe certain people (roles) should not give their input to the decision, as it does little value and must hence not be regarded. They prefer to make decisions efficiently over satisfying everyone, even though 'Gezelligheid' is an important factor in the Dutch work life. Interestingly many Germans appreciate the Gezelligheid, but not the means being used to reach it, for example collective decision making, mixing private and work life, or giving up on efficiency in terms to ensure harmony and friendship.

2.3.5. Underlying Cultural Values leading to Dutch cultural standards

The Dutch culture is shaped by various values and norms. J. Rosemann (2021) in her research interviewed several Germans working in the Netherlands to report about culture caused critical incidents they encountered with the Dutch. By doing so, she has been able to find the underlying values behind the cultural standards we previously discovered, including self-determination (zelfbeschikking), efficiency, consensus, and equality.

Self-Determination (Zelfbeschikking)

The cultural value of self-determination refers to the Dutch people's desire for personal autonomy and the freedom to make their own choices. The Dutch prioritize individual responsibility and independence, and they believe that everyone has the right to live their lives as they see fit. This value is reflected in the Dutch education system, where children are taught to be self-reliant and to think for themselves. Logically, those cultural standards related to personal freedom do result from self-determination, such as Freedom of Action, Approximate Planning, Anti-authoritarianism, Directness, and the highly valued work-life balance.

Figure 4 displays the connection between underlying values and cultural standards. The cultural standards are identified and described by critical incident situations that Germans working in the Netherlands encountered.

Figure 4

German Critical Incidents classified into Dutch cultural standards (1)

| Paraphrased quotations from interviews | Cultural standards | Underlying Values |

| Critical incidents with Dutch described by Germans | | |

- You are allowed to order items yourself if you need them
- They simply decide themselves
- They trust their employees that they can decide for themselves
- We have more freedom to shape our work
- You can leave a lot of things to your employees to handle
- We ourselves have the responsibility to report sick

→ Freedom of action

- Germans are formal, very punctual, at ten o'clock is also 10 o'clock. And the Dutch tend to have coffee first and not so punctually and come at 10:05, the Dutch somehow accept that more
- For a German a deadline is a deadline, but here I noticed it is not as bad if you inform the other person that it might be delayed because something important came up. Its less strict
- Dutch people usually come five minutes after you meet and Germans always five minutes before, but somehow I also have the feeling that it is socially accepted, because nobody really says anything when the meeting starts 10 Minutes later

→ Approximate planning

- The employees only do something if they agree and understand it
- Irritation when boss comes to us and interferes in our work
- They became completely furious when I told them what they had to do and what not
- They first question your authority and behave a little bit rebellious
- I as a manager have to justify my decisions to my subordinates

→ Anti-authoritarianism

- Dutch just say directly what they think in that moment to communicate their opinion on a topic
- If something bothers them, they directly communicate it without thinking about how the other person feels
- The way you negotiate and have meetings with each other. It is expected that one is open and sometimes a bit confrontational. If you then don't say anything, it is actually assumed that everything is okay.

→ Directness

- Especially this work-life balance, also that there is more understanding for private situations in the office
- The Netherlands is the country of part-time work. I even know a lot of people who have no children and no obligations and still work part-time in order to have time for hobbies
- It is very important that if something is planned for the weekend or in the evening, that Dutch can just go.
- They don't have much overtime, or take a day off straight after to compromise the longer hours

→ Work-life-balance

Self-determination

Note. Rosemann (2021)

Efficiency

The Dutch as well as the Germans place a high value on efficiency and practicality, but both interpret the term of efficiency different. While efficiency for Dutch means to be pragmatic and spend as little time as possible, Germans connect efficiency with extensive planning. The Dutch efficiency means they tend to be straightforward in their communication and approach problems logically and rationally, as long as gezelligheid and harmony are not harmed. They believe that time is a precious resource, and they strive to use it wisely. This cultural value is reflected in the Dutch work culture, where people can be flexible, pragmatic, and innovative when approaching problems. It leads to finding a simple and quick solution rather than establishing processes and projects. Figure 5 shows the interplay between efficiency and Dutch cultural standards.

Figure 5

German Critical Incidents classified into Dutch cultural standards (2)

Paraphrased quotations from interviews Critical incidents with Dutch described by Germans	Cultural standards	Underlying Values
• Flexibility regarding all sorts of agreements, contracts or regulations • Fast solutions are delivered when problems occur with clients • What you always see with the Dutch is how extremely fast and flexible they are then able to react to changes or new situations • The opportunity to set other priorities in your job and be flexible in your tasks	Flexibility	
• It was then no longer interesting for the Dutch publisher because the effort was too great and the workload was too much • The effort should be relatively simple and involve little obstacles to save time • For the Dutch, it must first and foremost be feasible and not involve so much effort	Pragmatism	Efficiency
• They are more oriented at changes in the digital domain • Dutchmen go more with their time and recognized that investing in technology is important • The Dutch are very future-oriented and the urge to change is strong	(Technological) innovativeness	
• The Germans work on their problems and try to analyze them for a long time and the Dutch simply put things into practice and work directly on a solution. • The boss was not interested who was responsible or involved in the animosities between the teams, but how they could be solved, how the atmosphere could be improved • I have the feeling that they are not actively looking for mistakes (like in G.), but if there is a problem they want to get rid of it as soon as possible • The Dutch react quicker than Germans to problems, somehow they are more interested in a quick solution. (..) In the Netherlands I think they just want to save time by addressing things directly, without making it an even bigger problem or expressing their opinion much later	Solution orientation	

Note. Rosemann (2021)

Consensus

The Dutch culture values consensus and cooperation. Resultantly, hierarchical structures and top-down decision making are rather unusual in the Netherlands. Instead, it is appreciated if everyone can express their opinion. Dutch believe in finding common ground and making decisions through discussion and compromise. Even though the Dutch tend to be direct and honest in their communication, they also place a high value on respecting others opinions. This value is reflected in the Dutch political system, where building alliances (coalition) and compromise are essential for developing the country and getting things done.

Figure 6

German Critical Incidents classified into Dutch cultural standards (3)

Note. Rosemann (2021)

Equality

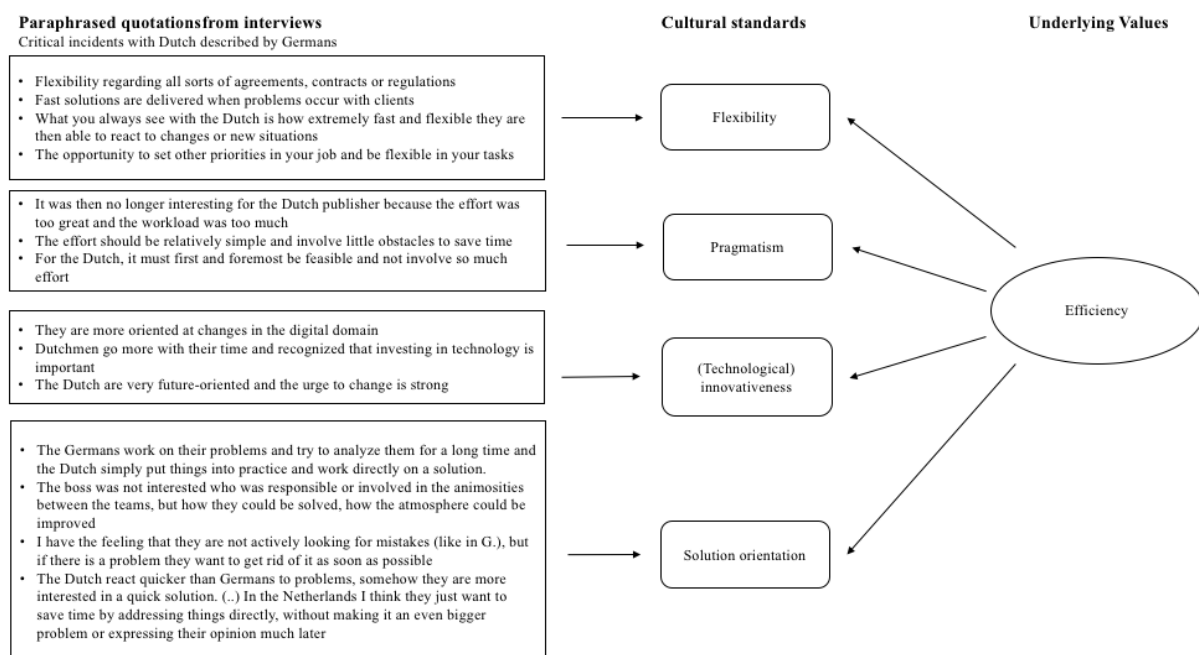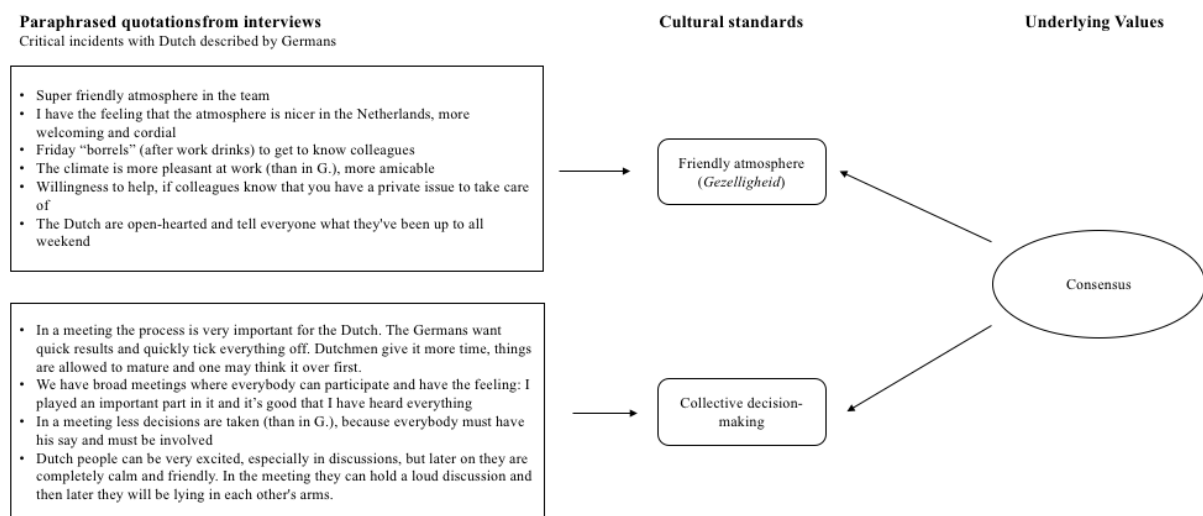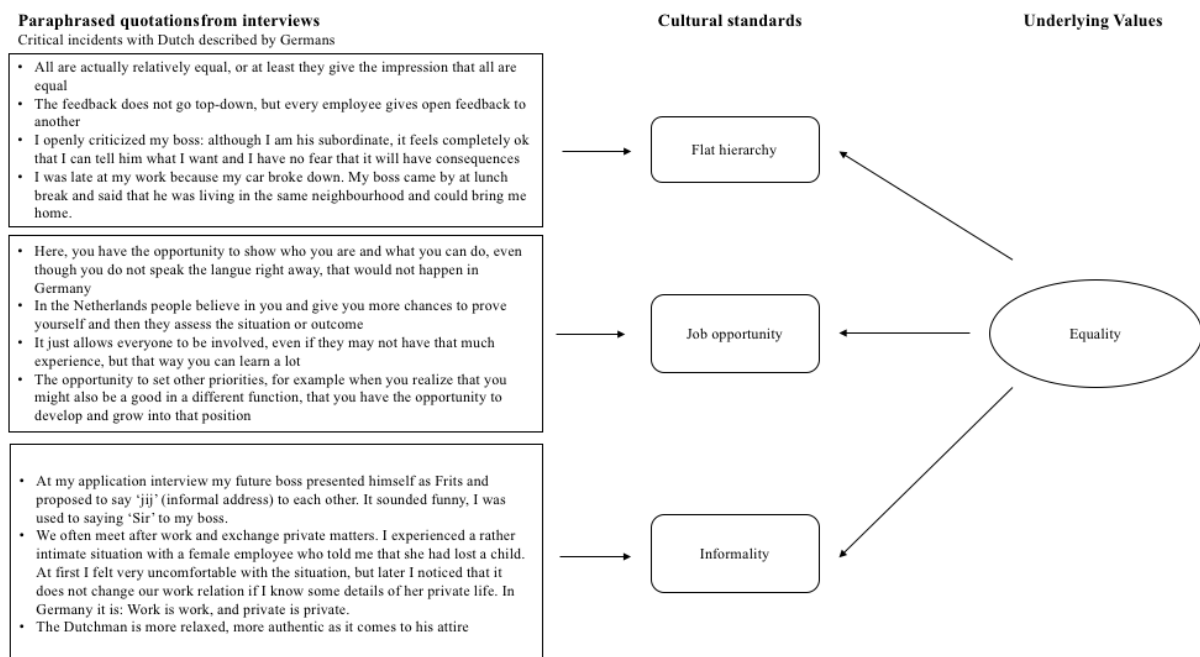Dutch culture values equality and fairness. They believe that everyone should have the same opportunities and be treated with respect and dignity. The Dutch tend to be egalitarian and do not like to draw attention to social status or wealth, which can be seen in the schools, where every student should start with the same conditions and chances regardless of their background. In practice, the equality leads to flat hierarchies and informality: a boss and his employee for example treat each other equally and there is respect and informal behavior between them, which would be unacceptable in more hierarchic cultures.

Figure 7

German Critical Incidents classified into Dutch cultural standards (4)

Paraphrased quotations from interviews	Cultural standards	Underlying Values

Critical incidents with Dutch described by Germans

- All are actually relatively equal, or at least they give the impression that all are equal
- The feedback does not go top-down, but every employee gives open feedback to another
- I openly criticized my boss: although I am his subordinate, it feels completely ok that I can tell him what I want and I have no fear that it will have consequences
- I was late at my work because my car broke down. My boss came by at lunch break and said that he was living in the same neighbourhood and could bring me home.

Flat hierarchy

- Here, you have the opportunity to show who you are and what you can do, even though you do not speak the langue right away, that would not happen in Germany
- In the Netherlands people believe in you and give you more chances to prove yourself and then they assess the situation or outcome
- It just allows everyone to be involved, even if they may not have that much experience, but that way you can learn a lot
- The opportunity to set other priorities, for example when you realize that you might also be a good in a different function, that you have the opportunity to develop and grow into that position

Job opportunity

Equality

- At my application interview my future boss presented himself as Frits and proposed to say 'jij' (informal address) to each other. It sounded funny, I was used to saying 'Sir' to my boss.
- We often meet after work and exchange private matters. I experienced a rather intimate situation with a female employee who told me that she had lost a child. At first I felt very uncomfortable with the situation, but later I noticed that it does not change our work relation if I know some details of her private life. In Germany it is: Work is work, and private is private.
- The Dutchman is more relaxed, more authentic as it comes to his attire

Informality

Note. Rosemann (2021)

2.3.6. Defining Coping Mechanisms and Reaction Types

When the hitherto discussed cultural standards meet each other, two individuals with different beliefs, values, and norms encounter. As mentioned before those meetings do not always go harmonically, instead the discussed differing cultural standards may cause critical incidents. Based on what an individual learned from his society, he shows some reaction to such a critical incident. We can think about the simplest things here, for example assigning stereotypes to other cultures is a very common way to react to the differences one might realize when crossing cultures.

Bandura (1986) explains with his social cognitive theory, that the reaction to a cross-cultural situation is learned from our cultural environment and from our family, as well as from individual experiences and individual health behaviors. The coping strategy an individual chooses for "[…] evolve[s] as a result of the models of coping to which an individual has been exposed and the types of reinforcement the individual receives when he or she attempts to replicate the modeled behavior.". It implies that, same as culture or cultural standards, we base our reaction to intercultural situations on what we have learned in the past from our relatives or other members of the culture, most probably as a child. As soon as the individual replicates this behavior, there will be a reaction shown by the involved environment, for example parents. In

this example according to Bandura (1986) the parents will either punish or reinforce a certain behavior in the child and so it learns to react to cross-cultural meetings. It is important to understand that there are multiple various sources of reaction legitimization: Not only parents, but also other social groups such as educational personnel and peers will evaluate the child's reaction to other cultures, and so it comes that learning reactions to intercultural situations happens in several contexts and changes with different exposures. The reaction one shows is hence individual for each person and was learned in various contexts.

When someone encounters a new culture, we assume that second culture acquisition does always happen. We assume so, since one can hardly meet persons of a different culture without trying to communicate with each other and thus constantly picking up and evaluating signals from each other. One could say: "I do not care about other cultures at all and am not interested in how they are or what they do!", but even such a person would still unconsciously try to understand the foreigner. He unconsciously evaluates things like signals and behavior schemes, at least to evaluate his own security. It can be argued that everyone is subject to experiencing and learning about culture and by doing so, one does always to some small extent acquire the second culture. Coleman (1995) describes this as behavioral episode schema for "[…] learning that culture and managing the stress related to the learning process." Fassinger & Richie (1994) and Gomez & Fassinger (1994) add, that when this behavioral episode schema is effective and successful, "the individual should be able to achieve his or her goals in that particular context.". On the other hand, "If an individual does not develop an effective strategy, then he or she will be subject to symptoms of acculturative stress such as depression, anxiety, school failure, or employment difficulties (Berry & Annis, 1974; Padilla, 1985)."

Summarizing, this implies, that understanding a second culture and showing the right reaction whenever there is friction between two cultures is a key to successful cooperation. If one manages to assimilate well and develop effective strategies, he or she will be successful, while the contrary can lead to experiencing problems with a certain culture. This shows the practical relevance of this research for Germans who want to work successfully in the Netherlands. In this research, coping mechanisms are defined as 'the reaction shown to a critical incident in a cross-cultural encounter, which consists of conscious acting and unconscious behavior patterns, the action deriving from those and the resulting effects on the cultural and business environment.' Inspired by this definition we will in the following discuss existing reaction and coping classifications by the researchers A. Thomas and H. Coleman.

2.3.7. Coleman's Strategies for coping with cultural diversity (1995)

With his strategies for coping with cultural diversity, the researcher H. Coleman inspired by LaFramboise et al. (1993) developed a classification for strategies individuals choose when connecting with individuals from another culture:

Assimilation

Assimilation is a coping strategy in which affected individuals become a member of the new culture, after letting go values and beliefs from the individuals' culture of origin. It means to completely give up the culture of origin the individual has acquired in order to accept a new culture entirely. The individual does not think and act like the culture of his origin, instead he/she does accept and embody the values, beliefs and norms of the culture the individual assimilates to. Compared to other coping strategies, assimilation does not compromise any of the cultures, it means either living after the cultural standards of culture A or culture B.

Acculturation

Acculturation is a very similar process to Assimilation, but there is a decisive obstacle. Some cultures are more closed than others and in return it can be quite hard to assimilate to them. Sometimes, if one wants to adopt a new culture he or she has to go through formalities, such as acquiring religion, learning language or fulfilling other requirements of the new cultural society. Sometimes it is impossible or undesirable to fulfil those requirements, then it happens that either the individual cannot accept the new culture, or the new cultural society does not accept the new individual. As a result, an individual can never become a part of the new culture.

Alternation

Alternation strategy is one of the most common ways to interact with a culture different than the culture of origin. An individual does adopt behavioral patterns of the new culture, while never forgetting or giving up any of its origin culture traits. Alternation means building new cultural skills on top of existing ones. This also implies that one must handle conflicts between cultural standards internally before knowing how to act. Usually, persons who choose to react with Alternation are very adaptive ones, as they will decide which behavior is right rather based on its environment than based on its inner values and beliefs, and then choose for the best reaction. This very adaptable approach brings the benefit of being flexible and getting along universally. Alternating individuals have a different problem when living in a new environment: Because they always go for the best option, individuals with this reaction type tend to oppress their culture of origin, which sometimes makes them miss their homeland or their family in a

silent and introverted manner. They do often miss their home culture but do not express that, different to other reaction types we will see.

Integration

Integration as reaction to intercultural encounters is also known as multiculturalism. Integration means that several people of multiple cultures live alongside without judging each other. One might think it is rude to judge another person about his/her behavior, but in reality judging is something the human cannot simply turn off. We all judge in every situation, using the cultural traits we have been trained from society and employing the cultural standards we have learned. Our brain constantly evaluates (judges) whether a situation is normal or not, whether we should be alerted or not. In this regard it is not possible to stop judging. People who react with integration rather add some 'apathy' to their judgement and are able to accept that everyone can behave as he/she wants to. Integration also means that people do not judge each other, while sharing the same ecosystem and social environment individuals mutually accept and respect each other. If different cultures in that shared ecosystem interact each other, this does not mean that anyone must relinquish membership of his own culture or become familiar/adopt characteristics of the other culture. Multiculturalism is a well renown concept in the western world, many countries identify themselves as multicultural and appreciate the mixture of different cultures within their own country.

Separation

Separation is a rather radical method to handle intercultural encounters. It shows little understanding for the new culture and always orients on the cultural values of the culture of origin. People who think in a 'separation' manner do not only believe cultures should now be mixed, they even focus on the incompatibility of both cultures. This means even if there is a shared understanding of some things or even benefits in the new culture, the separating individual will avoid to meet interculturally and always strive to work/live in a group with people from its culture of origin. Separators like to meet people from their own culture only and tend to educate about their own culture only. This behavior might often be observed by people who are lovers of their own culture, haters of the foreign culture, or insecure people who feel discomforted when they mix up with strangers.

Fusion

Fusion is a very individualistic reaction type amongst those mentioned. Individuals who fuse different cultures develop their completely own culture, which is often a mix out of several cultural standards. While cultural flux might affect any assimilating individual, the fusion type of reaction appears to be the only one to enjoy this flux. He does not have a certain objective, as many of the other reaction types do. Instead the fuser likes to pick the best from each culture in order to make his own perfect culture with which he/she gets along best, and the individual is ready to accept that the price for this is not belonging to any culture anymore. While all other types have the strong tendency to adopt a certain culture for a certain purpose (especially Assimilation, Acculturation, and Separation), an individual who fuses does not desire any certainty regarding its cultural status.

2.3.8. A. Thomas: Coping Strategies for Cultural Overlay Situations

In his research, A. Thomas devised coping techniques for dealing with cultural diversity, focusing on how individuals respond when exposed to situations in which two cultural meet and interact with each other. Thomas' research is relevant to be analyzed, as it is quite similar to this research and does provide many basics. He came up with the four strategies Dominance, Assimilation, Divergency, and Synthesis.

Dominance

When there is a cultural overlay and people behave dominant, this implies that they think their culture of origin is superior to the host culture they had the encounter or critical incident in. Their origin culture strategies and approaches are considered most appropriate, which is often communicated by dominators and they even exert pressure and enforce their own way of thinking and behaving rather than learning culturally, what the advantages and benefits of the host culture might be. By pressuring those of the new culture to adopt his own values and strategies, the dominance is exerted. The dominator is usually not very open and does not attempt to understand anything beyond from what he subjectively thinks is superior. He/She does often not realize that this is a subjective opinion and is hence not very culturally reflected. Such behavior is often not desired or appreciated by the host culture, in reality 'Dominance' as a way to react to cultural overlay does come together with a critical incident between two cultures. Thus, it can be said that a dominant behavior in cross-cultural situations is most of the time not sponsoring successful collaboration, is hence unprofitable and can therefore be said to be undesired in business situations.

Assimilation

Assimilation as a reaction to cultural overlay means that foreign cultures are welcome and even integrated into daily routine. Over time, this welcoming and adopting effect can lead to laying down old values and adopting values of a new culture, similar to the effect that Coleman (1995) described before.

Divergency

Divergency, other than assimilation, means to be respectful towards the new culture and its individuals. Those are considered to be important and effective and the new culture is very respected. This respect does not necessarily mean that the individual likes the new culture, it can also mean that it wants to be inconspicuous, fears a punishment by the host community, or simply does not want to be rude. Still, divergency might result in an ongoing switch of culture, especially in the beginning of intercultural collaboration, when the individual does yet have to explore which of the foreign cultural traits he likes and which not. It leads to the cultural flux we have mentioned before, where an individual does not really know which culture it has at the moment and which it should adopt for the future.

Synthesis

Following the synthesis type for situations with cultural overlay, the individual will always consider the differences between cultures to be important. The individual is somewhat educated about culture and cultural traits, knows the underlying differences and has an understanding for the potential of combining the best from both cultures for a specific situation. Such an individual would emphasize that a mixed team is important to reach a goal, and he/she would emphasize diversity a lot. The 'synthesizer' does understand that cultural differences need to be used strategically, if maximum importance should be reached. He uses his cultural knowledge to assign a very flexible short-term task to the Dutch and a structured long-term task to a German, and he is very aware that this is the best way to approach both tasks. Therefore, the synthesizer is making efforts to connect and combine both cultures in order to reach his ultimate goal to profit from diversity. Especially in business encounters where more nations than the Dutch and the German are involved, this reaction type is very desirable for businesses, as it maximizes efficiency and knows how to employ culture to reach a (business) target.

3. Methodology

In order to understand the underlying cultural standards causing the frictions, the critical incidents method introduced by A. Thomas et al. (2010) was applied to qualitative research design implementing interviews with managers and workers who live and work in the Netherlands. The aim was to interview a pool of candidates with diverse encounter situations and ask questions related to difficulties and embarrassments they experienced repeatedly.

As soon as a critical incident was identified, for the sake of understanding detailed questions were asked about the explanations an interviewee might have for the critical incidents, aiming to have the interviewee explaining why a certain cultural behavior was unfamiliar, unexpected, or even uncomforting.

3.1. Research Design

In the following the design of the research conducted is explained step by step and chronologically. First, we used previous mentioned critical incident method in order to identify the critical incidents that German individuals encounter in business situations together with Dutch. Questions were asked about such situations, how the individual felt, and how he interpreted the cause of the critical incident. To answer the research questions related to coping mechanisms, those have been analyzed for each critical incident in order to identify patterns. Interviewees were asked to describe how they coped with the situation, why they behaved like this and whether their own behavior has solved the problem or influenced the working relationship between German and Dutch.

After collecting the data, analysis has been conducted upon it. For each critical incident the underlying cultural standard (as introduced previously) was identified, and the coping strategy of the interviewee was classified into different categories which help to analyze the business effectiveness and the cultural appropriateness of the reaction. Some culturally respectful reactions will show harmonic ways to cope with cultural differences in cross-cultural situations. In the end those should be supplied to the reader, as a training to adjust to the Dutch culture in business situations. The focus here lays on synergizing effects, meaning that no culture should be dominant towards the other, instead that individuals are aware of the benefits of both behavior patterns and are able to combine them, with the ultimate goal to extract 'the best of both worlds.

Since the researchers of this project are socialized in their own culture as well, it needs to be ensured that the researcher's bias does not influence the results. As control mechanism three

Dutch students have been asked to control and interpret the analysis done by the researchers. Their input was used to check and revise the interpretations that have been made about the critical incidents. Lastly, in the discussion, this research's results will be compared to the previous findings of researchers such as C. Thesing (2016), B.U. Schlizio, and A. Thomas (2010). These results might either question or validate the results from previous research and help us to assess their reliability.

Figure 8

Methods
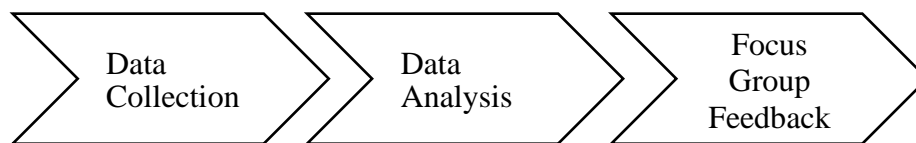
3.2 Research Instrument

To collect the necessary data to fulfill our research purposes and answer the research question, qualitative interviews have been conducted. The interviews follow the guidelines by Lindlöf & Taylor (2017), in order to ensure neither participants nor the researcher are biased, questions are designed valid, and ethics are maximized before, during, and after the interview.

The target group for those interviews are Germans, who are working in the Netherlands on a regular basis and so eventually must have experienced crossings with the Dutch culture. The interviews are being conducted in German since "Using the local language may be important in opening doors and establishing trust (Welch & Piekkari, 2006, p.425).

Formal requirements for the interviewees have been to be at least 18 years old, actively working in the Netherlands and signing the letter of agreement to participate. The sample consists of 15 interviewees, described in the following table:

Table 3

Interview statistics

Interviewee	Gender	Age	Years of working experience NL	Work location NL	Occupation /Industry
1	W	29	2,6	Almelo	Marketing
2	M	33	5,8	Enschede	Education
3	M	51	12,0	Enschede	Education
4	W	30	2,0	Utrecht	Marketing
6	W	25	4,6	Borne	Marketing
7	W	22	1,9	Almelo	Sales
8	W	23	2,8	Almelo	Business Support
9	W	26	5,4	Utrecht	Marketing
10	M	20	0,8	Enschede	Working student
11	M	23	0,5	Almelo	Sales
12	W	24	0,9	Amsterdam	Marketing
13	M	32	2,5	Tubbergen	Sales & Acquisition
14	M	27	1,8	Almelo	Sales
15	M	26	5,3	Utrecht	Business Development
16	M	48	2,2	Amsterdam	Event Marketing

Because this study aims to research business encounters, there is necessity for the critical incidents to happen in a certain business or institutional environment. Such environments are characterized by typical business objectives, such as maximizing profits, minimizing resources and expenditure while attaining profits, reducing environmental uncertainty, and having the vision to grow over time. Resultingly, there have been 16 interviews conducted, because one interviewee did not fulfil those requirements during the interview. It was clearly understandable from the critical incidents and the environment they happened in, that this interviewee's critical

incidents did happen during such a business encounter. Further, all interviewees have agreed to be interviewed, have participated consciously, and have given their consent to the anonymous analysis and evaluating of their behavior.

The sample consists of 7 female and 8 male interviewees. Their ages range between 20 and 51 years, with an average age of 29,27 years. Their working experience is in the span between 0,5 and 12 years, with an average of 3,41 years of experiencing business encounters and critical incidents in the Netherlands. The locations of the interviewees were somewhat spread, with a peak in the eastern Dutch region of Twente. This is due to the reason that many cross-border collaborations happen close at the border. Also, due to geographical closeness some businesses in Twente tend to rather explore Germany before they start to grow in the Benelux or even British market. Regarding the occupation of the interviewees, the sample involves typical business positions such as sales, marketing, and development managers as well as interviewees working in business support, education, or simply as a student worker. The interviews themselves are of deductive kind and semi-structured. Detailed questions were asked about the inputs the interviewee gives to the interview. The questions were being asked semi-structured, implying that there are some structured questions asked to every interviewee, and some spontaneous questions by the interviewer to dig for more information. Structured questions are for example demographic ones, to disclose the information given in the table above. Semi-structured questions were mostly inspired by the described critical incidents or the respective reaction to it. They were chosen since they give the interviewer the flexibility to follow up on certain responses to reveal hidden information which can be applied in the final analysis (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). When explaining a certain critical incident, sometimes it was necessary to go a bit further, either to find out more details about the story or to have a better understanding. In such situations a spontaneous question has been asked for investigation or clarification.

The structured questions followed a certain sequence, beginning with demographics. Afterwards we asked all interviews about their job, what kind of contact they have to their Dutch colleagues, which position they have, which language they are usually using for communication and whether they would rate that communication as good or bad. The next block of questions involved positive experiences the German has had with the Dutch. Asking for positive experiences here is a strategically placed question, as it probably evokes a good feeling in the interviewee, and he likes to remember about the situations and critical incidents he has experienced in the past. Reminding the interviewee about the positive does also help to show that even though we are talking about a lot of negative things in the interview, there are

also many positive things about the (more or less) foreign culture. Most people indeed were very happy to remember their positive experiences with the Dutch and were eager to talk about the certain situation.

The next question block, following the positive experiences, was asking precisely and detailed about negative experiences with the Dutch culture. Such a question could be: "Have you ever experienced misunderstandings between Dutch and German?"; "Have you ever been surprised by Dutch behavior?"; "Have you ever disagreed with your Dutch colleague?". Whenever the interviewee had to disclose a story and there was a critical incident to be found, semi-structured questions were asked to find out more about the critical incident. Questions like "What made this experience an uncomfortable one?" and "How did this experience influence your collaboration?" would typically enclose how the interviewee has reacted to the situation. Further when asking "How did you react?" and "How was the problem solved", interviewees explained a lot about what happened after the critical incident. Most importantly to estimate the 'matureness' (In terms of cultural education/assimilation) of a critical incident reaction is the question: "What do you think, why did your Dutch colleague behave like this?". This last question asks for assumptions about their Dutch colleague, and sometimes during the interviews the participant reacted hesitant, or rejecting to these questions. They do not want to give an opinion about their colleagues' behavior, or simply have no idea for the underlying cause of the critical incident. Those interviewees are typically not very culturally assimilated, they rather believe that the foreign behavior is stupid and unprofessional. Hence, they react in a dominant way to the situation, and instead of understanding the value and benefits of 'foreign' behavior, they tend to disregard it and 'do their own thing'. Some interviewees however justified and explained the situation in a more culturally reflected manner. They referred to the different cultures, that sometimes there are just differences in the way people behave and what appears important to them and what not. Depending on their actual reaction, those interviewees were usually showing more positive attitudes towards the foreign culture and tried to use it to its best. In some little cases interviewees were even perfectly assimilating in their reaction to a critical incident.

3.3 Data analysis

The obtained data from previously introduced interviews has been used for thorough analysis about critical incidents between German and Dutch during business encounters. As the interviews were conducted during physical or online meetings, the raw data collected was a video file of the interview. The video file has been split into audio and video track, emphasizing

to keep a high data quality in the audio track. Next the audio track has been induced into an online cloud transcription software, which converted the file from audio to text. Having a high audio quality increases the accuracy of the transcription results, and hence to some extend enhances the text output file.

In a next step we conducted text analysis on the collected interview transcriptions using a certain coding strategy. Strauss and Corbin's Grounded Theory (1976) has been used as an overall framework to result in newly explored coping mechanisms for culture-caused frictions between German and Dutch. The researchers decided to not use thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) since TA would emerge into completely new themes to classify critical incidents in. Instead, grounded theory does not necessarily deduct themes from the data, which enables the researcher to assign critical incidents into pre-existing categories, which are in this case cultural standards. The coding strategy followed the framework by E. Blair (2015) who introduced a coding application of the Grounded theory approach. In a first coding step called open coding, the researcher reads, highlights, and comments the interview transcripts. He searches specifically for situations that correspond to his understanding of critical incidents and critical interactions in cross-cultural situations. Useful here are 'trigger words' or 'indicators' which help to understand that a critical incident between cultures has been observed. Usually, those indicators are connected to certain behaviors or emotions connected to the critical incident. Such a trigger word could be 'confused', 'annoyed' or 'surprised'. Stories featuring indicators for a critical incident have been highlighted and extracted for later analysis. In theory this step is very similar to the first step of grounded theory, which is open coding. In open coding the same is being done, and afterwards the events found are being labeled. The labels used in this coding step are orienting on the previously identified Cultural standards of the Dutch perceived by Germans (Thomas and Schlizio, 2009) and some other categories that have emerged in the analysis but are not mentioned in the list by Thomas and Schlizio (2009).

Following the open coding an axial coding step has been conducted. The researcher re-evaluates the labels assigned to critical incidents and checks whether they can be merged towards categories or if several labels have the same meaning. As there was a pre-existing list by two authors, we were especially curious whether there are labels that do not fit into a category in the list of Thomas and Schlizio (2009). Using the previously identified Dutch cultural standards has benefits for both studies: While the existing list is checked for validity and reliability, it gives orientation to the researcher about which categories might be observed. Resulting from this axial coding step there are useful categories displaying the cultural standards Germans observed in their business encounters with the Dutch as critical incidents.

Lastly selective coding is conducted. It connects the categories identified in previous steps and organizes them towards logical patterns. Organizing them means to assess how logic and significant the identified categories are, and sometimes categories are not relevant enough to appear in a list, for example when the critical incidents connected to a category are not exclusive for German and Dutch but could have happened to any person with any nationality, such as language misunderstandings. In this research the result is a list of Dutch cultural standards that the German have experienced, which will be discussed in the findings section of this research.

3.4 Feedback from the focus Group

After conducting interviews, extracting the critical incident stories, analyzing them, and bringing together all categories in a list, these have been checked by Dutch students. This step is very important, because up to this point every research done is theoretically subject to the bias and diligence of the researcher. The researcher's interpretations could be biased by his own culture, even though he attempted to avoid this effect and was keen to have a neutral and objective eye on the situation.

Dutch students were having a look at the various critical situations and evaluated whether they recognized the cultural standards and the critical incidents. After the control step by Dutch students and their satisfaction with the identified cultural standards list and its completeness, the data were used for analysis.

4. Findings

4.1 Cultural standards

In this section we will identify the results from aforementioned methodology by picking one meaningful interview quote per cultural standard and trying to understand the potential conflicts by interpreting the interviewees.

Table 4 displays how many interviewees out of the total sample of 15 have found the respective cultural standard in one or more critical incidents.

Table 4

N of cultural standards identified

Cultural Standard	N	Definition
Flexibility	10	People easily change plans, methods or the organization in order to improve results, are open to changes
Pragmatism	8	Acting according to what is opportune at the moment (without using a plan or procedure)
Gezelligheid	7	People behave like actual friends to create a conflict-free atmosphere
Informality	6	People do not behave according to their formal roles or positions in the hierarchy
Freedom of Action	3	Having a lot of freedom to determine how to accomplish a task or handle a case without a manager involved
Approximate Planning	3	Not coming exactly on time/not keeping exactly to the planning
Collective Decision Making	2	Decisions are being made in the team, everybody is involved and has a say
Directness	2	Quickly expressing their own opinion without being asked
Do it Yourself	1	Tendency to do things in an own way rather than relying on third parties
Technological Innovativeness	1	Always in for (technological) innovation
Work-Life Balance	1	Private life is considered just as important as professional life
Flat Hierarchy	1	People of whatever position in the hierarchy treat each other as equals

Note. Number of interviewees who identified the Cultural Standards by experiencing Critical Incidents related to them at least once. Definitions derived from J. Rosemann (2021).

In the following each of the identified cultural standards will be introduced using a direct quote from the data collected in this research, starting with the most frequently found cultural standard. The percentage in brackets displays the fraction of interviewees out of the total sample, who found this cultural standard in one or more critical incidents during their working experience in the Netherlands.

4.1.1 Flexibility

(10/15 Interviewees clashed with this cultural standard)

Dutch flexibility implies that plans are being changed easily and people can be opportunistic. They prefer being flexible over fixed structures or appointments. While the German appreciates having everything structured and planned for the long-term, the Dutch see long term planning as a barrier to being opportunistic. What if a better option occurs on our way? They prefer to have the freedom of changing plans short-term. This is very conflicting to the German fear of losing control, establishing structures and planning. The conflict between the desire to introduce a structure and on the other hand striving to be free and flexible can be observed many times within the sample. Roughly 66% of Interviewees found those two cultural standards clashing, as in this example:

> *"For example, when my manager had left for external meetings, I did not know that. I planned to talk to him about certain topics, but I could not because he was gone [...]. Everyone had a calendar via Google and their appointments were shown, so you could plan appointments with others, because you were able to see their occupation. We could have implemented this easily. Everyone would have known about the planning of each other. These are simple things that are not being used."*
>
> *(Interviewee 12)*

The observable behavior in the quote is a good example for the very fact that Germans sometimes think quite dominant, with pressure they try to introduce structures. The Dutch tend to give in to pressure in order to ensure a harmonic working atmosphere and accept those structures at first, but will not follow the newly established structure when asked for. It leads to a kind of double clash: The first time German and Dutch clash, when the German dominantly tries to introduce a structure, and the second time the German will be disappointed when this structure is not followed. Instead of thinking for reasons why such simple structures and rules

do not exist, they think in a dominant way (my approach is the only right one) and are convinced more structure would help the company.

In the quote the interviewee is frequently disappointed because previously made appointments are surprisingly postponed or canceled on the short-term. She is convinced that bringing in a structure to make appointments will resolve her problem. The quote does quite clearly show that she does not understand why such simple structures do not exist. She acts and suggests new rules and systems, which is quite dominant behavior, since her new system is meant to overrule the current one. The team appears to accept her introduction of a new planning tool. It is unclear whether it is going to be adopted, but it is to be anticipated that such an appointment planning tool does work hardly in between the Dutch flexibility.

4.1.2 Pragmatism
(8/15 Interviewees clashed with this cultural standard)

As previously mentioned, pragmatism describes the choice for simple solutions to be chosen in order to counter issues, often instead of following plans. It is not necessarily important who or what was the cause of a problem, instead the focus lies on a quick and simple solution to minimize the negative effects of the issue. In general, it can be said that pragmatism means to find simple solutions for the tasks to be done.

*"In the beginning I went frequently to the management, because I was missing certain certifications. Germany is very strict and structured in this regard. You need thousands of certificates to satisfy packaging law, the electricity act, the "Grüner Punkt", CE certificate…
[…]. There I had the first clash with my colleagues, when I said:'Guys, you might have worked with less certificates before. But if we want to go to Germany aiming to be successful there, we will need to fulfill all those legal aspects.' […] I always had to mention that this is relevant and had to push towards improvement."*

(Interviewee 15)

In the German market certificates and validated information are very important, which has to do with German status orientation. Only legitimate and authorized institutions have the right to emit such certificates and hence they are suitable to reduce uncertainties and deviations in processes, and so avoid surprises or fluctuations in quality. Organizing and emitting such certificates and information might take a little longer in Germany (compared to other countries)

due to bureaucracy and the weak technological infrastructure. In the end, the German takes all those efforts just to maximize control and keep processes predictable. All possible uncertainties are eliminated before making a deal, which is why the Interviewee has the feeling he acts illegitimate and cannot be taken seriously without approbation of known and respected institutions. The Interviewee names quite a lot of regulations he thinks he needs to comply with and indeed, all of the mentioned certificates are necessary to operate in the German market when it comes to trading electronics. Even further, it is not true that there is no certification needed in the Netherlands, as if the market was completely unregulated. However, it is to assume that acquiring and holding such certifications is less sophisticated in the Netherlands, than it would be in Germany, due to the well-known German bureaucracy. Given the increased need for legitimacy in Germany, the Interviewee is worried to undermine his own status if there is no improvement, as he could seem dubious and would love to have a more structured approach to expanding into a new market. Interestingly, the German completely disregards the experience his colleagues have with this approach. Even though they have been following it for a while and should know risks and opportunities linked to it, the German is not really eager to recognize the experiences of his colleagues.

The Dutch on the other hand try to expand as simply as possible. The management would probably be very unsatisfied if they acquired lots of certificates that are not needed in the end or for which nobody will ever ask. Instead, one tries to approach the expansion as simple and pragmatic as possible, which means to react to challenges and problems whenever they would occur instead of acting too proactive. The Dutch do not care much about the risk of seeming dubious, as trust acquisition just works differently amongst Dutch. Trusting each other in the Dutch culture bases on Gezelligheid and harmony rather than on a set of certifications. Therefore, theoretical seriosity and status are subordinate to being friendly and informal.

4.1.3 Gezelligheid

(7/15 Interviewees clashed with this cultural standard)

Dutch 'Gezelligheid' is something that pops up frequently during the interview. A socializing attitude strongly characterizes the Dutch, even at work. In general, all interviewees loved being warm welcomed and introduced to the team quickly. Also, the tendency to eat and celebrate with colleagues is something that is overall picked up very positively. Still, there are some situations in which Gezelligheid, and a social atmosphere are not really appreciated. Even such

a positive thing as Gezelligheid can lead to critical incidents when misunderstood or simply not compliant with the German culture.

„I believe what was surprising for me especially in the beginning, and what I did not know from Germany was having lunch together. That the employer cares for lunch and all colleagues come and lunch together in the office, while in Germany it is rather normal to leave the office in small groups and to not eat together as a team. It is also not usual that the employer cares for lunch.”
(Interviewee 4)

The interviewee describes Gezelligheid as something very positive. She enjoyed that the team is having lunch together, paid by the employer. Such actions by the employer are rather uncommon in Germany, instead the employee cares for food himself, or uses the lunch break to grab something nearby. It does not happen seldomly that Germans lunch in smaller groups rather than with the whole team. Even though Gezelligheid is picked up very positively, still there are two cultural standards that are clearly clashing here, which is noticeable by the interviewee being 'surprised'.

4.1.4 Informality

(6/15 Interviewees clashed with this cultural standard)

A significant difference between the working styles in the Netherlands and Germany is the level of formality that is used while working. We previously learned about the Dutch Gezelligheid, and it unavoidably makes it hardly possible to distinguish private sphere and working sphere. While Germans tend to formalize their environment to minimize uncertainty, the Dutch avoid formality whenever possible. Hierarchical structures, separation of living and working, language, and communication channels are very formal in Germany, being informal is hence logically considered unprofessional and rude. Formal in this context means that structures are rather rigid than flexible, well-defined and optimized in order to reduce uncertainty. This rigidity does result from the tendency of Germans to fix structures for example in written manifestos, rules and laws, also within an organization. Important Dutch values, such as Gezelligheid, Work-Life Balance, Flat Hierarchies and Freedom of Action are in return very informal, as they can barely be planned. Unsurprisingly a diversity of conflicts appears when those differing cultures encounter each other, such as this one:

„Having a PhD in Germany I get addressed formally. But when I am in the Netherlands,

people approach me informal, which is wondering me […] I could perceive that negatively,

because I notice that others [Note: in Germany] are getting approached formal. […] I am

also a bit German and sometimes thinking, that people are too relaxed and that I have to say:

'Hey, we need to care about this a bit earlier.'"

(Interviewee 2)

The interviewee from the quote mostly struggles with the level of authority and respect he learned to be paired with formality. Being raised with German culture, he learned that over time and with hierarchical position, authority, and respect increase. Now that he has reached a higher hierarchical position, he 'wonders' about being approached informal by those who are theoretically lower in hierarchy. He notices that his contacts in Germany are being treated more formal, but appears to be quite reflected about Dutch culture, so he knows that respect is being expressed differently in the Netherlands. In the latter part of the quote, he states that being informal and 'gezellig' is sometimes too relaxed for him. The feeling of being unproductive while things are informal is quite common amongst Germans in the sample.

4.1.5 Freedom of Action

(3/15 Interviewees clashed with this cultural standard)

The Dutch leave their employees a lot of freedom when it comes to accomplishing tasks and reaching objectives. They rather focus on KPI's, objectives and goals than on fixed rules and instructions about how to do a job. This is done with the boss exerting little control on the team and employees. Exactly this little control is what many Germans do not like about the freedom they receive. For example, when their work is criticized Germans often have the feeling that their not-controlling manager can not properly estimate their performance. There are little instructions when it comes to working procedures, structures, and languages. Germans do not always appreciate the freedom and looseness given to them by Dutch colleagues, as there is no clear instruction on how to accomplish the task. A key is to take the benefit of freedom, and some interviewees, such as number 9 know how to profit from freedom:

„Somehow I found it very interesting. I did not know what to expect, which is why I liked

having the ability to try a lot. I did not suspect that one day the work could be too much. It

was communicated to me, that I can do a lot by myself and that I have the choice to state

which tasks I liked and which not. And I perceived that positively. I don't know whether it is the same in the German culture, but especially my employer says: 'If it does not give you energy or if you do not like the job, then you won't have to do it.'. Of course, there are some repetitive tasks to do, which are not very nice. [...] But it was never clearly communicated to me what my area of responsibility is and what I am doing."

(Interviewee 9)

In the quote we notice that the interviewee was happy to be able to try many different aspects of working and designing the job herself. It was clearly communicated to her that she will have lots of freedom and choose her own tasks, of course always according to the holistic strategy and company vision. Further, she can express freely which facets of her job she likes and which she does not. It gives the team the chance to split up tasks in a manner that satisfies all colleagues, and in the end, everyone can do majorly what he or she likes. Even though the interviewee talks so positively about the freedom she has, she still shows German cultural standards. She does appreciate a clear area of responsibility and points out that this area was never defined for her.

4.1.6 Approximate Planning

(3/15 Interviewees clashed with this cultural standard)

Approximate planning as a trait of the Dutch is closely related to flexibility. It implies that there are not always fixed time schedules to keep. Appointments do not have to start sharply at the time they are planned, they can start with small delays, be postponed or canceled. Having few fixed schedules which allow changes is of high importance for Dutch flexibility to exist and be useful. Given the often-busy time schedules and agendas in Germany, one might expect the approximate planning of the Dutch to be identified by more interviewees in the sample. Indeed, Germans often think approximate planning is inefficient and the short-term thinking leads to uncertainties

„I noticed that I am always there first. I am coming some minutes too early to the meeting to be on time. If you are meeting at 1 pm nobody will come before 12:58 pm. And then people start to come. [...] Students in the Netherlands do not take deadlines too seriously. In Germany that is a very strict thing, and if something is not complete it is still handed in one minute before the deadline."

(Interviewee 3)

Interviewee 3 has quite some experience with working in the Netherlands. Despite this, he is wondering about the looseness that Dutch people have towards appointments and deadlines. That he is caring about minutes shows the preciseness of the schedule he follows, and anything that is approximate or uncertain does not complement the schedule and even worse, it can lead to a delay in the schedule. He has the opinion that deadlines must be kept in order to ensure that the planning works, and so he is repeatedly surprised and annoyed that Dutch colleagues and students interpret deadlines more flexibly. This impression is an example for the three negative views of Germans on approximate planning, which is being equaled by the same number of positive experiences with this less precise approach to planning, leaving a neutral impression about how Germans think of this Dutch cultural standard.

4.1.7 Collective Decision Making

(2/15 Interviewees clashed with this cultural standard)

Problems and issues encountered by the Dutch are handled in a very democratic way. All involved in the company do have a say when it comes to important decisions, and every opinion is worth to be heard and valued the same. In Germany on the contrary, experts and managers high in hierarchy do have more decision power. Especially those whose profession is affected will have a more important opinion, as they must be the experts. Usually, Germans like having a voice where they would not in Germany. Interviewees in the sample however do see collective decision making quite critical. The extensive meetings needed to collect everyone's opinion and decide together are perceived as ineffective, since their length is hard to predict, and their purpose indeed can sometimes be doubtful. The intention of the Dutch is to involve everyone in decision making, so nobody feels overruled, and harmony is reached.

„ [...] we definitely wasted a lot of time with meetings, which did not really result in anything. The majority of those meetings could have also been solved with a simple mail. [...] I am sitting there for 45 minutes, listening to the others. In the end I am not understanding anything anyways. Then you leave the meeting and ask yourself: 'Okay, what was the purpose of this meeting and how did it actually help us?'. Many meetings did not bring any added value."
(Interviewee 11)

For Interviewee 11 this situation was almost extreme, since the collective meetings were held in Dutch, and as Dutch is a foreign language to him, he could not extract most of the information

that was exchanged. In return he sees meetings to find a decision as a waste of time and does not really make use of the very fact that he has the same decision power than anyone else in the meeting.

4.1.8. Directness

(2/15 Interviewees clashed with this cultural standard)

With the Dutch informality and Gezelligheid logically directness is part of the Dutch way to work. Usually Germans are used to directness, as critics and feedback in Germany can be quite harsh and rather task-oriented than human-oriented. German feedback can be hurting to the people, but as we learned before expressing emotions is considered unprofessional. Even though Germans know directness well, it appears that being direct pops up in a different form in the Netherlands. While being direct in Germany rather happens during feedback sessions, the Dutch directness comes up during more general communication. Additionally, Dutch have a very different feeling regarding discretion, since authority does have less importance in relationships between colleagues. While a German would rather not tell his boss about how crazy last night was, the lower level of authority between Dutch colleagues reduces discretion between them. These differences in discretion and authority result in critical incidents, for example misunderstandings. If a Dutch for example asks the German colleague to do a task in a very direct manner, it can be understood as instruction to do something, which undermines authority and respect towards the colleague, especially if the involved perceive to be on different hierarchy levels. According to the interview quotes, discretion does have a lower importance in the Netherlands. The Dutch generally fear to have conflicts and inharmonious atmospheres, so they tend to have no secrets and clear up misunderstandings in a quick and friendly manner. Topics like a forthcoming job termination are being addressed openly, while a German sees this information rather confidential.

„I believe when you are in a culture, where people are relatively direct, then sometimes it can appear very blunt to be asked to do a task. Especially now in times where we had a lot of home office and communication was only possible online. I had a situation with my new manager, she only asked whether I could fancy up her presentation. But the second time it was like: 'Can you just do it?' rather than asking 'Hey, would you have time to do it?'. I missed a bit of small talk. Being direct can appear quite blunt and dull."

(Interviewee 9)

Interviewee 9 has been asked for a favor by her manager, who apparently approached her in a very direct manner. Instead of asking whether the Interviewee would have time to help her, the manager rather instructs the interviewee. Fancying up a presentation is supposedly an easy task for an educated designer, and seemingly all involved are aware of that. Still, the interviewee would have wished to be asked for a favor less direct and with a little bit more small talk. Such discrepancies leave a negative impression about directness amongst Germans, all interviewees who have encountered this cultural standard in business situations can be classified as skeptical towards directness, as their interview quote and reaction are rather negative.

4.2 Reaction types

When closer examining the reactions of the German interviewees while being confronted with a critical incident, several patterns can be observed. Based on these patterns, four coping mechanisms could be derived using an open coding process. This approach was used in order to ensure the coping mechanisms stem from the data itself. The process involved several rounds of coding to derive fitting definitions which fit all coping mechanisms observed during the interviews. The final four reaction types, the amount the occurred within the interviews and the corresponding definitions can be found in table X. To illustrate the definitions, a sample quote has been added to the corresponding coping mechanism definition.

Table 5

Reaction types

Reaction Type	N	Definition	Example Quote
Walk away	7	The German feels incomprehension, disappointment and is offended by the critical incident. The reaction is based on a strong negative emotion towards the Dutch way of conducting business. The resulting coping mechanism is to walk away from the situation.	„Ich dachte, für mich war das erst gar nicht real. Ich bin halt auch sehr emotional, muss ich sagen. Ich bin sehr emotional geworden. [...] . Ich bin dann aufgestanden und rausgegangen. Musste erst mal runterkommen. Weil ich war sehr, sehr aufgelöst und anschließend bin ich wieder reingegangen und die hatten mir dann auch was komplett Lächerliches angeboten, wo ich gesagt hab Ihr braucht diesen Vertrag nicht aufstellen, den werde ich nicht unterzeichnen."
Compliance	20	The German feels incomprehension, disappointment and is offended by the critical incident. The reaction is based a moderate negative emotion towards the Dutch way of conducting business. The resulting coping mechanism is to keep working on the tasks, but without any intrinsic motivation.	„Da war es ab einem bestimmten Punkt für mich aber klar: Dir macht es hier mit den Leuten, mit den du arbeitest noch Spaß. Aber du wirst es hier nicht mehr Ewigkeiten machen, weil so kann man einfach nicht arbeiten."
Adaption	19	The German feels incomprehension for the critical incident. The reaction is based on a moderate negative emotion towards the Dutch way of conducting business. The resulting coping mechanism is to keep working on the tasks, while accepting the cultural differences and adapting to it in order to avoid negative impacts on the business.	„Durch die Zeit, die ich jetzt schon mit Holländern zusammenarbeite, wusste ich natürlich: Okay, wenn es bis zum 31.1. zugesichert wurde, dann hak nochmal mindestens zwei oder dreimal nochmal vorher nach. Dann würde ich so Mitte des Monats nochmal nachfragen: "Du, wie sieht es eigentlich aus?" Ist bis dahin noch nichts passiert, Weißt du, für dich selber: "Okay, wenn jetzt in der kommenden Woche nix passiert, dann musst du wahrscheinlich für dich selber schon mal vorsorglich die Deadline ein bisschen nach hinten setzen", um da direkt deine Ziele oder deine deine Richtlinien ein bisschen anzupassen. Also nicht das du am Ende da auch im Regen stehst."
Integration	13	The German feels comprehension for the critical incident. The reaction is based on a strong positive emotion towards the Dutch way of conducting business. The resulting coping mechanism is a full integration into the Dutch way of working without any cultural barriers.	„Es ist mein Gefühl, dass es im holländischen Markt einfach deutlich einfacher geht. Also alles geht viel schneller. Okay, die sind auch technologisch ein bisschen weiter. Da werden Verträge schon schon lange online unterschrieben, z.B. jetzt in Deutschland ist es ja meistens noch so. Da möchte, bevor man mit jemandem einen Vertrag schließen möchte, der dir in die Augen gucken und am besten noch die Hand schütteln, um den Vertrag so gesehen gültig zu machen."

Sometimes, the coping mechanisms of the interviewees were quite specific and only appeared once and, thus, did not fit the general patterns within the findings. As a result of this, these coping mechanisms have been left out in the coping mechanism definition process.

4.3 Reaction types per Cultural Standard and Typical Reactions

In the following table the four reaction types walk away, compliance, adaption, and integration have been sorted by the Dutch cultural standards. It displays which reactions the respective cultural standards have triggered and allow a first interpretation about how Germans perceive Dutch cultural standards when encountered in business environments. The most positive and the most negative reactions per cultural standard have been picked out for interpreting the cultural reasonings behind showing a certain reaction.

Table 6

Reaction types per cultural standard

Dutch Cultural Standard	Type 1 Walk away	Type 2 Compliance	Type 3 Adaption	Type 4 Integration
Pragmatism	2	5	1	
Flexibility	2	6	6	1
Gezelligheid		3	3	7
Informality		1	3	2
Approximate Planning		1	2	
Freedom of action	2	2	1	
Flat hierarchy				1
Collective Decision Making			2	
Directness		1	1	
Work Life Balance				1
Do it yourself	1	1		
Technological innovativeness				1

4.3.1. Reactions to Pragmatism

When German and Dutch experience critical incidents caused by pragmatism, Germans often react with type 2, rather "compliant". They might experience disappointment but decide not to show too much. Instead, their intrinsic motivation shrinks due to such situations. That happened with Interviewee 13, a salesperson working in the Netherlands for quite a while already. As for many Germans working in the Netherlands, his main task was expansion to the German market. When he heard that he should set up the contract to work in Germany on his own, just as a first trial, he built a contract knowing that he would not have the skillset to do so accordingly. However, this contract worked well and appeared to be acceptable to smaller business partners, so the strategy to set up legal documents on their own had been saving lots of time and money. Out of pragmatism, since the contract worked, no one but the German felt a need to improve the documents. But after some time, the German felt unsatisfied as if he would act illegitimate. Instead of showing his disappointment too much, he was less motivated to offer the contract to potential customers and hence lost intrinsic motivation.

Often, when pragmatism has an effect upon strategies, plans and approaches, the outcome is not having too strict order. Interviewee 12 reports that her coworker worked in a very untidy server/data structure, but she got along well with that kind of structure. The German however went crazy since she felt searching for the right data over and over again was unnecessarily time consuming.

In general, Germans appear to rather poorly get along with Pragmatism in their working environment. On the contrary, there are certain positive examples, such as Interviewee 10, a student worker in the Netherlands enjoying that his chef would not be too strict with him, when he came too late once.

The missing order and structure make actions less predictable, in return creating uncertainties. As we previously identified, uncertainties are not liked by Germans and so it is no surprise that pragmatism is a cultural trait that they tend to react upon badly, at least in a business context.

4.3.2. Reactions to Flexibility

Flexibility is a frequent cause for clashes and critical incidents between German and Dutch when it comes to working together in business environments. A total of fifteen critical incidents occurred due to flexibility, and it provokes all kinds of reactions in Germans. Most often though, Germans react with Type 2 "Compliance" and Type 3 "Adaption, meaning that there is a rather neutral opinion towards experiencing flexibility. This kind of critical incident appears often, but does not seem to cause very strong reactions, even though there are single cases in which the whole relationship between German and the business or his colleagues is affected.

Flexibility is a Dutch trait that often surprises Germans, as they do not expect businesses to be unstructured and adaptable. Extreme reactions can result from surprising flexibility, some Germans do quite impulsively decide that a flexible environment is not suitable for them to work. For example, Interviewee 4 was hired as Online Marketer for the German market. She expected that her job would contain typical Marketing activities, such as writing blogs, caring for social media and improving the website. She explains that in reality those typical online marketing tasks would only make up 20% of her daily tasks. Instead, she would be an allrounder for the German team in the company. That means she would try to acquire new customers, try to sell services to them and prepare for fairs, which would be rather an offline activity. The Dutch interpreted her job to be flexible, she would be employed as an online marketer but if those tasks do not fill 100% of her contracted time, she flexibly does fulfill other tasks too as long as it helps the team. For the German employee this difference in tasks and the flexible interpretation of her position surprised and frustrated her so much that she would search for a new job after some weeks. This is a Type 1 ("Walk away") reaction, since strong negative emotions do appear and in return she literally tries to walk away from the company.

On the other extreme, Flexibility can also lead to Integration between German and Dutch culture. Interviewee 2 had to keep a deadline in his job, and was strongly dejected when he had to report to his Dutch boss and the team that he would not be able to deliver on time. Working in a Dutch business environment gives him a much more comfortable feeling, since he is somewhat allowed to miss a deadline. While in Germany it would be roughly possible to soften up a deadline, the planning in Dutch environments is not too strict. Interviewee 2 enjoys this flexibility a lot, because he gains the opportunity to concentrate on whatever appears to be important at the moment. The Dutch realize that deadlines often lead to problems and hence, do not focus on time planning too much, especially not in a strict way.

Apart from previously mentioned extremes, flexibility causes many critical situations which are not really resulting in strong emotional reactions. Interviewee 3 had been promised

the budget to hire an employee for his team, but as he took several months to find the right employee, the money had already been planned for something else in the meantime. The Interviewee had no strong emotions on this decision, opportunism appears to be useful to him, but he complains that it makes long time personnel and budget planning quite difficult.

Interviewee 6 learned how to handle these issues. Her coping mechanism is that whenever she would like to avoid flexibility, she tries to arrange things written "black on white". As soon as there is written evidence of an agreement, she can use it repeatedly to remind her environment of their promises. It is one-way Germans might use to encounter flexibility.

4.3.3. Reactions to Gezelligheid

Reading from the data, Gezelligheid does lead to the least impactful critical incidents amongst Dutch cultural standards. The Dutch need for harmony and avoiding conflicts is omnipresent in the Netherlands and does create a friendly working atmosphere, which most people appreciate.

Three critical incidents caused by Gezelligheid led to Type 2 "Compliance" reactions. It is rather surprising that such a worthwhile and harmonic aspiration by the Dutch provokes bad reactions, but it can if such harmony appears unusual or disturbing to an individual. When analyzing the Gezelligheid-related critical incidents leading to Type 2 reactions, this is rather caused by confusion of the interviewee. To some Germans it might be unusual to have few conflicts in business situations. Their task-orientation and strict division of working and private sphere allows Germans to discuss and argue with each other in a productive way. While the Dutch for the sake of harmony do often avoid analyzing problems to the deepest and find out who is responsible, consequently those problems remain unsolved. Germans on the other hand do address problem cause and solution in detail, even if that means that the team would suffer from that. While the German feels a need for clearance, the Dutch way to avoid trouble does confuse the Interviewees, for example when Interviewee 16 had a problem related to his job. His boss gave him the task to work concentrated on content, but also to answer the phone at the same time. Since he was the only person to answer the phone, the callers would interrupt and distract him from concentrating and creating good content. Once the boss noticed, he came to his employee and apologized saying "Sorry Bro". While the Dutch Boss just wanted to keep up a friendly atmosphere and avoid conflict, the German employee did perceive this as confusing and manipulative. He states that in this situation he lost the respect for his boss, which shows his need for hierarchy and having a strict division between friend and colleague.

Interviewee 8 described that she enjoyed the Dutch Gezelligheid a lot, but not during work hours. She would be disturbed when she wanted to work concentrated and task-oriented,

and the Dutch are joking around and having fun. To her the "Gezellig" approach to working is too loud, she would like her environment to be quiet and focused as well, leading to her reacting with Type 2 "Compliance".

Those were the critical incidents leading to the greatest conflicts, and on the other hand there are many more critical incidents in which Germans did utterly enjoy the Dutch Gezelligheid and profited from the harmonic atmosphere, for example by immediately feeling like being part of the group and feeling welcomed. Interviewee 4 for example daily had lunch together with her colleagues. She perceives that very positive and thinks having lunch together is a free team building activity for the company. Interviewee 6 does enjoy Gezelligheid a lot as well but warns: "[…] you also lose the ability to give harsh criticism, just because you do not want to endanger the friendship of your colleague.". Interviewee 8 enjoys getting invited to have a drink together with colleagues that she never talked to before, from a different division within the company. And Interviewee 16 (who had the "Bro"-situation with his boss) did further enjoy having a spontaneous BBQ with his colleagues when the sun was shining.

4.3.4. Reactions to Informality

When it comes to informality, the reactions of Germans are rather skewed into the direction of the assimilating reaction types three and four. As previously mentioned, the separation between private and working sphere is very important and hence, informality is not really common in a German working situation. Further, as Germans tend to enjoy hierarchy for the advantages of a clear structure, this hierarchy can often not be supplied when colleagues encounter each other in an informal way. Often, in the Netherlands colleagues are also friends, and friends cannot deal with each other in a hierarchical way. The worst reaction to informality is a type 2 reaction, given by interviewee 1 when in personal feedback meeting, she was approached because of performance that would (in her perception) not belong to her area of competence. In this specific company, to generate new entries on the website, an acquisition manager would try to convince companies to place their offer on the website. Afterwards the online marketing manager would implement this new offering on the website. In the feedback session, the general manager wanted to rate her performance (the online marketing manager) by the number of new offerings on the website. She did perceive that this would be in the area of responsibility of the acquisition manager.

In general, Germans like to draw borders when it comes to areas of responsibility and areas of competence, while the Dutch see areas of responsibility rather informal. This informality leads to a blurry description of what one employee's tasks and key performance indicators are. Interviewee 1 did not accept to be evaluated for acquisition manager´s

performance, while she is in the marketing team. The Dutch however see the German team in a more general manner and assume a more or less founded connection between sales/acquisition and online marketing, which has definitely been proved to be existing. Interviewee 3 had to experience Dutch informality even from the highest institutional instances. Previously he had been an Official Dutch Servant for education, but after a certain time the public servant status changed and he was 'demoted' to be a normal employee. He claims that this would not be possible in Germany, since grandfathering (also keeping a status for lifetime) is normal and in general to him it would be a breach of contract if he was hired as an official Dutch servant and then demoted. He accepts that such constructs as grandfathering and lifetime status do barely exist in the Netherlands and adjusts to it, even though he would rather have liked to keep his old contract. His comment on contract changes is "[...] you can only say 'take and run'.", so his reaction can be seen as Type 3 "Adaption". There's a moderate negative emotion towards the action of the Dutch, which is generally accepted without having any influence on motivation or performance of the interviewee. Interviewee 9 does thoroughly enjoy the Dutch informality and believes that it improves the communication and harmony between colleagues, if the respect between each other can be held up. Interviewee 11 does enjoy the very same thing and adds that due to the missing structure and the guidance such a structure brings with it, there is a high extent of responsibility and self-determination needed to work in the Netherlands.

4.3.5. Reactions to Approximate Planning

One might mean that approximate planning leads to the most critical incidents between Germans and Dutch, since Germans are known to love their fixed appointments and appearing on time. Even more surprising is that only 3 out of 15 interviewees report a critical incident provoked by approximate planning. Their reaction to it is rather moderate, as Germans tend to react with Type 2 or 3, which means that approximate planning does lead to positive or negative emotion amongst interviewees, but this emotion does not imply anything for their motivation strength or structure.

Interviewee 3 experienced that colleagues and other invitees were coming late to a meeting. He would further experience that people in his working environment are not really keen on keeping deadlines. We have learned before that due to flexibility such deadlines are not the most strict and so, they can be discarded if there are more important tasks to do for a moment. Approximate planning and flexibility are Dutch cultural traits which often come together and are rough to differentiate, since approximate planning could also be described as 'flexibility in planning'. Interviewees 15 and 16 experienced very similar situations, but

Interviewee 3 found the most useful coping mechanism. He still keeps coming on time to the meetings and uses the time until everyone appears to work on something, being productive. Such a coping mechanism does work perfectly in order to make collaboration between German and Dutch in a Dutch environment easier.

4.3.6. Reactions to Freedom of Action

As flexibility and self-determination are important characteristics of the Dutch culture, the tasks one should do and the goals one should reach are certainly not as fixed as Germans would expect in a German business environment. While German business is characterized by drawing certain lines when it comes to defining areas of responsibility and areas of competence, such borders can be fluent in Dutch companies. The Dutch tend to be flexible in the interpretation of jobs and what tasks they might mean. Using this approach, they can be sure that no working time is wasted, since there is rarely an end to work. If an employee is done with his certain task, he might have a look for what else needs to be done. The employee is not afraid to do tasks the first time, or make small mistakes. The focus lies on helping and supporting each other, so at the end of the day everyone can finish his work, regardless of whether everyone has done his own tasks, or if they helped out.

Resultantly, the conflicts developing out of this difference are often related to taking responsibility and feeling legitimate while doing so. The German prefers to feel legitimate when fulfilling tasks, for example by being educated for the task. Whenever the German would be asked to support a task he is not educated for, he would most likely refuse to take responsibility.

One underlying reason for the difference is Dutch Gezelligheid. We previously learned and identified that Gezelligheid for the Dutch means avoiding conflict to create harmony and friendship. In the Netherlands it is not always necessary to find a culprit, if that would mean to weaken the team dynamics and strength. In Germany on the other hand, the analytic and objective approach to problems makes it necessary to identify a culprit. Obviously, you would like to avoid being the culprit in front of your boss, and so it can be reasoned that Germans do not like to take responsibility for topics they do not perceive to be an expert in and see likelihood for mistakes, even small ones.

The difference in interpretation of responsibility does lead to a few, still effective critical incidents amongst the interviewees. Whilst the culture standard of Freedom of Action does only provoke five critical incidents, those can be seen to result in quite negative reactions. The German reactions to Freedom of Action are skewed to the negative types 1 and 2. Not only that

Freedom of action leads to negative emotion towards the Dutch colleagues, but those emotions might also even affect the motivation one has to keep working in this constellation.

Interviewee 4 experienced Freedom of Action, when she applied for a job in the Netherlands. At the job interview, she asked in which language she would be working. A German led the interview, but in an assimilated Dutch manner he answered that she could work in the language she would feel confident in. Without further arrangements, the applicant thought her working language would be German, as she was educated in German and felt most legitimate to do her work in this language. However, she underestimated having Dutch colleagues, who wanted to integrate her into the team. As the Dutch are not task-oriented, but solution- and group-oriented, communicating in Dutch would play a big role in her daily business. She felt betrayed, since the application interview left her thinking that her job would be German. In reality, she interpreted the freedom of action given to her wrong. The freedom of action given by the employer would mean that she can work in whatever language makes her feel confident and successful. But still, she would have to contribute to a Dutch business following Dutch purposes in a Dutch team, which logically means that her work needs to help the Dutch, even if it is in German or in another language. To Interviewee 4 this feeling of betrayal was enough reason to react with type 1 "Walk Away", and search for a new job soon.

The Dutch Freedom of action does further result in another type of critical incident, which can lead to similar extreme reactions. Due to Freedom of Action, Dutch managers and bosses have rather few control mechanisms and tools in order to control the work of their employees. Often, a satisfying end result is proof enough that everyone did their contribution to the team achievement, which is a pragmatic and collective approach to assess performance. Those few control mechanisms lead to conflict in assessment sessions, for example performance evaluation meetings.

Interviewee 1 felt that her performance was improperly rated by her manager, since he was seldomly controlling her. In an evaluation meeting she said to her boss:: "You can not rate my performance, because you do not know what I did. You have never asked me: 'What are your projects for this week?'". While the Dutch boss wanted to give freedom to the team members, the Interviewee perceives that due to the freedom he does not have enough information to assess her performance. In the end, the Interviewee did not extend her working contract, since her motivation was decreased by this critical incident, which is a typical type 1 reaction.

4.3.7. Reactions to Flat Hierarchies

The Dutch cultural standard of Flat Hierarchies does lead to few critical incidents amongst Germans. It appears that Germans enjoy talking to their boss privately or seeing colleagues as equal, which are typical signs of flat hierarchies.

Hierarchies do not have to be bad though, while one might question the usefulness of top-down management which can demotivate employees, there can also be bottom up movements in hierarchy and those in return do have proper potential to motivate employees, since their opinion is regarded and they gain the feeling of having voice in the company, which is usually also to the good of their working situation and possible employer benefits.

Hierarchies do certainly provide structures and clarity, they make it possible to define processes in detail and hence provide certainty to employees. Also, hierarchies have the ability of staking out areas of responsibility, which as we previously identified is appreciated by the German. The certainty and reduction of risk fixed hierarchies provide is often the reason why German companies follow such.

Interviewee 10 was the only to experience a critical incident caused by flat hierarchies. Quite a short time after he began to work at the Dutch company, he would have a small-talk situation with his boss. They were standing outside talking about private topics. Interviewee 10 is surprised that his boss wants to be friends with him, even though he has only worked at the company for a few weeks. He feels valued, especially because up to this point in time he learned the relationship between boss and employee to be different, more hierarchical. The situation led to a positive and assimilating reaction that can be classified as type 4 reaction. Interviewee 10 did have a positive emotion towards the Dutch cultural trait of flat hierarchies and gained motivation out of this critical incident.

4.3.8. Reactions to Collective Decision Making

Dutch have a very democratic approach to making decisions and as in democracy everyone has a say and can participate, the democratic approach to decision making is not always the most time and resource efficient process. The characteristic harmonic environment and friendliness of the Dutch is a reason why it is important to involve everyone. If one has a strong opinion towards a topic or has to deal with the consequences of the decision, it is natural to have a need to participate in deciding. It would be harmful to harmony if this individual was not regarded and listened to, and so the Dutch are keen to satisfy everyone who might have something to add to decision making.

The Germans, on the contrary, are by no means undemocratic. However, involving too many people into a decision is seen as ineffective and a waste of resources, which is why affected groups of people often have representatives to contribute to decision-making in their favor. This very hierarchical approach makes it possible that still everyone has a say in German companies, but much more indirect than would happen in a Dutch business environment.

The Interviewees from this research reported about two situations, in which the Dutch collective decision making confused or just seemed ineffective to them. Both interviewees reacted with type 3, the critical incident led to negative emotions towards the Dutch culture, but those emotions were neither long, nor strong enough to convert into significant losses of work motivation.

For example, Interviewee 7 reports about a situation in a growing Dutch Start-Up when it was to decide which language the social media account should be posted in. So far, everything had been posted in Dutch, but there was growing attention in Germany and in general, their aim was to be successful internationally, which would mean English would make sense as well. The situation led to a strategic flux; in the young company nobody knew what the right way would be to go. Is it having one main account in English, or several accounts in the respective languages? Collective Decision Making was the Dutch solution, when in several meetings with many involved, they finally made the decision to have two different entities for social media, one in German and one in Dutch. The German would have wished for a clear allocation of responsibility, since that would have resulted in one or maybe two decision makers. However, the Dutch, as previously mentioned, decided to not pick one responsible person for such a tough and unclear decision, they gained as much relevant information as possible and decided to bear the risk all together.

Interviewee 10 was very happy that Collective Decision Making is a part of Dutch culture. When he had his application interview with the boss of the company and his deputy, his feeling was that he convinced only one of his two interviewers (the deputy). The German was afraid that he would not get the job, since he is familiar with hierarchy and individual decision making. However, after having a short chat the two interviewers discussed together that the Interviewee would get a chance. He had a very positive attitude towards the Dutch deciding together.

4.8.9. Reactions to Directness

The Dutch cultural trait of Directness leads to comparably few critical incidents, which might be the reason because the Germans can be very direct as well. Their task orientation and

avoidance of emotion in the workplace makes statements, feedback and evaluations automatically quite harsh, since they are formulated objectively.

From the interviews we know, that the Dutch directness would be much more generic, often not only focused on the task and the job. Since the Dutch have no problem with blending private and working spheres, their directness can also address personal topics, which is quite unusual to a German in a business setting.

Two Interviewees have identified Critical Incidents involving Directness, the reactions were once Type 2 and once Type 3, which means that the positive/negative emotions towards the Dutch culture in this situation have not changed the motivation of the affected Interviewees.

Interviewee 3 did not experience the Directness himself, he rather learned about it in a team meeting. While having a meeting, the team leader said that one colleague might leave the team soon. The news of the colleague leaving was still unofficial and unconfirmed. Interviewee 3 was very confused about the announcement of unconfirmed news. He states that such announcements could be reputation damaging if the announced event did not occur. The colleague might now have less reputation amongst the colleagues, or might not be chosen for new products anymore since others are concerned, she might leave during the project. Interviewee 3 was left with neutral emotion towards the Dutch culture, but it did not influence his motivation. He is rather concerned that a parallel structure is established, in which no one knows which stories and announcements are real and which are fake. His coping mechanism is to just recognize that stories can be spread and the things that are secret at the moment should not be told.

Interviewee 9 on the other hand had a much more serious critical incident, which left her in a tricky situation. In an evaluation meeting with her supervisor she was told that others had trouble criticizing her. Her colleagues claimed that she would not take criticism and feedback well.

The one big problem she had was: She had to take this one well, otherwise she would just confirm the point that was claimed. It left her in a dead-end situation, since she was not able to defend herself without confirming the point. She felt misunderstood and confused about what to do, since she had an opinion that was not to be exerted. Admittedly, this is a very unlucky situation that can happen in almost every cultural context, but confronting the Interviewee was partly caused by Dutch directness and the need to have such troubles solved for the sake of harmony, which is why this can (must) be counted as a critical incident, even though its meaning could be fairly challenged.

Work Life Balance, do it yourself and technological innovativeness have not been analyzed for typical reactions since their frequency in the data is quite low (1-2 appearances). Deriving any generous statements from only one interviewee would be strongly biased by the interviewee's opinions.

5. Discussion

The purpose of this academic thesis is to explore how individuals cope with clashing cultural standards, particularly in the context of doing cross-cultural business. Through a review of existing literature and collecting qualitative data, this thesis aims to provide a better understanding of the challenges of culture caused critical incidents and the strategies that can be used to overcome them.

In this discussion section the findings of this thesis are examined, conclusions be drawn, and recommendations for Germans in the Netherlands will be made. Four coping mechanisms that individuals may use to handle clashing cultural standards are considered, with the ultimate aim to reduce cultural conflict and increase the performance of potential collaboration between German and Dutch.

5.1 Critical Incidents caused by clashing Cultural Standards between German and Dutch

When Dutch and German work together, even though their cultures are assumed by many to be quite similar, they will experience clashes in between their cultural standards and the underlying cultural values.

Table 4

N of cultural standards identified

Cultural Standard	N	Definition
Flexibility	10	People easily change plans, methods or the organization in order to improve results, are open to changes
Pragmatism	8	Acting according to what is opportune at the moment (without using a plan or procedure)
Gezelligheid	7	People behave like actual friends to create a conflict-free atmosphere
Informality	6	People do not behave according to their formal roles or positions in the hierarchy
Freedom of Action	3	Having a lot of freedom to determine how to accomplish a task or handle a case without a manager involved
Approximate Planning	3	Not coming exactly on time/not keeping exactly to the planning
Collective Decision Making	2	Decisions are being made in the team, everybody is involved and has a say
Directness	2	Quickly expressing their own opinion wihtout being asked
Do it Yourself	1	Tendency to do things in an own way rather than relying on third parties
Technological Innovativeness	1	Always in for (technological) innovation
Work-Life Balance	1	Private life is considered just as important as professional life
Flat Hierarchy	1	People of whatever position in the hierarchy treat each other as equals

Note. Number of interviewees who identified the Cultural Standards by experiencing Critical Incidents related to them at least once. Definitions derived from J. Rosemann (2021).

Table 4 above shows the frequency of critical incidents resulting from different cultural standards per Interviewee. For example, 10 interviewees have reported critical incidents related to Flexibility while only 2 interviewees reported critical incidents caused by the cultural standards Collective Decision Making and Directness. The highest frequency of incidents was found to be related to the cultural standard of Flexibility, with a frequency of 10 incidents. This suggests that the lack of clear structures and responsibilities regarding how work is done leads to the most critical situations and misunderstandings between German and Dutch.

The second most frequent cultural standard leading to critical incidents is Pragmatism, with 8 incidents. This could be due to a focus on getting things done quickly and efficiently, without considering the potential consequences or risks. Disregarding risks to some extent lead to uncertainty, which we learned Germans can react sensible upon.

Gezelligheid, a Dutch term that refers to a sense of coziness and conviviality, had a frequency of 7 incidents. This suggests that cultural norms around socializing and creating a positive work environment may sometimes interfere with productivity or professionalism, which is in return sometimes confusing to the German. The confusion resulting from unfamiliarity to strongly harmony-seeking environments such as the Dutch working environment results in many critical incidents.

Informality and Freedom of Action had frequencies of 6 and 3 incidents, respectively. This may indicate a lack of clear boundaries or expectations around communication and decision-making, which can lead to critical situations with misunderstanding and conflict.

Approximate Planning, Collective Decision Making, Directness, Do it Yourself, Technological Innovativeness, Work-Life Balance, and Flat Hierarchy each had frequencies of 3 or less. This suggests that these cultural standards were less commonly associated with critical incidents, though they may still be relevant to understanding workplace culture and dynamics.

The critical incidents found were later analyzed towards the four deductively identified coping types 'Walk away', 'Compliance', 'Adaption' and 'Integration'. The following graphic shows the frequency of each coping type per cultural standards and gives indications whether certain critical incidents lead to rather disruptive or rather assimilating reactions.

Table 6

Reaction types per Dutch cultural standard

Dutch Cultural Standard	Type 1 Walk away	Type 2 Compliance	Type 3 Adaption	Type 4 Integration
Pragmatism	2	5	1	
Flexibility	2	6	6	1
Gezelligheid		3	3	7
Informality		1	3	2
Approximate Planning		1	2	
Freedom of action	2	2	1	
Flat hierarchy				1
Collective Decision Making			2	
Directness		1	1	
Work Life Balance				1
Do it yourself	1	1		
Technological innovativeness				1

It is visible, that there are reaction tendencies for each cultural standard. For example, while Germans tend to react upon Freedom of Action with walk away or compliance, the Dutch cultural standard of Gezelligheid is picked up very positively and Germans like to integrate in such convivial settings.

Flexibility and Pragmatism are most likely to lead to critical incidents in German-Dutch business collaborations, while Flat Hierarchy, Work Life Balance and Technological Innovativeness are the least likely to lead to critical incidents.

5.2 Theoretical Contributions
5.2.1. Identification of Critical incidents

The research thesis contributes to the field of cross-cultural communication and intercultural studies by identifying critical incidents that Germans encounter in the Netherlands. By systematically identifying and analyzing critical incidents experienced by Germans in the Netherlands, this research provides valuable insights into the dynamics of intercultural interactions between Germans and the Dutch, shedding light on the complexities and nuances of cross-cultural communication.

5.2.2. Validation of existing research

This research thesis validates the findings of Rosemann (2021), a fellow researcher in the field of intercultural interaction, who has conducted research on critical incidents encountered by Germans in the Netherlands. By replicating and extending Rosemann's findings in the context of Germans living and working in the Netherlands, this research contributes to the empirical validation and generalizability of Rosemann's theoretical framework on critical incidents.

Further, the use of the critical incident method in order to qualitatively approach cultural research has been proven to be useful and deductively leading to results which can help individuals with coping or assimilating with foreign cultures.

When it comes to ETIC literature on culture, for example from Hofstede (2011) or Trompenaars (1996), the results of this research strengthen the initial critique for those methods to assess culture. ETIC literature attempts to generalize culture for whole nations and disregards that culture can be different for individuals or smaller groups of individuals. In this research we have found very contrasting cultural ideas and reactions to cultural clashes within 15 interviewees. With this variety of culture found in only 15 individuals, it can be stated that it is almost impossible to adequately quantify culture amongst very large groups of people.

If one compares the coping types that have been deductively found in this research to Colemans strategies for coping with cultural diversity (1995) it is striking that Coleman found six strategies while this research found four. The differing number of types makes them harder to compare, however it can be said that Coleman's strategies are describing cultural interference very generic, they describe to which extent cultures in general can mix. This mix of culture does not necessarily have to happen within one individual, Coleman's strategies might also be applied to groups of individuals or societies (except of the strategy 'Fusion', which is very individualistic). This is different with the coping types/strategies that this research and A. Thomas identified; they are rather settled in one individuals' perception of mixing cultures. Comparing A. Thomas coping strategies for cultural overlay situations (2010) to the coping types of this research is more straightforward, since the number of types the reactions are being classified into is the same (4). If listed up, it appears as if the types would range from the worst to the best reaction measured by how the coping would affect harmony in the working atmosphere and expecting that harmony would be worth striving for (from 'dominance' to 'synthesis'). The same structure can be seen in the coping types this thesis found, they range from bad (coping type 'walk away') to the best reaction (coping type 'integration') when it comes to the effect an individuals' coping can have on the harmony between colleagues.

As A. Thomas and this research used a similar research method (application of Flanagan's critical incident technique) on a different sample, aiming to answer different research questions, it can be seen as validating that the outcomes are similar to some extent too.

Lastly, it is noticeable that Coleman and Thomas do not focus on business situations as much as this thesis does, they rather use less context to embed their coping types/strategies in. For further research it would be interesting to find out which influence the business context does have on coping, since there is some pressure one the one side, but also a shared goal and some obligation to get along with each other.

Table 7

Overview of coping mechanisms developed by Coleman, Thomas and Ahrens

Coleman (1995)	Thomas (2010)	Ahrens (2023)
Strategies for Coping with Cultural Diversity	*Coping Strategies for cultural overlay situations*	*Coping types for intercultural business situations*
Assimilation	*Dominance*	*Walk away*
This is a coping strategy in which affected individuals become a member of the new culture, after letting go values and beliefs from the individuals' culture of origin. It means to completely give up the culture of origin the individual has acquired in order to accept a new culture entirely. Compared to other coping strategies, assimilation does not compromise any of the cultures, it means either living after the cultural standards of culture A or culture B.	People with this coping type behave dominant in cultural overlays, because they think their culture of origin and approaches are superior to the host culture they have the encounter or critical incident with. The dominator is usually not very open and does not attempt to understand anything beyond from what he subjectively thinks is superior.	The German feels incomprehension, disappointment and is offended by the critical incident. The reaction is based on a strong negative emotion towards the Dutch way of conducting business. The resulting coping mechanism is to walk away from the situation.
Acculturation	*Assimilation*	*Compliance*
This coping strategy is somewhat similar to assimilation, with the difference being that some cultures are more closed than others and in return it can be quite hard to assimilate to them. Sometimes, if one wants to adopt a new culture he or she has to go through formalities, such as acquiring religion, learning language or fulfilling other requirements of the new cultural society. Sometimes it is impossible or undesirable to fulfil those requirements, then it happens that either the individual cannot accept the new culture, or the new cultural society does not accept the new individual. As a result, an individual can never become a part of the new culture.	This reaction to cultural overlay means that foreign cultures are welcome and even integrated into daily routine. Over time, this welcoming and adopting effect can lead to laying down old values and adopting values of a new culture, similar to the effect that Coleman (1995) described before.	The German feels incomprehension, disappointment and is offended by the critical incident. The reaction is based a moderate negative emotion towards the Dutch way of conducting business. The resulting coping mechanism is to keep working on the tasks, but without any intrinsic motivation.

Alternation	*Divergency*	*Adaption*
An individual does adopt behavioral patterns of the new culture, while never forgetting or giving up any of its origin culture traits. Alternation means building new cultural skills on top of existing ones. This also implies that one must handle conflicts between cultural standards internally before knowing how to act.	People with this coping type are respectful towards the new culture and its individuals. This respect does not necessarily mean that the individual likes the new culture, but it can also mean that they want to be inconspicuous, fears a punishment by the host community, or simply does not want to be rude.	The German feels incomprehension for the critical incident. The reaction is based on a moderate negative emotion towards the Dutch way of conducting business. The resulting coping mechanism is to keep working on the tasks, while accepting the cultural differences and adapting to it in order to avoid negative impacts on the business.
Integration	*Synthesis*	*Integration*
Integration means that several people of multiple cultures live alongside without judging each other. People who react with integration add some 'apathy' to their judgement and are able to accept that everyone can behave as they want to. Integration also means that people do not judge each other, while sharing the same ecosystem and social environment individuals mutually accept and respect each other.	The individual with this coping type will always consider the differences between cultures to be important. The individual is somewhat educated about culture and cultural traits, knows the underlying differences and has an understanding for the potential of combining the best from both cultures for a specific situation.	The German feels comprehension for the critical incident. The reaction is based on a strong positive emotion towards the Dutch way of conducting business. The resulting coping mechanism is a full integration into the Dutch way of working without any cultural barriers.
Separation		
Separation is a rather radical method to handle intercultural encounters. It shows little understanding for the new culture and always orients on the cultural values of the culture of origin. People who think in a 'separation' manner do not only believe cultures should now be mixed, they even focus on the incompatibility of both cultures.		
Fusion		
Individuals who fuse different cultures develop their completely own culture, which is often a mix out of several cultural standards. While cultural flux might affect any assimilating individual, the		

fusion type of reaction appears to be the only one to enjoy this flux. He does not have a certain objective, as many of the other reaction types do. Instead the fuser likes to pick the best from each culture in order to make his own perfect culture with which he/she gets along best, and the individual is ready to accept that the price for this is not belonging to any culture anymore.

5.3 Practical Relevance

The academic research thesis not only contributes to the theoretical understanding of critical incidents encountered by Germans in the Netherlands but also has practical implications for improving awareness and coping strategies for these incidents. The practical contributions of this research are as follows:

5.3.1. Improved Awareness of Critical Incidents

The research thesis contributes to raising awareness among Germans about the critical incidents they may encounter while residing or visiting the Netherlands. By systematically identifying and analyzing critical incidents in intercultural encounters, this research increases the knowledge and understanding of Germans about the potential challenges, misunderstandings, and conflicts that may arise in their interactions with the Dutch. This improved awareness can help Germans to better prepare for and navigate these incidents, leading to more effective intercultural communication and reduced intercultural stress.

5.3.2. Which coping mechanisms should Germans in the Netherlands use? A collection of positive coping options

The following table shows a collection of options to positively cope with critical incidents Germans might experience when working in the Netherlands:

Cultural Standard	Positive Coping
Flexibility	- Appreciate that rules and deadlines can be flexible, see them as orientation points rather than binding obligations. - Enjoy the diversity of work tasks and be able to say no when the workload is too high. - Check multiple times if agreements can be kept, and use communication to understand the progress and potential changes. - Be more careful with deadlines, appreciate the flexibility, and make personal use of it, such as interpreting working times more flexibly.
Pragmatism	- Appreciate that things can be simple and easy to fix when something goes wrong, as rules are less strict and can be ignored if necessary. - See mistakes as opportunities for learning, and understand that there are usually no hard consequences in a human-oriented environment like the Netherlands. - Make the best out of the simplicity and ease of achieving positive outcomes, such as deals and successes. - Share funny examples or analyzing errors together with Dutch colleagues to help them understand the need for a more sophisticated approach when dealing with the German market.
Gezelligheid	- Enjoy the Dutch concept of "gezelligheid" in private and informal situations but be mindful that it can be irritating in a task-oriented work environment. - Avoid a superior tone when reproving colleagues who may take things easy, and adjust to the context to avoid appearing grumpy or making others uncomfortable.
Informality	- Adjust to the informal work environment in the Netherlands and do not be overly formal, which can be seen as "snobby". - Appreciate the opportunity to have fun and build relationships with colleagues, including superiors, at work. - Embrace the variety of tasks and experiences without trying to establish unnecessary structures or fixed areas of responsibility.
Freedom of Action	- Accept responsibility and make the best out of the freedom to take your own approach to achieve objectives. - Explore new approaches and skills, even if they may result in failure, as there is freedom to do so. - See freedom as a chance for personal and professional development in the job. - Set your own deadlines and milestones, and communicate progress in a pragmatic and informal manner to be appreciated by the environment.
Approximate Planning	- Using spare time before meetings to prepare. - Seeing lateness as something that can happen to anyone without being heavily penalized. - Appreciating more flexible working times. - Communicating frequently with colleagues to adjust and change plans as needed, making planning less rigid.

5.3 Limitations and Suggestions for further research

Despite the rigor and validity of the research conducted, there are several limitations that need to be acknowledged in this academic thesis. The sample size used in this study was relatively small compared to the affected population, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. The findings of this study should be interpreted qualitatively and with awareness. Further research with larger sample sizes is recommended to confirm and extend the results.

Like any research study, this thesis may have been subject to various biases that could impact the validity and reliability of the findings. Common research biases such as selection bias, measurement bias, and recall bias may have influenced the results. Although efforts were made to minimize these biases through robust research design and methodology, they cannot be completely eliminated.

The results of this thesis may not be fully generalizable to other cultures, settings, or contexts. The study was conducted in a specific setting (business situations between German and Dutch) and with a specific sample (Germans working in the Netherlands), which limits the ability to extrapolate the findings to other cultures or settings than the ones researched.

The data collection was conducted within a limited timeframe (2021), which may have restricted the scope and depth of the study. Time constraints may have impacted the data collection process, data analysis, and interpretation of results. Future research with longer and multiple timeframes may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural interaction.

The study was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines; however, there may be inherent limitations associated with ethical constraints. For example, ethical considerations may have restricted the use of certain research methods or limited the scope of data collection. The findings should be interpreted with an understanding of the ethical limitations and potential implications.

There may be other limitations that were beyond the control of the researcher, such as limitations related to resources, access to data, and external factors. These limitations may have influenced the findings of the study and should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results.

The findings of this academic thesis have shed light on the coping types used by individuals after experiencing critical incidents, but there are still several avenues for further research that could expand our understanding of this topic. One potential direction for future research could be to focus on the prevention of critical incidents. This could involve identifying risk factors and developing preventive measures within the business setting to reduce the occurrence of

critical incidents. Evaluating the effectiveness of such measures in real-world settings could provide valuable insights into strategies for preventing critical incidents.

Another suggestion for further research could be to validate the findings of this study with larger and more diverse samples, using different research methods or approaches. This could involve conducting longitudinal studies, cross-cultural comparisons, or mixed-methods research to validate and extend the findings obtained in this study. Comparing coping types across different contexts, such as workplace settings, educational settings, or community settings, could also provide a more comprehensive understanding of how coping strategies vary depending on the specific circumstances.

In addition, investigating the factors that influence the selection of coping types in different situations could be another avenue for future research. For example, exploring the role of personality traits, social support, cultural factors, and situational factors in shaping coping strategies could provide valuable insights into the complexities of coping behavior. Intervention studies could also be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of specific coping strategies or interventions aimed at improving coping skills and outcomes. Developing and testing interventions that target specific coping types, such as cognitive-behavioral interventions, mindfulness-based interventions, or resilience training programs, could further enhance our understanding of effective coping strategies.

Furthermore, examining the long-term outcomes of different coping types could be another area of future research. This could involve investigating the impact of coping strategies on mental health, well-being, and overall adjustment over time through longitudinal studies. Understanding the stability and effectiveness of different coping strategies in the long run could provide important insights into their practical implications.

Overall, further research in these areas could contribute to the knowledge base of coping strategies, critical incident management, and related fields. By addressing the limitations of this study and building on its findings, future research has the potential to enhance our understanding of coping strategies and their practical applications in real-world settings.

6. Conclusion

The thesis discusses the cultural diversity of our world and how it brings together different beliefs, values, and norms, leading to critical incidents when these cultural standards clash. Its purpose is to explore how individuals cope with clashing cultural standards, particularly in the context of cross-cultural business between Germans and Dutch.

The findings of the thesis are examined, conclusions are drawn, and recommendations for Germans in the Netherlands are made. The most frequent cultural standards leading to critical incidents are Flexibility, Pragmatism, and Gezelligheid, while cultural standards such as Flat Hierarchy, Work-Life Balance, and Technological Innovativeness are less likely to lead to critical incidents.

All critical incidents have been analyzed towards the reaction types individuals may use to cope with intercultural situations. In a deductive manner the reaction types 'walk away', 'compliance', 'adaption' and 'integration' have been found to represent the reactions in the sample adequately.

The research contributes to the field of cross-cultural collaboration and intercultural studies by identifying critical incidents, validating existing research, examining cultural differences, and with newly established coping types providing a theoretical framework for further studying critical incidents in intercultural communication. It further helps to estimate the usefulness and preciseness of quantitative methods when attempting to describe the culture in an

7. References

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8. Appendix

Appendix A – Catalogue with interview questions