

Agile values across two different national cultures

A Comparative Research between France and the Netherlands

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Abstract

The literature on agile practices in different cultural contexts is very scarce. Most studies have dived into homogenous cultural settings raising questions on the cross-cultural generalization of understanding agile values and behaviours. This mixed-methods research has explored the differences in Agile implementation between France and the Netherlands examining how National Culture impacted agile values and behaviours, contributing significantly to the existing limited literature. With 16 in-depth interviews and surveys with agile team members, this research found that despite agile values being set as a foundation, their application differed through the influence of national values. French agile teams reflected the need for a framework for their autonomy and decision-making, reflecting preferences for control and honor. The Dutch teams emphasised collaboration through direct communication, accentuating the role of flexibility and aligned cultural values such as Equality and Truth. This research suggests that organizations should consider the cultural impacting values when implementing agile methodologies to enhance team performance. The good application and understanding of those findings are crucial for the successful implementation and effectiveness of agile practices globally.

Keywords: Agile, Agile values, Agile behaviors, National Culture, Individual values

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Table of contents

1. Introduction	6
2. Theoretical background	9
2.1 Agile way of working	9
2.2 Agile Values & Behaviours	10
2.3 Link between values and behaviour	12
2.4 Differences in (national) culture between France and the Netherlands	14
2.5 Agile values and cultural values	20
3. Research Methodology	21
3.1 Research design	21
3.2 Data collection	22
3.2.1 Sampling	22
3.3 Research Instruments	23
3.3.1 Semi-structured interviews	24
3.3.2 Survey	24
3.3.3 Collected data during interviews	24
3.3.4 Collected data during the survey	25
3.4 Qualitative and Quantitative Analyses	26
3.4.1 Qualitative Data Analysis	26
3.4.2 Quantitative data analysis	27
4. Mixed-method findings	27
4.1 Quantitative findings	27
4.1.1 Agile values	27
4.1.2 Individuals values	30
4.2. Qualitative findings	31
4.2.1 Communication and Feedback Mechanisms (1)	35
4.2.2 Flexibility and creativity in Agile Practices	36
4.2.3 Colleagues and collaborative behaviours (2)	37
4.2.4 Client-centric adaptability (4)	38
4.2.5 National Cultural Values (10)	39
4.3 Similarities and differences between the behaviours and the values of the French and Dutch agile samples	40

5. Discussion	41
5.1 Theoretical Implications.....	41
5.1.1 Extension of the cross-cultural Agile literature.....	42
5.1.2 Application of individual values and identity.....	42
5.1.3 Theoretical connections between lean and agile	43
5.2 Interpretation of the results	43
5.2.1 Working Agile is a mindset.....	44
5.2.2 The impact of individual values and identity on agile values and behaviours	45
5.2.3 The impact of culture on agile values and behaviours	45
5.2.4 Agile effectiveness between France and the Netherlands	47
5.3 Practical implications	49
6. Limitation and future research	49
7. Conclusion	51
References.....	52
Appendix 1a – Semi-structured Interview Guide (EN).....	60

1. Introduction

Companies all over the world and in many sectors have been facing turbulent market environments, such as a severe competition supported by the development of international trade, shortage of resources due to worldwide pandemics (e.g., Covid-19), and overall different demands from their customers (Sherehiy & Karwowski, 2014; Varshney & Varshney, 2020). In the late 90s, new dynamic and horizontally built companies started to appear with structures prone to react quickly to such market changes introduced as ‘flexible organisations’. These structurally disrupting models, later named “Agile organizations”, focused on the social dimensions of industries while maintaining a close collaboration between the customers and the operational teams (Hoda et al., 2017). The essence of the agile way of working can be found in the Agile manifesto published in 2001 by Kent Beck and others, a group of software development practitioners highlighting five values from which inspired methodologies have been developed over the recent years, such as SCRUM (Schwaber & Beedle, 2001), Crystal (Cockburn et al., 2006), and more recently Kanban (Kniberg & Skarin, 2010), in order to implement agile principles and practices into organizations. On a team level, the agile movement created a balance between workers’ freedom and responsibility by continuing to learn and achieve overall performance (Hoda et al., 2012).

However, despite the massive utilizations of the methodologies and the implementation of agile practices inside organizations, it has not always been successful (Suryaatmaja et al., 2020). Therefore, recent research on the analysis of critical success factors (CFSs) of agile implementation highlighted the need of getting an overall understanding of the “background” barriers. Their nature can be technical (delivery strategies and development techniques), organizational (company culture, communication), people (team capability, training, customer involvement and management support) and processes (essentially project management) (Aldahmash et al., 2017). The combination of these four barriers seems to be particularly important when looking at the internationalization and development of companies abroad (Dikert et al., 2016), and the influence of national culture on strategic, structural and human processes (Boscari et al., 2016; Gambi et al., 2015; Kull et al., 2014). Considering the impact of those four barriers on the internationalization of companies, the aspect of people is of interest in this paper as it seeks for better understand on the cultural logic shared in a specific organizational context. Therefore, the decision-making process can be an example, e.g. consensual decisions being very important in Sweden and the Netherlands; similarly, attitude toward risk might differ between cultures, directly impacting the way a company envisions the future of its activities. Literature has indeed explored the importance of national culture in

organizations to better understand global expansions. It has been found that, in this context, companies tend to prioritize national culture over their own company culture (Newman, 1996).

National culture can be defined as a 'fuzzy' set of values, attitudes, and expected behaviours that are 'partially' shared by a population, emphasizing the crucial aspect of this definition being the shared interpretation rather than a purely personal one (Herbig, 1994; Spencer-Oatey, 2008). Those values have an impact on people's way of working, managing, and running business operations (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2007; Schein, 1984). Therefore, when considering companies extending globally, culture is an important vector for failure (or success) as managers may (or may not) share national values that may differ from, or be similar to, the ones of other countries they are doing business with (Siakas et al., 2005). Similar to the agile way of working, since the early 1980s, numerous descriptions of cultural differences were published to compare country populations. There are two types of descriptions, the Emic approach which focuses on the cultural history and the point of view of the native person and the Etic approach founded in behavioural psychology studies using the external perspective when examining populations (M. W. Morris et al., 1999).

In the research of cultures, the predominant theory opting for an Etic approach remains that of Hofstede (2010), examining cultural similarities within groups. However, it is also necessary to consider individual values and their influence on behaviour (Brown & Treviño, 2009). The distinction between the theories lies not in their direct opposition, but in the understanding of the cultural values held by a group or an individual. This dual idea between cultural differences and individual values has been developed in Schwartz' theories, namely the refined Basic Values Theory (Schwartz et al., 2012), and Cultural Values Orientation Theory (2011). The former distinguished universal individual values clustered into four dimensions on two continua, namely self-transcendence vs. self-enhancement, and openness-to-change vs. conservation. The latter identifies those universal, national values underpinning national cultures (Fog, 2021), and comprises three cultural value orientations based on six polar dimensions in the form of a circumflex: autonomy (intellectual and affective) vs. embeddedness', 'egalitarianism vs. hierarchy', and 'mastery vs. harmony'. Both theories are inter-connected and could therefore explain someone's values and behaviours (Schwartz, 2011). However, when understanding the impact of culture on individuals and organizations, research often uses Etic approaches as the aforementioned models of Hofstede and Schwartz but little also considers the Emic approach which delves into the nuances and idiosyncrasies of specific cultures.

Despite their geographical proximity, France and the Netherlands are an example of two European countries with major cultural differences which have been the source of numerous studies (Hoeken et al., 2003; Hornikx, 2006; Stuurman, 2004). For instance, when comparing both countries with the Hofstede model, one of the most famous cultural frameworks which has been also highly criticized (Jones, 2007; McSweeney, 2002), France is scoring really high on the Power distance scale compared to the Netherlands; this dimension refers to power being concentrated in the hands of a few people (Hofstede, 1994). In agile values, low power distance is often emphasised, promoting a more collaborative and egalitarian approach to decision-making and problem-solving (Ayed et al., 2017). When looking into the Emic perspectives, Iribarne (1989) points to the concept of honor and its significant role in shaping behaviours, relationships and societal norms in France. Similarly, Enklaar (2007) highlights 12 partially religious values shaping the Dutch ways of being, working and interacting with each other. The books highlight for example the notion of self-control as a moderation tool, whereas the French culture puts emphasis on moderating others. Yet, literature on how the principles and behaviours of agile team members are carried out in different (national) cultural contexts is scarce (Cheng et al., 2012). Ayed et al. (2017) for instance, research the impact of cultural backgrounds on agile practices adoption by comparing (broadly) the cases of Europe and Asia and invites further research to explore different and more specific countries within these continents. Indeed, Europe is a continent with a rich variety of unique cultural values and behaviours distinguishing one country from each other (Kolman et al., 2003). Consequently, comparisons of agile practices across countries are lacking and limiting the understanding of the effectiveness of agile teams in different national contexts. However, another theory under the general idea of self-managing teams, Lean, has been source of cross-cultural comparisons. Recent research by Van Dun et al. (2023) found results contrary to expectations where Italians and Brazilians (That share similar cultural tendencies as France) embraced more Lean values than Dutch workers. By combining all the values and behaviours of the French and Dutch populations based on the Emic and Etic perspectives and by adding the foundations of an agile enterprise, it created a solid theoretical foundation with overlapping material. In the context of cross-country analysis, it is important to consider all analysis theories available and not just focus on one. By doing so, it allowed the research to get a deeper understanding of the cross-cultural differences and similarities and holding a deeper focus, on the main topic, Agile.

Together, this research paper aims to conduct an exploratory comparative research into the values and behaviours of agile team members working in organizations in France and the Netherlands. This thesis uses the national culture approach (Etic and Emic) as well as the personal value differences theories

developed by Schwartz (2011). Combined with the values of agile organizations, this paper thus aims to address the following research question:

How do effective agile team members' values and behaviours vary between France and the Netherlands?

Sub1. What are the differences in agile implementation between France and the Netherlands?

Sub2. To what extent is agile equally effective and successful in the Netherlands and France?

By answering the above research question, this work aims to extend the existing literature on the impact of culture on the organizational way of working and processes (Schein, 1984), while also expanding the analysis of agile organizations to include a previously unexplored factor, namely national culture. This thesis has also implications for practice. More especially the overall better understanding of agile practices across worldwide companies. Although this initial research compares both France and the Netherlands, it could benefit and inspire structures willing to develop or extend abroad. When scoping down to the managerial level, this research supports managers in a better understanding of their subordinates and their cultural values that might impact the adoption of agile practices.

The following section will develop the theoretical frameworks used in the cross-cultural analysis of both countries and expand on the agile values of today's worldwide organizations. Also, it will highlight the methodology behind this qualitative research as well as the practical and managerial implications of this research.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Agile way of working

Major projects around 1958-1963 as Nasa's project Mercury and US Navy's helicopter-to-ship following "plan-do-research-act" cycles have been applying flexible decision-making practices (Larman and Basili, 2003). In the 1980s researchers started to research the idea of self-managing teams in incremental software development with practices on risk analysis, circle planning, and reviews (Boehm & Turner, 2014). After several decades of research and an increasing amount of connected solutions software, it was a competitive advantage for the industry to deliver high-quality software that evolved over time. Working agile follows several ideas as self-management which allows teams to make their own decisions; communication with an

emphasis on face-to-face discussions; product turnaround as the capacity to deliver frequent and consistent output; reflexivity as the ability to reflect on previous output and feedback to improve future delivering; also it highlights the importance of staying ahead of change by quick implementation; simplicity for seeking the maximum amount of work and finally collaboration with the focus on the customer (Peeters et al., 2022). With rapidly changing markets influenced by political, social and economical factors, complexity is widely tackled by agility. The successful implementation of the previously mentioned ideas allows companies to improve employees' motivation and communication and enhance the share of knowledge and expertise by supporting cooperation and good relations with customers. Together, teams are able to proceed faster information and therefore reduce their reaction and adaptation to changes in the market (Kaim et al., 2019). However, each company has its own culture, its own sector and its own way of operating. It is therefore difficult to introduce a precise unit to measure the effectiveness of agile implementation within a company. Measuring effectiveness will be about seeking the benefits of such an implementation and how it compares with previous structure models (if possible).

2.2 Agile Values & Behaviours

The Agile way of working is grounded on a set of values that are pivotal to create a foundation for team collaboration and continuous improvement (Schön et al., 2015). Those values, which have been developed in 2001 by a group of software engineers from various countries under the name of the Agile Manifesto, emphasise the importance of agile teams being cross-functional and seeking self-management. The authors of the Agile Manifesto were primarily from the United States (15 out of 17 authors), with one representative from the Netherlands and one from the United Kingdom. There are 4 key Agile values: 1) *Individuals and interactions over processes and tools*; 2) *Working software over comprehensive documentation*; 3) *Customer collaboration over contract negotiation* and 4) *Responding to change over following a plan* (Beck et al., 2001). Together, they ensure better communication, better decision-making, and a general openness to change. From them, 12 principles were developed, please see Table 1.

1	Customer satisfaction through early and continuous delivery of valuable software.
2	Welcome changing requirements, even in late development.
3	Deliver working software frequently, with a preference to the shorter timescale.
4	Collaborate with customers and stakeholders throughout the project.
5	Build projects around motivated individuals and give them the support and environment they need to get the job done.
6	Use face-to-face communication as much as possible.
7	Working software is the primary measure of progress.
8	Agile processes promote sustainable development. The sponsors, developers, and users should be able to maintain a constant pace indefinitely.
9	Continuous attention to technical excellence and good design enhances agility.
10	Simplicity is essential.
11	Self-organizing teams encourage great architectures, requirements, and designs.
12	Regularly reflect on the team's effectiveness and adjust behaviour accordingly.

Table 1: The 12 principles of the Agile Manifesto based on (Beck et al., 2001).

In general, values can be defined as overarching goals transcending specific situations. They have different degrees of importance and represent principles for groups and individuals. Beyond people's values, when looking at Agile behaviours of team members working Agile, 7 categories were identified by research (Sutling et al., 2014), namely:

Leadership which highlights giving directions, motivating team members using communication skills, and supporting participative decision-making.

Creative and Innovation stands for creativity in motivation by ensuring team members' well-being and engagement through various means. Examples are training, external contacts, and unconventional locations to foster alertness, creativity, and project success.

Openness is the benefit of others' expertise, supporting collaboration, transparency, and facilitating stakeholder engagement.

Communication is the use of frequent communication through different mediums, active listening to address customer needs, and clear feedback to facilitate efficient problem-solving and reduce uncertainty.

Result orientation is the stakeholder satisfaction by establishing trust, credibility, and collaborative work with customers. It also considers delivery velocity, avoidance of waste, and the delivery of necessary tools and support to the teams.

Strategic behaviours, emphasise the execution of strategies by pushing members to take responsibility, support creativity, curiosity, and strategic agility through transformational leadership and effective coordination.

Ethics behaviours, through morally acceptable actions, ensure a conflict-free environment but also behaviours such as fairness, honesty, and respect for shareholders.

The previous section has been defining the agile values presented in the Manifesto as well as their affiliated principles. Recent literature has also been developing the agile behaviours to better understand the operational behaviours leading to a successful agile implementation. The forthcoming section combines on one side the different values and links them to the behaviours through the utilization of existing frameworks.

2.3 Link between values and behaviour

The literature has shown that personal values play a significant role in shaping people's behaviour. For instance, Schwartz and colleagues, in their refined Theory of Basic Individual Values (2012) highlighted the impact of individual-level values on behaviours. Individuals have unique life experiences, genetic background and personality. This leads to different values based on someone's personal background which results in different ways of behaving. However, some values are universal and are clustered in two different scales, *self-transcendence* (interest for the welfare of someone else) vs *self-enhancement* (support and legitimizes focus on its own interest) and *openness-to-change* (welcome change and stimulate the thinking of new ideas) vs *conservation* (maintenance of the status quo and not engage with threats) and can explain differences between individuals in the same context. The different arrangements of these (sometimes clashing) values then inform people's behaviours and can explain differences in such behaviours (Schwartz et al. 2017; Torres, Schwartz, & Nascimento 2016). Schwartz' theory of Basic Human Values is of relevance for this research as individual-level values should be distinguished from national ones and avoid biased findings. The individual level of analysis aims to explain differences in attitudes and behaviours as well as identify fundamental values universally shared across all societies and understand how those values

impact individual decision-making (Schwartz, 2011). The ten identified values are displayed in the following figure and will be developed in table 2a.



Figure 1: Retrieved from the Refining the Theory of Basic Individual Values by Schwartz et al. (2012)

Values ²	Definitions of the values	Bipolar dimensions
Power	“Social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources.”	Self enhancement values
Achievement	“Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards.”	
Universalism	“Understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature.”	Self transcendence
Benevolence	“Preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact.”	
Hedonism	“Pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself.”	Both openness & self-enhancement
Stimulation	“Excitement, novelty, and challenge in life.”	Openness values
Self-Direction	“Independent thought and action – choosing, creating, exploring.”	
Tradition	“Respect, commitment and acceptance of the customs and ideas that traditional culture or religion provide the self.”	Conservation value
Conformity	“Restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms.”	
Security	“Safety, harmony and stability of society, of relationships, and of self.”	

Table 2a: Individual values theory by (Schwartz, 2011) ²

Whilst research on Lean management, which previous studies found to have common grounds with the Agile philosophy and methodology (Cruz et al., 2020; Kišš et al., 2018; Rodríguez et al., 2019), has already combined lean values with Schwartz' basic value theory and behaviours (van Dun et al., 2023), far less research has been done on Agile ways of working and the key values followed by employees and their potential impact on behaviours. Also, previous research has identified behaviours closely related to the pursuit of agile practices as stated in the section 2.2 (Sutling et al., 2014). Given the claimed universality of Schwartz' values (Rudnev, Magun, & Schwartz 2018), individuals embracing the Agile philosophy and its values are expected to behave consistently and in a similar way across different cultures. Yet, the relative emphasis placed on certain values might differ across cultures which means that the behaviours of people working might not be so identical across the globe, and therefore national cultural differences can be considered as a key factor in explaining the variations in behaviours and effectiveness of Agile.

2.4 Differences in (national) culture between France and the Netherlands

Culture has been the topic of numerous frameworks, discussions, and cross-cultural comparison literature over the past decades. Kluckhohn (1954, p. 694-695) noted that “culture is to a society as the memory is to a person”; Hofstede (1980, p.13) emphasised the idea that culture is a “collective programming of the mind” which differs between groups (countries). A more recent definition by Spencer-Oatey (2008, pp. 220-286) characterized culture as a “fuzzy set of values, attitudes, and behaviours (partially) shared by a group of people, and that influences each member’s interpretations of the means of other people’s behaviour”. Culture would then emphasise both symbolic representations and tangible manifestations that reflect the perception and understanding of the world. Cultural values have been defined as the “central core of meanings” and are group-dependent (Groseschl & Doherty, 2000, p. 12). Therefore, in the cross-cultural and organizational behaviour literature, culture has mostly been conceptualized into dimensions of fundamental values (Hyland et al., 2021). As mentioned previously, research has also explored the positive impact of cultural values on the way of working, communicating and running business operations (Meyer 2017; Schein, 1984).

Considering their geographical proximity and the numerous cultural research done comparing both French and Dutch cultures (Hoeken et al., 2003; Hornikx, 2006; Stuurman, 2004) it is of interest for this research to apply a preliminary cross-cultural analysis. Hofstede’s framework is the most famous model used in the literature on national-cultural differences but also in relatable studies on entrepreneurial behaviour, leadership style and country conflict discussions (Shaiq et al., 2011). The model consists of six

different dimensions of fundamental values which will be developed in the following table to compare both countries.

Dimensions ²	France	Netherlands
Power distance	68	38
Individualism	71	80
Masculinity	43	14
Uncertainty avoidance	86	53
Long Term orientation	63	67
Indulgence	48	68

Table 2b: Cross-cultural comparison of France and the Netherlands based on Hofstede (2010)²

Throughout this table, major differences can be seen in the Power distance (68 vs 38) which is the degree of unequal distribution of power accepted by individuals with less power inside organizations. France is a known country for its strong hierarchy while the Netherlands is more an equalitarian country. The second major difference is masculinity (42 vs 14) which refers to the clear distinction of gender roles and preference for strong competition. Lastly, uncertainty avoidance is higher in France (86) making the French population feeling more threatened by unknown situations.

Albeit the massive use of Hofstede’s framework because of its accessibility and popularity, this approach compares countries based on scores by the means of the previously mentioned dimensions to explain cultural differences. Those practices resulted in numerous critics founded on homogeneity, the lack of dimensions, political influence and more recently about the age of the framework (Jones, 2007; McSweeney 2002). Hence, Hofstede’s framework provides supplementary knowledge on potential cross-cultural differences but does not touch upon national values and the link to behaviours.

On the contrary, Schwartz’ model of Cultural Values Orientation Theory (2011) specifies universal, national-level values that underpin (national) cultures (Fog, 2021). However, it is important to note that Schwartz's model shares similar limitations, such as being an etic perspective and simplifying cultures by categorizing them based on claimed universal 'values'. Schwartz’ theory explains how populations and institutions deal with key problems in society *Autonomy vs. Embeddedness*; the second orientation, *Egalitarianism vs. Hierarchy* highlights the coordination between people towards the successful production of goods and services; finally, *Harmony vs. Mastery* develops on the regulation problems on the utilization of human and natural resources. Value orientation scores for France and the Netherlands have been summarized in Table 2c. The scale use ranges between 1 and 7 with 1 being “Not at all important” and

7 being “Of Supreme Importance”. Both countries share similarities and differences in their cultural orientations. Autonomy and Egalitarian are both highly valued and highlight cultures emphasizing individuals highly value personal independence, self-expression, and an egalitarian approach to society. France leans more toward Harmony and Hierarchy implying a cultural orientation towards interpersonal relationships and formal structures for authority. The Netherlands emphasises just a little more Mastery standing for personal achievements and competencies. Despite the differences, both countries share relatively similar results on Egalitarian and Embeddedness which stands for an individual connection to his local and family environment.

Value orientation²	Harmony	Embeddedness	Hierarchy	Mastery	Affective Autonomy	Intellectual Autonomy	Egalitarian
France	4,21	3,2	2,21	3,72	4,39	5,13	5,05
Netherlands	4,05	3,19	1,91	3,97	4,13	4,85	5,03

Table 2c: Value orientation score for France and Netherlands (Schwartz, 2008) ²

Complementing the Etic analysis of Hofstede and Schwartz, Iribarne (1989) with a typical emic research of French-Dutch cultural differences has added some important insights on the behavioural construction of societies and their impact on the way companies are managed and running. When looking in the Netherlands, its society has been built on the principle of “consensus”. This principle was developed during the first half of the 19th century, when society was governed by three important ‘columns’ (groups), namely: The Calvinists, The Catholics and The Socialists. The Dutch way of working is notorious for flexibility, negotiation and cooperation. Also, direct confrontation and verbal abuse are two behaviours that are commonly avoided. Conversely, with regard to the French society, companies are managed on the principle of “honneur”. This principle defines a culture based pervasively on a lot of mutual judgment, fostering a culture of shame. People act as informal moderators, regulating society. Following this idea, hierarchy is naturally founded on the requirements for honor, the higher someone is in the hierarchy, the larger its notoriety, resulting in inherent distance between superiors and subordinates. However, the culture is also defined by a strong tendency towards personal initiative and responsibilities (sense of duty) on any level, which differs from the attainment of consensus required in the Netherlands. The following table will present the key elements of the book for both countries.

Key values and principles	Explanation	France	Netherlands
Hierarchy	There is a strong relation between honor and hierarchy. This creates major power gaps between supervision and subordinates	“Puissance souveraine” The traditional French industry is built upon “barons” that hold power with jealousy. Centralization and there are singularities between hierarchical and horizontal lines	Contractual and informal hierarchy avoiding direct confrontation.
Personal initiative	Some industries create their own value systems based on initiative, sense of responsibilities and personal duty towards the state	Despite the culture being founded on hierarchy, individuals do not appreciate close contracts. They expect space for personal initiative through flexibility (“Etre flexible”)	Group initiative but also supports individual initiative. However, there is a strong confrontation avoidance
Consensus and negotiation	Iribarne highlights two types of countries, on one side individualism countries and on the other side countries aiming for consensus in decision making or, similarly, strong negotiation to reach a middle point in between.	« On s’arrange » Strong emphasise on negotiation. Processus of adjustments and compromise. France is known for its syndicates. Groups are tight but unknown to others.	Strong aiming for consensus with no rigid constraints, search for alignment in convictions. Groups are also strongly related to other groups.
Cultural norms	Iribarne highlights norms such as flexibility, serving others, being responsible for the consequences of any action. All those norms have a direct influence on the honor someone has.	Helping others without becoming servile. Being flexible to change in the environment is an aim but difficult in practice.	Search for independence and flexibility. Everyone is responsible for any actions.
Honor	The central element of the book, it combines elements of collective reputation with social groups and organization trying to uphold their honor. It can be defined by actions and their results being positive or negative.	Strong emphasise on the duality between efficiency and effectiveness (aiming). Capacity of reaching objectives and make them evolve over time.	Less general emphasis on honor but rather the willingness to belong to the group. More collectivism than individualism
Judgement and shame	Closely related to honor, people are being judged on their actions and behaviours. Also, they are judges of others, making everyone strive towards beneficial actions morally and socially acceptable and so avoid shame.	Individuals are being judged and are judges themselves. Every beneficial and effective action has an impact on honor. Inverse holds strongly as well.	No needs for judgments but rather the desire to reach agreements with others.

Table 2d: Key values and principles for France and the Netherlands (Iribarne, 1990)

In order to better understand the (partially religious) Dutch values and create a solid foundation for comparison with the French ones, this research will use Enklaar’s (2007) 12 values resumed in the following table.

Christian values	Definitions
Salvation (Heil)	By making the right choices, it secures our happy life
Guilt (Schuld)	Acknowledging guilt and responsibilities for each personal mistakes or actions
Charity (Naasteliefde)	Threat someone else just as good as you would like to be treated
Truth (Waarheid)	Even if its uncomfortable, you must always speak out the truth
Weberian values	Definitions
Labor (Arbeid)	Work is good
Order and Neatness (Orde en netheid)	You should keep your affairs in order at all time
Utility (Nut)	Everything you might do has a purpose
Reliability (Betrouwbaarheid)	Keeping promises
Moderation (Matigheid)	You should reflect on yourself and apply self-control
Dutch values	Definitions
Consensus (Overeenstemming)	Seek for agreement with each other
Equality (Gelijkheid)	Never think you are better than someone else
Self-determination (Zelfbeschikking)	Everybody is free to do as they wish

Table 2e: Dutch values (Enklaar, 2007)

Iribarne's (1990) work delves into the innate values of the French with a meticulous analysis of the notion of honor. Although certain points in his research may raise questions, such as initiative-taking in a strict hierarchical context, his results are nonetheless essential to the analytical context of this research. It's also worth mentioning that his analysis of the Dutch culture aligns in many respects with Enklaar (2007). While the former gives us a broad understanding of French values and its power-based system of judgment, the latter teaches us more about the values held in the hearts of the Dutch. Moreover, values such as initiative-taking, consensus/negotiation, equality and hierarchy are examples of values common to the notion of Agile. So, it's relatively straightforward to find links between the different theories' values.

Additionally, relying on Schwartz' Cultural Values Orientation Theory allows drawing strong associations between national values and the individual-level values depicted in Schwartz's Basic Values Theory (Schwartz, 2011), which has been used before when researching, for instance, lean management values and behaviours across culture, and might thus be useful to explore the implementation of the Agile way of working in different cultural contexts. Furthermore, in recent years, numerous papers have been published comparing Hofstede's and Schwartz' frameworks while seeking common ground and parallels between the two theories (Dobewall et al., 2014; Kaasa, 2021; Maleki et al.,2014). A recent paper published by van Dun et al. (2023) summarized the results of the literature to apply it to a lean context exploratory research. By taking its core elements on culture and implementing the identified Agile elements on one side

and replacing the essential elements of both Emic approaches, Table 3 represents a summative literature framework.

National level EMIC	National level ETIC		Individual level			
<i>(Enklaar, 2007)</i>	<i>(Hofstede, 2010)</i>	<i>(Schwartz, 2011)</i>	<i>(Schwartz, 2011)</i>		<i>Agile Values (Beck et al., 2001)</i> <i>Agile behaviours (Sutling et al., 2014)</i>	
Labor Self-Determination	(+) Power Distance	Hierarchy	Power	Self-Enhancement	Responding to change over following a plan	Leadership:
	Masculinity	Mastery	Achievements			Openess to Change
Motivating team members						
Supporting decision making						
Strategic behaviour:						
Responsibilities taking						
Support creativity, curiosity						
Transformational leadership						
Openess:						
Supporting collaboration						
Transparency						
Customer engagement						
Consensus	Individualism	Autonomy	Stimulation Self-direction	Openess to Change	Individuals and interactions over processes and tools	Creative and Innovation:
Equality Charity	(-) Power Distance	Egalitarianism	Universalism	Self-Transcendence		Ensuring member's wellbeing
						External contacts
Continous training						
Engagement through various means						
Salvation Guilt Utility Moderation	Feminity	Harmony	Benevolence	Conservation	Customer collaboration over contract negotiation	Ethics behaviours:
Truth Order and Neatness Reliability	Collectivism	Embeddedness	Tradition, Security, Conformity			Acceptable actions
						Fairness
						Honesty
						Respect to shareholders
Communication:						
Different communication medium						
Adress customer needs						
Uncertainty avoidance						
Result orientation:						
Trust						
Collaborative work						
Delivery velocity						
Credibility						

Table 3: Summative table on combined literature between Agile and Culture

The aim of this research is to understand the alignment or difference in the adoption of Agile values in companies in France and the Netherlands. In order to achieve this objective, the previous theoretical background highlighted the values, principles and behaviours specific to the application of an Agile structure. In addition, this thesis has sought to separate two different approaches to culture analysis: outsider view (Etic) and insider understanding (Emic). That said, every human being has his or her own personality and ambitions, which is why Schwartz's theory of individual motives has also been added to the analysis. By combining all the elements in the table above, this research has a broad enough background to carry out a complete analysis. The following sections will seek to define the existing bridges in literature between Agile and cultural values.

2.5 Agile values and cultural values

The above overview can help to understand the interplay of agile values and behaviours and national cultures, especially given that the literature on behaviour topics in an international context is rather scarce. Although working Agile has become more and more common given its individual, team and organizational positive outcomes, little is still known on how agile implementation, with its set of values and behaviours, can vary when adopted in different national cultures. Cheng and colleagues (2012), for instance, explored the dynamic of self-managing multicultural teams and how cultural diversity impacts team performance. They found out that the team performance was highly impacted by cultural differences and namely, different values. Hence, in countries with high *Power Distance* this resulted in a negative effect on the egalitarian principle of self-managing-teams (Cheng et al., 2012). Also, countries with more emphasis on *Collectivism* succeeded better in the implementation of self-managing teams (SMT) (Magpili & Pazos, 2017). Similarly, Ayet et al. (2017) investigated differences in agile practices between Europe and Asia and noted differences in team commitment to agile practices, empowerment, transparency and communication for the collectivistic dimension. However, comparing continents has some clearly defined limitations as, within Europe only, national cultures differ significantly.

Albeit different in theoretical nature, Lean management across cultures has been the topic of several studies over the past decade (Camuffo et al., 2018; Gelei et al., 2015; van Dun et al., 2023; Taras et al., 2012). For instance, Camuffo and colleagues (2018) studied the case of Italy in which it was expected to find more hierarchy and control in the application of lean management; based on Hofstede's model and the country scores on *Masculinity* and *Power Distance*. Surprisingly, managers were less in control and rather in support of their collaborators, aligning themselves with the Lean management standards. Italy and France

have similar scores on those two cultural dimensions of Hofstede (2010). Also, with a deeper look into the essence of French culture, *Power Distance* and *Hierarchy* are rooted in the French way of living in society (Iribarne, 1990). It could therefore be expected that lean practices in France have the same characteristics as in Italy, in spite of high Power distance and Masculinity. Similarly, in another research comparing Dutch and Brazilian lean adoption through managers' values and behaviours, van Dun et al. (2023) innovatively implemented Schwartz' taxonomy and noted that Brazilian Lean managers showed more Lean behaviours than the Dutch counterparts. This was surprising since, from a national culture perspective, Brazilian managers were expected to show fewer lean behaviours and be more hierarchical and conservative (van Dun et al., 2023).

Lean and Agile are closely related theories falling under the general aspect of self-managing teams. Hence, in the application and analysis of lean practices, culture did not seem to have a moderating effect on the overall performance and implementation, despite research showing large cultural differences. It could be assumed that for Agile practices this holds likewise true. More research is needed to determine whether the implementation of an organizational strategy aimed at flexibility against the traditional industrial management system, does not override the elements of culture, which, according to previous research, had a significant impact on day-to-day activities.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research design

This research will attempt to understand how Agile values and related behaviours of people working in this agile environment may differ across different cultures, by connecting Schwartz' Basic Individual Value theory (2012), his other Cultural Values Orientation Theory, principles and values from Iribarne's emic intercultural studies and to the Agile way of working. This articulation has been researched through a mixed-method approach of quantitative and qualitative analysis. This design is of interest when the aim is to understand the "complexity of human phenomena" (Sandelowski, 2001).

Through interviews and questioning, the discernment of both the cultural values of each respondent and their ability to apply the principles of the Agile way of working was achieved. The use of qualitative interpretive research also enabled assessing the effectiveness of an agile implementation, by gathering data on the benefits of such an approach compared with past experiences or more traditional structures. It will

therefore be a question of understanding the progress brought by this way of working. Also, the use of a single interview may compromise the quality of the answers offered, as they may be biased by convictions or the desire to support the company's values. Combining different methods of data collection will enable both self-verification and create different insights into each individual's values and behaviours.

On the qualitative side, semi-structured interviews have been conducted, whereas on the quantitative side, a survey has been distributed. Data generated from the respondents have been then triangulated allowing the establishment of a comprehensive framework (Mertens & Hesse-Biber, 2012).

3.2 Data collection

3.2.1 Sampling

The purpose sampling of this research consisted of about 8 French and 8 Dutch employees from 4 organizations, working Agile. Their company positions were not considered; neither was the industry of the company. The decision to not consider company positions from the analysis aligns with the essence of the Agile theory where the different layers of management are excluded in the operational process (Hoda et al., 2012). To get better insights into agile values and behaviours, the interviewee had to work for the organization for at least one year (Gregory et al., 2020). The size of the company (which has been recorded as the number of employees) has been considered for the exploration of diverging results. Interviewees have been included regardless of their position, age, and gender. For both France and the Netherlands, the respective Chambers of Commerce will support the identification of companies having the right structure. Participation in this survey has been voluntary and anonymous. The interviewees will receive a copy of the findings as well as direct access to the paper once published and upon request. Before the interview, each participant has been asked to complete a consent form. This involves ethical and administrative elements, such as authorizing the participant to stop the questionnaire at any time. The ethical form has been provided by the University of Twente and has been available online for further consultation. The participants have been invited to the online platform Teams to proceed to the interview. With the worldwide pandemic of COVID-19, utilization of communication software has been increasingly used for research purposes (Jones & Abdelfattah, 2020). Also, this way of conducting interviews allows to reach a more diverse participant list by reducing traveling costs and enhancing flexibility with regard to time scheduling (Gray et al., 2020). To keep track of every interviewee, they were all given a special code, and all secondary data of importance to keep in mind has been summarized in the following table (Table 4).

Interviewee codes	Gender	Age	Position	Industries
Inter.NL.1	Female	23	Content Creator	Consultancy
Inter.NL.2	Female	24	Media Manager	Production of goods
Inter.NL.3	Female	25	Business Development Manager	Consultancy
Inter.NL.4	Male	26	Business Manager	Services
Inter.NL.5	Male	28	Policy Maker	Governement
Inter.NL.6	Female	28	HR Senior Professional	Consultancy
Inter.NL.7	Male	43	Independent Program Consultant	Consultancy
Inter.NL.8	Male	56	Administration & Community Manager	Services
Inter.FR.1	Female	53	President	Services
Inter.FR.2	Female	24	Talent Acquisition	Services
Inter.FR.3	Male	25	Product Owner	IT
Inter.FR.4	Male	26	Agile Coach	Consultancy
Inter.FR.5	Male	34	Scrum Master	Industry
Inter.FR.6	Male	30	Project Manager / Ingeneer	Industry
Inter.FR.7	Male	32	CEO	IT
Inter.FR.8	Male	27	Broker	Services Banking

Table 4: Interviewee codes and secondary data

3.3 Research Instruments

In order to increase the validity of the answers, two different data collection methods have been used. On the one hand, semi-structured interviews allow for a sense of participant perspectives rather than a generalized phenomenon as in structured interviews (McGrath et al., 2019). Also, semi-structured interviews support opinions and allow secondary questions for clarification or narrowing down misunderstood questions (While, 1994). This research seeks to understand someone's values and behaviours by encouraging each participant to share his experiences, sentiments (love, hate), and perspectives and so allowing the emergence of logic on values and behaviours related to the agile and cultural context. Opposed to structured interviews, semi-structured interviews allow discovery and leave a place for discussion by still following a defined path (Magaldi et al., 2020).

Secondly, at the end of each interview, a quantitative research in the form of a survey has been discussed with the respondents; totaling sixteen answers (8 French and 8 Dutch). This will enable values and behaviours to be rechecked for validity, as well as aligning the various responses to discern any

misunderstandings on the part of the interviewer. The complementary survey will also enable us to search for irregular patterns in the data.

3.3.1 Semi-structured interviews

The sixteen interviews took approximately an hour. The interviews for the French sample were conducted in French English, and Dutch for the companies in the Netherlands, as the researcher is a native speaker of both languages.

The purpose of the interview is to understand the personal values of each participant (using Schwartz's 2011 theories) while pointing out the possible influence of their national culture through values or behavioural traits (Schwartz's, Iribarne, and Enklaar's literature). Above all, the interviewer ascertained the Agile principles, values, and behaviours that the interviewee demonstrated throughout the interview (Agile Manifesto principles).

As previously mentioned, interviews were conducted via the online communication platform Teams. They were recorded, and transcribed verbatim in their native language and all relevant quotes have been carefully translated into English. An interview guide has been developed in Appendix 1.

3.3.2 Survey

The survey took place just after the online interview and did not last longer than 15 minutes. The purpose of this quantitative process was to verify and develop previous findings as well as seek for correlation or undefined "trends" inside the data. An extended description of the different tests has been made in the next section.

3.3.3 Collected data during interviews

Throughout the semi-structured interviews, the researcher sought to perceive subjective impressions of the agile organizational environment. Additionally, the Critical Incidents Technique (CIT) was used to collect data about job performance and behaviour specific to the work context of the interviewee. The goal was to identify key behaviours, actions, and outcomes associated with the application of agile values (Urquhart et al., 2003). The interviewee will then go through a Q-sort methodology (Fu *et al.*, 2010) where respondents will have to classify agile and French/Dutch values on a 9-point scale. The construction behind the values

used in the Q-sort methodology is in accordance with Schwartz *et al.*'s (2012) clusters. Namely, *self-transcendence vs self-enhancement* and *openness-to-change vs conservation*.

3.3.4 Collected data during the survey

Measurement of agile behaviours

Participants were asked to place agile behaviours from the 4 categories of Beck, K., et al. (2001) Agile Manifesto in a Q-sort methodology (Fu *et al.*, 2010) nine-point scale (-4= least important; 4 = most important)”; the scale has been later recoded into a 0 to 7 scale with the same measurement descriptions.

Measurement of cultural values

The concept of culture, with its associated values and behaviours, played an essential and implicit role throughout the interviews. Deliberating on these values and behaviours facilitated cross-analysis, potentially highlighting diverging responses. As mentioned in previous sections, incongruent behaviours emerged in the context of lean management, diverging from the national behaviours. The dual analysis approach serves to substantiate these assertions. Therefore, literature often used Schwartz’s Value Survey (1992) composed of 57 value items. However, to reduce the time needed from the respondents and still collect reliable data, this research used the SSVS methodology that provides 10 items strongly correlated with what would have delivered the 57-item SVS (Lindeman & Verkasalo, 2005). The scale however stayed the same and is described in Table 5 and the 10 items are developed in Table 6.

-1 (Opposed to my values)	0 (Not important)	1	2	3 (Important)	4	5	6 (Very important)	7 (Of supreme importance)
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Table 5: 9-Point Scale for SSVS (Lindeman & Verkasalo, 2005)

Benevolence	<i>Concern well-being of others</i>
Universalism	<i>Social justice, equality, and tolerance</i>
Tradition	<i>Deep respect for established customs, beliefs and cultural practices</i>
Conformity	<i>Following societal norms, avoiding actions that disrupt social order</i>
Security	<i>Need for safety, stability, and protection</i>
Self-Direction	<i>Pursuit of novelty, personal growth, adventure, change</i>
Hedonism	<i>Pursuit of pleasure, enjoyment, and personal gratification</i>
Stimulation	<i>Desire for novelty, new experiences</i>
Power	<i>Desire to control, influence, authority over others</i>
Achievement	<i>Focus on personal success, competence</i>

Table 6: 10 items model based on Schwartz's Value Survey (1992) (Lindeman & Verkasalo, 2005)

3.4 Qualitative and Quantitative Analyses

3.4.1 Qualitative Data Analysis

Before the start of the interview, a short introduction of the interviewee has been asked to present his assigned tasks and give an overview of his daily activities. This data collection was helpful in the identification of limitations or future research avenues.

Once transcribed, the semi-structured interview has been analyzed through Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) allowing the arrangement and extraction of insights from a dataset by identifying common “themes” or patterns. The coding of the interview has been done in two different ways. A deductive approach has been used to identify the values and behaviours developed in the theoretical background. Secondly, as a complement, inductive coding will allow to code of the remaining data, allowing the emergence and interpretation of new themes. This has been done by the generation of 1st-order codes which have been clustered in 2nd-order themes and 3rd-order aggregative dimensions which will eventually highlight similar patterns between the participants. Also, as a step towards reliability, data has been analyzed through CAQDAS (Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software) to enhance trustworthiness (O’Kane et al., 2021). For this research, Atlas.ti has been used for the coding part.

To ensure validity, the generated data has been analyzed and verified (O’Kane et al., 2021) using Sutling et al. (2014) set of 7 agile-oriented behaviours (developed in section 3.4.2). The process of semi-structured interviews has been subject to criticism and qualified as “mysterious” because the coding relies on the author’s interpretations (Alvesson & Karreman, 2011). Therefore, the data generated during this

research has been coded by the author and a second person with knowledge and expertise in the field of business administration and in the possession of a master's degree at a research university.

3.4.2 Quantitative data analysis

The quantitative part of this research has been made just after the interviews. The different agile values that have been ordered by the interviewee through the Q-sort methodology have been analyzed through means and standard deviations allowing a better insight on the ranking for every country. In order to check the normal distribution of the sample, a normality test was conducted using SPSS. The test used was the Shapiro-Wilk Test as the sample was small. The results did not show a significant normal. Considering the non-normal distribution, a non-parametric test was conducted, the Mann-Whitney U.

On the cultural aspects, the generated data by the SSVS methodology (Lindeman & Verkasalo, 2005) has been compared to the average results detailed in the theoretical background. Similarities or differences have been considered for the results sections or as considerations for further analysis.

4. Mixed-method findings

The purpose of this research is to explore how effective agile team members' values and behaviours vary between France and the Netherlands. This goes through the finding and understanding of the differences between the populations and through deeper insights into the equal effectiveness and the successfulness of their agile implementation. Two main avenues of research have been followed, namely the cultural one with the impact of national values and the secondary analysis of individual values to explain certain types of behaviours. In order to distinguish the mixed-method approach and their respective findings, this chapter is divided into two distinct sections of findings, namely resulting from the quantitative and qualitative analysis.

4.1 Quantitative findings

4.1.1 Agile values

The objective of this section is to find the means of the two samples, compare them to each other, to understand potential disagreements inside populations (with standard deviation), and see if there is a difference in the application of agile values between the French and the Dutch samples. In the following Table 7, the values of the Q-sort, recoded into a positive range from 0 to 7, have been ordered for the two

samples based on their means. The value of *Working Software over Comprehensive Documentation* has scored the highest by both samples despite the Dutch sample showing less variability (std. dev. 0.53 and 1.39) suggesting more agreement in the Dutch sample about the importance of *Working Software* and regarding *Customer Collaboration over Contract Negotiation*, ranked second place for the French sample with a mean of 6.25 and fourth for the Dutch with a mean of 6. Despite being relatively important for both samples, the standard deviation of the Dutch sample (1.93) clearly states differing opinions within the sample. The third value, *Individuals and Interactions over Processes and Tools*, highest ranked by the Dutch with a mean of 7 suggests a strong emphasis on interpersonal interactions and flexibility. At the same time, the French sample not only scored third but also had a standard deviation of 1.77, suggesting strong variability compared to the Dutch sample and their standard deviation of only 0.53. Finally, the fourth value; *Responding to Change over Following a Plan* where the French sample mean is the lowest at 4.63 and also has a high standard deviation (2.26) suggests respondents have different opinions regarding the importance of adaptability. The Dutch sample on the other side has a mean of 6.376 and a standard deviation of 1.60, also suggesting disparities in the importance of adaptability.

Values	French sample (n=8)			Dutch sample (n=8)			
	Ranking	Mean	std. dev.	Values	Ranking	Mean	std. dev.
Working Software over Comprehensive Documentation	1	6.75	(1.39)	Individuals and Interactions over Processes and Tools	1	7	(0.53)
Customer Collaboration over Contract Negotiation	2	6.25	(1.49)	Working Software over Comprehensive Documentation	2	7	(0.53)
Individuals and Interactions over Processes and Tools	3	6	(1.77)	Responding to Change over Following a Plan	3	6,376	(1.60)
Responding to Change over Following a Plan	4	4.63	(2.26)	Customer Collaboration over Contract Negotiation	4	6	(1.93)

Table 7: Summative table of means, standard deviations and ranking for the Agile Manifesto’s values in France and in the Netherlands (Bold values represent the highest mean per country as well as the highest standard deviation further developed in the previous section)

As the sample is composed of 16 respondents, which is a small sample, the Shapiro-Wilk test has been used (Petersen, 2017) to test the normality of the distribution; in other words, to see whether the variables statistically significantly differ from the normal distribution. The outcome of this test can be found in Table 8.

<i>Tests of Normality</i>			
	Shapiro-Wilk		
Individuals and Interactions over Processes and Tool	.784	16	.002
Working Software over Comprehensive Documentation	.810	16	.004
Customer Collaboration over Contract Negotiation	.827	16	.006
Responding to Change over Following a Plan	.886	16	.049

Table 8: Summative table of the Shapiro-Wilk normality test (Bold values and p. values)

Looking at Table 8, the p. values are < 0.05 (values in bold), therefore the null hypothesis is not supported. This suggests that there is a significant difference between the values distributions and a normal distribution. With this significant difference with a normal distribution, a t-test could not be run.

As the results from the Shapiro-Wilk show nonsignificant results, a nonparametric test has been used. Therefore, a Mann-Whitney U was utilized as being a non-parametric alternative and enabling the test of whether the means of two samples are equal or not. The following table shows the results of this test. The p.values (0.338; 0.955; 0.700; 0.084) for the respective agile values are greater than the significance level of $p.value > 0.05$. This implies that there is no statistically significant difference between the Dutch and the French population for the given agile values. However, there is a marginal trend for the Responding to Change over Following a Plan value with a p-value of 0.084 but does not reach the conventional threshold.

Test Statistics^a

	Individuals and Interactions over Processes and Tool	Working Software over Comprehensive Documentation	Customer Collaboration over Contract Negotiation	Responding to Change over Following a Plan
Mann-Whitney U	23.500	31.500	28.500	16.000
Wilcoxon W	59.500	67.500	64.500	52.000
Z	-.961	-.057	-.386	-1.725
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.337	.955	.700	.084
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]	.382 ^b	.959 ^b	.721 ^b	.105 ^b

a. Grouping Variable: Nationality

Table 9: Mann-Whitney U test results (Bolt values are the p.values)

As a result, both the French and Dutch populations emphasise the same agile values in their daily operations. In more simple words, there is no significant difference in the application of the agile values between the two samples.

4.1.2 Individuals values

Value Orientation	Interview results
Benevolence	5.25 (France), 5.875 (Netherlands)
Universalism	5.0 (France), 4.0 (Netherlands)
Tradition, Conformity	5.5, 5.375 (France), 4.875, 4.5 (Netherlands)
Achievement, Power	6.0, 5.0 (France), 5.875, 3.375 (Netherlands)
Hedonism, Stimulation	5.875, 6.0 (France), 5.75, 5.875 (Netherlands)
Self-Direction	5.625 (France), 5.75 (Netherlands)
Security	4.375 (France), 4.5 (Netherlands)

Table 10: Cultural values mean summary table.

During the interview, participants were asked to place their values based on Schwartz's Theory of Basic Individual Values (2012); on a 9-point Scale for SSVS (Lindeman & Verkasalo, 2005). The resulting means have been placed in Table 10. For *Benevolence* results are very close to each other between the samples (NL 5.875 > 5.25 FR), implying an overall concern for well well-being of others in both samples. On Universalism, the values differ from a point with 5.0 for France and 4.0 for the Netherlands, suggesting a bigger focus on justice, equality, and tolerance for the French sample. Regarding Tradition and Conformity slight differences have been identified between the samples (5.5, 5.375 for France; 4.875, 4.5 for

Netherlands) implying respect for customs and cultural norms through the following of societal norms without disrupting common orders. *Achievement* and *Power* on the other hand show some bigger gaps between the samples. When looking at the idea of personal success and competence, France scored a 6.0 compared to a 5.0 for the Dutch sample. Regarding the need to control, influence and exercise authority, the gap is even bigger with France reaching 5.785 and the Netherlands only 3.375. In other words the quantitative analysis shows that the French have a greater concern for their ability to have power and influence on others by still looking to reach personal achievements compared to the Dutch sample, showing results much more oriented to collective thinking and performing. The next values are *Hedonism* and *Stimulation* with very close scores, namely 5.875 (FR) > 5.75 (NL) on Hedonism and 6.0 (FR) > 5.875 (NL) on *Stimulation*. This reflects that samples pursue pleasure, novelty, and new experiences. These results have been found surveying people working in a fast-paced context with rapidly innovative environments that require a sense of pleasure in being curious. On *Self-Direction*, results are very similar to each other. France scored 5.625 and the Netherlands a little more with 6.625. Both high values compared to the scale also support the agile innovative environment as those values stand for the pursuit of novelty change, through adventures and personal growth as a result. The last individual value of *Security* is situated lower on the scale but with also very similar value for both samples, namely 4.5 (NL) > 4.375 (FR). This value stands for the common need for security, protection, and personal stability. Most of the resulting values are very close to each sample with a few differences, namely on *Universalism*, *Achievement*, and *Power*. Also, regarding the scale, the lowest value is 3.375 and the highest is 6 suggesting that values were mostly located around the scale mean, 5.

4.2. Qualitative findings

The quantitative findings have shown no significant differences between the French and the Dutch samples based on their agile values. To get a deeper understanding of supporting or explaining those statistical results, interviews have been conducted with a great emphasis on understanding the agile values and behaviours of every agile worker. Through questions and live reflection, enabled by semi-structured interviews, this paper collected deep data into the origins of differing behaviours. These interviews not only confirmed the general following of agile values found in the quantitative section but also highlighted diverging aspects in behaviours between the two populations. The following qualitative results shed further light on commonly shared themed themes with different operational behaviours. The following figure, GOIA, is the summative table of the recorded interview leading to the results developed in the following sections. The GOIA must be read from left to right. Its purpose is to create a funnel starting from what has

been said during the interviews (quotes) towards general, sometimes common, themes. In simple words, these themes are broader categories of concepts identified in data, they represent common patterns behind more specific concepts (1st order and 2nd order codes). The left column contains the rephrased codes, summarizing a certain number of quotes captured during the interviews, they are the 1st order codes. The second column assembles the codes into 2nd order codes, more general, and capturing common ideas. Lastly, the third column represents the general themes. To distinguish the results coming from the Netherlands or France, Dutch codes will be written in *italics*. Also, numbers and letters in between “(..)” will refer to the labeled elements of the GOIA model. For a better understanding of the complex differences between both samples, the second-order codes resulting in the general themes are analyzed, to understand how effective agile team member's (quantitative) values and behaviours vary between France and the Netherlands.

1a. <i>Open and transparent communication at all levels, encouraging feedback, problem-solving, stakeholder involvement, and collaboration across hierarchy.</i>	1. Communication and feedback Mechanisms	A. Team Dynamics
1b. <i>Agile team practices involve regular check-ups, feedback loops and working in sprints.</i>		
1c. <i>Effective communication in agile practices, facilitated by roles like the Scrum Master and processes, resolves disagreements, prevents conflicts, and involves everyone in team collaboration.</i>		
2a. <i>A good colleague is curious, supportive, gives freedom to grow, provides insightful feedback, and fosters responsibility and positive work psychology.</i>	2. Colleagues and Collaborative behaviour	
2b. <i>Good collaboration leverages mutual benefits, skills, accessible colleagues, clear goals, open-mindedness, and fosters continuous improvement</i>		
2c. <i>Working agile involves honest, transparent collaboration and physical interactions, all aimed at achieving common objectives.</i>		
2d. <i>Good colleagues are connected with the team and market, eager to learn, helpful, curious, socially adept, patient, proactive, innovative, respectful, positive, and, in project mode, united like a family towards a common goal.</i>		
2e. <i>Agile behaviour includes courage, loyalty, transparency, wisdom, seeking help, and signaling difficulties, creating a positive environment.</i>		
2f. <i>Agile implementation begins with trial teams, inspiring organizational change, inclusive participation, and mutual training.</i>		
2g. <i>Successful agile implementation requires balanced supervision, team autonomy, collective decision-making, training for top management, and maintaining a flat hierarchy.</i>		
3a. <i>Agile practices foster creativity and flexibility, emphasizing autonomy and expression of opinion</i>	3. Flexibility and Creativity in Agile Practices	B. Environment Adaptability
3b. <i>Working autonomously by creating impact without being micromanaged or depending on others</i>		
3c. <i>Adaptation and agility to the environment and market ensure the delivery of swift, tailored solutions to client needs.</i>		

3d. Agile companies grow by adapting to client and market needs but can face work overload, unsustainable pace, and contract losses due to client delays.		
4a. <i>Agile organizations prioritize client needs by quickly adapting to changes and delivering efficient, tailored solutions.</i>	4. Client-centric Adaptability	
4b. <i>Internal emphasis to catch trends in the market and discuss them through different types of internal profiles</i>		
4c. Utilizing end-user feedback for continuous improvement based on client needs and sharing it with production.		
4d. Emphasizing client-driven decisions, rapid problem solving, and strong connections between project teams and end users.		
5a. <i>Empowerment and Skill Development</i>	5. Continuous Improvement and Support	C. Supportive Frameworks
5b. <i>Diversification of decision-making between individuals with the right skills and the client</i>		
5c. <i>Equal Pay and Mentorship Across Levels</i>		
5d. Agile practices emphasise open communication, focus on quality and self-improvement, and evolve products through constant enhancement rather than creating new ones, unlike traditional hierarchical structures.		
5e. Reflecting on everyone's work for improvement, ensuring accessibility at all levels, and managing people and resources to keep autonomous teams within project scope.		
5f. Leadership-driven change is more easily accepted, emphasizing support through guidance, valuing input, and using practices like Kanban and regular meetings to help new and junior employees develop within an agile framework.		
5g. Working agile is a mindset that fosters personal improvement, motivation, versatility, and responsibility, creating a healthier work environment and enhancing the company.		
5h. Trust is built in a united team through self-responsibility, legitimacy, and autonomy, supported by internal adaptation, shifting responsibilities, processes, and tools.		
5i. Autonomy, highly valued for enabling individuals to work independently based on their skills and adapt to client needs, also allows for training others.		
6a. <i>Agile work involves organized planning, flexible application, clear targets, and defined goals with delegated tasks and budgets.</i>	6. Organizational Structure and Flexibility	
6b. <i>Supervisor as last decision-maker</i>		
6c. <i>Self-Organized Teams</i>		
6d. Hierarchy diminishes over time through workshops, while agile organizations adopt an entrepreneurial model with horizontal management and diverse roles and tasks.		
6e. Agile structures feature a flat hierarchy with clear reporting, flexible roles, and intermediary employee decisions, with executives making final decisions.		
6f. Final products are improved step by step through team reflection, with clearly stated and regularly reviewed tasks, emphasizing the importance of flexibility, adaptability, and versatility to avoid conflicts.		
7a. <i>Agile companies, unlike traditional ones, adapt IT infrastructure swiftly, operate without strict guidelines, decentralize decision-making, and handle unplanned processes faster.</i>	7. Data-Driven Decision	

<i>7b. Agile organizations use data to steer out challenges and interconnect people through continuous training and systematic decision-making</i>	Making and Infrastructure	
<i>8a. Working agile emphasizing innovation is resources costly and only work for the production of end products</i>	8. Agile Challenges and Limitations	D. Operational Challenges
<i>8b. Limitation of agile is the lack of knowledge and creativity shared between lowest levels and managers</i>		
<i>8c. Giving too much freedom without clear processes and supervision might deviate people from their job and apply a lot of pressure</i>		
8d. In an agile context, client processes and timing, along with individuals deviating from agile practices, can slow down progress and cost valuable time.		
8e. Agile is suited for digital products and smaller enterprises but less effective for standardized projects like construction.		
8f. In an agile context, assigning multiple roles to individuals, though encouraged by top management, ultimately slows down efficiency.		
8g. Agile implementation can fail due to educational gaps or mentality, especially in older companies entrenched in outdated processes.		
<i>9a. Disagreement occurring because of too much flexibility or central decision making on agile teams</i>		
<i>9b. Disagreements are resolved through direct confrontation, managerial involvement, and reaching agreements and compromises.</i>		
9c. In agile environments, disagreements are resolved through consensus, communication, neurolinguistic techniques, and team restructuring, avoiding conflicts by promoting understanding and collaboration.		
<i>10a. Dutch accessibility, direct communication and opinion sharing</i>	10. National Cultural Values	
<i>10b. Dutch emphasise for values as consensus, honoring commitments, individualism, productivity and short-term planning</i>		
10c. The French consistently seek to establish hierarchy or a leader, reflecting the belief that companies without hierarchy are an utopia.		
10d. The French struggle with creating team spirit but are flexible with timing.		
10e. French teams often feel that 50-60% of their meetings are useless, viewing them as typical and exclusive work periods.		
10f. Working the French way involves a sense of honor and commitment, a competitive drive to be the best, a focus on titles, and prioritizing their own perspectives.		
10.g French senior levels and culture make change difficult, requiring time, pedagogy, and a shift in deeply ingrained working and thinking habits.		

Figure 2: GIOIA model of the qualitative research. (*Italic sentences refer to Dutch first order codes based on the original quotes / Bold are general themes*)

4.2.1 Communication and Feedback Mechanisms (1)

When looking into the communication behaviours (1) of both French and Dutch agile team members, emphasis was set on transparent if not straight open communication across all the different layers of an organization. Although the general idea of communication was highlighted by all interviewees, the Dutch approach was described as notably more direct. For example, as explained by one of the interviewees *'I think it is typical for Dutch to be quite direct about what you need. What you don't need. What you like. What you don't like'*(1&10)-(Inter.NL.6). The Dutch approach to communication was also highlighted by the ease of approaching stakeholders without formal barriers; another Dutch interviewee mentioned *'It may cause some disagreement between colleagues among stakeholders (...) I think it is more efficient to communicate your thoughts and needs openly in order to reach your goal.'*(1a & 9c)-(Inter.NL.6) or also *'I think it and also like in terms of communication on daily basis and on the work you can always reach out like freely to someone on teams just to send them a message'*(1a,b)-(Inter.NL.2). The idea of straightforward and accessibility in between layers can be seen not only in the direct quotes but also in the emphasis on communication described by the interviewees.

The French interviewees highlighted several times the importance of communication as in the following quote *'So we always like to discuss, the communication is key.'*(1c)-(Inter.FR.2). Despite the importance of open communication, the same interviewee further explained his clustering of way of communicating in processes *'So we have processes in terms of communication'*(1c)-(Inter.FR.1) or *'When we talk about agile, if you try to understand each methodology, it's mostly about communication.'* (1c)-(Inter.FR.2) or even installing steps in communication as quoted *'(...) we have a tendency to lose ourself when setting to much intervening people and steps'*(8d)-(Inter.FR.5). To go even further, the interviewees also mentioned later on that communication between each other had to be diplomatic, suggesting that words and comments needed to be balanced as illustrated by the quote *'(...) someone who is easy to communicate with and someone who is also let's say diplomat, diplomat in the sense it's where he can...he accepts critics and try to find solutions and adapt.'*(1c)-(Inter.FR.2) or said slightly differently with soft skills *'It's a lot about, about soft skill, I would say, and about communication, about to being understood and to convince others on why you have to make this choice more than another.'* (1c)-(Inter.FR.3). Despite the same emphasis on communication between the two samples, there seems to be a disparity in how transparent and direct the communication is. The Dutch sample illustrated their directness as being a cultural value while the French diplomatic way of interacting was not directly presented as such but still could be sensed in all interviews. Communication and Feedback mechanisms have been placed under the general theme of Team

Dynamics (A) because they influence the way individuals, in this case agile workers interact, collaborate, and perform.

4.2.2 Flexibility and Creativity in Agile Practices (3)

Both French and Dutch interviewees granted importance to a significant degree of autonomy-oriented behaviours. However, the way autonomy is exercised between the two samples varies. From the French sample, while employees work and behave with a considerable degree of autonomy, it is often structured by a framework. Several French interviewees referred to planning operations or processed ways of working as this example given by a CEO of a company *'OK, so when we work on a project, we have different steps within our processes. Even though they are agile, we still have processes which is important.'*(8d) (Inter.FR.1) or another example *'(...) the little amount of processes they will try to instore, will be processes that will answer to something concrete something real'*(3c)-(Inter.FR.4). These examples highlight the balance between autonomy and ensuring there is a framework, a set of processes where employees can make independent decisions. These processes were presented as a complete part of daily activities.

In the Netherlands on the other hand, the significant degree of autonomy is emphasised through self-direction and decision-making. As stated by one of the participants *'I can make my own decisions.'*(3b & 5i)-(Inter.NL.2). *'I don't need to go to them (referring to managers) every time or in terms of also communication with stakeholders.'* (3b)-(Inter.NL.2) or from another interviewee *'And we don't really have like middle managers or something like for example, my team is self-organized.'*(3b)-(Inter.NL.5). This quote highlights the trust in the different employees' responsibility capabilities. Also, this autonomy is not subject to the boundaries of a framework such as the French sample seemed to suggest. Another participant said *'If I do receive some input, let's say for a campaign and I see something is not how I or how it's supposed to be (...) I don't need to go through my manager and to reach to the stakeholder, I can directly go through to them myself and sort it out.'*(1a & 3b)-(Inter.NL.2). Combined with the direct communication behaviour mentioned in the previous paragraph, Dutch agile members are granted a high level of autonomy allowing them to engage with daily tasks and decisions swiftly. Flexibility and creativity in Agile Practices have been placed under the Environment Adaptability (B) as the result of teams being responsible for responding to changing environments and unexpected challenges.

4.2.3 Colleagues and Collaborative behaviours (2)

When diving into the collaborative aspects of working agile, collaboration appeared to be a cornerstone for effectiveness. A French interviewee referring to good collaboration mentioned *'Follow the path to help succeeding the project.'*(5g & 2d)-(Inter.FR.3). Also, on the French side members had to be aware of their roles, their tasks, and their responsibilities within this collaborative framework creating competitive pressure. One of the interviewees operating as an agile coach highlighted that *'There is this French side of always willing to be the best, being always into the competition'*(10f)-(Inter.FR.5). Earlier in the interview, she pointed out this framework idea *'working agile is a mindset, it's not because we adopted a framework that we are agile'*(5g & 2g)- (Inter.FR.4). To better understand this cultural framework building and its original source, one of the interviewees said *'companies are minimizing certain roles inside agile therefore people are obliged to do them because the companies are deciding it (...) It's the top management that decides'*(6e)-(Inter.FR.5). The entire French dynamism in the way of working has been interpreted by the researcher as a complex terrain with points of vigilance because of the distinction of roles, the insured competitive pressure as mentioned by an interviewee and the overall general idea of a framework with its own rules.

The Dutch participants emphasised a generally different idea as stated in this quote *'and obviously collaboration requires that there is a certain kind of equality within the voices.'*(2a & 2b & 2e)-(Inter.NL.1) Additionally, they broke the general idea of a clear definition of roles as found in the French sample by emphasizing close relations instead of competition as described in this quote *'So within the team, we try to work closely together and you know like stay, stay close to each other'*(2e)-(Inter.NL.2) although this might sound as a mindset, operational activities pragmatically *'Like good collaboration within the team is just making sure that we use every member's best skills like everyone was putting their best skills forward'*(2b)-(Inter.NL.1). Collaboration is not only working closely together but also using everyone's capacities to drive toward a common goal. The interviews on the Dutch sample also considerably touched upon the idea that this strong collaboration finds its source in strong and transparent communication as highlighted earlier, but also through accessibility of colleagues and implemented staff. However, this refers to people in charge despite the horizontal structures in place. Examples of this accessibility aspect were numerous throughout the Dutch interviews, for instance *'And what they're trying to push more recently is that we just like they, they were calling it like just pick the phone and call wherever whoever'* or also *'And yeah, I don't really have issues going up to my managers to ask things.'*(2b & 2a)-(Inter.NL.2). Collaborative behaviors is an essential element of agile dynamism. This resulted in the second order falling under Team Dynamics (A).

4.2.4 Client-centric Adaptability (4)

Client orientation and client-centric behaviours were the results of numerous avenues of discussion during the interview. Both samples also pushed the necessity of being able to adapt to the surrounding environment. One of the French interviewees mentioned *'The agile company would start from a client base and will certainly expand their business in order to accommodate the clients and the market needs'*(4c & 4d)-(Inter.FR.2) or even more direct *'Agile organization for me first ... it's to be able to and adapt on a continuous basis to the needs of our clients.'*(4c & 4d)-(Inter.FR.1) . On the same line of thoughts, a Dutch interviewee replied *'I'd say that agile companies are characterized by their ability to adapt quickly, to change, to work closely together with the clients or to deliver value to clients efficiently.'*(4a)-(Inter.NL.6) and as another example *'As a consultant, you constantly have to adapt so depending on which project you are on and what the client needs are'*(4a)- (Inter.NL.6). Although the general idea behind those two quotes is tackling the strong involvement of customers along the process; by taking a third reflective view on this, both approaches slightly differ. The French interviewees seemed to be working proactively with the client, *'I believe a good colleague is someone proactive'*(4d)-(Inter.FR.8) as well described in this translated quote *'We focus mostly on what the client is wanting. It's nearly him (the client) who's piloting the project in order to get the most out of what he wants'*(4d)-(Inter.FR.7) or another example in a more industrial context *'So, every 2 to 3 weeks, an update is released, and it is implemented gradually based on the results and customer requests.'*(4c)-(Inter.FR.6). This develops on the idea that French companies prioritize client needs proactively and even allow the client to steer their projects to ensure optimal outcomes. To reflect on this statement, interviewees throughout their responses and the intonation used, created a form of respect towards the client, slightly pulling forward the general mental concept of "The client is King". This steering didn't feel imposed, interviewees strongly supported the utilization of feedback mechanisms for example the following quote *'We make it evolve with the feedback from the users to improve as good as possible based on the needs of the clients'*(4c)-(Inter.FR.6).

To illustrate the Dutch reactive client-centric behaviour, one of the interviewees reflected on the consultants she works with by saying *'So the consultants really tailor their services and interactions to the client needs and try to find individual solutions that, yeah, align with their expectations and priorities.'*(4a)-(Inter.NL.6). Another interviewee also described this reactive behaviour by saying *'An agile company respond quickly to change and to the clients needs'*(4a)-(Inter.NL.8). The separation between approaches separates the French systematic alignment with clients from the Dutch approach of quick responsiveness fostering greater spontaneity and innovation as quoted *'(Company name) was very much occupied with*

innovation. Where-in the IT-structure was create for special services and could very quickly upscale or downscale'(4a & 4b)-(Inter.NL.7). Although this difference has been felt during the interview, it is important to keep in mind that the interviewees were operating in fast-paced environments implying that differences might be related to their actual work in time during the interview phase. Client-centric adaptability has been placed under the general theme of Environment Adaptability (B) resulting from the important emphasis of agile companies to match client needs and environment change.

4.2.5 National Cultural Values (10)

In the previous section, several differing behaviours have been developed and quoted. However, some of those behaviours could be related to national cultural values. One of the questions during the interview asked about what typically Dutch or French was, depending on the sample in their way of working.

For the French sample, the first and most preferred value is hierarchy. As stated by one of the interviewees *'I believe that it is utopic to believe that we can have complete flat structures'*(10c)-(Inter.FR.5). The verticality of the company as such as never been described vertically throughout the interview. However, it has been interpreted by the several mentions of managers and decision-makers. Additionally, despite being in agile contexts which concerning the theoretical background does not support the idea of management, the French sample often referred to managers or directly to a decision maker. This has been interpreted throughout the interviews not only by the quotes but also that every time the discussion about the decision was engaged, it often time finished referring to someone. For example, the following quote *'meaning that the employees or the managers working on the selection processes, they decide who we qualify, who fits the needs, who is pushed forward to the client'*(10c)-(Inter.FR.2); sometimes also specifically making their roles clear while implying their managerial position as the following quote *'So for example, I'm talent manager'*(10f)-(Inter.FR.2). The strong emphasis on hierarchy and generally speaking the challenges of implementing and developing agile were referred to by senior colleagues as *'However, if we ask someone who's been working for 25, 30 years a certain way; to change his way of working, we enter into another discussion'*(10g)-(Inter.FR.5). Although this quote could refer to age being a vector of challenges in agile implementation, such statements did not appear during the different Dutch interviews. The last French value resulting from the interviews has partially been covered in the previous section but does concern a sense of honor focusing on the mentioned competitive drive, in order to be the best and prioritize own perspectives. To support those results, an agile coach, for example, mentioned *'there is really a French side, to be the best, being in the competition all the time'*(10f)-(Inter.FR.5). Another interviewee

reacted to the prioritization of personal ideas by stating *'Indeed, we listen to ourselves before listening to others, it's very difficult'*(10d & 10e & 10f)-(Inter.FR.5).

When looking into the Dutch values the most commonly discussed are the ones about communication developed in 4.2.1. However, the Dutch consensus value came out several times for example in the following quote *'Second, the Dutch mentality is driven on consensus rather than the boss is right'*(10b)-(Inter.NL.7&8). Another Dutch value reflected by an agile consultant throughout his mission in several big agile companies was described by interviewee 7 as *'individualism (...) In the Dutch culture, "I am responsible for my piece and I shall do my piece very well. However if you do not do your piece correctly, then I will explain to you that I am not satisfied"*(10b)-(Inter.NL.7). The last-mentioned national value is about honoring commitment and the weight given to asks of which someone is responsible. An example given during the interview is *'They also need to be responsible for their work, whether it's great work or not.'*(10b)-(Inter.NL.4). As a general result, National Cultural Values have been placed under the general theme of Operational Challenges (D) due to its aforementioned impact on behaviours.

4.3 Similarities and differences between the behaviours and the values of the French and Dutch agile samples

The quantitative findings with the Mann-Whitney U test results developed in Table 9 did not reveal significant differences between the French and Dutch Agile values. However, some observable tendencies have been highlighted in the means and the standard deviations suggesting disparities inside the sample on the ranking of the different Agile Manifesto values. When looking into the similarities (Table 9), Working Software over Comprehensive Documentation scored high for both samples (French: 6.75, Dutch: 7.00) and with relatively low standard deviations (French: 1.39, Dutch: 0.53). This phenomenon has also been identified for Customer Collaboration over Contract Negotiation with close means (French: 6.25, Dutch: 6.00) but very much variability in the Dutch sample (std. dev. 1.93). Individuals and Interactions over Processes and Tools scored high means for both countries (French: 6.00 Dutch: 7.00) with very few disparities among the Dutch sample (std. dev. 0.53).

Albeit the overlap tendencies in the data, the qualitative analysis has shown differences for example the Communication Styles. The Dutch sample highlighted their directness with straight-forward communication without formal barriers that sometimes, also, leads to disagreements despite being seen as efficient. Quotes like *'I think it is typical for Dutch to be quite direct about what you need'*(1&10)-(Inter.NL.6) can be found throughout the qualitative analysis. The French sample on the other hand emphasises a more diplomatic

way of communicating that cares about balanced and respectful communication with the example of the following quote *'someone who is easy to communicate with and someone who is also let's say diplomat.'* (1c)-(Inter.FR.2) Similarities have also been identified under Autonomy and Flexibility with French interviewees working relatively flexibly but, in a framework, often imposed by a culturally included hierarchy. On the other hand, the Dutch sample emphasised self-direction and decision-making autonomy with fewer formal constraints. Quotes such as *'I can make my own decisions'*(3b & 5i)-(Inter.NL.2). supported this conclusion. The third overlapping aspect from the qualitative analysis is the Collaboration Dynamics with a French sample very much focused on a competitive edge with clear roles and responsibilities despite being in an agile company and context. The Dutch sample however is valuing collaboration as a collective effort with mutual support. Finally, the last agile value with sensitive differences is Client Orientation. Interview results supported the idea that the French proactively engaged with clients emphasizing continuous feedback and direct adaptation while the Dutch sample reactively interacted more, tailoring their services based on the client's needs and feedback. Albeit this research aims to understand and elaborate on possible differences and similarities between agile values and behaviours, the results suggest that their interpretation and implementation vary. The resulting insights provide nuances on how national cultural values such as honor, individualism, and hierarchy could be sources of tailored agile implementation. The following section will combine the results and the literature.

5. Discussion

This research addresses the notable research gap between the agile and national cultures literature, specifically in France and the Netherlands. The research on the general impact of culture on ways of working, processes, and more specifically in an agile context is scarce. The goal of this research is to understand the differences in agile behaviours and practices between France and the Netherlands. This goal extends the research to the identification of values and behaviours influenced by national culture, providing crucial complementary perspectives on individual values but also on the existing literature of the impact of national cultures on ways of working and offering new insights into this same impact in an agile context. These results also provide useful material for further research and practical information for the industry.

5.1 Theoretical Implications

This research extends current knowledge by addressing a significant gap in the agile literature. Previous research has been researching the application of agile but in homogenous cultural settings and directly overlooking the complexities and impact of cultural diversity (Cheng et al., 2012; Ayed et al., 2017, Kuchel et al., 2023). Through mixed-method research including quantitative analysis and qualitative semi-

structured interviews, this research presents a comprehensive analysis of agile values and behaviours across French and Dutch contexts. The use of a mixed approach in this research delivers a comprehensive insight into how national culture affects the implementation of agile values and behaviour between the two countries. The use of this mixed-method approach enables the identification of nuances in the data highlighting both common and culture-specific behaviours and values.

5.1.1 Extension of the cross-cultural Agile literature

The first novelty in the agile cross-cultural literature built on the evidence that the agile values through the quantitative data analysis, were universally appreciated despite their practical implementation being significantly impacted by national values (found through the qualitative analysis). As an example, Dutch teams emphasised *direct communication* and high *autonomy* by keeping low *power distance* and on the other hand seeking high *individualism*. For the French interviewees, they preferred *structured processes*, proactive *client engagement*, and generally high *power distance*. These results align with the literature and provide crucial information for multinational organizations. This research provides practical insights that can support organizations in their agile implementation phase to tailor agile practices, despite values commonly shared, by fitting the cultural preferences of their teams and leading to success. When looking at the cultural differences, independently from the agile values, they align with the differences described in the theoretical background; namely French importance for *Honor* by Iribarne (1989), Dutch values by Enklaar (2007); Hierarchy and *Mastery* by Schwartz (2011) The common agile and cultural results contribute to the scarce literature by opening new avenues in research on this topic.

5.1.2 Application of individual values and identity

Numerous studies have been published by only considering individuals' national cultures as an impact vector for their differences in ways of working. However, this does not represent the real-life scope of how research should look at the populations as it does not consider the individual values of participants, which can result from experiences, education and beliefs (Brown & Treviño, 2009). Therefore, this research used an individual-oriented theory to understand the impact of individual-level values, namely Schwartz's Theory of Basic Individual Values (2012) providing new complementary insight to the national culture impact analysis. Through the results shown in table 9, despite the very common results on the values, there are differences between the two populations. These results build on the existing evidence that despite being from the same countries, people's values differ (standard deviations); and so does it differ in a population comparison. By looking into the individual values differences between the two populations, this research

also brought direct connections between individual values, cultural values, and their impact on agile values and behaviours. This is of importance as cultural research tends to only focus on cultural values without considering the deep contribution of looking at individuals independently (Brown & Treviño, 2009). Similar individual connections to their cultural values and working environment have been found in Van Dun et al. (2023) research where they introduced the general idea of *identity theory* to make sense of their findings. The social identity theory highlights how individuals perceive and interpret the world based on their background and beliefs (Ashforth and Schinoff 2016). The idea of identity refers to the identification of aspects of an individual as his gender, his religion, his position, or his relations. One of these strong identities is culture and it considers how individuals perceive the world. By reflecting on this study, an important point to highlight, is that the surveys were made just after the interview; it could therefore be noted that the interviewee naturally was thinking in an agile configuration. This specificity should be taken in account in the generalization of the results. Also, this idea is supported by the literature of identity theory on the aspects of ‘*salience*’ and ‘*centrality*’ where individuals showcase an identity prone to a specific context (Ashforth and Schinoff, 2016). In other words, despite being impacted by cultural values, individuals have their own values and identity, extending the impact on agile values and behaviours.

5.1.3 Theoretical connections between lean and agile

The last novelty brought by this research is the bridging of literature with lean. To dive into this research gap, comparable literature was needed to create parallels. Therefore, a bridge was made with existing lean studies exploring the impact of cultural values on self-managing teams (Van Dun et al., 2023). These cross-disciplinary insights support the findings of this research and provide a broader explanation of the emerging results. Bridging the literature with closely related topics provides an important vector for further research. In other words, because of the lack of material, there is not enough evidence to support a complete agile theoretical foundation. Linking this research of agile to lean not only offers a solid theoretical foundation but also opens avenues for further research on other closely related topics. These differences in agile values and behaviours influenced by national cultural values do bring new theoretical implications for its field. To get a better understanding of the differences between the populations, the next section will go deeper into the meaning of the results, highlighting propositions that could be used for further research.

5.2 Interpretation of the results

The mixed-methods research revealed disparities in results between the quantitative and qualitative results. Although the quantitative results did not show significant differences in the effective following of agile

values across samples, suggesting a universal appreciation for agile practices, the interviews did highlight the practical application differences between both national cultures. This can be explained by the nuanced impact of cultural values on implementing agile. This duality in the results has important implications for the agile literature on one side and for the culture literature on the other as it combines EMIC and ETIC approaches to get a deeper understanding of the impact of cultural values. This brings new perspectives on the challenges a company could face implementing agile or also supports literature on why the implementation of agile failed and reflected on the causes; culture being an example of these causes. Overall, this is supported by the literature that values influence behaviours (Bardi and Schwartz, 2003; Torres, Schwartz, and Nascimento, 2016).

5.2.1 Working Agile is a mindset

Considering the missing literature in agile on cross-cultural implementation (Kuchel et al., 2023), we referred back to the research by Van Dun et al. (2023) which found that Brazilian managers showed more lean-oriented behaviours than Dutch participants despite the contradictory idea given by the cultural literature; and both samples working lean. When bringing this back to the scope of this research, namely the differences between the French and Dutch in implementing agile, it does show how cultural values shape the application of agile inside a company. Mirror results have been found in recent studies in Lean management where cultural values influenced and were recommended to be considered in the application of lean principles (Wangwacharakul et al., 2014; Van Dun et al., 2023; Camuffo et al., 2018). Here comes the duality of our results where the quantitative section of this research does not support such differences as the Mann-Whitney U did not reveal significant differences between the two populations regarding the agile values and behaviour whereas the qualitative analysis highlights differences between the two populations. This entails in a pragmatism way that both populations apply agile values the same way and attribute just as much importance to them. However, on a day-to-day basis, their applications differ. More generally, as an example, by comparing two companies side a side in both countries, they will both say that they value customers a lot. However, the qualitative analysis showed a more proactive way of managing clients in France and a more reactive way of managing them in the Netherlands. This might appear like a similar way of managing clients, but it differs in the way of working. This also supports the common idea, also found in the results that agile is before everything, a mindset and that its application is tailored to the teams and the context in which it is needed. This leads to the first proposition, namely:

Proposition 1: Agile values and behaviours are a mindset and are operationally influenced by cross-cultural differences explaining the differences in agile implementation between the two populations. Agile is a foundation with different practices.

5.2.2 The impact of individual values and identity on agile values and behaviours

When stepping back to the impacting values found through the interviewees, Van Dun et al. (2023) introduced the general idea of *identity theory* to better explain their results, placing culture as an element of this identity. The identity theory element of ‘*sensemaking*’ suggest that despite being influenced by cultural values, an individual is also seeking to match the context in which he operates. In other words, agile employees will tend to forge their identity close to agile values because it is an environment in which they live rather than fully relying on a ‘*common perception*’ of the world (Ashforth and Schinoff 2016). Additionally, it is important to reflect on this research theory to understand the impact of individual-level values, namely Shwartz’s Theory of Basic Individual Values (2012). Through the results shown in table 9, although very common results on the values, there are differences between the two populations. Namely, France has been ranked higher in *universalism* assuming that French cares more about social justice, equality, and tolerance. In other words the commitment to the common good. Secondly, differences were to be seen in *achievement* which is the focus on personal success. Also, *power* is the desire to influence and control others. In line with the research question, these results suggest that individual values and identity can be a reason for the differences in agile implementations between France and the Netherlands. In simple words, despite numerous individual values being scored relatively similarly for both populations (Which could be explained by the identity theory), the differences in some of them might be a complementary explanation for the differences in operational agile practices between both samples. This leads to the second proposition for further research, namely:

Proposition 2: Shwartz’s Theory of Basic Individual Values (2012) and the Identity Theory (Ashforth and Schinoff 2016) could be two secondary theoretical frameworks to explain differences in agile values and behaviours across two populations.

5.2.3 The impact of culture on agile values and behaviours

In order to partially respond to the research question, namely “*There are differences in agile implementation between France and the Netherlands*” this research has been researching participants working in agile environments for different durations, in different sectors, in companies of different sizes and on top of that in different countries. Despite these differences, the research revealed a deep application of agile values, and no significant differences were found in the quantitative analysis. These findings align with the literature that supports the idea that agile practices are tailored to different companies but that the core principles or values stay the same (Beck et al., 2001). To go deeper into this avenue of thinking, the more

recent research by Dikert et al. (2016) also supported that the implementation of practices might differ from company to company, but that foundation practices and values would stay the same. The practical reason behind this has been described by one of the interviewees, defining agile as a ‘*mindset*’. This idea of mindset also appears in recent studies on agile (Eilers et al., 2022; Ozkan et al., 2022) commonly emphasizing that with the dynamic of agile tools, and the rapid progress of digitalization, agile becomes a way of thinking rather than a way of acting. On top of that, in real-life situations, companies often use similar methodologies, several interviewees across the populations for example mentioned SCRUM.

To go even deeper into the tailored practices, the interesting part of this research is the following qualitative data, revealing distinct differences in the application of agile. As an example, developed in the result section, French teams emphasised operating in a structured framework reflecting their cultural preferences for hierarchy and control. When looking pragmatically at the different interviews, it was clear that despite all working in an agile context, all of them were highlighting the sometimes qualified as crucial, necessity of having at least one person with a managerial or decision-maker status. Although this might oppose the essence of working agile described by the Manifesto (Beck et al., 2001); it has been identified as a key finding element out of every interview (for the French population). Referring back to the literature to further understand this concept, the behaviour can be attributed to the value of ‘*Honneur*’ described by Iribarne (1989). L’*Honneur* but also the idea of “*Puissance souveraine*” directly translates into the necessity of clear roles and responsibilities through structured processes to maintain clarity and respect inside populations and the organizations. This goes through natural, nearly societal hierarchy with a pursuit of recognition from others and by maintaining everyone’s social order and thus also inside an “un-cultural” environment. This special way of collaborating did appear as fully part of the operational daily processes. However, by looking back into the literature, similar behaviours have been found in a research by Iribarne (1998) where Swedish workers reflected on the French way of collaborating as; working on a similar task, individually without sharing with others. Similarities can be found between this research and this case where employees defend their responsibilities although focusing on a similar goal. It is therefore assumed that the French differ in the implementation of agile by putting natural efforts in setting up a framework for them to operate and this despite emphasizing essential elements of agile as a customer-centric approach, flexibility, and a strong reactivity to change.

It is even more interesting to contrast these implementation differences to the Dutch sample that did show emphasis for higher levels of collaboration, direct communication, and low distinction of roles. These

values align closely with Enklaar's (2007) literature, stating that the Dutch culture prioritizes consensus, equality, and truth. Truth being relatable to the idea of direct communication also numerous times mentioned by the interviewees. For the Dutch sample, the idea of collaboration has been described through the interviews as the idea of common participation of every member with the right skills toward a common goal. Again, this can be connected to Enklaar's (2007) values of *Charity* with interviewees being able to reach anybody inside an organization and resolving conflict by just working directly thing out. The value of *Unity* has also been identified in the general idea of collaboration as everyone is striving to a common and clear goal. On top of that, an interviewee mentioned values as '*honoring commitments*', which related to Enklaar's (2007) value of *Reliability* which stands for keeping promises. Finally, the notion of *Guilt* is described as '*individualism*' by one of the interviewees, highlighting the common idea that everyone has to acknowledge its actions and mistakes. This all leads back to the idea of collaboration; found in working with others and caring about their opinion and feedback. This illustrates the Dutch literature for building strong interpersonal relationships with a low level of hierarchical society and teamwork instead of competition (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012). It can therefore be assumed that for the Dutch differences in agile implementation are put on personal responsibilities and on the focus of collaborating with others and this is through direct and effective communication.

However, despite there being differences between the populations, and to support the aforementioned theory of agile value foundations, this research also found similarities between France and the Netherlands. Namely, they put a great focus on customer-centric behaviour and flexibility toward change. When looking at the literature on those specific behaviours, they are the cornerstone of agile. To explain this statement, going back to the Manifesto Beck, K., et al. (2001), agile disrupted the established industries through its capabilities to manage turbulent and fast-paced environments. One of the principles directly relates to the just mentioned customer-centric behaviour by stating "*Collaborate with customers and stakeholders throughout the project.*" (Table 1). This leads to the following proposition:

Proposition 3: Despite similarities in agile values and behaviours between France and the Netherlands, operational practices are influenced by national cultural values.

5.2.4 Agile effectiveness between France and the Netherlands

The last part of this discussion reflects on the second sub-question which challenges the idea of different effectiveness and successful implementation between both countries. By running through the interviews and the quantitative analysis, it is impossible to conclude at this stage whether companies in France or the

Netherlands are more successful or not. This can be explained by the fact that the participants came from different industries, with different backgrounds, and that the companies did not have the same services or products. More generally, this makes it impossible to properly compare them. This would require two companies, having the same size, having similar processes, slightly adjusting to the cultural changes, and targeting the exact customer base. Such exact scenarios are difficult to find and will be further developed in the limitation. Also, research by Budacu and Pocatilu (2018) highlighted the complexity of measuring performance as it is company and product/service dependent. It also stated that despite some metrical measurements that could be taken for measuring performance, they are limited to internal performance reflection. However, to still challenge the notion of effectiveness, the interviewees were asked to compare their way of working to a company in the same sector that did not apply agile practices. In 16 interviews, all agreed to perform more effectively. Some of them explained that traditional companies did not have the capacity to handle as well change as they did, others highlighted their capacity of being able to react to customer needs. The reasons were different but could easily be bounded to the agile principles described in Table 1. To summarize this discussion; although this research couldn't statistically define differences in performance between its populations, the interviews still did highlight the competitive advantage they had with working agile compared to similar companies in their respective industries. This leads to the following proposition:

Proposition 4: Agile effectiveness and successful implementation cannot be measured in an agile context as operational practices are company dependent.

This research aimed to answer the following research questions: *How do effective agile team members' values and behaviours vary between France and the Netherlands?* Additionally, the research had two sub-questions, namely: Sub1. *What are the differences in agile implementation between France and the Netherlands?* Sub2. *To what extent is agile equally effective and successful in the Netherlands and France?*

The findings from the different analyses, both qualitative and quantitative showed complementary results. The analysis of the survey answers did not show a significant difference in the application of agile values between the two samples. However, the semi-structured interview questions which encouraged wide discussions with interviewees did reveal some notable differences between the two populations. These differences in agile practices have been directly related to national cultural values but should also consider the impact of individual values and identity. This research is an explorative research in the field of agile understandings in multicultural contexts and should open a new avenue for further research on this subject.

5.3 Practical implications

With worldwide developing economies and highly competitive markets, more and more companies are seeking deeper agile ways of working. It all started with IT-related companies but today also extends to companies ranging from the industry to the telecom through banking. Despite its wide application, implementation of agile often time results in failure. This research shows that despite similar agile values shared among companies in different countries, it is important to remember that the people making those companies also share national and personal values. Therefore, companies that have branches and subsidiaries in different countries should consider adapting their agile practices based on the culture in place to reach maximum efficiency. This can go through a deep cultural analysis and the adaptation of agile practices. On a day-to-day basis, agile empowering positions as Scrum Master or Agile Coaches provide pivot positions to establish those appropriate practices.

By scoping back to the two samples of this research; France teams valued an agile framework that creates structured autonomy with agile behaviours that focus on clear processes with independent decision-making. Although the teams work in a flat, normally non-hierarchical context, they are still prone to implement natural hierarchy. For the Dutch agile teams, the focus should rather lay on flexibility on tasks, responsibilities, adaptation as well as the creation of freedom in their way of implementing agile in a straightforward communicative context. When looking more pragmatically at agile implementation for initiators or managers, it is already clear that the way agile is implemented depends on the company, the context, and their proposed good or service. The implementation is fully customized but should also consider the impact that cultural differences may have on the general way of working. More generally, by recognizing these cultural differences and behaviours, the organization not only would better install agile practices by fitting the cultural “country requirements” but also ensure optimal operating teams in their agile environment.

Albeit this has internal implications for companies, it does also consider external relationships when, for example, companies are working with external service providers also working agile, but in other countries.

6. Limitation and future research

As with all research, this research is not without limitations. The first limitation of this research refers to the sample size of 16 respondents of which 8 are from France and 8 are from the Netherlands. The sample is

relatively small compared to the population sizes which may limit the generalization of the findings. Even though small sample sizes may reduce the statistical reliability of the results (Babbie, 2013), for qualitative research, they also increase variability and may not be so relevant as long as the quality of the data is guaranteed. This was the case for this work since the participants that were interviewed were diversified in terms of roles, were experts in their field, and allowed the researcher to get thick descriptions and data saturation. Yet, for stronger statistical results, future research should consider a bigger sample enabling also to reach more organizations but also to develop the quantitative part by covering more agile and cultural behaviours as well as their affiliated values. This quantitative enlargement of the scope of analysis will strengthen the use of structural equations modeling and deeper regression analysis all supporting a better generalization of the results. Additionally, we recommend keeping a mixed-method approach for the data collection. Semi-structured interviews permitted capturing different behaviours that did not appear in the different statistical models used.

The second limitation bridges the discussion section and the importance of considering the analysis of individual values and identity. This research focused itself on the impact of cultural values but still considered the research of individual values to highlight potential differences between the populations. As a result, differences have been found and could open gates for further research diving into the differences in agile implementation based on the individual perspective. Combining both national cultural values and individual values could offer a solid foundation for the generalization of differences.

The third limitation of this research is the multiculturalism of the different companies. We refer here to the companies in which the interviewee sample was working and the nationality self of the participants. The ideal scope of this research would have been Dutch companies with only fully Dutch (or French) employees. However, including big multinationals in this research led to the interview of French or Dutch participants working in multicultural agile teams. Yet, still interviewing those companies, better reflects real-life companies that are composed of this cultural diversity. Even though this matches real-life organizations and represents more faithfully the diversity of today's companies, further research may want to consider this before conducting similar research and generalizing on full populations. Closely related, it should also consider the aspect of double nationalities and national origins. An example to support this limitation and avenue for future research is a participant with the right nationality on paper but raised in another cultural context. Further research should consider taking into consideration the mentioned disrupting cultural elements and for example research into companies with different branches in different countries.

Lastly, this pioneering research focuses on France and the Netherlands, limiting the applicability of the findings to other cultural contexts, knowing that cultural values can differ significantly across countries (Hofstede, 2010). Future research could not only continue on this dual-country research avenue but cross-examine several countries with each other. A practical example could be to research two countries with no geographical proximity and different cultural value orientations, ideally representing Western and Eastern countries, to have a more comprehensive understanding of how Agile values may vary in antipodal cultures.

7. Conclusion

This exploratory research has demonstrated the impact of national culture on the implementation of agile in French and Dutch companies. While French teams naturally require a framework for autonomy and natural (and so cultural) hierarchical decision-making, the Dutch teams rather emphasise collaboration and low hierarchy with decision-making focused on collaboration and through direct communication. These cultural values adaptations underline the importance of integrating national values into agile frameworks and practices. Therefore, the main takeaway of this research lies in the idea that accommodating space for national values and behaviours are crucial, if not essential, for the effective implementation of agile in multicultural organizations, naturally bringing performance and harmonized organizational agility. Finally, when looking into the impacting elements of values and behavior, further research should consider the importance of individual values.

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Appendix 1a – Semi-structured Interview Guide (EN)

[Online interview]

Introduction:

Presentation of the author: *Charles-David d'Artagnan, master student at University of Twente*

Presentation of the research: *A cross-cultural comparative research on effective agile implementation between France and the Netherlands.*

- ➔ Mention that all collected data will be analyzed and anonymized.
- ➔ Ask for consent on the reuse of transcript quotes.
- ➔ Verify the signature of the consent form. (<https://www.utwente.nl/en/bms/research/ethics-domainHSS/informed-consent-procedure/>)
- ➔ Ask for recording.
- ➔ Launch recording

Introduction questions:

- Please give me your age, gender and nationality
- Can you briefly describe your company (Sector / Age / Size)
- What is your function in X?
- (Cultural) What are you responsible for?
 - Are those heavy responsibilities?
 - Since how many years are you doing this job?
- (Agile, Cultural) How is the company organized internally?
 - (Cultural) Strong hierarchy?
 - Do you like that?

Specific questions:

- (Agile) Can you explain what it means to be an agile organisation?
- (Agile) What do you think are the most striking differences between an agile company and a traditional company in your sector?
- (Agile) Do you like working agile?
 - What do you like the most?
 - What do you don't like?
- (Agile, Cultural) Can you give us an example on how a project/product/service go through a pipeline
 - Are you autonomous or do you have supervision on such work? Do you like that?
 - Who's making the decisions?
- (Agile, Cultural) If a friend of yours wants to join the company, what would he/she need to know?
- (Agile, Individual, Cultural) What do you consider a good colleague?
- (Agile, Individual, Cultural) Have you ever experienced a disagreement with your colleagues?
 - Why did it happen?
 - How was it solved?
- (Culture, Agile) What is a good collaboration?
- (Agile, Culture, Individual) What do you think is typical Dutch/French in your way of working? And Why? [Broader question, gain overall insights.]

Q-short

Please sort the following values set by order of importance on the following scale:

4	3	2	1	0	-1	-2	-3	-4
Most important				Neutral	Least important			

Agile values

Individuals and Interactions over Processes and Tool
Working Software over Comprehensive Documentation
Customer Collaboration over Contract Negotiation
Responding to Change over Following a Plan

NL / FR values to be tested

Power	“Social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources.”
Achievement	“Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards.”
Universalism	“Understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature.”
Benevolence	“Preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact.”
Hedonism	“Pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself.”
Stimulation	“Excitement, novelty, and challenge in life.”
Self-Direction	“Independent thought and action – choosing, creating, exploring.”
Tradition	“Respect, commitment and acceptance of the customs and ideas that traditional culture or religion provide the self.”
Conformity	“Restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms.”
Security	“Safety, harmony and stability of society, of relationships, and of self.”

NL Values (For Dutch only)	FR Values (For French only)
Hierarchy	Hierarchy
Consensus	Consensus / Negotiation
Moderation	Judgement
Truth	Direct confrontation
Reliability	Honor

- ➔ Is there anything you would like to add to the previous questions or generally about your way of working in an agile context?
- ➔ After this interview, if there is anything you would like to add to one of the questions or the discussion, please feel free to send me an email.

Final dialogue and closing of the sessions.