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Discrepancies in Perception of Cultural Differences and Their Potential for Intercultural Conflicts in German-Dutch Interactions

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ABSTRACT

We investigated whether the conflict potential of cultural characteristics might be influenced by the importance that interaction partners attribute to them. We conducted a quasi-experiment in which we analysed the attitudes of 74 German and 75 Dutch people towards two cultural characteristics which both Germans and Dutch consider to be equally important and two cultural characteristics which they regard as differently important. We determined whether they were aware of this difference in equal measure. We found that intercultural conflicts are unlikely when people from both cultures estimate correctly how important persons from the neighbouring culture regard a certain cultural characteristic.

Introduction

Germany and the Netherlands are two neighbouring countries that maintain close relationships in many fields. First, they cooperate on a variety of political issues (cf. e.g. Läufer, 2007; Nijhuis, 2015; Pekelder, 2013) and maintain active cooperative alliances in global forums such as NATO and the UN. At the federal, state and provincial levels there are (institutionalized) intensive contacts between parliamentarians and government representatives (Pekelder, 2013). Furthermore, Germany and the Netherlands also maintain close educational and cultural relationships. In addition to about 570 cooperation agreements between universities and research facilities, there is also intense German-Dutch collaboration in regional science and technology networks between universities and companies (International Office of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research of Germany, 2017). Moreover, the two countries maintain close economic relationships. Germany is the Netherlands' most important trade partner, while the Netherlands is Germany's fifth most important trade partner. In 2018, Germany exported goods and services with a value of 86 billion euros to the Netherlands while importing goods and services with a value of 91 billion euros (CBS, 2018). There are about 5,350 Dutch companies in Germany and 2.200 German companies in the Netherlands (German-Dutch Chamber of Commerce, 2014), and more than 25,000 German and Dutch cross-border commuters work in the neighbouring country.

Despite their close ties and geographic proximity, there are various cultural differences that often lead to disturbances in cross-border cooperation. Linthout (2008, p. 39) even claimed that the cultural differences between Germany and the Netherlands are bigger than between almost any other neighbouring countries in the EU. This opinion was indirectly confirmed by Van Paridon (2009b), who stated that the close economic relationships between Germany and the Netherlands could be even closer if Germans and Dutch people were more familiar with the peculiarities of each other's markets and cultures. This was also stated by Gersdorf (2015), who interviewed German and Dutch entrepreneurs who have experienced problems in the other country because they had not familiarized themselves with the business culture.

When asked to relate situations in which Dutch persons were irritated by German behaviour, a Dutch interviewee stated: "I had a meeting with the mayors of two German cities. During the official programme, both acted very formally and showed a reserved and rather distanced attitude towards me. After the official part was over, we met for a pub crawl. Now, both appeared in informal clothing and acted jovial and informal, and we had a pleasant evening. This change in behaviour was very surprising to me." Another Dutch interviewee stated: "Yes, German supervisors definitely give orders in a more commanding tone. 'Do this, do that! Make sure the product is ready for shipping by tomorrow!' But I knew this should not be taken personally. It is just the way Germans are." (Thesing, 2016).

These statements illustrate that with regard to some situations, in German-Dutch encounters Dutch are not – or only slightly – surprised by German behaviour because they know about it in advance. However, with regard to other situations, they are totally surprised by German behaviour. Apparently, there are cultural characteristics the Dutch are aware of and others they are less aware of. It is plausible this holds true for Germans who make contact with Dutch culture, too.

The question that arises is whether and to what extent the awareness respectively the lack of awareness of cultural characteristics can lead to conflicts in intercultural interactions.In the field of intercultural communication it is generally assumed that the cultural characteristics in which people differ the most are also the ones that are most likely to lead to irritation in intercultural interactions. Since most management books and scientific approaches (e.g. Ajami et al., 2006; Buckley et al., 1998; Holtbrügge & Welge, 2010; Macharzina & Wolf, 2012) are based on dimension models, the majority of these studies and books do not expect to find many intercultural clashes between Dutch and German (business) people, because dimension models show (with a few exceptions) only little differences between the two cultures. However, a number of studies show that there are actually many intercultural conflicts in German-Dutch interactions. This will be elaborated and explained further in the theoretical framework.

Furthermore, in bicultural interaction, Thesing (2016) found there are certain cultural characteristics Germans and Dutch regard as equally important and other differences that Germans regard as differently important than Dutch. For example, Dutch find the German appreciation for rules important in intercultural interaction. Germans also find the – from their perspective – Dutch tendency to regard rules not as universally valid important in intercultural interaction. On the other hand, Dutch find the German tendency to plan further into the future very relevant while Germans find the Dutch tendency to not plan too far ahead not very relevant in bicultural interaction.

There is thus reason to assume that the importance that people attribute to cultural characteristics might also influence whether these characteristics will lead to intercultural conflicts. The aim of our study is to test this assumption.

Theoretical framework and hypothesis

In this section we will briefly introduce the concept of intercultural conflict. Subsequently we will outline the current state of knowledge regarding the conflict potential of cultural characteristics.

Intercultural conflict

Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2001) define intercultural conflict as "the experience of emotional frustration in conjunction with perceived incompatibility of values, norms, face orientations, goals, scarce resources, processes, and outcomes between a minimum of two parties from two different communities in an interactive situation." Furthermore they describe intercultural conflict as a situationally dependent phenomenon which is influenced, amongst others, by the roles, expectations, norms, and rules of the interaction partners.

Miyahara et al. (1998) add that intercultural conflicts do not necessarily have to result in open disagreement but are often hidden and not openly expressed. Thomas (2005) even states that the interaction partners might not even be aware of an intercultural conflict. They feel a sort of antipathy towards the interaction partner or have the feeling that they cannot work with this person but they attribute these feeling to the person and not to cultural characteristics.

Until now, the question of whether (and to what extent) cultural characteristics actually lead to intercultural conflicts has hardly been scientifically addressed. Of course, studies have been conducted that analyse culture-related conflicts in individual situations or contexts, for example, by Finch (2009), Kwok and Tadesse (2006), and Pagell et al. (2005), who illustrated how cultural characteristics can influence inter-cultural business negotiations. Other studies have used a more general approach to analyse how conflicts manifest in intercultural interactions. Jackson (2014) and Miyahara et al. (1998), for example, have analysed intercultural conflict styles and conflict solution strategies. Other authors such as Mahon (2009), Worchel (2005), Euwema and Van Emmerik (2007), and Kaushal and Kwantes (2006) have developed general strategies to deal with intercultural conflicts, while Jackson (2015) focusses more on the individual level and developed strategies to deal with intercultural stress and cope with intercultural conflicts. However, while these studies analysed how intercultural conflicts manifest and can be dealt with, they do not or only rudimentary take the cultural characteristics themselves and their potential for conflict into con-sideration. Spitzberg 2010) has developed an integrative model of intercultural compe-tence that combines most of these aspects and allows specific predictions of competent behaviour. He distinguishes three levels of analysis: the individual system, the episodic system, and the relational system. The individual system includes those characteristics an individual may possess that facilitate competent intercultural interaction in a normative social sense, such as the motivation to communication, knowledge of

communication in that context, and the skills to implement this motivation and knowledge. The episodic system includes those features of a particular actor that facilitate competence impressions on the part of his interaction partner in a specific episode of interaction. The relational system includes those components that assist a person's competence across the entire span of relationships.

Conflict potential of cultural characteristics

As already mentioned, it is generally assumed (but has not been scientifically been proven) that the cultural characteristics in which people from different cultures differ the most are also the ones that are most likely to lead to intercultural conflicts (Reuter, 2010). Dahlen (1997) states that especially in the field of business communication, many authors assume that cultural differences automatically lead to intercultural conflicts in bicultural encounters.

To determine potential cultural characteristics that might lead to intercultural conflicts, usually dimension models (predominantly from Hofstede et al., 2017; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012; E. T. Hall & Hall, 1990;; House et al., 1997) are used in management books and scientific studies (e.g. Ajami et al., 2006; Buckley et al., 1998; Holtbrügge & Welge, 2010; Macharzina & Wolf, 2012), intercultural workshops and trainings. A study by Ptak et al. (1995), in which they interviewed 94 cross-cultural trainers, showed that many of them used cross-cultural models to prepare people for intercultural contact.

This use of cross-cultural models for intercultural analysis is increasingly criticized. Rathje (2011), for example, states that existing training methods of intercultural competence have been criticized as ineffective, amongst others because they rely on cross-cultural models (see also Hansen, 2000). Dervin (2011) and Fantini (2009) add that many authors are not aware of the difference between cross- and intercultural research and use these phrases and methods interchangeably. Van Oudenhoven and Cushner (2008) acknowledge that cross-cultural knowledge (i.e. knowledge about cultural differences) can be useful for intercultural research. They point out though that cross-cultural models such as dimension models might not be well-suited for intercultural analysis because up to now it has not (or only rudimentary) been scientifically proven whether they can actually show which cultural characteristics are relevant in intercultural interaction. Other authors (e.g. Aneas & Sandín, 2009; Mahadevan et al., 2010; Triandis, 2000) claim that cross-cultural dimension models are etic approaches but the study of intercultural conflict requires an emic approach.

The criticism mentioned above is supported by different studies that were conducted in a German-Dutch context. If one compares Germany and the Netherlands using dimension models (e.g. from Hofstede et al., 2017; House et al., 1997; Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961; E. T. Hall & Hall, 1990; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012) one gets the impression their cultures differ only slightly, because they score more or less alike, with a few exceptions (i.e. Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov´s dimensions masculinity/femininity, indulgence/restraint and uncertainty avoidance). As a consequence, it is generally assumed that intercultural conflicts are unlikely in German-Dutch interactions (Gersdorf, 2015; Metzmacher, 2010; Moldenhauer & Vis, 2001).

That this might not hold true is suggested in different studies which show that there are actually many intercultural conflicts in German-Dutch interaction. Sand (2013), for example, analysed German-Dutch police cooperations. She found out that intercultural conflicts between German and Dutch policemen do not only occur with regard the masculinity dimension from Hofstede, Hofstede et al. (2017), on which Germany and the Netherland differ considerably, but also with regard to the dimension power distance, on which Germany and the Netherlands differ only marginally. Soeters, Hofstede & Twuyer (1995), who also analysed German and Dutch (and Belgian) police forces, came to similar conclusions. Thesing (2016), who analysed which cultural differences play a role in German-Dutch interactions in business contexts, also found out that intercultural conflicts do not only occur with regard to dimensions on which the two countries differ considerably but also with regard to dimensions on which they differ only marginally. For example, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2012) dimension universalism/particularism (in universalistic cultures rules are seen as universally valid while in particularistic cultures they are seen as guidelines that do not have to be followed in all contexts and situations) shows only negligible differences between Germany and the Netherlands. Nevertheless, in bicultural interactions Dutch perceive Germans as much more universalistic than themselves which often leads to intercultural conflicts. Other, economically driven studies (Duitsland Instituut Amsterdam, 2011; FENEDEX, 2011; Rabobank, 2008) support this view and suggest that due to intercultural conflicts between German and Dutch people potential cross-border business dealings with a value of up to 6 billion euros per annum are not realized.

This allows the assumption that besides the size of cultural differences there might be other factors that also influence the conflict potential of cultural characteristics. These factors have not yet been scientifically analysed. However, there are different studies that indicate that the importance that interaction partners attribute to certain cultural characteristics and the awareness of how important people from the other culture find these characteristics might be one of these factors.

In their studies both Thomas, Kinast, and Schroll-Machl (1995, p. 45ff) and Barmeyer et al. (2010, p. 52ff) focus on the cognitive aspects of intercultural competence. With regard to these aspects they state that knowledge of cultural differences is an important prerequisite for appropriate and effective interaction. When people from different cultures interact they start a (usually unconscious and non-verbal) "negotiation process" (Thomas, 2005, p. 46), in which they decide how a situation can be handled with their different cultural orientation systems. From this, it can be deduced that it is necessary to know one's own and the other's orientation systems to be able to start such a negotiation process (cf. Lösche & Püttker, 2009, p. 29; Thomas, 2005, p. 47).

According to Gersdorf (2015), most German or Dutch people who want to establish contacts with people from the other's culture, prepare themselves (at least to a certain degree) for the interaction. This means they are generally willing to understand the other's cultural orientation system and to establish interculturality; for example, by reading popular science and guidebooks about the neighbouring culture, or by participating in intercultural trainings or workshops. However, according to Gersdorf, their preparation is generally superficial; many only read about the most obvious cultural characteristics such as the attitude towards hierarchies or formality, and all had underestimated the impact of cultural differences. This allows the assumption that in German-

Dutch interactions the interaction partners often do not start a negotiation process on how to deal with cultural differences because one or both of the partners are not even aware of them. This assumption is supported by Thesing's (2016) study who found out that in German-Dutch interactions there are certain cultural characteristics that German and Dutch people regard as equally relevant and others that they regard as differently relevant. For instance, the Dutch regard the clearly *visible hierarchies* in German business life as very important in bicultural interaction. Similarly, the Germans regard the rather *hidden hierarchies* in Dutch business life as very important in bicultural interaction. On the other hand, there are differences that German and Dutch people rate differently important in bicultural interactions. For example, while the Dutch find the German appreciation for comprehensive and detailed planning minimally important in bicultural interaction, Germans regard the – from their perspective – Dutch lack of such planning as very important.

This allows the assumption that with regard to the cultural characteristics which German and Dutch people regard as equally important, those who prepare themselves and have a certain cultural sensibility (cf. Spitzberg, 2000) are aware that situations in which these cultural characteristics play a role might be a source of intercultural conflict. They are likely to start a (conscious or unconscious, non-verbal or verbal) negotiation process (Lösche & Püttker, 2009, p. 29). In this way, intercultural conflicts might be avoided. However, if one of the interaction partners is unaware of a potential source of misunderstanding, the partners are less likely to start a negotiation process to deal with situations in which these cultural characteristics play a role. It can, therefore, be assumed that intercultural conflicts are most likely to appear in these situations. This lead to the following hypothesis:

The cultural characteristics that Dutch and German people regard as differently important in bicultural interaction are more likely to lead to intercultural conflicts in German-Dutch interactions than the cultural characteristics that German and Dutch people regard as equally important.

Method

Choice of approach

As was pointed out in the theoretical framework, intercultural conflicts are often not directly visible and observable because they do not lead to visible reactions of the communication partners, but rather cause diffuse feelings of discomfort or antipathy, which might lead to problems in the medium or long term (cf. Lösche & Püttker, 2009, p. 29). Furthermore, it has been shown that when asked, people often cannot pinpoint why an interaction actually led to irritation (cf. Thesing, 2016). Therefore, to test the hypothesis, we chose not to use a direct observation or survey, but to design a quasi-experiment in which the attitudes of German and Dutch people towards certain cultural characteristics were analysed by means of a questionnaire. We developed cases for the German and Dutch respondents, and asked them questions about these cases. We conducted the quasi-experiment online using Qualtrics Research Suite (www.qualtrics.com). This allowed a quick data collection and a high geographic reach. We made two separate questionnaires: one questionnaire in German for the German respondents and one in

Dutch for the Dutch respondents. Since the three authors of the study have sufficient knowledge of instrument design, the German and Dutch culture, and are fluent in both languages (one of them is a native German speaker, two are native Dutch speakers), we used the committee translation approach (Harkness, 2003) to ensure translation equivalence

Participants

Respondents of this study had to meet only one requirement: they had to have (or have had) regular contact with persons from their neighbouring culture in both their private and business lives. For the purpose of this study, we defined the term r*egular* as repeatedly and for at least once a year.

Since the population of people who met the requirements mentioned above was unknown there was no sampling frame and it was therefore impossible to draw a random sample; it could therefore not be concluded with absolute certainty that the sample drawn was indeed representative of the population.

To find respondents we contacted intermediary organizations such as Euregios, chambers of commerce and companies that operate in a cross-border context (e.g. consultancies, public relations agencies) as well as members of German-Dutch cultural associations in both countries. We sent each of them an email with a brief explanation of the survey, its context, the requirements for participation and a link to the study. In addition, the recipients were asked to forward the email to acquaintances who also met the survey requirements.

Before taking part in the survey the respondents were informed (on page one of the online survey) about the aims of the study, the treatment of their data and their privacy, the fact that their participation in the survey was completely voluntary and that they could abandon the survey at any time, in which case the answers they had already given would be deleted. Furthermore, they were provided with the authors' email addresses in case they had questions, remarks or complaints.

The collected data was treated confidentially, stored on a secured server and could only be accessed by the authors of this study. Data exchange between the authors was conducted via secured email exchange. To ensure the respondents' privacy they stayed completely anonymous (i.e. they did not have to state names or addresses) and their IP addresses were not stored. However, to increase the survey response rate we raffled off two 50 Euro book vouchers among the participants. For this, the respondents could enter their email addresses at the end of the survey. Their mail addresses were not assigned to their answers, stored separately and deleted immediately after the raffle, in this way ensuring the respondents' anonymity. The data collection took place from July 2015 till December 2015.

The respondents were asked to state the following socio-demographic and other characteristics: their sex, age, education level, distance of residence from the German and Dutch border, frequency of contact with people from the neighbouring culture and foreign language skills (German or Dutch). Different studies (cf. e.g. Lustig & Koester, 2003) have shown that sex, age and education can influence people's attitudes and perceptions in cross- and intercultural surveys. The possible influence of the variables "distance of residence from the German-Dutch border" and "frequency of contact with

people from the neighbouring culture" was tested because it can be assumed that people who live closer to the border or have regular cross-border contact might have (or have developed) another attitude towards the behaviour of people from the neighbouring culture. Language skills were also suspected to possibly influence the respondents' attitudes and perceptions, because it can be assumed that people who learn the language of the neighbouring culture might have a more positive attitude towards that culture and/ or be more familiar with it.

One might argue that the profession of the respondents or the sector in which they work might also have an influence on their answers. For example, it might be possible that people working in highly competitive sectors have a less positive attitude towards consensus or that people working for a start-up company have a stronger aversion against hierarchies than other people. However, we decided not to test this variable since we considered this effect as negligible. After all, we did not ask people about cultural characteristics in their own work environment but about their general attitude towards the described situations, on which a certain profession or sector has little to no influence.

Initially, 84 German and 85 Dutch respondents filled in the questionnaire. We excluded those who did not complete the questionnaire, which left us with 77 German and 79 Dutch respondents. Furthermore, we excluded the statistical outliers (i.e. respondents with a standard deviation higher than 2.0), three among the German and four among the Dutch respondents. This left us with 74 German and 75 Dutch respondents. Table 1 shows the socio-demographic composition of the German and Dutch sample (in percent).

The socio-demographic variables are relatively evenly distributed. It was tested whether sex, age, education, the distance of residence from the German-Dutch border, the frequency of contact with persons from the neighbouring culture, or the foreign language skills /German/Dutch) had an influence on the respondents' answers by

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the German and Dutch respondents.

Socio-demographic characteristic	Dutch (N = 75)	German (N = 74)
Sex		
Male	43%	46%
Female	57%	54%
Age		
0–40 years	45%	49%
41+ years	55%	51%
Education		
Lower education*	23%	33%
Higher education*	66%	56%
Distance of residence from border		
0–50 km	87%	78%
51 + km	13%	22%
Frequency of contact with people from the neighbouring culture		
Daily	29%	26%
Weekly	39%	36%
Monthly or less	32%	38%
Foreign language skills (German or Dutch)*		
C-level	42%	39%
B-Level	48%	32%
A-level	10%	28%

Note. * Based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

introducing them as covariates in the univariate analysis that compared the answers of the German and Dutch respondents. Statistical analysis showed these variables did not influence the results of this study.

Data collection

Selection of cultural characteristics

We decided to test the hypothesis on the basis of four cultural characteristics. We chose two characteristics that, according to Thesing (2016) both Germans and Dutch regard as equally important in bicultural interaction, and two that they regard as differently important. We chose one cultural characteristic that both considered to be very important in bicultural interactions (1) and one cultural characteristic that both consider to be fairly unimportant (2). We also chose a cultural characteristic that German People consider to be important but Dutch people find rather unimportant (3) and one that Dutch people find important but German people find rather unimportant (4).

These are the four characteristics:

1) *Hierarchies*: In Germany, tasks, responsibilities, and functions are more clearly defined than they are in the Netherlands, and formal and real hierarchies match; while in the Netherlands, formal hierarchies are hidden to some extent. In German companies, the boss stands on top of the hierarchy and ultimately makes the decisions, while the employees play an advisory role. In Dutch companies, the boss is instead seen as a *primus inter pares* who has a moderating role and tries to include his employees in decision-making processes. In German companies, orders are often given directly, while in Dutch companies they have to be formulated as a kind request.

2) *Details*: Germans tend to have a higher appreciation for the attention to details in planning, discussions, meetings, presentations, and job applications that Germans tend to have a higher appreciation for than do the Dutch.

3) *Separation of work and private life*: From a Dutch perspective, Germans tend to draw sharp boundaries between professional and private life. Colleagues are not automatically regarded as friends. At work, Germans are perceived as reserved, distant, and humourless, and they do not tell much about their private matters or feelings. Also, Germans usually take longer than Dutch people do to switch to an informal form of address. From a German perspective, the Dutch tend to draw less sharp boundaries between their professional and private lives than Germans. At work they are less distant and reserved, and they also talk about private matters and feelings. Colleagues are often also considered as friends with whom one can also share leisure activities.

4) *Meetings and discussions/consensus and 'overleg'*: In Germany, consensus is generally regarded as less important than it is in the Netherlands; compromises are not considered to be the best solution. The team may take part in a discussion, but the decision is eventually taken by the boss. Furthermore, discussions are more about the principle, and in business contexts, Germans often only take part in the discussion when they can make a substantive contribution. On the other hand, in the Netherlands, consensus and *overleg* (a specific Dutch form of reaching a consensus) are very important, Dutch employees expect to be included in the decision-making process. Conflicts are to be avoided, and the Dutch usually argue less aggressively than do the Germans.

The four characteristics predominantly play a role in German-Dutch business settings but also apply to general interactions.

Cases for the cultural characteristics

We developed twelve cases, three for each of the four cultural characteristics. Each case describes a situation in which a cultural characteristic plays a role. Each of these 12 cases consisted of two versions. The first version described a situation in which people show behaviour that is regarded as *German*. The second version describes the same situation or context, but the people show behaviour that is regarded as typically *Dutch*. For example, with regard to the cultural characteristic *details*, we developed the following case:

> *A person has an idea: he wants to start his own model construction magazine.* In the *German* version, the following behavior is described: *Before starting, he writes a detailed business plan. He starts extensive market research, takes care of the funding for the next two years, and researches advertising customers, distribution channels, and the best method to get his magazine known. It takes roughly two years before the first edition is launched.*

In the *Dutch* counterpart of this case, the following behaviour is described:

> *Before starting, he writes a brief business plan which contains a rough framework for his business. Problems such as funding, advertising, and distribution are dealt with when they appear.*

The cases can be found in the appendix.

Questions for the cases

Each respondent was presented with the 24 cases (i.e. both the 12 describing *Dutch* and 12 describing *German* behaviours). With regard to the 12 cases describing *Dutch* behaviour, the German respondents were first asked this question: "What is your attitude towards the described behavior?" This question was used to analyse whether a cultural characteristic holds potential for intercultural conflict. Subsequently, with regard to the 12 cases describing *Dutch* behaviour, the German respondents were asked: "How typical do you regard this behaviour/reaction for the Dutch?" This question serves to analyse whether the respondent was aware of a difference between German and Dutch culture. Regarding the 12 cases describing *German* behaviour, the German respondents were first asked the following question: "What attitude is a Dutch person likely to show towards this behaviour?" The second question for those cases describing *German* behaviour was: "In your opinion, how typical would a Dutch person regard this behaviour to be for Germans?"

The Dutch respondents were asked the same questions inversely. With regard to the cases describing *German* behaviour, they were first asked: "What is your attitude towards the described behaviour?" Second, they were asked: "How typical do you regard this behaviour/reaction for Germans to be?" With regard to the cases describing *Dutch* behaviour, the Dutch respondents were first asked: "What attitude is a German person likely to have towards this behaviour?" Second, they were asked: "In your opinion, how typical would a German person regard this behaviour for the Dutch to be?"

The *German* and *Dutch* behaviours described in the cases for the questionnaires were based on the results from Thesing (2016). A basic premise for this study was that most of the German respondents are indeed *German* in their behaviours and attitudes, and that most of the Dutch respondents are indeed *Dutch* in their attitudes and behaviours. It was crucial to know if and to what extent this premise is accurate because if it were wrong, the

results of this study might have been biased. With regard to the cases that describe *German* behaviour, Germans were therefore asked: "What is your attitude towards this behaviour?" The Dutch respondents were asked the same questions with regard to the cases that describe *Dutch* behaviour. Those respondents who chose an answer option between five and seven (on a seven-point Likert scale), were considered to be typical representatives of their culture.

To test the functional and conceptual cross-cultural equivalence of our study, the survey was translated into German and Dutch by native speakers who discussed translation equivalence for each single case and question. Scoring formats in both countries do not differ considerably from each other, the seven-point Likert scales and answer options we used are common in both countries.

We conducted the survey online using Qualtrics Research Suite (www.qualtrics.com). This allowed a quick data collection and a high geographic reach. We made two separate questionnaires: one questionnaire in German for the German respondents and one in Dutch for the Dutch respondents.

Data analysis

We compared the answers to the questions about German behaviour by asking the Dutch respondents How typical do you regard this behaviour/reaction for the Germans?' and the German respondents "In your opinion, how typical would a Dutch person regard this behaviour to be for Germans?" Further, we compared the answers to the questions about Dutch behaviour by asking the German respondents "How typical do you regard this behaviour/reaction for the Dutch?" and the Dutch respondents "In your opinion, how typical would a German person regard this behaviour to be for Dutch?" These comparisons allowed us to determine whether German and Dutch people are aware of a cultural characteristic, and whether they are aware of this difference in equal measure. This comparison can thus indicate potential sources of intercultural conflict. If both German and Dutch people are equally aware of a certain cultural characteristic, it can be assumed that in bicultural interactions, they (unconsciously or consciously, non-verbally or verbally) negotiate how to deal with this difference. This means that with regard to the knowledge-based aspects of intercultural competence (Spitzberg, 2010) the chance that intercultural conflicts will arise from this difference is likely to be small.

Furthermore, we compared the answers to the questions about German behaviour by asking the Dutch respondents "What is your attitude towards the described behaviour?" and the German respondents "What attitude is a Dutch person likely to show towards this behaviour?" as well as the answers to the questions about Dutch behaviour by asking the German respondents "What is your attitude towards the described behaviour?" and the Dutch respondents "What attitude is a Dutch person likely to show towards this behaviour?" This comparison is not merely about awareness of cultural characteristics but shows if Germans and Dutch can correctly estimate if and to which extent certain cultural characteristics bother people from their neighbouring culture. For the answer options, we chose a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from "would bother me considerably" to "would not bother me at all", respectively, "very typical" to "absolutely atypical".

Table 2 summarizes the questions for the Dutch and the German respondents. The column "Behaviour" shows the type of case that the question refers to. Cases can be either German (describing *German* behaviour) or Dutch (describing *Dutch* behaviour).

Statistical analysis

First, we verified the premise that most of the German respondents showed indeed behaviour and attitudes that were characterized as German, and likewise that most Dutch respondents responded in what is characterized as a Dutch way. We did this by comparing the answers of the respondents to the manipulation check question "What is your attitude towards this behaviour?" for each of the three cases of each cultural characteristic. A high mean of the answers to the manipulation check question confirms that the German respondents are not bothered by the behaviour that is characterized as German and that the Dutch respondents are not bothered by the behaviour that is characterized as Dutch, and that we can therefore consider them as typical representatives of their cultures. We used a one-way analysis of variance with a Bonferroni correction to determine whether the three cases of each cultural characteristic differed significantly from each other.

To test the hypothesis, univariate analyses of variance (independent samples t-test) with the factor nationality (German/Dutch) were performed to analyse whether the means of the answers to the questions which we compared differed significantly. To check whether socio-demographic factors could have had an effect on the respondents' answers, those factors were introduced as covariates in the univariate analysis that compared the answers from the German and Dutch respondents (in this way, making it an ANCOVA). In those cases where a covariate actually had a significant effect, we used an independent samples t-test to determine whether the differences between the different groups were still significant after eliminating the covariate.

We used a significance level of .01 for the statistical analyses (including the Bonferroni correction for the ANOVA) because we performed a high number of statistical analyses.

Table 2. Questions for German and Dutch respondents and aim of the comparison.

Behaviour	German respondents	Dutch respondents	Aim
Dutch	What is your **attitude** towards the described behaviour?	What **attitude** is a German likely to have towards this behaviour?	Test if Dutch can estimate how much Germans are bothered by Dutch behaviour
Dutch	How **typical** do you regard this behaviour for Dutch?	How **typical** would a German regard this behaviour for Dutch?	Test if Dutch can estimate how typical Germans find "Dutch behaviour" for Dutch
German	What **attitude** is a Dutch person likely to have towards this behaviour?	What is your **attitude** towards the described behaviour?	Test if Germans can estimate how much Dutch are bothered by "German behaviour"
German	How **typical** would a Dutch regard this behaviour for Germans?	How **typical** do you regard this behaviour for Germans?	Test if Germans can estimate how typical Dutch find "German behaviour" for Dutch
Dutch		What is your **attitude** towards this behaviour?	Test if Dutch respondents are typical representatives of their culture
German	What is your **attitude** towards this behaviour?		Test if German respondents are typical representatives of their culture

Results

Manipulation check

A basic premise for this study is that most of the German respondents are indeed *German* in their behaviour and attitudes, and most Dutch respondents are indeed *Dutch* in their attitudes and behaviours. If this was not the case, the results of this study might be biased. The answers the German respondents gave to the question "What is your attitude towards this behaviour?" regarding German behaviour and the answers the Dutch respondents gave to the same question regarding Dutch behaviour showed whether this premise was indeed accurate. For both questions we calculated the mean of the respondents' answers for each case of each cultural characteristic. A high mean indicated the respondents were hardly or not bothered by the behaviour of their own culture, and could, therefore, be considered typical representatives of their culture.

The results of these questions are presented in Table 3 and show the means for each case and the mean for each cultural characteristic (i.e. the mean of the means of all three cases of a cultural characteristic, presented in the column *mean*). The last column shows the three cases of each cultural characteristic did not differ significantly at a significance level of .01 according to one-way analyses of variance with a Bonferroni correction. Table 3 shows that the means of the answers are predominantly higher than 5 (with 4 exceptions which are slightly lower than 5) and that the means for all four cultural characteristics are also higher than 5. The German and Dutch respondents can thus indeed be considered characteristic representatives of their culture. Furthermore, there are no significant differences between any of the cases, which mean the German and Dutch respondents can be considered as similarly characteristic representatives of their culture for each case.

Table 3. Question "What is your attitude towards this behaviour?'*: Means (and standard deviation) for each cultural characteristic and case.

Main category	Respon-dents	Case 1 M (SD)	Case 2 M (SD)	Case 3 M (SD)	Mean	Significance of differences
Details	German	5.03 (1.25)	5.25 (1.22)	4.75 (1.42)	5.01	ns (F(2,219) = 2.57, p = .08)
	Dutch	5.19 (1.38)	5.14 (1.63)	5.43 (1.39)	5.25	ns (F(2,232) = .96, p = .38)
Hierarchies	German	5.47 (1.17)	5.05 (1.35)	5.09 (1.45)	5.20	ns (F(2,219) = 2.20, p = .10)
	Dutch	5.69 (1.84)	5.36 (1.50)	5.40 (1.26)	5.48	ns (F(2,232) = 5.73, p = .04)
Separation of work and private life	German	5.09 (1.11)	5.08 (1.27)	4.88 (1.26)	5.02	ns (F(2,219) = .83, p = .44)
	Dutch	5.47 (1.26)	5.73 (1.08)	5.51 (1.11)	5.57	ns (F(2,232) = 1.8, P = .16)
Meetings and discussions /consensus and "overleg"	German	5.29 (1.28)	5.05 (1.09)	4.89 (1.76)	5.08	ns (F(2,219) = 1.40, p = .25)
	Dutch	5.81 (.92)	5.56 (1.14)	4.66 (1.72)	5.34	ns (F(2,232) = 15.11, p = .02)

*Note. Dutch respondents: N = 75. German respondents: N = 74. Scale from 1 (would bother me considerably) to 7 (would not bother me at all). * German respondents were asked this question with regard to German behaviour, Dutch with regard to Dutch behaviour.*

Results of the comparison of the German and Dutch respondents' answers

The hypothesis is confirmed if we find low differences in means for the compared questions for the cultural characteristics that German and Dutch people regard as equally important (*hierarchies* and *details)* and higher differences in means of the compared questions for the cultural characteristics that German and Dutch people regard as differently important (*separation of work and private life* and *meetings and discussions/ consensus and "overleg")*. Tables showing the results of the comparisons for each tested cultural characteristic and case can be found in Appendix A. They show no significant differences for the first two cultural characteristics but high significant differences for the other two characteristics.

It must be noted first that each comparison of the four cultural characteristics was internally consistent (i.e. the differences calculated for each case were similar and point in the same direction). In order to check whether it was allowed to aggregate the three cases of each cultural characteristic, reliability analyses were performed. For each of the four cultural characteristics the alpha of the three single cases was between .7 and .9, which according to Field (2013) indicates a good reliability and allowed us to aggregate the data of the three cases of each characteristic. From now on we will, therefore, deal with aggregated data for each cultural characteristic.

Table 4 shows the differences of the means of the German and Dutch respondents' answers for each tested cultural characteristic.

As can be seen in Table 4, there is a clear difference between the cultural characteristics *hierarchies* and *details* (similar importance) on the one side and the cultural characteristics *separation of work and private life* and *meetings and discussions/consensus and "overleg"* (different importance) on the other side. With regard to the comparison of the

Table 4. Differences in means per question and cultural characteristic (aggregated data).

Compared questions	Aim	Similar importance		Different importance	
		Hierar-chies	Details	Separation of work and private life	Meetings and discussions/ consensus and "overleg"
G: How typical do you regard this (D) behaviour for Dutch?/D: How typical would a German person regard this (D) behaviour for Dutch?	Test if Dutch can estimate how typical Germans find *Dutch behaviour* for Dutch	.07	.13	2.24	1.67
D: How typical do you regard this (G) behaviour for Germans?/G: How typical would a Dutch person regard this (G) behaviour for Dutch?	Test if Germans can estimate how typical Dutch find *German behaviour* for Dutch	.33	.22	2.17	1.81
G: "What is your attitude towards the described (D) behaviour?"/D: What attitude is a German person likely to show towards this (D) behaviour?'	Test if Dutch can estimate how much Germans are bothered by *Dutch behaviour*	.34	.38	2.38	1.74
D: "What is your attitude towards the described (G) behaviour?"/G: What attitude is a Dutch person likely to show towards this (G) behaviour?'	Test if Germans can estimate how much Dutch are bothered by *German behaviour*	.22	.46	2.16	1.63

Note. Answer scales from 1 (bothered considerably/very typical) to 7 (not bothered at all/very atypical). German respondents: N = 75, Dutch respondents: N = 77. In front of each question it is indicated whether this question is asked to German (G) or Dutch (D) respondents. The brackets in the questions show if this question deals with German (G) or Dutch (D) behaviour.

answers to the questions about German behaviour 'How typical do you regard this behaviour for Germans? (Dutch respondents) and "In your opinion, how typical would a Dutch person regard this behaviour to be for Germans?"(German respondents) and the questions about Dutch behaviour 'How typical do you regard this behaviour for Dutch? (German respondents) and "In your opinion, how typical would a German person regard this behaviour to be for Dutch?"(Dutch respondents), the difference in means of the answers to the compared question pairs is considerably smaller among the former (the highest difference here is .33) than among the latter (the smallest difference here is 1.67). The same applies to the comparison of the answers to the questions about German behaviour "What is your attitude towards the described behaviour?" (Dutch respondents) and "What attitude is a Dutch person likely to show towards this behaviour?" (German respondents) and the questions about Dutch behaviour "What is your attitude towards the described behaviour?" (German respondents) and "What attitude is a German person likely to show towards this behaviour?" (Dutch respondents). While the difference in means for the cultural characteristics *hierarchies* and *details* is at most .46, the difference in means for the cultural characteristics *separation of work and private life* and *meetings and discussions/consensus and "overleg"* is at least 1.63. The hypothesis is thus confirmed for each of the four analysed cultural characteristics.

With regard to *hierarchies*, the German respondents regarded the Dutch behaviour as typical of Dutch people, but they also correctly assumed that the Dutch would find their own behaviour typical. The same applies to the Dutch respondents, who found the German behaviour to be typical for Germans, but also correctly estimated that Germans would find the Dutch behaviour to be typical for Dutch people (and to what extent).Furthermore, both the German and Dutch respondents felt bothered by the other culture's behaviour, while concurrently correctly estimating that (and how much) the members of the other culture would feel bothered by their own behaviour. This suggests that – with regard to the knowledge-based aspects of intercultural competence – that in German-Dutch encounters, intercultural conflicts are unlikely to occur because both German and Dutch people know it is necessary to negotiate on how to deal with this cultural characteristic.

The same applies for the cultural characteristic *details*. Both the German and the Dutch respondents regarded the behaviour of the members of the other culture to be neither typical nor atypical, and correctly estimated the members of the other culture would also regard their own behaviour as neither typical nor atypical. Furthermore, the members of both cultures were neither bothered by the other culture's behaviour nor did they approve of it. They also correctly estimated the other culture's attitude towards their own behaviour. It can, therefore, be assumed that intercultural conflicts with regard to details are unlikely to occur.

With regard to the cultural characteristic *separation of work and private life*, the German respondents regarded the Dutch behaviour as rather atypical for Dutch people, and were not significantly bothered by it. Dutch people, on the other hand, believed that Germans would find the Dutch behaviour typical for Dutch people and would be bothered by it. On the other hand, the Dutch respondents regarded the German behaviour as typical for Germans and felt bothered by it; while the Germans believed the Dutch would find the German behaviour rather atypical for Germans and not be bothered by it. This discrepancy suggests that in bicultural interactions Dutch people

are likely to try to negotiate how to deal with cultural characteristics regarding a *separation of work and private life*. They potentially expect the members of the German culture to join this negotiation process. However, the Germans are unlikely to do this because they see no need for it. It can, therefore, be assumed that intercultural conflicts are more likely to occur.

The same applies for the cultural characteristic *meetings and discussions/consensus and 'overleg*. While the Dutch respondents regarded the German behaviour as rather atypical for Germans and did not feel bothered by it, the German respondents believed the Dutch would find the German behaviour typical for Germans and feel bothered by it. On the other hand, The German respondents regarded the Dutch behaviour as typical for Dutch people and felt bothered by it; while the Dutch respondents believed the Germans would find the Dutch behaviour rather atypical for Dutch people and not be bothered by it. This discrepancy suggests that in bicultural interactions, Germans are more likely to negotiate how to deal with cultural characteristics regarding this cultural characteristic. They potentially expect the members of the Dutch culture to join into this negotiation process. However, the Dutch are unlikely to join in this process because they see no need for it. Therefore, the results suggest that the chance for intercultural conflicts to occur is higher than for the cultural characteristics *hierarchies* and *details*.

Discussion

Our results confirm the hypothesis. They suggest that the importance Germans and Dutch attribute to cultural characteristics and the awareness of how important persons from the neighbouring culture regard them can actually influence the conflict potential of these differences.

With *hierarchies* and *details*, two cultural characteristics were analysed that – with regard to the importance attributed to them – are diametrically opposed. While both German and Dutch people find *hierarchies* to be very important in bicultural interactions, they consider *details* to have relatively little importance. Nevertheless, the differences in means of the answers regarding these cultural characteristics are very similar. This suggests that cultural characteristics that both Germans and Dutch regard as highly important do not have a higher potential conflicts than do cultural characteristics both regard as less important.

Our study tried to add a new component to the field of intercultural competence: the awareness of how important people from different cultures regard certain cultural characteristics. Up to now, the question of whether (and to what extent) cultural characteristics actually lead to intercultural conflicts has hardly been scientifically addressed. There are many studies that focus on how intercultural conflicts manifest and can be dealt with but they do not or only rudimentary take the cultural characteristics themselves and their potential for conflict into consideration. The results from our study can contribute to the knowledge-based aspects of intercultural competence by providing a framework for procedural knowledge, i.e. knowledge concerning the "how" of social interaction rather than the "what" (Spitzberg 2010, p. 384). By drawing attention to the fact that people from different cultures might perceive cultural characteristics in a different way and attribute different importance to them the chance of appropriate and effective interaction increases.

There are controversies in the scientific community about whether the concept of national cultures is a suitable distinguishing feature for groups of people. Critics such as Reuter (2010), Reiche et al. (2010), and Au (1999); and Dervin (2011) have suggested that culture scientists should abstain from making general statements about (national) cultures because there is significant intra-cultural variation within the societies of most countries, and that other factors on the meso- and micro-levels might have a far bigger influence on people's behaviour, perception, and attitudes than their national culture does. Other social scientists, such as d'Iribarne (2009) or Ghemawat (2001), have claimed the opposite and stated that the influence of national culture on peoples' behaviour, perceptions, and attitudes is of high importance. The results of this study support – at least for the German and Dutch cultures – the view of the cultural essentialists. There was high in-group homogeneity among the German and Dutch respondents who had different socio-demographic backgrounds and lived in different areas of their countries.

In addition, the results from this study support Reuter (2010) and Rathje (2007) criticism of using cross-cultural methods for intercultural research. For a long time, cross-cultural models such as dimension models have, without further reflection, been used to predict intercultural conflicts in intercultural interactions; for example, in management books and scientific studies (e.g. Ajami et al., 2006; Buckley et al., 1998; Holtbrügge & Welge, 2010; Macharzina & Wolf, 2012), intercultural workshops and trainings (e.g. Ptak et al., 1995). Our study suggests that this might be problematic because – as Reuter (2010) points out – they convey the impression that high differences in dimension scores mean intercultural conflicts are likely to occur, while low differences mean they are unlikely to occur. This study shows the potential for conflict might actually to some degree also be determined by differences in importance the interaction partners attribute to cultural characteristics as well as the awareness of the importance people from other cultures attribute to them; something cross-cultural models cannot show. We therefore agree with Van Oudenhoven and Cushner (2008) who state that even though cross-cultural knowledge is indispensable for intercultural understanding, cross-cultural models cannot singly be used for intercultural analysis.

Limitations of the study

As a matter of fact, the results from this study cannot automatically be generalized. First of all, we used an indirect approach to test the hypothesis. It would, therefore, be reasonable to test the ecological validity of the results; even though this would – as already mentioned in the methodology section – be difficult. Second, we chose four extreme characteristics (i.e. characteristics that Germans and Dutch find very equally or differently important). If we had tested the hypothesis on other cultural characteristics (such as the attitude towards perfection or towards modesty and status, which German and Dutch people find slightly differently important), the results might not have been as unambiguous. Third, we tested the hypothesis in a German-Dutch context. Germany and the Netherlands are close trading partners and maintain close contact and cooperation in a variety of fields. Germans and Dutch, therefore, have a lot of stereotypes and common knowledge regarding each other. It is, therefore, possible in the comparison of cultures

that have less contact with each other that those cultural characteristics in which they differ the most are also the ones more likely to lead to intercultural conflict (which does not rule out that the awareness of the importance could also play a role).

Practical implications

The findings from this study can help people to better and more comprehensively understand the culture of the neighbouring country and to increase their intercultural competence in bicultural interactions. They help them to prioritize cultural differences and to determine which cultural differences should be given the most consideration in intercultural courses and trainings that prepare Germans and Dutch for business contacts with persons from their neighbouring country. Barmeyer et al., 2010, p. 52) offered four different options for dealing with situations in which cultural orientation systems collide: dominance (the other person has to adapt to one's own orientation system), assimilation (one subordinates one's own orientation system to the other's), divergence (both interaction partners keep their own orientation systems while knowing about and acknowledging the differences) or synthesis (both orientation systems are merged). The results of this study enable people to find better ways to deal with cultural differences. If, for example, with regard to a certain cultural difference, Germans are bothered considerably by the Dutch behaviour while the Dutch are not at all bothered by the German behaviour, it would be reasonable for the Dutch to choose assimilation.

Furthermore, this study can contribute to improving popular science and guidebooks and intercultural trainings and to better preparing people to interact with people from the other culture.

Further research

First of all, it would be expedient to test the ecological validity of this study, to analyse whether the results can be generalized to real-life settings, for example, by observing business interactions between German and Dutch people in different business-related contexts or by interviewing people who have regular contact with people from the neighbouring country.

Another interesting follow-up research project would be a comparison of other cultures. The results of this study confirmed the hypothesis and showed that there is a high probability that, with regard to certain cultural characteristics, differences in relevance actually influence the potential for conflict. However, the study was conducted in a certain and narrowly defined context. Therefore, it has yet to be tested whether the results also apply to other cultures, for example, by conducting a similar study for cultural differences that play a role in bicultural interaction situations between cultures than German or Dutch.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to analyse whether the results from this intercultural study also have implications for cross-cultural dimension models. It could be analysed whether in the comparison of two cultures only the difference in scores with regard to certain dimensions is relevant or if the relevance that the members of these two countries attribute to certain dimensions also plays a role.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Appendices

Appendix A. Cases for the analysis

The following cases were created to test the hypothesis. Each case consists of two versions: a "German" version and a "Dutch" version. Both versions are based on the same situation. The "German" case describes "German" behaviour, while the "Dutch" case describes "Dutch" behaviour.

Cultural characteristic *Hierarchies*

Case 1:

Situation: The accounts department has prepared the annual balance sheet. The manager who has to sign it notices a serious mistake that — if overlooked — would have led to a severe loss of money.

"Dutch" behaviour: The manager holds the whole team responsible for this mistake; since people have been working on the balance sheet as a team, he cannot backtrack to find who exactly made the mistake.

"German" behaviour: The person responsible for the mistake can easily be found because everyone on the team has a clearly defined task for which he or she is responsible.

Case 2:

Situation: There is a stressful situation in a company and a deadline is approaching rapidly. The boss notices that some files have been forgotten up to now.

"Dutch" behaviour: He approaches an employee with the files in his hand. Instead of telling him directly what to do, he beats around the bush. He asks the employee, "If you find the time, would you mind doing this for me?"

"German" behaviour: He approaches an employee's desk, hands him some files and says, "Have these ready by 3 pm, please."

Case 3:

Situation: There is a strategy meeting in a company.

"Dutch" behaviour: The boss only defines general objectives and targets, stating: "We should try to raise the unit sale of our product X by 50% over the next 12 months." He then tells the employees that they can decide for themselves how they reach those objectives.

"German" behaviour: The boss defines specific objectives and targets, stating: "One year from now, I want the unit sale of our product X to be 50% higher than now. Production costs per unit have to decrease by 15%, production errors by 10%." Moreover, he demands to be informed about the approach the employees choose to use to reach these objectives and has to approve the approach before they get to work.

Cultural characteristic *Details*

Case 1:

Situation: A person has an idea: he wants to start his own model construction magazine.

"Dutch" behaviour: Before starting, he writes a brief business plan which contains a rough framework for his business. Problems such as funding, advertising, and distribution are dealt with when they appear.

"German" behaviour: Before starting, he writes a detailed business plan. He starts extensive market research, takes care of the funding for the next two years and researches advertising customers, distribution channels and the best method to get his magazine known. It takes roughly two years before the first edition is launched.

Case 2:

Situation: A new project is introduced in a company.

"Dutch" behaviour: The person presenting the project keeps her presentation short; she only presents basic data and a rough time schedule and scope of action. She has not considered possible mistakes and problems yet. When asked about them, she answers, "We will take care of that if and when it actually happens."

"German" behaviour: The person presenting the project gives very detailed and comprehensive information in her presentation: not only about the project itself and the time schedule, but also about possible problems and obstacles that could occur. When she is asked additional questions by the audience, she also has comprehensive answers.

Case 3:

Situation: A public relations agency is planning a Facebook campaign for a client.

"Dutch" behaviour: In the initial meeting the client tells the agency roughly what he wants. When they call him to ask for more details, he says, "You are the experts for this. I have full trust that you will do it well."

"German" behaviour: At their first meeting, the client already has detailed ideas and wishes. In the following weeks, he calls the agency several times a day to ask if they have considered this fact and that fact, and what they would do if this or that event occurred.

Cultural characteristic *Separation of Work and Private Life*

Case 1: An employee wants to celebrate his birthday.

"Dutch" behaviour: A new employee has been working in an office for only two weeks. One day he tells the people who work in the same office, "I will celebrate my birthday on Friday night. You are cordially invited."

"German" behaviour: An employee has been working in an office for a year. One day he — in the presence of his colleagues — talks to someone on the phone about his upcoming birthday and states, "I will invite all my friends." However, the colleagues who work with him in the same office are never invited.

Case 2:

Situation: A new employee is hired.

"Dutch" behaviour: He is a little intrusive and asks his colleagues who work in the same office about private things such as hobbies and family. He also tells a lot about himself even though his colleagues have not asked him to do so.

"German" behaviour: To get to know him, his colleagues who work in the same office ask him about his family and hobbies. He is rather reluctant and monosyllabic. He also does not ask them about their families and hobbies.

Case 3:

Situation: A person tells his colleague with whom he is working on the same project, "You totally messed up the task. I guess you are not skilled enough for this."

"Dutch" behaviour: When he asks his colleague to join him for lunch in the cafeteria a few hours later, the colleague refuses.

"German" behaviour: When he asks his colleague to join him for lunch in the cafeteria a few hours later, the colleague agrees. They go to the cafeteria together and get along totally fine.

Cultural characteristic *Meetings and Discussions/Consensus and "Overleg"*

Case 1:

Situation: There is a meeting within a company's sales department about the introduction of a new product.

"Dutch" behaviour: Each participant may state his or her opinion about each topic that is discussed. The manager of the company gathers the different opinions and points out agreements. Eventually, they work out a consensus on which everyone agrees.

"German" behaviour: With regard to each topic discussed, only those people who are familiar and/or engaged with it state their opinions. The others only listen. They are neither asked to state their opinions nor do they insist on doing so.

Case 2:

Situation: After the election's coalition negotiations start, a coalition agreement is worked out. However, before it can be signed, it has to be approved by the party's base.

"Dutch" behaviour: Most of the participants express the opinion that they feel that their party leaders have achieved a good compromise that both parties can be content with. They state that this is the best solution because it reflects the will of the majority of the country's voters.

"German" behaviour: Many of the participants express the opinion that they feel that their party leaders have given in to the other party too quickly. They state that such a compromise is a bad solution, that it can never be the best solution by nature and that they are not content with this.

Case 3:

Situation: There is a meeting within a company's sales department about the introduction of a new product. It is clearly noticeable that two people have totally contradictory opinions on a certain issue.

"Dutch" behaviour: No one directly brings this up. Instead, the two people beat around the bush, saying things like: "You are right, but you also have to consider . . . " or "You have a point here, but you also have to think about . . . ."

"German" behaviour: The opponents vividly defend their views, backing them up with facts and references but also raising their voices and getting louder. The atmosphere grows more aggressive because nobody wants to give in.

Appendix B. Results of the comparison of the German and Dutch respondents' answers

Table B1. Comparison of the German and Dutch respondents´ answers to the questions regarding hierarchies: Difference in means (M), standard deviation (SD) and statistical significance of the differences in means.

Case	Compared questions	German answers M (SD)	Dutch answers M (SD)	Difference in means	Significance
Case 1	G: How typical do you regard this (D) behaviour for Dutch?/ D: How typical would a German person regard this (D) behaviour for Dutch?	2.37 (1.16)	2.27 (1.05)	.10	ns (t (147) = .56, p = .74)
	D: How typical do you regard this (G) behaviour for Germans?/G: How typical would a Dutch person regard this (G) behaviour for Dutch?	2.63 (.98)	2.14 (.91)	.48	ns (t (148) = 3.14, p = .32)
	G: "What is your attitude towards the described (D) behaviour?"/D: What attitude is a German person likely to show towards this (D) behaviour?'	2.41 (1.24)	2.05 (.97)	.36	ns (t (138) = 1.97, p = .05)
	D: "What is your attitude towards the described (G) behavior?"/G: What attitude is a Dutch person likely to show towards this (G) behaviour?'	2.99 (1.15)	3.51 (1.95)	.52	ns (t (118) = 2.00, p = .04)
Case 2	G: How typical do you regard this (D) behaviour for Dutch?/ D: How typical would a German person regard this (D) behaviour for Dutch?	2.40 (.96)	2.48 (1.13)	.08	ns (t (146) = .47, p = .32)
	D: How typical do you regard this (G) behaviour for Germans?/G: How typical would a Dutch person regard this (G) behaviour for Dutch?	2.37 (.98)	2.05 (.96)	.32	ns (t (149) = 2.04, p = .28)
	G: "What is your attitude towards the described (D) behavior?"/D: What attitude is a German person likely to show towards this (D) behaviour?'	2.39 (1.10)	2.56 (1.23)	.17	ns (t (148) = .91, p = .72)
	D: "What is your attitude towards the described (G) behavior?"/G: What attitude is a Dutch person likely to show towards this (G) behaviour?'	2.45 (1.15)	2.36 (1.55)	.09	ns (t (140) = .41, p = .16)

(*Continued*)

Table B1. (Continued).

Case	Compared questions	German answers M (SD)	Dutch answers M (SD)	Difference in means	Significance
Case 3	G: How typical do you regard this (D) behaviour for Dutch?/ D: How typical would a German person regard this (D) behaviour for Dutch?	2.47 (.98)	2.51 (1.11)	.04	ns (t (148) = .23, p = .34)
	D: How typical do you regard this (G) behaviour for Germans?/G: How typical would a Dutch person regard this (G) behaviour for Dutch?	2.41 (.93)	2.21 (.88)	.20	ns (t (148) = 1.40, p = .82)
	G: "What is your attitude towards the described (D) behavior?"/D: What attitude is a German person likely to show towards this (D) behaviour?'	3.15 (1.29)	2.65 (1.08)	.49	ns (t (144) = 2.56, p = .17)
	D: "What is your attitude towards the described (G) behavior?"/G: What attitude is a Dutch person likely to show towards this (G) behaviour?'	2.45 (.86)	2.51 (1.43)	.06	ns (t (125) = .28, p = .03)

Answer scales from 1 (bothered considerably/very typical) to 7 (not bothered at all/very atypical). German respondents: N = 75, Dutch respondents: N = 77. In front of each question it is indicated whether this question is asked to German (G) or Dutch (D) respondents. The brackets in the questions show if this question deals with German (G) or Dutch (D) behaviour. Significance level: <.01

Table B2. Comparison of the German and Dutch respondents´ answers to the questions regarding details: Difference in means (M), standard deviation (SD), and statistical significance of the differences in means.

Case	Compared questions	German answers M (SD)	Dutch answers M (SD)	Difference in means	Significance
Case 1	G: How typical do you regard this (D) behaviour for Dutch?/ D: How typical would a German person regard this (D) behaviour for Dutch?	4.68 (1.65)	4.64 (1.95)	.02	ns (t (147) = .15, p = .88)
	D: How typical do you regard this (G) behaviour for Germans?/G: How typical would a Dutch person regard this (G) behaviour for Dutch?	4.51 (2.12)	4.10 (1.97)	.41	ns (t (148) = 1.21, p = .31)
	G: "What is your attitude towards the described (D) behavior?"/D: What attitude is a German person likely to show towards this (D) behaviour?'	4.79 (1.60)	4.44 (1.89)	.35	ns (t (150) = 1.21, p = .23)
	D: "What is your attitude towards the described (G) behavior?"/G: What attitude is a Dutch person likely to show towards this (G) behaviour?'	4.60 (1.38)	4.88 (1.25)	.28	ns (t (147) = 1.32, p = .18)
Case 2	G: How typical do you regard this (D) behaviour for Dutch?/ D: How typical would a German person regard this (D) behaviour for Dutch?	4.57 (1.64)	4.38 (2.09)	.19	ns (t (143) = .64, p = .72)
	D: How typical do you regard this (G) behaviour for Germans?/G: How typical would a Dutch person regard this (G) behaviour for Dutch?	4.35 (1.76)	4.16 (1.97)	.19	ns (t (152) = 1.00, p = .31)
	G: "What is your attitude towards the described (D) behavior?"/D: What attitude is a German person likely to show towards this (D) behaviour?'	4.79 (1.58)	4.20 (2.04)	.59	ns (t (142) = 2.31, p = .46)
	D: "What is your attitude towards the described (G) behavior?"/G: What attitude is a Dutch person likely to show towards this (G) behaviour?'	4.75 (1.38)	5.22 (1.36)	.47	p = .01 (t (151) = 2.45, p = .01)

(*Continued*)

Table B2. (Continued).

Case	Compared questions	German answers M (SD)	Dutch answers M (SD)	Difference in means	Significance
Case 3	G: How typical do you regard this (D) behaviour for Dutch?/ D: How typical would a German person regard this (D) behaviour for Dutch?	4.75 (1.55)	4.57 (1.90)	.17	ns (t (145) = .62, p = .11)
	D: How typical do you regard this (G) behaviour for Germans?/G: How typical would a Dutch person regard this (G) behaviour for Dutch?	4.43 (1.82)	4.35 (1.89)	.07	ns (t (150) = .25, p = .74)
	G: "What is your attitude towards the described (D) behavior?"/D: What attitude is a German person likely to show towards this (D) behaviour?'	4.79 (1.33)	4.60 (1.74)	.19	ns (t (142) = .75, p = .35)
	D: "What is your attitude towards the described (G) behavior?"/G: What attitude is a Dutch person likely to show towards this (G) behaviour?'	5.05 (1.77)	4.42 (1.88)	.63	ns (t (149) = 2.15, p = .49)

Answer scales from 1 (bothered considerably/very typical) to 7 (not bothered at all/very atypical). German respondents: N = 75, Dutch respondents: N = 77. In front of each question it is indicated whether this question is asked to German (G) or Dutch (D) respondents. The brackets in the questions show if this question deals with German (G) or Dutch (D) behaviour. Significance level: <.01

Table B3. Comparison of the German and Dutch respondents' answers to the questions regarding separation of work and private life: Difference in means (M), standard deviation (SD), and statistical significance of the differences in means.

Case	Compared questions	German answers M (SD)	Dutch answers M (SD)	Difference in means	Signifi-cance
Case 1	G: How typical do you regard this (D) behaviour for Dutch?/D: How typical would a German person regard this (D) behaviour for Dutch?	4.53 (1.81)	2.24 (.88)	2.11	p < .01 (t (106) = 9.14)
	D: How typical do you regard this (G) behaviour for Germans?/G: How typical would a Dutch person regard this (G) behaviour for Dutch?	4.49 (1.54)	2.22 (.90)	2.28	p < .01 (t (118) = 11.04)
	G: "What is your attitude towards the described (D) behaviour?"/D: What attitude is a German person likely to show towards this (D) behaviour?'	5.17 (1.24)	2.71 (1.01)	2.46	p < .01 (t (142) = 13.38)
	D: "What is your attitude towards the described (G) behaviour?"/G: What attitude is a Dutch person likely to show towards this (G) behaviour?'	4.63 (1.17)	2.65 (1.14)	1.98	p < .01(t (149) = 7.80)
Case 2	G: How typical do you regard this (D) behaviour for Dutch?/D: How typical would a German person regard this (D) behaviour for Dutch?	4.55 (1.52)	2.25 (.83)	2.30	p < .01 (t (114) = 11.54)
	D: How typical do you regard this (G) behaviour for Germans?/G: How typical would a Dutch person regard this (G) behaviour for Dutch?	4.49 (1.74)	2.38 (1.02)	2.11	p < .01 (t (118) = 9.12)
	G: "What is your attitude towards the described (D) behaviour?"/D: What attitude is a German person likely to show towards this (D) behaviour?'	4.85 (1.34)	2.48 (.87)	2.37	p < .01 (t (126) = 12.90)
	D: "What is your attitude towards the described (G) behaviour?"/G: What attitude is a Dutch person likely to show towards this (G) behaviour?'	4.76 (1.57)	2.43 (1.24)	2.33	p < .01 (t (140) = 10.12)

(*Continued*)

Table B3. (Continued).

		German answers	Dutch answers		
Case	Compared questions	M (SD)	M (SD)	Difference in means	Signifi-cance
Case 3	G: How typical do you regard this (D) behaviour for Dutch?/D: How typical would a German person regard this (D) behaviour for Dutch?	5.04 (1.20)	2.73 (1.10)	2.30	p < .01 (t (148) = 12.35)
	D: How typical do you regard this (G) behaviour for Germans?/G: How typical would a Dutch person regard this (G) behaviour for Dutch?	5.04 (1.20)	2.94 (1.54)	2.10	p < .01 (t (145) = 9.27)
	G: "What is your attitude towards the described (D) behaviour?"/D: What attitude is a German person likely to show towards this (D) behaviour?'	4.85 (1.40)	2.55 (1.18)	2.30	p < .01 (t (144) = 10.98)
	D: "What is your attitude towards the described (G) behaviour?"/G: What attitude is a Dutch person likely to show towards this (G) behaviour?'	4.93 (1.18)	2.75 (1.49)	2.18	p < .01 (t (144) = 10.03)

Answer scales from 1 (bothered considerably/very typical) to 7 (not bothered at all/very atypical). German respondents: N = 75, Dutch respondents: N = 77. In front of each question it is indicated whether this question is asked to German (G) or Dutch (D) respondents. The brackets in the questions show if this question deals with German (G) or Dutch (D) behaviour. Significance level: <.01

Table B4. Comparison of the German and Dutch respondents' answers to the questions regarding meetings and discussions/consensus and "overleg": Difference in means (M), standard deviation (SD), and statistical significance of the differences in means.

		German answers	Dutch answers		
Case	Compared questions	M (SD)	M (SD)	Difference in means	Significance
Case 1	G: How typical do you regard this (D) behaviour for Dutch?/D: How typical would a German person regard this (D) behaviour for Dutch?	2.93 (1.34)	3.89 (1.94)	.96	p < .01 (t (132) = 3.47)
	D: How typical do you regard this (G) behaviour for Germans?/G: How typical would a Dutch person regard this (G) behaviour for Dutch?	3.03 (1.45)	4.10 (1.90)	1.07	p < .01 (t (146) = 3.91)
	G: "What is your attitude towards the described (D) behaviour?"/D: What attitude is a German person likely to show towards this (D) behaviour?'	3.12 (1.60)	4.26 (1.73)	1.14	P < .01 (t (149) = 1.99)
	D: "What is your attitude towards the described (G) behaviour?"/G: What attitude is a Dutch person likely to show towards this (G) behaviour?'	3.27 (1.62)	4.34 (1.91)	1.07	p < .01 (t (147) = 3.70)
Case 2	G: How typical do you regard this (D) behaviour for Dutch?/D: How typical would a German person regard this (D) behaviour for Dutch?	2.62 (1.03)	4.64 (1.64)	2.02	p < .01 (t (129) = 9.08)
	D: How typical do you regard this (G) behaviour for Germans?/G: How typical would a Dutch person regard this (G) behaviour for Dutch? (107) = 11.30)	2.53 (.81)	4.92 (1.63)	2.38	p < .01 (t
	G: "What is your attitude towards the described (D) behaviour?"/D: What attitude is a German person likely to show towards this (D) behaviour?'	2.99 (1.19)	5.00 (1.25)	2.01	p < .01 (t (121) = 8.45)

Table B4. (Continued).

Case	Compared questions	German answers M (SD)	Dutch answers M (SD)	Difference in means	Significance
D:	"What is your attitude towards the described (G) behaviour?"/G: What attitude is a Dutch person likely to show towards this (G) behaviour?'	2.69 (1.01)	4.66 (1.76)	1.97	p < .01 (t (121) = 8.46)
Case 3	G: How typical do you regard this (D) behaviour for Dutch?/ D: How typical would a German person regard this (D) behaviour for Dutch?	2.66 (1.17)	4.68 (1.74)	2.02	p < .01 (t (127) = 8.23)
	D: How typical do you regard this (G) behaviour for Germans?/G: How typical would a Dutch person regard this (G) behaviour for Dutch?	2.50 (1.02)	4.49 (1.60)	1.99	p < .01 (t (107) = 9.04)
	G: "What is your attitude towards the described (D) behaviour?"/D: What attitude is a German person likely to show towards this (D) behaviour?'	2.53 (1.11)	4.62 (1.75)	2.09	ns (t (124) = 8.70, p = 0,35)
	D: "What is your attitude towards the described (G) behaviour?"/G: What attitude is a Dutch person likely to show towards this (G) behaviour?'	2.65 (1.27)	4.51 (1.71)	1.86	ns (t (135) = 7.50, p < .20)

Answer scales from 1 (bothered considerably/very typical) to 7 (not bothered at all/very atypical). German respondents: N = 75, Dutch respondents: N = 77. In front of each question it is indicated whether this question is asked to German (G) or Dutch (D) respondents. The brackets in the questions show if this question deals with German (G) or Dutch (D) behaviour. Significance level: <.01