

REPORT

CULTURAL CHALLENGES IN IRISH-DUTCH BUSINESS RELATIONS

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Avans University of Applied Sciences



In association with:



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FOREWORD
AVANS UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

This report presents the results of the research about the Cultural Challenges in Irish Dutch Business Relations.

Supporting the development of intercultural competences is at the core of the International Business professorship's research agenda at Avans University of Applied Sciences.

Like never before, we need collaborative efforts to address the challenges of the millennium. Creating a shared understanding of our cultural backgrounds is an essential contribution to facilitating international cooperation.

Internationally operating businesses are involved in complex activities that span across various national borders and economies. By operating on a global scale, they are involved in various networks (of subsidiaries, suppliers, customers, partners, governments, agencies, etc.) spread over several countries/societies/cultures.

Communicating and negotiating efficiently in an intercultural context can facilitate the understanding of values across societies and facilitate all the processes where inter-firm relations are involved.

The International Business professorship advances the professional field by providing practical insights to solve the challenges practitioners face in addressing global activities. The present research provides clear insights about the cultural challenges in Irish Dutch business relations and about the solutions to address them.

The research, therefore, supports the development of professional competences. The qualities developed serve to support professionals in all fields of expertise operating in an international context. In the interconnected world in which we live, being equipped to work in an international context allows seizing opportunities on a global scale.

In addition to the practical tools obtained from these applied research projects, the professorship aims at stimulating the development of key professional skills: driving change in business and society, being creative in finding new solutions, and becoming connectors of ideas, people and businesses.

We hope the present research contributes to this endeavor as well.

We would like to thank all the partners and contributors to this project: GrowEurBusiness, the Ireland Netherlands Business Association (INBA), the Dutch Irish Business Association (DIBA), all the workshop participants and interviewees whose insights have been essential to the realization of this research.

*Anna Sabidussi,
Avans University of Applied Sciences*

FOREWORD
GROWEURBUSINESS

Appropriately and unsurprisingly the GrowEurBusiness partners first met Professor Anna Sabidussi of Avans University of Applied Sciences at an international business gathering here in the Netherlands.

We quickly recognised our mutual interest in international business relations and started exchanging stories and experiences. With GrowEurBusiness' focus as a business consultancy helping Irish companies expand in the EU, the conversation quickly turned to Irish-Dutch relations.

Seemingly business people from both cultures quickly bind and easily communicate, but occasionally also with unseen misunderstandings leading to less effective processes than either side expects!

It was these Cultural Challenges in Irish-Dutch Business Relations that GrowEurBusiness and Avans set out to address.

Avans designed the resulting research project with suitable methodology and two series of workshops of Irish and Dutch business people – curated, transcribed and analysed by the Avans research team.

The resulting findings, insights, (anonymous!) quotes and "Top Tips" for both Irish and Dutch business people you will find here.

Some will be familiar but for the GrowEurBusiness partners as Irish nationals working 30 years in the Netherlands it was an eyeopener to see some of the Dutch comments on common Irish traits and behaviours!

We hope you will find the report equally entertaining, useful and continuing food for thought and discussion with Irish and Dutch colleagues, partners, customers and relations!

Finally we would like to thank all involved in making and supporting this research project: the researchers at Avans, the Ireland Netherlands Business Association (INBA) and the Dutch Irish Business Association (DIBA), but most of all the workshop participants and interviewees who so enthusiastically shared their stories!

*JP McAllister,
GrowEurBusiness*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The purpose of this research is to investigate what are the cultural challenges that Irish and Dutch business practitioners face and how to overcome them. The parties involved are the chair International Business (Expertise Center for Sustainable Business at Avans University), GrowEurBusiness, and two business associations: INBA, the Ireland Netherlands Business Association and DIBA, the Dutch Irish Business Association.

Approach

The project was organized around three separate events that took place online. The first two sessions were dedicated to data collection through roundtable discussions about the respondents' experiences and their perspectives on decision-making and communication. An additional source of data was provided by three in-depth interviews. The data were analyzed by using thematic analysis in Atlas.ti 9. The researchers identified, organized, described and interpreted the inputs in a systematic way in order to highlight common patterns in the data set. The final session was centered around the presentation and sharing of the findings.

Insights

The data research resulted in a series of findings that address the goal of identifying the main challenges and ways of overcoming them.

The **key challenges** that have emerged from the contributions of workshop participants are:

- Communication style (too direct versus too indirect)
- Language: communicating in a non-native language can result in misunderstandings and misconceptions. Interestingly the Dutch participants are not aware of their limitations when communicating in English and do not perceive it as a challenge (we don't know what we don't know).
- Different business customs: it is typical to separate business from private life for Dutch professionals, business and personal relationships are blurred and intertwined for Irish professionals; consequently, giving negative feedback becomes difficult if relationships are strong (in the case of the Irish culture). In the decision-making processes, the Dutch professionals will continue to question decisions for full understanding.
- Stereotyping: approaching business partners from the perspective of pre-conceptions has appeared a source of challenges in successful business relations.

The research has also identified **potential solutions** for overcoming challenges:

- Gaining awareness of the cultural background of business partners
- Increasing Language awareness and proficiency; Acknowledging limitations of non-native speakers.
- Developing cultural flexibility.
- Developing interest in each other's culture.
- Building personal relationships.
- Cooperation.
- Open communication.
- Being sensitive: Be aware of apparent similitudes among cultures, be ready to acknowledge and challenge your own assumptions in order to engage in an active and productive collaboration with professionals with another cultural background (e.g., being sensitive to each other's priorities- deadlines are not as strict in other countries, for some, consensus is more important than for others, etc..).

A series of tips are proposed based on the findings of the research. In the final part, we discuss the research results against the backdrop of the cultural models of reference: the high and low-context cultures by Hall and Hofstede's six dimensions models.

Top Tips for the Dutch	Top Tips for the Irish
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship is the key. Invest in building personal relationships before you start doing business. • Be careful with your feedback. Explicitly state that it is not directed to any specific people or partners but work. • A 'yes' may not always mean 'yes'. Put effort to understand the message behind it. • Be sensitive to Irish history and culture. Make sure you know the Republic of Ireland is NOT part of the UK. • You are a proficient English speaker. Still, it is a native language for the Irish. Do not hesitate to ask if a message is not clear to you. • Keep an eye on non-verbal messages. • Be flexible with time. Time is relative. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The fact that the Dutch starts talking business right away does not mean that they do not care about you. • Don't take feedback personally. The Dutch focus on work when giving feedback. The feedback may seem too direct, but it is not directed at you. • A 'yes' means 'yes'. A 'promise' is a 'promise'. • English is not a native language for the Dutch. Slow down and validate your message regularly. • How about learning a few words in Dutch? • Keep an eye on your non-verbal messages. They may not always be clear to the Dutch. Again, validate your message. • Be sensitive with time. Punctuality is important for your Dutch partners.

Remarks

Our study addresses cultural challenges from the specific perspective of the very professionals experiencing them. Additionally, the study focuses on cultural challenges in the context of business relations (as opposed to other approaches which consider broader cultural aspects).

Our results show that existing models (such as the high and low-context cultures by Hall and Hofstede's six dimensions models) commonly used to gather insights about cultural differences are insufficient to support business professionals. Although existing models can provide general guidance, they do not offer in-depth knowledge necessary to understand the interactions between two specific cultures in a specific context such as international business.

In this sense, studies such as the present are valuable to fine-tune existing models, gather key insights and practical guidelines to develop the competences required in a business setting.

This research could be replicated with a different group of respondents (for example professionals with very little intercultural experience or lower in the career ladder) and with different countries, in order to gain a broader understanding of the cultural issues at stake.

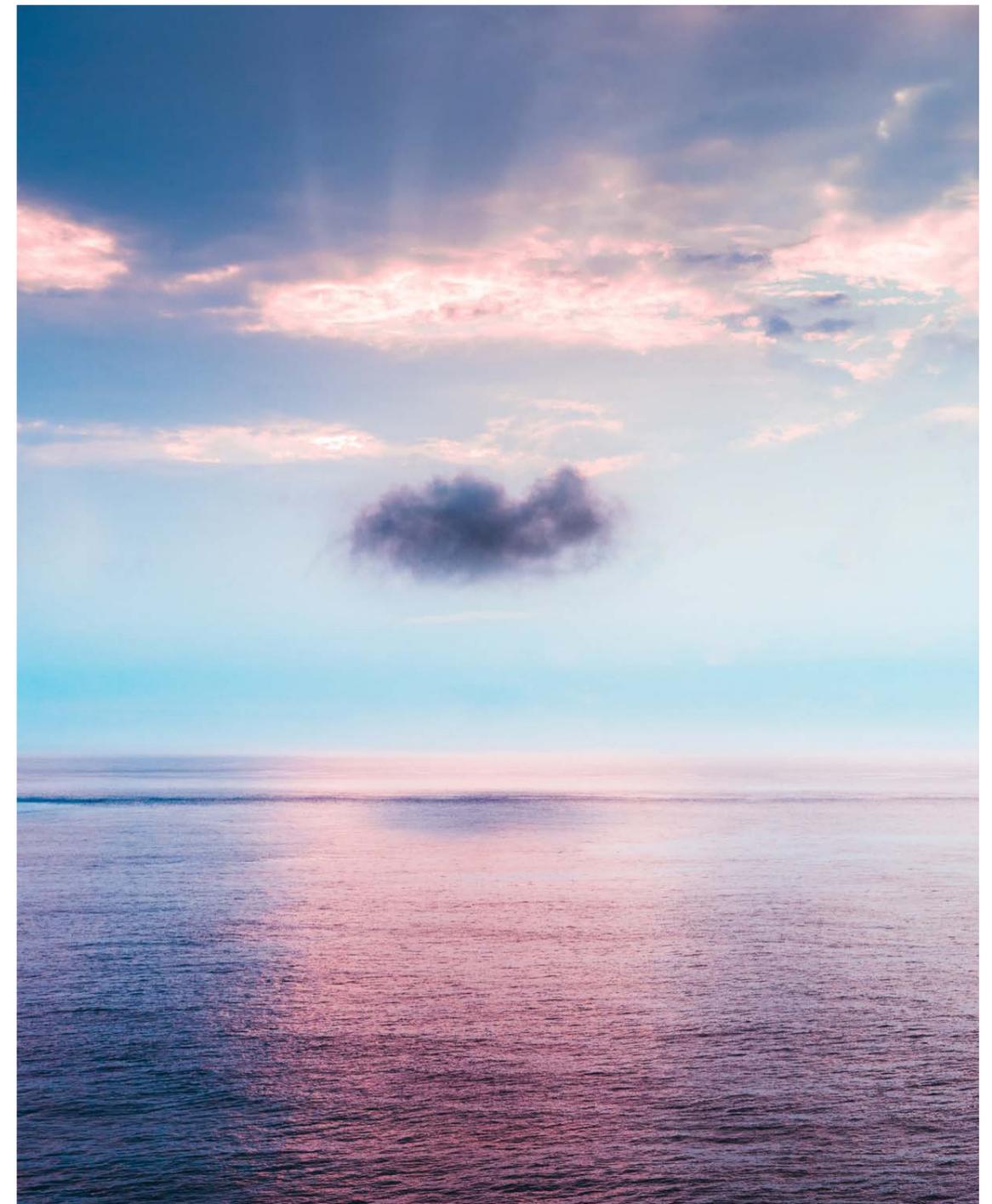


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INTRODUCTION

Scope and goals of this project

This research initiative focuses mainly on the cultural aspects that are relevant for the purpose of conducting business. Although there is plenty of information about cultural differences on national level, the big picture does not seem to explain the actual business practice when it comes to individual interactions. Consequently, a clear need emerges for studying the specific challenges encountered by professionals from the two countries. This project explores how do businesspeople of both cultures experience the reality of working together, what are the most frequently encountered challenges and what are the competences needed to overcome them.

The present project about cultural challenges in Irish-Dutch business relations has been developed in partnership between the International Business chair (Expertise Center Sustainable Business) of Avans University of Applied Sciences and GrowEurBusiness. Additional partners include two relevant associations INBA, the Ireland Netherlands Business Association and DIBA, the Dutch Irish Business Association.



What is intercultural intelligence and why is it relevant for international business?

Doing business nowadays often implies working both locally and globally. More than ever in our interconnected world, there is awareness that an enterprise operates across borders. Regardless of their size, all businesses need to understand that their business partners may come from different cultures and hold different perspectives on the issues at stake.



The following cases provide an illustration about how the understanding of other cultures can be relevant for business purposes and how cultural misunderstanding can potentially hamper business success.

“Henri, a French manager at Aegis, a media corporation, followed the national custom of greeting his female clients with a hug and a kiss on both cheeks. Although Melanie, a British aerospace manager, understood that in France such familiarity was de rigueur in a professional setting, she couldn’t suppress her discomfort when it happened to her, and she recoiled. Inability to receive and reciprocate gestures that are culturally characteristic reflects a low level of cultural intelligence’s physical component” (Earley and Mosakowski, 2004).

“In another instance, a Hispanic community leader in Los Angeles and an Anglo-American businessman fell into conversation at a charity event. As the former moved closer, the latter backed away. It took nearly 30 minutes of waltzing around the room for the community leader to realize that “Anglos” were not comfortable standing in such close physical proximity” (Earley and Mosakowski, 2004).

“One American woman who managed a German team discovered that generating informal conversation at the beginning of a meeting eroded her credibility. She normally would have considered her employees’ disregard for informal conversation to be dysfunctional. But she learned that the best way to build rapport and trust with her German counterparts was to immediately address the task at hand. Her evolving understanding of culture and its role in her organization’s life was essential to working effectively with her colleagues” (Livermore & Van Dyne, 2015).

Cultural misunderstanding or misinterpretation could lead to missed opportunities, project failures, financial and reputational losses. Knowledge gaps in terms of cultural differences often create friction in the workplace and stifled relationships.

In order to operate globally and be effective in international teams, it is crucial to integrate quickly into a new culture. An individual capability to function and manage effectively in culturally diverse settings is referred to as intercultural intelligence (Early and Ang, 2003).

The benefits of deploying culturally intelligent professionals are of great value to companies in achieving their strategic goals. Where teams communicate effectively in culturally diverse settings, common ground is established, there is team cohesion and trust. Better cohesion enhances collaboration, trust increases the free exchange of ideas and information. Ultimately, it all leads to improved team performance and innovation which contributes to the competitive edge of a business. Intercultural intelligence has become an indispensable asset of a business professional.

In this study, we explore the cultural challenges Dutch and Irish professionals face when conducting business together. Whilst Ireland and the Netherlands share some similarities in terms of the size of the country, coping with a significantly bigger and influential neighboring country, ease of communication in English, etc. the individual practitioners are still experiencing challenges in

conducting business together. In fact, the perceived similarity between the two countries makes it even more surprising that cultural barriers are experienced. Therefore, the need emerges to clearly identify the key challenges and how they can be overcome by developing intercultural intelligence. An overview of the theoretical framework in which intercultural intelligence is studied is available in Addendum 1.

THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Project organization

The first part of the study has been dedicated to research design. In co-creation with GrowEurBusiness, the business needs motivating the research have been identified. The project definition included the selection of goals as well as the delimitation of the project's scope.

Based on a preliminary literature review the most relevant theories and methods for the purpose of the study were identified and classified.

As the purpose of the study has been to address the specific intercultural challenges of the Dutch-Irish business community, rather than exploring general differences among the culture in the Netherlands and in Ireland, particular attention has been dedicated to the methodological design.

A detailed description of the methods adopted by the present research is available in Addendum 2.

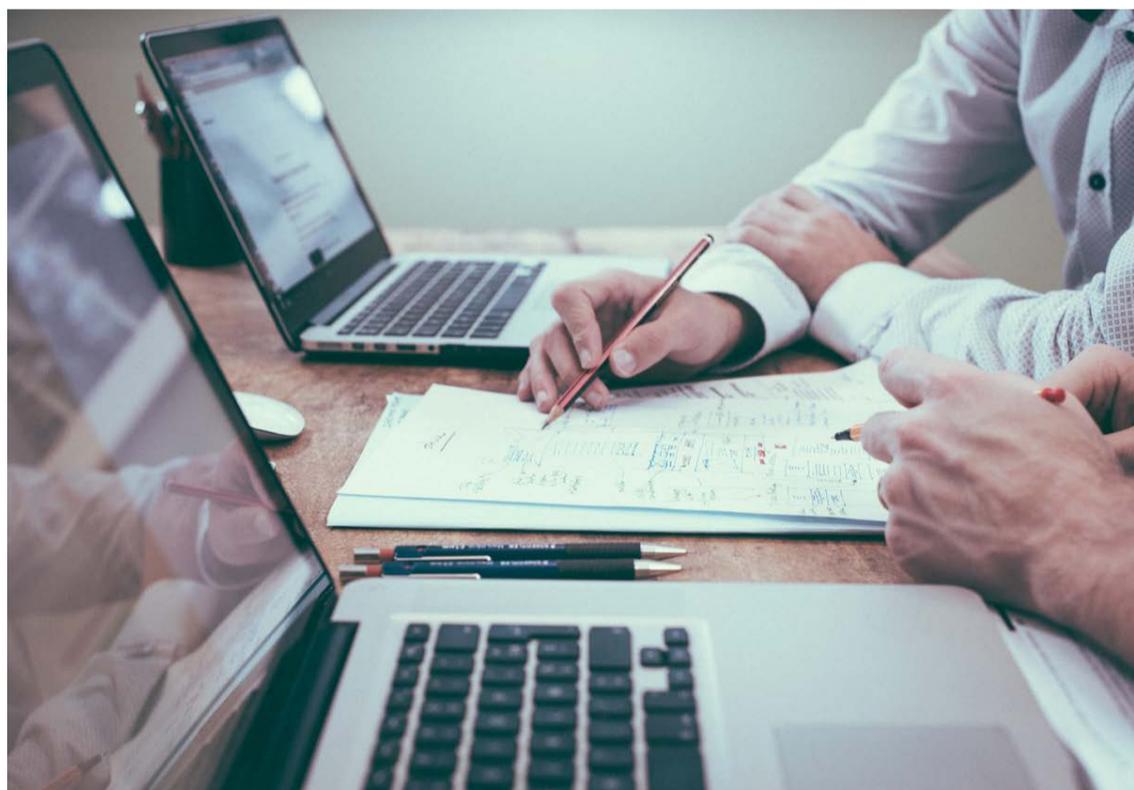


Photo by Scott Graham on Unsplash

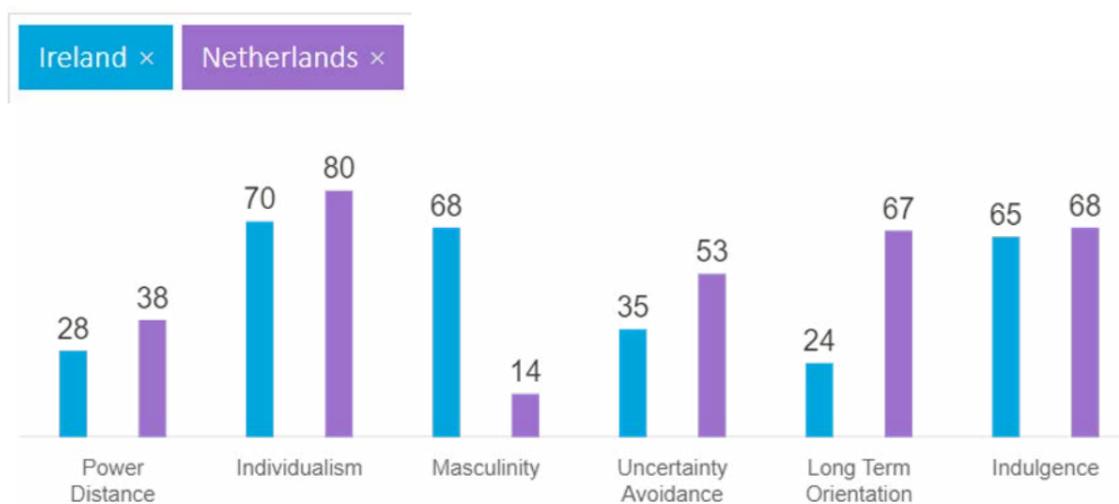
GENERAL PERSPECTIVE ON CULTURAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE NETHERLANDS AND IRELAND

Cultural models of reference

There is abundant literature about various national cultures and their bilateral interactions. Edward Hall (1976) for example, put forward the concepts of high- and low-context cultures. Geert Hofstede (1984) proposed one based on six dimensions of national culture which had great scholarly repercussions. It resulted in further research by different authors such as Trompenaars, the GLOBE initiative scholars, Schwartz, Meyer to name but a few.

In the approach of these scientists the cultural dimensions are based on values seen as stable elements that shape the differences between specific cultural patterns of different groups. One can see cultural models as sophisticated stereotypes or mental mind maps that help us make sense of the world and understand the other (Trompenaars, 2021).

For the purpose of this study, it is interesting to start with the macro-level comparison of the specific cultural differences between Ireland and the Netherlands according to Hofstede's six dimensions of national culture:



Cultural dimensions relevant for communication behavior

Three dimensions of cultural variability emerged as relevant for communication behavior in culturally diverse situations:

The individualist – collectivist dimension, (in countries low on individualism, conformity is popular, and autonomy is rated as less important).

The uncertainty avoidance dimension (anxiety and distrust in the face of the unknown, wish to have fixed habits and rituals, and to know the truth).

The long-term orientation (fostering of virtues oriented towards future rewards, in particular perseverance and thrift) in the business context, this dimension is referred to as short-term normative versus long-term pragmatic as proposed by Hofstede (1984).

The concept of high and low-context cultures was put forward by E. Hall (1976). Low-context cultures tend to communicate by focusing on the content of the message and on the words. Low-context cultures that value individualist goals, such as the United States of America, separate person and issue, are confrontational, and use explicit codes of speech.

High-context cultures tend to focus on what surrounds the message and value collectivist goals. They intermesh person and issue, are indirect, and rely on contextual cues and situational knowledge. As a result, members of high context cultures often use embedded references and indirect speech acts. In high-context cultures, people tend to express emotional information through facial expressions, tone of voice, and body movements (Samovar et al, 1998) whereas people who live in low-context cultures convey the information through the spoken message itself.

The other dimensions in Hofstede's model (1984) did not appear to be relevant to our scope. Although power distance, masculinity and indulgence might play a role in different contexts, they did not emerge as core issues in the perceptions of our participants. Additionally, while the Netherlands and Ireland seem to have a similar high score on individualism on the world map of intercultural differences, there might be reasons to argue that this similarity does not represent the local differences in business.



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INSIGHTS GAINED

This research investigates in detail two main predefined categories: a) the challenges faced by Irish-Dutch business practitioners and b) how to overcome them.

It is worth noticing that all participants show special interest in working together with the other group and getting to know about them. Although problems resulting from intercultural differences are at the focus, participants state that they enjoy and appreciate working with each other. The section below presents an overview of the most frequent and relevant themes under these categories.



Key challenges

Our research identified four main categories of challenges: 1. Communication style differences (direct/indirect communication), 2. Language, 3. Business Customs, 4. Stereotyping.

Communication Style Differences (Direct/Indirect Communication)

The interactions between Dutch and Irish business practitioners are highly influenced by differences in communication style. Namely, Irish participants tend to find Dutch communication too direct whereas Irish communication is too indirect for their Dutch partners. Even though these differences in communication style between two cultures are widely discussed in literature and explicitly addressed in any daily conversation, our study confirms that they still create significant challenges. A possible reason could be that this explicit aspect is often overlooked in a business setting where

cultural differences are underestimated. It is also possible that communication differences are simply too striking thus providing the most dominant challenge in cross-cultural encounters.



The business professionals who participated in our project have different explanations of this communication style difference.

One Irish participant describes Dutch directness as a **'massive challenge for us, between, let's say the finance division in Europe and the finance division on the head office'** (Irish 10). Directness is also viewed as a sign of arrogance, revealed as **'It is pretty hard to have somebody come and host them and then say, you know, your coffee is crap, oh I don't like this or it's hard to deal with, it is really hard to be hurting inside when you're pretending that you don't care'** (Irish 5). Apparently, not everybody is accustomed to conducting business in the direct way the Dutch are used to, so it is an explicit challenge for Irish partners.

Another story shared by an Irish participant illustrates the above point: **'There was a guy there who had just been hired by a large company in the Netherlands. After the first team meeting with his direct reports, he asked, "anybody have any questions or comments?" One of his team put up his hand and said " Well, you know, speaking personally, I really would have preferred if somebody else got the job rather than you"! He thought "Wow, I mean, I knew that he had a reputation for being direct, but he said, I was never... I didn't expect that".'** (Irish 13)

In some case, directness may be perceived as lack of courtesy: **'You're pretending that you don't care... or I went to a trade show once, a long time ago. And this guy at the stand said to me 'oh**

Please note that all the citations from the participants are quoted literally.

my god, does your work make you wear that uniform', and it was actually a suit that I had bought, and I just said, "yeah are they terrible". I was mortified. It was really the most offensive thing. I was wearing what I thought was a smart work suit, and he just goes, it was really, I have to say I find that really savage'. (Irish 5)

On the other hand, Dutch partners face challenges in understanding their Irish partners' messages clearly since they find Irish communication too indirect.

One of the Dutch participants (Dutch 1) agrees that their direct communication is not appreciated across borders, but their Irish partners are too careful and more indirect.

A Dutch person tells the following experience: 'I was ... at the customer service counter and had to speak to customers, Irish customers. At one point my Irish colleague comes down and said to me if I wanted to be a little less direct in my answers to the Irish. So, I didn't have to say that the event was full, but I had to say, "I'm afraid I have to inform you that we have no more room on this event". I really took that to heart. So, all my e-mails and conversations with Irish people are always dressed up with nice words ever since then'.

Although a challenge, being direct is also viewed as a positive sign of open communication, since Dutch directness 'is really just a directness and openness, and no ignoring the elephant in the room' (Irish 6). Similar impressions are reflected by the Dutch side.

Language

Language emerges as an important theme in all the interviews with the Irish participants both as an opportunity and as a challenge although it does not emerge as a challenge by the Dutch participants in any of the interviews. The fact that English is commonly used among Dutch people in business meetings is a facilitating factor to some extent; however, communicating in a language which is native to the Irish but non-native to the Dutch results in misunderstandings and misconceptions.

This is a serious problem because it creates a false sense of comfort, and it prevents us from gathering a realistic perception about the other culture. On the one hand, it gives the Irish the comfort to communicate in their native language with their Dutch partners. The Dutch also feel confident that they are proficient communicators in English, and no extra effort is needed. However, this leads to inevitable inertia since when both parties feel at ease with their existing communication channel, it gives the wrong impression that no extra effort is needed. On the other hand, the misinterpretations resulting from lack of understanding of the nuances prevents business partnership from excelling.

One of the participants says: 'If that's done in a way that you would do to an all-native English audience, you can be guaranteed that half of the message will not be received' (Irish 13). The participant here criticizes the fact that Irish businesspeople tend to overestimate the skills of non-native English speakers, and that is why the message is not always clearly conveyed. Another one adds: 'about the language, that when it's translated into English it's translated directly, and it sounds, it sounds worse for want of a better word for people coming first of all' (Irish 2). In the same line, another Irish participant agrees: 'So, it's also part of the background and our thinking of this was, what we've seen, is that you can have an Irish person speaking English to a Dutch person also speaking English, and they may both be speaking the same language, but actually they mean different things' (Irish 13). 'The reason for having this challenge is mostly that Irish partners assume they talk to an Irish colleague instead of a non-native speaker' (Irish 12).

Different Business Customs

Each culture has its own customs and habits in life, which is highly reflected in business. Although both Dutch and Irish participants in this study are aware of these customs, they still feel overwhelmed by how business is maintained in different countries. Namely, they claim they know the basic characteristics of each other, yet familiarity of each other's cultures is not adequate to work smoothly in a business environment.

For the Irish and the Dutch, talking business has a different meaning. For instance, the Irish talk about personal / non-business topics as part of doing business together while the Dutch tend to go straight to the point of the business discussion.

A Dutch professional (Dutch, 1) reports: 'We spent an hour on it and after 45 minutes it was still about football and who they all knew. I felt like I was going to write a story. I remember my boss said: he's not used to it yet, but that's how we do business in Ireland. And I thought it was something from the old days. But then I had it again in 2018. I introduced 2 friends of mine who I also knew professionally. To my amazement, that was another 50 minutes about who they knew, about rugby, how the team was doing... it went on and on'.

The above is in sharp contrast with the efficiency-focus that is typical of Dutch business meetings: 'A Dutch partner was flown over to Ireland to discuss/finalize a far-reaching restructuring of the Irish organization with at least 20 redundancies. While all sort of details including family circumstances and the consequences of redundancy, different angles were discussed, the Dutch partner kept ticking into his laptop. In the end, he thanked everyone and left. Before he (or maybe they) even reached his (their) car: all the findings, discussion items and decisions were emailed to participants as agreed. It was all done and finished, which left everyone stunned. I asked if those findings were correct? Yes, everything was exactly as discussed and decided, but according to them, the Irish would have taken more time to let it all sink in, maybe more rounds to finalize it, further emphasize with the families... But like that it was all done and settled quite "abruptly"- very Dutch and very efficient'. (Irish 14)

The Dutch tend to separate business from their private life whereas this is blurred and intertwined for the Irish. Although it is difficult for the Irish to criticize a work of a business partner or a colleague who are also their social circle of private life, it is common in Dutch business. As one participant states: 'You can have quite a heated debate with somebody and then greet them the next day and you're friends, and it's not artificial, it's sincere' (Irish 5).

In line with this, another participant (Irish 2) tells a story of a business confrontation with a Dutch colleague:

'I was getting feedback – this is years ago – feedback from a manager, I've had a project that my part didn't go too well and was very Dutch-direct criticism. And I think I was maybe six months or a year there, so I wasn't quite into it. And my Irish brain was going: Oh my God, he's going to fire me, like literally. And then you know, my Irish brain was going: How can you say these things to me, I thought we had a good relationship, you know. And then afterwards, you know, it was finished, it was 12 o'clock, lunchtime, he said "Should we go for lunch?" And my Irish brain was thinking: You've just said all these things and now you want to go for lunch? They're not criticizing you as a person, they're looking at the task, it didn't go well, how can we improve it the next time. It's not about me as a person'.

Moreover, no doubt that differences in decision-making in social life in unfamiliar cultures are reflected in business, as well. Irish participants explain that there is more hierarchy in Ireland than the Netherlands, which results in decisions being taken from the management, and co-workers obeying the decision. On the other hand, there is a lot of questioning every decision to be made in a company by the Dutch side. An Irish participant (Irish 1) complains:

'And it is a real puzzle sometimes from people from other countries to get things done. What appears to be a clear decision, taken in a clear hierarchy by a boss. Like it or not, that is the decision from the organization, but every Dutch thinks they can question it, even after the decision has been made'.

There is another side with the Dutch, though. Although Irish participants feel that decisions are being questioned more than necessary, the Dutch believe that they need to keep asking questions, otherwise they cannot clearly get an understanding of what the Irish want to say:

'You don't know exactly what the Irish really think about it and you need some more questions than, to find out what exactly is going on' (Dutch 5).

The fact that each party views the other side from their own perspective results in conflicts. In the examples provided above, it is clear that while the focus of conversation in business is on the topic, and the criticism is on the work itself for the Dutch, the focus is perceived as directed more on personal relationships for the Irish.

In short, differences in business customs, although implemented with positive intentions, result in misunderstandings and miscommunication in business.

Stereotyping

It is inevitable that there are common patterns and threads a culture has. For example, the Dutch are known to be punctual, the Irish tend to establish more personal relationships in business, etc. However, approaching everyone with these stereotypes in mind may also result in challenges. It was a common topic in second round of the interviews with the Dutch partners that it is too 'black and white' to assume that people of a specific culture have the same characteristics. One participant (Dutch 2) criticizes the generalization that the Irish are collectivistic whereas the Dutch are individualistic. Similarly, an Irish participant (Irish 1) agrees that they are stereotyping as well that Dutch people are direct in business. In addition, Irish participants who have lived in the Netherlands for at least a decade also find it difficult to identify where they stand more due to the fluidity of their experiences.

It is worth noticing that the above-mentioned cultural challenges may be simultaneously present and intertwined. It is therefore relevant to be able to recognize and identify them.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES: KEY COMPETENCES AND SOLUTIONS

This section presents an overview of the findings on overcoming challenges documents in the previous section. While there are numerous challenges due to cultural differences, there is one significant way of overcoming them: raising intercultural awareness.



All participants in the study focus on the importance of gaining awareness of the cultural background of business partners, understanding each other despite disagreements and appreciate the fact that there are diverse ways that bring people together to achieve success in business. In a way, the tips on addressing cultural challenges align with the concept of cultural intelligence (Early & Ang, 2003). Both parties have a strong desire to function effectively with each other and look for long-term business partnerships. They are both willing to acquire knowledge of each other's norms and expectations and motivated to engage with each other as well as guide their own group to be involved in positive relationships with each other. In line with this, business professionals who participated in this study suggest various practical tips in order to address challenges in multicultural business settings. The most frequent and relevant suggestions are demonstrated below:

Language awareness: Although English is a common business language, and most of the Dutch people are fluent speakers of English, nuances within the language, especially during communication between native and non-native speakers cause miscommunication. An awareness of these differences is very important. Irish participants focus on the necessity of always keeping in mind that they may be speaking with a colleague to whom English is a foreign language (Irish 9), *'slowing down and realizing it is not the first language'* (Irish 12) for the other side, *'validating the message and saying the same thing in different ways'* (Irish 13), *and switching to Dutch if possible to show respect and empathy when possible'* (Irish 13).

Besides that, as another participant emphasizes, showing interest in each other's language helps partners understand the culture and people of a specific country (Irish 2).

Cultural flexibility: Intercultural awareness begins with being open to differences and accepting that there are multiple ways to achieve success. To illustrate, although being direct may be considered as a negative characteristic by the Irish in general, accepting this and focusing on the message behind it solves most of the problems (Irish 13).

Building personal relationships: Building relationships besides actual business help partners increase trust in each other. It may be difficult for an Irish colleague to open directly to a Dutch colleague within the company settings but socializing at a pub will increase the quality of communication and improve the quality of work (Dutch 5, Irish 14).

Cooperation: Cooperation facilitates overcoming the cultural difference between directness and indirectness: steering the Irish or Dutch in the right direction in a cooperation (Dutch, 3). As one of the Irish participants (Irish 4) exemplifies: *'sometimes we hear that the Dutch football team is very successful but would be more successful if it was less individualistic and more played as a team'.*



Interest in each other's culture: There are already some international companies that adjust the habits within their departments to the local cultures where they are located. This seems a wonderful way of adapting to intercultural differences (Dutch 2, Dutch 5). Besides, Irish partners are sensitive to history and culture, due to both political history and Brexit. An Irish participant (Irish 13) suggests: 'A Dutch person trying to develop interest or business in Ireland... Basic awareness of Ireland is probably not a bad thing in the sense that the Republic of Ireland is not part of the UK.'

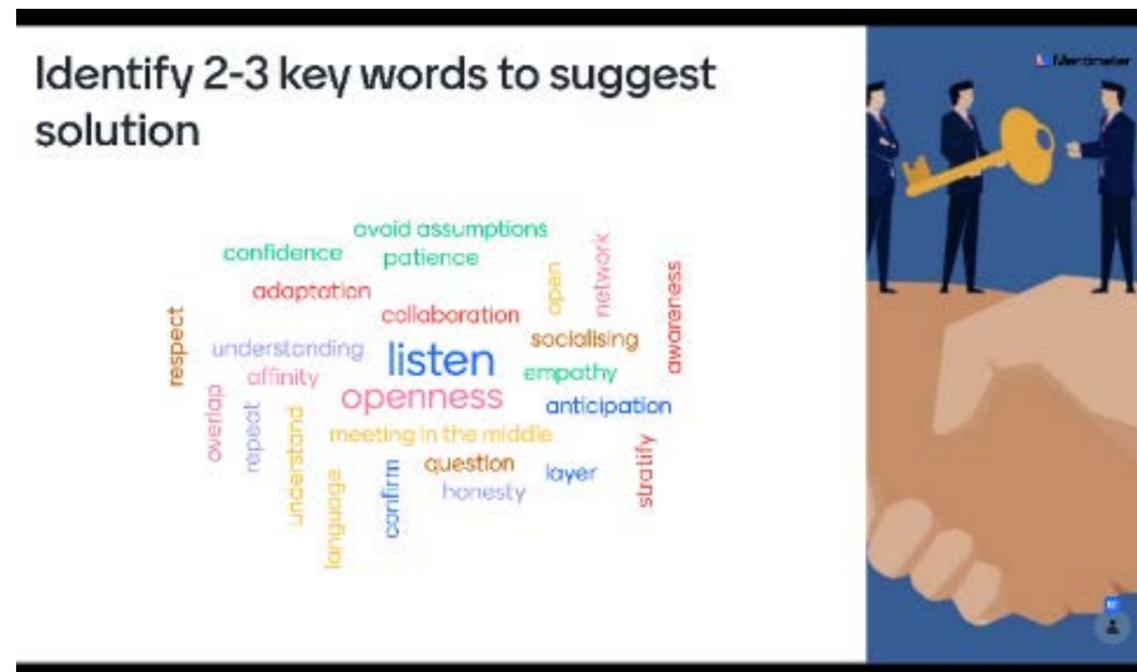
Open communication: People tend to misinterpret non-verbal messages more than verbal and written communication. This is why open communication is a significant element in intercultural business. There are a few ways to achieve this: supporting verbal communication with written communication by, for example, sharing the minutes of a meeting and asking for confirmation, asking straight questions to double-check if the message is conveyed properly, (Dutch 5, Irish 14, Irish 5, Irish 6).

Being sensitive to each other's priorities: A 'yes' may not always mean 'yes' as much as deadlines may not be as strict as in different countries. If a promise to deliver a piece of work is made in Dutch culture, it is expected that all parties agree on it and finish the work before the deadline. This differs in the Irish case, since there is flexibility in the deadlines. In this sense, we may argue that the time perception is different in the two cultures. Similarly, coming to an agreement and consensus is important in Dutch business. Therefore, participants recommend noticing such priorities and adjusting their actions accordingly (Dutch 2, Dutch 3, Irish P10).

As mentioned earlier, multiple cultural challenges can occur simultaneously. Identifying what specific cultural perspectives can play a role in the business situation at hand can facilitate a successful outcome. Developing cultural intelligence allows us to identify the challenges and take an active role in overcoming them.

Tips on how to develop Key Competences for Business Success

The picture below represents the suggestions for overcoming challenges provided by the respondents during the second session.



Top Tips for the Dutch	Top Tips for the Irish
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relationship is the key. Invest in building personal relationships before you start doing business. Be careful with your feedback. Explicitly state that it is not directed to any specific people or partners but work. A 'yes' may not always mean 'yes'. Put effort to understand the message behind it. Be sensitive to Irish history and culture. Make sure you know the Republic of Ireland is NOT part of the UK. You are a proficient English speaker. Still, it is a native language for the Irish. Do not hesitate to ask if a message is not clear to you. Keep an eye on non-verbal messages. If validating a message is needed, consider using communication in writing which reduces the chances of non-verbal messages in oral communication to be misinterpreted. Be flexible with time. Time is relative. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The fact that the Dutch starts talking business right away does not mean that they do not care about you. Don't take feedback personally. The Dutch focus on work when giving feedback. The feedback may seem too direct, but it is not directed at you. A 'yes' means 'yes'. A 'promise' is a 'promise'. English is not a native language for the Dutch. Slow down and validate your message regularly. How about learning a few words in Dutch? Keep an eye on your non-verbal messages. They may not always be clear to the Dutch. Again, validate your message. If unsure about how to convey a message, consider using communication in writing which reduces the chances of non-verbal messages in oral communication to be misinterpreted. Be sensitive with time. Punctuality is important for your Dutch partners.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The findings can be discussed against the backdrop of the cultural models of reference: the high and low-context cultures by Hall and Hofstede's six dimensions models. Our results show that there is a clear difference in the social interaction of the Dutch and the Irish in their practice of business. This is most evident in their communication styles: the Dutch tend to be direct, the Irish indirect which presents a potential barrier in the conducting business. The cause lies in the level of cultural context on which the two cultures rely. The cultural traditions regulate our initial contacts: in a high-context culture most of the important information is presented in the context, while in a low-context culture almost all the information is presented in the message (Hall & Hall, 2001). This explains the Irish communication style, which is often seen as polite, but indirect and of the Dutch communication style, which is often seen as direct, but experienced as rude (low-context). These opposing contexts define an important challenge between the two cultures in business, which calls for more awareness.

The degree of uncertainty avoidance is also related to the cultural context. However, whereas the first refers to communication styles, the uncertainty avoidance relates to the business customs. Uncertainty has to do with anxiety and distrust in the face of the unknown, and conversely, with a wish to have fixed habits and rituals, and to know the truth (Hofstede, 1984). The six dimensions model of national culture indicates the Netherlands as higher on uncertainty avoidance than Ireland. The present study confirms these findings: the Dutch are found to be more inclined to follow formal procedures in their business customs. The Dutch tend to be less comfortable with ambiguous situations while doing business than the Irish. The Irish are found to be more informal, flexible and less interested in procedural issues. These opposing tendencies for clarity and systematic approach and being comfortable with blurred barriers between work and private life are also culturally determined.



The Dutch punctuality and structured approach to achieving future goals on one hand and the Irish concern about their cultural roots and the social aspects in business on the other can be explained with the Hofstede dimension of long-term orientation. "Long-term orientation stands for the fostering of virtues oriented towards future rewards, in particular perseverance and thrift. Its opposite pole, the short-term orientation, stands for the fostering of virtues related to the past and present, in particular, respect for tradition, preservation of 'face' and fulfilling social obligations" (Hofstede, 1984). In business research, this is referred to as pragmatic versus normative (Hofstede & Minkov, 2010).

While the difference in uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation as presented by the six dimensions model of national culture from Hofstede (1984) could be replicated, the findings on the dimension individualism versus collectivism are contradicting. According to the model, Ireland and the Netherlands are quite close on this dimension, but the findings from the present study suggest otherwise. Especially when it comes to conformity, an important factor in the difference between individualism and collectivism, there seems to be a clear distinction between the Netherlands and Ireland in their practice of business. Conformity is a form of social influence in which individuals change their attitudes and/or behavior to adhere to a group or social norm (Shiraev & Levy, 2010). This habit is clearly present in the Irish business culture, where the traditional companies are often perceived as a family: maintaining a strong group cohesion with the in-group, adherence to the group's norms is perceived as important. However, in the Dutch business culture



there is a higher preference for autonomy which is the opposite of conformity and represents a self-determination to independently follow personal norms (Deci, 2006). This is in line with the critical notes on the six dimensions model as over representing cultural homogeneity. The discussed dimension extends findings on individual levels to a national and overall community (Dorfman & Howell, 1988) without accounting for the importance of conformity in the specific context of business customs.

This critical side note emphasizes the importance of being aware of the risks of cultural stereotyping. As indicated by the Dutch participants in the interviews, some of the visualizations presented during the sessions were deemed too "black and white". Stereotyping needs to be avoided when working with different cultures. It limits knowledge about a culture as part of the information gets lost. People are likely to have an assimilation bias when working with another culture and we should be fully aware of it as discussed in the previous sections of this study.

Finally, the existing models provide general guidance about cultural differences, they do not give the in-depth knowledge necessary to understand the interactions between two specific cultures in a specific setting e.g., international business. Therefore, studies such as the present are valuable to gather key insights and practical guidelines to develop the competences required in a business setting.



CONCLUSION

The present research on the cultural differences between the Dutch and Irish business practices clearly demonstrates that while countries may look quite similar on most dimensions, an in-depth analysis reveals that even small differences can provide big challenges in business. A study of the underlying cross-cultural mechanisms that are critical in each relevant dimension helps to get a clearer overview of the main challenges.

The six dimensions model has its value in providing an initial, general overview of differences between cultures. Nevertheless, an in-depth analysis to understand the cultural differences within specific contexts is necessary.

This study provides a clear overview of cultural differences and applicable solutions for overcoming the challenges. It remains important not to overgeneralize the findings. Future research might also want to consider the local differences within cultures, to get an even better understanding of how cultures challenge us in business.

This study is not without limitations. We acknowledge that the set-up is centered around a specific group of 19 respondents, out of which the great majority have extensive experience in doing business with the other culture. They are highly accomplished professionals, personally steeped into our research subject and on top of that they have developed a vision on of their own. Consequently, the findings are derived from what they consider to be the reality. Replicating the same research with another group of practitioners with little experience of doing business with the other party or on another level of seniority in the professional career might very well result in different outcomes. In any case, the great advantage of working with this particular group is that they are also able to provide suggestions on how to overcome the challenges. We leave these observations as recommendations for further research.

FINAL REMARKS

As remarked earlier in this report, our respondents are quite advanced in this process of understanding what is necessary to deal with cultural challenges. They have already experienced a shift of consciousness from the initial stage of cultural constraint or ethnocentricity to cultural transcendence i.e., becoming ethno-relative. Not only do they deal with cultural differences in their business practice, but they also realize how those have influenced their ways of viewing the world. In fact, this type of mind shift is required to further develop cultural intelligence. Our respondents are clearly willing to embrace and explore the complexity of diversity and may sense that their own personal perspective can be modified again. Cultural transcending involves a commitment to living with uncertainty, it a beginning of a never completed intellectual and emotional journey through constant change and learning (Cortes and Wilkinson, 2009). A journey, we all seem to believe, is a worthwhile undertaking.



ADDENDUM 1 - LITERATURE

International business and the scientific foundations of cross-cultural competences

In order to understand how intercultural challenges emerge and how to overcome them, it is critical to gather an overview of the scientific insights about the subject. Here we rely on cross-cultural psychology which is an important discipline for efficient business in the globalized society. It is the scientific study of variation in human behavior, considering how behavior is influenced by the cultural context (Breugelmans, 2004). There are two main interests in this field of research: the first is to describe the diversity in human behavior and the second is to link this behavior to the cultural environment where it occurs. The latter is the most relevant for the challenge to define and overcome cultural differences. As a matter of fact, the emphasis of our study will be mostly on the link between human behavior and the cultural environment.

The very first observation is that human beings cannot survive living in total isolation from other people. During our lives, we join various groups, voluntarily or forcibly, deliberately or by chance (Shirae & Levy, 2010). Along with the cultural- and societal differences, people form groups. On the one hand there is the in-group to which we feel committed and belonging, on the other the out-group which is quite the opposite: this is how we define groups which we are not "part of". People rely on proximity to define the in-group. This is not necessarily only the spatial proximity, which refers to the idea that visual stimuli that are closer (Pomerantz & Portillo, 2011). In fact, social proximity plays a role in the perception of groups. It emphasizes the togetherness from an affective perspective instead of a geographic one. This implies that both social, cultural and geographic factors contribute to the shaping of our groups. We create our own roles, norms and sanctions which give the in-group a unique character and influence social interaction with both the in-group and the out-group.

In order to efficiently identify members of other groups and to categorize their roles, norms and sanctions people engage in cultural stereotyping (Lee, 2011). From the perspective of cognitive psychology this an advantageous cognitive process that saves effort on the usage of our brain. Hence, it could be identified as a heuristic: in terms of stereotyping this emphasizes that people use their oversimplified beliefs about social groups as a basis for responding to the members of those groups whenever they lack the desire or the ability to engage in more extensive thought about the individuals (Bodenhausen, 1993).

However, there is also a notable disadvantage of cultural stereotyping. By simplifying our beliefs about social groups, part of the information about these social groups is not processed or is processed incorrectly. This could result in the assimilation bias: the oversimplifying of our beliefs leads us to excessively rely on vivid but not necessarily appropriate information, to unwittingly elicit the very events that we expect to find (Lord et al., 1979). The effects of stereotyping are particularly interesting when comparing two cultures. For the purpose of our study the specific influence of this on business between the Dutch- and Irish culture have been taken into consideration.

ADDENDUM 2 - METHODOLOGY

The first activity has been to delineate the state-of-the-art knowledge about the cultural differences between the Netherlands and Ireland. In this phase, we have compared the two cultures along the dimensions typically adopted in intercultural studies.

As the purpose of our project is to go beyond the general understanding of the two cultures, we need relevant and original insights from the professionals working in Ireland and in the Netherlands. The next priority of the project has been, therefore, to ensure a comprehensive and rigorous data collection. For this purpose, the project partners engaged in a social media campaign to communicate the initiative to the business community. GrowEurBusiness, the associations INBA, Ireland Netherlands Business Association and DIBA, Dutch Irish Business Association have contributed to the data collection by reaching out to prospect participants in the reciprocal networks.

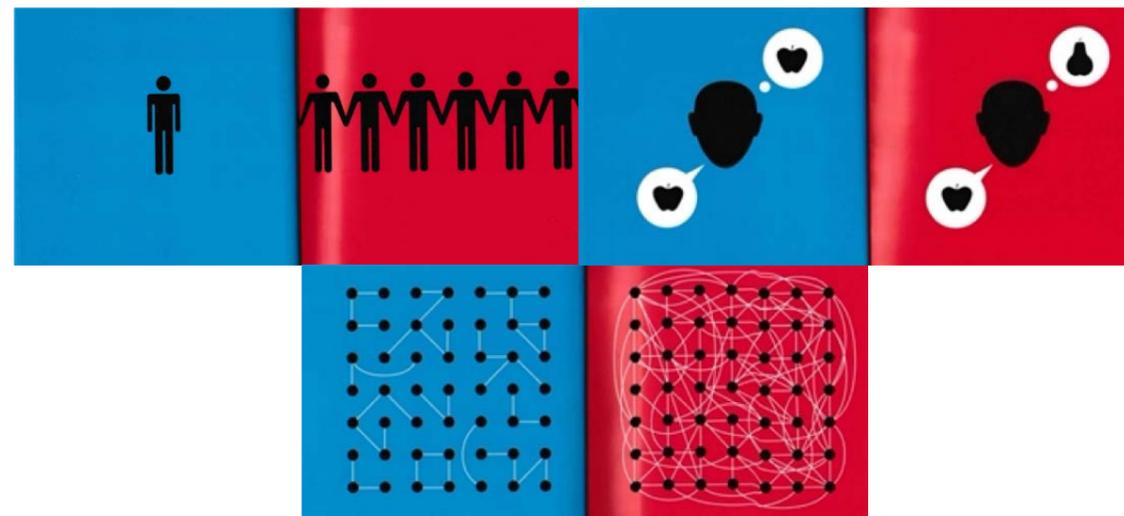
The project design was organized around several cycles which include three separate events, all of which took place online (MS Teams) due to COVID-19 regulations. Data collection included individual interviews, and two rounds of focus group interviews. Individual conversations took place in June 2021. Focus group interviews were held on the 22nd of June and the 6th of July 2021. Each focus group session started with a general introduction to all the participants. Afterwards, participants were divided into smaller break-out rooms with 3 or 4 other participants from the same nationality. Researchers of Avans University of Applied Sciences moderated the break-out rooms. Each session was concluded in the main call. Interviews with the Irish participants were held in English by proficient speakers of English whereas interviews with the Dutch participants were conducted in Dutch by a native speaker of Dutch. The fact of allowing participants to talk in their mother tongue is intended to allow unfiltered, non-biased communication.

The focus group interview sessions were moderated, recorded, transcribed and analyzed by Avans researchers. These consisted of the following:

First session: a roundtable discussion focusing on the collection of experiences across two cultures. The session started with a kick-off during which the project description was provided to the participants. Afterwards, Dutch and Irish participants were placed into 4 different break-out rooms (1 break-out room for the Dutch and 3 break-out rooms for the Irish). In the break-out rooms, each participant was asked to introduce themselves, and then tell a story about the challenges they had in a cross-cultural settings with the opposite partners. Afterwards, some of the common challenges that were notified in the stories were further elaborated.

Second session: Dutch and Irish participants discussing their perspectives on decision-making and communication in separate groups. The interaction was prompted by images proposed by moderators and selected the basis of the main issues identified in session one. Finally, participants were asked to identify two or three key words to suggest a solution to address these cultural challenges.

Three prompters (Liu, 2010) were used to initiate discussion:



Individual Interviews: each interviewee was asked about their background, involvement in business within a cross-cultural setting, challenges faced due to cultural differences and how to address these challenges.

Participants: the participants of the project are Dutch and Irish businesspeople who live in the Netherlands or Ireland and who work with each other in a business setting. Including individual interviews and two rounds of focus group interviews, a total of 19 participants took part in data collection. Among these 19 participants, 6 of them were Dutch. The table below presents the participants' characteristics.

	Irish	Dutch
Number of Participants	13	6
Country of accommodation	11 in the Netherlands 2 in Ireland	3 in the Netherlands 3 in Ireland

All participants have experience of working in an intercultural setting. The years of experience vary from 1 year to 43 years. All of them indicated a great enthusiasm to work in an intercultural setting during the interviews.

Data Collection and Treatment

The process of data collection began with intensive discussions among researchers with expertise in the field on possible theories and models applicable to current research. These discussions led to a refined planning of the interviews and focus groups, which resulted in a smooth process regarding hosting participants during the events, asking relevant questions in the interviews, moderating each focus group with ultimate care and collecting credible and reliable data.

Interviews rendered an extensive amount of data, which was handled immediately after the collection. A total of 530 minutes (8,8 hours) was invested in the data collection of three individual interviews, and two rounds of focus group interviews. Right after the data collection period,

the process of data analysis began. Each interview was transcribed verbatim. The process took approximately 37 hours to complete for a total of 173 pages.

The following section describes how the transcribed data were analyzed.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with the help of Atlas.ti 9. Atlas.ti is a powerful workbench for qualitative analyses of large bodies of textual data that is available to Avans researchers. Thematic Analysis fits well with our project due to the qualitative nature of our research. It gave the researchers the opportunity to identify, organize, describe interpret data in a systematic way and gain an overview of the common patterns in the data set. In addition, as there have not been specific studies between Irish and Dutch businesspeople in a similar setting, it was significant to contextualize our findings in a unique way rather than following predefined categories.

We followed the steps of thematic analysis as developed by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2013).

Step 1 - Familiarization: The initial step was to get familiar with the data through transcribing, reading, re-reading transcriptions and discussions within the research team. In addition, moderators involved in a specific focus group interview gave an overview of the data collection process and elaborated on the transcripts. Where necessary, they shared their personal notes with each other.

Step 2 – Coding: This step included giving a code to each meaningful unit in an interview. Each utterance was read carefully, and every single word that reveals data about cultural challenges and addressing them was identified. Three researchers collaborated on the coding of the interviews. A total of 366 codes were identified in the initial coding. In order to ensure the quality of the codes, several meetings were held to check the coding process and to ensure alignment.

Step 3 – Themes: The analysis proceeded by identifying patterns in the comments and in the reflections of the participants to the workshops. Eight themes (code groups in Atlas.ti) were identified in the analysis: Background, Netherlands, Cultural Challenges, Overcoming Challenges, Dutch Culture, Irish Culture, Intercultural Differences and Language. Codes were merged into themes depending on the identified patterns.

Step 4 – Reviewing Themes: The research team reviewed the themes to ensure accurate representations of the data. This was realized through an iterative process of independent validation among the researchers. This allowed us to confirm that the themes are comprehensive and properly reflect the data gathered.

Step 5 – Defining and Naming Themes: This step involved defining and selecting the themes that were most frequent and relevant to the project. Then, to ensure understandability, we placed themes under 2 categories: challenges and overcoming challenges

Step 6 – Producing the Report: As the final step of the analysis, we reported the process of conducting this research, collecting data and analyzing it as well as implications and conclusions of the project.

In order to ensure the anonymity of the participants, we labeled each participant with an identifier (Irish or Dutch) and a number (e.g., Irish 1, Dutch 2). Quotations from the Irish participants were documented as they have been produced during the interviews. Quotations uttered by the Dutch participants were translated into English.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Irem Bezcioglu Göktolga



Irem Bezcioglu is a researcher at the Lectorate International Business. Irem has a background in teaching. After doing her Master's in education at the Middle East Technical University in Turkey, she moved to the Netherlands to do her PhD in Culture Studies at Tilburg University. She specialized in sociolinguistics and in investigating the connection between immigrant languages, state policies and integration. She has published several academic articles on the topic of family language in multicultural societies. She also had the opportunity to collaborate internationally with institutions and scholars during her PhD, including via fellowships at Oranim College of Education in Israel and University of Jyväskylä in Finland. She is currently coaching International Business students at Avans in intercultural business communication and personal leadership. She is passionate about assisting students to develop their unique potential as well as helping them understand and embrace diversity in society. Irem is involved in projects on multiculturalism, diversity, intercultural awareness. She is currently investigating cultural barriers and how to overcome them in business in cross-cultural settings.

“Understanding intercultural encounters and contributing to creating a multicultural society where people from different backgrounds live in harmony has always been my passion. I am lucky to be able to work on my passion in the Knowledge Circle Knowing that I am surrounded by dedicated colleagues who care and share is the best part of being in this research group”.

Ingrid Devjak



Ingrid Devjak is a researcher at the Lectorate International Business. Adventurousness, an open mindset and curiosity are qualities that describe Ingrid and that have determined her life path. This led to living and studying in several countries, several months of world travel and literary studies. But also, an international MBA to a postgraduate course. In addition to her research work at International Business in the area of Intercultural Competences, she works as a lecturer in Business English for the Accountancy, Finance and Control study programmes at Avans. With great enthusiasm, she coaches students of the international minor Business, Leadership, Sustainability. In these roles, she uses the experience she gained at various multinationals. For instance, Ingrid worked at InterContinental Hotels Group in the sales, customer service and guest relations departments, she gave shape to Learning and Development at Epson Europe and was a senior trainer at KLM. Ingrid is involved in projects on 'intercultural competences' and 'cross-cultural awareness'.

“Drawn by its mission I joined the research centre with the wish to contribute to its goals and ultimately to a better world. Working with my new colleagues is more than just stimulating and challenging”.

Reinier Smeets



Reinier Smeets is a junior researcher for the Expertise Centre For Sustainable Business, where he enthusiastically participates in numerous projects such as The World Is Our Village and Intercultural Competences.

Reinier has a Bachelor's degree in Psychology & Society and a Master's in Economic Psychology in Tilburg. Due to his research he has accumulated a great deal of experience with projects related to marketing and consumer behaviour.

Reinier is a driven, ambitious researcher. He uses his skills in data analysis and his psychological background to discover in detail how consumers and employees are influenced in their decision making. He has a purposeful, innovative style of work and believes that science should have an added value.

Reinier has researched how mindfulness leads to responsible purchase behaviour, how greed influences purchase behaviour, how globalized marketing changes local cultures, how proximity leads to sustainability and how emotions affect financial decision making.

"I have a great interest to discover how Social Psychology and Cultural Psychology relate to International Business. There is an overlap between these topics, where still many innovations could be found. I also like to be part of the Knowledge Circle, to present the new findings of his projects and gather inspiration from the conversations with his colleagues."

Anna Sabidussi



Anna is passionate about linking education, business and research to respond and anticipate the fast-paced changes of a globalized, interconnected world.

Her approach is grounded in the creation of international knowledge-sharing platforms where students, researchers, companies and institutions collaborate and generate synergies from their complementary skills and experiences. This activity has been specifically applied in her roles at Wageningen University and Research Centrum, where she won a best lecturer award, at Eindhoven

University of Technology and at TiasNimbas Business School, Tilburg University.

She views leadership as a team endeavour that is a success enabler across business/industries. She and her teams have been active in a variety of sectors from services to high-tech, finance, agri-food, manufacturing, perfumery and beauty, luxury goods, biopharma, art and the creativity industry. She brings with her expertise from the multiple roles she has worked in over the years'; entrepreneur and founder of two international companies, strategy management consultant, competence-centre director, academic director among others.

Anna has a Masters in International Business from MIB and a Ph.D. in Management Science obtained on a joint NWO-sponsored project between Wageningen University and Research Centrum and Utrecht School of Economics.

Her research has been published in the Academy of Management Journal, Innovation & Industry, Computers in Human Behaviour, International Journal of Technology Transfer and Commercialization, Journal of Engineering and Technology Management, European Management Review, International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business among others.

On the 13th of October Anna Sabidussi presented her inaugural lecture
<https://vimeo.com/622514171>

ABOUT THE RESEARCH GROUP INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

Transition towards a brighter future

Internationally operating businesses and global value chains are at the core of complex networks that involve flows of goods, services, capital, technology, knowledge and investments. The rapid pace of evolution in our world is challenging businesses to re-think how they can gain a competitive advantage over the longer term. Reliance on old paradigms is not enough to succeed in the new global panorama.

The resilient businesses that are capable of navigating their way through uncertain and difficult times also seem to be those that are taking responsibility for our world and contemporary societal problems. The current global crisis has shown that the transition towards sustainable, restorative and regenerative approaches are associated with resilient businesses.

This triple transition process represents an opportunity to contribute to multiple stakeholders, societies and our planet.

Mission and Focus

The mission of the International Business team is to support the transition of internationally operating businesses and their ecosystems towards sustainable, restorative and regenerative practices. Through a process of co-creation, we are helping to build resilient businesses, improve society and protect the planet's resources.

Key Themes for Competence Development

The research agenda embraces the above mission. To achieve its goals, the research agenda supports the development of key competences in three main areas: business configuration, business dynamics, and business orchestration. Additionally, the research agenda promotes the use of key enablers such as digitisation and intercultural negotiations.

Business Configuration

Effective business configuration is critical to dealing with the interdependencies and local-global dichotomies that international businesses contend with in their operations.

- By considering these configurations in the context of their ecosystem, the research group promotes best practices for the transition towards sustainable, restorative and regenerative business practices. The research identifies practical guidelines to equip internationally operating businesses with the tools they need to achieve higher levels of resilience and to transition successfully to sustainability.

Business Dynamics

Internationally operating businesses are evolving continuously, improving their position in global value chains to benefit from their participation in networks. Added value can be achieved by transitioning towards sustainable, restorative and regenerative models.

- The research projects support the process of internationally operating businesses entering into new markets, creating new markets and/or upgrading their position in existing markets. In particular, collaboration and partnerships are leveraged to enable business opportunities that conciliate profit generation with positive impact on people and planet.

Business Orchestration

Businesses in the international arena deal with multiple stakeholders and often need to coordinate their activities at a wider scale. Interacting with multiple stakeholders in a triple and quadruple helix approach can be a source of complexity but also of value creation, supporting economic progress and societal well-being, and protecting the earth's resources.

- The research output provides assessment tools and analysis that serve as a compass to help internationally operating businesses get their bearings when the roles of multiple stakeholders are intertwined.

Key Enablers: Digitisation & Intercultural Negotiations

International operations take place in a context that is characterised by high levels of digitisation and in countries with a specific cultural identity.

- The research agenda considers digitisation and intercultural negotiations from an economics and business perspective and in relation to the main research lines. Connecting technology with cultural expertise enables organisations to improve their business practice by applying digital and intercultural ad-hoc tools in their international operations.

Approach

The team focuses on the needs of the business community and works on applied research initiatives in co-creation with companies. The adoption of multilevel and multidisciplinary techniques means that our approach helps to reveal the bigger picture and to connect the dots.

We collaborate with a global network of national and international experts and knowledge institutes around the world to ensure that our projects benefit from the most recent knowledge and insights.

Our experts organise workshops and events to share their insights, contribute to the public debate and shed new light on the principles of doing business. We also publish our findings in professional and academic journals.

Contact us

Would you like to discuss opportunities with us and explore solutions for your international business? Please do not hesitate to contact us at info.esb@avans.nl



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