

THE DOMINO EFFECT OF CROSS-CULTURAL MISCOMMUNICATION
IN MULTINATIONAL MANUFACTURING AND SERVICE ORGANISATIONS
IN THE NETHERLANDS

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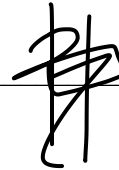
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A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of stylized, overlapping loops and vertical strokes, positioned above a horizontal line.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Alex and the children, Ephraimina and Daniel.

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I am most grateful to God for the grace and mercy granted to me throughout this process. To my supervisor, Dr. Mario Silic, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to you for guiding me throughout this process. You were always available to answer my questions and gave me valuable feedback that shaped my work, and I truly appreciate your mentorship. I would also like to thank SSBM Geneva for the opportunity granted to me to carry out this valuable research.

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ABSTRACT

THE DOMINO EFFECT OF CROSS-CULTURAL MISCOMMUNICATION IN MULTINATIONAL MANUFACTURING AND SERVICE ORGANISATIONS IN THE NETHERLANDS

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2025

Dissertation Chair: Vasilki Grougiou

A lot of studies have been devoted to cross-cultural communication because researchers claim that multinational teams face a lot of challenges due to their differences in culture. Some researchers also called for research to be conducted on individual situations that occurred in the working relationships of multinational people. Therefore, this research aimed to gain knowledge and insight into how cross-cultural miscommunication influenced multinational teams, whilst looking into how their differences affected their working relationships and the effect this had on the company. Besides, the literature demonstrated that cultural differences among employees led to misrepresentations, mistrust, anger and confusion, among others.

The qualitative research method was applied by the researcher, through semi-structured interviews, to gather the data for the research. Mediums for communicating and the interviews were through MS Teams, WhatsApp, and email. 20 research participants from multinational service and manufacturing organisations were interviewed, comprising 7

managers (2 were company directors), 1 supervisor, and 12 general employees.

Additionally, I used the Thematic analysis of Braun and Clark (2006) to analyse the data.

The findings of the research established that cultural values, traditions, communication styles, and corporate cultural practices were remote causes of cultural miscommunication in teams, leading to misrepresentations and collaboration challenges, which had organisational consequences. Also, verbal and non-verbal communication and power distance had some influence on the leader/subordinate miscommunication consequences.

This research contributes to ongoing debates and literature on the effects of cross-cultural miscommunication and closes the gap on the ripple effects of multinational cultural miscommunication issues.

Strategies that management could apply to reduce cross-cultural miscommunication include cross-cultural training, creating a common business language, feedback frameworks to tackle cross-cultural issues, and organising annual cultural team-building and awareness fun events.

The study's limitations included non-generalizability and time-consuming factors resulting from the use of a qualitative method.

It was concluded that cross-cultural miscommunication has a lot of consequences, which affect the working relations of employees, their collaboration in teams, and could eventually affect their output, leading to possible turnover, demotivated employees, and lower revenue for the company.

Based on the literature gaps and findings, it is recommended that future studies be conducted on how the combination of certain cultures in teams could affect their productivity and efficiency, and how the cultural background of teachers and lecturers impacts students' scores in exams and assignments.

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CHAPTER I

1.1 Introduction

In today's globalised environment and market, increasing interconnections and competition have led to many companies expanding into international markets, resulting in people from different cultures having to work closely together, but with many challenges (Ascalon, Schleicher and Born, 2008). The Netherlands, for that matter, is a country that accommodates a large number of multinational companies in many of its sectors, including the service and manufacturing sectors. Iamexpat.nl (n.d) asserts that the Netherlands, a multicultural country, has a huge number of jobs that the local workforce is not able to fill, therefore, most international companies situated in the country use English as a medium of their business language, where they keep looking for a diverse workforce. Consequently, such companies continuously employ people from many other nations across the globe. Subsequently, Hildebrand, 2018; Kimmel, n.d) argue that coming across diverse cultures in such organisations is inevitable, following the existence of international cooperation meetings and trainings. The intricacies involved in assimilating corporate cultures, matters concerning leadership, decision-making, organising, assigning tasks, planning and recruiting are all made up of the national characteristics or traits of the people concerned. This is thus an era in which cultural differences are of great importance to managers, leaders and executives in international and multinational organisations (cross-culture.com, 2015).

In a world that keeps growing smaller as people continue to interact at a higher frequency, there is a huge potential for miscommunication and misconception dependent on varying norms of interaction throughout societies (Boxer, 2002). The cultural backgrounds of the various workers come into play both consciously and unconsciously during business interactions, which sometimes leads to 'jaw-dropping experiences' that may hamper the working relationships between individuals and their colleagues. This is confirmed by Pavol and Mukthy (2022), who assert that co-worker diversity could result

in cultural barriers. This barrier could be so complicated that some people have little to no idea of how to handle it. Study Abroad (2017) further validates that cultural misunderstandings lead to confusion that might result in embarrassment or, most likely, being fired from a job. These miscommunications sometimes happen unintentionally, whereby one does something that is fine in one's own culture but tends to be offensive to others' cultures. The effect here is that it may be the root cause and may not even be identified. Karthik (2014) further argues that cross-cultural issues that are not detected at grassroots levels can create friction in individual and group productivity, affecting integrity at the workplace. These issues cannot just be ignored or swept under the carpet. Even though much research has been conducted on cross-cultural miscommunication in various sectors of the economy of many countries, it is necessary to do much more extensive research to find out how the whole situation plays out and its subsequent effect on the parties involved. Another prevailing current situation bringing about cross-cultural miscommunication is the increasing manner in which organisations develop and aim at a higher level of internationalisation and digital transformations. Internationalisation, for instance, is a strategy used by companies where they sell their goods and services beyond their domestic markets, thereby venturing into international markets. This is validated by Meyer (2015), who asserts that corporate culture clashes with local culture due to internationalisation. Since both parties involved in the business transaction are from different cultures, one partner's way of doing business could be contrary to the culture of the other party. Concerning internationalisation, the Netherlands has a long history with it, and therefore, it is home to many multinational companies, such as AKZO, Philips, Unilever, Robobank, and numerous others (Hogenbirk et al, 2009).

Van het Kaar (2009) states that the Netherlands had a pretty good beginning as a home country for Multinational companies (MNCs), and has a long history of being a huge open economy. This is confirmed by Hofstede and Soeters (2002), who claim that the Cosmopolitan nature of the Dutch may account for their long trading history. Rintoul (2019) confirmed that as of 2022, 31,500 multinational companies were already established in the Netherlands, and these companies accounted for 31% of the country's

GDP. Furthermore, Eures.europa (2025), an official website of the European Employment Services, reported that as of 2023, 4.7% of the workforce in the Netherlands comprised people from EU Member States, whilst 10.6% were from third countries.

Furthermore, Berkenbos et al (2023) stipulate that figures show that Dutch and foreign-owned multinational companies employed 2.3 million multinationals in 2021, accounting for 35% of the total number of employees in the business economy of the Netherlands. Therefore, because the Netherlands had 17.9 million inhabitants by January 2024, Eures.europa (2025), all of the figures mentioned previously, confirm the openness of the Netherlands to foreign nationals and companies and their relevant contribution to their economy, highlighting the significant role that Multinational companies play in the country.

On the other hand, it is worth noting that 84.7% of the workforce comes from the Netherlands (Eures.europa, 2025). These figures, however, do not mean that the 87% mentioned are all native Dutch nationals. The reason is that due to post-war and post-colonial restructuring, the recruitment of unskilled guest workers, limitations on immigration, and the influx of a huge number of refugees led to many other ethnic groups becoming part of the Dutch population (Hartog and Zorlu, 2018; Ersanilli, 2014). Consequently, Hartog and Zorlu (2018) claim that in the 2000s, the Netherlands had Surinamese, Aruban, Antillians, Turks and Moroccans who were either born abroad or had in any case a parent who was born abroad. This suggests that the labour force in the Netherlands comprises people born abroad or brought up by parents who had grown up in cultures other than the Netherlands.

Despite the open business culture in the Netherlands, Hofstede and Soeters (2002) argue that the Dutch are known to tend to feel morally superior to other cultures. This suggests that this attitude of the Dutch could bring about misunderstandings in multinational working environments because, as Boaz (1930) suggests, the values and norms of other cultural backgrounds influence their behaviour and activities, and practices, and so the differences in perception and behaviour may not be accepted or tolerated by the Dutch.

The preceding argument is supported by Scholar (2023)'s assertion that the rich culture and population diversity in the Netherlands bring with them an exceptional challenge in cross-cultural communication. Consequently, this research seeks to take a deeper look into the complexities involved in cross-cultural miscommunications in multinational teams in manufacturing and service companies in the Netherlands.

1.2 Research Problem

Based on the reasonable interest of an advantageous geographical location, Hogenbirk, Hagedoorn, and Kranenburg (2009) claim that the Dutch government has always aimed to sustain and enhance the investment climate in the Netherlands. The ultimate goal in providing such grounds was to create a promising economic environment for multinational companies to remain in the Netherlands (Hagedoorn and Kranenburg, 2009). This suggests that the Dutch have opened up to multinationals for several decades, indicating their tolerance of foreign companies, which Krjukova, Schalk and Soeters (2009) claim, increased the recruitment of foreign workers, and catering for shortages of labour supply.

Besides, Adam (2014) affirms the Dutch tolerance history, indicating that the Netherlands has had an unmatched history of cultural tolerance since the 17th century, which was highly necessary for building its trading empire at the time. This notion was authenticated by Hofstede and Soeters' (2002) statement that the Dutch are possibly more cosmopolitan, which demonstrates their global trading history. On the other hand, Velthuis, Verkuyten, and Smeekes (2021) emphasised that the majority of Dutch society indicates and stresses coexistence tolerance. They noted that many Dutch people respect other cultures as fellow citizens, even though in some situations, tolerance to avoid conflicts was the best option to have been taken.

In contrast to the many views of the Netherlands being highly viewed as a culturally tolerant country, many researchers argue that cultural diversity is a challenge in the country (Asampong, 2021; Haartog and Zorlu, 2018; Maussen and Bogers, 2010; Elgar,

2010; Tatli et al., 2012; Subeliani and Tsogas, 2005). To buttress some of the prenotation of the Dutch cultural tolerance versus the actual experiences of multinationals, Adam(20014) stated: ‘Before I moved to the Netherlands, I shared the perception of the Netherlands from a German point of view: a country admirable for its tolerance of immigrants, openness towards drugs, and emancipation. However, since I live in the Netherlands, being in contact with Dutch people and learning more about the Dutch society, history, and way of living, that perception has shifted. I have started to get the impression that Dutch society is not as tolerant as it is said to be.’

It is important to note that cross-cultural differences have advantages like enriched creativity and innovation, a wider variety of skills, insights and perspectives, which lead to better decision making (Mihalicz, 2024). This could also be said to apply to multinational companies in the Netherlands; however, despite having advantages, cultural differences, differences in communication styles, and approaches to work are noteworthy challenges for teams in the Netherlands (de Waal et al., 2012; Subeliani and Tsogas, 2005). Therefore, the Dutch government was forced to pass diversity legislation for companies (Tatli et al., 2012).

Furthermore, Elgar (2010) corroborated that workplace diversity with reference to ethnic background is a hot matter in the Dutch public, where the biggest matter of urgency is with the level of freedom that multinationals should or should not have at their workplaces, based on their cultural or religious backgrounds. This connotes that the Dutch are somewhat agitated at how much cultural diversity should be tolerated in the workplace. This could be a source of misunderstanding because issues like religious events, holidays, or practices like praying during the day could be a source of conflict at the workplace. In validation of Elgar's (2010) claim, Maussen and Bogers (2010) stated the following in an international political science conference in Budapest: ‘What the hell happened to the Netherlands. Public culture and minority integration in the country of (in) tolerance?’ Here, they were trying to highlight the paradoxical perception of cultural diversity tolerance in the Netherlands.

Arguably, culture plays a vital role in multinational organisations however, it creates many problems that may have a significant impact on employees of organisations. This argument is confirmed by Busse (2014), who indicates that intercultural engagements could pose specific challenges. Therefore, no matter how culturally aware or sensitive some employees may be, working with people from different cultural or societal backgrounds could present cross-cultural miscommunication issues.

Another important cross-cultural communication challenge that the Netherlands faces is based on the fact that its labour market comprises a large chunk of three major groups, which dates from its history. Haartog and Zorlu (2018) established that these were migrants from former Dutch colonies, guest workers, as well as refugees, whose interaction with the Dutch involved strong cultural differences. They further noted that even though some of these groups of migrants already speak Dutch before coming over to the Netherlands, and are familiar with the Dutch society, highly remarkable differences could still be seen between them and the Dutch. One reason why the differences happen is because even though they could speak the Dutch language, their presumptions of proper communication and interaction attitudes were shaped by their ethnic backgrounds in which they were raised (Haetel, Lloyd and Singhal 2010). Hence, disorientation owing to misinterpretation, false impression, misunderstanding, and misjudging from different viewpoints (Llama.com, 2022; Martin, 2014; Aririguzoh, n.d.). This means that when multinational workers from different backgrounds misinterpret or misjudge the actions of their colleagues, they leave them confused. Cross-cultural miscommunication could therefore be said to be the most significant problem in companies, primarily due to variances in the cultures.

In conclusion, all the aforementioned arguments connote that working with the Dutch is not as rosy as is known worldwide. The gaps in the literature of this study show that there is little to no research on the domino effect of cross-cultural miscommunication in multinational companies in the Netherlands. Hence, there is an urgent need to explore practical workplace cross-cultural miscommunication, to ascertain the severity of the

situation in multi-national manufacturing and service companies, if so. This study is therefore hugely important because it will unravel many practical situations in multinational companies, show their practical implications, and offer practical strategies for managers and employees to help curb the nuances in cross-cultural team communications.

1.3 Research aims

This research aims to gain knowledge and insight into the extent to which cross-cultural miscommunication affects cross-cultural teams in multinational manufacturing and service organisations in the Netherlands. The researcher also wanted to attain insights into how the working relations of employees and teams were impacted by their disagreements that resulted from their cultural differences, and if that, in turn, affected the company in any way.

The basis of the knowledge and insight that the study seeks to gain supports Adler and Aycan's (2018) argument that cross-cultural dynamics are widespread in multinational organisations and among persons who work with other cultures regularly. Therefore, the study seeks to determine if the widespread cross-cultural miscommunication has a domino effect on the teams' working relations and subsequently the organisation, if applicable. Also, based on the findings, the study aims to offer practical strategies that management of multinational companies could employ to reduce cross-cultural miscommunication and its impact.

Notably, knowledge gained from the study equips employees and managers alike with intercultural know-how on interpreting cultural attitudes, beliefs and values to communicate effectively (Ramthun and Matkin, 2012; Lustig and Koester, 1998). Besides, the insights from the study offer managers practical instances and admonitions to contemplate or examine when managing international employees, as Riskó and Csapó (2024) affirm.

1.4 Research objectives

Based on the aim of the research, the following objectives outline the basis on which the outcome of the research was organised:

- To identify the causes and effects of cross-cultural miscommunication in multinational manufacturing and service companies.
- To assess the role of verbal and non-verbal communication in cross-cultural communication.
- To determine the role of hierarchy in the outcome of cross-cultural miscommunication issues.
- To identify strategies that management could apply to reduce cross-cultural miscommunication conflicts and disagreements.

1.5 Purpose of Research

Overall, the primary purpose of this research is to contribute to knowledge and offer insight and understanding into the long-term ripple effect of cross-cultural miscommunication and its challenges to individuals and teams. The domino effect of cross-cultural miscommunications has not been widely researched. Therefore, this research aimed to gain knowledge and insight into how cross-cultural miscommunication affects cross-cultural teams in multinational manufacturing and service organisations in the Netherlands. The study sought to determine if cross-cultural miscommunication had a domino effect on teams, contributing to academic argumentation and business reasoning. Critical analysis of various theories relating to cross-cultural communication was carried out, and the most appropriate ones were adapted for the study. Moreover, the research established whether hierarchy led to more complex results of cross-cultural miscommunication.

Organisations are generally dependent on communication, which is depicted as uttered, non-verbal, or written correspondence of ideas and information. Mirabella and Ariana (2022) argue that the whole organisation becomes impaired when communication is

obstructed or retarded. Still, it is dynamic and successful when communication is comprehensive, well-aimed, and appropriate, and allows the organisation to perform. When communication between individuals goes the wrong way, each individual may take or see the situation differently, often depending on their background. Examining whether the miscommunication affected their teamwork and the level of impact it had was also essential for this study. It was therefore important to critically examine the breakdown in communication to see how the whole process played out and what measures could be taken to address the issues, hence the purpose of this research.

1.6 Significance and Contributions of the Research

Culture plays a significant role in today's globalised world which calls for the need to manage cross-cultural miscommunication effectively. Numerous studies have looked into the issues and challenges in research relating to cross-cultural miscommunication, for example (Scholar, 2023; Stahl and Maznevski, 2021; Green, 2017; Zhang, 2002; Krouglov, n.d).

Importantly, Krouglov (n.d) holds that the globalisation of cultures presents new dilemmas for researchers because the varied notions, procedures and perceptions are normally restricted or adjusted in accordance with the traditions of a specific country, society or particular organisation. This means that the cultural ideas, perceptions or processes undertaken in research so far are usually amended to suit the traditions, norms and values of specific countries or societies. This argument is validated by Asampong (2021), who indicates that the various concepts, models and theories proposed by researchers attempt to devote their efforts to national or global overviews, which lack individual perceptions in multicultural teams.

Based on the above arguments, this study is crucial because it does not conform to any particular tradition, general global views or a particular national culture. Rather, it collates and brings to light several individually distinct perceptions of traditions and

cultures, showing the differences and their implications for the work teams or organisations.

Also, it is essential to note that the findings from the data gathered in this study contribute to the existing body of knowledge and help close the gap in information on the domino effects of the misunderstandings encountered in multinational working relations. Hence, the study contributes to knowledge addition to debates and scientific literature, outlining the proof that if cross-cultural miscommunication is not addressed in due time, it may cause complex or unforeseen challenges for multinational organisations.

Moreover, the study's findings show the need for employees and managers of multinational teams to gain knowledge and awareness in cross-cultural education, to help reduce their consequent effects (Krajewski, 2011; Kirpalani and Luostarinen, 1999).

Additionally, Many researchers have worked on cross-cultural miscommunication, but almost nothing has been done about its domino effect on the employees, managers, teams and possibly the company. Hence, the findings and recommendations of the study contribute to enriching company employees, managers, directors, and executives' cultural awareness and sensitivities, to enable them to identify cross-cultural miscommunication situations and address them accordingly.

Besides, the findings and recommendations in this research serve as a guide for managers and employees of multinational companies in identifying and tackling cross-cultural miscommunications early enough to take the necessary steps to avoid the ripple effects identified in the research. This is because the study sought to gain insight into the consequential effect of cross-cultural miscommunication on individual employees, their working relationships in teams and with superiors. Thus, the strategies provided could add to business practices that could become a policy framework for addressing cross-cultural miscommunication issues in multinational companies.

Consequently, this research will offer insight and understanding into the short or long-term domino or ripple effects of cross-cultural miscommunication and the challenges it poses to individuals, teams, and the organisation as a whole.

1.7 Research Purpose and Questions

This research aims to gain knowledge and insight into how cross-cultural miscommunication affects cross-cultural teams in multinational manufacturing and service organisations in the Netherlands.

The central research question is *'What is the Domino Effect of Cross-Cultural Miscommunication on Employees in Multinational Services and Manufacturing Companies in the Netherlands?'* Based on the research's aims and objectives, the following sub-questions guide the study.:

- What are the causes of cross-cultural miscommunication in multinational manufacturing and service organisations in the Netherlands?
- What are the effects of cross-cultural miscommunication in multinational manufacturing and service organisations in the Netherlands?
- What roles do verbal and non-verbal communication play in the cross-cultural miscommunication process in the Netherlands?
- How does hierarchy influence the outcome of cross-cultural miscommunication issues in the services and manufacturing companies in the Netherlands?
- What steps could management apply to address cross-cultural miscommunication in multinational manufacturing and service organisations in the Netherlands?

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

This section aims to provide knowledge, theories, models and insights into cultural differences and their consequent impact on cross-cultural communication between individual employees and teams in multinational companies.

The key themes analysed in this section are: Understanding culture, Trompenaars' cultural dimensions, Hall's cultural dimensions, Lewis' model of cross-cultural communication, the concept of cross-cultural communication versus miscommunication, and finally, cross-cultural verbal and non-verbal communication.

Notably, culture plays a vital role in modern-day multinational companies. The fundamental reason is that these organisations' dealings involve many nations, making culture one of the most potent factors causing problems and downfalls for them (Miroshnik, 2002). The differences in culture often show up during communication in teams, bearing in mind that since people brought up in the same cultural setting are taught distinct values and societal norms from childhood onwards, these values come to be ingrained in their psyche like a cultural footprint (Global Leadership Magazine, n.d). Therefore, teams cooperating on projects, planning, etc., encounter huge miscommunication problems that may affect their ability to work together. Similarly, situations come up, for instance, in multinational companies, where through the grapevine or the rumour mill, cross-cultural miscommunications have led to some colleagues being wrongly labelled, so others do not cooperate with such people. Therefore, this research highlights many such problems and addresses the pertinent challenges.

This study examines some cross-cultural communication models to identify how they enhance the study while facilitating the researcher's understanding of the work of such scholars and debates, and how various identified concepts were applied to business

settings. Therefore, the following sections portray the analysis of the chosen concepts, models and theories for this research.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Culture plays a vital role in modern-day multinational companies. The fundamental reason is that these organisations' dealings involve many nations, making culture one of the most potent factors causing problems and downfalls for them (Miroshnik, 2002). The differences in culture often show up during communication in teams, bearing in mind that since people brought up in the same cultural setting are taught distinct values and societal norms from childhood onwards, these values come to be ingrained in their psyche like a cultural footprint (Global Leadership Magazine, n.d). Therefore, teams cooperating on projects, planning, etc., encounter huge miscommunication problems that may affect their ability to work together. Similarly, situations come up, for instance, in multinational companies, where through the grapevine or the rumour mill, cross-cultural miscommunications have led to some colleagues being wrongly labelled, so others do not cooperate with such people. Therefore, this research highlights many such problems and addresses the pertinent challenges.

2.3 Understanding Culture

This research dwells mainly on cross-cultural miscommunication, so the researcher deems it essential to discuss what culture is. It therefore delves briefly into the various meanings and perceptions of culture.

The proliferation of the meaning and definition of culture by numerous scholars and researchers spanning over many years has made defining culture rather complex. Over many centuries, many scholars have attempted to define culture and its meaning or origin. For instance, Melville (n.d) cites Edward Tyler's book 'Primitive Culture', which was published in 1870, where he stated that "Culture or civilisation, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of

society”. However, many other researchers have disputed their claims over the years. Spencer Oatey (2012), for one, argues that cultural traits, as claimed by Hofstede (1994), were linked to heredity because scholars and philosophers in bygone times were unable to clarify the stunning stability of the distinction in the patterns of culture among groups of people. This, according to him, happened because philosophers and researchers misconstrued the impact of how past generations could be learned from and, in turn, teach what they have learned to future generations. Baumeister (2010) further confirms that Culture stems from our genes. He, however, states that cultural differences may not be found in our genes. This makes the topic of culture and the attempt to understand it hugely complex. It can, therefore, be seen that research on cross-cultural miscommunication would have been more complex using the old theories and research results because it would have been difficult to determine if situations of cross-cultural miscommunication resulted from inner traits or just the way of life in which people grew up. Therefore, understanding cross-cultural miscommunication issues and finding solutions would have been too complex, leading to further stereotypes and prejudices. Matsumoto (1996) confirms that failure to admit individual differences in cultural setups and opinions in the past has facilitated the establishment and continuance of stereotypes. Furthermore, Hofstede argues that the role of heredity has been exaggerated in the pseudo-theories of race. Brigg and Muller (2009) further affirm that this recent proliferation has been made more complex by the muddle of the term. This confirms that the term has become much more complicated since many have attempted to define culture. However, despite these complexities, many definitions and meanings of culture have been given. This study further looks into some of the later definitions of culture and determines its relation to cross-cultural miscommunication.

Hofstede (1994) asserts that culture is learned through one’s social surroundings rather than inherited through genes. This connotes that the environment in which one lives or grows up shapes the way people interpret the behaviour or attitudes of others, and not their personality or inherited traits. Therefore, it directly impacts their communication

with others from different ethnic backgrounds or countries. These differences lead to cross-cultural miscommunication.

Furthermore, culture is the collective development of the mind that differentiates members of one group of people from the other (Hofstede, 2004). It can be seen as a collective happening because it is somewhat shared with people who lived or used to live in the same social environment (Hofstede, Minkov, 2010). This implies that the minds of group members are jointly developed over time through learning, defining what they value and how they behave as a result of living in the same vicinity or socio-cultural setting. Hofstede and Minkov (2010) further stipulate that since culture is derived from one's social environment, it is not inherited from one's genes but learned. This connotes that culture should be differentiated from human nature on the one hand and an individual's personality on the other hand.

Culture is explained by Graffius (2020) as a set of collective perspectives, values, and customs that distinguish a group or an organisation, implying that each group has shared beliefs and ways of life that are unique to others. Furthermore, culture is established on divergent practices of problem-solving procedures cultivated by a social group previously and mutually held by the group members (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961; Maznevski et al., 2002). It could, therefore, be said that the practices set down in the past are carried on from the past into the future and generally adhered to by members of the group.

Contrary to many scholars, Matsumoto (1996) argues that though culture is based on a set of behaviours, values, etc., by a group of people carried on and communicated through generations, this is different for each individual. It could, therefore, be seen that individuals could interpret shared values in their own way. This is confirmed by Spencer-Oatey (2008), who stipulates that the shared values, orientations to life, behavioural conventions, and so on influence but do not ascertain the way each member of the group behaves or interprets the meaning of other people's behaviour.

Having critically looked at what culture is, it is important to note that culture cannot be separated from communication, in which case, cross-cultural miscommunication comes into play when the differences in culture cause conflicts among individuals and teams. Culture is, therefore, related to communication because culture is the core of cross-cultural miscommunication; as Gudykunst and Lee (2003) confirmed, 'Culture is communication, and communication is culture' (Hall, 1959). Culture plays a crucial role in cross-cultural communication due to its dominant impact on how people think and behave, apart from their individual differences. As a result, the main issue in communication across cultures is how people react to the behaviour of people from other cultural backgrounds during cultural conflicts (Sun and Liu, 2012). This is what leads to many conflicts and problems in organisations.

Additionally, culture is the central concept in understanding differences in behaviour that directly result from differences in background. Whether people's backgrounds matter or not, a little or a lot depends on the extent to which and how the differences in background affect the behaviour of those involved (Guirdham, 1990).

Conclusively, culture plays a significant role in communication in multinational companies, especially in modern times, where people collaborate in virtual and onsite teams.

The following figure shows how culture affects the behaviour of people.

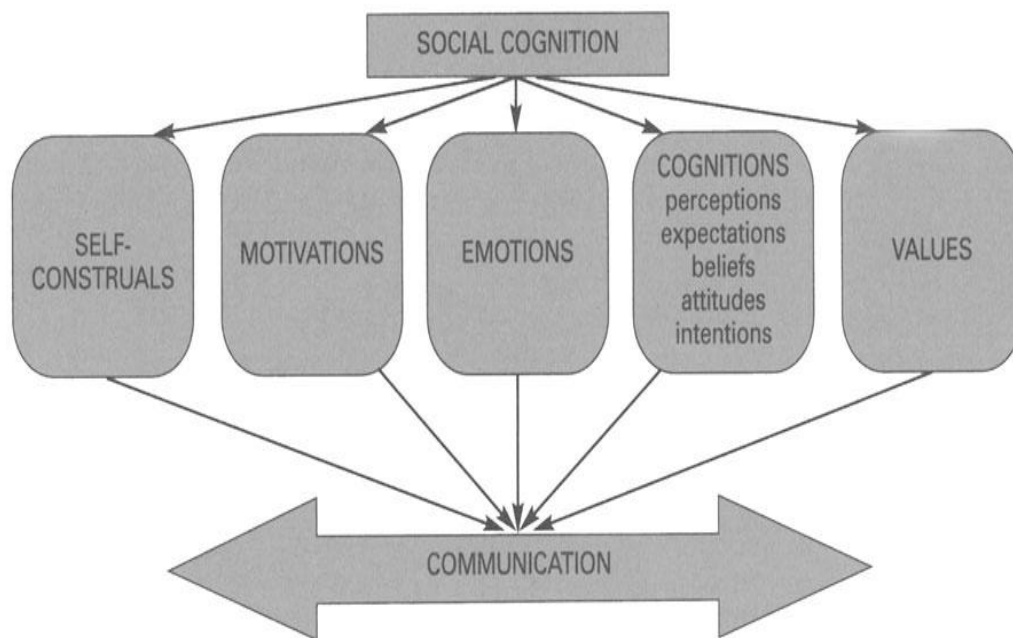


Figure 2.1 Behavioural constructs and communication behaviours

Figure 2.1 demonstrates Guirdham's (1999) argument that one can enhance their understanding of how people communicate when one learns more about what influences their behaviour. The various representations in the figure are explained below.

Self-construal from the figure indicates how persons see and define themselves. These could be inspired by cultural standards, which influence how they interact and communicate with other people. Motivations, on the other hand, are the impetus that drive individuals' actions and communication styles. Various cultures give priority to different motivations, for instance, individual achievement as opposed to group harmony.

Furthermore, cultural differences influence how people express their emotions and how they are interpreted. For instance, a person from Western Europe or America may weep when overwhelmed with joy, but some people from parts of Africa, like Ghana or Nigeria, may leap or scream. Some Nigerians even roll on the floor many times to express their emotions. All these may be frustrating to people who are not aware of such expressions of emotions.

Also, from the figure, Cognitions refer to attitudes, expectations, beliefs, and notions that mould how individuals perceive and respond to communication.

Fundamental cultural values also impact individuals' communication styles and attitudes. For instance, while some cultures see direct communication as the best, others are more inclined towards indirect communication and politeness.

In conclusion, one of these constructs interconnects to form or outline communication behaviours, the result of which is either effective communication potential or cross-cultural miscommunications, depending on the cultural context.

2.4 Trompenaars' Cultural Dimensions

Vasif Aliyev (2021) claims that Fons Trompenaars conducted a survey in which he took 8,841 managers across 43 countries, which he analysed and eventually came out with seven related dimensions. Additionally, Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner surveyed in 1993 (Global Leadership Magazine, n.d), where they studied the preferences and values of 46,000 managers spanning 40 countries. They discovered that people across cultures differ in specific and usually predictable ways. This connotes that people from different cultures typically communicate in a way that can be concluded or identified by where they came from or grew up. These researchers made their conclusions and dimensional groupings after studying those specific cultures and their behaviour. Dahl (n.d) affirms that Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner derived their value dimensions from inquiring about preferred states or behaviours. This means that they dwelt specifically on certain chosen countries and behaviours. The study looks at some of Trompenaars' dimensions directly related to organisational cross-cultural communication.

Universalism versus particularism, for instance, defines how people judge colleagues' behaviour (Kimmel, n.d). The difference between these two cultures is that universalistic cultures are more centred on rules and more specific in defining standards for human resources practices. On the other hand, particularists focus more on relationships, and local variations could be created for human resources policies to adjust to different

requirements. In such situations, serious cross-cultural miscommunication issues could arise, whereby having both cultures in a team would mean that making decisions on specific policies could be prolonged. Problems arise because, as Trompenaars (1996) puts it, universalists presume that the standards they value are the 'right' ones, so they attempt to change others' attitudes to match theirs. With this notion, particularists may misinterpret universalist attempts and not take kindly to their behaviour.

Another dimension related to cross-cultural communication is neutral vs. affective cultures. Trompenaars argues that people from neutral cultures delight in calm and composed demeanours and control their feelings, which could blow up under stressful situations. However, people from high-affective cultures use different gestures, such as smiling and body language, to express their feelings openly. They also approve of heated, important, and high-spirited expressions. This sharp contrast in cultures may lead to cross-cultural miscommunication, where those from neutral cultures may misconstrue the behaviour of people from emotional cultures as not severe or even rude in some cases. Also, Trompenaars (1996) states that when working together, there is a relational problem between neutral and affective cultures where the neutral person is quickly accused of being ice-cold with no heart, and the affective is viewed as inconsistent and uncontrollable. Their manner of communication has been wrongly translated, which can pose problems to team collaborations, etc. Kimmel (n.d) suggests avoiding eloquent, warm, or energetic behaviours when working with people from neutral cultures to minimise or avoid conflicts resulting from cross-cultural miscommunication between affective and neutral cultures. Figure 2.1 depicts the characteristics of Trompenaars' cultural dimensions and how the beliefs and values oppose each other.

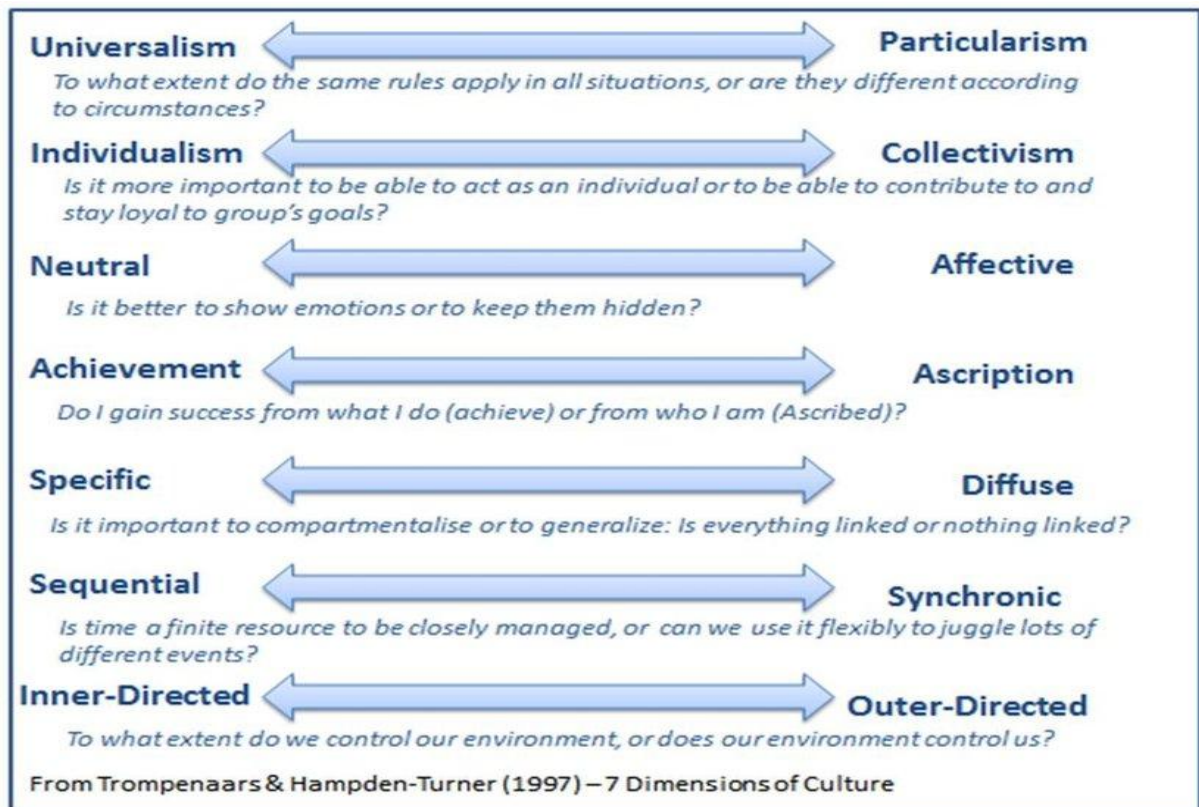


Figure 2.2 Trompenaars Cultural Dimensions (Source: Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997)

2.5 Hall's Cultural Dimensions

How people communicate verbally and nonverbally is known as their communication style. This style combines language and nonverbal cues known as the meta-message, which determines how the recipients of the message, the listeners, interpret the verbal messages (Liu, 2016). Edward Hall was a major proponent of communication styles.

Grounded on knowledge gained from his graduate studies in anthropology at Columbia University and the experience attained from working as an applied anthropologist in the foreign service, Edward T. Hall published two books, “The Silent Language” (1959) and “The Hidden Dimension” (1969) (Rogers et al. 2002). Hall identified two dimensions of

culture in these books, namely high- and low-context cultures, which deal with how information is communicated.

According to Hall (1998), “high context communication or message is one in which most of the information is already in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message”. Such cultures focus on the physical or larger context when assessing an event or action (Liu, 2016). The meaning is that people from high-context cultures do not say precisely what they mean; instead, what is said is derived from the context. Low-context communication is the opposite: the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code”. Their communication style revolves around analytical thinking and is centred on particular, definite objects or situations that could be unconnected or unrelated to the environment in which they are. They, therefore, say exactly and directly what they mean to say. Such a context of communication style is predominant in individualistic cultures (Liu, 2016)

Generally, high-context cultures communicate through tone, body language and the general context of the message, whereas low-context cultures communicate more precisely and straightforwardly (countrynavigator.com). A Norwegian study conducted in 2013 by Söderholm identified that between 1990 and 2006, about two hundred and twenty-four articles affiliated with context and culture had been published in business and technical communication journals, patently proving Hall’s model of High-Low Context cultures as one of the most influential theoretical frameworks for interpreting intercultural communication patterns (Cardon, 2008). This connotes that Hall’s High-Low Context cultures can be used to analyse how people across various nationalities work together, especially in multinational organisations.

Due to the differences in communication styles, a clash of the two cultures could result in potential miscommunication, leading to conflicts and uncompleted business in cross-cultural teams (Countrynavigator.com, 2022). To buttress this point, Hall (1976) argues that people of European heritage (low-context culture) make mistakes in communication because they are of the view that what they think is real because their world is one of

words, and so anything apart from words are seen to be of less importance in the communication process. Hall sees this as a mistake because words do not always carry every connotation in a message, since some fundamental nuances or uncertainties provide the entirety of a 'spoken message'. Alomari (n.d) confirms that Western cultures view the direct communication style as a sincere and reasonable attitude to professional and personal engagements. This could pose severe cross-cultural miscommunication problems in multinational companies. For instance, Countrynavigator.com (2022) maintains that the communication style among cultures determines how vital business agreements, decisions, and negotiations are made and handled. To make preparations for meetings or assignments, colleagues from low-context cultures prefer to have detailed information, specific agendas, and meeting reports. On the other hand, those from high-context cultures would prefer face-to-face meetings because they appreciate close contact, establishing bonds, and relationship-building, which are essential for setting up rapport or cooperation. Moreover, people from high-context cultures understand messages through references to realistic or personal stories, whereas those from low-context cultures believe in detailed information data in journals, presentations, etc. Furthermore, the context's degree ascertains how the communication goes, forming the foundation on which consequent behaviour is based (Kittler et al., 2011). This means that the context of any communication could determine how the communication progresses. Cross-cultural miscommunication could thus result from the context and lead to subsequent problems. This means that people react depending on how they understand what is being communicated. Therefore, one's cultural background is a huge determinant of how one understands and responds to people from other cultures. This may lead to difficulties when people from low and high cultures work in a team on a project or an assignment. In the 1990s, Richard Lewis, who had visited 135 countries and worked in more than 20 of them, concluded in his book, *When Cultures Collide* (1996), that human beings can be split into 3 distinct classifications: linear-active, Multi-active and Reactive. These classifications are mainly based on the behaviour of various individuals. Remarkably, people from various cultural backgrounds tend to behave in certain ways, as

seen in Gollin (2014) posits that many cross-cultural experts have proposed a lot of dimensions in an attempt to explain the various cultural dimensions which impact communication. Notable among these are Trompenaars, Hofstede and Hall's cultural dimensions. Gollin (2014), however, argues that the Lewis model developed in the 1990s is the most recent to gain international recognition.

2.6 The Lewis Model of cross-cultural communication

The Lewis model of cross-cultural communication was founded in the 1990s by Richard Lewis, a world-renowned linguist and cross-cultural expert. Skarbek (2021) claims that the model was published in Lewis's bestseller, *When Cultures Collide: Leading Across Cultures* (1996). Importantly, the Lewis model is embedded in Hall's theory of monochronic (dealing with single things at a time) and polychronic (working on many things at a time) cultures. Lewis dived deeper into Hall's concept and added a new concept called the reactive concept, after being immersed in the Japanese culture for several years (crossculture.com).

Lewis argued that cross-culturalists, in the past, confused people looking for clarity and conciseness in summarising the number of dimensions. He claimed that those cross-culturalists mainly concentrated on north versus south and mono versus polychronic polarities to the neglect of the influential Asian perspective, which comprises half of humanity (crossculture.com, 2015). This connotes that the models of Hall, Trompenaars and others failed to produce a broader global perspective of cross-cultures. Therefore, this model seeks to dive deeper into individuals' behaviour, which could cause conflict and, for that matter, cross-cultural miscommunication.

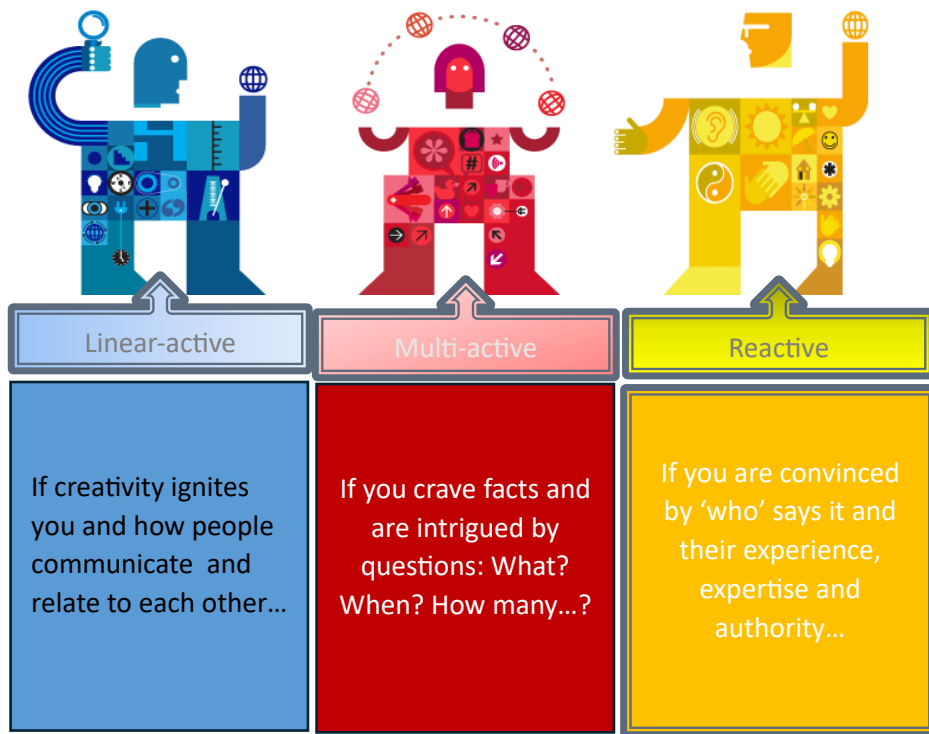


Figure 2.3 Know your culture type

Figures 2.4 and 2.5 below generally outline some of the characteristics of the dimensions of Lewis's Behaviour when people from different backgrounds work together.

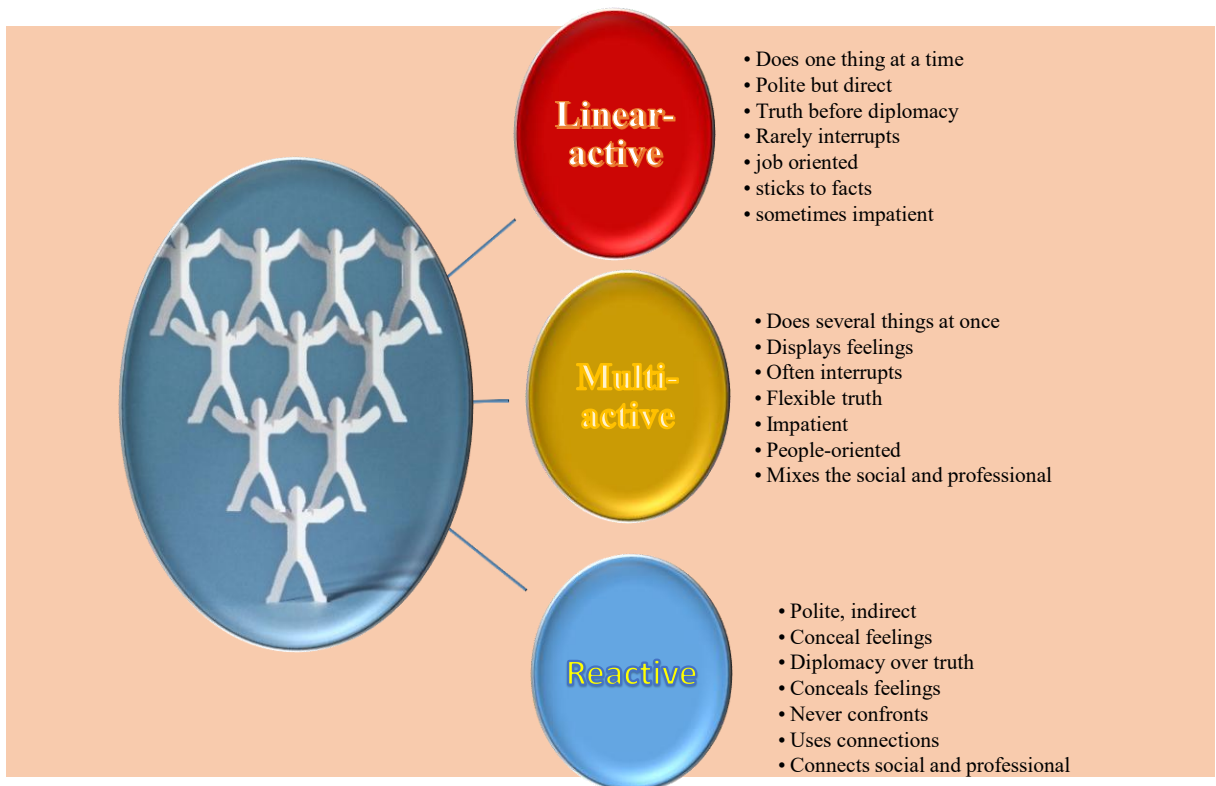


Figure 2.4 Lewis's Dimensions of Behaviour in Working Together.

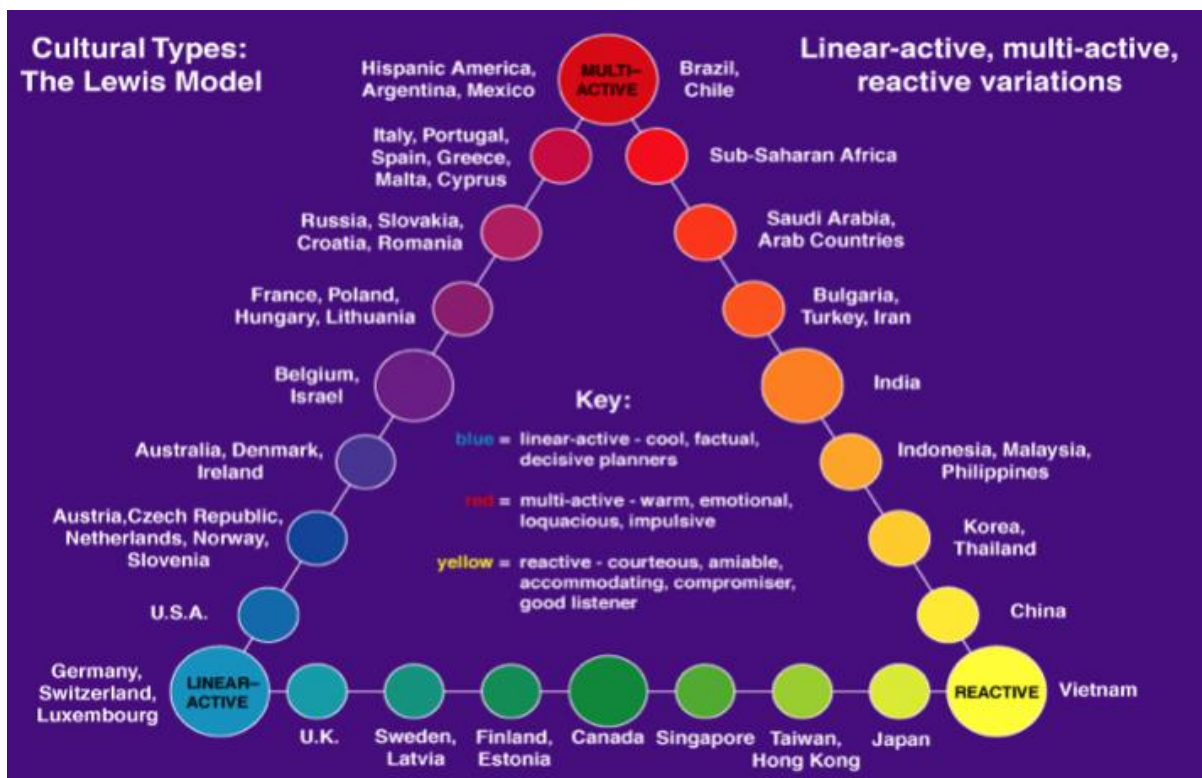


Figure 2.5 The Lewis Model

Figure 2.4 shows several characteristics or behaviours of the three dimensions of Lewis' model. Hence, people could trace their beliefs and attitudes to specific dimensions on the model, and then trace those of their colleagues. This will serve as an eye-opener for people, helping them to analyse and understand the nuances of cross-cultural attitudes and behaviour better (Skarbek, 2021).

Figure 2.5 depicts the three dimensions on a world scale, showing specifically which countries are thought to lean more towards linear, multi-active or reactive tendencies. Subsequently, it can be deduced that people from various regions normally behave differently, which could be a source of misunderstanding when such cultures work together. It implies that in trying to communicate while carrying out our tasks in a team, people from specific national backgrounds could misconstrue the other's communicative style, irrespective of whether they are verbally articulated or demonstrated in a nonverbal

manner. Lewis also noted that some cultures were a combination of dimensions (Wikipedia, 2024).

Lewis's model of cross-cultural communication aimed to help his clients understand their own culture first, using his model, and then apply the knowledge gained to improve global business. This connotes that with the model, multinational organisations can do business better through the ability to first understand their own cultures, and then gain the skills to close the gaps between their own and other cultures. Therefore, such individuals attain the best out of diversity. The three dimensions of the Lewis model are explained in the following subsections:

2.6.1 Linear-active cultures

Linear-active cultures are introverted, process-oriented, do not exhibit non-verbal cues in communication, and respond promptly to written communication. To them, status is achieved, and leaders are low-key. They plan actions one step at a time, value privacy, and therefore distinguish between private and professional life. Also, they are sometimes impatient and have little respect for the law. Details of their characteristics are shown on the figure below (Skarbek, 2021; crossculture.com, n.d).

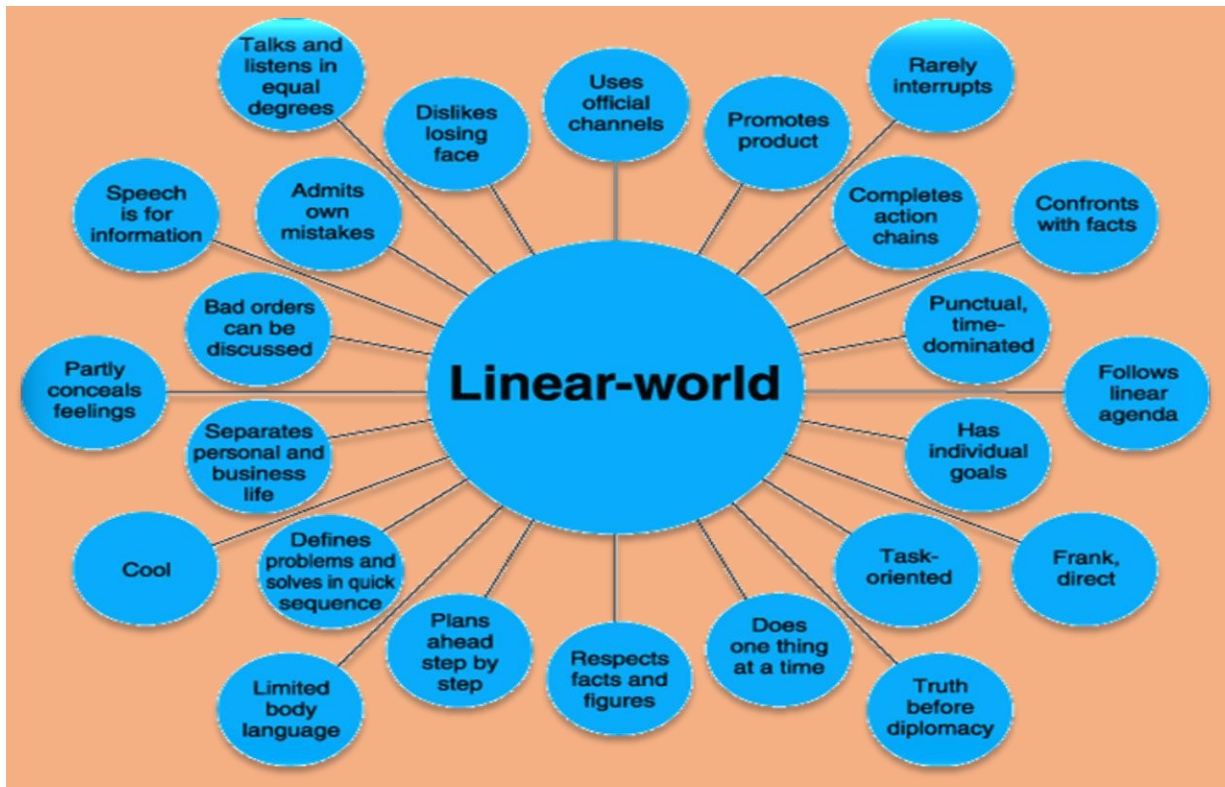


Figure 2.6 Characteristics of linear-active cultures

2.6.2 Multi-active cultures

These cultures are extroverted and talk more than they listen during communication. They are people-oriented, and so combine private and personal life as opposed to linear-active cultures. and could often interrupt a conversation (Skarbek, 2021). Besides, multi-active cultures are impulsive and because they like to do many things at the same time, they can listen and talk at the same time. These characteristics are a sharp contrast to linear-active cultures, and so when working together, they could have serious misunderstandings. Crossculture.com (n.d) states that multi-active cultures are uncomfortable when there is silence during a conversation, and so do not allow that during interactions. Due to their belief in dialogue, multi-active cultures prefer to give and receive information face to face and therefore do not like to be given information

through emails, phone calls or other written forms of communication (Crossculture.com, n.d). Concerning authority, multi-actives have less regard than compared to reactive cultures, but accept and remain in their known position.

One point of conflict between multi-actives and Linear-actives, for example, is the fact that multi-actives are more flexible with time and deadlines, because it is normal to procrastinate and change plans, and unpunctuality is tolerated. Since linear actives are strict with time, as well as sticking to plans, agendas, and deadlines, this could create major misunderstandings in multinational teams. Rumours and gossip are common features of multi-active cultures, implying that having disagreement with any of them could mean that the word could spread throughout the team or company easily. Further features of multi-active cultures could be found in Figure 2.7.

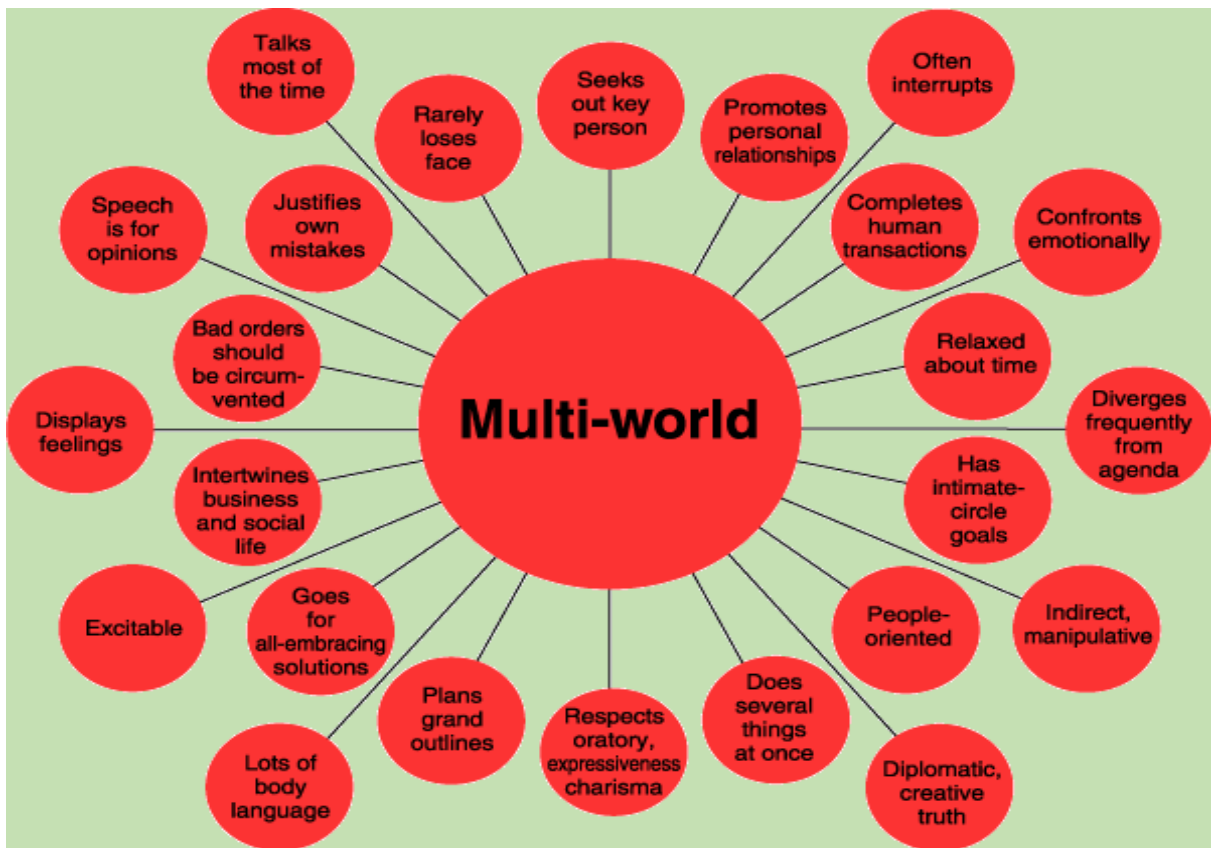


Figure 2.7 Characteristics of linear-active cultures

2.6.3 Reactive cultures

These cultures prefer to listen more than talk, and so they do not normally interrupt. Hence, they rarely initiate conversations. Moreover, during a speech or a talk, they do not ask questions and even remain silent for a short while when the speech or talk ends, to show respect for the speaker. This contrasts with linear-active cultures that may ask how the audience found their speech or talk, and may probably be uncomfortable with the ‘awkward’ silence just when the speech or talk ends. Skarbek (2021) states that reactives hardly use body language, do not interrupt, are indirect and do not show their true feelings. Since this is different from the existing way in which Latinos or Africans talk, this feature of reactives implies counterparts of reactives need to be very alert to be able to identify red flags or cues for miscommunication.

Likewise, Crossculture.com (n.d) writes that conversations between reactive cultures and linear or multi-active cultures could be challenging because, reactives prefer monologue conversations, whereas multi-active and linear-active cultures value dialogues. Moreover, communication with reactive cultures gets even more complex for the other cultures because these use passives rather than active language, in order to stay polite. Therefore, this confuses the remaining culture when interacting with reactive cultures. Figure 2.8 points out features of reactive cultures.

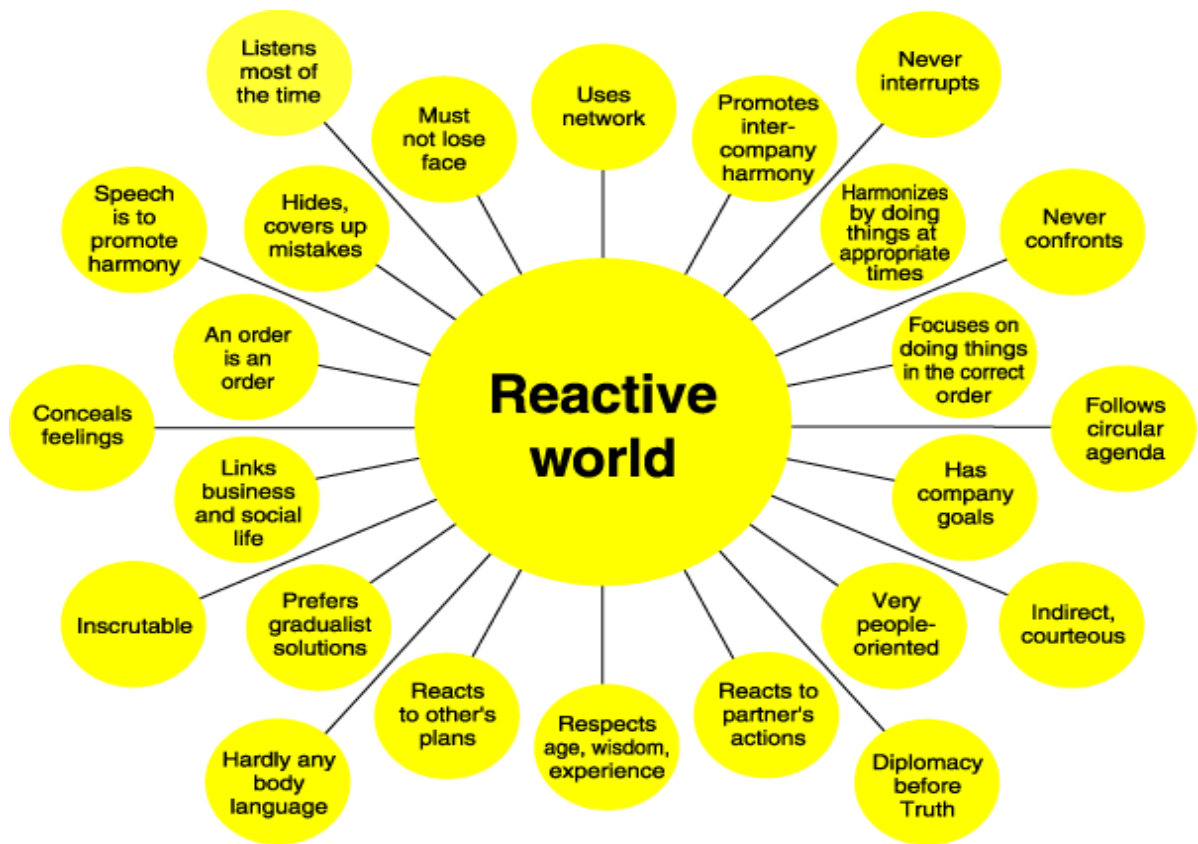


Figure 2.8 Characteristics of linear-active cultures

In summary, based on the models analysed so far and from examining cross-cultural studies, the researcher concludes that linear-active cultures could be linked to monochronic and individualistic cultures, whilst multi-active cultures could be closely tied with polychronic and collective cultures proposed by Hall and Trompenaars, respectively. These cultures bear similar features. However, the reactive culture, according to Lewis, is more linked to Asian cultures, which often tend to have more collective and polychronic features.

Finally, researchers, including Serefloglu (2016) and Gollin (2014), have criticised the Lewis model. However, Gollin stated that even though the model was quite vague in its theoretical base, they still argue that the model continues to be a powerful and effective instrument for dealing with the growth process of a company. The implication here is that

for multinational companies to grow and prevent stagnation caused by cross-cultural miscommunication challenges, Lewis' model could be used to help build cultural synergy in their teams.

2.7 The concept of Cross-cultural communication vs miscommunication

Firstly, communication between people from different cultural backgrounds could be considered intercultural (Durani, 2020) or cross-cultural communication. Therefore, communication can be said to have been successful when a piece of accurate and total information is transmitted from the speaker to the hearer. Thomas (2016) defines cross-cultural communication as 'a field of study that looks at how people from differing cultural backgrounds communicate, in similar and different ways among themselves and how they endeavour to communicate across cultures'.

The diagram below shows elements involved in cross-cultural communication.

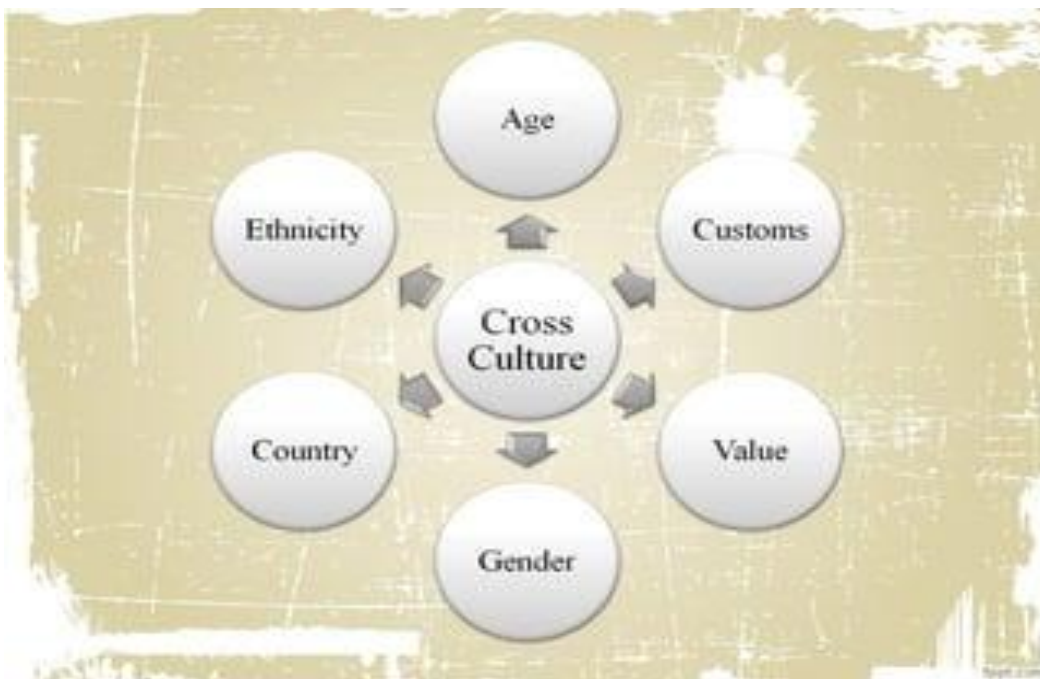


Figure 2.9 Cross-cultural elements.

As the figure above depicts, differences in values and behaviours influence how people communicate and could lead to miscommunication (Hofstede, 2001; Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). Al-Zahrani and Kaplowitz (1993) stipulate that although values like trust, honesty, and sincerity are uniform across the world's cultures, differences in values, beliefs, and global perspectives can still make cross-cultural communication incredulous. This is confirmed by Thomas (2016), who stipulates that breakdowns in communication due to cross-cultural miscommunication occur because of differences in values, beliefs, norms, etc. Furthermore, Levi (2020) stresses that cross-cultural interactions could result in miscommunication due to differences in traditions and communication styles. For example, some cultures focus on explicit and direct communication to demonstrate individualism and autonomy. This could lead to miscommunication because other cultures may view this attitude as rude and selfish.

Another essential element of cross-cultural communication is gender. How gender roles are perceived could lead to miscommunication and serious disagreements in cross-cultural settings. Many researchers argue that different cultures and social locations conceptualise gender differently, which defines how they interpret, acknowledge and relate to gender. (Guirdham, 1999; Stedham & Yamamura 2004; Nofziger, 2019; Mazzuca et al, 2023; MacCormack, 200; Neculaesei 2015). Thus, the different perceptions of gender roles may lead to miscommunication and serious misunderstandings in cross-cultural settings. For instance, in many parts of Africa, Arab countries and European countries like Italy, some tasks are designated more to men than women. Countries like Germany and the Netherlands strongly oppose this, so not allowing women to do such tasks could cause considerable resistance. Therefore, a well-meant gesture from an African or Arab man could be turned into a serious miscommunication between him and other nationals, like the Dutch.

Thomas (2016) proposes that cross-cultural communication is important because it opens the doors to business opportunities, provides jobs, and gives companies an understanding of diverse markets. Also, through cross-cultural knowledge, people can gain knowledge

and insight into how people across cultures talk, communicate, and view the world around them.

Cross-cultural communication, however, has positive impacts on organisations and teams. This implies that communicating effectively across cultures provides employees and the organisation with substantial benefits, such as fast problem-solving, maximised productivity, stabilised workflow, secured business relations, and so on. Cross-cultural communication is therefore important because it opens doors for businesses regarding trade policies, negotiations, mergers, team building and so on (Sahadevan & Sumangala, 2021). In this regard, Wolfe (2023) claims that companies are increasingly beginning to invest in training their employees to equip them with skills to interact with other cultures to help them get positive cross-cultural experiences.

Additionally, Olsina (2002) states that successful communication is ‘understood as a mutually acceptable outcome rather than the total match of participants’ speaker meanings and listener interpretations’. Therefore, cross-cultural miscommunication could be said to have occurred if an acceptable outcome is not achieved due to cross-cultural differences. Often, the speaker and listener are unaware of the miscommunication and realise it later, when it might be too late.

Moreover, Korkut, Dolmaci, and Karaca (2018) point out that communication breakdowns in cross-cultural settings primarily emanate from misunderstandings between the speakers. Also, cross-cultural miscommunication is described by Huang et al. (2012) as a collapse in communication between two people due to differences in cultures, languages and sociolinguistic transfer. Furthermore, Nishimura, Nevgi and Tella (n.d) argue that nationals from diverse countries tend to communicate in slightly different ways and that differences are linked more to communication cultures rather than other differences. Therefore, the ability to perceive these differences would typically result in better judgement, limited misunderstandings and shared respect. Consequently, the more culturally aware people are, the more they will understand how and why people behave

the way they do. They can thus generally behave appropriately to avert otherwise difficult cross-cultural miscommunication situations.

The researcher of this study defines cross-cultural miscommunication as a situation where there is a distraction or disturbance during communication, where a verbal or message conveyed by a sender does not reach the receiver in its intended sense or in the way it was meant to, due to cultural differences in cultural backgrounds. This means the sender sends the message in their 'best possible way and perspective' based on their norms, values, beliefs, etc. The receiver(s), on the other hand, encode(s) the message based on their 'best possible' understanding or interpretation due to their cultural background(s), which turns out to be an opposite viewpoint. However, breakdowns in communication due to cross-cultural miscommunication occur because of differences in values, beliefs, norms, etc. (Thomas, 2016). This eventually determines how the message is sent and received. On the other hand, understanding how various cultures communicate allows people to communicate their messages to their counterparts as intended, determining how people interact and forming a basis for shared identity. Additionally, according to Pavol and Mukthy (2022), miscommunication may lead to stereotyping, uncertainty, ethnocentrism, prejudice, and non-verbal signs. Research has shown that different communication styles lead to cross-cultural miscommunication, which may be a significant source of conflict and distrust or, in turn, exacerbate existing conflict (Le Baron, 2003; Lui, 2016; Pogosyan, 2017; Singh, 2022; Fagan, 2023). This implies that in the organisation, such miscommunication resulting from cultural differences could lead to tension among subordinates, managers, or team leaders. Additionally, this could sometimes leave behind bitterness, demotivation, disengaged co-workers, and, in some cases, turnover. Conversely, non-verbal communication has the potential to bring people together or complement intercultural cooperation (Pogoyan, 2017; Fangan, 2023). In that regard, cross-cultural communication styles, if sensitised, could reduce or prevent the adverse effects they carry.

Tzanne (1999) explains cross-cultural miscommunication as a communication breakdown due to racial, social, cultural, etc. differences among players who misunderstand each other. This implies that different races, cultures, and societies communicate differently, which could lead to cross-cultural miscommunication. For example, commisceo-global.com (2022) states an instance where a Dutch worker in England understands that when a report 'is fine,' it means it is indeed fine, whereas it means his British boss is not pleased because some things have not been covered in the report. This could lead to a breakdown in communication, demotivation, or even being sacked from the job. Irimeas (2011) asserts that such miscommunication could be emotional, perceptual, cultural or interpersonal. This makes the situation quite complex because both parties involved may not realise the cause of the misunderstanding or even fail to realise that it is a cultural difference issue, sometimes resulting in a fallout or teams finding working with each other very difficult. These differences in cultures lead to cross-cultural miscommunication, which goes a long way in affecting teams in companies. This could result in situations where individuals with miscommunication issues do not cooperate properly with one another, and the company could eventually lose revenue, among others. Beauty (2013) ascertains that problems that arise in the company are the direct outcome of failure in communication among people, which indicates that miscommunication leads to many problems in the organisation. On the contrary, Wierzbicka (2010) suggests that 'Anglo English', referred to as the 'Englishes of the inner circle', highly promotes cross-cultural communication but, at the same time, is a crucial component of miscommunication and cross-cultural breakdown. This indicates that speaking the same language does not constitute having the same beliefs and cultural communication methods. Austin.thinkingbilingual.org (n.d) confirms that Americans and Britons share a common language, English, but certain words have different meanings in specific contexts. For example, the word boss can be construed differently depending on the social structure. This is where an outcome of such miscommunication could lead to people generalising that some words mean the same since it is in the English language and, therefore, cease to understand why the choice of such words is causing problems.

Likewise, failure to recognise the meaning of words in both languages may offend various people.

Furthermore, cross-cultural communication resulting from globalisation, local solid market competition, migration, increased trade, etc., has become part and parcel of the day-to-day activities of workers in a company (ukessays.com, 2015). Therefore, adequate or rich knowledge of the cultural communication styles of colleagues or the lack of it could make or mar otherwise healthy working relations. Several researchers have dwelt on general cross-cultural miscommunication in companies and how it affects employee relationships. Many have also seen typical examples of such miscommunications and their consequences. For example, Boxer (2002) asserts that individuals from separate societies and circles interrelate, conforming to their pragmatic norms, often leading to a clash of expectations and, in time, misconceptions about the other group. Here, there is a two-way misconception where each group misconstrues the other. Contrary to that, Irimias (2011) argues that barriers to cross-cultural business communication include assuming similarity instead of difference, resulting in intercultural miscommunication where a narrow image of the other culture is portrayed. This means that people tend to assume that they and others from different cultures are similar and, therefore, tend to look down on the so-called 'odd' behaviour of others.

Furthermore, Clyne (1999) argues that patterns of immigration, new communication technologies like computers and emails, and opportunities for working in international networks and teams are reasons for cross-cultural communication. Michulek and Blazek (2022) confirm that speedy urbanisation and technological advancement are fundamental to running international companies. Therefore, globalisation, computers, the internet, and social media have allowed people from different nations and companies to do business and collaborate effectively; however, the cultural differences resulting in cross-cultural miscommunication cause many problems. Companies pay an ultimate price as a result of cross-cultural miscommunication. For example, Ukessays.com (2015) asserts it will prove costly for the organisation unless the cultural aspect entangled in cross-cultural miscommunication is learnt. This is because, when entering a new market in a foreign

culture, a diverse culture meeting a complicated one means several cross-cultural miscommunications. The connotation here is high uncertainty rates and more significant risks, making the company not invest much in the market. Beckers and Bsat (2014) confirm that studies have tracked down failures in Multinational business enterprises to remarkable factors like lack of intercultural competence and the inability to communicate efficiently in an international environment. In addition, Michulek and Blazek (2022) also claim that problems in intercultural communication occur because the message is encoded in one culture and decoded in another. Therefore, the differences in culture slow down and disrupt the communication process. For instance, if there is miscommunication in a virtual project team, challenges arise in project management. These include effective communication between the project team members, information transfer issues, etc. Moreover, according to Michulek and Blazek (2022), the study results of Nordin and Jelani (2019) demonstrate that communication is a crucial element that can influence an organisation's success or failure since it involves its intellectual assets. Therefore, effective communication will benefit employees, superiors and the entire organisation. This shows that the adverse effect of cross-cultural miscommunication can be seen or felt by employees, superiors, and, eventually, the organisation. This shows a chain reaction from the initial miscommunication to the ultimate effect on the company. For example, a minor cross-cultural miscommunication can lead to a company losing a vital contract. Comparatively, Fistic (2022) claims that language and cultural differences are the prominent causes of organisational miscommunications. We are constantly confronted with clashes between our own culture and the mass cultures of numerous colleagues, leaving us feeling misunderstood and frustrated. This agrees with the assertion of impactgrouphr.com (2022) that nuances exist from country to country and even from regions within a particular country. Diversity constitutes how people talk to one another. Concerning the domino effect of communication at the workplace, Barsade (2002) confirmed that there is a remarkable emotional impact, which is a contagion on individual-level mindset and group processes. In this regard, individuals' beliefs affect how they work or cooperate in teams or with colleagues. This is confirmed by Guillory et

al. (2011), who carried out research and stated that when negative emotion, for example, was induced in one group, the partners involved encountered more talkativeness, disagreements and complex language. The implication is that tasks may take longer to achieve, and company targets will be negatively affected.

Moreover, cross-cultural miscommunication also occurs in some circumstances, which could either be inconspicuous or ignored, but may, however, have a significant impact on the parties involved. For instance, when companies practice various staffing policies like egocentrism, poly, geo or Regio centrism. As Meyer (2015) puts it, corporate culture clashes with local culture, implying that companies that, for instance, apply polycentric staffing policies may have employees disagreeing over why some corporate culture should not be applied in the local setting. The reason here is that, since people in different countries communicate and make decisions differently, corporate cultures, which are the norms in the headquarters, are interpreted differently and seen to be non-applicable in the local settings. The implication is that such corporate cultures begin to malfunction. In such cases, companies may encounter recurrent miscommunication, leading to decreased trust between the head office and local or regional offices. Japanese companies, for instance, that strongly believe in maintaining corporate culture, try to maintain ethnocentric policies where Japanese managers hold key management positions. Sekiguchi, Froese and Iguchi (2016) confirm that non-Japanese are employed to take up supporting staff positions. The reason for holding on to an ethnocentric policy is to preserve the company culture. However, they further argue that the ethnocentric staffing style is the main reason Japanese multinational companies have not been thriving in the internationalisation of management and in enticing and keeping back global talent. Meyer (2015) also argues that companies risk yielding to features fundamental to their commercial success in solving such miscommunication issues. The connotation here is that such compromises could lead to companies losing focus on some of the core values on which the company was initially built, leading to staff conflicts, layoffs or high attrition rates.

2.8 Cross-cultural Verbal and Non-verbal Communication

Many forms of communication occur in organisations and are normally in the form of verbal and non-verbal communication.

2.8.1 Verbal communication

Guilherme (2002) assert that communication can only occur when one person speaks and the second person understands the message being carried across. This can generally be termed as verbal communication. Purnell (2018) states that verbal communication pertains to chosen language and dialects, circumstantial language use, chosen greetings, sound and volume of the voice, the necessity for interpretation and explanation, etc. It can, therefore, be said that verbal communication involves individual choice of words and language and the need to be interpreted and understood. The problem is that the differences in cultures sometimes tend to send the wrong message, which leads to problems in teams. For instance, people from low-context cultures who say exactly what they mean in communication are seen as too direct by those from high-context cultures. Another example is when Chinese business counterparts say yes during meetings, where they mean that they have understood what is being said. This is usually misconstrued by Western cultures to mean they agree with the business deals or what is being said.

2.8.2 Cross-cultural non-verbal communication

To delve into the role of nonverbal communication in cross-cultural miscommunication, it is essential to identify what nonverbal communication entails. Nonverbal communication is as essential as verbal communication and accounts for a significant chunk of our communication (Purnell, 2018; Cherry, 2023). It deals with body language, facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, and perceptual distancing (Purnell 2018 and Lowe 2022). Additionally, non-verbal communication could be described as the cues that form the basis of unspoken languages that channel connotations, intentions, and perspectives (Singh, 2022).

Culture plays a huge role in people's non-verbal behaviours. Differences in how people communicate non-verbally could be dependent on one's cultural background.

Additionally, economic globalisation and recent communication technology have paved the way for cross-cultural exchanges with people all around the world. Therefore, the differences in culture result in discrepancies and misinterpretations in verbal and non-verbal communication (Broeder, 2021; Zang, 2021).

Horace (2023) further argues that in non-verbal communication, people tend to rely profoundly on first-hand experience, opinion or observations instead of taking different cultural norms that may be involved in the situation. Zang (2021) further stresses that non-verbal signs or gestures could doubtlessly be misconstrued, and the resulting disagreements may be hard to resolve because people may be unaware of non-verbal cues that make them presume they are not liked, disrespected or disregarded. This results in the fact that when people are in surroundings where the attitudes, behaviour and values are foreign or unfamiliar from what they are used to, they may experience frustration or even cultural shock. These differences could lead to cross-cultural miscommunication. Therefore, if the cultural background of various individuals is not taken note of or recognised, it could have serious implications for working relationships in teams

Undoubtedly, Baron (2003) argues that nonverbal communication is essential because people look for nonverbal cues, mainly when verbal messages are ambiguous or vague. Pogosyan (2017) validates this assertion that non-verbal communication assumes a harrowing role when interlocutors have diverse cultural backgrounds. This is what makes it clear the difference between looking genuine and being understood. Baron further argues that nonverbal behaviour stems from our cultural common sense and uses various systems to better understand silence, touch, demeanour, expressions of emotion, and touch. This implies that individuals interpret the nonverbal behaviour of others based on their own cultural beliefs, norms, etc.

Significantly, the degree to which cultures attribute importance to verbal and non-verbal behaviour varies across cultures. For instance, Canada and the United States of America, which are low-context cultures, place less emphasis on non-verbal behaviour. To Japanese and Colombians, who are high-context cultures, comprehending the non-verbal elements of communication is much more important to attach the intended meaning in the communication process. Le Baron (2003) stresses that this is not an indication that non-verbal communication is not visible or not important in low-context cultures; it is just that these attach less importance to it and instead focus on the literal meanings of the words that their counterparts speak or utter. Notably, verbal language carries only a certain proportion of content; developing language skills for communication without developing the non-verbal skills of that language could land one in a conflict situation (Pogosyan, 2017). This could result from the fact that people from high-context cultures, for instance, could be saying something, but most of what they are communicating is non-verbal. It could also happen that they would pay much attention to non-verbal behaviour, as mentioned earlier. Therefore, this could lead to ambiguities during the communication process, even though they are speaking the same language in communication (Pogosyan, 2017).

Furthermore, due to the level of importance placed on verbal and non-verbal communication, the diversity in modern organisations could result in certain behaviours being misconstrued, leading to cross-cultural miscommunication among individual workers and teams. Guilherme et al. (2010) admit that communication is a complex situation in which several skills and devices have to be successfully implemented. This shows a means through which people exchange information and ideas through interaction.

Notably, non-verbal communication involves decoding and encoding non-linguistic attitudes or behaviours. When this occurs between two cultures, where the message is encoded in one culture and decoded in another, the communication process is sometimes delayed and disrupted (Paramita & Carissa, 2018; Guilherme et al., 2010). Another example is where Americans could have a hard time starting a business with the Japanese

because Americans normally use fast message systems of communication, whereas the Japanese use slow messaging systems. After all, they prefer building good relationships before doing business with other cultures. The differences in communication could cause undue tension between the two cultures.

Despite proposing that some cultures place less importance on nonverbal communication, Le Baron (2003) states that research has revealed that some nonverbal behaviours are homogenous throughout many cultures around the world. Therefore, people across the world express surprise, sadness, fear, revulsion, etc., in similar ways. That notwithstanding, there are differences in what is socially acceptable and what is not in some countries. For example, in some parts of the United States, it is socially acceptable for men to express anger in some given situations rather than fear, and for women, it is acceptable to express fear rather than anger.

The figure below shows examples of universal non-verbal communication gestures.



Figure 2.10 Worldwide Non-Verbal Communication Gestures

There are various forms of non-verbal communication, some of which this study will look into. Eye contact, for instance, is a significant form of nonverbal communication, which can lead to miscommunication between cultures when ignored or not noted. In Asian and African cultures, for instance, avoiding direct eye contact is seen as a sign of showing respect, whilst direct eye contact in communication in Western countries indicates that the other is paying attention or listening. Thomas (2016) affirms that in some cultures, looking at people in the eye depicts honesty, whereas in others, this is seen as challenging and rude. Matsumoto and Juang (2016) conclude that variations in cultural norms regarding eye contact could lead to misconstruing nonverbal communication or gestures. This could lead to cross-cultural miscommunication among individuals or teams in organisations. Therefore, the study sets out to see what happens when such miscommunication occurs and if there is any ripple effect afterwards.

Another form of nonverbal communication is gazing at people. Matsumoto (2006) cites Fehr & Exline (1997), who claim that research on humans has proven that gazing is related to power, authority, pugnacity, affiliation, and mentoring (Argyle & Cook, 1976). For example, in a lot of Asian, Latin American and African cultures, gazing at someone is seen as challenging authority, but in Western Europe, it is seen as genuine and courteous. This connotes that one person working in a team could gaze at another teammate or leader, and the gaze could be misconstrued, leading to tension between the parties involved.

Matsumoto (2006) further argues that various cultures set up rules governing gazing and visual attention because pugnacity and mentoring are behavioural inclinations vital for the culture's solidity and alimentation. Differences in rules have been documented over the years. Watson (1970), for example, established two forms of culture: contact and non-contact. Contact cultures promote physical touch during communication, have less interpersonal distance and gaze longer than noncontact cultures. For instance, it has been established that Arabs (contact culture) have a more prolonged and direct gaze than Americans (noncontact culture) (Hall, 1963; Watson & Graves, 1966). Also, Italians, Latin Americans, Indonesians and Colombians are linked to contact cultures, in contrast

to their Australian, German and other European counterparts. This could send the wrong message to the various counterparts and lead to miscommunication. This is because, as mentioned earlier, gazing could be related to power; an American employee, for instance, may misconstrue an Arab colleague's gaze for lording power over them and their touch for entering their personal space or even harassment. Numerous other studies confirmed differences in nonverbal cross-cultural communication, especially related to semantic meanings ascribed to body postures, voice pitch, and hand movements.

Generally, culture plays a pivotal role in shaping the nonverbal behaviours of people from various cultures, making up a crucial part of the process of communication (Matsumoto, 2006). This implies that our nonverbal behaviours stem from the cultural setting in which we grew up. Thus, the inability to recognise this could have many cross-cultural implications.

In addition, Wilson (2021) cites Marco Iacoboni (2008, p. 81) as indicating that when a speech entails gestures and verbal communication, it plays a dual role. This implies that speakers are assisted in conveying their thoughts, and the listeners can understand what the speaker is saying. Therefore, it suffices to say that verbal and non-verbal communication are pivotal in cross-cultural communication.

Conclusively, the key findings of the literature highlight the fact that there is a direct link between culture and communication because when communicating, one's behaviour is influenced by the cultural setting in which they grew up. Hence, culture determines the way people interpret and react to the behaviour of cultures that are strange to them, in given situations. Therefore, culture usually determines the direction in which cross-cultural miscommunication goes.

Moreover, the findings show that major causes of cross-cultural miscommunication include differences in values, norms and beliefs, which are reflected in the communication styles and the verbal and non-verbal behaviours of people. Also, the findings show that cross-cultural miscommunication leads to confusion, disappointment, among others. Further highlights showed people's tendency to behave in certain ways in

circumstances like making decisions, during meetings, or expectations for cooperation were often based on whether they came from Linear, multi or reactive cultures. This was demonstrated by the Lewis model.

Besides, the findings from the literature review show that it is possible to work harmoniously together in a multinational team if one is culturally aware. So, team and individual cultural competence are of great importance when working in multinational teams. Therefore, this study sought to gain insight into the feelings, thought processes, and what inspires or stimulates participants within their particular cultural and social settings. This literature review was a formidable link with safeguarding the subjective viewpoint of the participants of the study.

2.9 Literature gaps

Several arguments have been centred on various forms of cross-cultural miscommunication and how they take place. Many also advise on how to reduce cross-cultural miscommunication in companies. However, there is no research on the domino effect of cross-cultural miscommunication in the manufacturing and service sectors, considering how cross-cultural differences impact company workers and their teams. The previously mentioned study by Söderholm (2013) validates this by inviting future researchers to use scales in his research to delve deeper into how different communication patterns are and the extent to which these differences influence business collaborations. This research, therefore, attempts to fill this gap by exploring whether there is any domino effect in such collaborations within companies.

Future researchers are invited to use and refine this scale in comparative analyses in order to explore how communication patterns differ across cultures and how these differences may tend to influence business collaborations.

Generally, most past research also focused on cross-cultural communication, with many touching mainly on cross-cultural miscommunication, its barriers, and the effect on individual employees and teams. Others delved deeply into the need for knowledge on

cross-cultural communication, hindrances to such communication and their effect. Many researchers have dwelt on people's views on how badly different cultures treat one another and the differences that lead to miscommunication. For example, Broesch et al. (2020) argue that extensive cross-cultural research was previously established on motivations, racism, and capitalist beliefs. There is, therefore, a need to research further into various aspects of cross-cultural miscommunication and look into the extent to which these affect the teams involved. Széchenyi (2020) validates this, arguing that future research should include communication strategies, meaningful behaviour, stereotypes, body language, myths, beliefs, values and customs.

Additionally, Bjerregaard et al. (2009) argue that there are significant limitations to models of functionalist intercultural interactions, which depend on static, isolated, or decontextualised cultural views. It is also essential to note Barsade's (2002) research on how positive and negative moods were transferred in a group and their influence on their work group dynamics. This study clearly outlined the impact of good communication and miscommunication and their knock-on effect on the group. However, it failed to detail the additional effect that both situations had on the company in the fullness of time. It is, therefore, vital to research how miscommunication in various situations affects individual employees and how their actions and inactions affect their teams or the company, if so. Moreover, specific cross-cultural miscommunication situations and their direct effect on the individuals and teams, including hierarchy, need to be clearly outlined. The literature gap proves a need for research to close this gap.

Another gap in cross-cultural communication is that many cultures are still unable to successfully interpret non-verbal communication, even though there is a lot of sensitivity regarding verbal communication. Europe, for instance, still has a long way to go in this regard, as Kurkowska (2021) claimed that even though Europe sustains a notable diversity of categories and multi-colour forms, it is still deficiently integrated. This study will, therefore, close a considerable gap in some multinational service and manufacturing companies in the Netherlands through its findings.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

3 Introduction

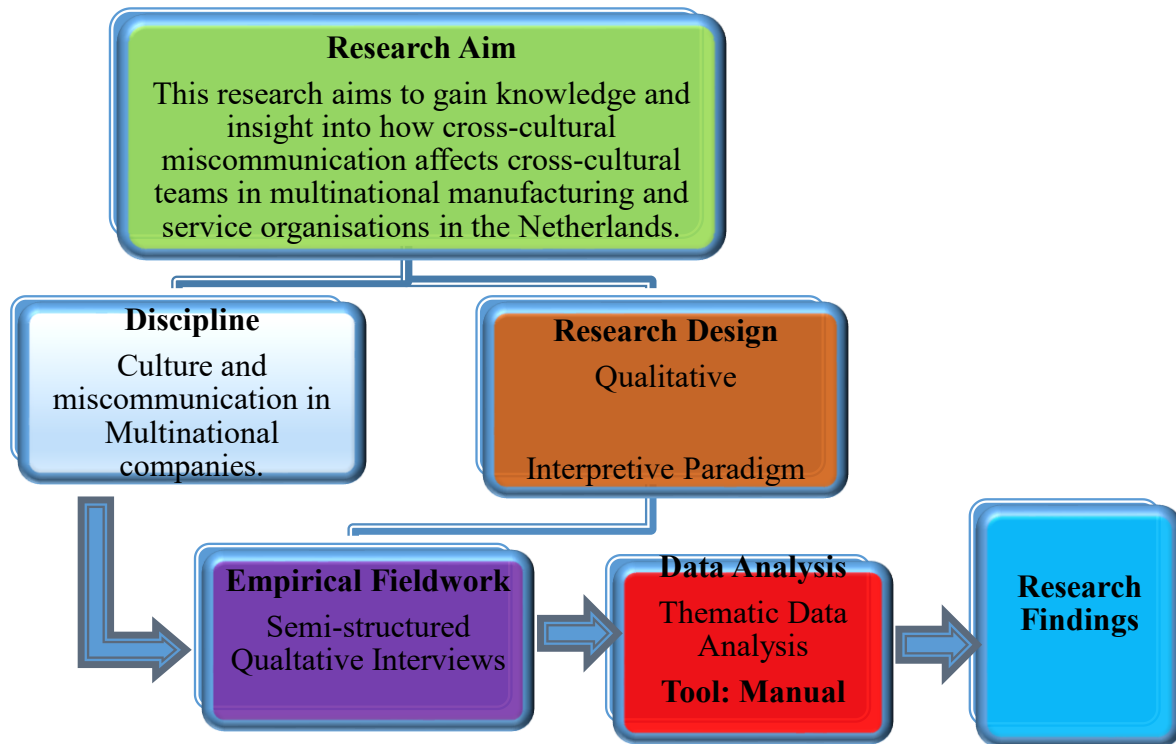


Figure 3.1 Research Method and Design Framework for the Study

The above framework outlines the method and design employed in the study. The aims of the research are shown; the qualitative research design was used in the study.

Furthermore, the framework shows the interpretive paradigm that formed the basis for research, whereas the discipline is culture and miscommunication in multinational companies. The empirical fieldwork depicted in the framework is semi-structured qualitative interviews, and the thematic data analysis method was used to analyse the data. The researcher did not use any software to analyse the data, and so did so manually. This allowed for thorough screening of the data and a total representation of every single important information gathered during the interviews for the study.

Additionally, this chapter outlines the methodology the researcher used for conducting the research. The chapter describes the proposed research design and method, population and sample, demographic variables, data gathering method, and the procedure used in analysing the data. Also, a solid argument for applying an interpretive approach to the research is provided. How the population is sampled is clearly outlined, the data collection procedures are explained, and the research design limitations are provided in this chapter. The reliability and validity of the study are also explained.

3.1 Overview of the Research Problem

As the world continues to turn into a Global village, more and more companies are changing their strategies to adapt to the challenges that globalisation brings with it. Companies are also expanding by venturing into other markets, both nationally and internationally. The Netherlands is no exception to this move, and has welcomed and maintained several multinational companies for several decades (Hogenbirk, Hagedoorn, Kranenburg, 2009). However, this move has come at a considerable cost because the cultural differences in working together with a variety of employees are causing a lot of challenges in multinational companies (Asampong, 2021; Haartog and Zorlu, 2018; Ersanilli, 2014; de Waal et al., 2012; Maussen and Bogers, 2010; Elgar, 2010; Subeliani and Tsogas, 2005). Various issues taking place in the companies need to be investigated, to bring them to light and find practical solutions to solve them. This will lead to increased productivity and good team cohesion.

Hence, this study seeks to gain deep insight into whether the cross-cultural miscommunication that occurs affects the individuals, teams, or the company as a whole. Also, the study seeks to understand the extent to which such conflicts affect the working relations of teams, the colleagues involved and, consequently, the organisation, if applicable.

3.2 Operationalisation of Theoretical Constructs

Flanagan (2013) asserts that the scientific method is the most powerful tool for ascertaining accuracy about the world, researching new theories, and accomplishing their empirical substantiation. It is important to note that there are three basic classifications of scientific research: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method (Haradhan, 2020; Creswell, 2011; Kothari, 2008; Swanson & Holton, 2005). However, the qualitative method was chosen for this research because it was mainly linked to its aims, objectives, topic, and research questions. (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012; Walliman, 2011). Therefore, based on the aims and objectives of gaining insight into the causes and effects of cultural miscommunications, the role of verbal and non-verbal communication and the role of leadership in miscommunication, the qualitative method helped the researcher to achieve the expected goal of the research (Mohajan, 2020). This is because the semi-structured interviews provided quality and in-depth information from the experiences of the participants to help reach the aim of gaining insights and knowledge into the domino effects of cross-cultural miscommunication. Therefore, there was an alignment between the research question of the study, its paradigm, the context, and the research method (Swanson & Holton, 2005).

Generally, the researcher chose not to use quantitative research methods, even though Mohajan (2020) claims that many researchers prefer to use them, with two-thirds of published research articles having used quantitative methods. This is affirmed by Holton III & Burnet (2005), who argue that the quantitative method is the ‘foundation of modern science’, which indicates that the quantitative method is widely used in research.

Also, (Holton and Burnet, n.d; Mohajan, 2020) argue that the quantitative research method is experimental, quasi-experimental, based on deductive logic, starting with a hypothesis or a set of hypotheses, where an experiment is carried out to prove or disprove, or reject the hypothesis. These research methods calculate and evaluate behaviours, opinions, perspectives, and other definite variables, and generalise results

from a substantial sample population through developing numerical data. This helps to provide accurate and reliable answers about the relationships between variables to predict, interpret, and control a phenomenon using software like SPSS, Excel, and Python, among others. (Queiró, Faria, Almeida, 2017; Rahman, 2017; White & Millar, 2014; Mahoney, 2012; Creswell, 2011; Wong, 2014). However, due to the subjective nature of the descriptions or interpretation of the experiences of participants, the use of SPSS was not convenient enough for retrieving the information from the semi-structured interviews conducted.

Additionally, Leedy (1993) states that quantitative research involves a methodical investigation of the relationship between measurable variables. Swanson & Holton (2005) hold the view that researchers who use quantitative research methods perceive the world as objective and search for quantifiable correlations among variables to test and validate their studies' hypotheses. Thus, the findings from studies that use the quantitative method are conceivably anticipative, illustrative, and authentic (Mohajan, 2005). However, since the findings were based on individual experiences of participants, some of the experiences shared, even though they may be authentic, could not be anticipated. Hence, there was no necessity to use the quantitative method.

Despite quantitative research gaining worldwide recognition, especially when studying large data, this research did not employ quantitative methods due to various reasons. For instance, they fail to provide in-depth explanations but only give the overall image of the variables being measured, and hidden motives in the feelings or behaviour of individuals are not identified (Panthee, n.d; Taherdoost, 2022). Therefore, since one of the main motives for this study was to obtain in-depth explanations and motives of people's behaviour and feelings, quantitative research was not feasible for the study. Also, more time was needed to carry out the investigation, and the researcher preferred to use limited time to complete the data gathering (Lazar et al., n.d; Taherdoost, 2022), making the quantitative method not ideal for this study.

Qualitative research, which was employed in this study, is becoming the leading methodology for the field of communication, as claimed by Lindlof and Taylor (2011). This, according to them, is because qualitative research possesses the ability to develop knowledge regarding communication. Furthermore, according to Daba-Buzoianu et al. (2017), ‘ Scholars argue that qualitative methodologies could be considered features of the epistemology of communication,’ which implies that how we analyse and understand communication could be motivated by how we gather and interpret the information. Therefore, to study, understand, gather, and interpret cross-cultural miscommunication data more effectively, the researcher needed to use the qualitative method.

Another inspiration for using the qualitative method in this study was based on the second postulate of Alfred Schulz, subjective interpretation (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). He was an eminent social scientist who developed many postulates to steer social phenomena. Schulz’s second postulate of subjective interpretation highlights the significance of understanding group behaviour involving how they interact with other individuals or groups from the point of view of the individuals concerned and admitting the context wherein the phenomenon was investigated. This means that to genuinely understand why people behave or act in certain ways, there is a need for researchers to look at things from the perspective of those particular people (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 81; Horsfall et al., 2001; Leininger, 1994).

3.3 Research Purpose and Questions

This research aims to gain knowledge and insight into how cross-cultural miscommunication affects cross-cultural teams in multinational manufacturing and service organisations in the Netherlands.

Based on the aims and objectives of the research, the following sub-questions will guide the research:

- What are the causes of cross-cultural miscommunication in multinational manufacturing and service organisations?
- What are the effects of cross-cultural miscommunication in multinational manufacturing and service organisations?
- Does verbal or non-verbal communication play a role in the cross-cultural miscommunication process?
- Does hierarchy influence the outcome of cross-cultural miscommunication issues?
- Which strategies could address cross-cultural miscommunication in multinational manufacturing and service organisations?

3.4 Research Design

Various factors influenced the use of a qualitative research design for this study. On the one hand, qualitative research delves into and provides a deeper understanding of real-world issues or challenges. On the other hand, rather than gathering numerical data as in quantitative research, qualitative research collects the experiences, impressions, attitudes, and demeanour of people, thereby answering the hows and whys and not the how many or how much (Tenny, Brannan, and Brannan, 2017). Even though it is possible to quantify qualitative data, this method of doing research helped the researcher to look out for themes and patterns that pose challenges to being quantified.

An evident strength of qualitative research is its potential to illustrate and describe motives and processes of human behaviour that could be difficult to quantify (Tenny, Brannan, and Brannan, 2017). This is because the qualitative approach allows for participants themselves to explain their experiences, attitudes, and behaviour, as well as how, why, and what they felt, experienced, and were thinking at a certain point in time or ‘during an event of interest’.

Importantly, the research aim and objectives normally give a clue as to the research design to be adopted (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). This is because qualitative research focuses on initiating and developing descriptions and clarifications rather than testing

pre-determined hypotheses. Besides, the research design taken is flexible instead of one where a comprehensive plan is prepared at the beginning of the research and is then implemented (Hammersley 2013). Hence, the qualitative research design was highly essential for this study because the researcher aimed to listen to the experiences of the participants and ask in-depth questions as to why they think and believe in what they experienced.

Firstly, the gaps identified in the literature review served as a motivational factor and basis for using qualitative methods for this study, to add to the body of knowledge on cross-cultural miscommunication and its domino effect on multinational organisations. The line of reasoning validates that it is possible to use qualitative methods to illustrate or demonstrate phenomena with limited recognition to guarantee that under-researched subjects or matters are investigated (Minichiello and Kottler, 2010).

Also, the qualitative research method deals with gathering and analysing non-numerical data that can be comprehended and not measured to facilitate understanding viewpoints, notions or experiences (McLeod, 2019; Bhandari, 2020; and questionpro.com, 2020). The researcher used this method to get in-depth knowledge and insight into the issues raised by participants.

Another approach employed in this study was the ethnography approach as a research design. Tenny, Brannan, and Brannan (2017) assert that ethnography originated from social and cultural anthropology, whereby the researcher was directly immersed in the environment of the participant, with the aim of coming out with narratives and interpretations of the behaviours, actions, and occurrences through the very experience of the participants. To this end, the ethnographic approach made it possible to identify data that could otherwise have been very hard to obtain and record.

Moreover, one theory that backed the use of the qualitative method for this study was the grounded theory, proposed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967. It is an inductive methodology that offers methodically structured guidelines for collecting, harmonising, analysing, and

developing qualitative data to construct theory Charmaz (1995), rather than being hypothetico-deductive (Bakker, 2019). The grounded theory methodology steered this study in guiding the researcher with flexible strategies that steered the gathering and analysis of the qualitative data. This could be identified in Charmaz's (2000) argument that the grounded theory 'codifies steps in analysing qualitative data', where its potency exists in communicating logical procedures for conducting data gathering and analysis, being a medium of rectifying inaccuracies and omissions, and improving analytical notions and impressions. Eventually, the grounded theory serves as a tool for examining fundamental social and social psychological procedures in commonplace settings, and therefore, the design of the study's method is to be closely centred around the aforementioned processes and procedures.

Further to the arguments made on grounded theory, Bakker (2019) stipulates that the grounded theory method has become a crucial feature of contemporary sociological research and that the interpretive qualitative approach takes into account the human being as a person, as well as their feelings and emotions. This interpretive approach, therefore, fulfils Meryem's (2002) view that the interpretive qualitative approach deals with gaining insight into how individuals interpret their experience and interaction with their social environment in given instances and contexts. Therefore, the qualitative method allowed the researcher to gain insight into how employees in companies interpreted their experiences in dealing with cross-cultural miscommunication with colleagues. The interpretations from the data gathered in the study enabled the researcher to identify specific misunderstandings and their effect on the parties involved and on the organisation, if any.

As mentioned earlier, one inspiration for using the qualitative method for this research was based on Alfred Schulz's second postulate of subjective interpretation. In this vein, the interpretive rigour in subjective interpretation demanded that the researcher distinctly illustrate how the interpretations of the data gathered were attained to outline the findings, providing quotations from the raw data. Therefore, the thematic data analysis of

Braun and Clarke (2006) served as a solid basis for the study, guaranteeing a cautious and elaborate analysis and the application of vigorous interpretive techniques while indicating direct quotes from participants to validate the interpretations made. This rendered the interpretations of the data collected consistent, reliable, and justified. Thus, the researcher tried to comprehend and clarify the individual experiences, feelings, sentiments, or viewpoints of the research participants. Therefore, the subjective interpretation employed in the study was influenced by personal perspectives and circumstances as opposed to an objective interpretation, which normally dwells on generally applicable findings, as used in quantitative methods.

Moreover, this study, having used the qualitative method, allowed for the maintenance of the subjective opinions and perspectives of the research participants (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 81).

Additionally, it is important to note that interpretive-qualitative research involves three important procedures, which comprise defining the research problem, sample selection, collection and analysis of data gathered, and the final write-up (Merriam, 2002). This study could be said to have fulfilled all three procedures because I first defined the problems related to the research, sampled out workers of multinational manufacturing and service organisations who normally work closely together, or have many work processes dependent on one another, bringing out possible friction in working together due to differences in cultural backgrounds. I then collected the data, analysed it, and did the final write-up. Apart from that, the remaining chapters of this research provide an analysis of the findings from the data gathered, discuss them, and provide conclusions and recommendations for the future.

It can, therefore, be concluded that, based on the above arguments, the use of qualitative design for this study was much more applicable, given the aim of the research to find out how cross-cultural misunderstandings affect the working relations of employees in multinational manufacturing or service organisations.

3.4.1 Justification for employing Interpretive qualitative research

Boas (1995) claims that the interpretivist paradigm originated on the assumption that people's viewpoints, ways of thinking, ideas, and the interpretations that are important to them can be understood by way of conducting research into their various cultures. This is because human beings interpret their environs and circumstances and, in turn, behave based on those interpretations (Hammersley, 2013), which could be related to the ancient Greek philosopher and sociologist Epictetus' statement that 'it is not actions that alarm man or disturb man, but it is their opinions and fancies about actions' (Merton, 1995). This implies that human behaviour or reaction is triggered by what they perceive about the behaviour of others towards them. Therefore, since cultures behave and react differently, one behaviour may lead to a misunderstanding in someone from a different culture. To that effect, in attempting to understand how the culture of individuals in various workplace settings influences miscommunications that take place, this research deemed it useful to employ the qualitative interpretive research method.

The philosophy of interpretivism is seen as a 'cornerstone in social research' as it presents a distinctive lens by which researchers perceive the social world. This philosophy, as argued by Prime (2024), is contrary to the positivist approaches to research, which insist on the fact that it is important to have subjective meanings and experiences in understanding social settings. Prime (2024) further claims that interpretivism aims to comprehend the world by encountering and illustrating social phenomena, stressing that reality is subjective and socially established. Not all, Prime (2024) stresses that interpretivism is closely tied with qualitative methods of research, which have the goal of grasping the rich circumstantial characteristics of social interactions, attempting to understand the subjective connotations and experiences of individuals within normal environments or situations. Given this, this researcher, based on the interpretivism philosophy, does not believe that gaining access to reality is direct and authentic (Prime, 2024) but rather that going in-depth into the complex web of social settings, such as shared meanings and language, among others, is important. Therefore,

based on the need to get deeper insight into the effect of the happenings and circumstances in cross-cultural miscommunication situations at the workplace, the study prepared semi-structured interview questions to allow for rich data collection through in-depth questioning and explanations. This gives room for the research questions and objectives to be explored (Pervin and Mokhtar 2022) to the highest level.

Additionally, using the interpretive research method allowed this researcher to explain the truth behind situations through a system of understanding, with the help of making use of and incorporating the subjective experiences, impressions and beliefs of the research participants based on their personal social and cultural context (Rehman and Alaharti, 2016; Shah et al., 2013; Bhattacharjee, 2012).

Conclusively, the interpretivism method shaped the research, allowing it to strategically and methodically carry out the research to obtain quality knowledge and insights into how cross-cultural miscommunication impacts employees personally and in teams. This notion is strongly validated by Hermersley (2013), who maintains that interpretivism emphasises cultural difference and has until now been the most essential concepts that justify qualitative enquiry.

3.5 Population and Sampling Method

Primarily, the main intention of sampling was to select the most suitable population so that the focal point of the study, cross-cultural miscommunication, could be appropriately researched, as Lopez and Whitehead (2013) propose. This is because generally, when conducting research in business and management, choosing research participants entails choosing and getting access to a small sample from a bigger target population made up of prospective participants on whom the study is focused (Miles et al., 2013).

Blaxter, Hughes, and Tight (2010) argue that irrespective of the procedure used in research, the associated issues of sampling and selection need to be taken into consideration. Thus, the researcher considered sampling employees from multinational manufacturing and service companies in the Netherlands. Also, since it was not

practically possible to investigate all the employees, a small but sufficiently substantial representation, and a sample for that matter, was chosen. However, the sampling method was done systematically and in a well-organised manner to draw valid conclusions from the sample taken (Acharya, Prakash, and Nigam, 2013).

Furthermore, whilst there are no strict, fixed, or clearly defined rules for the size of a study's sample (Busetto, Wick, Gumbinger, 2020; Baum, 2002; Patton, 1990), sampling done in qualitative research normally depends on small figures aiming to investigate comprehensively and in detail (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990). Therefore, some researchers suggest that the data size should be between 12 and 20 to achieve the highest variation (Baum 2002: 176). Thus, this study fulfils this criterion because it obtained data by making use of 20 participants in a semi-structured interview setting, which validates the depth and richness of the data collected.

Additionally, non-probability sampling, which depends on the researcher's perception, was used for the study, as not all organisation members participated in the research (questionpro.com, 2020; Stephanie, 2015). This is confirmed by Lopez and Whitehead (2013), who claim that when using non-probability sampling in qualitative research, the researcher makes use of particular populations to research into a particular topic, or when the entire population is unavailable. In addition, as a result of employing non-probability sampling, the researcher saved costs whilst using subjective judgement and an easily accessible selection of segments from the various multinational companies in the Netherlands, which supports the argumentation of (Fowler, 2002).

Two non-probability sampling selection methods were chosen for the study. One was purposive non-probability sampling, which enabled the researcher to understand the specific depth of the data being gathered and not what is generally true (Merriam, 2019, p. 29). This meant that the study purposefully attained the sample rather than sampling the participants randomly to derive rich data about the cross-cultural differences that resulted in miscommunication (Polkinghorne, 2005; Ezzy, 2002; Reed et al., 1996; Mays & Pope, 1995). Here, the researcher used purposeful personal judgment, convenience,

and the accessibility of participants to choose those who met the specific objectives of the research (Shinija, 2023; Ayhan, n.d). The reason why purposive sampling was used is that this method makes it easier to match the sample to the aims and objectives of the research, consequently enhancing the accuracy of the study, the reliability of the data, and the results. Besides, the researcher chose the participants in agreement with Vehovar, Toepoel, and Steinmetz's (2016) statement that the selection of participants follows some personal subjective ideas or judgment of the researchers who tend to look for a sort of 'representative' sample or even diversity. Since the study aimed to gain knowledge of the experiences of multinational workers, it was important to get a diverse range of respondents to achieve a good balance of participant experiences. Therefore, the participants chosen originated from Africa, Europe, and the Caribbean.

Furthermore, the snowball non-probability sampling method, also known as 'networking,' was used. The researcher encountered some challenges getting participants, where some of them were not easily accessible, which validates Saunders and Townsend's (2017) argument that the choices we make and the consequential acquisition of participants are consistently filled with problems and are susceptible to challenges. This implies that we may prefer to obtain data from certain specific participants, but it all depends on getting the chance to gain access to those particular people. Consequently, by employing the snowball method, respondents were informants and were asked to recommend other respondents who fell within the criteria or had the characteristics specified by the researcher (Acharya et al., 2013; Lopez and Whitehead, 2013; Blaxter, Hughes, and Tight, 2010; Ahyan, 2005). This method of getting respondents was a non-probability method because it was impossible to know any person who was part of the larger population who could end up participating in the study (Ahyan, 2005).

The process of snowballing validated the study because the researcher had initial respondents, who then contacted their coworkers, managers, leaders, friends, and acquaintances, who then agreed to participate in the study. The initial respondents came

from the researcher's professional network, friends, and colleagues who fulfilled the criteria set by the researcher based on the aims and objectives of the research. Contacts were made through WhatsApp, emails, and LinkedIn, and they were very interested in the research.

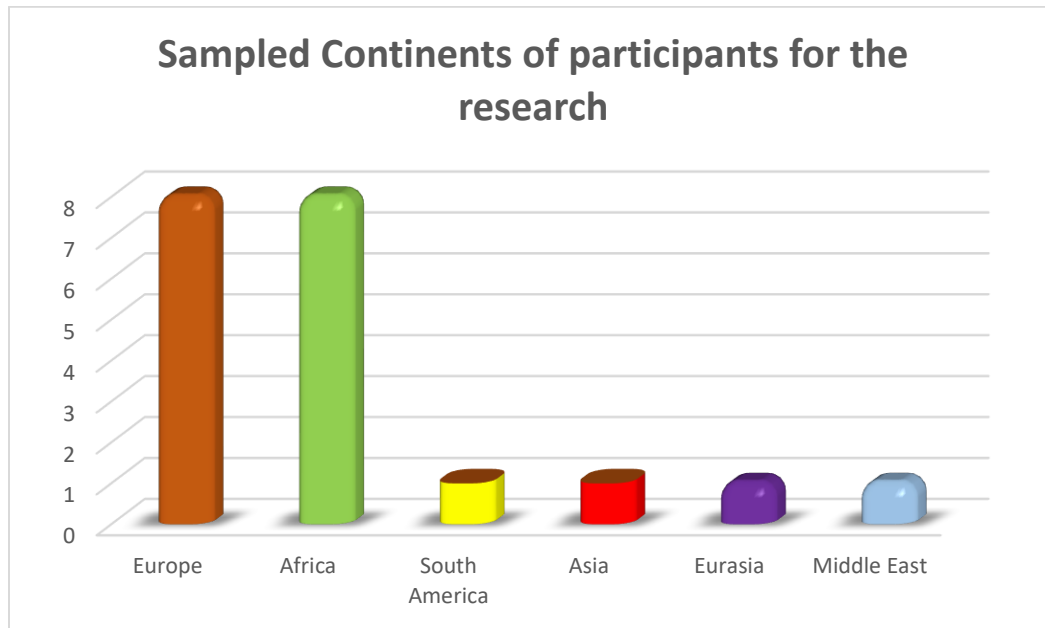


Figure 3.2 Continent Representation of Participants

Overall, 20 participants were selected, spread over 6 continents. Out of the 20, 5 were junior managers, 4 were senior managers, and 11 were general employees. In all, employees from 16 organisations were interviewed, of which 13 were service and 7 were manufacturing companies. The manufacturing companies were involved in producing electromechanical products and laboratory equipment, among others. The service companies interviewed included consultancy services, government-based services for city inhabitants, education, delivery services, and NGOs.

3.6 Participant Selection

The sample size was quite modest, but enlightening, and allowed the researcher to gather the information needed. Hence, the sampled participants enabled the research question to be answered (Saunders et al., 2016). In doing so, the researcher sampled participants who had knowledge and experience to answer the interview questions, which were mainly based on or linked to the research questions.

Demographic variables were used to sample the participants, including lower-level employees, team leaders, age variance, ethnicity, and experience. This means that participants comprised men, women, old and young, managers, subordinates, and workers with diverse cross-cultural backgrounds and experiences. In all, 12 men and 8 women were interviewed. Out of that number, 7 were managers (2 were company directors), 1 was a supervisor, and 12 were ordinary employees. Also, the ages of participants ranged between 33 and 56 years. These participants were chosen because they had worked for their respective companies for a minimum of 3 years, and also in international teams or with colleagues from other cultures. This confirms Sun and Lui's (2012) argument that such experienced participants allow for immense information and knowledge on the research topic.

Also, the variables mentioned above achieved variations in knowledge, views, and ideas for this research because each had different ways of analysing and interpreting behaviour. This is because young people, for instance, have a different perception of cultural differences as compared to older people, and they both handle such situations differently, which gives this research a good blend of the causes and effects of cross-cultural miscommunications in companies.

Another aspect that directed the decision to choose certain specific participants was the fact that the researcher sought to sample participants who could inform crucial facets and viewpoints that were related to cross-cultural miscommunication (Sargeant, 2012).

Finally, interviewing managers and subordinates helped the researcher gain additional insight into the role hierarchy in various cross-cultural miscommunication situations and their outcomes.

3.7 Instrumentation

For the study, data was collected through the primary method, which, as indicated by Mazhar et al. (2021), is done through communicating directly with the participants in various forms. MS Teams and WhatsApp were used for the interviews. A laptop was used to take down notes, record, and transcribe the conversations whilst interviews were being conducted on WhatsApp.

A structured qualitative interview approach was used for the research interviews to allow for predetermined and unplanned questions. This provided the chance to look into topics suitable to participants and draw objective comparisons (Pollock, n.d). The semi-structured interview questions were set for more flexibility in collecting data (Toladata, 2021). The researcher prepared an interview guide to ensure that information was obtained for all the research objectives. These objectives were, in turn, well aligned with the research questions to ensure that the data collected could answer the research questions and thereby fulfil the research objectives and provide in-depth information to be analysed and interpreted.

All interview questions were straightforward and simple to understand, which is in line with Yin's (2016) notion that the instrument for data collection needs to be explicit.

3.8 Data Collection Procedures

The interview tools included face-to-face interviews and recorded interviews using WhatsApp and MS Teams. The interviews were conducted within nearly 3 weeks, so between 17th January and 6th February 2025. The researcher prepared an interview guide to ensure that information was obtained for all the research objectives. The methodical process of collecting the data is illustrated in the section below:

1. Emails were sent to some of the participants, and WhatsApp messages were sent to others, indicating the topic for the research, the aim, the time involved, and the questions that were going to be asked. Knowing the main questions that were going to be asked allowed participants to think, especially about examples of practical situations that the researcher intended to know about.
2. An email or WhatsApp message was sent, where applicable, as a follow-up reminder and to make an appointment. An agreement was made as to whether the interview was going to be done via MS Teams or WhatsApp.
3. When the interview started, the participant was thanked for offering to participate in the research. There was small talk for a very brief moment to help participants relax and set the tone for a relaxed, open, and friendly atmosphere.
4. The rights of the participant were explained to them, and they were promised anonymity and discretion regarding how their data was going to be handled. They were then asked for their consent before we proceeded with the interview.
5. A set of 12 semi-structured questions was asked during the interview. To make the interview explorative, some further questions were asked depending on how satisfied the researcher was with the answers provided by participants, or if the researcher wanted additional information on some issues. This process confirmed Young et al's (2018) assertion that the semi-structured interview allowed the researcher to ask additional questions of interest in addition to the standard question set. This provided the flexibility for the researcher to delve in-depth into

a particular topic (Young et al, 2018). Also, the whole interview process lasted between 30 and 50 minutes.

6. All interviews conducted on WhatsApp were directly recorded and transcribed on MS Word. Those done on MS Teams were also directly recorded and transcribed on that platform. This confirms the argument that semi-structured interviews could be conducted through WhatsApp, emails, and telephone (Saunders and Lewis, 2018, p.165).

Examples of questions asked during the interview are stated below. Please refer to Appendix B for the full interview protocol.

1. As a member of a culturally diverse team, what factors do you think mostly contribute to miscommunication breakdowns between colleagues from different cultural backgrounds in the team?
2. In your opinion, did verbal or non-verbal communication play any role in the miscommunication process? Why do you think so?
3. Could you give an example of a situation where a slight misunderstanding resulting from nonverbal miscommunication snowballed into a larger issue within the team or department?
4. Given the opportunity, what could you have done differently to solve the situation?
5. In what ways does unresolved cultural misunderstanding affect long-term teamwork and collaboration over time?
6. Looking at the impact of cross-cultural miscommunication in your team, what kind of help would you need as a leader or from your leader to improve your team's performance?
7. What specific strategies has your company's leadership implemented to reduce cross-cultural miscommunication?

3.9 Data Analysis

The following section outlines the method used in this research to systematically analyse the data gathered.

3.9.1 Thematic Data Analysis

The study applied Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic data analysis steps to get a good overview of the collected data.

The data analysis process adopted by the research is shown in the figure below.

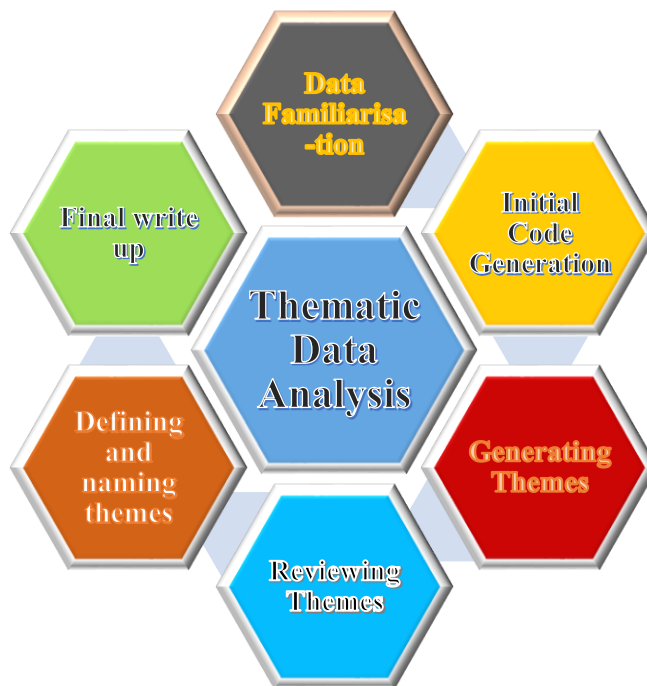


Figure 3.3 Thematic Data analysis process for the study

This study decided to use Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis to pinpoint, analyse, and report themes with the data collected. Thematic data analysis (TDA), as seen in Figure 3.3, is generally a method for progressively pinpointing, organising, describing, and interpreting patterns to make meaning of a qualitative dataset (McLeod, 2024; Rosairo, 2023; and Braun & Clark, 2012). With TDA, the researcher sought to

understand and make sense of the perspectives, views, experiences, and knowledge from people, whilst attempting to identify the unique and distinctive shared meanings located in the entire data collected through semi-structured qualitative interviews.

Additionally, based on thematic data analysis, I used an iterative, recursive process, alternating backwards and forwards between the phases, amending the codes and themes as I got to understand my data better (McLeod, 2024). This method also helped the researcher to identify commonalities in the several patterns taken from what participants talked about in the interview and then tried to make sense of them concerning their relevance to the study's topic and research questions (Braun & Clark, 2012).

Importantly, the researcher decided to use an inductive approach, permitting the data to create themes based on their findings, as Caulfield (2020) cites, rather than the deductive approach, which is based on content analysis (Rosairo, 2023; Hayes, 1997). The inductive approach of Crosley and Rautenbach (2021) also helped get into the analysis without a preconceived notion of the themes that turned up, enabling the data to establish the themes, providing less biased codes (Medelyan, 2025). In doing so, the content of the data was analysed precisely, which is known as the semantic approach, to get a clear picture of the themes derived from the data. The analyses of the codes and the emerging themes, therefore, produced answers to the various research questions of the study, as validated by Braun & Clark (2012), even though the particular question being answered only became obvious through analysis of the data.

The subsequent sub-sections outline the six steps of how the data gathered was methodically analysed.

3.9.2 Data familiarisation

First, the researcher transcribed the data and read through carefully (Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005). This helped identify that some words were not correctly captured during transcriptions. It is important to note that the transcripts were obtained in various ways: Some were transcribed concurrently with the recording of the interviews on MS Teams. A few others were transcribed directly on an MS Word document during the telephone interviews on WhatsApp. For better accuracy and quality transcription, the interviews that were transcribed directly on MS Word were worked on again. Here, I uploaded the audio of the interview recording onto the Imono transcription and translation App, which translated the data from a voice format into a written format, and then I proceeded to export the transcribed files as a PDF. After that, I opened the PDF document in MS Word to enable me to make further important corrections while listening to the audio recording to familiarise myself further with the data.

Subsequently, I managed my data by listening carefully to each recorded audio, whilst carefully correcting all wrongly transcribed words and sentences from each document, which eventually gave me thoroughly cleaned transcribed data that represented both verbal and non-verbal information from participants during the interviews, as substantiated by (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.17).

After obtaining clean data, I read over it carefully and made notes on my early impressions of Maguire and Delahunt (2017), allowing me to get a complete overview of the data gathered. Making notes allowed me to, as stipulated by Braun and Clark (2012) ‘start to read data as data’. This implies that I did not just assimilate the surface meaning of the words on my transcript, but rather read the words actively, analytically, and critically, whilst beginning to ponder over what the data meant. (Braun and Clark, 2012). In trying to ponder over what the data meant, I kept asking myself questions like, how does each participant take their experiences into account, and what speculations or presumptions do they make when shedding light on their experiences? Each information

linked to each research question was highlighted with a separate colour. A sample of the highlighted information can be seen in the figure below.

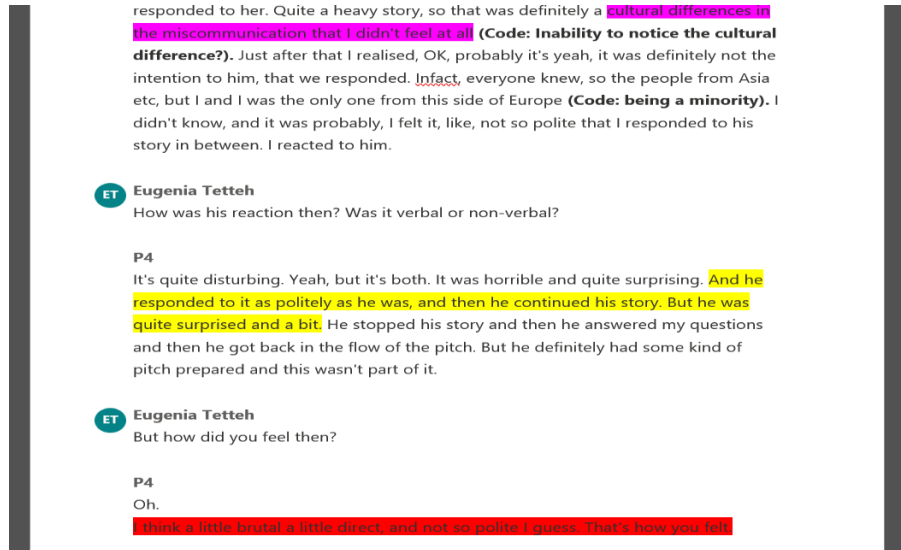


Figure 3.4 Generally highlighted transcript with initial potential codes.

Figure 3.4 shows how the researcher first identified important information related to the various research questions (RQ). These also served as potential initial codes. The **purple** highlighted section represented RQ1, **red** for RQ2, and **yellow** for RQ3. The highlighted sections made it easier to identify which information was related to which research question. For the sake of anonymity, the respondent was named P4.

3.9.3 Initial Code Generation

The researcher used manual coding for all transcripts, which provided a completely unbiased view of the themes throughout the data. A code is a short term or expression that describes the framework and meaning of a phrase, paragraph, or sentence (researcharticles.com, 2014). The coding process involved systematically going through each transcript line by line and coding every relevant information linked to each research question. I then analysed the data, deriving codes from various aspects of the data, and giving them a descriptive label to enable me to identify related content throughout the

data (guides.library.illinois.edu 2022; researcharticles.com 2014). It means that the researcher coded the data obtained by describing them using phrases or sentences, making sure that every potentially relevant information linked to the research question was identified. Therefore, the codes that were recognised came up with a label for the characteristic of the data, which was related to the research question. Importantly, the codes were generic enough to pertain to varied comments from participants, but specific enough to be of great use in the data analysis (Medelyan, 2025).

After all relevant information on the transcripts was neatly highlighted, I opened a separate MS Word document where I categorised all the codes under their respective research questions. The sample can be seen below in Figure 3.5

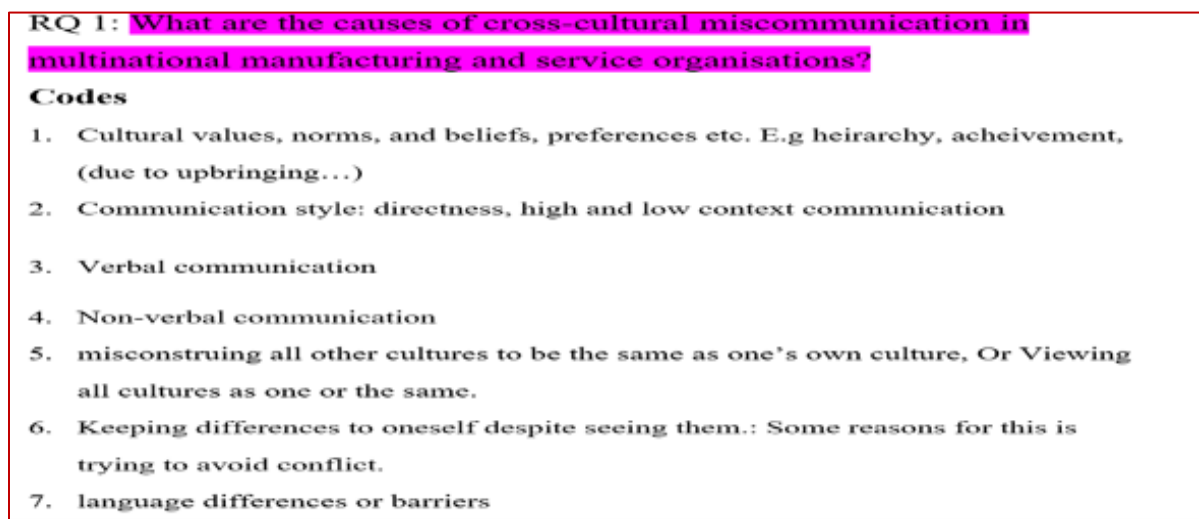


Figure 3.5 Categorised code

Categorising the initial codes allowed me to look for repetitive codes, where I applied axial coding. Axial coding lays out a coding framework, which helps a researcher to build up correlations between working categories and subcategories to identify both the features of a phenomenon as well as the dimensional variation. Therefore, I examined the codes in relation to their respective sub-questions, evaluated their accuracy, merged some, and changed some. The result was that I organised my data into very consistent and well-structured categories that not only added nuance, but also elements to emanating

concepts and the possible relationships between them (Scott and Medaugh, 2017; Boeije, 2010).

3.9.4 Generating themes

Next, the codes were collated as a basis for the themes. Themes are patterns identified in the data by using the codes (Crosley and Rautenbach, 2021). To generate themes, particular topics or words that kept arising in the codes from the data were identified and then categorised into themes. The codes were then grouped into themes to summarise the various sections of the data in an applicable way. This helped to systematically answer the research questions and attain the aims and objectives of the research. Generally, themes illustrate the pattern in the participants' responses as identified in the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82).

Furthermore, McLeod (2024) argues that themes at this stage don't just emerge from the data, but are rather constructed by the researcher, dependent on how they interpret the coded data. Rosairo (2023) validates this, that themes are different from codes because they depict patterns in the data as opposed to topics related to the sub-questions, and are, therefore, the prevalent ideas and details inside the data. Therefore, at the themes phase, to depict the patterns, I assessed the coded data and identified the elements that overlapped or were similar, and consequently identified comprehensive topics under which the codes were based. I therefore merged some of the themes that had connecting features in a way that they reflected and outlined a coherent and concise pattern in the data. Secondly, I began to analyse and delve into the relationship between the derived themes and contemplated how those themes were going to join forces to tell a comprehensive story about the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). Sample themes generated are depicted in Figure 3.6.

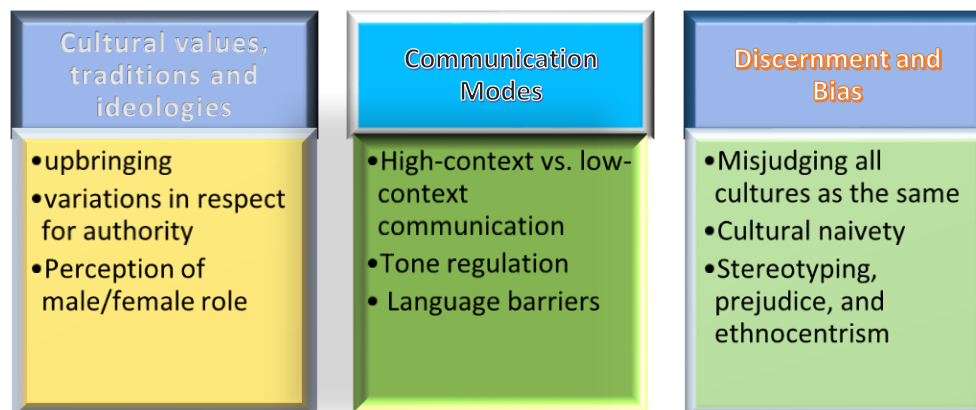


Figure 3.6 Data analysis sample themes

Eventually, as shown in Figure 3.6, I identified the themes by bringing together the outcomes of the coding process and generating themes that grouped or correlated the codes into expressive groups based on the issues being discussed or clarified (Rosairo, 2023).

3.9.5 Reviewing themes

At this point, the researcher had excellent knowledge of the data collected. I critically examined the themes derived and compared them against the codes to ensure they corresponded with the data gathered. A thorough cross-check was carried out to ensure that every category of theme was accurately and comprehensively represented in the data. This is confirmed by Rosairo (2023), who stipulates that researchers double-check the themes to align with the data that had been coded. Subsequently, themes that were too broad were restructured into new themes and sub-themes to produce a more specific analysis.

Importantly, the research questions served as a basis to ascertain that the data and themes were directly linked. This implies that the themes provided relevant information to address the questions posed in the study. In that regard, I critically evaluated the themes initially generated and compared them to the data coded and the general dataset (McLeon

2024). In some cases, I had to redefine or modify the themes, and in others, I had to generate an entirely new theme to align with the research question being analysed. I then read the data related to the various themes, as suggested by Maguire and Delahunt (2017), to ensure that the data indeed supported the corresponding themes. It was also essential to make sure that each theme was concise and distinguishable from all the others. Additionally, I cross-checked to see if there were sub-themes within themes and then separated them.

Another significant aspect I was interested in was the impact of cross-cultural miscommunication on the working relations of participant and their companies, so I closely examined and evaluated how often prevalent themes occurred. This helped me to analyse the intensity of the occurrence and served as a foundation for me to define and name my themes.

3.9.6 Defining and Naming Themes

The researcher defined the themes and used them as a basis for the final write-up to demonstrate how the methodology and findings answered the research questions.

At this stage, I had reached the core of my themes by defining and refining them (Javadi and Zarea, 2016). I guaranteed that each theme was very well defined and contained adequate data to support it, whilst merging related themes and dropping those with inadequate data to support them. At this stage, what the themes were mainly made up of was outlined and recounted in detail, as well as ensuring that they had a direct alignment with the study's research questions, and pointing out how the themes added up to the result of this research. Additionally, I indicated the meaning of the themes in correspondence to the research questions, making them fully ready to be analysed.

Additionally, I established specific elements that were interesting in the data and how important they were for the study (Javadi and Zarea, 2016). An example of interesting themes was how people from the same country had different cultural norms depending on

the region they were from, and how a lack of knowledge of these differences led to stereotyping and prejudice from other cultures.

In finally defining and naming the themes, I tried to ensure that my themes were related, but did not overlap, and were not repetitive. I also made sure that my themes had a single focus, directly answered the research question, all of which are validated by Braun and Clark (2012). I developed meaningful names for the themes that carried the exact message across to the reader as was intended. Each theme had a name which was catchy, brief, and self-explanatory, which McLeod (2024) sums up as a ‘good name for a theme’.

3.9.7 Final write-up

Finally, the researcher used the themes to present how my methodology and findings answered my research questions. Here, an interpretive analysis was used to argue the claims that authenticated the analysis. In doing so, a coherent report about the gathered data was created, and precise quotes from the data were chosen to validate the arguments made. Moreover, the accurate process was followed to analyse the data, stating the reasons for using it to validate the findings. I also stated my findings and analysed them thoroughly, concluded, and finally made recommendations that could be used as a framework to develop company strategies.

3.10 Ethics

The interviews were conducted discreetly since they involved human participants, and there needed to be a high level of confidentiality regarding how the data collected was going to be handled. At the start of every interview, participants were reminded of the anonymity of the information that they were going to provide and that their personal information would not be used by any other external or third party. Their consent was sought and received before the interviews began.

3.11 Reliability and Validity of Research Methods

Golafshani (2003) asserts that to guarantee reliability in qualitative research, it is important to examine its trustworthiness. Many researchers have initiated or adopted quality, rigour, and trustworthiness as suitable terms to describe the validity of research, as cited by Davies & Dodd (2002), Lincoln & Guba (1985), Mishler (2000), Seale (1999), and Stenbacka (2001). Validity and reliability have also been defined as ‘being attentive to the conceptualisation of the research by applying and carrying out an applicable theoretical framework and the design of the research’ (Merriam, 2009, p. 210).

Importantly, Lincoln and Guba (1985) affirm that a research’s trustworthiness is crucial in the evaluation of their worth. They therefore suggested four criteria on which the trustworthiness of qualitative research could be developed. This criterion is depicted in the diagram below.

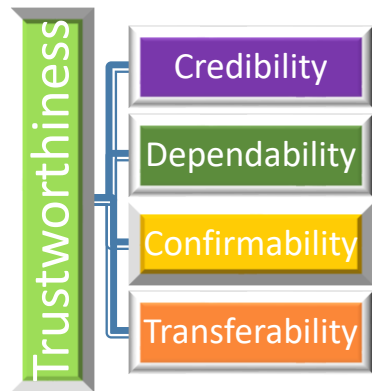


Figure 3.7 Criteria for a study’s Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness pertains to how the quality or worth of the entire study is assessed, whilst assisting in establishing how closely the findings illustrate the aims of the study, based on the data that participants provided. Various methods used to gather and analyse data make the entire process credible, reliable, transferable, and verifiable (Campbell, Greenwood, and Walker, 2020).

Hence, guided by the four criteria posited by Lincoln and Guba (1985), the following paragraphs outline how the study fulfils the various criteria, rendering the study valid and reliable.

To certify the credibility of the method used, the data for this study were analysed using Braun and Clark's (2006) Thematic data analysis. This strongly validates the methodology used in this study because it independently recognises themes in qualitative data using codes (Arolker and Seale, 2012). Therefore, having had a large amount of qualitative data, the axial coding method applied in the study allowed the researcher to reassemble all the data into ideal categories, thereby supplying a coding framework that the researcher used to organise the entire dataset into more coherent and structured themes (Scott and Medaugh, 2017). Since the themes formed from the codes served as the foundation for reporting the results derived from the interview, it is right to state that through axial coding, the themes are directly linked to the research questions, on which the codes were formed. Consequently, this established direct link makes the results credible in validating the methodology of the study, since the interpretation of the results helps to tackle the research questions that the study aims to address.

Moreover, to achieve credibility of the method, the researcher used triangulation by searching for uniformity in the data collected from the various participants to form and define themes in the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 126). Also, triangulation allowed for consistency in the data, thereby limiting possible distortion of the data collected. Mathison (1998) confirms that triangulation is a crucial methodology in qualitative research since it controls bias and guarantees well-grounded propositions. Therefore, the step-by-step and structured process involved in the Thematic data analysis applied in the study indicates, as claimed by Alexander (2019), the truth of the interpretations of the data gathered.

Additionally, axial coding used by the researcher was validated by Scot and Medaugh (2017), who claim that it is a key element of grounded theory, which was the main theory that motivated the use of the qualitative method of the study.

Furthermore, what renders the methods used in the study more credible is the fact that the researcher employed the purposive sampling method. With that, the researcher was able to get access to participants who could answer the questions to meet the objectives of the study. This approach made the data collected authentic and minimised the possibility of having a biased sample (Sargeant, 2012).

To ensure the dependability of the study, I employed a member check strategy for qualitative research. With this strategy, participants were asked to comment on the researcher's interpretation of the data (Merriam, 2019). Here, the tentative findings were taken back to some of the participants from whom the raw data were collected to comment on whether they found the researcher's interpretation to be what was meant or said. This meant that although the researcher might have used different words for the findings, the participants could recognise their experience in the interpretation. Some participants made a suggestion or two that fine-tuned the researcher's interpretations to reflect their opinions better. All the above were replicable standard methods, making this research highly reliable and valid.

Confirmability of the method used in this study could be established because samples of the interview transcript can be found in Appendix C of this research document. Also, samples of codes and themes are included in both Appendix D and E, respectively, and depicted in Figures 3.4, 3.5, and 3.6.

Various techniques utilised by the study confirm its transferability. I interviewed 20 employees of multinational manufacturing and service companies in the Netherlands. This number is validated by Creswell and Poth (2018), who stipulate that smaller samples in research could range from 5-30 participants. Bekele and Ago (2022) cite Guest, Bunce, & Johnson (2006), indicating that 12-20 participants are enough when trying to attain maximum variations, based on the research's objectives. Based on my objective to

ascertain what the causes and effects of cross-cultural miscommunication are, and their subsequent impact on employees and the organisations, it was imperative to take 20 participants to achieve the maximum distinctions that would give the study a lot of information and valid interpretations.

Besides the number of participants, I spent ample time of between 35 and 75 minutes on the interviews, which allowed time for participants to have a trustworthy and relaxed environment to hold the conversation with me. I was therefore able to collect a lot of vital information from each participant, making my data very rich in content. The interview process is therefore validated by Lincoln and Guba's (1985) assertion that lengthened sessions build trust and rapport with participants, which indicates the likelihood that rich and valuable information will be gathered.

Another feature that renders the method of this study transferable is the fact that I made a clear, distinctive, and consistent description of the findings and included word-for-word quotes from participants in reporting the findings, which authenticated the qualitative study further (Alexander, 2019). Importantly, the participants' recollections and remarks recapitulated in their very words went a long way to establish the content validity and reliability of the research (Patton, 2002).

Conclusively, all the various vital steps methodically carried out in the study enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, and take the necessary measures to demonstrate this credibility to external readers of the study (Alexander, 2019). This research methodology could therefore be highly replicable for research centred around similar phenomena.

3.12 Research Design Limitations

Qualitative research design, like all other design methods, has its downsides (which will be discussed as follows:

The qualitative research design is time-consuming. Due to the use of semi-structured interview questions, the researcher asked questions other than those on the interview protocol. The reason for asking those questions was to get information to meet various aspects of the research aims and objectives. Moreover, the further questions made the participants more excited or eager to share their cultural experiences, somewhat prolonging the conversation as compared to quantitative data collection, where the participants answer straightforward, structured questions and do not need to give detailed explanations for their answers. Chest (2016) affirms that one main limitation of qualitative cultural analysis is how time-consuming the process is. Lopez and Whitehead (2012) also confirm that this type of research method is time-consuming and were quick to add that it is also resource-intensive to carry out. The various emails explaining the aims of the research and questions to be asked, etc., asking other sub-questions to gain in-depth insight into the phenomenon being researched, and the arrangement for a laptop with recording and transcription function for participants were all resource-intensive.

Moreover, the scope of the study was limited to multinational companies in the Netherlands and not to other countries. Also, due to the use of the qualitative study, it was not possible to interview many people. Therefore, the findings cannot be applied to multinational companies on a global level. This is affirmed by Payne and Williams's (2005) assertion that the use of qualitative data to generalise continues to be a crucial problem.

Secondly, some vital information or specific problems could likely be lost in the interpretation of the data. Since the participants were expressing their thoughts, feelings, and behaviour about themselves and other colleagues, they explained different issues,

which could have led to the loss of some of the vital information in the process. (Chest 2016, Bowen, 2006).

Moreover, even though all participants spoke English well, the accents and pronunciation of some of them led to a lot of errors in the transcribed data. This was challenging because the researcher had to listen to those recordings over and over again to ascertain exactly what message was being conveyed. Also, during the interview, the researcher had to reframe a couple of questions to be able to understand exactly what the participant wanted.

Lastly, there was the challenge where some participants tended to get sidetracked when answering their questions due to the semi-structured nature of the questions. The researcher, therefore, had to find ways and means of refocusing participants on the specific question asked. For instance, the researcher briefly summarised and asked if that was exactly what they had meant to say, or rather asked the question in a different way or in parts. This gave the participants a better understanding of the information that the researcher was trying to get from them.

3.13 Conclusion

Despite increasing awareness and studies on cross-cultural issues, the ripple or domino effect of cross-cultural miscommunication has not been researched, and there is a need to research it to help raise more awareness to avoid otherwise unnoticed business challenges. Due to the consequent effect of cross-cultural miscommunication right from the moment it happens between individual employees to teams and the organisation, companies have to educate workers more on the domino effect of their actions or ignorance.

The objective of this study was to delve into how cross-cultural miscommunication affects multinational companies in the Netherlands. To gain a wide spectrum of knowledge and insight, the methods used were to help the researcher go deep into what

people think and feel about the research phenomenon, for which reason the qualitative study was chosen over the quantitative method. Using the qualitative method allowed me to use semi-structured interview questions to delve deep into the subject matter, thereby showing the body language, pauses, expressions, etc of participants, as stipulated by Yin (2015). This was consistent with how Denzin and Lincoln (2011) envisaged that qualitative researchers investigate concepts in their natural environments and endeavour to interpret phenomena regarding the meanings that people attach to them. Therefore, the qualitative research method was the most befitting for this study because with that, the thematic analysis outlined simple but well-structured steps, which made the findings authentic.

In addition, my research questions served as a basis for the interview questions, which made it easier to carry out the interviews.

It is worth noting that many people are aware of the fact that cross-cultural miscommunication does exist. However, most still do not know or do not realise the extent to which certain misunderstandings affect their colleagues, teams, and the organisation. Therefore, the qualitative method, through semi-structured interviews, revealed a lot of real-time situations in companies.

Moreover, identifying and gaining insight into specific domino effects of cross-cultural miscommunication enabled management and company executives to realise the pressing need to deal with grassroots and management-subordinate issues. This correlates with Jennifer and Raman's (2015) argument that a company must understand the impediments connected to the cross-cultural communication process and find ways of getting around the barriers to allow for effective cross-cultural communication. This will prevent unfortunate business losses like contracts and the inability to survive in foreign markets.

Additionally, the findings, with the help of the method, will equip workers in multinational teams and companies with skills to deal appropriately with

miscommunication and better differentiate between colleagues' character and their culturally driven behaviours. Company employees will, therefore, look less at colleagues' behaviour through their own cultural eyes or lenses, as described by commisceo-global.com (2022).

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the results and analysis of the data collected in the qualitative study carried out using a semi-structured interview research instrument. It details the major results, including verbatim quotes from participants to illustrate exactly how participants felt and perceived some of the causes and effects of cross-cultural miscommunications in their respective teams or companies. The chapter is sub-sectioned into results in the order of the research questions in chapter one, and thoroughly outlined based on the final overarching themes, named after carefully analysing and evaluating the initial codes derived from the dataset. Also, for the sake of anonymity, the various participants are referred to as P1 to P20.

Additionally, some words or groups of words are highlighted in some of the direct quotes of participants to emphasise the main point that they were trying to make.

4.1 Causes of cross-cultural miscommunication between colleagues and in teams

The study found a lot of causes of cross-cultural miscommunication, which are explained below:

4.1.1 Cultural Values, norms, traditions, and ideologies

The study found that upbringing played a huge role in the way people behaved and responded to certain situations, leading to miscommunication among colleagues. This could be seen from P1's statement that '***Based on their cultural values, norms and beliefs, they communicate differently and because we communicate differently, sometimes we find it difficult to understand some of these styles of communication and this sometimes results in misunderstanding***'.

Some participants also expressed that they were brought up to say yes, even though they meant to say no. For instance, P14, who is African, indicated that *'In the African or Indian community, **it is quite hard to say no**, whereas in the Dutch culture, it's very common to say no'*. Another norm that causes cross-cultural misunderstanding is greetings. In some countries, when you enter an office, the one sitting there has to greet you, but in others, the visitor has to be the one to greet, which, according to the findings, causes misunderstandings. As P10 put it, *'Some of the causes might simply be from where people come from, the norms and practices that they are used to. For instance, when **you enter an office** and you meet people, you are **expected to greet** them, but from other cultures, those in the office have to greet you, and this could bring some grudge or annoyance if one does not do as is expected.'*

Also, most of the participants affirmed that variations in respect for authority lead to cross-cultural miscommunication. An example was given by P11, as: *'looking at **Germans**, they tend to be a bit more formal and a bit more hierarchical, where **the boss is the boss**, while in **Holland** we are used to seeing whoever we are talking to, to be **co-equals**....'* To buttress their point, P11 indicated that *'**Germans are very fond of their titles**, so if you finish your studies, you become an engineer, for example so if you write to them, you have to put their title as well because they value that and like to be addressed with a Herr. **If you forget that, they get at least a bit grumpy and they do not tend to take you seriously anymore**'*. Additionally, due to respect for authority, some cultures tend to involve their managers when there are issues between them and their colleagues. This, however, brings about conflict because some cultures prefer to deal with misunderstandings at their level and not involve managers unless the issues get out of hand. One employee is quoted as saying, *'He told me that **in his country**, that's what they do: you **tell the boss** what the person has done.'* Researchers, including Ayoko & Hartel (2000) and Härtel (2004), mentioned that when interactions between people from different cultures take place, these people are often confronted with rules and norms which are unknown to them, leading to misunderstanding and confusion. These expressions confirm the comments of P 10, 11, and 14.

Other norms and traditions identified in the study included Cultural perceptions of male/female roles, misinterpretation of cultural symbols and meanings attached to them, as well as the impact of religious beliefs within the workplace. This is in line with Minkov (2003)'s assertion that culture is related to the beliefs and values that humans employ to interpret the experiences they face, giving cause to their behaviour. Hence, upbringing or one's experience in their own culture determines how they interpret and thus behave, given certain circumstances. The study also found that some male colleagues could not stand getting instructions from females due to their religious and cultural backgrounds. For example, P2 expressed: *'It was not a fight, just a communication, but **due to the male/female relationship cultural norms**, he did not use the right tone to talk to her'*, confirming Weinland (2023) and Alomari (n.d)'s claims that serious misunderstandings in cross-cultural settings result from differences in the perceptions that people have regarding gender roles. Also, concerning religious symbols, gestures, and very trivial comments about eating with the hands, cause some level of misunderstanding in teams.

4.1.2 Language and Communication Styles

The results from the interviews revealed that High-context vs. low-context communication differences, tone regulation, and verbal/non-verbal communication gaps were big hassles when working with people from cultural backgrounds other than yours. Many participants indicated that some colleagues were implicit in their communication, and so it led to people interpreting their instructions differently, depending on whether one came from a low or high context culture. P1 stated as follows: *'Recently, we were supposed to accomplish some tasks and I remember the coordinator who does the coordinating for that project **told us to finish soon** but because **he was not explicit with his communication**, with the word soon, some took it that I can take my time to bring it later whiles some of us think the word soon means immediately'*. This difference in communication style is explained by Hall's (1976) assertion that in high-context cultures, information is communicated indirectly, and the listener has to make meaning of what is

being said because it does not contain all the information that is verbally or nonverbally expressed. Whereas high-context cultures state explicitly what they want to say. Some participants indicated that the low-context cultures were indirect because they wanted to be polite and avoid any form of conflict with colleagues or superiors. Such miscommunication between people from varying cultural ethnicities, as suggested by Weinland (2003), happens due to the differences in beliefs and communication styles.

Concerning tone of language, P9 indicated that: *'our tone in language is different from a lot of other nationalities, which sometimes causes others to misinterpret our intentions and message.'*

Additionally, language barriers were also found by the study to be a major source of cross-cultural miscommunication. For communication to be effective, various components, including “mutual intelligibility of the language utilised between and among interlocutors,” are necessary (Abuarqoub, 2019, p. 1). Therefore, anyone speaking needs to be able to translate their thoughts into words (Meuter et al., 2015). Hence, the inability to translate their thoughts into the right words is causing cross-cultural miscommunication among the study's participants and their colleagues. To further illustrate this situation, Abrams (2020) indicates that miscommunication and disagreements are unavoidable in human relations, and it is challenging to manage them when individuals share the same language knowledge, let alone when people have to use a second language. He claims that the use of a foreign language results in people communicating incorrectly and ineffectively across cultural and linguistic confines. Limitations in language skills may cause people to misunderstand the utterances of others, or they may impede them from expressing what they would like to. We are therefore unable to grasp the implications or, in some cases, react, using contrasting communication styles (Abrams, 2020).

Mainly, participants recognized the fact that language barriers were caused by a lack of proficiency in the business language being used in the company, differences in meanings

attached to specific words, and the fact that even though some people were born or grew up in the Netherlands, they did not know certain words because they grew up in homes where they spoke their mother tongues or had friends from other nationalities in school. An example was from P8: *'Of course, some words you use. **People don't know the words because they speak Dutch, but they have not been raised with every Dutch word, I think. So language, partly, and that depends on how the person is raised in their own country. Though some were born in other countries, they were raised in the Netherlands. Also, some of them were born here, but were raised in other languages at home with their parents or at school with friends.**'* P8 was quick to admit that the use of some old-fashioned words could also cause misunderstandings. Furthermore, regarding language proficiency, some participants indicated that some people did not understand the business language well enough to both express themselves correctly and understand others well, which was a major issue. P11 added a twist to this, stating: *'In a lot of in a lot of instances, the language barrier that is there also prevents people, **especially at the lower levels**, for people whose English is not that good, to have proper communication and that leads to miscommunication,'* trying to indicate that people at lower levels often had language proficiency issues. In sharp contrast, P5 indicated that the language issue was a problem in senior management: *'In this academy, where English is the main spoken language, **the director of my programme doesn't even speak B1-level English. I don't know how she got the job, to be honest. There was an incident where a senior manager from another programme was about to give a talk in a formal meeting. When he started, he just spoke one sentence in English, and the second sentence I heard from him in English was 'I don't feel comfortable using English for my speech, so I have you switch to Dutch'...**'*

4.1.3 Discernment and Bias

The study ascertained that stereotyping, prejudice, ethnocentrism, indifference, and cultural naivety were some of the causes of bias and discernment in multinational teams. Other causes were the general use of sarcasm, arrogance, insensitivity, lack of experience

in working with other cultures, and other potentially offensive behaviours. Baldwin (2007) is of the notion that ethnocentric viewpoints include indifference or ignorance of differences, as well as the feeling that your culture is superior to other cultures. This resonates with what most participants shared about such issues being prevalent in multinational teams. Importantly, among all the issues mentioned regarding bias and discernment, the results indicate that ethnocentrism is the main issue of bias in working with the Dutch, and these sentiments were expressed by both Dutch and non-Dutch nationals. Examples of quotes on bias and discernment include the following: P 5 (an Asian) expressed that *'What I experienced in the Netherlands is that sometimes **they prefer you to follow the local way to do things**, and they aren't even interested in what kind of behaviours you normally have from your cultural background'*. Whereas P6 said: *'Because that's what they are used to, **some of them are quite more or less 'right in their own eyes'** when dealing with other cultures*. Researchers like Bryan (2024) argue that biases, which are a natural part of the thinking processes of humans, can be applied to intercultural communication because, in such a setting, one finds oneself enclosed by people from new cultures, together with varied stimulus cues which demand rapid interpretations. Hence, a listener in a conversation, due to the time pressure to respond, has a reduced opportunity to rethink (Guirdham, 1999). This can be said to explain why people are so quick to judge others without thinking twice, leading to biases and eventually thinking their culture is the 'right one' or the best to emulate, so ethnocentrism sets in.

To further explain the role of sarcasm in cross-cultural miscommunication, P9 stated: *'Sarcasm is also a really big common thing, because Dutch people tend to be quite sarcastic. We tend to just say things sarcastically to almost anyone. Sometimes for us it's just fun, but for international people that are new to the company, they tend to take things seriously and don't understand when we're being sarcastic or use a bit of satire.'*

It is important to note that three participants indicated that some causes of cross-cultural miscommunication were that some people are simply oblivious to its existence and

impact. For instance, P3 stated: *'In most cases, people are not aware that there are cultural differences and that those differences can be perceived or received.'* Similarly, P5 stated: *'They aren't even interested in what kind of behaviours you normally have from your cultural background.'*

4.1.4 Organizational Culture and Corporate Practices

In the organizational context, the study's findings showed that some organisational cultural practices were sources of cross-cultural miscommunication. This suggests that differing communication norms in connection with emails, variations in how time is valued, and how company regulations were implemented resulted in cross-cultural miscommunications. Some participants specified that they were displeased with situations where colleagues or managers sent them emails instead of sitting down with them in meetings to make joint decisions. P19, for example, stated: *'I did not like the idea of just sending an email that the task was being given to someone else without sitting down to discuss it first with me.'*

The study also showed that differences in cultural background were the basis for how the company's core values were interpreted. An example could be seen from P19: *'I was working for this U.S. company, and they defined what we call our core values, but you could still see that because of cultural differences, the interpretation of such core values differed, even though the values were specifically spelt out in English.'*

Flexibility in the value of time was also a core issue mentioned in the interview. A couple of participants mentioned that they were quite flexible when a client was late, but some Dutch colleagues were highly intolerant if clients were even five minutes late. Also, P9 indicated how time is valued in at their workplace, referring especially to coming to work on time, etc: *'Time is a really big miscommunication thing in my company, which some people think of, time as more flexible, but Dutch people are really strict with time and you have to be there even before the time is.'* The difference in how time is valued could be accounted for by Hall's (1950) theory that some cultures perceived time as linear and progressive, thereby highlighting punctuality and schedule. This type of culture is the monochronic culture. However, Hall's theory posits that the opposite of monochronic culture is polychronic culture, which views time as flexible and adjustable, or easy-going, which could easily be a point of misunderstanding.

4.2 Effects of cross-cultural miscommunication in multinational manufacturing and service organisations

The study uncovered several issues, accounting for the major and a few minor effects of cross-cultural miscommunication. The following sub-chapters outline the findings.

4.2.1 Misinterpretations in Communication

As mentioned earlier, people's values, norms, and upbringing determine how they interpret or react to information or the behaviour of other people. Since culture is one of the most crucial sources of communication conflicts at workplaces, Deep, Salleh, and Othman (2007)

All participants indicated some degree of confusion when cross-cultural miscommunication occurred. For instance, because expectations for certain tasks were not explicit enough, everyone interpreted in their own way, which led to delays and loss of urgency for certain tasks or projects. P1 stated, for instance, *'Because he was **not explicit** with his communication, I mean, generic for each other to understand how soon it could be accomplished or could be applied. There was a whole lot because some finished soon, others brought it later, and **it got us delayed**'*. Generally, participants declared disappointment, and in other cases, some felt like they were not validated and felt undervalued. P 6 stated: *'What I was disappointed with is that she didn't communicate it immediately'*. Also, some participants expressed that disappointment from cross-cultural misunderstanding further led them to gossip about colleagues and the situation that occurred, where misinformation and slander took precedence. Examples to buttress these points could be seen from P19's statement: *'I think, there was some **gossip** or, I don't know, **rumors** of discussion that this can be improved and this and that....'* P15 also affirmed: *'And you do notice that there is a lot of miscommunication happening there because **people do not feel valued or recognized** for what they can bring to the table'*. Gossip, slander, and disappointment have significant implications for team collaborations because they create negative feelings in the team, which could affect their

performance. This confirms De Jong and Elfring's (2010) argumentation that there is a correlation between trust and a team's effective performance. This could be argued to be true because gossip, etc, leads to ill feelings about colleagues, and so such colleagues are unable to work together effectively, since they sometimes want nothing to do with each other. Hence, they cannot give their maximum efforts to achieve high productivity.

Another issue worth mentioning was that communication and interaction gaps caused stagnation in work cooperation because both parties were either not communicating at all or communicating on such a minimal level that their cooperation was sometimes directly or indirectly affected.

4.2.2 Relational difficulties or hurdles

Concerning interpersonal or relational dealings, the study revealed several issues that came up as a result of cross-cultural miscommunication. Prevalent among the many insights provided were verbal arguments, disagreements, and tensions, negative dynamics, including stereotyping and prejudice, as well as feelings of intimidation and embarrassment. Some people did not want to work with others or made sure to have the least contact with those with whom they had had a misunderstanding. P7 indicated that *'it wasn't an immediate reconciliation, because she was not ready to speak to me, ... I could see there was this kind of **mean look** for several weeks, and **then the tension** during that period was really bad'*. On the other hand, some participants indicated that when they sat down to talk with their colleagues, the tension died down. In instances where misunderstandings led to prejudice, P8 had this to say: *'So **it's** a little bit **confusing** when somebody is humble like that, and you're already thinking, 'so you cannot do your work well by yourself, you constantly need somebody', but in fact, she's just trying to be polite'*.

The majority of participants mentioned that miscommunications led to anger and frustration. These feelings further produced hostilities, intimidation, and alienation, where some members ended up even feeling like the out-group. P11 indicated: *'It led to*

disruptive communication, so people didn't talk to each other anymore, which, of course, led to further misunderstanding. **Alienation** set in, and people started to dislike their job, their boss, and the company'.

4.2.3 Collaboration and Teamwork Dynamics

The study ascertained that cross-cultural miscommunication among team members resulted in a breakdown in teamwork. Some participants stated that when task interdependence was involved, one person's inaction affected the subsequent tasks or duties of others after a misunderstanding. For instance, P7 explained that: *'You know, in my finance team, our activities are linked. It's a kind of cycle, so one person does their work, and then after that, the other person uses that to work on theirs. So when one person is offended by your action or because of anything that leads to miscommunication, this can cause a delay in our work process or collaboration. And it can lead to you also not meeting your deadline'*. P14 also shared a similar situation: *'Because we work as a team, when I was unable to finish some of the tasks, it also affected the team. For example, if I had to do the initial stages of a specific task and had to forward it to another colleague to continue the task, because I was delayed, my colleague was also delayed in fulfilling his or her task, bringing frustrations in the team'*. Again, most participants shared that misunderstandings resulted in colleagues showing reluctance to collaborate or share ideas during the communication breakdown. In addition, some of them said that they became demotivated and felt reluctant to support future efforts or participate in future tasks. P6 gave a typical example of *'If there's going to be another situation where she needs my help or something, I wouldn't start out of the blue like we did this time because I naturally I like my creative freedom.'*

4.2.4 Organisational Effects and Consequences

The findings showed that the organization was in one way or another affected by the impact of cross-cultural miscommunications that led to misunderstandings. Strained collaborations resulted in delays, and people became inefficient, whereas resources were

eventually wasted, and team collaborations were affected by prolonged deadlines and aims. P14 stated that: *'because I was afraid to say no, so I took it upon myself to go ahead with the task, and later on it had a lot of **consequences** for me by **not meeting all the tasks** that I was assigned.'*

Besides, the inefficiency reduced the performance of individuals and teams, and so organizational and team goals were not always met. Some participants explained further that hostile tensions from misunderstandings affected the working environments, the team spirit, and even the quality of the company's products. An example of the situations faced by teams was given by P6: *'This immediately **affects the production, the productivity**, of course, because it sure takes a lot of time to explain to each other and then afterwards to understand each other. And it also caused some **quality issues**, in connection with **customers**.'*

Moreover, some participants admitted that due to cross-cultural differences in communication and the resulting conflicts and misunderstandings, they preferred working with team members from cultures with similar beliefs and values. An example is a statement from P13: *'In our team, due to such disagreements, **I feel more comfortable working only with specific members of the team**, more than with other people. I tend to work more with people from similar cultures to me'*. This authenticates the social framework argument and its effect on self-categorization, which stipulates that people are prone to identify mostly with groups with which they are affiliated (Turner and Oakes, 1986; Tajfel, 1978).

4.3 The role of verbal and or non-verbal communication in the cross-cultural miscommunication process.

The findings showed that there are cultural differences in communication styles, namely: verbal, non-verbal, and mixed communication styles had different degrees of influence in teams, as proven by participants interviewed in the study. Regarding verbal communication, the findings revealed that cultures that communicated explicitly found it

difficult to understand those that communicated implicitly. Also, body language, gestures, eye contact, and attitudes influenced intercultural interactions with colleagues. Verbal and nonverbal cues were sometimes fused in a way that the mixed communication styles caused situations of concern in teams. The various findings on the above-mentioned styles are depicted in the subsequent sub-sections.

4.3.1 Misinterpretation and Cultural Misalignment

The study revealed that instructions that were given implicitly led to people interpreting them in their own ways. P2 gave a situation as follows: *'I asked a new colleague to wait a while for me to finish before leaving the workplace. So, when I told him to wait, he thought it was because I was alone and could not do the job, and so he got angry. But the main reason was that with our job, somebody can bring some allegation against you when you are alone, and there would be nobody to defend you.'* It could be seen from P2's example that he did not tell the colleague explicitly why he wanted him to wait for them to leave together, which made the new colleague, who did not know some of the company rules, angry and even had wrong impressions about him.

Secondly, ambiguity in word usage and differences in interpretations of specific phrases were also found to cause misunderstandings in teams. Some phrases or words that are completely normal in some cultures have entirely different meanings in other cultures. P7's statement was an example: *'I remember once I was discussing something with someone and I asked her: 'Do you understand what I mean?' Strangely, the person was seriously offended, and I could not figure out what the cause was. And later in her anger, she said to me, 'Do you think I'm dumb, that you ask me? Do I understand what you mean? Do you think I don't have brains?'*

P7 also indicated: *'I believe when you talk of language, some words that are accepted in your culture are not accepted elsewhere. For instance, one can never say, 'Oh, this is nonsense' in my background, because it is an insult to the listener'.*

Furthermore, many participants stated how some gestures and behaviours were perceived by them or by their colleagues, and explained what specific attitudes meant to them or their colleagues. For instance, P10 said *'The way she was looking at her, that's what started the whole thing. She didn't say anything. None of them said anything. But then she turned and saw she was looking at her in a very bad way'*. Or as P12 put it. *'Sometimes, if she's even holding something, **the way she bangs the thing on the table means she's angry** or something like that.'* Therefore, 'mere' looks sparked a disagreement between colleagues, and so cannot be overlooked in this research. Further findings were that greeting colleagues with either a handshake or kisses on the cheeks was misinterpreted, and also throwing hands in the air when talking, or using the hands a lot in communicating, led to disagreements or conflicts, some of which had consequences like suspensions or even getting fired. P13 for one said: *'In the **Netherlands**, when you are **like saying hello** to somebody who we meet, it is normal to have good eye contact and to **shake hands strongly**, and when I came here to the Netherlands, like I was shaking hands like normally not strongly but some people told me that it doesn't give a good feeling as you are weakly shaking hands.* P3 also had this to say: *'You give **a thumbs up** in Europe and then they think that you agree, right? But in Ghana, where I come from, it's generally considered impolite to give a thumbs up to your boss or higher authorities in the company.'* Some participants, one of whom was an HR manager, also mentioned that the politeness of Asians, like the Chinese and Indians, made them think that these colleagues were not independent and would need support frequently if employed, showing prejudice and bias.

Importantly, the findings show that most participants mentioned how much eye contact played a significant role in collegial interactions. Participants from Africa expressed that not making eye contact or less eye contact signified respect for the listener, whilst to the Dutch and some other nationalities, making eye contact showed that you are having some connection in the interaction. P3 contrasted different perceptions of eye contact: *'Eye contact is a way people perceive that if they are speaking to you and you **look into their eyes** or stare, then **you have made contact** and are communicating. Well, I guess, in*

*Ghana things are changing, but I think it used to be the case in Ghana where even if you go to an interview and you are staring at the person that is interviewing you, you will be **considered to be impolite**. Another example was P18, from South America, who indicated that: ‘When **the eye contact is not fully there**, you **don't feel the emotion**, or I would say the **empathy**. I am someone who recognises that quickly, so I could see that for me I classify it as **disinterest during interaction**, you know’.*

Again, P4 expressed how she and her colleagues were utterly surprised after they misinterpreted an interview candidate's behaviour: ‘She was **not used to declining stuff**, and she thought it was quite **too direct, too harsh, and not polite** to say anything about her doubts. So we were definitely surprised that she declined the job. It was definitely the cultural differences in the way we communicate, and the meanings we give to signs, that led to the miscommunication’.

The research brought to light how all participants mentioned that the directness of the Dutch made working with them a challenge. Some participants were of the view that their manager's direct way of dealing with team conflicts was merely an attempt to dismiss the issue, rather than go deeply into that. In one instance, the directness of an external body member for the company's conflict management led to one employee going on sick leave for over a year. This is because the person was direct and blunt to someone from Asia, who did not take kindly to that. Also, the directness of the Dutch was mostly perceived as nationalism, racism, ethnocentrism, prejudice, etc. One participant, P8, was quick to add that people are not able to freely speak their minds these days are somewhat careful in their behaviour due to things happening in the world around us today, and had this to say: ‘People, because of miscommunication, are thinking somebody's **racist** or somebody is **being discriminatory**’. Notably, further responses from some participants affirm that indeed, these were the thoughts of some colleagues during cross-cultural miscommunication. For instance, P12 said: ‘I don't know, I'm not sure .. this guy, it's like, **he's a bit racist**. He doesn't like Ghanaians, so if there's something that he has to do for some of us, he doesn't want to do it.’

To further substantiate how participants expressed situations where the Dutch are normally direct, P5, for instance, affirmed that *'It was more like a very negative feedback where she yelled and said, 'You just finish what you have in your mouth and we can talk later, maybe you guys do that in Asia, but they don't do it in the Netherlands. She meant that I was eating and talking at the same time, which is not done in the Netherlands. That was quite kind, of aggressive in my opinion'.* The Dutch also admitted that they are direct in communication as compared to other cultures, which could be seen in P6' who is Dutch's statement: *'We are kind of direct to say no, we don't want it like this, and that we want it differently. But in the culture in Romania, it's kind of different'.*

Interestingly, one significant finding was the notion that the Dutch are generally very direct in their communication. However, some Dutch participants pointed out that this was prejudice because not all Dutch are as direct as people think. They stressed that the directness depended on the region where one grew up or lived. P4, who is Dutch, had this to say: *'My boss, who is also Dutch, can be quite direct in the way she responds, and the result sometimes is that I can't deliver some things right away because she's going to be quite critical and also direct... Because I don't want the criticism, I want my work to be perfect because I don't want her direct response.'* P8 also added the following to explain why some Dutch are more direct: *'The directness depends on which province of the Netherlands you're from... Yeah, and even our dialects are different, so the way we talk can be a lot rougher than the way people from the other provinces talk.'*

Other significant findings showed that sometimes, the neutrality of facial expressions or behaviour made it difficult to see if a colleague from another culture was angry, sad, or even satisfied. Other times, the contrast between the person's gestures and mimics seemed to indicate that the person would rather have things the opposite way. P8 said: *'It's hard to see if something is good or bad, so you're automatically thinking, uh, are you too relaxed or too polite? The same with when **she** says **yes**, **but** you see non-verbal, that **it's a no**'.* P3 confirmed this, modelling how ambiguous some verbal responses could

be: *'The same is in certain areas where if they say yes, but you know, looking at their demeanor, you ask yourself if they actually mean yes or they just want to get rid of you.'*

4.3.2 Barriers to Collaboration

This research demonstrated that when verbal or non-verbal communication resulted in misunderstandings, it led to some impediments in collaboration.

Some of the issues identified in the interviews included the fact that in trying not to be direct, not to offend other nationalities or cultures, people rather offended their colleagues, leaving collaboration strained. P3 gave one instance:

'I have a situation, for example, with a colleague regarding positive comments that I kept giving to motivate and encourage him. However, when it came to his performance review, I told him that he was not performing. He asked me why I did not tell him all that while, but had been saying how wonderful he was, and the situation didn't end well, because there were a lot of differences in the way we saw this'.

Further findings showed that due to the attempt to show cultural sensitivity towards specific colleagues, the real message that one wanted to convey was not correctly transferred. P3 stated the following to demonstrate that: *'If you are communicating with an African colleague, you know that they tend to be polite towards you. And so, when communicating with them, you are also polite towards them. And then in that case, you lose the urgency of what you want to communicate. And I think that that is where part of the problem lies'.* What came up from the conversation with P3 was that such unintended reactions led to disputes between colleagues.

Regarding collaboration, some participants mentioned that the collaboration issues they faced were based on sentiments and angry feelings that resulted from the communication breakdown. For example, P4 mentioned that *'I was joking with a French colleague, and I was just pushing him with a little bit of playfulness, and was just being sarcastic. That didn't feel playful to him at all. He didn't see it as funny, so he got very angry with me,*

saying that I was bullying him and so forth. He didn't want to work with me or talk to me for three months. So, afterwards, we didn't continue full collaboration because I didn't come to him at all, and he didn't want to talk to me, but we rather used short emails only to communicate'.

Also, P10 gave an example of what happened after a verbal communication breakdown: '*But in so many cases, this affects their cooperation since it brings negative vibes. If there's something, you have to ask the other person, because of that ill feeling, you wouldn't even need to go and ask. So if something will take two minutes to sort out, because you have to ask this person for a direct answer, you go through people, which is a waste of resources, and time-consuming'.*

4.3.3 Implications for Productivity

The study found that verbal and non-verbal communication had some implications for productivity. Some participants stated that facial expressions and gestures made them reluctant to approach some colleagues for support. Some also felt intimidated by the directness of their managers and so preferred to hold back their views in discussions. This could be seen in P15's statement: '*We currently actually have a new dean who is a very direct communicator, who our team is not being receptive to, because it's a very international team. We were used to being diplomatic, adjusting to each other, taking the time, and the relationships, and now, you have a new dean coming in who is not doing that. And it's almost like having an elephant in the room, so people are feeling very scared and unsafe to share what they think.* This statement indicates that teams' reluctance to share ideas has an impact on the team's productivity. Others noted that they felt that they could not get all the required skills and knowledge for their jobs because of the lackadaisical attitude portrayed by the colleagues who were supposed to train them. P12 expressed the following: '*All the time, his **facial expression, like his body language**, tells us that he doesn't like the Africans. Sometimes, if we need something and we call him, the look on his face tells us he doesn't want to come. We have to get the opportunity*

*to be trained in other areas, but **he refuses to train us**, and mostly chooses people from Europe or other countries to train before he comes to choose one person from Africa’.*

In addition, the inability to say no led to many delays and unmet targets. Many participants affirmed that they or their colleagues’ action or inaction affected their respective teams. P14 stated: *‘I was afraid to say no, so I took it upon myself to go ahead with the task, and later on, it had a lot of consequences for me by not meeting all the tasks that I was assigned’.* P15 shared a very crucial point about how difficult it is to read some facial expressions: *‘I have some colleagues from more liberal cultures who **don’t show their emotions** at once, and it’s very **difficult to read them** to understand, like, are they enthusiastic? Are they angry? Are they sad? Are they annoyed? But instead of saying that, they are not able to talk about it, and go quiet, and you can misread that as well.’*

Another finding of the research was the use of mixed communication, which caused misunderstanding among cross-cultural teams. The study identified that sarcasm, coupled with the tone of the voice and, in some cases, succinct commands which were too fast, posed challenges for the listeners of the messages to interpret correctly. P9 gave a typical example: *‘I was the first supervisor, and there were a few new coworkers who tended to just stand around and not do much. So, I said, like, **‘hey, go drive’**, but they did not understand. What I meant was to go take your order, do everything that you need to do, and then drive off, but they just stood around not understanding what I had said. They needed specific step-by-step instructions, and because I just really spoke in short sentences and just said really direct things like do this, do that, people didn’t really like that.’*

Lastly, many participants attested to the fact that people from direct cultures were bold enough to confront colleagues if they felt there was any issue, and they tried to solve the matter. The findings also showed that some people from indirect cultures also employed this method, which, to some extent, was the result of the Dutch national culture being

incorporated in the cooperate culture, from which other cultures may have learnt. P11 stated the following: *‘Usually, you can feel if something is bothering someone, and the Dutch are direct enough to ask about it, no matter who it is.’*

4.4 Impact of hierarchy on the outcome of cross-cultural miscommunication

The impact that hierarchy had when misunderstanding took place between superiors and subordinates is explained in the subsequent sub-sections.

4.4.1 Authority/Power dynamics versus hierarchy

The research findings discovered that hierarchical structures influenced the leader-subordinate relationships. The majority of the participants affirmed that leadership does have a strong influence on the impact of misunderstandings resulting from cross-cultural miscommunication. This, according to most of the participants, comes about because hierarchical structures in companies don’t make the relationship between leader and subordinate equal, thereby implying that organisational structures influence the impact of the misunderstanding. P3’s assertion sums up some of the aforementioned: *‘But leadership or **hierarchy** also plays an important role, where it **doesn’t make the relationship equal**. So, yeah, in a situation where it doesn't make it equal, then, you know, it also distorts the information where somebody can do things to appease you’.*

This was affirmed by P11: *‘As for many cultures, they **don't speak up** to someone who is their **boss** or is at a higher level in the organization. This increases the gap between the boss and the employee, therefore also increasing the problems that might or might not arise’.* Consequently, participants indicated that both leaders and subordinates indeed felt some level of intimidation during cultural miscommunications. Some participants, however, felt that due to disproportionate power dynamics, since some cultures don’t challenge the one in authority, subordinates could unwillingly accept everything the leader says to avoid any further conflict or consequences, further compounding the feelings of the subordinate.

Additionally, some participants stated that the impact of hierarchy involvement is normally strong because when a leader is involved in a misunderstanding, matters are taken more seriously. For instance, P3, a senior manager in a service company, said: *'I think **hierarchy** also plays an important role in **the way that things are perceived**. When you are seen as the manager, when you say something, and the subordinate feels the consequences of what you are saying. So, because you are a leader, if you make a point, it's taken seriously, that is why the impact is stronger when leadership is involved.'*

The study also found that subordinates faced harsh consequences after cross-cultural misunderstandings, due to the status of the boss. Some consequences included unexplained warnings, firing of the subordinate, suspension, among others. P2 provided that: *'Because she was his boss, **she wanted to sack him**, so we had to form a group to talk to the lady not to do that. However, because she wanted to show the guy that she's the boss, **he had to stay home for two weeks**. If she weren't the boss, she couldn't have done that.'*

The findings also identified a division in a particular perception that when people from different cultures are put to work in the same position, there is no miscommunication. Whereas some participants thought so, others thought otherwise. P13 had this to say: *'I think if it is like a miscommunication or a conflict with team members from the same level, it can be discussed more easily. It could be accepted or maybe negotiated than if it were with a leader. Maybe the leader will dominate this conflict, and maybe the subordinate may not dare to discuss that in the same way with another subordinate.'*

4.4.2 Influence of leadership approach/ style

In contrast to the findings that hierarchy played a huge role in the impact of cross-cultural misunderstandings, a few participants were of the opinion that the cultural background of the leader made the difference. Others thought that the position of the leader made no difference in the miscommunication setting. This was particularly indicated by most Dutch participants who said that they believed in the flat organisational structure, and did

not see any difference or hierarchical gaps, which could cause any leadership impact on such misunderstandings. An example is what P20 shared: *'Well, regarding the impact of the misunderstanding if there's a leader involved, this differs from country to country, as to indeed how the relationship is between manager and the subordinate, and importantly, the power and distance.'* Some, however, added that they had seen or heard of such an impact in other teams or companies they had worked for, and could thus imagine that leadership could have a significant level of impact, even though they did not share similar views.

Also, some participants indicated that if open-minded leaders were involved in cross-cultural miscommunications, it would not result in any big issues, because of the positive vibe that they promote in the team. P5 mentioned that: *'If the leader has certain leadership abilities, etc., there may likely be no conflict. This person can work well with the people because they encourage an open-minded working atmosphere in the team.'* This shows that with culturally-sensitive leaders or managers, there are very limited or no major conflicts and consequences when cross-cultural miscommunication occurs in cross-cultural teams.

4.5 Strategies for addressing cross-cultural miscommunication in multinational manufacturing and service organisations

Many strategies that could help address miscommunication issues were uncovered by the study and are described in the following sub-sections.

4.5.1. Training and education

The research findings indicated that companies need to arrange training on cross-cultural miscommunication, both for leaders and all employees, and some stated that these training sessions should be made compulsory for every worker. Concerning the training of managers, P15 stated: *'So managers should be trained so that they could be able to separate personal characteristics from cultural traits or behaviours. This was confirmed*

by P4: *'Of course, training about cultural differences in how to handle this during conversations and during meetings, how to see the signs, how to see nonverbal signs, etc. I think that's definitely important for every leader where there are people from different cultures in the team.'* In the same regard, P19 mentioned that: *'There could be workshops for teachers and how we can work together to ensure that culturally, there's a plain level of communication.'* The need for one training or the other was reiterated by almost all of the participants. Some participants suggested that small, virtual informative classes, symposiums, or workshops could be organised for multicultural teams. It was suggested that these lectures need not be long, so a maximum of one hour was enough. Consultants or culture experts could occasionally be brought in to give such training. Also, one participant stated that existing online platforms could be used for the cross-cultural training, since employees are already familiar with those platforms.

The study also identified that training could include sessions where employees trained each other on what some of the cultural traps could be when working in multinational teams.

4.5.2 Formalities for Interpersonal Communication

This study found that some strategies were needed to promote interpersonal communication. Some participants noted that these strategies could reduce the impact of leader/subordinate miscommunication conflicts. Suggestions made included the following:

- Describe tasks, goals, and deadlines clearly and explicitly.
- For team members who don't understand fast messages, the leader should provide distinct and structured instructions.
- Before tasks start, leaders should meet with team members to clarify the goals and expectations of assignments.
- Employees should be encouraged to ask clarifying questions to ensure mutual understanding.

- Leaders should talk less, listen, and allow others to share their views before sharing their own. This implies that leaders should listen more than speak during misunderstandings. They should let counterparts provide input on how they would like tasks to be carried out to avoid miscommunication.

Sample statements from participants concerning the above-suggested strategies included:

P6: *'Carry out cultural training in explaining something like the differences in various cultures of employees working in the company.'* And P3: *'as a leader, talk less, listen, be the last to speak, and let everybody say what they want to say before you influence them.'*

P2 also mentioned: *'I think seminars will be good. Bringing in consultants or culture experts with knowledge to make people aware that we have cultural differences, and show us how to react to various issues. I think this can also help a lot to bring some cultural awareness.'*

4.5.3 Language uniformity/support courses

Some participants noted that there was a need to create a common business language like English or Dutch, so that all workers would speak that language on the work premises, so that people can communicate freely with one another. Three participants noted that without a common language, people only communicated with those with whom they spoke the same language and so had little or nothing to do with other team members. P2 indicated: *'I think there should be a business language in all the companies, where it could be English or the native language of this country, which is Dutch. Then you can express yourself well in English so that your colleague can easily understand you.'*

Secondly, some participants explained that companies should offer more Business English courses to employees who need that or Dutch lessons to foreign employees. P6 for instance, wrote: *'We offer Dutch language courses, but also business English language courses but I don't think that's enough.'* This was confirmed by P11: *'For the Polish employees, we started giving Dutch classes.'*

Another important strategy mentioned by a participant was that working instructions should be available in multiple languages. The findings revealed that one company did not have working instructions in English, even though one of the business languages in the company is English. Therefore, foreign workers need to have things translated into Dutch for them before they can carry out their tasks, which leads to a waste of time, delays, misinterpretations, among other issues. P6, for example, said: *'We don't have any English working instructions at all, and I still don't know how that's possible. They cannot read the Dutch language; they need to hear it from their coworkers, who aren't always very sure how to say something in Dutch.'* This indicates that some words may be misinterpreted, which could lead to cross-cultural miscommunication issues.

4.5.4 Cross-cultural recruitment strategies

The findings showed that managers or leaders need to employ some crucial strategies to help reduce cross-cultural miscommunication challenges to the bare minimum. For instance, some participants shared that new recruits had to be sensitised about the diversity in their prospective teams before they started to work closely with colleagues. Some participants, therefore, stated that incoming colleagues should receive practical training on cultural norms and values, for instance, on the Dutch culture, because they would be working in a Dutch environment. P17's statement highlights the aforementioned points: *'Like in onboarding, there should be a sense of awareness of the types of cultures working in the team... It is important to try to understand whether these incoming colleagues understand the Dutch way of working or not, and if not, then practically arrange some training for them'*. However, on the other hand, P 17 stated that the existing team should also be sensitized about the culture of incoming colleagues: *'For the team, they need to understand what's coming due to having a new colleague with a different cultural background. Prepare the team for the new colleague with a different culture. This is necessary because a person from a Turkish background is different from a Ghanaian or German, or whatever.'*

The findings also show that some participants believed that leaders should speak both the host country's native language and at least one international language, e.g., English, as seen in P5's statement: *'If a team leader is being recruited, the person should speak English and Dutch, and this will be more beneficial for our team.'*

Importantly, many participants said that, particularly for multinational teams, companies should recruit people who have a good level of cultural sensitivity and awareness. P20 stated: *'For the selection process in recruitment, it is important to hire people who portray some of the characteristics of awareness, respect, empathy, open-mindedness, adaptability, and effective communication.'*

4.5.5 Feedback Systems or mechanisms

Some participants noted that there should be laid down feedback systems for employees to establish independent avenues for expressing views. The study found that some well-established systems or newly created mechanisms could help employees deal with the influence of cross-cultural miscommunication issues. New mechanisms could be created by creating platforms on the intranet to reach all colleagues. P3 explained the following: *'I believe more in informality where you create space for people to add their views. Because those are more, those things cannot be found in policies, but then somebody feels like, you know, I'm going to say this and I know that the listening party will not be defensive.'* The established platforms could be used by including cross-cultural awareness content so that employees could inform themselves on how to deal with colleagues from specific cultures or get information on what to do in certain cross-cultural miscommunication situations.

Secondly, an assertion worth mentioning is P15's suggestion that leaders should adopt a coaching role when addressing complaints based on cultural differences. Therefore, during misunderstandings, leaders should use the opportunity to educate subordinates on cross-cultural differences. The example of P15 is as follows: *'When people complain*

about behaviors, managers should take more of a coaching role, and talk to the people involved.'

It was also identified in the study that Leaders could ask subordinates about their preferred style for critical feedback.' P3 *'So, if you have critical feedback, you could also just ask, 'How do you want me to communicate that to you? And then you understand the way he can appreciate it, right?'*

The data also showed that in jobs like teaching or lecturing, exam questions were unconsciously set or graded based on lecturers' style of communication. P1 explained as follows: *'The way we communicate affects our way of setting and grading exam questions, which pose challenges to students.'*

4.5.6 Team building and cooperation

Creating settings or events for cultural exchange among employees was identified during the interviews. Many participants noted that this was significant to help employees get to know more about the culture of their various colleagues. Such events could be held annually or twice a year. Some examples from participants are as follows: P11 explained what their company does- *'We have a big internal network, and the company is supporting that by having a couple of times a year gatherings with colleagues from all over Europe. So, you got to know each other much better than only from an email or once a year superficial contact.'* This strategy could be emulated by other companies to provide practical settings for cross-cultural exchange among employees. P11 indicated: *'Another way is to **organise special meetings** or settings where I can tell colleagues more about my culture, **to talk more about our habits** in our home countries, and also to know more about **their cultures too**.'* One participant also mentioned that companies should organise annual get-togethers for all subsidiaries of the whole company, and the event should be held in one country or region.

4.5.7 Policies and Systems

Findings from the study identified that strategies to support people who were troubled after cross-cultural miscommunications included companies having a system where policies and procedures are in put in place, such that people can go to someone they trust, for instance, buddies, or senior colleagues, etc. For instance, P 15 said: *'I think **policies and procedures** need to be in place, where there is a **person that you can go to**, to share your concerns, like someone you can trust anonymously, without fear of attribution. This is really important.'* Also, P4 said that *'... but in the company, maybe not your manager, but it's like a buddy that you had since the first day you joined the company... **then you get more support from a buddy**, where he or she can help with the talk and confrontations in challenging situations, I'd say.'* P4 was, however, quick to add that the buddies needed to first be trained to support new colleagues.

Further findings were that workers who could not understand fast messages due to their cultural communication style needed more structured, direct information and step-by-step instructions on how to carry out specific tasks, to help reduce cross-cultural misunderstanding.

Also, P12 felt that most cultural misunderstandings happen on the blind side of management, and therefore, it was necessary to create extra roles for some office workers for some hours a day or a week to work on the factory floor to closely monitor the cross-cultural misunderstandings happening there.

Finally, the findings indicated that companies should standardize their code of ethics such that it will create organisational cultural ethics that employees will follow to eradicate or minimize misunderstandings. In the code of ethics, P5 mentioned that in their previous company, this was done as follows: *'During the onboarding procedure, I got a free **handbook**, where they have, like, they're very clear and specific sections regarding this kind of topic. In that company, **they didn't use the word 'intercultural'**; instead, **they used terms like 'cultural diversity'** or the various descriptions provided.* P5 further

suggested that: *'The vocabulary we generally use should be one which can guide the whole working environment to be more open-minded or more culturally inclusive'*. This implied that in writing e-mails, during meetings, interpersonal relations, etc, the tone of such communication channels, vocabulary used, etc, should be standardized.

It was important to P that all management had to make sure that the policies made to curb cross-cultural miscommunication challenges were implemented.

4.5.8 Other strategies

Some participants also stated some strategies that they believed could help support the efforts of companies to get necessary information as a basis for training and policy making on cross-cultural challenges. These included researching the specific cultures of employees to ensure that they are trained to be culturally aware of how to handle and interact with one another accordingly. Additionally, surveys of previous employees' experiences with cross-cultural cooperation in various companies should be carried out by organizations to enable them to know how to go about their cultural sensitization policies and programmes. P16, for example, stated the following: *'I think they need to really do **research** and **know the backgrounds of the people**. If they know the different cultural backgrounds of their employees, they will know how to **educate them**. It is important to educate the employees on how to deal with their fellow employees, based on their cultural background.'*

4.6 Summary of Findings

The growing increase in multicultural people has led to many companies having multicultural employees, which Rehani (1994) claims affects the communication process. Therefore, multinational companies are facing challenges in the working relations of employees due to differences in the way some behaviours or communication styles are perceived. This study, therefore, sought to gain insight and knowledge into the domino effect of miscommunication issues that happen in companies and see if the

misunderstanding has any direct or indirect impact on the employee, the company. This research is therefore timely because Rehani (1994) asserts that experiences during cross-cultural miscommunication need to be researched.

Through a semi-structured questionnaire, a qualitative interview was conducted to answer the research questions.

The study identified that many things caused cross-cultural miscommunications among team members in a company, but predominant among them were cultural beliefs, norms, and values, language problems, and communication styles. Others included bias, organisational culture and practices, as well as cultural insensitivity and inexperience in working in multinational settings, all of which demonstrate, as Green (2017) states, from their study conducted, that interpersonal communication covering cultural and linguistic subdivisions is demanding.

The research further unveiled the fact that cross-cultural miscommunication often ended up in disagreements, some of which had serious consequences like turnover, suspension, and demotivation. Most effects were found to be anger, confusion, verbal arguments, tensions, and alienation in teams, among others.

Leadership was seen to have a considerable degree of impact on the severity of the consequences of the cross-cultural. It was, however, argued that the culture of the leader, or the flat company structure system, determined the impact of leadership in such misunderstandings.

Additionally, the study found that verbal and non-verbal communication played a major role in cross-cultural conflicts. The directness of some cultures posed problems for multinational teams, and also people's attitude to time. The study identified some implications of disagreements on productivity, where it could be seen that such incidents led to delays and lowered productivity.

Finally, the study comes out with strategies that could help companies reduce the occurrence or impact of misunderstandings. For instance, providing cross-cultural training for employees, creating different mechanisms for obtaining feedback on issues relating to cross-cultural communication, cultural sensitivity awareness, and team-building activities, etc.

Chapter V: DISCUSSION

5 Discussion of Results

This chapter outlines a thorough discussion of the findings collated from the interviews with employees and managers from multinational manufacturing and service organisations in the Netherlands. Inferences from the literature review are linked to the critical analysis of the findings, and implications for professional practice are well-aligned with the discussions.

The chapter comprises five sections, with each section centered on the respective research questions of the study. The first addresses the causes of cross-cultural miscommunication, followed by their effects in the second section. The role of verbal and non-verbal miscommunication is then discussed in the third section, and the impact of hierarchy on the outcome of cross-cultural miscommunication is discussed in the next section. The chapter closes with strategies/recommendations aimed at addressing cross-cultural miscommunication.

From the literature review of this research, it could be seen that in modern times, the increase in economic globalization and the continuous upsurge of communication technology have given access to people from all over the world to engage in cross-cultural dealings through the exchange of information, negotiation, etc. Consequently, there is a growing necessity for communication between people from diverse cultures (Chi, 2016). All such business engagements always demand communication, which in turn encounters obstacles in attempting to maneuver around the differences in culture. Moreover, as many companies are resorting to teamwork, multicultural groups are most likely to face numerous problems, leading to tensions (Mittelmeier et al., 2017). Hence, a successful interaction is reliant on the skillfulness to communicate with counterparts from different cultures (Zang, 2021; Chi, 2016).

Therefore, an attempt to understand how culture constructs the emotional lives of people and the level of impact it has on their wellbeing will further develop studies devoted to human behaviour and will, in turn, be of immense advantage to multicultural societies Tsai (2015), and for that matter, multinational companies. Hence, this study, which set out to look into, gain knowledge, and provide insight into how cross-cultural miscommunication affects cross-cultural teams in multinational manufacturing and service organisations in the Netherlands, would contribute immensely to the business and academic world. The study also attempted to determine whether cross-cultural miscommunication has a domino effect on multinational teams, and contributed strategies and recommendations to help reduce cross-cultural miscommunication effects as much as possible. In doing so, this chapter seeks to analyse the findings, while basing various arguments on proven scientific theories, citations, and information for other researchers, and showing the practical implications for the study. Therefore, the various findings are comprehensively discussed in the following sections, centred on the results of each sub-question.

5.1 Discussion of Research Question One:

Causes of Cross-Cultural Miscommunication



Figure 16.1 Sources of cross-cultural miscommunication

Figure 5.1 shows various elements from the analysed data, which were found to be the primary causes of miscommunications that resulted in disagreements in multinational teams.

The study established many important causes of miscommunication in teams in multinational companies. Findings indicated that upbringing plays an important role in how people behave and respond to certain situations, which is due to the various norms, beliefs, traditions, and values, among others, that are somewhat instilled in them consciously or unconsciously from home or the society in which they grew up. This implies that since people come from different countries, they have their way of speaking verbally and non-verbally, and so based on their cultural values, norms, and beliefs, they communicate differently. This is generally to be expected because, as Tahir et al (2020) purport, various cultures have diverse value systems, and so their communication is greatly determined by language, norms, or rules that are present in every culture. Zhang (2021) affirms that people's cultural ethnicity defines them in various ways, such as traditions, customs, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour. Therefore, because people are used to such attitudes, etc, from their respective backgrounds, it facilitates a negative response to different cultures (Chi, 2016). This means that people generally react negatively to miscommunicated behaviours or attitudes of colleagues from other cultures, which results in misunderstandings or conflicts in the workplace.

Also, some norms, values, and practices that were identified as causes of cross-cultural miscommunication included differences in regard for authority and male-female roles. Some cultures that had a high regard for authority preferred to go through bosses rather than talk to colleagues of the same level in some situations, which sometimes angered, confused, or further compounded miscommunication situations. P6 stated, for instance, '*The higher-ups are the ones they listen to, so I totally understand why she would go to my manager and not to me because their working culture is more aligned to that.*' This shows that people's values impacted how they reacted to situations. Importantly, even though some other cultures regarded or had respect for authority, they were of the view

that colleagues could discuss issues directly without involving team leaders or managers. On the other hand, as indicated, since cultures viewed gender roles differently, Alomari (n.d) sees this as normally controversial. For instance, in some cultures, men tend to shield women and honour women by preventing them from doing certain types of jobs. However, prohibiting or excluding women from doing some difficult jobs is perceived as breaching women's rights and fundamental labour rights. Therefore, the differences in gender role perception cause far-reaching false impressions in cross-cultural settings (Alomari, n.d).

Language, as a source of cultural miscommunication, was noted across nearly all participants' observations and experiences, and confirmed by Linh (2016), that language was surely an obstacle in intercultural communication.

In that regard, the findings showed language barriers like proficiency in the business language of a company, high versus low context communication, literal translation from one's one language, and the general use of sarcasm, led to many misunderstandings. In a slight contrast, Korkut, Domalci, and Karaca (2018) argue that even though people may have a high level of proficiency, misunderstandings could still occur, signifying that we still have to look at look closely at the other areas that cause misunderstandings.

Notably, the misperceived words or phrases led to stereotypes and prejudice among colleagues. This correlates with Boxer's (2002) assertion that in this era, where cross-cultural interconnections have become the norm, the differences in the regulations of speaking can create stereotypes, discrimination, or prejudice against entire groups of people.

Ethnocentrism was found to be one of the main underlying causes of cross-cultural miscommunication in the companies involved in the study. This led to stereotyping, prejudice, and other forms of bias between or among affected colleagues. Ting-Toomey & Dorjee (2015) postulate that ethnocentrism is a defence mechanism that exalts one's own culture above other cultures, making one anticipate that all other cultures emulate the way one lives or behaves because they see it as the most appropriate or right way.

This defence mechanism was seen in most participants' responses, indicating that some people thought that because other cultures were living in a new country, they needed to conform to the standards of the new country. Therefore, the inability of those colleagues to conform to their expectations led to such people being misperceived and wrongly eyed.

Besides, it was also discovered that such ethnocentric notions and attitudes stemmed from people's lack of experience working with different cultures, as well as people being ignorant and not realising that there were indeed cultural differences in the teams. P6's statement shows this notion: *'Normally, when they see a new culture, they automatically try to say no, or for example, what I experienced in the Netherlands is that sometimes they prefer you to follow the local way to do things. They aren't even interested in what kind of behaviours you normally have from your cultural background.'* Boxer (2002) authenticates this view, based on a study on cross-cultural pragmatics, which proposes that individuals from different cultures interact based on their own 'logical or realistic' norms, which lead to a conflict in expectations, and consequently misperceptions related to the counterpart. Hence, since almost all participants mentioned ethnocentrism, it shows a sharp contrast to the general notion that the Netherlands is a tolerant country for foreigners. Interestingly, both Dutch and other nationalities confirmed the perception that people normally tell other cultures to conform to the norms and practices in the Netherlands, as P19 said. *'They usually tell you if you go to Rome, do what the Romans do.'* A report from a research-funded project by the European Union on National Discourses on Tolerance and Cultural diversity in the Netherlands had some interesting highlights. The report indicated that the Netherlands had a reputation as a country that played a crucial role in advancing ideas and practices of tolerance, and even has a slogan of "integration with retention of cultural identity" (Maussen and Bogers, 2010). Nwazia (2018) also shares similar views about the cultural tolerance of the Dutch, highlighting the slogan 'live and let live'. The information in such articles and reports is a sharp contrast to what nearly all participants stated, showing that this perception of the Netherlands was not applicable in working together with the Dutch, for instance. No wonder P15 stated what is happening in their team as: *'People are just like, I love this*

person, but I hate working with them.’ People misconstrue the friendliness of colleagues as them being highly culturally sensitive or open-minded in work settings. It is, however, important to state here that this situation may not only apply to the Netherlands, and therefore highly underscores the need for people to separate their general perception or attitude of people from their expectations of how things should be when working with them, as the popular saying goes, ‘all that glitters is not gold.’ Being sensitive to this will reduce stereotyping, prejudice, or other biases when working in multinational environments.

Furthermore, Meuter et al (2015)’s argument that language barriers cause misunderstanding because, during interactions, speakers have to decode their thinking or reasoning into words, posing challenges to them when they try to communicate in a language other than their mother tongue, was confirmed by the findings. In that regard, some participants indicated that people literally translated words or sentences from their own language, which sometimes had a completely different meaning in another language. This implies that when a person is not proficient in a language, they might miss the right words or literally translate the words from their own language, which eventually causes a stir among colleagues. An example was in P2’s statement as follows: *‘A colleague working together sometimes says something which may be a direct translation from his language, but this has a completely different meaning in the common language that you both speak. When you inquire from the colleague, you realise that that wasn’t what they wanted to say. But since he said it in a direct translation from his language, you could not understand, which brings problems since we may perceive that maybe they’re insulting you or saying something against you.’* Other participants indicated that the meanings attached to certain words and phrases differed, which sometimes caused misunderstandings. A typical example was when a participant asked a coworker if they understood what he meant, which made them very angry because they interpreted it as he was undermining their intelligence. These unfortunate phrases or questions cause unnecessary tension between colleagues, due to the listener being angry and the speaker being left utterly confused. Additionally, P6 had this to say regarding proficiency and the

meaning attached to words: *‘One issue is that because we speak different languages, proficiency is an issue. Another one is the meaning that we attach to stuff. The same meaning in certain areas, where if they say yes, yes, yes, you wonder if they actually mean yes or if they just want to get rid of you.’* This leaves room for confusion, whereby the listeners could interpret such words wrongly.

Another finding of the study was that high and low contexts of communication were a cause of miscommunication in teams. With high context cultures, according to Hall (1976, 91), not everything in the meaning of the information being communicated is said explicitly, both in verbal and non-verbal communication. Thus, communication in such cultures is said to be ambiguous, indirect, and understated (Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey, 1988). However, Hall (1976, 91) proposes that the message transmitted in low-context cultures contains most of the expected information. Such cultures communicate directly, are precise, and could be dramatic (Nashimura, Nevgi, and Tella, n.d). Gamsriegler (2005) also confirms that such cultures explicitly say what they want to, proving the literal meaning when communicating with people, and their goal is normally to receive and give specific information. Therefore, when people from both cultures communicate, there tends to be tension. One cause for conflict due to the differences in communication could be linked to the literature review of this study, where Hall's (1976) argument is that those from low-context cultures make the mistake of thinking that their way of communication is the best. He finds their perception wrong because, according to him, words do not always convey every meaning in a message. Green (2017) confirms Hall's argument by proposing that ethnically mixed conversations often encounter miscommunication, especially if one or both of the people involved have the “‘that’s the way it is’ mentality.” Alomari (n.d) elaborates on this, stating that Western cultures view the direct communication style as a sincere and reasonable attitude to professional and personal engagements. This attitude is not often taken lightly by other nationalities, which confirms why the open-minded Dutch participants and other nationalities noticed that ethnocentrism is very prevalent in the multinational organisations where participants work. Notably, the differences in the context of communication between the two types of

culture are what result in misunderstanding, caused by misperception, misinterpretation, and misevaluation (Gamsriegler, 2005). The connotation is that people from low-context cultures generally view their culture as the right one because they look at the behaviour of other colleagues through their cultural lens.

Finally, the findings of the study pointed out that time was a major issue in cross-cultural miscommunication in the companies interviewed. Time was perceived as flexible for some workers, whilst others were of the view that time is time and that there is no discussion about that. Some participants even believed that it was important to be present for work or an appointment shortly before the scheduled time. P13 gave the following example: *‘So for my colleagues who are from the Dutch culture, if it is like 9:00 AM so no client should be accepted if he is coming even 30 seconds after 9:00. But when, somebody from our region, like Syria or Turkey, and he or she comes a little bit late, like one minute or so, saying that I was in the bus, I couldn't come on time, please. So, from my side, I tend to be flexible. I accept the clients because this is a culture where time is not of the same importance for people from countries like Syria and Turkey, as time is important for people here in Europe or in the Netherlands.’* P9 also said: *‘When you're late, you're late. There is no excuse when you are a minute late. We don't know why they're doing it, and there's a lot of frustration from our side. We are like, this is not how you act in the job, and they don't understand that. They don't view time in the same way as we do.’* The point of conflict in such instances stems from the fact that the colleagues whose culture is strict on adherence to agreed-upon time tend to see those who are flexible with time as unprofessional, whereas those flexible with time get confused because they see it as normal. P13 also stated: *‘This example about trying to be a little or many liberal with the clients who come in late to appointments, sometimes leads to many other Dutch colleagues thinking that we are not so much professional or less professional or not so much committed to our regulations.’* Also, it was established that sometimes, people who were flexible with time got laid off because they often went to work late and did not see it as a big deal. This implies that people with cultures that are flexible with time, and who tend not to be sensitive to how others regard time, may end up losing some

opportunities, and also companies may risk losing good workers or potential clients due to their strict rules regarding time. P9, a supervisor, had this to say regarding what he sometimes did when working with people who were flexible with time: *'There needs to be a little bit of leeway. So, when they are late, I'm like, you know what? Make sure the food arrives at least warm, you know, so we can get proper quality to the customers.'*

5.2 Discussion of Research Question Two: Effects of Cross-Cultural Miscommunication

Matters that came to light in the analysis of the data regarding the effects of cross-cultural miscommunication showed that misinterpretations and or misrepresentations during interactions led to difficulties in collaboration and interpersonal relationships among colleagues. The effects of the challenges identified in the study were found to have a direct or indirect impact on the organisation, and all participants affirmed that there were some consequences of the cross-cultural miscommunications, though the severity of the impact varied.

The data analysed showed that the immediate effect of miscommunication situations was confusion and anger. Many people experienced anger, frustration, disappointment, and a feeling of being undervalued. The diagram below depicts the most stated consequences of cross-cultural misunderstanding given by the participants, according to the data. The diagram also shows the percentage of employees who thought that their differences affected the organisation.

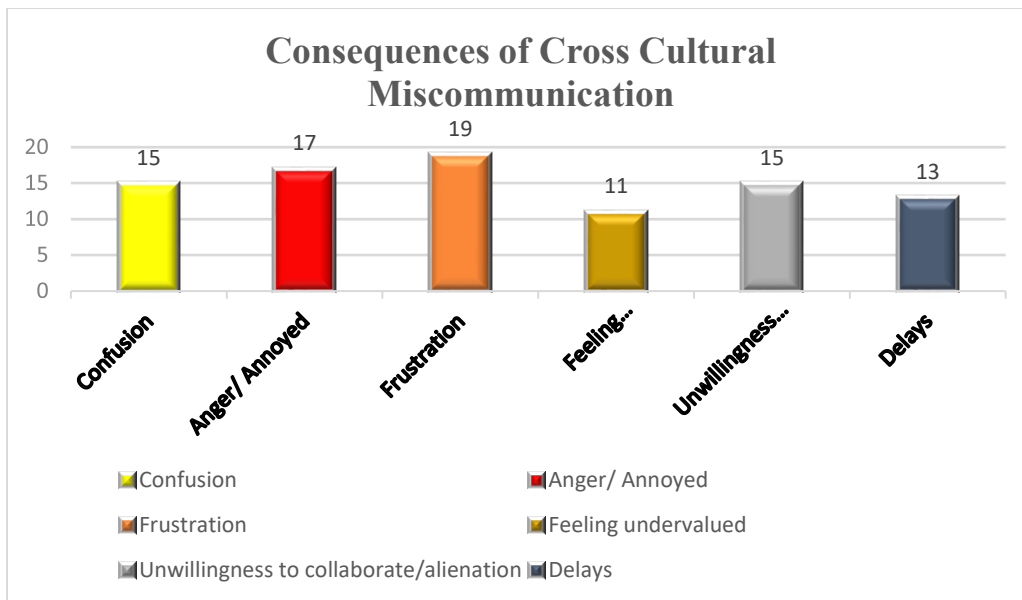


Figure 16.2 Consequences of Cross-Cultural Miscommunication

Figure 5.2 shows precisely how many participants stated what happened after misunderstandings or conflicts due to miscommunications. It could be seen that 19 (almost all) participants stated that there was frustration after misunderstanding, while 17 of them, the second highest, said they or colleagues got angry or annoyed. Anger, frustration, confusion, and unwillingness to collaborate were mentioned by most participants many times in each interview, explaining how they or colleagues felt in different misunderstanding situations at work. This implies that miscommunication issues led to a lot of anger and resentment in teams or among colleagues, resulting in people not willing to work with each other, prejudices, gossip and alienation. These experiences of participants can be linked to the fact that, whilst people are submerged in environments where the behaviour, attitudes, language, norms, etc, are unfamiliar to what they have experienced, they may tend to get frustrated and, in some cases, suffer cultural shock (Zhang, 2021). P13's statement confirms the aforementioned, showing how they felt, and the reaction afterwards: *'It affected us, so for like two or three weeks I was avoiding her because I was feeling angry with her.'* P7 also indicated the following: *Seriously, I could not figure out what the cause of her anger was... She was not ready to speak to me, and I*

could see there was this kind of mean look for several weeks. I would say maybe four, five, and there was tension between us during that period.' The various effects of cross-cultural miscommunications identified in the study are authenticated by findings of Che-Hussain's (1994) study on effective and ineffective cross-cultural communication. Hussain found out that ineffective cross-cultural communication comprised categories, including non-cooperative communication, temperamental attitudes, personal traits, problems from unmet needs, and misinformation. The connotation here is that when communication does not yield desired results, the consequences are anger, lack of cooperation, misleading information, and gossip, among others, which were all identified in the study.

Generally, the unmet expectations where, for instance, implicit instructions were given, or where, due to language barriers or differences in values and norms, some words or behaviours were misinterpreted, many defendants confirmed that this often made them confused or angry at the beginning, which led to frustrations and, in some cases, unpleasant arguments. Dąbrowska and Fandrejewska (2020), in their research on the importance of cultural differences in the service sector, argue that the factors that make the differences in behaviour visible stem from people's inclination to be selective, by sieving the message sent or the words or attitudes that suit oneself and disapproving of whatever is deemed inappropriate. The connotation here is that because people tend to perceive some behaviours as 'normal' or acceptable, they choose which attitudes to accept and which ones not to accept. Hence, those behaviours that they deem inappropriate or unacceptable make them confused or angry, causing friction or tension in the team or between colleagues. Dąbrowska and Fandrejewska (2020) further argue that the attribution and stereotypical mindset also cause people to think negatively of others' behaviour, and since those mindsets are not contingent on change or negotiation, it may result in misconceptions. This means that one's values and norms may be so deeply rooted in one's mind that it is 'natural' to immediately judge others' behaviour, which could be wrong. It is therefore important to avoid stereotypical and attributional mindsets to avoid getting confused by a maybe genuinely well-meant behaviour of a

colleague. P6 mentioned the following, which confirms that personal culture affects interactions in the team: *'We have a lot of different cultures, of course, within our employees, and we see that some of them have a different kind of mindset. Because that's what they are used to, some of them are quite more or less 'right in their own eyes' when dealing with other cultures.'*

Furthermore, the disappointment, feeling of being undervalued, and the consequent interaction gap that was gathered by the study showed that cross-cultural miscommunication created loggerheads, and so people did not cooperate afterwards. This, according to some participants, led to stagnation in the process. The worst was when some jobs were dependent on others, and so there was a chain of delays, as P7 said: *'You know, in my finance team, our activities are linked. It's a kind of cycle, so one person does their work, and then after that, the other person uses that to work on theirs. So when one person is offended by your action or because of anything that leads to miscommunication, this can cause a delay in our work process or collaboration. And it can lead to you also not meeting your deadline.'* Consequently, the company could be directly affected due to a reduction in productivity or delays in the work processes.

Besides, the stagnation in communication after cross-cultural misunderstandings does not, in P8's words, allow teams to 'grow together as a team'. Also, demotivated and disengaged employees could hurt their performance. In such instances, the company tends to lose because engagement is one of the most dominant factors that determine a company's success (Maira, 2025). This is because employee engagement depicts the intensity of how employees are passionately attached to the company that they work for, and are willing to finish their given assignments to help develop the company (Maira, 2025).

Looking into the language barriers, the findings identified some important elements. Firstly, as P2 put it: *'If you are explaining something to him in English, since he doesn't speak English well, he also doesn't understand. Yeah. Then he's caught in between. He*

doesn't know what to do. ' Moreover, language barriers led to gross miscommunication that affected productivity and the quality of goods produced. For instance, P6 stated that because working instructions were not written in the business language of the company, but rather in the national language of the headquarters, productivity was challenged. This implied that, since time had to be taken to explain the instructions to the foreign employees, apart from the reduction in production due to extra time needed for interpreting the instructions, the quality of the goods was not always up to the company's set standards. The reason is that some words were sometimes distorted or misinterpreted in the process of interpreting the working instructions, and some information was not well understood and implemented during production. The effect of this could be felt by the company directly because lower production led to lower revenues, and also indirectly because customers would not be satisfied, and some of them could either be lost, or potential customers would not buy the company's products. Tomar (2022) suggests that if a company wants to increase productivity in a multi-cultural environment, it has to ensure that its employees have clear expectations, proper training programmes, among others. This confirms why the P6's company had production challenges because the instructions were literally translated to employees without proper training.

One crucial statement made by P6 was that people are judged according to their language abilities, where people were deemed to be less smart because of their inability to speak a language properly. However, this notion has been disputed by research conducted by evlab.mit.edu (2024), with the argument that in the brain of humans, language processing procedures are different from procedures or mechanisms that aid human knowledge, intelligence and critical thinking. This suggests that the human brain has separate areas for understanding language and other separate areas that cater for thinking and reasoning. Therefore, understanding language is separate from the general intelligence of humans, and so should not be used as a measuring yardstick to determine one's intelligence or smartness. This has crucial implications because, due to limited abilities in a company's business language, a potentially good employee who could contribute to the development of a company may not be given the necessary position and autonomy to effectively put

their expertise and knowledge into practice. The company, therefore, loses the potential of such people, and the people may, in turn, be disengaged or demotivated. In extreme cases, such individuals could underperform and therefore be sacked, or they could leave the company.

Other elements that resulted from the misunderstandings outlined by the study's participants were alienation and the unwillingness to work with colleagues after conflicts or disagreements led to the formation of smaller groups within the teams. Some participants indicated that the smaller groups were mostly made up of people who spoke the same language or those who had similar cultures. An example could be seen from P13, who said: *'In our team, due to such disagreements, I feel more comfortable working only with specific members of the team, who are people from similar cultures to me. I feel that this culture is similar to my culture, so we can work better and more effectively. At the same time, I feel that our colleagues from the Dutch culture they are feeling maybe sometimes feel more comfortable working with people or team members from the same culture. They can understand each other quickly. They can maybe work more easily with each other.'*

5.3 Discussion of Research Question Three.

The role of verbal and non-verbal miscommunication

As humans, we have two channels of communication, namely, verbal and non-verbal communication (Zhang, 2012). Therefore, every aspect of people's daily communications is done through both words, body language, and gestures, among others (Greenidge-Horace, 2022). Consequently, differences in culture give rise to discrepancies in both verbal and non-verbal communication (Zhang, 2021). During communication between people, Greenidge-Horace (2022) argues that misinterpreting or failing to identify important cues is pretty easy, especially in connection with nuances like gestures and demeanor that people are not aware of. This connotes that one can simply misconstrue people's non-verbal behaviour because they have not experienced it before. Hence, the study sought to identify the role of verbal and non-verbal communication in cross-

cultural miscommunication to see how these impacted working relations in the multinational companies already mentioned in the research.

The data analysed brought to light many verbal issues that led to misunderstandings. One was that the implicit style of communicating led to people interpreting information according to their own cultural communication style. The implication is that verbal instructions were given, but they seemed to have been suggested, and did not give a direct hint, so the listeners processed the information differently. P1 shared an example: *'He openly talked to us that we could make it soon and then with the word soon some understood it clearly others did not understand it clearly and, in the end, the soon was misinterpreted. That was it, it was a verbal discussion.'* Also, some cultures found it difficult to explicitly tell other colleagues that they had not carried out the instructions given the way they wanted them. P6 gave an example as follows: *'I do think that we here are kind of direct to say no, we don't want it like this, and that we want it differently. But in the culture in Romania, it's kind of different, so I don't think it's coming from a bad intention. I think it's really just a culture not to say this explicitly.'* Such situations usually bring confusion and disappointment to cultures that wonder why it is not possible to explicitly say you want something done this way or that way. These styles of communication are in line with Brislin (1980)'s assertion that culture is made up of implicit and explicit patterns of behaviour that are learned and passed on through traditional ideas and the values attached to them. Therefore, because people learn these behaviours from the society in which they grew up, they may consciously or unconsciously talk or behave implicitly or explicitly. Which answers for why people, in their own eyes, find the other way of communication 'strange', as it is directly opposite to their own communication style. Another interesting implicit situation was shared by P11, who was looking for some items in a factory and asked his Filipino colleague where he could find them. Instead of saying he did not know, the Philipino, who communicates implicitly, sent him to three different locations in the factory, but he still could not find the items. This situation left the colleague frustrated, wondering why the other could not say it explicitly clear that they did not know where the items were.

The implicit and explicit communication styles could be attributed to Hall's low and high context of communication, which is expressed in this study's literature review. The notion is that using context to instill information and implication into communication differs from one culture to another (Broeder, 2021). Since most of the information in the message communicated by high-context cultures is implicit and indirect, it directly contrasts with how those from low-context cultures who explicitly express information largely through visual and verbal forms (Hall, 1976). Western cultures incline towards low context and so communicate largely through words (Broeder, 2021). These assertions are confirmed by the previous statements provided by P1 and P6. In further agreement with Broeder (2021) and Hall (1976), P3 stated: *'So then, you know, a Dutch person can easily say to a Dutch person, this work is not good, because then they feel that's the way they should communicate to each other. But if you are communicating with an African colleague, you know that they tend to be polite towards you, and so they will not say it directly in that manner'.*

On the other hand, the findings revealed another interesting aspect, which created an implicit situation in teams, even though it was mostly found among the Dutch, who are explicit in their communication style. This aspect was sarcasm, which sometimes made information unclear to some other Eastern European colleagues, for instance. Many participants stated that even though the Dutch are explicit in their communication, they were often sarcastic, and the implications or meanings of what they said were not often understood by other cultures. One problem identified to cause this is that people know the Dutch to communicate explicitly, so when they are being sarcastic, people understand the message in its literal form, which leads to a lot of misunderstanding. According to P9: *'Sarcasm is also a really big common thing, because Dutch people tend to be quite sarcastic... specifically the supervisors, we tend to just say things sarcastically to almost anyone. Sometimes it's just like for us it's fun, but for international people that are new to the company or that are not working there for more than like a month or two, they tend to take things seriously and they don't understand when we're like, sarcastic or use a bit of*

satire. ' In such cases, it is better to, if possible, avoid sarcasm and communicate directly and clearly to ensure the understanding of all colleagues or employees.

Ambiguity in the use of words or phrases was found to cause misunderstandings in teams. This verbal form of communication was mentioned by some participants. P7 gave an instance: *'When you talk of language, some words that are accepted in your culture are not accepted elsewhere. For instance. Never can one say, oh, this is nonsense. In my background, this means an insult to someone. So, I realised that words that I think are accepted in my culture were unacceptable in her culture. Some will interpret it in a different way than you mean it. That is what I can say about these things.'* To some cultures, saying this is nonsense implies that one is looking down on their intelligence. Also, P2 confirmed the ambiguous use of words in their team as: *'Another example is that a colleague working together sometimes says something which may be a direct translation from his language, but this has a completely different meaning in the common language that you both speak. When you inquire from the colleague, you realise that that wasn't what they wanted to say.'* Ambiguity happens quite often, as shown in the data, and multinational teams must be made conscious of this to avoid misunderstandings. One way to avoid such miscommunications is to ask for clarification from the colleague to make sure both people are on the same wavelength.

One major verbal miscommunication issue that was mentioned by almost all participants, both Dutch and other nationals alike, was the directness of Dutch colleagues. *'My manager being Dutch, he's very direct and he's like, oh, but that shouldn't be an issue'*, was said by P18. Also, statements from participants showed that the directness of the Dutch sometimes indicated their prejudice in correcting the behaviour of others, whilst other comments showed their ignorance. For example, P5 stated, *'She said, maybe you guys do that in Asia, but they don't do it in the Netherlands. She meant that I was eating and talking at the same time, which is not done in the Netherlands... I didn't feel very comfortable. So if the person is very open-minded, they could just tell me very quickly that yeah, you just finish what you have in your mouth and we can talk,'* The directness of

the Dutch was also clarified to be of good significance in teams because they were direct enough to mention their views, or inquire from colleagues if they felt that someone had something against them. P13 gave an instance of how a Dutch colleague approached him after he had avoided her for weeks because he was angry with them. He explained that the colleague was having a long conversation with another colleague, and after waiting for about 4 minutes, he interrupted their conversation (which was normal in his culture) to ask a very quick question, but was told by this colleague to wait because they were in a conversation. P13 said, ‘She noticed that I was avoiding her, and she said to me, *‘I feel that there is something wrong, if there is a problem, please tell me so that I will be encouraged to learn.’ I told her what happened and asked her why she behaved in this way. Then she apologised and told me, ‘Maybe you misunderstood me, but I didn’t mean anything bad. But I was busy with the other colleague, and you should not interrupt us.’* The misunderstanding in this scenario was where the Dutch colleague thought that P13 was being impolite by interrupting their conversation; meanwhile, in P13’s culture, it was very normal to briefly interrupt and ask two people who are grossly involved in a conversation. Secondly, P13, who comes from a culture where women were supposed to be modest towards men, felt that the female colleague was being rude in asking him not to interrupt their conversation. Such miscommunication happens because people’s culture is unnoticeable to them, so they cannot see their own ways of doing things. Hence, they believe that theirs is the correct way of doing things and conclude that people who come from other countries have major errors (Olson and Olson, 2003). P13 attested to this concept by adding, *‘ But she told me this is the way we behave here, and as you are living here in the Netherlands, you should pay attention to that. ’*

Non-verbal communication seemed to play a significant role in communication among the teams of participants interviewed. Zhang (2021) posits that non-verbal signals could undeniably be misunderstood, and the resulting misunderstanding could be challenging to resolve because there is the possibility that people are unaware of non-verbal cues that steer them to presume that they are unaccepted, disregarded, or disapproved. Hence, cross-cultural communication could be misleading and immensely stressful. Notably, the

perception of gestures and behaviours like looks, facial expressions, eye contact, throwing of hands, and tone of voice were identified in the data to cause a lot of tension among colleagues. This is because gestures and other non-verbal behaviours convey messages equally as effectively as words, if not more effectively (Zhang, 2021). Some participants identified that male/female role perception played a role, where non-verbal communication caused misunderstandings. They stated that some male colleagues used higher tones to talk to female colleagues and even threw their arms around in the process. The female colleagues who came from cultures that valued equality felt intimidated by these behaviours. These situations happen because, as Olson and Olson (2003) suggest, people don't bear in mind that they possess some values, but they just imagine that the standards they highly regard are of equal importance to all humanity. This suggests that people do not see that their culture is different from others, and so what they hold dear is not the same for others. An example was shown by P10, who said that a misunderstanding ensued between colleagues when one saw that another colleague was giving her some 'weird' looks and then, when she inquired about what the problem was, the colleague claimed that she did not greet her when she came into her office to talk to another colleague. The misunderstanding came about because to one colleague, the one who entered the other's office needed to greet them, meanwhile to the other, the one sitting in the office was supposed to greet the one entering. P10 explained that this led to a big argument that had to be solved at the management level.

Furthermore, gestures like thumbs up, which were okay to be given to superiors in the Netherlands, were not accepted in cultures like those of Africans.

Moreover, eye contact played a huge role in communication in teams. The findings revealed that, in some cultures, maintaining eye contact was a sign of paying attention and showing interest. However, in contrast, people bowed their heads slightly when talking to people or their superiors as a sign of respect. P3 even mentioned that *'In Ghana, things are gradually changing, but usually even if you go to an interview and you are staring at the person that is interviewing you, you will be considered to be impolite.'* Durant (2023) confirms P3's assertion that keeping eye contact could feel empowering in

some cultures, but intimidating in others, and is authenticated by Korkus, Dolmaci, and Karaca's (2018) research on communication breakdown in cross-cultural settings among Erasmus and Turkish students. They therefore concluded that patterns of eye contact caused miscommunication among the participants studied. This contrasting difference brings misunderstandings when one party is unaware of the role of eye contact when interacting with colleagues. P13 stated, *'You would see signs of disinterest. So, you would see that their face is not really reacting, because it would be very neutral, or you would see that their eyes would be looking somewhere else.'* From P13's statement, it could be seen that eye contact is very important to their culture, and if a manager or colleague whose culture does not place value on keeping eye contact interacts with them, this colleague would conclude that that person is not interested in what they have to say. Durant (2023) authenticates the perception of various participants concerning eye contact, stating that whereas Western cultures generally perceive keeping eye contact as a sign of confidence, honesty, respect, and active listening, Eastern cultures view it as a sign of being aggressive or impolite. Therefore, when eye contact is avoided, it is viewed by Westerners as a sign of disrespect or dishonesty, whilst in other cultures, it is perceived as a sign of respect, as seen in African and Asian cultures. Durant (2023) further insisted that these differences in how maintaining eye contact is perceived lead to miscommunication and misunderstandings.

The findings revealed that non-verbal behaviour made it difficult to determine if one was communicating their intentions correctly. P8 shared: *'But sometimes it's also the non-verbal part because it's another energy. So, it's hard to see if something is good or bad, so you're automatically thinking, uh, are you too relaxed or too polite?'* This was usually difficult for cultures whose facial expressions clearly showed how they felt about some situations. Thus, when dealing with cultures that hid their emotions, direct cultures easily misinterpret their neutrality as being okay with situations, even though they were, in an actual sense, aggrieved. Hence, the ability to know the differences in the attitudes and behaviour of colleagues' cultural backgrounds, and the meanings they give to certain actions, helps to reduce cross-cultural miscommunications and misinterpretations.

A critical evaluation of the role that verbal and non-verbal communication plays in cross-cultural miscommunication identified some implications for the multinational companies examined in this study. The findings revealed challenges in identifying red flag signs during recruitment. This meant that HR's inability to see the communication styles of candidates could lead them to make wrong decisions. For instance, a candidate's show of interest or excitement could be misinterpreted as a green light that they would like to take up the job. However, this may be a wrong impression as candidates from cultures who don't show negative ideas or emotions may be misconstrued. A typical example was shared by P4: *'We gave her an offer after very good interviews and ... she just refused it quite fast, which surprised all of us because there was no sign at all that she would decline it, because she was very enthusiastic. She didn't say anything. That was definitely a cultural part of the cultural differences. We didn't see the signs because we were used to quite clear and direct signs, as the Dutch people might have the tendency to be quite direct.'* The issue in this situation was that the candidate was used to not declining stuff, and thought it was too direct, too harsh, and not polite to say something about her doubts. When this element of any culture is well known and identified beforehand, the company will save time and resources used in going further to try to recruit any unwilling candidate.

Secondly, since companies sometimes train new employees during the onboarding period, there is a tendency for misinterpretations. For instance, a trainer may train the employee, giving examples based on their own beliefs and values, to the detriment of the personal cultural values of the new colleague. What could happen is that the new employee may get a wrong impression of some of the unwritten organisational culture of how they treat one another. Another point of miscommunication that could occur is when the company's core values are explained to new employees. However, they might interpret it based on their own culture. For instance, in the case of the company having a core value of a team reward system. P20 stated that in such instances, people from the US, for instance, who believed in individual results, interpreted this value differently from Italians who believed in collective rewards. The implication here is that Americans would like to be seen for

their individual role in carrying out the team task, but Italians would like everything to be seen as a collective effort. The danger here is that some Italian colleagues may hide behind the backs of other colleagues and may not put in their maximum best efforts, since they believe in team recognition.

Besides, people who have a very strong point could be perceived as dictatorial, leading to them being disliked or despised in teams. Also, time spent resolving miscommunication issues could put strain on the resources of the company and could rather have been used to develop the org productively.

Last but not least, fast and slow messages were highly regarded by various cultures. The connotation is that collective verbal discussions are preferred by some cultures, where they would like management, for instance, to sit down with them and make agreements rather than sending emails regarding tasks or changes to assignments. *'If there's anything, I want a sit-down discussion with management. We all sit down and then discuss it. If it's all clear, we write it down and we all sign it. We all have to basically respect such a kind of agreement.'* This was cited by P19. Hence, management has to make sure that employees' style of communication and theirs are met at some point. It would be good to have laid down policies that indicate the exact channels through which information about tasks is relayed to employees. Some form of compromise could be met, such as some tasks could be transmitted through a sit-down meeting, and others through emails, for example. Hence, various cultural needs will be met in multiple processes.

5.4 Discussion of Research Question Four

Impact of hierarchy on the outcome of cross-cultural miscommunication

In the global business environment, leading, exchange of ideas and information, decision making, and motivation are all dependent on the capability of managers who come from one culture to successfully communicate with subordinates from other cultures. The quest to attain effective communication is a huge challenge to companies with a variety of cultural backgrounds, therefore rendering two-way communication cumbersome (Rani

2013). This suggests that managers are confronted with difficulties in dealing with subordinates from cultures other than theirs, due to differences in culture, which affects their decision-making and dealings with their employees.

One thing that makes dealing with conflicts with a manager from a different culture is the fact that people from diverse ethnic backgrounds have diverse perspectives relating to work and hierarchy, and exhibit differences in their behaviour in connection to work norms, and solving problems (Behfar, Kern & Brett, 2006; Hofstede, 1983). Hence, different cultures have different attitudes towards hierarchy and managers or leaders, Hofstede (1980), which could be sources of difficulties in multicultural teams (Behfar et al., 2006). Therefore, leadership in multicultural teams in multinational companies is of major relevance (Zander & Butler, 2010). Consequently, the following paragraphs discuss the findings from the data regarding whether leadership or hierarchy has any impact on cross-cultural miscommunication in multicultural teams.

The establishment of the findings that due to organisational structures, hierarchy doesn't make the relationship between leader and subordinate equal. This is to say that the authority and power given to leaders from the organisation usually create a gap between leaders and their subordinates. Therefore, some participants were of the opinion that leaders dominate cross-cultural misunderstandings. The answers from participants mostly differed, depending on their cultural background. It was evident that participants who stemmed from cultures that don't challenge the one in authority stated that the influence of consequences is felt when a leader is involved, whereas egalitarian cultures felt that it made no difference if one was the leader or not. The reasons given for saying that the influence is felt included the fact that leaders could feel intimidated and dominate the conflict, and so could take action without consulting subordinates. This is confirmed by Thunderbird School of Global Management's (2024) article, which states that leaders in hierarchical cultures make decisions with little or no contributions from their subordinates. Consequently, subordinates could also feel intimidated and unwillingly accept everything the leader said to avoid any conflict or consequences, as indicated by

some participants. This connotes those subordinates who came from a culture where superiors were highly regarded and are usually forced to suppress their ideas or emotions for fear of consequences. Also, subordinates felt compelled to be submissive and stay silent so as not to escalate the situation because of the authority of their leaders, which made them dominate the miscommunication process, and these leaders could take action without consulting them.

On the other hand, some participants believed the impact of cross-cultural miscommunication was dependent on the cultural background of the leader. So that meant that if, for instance, one had a leader or manager who came from a high power distance culture, the consequences were also significant. P 16 noted: *'Some people, it's due to their backgrounds, or something. What I realize is that people with African, Egyptian, or Irish backgrounds, when given some positions, they are more bossy as compared with those coming from other European backgrounds. So when something happens between them and you, they react towards you in a hard way.'* P16 went on to narrate an incident where a bossy manager got angry and spoke rudely to a subordinate who reported the incident to the HR manager. According to P16, the subordinate came from a culture that could challenge authority, she therefore reported the incident to HR. In contrast, P16 stated that the situation would have been different if the subordinate were from another culture. *'But the Dutch girl did not like the rude way the manager approached her, and you know the Dutch people, she knew her rights, and so she called HR. If it had been one of the girls from other countries, like, maybe a Ghanaian, Egyptian, or others, they wouldn't have reacted, but the Dutch girl reacted and called the HR headquarters, they ended up querying this manager.'* An argument confirming the impact of the leader/subordinate miscommunication was put forth by Kobayashi-Hillary (2003), stating that it was important to acknowledge the cultural gap because it could be huge, and is normally present at all phases of the manager/team member relationship, leading to miscommunication and resentment. This assertion was demonstrated by the experiences shared by participants, whose impression was that the impact was high with a manager or leader's involvement. An unsurprising fact was that most Dutch participants

said that there was little to no impact when a cross-cultural miscommunication took place between a manager or a leader and a subordinate. Both situations discussed about the impact of the misunderstanding based on the cultural background of the manager have their implications: Thunderbird School of Global Management (2024) argues that cultures that regard authority and 'face saving' may rather avoid direct encounter and would rather lean towards indirect ways of intervention. P2 confirmed this assertion '*We had to form a group to talk to the lady because she wanted to sack him. But that, because she was his boss. You see, the way he was shouting at her was not nice.*' Likewise, Thunderbird School of Global Management (2024) cited Leclerc, who stated that other cultures preferred direct encounter and open dialogue. This answers why most of the Dutch felt that the issue could be discussed and that was the end, as affirmed by P11: '*Usually, you can feel if something is bothering someone, and the Dutch are direct enough to ask about it, no matter who it is.*' Vliet (2023) shares the same view by indicating that Dutch managers would not hesitate to honestly give messages straight away, even if it should be done in a group, a Chinese manager would avoid criticizing a co-worker openly. The data, however, showed that the attitude of the Dutch was sometimes a bother to some other cultures and occasionally posed challenges in teams.

Another perception identified in the data was that when people from different cultures are put to work in the same position, there is no miscommunication. Some participants, however, thought otherwise. The argument was that when a leader was involved in a misunderstanding, matters were taken more seriously. This implied that it was when a leader was involved that cross-cultural misunderstandings mostly escalated, because whatever they said was more impactful. However, same level workers felt more at ease to discuss matters, maybe because there was no pressure felt that there would be some consequences. '*I think if it is like a miscommunication or a conflict with team members from the same level, it can be discussed more easily. It can be maybe accepted or maybe it can be easily negotiated than if it were with a leader*', was P13's statement.

Furthermore, the data highlighted certain underlying issues that accounted for some cross-cultural miscommunication, eventually leading to a huge impact in misunderstanding with superiors. The underlying problem was that people said yes when in fact they meant no because of factors like not wanting to lose face to their superiors, trying to stay polite, and the culture of not hurting others. Some participants also mentioned that they were brought up not to say no, so they always said yes even if they did not want to. An example was what P14 shared: *'In the African culture, it's quite difficult to say no. I remember one time my manager asked me to take up a task which I knew that I was unable to manage with all the other things that I was handling, but because I was afraid to say no, I took it upon myself to go ahead with the task and later on it had a lot of consequences for me by not meeting all the tasks that I was assigned.'* Similarly, P6, a Dutch national, also gave the difference between saying no in Asia and the Netherlands: *'Look at parts in Asia or for example Japan, you lose your face when you say no to, or disagree with your higher-ups. And here it's like you can tell me no, even if I'm your higher up. I think here it's possible because we have a bit of an individualistic culture within the Netherlands.'* This was a point of confusion between people from Africa, Asia, and the Netherlands, since those from the Netherlands expect subordinates from Africa and Asia to say no if they cannot fulfil a task, whilst their counterparts from Asia and Africa are reluctant to say no. The issue here is that when leaders were involved, the implications were significant. For example, some leaders interpreted the inability of the subordinates to finish their tasks as being incompetent or underproductive. This is because they assumed that if they were not able to do the tasks, they would have said so. Aaron (2024) stated the following quote: *'The biggest mistake you can make is to assume people from another culture are like you.'* - Stephen R. Covey. P8 recalled how they misconstrued a humble colleague as someone who was not independent. *'So, it's a little bit confusing when somebody is humble like that. So you, you're already thinking, so you cannot do your work well by yourself, you constantly need somebody, but in fact, she's just trying to be polite.'* Subsequently, a good employee may not reach their full potential or even get promoted because they are not given the

maximum autonomy or needed attention to effectively fulfil their work. However, with knowledge of their cultural differences, Asians and Africans would understand that it is okay to say no to their superiors. The Dutch, on the other hand, would keep in mind that subordinates are likely to say no when they indeed meant yes, or find it difficult to say that they cannot accomplish a task. Hence, they will try to encourage them to speak out, knowing that saying no to some tasks does not signify weakness in any way. Also, with knowledge of why Asians, for instance, behave politely and humbly, Dutch managers will not assume that they are not independent. Likewise, managers from other cultures with knowledge of the Dutch direct way of communication will not take it that they are rude.

5.5 Discussion of Research Question Five:

Strategies to address cross-cultural miscommunication

As diversity and globalization are gaining traction, international businesses have pursued possibilities to influence people from diverse cultures to become more efficient, creative, and productive. Consequently, companies that have diverse employees have concurrently advanced the possibility of cultural miscommunication (Meyer, 2014). Unfortunately, in far too many instances, differences in culture lead to miscommunication, which results in disputes, distrust, and confusion. Hence, productive cross-cultural communication needs to be worked on. This goes beyond simply exchanging words and comprises a thorough understanding of cultural nuances, understanding, and the ability to adapt, allowing individuals to bridge the chasm that cultural differences create (Jain, 2024). Therefore, to leverage the nuances of cross-cultural communication, this study provides suggestions for some strategies, based on the data gathered. This connotes that the following strategies could assist multinational teams and employees to be more culturally sensitive towards one another and use their differences for the betterment of their teams and the company as a whole. These are discussed in the following sub-chapters.

5.5.1 Training and Education

The study found that informative cross-cultural training sessions on how to address cross-cultural miscommunication could be held in the form of onsite or online workshops, symposiums of lectures, etc. This substantiates the argument that equipping employees with the necessary awareness makes them productive in their tasks (Kirpalani and Luostarinen, 1999). On the other hand, Tharp and Scott (1990) maintain that some intercultural trainings do not delve into underlying cultural values, so people gain shallow knowledge and skills. Hence, cross-cultural trainings need to start with a solution-focused approach, rather than integrating theories and complicated definitions (Tharp and Scott, 1990). Using a solution-focused approach suggests that all activities incorporated in the training are practical and effective, and geared towards inspiring participants to develop concrete solutions that are well-linked to their cultural beliefs and values. To ensure practicality and effectiveness in the trainings, cross-cultural experts, consultants, and trainers should be contracted to carry out the training, so that they could use their expertise to ensure effective sessions. The training could be done in two ways: one could be that joint sessions could be held for cross-functional departments, or per department. Secondly, some sessions could be held exclusively for managers and supervisors, where they would learn to identify red flags and handle cross-cultural miscommunication issues between them and subordinates, or to serve as a cross-cultural coach when misunderstandings from cultural miscommunication arise among subordinates.

'Management should get training, so that when people complain about the behaviors of other teammates, they could take more of a coaching role, and talk to the people involved,' said P15. Additionally, managers could be trained to separate personal characteristics from cultural traits or behaviours, connoting that they will be sensitized to behaviours that are culturally induced, and those that are personal characteristics of people. This training will also reduce the impact of leader/subordinate cultural miscommunications. What's more, when leaders attain intercultural skills through training, they acquire indispensable and vital tools that advance their cultural awareness expertise (Krajewski, 2011).

Another strategy will be to extend the use of existing online company platforms. The reason being that some participants indicated that their companies had channels for complaints and other learning and development programmes, but none of those channels were used for cross-cultural training. *'The training we have now does not at all look at culture at all, which I think is a little bit of a problem, as miscommunication happens in teams here.'* Some companies have intranet platforms with all kinds of questions and answers relating to how to navigate around the company for new employees, or for all other employees to get answers to questions for which they may not even know who to contact. Hence, such channels could have specific information about some features of the cultural background of colleagues, what to expect, as well as the dos and don'ts to take note of.

Onboarding was much of a major concern to some participants, and they stated that some strategies would help a lot. P17 believed that management needed to look back at previous onboarding programmes, look at the mistakes that were made in the past, and find ways of avoiding such cross-cultural mistakes in the future. Two measures could therefore be put in place to combat these mistakes: Incoming colleagues should be given practical training in working in the Dutch culture, as well as with other cultures in the prospective teams. Secondly, prepare the team for a new colleague with a different culture. Current employees should be sensitized to incoming colleagues and cultural differences. This meant that the onboarding period should provide a sense of awareness of the types of cultures working in the team and how to work in harmony with them, whilst the team is given tips on behaviors to expect and how to handle cross-cultural conflicts. Providing new and current employees with intercultural competence will endow them with the requisite capabilities to iron out tensions that result from cultural differences (Canen, 2004).

5.5.2 Interpersonal Communication Formalities

The findings showed that explicit information on tasks to be accomplished should be given, and the deadline should be explicitly communicated. This connotes that sarcasm should be avoided if some cultures don't understand it. Also, before team assignments, the leader should meet the team members, explain the assignment, and describe the goal of the assignment, asking questions to make sure everyone is clear about the expectations for the various tasks. In addition, when clarifying tasks with colleagues from other cultures or subsidiaries in different countries, it is important to let counterparts provide the input for carrying out needed tasks or projects, instead of trying to figure it out by oneself. This suggests that the counterparts giving out the instructions for jobs or tasks should be made to explain precisely what their expectations are what outcomes they expect to see. This will minimise individual cultural interpretations, thereby making sure all team members are on the same wavelength. One strategy to ensure that the right message and or instruction is understood is to make guesses, asking what precisely the other person means. This will help to clarify phrases or words that could lead to misunderstandings.

Interestingly, one strategy mentioned in the data to help managers minimise cultural misunderstandings in their interactions with subordinates was that leaders needed to talk less, listen more, be the last to speak, and let everybody say what they want to say before influencing them. This signified that managers ought to listen more than speak in times of misunderstanding, so that they could get the message being communicated clearly, to be able to provide an appropriate response.

5.5.3 Feedback frameworks

Since the data showed that providing feedback or giving information on decisions made on certain issues brought misunderstandings, one strategy that managers could use is, first of all, to ask how their subordinates want them to communicate critical feedback to them. This is because some cultures like to get feedback straightaway, regardless of whether it is in informal settings, whilst others prefer it during sessions like performance interviews. Furthermore, companies could create new mechanisms to get feedback from people. This could be done by establishing independent avenues for people to express their views. Some internal platforms, like SharePoint, could be created where employees could anonymously ask burning questions relating to cross-cultural miscommunication challenges that they are facing, and thereby get answers. Also, there could be a system whereby the company appoints certain trusted people to whom employees could confide when facing misunderstandings. Buddy systems could also be set up for new employees so that they could get support for initial cultural shocks, for instance. *'So with a buddy, new colleagues get support for the first three months of the start of the job. The buddies support the new colleague with everything about the practical job, and also if you don't match with your boss, how you can cope with it, etc.'* These strategies would help reduce the impact that miscommunications cause, especially between bosses and their subordinates.

5.5.4 Other strategies

Other strategies seen in the data indicate that companies could create settings or events for employees. This supports the argument that such cultural socialisation enhances and establishes positive bonding or relationships between employees (Davis and Stevenson, 2006; Bowman and Howard, 1985). For instance, yearly get-togethers could be organised for all subsidiaries or representatives to meet and have some fun events. Intercultural team days could also be organised, where people could put on cultural attire or bring along cultural symbols, finger foods to share, or artefacts from their respective cultures. During these activities, colleagues could share the similarities and differences in their

individual cultures. Such informal interaction settings encourage socialization and inspire the establishment of relationships with colleagues, sharing of information, and good collaborations that augment team performance (Means et al., 2015; Barrett and Oburn, 2010). Likewise, since the various cultural events mentioned would be held in informal settings, employees are more motivated to participate

Moreover, in order to curb the issue of language barriers, the findings gathered some useful strategies. Firstly, there should be a business language in all the companies, which all employees will speak everywhere on the company grounds, meaning in offices, factory floors, etc. It could be English or the native language of the host country. Secondly, leaders should speak both the native language of the host country and at least one international language like English, which should be the very basic requirement for recruiting them.

Also, multinational companies should mostly recruit people with experience working with other nationals. Recruiting managers and employees with international exposure would reduce the situation found in the study, that a lack of international experience was one major cause of misunderstandings in teams. Besides, offering business English for workers would fill in the language barrier gaps seen in the data. This confirms Mirabela and Ariana's (2022) suggestion that it helps when companies invest in the befitting and relevant tools that give their employees the assistance needed. In doing so, organisations could make use of foreign language consultants to support them in keeping their heads above the water of cross-cultural communication (Mirabela and Ariana, 2022).

Working instructions should be available in different languages, especially in the dominant languages spoken by employees, and in the business language. Rani (2013) affirms this idea, noting that language is a huge problem in communication, so the partners in the communication process need to possess a common language that both can speak. This will help immensely because the time spent on interpreting the working

instructions, for instance, could have been spent on productive measures for the company.

Besides, one strategy that will help expatriates to better integrate and be productive whilst minimizing cross-cultural miscommunication is to adapt. It is therefore important to give up certain things to acquire certain things (Boerner and Jopp 2007). Hence, change becomes the prerequisite to adaptation, as Hughes (2009) argues. This implies that expatriates need to change certain ingrained values and norms and embrace some of the host country's values and norms. An example is to try to be explicit in communication and communicate with superiors without fear, so that certain tensions can be avoided when miscommunications occur. Consequently, expatriates will achieve cross-cultural adjustment, which Black (1988) claims is the extent to which expatriates become psychologically cosy or relaxed with all aspects of the host country's culture. Thus, as they continue to accept the differences between them and their colleagues, and adjust to their cultural norms through exhibiting acceptable behaviour, they could be said to have been formally accommodated (Boylan, 2001). On the other hand, since communication is said to be double-sided, overcoming the barriers calls for the involvement and cooperation from both parties involved (Aria, 2024). This suggests that all parties in the team need to put in conscious effort to work towards the miscommunication challenges, which include making compromises.

The following diagram suggests certain practical measures that could be taken to enhance cross-cultural communication, hence minimizing the challenges of miscommunication issues.



Figure 16.3 cross-cultural miscommunication

From Figure 5.3, it could be said that for cross-cultural differences to work well, people need to acknowledge and keep in mind that their way of doing things is not always the best or the right way of doing things. Therefore, each employee needs to recognise the fact that cultural differences exist. Jain (2024) suggests that in recognizing differences in culture, there should be a profound understanding and respect for the differences, whilst identifying the impact that these differences have on perceptions, communication styles, and attitudes. If people become aware of the aforementioned, it serves as a precaution in handling likely misunderstandings and promoting mutual respect and collaborative environments (Jain, 2024).

Besides, language barriers could be removed by providing language training to employees, which was also mentioned by some participants. Also, having a common business language will help those who are not well-versed in the language to practice and would hopefully be more fluent in the language over time. Training and seminars mentioned earlier in the chapter will improve employee communication skills, so that they will learn how to react and what to say and do when interacting with various cultures.

In addition, Jain (2024) maintains that active listening has to be practised in cross-cultural communication because it goes beyond just hearing verbal words being said by another

person, and is fundamental in establishing respect, credibility, and understanding beyond cultural divisions. Thus, active listening requires wholly interacting with the speaker, ensuring that one understands the context of their message, and recognizing the differences that impact the conversation.

In conclusion, this study proposes the following checklist for both leaders and subordinates in culturally diverse teams to help promote cultural sensitivity and inclusion to Some of these points have already been discussed:

- ✓ Companies should hire culturally sensitive workers and managers
- ✓ People have to adjust to understand other people better, to be able to work with different cultures
- ✓ Individuals and management should show some awareness of other people's cultures, understand and respect differences, and show certain levels of empathy and open-mindedness.
- ✓ Companies need to standardize their code of ethics- There should be sections in the code of ethics that make people aware of the kind of people they work with.
- ✓ Sensitizing employees about the presence of many cultures in the team, hence differences in behaviour, norms, attitudes, etc, providing applicable strategies for teams and individuals. Connoting that there should be intermittent reminders of miscommunication challenges in teams.
- ✓ Establish culturally inclusive policies on written documents that management should ensure are implemented.

CHAPTER VI:

6.1 Summary

The findings of the study revealed that individuals' cultural backgrounds influenced their behaviours. Those behaviours led to many causes and effects of cross-cultural miscommunications, which were examined in the study, including the role of verbal and non-verbal miscommunication. The impact of hierarchy on cultural miscommunication was also looked into, and strategies were laid out to lessen the influence of misunderstandings on teams in multinational companies.

The findings from the data gathered features like upbringing, language, ethnocentrism, and corporate practices that caused misunderstandings due to miscommunication from cultural diversity. This could be seen through participants' individual cultural beliefs, values, symbols, and communication styles. Hence, due to the differences in values, norms, etc, some people who were unaware of such differences tended to be judgmental of other cultures. This, therefore, gave rise to ethnocentrism, which was found to account for many disagreements that occurred in the multinational teams interviewed.

Subsequently, the differences in values, norms, and beliefs, as well as the ethnocentric attitude of colleagues, had considerable effects on teams. Such behaviours led to misinterpretations, prejudice, stereotyping, and other biases, as well as stalled cooperation in teams. Also, from the data collected, misunderstandings that occurred from cultural differences left employees demotivated, and they often didn't feel fully engaged and appreciated. Most people were left angry, confused, and disappointed in their colleagues or superiors. So, there was a consequential impact on the organisations due to the lack of effective collaboration and communication between affected parties. This is because production was affected, delays were recorded, and deadlines were missed.

The findings further pointed up how verbal and non-verbal communication influenced working relations in teams. Implicit and explicit communication styles, body language, and gestures served as barriers to collaboration in teams, and these had implications on the productivity of teams because instructions, for instance, were not clearly given, and so jobs were not carried out promptly and as desired.

In addition, the differences in communication styles clashed, resulting in confusion and frustration among colleagues. Hence, some issues that could have been well handled if the parties involved were culturally aware and sensitive were ignorantly handled. Consequently, in instances where there was miscommunication between leaders and their subordinates, gaps in the organisational structures mostly left subordinates disadvantaged. Therefore, some subordinates were suspended or treated in ways that, from their perception, were unfair, because in their view, the gap between them and their leaders left them with little to no power to challenge their leaders. This has implications like loss of revenue and loss of potentially good employees who were either laid off or voluntarily left the company (Hussain,1994). In addition, the time and money spent on solving disagreements or recruiting new employees and training them could have been well invested in other areas for the development of the company. On the other hand, the data portrayed how conflicts with leaders from high power-distance cultures had serious consequences for subordinates than issues involving leaders from low-power distance cultures. Turnover has implications such as revenue loss and loss of potentially good employees

In contrast to the many effects of cross-cultural miscommunication, the findings of this research showed some positive aspects that helped in the development and further growth of teams in multinational companies. For instance, the study showed that the awareness of differences in behaviours as well as actions and reactions led to curiosity, where some people sought to identify why some colleagues behaved the way they did, prompting them to look deeper into cultural diversity, subsequently leading to the discovery of the fundamental knowledge of how and why certain cultures behave the way they do. This

led to such people becoming more culturally sensitive to the differences between their culture and that of their colleagues. This attitude, if undertaken by people in companies, will go a long way to help reduce cross-cultural miscommunication issues.

Furthermore, it was identified that directness in verbal communication had some positive implications, which brought peace after misunderstandings, where people from direct cultures could approach colleagues and verbally inquire about the reason why colleagues seemed to ignore them or behave unpleasantly towards them. This resulted in issues being thrashed out more quickly and effectively, preventing further consequences like anger, frustration, and limited or ineffective collaboration.

Due to global interdependency, solutions to cross-cultural miscommunication have to be identified. Thus, the study identified some strategies to curb miscommunications because Ting-Toomey & Dorjee (2015) argue that to behave both appropriately and effectively in managing a diverse range of intercultural situations, people need to be mentally and behaviorally agile and flexible. Thus, strategies like training and education, having language uniformity, good feedback channels, and general cultural sensitivity programmes were suggested to meet individual and team expectations.

6.2 Implications

Working with multinational teams implies addressing cultural variations and cross-cultural miscommunication because van Vliet (2023) contends that misunderstandings in cross-cultural settings could culminate in missed chances, strained collegial relationships, and sometimes, invaluable disagreements. The argument resonates with Maira (2025), who maintains that if cultural differences are poorly managed, it could imply challenges in coordination, underperformance, and dysfunctional teams. Van Vliet (2023) confirms this assertion by indicating that companies that are uninformed about cultural differences in multinational teams could create miscommunication and resentment that could make it difficult to achieve business goals and establish happy employees.

Again, differences in cultures create variations in communication styles, decision-making frameworks, and management styles, which impose constraints on the adaptability of business practices (Maira, 2025; van Vliet, 2023; Ghemawat and Reiche, 2011). The implication is that due to the differences in communication styles, models of decision-making, and management styles, among others, it is not easy or possible to maintain uniform business practices in all subsidiaries of an organisation. Since the study identified major disagreements in such areas, if senior management and other leaders of multinational companies are aware and take note of this, they will not force other branches or subsidiaries to always conform to their way of working or making decisions, thereby reducing misunderstandings that result from such differences. They need to look at some of the national values and norms of the subsidiaries and align some of their practices with the national cultures of those subsidiaries. An example could be to implement collective reward systems for countries that value them more, and individual reward systems for subsidiaries that value such reward systems more.

On the contrary, companies that are proficient in navigating cross-cultural miscommunication issues and culture-based policies stand the chance to enhance and nurture healthier relations, hence exploiting new markets and managing teams that are both diverse and maintain amicable relations. The connotation here is that culturally sensitive companies would be able to maintain cordiality among their multinational team members, resulting in steady growth and development of the company.

Also, verbal and non-verbal communication were found to play a significant role in the multinational companies involved in the study, which confirms Mirabela and Ariana's (2022) argument that verbal and non-verbal behaviour, interpreting these correctly, are very important because they could be the basis for cultural misunderstandings. Non-verbal communication was found to be the hardest to interpret in cross-cultural interactions. In this regard, Greenidge-Horace (2023) claims that it is challenging to interpret body language, but it is essential to have such skills in one's professional life. This implies that when people pay attention to such non-verbal cues, they can better

interpret the body and avoid miscommunications and misunderstandings. Therefore, training in cross-cultural differences in behaviors, as well as occasional cultural events for employees, will make room for employees to share various cues from their cultures, which colleagues may not be aware of. Providing opportunities in such informal settings will be fun, and employees will interact and learn better, rather than in formal and more serious-looking office settings. Additionally, the informal interactions give room for more questions to be asked and will boost the team spirit and bonding. The more people understand why colleagues behave the way they do, the more they will appreciate and understand them, leading to fewer misunderstandings.

Additionally, Canary, Lakey, and Sillars (2013) suggest that members of multinational teams need to have a broad spectrum of verbal and non-verbal repertoires to effectively apply communication strategies. This implies that the proficiency in the business language of the company is important. This is because, if employees have sufficient understanding and command over the vocabulary of the business language, as well as knowledge of non-verbal attitudes of other cultures and what they mean, they will know how to deal with one another appropriately, hence reducing misunderstandings to a bare minimum. The argument is confirmed by Canary, Lakey, and Sillars's (2013) explanation that communication becomes effective when multiple meanings are accurately dealt with in a culturally-sensitive way, and the goals of all parties involved in the communication are achieved diplomatically and creatively. Besides, employees having sufficient language skills imply that Mirabela and Ariana (2022), the company needs to be aware of the various levels of language proficiency as well as the drawbacks that prevail in the workplace. The records of the language proficiency levels could form the basis for planning language courses, which will boost the efficiency of employee communication (Mirabela and Ariana 2022).

Another important finding of the study, which has substantial implications, is that a high level of miscommunication takes place on factory floors or among employees in offices. It turned out that many are aggrieved but suffer in silence due to fear of consequences

when miscommunication triggers issues with superiors, and this needs to be addressed. Companies need to keep channels of feedback open, making sure employees can be heard either through trusted persons, internal feedback channels, which could contain anonymous questions or information. Managers should be trained to have an eye for miscommunication settings, where they can differentiate between the character of employees and behaviors that result from their cultural values and beliefs. They should also be trained to recognise red flags in teams that indicate disagreements from cross-cultural miscommunication issues. Also, when subordinates raise concerns, they need to treat these with utmost discretion, making sure not to make comments or decisions that come from their cultural lens. This means that leaders should look deeper into the situations and see if any cultural differences are involved, examine which specific factors are at play, and then try to solve the issues amicably to meet the expectations of the parties involved at a certain point. Here, compromises could be made by the various cultures, but it should be clearly explained to their understanding before any decision is finalized.

Moreover, the study found that organisations like schools and Universities, teachers and lecturers set exam questions and graded students' work based on their cultural backgrounds. This implied that some students could misunderstand exam questions, since some of the questions could be too implicit for them, because they come from explicit cultures. Likewise, lectures from implicit cultures could downgrade students from explicit cultures because their answers are very straightforward and short, whereas teachers or lecturers from explicit cultures could downgrade students from implicit cultures because they may find them to be beating about the bush before getting to the main point. This issue could be resolved by regular calibrations on setting exam questions and effective grading. Lecturers and teachers also need to be sensitized about this to minimize the possibilities of cultures creeping into both formative and summative exam questions and grading.

Tomar (2022) posits that the recruitment of culturally sensitive employees has positive implications. It enhances mutual respect, helps to make decisions and solve problems faster, and promotes personal, professional, and organisational growth (Tomar, 2022; Hussain, 1994). This is because when cross-cultural communication is managed, the variety in the cultural perspectives of employees brings in diverse ideas that help to handle problems easily. Tomar (2022) further argues that culturally sensitive employees are equipped with interpersonal skills that make them sensitive to their teammates and customers. Consequently, teams will have better working relations, and customers will be treated well. Having happy customers will bring in good revenues and profitability for multinational organisations.

Aside from the above, a lack of cultural sensitivity has implications for the Human Resources department. This is because those who carry out the recruitment process need to be trained and sensitized about some red flags or cues, especially with non-verbal communication. This is because the recruitment process could be hampered by the inability of the HR personnel to identify cultural differences. Prejudices and other biases may unconsciously creep into the recruitment process, in that some candidates who may appear bold but may be deemed to be overconfident, whilst those who appear shy and humble may not be taken seriously, and those with language deficiencies may be labelled incompetent. Also, those who appear too humble may be seen as not independent. Thus, cultural sensitivity training helps to eradicate or reduce the effects of such mistakes and helps to recruit the right employees for the organisation.

6.3 Recommendations for Future Research

Ting-Tooney & Korzenny (1991) claim that many researchers have studied cross-cultural communication, and many among them acknowledged the complexity of conducting cross-cultural interpersonal communication research. That notwithstanding, it is important to continue researching cross-cultural miscommunication to help move the business world, which is being hindered in one way or the other by the challenges of cultural diversity.

Again, future research could be done to explore how organisational culture influences individual culture and what its consequences are for the company and employees.

Future studies could also measure the major differences in the context during communication between high and low context cultures. Broeder (2021) supports this, stating that very limited studies have attempted to establish measurement instruments to measure how context is used in different cultures during communication.

Companies could also carry out research on the various cultural backgrounds of their employees and know their values and norms. This would help them the combination of employees that they have and identify the possible impact that this would have on productivity, effectiveness, and efficiency. This research will help organisations to educate their employees accordingly, hence reducing the domino effect of cross-cultural miscommunication.

Organisations need to survey current and former employees to know what is happening or what happened in the company regarding cultural misunderstandings and how it impacted them. The results and recommendations could positively influence the cooperation between employees from other cultural backgrounds.

Finally, studies need to be conducted on how the cultural backgrounds of teachers and lecturers affect how they grade students and the impact it has on the performance of students. For instance, Dutch lecturers or teachers may prefer straightforward and short answers, whilst some other cultures may want students or pupils to explain and elaborate on their answers in exams or assignments.

6.4 Conclusion

Riskó and Csapó (2024) argue that cultural differences continue relentlessly and pose a cluster of challenges for multinational organisations, and the consequences are repeatedly seriously underestimated. Understanding the demeanor, attributes, and features of a particular culture and how work and organisational processes are affected by these is immensely advantageous for multinational companies and managers. Therefore, organisations that manage employee adaptation or adjustment effectively are capable of achieving congruence in the varied cultures represented within their organisation (Riskó and Csapó, 2024).

Usually, some values, stances, and presumptions that have a consequential impact on the company's business and organisational culture are often invisible or difficult to detect (Dąbrowska and Fandrejewska, 2020). This implies that cross-cultural miscommunication needs to be given the much-needed attention in multinational companies, which have an array of cultures with generally difficult-to-detect behaviour and attitudes that could affect the business directly or indirectly.

In general terms, when people from different cultures interact, it opens new borders and enlightens them to new perspectives. (Fermin and Mueller, 2023). Generally, certain values and norms are universally accepted, which makes working together in a multinational setting seem conventional. However, that notwithstanding, Alomari (n.d) notes that despite sharing values like trust, honesty, loyalty, among others, cross-cultural communication could still produce mistrust and tension as a result of the differences in world views on values and beliefs. Therefore, when employees understand the cultural differences between themselves and those of their colleagues or managers, it will improve their working relationships with them.

Based on the above perspectives, the findings of this study showed that there is a direct link between cross-cultural miscommunication and the organisation, in that the underlying causes of miscommunication resulted in misunderstandings, which impacted

the working relations of colleagues. The findings indicated that due to misunderstandings, misrepresentations, and resentments, collaboration with affected colleagues was affected, eventually impacting production, quality, and in some cases, the company's customers. These lead to loss of revenue, valuable resources, including some experts in the workforce, and the inability of companies to achieve their goals in their entirety.

It can therefore be established that cross-cultural miscommunication does have a domino effect on companies, both directly and indirectly. The level of intensity of the impact, however, depends on the ability of companies to manage the cultural differences effectively to their maximum advantage.

Consequently, Jain (2024) asserts that in today's 'global dance of diplomacy', companies that exercise control, employing certain strategies, could boost the effectiveness and efficiency of cross-cultural communication. This connotes that organisation that invest in and take cognizance of the obligation to deal with cross-cultural differences will have reduced disagreements, conflicts, and tensions. Hence, employees will conspire and collaborate more effectively, leading to the growth of individual employees, teams, and subsequently the organisation.

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Participant Number: P5

Title of Research

‘THE DOMINO EFFECT OF CROSS-CULTURAL MISCOMMUNICATION IN
MULTINATIONAL MANUFACTURING AND SERVICE ORGANISATIONS IN THE
NETHERLANDS.’

Introduction

You are cordially invited to take part in this study. Before deciding to take part, it is essential for you to read the information on this form thoroughly. Please do not hesitate to ask me any questions that are unclear to you before making your decision.

What is the aim of the research?

It is to gain knowledge and insight into the impact of cross-cultural miscommunication among employees of multinational manufacturing and service companies in the Netherlands. The study also aims to see if their disagreements have a ripple effect on the company and the degree to which it does so.

Must I take part?

Taking part in this research is solely your personal decision. Also, you are free to withdraw from the interview without providing any reasons, or decide not to take part at all.

How long is the interview?

It will take about 30- maximum 45 minutes.

What are the possible risks involved in taking part in this study, and what do I need to take note of?

There are no risks whatsoever for participating in the study, and your comments will be made anonymous. The researcher will also make every effort to preserve your confidentiality, including doing the following:

- Assigning code names/numbers for participants on all research notes and documents.
- Keeping notes, interview transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of the researcher.
- All data provided by participants will be kept confidential.
- The data will be kept until the investigation is finished; after that, the information will be destroyed unless it is needed for further investigation, but your consent will be sought first.

Who will review this research?

My DBA mentor at the Swiss School of Business and Management

Thank you.

Indication: Agreed.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

My topic is: THE DOMINO EFFECT OF CROSS-CULTURAL MISCOMMUNICATION IN MULTINATIONAL MANUFACTURING AND SERVICE ORGANISATIONS IN THE NETHERLANDS.

May I please have your name, age, and gender? Do you work in the service or manufacturing sector? What's your position in the company?

1. As a member of a culturally diverse team, what factors do you think mostly contribute to miscommunication breakdowns between colleagues from different cultural backgrounds in the team?
2. Can you describe any recent situation in which you or members of your team encountered a cross-cultural miscommunication that resulted in a misunderstanding?
3. In your opinion, did verbal or non-verbal communication play any role in the miscommunication process? Why do you think so?
4. Could you give an example of a situation in which a slight misunderstanding resulting from nonverbal miscommunication snowballed into a larger issue within the team or department?
5. How did you feel afterwards when you realised that cultural differences caused a miscommunication?
6. How did you manage the situation?
7. Given the opportunity, what could you have done differently to solve the situation?
8. In what ways does unresolved cultural misunderstanding affect long-term teamwork and collaboration over time?
9. Looking at the impact of cross-cultural miscommunication in your team, what kind of help would you need as a leader or from your leader to improve your team's performance?
10. Would you say some of your team members possess cultural awareness and sensitivity? How would you describe such people?

11. Are there others who do not possess such qualities? What elements can be seen in such people?

12. What specific strategies have your company's leadership implemented to reduce cross-cultural miscommunication?

APPENDIX C: SAMPLE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Speaker 1

Oh, that's nice. OK, looking at the teams in your company, in your own team or in the other teams that are in the company, could you tell me of some of the things that cause cross-cultural miscommunication? I mean some of the causes of some of these miscommunication issues in your team?

Speaker 2

Some of the causes might simply be from where **people** come from, the **norms and practices** that they are used to. For instance, when you enter into an office, and you meet people, you are expected to greet them, but from other cultures, those in the office have to greet you, and this could bring some grudge or annoyance if one does not do as is expected,

They expect you, whom they come to meet, to say good morning. We were trained to greet people in that manner.

When you go to a room, let's say a room, and you meet somebody, you will say good morning to the people there.

Yeah. And if you go and say good morning to them, sometimes, if they are talking, they will not respond.

They are interacting with them because they are busy with other people, so you don't have to say good morning.

So sometimes the cause is **greetings**. It can be as simple as greeting or saying good morning or hello to somebody.

Yeah. When all Dutch people are talking or having conversation and you say good morning, they will not respond. But from where I come from, it's totally different. (No interruptions during conversations.

And they expect they can come in in the morning, just walk to their office, even if you share a room or different rooms in a place, they just walk to their office, do whatever they want and then later, when they see you, they are like hi, but we were not brought up like that.

So if you don't understand the system or how these people are, **initially** it will be a **difficult** thing for you even **to fit in**.

So, you have to adjust to understand people better, to be able to work with different cultures.

If you don't adjust, you would think that they are angry with you or you have done something wrong?

Did I do something wrong?

But if you know it is how they are, these things wouldn't hurt you.

If those assumptions build up, it can result in people having issues with people. Or people have a bad attitude.

Speaker 1

You're raising really interesting and points.

So, talking about what you just said, can you describe any recent situation that happened in your team or in any of the teams in your company where, you know, a kind of cross-cultural miscommunication resulted in some misunderstanding?

Speaker 2

Yes, there's something we're dealing with.

It's just also just about this example I just gave.

A lady went to an office to meet two people a day.

She just started talking with an African lady.

And the other one just got up and walked away.

So, while she was going, this Dutch woman got angry, like, she was looking at her in a very bad way.

Why didn't you greet me? So, she, for whatever, coincidentally, she turned and saw how the Dutch woman was looking at her.

And this became a big issue. So it was, why are you looking at me in that way? And why didn't you say good morning?

And say, no, you came to meet me, yes, so you should have said good morning.

And this was something they had to sit down and, oh, this is, from where I come from, this is how it works.

And from where you come from, this is how it is.

So, it was just miscommunication, certainly what you're saying, cultural differences that resulted in that.

But now it is okay, because now they know, okay, this is how they do it. This is how we do it.

Speaker 1

And would you say that maybe, apart from what the person said, were there kinds of non-verbal communication that happened during this interaction?

The way she was looking at her, that's what started the whole thing. She didn't say anything. Nobody said anything. None of them said anything.

But then she turned and saw she was looking at her in a very bad way.

Speaker 1

When you say bad way, how do you mean?

Sometimes the action says more. It's not only by talking, you communicate. By behaving in a certain manner, we communicate.

APPENDIX D: SAMPLE INITIAL MANUAL CODING

Speaker 1

Oh, that's nice. OK, looking at the teams in your company, in your own team or in the other teams that are in the company, could you tell me of some of the things that cause cross-cultural miscommunication? I mean some of the causes of some of these miscommunication issues in your team?

Speaker 2

Some of the causes might simply be from where **people** come from, the **norms and practices** that they are used to. For instance, when you enter into an office, and you meet people, you are expected to greet them, but from other cultures, those in the office have to greet you, and this could bring some grudge or annoyance if one does not do as is expected,

They expect you, whom they come to meet, to say good morning. We were trained to greet people in that manner.

When you go to a room, let's say a room, and you meet somebody, you will say good morning to the people there.

Yeah. And if you go and say good morning to them, sometimes, if they are talking, they will not respond.

They are interacting with them because they are busy with other people, so you don't have to say good morning.

So sometimes the cause is **greetings**. It can be as simple as greeting or saying good morning or hello to somebody.

Yeah. When all Dutch people are talking or having conversation and you say good morning, they will not respond. But from where I come from, it's totally different. **(No interruptions during conversations.)**

And they expect they can come in in the morning, just walk to their office, even if you share a room or different rooms in a place, they just walk to their office, do whatever they want and then later, when they see you, they are like hi, but we were not brought up like that. **(different interpretations of work norms)**

So if you don't understand the system or how these people are, **initially** it will be a **difficult** thing for you even **to fit in**.

So you have to adjust to understand people better, to be able to work with different cultures.

If you don't adjust, you would think that they are angry with you or you have done something wrong? **(Make wrong assumptions).**

Did I do something wrong?R

But if you know it is how they are, these things wouldn't hurt you.

If those assumptions build up, it can result in people having issues with people. **(Possible resentment from people).**

Or people have a bad attitude.

Speaker 1

You're raising really interesting and very vital points.

So, talking about what you just said, can you describe any recent situation that happened in your team or in any of the teams in your company where, you know, a kind of cross-cultural miscommunication resulted in some misunderstanding?

Speaker 2

Yes, there's something we're dealing with.

It's just also just about this example I just gave.

A lady went to an office to meet two people a day.

She just started talking with an African lady.

And the other one just got up and walked away.

So while she was going, this Dutch woman got angry, like, she was looking at her in a very bad way.

Why didn't you greet me? So, she, for whatever, coincidentally, she turned and saw how the Dutch woman was looking at her.

And this became a big issue. So it was, why are you looking at me in that way? And why didn't you say good morning?

And say, no, you came to meet me, yes, so you should have said good morning.

And this was something they had to sit down and, oh, this is, from where I come from, this is how it works.

And from where you come from, this is how it is.

So it was just miscommunication, certainly what you're saying, cultural differences that resulted in that.

But now it is okay, because now they know, okay, this is how they do it. This is how we do it.

Speaker 1

And would you say that maybe, apart from what the person said, were there kinds of non-verbal things that happened during this interaction?

The way she was looking at her, that's what started the whole thing. She didn't say anything. Nobody said anything. None of them said anything.

But then she turned and saw she was looking at her in a very bad way. (Facial expression).

Speaker 1

When you say bad way, how do you mean?

Sometimes the action says more. It's not only by talking, you communicate. By behaving in a certain manner, we communicate.

APPENDIX E: SAMPLE THEMES DERIVED

Final Themes for Research Question 2

1. Implicit giving of instructions leads to people interpreting them in their own ways.

2. Ambiguity in word usage and differences in interpretations.

3. Perception of gestures and behaviours. E.g., looks, facial expressions, eye contact, throwing of hands, tone of voice

4. Directness in communications: Sometimes led to prejudice in correcting the behaviour of others. Some comments showed ignorance. The role of sarcasm in cross-cultural communication.

5. Inability to say no.

6. Sometimes, some cultures are passive in some situations but active in others, which makes colleagues confused as to how to deal with them.

Implications for the company

1. Challenges in identifying red flag signs. E.g., it's hard to see if something is good or bad.

2. Contrast in the trainer's versus the new trainee employee's culture, differences in interpreting the company's core values.

3. People who have a very strong point could be perceived as dictatorial

4. The role of fast and slow messages

5. Collective verbal discussions are preferred by some cultures

6. Time spent to resolve miscommunication issues could rather have been used to develop the organisation productively.

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