How does cross-cultural collaboration works in an international horticultural family business?

Graduation thesis as part of the Masters in Business Administration

Tessa Nanninga

September 2019

Graduation committee: dr. M. Flory, dr. P. Aersten

Contents

1. Introduction

People are looking more and more to improvements of life quality and have long life expectations. Together with the increase of income per capita of development countries change their concerns. Having food on the table is 'guarantied', quality food on their plate is the challenge which moves people to think about their source, way of production and sanity sustainability of their food chain including environment conscience gains attention on consumers. When there is a demand the supply chain tries to respond to that. This demand is developing faster than the development of companies, entrepreneurs, land, labor and knowledge (Horticulture sector development for emerging markets, 2018). Organizations that only operate on the local market are already lagging behind their international competitors (Cullen, 2002). When an organization operates alone within one market, it has greater risks. If things go wrong within one market, the financial damage in case of spreading the risk is more limited. But the disappearance of the European internal borders has made it attractive for Dutch entrepreneurs to do business abroad. Furthermore, the high wage and production costs in the Netherlands make it difficult for entrepreneurs to maintain a good negotiating position. Another reason may be that the home market is already saturated with certain products and in some sectors it is difficult to attract the right staff or there is no staff available with sufficient knowledge and experience. The growth of international organizations strongly depends on the quality and intensity of the interconnections and interactions within their own international branches. In 2040, half of the Dutch companies in the horticultural cluster will have one or more branches abroad. The Netherlands, with 60% of the world trade passing through Dutch companies, is the international commercial center for flowers and plants (Brouwer, Van der Zwan, 2011). The essence of success is when organizational cultures of different parties are open to change, share knowledge and whether operational processes fits well. But how do you build up a good relationship in these times of increasing globalization (Euwals, Meijerink, 2018)? Through globalization and innovation, new ways of thinking and work are emerging, which increases boundless teamwork. It appears that working with global teams is becoming increasingly important. Employees within an international organization that work together flourish. Working together to achieve a common goal, presuppose the formation of a team. In an international operating company this hardly can be avoid. The environment of international companies gives birth to global teams. Gupta & Govindarajan (2004) defines a global team as a mix of employees from different countries with different cultures, backgrounds and life experiences that work together to a common goal or strategy by developing and managing

global operations. Cross-cultural management ensures cross-pollination and is an important driving force for promoting growth because they bring cultural diversity to help solve specific challenges and offering tools to handle sources of conflict or miscommunication, and exist naturally in various international strategic alliances (Steers, Nardon, Sanchez-Runde, 2016) (Zeng, Ming, Tong, Sun, 2010). On the other end, Phene & Almeida (2008) defends that it is more important to be familiar with the uses and customs of the host country, that means, the awareness of the peculiarities, of this host country, is crucial for the dimension and innovation quality. The subsidiaries or head offices, normally, don't contribute or lead to an increase of innovation while they stick to their own local customs.

The eclectic paradigm (Dunning, Lundan, 2008) drew attention to the international distance and proposed a multidimensional perspective. Countries can not only be 'geographically separated', but also because cultural, economic, political or social differences make it more hard for international companies to operate. Geert Hofstede has done most and most detailed research in the field of international distance. His research is based on the four measures of culture (Hofstede, 1980). Studies using the cultural dimensions of Hofstede have produced contradicting results despite the fact he later onwards added a fifth dimension. Hofstede's research is limited and should also include how different aspects of distance beyond culture, influence decisions and results at company level. Different types of distance can affect the way of doing international business, how management deals with this and how employees make decisions. Therefore it is important to do research as wide as possible but use a funnel strategy by focus on defining and measuring international distance. In their research, Berry et. all identified nine dimensions of distance: administrative, connectedness, cultural, demographic, economic, financial, geographical, knowledge and political (Berry, Guillen, Zhou, 2010). Gong (2003), for example, discovered that a greater cultural distance increases the proportion of expats. Given our increasing diversity and interconnected problems, working together seems to be the best strategy to achieve our goals. Connecting these worlds is therefore an important topic to promote cross-cultural collaboration. A change in culture can positively change this, because collaboration establishes interconnections and there is more interaction between employees from different cultures. Global teams in companies can play a meaningful role in relation to collaborations when they include the social and cultural aspects in their strategy and when making decisions in daily operations (Steers, Nardon, Sanchez-Runde, 2016). For example, in supply chain management often independent companies from different countries are working together on planning and logistics to achieve international supply chain collaborations (Caoa, Zhangb, 2011). We are all connected by the increasing globalization of

communication. Cross-cultural collaboration and communication are clearly related, but they are two different things. Communication is about the transfer of information between people. This message must have meaning for both of them so that information with the highest possible chance can be sent and received in the right way. Communication makes it possible to start, maintain and end relationships and thus do business (Steers, Nardon, Sanchez-Runde, 2016). Communication is often about language in the first instance. Research into the relationship between language and organization is still in its infancy (Lauring, Tange, 2010). Languages reflect the communication styles of the cultures that use those languages. Languages with a high context in which a relatively high percentage of words can be interpreted in different ways based on how and when they are used, you need to hear the entire sentence, non-verbal communication and social aspects to understand in which context it has been used. In other words, we speak about high context when good communication is worldly-wise, have nuances, and is build up in different layers. Messages are spoken (verbal) and are not pronounced (non-verbal) (Meyer, 2014). Low context communication is clear, precise and, simple and is therefore more focused on verbal and less on non-verbal. Within low-context communication, repeating is valued when this give more details in regards of exchanging information (Meyer, 2014). If you come from a culture with a high context, you might see a communicator with a low context as inappropriate to the obvious, or even patronizing, and patronizing statement. On the other hand, if one comes from a culture with a low context, one can see a communicator with a high context as secret, not transparent or unable to communicate effectively (Meyer, 2014). Twins who grew up together can and will communicate more economically (high context) than two lawyers in a courtroom during a court case (low context) (Hall, Hall, 2000). In daily life we all sometimes communicate explicitly, while in other situations we pass on messages between the lines. The moral of the story: You think you are a good communicator, but what works for you, will not always work with people with another culture. Everyone who has to deal with other cultures on a daily basis must therefore be able to adapt. Some have suggested that the increasing growth of communication and information technology, such as the internet, creates partnerships. Although they are supporting factors, Laudel (2001) has shown that almost all, in this case, scientific collaborations start in person. After the personal contact, researchers use the IT facilities as a catalyst to maintain the new collaborations via internet. Therefore it is not a guarantee that when IT is in place, collaborations are automatically a success.

Hall (Hall, 1988) believed that people who have different cultural backgrounds were responsible for the biggest miscommunications. Training on miscommunication can teach different social and other skills, but training is only useful if participants are aware of the different relationships

between individuals and in a group context (Petronio, Ellemers, Giles, Gallois, 1998). Hall had a different approach than Hofstede. Hall has attempted in his research to view the cultural dimension from the individual on human level. His research mainly focuses on how cultures differ in personal communication and also how individuals deal with their personal space and time (Steers, Nardon, Sanchez-Runde, 2016). Hall present three dimensions in his model. In the first dimension, Hall starts with the contextual relationship in which the content of a message is just as important as the message itself (low and high context). In the second dimension he argued that the relative distance between people (space), also called proxemics by Hall, has influence on cultural communication and understanding cross-cultural settings which are internalized in all people at an unconscious level (Hall, The Hidden Dimension, 1988). His book analyzed different spaces that people have around themselves. First, the direct environment around them and called the personal space and secondly, the living environment in which they determine how streets, neighborhoods and cities should be organized on a cultural level. (Hall, 1973). In the third dimension Hall categorized cultures by the position to the concept of time. According to him, there can be monochronous and polychronous cultures. In cultures with a low territoriality, people don't value space and boundaries on a high level and is therefore less important to them. In this situation people don't see problems to share their space. People from high territoriality cultures value more concern for ownership and are likely to mark their space (Hall, 1973). Up to now, research has mainly been conducted on cross-cultural collaboration between different organizations in a specific sector, such as Spence and Crick's (2006) research, which investigates two countries between small and medium-sized high-tech companies or is focused on cross-cultural collaboration in an organization that only operates with local branches (Schneider, 1997). Little is known about cross-cultural collaboration within one international operating organization with branches in different countries. This type of research is unknown in the horticultural sector, while the horticultural world is in an interesting time.

2. Sector description

The horticultural sector is on the move, with new energy sources such as innovative cultivation systems, internationalization and collaboration in sales and operations. In the Netherlands there are 74,145 (4.6%) companies active in the agriculture, forestry and fishery sector (CBS, 2018), of which 68,810 in agriculture and horticulture and 4,049 in greenhouse horticulture. The agro-complex accounts for 10.2% of Dutch employment. The Dutch economic added value in 2011 amounted to 52 billion euros (10%). The export was 76.2 billion euros in 2012 compared to 51.3 billion euros imports. Horticultural production is mainly stimulated by the increased foreign demand for Dutch vegetables, flowers and plants. In 2014, around 44% of Dutch production was exported (Verkerk, Groot, Luiten, Quaedflieg, 2014). But the concentration of horticultural and horticultural businesses has been falling for several decades. A trend in the horticultural sector is the increase in the number of mega-companies with an annual standard yield of more than 0.5 million euros. They supply almost 60% of the total horticultural production (Verkerk, Groot, Luiten, Quaedflieg, 2014). International collaboration between and within organizations plays an important role in this.

The organization in this research operates in the horticultural sector and is a Dutch second-generation family business. With over 2,000 employees from the Netherlands, Europe and beyond, they produce more than 900 million young plants every year. The company has sales offices in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Poland and the United Kingdom. For unrooted cuttings and seed production, the company has production locations in Ethiopia, Kenya and Portugal. The production of young plants takes place in the Netherlands. One of the most important objectives is to increase delivery reliability to 99%. The organization wants to achieve this by focusing on synergy, making optimum use of the added value of a group. Delivery reliability was 95% last year and this did not achieve the target. First, language barrier is caused by difference in language. Not all employees within the organization speak Dutch and / or English. Secondly, a number of environmental factors play a role such as the IT facilities are not well organized in some countries. This has to do with the infrastructure and political situation in a country. As a result, communication or poor communication is not always possible. But also the social aspects in, in particular, Ethiopian and Kenyan communities are important to mention. Dutch people often do not know (enough) the customs in these countries. Third, the geographical location plays a role. Some production locations are located outside the EU, which makes it difficult for employees from non-EU countries to travel due to required visas, but also includes long travel times and travel costs. Fourth, the company uses Dutch expats as top

managers at production sites while the rest of a production location are local employees. As a result, people have to deal with different cultural views on the relationship of authority within an establishment. The lead time of expats working within the company is relatively short. This has to do with the fact that expats often move to another country after a period of 3-5 years. As a result, continuous investments must be made in recruiting new expats and knowledge must be transferred. Fifth, knowledge plays a role. Employees at foreign locations are generally low-skilled. Education in African countries is not yet up to standard and the school system is organized differently than in the Netherlands, resulting in knowledge differences between non-local and local employees. Finally, social aspects in foreign countries play a role in the organization.

The focus of this research is on cross-cultural collaboration, of which it has not yet been sufficiently investigated. In particular, the focus in this study is an intra-organizational cross-cultural collaboration in a single organization that operates internationally in the horticultural sector. When researching cross-cultural collaboration, the focus in this research is based on communication and cultural aspects. These are two topics that are regularly discussed within the company how this can be improved but has not been further investigated within the company. It is nevertheless an interesting topic for further research. Based on the literature found so far about cross-cultural collaboration, own experience with this sector and in conversation with the organization where this research will take place, the following research question has therefore been formulated:

How does cross-cultural collaboration works in an international horticultural family business?

The following sub questions are formulated based on the main question:
- How does cross-cultural communication influence international collaboration within an organization?
- What are the most important sources of miscommunication?
- What influence does the difference between high and low context communication styles have on collaboration between groups?

3. Methodology

The chosen research question is an ethnographic research based on participant observation. It will be an empirical study that is based on the personal experience of research participants. An attempt is made to answer the research question using Hall's cultural model with help of mapping the cross-culture collaboration within the company as completely as possible. The research concept is cross-cultural collaboration and the concepts of organizational structure and network structure. The research is conducted at the organizational level. Furthermore, it is a study that revolves around understanding the subject in the context. The data is collected through interviews with employees from the organization over a short period of three months. Since it is a short period, it is a cross-sectional study. In this research it is interesting to discover what lives among a certain target group and why. The use of qualitative research is a proven methodological approach whereby most important points in social sciences are researched (Eisenhardt, 1989). This approach corresponds to a number of studies in the growing amount of work with international entrepreneurship research (Coviello,Munro, 1997) (Bell, Crick, Young, 2004). Ethnographic research takes a cultural look at the study of the lives of people within their community (Hammersly,Atkinson, 2007).

An attempt is made to understanding other peoples understanding of things, Geertz (1973) called this 'thick description'. The goal is to understand what a certain population believes and thinks. This method can be used to investigate how cross-cultural collaboration actually functions within the chosen organization or how members of this group give meaning to their organizational context or actions. This ethnographic study attempts to understand cross-cultural collaboration in the terminology of employees.

The position of the researcher in this research is important to mention, because the researcher works within the organization. Ethnographic research is highly dependent on the unique knowledge and experience of the individual and his / her actions as a thinking person who contributes his / her subjectivity to the construction of information and knowledge. Ethnographers as knowledge workers are therefore confronted with potentially conflicting requirements and they rely on personal experience and subjective involvement to generate insights in their research. Further onwards, ethnographers have to convince the scientific community of the transitional and reliable nature in their role as scientists. This suggests that ethnographers have to find ways to balance subjectivity and objectivity (Schultze, 2000). Schultze (2000) accurately describes her role and presence in her research. In this research the position of the researcher will also be described as detailed as possible. Interviews are an

important part of ethnographic research. These will be semi-structured in nature with an overview of topics to be discussed such as language, culture in communication and collaboration, miscommunication, distance between locations, and hierarchy (Schneider, 1997) (Steers, Nardon, Sanchez-Runde, 2016) (Meyer, 2014) (Geertz, 1973). This structure offers the possibility of further following interesting and / or unexpected topics. The purpose of these ethnographic interviews is to develop contacts and elicit information (Spradley, 1979). The aim is to conduct 10 interviews with a length of 60-90 minutes per interview, in which informants are selected on the basis of a targeted sample. The interviews will be conducted with employees who work as members of the board, managers and (senior) employees who deal with cross-cultural collaborations on a daily basis. The demographic distribution of the interviewee is a point of attention in this study. That is why a selection is made that takes into account the geographic background as the most important characteristic. The interviewee works at the head office in the Netherlands or at a production site in Ethiopia, Kenya or Portugal. The interviews are conducted in person or via a video conference. The interviews are conducted in Dutch or English depending on the mother language of the interviewee. From the analysis of the interviews a thematic overview is made in the form of a table. In this table the main and sub question(s) are presented with the findings per question. These findings were mentioned by at least 2 or more respondents in the interviews.

4. Findings

The most important characteristics of cross-cultural collaboration drawn from participants in Ethiopia, Kenya, Portugal and The Netherlands were used to compare the main attributes judged to be the most important for an international horticultural family business. The reported results present generalized findings based on the 10 interviews.

4.1 How cross-cultural communication influence the company

As established from the participants, all 10 participants believe that communication is crucial. Communication is the basis for every business relationship inside and outside a company. Without communication, they cannot perform their duties and responsibilities in the right way, because sharing information is the most important aspect of any job. Sharing information and understanding each other bridges a gap between people. Shared information is analyzed, interpreted, sent and received. For example, participant G explains why we need communication:

"Communication influences collaboration for quite a large part. If you are asked to do something together with person B, you cannot go to work without having discussed with person B how you are going to do that. So, before you start working together, you also have to communicate whether you are on the same page. You always have communication first and then collaboration. That is the most logical order for me."

And participant J confirmed as well why communication is important: "*Communication is very important because we can't work together if we can't communicate*". All participants have said that communication is not just about sending information. A message must also be received and interpreted correctly. If team members have known each other for a longer time due to the number of years of service at a company and / or by visiting locations and head office (face-to-face), the business relationship is already further developed and communication is experienced more easily. If this is not the case then communication does not have to be a problem as long as there is some form of connection between colleagues. All participants highlight that within the company there is an open communication culture. Much value is attached to informal communication despite the fact that there is a hierarchy within the company. The board encourages and creates conditions for this by commitment. Don't confuse open communication with informal communication. Open communication ensures that employees do not feel impeded to share their thoughts and concerns with colleagues - good and bad - without having

to worry that management is giving negative feedback. Despite all participants mention there is an open communication culture within the company, participant A, B and H indicate that sometimes information is withheld or presented in a different way.

As stated by participant A:

"For example, if I had a problem with a manager in The Netherlands, you would work it out, but if, for example, you see the communication between production in The Netherlands and African managers, information is kept from both sides".

And participant H said:

"You notice, by the way, in an information session with all employees is a different atmosphere and the message is different when the same presentation was held for the management team only the week before. The story for all employees was a lot more positive than during the management session. The management communicates the information in a different setting in a different way."

Cross-cultural communication in every company deals with their own beliefs, communication strategies and business customs. Language barriers, high context versus low context cultures, nonverbal differences, and power distance are factors that can affect cross-cultural communication. During the interviews, people were asked whether there was a difference in communication within their own location, the Netherlands and other production locations. Of the 10 participants, 2 from the same location agree there is no difference but, for example, participant B explained the difference:

"There is the belief that Africans do not need to know everything. It is an old thing that is still being kept alive and this is not sufficient being taken away. All international communication is spread within The Netherlands and within the production locations, but only to the Dutch expat managers and they must communicate internally".

Participants emphasize that there must be clear, sufficient and accessible internal and external cross-cultural communication that is clear for all colleague from all levels and for every location. The cross-cultural communication between the supply chain cuttings department and the production locations is positively assessed and cited as 'the example' by all participants.

As stated by participant A:

"In certain departments, such as supply, I think that people take their responsibility for their work. I think this is due to the personality of the manager but for example the supply chain cuttings department has always been under pressure because of poor delivery reliability. I think that the director has made a priority to resolve this. I therefore think that the board can play a role in the way how we have to communicate within the company".

But the cross-cultural communication with HR and purchasing department is assessed as poor by half of the participants. According to the participants the responsibility is easily shifted to someone else and no responsibility is taken and they feel a mental distance with these departments in the Netherlands. Further onwards, respondents were also asked how they describe the cross-cultural communication within their organization. 8 out of 10 respondents indicate that they sometimes experience miscommunication. According to them, this has to do with the different culture background. The other 2, that both works at the same location don't experience this barrier. When asked who is responsible to take action for possible improving the cross-cultural communication within the company different answers were given. Out of 10, 1 stated the CEO is responsible, 2 stated the person itself is responsible, 1 stated the general manager of the production locations is responsible and the remaining 6 answered that the board is responsible.

4.2 Sources of miscommunication

Any time an employee misunderstands the words or actions of a colleague, this could cause conflict. Poor communication can lead to poor performance, lack of teamwork and is frustrating for employees. Language barriers are the most common cross-cultural communication obstacles which can cause wrong ideas and misunderstandings between employees. Although the respondents operate in 4 different countries, 4 out of 10 participants indicate that there are often language barriers within the company. However, it is noted by 6 respondents that there is still a lot of e-mail traffic in Dutch even though the company claims to be an international company and it is expected that English is the official language within the company. When asked if the participants work for a Dutch or international company they all agree that they work for an international company despite the still often used Dutch language and not all employees have a good command of English. Only 1 respondent noted that within the company there are

e-mail etiquettes with a number of tips on how to communicate within the company although these are only spread within the head office.

Most of the participants didn't give a clear answer about miscommunication situations or have given examples within the company. The response of the other participants fluctuates. It varies from some miscommunication according to participant H: *"There is sometimes miss-communication within the company but I do not experience this very much"*. And on the other hand, participant B made a strong statement: *"We still talk in a nice informal way, but that means that everything goes wrong, because there are no structures. Nobody talks to each other, one person tries to solve the problem and then it becomes one big disorganized communication"*. According to this participant it's important to establish a structure for communication but participant D has a different opinion: *"Sometimes I hear from colleagues that communication within the company is difficult but I also have an answer for those situations. Communication has two ends and has no beginning or end - its round. If people don't communicate you have to analyze yourself"*.

The respondents were asked to define the characteristics of a good communicator and the following answers are given: Create the right environment so that everyone is open to give their opinion, be an effective listener, and take responsibility. Create the right environment means; first of all, good communicators establish a personal connection, empathy, by focusing on how their message may impact most the other person.

Participant J formulated:

"With The Netherlands it's more a professional communication except for a few that we have met personally. When we don't know the person, never have seen the person face-to-face and we talk with that person by phone, you only talk professionally. When we have some personal contact in the past, with that person, it's easier going. Although, we still have the respect and we always keep the respect".

A high level of respect and trust are part of good communication between employees and there is a good chance that high team performance will arise and continue to exist. In this case, it doesn't matter in which culture you are operating because it applies to everyone as stated by participant A: *"You do have to ask for someone's opinion within the African culture, because if you do not ask for it, it will not be given, even though they may have a good input"*.

Effective listening offers many benefits such as getting more information from people, reduce conflict, inspire a higher level of commitment and encourages the speaker to feel valued as well. Good listening connects you to the work environment. The power to listen effectively depends on the degree to which someone observes and understands messages. This demands knowing how to careful listen and making an effort to understand what someone says. If you don't listen in a correct way and therefore respond inappropriately, that can make you interfere in a wrong moment with wrong sentence and in limit make fool of yourself or not be consider worthwhile to listen too, besides makes surrounding people feel inconsiderable and unheard as formulated by participant J:

"To be a good communicator you have to be a good listener. Sometimes you just have to be quiet to be a better communicator. It's a two-way road. You also have to give feedback and that's only possible when you listen. If you talk a lot, the other person can feel restrained to talk".

Cross-cultural misunderstandings or conflict may arise whenever there are cultural differences. Taking the time to research or ask about another's culture can make employees feel comfortable. Because of this extra effort, colleagues will value the work relation. Participant A stated that: *"The way of communication depends on culture and I think that people in the Netherlands can at least try to get a better understanding of the third party culture".* And participant G said: *"You have a different kind of dynamic with your foreigner colleagues because communication is not always as you expect or you do not communicate as others expect. People have a different background than in the Netherlands".* Write, for example, an article in the company newsletter or internal communications about a specific culture.

Workplace responsibility is important because it leads to a good operating company and a safe and accommodating working environment. According to 2 respondents located at the same production location, the responsibilities within the head office are not always clear.

According to participant C the following problem can occur: *"The more you break things down, the less responsible people feel. At a certain point in time someone has to be the initiator of a process or a project. If everyone is half responsible, my experience is that ultimately nobody takes responsibility".*

4.3 The influence of high and low context communication styles

The concepts of high context and low context address how people communicate in different cultures. Understanding whether your international colleagues are high context or low context

will help you to fit your communication style and build stronger relationships with them. All 10 participants directly or indirectly mentioned several examples of high and low context communication styles. Participant A, gives an example for a low context communication: *"You should know that you have to ask a clear question and not that you ask a polite question to a Dutch person and that you actually mean something else".* Or participant B: *"We as Dutch people easily give negative feedback. We have no problem with that".* In other words, this is giving a direct, simple and clear message. 6 out of 10 participants mentioned that Dutch people are very direct in their communication and according to these participants this can create misinterpretations and misunderstandings within the production locations due to the different cultural background. One of the participants said: *"The people in the Netherlands are not always aware of this and because of this I have sometimes upset or sad people in my office meaning I have to solve the problem immediately".* Understanding the feelings, experiences and intentions of colleagues will help to prevent misinterpretations and misunderstandings. It helps to empathize and think about things from another point of view. Participant B continued with the phrase: *"Africans pick up a lot with body language. A Dutch person only listens to what is being said and does not look at the body language. While an African person finds body language almost more important than what is told".* Body language can lead to a better and deeper connection with the receiver. In high context cultures it is common to communicate mostly via body language and in low context cultures they hardly use body language to communicate. Further onwards, 4 out of 10 participants highlight the importance of hierarchy in the company. The hierarchy in an organization is designed to have a structure to get people together with the same goal in mind. Participant J:

"I would never go to, for example, to the office of supply chain cuttings when I'm in the Netherlands without an appointment. There a limits and barriers that we have to respect. Some people are arrogant and they think they can just talk to everyone like they are family. We are all the same but it's the respect for the position".

In high context cultures there is a high difference between in-group and out-group while in a low context culture it's more flexible and open. Timing is important according to participant G:

"For example, we had a meeting last week with several people from the head office and production locations together via a video-conference. In the middle of this meeting was announced that we had a 10-minute break. Most come back to their desk after 10 minutes but some colleagues are not present yet so we wait with the complete group for 4 people. In

principle, 20 people are waiting for 5 minutes, which is 1,5 hour in total if you calculate this together".

For people coming from low context cultures schedules are more important than relationships but for high context cultures relationships are more important. Participant G continued: *"I don't think this is necessary when you make certain agreements with each other. I'm sure that it's sincerely appreciated when everyone keeps track on their time management".* Making agreements are important because they outline expectations for both parties.

4.4 How cross-cultural collaboration works

Communication and collaboration are closely connected in day-to-day business activities that it's often hard to determine which comes first or how to see the difference between them. Both terms are regularly used interchangeably during the interviews but all participants indicate that collaboration starts with communication, no collaboration is possible without communication. 2 out of 10 participants describe the cross-cultural collaboration within their location and between the different locations as good and have no negative feedback about the cross-cultural collaboration within the company worldwide. Both of the participants have the same culture background and are both working in their home country. Beside participant E none of the others expressed this have certain benefits:

"A local manager can understand what we want to achieve at the head office and translate this to the employees in the foreign production location who think differently. I'm actually happy that we have a local manager at one of our foreign farms. You have someone who speaks the mother language of the foreign country, which is also very important in communication and collaboration. The manager knows the contacts in the area, knows the culture and customs in the foreign country. A local manager is not required, but I do think it is important that the management team abroad should not only consist of expats. You actually have to attract local management at a high quality level to make that translation every now and then and together you achieve more".

The remaining 8 participants describe the cross-cultural collaboration within the company differently. First, looking at the collaboration within their own location all participants, except for 2, describes the collaboration as reasonable to good. For example participant F explains:

"Within our farm I must say that we have made steps. If I look back to the past few years the collaboration between the departments is becoming increasingly intensive. Head of departments are increasingly taking their role and do things independently so we are on the right track".

But still improvements are needed according to all these participants. In general, 2 reasons are described by the participants. First, accountability will make cross-cultural collaboration a success and secondly cultural backgrounds influence the cross-cultural collaboration. Participant A claims:

"The collaboration is going pretty well within our farm. The only thing you encounter is people quickly protect their own skin. Yes, we work together to achieve a better end result, but sometimes I have the feeling that not everyone is 100% open to achieve the end result. We quickly protect our own location or our own department. People are afraid of being judged by things they do wrong".

Participant H explained: "*People who collaborate with each other for a longer period of time have difficulty addressing specific issues towards each other. There is a clear difference in cross-cultural collaboration between Dutch managers and local managers in Africa".*

And participant C stated: "*I would say that in my experience the culture can be tougher or that people have to take account for their responsibility. The local colleagues within our location, in average, have difficulty taking responsibility. It's the culture to hide and not put problems on the table".*

Participant B and K stated that the collaboration within their location is not going well but both mention different reasons for this. According to participant B the cross-cultural collaboration has to improve companywide because the company experienced growing pains in the last years:

"The collaboration within the company is informal and unstructured because we are growing and struggling to implement internally that change. I see problems within the head office, within the farms and between all the different locations. It is the total organization that has this problem".

Participant K explains the lack of leadership competences and thus influences the collaboration negatively:

"There is not a lot of collaboration with the Dutch manager within our production location. He does his program and I do my program. It is not really a great collaboration. He is not interested

in what I do. If I, for example, explain something about our ERP system he always wants to finish quickly or starts another subject. He is also not interested in the person. I would call this more of a parallel collaboration but my collaboration with the African colleagues here at the company is just fine".

Looking at the cross-cultural collaboration between the different locations and the head office, 8 participants highlight that the current cross-cultural collaboration need to improve but there is a difference between the cross-cultural collaboration between the production locations and the head office.

Participant E explained*: "I think the collaboration has improved but all farms are still all separate units that do their own thing. Cross-collaboration with the head office has improved but this is because the systems are better connected. With this you have automatically better contact with each other".*

As already described by participant E, the cross-collaboration with the head office is more intensive then between the production locations. All highlight that the need for cross-cultural collaboration with the head office is essential but between the production locations the demand is lower because it does not affect the core business processes. Still, with some departments located at the head office, the collaboration is described as difficult with little interest for the foreign farms that causes a lack of collaboration in general.

Participant C:

"It depends on the person and situation how I experience the cross-cultural collaboration with the head office. In general, the cross-cultural collaboration is literally and figuratively distant. It is different, for example, with Supply Chain Cuttings department with whom we have a good relation with but there are also a number of departments like purchase, HR and production department where I still get the feeling: We are not really taken seriously".

All participants agree that there is no or little collaboration between the production locations. Of the 10 participants, 1 agrees that there is no reason for collaboration between the production locations because all locations have individual goals to achieve. Another 3 participants do see the added value of exchanging information with each other but don't see this as a high priority as explained by participant K: *"It's not because I don't want it but according to me it's not necessary to have a close relation with the other farms. I don't see the reason for it".* The 6

remaining participants do see added value to establish a good cross-cultural collaboration between the production locations as explained by participant C:

"Every farm is inventing its own wheel. For example, one of the African farms is 3 to 4 years ahead in labor efficiency to improve processes. You could, for example, share this experience with each other. We are asking and you receive an answer, but the exchange could be much better. General guidelines must be created".

The 6 participants expressed the view that you gain with more colleagues additional knowledge and resources to boost more creativity and realize the benefits to acquire cross-cultural collaboration such as networking in the workplace.

Table 1: Thematic overview of findings

Topic	Findings
How cross-cultural communication influence the company	- Communication is crucial. - Ensure that any message is received and understood. - Personal level doesn't have to be deep. - Open and informal communication culture. - Adequate internal and external communication needs to be in place. - Different culture background influence communication. - Responsibility is on the upper level.
Sources of miscommunication	- Language barriers - Despite working for international company, mother language head office is dominant. - A good communicator creates the right environment, be an effective listener, take responsibility. - Cultural differences influence miscommunication.
The influence of high and low context communication styles	- Understanding feelings, experiences and intentions help to prevent misinterpretations and misunderstandings. - Body language helps breaking the barrier and forms a better connection. - Hierarchy influences positively. - Punctuality in meetings is important.
How cross-cultural collaboration works	- Collaboration starts with communication. - Local management benefits. - Accountability equal success. - Cultural backgrounds influence. - Company expansion influence negatively. - Head office collaboration is essential. - No collaboration between production sites. - Added value: Gain with more people extra knowledge and resources to boost creativity.

5. Conclusion

This study has explored the practices of 10 employees active in 4 layers of the researched organization with regards to dealing with cross-cultural issues in an international operating company. The research has highlight a number of principles that need to be realized before having a complete view of understanding of how cross-cultural collaboration works in a horticultural company. This study reveals that participants in The Netherlands, Ethiopia, Kenya and Portugal acknowledged that cross-cultural communication is essential to the success of cross-cultural collaboration. As noted in this study, key factors of a successful cross-cultural communication are ensuring that every message is received and understood, the personal level has to be present but doesn't have to be too deep and you need an open and informal communication culture. Further onwards, both internal and external cross-cultural communication provides the invisible glue which can positively boost an international company but most participants still experience language barriers and the Dutch command is dominating the company. Adopting a global language policy is a must; companies can't close deals if the people in the room can't communicate together. It was established that a good communicator knows how to create the right environment, be an effective listener and take responsibility and is the key to banish misunderstandings and misinterpretations. As confirmed, different cultural backgrounds can influence cross-cultural communication in a positive or negative way. All participants agree that understanding whether your international colleagues have a high or low context cultural background will help you to adjust your communication style and build powerful business relationships. The participants indicated that understanding feelings, experiences and intentions positively affect the cross-cultural communication. Despite the fact that the participants have given examples doesn't mean they see the complete picture. When employees are not in time for meetings, it may be because they are polychronic, not because they are bad-mannered or work-shy looking at Hall's cultural dimension. In this example, it's the difference between when things must be or what will be achieved. The research has established that cross-cultural collaboration always first starts with cross-cultural communication. The benefits of local management are under estimated despite the fact that this research shows that the cross-cultural communication and collaboration is assessed as more positive than among the expats although all participants indicate that cultural backgrounds are influencing the cross-cultural collaboration. All participants agree that taking ownership is part of a successful cross-cultural collaboration to strengthen relationships and create better results. The study found that cross-cultural communication and collaboration patterns varied between the countries. All

production locations have communication with the head office but between the different production locations hardly any communication and collaboration exist. On the other hand, each production location has the same lines of communication with the head office and is the most important communication and collaboration line for a good performance. To lift the company, the company has to start creating structured basic needs to start cross-cultural communication and collaboration to empower sharing knowledge across boundaries. All participants agree that the responsibility of establishing cross-cultural communication and collaboration is the responsibility of the upper level. In a certain way this is true because strategies start at the top of the company. In fact, if the board is not stimulating this subject, the cross-cultural communication and collaboration will not change. In order to achieve this, training in cross-cultural awareness, communication and collaboration for employees with a close contact with the foreign farms can stimulate to improve. Cross-cultural management is the essence of success and the local management teams have the most important role in making this. Expats, who life and work abroad, understand business operations and cultural diversities better than the management located at the head office. They have the essential role in translating the needs and demands between the countries. When you understand the cross-cultural person and organization, then you can seek to align with them and hence gain greater influence.

6. Discussion

Looking at Hall's cultural dimensions theory not all 3 dimensions are explicit explored in this study. Based on the main and sub questions in this study, the focus was on Hall's first dimension, high and low context with the scale anchors of high and low communication styles. In this study, the participants didn't mention high and low context in an explicit way but by the different communication and collaboration style explanations given it's stated that different cross-cultural communication and collaboration styles exist. Given the examples during the interviews, high and low context cross-cultural communication and collaboration are present within the organization worldwide. Cross-cultural communication and collaboration are intertwined and therefore the division between both terms is indistinguishable. Hall's dimension culture explains specific communication styles but a connection can be made towards collaboration. Therefore, this study confirms Hall's cultural dimensions theory on the first dimension and makes a link to cross-cultural collaboration as well. The second dimension, space, and the third dimension, time, are not explicit explored in this study but indirectly they are partly briefly discussed by the participants. Space in terms of distance is not discussed in this research but looking in terms of territorial, the participants spoke about the lack of taking responsibility, accountability and ownership that indicates a low territoriality culture. Hall's third dimension, time, is often referred to 'time management'. Some participants attach great value to this aspect. Although, space and time were not a direct part of the research question in this study and therefore not explicitly asked for in the interviews, the subjects are mentioned by the participants. This study can't confirm or reject Hall's space and time dimension but given the response from the participants both themes are a part of and influence cross-culture collaboration and communication.

7. Recommendations

First, there are a number of practical recommendations for further research. Because of the limited duration of this study, this research was executed within a part of the management teams of the supply cuttings department and cutting production farms. Although, these 10 participants, mostly Dutch expats, have a lot of experience in cross-cultural collaboration and communication and therefore represent the target group it's recommended to use a larger target group for better statistical qualitative analysis. Looking at the subject of this study it's advisable to do the research in more different countries because of the cross-cultural subject. The company also has a large sales organization in various countries. A sales organization can operates differently from production and therefore can have a different approach towards cross-cultural collaboration. Also, within the sales organization the group is more heterogeneous because this group is located in more countries and only exists out of local staff meaning more cultural backgrounds. Secondly, there are a number of theoretically recommendations such as the role of the observer has to be critically examined because the observer bias is almost impossible to eliminate in this study. The research is depending on the researcher's observations and interpretations. In this case the observer is working inside the organization and therefore already has a certain opinion despite the fact that the researcher try to remain as objective as possible. Execute this research with a researcher from outside the organization can have different results. This research is mainly about communication. Communication starts by asking questions to interviewees and therefore already influences the research. The researcher's native language is Dutch. A number of interviews were conducted in English, whereby English is not the mother tongue for both, the researcher and the interviewee. Even when both speak English, misunderstanding may loom around the corner: Verbal and non-verbal communication could be lost in translation. These are aspects that have to be taken in consideration for further research.

8. Summary

The researched horticultural company has its headquarters in the Netherlands with production locations in Ethiopia, Kenya and Portugal. This taken as starting point, this study investigates how cross-cultural communication and collaboration within an internationally operating horticultural company works. This study is based on 10 semi-structured interviews. The target group represents supply chain and foreign production locations and is working in the management level. The interviews revealed that cross-cultural communication is crucial, that a message has been well received and understood, relationships do not have to be too deep, good internal and external communication have to be in place and different cultural backgrounds influence cross-cultural communication. This study reveal that language barriers, cultural differences and the dominating mother language are the most common forms of miscommunication in the researched company. A good communicator knows how to create the right environment, be an effective listener and take responsibility and is the key to banish misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Understanding feelings, experiences, intentions, body language, hierarchy and punctuality influences high and low communication styles. Local management has a positive influence on cross-cultural collaboration and taking ownership is the key to success. According to the participants, cross-cultural collaboration with the head office is essential and cultural backgrounds influence this. On the other hand, cross-cultural collaboration between the farms is hardly in place although participants see this as added value. The expansion of the company can negatively influence cross-cultural collaboration. Hall tried to identify the cultural dimension from the perspective of culture in regards to communication, space and time. In cultures with low context, people speak from the heart and they say what they think. Cultures with high context are recognized by indirect communication which is attended by high and powerful communicative context. This study has shown that high and low context cross-cultural communication and collaboration are present within the organization worldwide. The space and time dimensions have not been directly investigated although both dimensions are mentioned by the participants. Hall's theory on the space and time dimension is not rejected or confirmed but both dimensions are a part of and influence cross-culture collaboration and communication.

Bibliography

Bell, Crick, Young. (2004). Small Firm Internationalization and Business Strategy. *International Small Business Journal*, 23-56.

Berry, Guillen, Zhou. (2010). An institutional approach to cross-national distance. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 1460-1480.

Brouwer, Van der Zwan. (2011). *50 Inspiring business cases: The Dutch industrial landscape.* Rotterdam: MainPress B.V.

Caoa, Zhangb. (2011). Supply chain collaboration: Impact on collaborative advantage and firm performance. *Journal of Operations Management*, 163–180.

CBS. (2018, 10 11). *CBS Statline.* Retrieved from CBS Statline: https://opendata.cbs.nl/statline/#/CBS/nl/dataset/81589ned/table?ts=1547369772431

Coviello,Munro. (1997). Network Relationships and the Internationalisation Process of Small Software Firms. *International Business Review*, 361-386.

Cullen. (2002). *Multinational Management: A Strategic Approach.* Cincinnati: South-Western College Publishing.

Dunning, Lundan. (2008). *Multinational Enterprises and the Global Economy, Second Edition.* Cheltenham, UK • Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Eisenhardt. (1989). Building theory from case study research. *Academy of Management Review*, 532-550.

Euwals, Meijerink. (2018, 08). *CPB.* Retrieved from Centraal Planbureau: https://www.cpb.nl/sites/default/files/omnidownload/CPB-Policy-Brief-2018-08-Inclusieve-globalisering.pdf

Geertz. (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures.* New York: Basic Books, Inc., Puhlishers.

Gong. (2003). Subsidiary staffing in multinational enterprises: Agency, resources, and performances. *Academy of Management Journal*, 728–739.

Gupta, Govindarajan. (2004). *Gobal Strategy and Organization.* New York: Wiley.

Hall. (1973). *The Silent Language.* New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group Inc.

Hall. (1988). *The Hidden Dimension.* New York: Bantam Doubbleday Dell Publishing Group Inc.

Hall, Hall. (2000). *Understanding Cultural Differences: Germans, French and Americans.* Boston: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

Hammersly,Atkinson. (2007). *Ethnography. Principles in Practice.* London: Routledge.

Hofstede. (1980). *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations across Nations.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Laudel. (2001). Collaboration, creativity and rewards: why and how scientists collaborate. *International Journal of Technology*, 762–781.

Lauring, Tange. (2010). International language management: contained or dilute communication. *European J. International Management*, 317-332.

Meyer. (2014). *The Culture Map.* New York: Public Affairs.

Petronio, Ellemers, Giles, Gallois. (1998). (mis)communicating across boundaries. *Communication research*, 571-595.

Phene, Almeida. (2008). Innovation in multinational subsidiaries: The role of knowledge assimilation and subsidiary capabilities. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 901–919.

Research, W. U. (2018). *Horticulture sector development for emerging markets.* Wageningen: Wageningen University & Research.

Schneider, B. (1997). *Managing Across Cultures.* Hertfordshire: Pearson Education.

Schultze. (2000). A Confessional Account of an Ethnography about Knowledge Work. *MIS Quarterly*, 3-41.

Spence, Crick. (2006). A comparative investigation into the internationalisation of Canadian and UK high-tech SMEs. *International Marketing Review*, 524-548.

Spradley. (1979). *Asking descriptive questions.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Steers, Nardon, Sanchez-Runde. (2016). *Management across cultures.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Verkerk, Groot, Luiten, Quaedflieg. (2014). *Feiten & Cijfers van de Nederlandse Land- en Tuinbouw.* LTO Nederland.

Zeng, Ming, Tong, Sun. (2010). Creating synergy for cross-cultural teams in international R&D projects. *African Journal of Business Management*, 2625-2633.