



# Deep-Diving into Diversity

*Understanding and adapting to cultural communication differences in Singapore*

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## FOREWORD

Before you lies “Deep-diving into Diversity: understanding and adapting to cultural communication differences in Singapore”: the culmination of almost a year of research (following another year of making assumptions about Singaporean culture) packaged into a Bachelor’s Thesis for my Communications studies at the Hogeschool Leiden. This second attempt has been tuned to echo the feedback I’ve gotten from my readers and coaches. As you will read in this thesis, the subject was a deeply personal one; having to exclude myself from the equation to ensure scientific rigor, was one of the most interesting challenges I’ve faced in a long while. Seeing as this is my “last chance to dance”, I hope that, if anything, it will help the reader understand that I’m highly passionate about turning theory into practice.

It is customary to thank people in your foreword - which I definitely intend to do, because I couldn’t have done this alone - but I’d like to start with an entity: the Hogeschool Leiden itself. After almost four years of choosing my career over my education, the Hogeschool Leiden allowed me to attempt to finalize my studies in a way that could combine those two in the best possible manner. I’m extremely grateful for this; I would have conducted this research even if I couldn’t have used it as the subject for my Bachelor’s Thesis, but applying it to my studies makes it all the more useful. Sincerely: thank you.

I wouldn’t have known anything about the issues that preface this thesis, if REDACTED hadn’t trusted me enough to send me out into the big, scary world and experience Singaporean business culture for myself. This was also made possible by my manager and thesis coach, Daniel Savalle, who knows how to make me look at situations differently and challenge me. Constantly.

Secondly, Piet Hein Coebergh deserves many thanks for being understanding of my schedule and helping me when necessary. It is greatly appreciated.

Thirdly, Kristina van Eenennaam deserves a special mention: if it wasn’t for her, I wouldn’t have thought of going “back to school” with this study to begin with.

Also, I would like to thank all the interviewees that took time out of their busy schedules, to help shine a light on how REDACTED can gain a foothold in Singapore.

Lastly, I want to thank YOU for taking the time to read this. Hopefully, at the end of the ride, you’ll feel like you’ve gained insight into how differences in culture affect the ways we communicate.

I love Singapore, and I’m proud to have learned more about working with the beautiful Nation State. Here’s to hoping my research helps REDACTED advance its position in one of my favorite places on earth.

With every good wish,

Michel Tol

## **DISCLAIMER**

### **Language choice**

This thesis is written in English. This decision was made (after being discussed with my HSL coach) to ensure maximum exposure and usability within REDACTED, which is primarily English-speaking.

### **Confidentiality**

Due to the nature of the industries REDACTED operates in, the contents of this thesis could contain information not meant for the public. Hence, the reading of this document constitutes tacit approval of the fact that none of its contents may be shared and/or distributed without REDACTED's expressed knowledge and consent.

## SUMMARY

REDACTED, a specialized software provider for work safety in hazardous industries, has attempted to break into the Singaporean market without success for several years. This is a challenge of strategic importance, due to low oil prices and Western and Middle-Eastern markets slowly growing saturated with digital work safety solutions. REDACTED commissioned this research to gain insight into the situation, and attempt to address the challenges in communication with the South-East Asian nation state. The research objective was therefore *“Analysis of Singaporean cultural dimensions contrasted with Western countries, to provide REDACTED with a valid and sound recommendation on how to engage relevant stakeholders in Singapore.”* This study performed this analysis through a combination of desk research around Trompenaars’ and Hampden-Turner’s studies (1997), and in-depth, semi-structured interviews with key Singaporean respondents.

It can be concluded that there are significant, relevant differences between REDACTED’s current, Western culture- style communications approach and Singapore’s mode of business communication, indicated by the cultural incongruences demonstrated in Trompenaars’ studies as well as the responses from Singaporean interviewees. It can be concluded that, to adapt to cultural differences between Singapore and The Netherlands when presenting REDACTED solutions in Singapore, REDACTED should address and reconcile the differences between Universalism vs Particularism, Individualism vs Communitarianism, Neutral vs Emotional, Specific vs Diffuse and Achievement vs Ascription, because all these dimensions have been shown to impact business communication differences. It is important for REDACTED to effectively address these differences, as Singapore has the potential to increase REDACTED’s revenue with high-value contracts, offsetting the waning opportunities in the West and Middle-East.

Each of the five dimensions laid out in the conceptual model of this thesis has an impact on how to effectively engage Singaporean stakeholders. Therefore, this study recommends REDACTED’s existing “Western-style” approach be amended throughout the engagement with Singaporeans through various means. Broadly, the assignment of a Cultural Connector will provide further deep-level insight into how to overcome cultural differences with Singaporean stakeholders, and allow REDACTED’s staff to engage with them from a far more prepared position. Furthermore, this researcher recommends adaptation on multiple levels:

- **Tone-of-voice:** the interviews conducted in this thesis validate the hypothesis that cultural differences have an impact on communication. By rewording communications to align more with Singaporean cultural traits and therefore be more object-focused, status-deferential, and based on relationship over product, REDACTED should be able to increase acceptance of proposals, presentations and other client- facing material
- **Body language and verbal communications style:** REDACTED’s client-facing staff should undergo professional presentation training to understand the engagement-specific elements important to effectively communicate with Singaporean stakeholders
- **Patience:** REDACTED’s staff should calculate impact to their sales pipeline due to longer sales cycles, borne from the meandering and group-focused communication style of Singaporeans.

Lastly, a summary implementation plan for these recommendations was devised to ensure an effective transfer of information and knowledge to REDACTED’s internal stakeholders. Correct implementation could lead to significant revenue increases in the region.

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## ATTACHMENTS

ANNEXURE 1 – REDACTED competitive analysis

ANNEXURE 2 – Marketing Annual Operating Plan 2017 PDF (*please note: this is an animated PowerPoint presentation, not optimised for print*)

ANNEXURE 3 – In-depth persona definition

ANNEXURE 4 – Topic guide

ANNEXURE 5 – Interview verbatims

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ANNEXURE 7 - Reflectieverslag Afstudeerscriptie Michel Tol - S1044385

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Singapore is a booming “emerging” energy market, with structural annual economic growth which continuously outperforms expectations (Kit, 2017). With an eye on the future, the region is looking to increase domestic Oil and Gas demand to decrease dependency on foreign imports (Trading Economics, 2017). The region also holds both innovation and safety in high regard (Choudhury, 2017), with multiple government initiatives across the region supporting hazardous industries in improving safety and efficiency with modern tools. REDACTED’s integrated operational safety management software can play a role in this, improving both workforce and asset safety while increasing productivity (Verdantix EHS Research Group, 2017).

REDACTED has a large cache of Oil and Gas references, and its corporate strategy contains continuous focus on opportunities in this area. To ensure its continued relevance in this space, REDACTED in 2016 defined a new strategy: one where the switch from project to product company would lead to a more homogenized and standardized product offering, allowing its products to be purchased at lower prices, with quicker turnaround times, and less development required. While researching what geographies to pilot this new proposition in, the decision was made to focus on South-East Asia (among other geographies), and Singapore in particular. This because there is a lower technological barrier there due to the country’s focus on innovation; a pre-existing domestic oil, gas and chemical industry; and a strong, government-driven focus on workplace and asset safety (Ministry of Manpower, 2017).

With close to a decade of experience selling to Middle-Eastern and Western companies, and with an easier-to-understand and lower-cost product-driven proposition, the assumption was made by REDACTED Sales Management that Singapore would be receptive to REDACTED’s offering. This idea was also bolstered by the fact that key government workforce safety and innovation initiatives were sprouting up across the country, in part due to Singapore’s rapid economic growth.

REDACTED is used to approaching and engaging with stakeholders in a certain way: a “Western” way. A methodology in which decisions are more generally driven by propositions and proposals, than by relationships and discourse. Due to this, REDACTED came into Singapore with the focus on “what to sell”, and did not effectively assess “how to sell”. Since having been in Singapore for the first time in 2016, this researcher beheld colleagues’ typical culturally Western communication strategies when interfacing with stakeholders: their product-first, sales-focused approach wasn’t leading to progress. As this researcher was only there from a knowledge-sharing perspective, this researcher decided to focus more on building relationships and explaining concepts, than on hard selling.

The more this researcher engaged with stakeholders in the region, the more the impression was formed that Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, et cetera seem to operate on a “friends first, business comes after” model. A significant example of this phenomenon in action was when, in late August 2017, an audience was requested with the Executive Director of the Singapore Chemical Industry Council (SCIC, 2017). He and this researcher had spoken casually a few months earlier. This audience ended up consisting of discussing the history of Shell, what airplanes were the most interesting, and the Executive Director’s time in the military. Five minutes before the end of the meeting, this researcher reminded the Executive Director of the actual purpose of the meeting, and what was needed from him; the Executive Director promptly picked up his phone, called the person requested, and arranged a meeting. This researcher was able to operate under the relatively “stress-free” conversational atmosphere the Executive Director of the SCIC initiated, because there was no explicit drive to sell. However, the result of this conversation was a large step towards an important collaboration.

This type of anecdotal example can be found throughout REDACTED, but its direct relevance seems to be as of yet undocumented (and also hasn’t been studied or mapped internally). This specific example, as well as the current lack of progress in the region, indicates - at a minimum - a gap between REDACTED’s sales-driven approach, and Singapore’s culturally preferred mode of communication.

For REDACTED, this is a challenge of strategic importance. A challenge where providing well-priced, innovative software is apparently not a good enough proposition. With oil prices low and Western and Middle-Eastern markets slowly growing saturated with digital work safety solutions, REDACTED *must* expand to new geographies that provide opportunities in the operational safety space. On paper, Singapore is a strategic fit: a clear push

towards innovation, a strong safety culture, and a domestic oil and gas market are three complementary indicators. This study hopes to analyse, define and operationalise a communications approach strategy, which will allow REDACTED to adapt itself to the emerging nation state of Singapore and effectively communicate in Singaporean business culture. Therefore, the research objective of this thesis is defined as:

*“Analysis of Singaporean cultural dimensions contrasted with Western countries, to provide REDACTED with a valid and sound recommendation on how to engage relevant stakeholders in Singapore.”*



## 2. SITUATION ANALYSIS

This chapter covers an internal and external analysis. The internal analysis discusses relevant elements surrounding REDACTED as a company. The external analysis takes the form of a DESTEP analysis, while a Competitive Analysis can be found in ANNEXURE 1 – REDACTED competitive analysis. A SWOT analysis rounds out these two analyses.

### 2.1 Internal analysis

REDACTED Industry Software (henceforth also “REDACTED”) is a multinational software company, headquartered in The Hague. Started in 2008, it quickly grew in size and scope and currently counts 232 employees, six offices worldwide and a clientele that contains 60 percent of Oil and Gas majors.

REDACTED creates a type of software called “digital Control of Work” (henceforth also “COW”), which concerns itself with improving the way maintenance is performed within hazardous industries. This is tailor-made software which enables maintenance crew on, for example, an oil rig, to perform their jobs more safely, with increased awareness and increased speed. The government-driven concept of COW was initiated soon after the Piper Alpha oil rig explosion in 1988, which was directly caused by a lack of oversight in the Control of Work process. This resulted in 167 people dying and over one billion dollars’ worth of property damage (Macalister, 2013).

As an organisation, REDACTED has helped hazardous industries over the past decade by addressing the dangers of complex maintenance through comprehensive software. Its fit-for-purpose proposition and the oil and gas industry’s high-capital focus allowed REDACTED to rapidly expand its business, taking advantage of the high oil price, industry focus on safety, and the slow-but-steady introduction of “digital” in the oil and gas space.

However, things started changing in 2014, with oil prices dropping to record lows (Kemp, 2015) and companies across the globe cutting CAPEX (capital expenditure) budgets and change initiatives. REDACTED had to rethink its global strategy, offsetting the contracts potentially lost to lack of budget. The organisation realised the potential benefits of moving into other hazardous industry verticals. For example, petrochemical companies buy oil to make derivative products, and they suddenly saw their purchase price drop and their profits increase. This paved the way for these organisations to invest in innovation, and REDACTED expanded its reach into chemicals, pharmaceuticals, fertilizers, and more. It now holds contracts with major corporations outside of oil and gas, including pharmaceutical company Pfizer and nuclear fusion project ITER.

To expand its reach, REDACTED has attempted to work with partners in the past. This has seen mixed results: the only successes so far have been booked with partners doing training post-implementation. While many software companies utilise resale partners and implementation partners, the niche nature of the products REDACTED offers have led to a proposition that is complicated to communicate. This could be mitigated with more time and money, but oftentimes resellers are looking for a quick turnover. Therefore, REDACTED’s partner approach is mainly focused on technology integrations, which improve the capabilities of the software. However, REDACTED has taken it upon itself to bolster its partner strategy over the next three years.

#### **Mission and vision**

REDACTED’s mission states: *“REDACTED is the leading global provider of software solutions and services for Operational Excellence and safety in industrial environments”.*

REDACTED’s vision reads as follows: *“To drive the industry standard for Operational Excellence and safety by continuously innovating with a focus on usability and seamless integration.”*

#### **Company brand**

REDACTED combines solid operational subject matter expertise with a young and proactive workforce. This combination is found in its external positioning, through the use of powerful, corporate color schemes contrasted with active, semi-informal communication styles. REDACTED pushes the concept of thought leadership in tandem with a “getting things done” mentality, bridging the gap between old-world oil and gas conservatism and modern technology-first methodologies.

REDACTED's large client portfolio, level of in-house industry specialists (some of which have 30+ years of operational experience), and positive client feedback codified in various case studies, all help REDACTED maintain the top position in the COW-specific market (Verdantix EHS Research Group, 2017).

### **Marketing communication**

REDACTED holds a clearly defined marketing communication strategy, that is reviewed and adapted each year by way of the Annual Operating Plan (the Marketing Annual Operating Plan for 2017 can be found in ANNEXURE 2 - Marketing Annual Operating Plan 2017). Due to its relatively small buyer niche and high cost of product, REDACTED's marketing communication is specified to the market and can be split into several facets:

#### *Social Media: LinkedIn*

Due to its corporate clientele, REDACTED focuses its social media efforts solely on LinkedIn. With almost 9,000 followers as of December 2017, REDACTED holds a lead over its direct COW competitors (including, for example, Petrotechnics with 1,740 followers and NiSoft with 228 followers as of December 2017). Its defined content strategy for LinkedIn contains: type of post (event announcements, software go-lives, new clients, case studies, and more); frequency (no less than one post per week and no more than 2, barring specific circumstances); budget (for sponsored posts), and other facets. Tone of voice for LinkedIn is outlined in the REDACTED corporate style guide, which is regularly updated.

#### *Events*

REDACTED has a dedicated events coordinator, who selects and facilitates industry events which fall within REDACTED's external communications strategy. Criteria include event size, market type, attendees, speaking opportunity, cost, geography, and more. Events are the company's largest communications expenditure.

#### *Web*

The company communicates via its website in tandem with LinkedIn. General SEO/SEM tactics and strategies are employed to increase traction and conversion via the various contact forms found on REDACTED's site.

#### *PR*

Public Relations firms are used on an ad-hoc basis, often when news of significant importance (such as REDACTED's global contract win with Statoil) is deemed to require greater reach. REDACTED utilizes both free (PR.com and other similar platforms) and paid (REDACTED has a large global PR firm on retainer) avenues for this.

### **Team and culture**

REDACTED consists of 250 employees hailing from 35 different countries, with an average age of 32 years old. 85% of total staff work in The Hague, at REDACTED's head office. The culture is informal, with healthy lunches, open floor plans, weekly drinks, and horizontal hierarchy. It has defined five Core Values which make staff "REDACTEDaries": *We grow together, We take ownership, We are innovative, We are industry-minded, and We work hard & play hard.*

## **2.2 External analysis**

This chapter will assess key factors of REDACTED's operations through a DESTEP analysis, focusing on Demographic, Economical, Sociocultural, Technological, Ecological and Political elements. This method provides insight into the current state of REDACTED.

#### *Demographic*

Due to the niche nature of REDACTED's products, the company's demographic landscape is relatively narrow. Key external stakeholders can be defined as Operations, HSE, IT, and CxOs within the hazardous (process) industries. Due to the industry knowledge required for the reader to understand these stakeholders, I have created an in-depth persona definition for each of the four domains, which can be found in ANNEXURE 3 - in-depth persona definition.

#### *Economic*

REDACTED had much success winning major contracts with oil and gas companies between 2010-2014, due to the high oil price (and therefore higher profit margins for oil and gas companies) (Nasdaq, 2017). With digital

transformation in full swing, REDACTED was able to provide fitting, tailored solutions to industry challenges at high cost. However, with the oil crash of 2014, REDACTED was required to rethink its strategy, moving from only tier 1 (\$5b+ annual revenue) oil and gas clients, to tier 1-2-3 (starting from \$500m annual revenue) companies in downstream, chemicals, refining, pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, and other verticals not – or positively – affected by the low oil price.

For example, the manufacturing industry will be spending \$189b on Internet of Things solutions alone, and \$772b in total in 2018 (O'donnell, 2017) . This indicates a healthy market.

#### *Sociocultural*

As previously mentioned, REDACTED creates software-based work safety and efficiency solutions for hazardous industries. While there has been local legislation regarding workplace safety (such as Health and Safety Executive in the United Kingdom, among others), these guidelines have primarily focused on paper-based safety and process solutions. This is in part due to the time in which these regulations were erected (most after the Piper Alpha incident in 1988, mentioned above in the Internal Analysis), but also due to the complexities of changing methodologies in massive, complex industries (Tol, 2016). However, more and more regulatory bodies, including Singapore's, are offering incentives to companies for switching critical maintenance and safety systems to digital (Workplace Safety and Health Council, Unknown year). The transition to robust, digital safety systems is saving lives and streamlining processes, improving production and reducing risk across hazardous industries.

#### *Technological*

As referenced in the previous paragraph, true shifts towards digital technology from analog are difficult in the context of massive, conservative organisations. However, the current digital boom is creating more use cases and increasing understanding of the value of these digital solutions, aided by various major industry consulting firms like McKinsey espousing the adoption and benefits of digital in oil and gas (Choudry, Mohammad, Tan, & Ward, 2016).

#### *Ecological*

Being in the hazardous industries space, REDACTED is in a complicated place regarding ecological factors. On the one hand, the software helps prevent spills on for example oil rigs, and on the other hand REDACTED's systems are also used in (innovative) renewable energy scenarios. Due to the flexibility of the software, the change towards more renewable and less fossil energy is welcomed by REDACTED, and seen as a powerful step forward for process industries.

#### *Political*

As REDACTED provides complex, often bespoke software to an international clientele, the company must deal with various international laws and regulations. This can also mean that some business relationships can become complicated; for example, the proxy conflict between Qatar and Saudi Arabia that grew heated in June 2017 (Waleed, 2017) has caused potential issues with maintaining relationships in both countries simultaneously. Also, the current political climate in the US means a different approach might be necessary in the coming years.

### 2.3 SWOT analysis

The SWOT brings to light the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats derived from the internal and external analyses.

#### Strengths

**Seen as industry leader**  
**Strong corporate culture**  
**Internal operational expertise**  
**Validated business and use cases**  
**Large social media reach**

#### Weaknesses

**Potential development confusion with multi-vertical approach**  
**Niche offering with high cost makes financial forecasting complicated**  
**Relatively low avg. age can prompt lack of prospect competence**  
**One-faceted social media approach restricts engagement**

**Industries set to conduct major investments into digital**  
**COW concept ubiquity breeds easier prospect entry**  
**Government-led change initiatives lend credence to eVision solutions**  
**External validation through case studies**

**Political pressures**  
**Decreased budgets due to persistent low oil price**  
**Boutique competitors**

#### Opportunities

#### Threats

### 3. Problem analysis

This chapter details the situation which leads to the core challenge, formulated in a research question. This question is aligned with the research objective, which is defined and supported by sub-questions. The chapter concludes with a research demarcation: guidelines to keep both the study and results as valid and sound as possible.

#### *Core challenge description*

In a quantitative sense, REDACTED has always “won”. From a business perspective, REDACTED is the world’s leading specialist Control of Work software provider, servicing 80% of Super Major Oil & Gas companies worldwide (Cornelissen & Young, 2018). From a personnel perspective, REDACTED’s clients are regularly polled with regard to their satisfaction concerning REDACTED’s expertise and support, and the results waver between 89% and 98%. Ergo, REDACTED’s business communication methodology has proven effective in Western markets (evident from – among other things - REDACTED’s strong growth and competitive position). However, this existing approach is not leading to positive results in Singapore, as can be derived from the fact that in the three years of being regionally present, no local contracts have been signed. This is not uncommon (Hegarty, 2016): Western companies often run into business communication issues in Singapore (and, by extension, other South-East Asian countries), making it complicated to engage the types of stakeholders REDACTED requires to achieve success. This despite REDACTED having recently made the push towards a product-oriented organisation, with an offering which is both easier to understand and more transparently priced.

REDACTED has long maintained an aggressive “start-up”-style operations approach, even though it has surpassed the start-up phase. This approach has led to successes, but comes with trade-offs: where competitors are often inherently risk-averse (which is understandable when providing risk mitigation software in a conservative industry), REDACTED regularly opens the organisation up to massive challenges (e.g. major ad hoc development trajectories driven by client asks, instead of structured R&D and roadmaps). Due to the current success of this methodology, management advocates for and applies this strategy everywhere, but they have not taken into account the similarities between the companies upon which this strategy was executed.

To elaborate, REDACTED has long operated in a space where companies overlap in various ways. There are the obvious similarities, such as location (Shell, BP, Total, HESS, and Repsol-Sinopec all operate in the North Sea, so they are beholden to identical legislation, even though, for example, Repsol-Sinopec is Brazilian-Chinese owned while Shell is Dutch), and ownership (many assets are joint ventures where at least one of the stakeholders already engages with REDACTED). There are also less obvious similarities, like employees often sticking around in the industry, meaning that someone who might have been involved with REDACTED at Shell can pull REDACTED into the next company by which he is employed. This has happened on multiple occasions.

These elements have formed the basis for assumptions made by REDACTED when engaging new geographies and cultures. REDACTED has until now not taken the effort to perform detailed analysis of Singapore, because the company believes its method works everywhere. However, not a single Singapore-owned or decentralised Singapore-based company has awarded REDACTED with a contract in the past three years; the current approach barely even leads to any face-to-face meetings, indicating that REDACTED’s traditional communications strategy might be lacking.

This research sets out to assess and understand the reasons for this, and operationalise a methodology to improve communications with stakeholders in Singapore.

#### *Research question*

Above analysis can be diluted into a research question that follows from the challenge at hand:

*“How can REDACTED adapt to cultural communication differences between The Netherlands and Singapore, when presenting its solutions in Singapore?”*

The answer to this question is directly relevant to REDACTED (sales) staff, as it is expected to provide a deeper understanding of and an approach methodology for a region in which success has not been forthcoming. This

could result in significant increases in revenue, but more importantly improved safety of hazardous industries personnel in Singapore.

In support of finding the answer to the research question, three sub-questions have been defined to structure the path towards attaining and utilising this information:

1. *What are known cultural differences between Western countries and Singapore?*

The goal of this sub-question is to baseline already understood cultural variations, which will allow for validation of assumptions, provide deeper insight into Singaporean culture, and help effectively shape the content and questions of the semi-structured interviews.

2. *How do these cultural gaps translate to differences in business communication with Singapore, as opposed to Western countries?*

The answer to this sub-question, to be gained from interviewing Singaporean and Western stakeholders with industry knowledge, should provide insight into where culture and communication-related differences between Singapore and Western countries lie.

3. *What effect do differences in business communication regarding Singapore versus Western countries have on REDACTED's communication of its proposition in Singapore?*

This sub-question connects the potential differences in business communication to REDACTED's proposition.

*Research objective*

The purpose of this study is to analyse, define, and operationalise business cultural communication "KPIs" in Singapore, so as to provide REDACTED with a canvas of information to more effectively approach key stakeholders in the country. This core objective can be defined as such:

*"Analysis of Singaporean cultural dimensions contrasted with Western countries, to provide REDACTED with a valid and sound recommendation on how to engage relevant stakeholders in Singapore."*

*Demarcation and target demographic*

The focus of this research is to analyse business cultural communication in Singapore, compared to several Western countries REDACTED is currently active in. It will focus on the oil, gas and chemical industries, as these are verticals REDACTED's products are tailored towards. Geographically, the research will focus on Singapore only. (This data can still possibly be extrapolated to the rest of the South-east Asia region, as Singapore is seen as a sort of "melting pot" of South-East Asian cultures (Palmer, 2009)).

To gather valid and sound results, an understanding must be achieved of how Singaporean stakeholders approach business cultural communication. To this end, the target demographic is:

- Stakeholders working in Singapore
- At companies in the oil, gas and chemical industries
- With annual revenues of USD 500 million or more (basic REDACTED requirement, due to the relatively high TCO (total cost of ownership) of the product)
- With the following possible job titles: Maintenance Manager/Director, Operations Manager/Director/Leader, HSE/HSSE/HSEQ/EHS/Safety Manager/Director/VP, CxO, Principal Engineer, Asset Manager, Executive Director, VP, Plant Manager, Site Manager

Additionally, to assess possible cultural communication differences between Western and Singaporean organisations, a Western control group will be assessed based on the exact variables above. To improve the return rate, this Western control group will be based around oil, gas and chemical companies in geographically nearby countries, specifically: Netherlands, UK, Germany.

As the interviewees will be senior employees in demarcated industries, will be reached out to directly through respectable channels, and because the interviews serve as an expansion of existing research on cultural differences with Singapore, as found by Trompenaars, the respondents pool is highly specific and can be kept compact. More about the demographic and research population can be found in Methodology.

The success of this thesis is in part based on the assumption that certain basic requirements and conditions will be met, to ensure optimal performance and on-time delivery. These requirements and conditions are as follows:

- **Financials**  
Costs made for this thesis should be incidental. Perceived possible costs are printing of collateral, accessing data, and possible gifts for respondents. These costs should not exceed €250 for the entire duration of the project.
- **Real estate**  
Research will be carried out at REDACTED's Headquarters in The Hague during business hours, at my private residence in Leiden outside of business hours, and in Singapore during my time there.
- **Research materials**  
Besides data repositories, scientific papers, and access to existing REDACTED information (such as past proposals), this research does not foresee the need for alternative external research materials. If it turns out these are required, ad-hoc solutions will be devised.
- **Expertise**  
The target demographic for this research is senior personnel with a mostly operations-related background. Lack of expertise is inherently not a problem when the pool of respondents are experts by default. Furthermore, REDACTED is filled with highly experienced personnel, including industry Subject Matter Experts with decades of front-line knowledge. The company prides itself on an open communication culture; therefore, no problems are foreseen regarding quality and quantity of internal information.
- **Time**  
The assumption has been made that respondents are willing to answer questions pertaining to this thesis in the time span outlined by Hogeschool Leiden.
- **End product**  
This research intends to produce business cultural communications recommendations, leading to an implementation plan for REDACTED.

## 4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As described in the Core Challenge chapter of this thesis, REDACTED has the tendency to approach situations with various assumptions based on previous experience. This largely anecdotal methodology cannot be said to be held to a high scientific degree of validity and soundness. To avoid repeating the existing errors, this study will be based on contemporary (where possible), peer-reviewed theory pertinent to the research.

To ensure that the Research Objective is met, a thorough study of cultural communications must be performed. As cultural communications and market analysis are well-studied fields within communication sciences, there are various theoretical models which can be utilised to underpin this analysis. This chapter discusses the merits, relevance and challenges of each of these models, and offers evidentiary support for the theory selection pertinent to this thesis.

This chapter will briefly address the theories passing review, detail their pros and cons, and assess which known research is most applicable to this thesis with a critical review.

### 4.1 Hofstede's cultural dimensions

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions model (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010) outlines the key differences between countries, divided into six (previously five) main cultural dimensions. Hofstede's ground-breaking work and extensive research on cultural distances across these dimensions - power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and indulgence/restraint - has formed the basis for countless companies to get a better understanding of how to conduct cross-cultural business (Hofstede, 1984).

Hofstede's key measurable indicators are: **Power distance**, **Individualism**, **Masculinity**, **Uncertainty avoidance**, **Long-term orientation**, and **Indulgence/restraint**.

Hofstede's research is widely regarded as the paradigm in various fields, including cross-cultural psychology and communication, and international management strategy. Hofstede has frequently updated his findings, even taking into account cultural changes over time in his original publication (Hofstede, 1984). Furthermore, he has added dimensions and contingencies over the past three decades, establishing a well-rounded framework of future-proof ideas, data, and analysis.

However, rapid political, societal and cultural shifts in the past years have resulted in possible complications when scoring countries (Wu, 2006). In practice, this means additional diligence required when assessing the validity of the data. Even then, Hofstede's data is often contested in the modern era -for example by Eringa et al (2015), which could possibly lead to the research being valid, but not sound.

### 4.2 The Lewis Model

While assessing (at the time) current cross-cultural communication models, Richard Lewis ran into several issues. Mainly, he felt that the research didn't offer the clarity and succinctness required to actually make useful decision based on the data (Cuco, 2015). After visiting over 130 countries, he chose to construct a theoretical model based on behaviour archetypes. One leading reason for this was the fact that "the experts' preoccupation with north/south, mono-chronic/poly-chronic dichotomies, had caused them to overlook or ignore the powerful Asian mind-set (comprising, in fact, half of humanity)".

His research culminated in The Lewis Model (Lewis, 2005): a behavioural element study which maps dominant behavioural traits throughout three categories. The model was borne from massive amounts of quantitative research, including over 150,000 filled-in questionnaires. In essence, he created a three-tier model which contains the following characteristics:

**Linear-active** is generally seen as countries which are considered English-speaking, including the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and Northern Europe.

The **Reactive** tier is generalised as most countries in Asia, not including India (which is considered a hybrid).



**Multi-actives** are found all over the globe, from the Mediterranean to sub-Saharan Africa, and from the Middle East to Slavic countries. It might be strange to categorise these diverse cultures as a single group, but Lewis's research focuses on *behavioural* aspects. In that area, they share commonalities.

These groups are distinctive from each other, but naturally most countries contain traits in each of the categories. As mentioned before, Lewis's research focuses on dominant traits; not on exclusive ones.

While Lewis's model is widely lauded for its focus and usability, that focus might provide a challenge for this particular thesis. To elaborate, Lewis's model is almost exclusively behaviour-oriented. More pressingly, though, it does not contain inherent comparisons between these behavioural constructs, which would mean that an extra step must be taken (i.e. first understanding *Dutch* culture in the context of this model, *then* analysing Singaporean behaviour with the same framework and comparing the two). Models like Hofstede's cultural dimensions do contain inherent comparisons, which will aid this research greatly.

#### 4.3 Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's Dimensions

Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck set out in the 1940s and 1950s to define cross-cultural understanding and communication. In their words: "Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiment in artefacts." (Adler, 1997).

At the time, Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck posited that the traditional emphasis of anthropology on "whole" cultures only showed part of the picture. To truly understand culture, there was a need to look inward; assess the variances *within* each culture to grasp the whole. Their research proposed a set of (dichotomous) questions which they dubbed cultural orientations, which they posited every culture must answer to be able to operate effectively and cooperatively; they also defined the answers to these questions, which they named variations. (Kluckhohn, 1961) Orientations are basic cultural questions people can ask themselves, including: "How do I think about people? How do I see the world? How do I relate to other people? How do I use time?" (Adler, 1997). Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck ultimately identified six cultural orientations with limited variations (i.e. answers). These answer the following questions:

1. What is the nature of human beings: are they good, evil or neutral?
2. What is our relationship to nature: are we subjugated to nature, in harmony with nature, or do we have mastery over it?
3. What is our relationship to other human beings: is it lineal (ordered position within groups), collateral (primacy given to goals and welfare of groups), or individualistic (primacy given to the individual)?
4. What is our primary mode of activity: is our basic orientation one of being-in- becoming, doing or reflecting?
5. How do we view time: do we focus on the past, present, or future?

At face value, Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's model and research seem a tight fit for answering the core research question. However, there are certain things to take into account when deciding whether or not it is the *best* fit. The first one, quite obviously, is its contemporaneousness. This model is almost 70 years old, and the business this research is taking place in is a modern one. An assumption can be made that more modern variations of Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's model would be a better match to achieve useful results.

Besides that, this researcher is not fully confident the implications of using a 70-year-old model on a country that has done a complete 180-degree turn in the last 60 years can be properly accounted for. Singapore went from a subservient farm country to a blossoming and wealthy nation state, and it could be unwise to not take this into account when conducting research.

#### 4.4 Trompenaars' model of national culture differences

Fons Trompenaars' model serves as a baseline for communicating across cultures, which is applied to general management and business. To assess the differences in cultural communication, Trompenaars set out to survey

values of almost 9000 corporate employees hailing from over 40 nations. The measures Trompenaars used are defined as such (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997):

- **Universalism vs. Particularism**  
Universalism is the belief that ideas and practices can be applied everywhere without modification, while particularism is the belief that circumstances dictate how ideas and practices should be applied. It asks the question, *What is more important, rules or relationships?* Cultures with high universalism see one reality and focus on formal rules. Business meetings are characterized by rational, professional arguments with a "get down to business" attitude.
- **Individualism vs. Communitarianism**  
Individualism refers to people regarding themselves as individuals, while communitarianism refers to people regarding themselves as part of a group. Trompenaars' research yielded some interesting results and suggested that cultures may change more quickly than many people realize. It may not be surprising to see a country like the United States with high individualism, but Mexico and the former communist countries of Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union were also found to be individualistic in Trompenaars' research.
- **Neutral vs. Emotional**  
A neutral culture is a culture in which emotions are held in check whereas an emotional culture is a culture in which emotions are expressed openly and naturally. Neutral cultures that come rapidly to mind are those of the Japanese and British. Some examples of high emotional cultures are the Netherlands, Mexico, Italy, Israel and Spain.
- **Specific vs. Diffuse**  
A specific culture is one in which individuals have a large public space they readily share with others and small private space guard closely and share with only close friends and associates. A diffuse culture is one in which public space and private space are similar in size and individuals guard their public space carefully, because entry into public space affords entry into private space as well. It looks at how separate a culture keeps their personal and public lives.
- **Achievement vs. Ascription**  
In an achievement culture, people are accorded status based on how well they perform their functions. In an ascription culture, status is based on who or what a person is. Does one have to prove him or herself to receive status or is it given to him or her?
- **Sequential vs. Synchronic**  
The degree to which individuals do things one at a time versus several things at once. Cultures developed their own response to time. Time orientation has two aspects: the relative importance cultures assign to the past, present and future, and their approach to structuring time. In a sequential culture, people structure time sequentially and do things one at a time. In a synchronic culture, people do several things at once, believing time is flexible and intangible.
- **Internal vs. External control**  
The degree to which individuals believe the environment can be controlled versus believing that the environment controls them. In an inner-directed culture, people have a mechanistic view of nature; nature is complex but can be controlled with the right expertise. People believe that humans can dominate nature, if they make the effort. In an outer-directed culture, people have an organic view of nature. Mankind is viewed as one of nature's forces and should therefore live in harmony with the environment. People therefore adapt themselves to external circumstances.

Trompenaars' model provides a level of insight into culture which is inclusive where it has to be, and exclusive where it doesn't. By assessing the defined dimensions, a greater understanding can be reached regarding how these cultures operate, as well as their key drivers and motivations. Furthermore, the validity of the research is supported due to the fact that the findings correlate strongly with differences in culture reported by others.

Trompenaars' research provides a useful database explaining how national culture varies and how it can be measured. The conclusion is that understanding these cultures truly matters, and that anticipating and operationalising these cultural differences can lead to a competitive edge when attempting to enter the market. It is more operationally culture-focused than Hofstede's research, which generally tends to offer a basis on which the reader can build its own conclusions.

Furthermore, Trompenaars' research is specifically focused on doing business, for example indication that the way business is conducted in one part of the world is different from the way it is done in another. Culture is defined as an inherently important aspect in doing international business.

As a theoretical kick-off point, Trompenaars' research relates directly to the defined research question and sub-questions. The whole point of this thesis is to find out where the differences in culture lie, and then devise a methodology focused on how to address these differences from a business communication perspective. Besides the fact that comparisons in this space are numerous, Trompenaars also has an enormous amount of data specifically surrounding these cultures, which can be utilised to gain deeper insight from an academic perspective. While much research has been done regarding cross-cultural communications, REDACTED's case would benefit from deeper insight specifically tailored to the company, due to the bespoke (and niche) nature of the product, the relatively long implementation cycles, and the high price.

#### 4.5 Conceptual model

This research sets out to understand the business communication differences between Western countries and Singapore, to aid REDACTED in communicating with Singaporean stakeholders more effectively. Trompenaars' model of national culture differences defines seven key variables by which the differences in culture can be assessed. By researching five of these seven variables in both demographics, possible contrasts can be ascertained and operationalised specified to relationships and rules. Therefore, a slightly truncated version of Trompenaars' model will be the theory that will be used to underpin this research. The factors that will be contrasted are: **Universalism vs. Particularism, Individualism vs. Communitarianism, Neutral vs. Emotional, Specific vs. Diffuse, and Achievement vs. Ascription.** Seeing as this thesis focuses on assessing cross-cultural relationships and rules, **time perception** and **environment perception** have been disregarded from this study. This further helps to keep the focus on the core dimensions which are best understood in the context of corporate cultural communication.

Based on Trompenaars' vast insights which underpin this conceptual model, hypotheses can be derived from expectations concerning possible cultural communication traits present in Singapore. While the below hypotheses might seem relatively logical and "par-for-the-course", it is important to take into account the fact that, as described in the situation analysis and core challenge, REDACTED has a somewhat unique position as a company in a highly niche market. Therefore, it cannot simply *only* be assumed that Trompenaars' results are valid by default in this specific case, and additional research must be done to be able to provide a valid case for approaching this complicated market. That being said, the hypotheses are as follows:

1. Differences between national cultures have an impact on communication
2. Understanding differences between national cultures improves understanding of differences in communication between these national cultures
3. Improved understanding of differences in communication between national cultures can lead to better communication with these cultures

These hypotheses align with the defined research objective:

*"Analysis of Singaporean cultural dimensions contrasted with Western countries, to provide REDACTED with a valid and sound recommendation on how to engage relevant stakeholders in Singapore."* The model and hypotheses are clearly delineated and, due to this, less susceptible to contamination and bias.

To bolster the research and ensure that enough information is available to provide evidence for the hypotheses, it is essential to find additional information surrounding cultural communication. Therefore, a search term index has been defined (see below). This is not an exhaustive and final list: it will naturally expand and perhaps change scope based on new information gathered, and can therefore be viewed as a baseline and not an exclusive document.

The search term index will be centered around the following terminology:

- Cultural differences
- Business communication
- Communicating across cultures
- Corporate communication across cultures
- Singapore business culture
- Western Business culture
- Difference between Western and Asian culture
- Difference between Western and Asian business culture
- Singapore
- Netherlands
- Oil&Gas
- Chemical industry
- Communicating with major organisations
- Cultural communication theories
- Trompenaars' cultural dimensions
- Cultural communication interview questions
- Culture questionnaire

The resulting sources used will be assessed on quality, contemporaneousness and peer review. For example, Trompenaars' research itself (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997) will be a core resource of information. Furthermore, research that led to Trompenaars' study can offer insight into the basis for his results, such as Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions (Hofstede, 1984), as well as studies performed based on Trompenaars' results. Generally, sources will come from Google Scholar, as this search engine offers scientific articles with clear descriptions of works cited, adding to their validity.

As Trompenaars is Dutch, there is a possibility that Dutch sources can provide useful information. All information dated after Trompenaars' seminal research (1997) is appropriate, however preference goes out to more recent studies, due to the fact that Singapore has changed significantly over the past decades.

## 5. METHODOLOGY

The goal of this thesis is to find data regarding communicating with Singaporean stakeholders, which should lead to useful tools to accelerate REDACTED's expansion into the region. Selecting a primarily quantitative methodology for this subject is scientifically inherent to this research: this study pertains to a large emerging market; there is a host of research surrounding the business-cultural factors in the region; and the goal of this study is a comparative analysis of cultures and cultural communication, meaning in-depth data is key.

REDACTED's strategy for 2017 outlines the need for a more data-driven communication and marketing approach. This thesis sets out to answer this direct need for deep-level business intelligence requested from C-level, further underlining the relevance of the subject at hand. The expectation of REDACTED with regard to my research, is to gain increased understanding and knowledge about how to communicate with Singaporean stakeholders, as well as a tangible plan how to do so.

This will be realized taking into account the Conceptual Model defined in the previous chapter, translated into two distinct research methods which set out to prove the stated hypotheses.

### *Desk Research*

Firstly, a desk research-oriented study will be conducted surrounding the factors defined by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997). Using this mode of research, which includes utilising established and time-tested models, a coherent and cogent assessment can be performed surrounding the conceptual model. This desk research will answer the first sub-question.

### *Field Research*

The field research in this study will consist of semi-structured face-to-face (where possible due to this researcher's relatively limited schedule in Singapore; alternatively by video call) interviews with Singaporean stakeholders in the oil and gas / chemical industries, as described in the Target Demographic portion of this thesis. Besides this, European stakeholders will also be interviewed. Pinto (2000) states that it is not effective to assess cultural differences, when one does not assess its own culture. A qualitative approach was selected due to the nature of the research: it is the purpose to ascertain wishes, needs and motives the target population has.

Qualitative research has shown to be more effective to reach this goal than quantitative research (Verhoeven, 2011). Also, Schein (1990) states that qualitative methodology is a strong approach to researching cultural dimensions, as it allows the interviewer to ascertain feelings and thoughts as opposed to simple dichotomous answers or forced ratings scales. The interviews will be semi-structured, allowing the opportunity for slight diversions and tangents, enabling the interviewee to perhaps focus more on certain aspects than others. This field research shall answer the second sub-question: *How do these cultural gaps translate to differences in business communication with Singapore, as opposed to Western countries?*

The third and final sub-question will be answered through the conclusions gleaned from both the desk research and interview results, and formulating a translation of these results to REDACTED's proposition.

## **5.1 Research demographic, respondents and approach methodology**

This study focuses on a specified demographic, previously defined in the paragraph "Demarcation and target demographic". Due to the relatively senior level of interviewees required, this researcher has taken steps to ensure the highest possible response return without jeopardising existing or future business relationships. This was achieved by the following means:

### *Singaporean market*

Due to the strong relationship with Singapore's Chemical Industry Council (SCIC), an agreement was put in place that SCIC will connect this researcher to respondents via its existent network. Despite the name, SCIC has many connections outside the Chemical industry, ensuring that the request will reach a varied target group. SCIC has pledged to provide a sufficient number of respondents to satisfy scientific muster.

### *Western markets*

Relevant stakeholders will be selected by REDACTED's Business Consultants, who have longstanding relationships with senior staff of relevant companies in the Western target demographic. They have pledged to supply the number of respondents required to ensure validity.

Verhoeven (2011) states that, in the case of qualitative research, 25 interviews are too many. She elaborates that the point of saturation can even occur after ten respondents. This saturation point is seen as the moment where the researcher ceases to acquire new information. Therefore, a pool of ten respondents was chosen.

No. of Respondents		
Singaporean	5	# 1 – 5
Western	5	# 6 – 10
Total	10	

## 5.2 Operationalisation

The first iteration of this study utilised quantitative research; in hindsight, this was an error. As Dr Karim Abwi (2008) states, quantitative research is geared towards answering questions which begin with how much, how many, and other quantifiable ratings. However, this study is far more interested in the “why?” and “how?” of the situation. Interviews allow this researcher to collect narratives, which can help gain insight into areas of interest. As Dr Abwi states: *“It provides much richer, in depth data, which often provide insights into subtle nuances that quantitative approaches might miss.”* The interviews are semi-structured, and the topic guide for the interviews can be found in ANNEXURE 4. The topics are centred around the five dimensions Trompenaars has defined, allowing room for a potential quantitative mini-study on the results of the interviews.






Beforehand, the respondents will be asked if they opt into the recording of the interview, and a small MOU will be signed (this is common practice in the industry, due to the possibly sensitive nature of the content). The respondents will be interviewed anonymously, unless they decide otherwise. Name of organisation will be redacted unless stated otherwise. The interviews verbatim can be found in ANNEXURE 5, and the analysis of the answers per question in ANNEXURE 6.

Verhoeven states that it is best to structure an interview with a beginning, middle, and end. She describes the following essentials:

- Beginning – introduction: formalities, purpose, structure, duration, appreciation for participation, importance of information, content usage policy
- Middle – core: split into relevant categories for specific content
- End – closing: effective build down, summary, additional comments and questions, ensure positive closing.

## 5.3 Risk analysis

To ensure that the risks of this study are clearly defined and effectively mitigated, a Risks and Controls assessment has been performed. This is coupled with a risk likelihood as well as a critical risk weight, i.e. how much impact *incorrect mitigation* of the hazard will impact the research. This is done according to a red=high impact, yellow=medium impact, green=low to no impact scoring.

- 1. Risk: inadequate or inappropriate theoretical basis for research**  
Control: multilevel approval of theoretical framework prior to research commencement. Risk likelihood: low. Critical Risk weight: 
- 2. Risk: lack of relevant desk data surrounding the research question**  
Control: utilise knowledge and expertise maintained by internal and external stakeholders through qualitative research. Risk likelihood: low. Critical Risk weight: 
- 3. Risk: lack of availability key stakeholders**  
Control: offset with desk research and ensure fall-back options are available. Risk likelihood: medium. Critical Risk weight: 
- 4. Risk: time constraints in performing research**  
Control: maintain tight schedule, ensure contingencies for complicating circumstances, and keep strong visibility of research demarcation. Likelihood: low. Critical Risk weight: 
- 5. Risk: results not accepted by staff**  
Control: strong theoretical foundation, easy-to-understand documentation, and prepping of relevant stakeholders for information reception. Likelihood: low. Critical Risk weight: 

## 6. Results

This chapter covers the findings of both the desk research and interview responses. The sub-questions will be answered in sequence, and the chapter will be rounded out with the validation or discarding of the hypotheses.

### 6.1 Desk research

It has to be stated upfront that it is known that socio-psychological and cultural communication learnings from Western cultures cannot always be replicated in other cultures (Smith & Bond, 1993). Therefore, a key target of cross-cultural research in the past three decades has been understanding the various dimensions that differentiate culture, because, according to Trompenaars (1997), “it opens the way to more adequate operationalizations of the concept of culture.” Creating a framework through which various variations in culture can be identified, would allow researchers to integrate preconceived and defined attitudes and behaviours to lead to effective hypotheses. Furthermore, a better understanding of cultures before conducting research can allow researchers to more effectively demarcate their target groups (Bond, 1988).

This understanding serves as a basis for the desk research performed in this study. It presupposes, as supported by abovementioned evidence, that Western cultural attributes do not necessarily align with non-Western cultural attributes (Bond, 1988). Nota Bene: Bond, in his universal dimensions study, states that one can compare multiple Western countries with singular non-Western countries. This aided the agility of this research, as Western culture can be viewed as an umbrella, meaning that this researcher was not required to perform analysis between each of the separate Western countries and Singapore.

The desk research in this thesis serves two goals. The first is to answer sub-question 1:

*“What are known cultural differences between Western countries and Singapore?”.*

The second goal is to be able to inform choices leading to relevant questions for the interview.

To answer sub-question 1, Trompenaars’ findings were put into context of the contrast between Western countries and Singapore, based on five of his cultural dimensions. Per dimension, a tentative and summary connection is made with REDACTED in context of the research.

According to Trompenaars’ seminal work (1997), culture can be differentiated by how and what solutions are found for specific problems and dilemmas. These problems and dilemmas are defined in three sub-categories: problems which come from interpersonal relationships, problems which arise due to the passing of time, and problems related to the environment. These are then specified into seven measures: **Universalism vs. Particularism, Individualism vs. Communitarianism, Neutral vs. Emotional, Specific vs. Diffuse, Achievement vs. Ascription, Sequential vs. Synchronic, and Internal vs. External control.** (For information about these seven measures, please review chapter 4: Theoretical Framework of this thesis. This Results section will focus on how five of these measures apply to the differences between Western and Singaporean cultures.) The final two measures are not part of the “relationships and rules” domain of Trompenaars’ research. Seeing as this thesis focuses on relationships and rules, time perception and environment perception have been disregarded from this study.

#### *Universalism vs Particularism*

As humans, we judge behaviour on a daily basis. An important distinction between types of behaviour can be found in the concept of Universalism vs Particularism. In short, a universalist approach looks at a set of rules as static, whereas particularists are more inclined to take into account situational circumstances. A clear example of this is shared frequently by Trompenaars in many of his works. The scenario is as follows: you are in a car with a friend. This friend hits a pedestrian going 35 MPH in a 20MPH zone. There are no witnesses. Your friend’s lawyer tells you that if you testify that he was driving the speed limit, he might be saved from facing serious consequences. What right does your friend have to expect you to protect him?

When assessing Trompenaars’ survey results regarding this scenario (1997), it can be seen that Western countries overwhelmingly choose a strong Universalist position, i.e. your friend has no right to expect you to protect him: this aligns with Trompenaars’ research, as Western cultures often focus on rules over relationships. Conversely, Singapore has a significantly less firm stance on this matter. This can be ascribed to the fact that

Asian cultures are predominantly Particularist, where the focus is more on relationships than rules, and hence the fact that it is your friend asking for help can weigh more heavily in the decision-making process.

**In the context of this thesis, the rational, rule based Universalist approach is difficult to reconcile with a personal, relationship based Particularist culture without local adaptation. REDACTED's price-driven, aggressive sales methodology can possibly be incongruent with the meandering, relationship-driven, "get to know you first" attitude of Asian countries (Stanford University, 1999).**

#### *Individualism vs Communitarianism*

This measure can be described as a "me-focused" vs "we-focused", and holds a strong correlation with "modern society" vs "traditional society". There are various international business scenarios defined by Trompenaars which can be used as examples for this measure. One that is particularly apt in this study, and one that this researcher has experienced first-hand multiple times, is the concept of representation. Where Individualist cultures will often send a single representative to a business meeting, to ensure that a single conscience is responsible for decision-making, Communitarian cultures will opt to send delegates in groups, as any confrontation of conflict will allow them to discuss with one another. In travels to Singapore, this researcher saw clear distinction between local event delegates and attendees and those from Western countries, due to the former often navigating and discussing in groups, while the latter often could be identified by spotting "lone wolves". Another clear indicator of the difference between Western countries and Singapore, can be found in the concept of responsibility. Whereas Western countries choose to more often take individual responsibility for mistakes, Singapore overwhelmingly will take group responsibility (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997). This differentiation is also echoed by Hofstede (1984).

**In the context of this thesis, group dynamic differs from that of an individual. Where REDACTED's aggressive, fast approach can work in Individualist cultures, Communitarian cultures require patience and the creation of long-term relationships (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997).**

#### *Neutral vs Emotional*

In relationships, feelings and sense are both important elements. Emotional cultures tend to show feelings relatively clearly, while Neutral cultures tend to withhold outward emotion. Effects of this manifest apparently in situations like how employees show they're upset at work (with Western countries often opting for the showing of emotion, while Singaporeans opt against this far more often), but also in more abstract concepts, like humor, irony, and understatement, which require a vast understanding of cultures to be able to apply across them (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997). Where Western countries tend to value expressiveness and transparency to release tensions, Singaporean culture admires calm and self-possessed conduct. The active body language of Western countries is also looked down upon.

**In the context of this thesis, this indicates that REDACTED could benefit from improved understanding of the impact emotion, tone of voice and body language have upon a business meeting in Singapore, and how this differs from Western culture.**

#### *Specific vs Diffuse*

Trompenaars defines a Specific culture as maintaining a rigid barrier between business and personal relationships. In Diffuse cultures, this barrier is flexible and sometimes non-existent. Looking the house-painting scenario from Trompenaars' questionnaire (1997), it is readily apparent that Western cultures overwhelmingly would not help their boss paint his or her house outside of work hours, while Singaporeans are far more likely to do so. Again, this is a clear indication of strong cultural differentiation between Western countries and Singapore.

**In the context of this thesis, rapid-fire, impersonal approaches must be reconciled in a similar context to the Universalism vs Particularism facet, taking into account the situation and gaining understanding of the implications of ambiguous communication structures.**

#### *Achievement vs Ascription*

This dimension describes the difference between being primarily judged on your previous accomplishments, versus being judged on things like status, gender, education, age, and other ascribed factors. In this context, the differences between Western and Singaporean culture are less major. This could be due to the fact that



Singapore was a British colony and has pushed to modernise itself over the past 60 years. More research into this assumption is required.

**In the context of this thesis, industry professionals will be interfaced with who, by nature (see: Target Demographic), have accrued operational experience. Therefore, the achievement vs ascription dilemma is expected to be negligible as no significant difference in approach methodology between Singapore and Western countries is apparent from existent research.**

Above review of each relationship-based dimension provides insight into the cultural differences between Western countries and Singapore. In all cases except *Achievement vs Ascription*, Trompenaars' and other studies clearly indicate and identify cultural gaps between Western countries and Singapore.

## 6.2 Interviews

A total of 8 respondents took part in interviews: 4 Western respondents, and 4 Singaporean. Both demographics shared insight into cultural baselines and approaches. Below, their experiences will be discussed based on the five Trompenaars dimensions defined. The questions are variations on key juxtapositions in Trompenaars' work, allowing this researcher the opportunity to assess possible cultural communication differences through the REDACTED lens. The verbatims can be read in ANNEXURE 5. This section sets out to answer the research question: *How do these cultural gaps translate to differences in business communication with Singapore, as opposed to Western countries?*

### *Individualism vs communitarianism*

There are clear differences between the way Westerners and Singaporeans approach this dimension. Echoing Trompenaars' findings, the Western respondents do indeed ascribe more closely to individualism, and the Singaporeans more closely to communitarianism. Western respondents tend to be highly individualistic when expressing an opinion; something that was even explicitly addressed by a Singaporean stakeholder:

*"The Dutch are really direct. Not like Singaporeans. If the Dutch like something, or don't, they just say it. A Singaporean wouldn't do this so quickly. Singaporeans usually don't judge people face-to-face, or compliment them, or insult them. When a situation doesn't concern us, we tend to stay out of it... it's not our culture."*

By not expressing an opinion or tending to stay in the middle, Singaporeans can adapt their opinion to the group's. However, Westerners are more likely to appreciate direct communication.

Singaporeans tend to want to keep the peace, and are scared to disturb a group. A consequence of this, is that they tend to let their colleagues and/or superiors know how they actually feel afterwards:

*"I think it's sometimes hard to talk to people who are so focused on work, and not us. I think it's hard when someone is telling us something in a meeting and doesn't think about what we feel. When we work hard and someone only is about business, it is hard to talk freely. I take pride in my work. But it is not feeling right to say that then. It's difficult."*

This further bolsters a difference between Western and Singaporean cultures: Singaporeans tend to address situations in a "we" format, as opposed to "I". It is a form of self-protection: by formulating a position as a group, no single point of responsibility is taken. Singaporeans can be taken aback by Western communication styles, because they take the message personally as opposed to work-related.

### *Neutral vs Emotional*

Desk research would point out that Westerners tend to be more emotional, and Singaporeans more neutral. From interviews, it becomes clear that Singaporeans see their job as a priority, which is apparent through the flexibility they adopt when working. Singaporean stakeholders tend to not mind overtime, if that would lead to benefits in the workplace. Also, when an important issue comes up, meetings can be arranged immediately: *"problems are problems. If it can wait, what is the real problem? When we have an isolation challenge [on the plant], we will fix it. Everybody knows that problems must be fixed. So everybody knows to be ready."* Contrast this with Western respondents, who tend to take umbrage with the "freewheeling" nature of operations.

Singaporean respondents also tend to care less about their free time, which seems to stem from the workload, which is significant. On the one hand, they feel invaluable in the workplace because they don't have adequate backup, but on the other hand it also has to do with their communitarian roots. They tend to not want to offset

their work to others, because they are also very busy. As a result, they generally simply choose to not take time off.

#### *Universalism vs Particularism*

Every organisation has its own way of running things. This is apparent from the work methodology its employees adopt. Western countries tend to be highly rigid: *"One of the things I notice when working with the Far East, is contracts. Contracts are an issue, because they don't really understand what 'binding' means, so if you make an agreement about something, don't be surprised if some details will be changed at some point, even though the contract's already been signed"*, says a Dutch respondent. Another facet where this is apparent, is in how long it takes to kick off a project, as one Singaporean stakeholder put it: *"in Europe, everybody is always preparing. Many procedures, which take a lot of time, and risks are all tried to be accounted for. This means we miss many opportunity, and this is because decisions are made but then the situation maybe already changes."* In the West, there is a realization that these procedural issues exist, but they are still perceived as highly important. This is contrasted with Singapore, where employees are quick to circumvent rules on the basis of their vast experience. They also tend to make verbal agreements, because reporting takes too much time.

#### *Achievement vs Ascription*

Unexpectedly (when looking at the desk research), there was some evidence to support a cultural gap between Western countries and Singapore surrounding this dimension. One possible example of this dichotomy can be found in the words of one of the Singaporean respondents, who said: *"We aren't a big fan of meetings with European guys. Loads of meetings. But lots of times there's no real result in those meetings, so everybody has to talk to each other again afterwards about how we're going to perform a job, because they don't know what the boss expects and wants. But everybody's busy, so it's hard to get another meeting. So everything takes long."* Singaporeans are surprised by this: they expect a clear leader in a conversation, and when that is not the case, such as in meetings with Western stakeholders, they find it difficult to assess what to do.

Western stakeholders tend to acknowledge this problem, and one German respondent put it succinctly: *"I know that one of the challenges is making quick decisions. I've seen it a lot when speaking to Thai companies like [redacted]. But we don't only meet to get a consensus, you know? It's also a bit of empowerment, and the moment to get your voice heard. I don't see that much in Asia, because they're a bit more hierarchical. You know? In [redacted], we know that a manager might not know more than an engineer when talking about engineering, right? By letting him share this knowledge, we know more about a situation and can make better decisions. But Asians expect the boss to make a decision."*

#### *Specific vs diffuse*

Singaporean stakeholders tend to hold respect and admiration for superiors and mentors. This translates into relationships that transcend the boundaries of "colleagues", whereas Western countries are far more compartmentalised on this issue. Take, for example, the answer to the question "If your superior asked you a personal favour, how would you respond? Could you give an example of this happening?": One of the Western respondents answered *"what do you mean? A work favour? ... A personal favour? I don't know, I don't think that would happen, really. But if he did... I don't know, it just seems strange, he wouldn't ask a personal favour. I think my colleagues would be confused as well. I don't know, it's a weird question."*

Conversely, a Singaporean respondent said the following: *"[respondent's superior's name] has given me my current position and trusts me to do my job well... I'm very grateful for this, it is not just a given. If he would need my help it is my duty to help him. I have not personally had any favours asked of me yet and of course it depends on what is being asked, but I am sure I would if I could."*

### 6.3 summary

Responses clearly indicate a disparity between business-focused communication in Western countries and Singapore. How cultural gaps translate to differences in business communication with Singapore are highlighted above, and can be summarised as:

- *Individualism vs Communitarianism*  
Western staff take a more direct, personal approach to communicating their opinions, while Singaporeans are hesitant to make their opinions known, and will strongly align their position with others around them.
- *Neutral vs Emotional*  
Singaporean stakeholders display a more dedicated work approach; they are significantly more job-oriented than Western respondents.
- *Universalism vs Particularism*  
Especially when designing agreements, there are disparities between the more flexible Singaporean approach, and the more rigid Western approach.
- *Achievement vs Ascription*  
While Singaporean stakeholders expect a more results-driven and hierarchical communication style, Western respondents tend to allow more room for personal empowerment, leading to a disconnect when, for example, conducting meetings.
- *Specific vs Diffuse*  
Singaporeans and Western respondents differ in their approach to work/life balance. Singaporeans tend more towards an inclusive concept, while Westerners tend to compartmentalise

This researcher set out to answer the third sub-question after completing the desk research and interview cycle. This sub question asked: *What effect do differences in business communication regarding Singapore versus Western countries have on REDACTED's communication of its proposition in Singapore?* After performing the research, it is apparent that this sub question is both too vague and too broad. It is also too close to the central thesis, and will therefore be folded into the Recommendations section of this thesis. The error made when establishing this question is also addressed in the Discussions section.

#### 6.4 Hypotheses

To increase scientific accuracy when utilising a conceptual model, it is important to establish hypotheses before performing studies. When the research is then performed, these hypotheses can be confirmed or not confirmed, highlighting possible further research areas. This section of the thesis will do so per hypothesis:

1. *Differences between national cultures have an impact on communication*  
This hypothesis is confirmed, both through Trompenaars' own examples of failures in communication between disparate cultures mentioned in *Riding the Waves of Culture* (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997), as well as further validated by the responses in the interviews, with various answers having inherent impact on communication style (for example: the difference between Western and Singaporean approaches to negotiations and contracts).
2. *Understanding differences between national cultures improves understanding of differences in communication between these national cultures*  
Trompenaars provides ample case work in which a greater understanding of the differences between cultures provides a baseline for understanding communication differences: take, for example, Trompenaars' case of the Canadian ball bearing manufacturer and the Arabian client on page 41 of *Riding the Waves of Culture* (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997) paints a clear picture of where a deeper understanding of Arabian culture could have pre-empted a communications challenge. In the interviews, this hypothesis is further evidentially supported. For example, one Western respondent stated: *"it's taken me a long time to feel at home in meetings with [South-East Asian companies]. I think most of it is down to spending more time there, kind of letting go of my own preconceived notions. It's still strange, especially coming from a company like [REDACTED], where everything is rigid, and then having to provide consulting services to O&G in Malaysia. But you get used to it, you learn, you've just got to put some effort into it."*
3. *Improved understanding of differences in communication between national cultures can lead to better communication with these cultures*  
This is confirmed by assessing the "reconciliation" aspect of Trompenaars' research. A major benefit of the breadth of *Riding the Waves of Culture*, is that it covers nearly the full cycle of assessment to assumptions to testing to validation, meaning that much of the results provide a broad and clear picture

of the implications of cultural communication. After each chapter, Trompenaars provides a methodology for improving cross-cultural communications, including tips for each side. Within the interviews, this is also mirrored. It is clear that those interviewees who have spent more time in and effort on the “opposite” culture, have been able to adapt and, in various ways, mitigate cultural communication challenges along the way. See the interview excerpt above in Hypothesis 2.

In the context of this thesis, more study must be performed to validate that the implementation of measures to answer the central research question leads to better communication with Singaporean stakeholders. This is grounds for further research once the implementation of recommendations is assessed.

## 7. Conclusions

Using the answers to the sub-questions covered in the results section of this thesis, a tentative conclusion can be reached which answers the central research question: *“How can REDACTED adapt to cultural communication differences between The Netherlands and Singapore, when presenting its solutions in Singapore?”*

Below, conclusions will be reached through analysing the results of both the desk research and interviews per cultural dimension, and lastly, final conclusions will be shared.

### *Universalism vs Particularism*

Both Trompenaars' study as well as the results of this researcher's questionnaire conducted among Western and Singaporean stakeholders indicate a cultural gap between the generally Universalist West and particularist East. This can create tensions and complications due to incongruous approaches towards relationships (Stanford University, 1999).

Based on the examples of major communication breakdowns provided by Trompenaars (1997) and the gaps found in interview answers, it can be concluded that Universalism vs Particularism has significant impact on communication between Western countries and Singapore, in areas specifically important to effectively presenting software in the region: these areas include differing concepts of the legality of contract, differing approaches to business relationships, and differing focus on rules.

### *Individualism vs Communitarianism*

As with the previous dimension, the existence of Individualism vs Communitarianism in the context of Western vs Singaporean culture is readily apparent from Trompenaars' study and this researcher's interview cycle. In fact, the response to various interview questions saw an almost diametric opposition between Western and Singaporean respondents. Based on this insight and Trompenaars' research, it can be concluded that Communitarian cultures require group focus, patience, and the creation of long-term relationships (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997).

### *Neutral vs Emotional*

This dimension discusses clearly defined person-to-person interaction variations, and can therefore be concluded to be relevant to how communication differences between Western countries and Singapore are adapted to in presenting to Singaporean stakeholders. It can be concluded from both the desk research as well as the interviews, that neutral vs emotional approaches require reconciliation to improve communication, by vocalizing and recognizing the differences, and withholding judgment based on apparent (lack of) emotions.

### *Specific vs Diffuse*

This dimension presents a dilemma, in which the balance of reconciliation between the two cultures is not as overt as some other dimensions may be. However, when for example assessing the interview question *“If your superior asked you a personal favour, how would you respond? Could you give an example of this happening?”*, a gap can be seen between Western and Singaporean answers, with Singaporean respondents exhibiting far more willingness to do so. It can once again be concluded that the difference between Western and Singaporean cultures in relationship to specific vs diffuse traits has impact on business communication, with page 91 of *Riding the Waves of Culture* (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997) clearly referencing the impact of unreconciled gaps between a direct and blunt approach vs a situational, personal and indirect approach.

### *Achievement vs Ascription*

As addressed in the Results section of this thesis, desk research indicated that this factor would not be highly relevant. However, the results of the interviews indicate that there are still disparities between the Western and Singaporean respondents, for example in the apparent fear of expressing disagreement with superiors found in the Singaporean respondents' answers. This is indicative of a more hierarchy-focused culture in Singapore, echoing Trompenaars' findings. It can be concluded that recognition by Western countries of the importance of status and – more specifically – leadership in Singapore can have an impact on how business communication is handled.

## 7.1 Final conclusion

Based on the answers to sub-questions, validation of hypotheses and tentative conclusions based on the results of desk research combined with this researcher's survey, an answer can be formulated to the central research question: *"How can REDACTED adapt to cultural communication differences between The Netherlands and Singapore, when presenting its solutions in Singapore?"*

It can be concluded that there are significant, relevant differences between REDACTED's current, Western culture-style communications approach and Singapore's mode of business communication, indicated by the cultural incongruences demonstrated in Trompenaars' (and, by extension, Hofstede's and various other cross-cultural researchers') studies as well as significant dichotomies between Western and Singaporean answers found in the interviews performed by this researcher. It can be concluded that, to adapt to cultural differences between Singapore and The Netherlands when presenting REDACTED solutions in Singapore, REDACTED should address and reconcile the differences between Universalism vs Particularism, Individualism vs Communitarianism, Neutral vs Emotional, Specific vs Diffuse and Achievement vs Ascription, because all these dimensions have been shown to impact business communication differences. It is important for REDACTED to effectively address these differences, because, as stated in the Introduction of this report, Singapore has the potential to increase REDACTED's revenue with high-value contracts, offsetting the waning opportunities in the West and Middle-East.

## 8. Recommendations

As the previous chapter, Conclusions, provided an answer to the research question, the Recommendations section of this thesis will focus on operationalising the gathered information, to be able to effectively complete the research objective: *"Analysis of Singaporean cultural dimensions contrasted with Western countries, to provide REDACTED with a valid and sound recommendation on how to engage relevant stakeholders in Singapore."*

For consistency, this chapter will follow the format laid out in Conclusions, with recommendations based on each of the five cultural dimensions defined by Trompenaars, ending with an overarching recommendation.

### *Universalism vs Particularism*

REDACTED has a strong focus on "closing". As this research has shown, that aggressive sales approach can be incongruent with Singaporean culture. Due to the difference in approaches between Western and Singaporean stakeholders regarding important factors in the sales process (such as diametrically opposed views on the legality of contracts and the fact that Singaporeans prefer relationships to evolve slowly, again diametrically opposed to the Western "deal first" approach (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997)), REDACTED is recommended to change their engagement approach from structure and rule-based (e.g. proposals presented at the beginning of an engagement, and quickly introducing Memorandums of Understanding and Letters of Intent to lock down sales), to a relationship-based approach.

According to research done for Harvard Business Review (Molinsky & Zakkour, 2013), an effective method to aid this transition is finding a "cultural connector": someone who has experience in the region, and who is able to transform behaviours between the two disparate cultures, all the while assessing how severe the changes must be. This is also the strong recommendation of this researcher. While perhaps slightly presumptuous, the answers given by interviewees show a strong willingness to understand the other culture, but perhaps a lack of direction to do so. A cultural connector would be a bridge builder between cultures, and a way to sincerely understand and address relevant differences in cultural communication. This cultural connector could, in theory, also help in improving relationships with local partners, further strengthening REDACTED's Singapore position.

### *Individualism vs Communitarianism*

This dimension has a direct impact on sales cycle duration, due to the fact that (impactful) decisions are often not made by representatives on the spot during engagements with Singaporean stakeholders. According to the interviews in this study, which closely mirror Trompenaars' findings, communitarian cultures must often refer back to their organization when making decisions. Based on this information, the recommendation is to allot extra time in the sales planning, forecasting and stakeholder management when preparing an engagement with

Singaporean stakeholders. This will improve forecast quality and remove uncertainty and stress when sales cycles end up taking longer than those with Western stakeholders.

#### *Neutral vs Emotional*

REDACTED is sometimes described by peers and local clients as “jonge honden”, or “young dogs”. This is indicative of how REDACTED does business: aggressive, playful, youthful, and emotive. This is also apparent when present in REDACTED’s office, with (often noisy) open floor plans and a hierarchically horizontal, informal communications style. Western stakeholders are also generally more open to showing emotion verbally, through body language and through text. This, however, is not the case in Singapore. It is recommended that twofold mitigations are put in place:

- important text-based communications (such as proposals, high-priority emails, or tender responses) will receive Singapore-specific general updates, and will structurally be reviewed by REDACTED’s in-house copy editor, to ensure tone-of-voice is neutral, object focused and calm
- REDACTED will arrange a presentation training for its client facing staff for the APAC region, focused around effective intercultural communications with Asia. REDACTED already has a Toastmasters programme in place and they offer courses on intercultural intelligence (Livermore, 2015).

#### *Specific vs Diffuse*

Another dimension that impacts effectively engaging Singaporean stakeholders, specific vs diffuse approach strategies can cause challenges in business communications. For example, in Western countries, there is a relatively clear split to be seen between “business” and “personal” (further demonstrated in the survey results of this thesis). The recommendation of this researcher closely matches Trompenaars’ reconciliation proposition (1997): when conducting communications with Singaporean stakeholders, understand that this hard split between business and personal matters can lead to a perception of superficiality and alienation. REDACTED should prepare itself for an unusual group dynamic when interfacing with Singaporean stakeholders, due to the fact that superiors often have a say in subordinates’ lives outside of business hours. To mitigate this, REDACTED should study the concept of diffuse cultures, specifically focusing on its history, future perspectives and background.

#### *Achievement vs Ascription*

In ascriptive cultures, deference is paid to status above achievements. This can lead to disconnects when Western organisations like REDACTED interface with them, as Western cultures measure success by what the stakeholder has done, which is then mapped to their level of seniority. When engaging with stakeholders in Singapore, it is recommended that REDACTED gains an understanding of this, and specifically: there exists a possibility that the senior stakeholder in the discussion is not aware of the specifics of the project nor has the knowledge to understand the project. Due to the observed hierarchical, more status-deferential nature of Singapore culture, REDACTED staff in Singapore can choose to:

- update their job title to reflect degree of influence instead of competency
- exhibit respect for what people *are* as opposed to what they *do*, incorporating more status-focused terminology (like *senior*, *director*, *leader*, *boss*, *executive*) in lieu of job-focused terminology (such as *operations*, *maintenance*, *HSE*, *IT*).

### 8.1 Final recommendation

Each of the five dimensions laid out in the conceptual model of this thesis has an impact on how to effectively engage Singaporean stakeholders. Therefore, the existing “Western-style” approach should be amended throughout the engagement with Singaporeans. Broadly, the assignment of a Cultural Connector will provide deep-level insight into how to overcome cultural differences with Singaporean stakeholders, and allow REDACTED’s staff to engage with them from a far more prepared position. Furthermore, this researcher recommends adaptation on multiple levels:

- Tone-of-voice: the research conducted in this thesis validates the hypothesis that cultural differences have an impact on communication. By rewording communications to align more with Singaporean cultural traits and therefore be more object-focused, status-deferential, and based on relationship over



product, REDACTED should be able to increase acceptance of proposals, presentations and other client-facing material

- Body language and verbal communications style: REDACTED's client-facing staff should undergo professional presentation training to understand the engagement-specific elements important to effectively communicate with Singaporean stakeholders
- Patience: REDACTED's staff should calculate impact to their sales pipeline due to longer sales cycles, borne from the meandering and group-focused communication style of Singaporeans.

## 9. Implementation plan

Based on the recommendations found in the previous chapter, an implementation plan has been devised to most effectively translate the knowledge gained from this research into actions. These actions can be taken by REDACTED, and non-ongoing actions should be possible to complete by November 1, 2018. In the research and analysis phase of this study, the current situation has been defined; the results and conclusions phase provide the groundwork for creating a new situation; and the translation of the recommendations to an implementation plan can be seen as the method by which the transition from current to new situation is made (Zegel, 2016).

### 9.1 Implementation plan boundaries and demarcation

As some of the changes to be made are continual (such as structural review of documentation by REDACTED's copy editor), these will not be subject to time constraints. However, for the selection of a Cultural Connector, cultural communications training, and general Singapore-specific update of client-facing material such as proposals and presentations, REDACTED will have a deadline of 1 November 2018. Some financial variables are difficult to assess at this stage, and will be addressed and estimated per element of the implementation plan.

From a financial perspective, assessing the cost and ROI of these activities is unfortunately complicated. REDACTED maintains a highly multivariate cost, expense and T&M structure, which makes it difficult to outline what type of costs will actually be made. The indicative and tentative cost of the entire project listed below is not expected to exceed €25,000, but this doesn't take into account the time and travel costs of employees actually conducting business in Singapore. However, a single won contract would offset the entire cost estimate of the implementation, making it –in this researcher's opinion- a worthwhile investment based on the results of this study.

### 9.2 Implementation structure

WEEK	ACTIVITY	
1		Plan of approach
	Information	Not initiating a project of this type with a plan of approach can make it difficult to implement change. It is essential for REDACTED to formulate a more detailed strategy based on this implementation plan, delving deeper into the exact project costs, timing, and requirements. The improvement of business communications in Singapore could lead to significant financial and market implications for REDACTED, so it is important to approach this project seriously. In this phase, the roles and responsibilities of this process must be defined.
	Checklist	-define roles and responsibilities -create RACI to ensure relevant internal stakeholders are involved in the implementation process -select decision makers required to sign off plan of approach
	Who	Plan of approach will be created by the Marketing department and will be driven by Michel Tol, Product Marketing Manager
	Costs	All internal staff, so none additional outside of pre-existing personnel costs
2		Hiring of Cultural Connector
	Information	As described in the Recommendations section of this thesis, the assignment of a Cultural Connector should strongly improve understanding of the Singaporean culture, and inform the adaptation of materials to Singapore-fit content.



	<b>Checklist</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-define budget</li> <li>-define key qualities and attributes</li> <li>-Define allotted hours</li> </ul>
	<b>Who</b>	HR, informed by Marketing
	<b>Costs</b>	Dependent on elements in checklist above
<b>5-13</b>		<b>Update communications materials</b>
	<b>Information</b>	From the results of this study, it is apparent that various elements of Singapore-bound materials must be updated to suit the expectations and cultural milieu of Singaporean stakeholders. The initial focus will be: updating the general REDACTED product proposal and general presentation. This is contingent on input from the Cultural Connector.
	<b>Checklist</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-create adapted product proposal</li> <li>-create adapted general presentation</li> <li>-align with Cultural Connector during and after updating materials</li> <li>-share updated materials in a plenary session with relevant Singapore stakeholder facing staff</li> </ul>
	<b>Who</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Marketing</li> <li>-Cultural Connector</li> <li>-Communications</li> <li>-Business Consultants</li> </ul>
	<b>Costs</b>	All internal staff, so none additional outside of pre-existing personnel costs
<b>5-...</b>		<b>External communications review by Copy Editor</b>
	<b>Information</b>	important text-based communications (such as proposals, high-priority emails, or tender responses) will structurally be reviewed by REDACTED's in-house copy editor, to ensure tone-of-voice is neutral, object focused and calm.
	<b>Checklist</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Inform Copy Editor</li> <li>-Connect Copy Editor with Cultural Connector</li> <li>-Initiate a regular process review</li> </ul>
	<b>Who</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Marketing Manager</li> <li>-Cultural Connector</li> <li>-Copy Editor</li> </ul>
	<b>Costs</b>	All internal staff, so none additional outside of pre-existing personnel costs
<b>14-22</b>		<b>Toastmasters cultural communications training</b>
	<b>Information</b>	REDACTED's client-facing staff will undergo professional training to understand the engagement-specific elements important to effectively communicate with Singaporean stakeholders. This training will be delivered by Toastmasters, an internationally acclaimed organisation with which REDACTED already has a relationship. Proposition is eight weekly trainings for each of the Business Consultants for the region.
	<b>Checklist</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Contract Toastmasters for training</li> <li>-Create effective planning for availability international Business Consultants</li> <li>-Create evaluation method</li> </ul>
	<b>Who</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Marketing Manager</li> <li>-Business Consultants</li> <li>-Toastmasters representative</li> <li>-Sales Manager</li> </ul>
	<b>Costs</b>	Indicative pricing for this training is between €8.000-€10.000
<b>50-52</b>		<b>Evaluation</b>
	<b>Information</b>	Qualitative assessment of effectiveness of proposed measures, based on the opinion of relevant internal stakeholders.
	<b>Checklist</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Define KPIs</li> <li>-Create assessment</li> <li>-Define positive/negative stage gates for results</li> </ul>
	<b>Who</b>	-Marketing

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Business Consultants</li> <li>-Communications</li> <li>-Cultural Connector</li> </ul>
	<b>Costs</b>	All internal staff, so none additional outside of pre-existing personnel costs

## 10. Discussion

This thesis was made up of desk research and qualitative, interview-based research. This chapter serves as a retrospective on the process, highlighting the positives and negatives of this study.

### 10.1 Strengths

#### *Applicability of conceptual model*

The alignment of the theory with the research subject was clear, well-documented and well-tested. Using a truncated version of Trompenaars' expansive research into culture differences in the context of business communication, provided a solid basis for both the hypotheses as well as served as a positive indicator for the reliability of information.

#### *Two-phase validation*

By allowing the desk research to precede *and* influence the content and direction of the interviews, the latter could serve as an REDACTED-specific validator of Trompenaars' findings. The results of the interviews were similar to Trompenaars' research while adding a layer of detail, validating that the defined cultural gaps are also present within the respondents spoken to. This served as a qualitative peer-review and focused extension of Trompenaars' seminal work, and strongly informed the recommendations made by this researcher.

#### *Depth and clarity of information analysis*

By continually referring back to each of the five dimensions addressed in this study per chapter, it was possible to paint a detailed picture of where the challenges lie. It prevented the waters being potentially muddied, by ensuring no overlap between dimensions would be present throughout the study. This allows future studies to potentially focus on the dimensions separately, and possibly increase the quality and detail of the results.

### 10.2 Weaknesses

#### *Insufficiently distinctive final sub-question*

Retrospectively, this researcher should have formulated a third sub-question that was more differentiated from the central question, as "*What effect do differences in business communication regarding Singapore versus Western countries have on REDACTED's communication of its proposition in Singapore?*" and "*How can REDACTED adapt to cultural communication differences between The Netherlands and Singapore, when presenting its solutions in Singapore?*" are, in essence, intrinsically linked. The ramification of this is that the study was conducted with three sub-questions to be answered, spending valuable time on answering one that had significant overlap with the central question. Luckily, it does not negatively impact the results, as it is a relevant question to the study. To solve this, sub-question 3 should be discarded as a separate element from future research.

#### *Ubiquity of theory*

Trompenaars' work is so well-known and so extensive, quoted so often and so heavily, that it is possible that this researcher assumed the quality based on these factors. While not necessarily a problem in and of itself, more effort could have been spent perusing possible competing or complementary theories. This would have had the added benefit of further broadening this researcher's understanding of the subject, and perhaps have increased or influenced the level of detail in the conclusions. However, the fact that the survey results correlated strongly with Trompenaars' findings at least tentatively indicates that Trompenaars' theory is applicable to the research question.

#### *Interviews / time constraints*

The complicated nature of setting up interviews with respondents thousands of miles away, led to a final stretch race to record and assess the results. Meetings were often moved and some were cancelled, which led to a strained final several weeks. It also led to the unfortunate result that two interviews could not take place, leaving eight interviews. It is hard to say if that number is high enough. In future, more time or better planning should be taken into account, as busy people's schedules are highly opaque and meandering.

### *Bias*

This researcher has much experience interfacing with Singaporean stakeholders both locally and internationally. This experience drove the desire to research the subject of this thesis in the first place. However, it remains anecdotal – personal – experience, which is not scientifically valid. While this researcher took precautions to remove implicit or explicit bias from the equation during the research trajectory by consistently connecting found results to existent theories, basing methodology on that of leading cultural scientists, and removing personal opinion from as much of the content as possible, a possibility remains that some part of the study was contaminated by bias. If that is the case, further research must remove and readdress that element of the study.

-END-

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