

Author: Zoran Vaupot

Title: Dutch for Slovenes: Instructions for Use

Date: 03 November 2002

How would you describe a typical Slovenian businessman? On the outside he is confident, responsible, and standing behind his own views and decisions? Let us describe a businessman who is not typically Slovenian, and we might answer the above questions.

A Dutch businessman, as opposed to a Slovenian one, has a developed ego and a sense of personal responsibility; he is simultaneously relaxed and does not avoid taking risks. The smaller the country, the more necessary is its incorporation into international economic currents. A small and especially young country such as Slovenia cannot count on the heritage of its ancestors during the establishment of international relations, which would, throughout decades or centuries and through its acquisition of cultural imperialism, enable them to, at least in some countries or continents, feel at home. The absence of the dissemination of their own culture outside of their home borders, by rule connected with a lack of a worldly way of thinking, can be an important (self) limiting factor with long term damaging consequences. If you do not believe in self limitation, you should read the strategic orientations of the most respected and largest Slovenian companies, and you will, in more than half of their recordings, find statements as similar as two peas; “our strategic orientation is to breach and takeover the leading role in the markets of South-East Europe” statement types. The “markets of South-East Europe” is mostly only a poorly disguised synonym for the remaining countries of the former-Yugoslavia. Are these kinds of (self) limitation only the consequence (realistically?) of evaluated economical interests of the aforementioned region, the owner manager structure of the abovementioned companies, which in most cases derives from the previous system, or is it mostly a weakness in the ability of intercultural or international adaptations?

The Dutch do not excuse themselves because of their size. Despite the fact they are eight times more numerous than us, the landmass of their country is only one and a half that of Slovenia's, the Dutch and the Netherlands are already part of the EU but even more globally and in the meaning of quantity, world-wise, a small nation and an even smaller state. Except that contrary to Slovenia or Slovenians, their “smallness” does not represent a handy excuse for the future possible failures in any field. They are a small state, and the Dutch are very few ...so what? To make business with the Dutch means to overcome the stereotypical grasp of their culture, which is, by Slovenians, especially those who have never seen the country in person, described in a few words as “with orange tulips strewn across a flat land, densely populated with tall skinny and pale inhabitants who have an exaggerated measure of tolerance towards drugs, prostitution, homosexuality and euthanasia”. Because the burdening of stereotypes can sometimes be fatal, let us take a look at the cultural difference between Slovenians and the Dutch in an empirical model of intercultural communication by Geert Hofstede who is Dutch by birth. In the years from 1967 to 1973 he conducted a research in which he sent questionnaires to 116,000 co-workers of IBM from 72 states in which 20 different languages were spoken. Based on the results, he defined four measurements with which it is possible to explain around 50 % of differences between national cultures. The rest of the differences had to be explained with the specifics of individual states. These measurements are: a) masculinity (Masculinity –MAS), b) individualism (Individualism – IDV), c) the distance in power (Power Difference – PDI), d) avoiding uncertainty (Uncertainty Avoidance – UAI). During the conducting of the research, Slovenia was, of course, not an independent country, so it should be added that the results for Slovenia were analysed in the 90's, based on the same measurements as applied to the primary

research. The results measuring masculinity (MAS), when comparing the Dutch and Slovenian culture are very similar. With the rest of the measurements, clear differences presented themselves between aforementioned cultures (see table).

In what way are the Dutch different from us? If we would, based on the differences, try to assemble a model of the Dutch and Slovenians, we would be perfect opposites; then, in front of us, an individual with a developed ego (which is not to be confused with selfishness) and feeling of personal responsibility would appear who is used to working in a low hierarchical and group based organisation and has the nerve to express his own opinion without the fear of possible negative consequences to his bosses. At the same time, he is relaxed concerning future events, and the positive relation to this encourages him to accept (also only in appearance) risky decisions. The world, because of Dutch imperial traditions and even before the expansion of the Internet, appears as a “global village” to him. Nonetheless, for example, the culturally similar neighbour Belgium and its market do not represent an explicit strategic goal for broadening his business activities in the future.

So how do we ease our communication with the Dutch? In Europe, it would be hard to find two more dissimilar cultures as the Slovenian and Dutch. Therefore, at least the understanding and tolerance, if not adaptation (maybe also virtual) is necessary for the effective communication with the Dutch. Let us not forget: the one which succeeds in adapting to the other is not in a submissive position but ahead in the game!

The Dutch respect us more than the Germans or Austrians. Sašo Bitenc, the Director of Cordia, who is a general representative of cargo trucks of the Dutch manufacturer DAF in Slovenia, has good business experiences with the Dutch. “They are very correct, they always respect the points agreed upon. They are perfectionists, they do nothing by half, and it is all precisely completed. As partners, they respect us much more than Germans and Austrians. At the same time they are very open and together we discuss many things,” says Bitenc.

Cultural differences between the Slovenes and Dutch

Points of view, typical for:		Gathered results
Low value of characteristics	High value of characteristics	
INDIVIDUALISM		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of “us” • Opinions are defined with the group • Prioritised is the fulfilment of obligations to family, group, society • Punishment for non-fulfilment: disgrace in front of others • Values differentiate themselves on the inside of the group and between them - particularism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of ”me” • Opinions are created by the individual • Prioritised is fulfilling obligations to yourself • The punishment for non-fulfilment: loss of self respect and feeling of guilt, • Values should refer to everybody - universalism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guatemala (min.): 6 • Slovenia: 27 • Netherlands: 80 • USA (max.): 91
DIVISION IN POWER		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managers are people like other employees • We do not like constant control over our work • We are not afraid of disputes with our superiors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managers are “the other type of people” • The employees have a hard time trusting each other • From the managers, we expect distinct power and autocratic decision making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Austria(min.): 11 • Netherlands: 38 • Slovenia: 71 • Malaysia (max.): 105
AVOIDING RESPONSIBILITY		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have unlimited time • We live day by day • We hope for success and are prepared to take risks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time is money • We are constantly worried about the future • We are afraid of making mistakes and we do not like to take chances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Singapore (min.): 8 • Netherlands: 53 • Slovenia: 88 • Greece (max.): 112