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EXPLORING EMOTIONAL VALIDATION IN CROSS-CULTURAL MANAGEMENT – A CASE STUDY

Student: Hannah Sophie Daniel
Master's Thesis tutor: Ryan Christopher Armstrong, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

Recent trends have shown increased prominence within the area of emotional validation as it pertains to workplace interactions. This thesis emphasizes the importance of applying emotional validation in cross-cultural management to improve employees' well-being and associated work performance. To deepen the knowledge of the role of emotional validation and cross-cultural management, this thesis conducts a case study where employees from an internationally renowned company are asked to share situations in which they felt emotionally invalidated. The study's main findings reveal experiencing similar perceptions of emotional invalidation and emotions, regardless of the participants' cultural background. Still, variations in reactions and outcomes can be associated with cultural differences and the subjective perceiving of emotional invalidation. The study proposes practical measures for enhancing emotional validation recognition to establish international guidelines, stimulate cross-cultural sensitivity, and integrate supportive personnel. The results show that future research is necessary to explore diverse factors influencing behaviors at work.

Keywords: Emotional Validation; Emotional Invalidation; Cross-Cultural Management; Organizational Culture; Employee Well-Being

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1. INTRODUCTION

The workplace has changed significantly in the last five years due to Covid-19 and digitalization. There was a massive shift towards digitalization because, during the pandemic, many companies were forced to close their offices and let their employees work digitally from home (Ratten, 2020). Referring to the data provided by *Statista* (2023), it can be noticed that the digital economy and society index of the European Union (DESI) saw a significant rise of ten percent in 2020, which is much higher than the average annual growth of around three percent in previous years. "The Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) summarizes indicators on Europe's digital performance and tracks the progress of EU countries." (European Commission, 2023). *Bregenzer et al.* (2021) present in their study a positive correlation between mobile work and increasing stress in the workplace. Furthermore, the *American Psychological Association* (2009) claimed already in 2009 that more than 69% of employees reported that work is a significant source of stress in their lives. Research indicates that work stress has negative consequences, including decreasing psychological well-being (Terry et al., 1993). Another trigger besides stress for decreasing well-being can be negative situations at work, in which emotional invalidation is present. There are several definitions and publications on emotions and validation, but only a few on emotional validation. *Andalibi et al.* (2021) define it as the following: "Emotional validation describes the "unambiguous communication" to an individual that an "activity, emotion, belief, sense, or other experience or response" is "relevant and meaningful" given the circumstance. Emotional validation avoids trivializing a person's response to an event and communicates the inherent validity of emotions through serious attention (Andalibi & Garcia, 2021, as cited in Linehan, 1997a).

According to *Mayer* (2008), many international companies employ workers from diverse cultural backgrounds due to the rise of digitalization, globalization, and the increased potential for remote work. Combined with the increase in digitization in recent years, this would speak for an increasingly cross-cultural working environment. Therefore, understanding and addressing emotional validation in the workplace, particularly within diverse cultural backgrounds, is critical for contemporary international companies.

1.1 Statement of Problem Definition

Emotional validation received attention recently because employees' well-being gains importance, which is linked to emotional validity (Pradhan & Hati, 2019). There are many definitions of employee well-being, and the number of studies on the effects of positive well-being is increasing. The concurrent increase in international teams raises a current research gap on whether and how employees' emotional validation behavior differs in organizations with more than one culture.

This thesis should provide beneficial aspects regarding the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In 2015, the United Nations established a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals as global objectives that act as guidelines for a sustainable future for the world (United Nations,

2015b). The SDGs cover a range of interconnected issues, including poverty, inequality, climate change, peace, justice, and more. In this thesis, two goals are particularly relevant, which the research of this paper should further develop. The third SDG describes health and well-being, which ensures a healthy life for all ages and promotes well-being. An essential component of health is also the well-being of employees, so this thesis aims to gain more profound knowledge in this area to support further learning that can be used for better health and well-being. The eight SDG promotes sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all (United Nations, 2015). In this context, among other things, the goal of increasing worker productivity is discussed. Research shows a significant correlation between employees´ well-being and productivity (Johnson et al., 2018). This thesis also provides insights into the correlation between well-being and performance. Based on the given related context, it can be stated that this Master Thesis and the case study results will help develop the UN's two goals further.

1.2 Research Objective

This master's thesis aims to deepen the knowledge of emotional validation's role in cross-cultural management. The objective is to investigate how cultural variances affect emotional validation's causes, emotions, responses, and outcomes. This study will enhance comprehension of the significance of emotional validation in supervising culturally diverse teams. It will also identify practical implications for corporations on effectively applying emotional validation in cross-cultural management. It targets to answer the following research question.

What is the role of emotional validation in cross-cultural management?

1.3 Applied Methodology

As a first point of reference in the context of this work, the theoretical foundations are defined. For this purpose, methodical literature research is conducted to identify existing theories and definitions of emotional validation and the related impact on employees´ well-being and performance. Culture as such, organizational culture and cross-cultural management will be defined. The empirical part of the thesis follows the literature review. The chosen method is empirical social research, in which a case study as a qualitative method is conducted. These interviews should lead to insights into the workplace's perception and behavior of emotional validation. Furthermore, experiences in cross-cultural management will be shown. Based on the data evaluation program *atlas.ti*, the case study interviews are evaluated using the content analysis after *Mayring* (2000), providing valuable insights into the results. The interviews should also lead to transferring the acquired knowledge from theory to practice and the resulting recommendations for the practical applications of international companies. The conclusion includes the summary of the most relevant findings after the discussion and limitations, which lead to future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is based on an extensive literature review to set the theoretical background for the thesis. The first part of this chapter describes culture in general and provides insight into organizational cultures. Further, cross-cultural management is discussed to show the correlation between the theory of cultures, organizational cultures, and internationality. The second part of the chapter will focus on the theories about emotional validation and its impact on the companies, as it shows an immediate influence on the employee's well-being and performance. In general, methodical literature research was conducted to identify existing theories and definitions to establish the theoretical foundation for the case study. Therefore, sources from academic journals, books, dissertations, and grey literature such as governmental reports, conference proceedings, and databases are used.

2.1. Culture

This chapter will introduce definitions of culture and define one for this thesis's use. As this paper aims to find differences in behavior to emotional invalidation in cross-cultural management, culture is relevant to determine whether the participants acted because of their nationalities or based on other triggers. Culture finds a lot of different definitions and meanings nowadays; relevant ones will be given in the following.

The current definition of the *American Anthropological Association* (AAA) is used. This definition states that culture is a pattern of behavior and ways of thinking that people learn and share when they live in social groups. Thus, culture can distance different groups from each other (American Anthropological Association, 2023). Besides a current definition, also fundamental ones are given in the following. *Geertz's* (1973) definition of culture is one of the most widespread interpretations and basis for further definitions. He defines culture as a system of symbols that individuals use to comprehend and express meaning about their surroundings. This concept highlights the significance of meaning-making in human culture. The work also pioneered the theory of thick description, a method of analyzing cultural occurrences by delving into their contextual and symbolic significance (Geertz, 1973). *Schein* (2017) laid a more current definition of culture: "Culture covers pretty much everything that a group has learned as it has evolved.". Culture can be understood as the collective learning of a particular group, often manifested in a set of shared, fundamental assumptions that are unconsciously accepted as the group's worldview (Schein, 1993). *Schein* (2017) distinguishes between micro and macro cultures, with macro cultures representing large ones such as nations. Accordingly, a more comprehensive, dynamic definition that shows how culture emerges and develops in organizations, subcultures, and microsystems needs to be captured because culture is not only about a nation but also about smaller groups interacting with each other (Schein, 2017).

Another widely used conception of cultures was laid by *Hofstede* (1980), who defined culture as shared mental programming that sets apart individuals of one group or category from another. He posited that culture is acquired, disseminated, and passed on across generations, shaping a society's values, beliefs, norms, behaviors, and artifacts (Hofstede, 1980). In its initial form,

Hofstede's (1980) philosophy contained several distinguishing features that gave it a distinct identity and elevated it to the rank of a paradigm shift in cross-cultural research. *Hofstede et al.* (1980) developed dimensions of national culture based on variables that correlated at the national level rather than at the individual or organizational level. *Hofstede's* (1980) first manuscript introduced four national culture dimensions. The first dimension is *power distance*, which reflects the extent to which less powerful members of a society accept and expect an unequal distribution of power. Societies with high power distance tend to be hierarchical, emphasizing respect for authority and seniority. In contrast, societies with low power distance are more egalitarian, emphasizing individualism and equal opportunities. The second dimension is *individualism vs. collectivism*. It suggests the level to which individuals prioritize their goals and interests over those of the group to which they belong. Societies with high individualism value autonomy, independence, and self-expression, while societies with high collectivism emphasize group harmony, loyalty, and cooperation. *Masculinity vs. femininity* is the third dimension, showing the scope to which a society values traditional masculine traits, such as assertiveness, competitiveness, and material success, versus traditional feminine traits, such as nurturing, modesty, and quality of life. Groups with high masculinity tend to be more achievement-oriented and less caring, while societies with high femininity are more caring and less competitive. The last one of *Hofstede's* (1980) first manuscript is *uncertainty avoidance*, in which the extent to which members of a society feel threatened by ambiguity, uncertainty, and ambiguity is reflected. Societies with high uncertainty avoidance tend to be risk-averse, emphasizing rules, regulations, and formal procedures. Societies with low uncertainty avoidance tend to be more flexible, innovative, and tolerant of change (Hofstede, 1980). While the topic got further developed, a fifth dimension was later added based on additional research conducted in the 1990s. The dimension of *long-term orientation vs. short-term orientation* reflects how much a society values long-term planning, perseverance, and thrift versus short-term gratification, present-focused thinking, and quick results. Groups with high long-term orientation tend to be more future-oriented, focusing on sustainable growth and development. In contrast, societies with high short-term orientation are more present-focused, focusing on immediate results and gratification (Hofstede, 1991). *Indulgence vs. Restraint* was added as the last of the dimensions. It indicates how much a culture accepts the self-realization of each person. Thus, in a culture with a high value, marginalized groups or people who do not conform to "the average" are also accepted - freedom is considered a significant value. For example, the American culture is high in indulgence (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Triandis (1995) explored the cultural dimensions of individualism and collectivism by *Hofstede* (1980) and challenged the conventional understanding of culture-specific influences on thoughts and behavior. His inquiry unveiled the profound impact of these cultural paradigms on the interpretation of one's environment. *Triandis* (1995) demonstrates that the individualism-collectivism dichotomy leads to different lenses through which people perceive their world, attributing unique meanings to life events. He defined individualism as the motivation to prioritize a person's self over a group goal's needs, preferences, and rights. Collectivism is the motivation to impose the duties and norms by the collective entity, which can be a network, tribe,

family, or nation (Triandis, 1995). He defined culture as a shared pattern of beliefs, norms, role values, role perceptions, and attitudes.

> Thus, the first thing to pay attention to when we study culture is whether or not ideas are shared. The next thing to pay attention to is whether shared responses correspond to a language, a time period, and a geographic region. A nation consists of thousands of cultures, but many of these cultures have common elements. (Triandis, 2002b)

Furthermore, he introduced the concept of cultural syndromes, which are common attitudes, beliefs, conventions, and values among people who speak a particular language dialect in a specific geographic location during a specific historical time. Subjective culture's shared features are organized around a theme, such as complexity or the value of the community (Triandis, 2002a). "Cultural syndromes provide a focus so that we can get out of the fuzzy construct of "culture" and into a construct that we can probe systematically." (Triandis, 2002a).

In the context of this thesis, the dimensions of *Hofstede's* (Hofstede, 1980a, 1991; Hofstede et al., 2010) introduced six dimensions are used as a reference. Therefore, for the comparability of the study, nationality is mainly used as the term for culture.

2.2. Organizational Culture and Behavior

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the idea of differences in emotional validation in cross-cultural management. After defining culture in general, revising organizational culture and corporate behavior becomes particularly pertinent for this thesis, as respondents all work for the same company in the performed case study. Organizational culture is an integral part of the larger culture. Building on *Schein's* (2017) general definition (see Chapter 2.1.), this thesis uses his more dynamic definition of micro-cultures for organizations to define organizational culture.

> The culture of a group can be defined as the accumulated shared learning of that group as it solves its problems of external adaptation and internal integration; which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, feel, and behave in relation to those problems.
> This accumulated learning is a pattern or system of beliefs, values, and behavioral norms that come to be taken for granted as basic assumptions and eventually drop out of awareness. (Schein, 2017)

According to *Agbo and Okeoma's* (2020) study, establishing a company's culture involves three critical steps. Firstly, founders must select employees who share their mindsets and feelings carefully. Secondly, these employees must undergo rigorous training and assimilation to align with the founders' thinking and feeling. Lastly, the founders' behavior is crucial as it is a role model for employees, inspiring them to adopt the same beliefs, values, and assumptions. The

founders' vision is vital to the company's success, and their personality plays a pivotal role in shaping its culture (Agbo & Okeoma, 2020).

The employee's behavior plays an essential role in keeping that culture alive. Culture operates as a mechanism for understanding and exerting control, influencing, and molding the attitudes and behaviors within an organization (Alvesson, 2002). One organization can be distinguished from another based on values, beliefs, and behavioral norms (Ortega-Parra & Ángel Sastre-Castillo, 2013). *Armstrong and Taylor*. (2014) defined employee behavior as how an employee reacts to a specific situation in the workplace. Personal and organizational dynamics influence this reaction. Three main factors, motivation, commitment, and engagement can have an impact on behavior and performance. Motivation refers to the driving forces that lead individuals to act in specific ways, while commitment reflects how much an individual identifies with and is involved in an organization. Engagement combines motivation and commitment to measure the level of employees' emotional investment in their work and the organization (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014).

Understanding organizational culture and behavior is fundamental to this thesis. These elements shape the environment in which emotional validation occurs in cross-cultural management. As it progresses, these insights will guide the exploration of emotional validation's role and impact on the organization.

2.3. Cross-Cultural Management

Exploring cross-cultural management is critical to this thesis, given its focus on emotional validation in diverse cultural contexts. Understanding the dynamics of managing across cultures is essential to address the nuances of emotional validation effectively.
Cross-cultural management is a crucial aspect of organizational behavior that extends beyond domestic boundaries to include international and multicultural contexts. It involves understanding and improving interactions among diverse stakeholders, including employees, managers, clients, and partners from different countries and cultures. This approach recognizes that traditional single-culture or domestic management is a subset of a more comprehensive, global, cross-cultural management framework (Adler et al. 2008). Cross-cultural management examines how cultural norms, values, and behaviors impact work performance, motivation, and overall organizational culture (Hofstede, 1980a).

Adler (1983) categorizes cross-cultural management research into three distinct types: unicultural, comparative, and intercultural. Unicultural research concentrates on management within a single country, such as studying organizational commitment within, for example, only German organizations. Comparative research, on the other hand, involves examining management practices in multiple countries and drawing comparisons between them, like analyzing conflict resolution norms across Mexico, India, and Turkey. Lastly, intercultural research focuses on the interactions between organizational members from different countries, such as assessing communication effectiveness between Danish expatriate managers and Filipino employees in

the Philippines (Adler, 1983; as cited in Bird & Mendenhall, 2015). This thesis conducts inter-cultural research because the case study is based on organizational members from one company with different national backgrounds.

Cross-cultural management is integral to this thesis, providing a foundation for understanding emotional validation across diverse cultures. As it navigates an increasingly globalized business landscape, the insights gained from this chapter underscore the growing importance of effective cross-cultural management and its impact on emotional validation.

2.4. Emotional Validation

As this thesis examines whether there are differences in behavior regarding different cultures, a shared understanding of emotional validation must first be created. Validation affirms the experiences or judgments of someone as truthful or logically coherent. This process can be likened to validating a research instrument, which focuses on confirming its accuracy in measuring its intended target (American Psychological Association, 2023a). As early as 1997, *Linehan* (1997) acknowledged that validation requires both empathetic comprehension and effective communication. Empathy alone is inadequate; therapy must progress further by deducing and conveying what has been perceived. According to *Linehan* (1997), there are six levels of validation. The first level describes *Listening and Observing* to pay attention and interest to individuals. It can be practiced with an "engaged reciprocal interaction pattern," such as asking questions to understand their statements better. The client's own feelings, thoughts, assumptions, and behaviors are accurately reflected to them as part of the second level of validation. At this level, there can be said who the individual actually is. The third level of validation is described as expressing "an intuitive understanding" and trying to articulate the unverbalized for the individual. The fourth level focuses on the cause of behaviors, including those in the past and present. It involves validating based on the individual's history. Level five describes validating based on current circumstances, such as ultimate life goals or current situations, involving restating the past and connecting it to current issues. The sixth level is about genuineness, expressing hope for the individual and showing genuine belief in the individual's capability for change. On this last level, the individual is treated as an equal. The levels of validation provide a framework for comprehending and reacting to others, as well as acknowledging and embracing their emotions, ideas, and conduct (Linehan, 1997).

Over time, various theories of emotion have evolved. The *American Psychological Association* (2023b) defines emotion as the following.

> A complex reaction pattern, involving experiential, behavioral, and physiological elements, by which an individual attempts to deal with a personally significant matter or event. The specific quality of the emotion (e.g., fear, shame) is determined by the specific significance of the event. For example, if the significance involves threat, fear is likely to be generated; if the significance involves disapproval from another, shame is likely to be generated. Emotion typically involves feeling but

differs from feeling in having an overt or implicit engagement with the world. (American Psychological Association, 2023b)

Emotional reactivity is the idea that the observed emotional response signifies a shift from a prior emotional state. This notion is consistent with numerous foundational emotion theories, which suggest that emotional reactions are not standalone events but are layered onto previous affective states (Rosenberg, 1998, as cited in Nelson et al., 2011;). Thus, emotional reactivity encompasses not just the response to a stimulus but also the change in the emotional state triggered by the stimulus compared to the pre-stimulus state (Nelson et al., 2011).

Emotional validation implies conveying that the emotional responses are valid, understandable, and legitimate given one's personal experiences and current circumstances. This process helps the individual feel understood and accepted and fosters a therapeutic environment that promotes openness and trust. It is important to note that validation does not mean agreeing with or endorsing the individual's thoughts or behaviors. Instead, it is about acknowledging the reality of their emotional experience, which can help the individual better manage their emotions and engage (Linehan, 1997).

Emotional validation is critical to interpersonal relationships, including those in the workplace. It involves acknowledging and affirming an individual's emotional experiences, promoting understanding, acceptance, and effective emotional management. This understanding of emotional validation, drawn from therapeutic contexts, can be transferred in the workplace. As delving deeper into the role of emotional validation in cross-cultural contexts in the following chapters, it will further explore its implications for employee well-being and performance.

2.5. Impact of Emotional Validation on Employee Well-being and Performance

This chapter delves into the pivotal role of emotional validation in influencing employee well-being and job performance. It underscores the importance of employee well-being in boosting productivity and the potential consequences of emotional invalidation.

Well-being is "a state of happiness and contentment, with low levels of distress, overall good physical and mental health and outlook, or good quality of life." (American Psychological Association, 2023c). Employee well-being encapsulates the holistic experience of an employee, encompassing both physical and psychological aspects. It signifies employees' overall health, comfort, and happiness, addressing their physical, psychological, and emotional states (Warr, 1999, as cited in Pradhan & Hati, 2022;). *Pradhan and Hati* (2022) proposed a model of Employee Well-Being that includes four dimensions: Psychological Well-Being, Social Well-Being, Workplace Well-Being, and Subjective Well-Being. Psychological Well-Being refers to an individual's psychological health and growth, while social well-being encompasses the individual's relationships and interactions with others. Workplace well-being pertains to the individual's satisfaction and experiences in the work environment. Subjective Well-Being is a broader measure of the individual's overall life satisfaction and emotional state (Pradhan & Hati, 2022).

The study by *Zielinski et al.* (2022) initiated that individuals who perceived higher levels of emotional invalidation experienced decreased positive affect. Furthermore, this perceived invalidation had a significant interaction with social context. Specifically, individuals who felt their emotions were invalidated reported increased negative affect when interacting with non-close associates, such as coworkers or acquaintances. Interestingly, only those participants who reported high levels of perceived emotional invalidation experienced increased stress in tandem with heightened daily negative affect (Zielinski et al., 2022).

From this, it can be deduced that employees who experience emotional validation are less stressed and more satisfied as a positive effect. *Haddon* (2018) emphasizes that a person's productivity is strongly linked to their overall health and well-being; therefore, organizations should prioritize the welfare of their staff. The paper outlines the importance of physical, mental, and nutritional well-being. It highlights that mental health is one of the core foundations of a person's performance, yet it is often overlooked (Haddon, 2018). In the context of this thesis, job performance is conceptualized as the quantifiable actions, behaviors, and outcomes enacted or produced by employees. These are intrinsically linked with and actively contribute to achieving organizational objectives. This definition aligns with the perspective of *Viswesvaran and Ones* (2000), who emphasize the scalability of these actions and their direct contribution to the organization's goals.

The findings of *Sarwar et al.* (2020) suggest that ethical leadership, which upholds and promotes an ethical culture, can positively influence employee behavior and attitudes, leading to higher-quality work performance. Ethical leaders are encouraged to create a favorable work environment that prioritizes employee well-being, which can enhance personal capabilities and overall organizational performance (Sarwar et al., 2020).

The well-being of employees has been identified as a crucial factor for organizations in further research, significantly impacting their performance and longevity. This identification is due to its influence on health-related costs, absenteeism, staff turnover, and job performance. Employee well-being can boost productivity at both individual and organizational levels. Conversely, its absence can lead to substantial financial and non-financial losses for the organization (Bevan, 2010; Bryson et al., 2017; Grawitch et al., 2006; Pradhan & Hati, 2022; Spector, 1997; Wright, 2006; Wright & Cropanzano, 2000).

The exploration of emotional validation's impact on employee well-being and performance in this chapter underscores its significance in the workplace. The evidence suggests that fostering an environment of emotional validation can enhance employee well-being, which in turn, contributes to improved job performance. This improvement in job performance aligns with the central thesis of this work, emphasizing the need for organizations to prioritize emotional validation as a key strategy in their human resource practices.

3. METHODOLOGY

After laying the theoretical foundations in the previous chapters, the following chapter outline the methodological procedure for empirical research. First, it introduces the general case study's design following the empirical approach, including the description of the participants. The chapter continues by describing the design of the interview protocol before explaining the data analysis. In this section, the conduction and evaluation are presented.

3.1. Case Study

Scientific data can be collected using different methods, such as experiments, surveys, and historical analysis, but for this paper, the methodology of the case study is chosen. Case study research is appropriate for this Master´s thesis because it is critical for practically demonstrating the veracity of theoretical knowledge. Indeed, case studies allow researchers to examine a particular event or situation in great detail and explore the complexities of human behavior and decision-making (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Regarding *Yin* (2014), case studies are appropriate when asking *how* and *why* questions about a contemporary set of incidents over which the investigator has little or no control. This thesis is rather explorative and descriptive, as trying to gain knowledge about the correlations between emotional validation and cross-cultural management, where the author of the thesis has no to little control over the outcomes of the case study. It can be defined as follows:

> A case study is an empirical investigation that examines a contemporary phenomenon in its real life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. […] The case study inquiry copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis. (Yin, 2014, p.13)

Four tests frequently used in empirical social research are applied to ensure the quality of the case study. These include construct, internal and external validity, and reliability. These appear either already in the design of the case study, during the data collection, in the data analysis, or the composition (Yin, 2014a).

The case study exemplifies qualitative, empirical social research (Wintzer, 2016), understood as a set of methods, techniques, and instruments for the scientifically correct undertaking of studies of human behavior and other social phenomena (Häder, 2019). One such technique, qualitative interviews, can be defined as a systematic, theory-guided data collection procedure by interviewing people with exclusive knowledge about strategies, instruments, and the mode of action of topics or situations (Kaiser, 2021).

The goal is to interview approximately fourteen participants or until theoretical saturation is reached. Working for an international company where at least two cultures work together was the primary criterion for selecting the candidates. In line with the goals of this paper, during the in-depth interviews, participants get asked to report on negative incidents in their work environment. In doing so, the critical incident technique developed by *Flanagan* (1954) was used to investigate and analyze significant events or experiences that profoundly impact individuals or organizations. Therefore, the interviewer (in this case, the paper's author) asks the participants to describe the specific events in more detail. This information should include what happened, who was involved, and how they reacted in the situation described (Flanagan, 1954). Here, semi-standardized in-depth interviews are used, with the interviewer directing the questions to the target person (Häder, 2019). Those semi-structured interviews are conducted using a guide with standardized questions. The interviewees speak in monologue to present their subjective patterns of interpretation, ways of thinking and perceived reality in detail (Wintzer, 2016). The interviewer asks follow-up questions to observe how the participants dealt with these negative situations to discover how emotional validation or invalidation differs in different cultures in the work environment.

Eisenhardt's (1989) Within-Case Data is followed to analyze the data. The first step is to list all relevant descriptions, including the interview transcripts and the introduction of the candidates. Further, the transcripts are then analyzed for patterns. *Eisenhardt* (1989) suggests using the tactic of cross-case patterns. According to common form characteristics, the category formation system, according to Mayring (2000), is used to form common characteristics. This method is particularly well suited because structuring content analysis aims to filter specific content, topics, and aspects from the interview material according to characteristics. There will be an inductive category application in eight steps conducted. These categories are determined in advance using the theoretical foundations. Subcategories are then inductively derived during the analysis of the interviews (Mayring, 2000). The category system forms the core of the content analysis. The content analysis is carried out in eight steps. The *Atlas.ti* software is used for the category construction of this work. The categories will be explained in further detail in the following chapters. First, the empirical procedure is explained.

3.2. Empirical Approach

This chapter discusses the approach of qualitative, empirical social research in more detail. The goal is to understand better if emotional validation is used in the work environment and how the behavior might be differentiated on cultural grounds. Therefore, semi-structured in-depth interviews are conducted in which the interviewer directs the questions to the target person. To do so, the interviewees are granted a monological right to speak to present their subjective interpretation patterns, ways of thinking, and perceived reality in detail (Wintzer, 2016).

The interviews were recorded using an audio recording, the interviewees' consent having first been obtained and then transcribed. During transcription, the names of the experts were replaced with abbreviations. The interviews were scheduled to last between 20 to 30 minutes.

When selecting the interview partners, care was taken to ensure that the employees all work for an international company guaranteeing a broad range of cultural backgrounds. The participants chosen for this study all work in a professional environment for a multinational company. The company's name will also remain anonymous and be called "the company". Note: The transcripts are available on request from the author of this thesis. It is important to mention for the thesis that due to the aligning organizational culture, negative situations and reactions of the participants were also included, which originated from previous employers because it can be assumed that they would react similarly again in their current company.

3.3. Conceptualization of the Interview Protocol

In this chapter, the conceptualization of the interview protocol is explained. The guidelines were developed in advance and are intended to structure the interviews to make them comparable. The protocol consists of three identical passages used for each interview to make the evaluation of the individual interviews comparable. The interviews are divided into an introduction, thematic questions, and a conclusion.

Before the interviews, all the participants signed a permission and information document confirming the use of the interviews for this master thesis. The document can be found in the annexes. First, the interview was introduced, and permission to record the interview was requested. This procedure was followed by an introduction on the part of the participants so that their relevance for this study was clear. The first thematic block of questions followed. This first part of the questions is about emotional validation in general. The aim was to determine the participants' initial knowledge and, by asking specific follow-up questions, to ascertain if emotional validation is used as a tool in the company. A short introduction and definition of emotional validation were given to ensure understanding for every participant. Additionally, an example of a typical office situation in which emotional invalidation was happening was explained to give the interviewees more confidence in sharing their events.

The second question segment should be followed as smoothly as possible by initiating the interview with general knowledge sharing. The participants were asked to think about a specific situation in their working environment in which they felt emotionally invalidated. If they could not identify an incident immediately, follow-up questions were asked, and situations in which typically emotional invalidation could happen were given. Starting to understand the interviewee's situation, the interviewer tried to listen carefully and lead the talking towards more details. With more provided follow-up questions, the interviewees explained their negative experiences. They gave details about previous behavior, their first reactions toward the situation, their emotions, and the outcome of the described situation. Furthermore, they were asked if their behavior towards the other person changed long-terminally or how they remained. Finally, the interview ends with the opportunity to provide a final thought or question regarding their situation or emotional validation in general.

The practical implications of this paper on dealing with emotional validation in a multicultural working environment are based on the statements of the interviews and theory. Therefore,

especially the thematic question block is of high relevance for the further course of this thesis. The interview guide can be found in Annex A of this paper.

4. RESULTS OF THE CASE STUDY

In this chapter, the results of the case study will be presented. Starting with an introduction about the company in which the participants work. An introduction by the participants themselves follows the company introduction. Next, the category system is introduced and explained. After that, the study's results are presented in a table and then described in greater detail.

4.1. Introduction of the Participants

All the participants work for the Company, which is included in the DAX Germany, a stock market index that comprises the top 40 major German companies with the highest revenues (Statista Research Department, 2023). The company can be described as the market leader for business software that helps companies and industries to be more successful. It offers products for machine learning, the Internet of Things (IoT), and advanced analytics to help its customers create a smarter business. The company employs over 110,000 employees in over 160 countries with over 130 different country offices to keep a high revenue.[1] Due to the diversity of nationalities, this company is suitable for this case study and meets the minimum number of two cultures. In this way, added value can be assured for this work, and results can be used for other companies worldwide.

The interview participants are presented in more detail in the following. In total, fourteen employees of the company participated in the case study. Hereby seven different national backgrounds could be provided. The participants had Austrian, Bulgarian, Egyptian, German, Indish, Italian, or Spanish cultural origins. Still, some moved since birth to different countries, so their nationality and cultural influences need to be considered.

The following Table 1 provides the candidates with a clear overview. Afterward, they will be briefly introduced.

Table 1: Descriptive Table of the Participants.

	Abbreviation	Gender	Origin	Role/ Division	Working Experience
1.	ML	Male	Germany	Customer Advisory	>3 Years
2.	FB	Female	Germany	New Ventures and Technologies	3-5 Years
3.	MM	Male	Egypt/ United States	Customer Success Partner	< 5 Years

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[1] Based on information from the company's corporate website. To preserve anonymity, this is not listed here. An excerpt from this can be requested from the author of the thesis.

4.	FM	Male	Germany	Business Consulting	>3 Years
5.	JT	Female	Bulgaria	Product Management	>3 Years
6.	FP	Male	Germany	Digital Business Management	>3 Years
7.	GC	Female	Spain	Customer Success Partner in Digital Supply Chain	Years
8.	DJ	Male	Germany	Digital Business Management	>3 Years
9.	DA	Male	India	Consulting for Finance Solutions	3-5 Years
10.	TB	Male	Germany	After Sales	>3 Years
11.	AD	Female	Austria	Customer Success Partner	3-5 Years
12.	LF	Male	Germany	Specialist Customer Success Partner	3-5 Years
13.	ADG	Female	Italy	Customer Success Partner	3-5 Years
14.	FS	Male	Germany	Customer Success Partner	3-5 Years

Source: Own elaboration.

The first participant (ML) is German and has worked in the company for less than three years. He is working in Customer Advisory and in a group trying to accomplish a *Tell It Like It Is* company culture and therefore is organizing events distributing the importance of this approach. Their approach is to open up, appreciate, and value all emotions, even imperfect workflows. This approach is his primary touchpoint around the topic of emotional validation. Based on his working experience, he shared an incident that he claimed was due to miscommunication (Participant 1, 2023).

The second participant (FB) is German and has been working with the company for four years. After her studies, she started to work for the New Ventures and Technologies department. She is working for her team manager and therefore has a wide range of knowledge of different topics. Because of her studies, she also worked for an American team leader and can tell some differences between German and American leadership styles. Thus, she is organizing and participating in international events, for example, with colleagues from India, Italy, The United States, Australia, and Japan. During the interview, she opened up about an event that occurred but turned out with a positive outcome (Participant 2, 2023).

(MM) is the third interviewee of the case study, and his origin is Egypt. He moved with his parents to Abu Dhabi; after that, he lived in Australia for a few years, returned to Dubai, and is now living for nine years in Texas. Therefore, he said to have multiple cultural influences and knows situations regarding cultural conflicts. His work experience is over five years, but he only works for around one year for the case studies company. Nevertheless, his experience will be used for this thesis, as he would handle the situation the same way nowadays. Since all of

his working experience was in the States, he would call himself culturally American regarding business (Participant 3, 2023).

Participant number four (FM) is in his third year and works for the Business Consulting department of the company. His origin is German. He has not heard anything regarding emotional validation yet but referred to some company guiding principles. He shared a situation in which he openly criticized a procedure by his supervisor regarding a process, the conflict that arose from the situation, and the outcome (Participant 4, 2023).

Going on with participant five (JT), she is Bulgarian and has been working for one year for the company. Currently, she works for a product management team. Since it is her first job, her main goal in the first year was to get to know the company and the working processes. During her onboarding process, she did not learn anything about emotional validation. Still, she knows about general guidelines and that managers have more specific ones about how to behave with their employees. During her interview, she opened up about an event that occurred in the beginning (Participant 5, 2023).

The next interviewee is (FP) number six. He is a German employee studying Digital Business Management in cooperation with the company. He has nearly been working for three years with the company and has gone through different departments. Therefore, he has made several experiences with supervisors and colleagues (Participant 6, 2023).

Following is the seventh interviewed person (GC). She was born in Spain and is working for the company in Madrid. She previously worked for another company and changed over a year ago to her current role. She works as a Customer Success Partner in Digital Supply Chain. She has never seen guidelines or something similar about emotional validation in a working environment. She explained a situation in which she felt frustrated (Participant 7, 2023).

The next candidate was (DJ), the eighth one, and his origin was Germany. He is a cooperate student in Digital Business Management and has worked for almost three years for the company. Due to his studies, he has been in four different divisions and knows teams from Product Management, Sales, and IT background. Emotional Validation was a new terminology for him. Furthermore, he worked for a few months in California for the company and therefore worked together with different cultures (Participant 8, 2023).

Followed by number nine (AD), an Indish employee working for the Business Consulting team specializing in finance solutions products. Due to his previous international studies, which included cooperation with China, he has multiple intercultural experiences. His clients are based all around the world, so he visits the ones based in Europe onsite and the clients outside of Europe via video calls (Participant 9, 2023).

Participant Ten (TB) is German and has been working for the company for about one year. He works in a division consulting, but his field of responsibility is more After Sales. In general, he says that he is separating his emotions from work, so he does not need to handle some kind of emotional invalidation (Participant 10, 2023).

Case study participant eleven (AD) is from Austria and has been working with the company as a Customer Success Partner for about one year. Before joining the company, she worked in sales for other companies. Based on her job she also works in an international environment (Participant 11, 2023).

The twelfth participant (LF) of the case study is working as a Specialist Customer Success Partner for the company. He is German and has working experience between three and five years. He said he knows something about Active Listening and how to listen first and react adequately. However, Emotional Validation was a new term for him (Participant 12, 2023).

Following participant thirteen (ADG), working as a Customer Success Partner for the company based in Italy. She is Italian and has been working with colleagues from the US, Germany, Spain, and Turkey. She has been working with the company for around one year but has more professional experience from an Italian department working for an American company. Therefore, she noticed a difference in working and company culture between a strongly Italian department and her current more international company (Participant 13, 2023).

The last candidate is number fourteen (FS), a Customer Success Partner. He is German and has been working for the company for around four years. First, he started working in the German part of the company, and now he works in an international role. For him working in a sales role, emotional validation does not play a big part (Participant 14, 2023).

4.2. Categorizing

The thesis aims to examine how cultural differences impact the content and effectiveness of emotional validation in managing multicultural teams and identify best practices for emotional validation in cross-cultural management. In this chapter, it will be discussed the formation of codes and the reasons behind their creation. Following the eight steps of *Mayring* (2000), nine categories were formed to analyze the data. Building categories based on the participants' jobs and cultural backgrounds is essential to analyze the case study effectively. The categories help further understand their role in the company and allow the chance to explore if different cultures have different behavior within the case study. Inductive category building was chosen for this thesis because it will enable patterns, themes, and categories to emerge organically from the data rather than imposing preconceived ideas or theories onto it.

Four main categories were built regarding the participants' description of their emotionally invalidated situation. The first category is about the description of the problem itself. All the details about the incident, why they felt invalidated, and how it got to the situation in the first place are coded under the *situation* and followed by the category *Reaction*, which sums up all the behavior immediately after feeling invalidated. Additionally, to the immediate behavior, the complete behavior after the event is coded in *Reaction*. The next category is *Emotions* because it contains all the participants' feelings and emotions attached to the incident. The last category regarding the occurred situations is *Outcome*. The participants were asked if it affected their relationships and whether it was positive, negative attached, and long-term or short-term. Those

four categories will be the most important ones in analyzing the different behavior of the participants in unpleasant situations.

Three other categories were formed based on the participant's perception of the company. The first one was *Company Culture & Company Guidelines,* since they were asked at the beginning of their interviews if they knew something about emotional validation at their company. The second is about their experiences *Working Cross-Cultural* inside and outside their company, with international colleagues, supervisors, and clients. The last category is *Emotional Validation* because some participants also gave positive examples and what is essential for them to or belongs to their understanding of emotional validation. The coding is illustrated based on the constructed category system in the following Table 2.

Table 2: Code Description.

Category	Definition	Quote/ Example	Rule of Coding
Job	Job title and description.	"New Ventures and Technologies. This is in the area within the CTO Board Area and deals with the innovation of the BTP, i.e., the business technology platform, which is a major product of […], and we investigate and research what are the future needs of our customers, what do they need and how can we meet those needs." (Participant 2)	All the information the participant shared about their current job. Also, descriptions of previous jobs.
Cultural Background	Cultural background and nationality.	"I was born in Egypt, and I moved to […] Abu Dhabi, […]. And then I moved to Australia for a few years, then I came back to Dubai, and then I came to Houston, […]. Texas. […] so the past nine years I have been in Texas." (Participant 3)	Every piece of information about the participant's heritage and cultural influences.
Situation	Description of the incident.	„It is just that they accept meetings, but they do not attend, and then they postpone them, and they are like, no, I have had an emergency." (Participant 7)	All given information about what led to and was happening in the emotional invalidation situation.
Reaction	The reaction after emotional invalidation.	"What I have then ultimately made as the very first, […] I actually said, yes, ok, we understand, and we also see a, or we accept now times so? I then tried to make it sound as neutral as possible from my side, that we accept this feedback somewhere." (Participant 12)	The immediate reaction after the event occurred and further reactions.
Emotions	The emotions of the participants dealing with their emotional invalidation.	"Oh my God. No, I felt horrible again. Like I felt, you know, I felt insecure because I felt like whatever I would do was not ever enough or right." (Participant 13)	All emotions the participants felt before, during, and after emotional invalidation.
Outcome	The outcome of the situation.	"Yes, so would you say overall the situation is then definitely a breach of trust and negative as an outcome." (Participant 6)	The short- and long-term outcome of the situation. Additionally, the effects and behavior after the

			emotional invalidation.
Company Culture & Company Guidelines	Perceived company culture and guidelines about emotional validation.	"So what we have, for example, which is often mentioned, is this motto Build bridges not silos. This is a little bit in the direction of saying okay, you want to work together collaboratively." (Participant 14) "So guidelines exist with a very high degree of certainty, but that does not mean that I also know." (Participant 10)	Everything the participants perceived about emotional validation in the company. Also, how the participant describes the company culture.
Working Cross-Cultural	Experiences working with different cultures.	"Right now, I am working. Not only with Italians like I work also with the I do not know the Prague office. I have a client in Greece, for example, like, now it is much more international. My boss is Spanish, for example." (Participant 13)	All the experiences with cross-cultural interaction of the participants.
Emotional Validation	Experiences with emotional validation.	"Yes, exactly, so that the continuous dialog, the openness, but also that the praise and show potential, that is what I would say in my case. These are all aspects that I find fantastic." (Participant 2)	Situations the participants shared about working with the company, they interpreted as emotional validation.

Source: Own elaboration.

4.3. Data Analysis

This chapter presents the results of the case study. It summarizes the most important findings regarding the goal of this thesis, in gaining a deeper understanding of emotional invalidation in cross-cultural management, and gives practical implications. This chapter begins with general findings, then uses the category system to guide comparisons of results. In total, 19 individual negative situations were reported. Table 3 summarizes the incidents and includes a short description of the occurred situation, the reaction to it, and the outcome. Only these three categories are illustrated, as they are the most suitable for comparing just the situations with the focus on what happened. Therefore, emotions are not included but described as results in the data analysis, as they are relevant to the discussion.

Table 3: Summary of Incidents.

Pp2	Situation	Reaction	Outcome
1, ML	- He prepared things not properly because some information was lacking. - He got time pressure from a supervisor. - He felt overlooked and not really considered.	- Overwhelmed. - Talked with colleagues and supervisor to reflect on the situation and view it from different angles	- No Long-Term negative outcome: The situation got resolved. - He learned to give colleagues more time to get to know each other and

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[2] Pp is the abbreviation for Participant

			- their art of working.
	- He was on vacation. - Regarding a given group work, his expectations from the team could not fulfill	- He understood what they meant, but despite this, he exchanged his team members for the future.	- No final resolution was found. - He was thinking about how to avoid information loss and standstill for projects in the future.
2, FB	- The supervisor promised something but did not fulfill the promise. - The supervisor's communication between her and the rest of the team was not transparent. - Therefore, it came to misunderstandings about her responsibilities inside the team.	- She communicated that her expectations were not fulfilled. - She attempted to address her colleagues directly to increase her level of responsibility.	- The situation is still in the process of resolution. - Learning: Ask quicker for what you are entitled to.
3, MM	- He has spent plenty of time on a big project, and after presenting the results, he was told it was not valuable for the company. - He and his colleagues did not get a lot of guidance when starting the project.	- He expressed his emotions to his supervisors. - They argued against the supervisors' opinion and asked for the sense of the project. - And he tried to understand why. - He asked how it could be avoidable in the future.	- He left the company afterward. - New values and conditions became more important for him for his next employer.
	- As a team leader, he had an incident with an employee who never fulfilled his expectations. - They have agreed on new key figures that must be achieved. - The employee was consistently unable to achieve the common goals.	- He directly searched for an open conversation and asked what the problem was. - He offered to set smaller goals that can be achieved so that there is an increase in performance. - He reached a compromise with the employee, meeting halfway and trying to understand their perspective to work towards their goals together.	- The employee reached some improvements towards getting the aimed numbers but never achieved the required level. - The employee never reached a promotion because he was underperforming, but they agreed because he worked well with clients.
4, FM	- He has noticed improvements in the project's implementation and reported it to his supervisor. - The supervisor was in charge of the project and felt attacked regarding their actions. - The supervisor responded that the participant just lacked enough knowledge and would not be involved enough. - This led to a dissonance in content and tensions between the two.	- He shared the situation with externals to get an objective view of the incident. - He asked for an open discussion. - He developed a clear and well-prepared argument. - This led to a special workshop to discuss the problematic incidents.	- The workshop concluded with a positive outcome of collaborative cooperation toward achieving the project's objectives. - The project's content has progressed due to his efforts.

5, JT	-	When she was a new company member, she asked for an open conversation about the timing of her first vacation. - The supervisor postponed the conversation several times and dismissed the participant, saying it was unimportant. - The supervisor reacted in a very irritating and annoying. - The supervisor did not take the time to talk to the participant. - She said that her supervisor did not care about the circumstances and that they were unimportant.	-	She always tried to explain herself and her reasons why it was important to her. - At some point, there was a meeting to discuss the topic.	-	She was able to take her vacation as she wanted. - She learned the importance of focusing on essential information rather than sharing personal details.
	-	None of the involved stakeholders in her project showed interest or listened. - Sexist comments were made about her.	-	She reacted in a quick-witted manner. - She deflected comments and tried to place her arguments.	-	She learned to be more confident. - She finished her project as required.
6, FP	-	He made a presentation only to inform his team about product news. - He got positive feedback and went on vacation. - After returning from his vacation, subsequent work had to be invested because it did not meet the colleague's expectations. Therefore, he got negative feedback from his colleague after all.	-	He wrote an apology email promising to pay more attention in the future. - He shared his feelings and opinion about the situation. - After receiving a response, he reached out again and called her to clarify the incident.	-	The colleague expressed regret for their hasty actions, and together they reviewed the case to prevent any future misunderstandings.
	-	For him, a significant promise was not fulfilled. - Excuses were presented as arguments. - He felt a lack of appreciation for his great work. - Additionally, the Budget for his department got shortened. - He has given indications to remove promises that are publicly accessible. These provide a falsely positive image of the company since the promise is no longer carried out in this form. - The board of his managers has commented that he is annoyed by the topic and does not want to hear more complaints about it.	-	He shared his emotions with externals to calm down and gain a more objective view. - Every occasion with the supervisor was used to discuss the issue and when the promise was maintained. - He collected arguments and adequately prepared them. - He confronted the supervisor in front of the whole team.	-	The promise was not fulfilled. - The participant has come to accept that it will not happen and has stopped asking about it. - The relationship and trust with the company got damaged.
7, GC	-	She depended on colleagues that did not meet her expectations. - They postponed several meetings. - They accepted meetings and did not attend.	-	She discussed the situation with colleagues and her supervisor.	-	The supervisor offered to talk to the supervisor of the affected colleagues.

			- She was trying to accept that it was not her fault and that she couldn't change anything about it.
8, DJ	- Expectations were not fulfilled. - He relied on a supervisor's commitment, which in his opinion, took too much time.	- Did not talk with anyone about it.	- Learning for the future to discuss problems previously.
9, DA	- He was requested to participate in an image video based on his physical appearance. - As it is more appealing to have a multicultural image. - The same incident happened in his consulting team. - In order to impress their key client in Asia, they included their Asian colleagues in the picture, even though the colleagues had no involvement in the project.	- The affected persons have raised the issue anonymously in a large online round and expressed their negative feelings. - They were not taken seriously with their concerns. - Instead, they were laughed at.	- So far, no concurring solution. - He was uncertain if he would express his negative opinions in the future since they might not be taken seriously and could be ridiculous.
	- He experienced the feeling of doing useless tasks because the supervisor did not tell him about any of its values. - He was not feeling valued.	- He shared his frustration with colleagues. - They motivated him to speak sooner with the supervisor. - He openly expressed his concerns and communicated his dissatisfaction with his supervisor. - In the discussion he shared an example.	- He was informed that his work had been partially used further. - It had merely been a communicative misunderstanding.
10, TB	- He did not remember one specific situation. - If somebody forgets to answer, he dislikes it.	- He tries to separate his personal feelings from work professionality.	- He is not taking things personally at work.
11, AD	- She opened up about a problem/ a wish for improvement with her supervisor. - First, her supervisor agreed. - The supervisor took it personally and said either she would shut her mouth or she could leave the company.	- She explained that it was nothing against her supervisor personally but that they had agreed on that before. - After getting threatened, she kept quiet because she felt nothing would change.	- She would not stay with her supervisor. - She did not feel heard or understood. - Trust in the company about "safe Space" was disrupted.
	- She was in a virtual international meeting. - She was laughing about something off-topic, and an American colleague confronted her about why she was disrespecting his colleague by laughing about a private problem.	- She texted the guy asking why he did not just directly come to her. - They talked to share their feelings about the event.	- Ultimately, there were no harmful long-term consequences with the colleague, and everything turned out well.

	-	She was confronted with this issue in front of the whole team and managers.	-	The colleague apologized for misinterpreting the situation.	
12, LF	- - - -	He should support an event with a colleague. They did not get many insights and thought they performed well. Afterward, a colleague came up and gave them negative feedback. The named colleague expected more additional work from them.	- -	He tried to be as objective as possible. Then he justified his actions and accepted the feedback.	- - - He should support an event with a After their talk, he thinks that both parties still feel misunderstood. He did not open an extensive discussion about it. The colleague never asked for their support again.
	- -	Expectations were not met. He neither felt valued nor taken seriously during his time there because his supervisor was only talking about herself and not listening to him.	- -	He reflected his situation with his team, which confirmed him that his problem is common. The team gave anonymous group feedback on what they wanted to change in communication.	- -	He reflected his situation After the given feedback, the supervisor tried to improve her communication style. Now he is immediately giving her feedback if something negative comes up.
13, ADG	- - - - - -	A lot of pressure from her superiors. It is best for her to strictly adhere to the instructions given by her supervisors without deviating from them. Supervisors react aggressively if employees do something outside of the norm. They expected her to know what to do without giving any guidelines. Not able to do anything right. The supervisors always found a way to insult her.	- - -	In the beginning, she accepted everything and did what she was told. She started to be aggressive as well in return. She stood up and defended herself.	- - - A lot of pressure from her superiors. After standing up for herself, the supervisor got a bit friendlier. She grew as a person and learned her value. Finally, she left the company and started working with the current company.
14, FS	- - - 	He did not explain one specific situation. He explained that there is no emotional validation in sales because all that matters are the revenues. Dealing with clients who assume he is only interested in selling products can be challenging for him. He must maintain a delicate communication balance to ensure clients feel emotionally validated.	- - - 	Being honest with the clients, he preferred a good long-term customer relationship and not only the revenues. He invites them to pleasant events to show them their meaning to him. He was inviting his manager to meetings as a form of showing respect.	- - 	He did not explain one specific situa His goal is to ensure the satisfaction of his clients over a long period of time. Therefore he tries to please them so they do not feel emotionally invalidated.

Source: Own elaboration.

Twelve out of the fourteen participants shared at least one specific situation in which they experienced emotional invalidation. Two participants said they had never experienced such a situation with their company. One of them claimed that he is working in Sales and, therefore, emotional validation does not matter that much as they are focused on revenues. Their goal,

after all, is to make the clients happy; he sometimes senses emotional invalidation from the customers' side. He did not share a specific event but said that he tries to be honest and give them attention in the form of invitations or to tell them how important they are to him and the company (Participant 14, 2023). Participant 10 (2023) said he tries to separate his feelings from work to be professional and therefore has never experienced emotional invalidation.

Emotional Validation in Corporate Guidelines

Interestingly, none of the participants have heard about emotional validation before signing up for the case study. All of them said that a lot of guiding principles exist in the company but not regarding behavior rules between employees. Some of them said that they knew about behavior guidelines for supervisors., but none of them had seen these guidelines. A typical statement from participants: ”Like I will not say that I know that there are no guidelines. I would say that I do not know. I have not heard of them.“ (Participant 13, 2023). Two concepts that several participants named as well-known and company-spread knowledge are *Build Bridges Not Silos* and *Tell It Like It Is.* Participant 1 (2023) described it as the following:

> That's one of the pillars that you also get, for example, during onboarding. It's Tell It Like IT Is. [The company] itself also stands for a very open and diverse work culture. That means it's basically very welcome to address things that have gone wrong. (Participant 1, 2023)

With the further development of this thesis and the results, it will be shown that this has not been the case for all participants so far.

Emotionally Invalidated Situations

This section starts with the central part about the emotional invalidation of the participants in a specific situation and how they reacted. The 19 shared situations ended with various emotions, reactions, and outcomes. The following results will be subdivided into four categories, starting with situations with positive outcomes, such as learning for the future, followed by situations perceived but without a learning effect. Thirdly, the situations with short-term negative outcomes are described, and then the situations with long-term negative outcomes are presented.

Emotionally Invalidated Situations –Positive Outcomes with a Learning

Participant 1 (2023) described a situation in preparing customer information sheets. He was new in his position as a customer advisor and lacked some important information but had a deadline to meet. Participant 1 did not feel that his supervisor was paying attention to him and that he was struggling to get the finished document. “And that is what I was missing at that moment, and at that moment, it also frustrated me a bit.” (Participant 1, 2023). Because he felt frustrated, he shared the situation with a dear colleague, whom he called a reference person. After reflecting the situation, he told his supervisor that he needed more time to get into the

workflow and called the outcome positive. He learned to communicate more previously if something bothered him (Participant 1, 2023).

Participant 2 (FB) had a similar experience and also learned from it for the future to ask earlier for what she is entitled to. She was promised some responsibilities during her application process, which she did not get while working. Furthermore, her supervisor was not transparent with the other team members and did not tell them about FBs' new role. This led to continuous misunderstandings until she spoke with her supervisor and colleagues. "I would say that I was disappointed and perhaps also briefly frustrated because I first had to think about how I should approach this now and how I can change it to feel more comfortable?" She said that talking about her issue improved the situation, and she shared her frustration with certain colleagues but not with everyone. Therefore, she learned to communicate earlier about an issue to resolve it faster (Participant 2, 2023).

Participant 8 (DJ) relied on a commitment from a supervisor, and his expectations were not met. Because he did not want to bother his supervisor, he waited instead of directly asking again for his commitment. He did not discuss the situation with anyone because he thought it was not worth making a problem. He felt being in an unfortunate situation. However, he took the situation as a learning for his future and will ask earlier next time for a commitment so he can properly do his tasks (Participant 8, 2023).

Following with a more detailed description of a more intense situation. Participant 4 (2023) described an incident where he was put on a new project. He noticed things that made less sense and asked his supervisor critical questions about the business model behind the application. The supervisor was responsible for the project and invested a lot of passion. The manager perceived Participant 4's critical questions as an attack and reacted by accusing him of not having enough knowledge to understand the technical background. Participant 4 perceived this reaction as emotionally invalid because, from his point of view, he simply wanted to get the project moving. This led to a certain tension and dissonance between the two. Participant 4 first reaction was relatively calm because he did not know how to react appropriately. He thought it was demotivating and took the feedback home and discussed it with his family. He did not share his emotions with someone from the company. "I found the situation quite frustrating, honestly […]. Also, still a little bit of incomprehension about this defensive attitude." His reaction after talking to his family to win a more objective view was to build a more precise line of reasoning and justify his arguments better, aiming at working together toward a common goal. He could present his prepared arguments at a one-day workshop in which other employees and his supervisor participated to work collaboratively towards a company-useful business model. Participant 4 said that the outcome was positive for him because it was less fighting with each other and more working for a common goal. As a learning for him, he will question the opponents' motives before getting into such a situation (Participant 4, 2023).

Participant 5 (2023) described a situation with her manager at the beginning of her employment with the company. Because she was new, she wanted an open conversation about the reason why she wanted to take her vacation during a certain period of time. Several times her meetings

got postponed, followed by the dismissed message that it was unimportant for the manager. In Participant 5´s perception, her supervisor acted irritated and annoyed. Because the manager did not take the time to talk to her, she perceived the situation as unpleasant, which made her sad. Participant 5 reacted slightly panicked. Therefore, she started to justify herself, which annoyed her supervisor even more. The situation's outcome was a meeting with the result that she could take her vacation as she wished. Learning for her was not to share so many private details and focus on the essential things. "Here, my feelings do not play such a big role." (Participant 5, 2023).

The situation that Participant 12 shared in the interview was about a supervisor who did not fulfill his expectations. This feeling came from the fact that, in his eyes, the supervisor did not meet her responsibilities as a manager but was very self-centered. He never felt that he could easily talk to her about his issues, which in his eyes, is one of the most important tasks of a manager. This created disappointment and demotivation because he wanted to develop himself further; in his eyes, managers are essential for that. He asked his team for advice, but they could not offer solutions as they faced the same problems. Consequently, those problems also affected him. However, they told him that a different communication style should be chosen if he wanted to achieve certain things. In addition, the entire team has collected negative feedback and anonymously brought it to the manager so that she had a chance to improve. Since then, things have gotten better, according to Participant 12. He tries to look at the situation positively and has learned to give direct feedback to his manager and not just be satisfied but see that change is possible (Participant 12, 2023).

Emotionally Invalidated Situations –Positive Outcomes

Another situation Participant 5 described was about collaboration with computer scientists in which she volunteered to educate about the gender gap in the IT industry. The goal was how to best convince women about IT. She was the only woman in the meeting. Her problem was: "I was the only one who was so really excited.". She felt that no one listened to her and felt relatively less valued. At the end of the meeting, even sexist remarks were made to her, which is controversial. It was a relevant topic, so she felt unfair and uncomfortable. In this environment, she has been quick-witted because her colleagues have not taken such an authoritarian role for her. As an outcome, she is glad to have reacted confidently (Participant 5, 2023).

Participant 7 (2023) shared a situation in her team in which she depended on colleagues that did not meet her expectations and, therefore, suffered in doing her job well regarding her clients. She depended on her colleagues' knowledge to deliver all information perfectly to her customers, who ignored her. The colleagues accept meetings, will not show up, hand in an excuse for their absence and postpone the meeting, and are not showing up again.

> It's like there's an internal process they're not accomplishing, and I'm just. I'm tired from, you know, my hands are tied, and it's like nothing I can do. […] Yeah, it's frustrating. […] I mean, I get angry and upset. (Participant 7, 2023)

After feeling frustrated, she talked to her colleagues and asked for guidance. They responded,

> It is very usual to have […] account executives ignore you, and then there is something you can expect. Like sometimes you are lucky, and they do not ghost you, and sometimes you are unlucky, and you are ignored. (Participant 7, 2023)

Because Participant 7 was still frustrated, she shared the situation with her manager, who replied similarly to her colleagues because it was a known internal problem. However, her manager offered that in critical scenarios, she would talk to the managers of the problematic colleagues. She described the outcome positively because she knew her supervisor would help her in the worst case (Participant 7, 2023).

> I would say that is not a solution, but I also need to think it's mostly in me to understand that it is not my fault and that I should not be so worried about it. […] I need to be realistic. I understand that it is not my fault, I am doing my job correctly, and it should not be a bother, or I should not be anxious about it. (Participant 7, 2023)

Participant 6 described two different scenarios in which he felt emotionally invalidated. The first one was an internal presentation to inform about news. Participant 6 created it and consulted with the corresponding colleague before his vacation to determine whether everything was adequate. The deadline for the presentation was during his two-week vacation, so he handed over the finished presentation to his colleague. When he returned from vacation, he saw an email from this colleague, which gave him negative feedback indicating that she needed to revise some things. Since it was his first negative feedback in the company, he described his feelings as follows. "I was a bit shocked at first and did not quite know how to react […]. On the other hand, it was just a bit incomprehensible for me." His reaction was to wait one day, and the following day, he apologized in an email and said that the situation was unpleasant for him. The colleague answered again that it should not appear meanly from her side. Participant 6 called his colleague personally during the week to clarify the situation. Thus, the outcome for him is positive since he had the opportunity to have an open conversation with her. Still, he said it didn't necessarily improve the relationship if not disrupted it. He will be more careful and attentive to his colleague regarding his tasks (Participant 6, 2023).

Participant 11 described two different scenarios in which she felt emotionally invalidated. The first was in the international context of a sizeable online team meeting. So far, the series of meetings has always been about pure knowledge sharing. Participant 11 sat in a room with a work colleague friend for the meeting, participating online. The attention was only half on the meeting, and they made jokes in parallel. While a colleague talked about his grandma's death anniversary, unfortunately, one of the jokes by her colleague made Participant 11 laugh. Another colleague saw Participant 11 online laughing and asked her in front of the whole team, including managers, why she was laughing about it. She then had to react with a spontaneous excuse. Afterward, she told her colleague that his action of blaming her during the online meeting was not ok for her at all and asked him why he did that in front of all participants of the meeting. She had already told the concerned colleague that she had not laughed about him. The

colleague explained to her that he wanted to stand up for his friend and misperceived the situation. He then set her an appointment to apologize and clarify the whole matter. Since the situation was resolved and did not involve any long-term consequences, Participant 11 would say it had a positive outcome (Participant 11, 2023).

Emotionally Invalidated Situations –Short-Term Negative Outcomes

Participant 3 described two different situations, one from an employee's perspective and one from a team leader's perspective. Both occurred before he joined the company. Starting with the situation as a team leader. He had an employee on his team who consistently failed to meet target metrics. The job description included making phone calls to customers, which was one of the key metrics. The goal was 65%, and the employee was at 20% at the beginning. Participant 3 tried to set small goals together to get to 30% and then up to 40%. Unfortunately, the progress was not achieved either. He kept trying to talk to the employee to find out the problem. At some point, the employee told him he was uncomfortable making phone calls and would make up for it with emails instead. As a result, they met in the middle and agreed on a new target of 50%. After a month, nothing has changed again. Participant 3 tried to motivate his employee and stay positive because he did well at other tasks, but his manager's expectations were constantly unmet. At a certain point, it was clear that the expectations would never be met. Participant 3 again sought an open discussion and clarified that he could not give him a bonus or promotion with the KPIs that were not being delivered but that he did not have to worry about losing his job. That was the outcome of the situation, according to Participant 3, neither positive nor negative. Nevertheless, because it never fully got resolved, rather a negative short-term outcome (Participant 3, 2023).

Participant 9 described two different situations. The first one is about a feeling of low appreciation. He felt unappreciated because he was given tasks and had to complete them under time pressure, but then he was never told anything about the result or the purpose of the task. He felt he was doing meaningless tasks just to keep him busy, which made him angry. In addition, there was disappointment, frustration, and a little anger. His reaction to the situation was to first seek advice from colleagues. They encouraged him to raise the issue with his manager openly. At a quarterly meeting, he was asked for his feedback and then asked his supervisor whether his tasks were being used further. He was then told that they were relevant and still being used. This, in turn, made Participant 9 very happy. As an outcome, he would not let a problem become so prominent in the future and would address it directly and openly. Furthermore, he sees the situation retrospectively as a misunderstanding, not necessarily negative but not positive (Participant 9, 2023).

Participant 12 shared another situation in which he assisted with organizing an event. The main task was to talk to customers and simultaneously report what was happening at the event via social media and think about content to post afterward. At the event day, the responsible person, a colleague who asked for support, approached him again and distributed additional tasks. According to his perception, the customer event was a complete success. After the event, the responsible approached him and his colleague, told them that she was disappointed, and gave

negative feedback. They did not expect this and felt insulted. Her feedback was that the tasks were not performed well enough for her. One example was printing QR codes; doing so took her too long. Participant 12 described his feelings as the following.

> So, I would say initially I was confused. Then frustrated to a certain degree, and then you also become […] a bit aggressive, not in the aggressive sense, but I then had the feeling you now […] to defend your point of view […] and felt unfairly treated then ultimately.

His reaction was to take the feedback in and try to be objective about the situation, and then he justified his actions. The feedback turned into a small discussion because the responsible colleague could not quite understand that they were also responsible for the customers on-site and not only for organizational matters. On the other hand, Participant 12 expressed that what is expected must be articulated more clearly beforehand. Participant 12 would not see the situation's outcome as neutral but slightly negative because he still felt misunderstood after the conversation, even though he was wrongly accused. Nevertheless, since it was an additional, voluntary task and usually not in his field of responsibility, he did not want to make a big problem. Since then, this colleague has not asked if he would like to support an event again (Participant 12, 2023).

Emotionally Invalidated Situations –Long-Term Negative Outcomes

Participant 6 described a second, much more intense situation for him. This is about a promise that compelled him to work for the company. The promise represented a certain kind of appreciation for him because working abroad would have been remarkable. The company never kept its promise. First, it could not be maintained because of the covid pandemic, but after that, the travel budgets were cut for his department. When Participant 6 realized his chances to go abroad might be denied, he discussed the issue every time talking to with manager. He aimed to show his passion for the topic because he felt upset, sad, and angry. Moreover, to this day, a video was on a publicly accessible platform where this promise continueed to be advertised. This has also greatly irritated Participant 6 because he said that a company in that dimension should not advertise with false promises. The direct manager and her leader had already raised the issue that he was annoyed by the discussion and that there was no false promise. However, the promise is still given in the video. The discussion intensified regarding a team-building event, and the individual team members were asked about their current mood. Participant 6 said openly that the topic made him angry because the video was still accessible, and savings were being made in his department. Finally, three or four months later, the company offered was that everyone could go abroad, but that they had to pay for outside the European Union. He clearly expressed his wish to see more commitment to himself and his colleagues from his manager and her team, as it also shows appreciation. The manager's general reaction was always understanding, but her hands were ultimately tied. Then Participant 6 started to accept the situation because there was nothing more he could have done.

> I say the relationship with the company is a bit broken because, in the beginning, we always got all the values for which [The company] stands to keep the promise. Yes, I have found for myself that [The company], just in my opinion, does not keep promises, and that's now what I go out there with, and I think I will not forget that either. (Participant 6, 2023)

The outcome of the whole situation for Participant 6 is strongly negative. (Participant 6, 2023)

The second situation in which Participant 9 felt emotionally invalidated happened to him similarly twice. The first time it happened to him while shooting an image film of the apprenticeship department, which should look as diverse as possible. It was his first week at the company, and, according to him, mainly non-European-looking employees were invited for the image film. The situation was unpleasant because the whole thing seemed fake to him, and he was upset about it. Since it was his first week, he did not show any reaction. Another time he noticed such discrimination was when he was part of a consulting project. The clients were settled in the Asian region, and pictures were taken for a marketing kick-off meeting to show what the company offers.

> [...] these colleagues, who also naturally looked a bit Asian, to put them in this picture and actually to exploit them for this somehow. So, they were actually invited to this event somehow because of their appearance, so they could simply be the [The company]-Asians, so to speak. That was a bit of a culturally absurd situation because they basically had nothing to do with the projects. About eleven, twelve people in the office had to do with the project. Still, for him, it was simply a matter of somehow culturally adapting and simply presenting what the customer wanted to see. (Participant 9, 2023)

This made Participant 9 uncomfortable, mainly because he had encountered a similar situation. The two colleagues involved kept trying to raise the issue with the manager, but little attention was paid to it. It was noticeable to both that they felt exploited and offended not because of their expertise but because of their appearance to have been invited to the event. After receiving no attention for the topic in advance, they wrote it on the agenda in a large anonymous round. They were smiled at instead of taken seriously. Participant 9 opinion was that it was not good management of the conflict. So far, no resolution to the situation has been found (Participant 9, 2023).

> [...] That is just one example of what speaks extremely against this corporate culture. And then we won't do something like that anymore because I don't know if the two colleagues would open up in the future or I wouldn't either. If this somehow burdens me here for a long time, these negative feelings, I also don't know if I would want to create such a conflict if it's all smiled at anyway. (Participant 9, 2023)

The other scenario Participant 3 described happened in the context of a large project assigned to him with other colleagues. A lot of effort and time was put into this project, and then, after the final presentation, they were told that it was not valuable. In doing so, he felt unappreciated,

frustrated, and upset. His work was not valued in his perception. The first reaction to the feedback was direct justification. "And then we were like expressing how much effort we had put in and that there wasn't as much guidance." He tried to start a discussion with his other responsible colleagues to determine what the project was ultimately good for. But they never got a verified answer. "So a lot of frustration. And also, I just felt like […] I wasn't being heard like that was the biggest feeling […]. I had some frustration. I had some comments, and nobody really cared to listen. And yeah, it was definitely negative. […] I was unhappy." The outcome of the whole situation was described by Participant 3 as strongly negative and ultimately one of the reasons why he also left the company. He did not want to let something like that happen to him again and therefore was looking for a company with values (Participant 3, 2023).

Participant 13 reports a situation in which she left her previous company and joined the company afterward. She worked for a company where it was expected to be constantly available and consistently deliver what the managers wanted. In doing so, one should recognize and pursue the goal without further guidelines. There was no space for her to use creativity or her brain. "We were encouraged to do what was the right thing, like the trivial thing. […] If this thing were not as expected, they would get mad at you. So, they would be like, are you stupid? […] And it would be aggressive." The situation with her managers has changed from bad to worse. Her initial reaction was overwhelming, so she cried due to the high stress and pressure. At some point, it turned into a kind of back-aggression. The pressure was so extreme that she sometimes did not even dare to leave her laptop just for a bathroom break. "I felt horrible again. Like I felt, you know, I felt insecure because I felt like whatever I would do was not ever enough or right." Over time, she has learned to respond more strongly and has countered her manager. In doing so, she made him realize he could not jump around with her anymore. She said that during her time there, she had to grow as a person and find her values. When she got to the point of saying that she would not take it anymore, she wanted to go to a company where the employees were treated better and, as a result, applied to the company (Participant 13, 2023).

The second situation of Participant 11 relates strongly to her relationship with her manager. She was in a company training program, and the program's second phase was too unstructured for her. Her most significant problem was her interaction with her manager. In her perception, the manager "lacks objectivity." "If she does not know the answer, she takes it personally." Participant 11 always told her manager her professional concerns, and her manager communicated her understanding. At some point, the manager said that Participant 11 was too negative. It came to the point when the manager said, "Either you stay and keep your mouth shut, or you can leave." Participant 11 perception was that the manager just wanted to "kiss her superiors' asses" and was relatively less focused on the team's problems. She describes her emotions in the situation as speechless.

> I was stunned because I thought I did not understand at all. A little not betrayed or cheated sounds so strong, but so along those lines. As a manager, her job is to keep everything that comes from the top with her and not have it sent down and understands what her staff's concerns are and then, in turn, objectively passes them up. (Participant 11, 2023)

This left Participant 11 puzzled, disappointed, and in a way, very angry. Her first reaction was to explain again, in other words, that it was nothing personal but purely objective. When that did not work again, Participant 11 decided to say nothing more and quietly bit her way through the last two months in the program, constantly nodding nicely. Overall, she lacked accountability. As an outcome of the situation, Participant 11 sees a disturbed relationship with the company values. Her safe space and openness to address everything were destroyed due to the situation.

> As a person, she is quite nice, but as a manager, I do not want her anymore. […] I would have quit a long time ago if the program should really go one year and not nine months. […] It sounds maybe too heavy, but for me, it's just important to know my manager really has the best for me in mind, is listening, and doesn't just think that she has to look good because this is her first management position. (Participant 11, 2023)

The whole situation is very negative for her, she will stay with the company, but after the program, she will start in another department (Participant 11, 2023).

Emotional Validation of the View of the Participants

Summarizing what the participants experienced as emotional validation or think it would be. Five participants shared values and moments in which they felt emotionally validated working for the company. Almost all of that happened in an international environment. Among other things, attentive listening, and the ability to express positivity are mentioned. When time is taken, thought is given to the issue and not simply dismissed. (Participant 1, 2023) It is also said that an emphatic manager who is praised when something goes well is preferred (Participant 2, 2023). When one is given appreciation for tasks or time and open discussion is wished (Participant 10, 2023). After leaving her previous one, participant 13 described her time at the company: "I have not had bad experiences like it's every everybody is very respectful." (Participant 13, 2023).

Experiences resulting from cross-cultural working

Regarding working cross-cultural, some information was provided by the participants. Most participants are settled in Germany, but as the company is international, almost all have had cross-cultural working experiences. From all the situations described, the participants worked with Americans, Australians, Austrians, Canadians, Czech, Chinese, English, French, Germans, Greeks, Indish, Italians, Japanese, Spanish, Swiss, Turkish, and Latin America. Those are the nationalities named explicitly by the participants, based on the company's internationality; there are further that are not mentioned. For example, Participant 13 worked for [The Company] Italy, but her manager was Spanish, and her team colleagues were from different continents (Participant 13, 2023). Some participants claimed that the time difference could be a challenge. A popular opinion was that you must communicate differently with other nations in a cross-cultural work environment. Participant 2 described that compared with other nationalities, the

Germans seem to be colder and more unapproachable working with Germans while Americans are more warmhearted, praise more and give positive feedback. As she learned once from a German manager: "No criticism is good criticism." (Participant 2, 2023). Regarding the Germans, as a non-German, Participant 13 described the Germans as organized and clear in their intentions. "Like nobody ever tried to, you know, made make me do something I did not want to do. Or, like, nobody ever runs away from their responsibilities." She said that everybody has their roles and activities. It seems structured because they set up meetings to talk about specific topics (Participant 13, 2023). Going over to the experience working with Americans from Participant 3, who works in the United States." In the US, in general. I would say people are direct. I would not necessarily say people are honest. I think people are honest only when you are honest with them. […] I would not say it's a thing to bounce. Most people just say what their boss wants to hear, unfortunately."(Participant 3, 2023). Additionally, Participant 8 worked for a few months for the company in Silicon Valley, California.

> I would say the American culture, at least in Silicon Valley, is very open compared to German culture. I don't find German culture fundamentally reprehensible or anything. Still, in German culture, I feel that opening simply takes longer. […] One of my colleagues even took me to a shooting range. (Participant 8, 2023)

After Participant 11 shared her issue about her manager with international colleagues, Americans reacted surprised. She was told that Americans would not get upset because they just quit and look for a new job without long notice periods (Participant 11, 2023). Participant 13's experience with Americans is that they would try to delegate a lot and do fewer complex tasks themselves. She would say Americans are very superficial and worry more about the form than the substance (Participant 13, 2023).

Participant 2 reported that with Asian colleagues, she noticed that they rarely say no, but try to rewrite it politely, which is why, for example, in a meeting with Japanese customers, she was not sure afterward whether everything was right or they were just being friendly. Furthermore, she reported that with the Japanese customers, more attention was paid to always being on time and meeting deadlines. It was important that it was communicated in a tangible and precise way and that not much was changed afterward. Whereas with the Australian customers, there was no finished briefing document shortly before the meeting, and after several times to ask, there was nothing from the Australians. She perceived the Australians as relaxed, laid-back, and sympathetic (Participant 2, 2023).

Participant 5 has reported consistently positive experiences with Indian colleagues. In his opinion, they are very sweet, and no situation arose in which something was wrong. (Participant 5, 2023) Furthermore, Participant 13 described a situation with a Turkish colleague. "What I observed was that she was completely unaware of reality. […] She would not be aware of the timing. Or, I do not know if she just was not putting her mind to work. Very unorganized and not aware of how much time takes." (Participant 13, 2023).

Summarizing the case study results, next to the findings based on the code description, participants reported their perception of the corporate culture, of emotional validation, and various

experiences working with colleagues from different cultural backgrounds. Figure 1 highlights the key findings of the participants' descriptions of what caused the situation in which they felt emotionally invalidated at work.
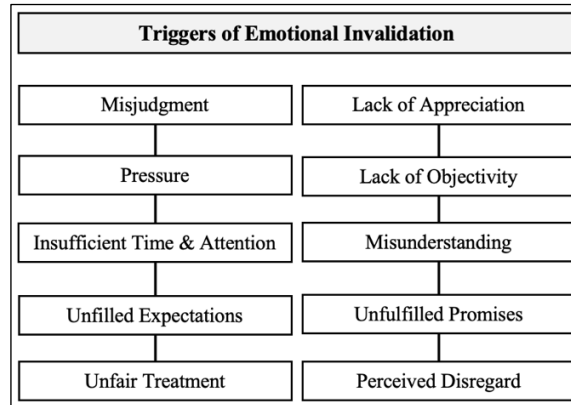
Figure 1. Triggers of Emotional Invalidation.
Source: Own elaboration.

Analyzing what caused the negative situation, the participants shared their emotions regarding the invalidation. In total fifteen different, what the participants interpreted as emotions, were named. Figure 2 shows all of them, sorted following the mentioned frequency, which marks frustration as the most named emotion. No cultural differences can be identified here.
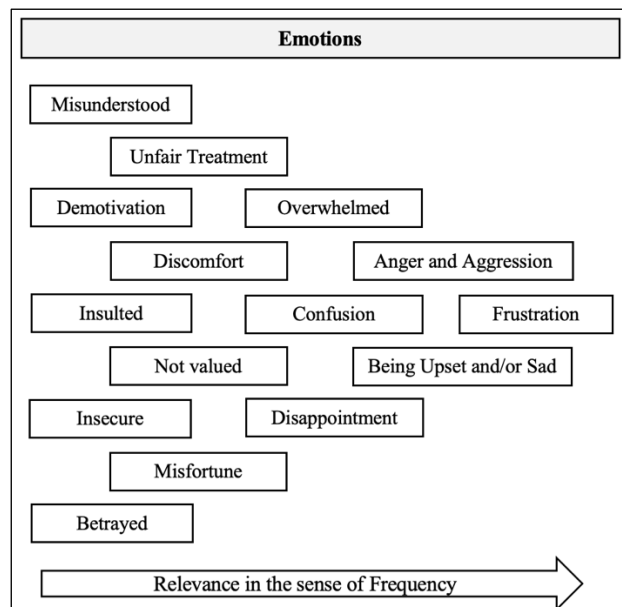
Figure 2. Perceived Emotions during Emotional Invalidation.
Source: Own elaboration.

The following Figure 3 illustrates the different reactions of the participants to the emotionally invalid work situation and their connections to their cultural background.
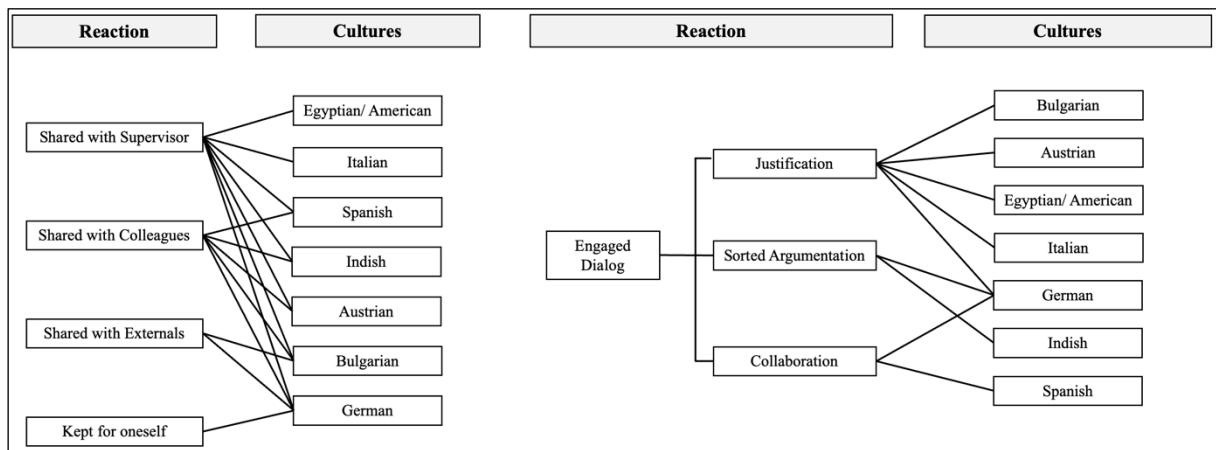
Figure 3. Cultural Differences in Reactions.
Source: Own elaboration.

The reactions to the described negative experiences varied among participants. Most of the participants shared the invalidation with their supervisor. Besides two participants all of them also shared the situation with colleagues. Only a few German participants kept the situation to themselves. The participants that chose to engage a dialog with the person who initiated the invalidation, reacted in different ways. The most used reaction was a justification for one's actions. Other participants decided to internalize their feelings or seek colleague advice and address the situation with a prepared line of arguments. Collaboration thus means that supervisors, who were not the triggering person in the case, collaboratively tried to support the participant in the best possible way and provided some kind of emotional validation.

Figure 4 is the final illustration presenting a summary of significant outcomes of emotional invalidation situations and their varying reasons. The results of the study can be divided into positive and negative categories. Negative outcomes are further divided into short-term and long-term outcomes, and the described reasons for that are shown by the participants. A separate section is dedicated to the positive outcomes showing the differently described learnings.
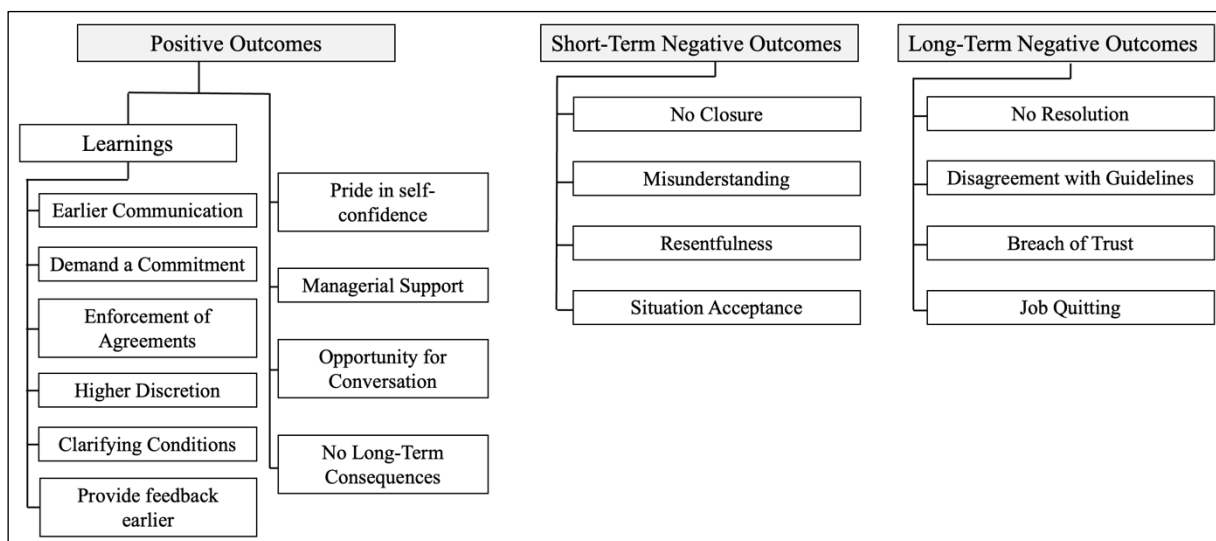

Figure 4. Summarized Outcomes.

A comprehensive figure that encapsulates all key findings is provided in Appendix B (see Figure 5). This figure serves as a succinct visual summary of the study's key findings.

5. DISCUSSION

A literature review was conducted, and a case study was performed to answer the research question of what the role of emotional invalidation in cross-cultural management is. This section discusses the main findings of this case study as well as the existing literature focusing on cultural differences in emotional validation. The implications of this research regarding the scientific field as well as resulting insights and recommendations for companies, will be reviewed. Eventually, the limitations of this work and the development of this field in the future will also be highlighted.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

As a baseline to be able to discuss and compare this study with other research in the field, two of the four tests by *Yin* (2014) were confirmed. The first test is crucial to ensure that the study being used accurately measures the goal of the study. After presenting the results, construct validity can be confirmed because the participants explained a situation of emotional invalidation, their emotions, reaction, and outcome. The second test regarding reliability can also be confirmed as the participants were all asked the same questions and shared their answers to the best of their ability (Yin, 2014b). Furthermore, this study highlights several sources of emotional invalidation at work. The study found that employees express consistent emotions and perceive emotional invalidity regardless of their cultural backgrounds. Moreover, the resulting emotions from the perceived emotional invalidity were similar among all seven national backgrounds. Possible reasons and different triggers of what cause emotional invalidation will be discussed.

The emotional responses in the study were triggered by various factors which can be seen in Figure 1 and Figure 2. All these situations fit within *Linehan's* (1997) definition of emotional invalidation, supporting the idea that emotional invalidation plays a role in not feeling valid, understandable, legitimate emotional responses or that their situations were not acknowledged. Accordingly, *Zielinski and Veilleux* (2018) have identified emotion invalidation as a phenomenon where an individual's expression of emotions or feelings is met with a response that appears to dismiss or deny the validity of those emotions. This can result in the individual feeling as though their emotions are being judged as incorrect or inappropriate (Zielinski & Veilleux, 2018). This definition is also consistent with the emotions described in the emotional invalidation of the case study´s participants. The study's results indicate that a misunderstanding or lack of understanding leads to frustration. Therefore, the addition of the definition by *Greville-Harris et al.* (2016) can also be confirmed, which states that feeling understood is a big part of

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emotional validation. *Shipton and Sillince´s* (2013) define validation as an event's actual experience aligning with what was anticipated. Invalidation occurs when the experience does not meet expectations (Shipton & Sillince, 2013). *Shipton and Sillince* (2013) definition can also be confirmed by the conducted study since there were several situations in which the participants referred to unfulfilled expectations. While *Linehan* (1997), *Shipton and Sillince* (2013), *Greville-Harris et al.* (2016), and *Zielinski and Veilleux* (2018) simply define emotional invalidation, *Shenk et al.* (2014) go even further and make possible assumptions about the reason why people react differently to invalidation. *Shenk et al.* (2014) make the assumption that the response depends on how invalidated people were validated by their parents as children, with the reasoning that this has a long-term effect on externalizing behaviors. Since no information on the childhood of the participants was collected, the assumption according to *Shenk et al.* (2014) cannot be confirmed with the study. However, this assumption is relevant for this thesis because behavioral triggers are a part of this paper to justify different reactions. An important difference here is that *Shenk et al.* (2014) and *Zielinski and Veilleux* (2018) refer, like *Linehan* (1997), to emotional dysregulation, which describes any excessive or poorly controlled mechanism or response (American Psychological Association, 2023d). In comparison, *Shipton and Sillince* (2013) base their definition on the personal construct theory after *Kelly* (1955) rather than *Linehan´s* (1997) focus on emotional dysregulation. This would mean that *Shipton and Sillince* (2013) approach to emotional invalidation at work moves away from psychological foundations to other factors that can trigger emotional invalidation.

This thesis highlights a range of emotional responses resulting from emotional invalidation at work. As can be seen in Figure 2, this study examines different negatively described emotions. These emotions coincide with *Shenk et al.* (2011) who assume that validation favors the regulation of individual emotional reactivity and that invalid responses trigger stronger emotional reactivity. This is in line with the observations made in this work's case study, as only two participants did not share any situations or emotions as they try to exclude emotions from work. This could be linked to the paper of *Schreiber et al.* (2022), who define this behavior as emotional self-invalidation. *Participant 14* (2023) states that his department does not encourage emotions. *Schreiber et al.* (2022) further explain that emotional self-invalidation includes the belief that one's emotions are unwanted, which is completely in line with Participant 14´s behavior, confirming their research. *Abdallah et al.* (2011) investigated discourses of transcendence and provided a way to avoid invalidations while bringing about change. However, *Abdallah et al.* (2011) point out that these discourses are often temporary and may ultimately contribute to their own dissolution. This may suggest that although avoiding declarations of invalidity may have short-term benefits, it may lead to long-term problems (Abdallah et al., 2011). In addition to the two participants who generally try to leave emotions out of the equation, two other participants did not openly address their situation. Based on *Abdallah et al.* (2011), this could mean that these participants are trying to pursue short-term benefits and avoid problems.

Another approach to why the participants might have behaved similarly could be because of organizational culture. According to *Alvesson* (2002) and *Ortega-Parra et al.* (2013), the employees inside an organization align their behavior with the company's norms, values, and

beliefs. That could be a reason for this study's findings, that the participants' perception of emotional invalidation was similar across different cultures. Hiring influences the organizational culture (Agbo & Okeoma, 2020), affecting emotional invalidation. Furthermore, *Rivera L.'s* (2012) study confirms the argument that hiring is more than just a skill selection process, as he provides empirical evidence that a shared culture, particularly lifestyle characteristics, is critical to employer hiring. If only like-minded people are hired, groupthink can occur. *Janis* (1972) defines this as deficient cognitive processing in which individuals suppress their doubts about a proposal to maintain a sense of conformity within the group. This can lead to harmonious cooperation or set a limit at which it is questionable whether the same thinking remains positive because there is a risk of losing critical thinking and isolating the group (Janis, 1972). Supporting the thought of *Janis* (1972), at a certain point, like-mindedness can also become a disadvantage. From the case study, it can be inferred that like-mindedness must have failed at some level, as the company has tried to introduce concepts such as "Build Bridges not Silos" or "Tell It Like It Is" to promote employee well-being. However, simultaneously, participants pledged that these concepts are not consistently obeyed. Groupthink cannot be confirmed by the results of this work. Some of the situations were strong enough to trigger a breach of trust with the company; therefore, a risk of losing conformity within the group was taken.

Looking at the cultural differences as a factor for altering the responses to emotional invalidation, it was found that different cultures may influence the behavior. Figure 3 combines different reactions with the cultures of the participants. It could be deduced that reactions and outcomes diverge culturally, despite feeling similar about emotional validation end emotions. Compared with *Hofstede's* (1991; 2010) introduced culture dimensions, other behaviors and, thus, reactions to emotionally invalid situations can be understood and justified based on different cultures. Cultures with high individualism and low power distance are more likely to openly address problems with their supervisor (Hofstede, 1991). These include in the conducted case study Germany, the United States, Italy, Austria, and Spain. However, the power distance is comparatively higher in Italy and Spain (Hofstede Insights, 2023). This applies to the participants' situations since the participant from Italy did not dare to address the situation initially with her supervisors. On the other hand, the Spanish participant addressed the problem openly. The behavior of *Participant 3* (2023), who was born in Egypt but adapted American culture, can also be explained by the fact that in the United States, long-term orientation is shallow (Hofstede Insights, 2023). Therefore, a reaction to dismissal is common. This would verify the statement made by *Participant 11* (2023) regarding her American colleagues. (An overview of the countries and their cultural dimension score can be seen in Annex C.) Another approach to why reactions and outcomes can be different is featured in the paper of *Elzy and Karver* (2018). They indicate that perceptions of emotional invalidation tend to be subjective, and the objective presence of emotionally invalidating behaviors is likely not the same as the experienced perception of emotional invalidation in different individuals (Elzy & Karver, 2018). The reactions and outcomes could also be subjective if the situations correspond to subjective perception. Moreover, in a recent paper by *Zielinski et al.* (2023), they state that the feeling of emotional invalidation can affectively predict how situations are interpreted later. It is assumed that reflection and interpretation of emotional invalidation are also subjective. When reflecting on the

study´s findings, this can be confirmed and contradicted on the other. It can be confirmed that participants described strongly negative feelings and interpreted the situation also negatively. Not confirmed because participants also described negative emotions, but the interpretation of the situation is now described as a positive outcome.

Another main aspect to consider is that participants reported experiencing emotional invalidation more often from their supervisors compared to their colleagues. In the collected data, eleven instances were reported where emotional invalidation was experienced in the context of a supervisory relationship, and six cases were associated with colleagues. One situation involved a participant in a managerial role, which also indirectly was a supervisory figure. These findings underscore the significant impact that hierarchical relationships can have on the experience of emotional invalidation in the workplace and hint at a more frequent occurrence of emotional invalidity in power discrepancies. This is in line with the paper of *Berti and Simpson* (2021), who suggest that due to their position of authority, supervisors may have a more substantial influence on the emotional climate of the workplace and, consequently, on the emotional experiences of their subordinates. Based on his observation, using emotional invalidation to express the disparity between power structures (Berti & Simpson, 2021). Whereas *Li* (2021) argues that power disputes are not always futile but relies on *Lazarus* (1984) that it is always possible to solve the paradox by the individuum lowering their own expectations (Li, 2021). However, the data also highlights the relevance of peer relationships in shaping employees' emotional experiences. *Shipton and Sillince* (2013) conducted a five-year study on instances of invalidation in the workplace observing how different hierarchical relationships among employees led to invalidation. The study reported emotional invalidation in various contexts involving colleagues, including those at the same hierarchical level, those at a higher level, and those from different teams. This suggests that emotional invalidation is not confined to hierarchical relationships but can occur in lateral colleague interactions and can be confirmed with literature like *Shipton and Sillince.* (2013). *Zielinski et al.* (2022) state that perceived invalidation also depends on social context and, for example, with less close people such as colleagues, the negative affect is more significant. In the study context, this includes colleagues and supervisors.

5.2. Practical Implications

Practical business recommendations for companies with cross-cultural teams that can be applied will be given in this chapter. The first implication for an internationally operating company would be to acknowledge emotional validation in general and provide information about what it is and guidelines on how everyone can use it. As seen in the case study, if the company gets bigger, there are many guidelines, but the employees cannot name them or think of some. It would be an accomplishment if your employees could know the term emotional validation and how it can be helpful for the whole team spirit, as it directly influences employees' well-being. A suitable method could be to transfer the knowledge to the employees within the framework of external workshops. After the implementation of the case study of this thesis, a seminar on emotional validation will also be conducted with the candidates. At this point, it could be

interesting to interview the same group of participants again to see if their behavior and reactions would change. Since this would exceed the scope of this thesis, it can be done in the future.

As a second recommended action, offering a support person who does not work within the team, or a direct manager role would be helpful so that the employees can open up completely. This person could be a neutral party for employees to express their thoughts and feelings openly. Optimally psychological experts would provide emotional validation, helping employees understand and articulate their experiences more effectively. This gives all employees a chance to get rid of their thoughts. In the context of cross-cultural management, this approach could be particularly beneficial. Cultural norms and expectations can influence how individuals perceive and respond to emotionally invalidating situations. Since this should apply to all countries, for example, even those cultures have the chance to open up, which perhaps according to cultural dimensions are less inclined to address negative situations. By providing a neutral support person, organizations can create a safe space for all employees, regardless of their cultural background, to express their feelings and experiences. Moreover, this support person can also be crucial in educating the organization about emotional invalidation. They can share anonymized insights and trends with the management, helping them understand the prevalence and impact of emotional invalidation within the organization. This can inform the development of policies and guidelines to reduce emotional invalidation and promote a more supportive and inclusive workplace environment. Providing a neutral support person can be a powerful tool in addressing emotional invalidation in a cross-cultural workplace. It offers individual employee support and contributes to a broader organizational understanding of emotional invalidation and its impacts.

Another recommended action relating to the previous one is establishing a guideline for all international colleagues. Such guidelines can serve as a roadmap for behavior and interaction within the organization, providing a common framework that all employees, regardless of their cultural background, can understand and adhere to. Using the example of the company in the case study, it would make sense to create international guidelines for everyone to promote an international corporate culture. So that the cultural differences become smaller, all can adapt to the corporate culture. Thus, employees can follow similar behavior patterns and know strictly in which situation perhaps more is interpreted. In the context of emotional invalidation, these guidelines could include clear definitions of what constitutes emotional invalidation, examples of behaviors that could lead to feelings of invalidation, and strategies for addressing and resolving such situations. They could also guide how to communicate effectively and empathetically across different cultures, considering cultural nuances and sensitivities.

In cross-cultural management, dealing with a certain cultural sensitivity in advance is essential. So that all participants of the international team know where their colleagues come from and can react to different behaviors without causing an emotionally invalid situation. In the context of cross-cultural management, it involves recognizing and appreciating the diverse cultural backgrounds of team members and adapting one's behavior and communication style accordingly to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts. This sensitivity could be promoted by enhancing international exchange programs abroad, where employees get to know their colleagues worldwide. Furthermore, international company events where all cultures unite could promote

cultural sensitivity. Prioritizing cultural sensitivity is crucial for businesses to avoid hurtful or inappropriate situations. This approach promotes better teamwork and collaboration and creates a more inclusive and respectful workplace for all employees, which is the last recommendation.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research

After discussing theory and study´s findings, it will now be looked at the limitations of the thesis as well as the possibilities for further research in the future. First, the study's sample is drawn exclusively from a single organization, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. This limitation is based on the third test by Yin (2014), external validity. Other companies can use the thesis to improve their cross-cultural management. Still, because the sample size is not equally split into cultures and from cultures all around the world, there are limitations to the generalization of the work. The sample consists of eight Germans, and the other seven nationalities are each represented by only one participant. As the study participants were relatively young and at the beginning of their working experience, this is a second limitation of the sample size. Future research could benefit from including a more diverse age range, particularly employees with more than ten years of work experience. This would allow for exploring whether perceptions of emotional invalidation and associated reactions evolve with increased work experience. Furthermore, future studies could include a more diverse sample of organizations. This would allow for exploring whether and how organizational culture influences the experience and management of emotional invalidation in the workplace. It would also enhance the generalizability of the findings.

Second, the study's reliance on participants' subjective perceptions of negative situations where they felt emotionally invalidated introduces an element of subjectivity that may affect the comparability of cases. Given that individuals interpret and express behaviors differently, the subjective nature of these experiences may limit the study's ability to draw definitive conclusions.

Lastly, the second test, according to Yin (2014), internal validity, leads to a further limitation of this work since it was based on the voluntariness of the participants and thus non-dependent variables, which in this work can represent primary conditions such as age, gender, and origin, were controlled and selected separately. Future research could aim to control for non-dependent variables such as age, gender, and origin. This would allow for a more controlled comparison of experiences and reactions to emotional invalidation across different demographic groups.

6. CONCLUSION

This thesis aims to elicit knowledge related to answering the research question about the role of emotional validation in cross-cultural management. In the first part, the current reference of the topic is presented, from which the problem definition, research objective, and applied methodology is briefly introduced. The second part introduces the theoretical fundaments to build a solid foundation for the case study. For this purpose, the concepts of culture and emotional

validation are introduced, highlighting the significance of companies supporting employee well-being, as it can impact their performance. After the literature review is set, the empirical part of the work follows. Through a case study, the qualitative research aims to determine the participants' perception and experience of emotional invalidation. In order to identify cultural differences, the sample size consists of seven different cultures, and to maintain the cross-cultural management reference, participants were asked about emotionally invalid situations in the work environment. The results are evaluated and presented by using a developed category system after *Mayring* (2000). The results show some differences and similarities in behavior. The participants in the study reported experiencing comparable perceptions of emotional invalidation and emotions, regardless of their cultural background. Similar behavior can be created because of strong organizational culture, but in this study, group thinking is found to be limited. Still, cultural differences can be found in how the participants reacted to emotionally invalid situations and how that ultimately impacted the outcomes. The differences can have different reasons, such as cultural and subjective perceptions, triggered by perceiving emotional invalidation differently. Practical implications for action can be derived. First, it is recommended to recognize emotional validation in general as a corporation and provide information about what validation is and guidelines on how everyone can apply it correctly in the workspace. In addition, this thesis recommends providing a neutral professional dedicated to the employees' concerns. This psychologist can anonymously provide feedback to the company and thus make analyses for the future and improvements, for example, adjusting the guidelines. This thesis recommends that the company guidelines be issued internationally and available to all employees worldwide. The last recommendation is raising awareness for cultural sensitivity, which can be promoted through international employee events. It should be noted that the observed differences were limited to the sample size of fourteen participants. This is a potential limitation for future studies exploring the intersection of organizational culture, culture in general, and behavior in invalid situations. It would be beneficial to conduct further studies on how culture and organizational culture impact emotional validation experiences and the development of effective techniques for enhancing emotional validation in cross-cultural teams. The thesis offers insights and recommendations about the role of emotional invalidation in cross-cultural management, which will be useful and practical for international corporations to understand the relationship between emotional validation and cross-cultural management to improve well-being and productivity.

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ANNEXES

Annex A   Interview guideline

Interview Protocol – Qualitative Interviews „Emotional Validation in Cross-Cultural Management"

Duration ca. 20-30min

DSGVO	Before I start the recording, I would like to inform you that all data will be kept confidential, and the actual recording will be deleted after the transcription. I would start to record it now. Is that fine your you?

Introductory Question:	Please introduce yourself, what you do / what you are responsible for, how you got there, and your educational background.

Follow-up questions, depending on how the participant reacts	(Since the case study intends to highlight differences in how different cultures work, are you open to sharing your national cultural background? (And which other cultures do you work with).) Would you consider yourself a typical (the company) worker?

1. 1st questionnaire segment: Emotional Validation in general

Leading question	In this study, we will look at Emotional Validation and the differences between cultures in how they deal with invalidation. In the following, I will explain what Emotional Validation means and give an example of a situation.
Follow-up questions	- Emotional Validation is a technique in which we accept the feelings of others without judging. In this way, we can counteract negative emotions and promote positive feelings. In contrast, emotional invalidation can cause us to indirectly reject the feelings of others, thus interfering with understanding and listening. - For example, when a team member expresses frustration or disappointment about a project, acknowledging their feelings and showing empathy can validate their emotions. This can help them feel heard and understood, leading to constructive problem-solving and better communication. - How does this affect you as an employee in your company?
Leading question	Does your company have guidelines or directives for those kinds of situations?
Follow-up questions	- Or is there any training on this as part of the onboarding process? - Is it included in your company culture? - Did you ever use one of those guidelines/ opportunities?

2. 2nd questionnaire segment: Description of an event

Leading question	If you now think about your professional environment, customers, or colleagues. Are there any situations that come to your mind in which you recognize possible conflicts? It does not have to be a big conflict; it can also be a moment, like in the example, where you did not feel 100% well taken care of or positive.
	Could you describe a moment when you felt emotionally invalidated?
Follow-up questions	- Can you elaborate on this situation/incident?
	- Can you give me an example, when somebody was acting superior to you than they are supposed to
	- The last time you felt that you did not meet expectations at work
	- The last time somebody did not meet your expectations
	- The last time you did a performance review with your manager (often there are small discrepancies about time and value)
Leading question	Why did you feel this way in this situation?
	Please describe your emotions, feelings, and thoughts.
Follow-up questions	- Let me get you back to that
	- Were there previous actions or behavior that could have led to the situation?
	- How did you react? What was your behavior in the situation?
	- What happened after? What was the outcome of the situation? (short-term/ long-term)
	- How did you behave afterward?
	- Did the relationship/behavior between you remain the same, or did something change?

3. 3rd questionnaire section: End of the interview

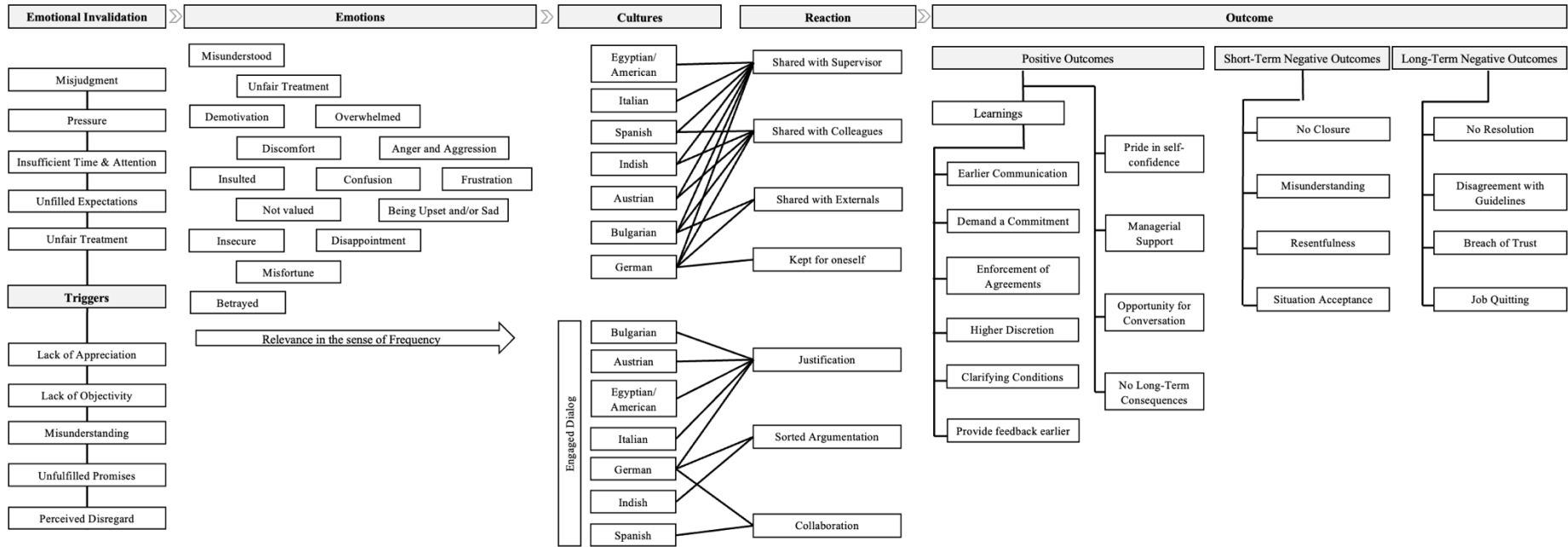|	
Leading question	We have now reached the end of the interview. Are there any concerns you would like to share with me?
	Thank you very much for taking the time for this interview.
	I will let you know more about the upcoming workshop as soon as we have a fixed date.

Source: Own elaboration.
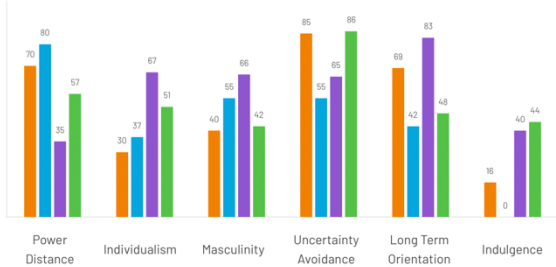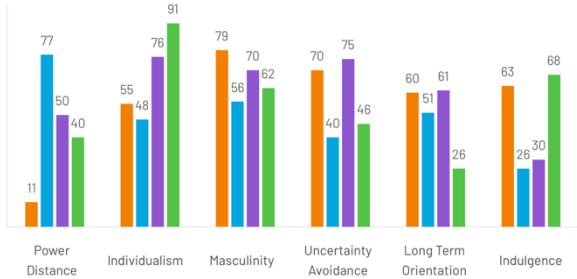
Annex B   Figure 5. Summarized Key Findings.

Source: Own elaboration.

Annex C   Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions for Participated Cultures

| Austria × | India × | Italy × | United States × |

| Bulgaria × | Egypt* × | Germany × | Spain × |

Source: Hofstede Insights.