

Stress, Task, and Relationship Orientations of Dutch: Do Age, Gender, Education, and Government Work Experience Make a Difference?

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Abstract Working people are often socialized differently based on their age, gender, education, and work experience in the public versus the private sector. To explore the stress, task, and relationship orientations of people in the culture of the Netherlands, this study focused on the differences of 208 Dutch respondents based on the demographic variables. It appears that they have dissimilar scores on the relationship and task orientations. Age, government work experience and education do appear to be a significant factor in their leadership orientation. Also, males seem to be less task-oriented and less relationship-oriented than their female counterparts. Overall, the Dutch respondents reported a moderate level of stress with no gender differences.

Keywords Relationships · Tasks · Leadership · Culture · Government experience · Stress · The Netherlands

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Introduction and Cultural Values

There are various beliefs about leadership in different cultures as demonstrated in cross-cultural leadership literature (Dickson et al. 2003; Martin et al. 2009). Cultures regularize behavior and cultural background and context is an important predictor of behavior (Hall 1976, 2000). In today's globalized business world, understanding employee behaviors in different cultures is perhaps the most important task of managers, leaders, trainers and coaches. It can help build a strong knowledge base and practical application that can help businesses succeed in such a diverse environment. The purpose of this study is to analyze the work overload stress orientation as well as leadership similarities and dissimilarities between adult Dutch respondents based on several demographic variables. More specifically, this paper addresses the following research question: Do age, gender, education, and government work experience make a difference in Dutch working adults' orientations of task, relationship and stress? In addressing this question, we use the Style Questionnaire, provided by Northouse (2007) to obtain a general profile of a person's leadership behaviors regarding task and relationship orientations and the Overload Stress Inventory, adapted from Hyde and Allen's conceptual analysis of overload (1996, pp. 29–30), to assess the stress perception of respondents.

We chose the Netherlands for two reasons. First of all, few studies have been conducted to address the cultural influences on leadership behavior in the Netherlands, and if so, their results are still very unclear (Brodbeck and Frese 2007). Furthermore, since cultural patterns and their effects on leadership seem to change over time, some of these studies may be outdated (Ardichvili and Kuchinke 2002). There is a strong call for more recent research in this area. Secondly, Netherlands, which holds an important role as a European transportation hub, is the fifth-largest economy in the euro-zone with a GDP of \$713 billion and is known for its stable industrial relations, moderate unemployment and inflation, a sizable trade surplus (Central Intelligence Agency 2012). Despite the fact that their economy has been shrinking in the second half of 2012, Dutch businesses are very active in international markets and have a highly diverse workforce as a result of excellent incentives, such as green card and citizenship, to attract foreign professionals to work in the Netherlands. Therefore, an understanding of cultural influences on Dutch employee's orientations of leadership and stress is also necessary for human resource development as well as for economic growth.

The Dutch Culture

Located in Western Europe, bordering the North Sea, between Belgium and Germany, Kingdom of the Netherlands, or Netherlands in short, has a population of about 16.7 million people and close to two-third of them are in 15–64 years of age range. Its government style is constitutional monarchy. Amsterdam is the capital. Netherlands has 12 provinces and 3 dependent areas including Aruba, Curacao, Sint Maarten (Central Intelligence Agency 2012).

The Netherlands has a history of a seafaring people. The Dutch are primarily of Germanic descendants with some Gallo-Celtic mixture. Given its strategic location,

the Netherlands has frequently been threatened with destruction by the North Sea and has often been invaded by the great European powers (Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs 2012). The Dutch United Provinces declared their independence from Spain in 1579 (Central Intelligence Agency 2012). However, the nation's independence was not completely established until after the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648), when the country became a leading seafaring and power. By the end of the 17th century, the Netherlands was one of the great sea and colonial powers of Europe (Rietbergen 2002). After 20 years under the control and occupation of France, a Kingdom of the Netherlands was formed as a result of a merger of all the provinces of the Netherlands and Belgium in 1815; however, the southern provinces broke away to form the kingdom of Belgium in 1830. A liberal constitution was adopted by the Netherlands in 1848 (Rietbergen 2002).

Despite remaining neutral in World War I, the Netherlands was invaded and occupied by Germany in May 1940. The nation was liberated in May 1945. In 1948, after reigning for 50 years, Queen Wilhelmina abdicated and was succeeded by her daughter Juliana. In 1949, the Netherlands granted independence to the Dutch East Indies, which became the Republic of Indonesia. The Netherlands also joined NATO that year and the European Economic Community (now, the EU) in 1958. In 1999, it joined other European countries in introducing the Euro, the single European currency (Rietbergen 2002). In October 2010, the former Netherlands Antilles was dissolved and the three smallest islands, Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, and Saba, became special municipalities in the Netherlands administrative structure. The larger islands of Sint Maarten and Curacao joined the Netherlands and Aruba as constituent countries forming the Kingdom of the Netherlands (Central Intelligence Agency 2012).

The Netherlands has several strong industries including food processing, chemicals, petroleum refining, and electrical machinery. Agricultural sector is highly mechanized which helps reduce labor cost and provides large surpluses for the food-processing industry and for exports.

Like other countries in the world, the Netherlands have been negatively impacted by the global financial crisis and economic recession due to its strong dependence on international financial and international trade. In 2011, its GDP growth rate was estimated at 1.3 %, unemployment rate at 4.4 %, and inflation rate at 2.3 % (Central Intelligence Agency 2012).

Dutch Cultural Aspects

The history of the Netherlands has influenced its culture in many ways due to their colonies, international trade and travels. The term “culture” may be defined as an integrated system of learned behaviors that are typically characteristics for most members of the given society (Nguyen and Mujtaba 2011). Culture is learned and transmitted from generation to generation (Kohls, cited in Peters and Kabacoff 2010, p. 3). By this definition, culture may be viewed as a “collective programming of the mind” (Hofstede 1984, p. 82) where “typical” ways of behavior and attitudes are constitutive for the culture of a country, or society.

In the seventeenth century, Dutch economy thrived with increasing trade. This helped the country dominate the world trade, achieved a prominent international position, and attracted a large number of immigrants. Thus, Dutch culture is diverse and reflects foreign influences. The main language is Dutch. There are several regional languages recognized in the Netherlands, including West Frisian and several dialects of Low Saxon (*Nedersaksisch*), which are spoken in much of the north and east, and Limburgish, which is spoken in the south-eastern province of Limburg (Ginkel 2008).

The Netherlands is one of the most secular countries in Europe. People who have no religions are accounted for 42 % as the largest group, followed by Roman Catholic with 30 % and Protestant with 20 %. Islam is accounted for almost 6 % for the population and other religions make up the rest of over 2 %. The Netherlands is also home to a large number of Hindu minority, which is mostly made up of migrants. A small group of Jews, about 40,000, live in the Netherlands, many of whom are settled in Amsterdam (Welschen 2000–2005).

Dutch Cultural Dimensions

Some general cultural aspects of the Netherlands have been identified in past research, including the Hofstede studies and the GLOBE project. Back in the 1980's, the Dutch social scientist Geert Hofstede conducted some significant studies concerning cultural value dimensions, and differences between countries on these dimensions. The cultural dimensions also determine styles of management and leadership (Hofstede 1984). In contrast, this determination is of course not exclusive. Within a company, the corporate culture and individual characteristics determine the behavior of each employee (and each member of an organization, in general) as well. Figure 1 illustrates the levels of culture and the individual as determinants of behavior.

Hofstede (1984) created rankings off numerous countries all over the world with respect to the five cultural dimensions. The ranks are based on indices which in turn are derived from the results of all individuals' answers to the questionnaires collected in each country (Hofstede 1984: 84). Figure 2 shows the ranking of the Netherlands in cultural dimensions.

- *Power distance (PDI)*: This dimension deals with the fact that all individuals in societies are not equal. It expresses the level to which people in a culture accept status and power differences and how they respect hierarchy and ranks. With a

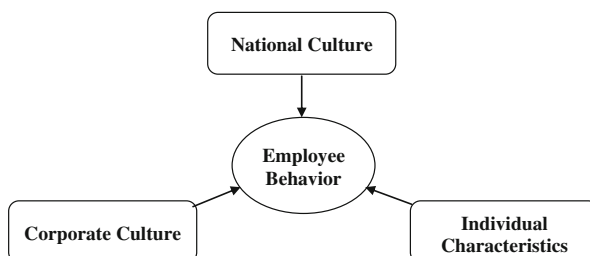


Fig. 1 Culture and determinants of behavior (adapted from Reimer 2005)

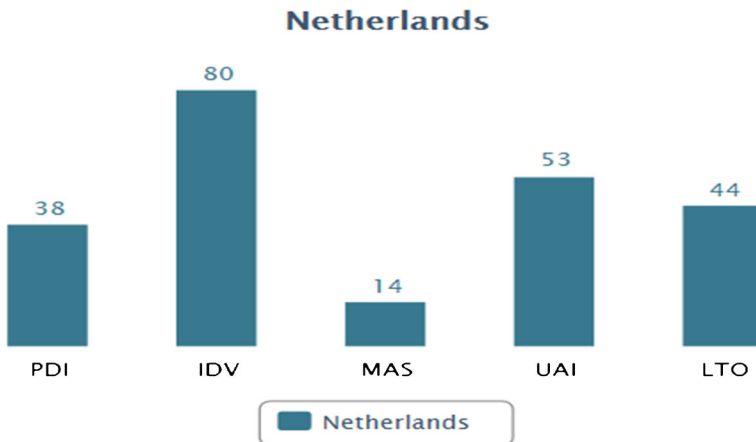


Fig. 2 Netherlands' Cultural Dimensions. *Source:* Hofstede (2011)

low score of 38, people in the Netherlands do not welcome inequalities in society. They emphasize equal rights. They accept a hierarchical order for convenience only. Power tends to be decentralized to lower levels of the hierarchy and managers rely on the experience of the employees. Employees expect to be consulted. Every person is entitled to his or her opinion and has the right to have it heard. The relationship between managers and employee is informal. Dutch people do not like control. Communication is direct and participative (Hofstede 2011).

- Individualism/Collectivism (IDV):** This dimension indicates the degree of interdependence a society maintains among its members. In individualist societies, the ties among individuals are loose. People are expected to be independent and look after themselves and their immediate family only. They prefer working as individuals and tend to be more decisive and assertive. In collectivist societies, people seem to have strong ties and beliefs in cohesive groups. They believe that by being an “in-groups” member, they are more likely to be protected and that the group will take care of them in exchange for their unquestioning loyalty. They prefer working together in groups and tend to be less decisive and assertive. With a high score of 80, the Netherlands is an individualistic society. Dutch people highly prefer a loosely-knit social framework. Individuals are expected to take care of themselves and their immediate families only. Small family, typically with only one or two children, is considered as the foundation of the social structure. People tend to have more independent thinking style, prefer and expect individual task and decision making that benefit their personal goals instead of the group goals. They value personal space and privacy. They believe that they have control over their own fate. In the Netherlands, individual performance is highly rated and merit performance is widely used for hiring and promotion decisions. Individuals are proud of their own performance though they are modest and unlikely to boast about personal achievements. Dutch people do not draw attention to themselves or brag about their wealth and material possessions. This is very interesting since Dutch is an individualistic society. The relationship between employer and employee is a contract based on mutual advantage. Management is the management of individuals.

- *Masculinity/Femininity (MAS)*: This dimension indicates the degree to which a society values masculine or feminine traits. It describes the social gender roles in a culture. A high score (masculine) indicates that the society will emphasize competition and assertiveness. A low score (feminine) indicates that the society values interpersonal sensitivity, concerns for others, and quality of life. With a score of 14, the Netherlands is a feminine society. In feminine societies, balancing work and life is a top priority. Dutch individuals tend to be sensitive and care more about other people's feelings and concerns. Managers are expected to be supportive to their subordinates, and embrace participatory decision making style where decision is made through involvement. Dutch people tend to work together to reach consensus. This is quite interesting given that the Netherlands is an individualistic society. Managers strive for consensus and people value equality, solidarity and quality in their working lives. Negotiation and compromise are the most common techniques to resolve conflicts. Often times other people's opinions can impact one's decision. Dutch are known for their long discussions until consensus has been reached (Hofstede 2011).
- *Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI)*: This dimension indicates the degree to which people in a society can tolerate risk and ambiguity. It reflects how strongly people believe that they can control the future. The ambiguity brings up anxiety and different cultures have learnt to deal with it in different ways. With a score of 53, the Netherlands shows a preference for avoiding uncertainty. Dutch maintain rigid codes of belief and behavior and do not accept "out of the norms" ideas and behaviors. They are straightforward and often speak their minds in a direct way. Precision and punctuality are the norm. Security is an important element in individual motivation (Hofstede 2011).
- *Long Term Orientation (LTO)*: This dimension indicates the degree to which a culture values virtues towards future, such as persistence and thrift. It shows whether the people in a society emphasize long-term or short-term vision. With a score of 44, the Netherlands is a short term oriented society. Dutch people have a great respect for tradition. They also have a need for norms and absolute truth as guidelines. Business managers tend to focus on quick results. Immediate gratification is the main drive of consumption. Saving is not the ultimate goal. Dutch people are sensitive to social trends and rituals.

Task and Relationship-Oriented Leadership

Many leadership models in the behavioral approach differentiate behavioral patterns, or leadership styles. A leadership style is a pattern of behavior that a leader exhibits in a certain way and does not change much across situations (Stock-Homburg 2008). The two main types of leadership behaviors that have been discussed in the literature were the task-oriented and relationship-oriented behavior, also referred to as initiating structure and consideration (Oaklander and Fleishman 1964; Fleishman 1967; Yukl 2002; Judge et al. 2004; Northouse 2007).

One of the earliest and most influential studies on leadership is the Ohio State University studies which began in the 1940s. The studies have been significant as they found two basic types of leader behaviors: consideration (relation-oriented) and initiating

structure (task-oriented). Consideration style leaders establish and maintain good relationship, provide great supports, and delegate authorities to their subordinates. They show personal respect, trust, and appreciation of their employees (Nguyen et al. 2012; Stock-Homburg 2008). On the other hand, initiating structure regards the objective and performance aspects of leadership. Initiating structure leaders concentrate on goals, tasks and delegation. They concern mainly with defining and organizing tasks and activities and their accomplishments (Oaklander and Fleishman 1964; Schermerhorn et al. 2008). Initiating structure leaders communicate with precise goals, emphasize the effectiveness and efficiency of tasks that lead to the achievement of their goals, and delegate them accordingly.

Another popular research that provided similar findings to the Ohio State University studies is the University of Michigan studies. These studies identified two similar categories of leadership behavior: employee-centered and production-centered (Schermerhorn et al. 2008). Employee-centered leaders, who resemble the consideration leaders categorized in the Ohio State University studies, pay attention to the well-being of their followers while production-centered leaders, who resemble the initiating structure leaders, focus on goals, tasks and the accomplishment of these goals and tasks (Nguyen et al. 2012).

Task orientation and relationship orientation leadership styles are considered not mutually exclusive and may be combined (Mujtaba et al. 2010, p. 179). In some cases, leaders should be high on both behaviors (Blake and Mouton 1966; Schermerhorn et al. 2008).

Women are supposedly concerned for other people, sensitive and caring. With their specific skills and attributes, Isaković (2011) indicated that female leaders produce a more humane, relations-oriented, flexible, participatory, and caring organization. They tend to focus more on teamwork and delegation. Females are believed to be more accommodative or relationship-oriented (Nguyen and Mujtaba 2011). However, research is inconclusive on the results. Nguyen and Mujtaba (2011) found that Vietnamese females are more relationship-oriented than Vietnamese males. On the contrary, no significant differences were found in the relationship orientation between females and males in Oman, Germany, and Iran (Mujtaba et al. 2010; Nguyen et al. 2012; Tajaddini and Mujtaba 2011).

Cultural Influences on Leadership Behavior in the Netherlands

Hofstede's data (1984) implied that in the early 1980s, a Dutch leader was expected to be "modest, favor consultation of employees, work autonomy, training, the use of skills, the support of his group, and the contribution of all towards the success of the organization" (Thierry et al. 1998). The GLOBE research in the early 1990s reported a leadership preference of Dutch people as a relative high score on attributes like team orientation, diplomatic, and humane, and a rather low score on autocratic, self-centered, and status-conscious (Thierry et al. 1998). As the country is in favor of an organized, business-like climate rather than a powerful leader-oriented atmosphere, a leader is expected to be an ordinary person. Dutch people somehow demonstrate an anti-hero attitude. Thierry et al. (1998) reported how media portrayed good Dutch leaders:

as fulfilling a modest role; they tend to be "trustworthy, down-to-earth, well-organized, hard working, competent and inconspicuous." At the same time, they are strong willed, ambitious, inspirational, pragmatic and demanding on

their personnel and on suppliers. They feel they should take time to consult major parties before implementing plans; they tend to mediate well between various stakeholders and they attribute success to teamwork. Dutch leaders are considered mostly as intellectually mediocre and some critics think they should say that in public; often, leaders get more public criticism than praise in the Netherlands (p.27).

Expertise is a major power of Dutch leaders. Leaders need to have particular skills and background in the areas they lead. In addition, some managerial experience is also expected. Dutch leaders need to be socially astute. They need to work well with the team, focus on fairness and equal treatment among team members. Leaders make policies and rules by combining different viewpoints rather than personal views and preferences. This seems to reflect well the cultural feature that Dutch people prefer working together to reach consensus.

Based on interviews with 20 middle managers, an outstanding Dutch leader is thought to be a visionary and decent person who connects with his or her subordinates closely. This leader should be creative and innovative and maintain good interpersonal relationship. It appears that integrity, inspiration, and vision are considered important characteristics of Dutch leaders to be successful. In addition, being decisive, diplomatic, and humane orientated can make a person an outstanding leader in the Netherlands (Thierry et al. 1998).

According to Thierry et al. (1998), a nation-wide study listed innovation, long-term oriented, vision, convincing, trustworthy, communicative, confidence building, and courage as the most important characteristics for top managers in the Netherlands. For middle managers, important characteristics include trustworthy, communicative, concern for subordinates' interests, team builder, participative, and confidence building. This illustrates that leadership in the Netherlands should be more participative and informal and less dominant and authoritarian.

In the Ardichvili and Kuchinke study in 2002, though there was no country specific in the correlation analysis between the cultural variables and the leadership styles, the findings indicated that the low level of power distance in the Netherlands may be related to a low level of management by exception and a high level of individual consideration. In addition, the low level of masculinity relates to a particularly high level of laissez-faire leadership style (Ardichvili and Kuchinke 2002).

Ozorovskaja et al. (2007) compared Dutch and Lithuanian leadership styles and culture. They found that Lithuanian leadership is seen to be more "strongly convinced of their own opinions and values," whereas the Dutch leadership supports the idea that "employees should learn from their mistakes." Lithuanian leadership approach is based on exchange, which provides rewards such as payment of wages in recognition of excellent performance, or conversely, punishment for non-achievement. The Dutch leadership, on the other hand, is based on mentoring and teaching.

Stress and Overload Perception

Stress is part of life. People, regardless of age, gender, educational backgrounds, or work experience, are likely to experience stress and the Dutch people are not immune

from it. Stress is defined as “a sequence of events with the presence of a demand, and the perception that the demand is taxing on an individual’s resources well-being” (Ellis 2006). Many believe that the impact of stress can be physical, emotional, mental, and behavioral such as all those feelings and perceptions in lack of time, ability, skill, or resources to effectively deal with personal or professional demands in a given time (Frese 1985; Hyde and Allen 1996; Nichols 2008; Selye 1956). Hyde and Allen (1996, p. 27) state that overload stressors can produce psychological, physiological and behavioral changes (Mujtaba et al. 2012). When not managed effectively quantitative overload can cause elevation in blood cholesterol level which is associated with such disorders as atherosclerosis and coronary heart disease (Hyde and Allen 1996, p. 27). Similarly, overload can decrease motivation toward learning/work performance. Hart believed that there are several issues that can be linked to stress in today’s society such as finances, work, family, personal concerns, personal health and safety, personal relationships, and death (as cited in Tajaddini and Mujtaba 2009). Frese (1985) found a link between stress and job insecurity, low-paid jobs, and lower socioeconomic status of the workers.

In organizational setting, stress goes beyond impacting individuals. It impacts the organizational performance as well. Organizational stress can come from interpersonal conflicts, hostility, and non-cooperative relationships among employees and colleagues (Oaklander and Fleishman 1964). Employees working in high stress environments are more likely to show defensive and uncooperative behaviors. They may reduce communication, express hard feelings and mistrust among others, isolate themselves from the group and freeze the relationship. In a low stress environment, people are more likely to engage in collaborative behaviors, which create a more positive working environment that fosters cooperation and trust (Oaklander and Fleishman 1964).

Leaders face tough challenges and make tough decisions. They often deal with stressful situations such as facing ethical dilemmas. Thus, stress and ethical dilemmas are believed to coexist in organizations (Mohr and Wolfram 2010; Mujtaba and Sims 2011). Pressures from shareholders, competitors, family and economic difficulties, stressful work environments, and demanding work schedules, are just among a few reasons that can increase the stress level of the leaders, which can negatively influence their ethical decision making.

In the Netherlands in the past, the quantitative work load was relatively high with high speed and tight deadlines; however, this figure has appeared to flatten since 2000. The Employers Working Conditions Survey (WEA), a national survey among at least 5,000 employers, indicated that in 2008, about 48 % of all Dutch organizations considered work stress as an important risk in their organization. Work stress was found to have a strong relationship with organizational size. In non-profit organizations such as government, health and social care and education, more work stress was reported (Hesslink and Houtman 2011). Figure 3 shows the same stress perceptions on work stress as an important risk in Dutch organizations between Dutch men and women. Employees between 25 to 54 years of age perceive higher stress than those who are younger than 25 years of age or older than 54 years of age. People working in hotels, restaurants, financial services and education sectors perceive higher stress than other sectors (Hesslink and Houtman 2011).

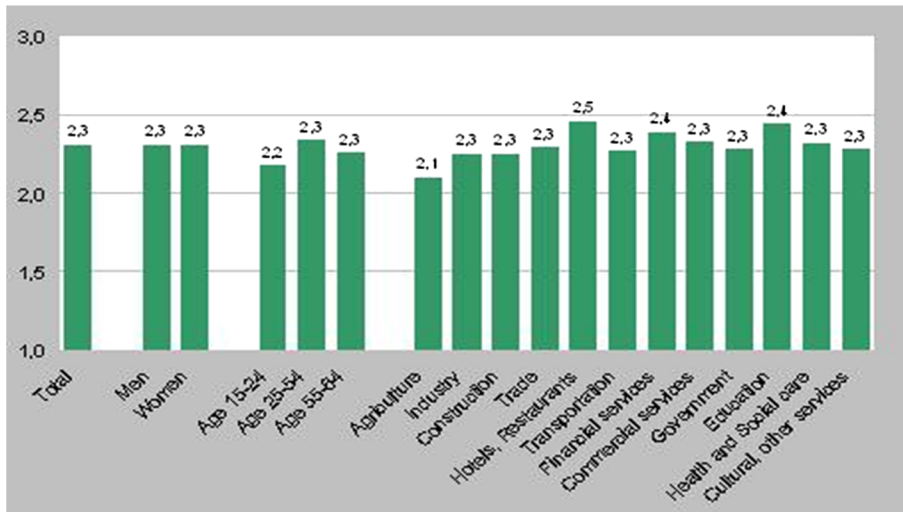


Fig. 3 Work stress as risk in Dutch organizations (Hesselink and Houtman 2011)

Jeurissen and Nyklíček (2001) conducted a research on 162 employees from a healthcare organization in the Netherlands and found that a higher level of job demands was significantly associated with a lower level of well-being and self-reported health. Van Horn et al. (2001) studied Dutch teachers and found that teachers who feel under benefited by their students experience more stress in their interactions with students, more stress due to time pressures and other teaching-related aspects, and more stress due to tensions in the exchange relationship with colleagues experience. Similarly, when teachers feel under-benefited in their relationship with the school, they experience relatively more stress. Gorter et al. (1999) studied a highly representative sample of Dutch general dental practitioners and found a strong inverse relationship between work stress, in particular lack of career perspective, and job satisfaction. Kop et al. (1999) studied Dutch police officers and concluded that organizational stressors were more prevalent than task-related stressors. They found that Dutch police officers demonstrated a relatively low level of emotional exhaustion, an average level of depersonalization, and a high level of personal accomplishment. Their burnout is associated with a lack of reciprocity between investments and outcomes in the relations that police officers have with citizens, colleagues and their organization. The job burnout is positively related to attitudes towards use of violence and the use of violence during the officers' duty. Dutch Daily News (2011) reported that the proportion of working people in the Netherlands who are developing burnout symptoms has grown between 2007 and 2010 from 11 % to 13 %. The higher educated group has a slightly higher burnout rate than the lower educated group. Young workers have a lower burnout rate than their older counterparts with one in ten in the 15–25 years age group, compared to more than one in seven in the above 25 years age group. The education sector is where burnout symptoms are most frequently found.

Many interventions have been implemented to manage work-related stress in the Netherlands. NEA (2005–2006) shows that 13.4 % to 22.8 % successful interventions have been reported in the previous 12 months. The most sufficient intervention is

“employer agreed with better home-work adjustment.” The most inefficient intervention is “Assistance in handling work stress related complaints.” The most wanted intervention is “Provision of information on managing work stress.” Other interventions include “Reduction of work load” and “Assistance in handling conflicts, intimidation or aggression.”

While there are many variables that impact a person’s level of stress that can lead to health problems, this study is designed to assess whether Dutch respondents report low, moderate, high, or severe levels of stress associated with work overload.

Study Methodology: Stress, Task and Relationship Orientations

This research examines whether Dutch respondents are more task-oriented or more relationship-oriented based on their age, gender, education and government work experience. It further attempts to determine whether males and females have a different focus on stress, tasks and relationships.

The Style Questionnaire (Northouse 2007) can be completed by oneself as well as one’s friends, peers, bosses, and/or employees for leadership orientation purposes as the results can show one’s use of various task and relationship behaviors. The scoring interpretation for the Style Questionnaire by Northouse (2007, p. 87) is as follows:

SCORES	DESCRIPTIONS
• 45–50	Very high range
• 40–44	High range
• 35–39	Moderately high range
• 30–34	Moderately low range
• 25–29	Low range
• 10–24	Very low range

This study used the Overload Stress Inventory (Hyde and Allen’s conceptual analysis of overload, 1996, pp. 29–30) to assess the work overload stress perception of Dutch respondents. Work overload stress can be understood as: regularly taking work home to finish in the evenings or weekends, having more work than it is possible to complete, having many important deadlines which cannot always be met; feeling less competent on tasks; having limited time to do as good of a job as one is capable of doing; being given more work than one’s current qualifications and skills; falling behind schedule and deadlines; having too many tasks and jobs at the same time; and often feeling overwhelmed by the amount, difficulty and complexity of tasks and assignments. The responses are assessed according to the following general criteria (adapted from Hyde and Allen’s 1996 book):

- *Scores in the range of 40 – 50* tend to mean *severe* stress from overload.
- *Scores in the range of 30 – 39* tend to mean *high* stress from overload.
- *Scores in the range of 20 – 29* tend to mean *moderate* stress from overload.
- *Scores in the range of 19 and below* tend to mean *low* stress from overload.

The research question for this study was to determine whether adult Dutch respondents are highly or moderately stressed and whether they have a higher average score on the relationship orientation or task orientation. Another aspect of this study was to determine whether male Dutch respondents have a higher or lower average scores on the relationship orientation or task orientation when compared with their female counterparts. The specific hypotheses for this study are as follows:

1. *Hypothesis 1:* Dutch respondents will have similar scores for relationship and task orientations.
2. *Hypothesis 2:* Dutch respondents with more years of education will have similar scores for task orientation as those with fewer years of education.
3. *Hypothesis 3:* Dutch respondents with more years of education will have similar scores for relationship orientation as those with fewer years of education (high school diploma or less).
4. *Hypothesis 4:* Dutch respondents with more years of government experience will have similar scores for task orientation as those with little to no public work experience.
5. *Hypothesis 5:* Dutch respondents with more years of government experience will have similar scores for relationship orientation as those with little to no public work experience.
6. *Hypothesis 6:* Dutch male and female respondents will have similar scores on task orientation.
7. *Hypothesis 7:* Dutch male and female respondents will have similar scores on relationship orientation.
8. *Hypothesis 8:* Younger and older Dutch respondents will have similar scores on task orientation.
9. *Hypothesis 9:* Younger and older Dutch respondents will have similar scores on relationship orientation.
10. *Hypothesis 10:* Dutch male and female respondents will have similar scores on stress perceptions.
11. *Hypothesis 11:* Dutch respondents with more years of government experience will have similar scores on stress perceptions as those with little to no public work experience.

The target audience is Dutch adults, both male and female, who understand and speak English fluently. Thus, the original English questionnaire was distributed to ensure its validity. Hard copies were distributed in two universities and over four

Table 1 Stress, task and relationship scores of Dutch respondents

Dutch respondents	No.	Average task orientation score	Average relationship orientation score	Stress perception score
Scores		32.778846	38.1106	24.7356
St. Dev.		6.7106617	6.27026	6.59104
	208			

$t = -8.37; p < 0.000$

Table 2 Task orientation by education

Group	No.	Mean	St. Dev.
High school or less	54	28.296	4.84
College degree	154	34.35	6.574

$t = -6.20$; $p < 0.00$; reject

companies. In universities, students of both undergraduate and graduate studies were asked to participate. Additionally, the executives of several companies including import/export, national motor vehicle bureau, box packaging and employment agencies were approached. Upon receiving the required permissions for data collection, hard copies of the surveys were given to the employees. One of the authors was present while the subjects filled out the questionnaire. In this way, it was ensured that the questionnaires were actually completed and returned. There were 127 hard copy questionnaires obtained.

In addition, the questionnaire was made available as a web link that was distributed via several online services such as email and Facebook. This was surprisingly successful with 81 completed questionnaires received. Altogether, 208 complete questionnaires were received from participants of the study. Of 208 respondents, 136 are male, which is accounted for 65.54 %. The mean age is 27.73 years ($SD = 9.34$). The mean number of years of work experience is 4.83 years ($SD = 4.92$). Of 208 respondents, 176 respondents (84.21 %) do not have experience in the government/public sector, 20 respondents have 1 to 5 years of work experience in the government/public sector, four respondents have 6 to 10 years, and six respondents report to have more than 10 years of work experience in the public sector. Of the 208 subjects, 21 reported to be Buddhist, 19 Muslim, 7 Jewish and 130 Christian; 14.83 % (31 subjects) reported other. Finally, with respect to educational status, 25.84 % reported to have a high school degree or less, 39.71 % have a Bachelor degree or work on earning it, 32.06 % have a Master degree or work on earning it, and 2.39 % have a Doctorate degree or work on earning it.

Results

As presented in Table 1, the average scores of Dutch respondents for task orientation falls in “moderately low range,” and their relationship orientation average also falls in “moderately high range.” Similarly, the average score of Dutch respondents for stress perception falls in the “moderate” range.

As can be seen in Table 1, hypothesis 1 “*Dutch respondents will have similar scores for relationship and task orientations*” is rejected as the mean task orientation

Table 3 Relationship orientation by education

Group	No.	Mean	St. Dev.
High school or less	54	36.46	5.414
College degree	154	38.688	6.46

$t = -2.27$; $p < 0.02428$; reject

Table 4 Task Orientation by government experience

Group	No.	Mean	St. Dev.
With Gov. Exp.	32	35.25	7.29
No Gov. Exp.	176	32.33	6.522

$t=-2.29$; $p=0.02320$; reject

score for the Dutch respondents is 32.78 (St. Dev. 6.7) and the mean relationship orientation score is 38.1 (St. Dev. 6.3) with statistically significant differences demonstrated in the t -test of the two means ($t=-8.37$; $p<0.00$). The Dutch are more relationship oriented.

As can be seen in Table 2, hypothesis 2 “Dutch respondents with fewer years of education (high school diploma or less) will have similar scores for task orientation as those with more years of education” is rejected ($t=-6.20$; $p<0.00$) as the latter group has a significantly higher mean (34.35) than the first group (28.296). Perhaps people with more education are socialized to be more task-oriented in order to effectively compete with their more global counterparts.

As can be seen in Table 3, hypothesis 3 “Dutch respondents with fewer years of education (high school diploma or less) will have similar scores for relationship orientation as those with more years of education” is rejected ($t=-2.27$; $p<0.02428$) as the latter group has a significantly higher mean (38.688) than the first group (36.46). Once again, it appears that people with more education are socialized to be more relationship-oriented as well in order to effectively do business with others in today’s interdependent and interconnected world.

As can be seen in Table 4, hypothesis 4 “Dutch respondents with more years of government experience will have similar scores for task orientation as those with little to no public work experience” cannot be supported ($t=-2.29$; $p=0.02320$) since those with more years of government experience has significantly higher score (35.25) than those with little to no government experience (32.33). Perhaps there are higher expectations of productivity in those who more years of government experience compared to those who have not worked in the public sector.

As can be seen in Table 5, hypothesis 5 “Dutch respondents with more years of government experience will have similar scores for relationship orientation as those with little to no public work experience” cannot be rejected since those with more years of government experience do not have a significantly higher score ($t=-1.52$; $p=0.12918$). Again, it is possible that there are higher expectations of professionalism from those who more years of government experience.

As can be seen in Table 6, hypothesis 6 “Dutch male and female respondents will have similar scores on task orientation” cannot be supported ($t=-2.62$; $p=0.00936$) since females have significantly higher score (34.431) than males (31.9).

Table 5 Relationship orientation by government experience

Group	No.	Mean	St. Dev.
With Gov. Exp.	32	39.66	6.646
No Gov. Exp.	176	37.83	6.178

$t=-1.52$; $p=0.12918$; cannot reject

Table 6 Task orientation by gender

Group	No.	Mean	St. Dev.
Males	136	31.9	6.47
Females	72	34.431	6.897

$t=-2.62$; $p=0.00936$; reject

As can be seen in Table 7, hypothesis 7 “Dutch male and female respondents will have similar scores on relationship orientation” cannot be supported ($t=-2.84$; $p=0.00502$) since females have significantly higher score (39.778) than males (37.228). Females are both more task-oriented and more relationship-oriented.

As can be seen in Table 8, hypothesis 8 “Younger and older Dutch respondents will have similar scores on task orientation” cannot be supported ($t=-2.88$; $p=0.00439$) since older people have a significantly higher score (34.11) than younger people (31.476). Older respondents seem to be more focused on their tasks.

As can be seen in Table 9, hypothesis 9 “Younger and older Dutch respondents will have similar scores on relationship orientation” cannot be supported ($t=-4.12$; $p=0.00006$) since older respondents have a significantly higher score (39.85) than the younger (36.4). Older respondents are more relationship-oriented.

The mean stress perceptions of the 208 respondents in the Netherlands is in the moderate range (24.7356; St. Dev.=6.59104). As can be seen in Table 10, hypothesis 10 “Dutch male and female respondents will have similar scores on stress perceptions” cannot be rejected ($t=-0.33$; $p=0.74073$) since there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups. Males and females in the Netherlands seem to have similar perceptions of work overload stress in life.

As can be seen in Table 11, hypothesis 11 “Dutch respondents with more years of government experience will have similar scores on stress perceptions as those with little to no public work experience” cannot be rejected ($t=-1.51$; $p=0.1339$) since there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups, though people with government work experience reported a higher score. Government work experience is not a factor that creates a difference in the scores of work overload stress perceptions among Dutch respondents.

Discussion and Implication

It was hypothesized that Dutch respondents will have similar scores for relationship and task orientations, and the current study did not support this proposition. As expected, the more educated Dutch respondents are more task-oriented and more relationship-oriented than those who do not have a high school degree.

Table 7 Relationship orientation by gender

Group	No.	Mean	St. Dev.
Males	136	37.228	6.22
Females	72	39.778	6.071

$t=-2.84$; $p=0.00502$; reject

Table 8 Task orientation by age

Group	No.	Mean	St. Dev.
Younger	105	31.476	5.47
Older	103	34.11	7.57

$t = -2.88$; $p = 0.00439$; reject

Furthermore, this study found statistically significant differences in the task-oriented scores between those with government experience and those that did not work for the public sector. However, no statistically significant difference was found in the relationship-oriented scores between these two groups. Dutch females were found to have significantly higher task-oriented scores as well as relationship-oriented scores than their male counterparts. Dutch respondents who were 26 years of age and above were found to have significantly higher task-oriented scores as well as relationship-oriented scores than Dutch respondents who were less than 26 years of age. Finally, no statistically significant differences were found in the work overload stress perception scores between Dutch males and females, as well as between Dutch with government work experience and Dutch without government work experience.

The findings of this study indicate that relationship orientation is the prevalent leadership style in the Netherlands. Dutch people are more relationship-oriented. Additionally, there is a strong tendency towards a cooperative leadership style. Task orientation is the preferred leadership style in government sector in the Netherlands. Dutch people with more education are socialized to recognize both task and relationship orientation leadership styles in order to effectively compete with their more global counterparts in such a diverse workforce. They usually assume more responsibilities at their workplace and thus are required to better understand tasks as well as people who work with them. An interesting finding is that Dutch females are both more relationship-oriented and task-oriented than Dutch males. This is perhaps impacted by the cultural and working environment factors in the Netherlands. The Netherlands is a feminine society where the society values interpersonal sensitivity, concerns for others, and quality of life. However, a “glass ceiling” may still exist, which forces women to become more assertive and task-oriented to be able to compete in the workplace. Thus, Dutch females may be relationship-oriented in mind but may also need to be task-oriented because of the working environment. Older Dutch people have shown significant higher task and relationship orientations than their younger counterparts. This perhaps reflects the unique cultural feature of the Netherlands: though rules and policies are still expected, leaders need to work well with the team, focus on fairness, treat team members equally, and compromise to reach consensus. Older people seem to

Table 9 Relationship orientation by age

Group	No.	Mean	St. Dev.
Younger	105	36.4	6.035
Older	103	39.85	6.048

$t = -4.12$; $p = 0.00006$; reject

Table 10 Stress perception by gender

$t = -0.33$; $p = 0.74073$; cannot reject

Group	No.	Mean	St. Dev.
Males	136	24.625	6.44
Females	72	24.944	6.91

have more experience with the systems and understand the flexibility at the workplace and thus can develop a preference towards both leadership styles. Dutch people seem to experience moderate work overload stress regardless of whether they have government work experience or not. It perhaps indicates that Dutch organizations, public or private, pay adequate attention to work-related stress and implement interventions to help reduce their employees' stress efficiently. Finally, this study concludes that gender is not a factor that makes a difference in the work overload perception stress between Dutch males and females. This conclusion supports the results of the Netherlands Working Conditions Survey NEA in 2008.

Limitations and Recommendations

There are limitations that need to be mentioned. The first limitation is the fact that this study was conducted with a convenient adult population from a few different sectors and industries in the Netherlands. Future studies can compare populations with similar working backgrounds and demographic variables such as comparing government employees with the private sector. Another limitation is the small sample size of Dutch adults who can speak fluent English. Thus, these results cannot be generalized to the larger population. Future studies can be conducted on larger sample size with similar populations. Work overload perception stress was the only aspect of stress that was examined in this study. Future research can examine other aspects of work and life that can cause stress. In addition, this study only examined age, gender, education, and government work experience. In reality, working life is more complex and diffuse. Future research can examine many other factors such as different levels of work and different types of work. Finally, this study only focused on Dutch respondents. Future studies can examine the task, relationship and stress orientations across cultures to see if there is similarity or difference among these cultures.

Table 11 Stress perception by government experience

$t = -1.51$; $p = 0.1339$; cannot reject

Group	No.	Mean	St. Dev.
With Gov. Exp.	32	26.34	6.338
No Gov. Exp.	176	24.44	6.611

Conclusion

This study has shed light into the differences in leadership styles and work overload stress perception in the Netherlands, an interesting direction for multi-disciplinary research. Researchers and scholars can benefit from this study as it provided more empirical results regarding the stress orientation as well as the task and relationship similarities and dissimilarities between Dutch adults based on gender, age, education, and government work experience. Managers and practitioners can also benefit from the study as it provided many real-world implications in doing business or in dealing with Dutch working adults. The world of business has become more globalized and interconnected and the workforce has become more diverse; therefore, understanding the leadership and stress orientations of the Dutch workforce can help managers and companies successfully recruit, manage, and retain their talented employees.

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