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**MSc Thesis Communication and Innovation Studies Group**

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# **An Exploration Study of intercultural communicational problems Of Huawei Amsterdam Branch office**

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## **Summary**

This study was carried out in Huawei Amsterdam Branch office in the Netherlands. The Huawei is a Chinese telecommunication company. It was set up in 1988 in Shenzhen, China. Their products and solutions are deployed in over 100 countries and serve were from the international market, and they have set up more than 100 branch offices in order to provide quick services to their customers. The Huawei Netherlands was set up three years ago by 10 people. Until now, they have become the centre of Benelux with more than 100 staffs. Around 50% of their employees come from local area, and the rest of employees are mainly Chinese experts sent by China headquarter. English is official language there.

According to the internal anonymous survey conducted by HR department in the recent time, there are lots of potential problems relating to internal communication existing in the office, which lead to some negative consequences to the office. Moreover, more and more intercultural communication problems between local employees and Chinese management have been discovered during the practice times by conflict reports to HR department and Top management. Therefore, they have specially taken some actions to solve the problems, but the performances are not satisfied.

The objective of this study is to explore potential intercultural communication problems by applying relevant intercultural communication theories. In this study, data are collected through semi-structure interviews. And the comparison method is applied for analyzing data. By comparing the targets' opinions on same issues, I can easily understand whether or not there are different understandings among them. And the potential problems which may rise from those differences.

# CONTENT

<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>1</b>	
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>4</b>	Deleted: 4
1.1 Intercultural communication.....	4	Deleted: 4
1.2 About Huawei .....	5	Deleted: 5
1.3 Problem Finding .....	6	Deleted: 6
1.4 Theoretical base .....	7	Deleted: 7
1.5 Targets.....	8	Deleted: 8
1.5.1 About Chinese managers and employees.....	8	Deleted: 8
1.5.2 About Dutch managers and employees .....	9	Deleted: 9
1.6 Research Objective and Research Questions .....	9	Deleted: 9
<b>CHAPTER 2: THEORY REVIEW .....</b>	<b>11</b>	Deleted: 11
2.1 Overview of intercultural communication.....	13	Deleted: 13
2.1.1 Definition of intercultural communication.....	13	Deleted: 13
2.1.2 Three approaches to study intercultural communication.....	14	Deleted: 14
2.2 Cultural differences.....	19	Deleted: 19
2.2.1 Power distance.....	20	Deleted: 20
2.2.2 Uncertainty avoidance .....	23	Deleted: 23
2.2.3 Directness/Indirectness.....	25	Deleted: 25
2.3 Language competence .....	27	Deleted: 27
2.4 Anxiety/uncertainty management .....	29	Deleted: 29
<b>CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>31</b>	Deleted: 31
3.1 Research method .....	31	Deleted: 31
3.2 Techniques for data collection .....	32	Deleted: 32
3.2.1 Pre-test interviews .....	32	Deleted: 32
3.2.2 Open questions .....	33	Deleted: 33
3.2.3 Interviews .....	34	Deleted: 34
3.3 Data analysis method .....	35	Deleted: 35
3.4 Limitations .....	36	Deleted: 36
<b>CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS .....</b>	<b>37</b>	Deleted: 37
4.1 Power distance.....	37	Deleted: 37
4.1.1 The experience from Chinese subordinates .....	37	Deleted: 37
4.1.2 The experience from Dutch subordinates.....	41	Deleted: 41

4.1.3 Analysis.....	<u>43</u>	Deleted: 43
4.1.4 Conclusion.....	<u>46</u>	Deleted: 46
4.2 Teamwork (Uncertainty avoidance).....	<u>47</u>	Deleted: 47
4.2.1 The understanding of Chinese population.....	<u>47</u>	Deleted: 47
4.2.2 The understanding of Dutch population.....	<u>49</u>	Deleted: 49
4.2.3 Analysis.....	<u>50</u>	Deleted: 50
4.2.4 Conclusion.....	<u>51</u>	Deleted: 51
4.3 Feedback.....	<u>52</u>	Deleted: 52
4.3.1 The experience from Chinese employees.....	<u>52</u>	Deleted: 52
4.3.2 The experience from Dutch employees.....	<u>52</u>	Deleted: 52
4.3.3 Analysis.....	<u>53</u>	Deleted: 53
4.3.4 Conclusion.....	<u>54</u>	Deleted: 54
4.4 Language ability.....	<u>54</u>	Deleted: 54
4.4.1 Being able to speak English.....	<u>54</u>	Deleted: 54
4.4.2 Ability of English expression.....	<u>55</u>	Deleted: 55
4.4.3 Analysis.....	<u>56</u>	Deleted: 56
4.4.3 Conclusion.....	<u>58</u>	Deleted: 58
4.5 Anxiety/Uncertainty Management.....	<u>58</u>	Deleted: 58
4.5.1 Adaptation process.....	<u>59</u>	Deleted: 59
4.5.2 Analysis.....	<u>62</u>	Deleted: 62
4.5.3 Conclusion.....	<u>64</u>	Deleted: 64
<b>CHPATER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMENDATION.....</b>	<b><u>66</u></b>	Deleted: <b>66</b>
<b>APPENDIX.....</b>	<b><u>69</u></b>	Deleted: <b>69</b>
1 Questions for Dutch managers and employees.....	<u>69</u>	Deleted: 69
2 Questions for Chinese managers and employees.....	<u>71</u>	Deleted: 71
<b>REFERENCE.....</b>	<b><u>73</u></b>	Deleted: <b>73</b>

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to give readers general ideas about what the case concern. The first section gives a brief introduction about intercultural communication. The second section is about the company background. The following sections explain why I choose Huawei Netherlands to be my study case and the research targets. Finally, the last section explains the overall objective and research questions of this study.

## 1.1 Intercultural communication

Today, the world we live in is “a global village”, what happens in one part of the world affects all parts of the world. As different nations or groups are getting closer, we are increasingly interacting with people from many different cultures. While modern technologies make us easier to communicate with people anywhere in the world (Jones, 2002). Besides, as the world economies develop to being globalization, the business world becomes more international and interrelated. Cultural diversity and multiculturalism are the realities of working and domestic life in everywhere. In order to live and work in such multicultural environment effectively, people should be competent for intercultural communication.

The intercultural communication study refers to an academic field of study. It refers to understand how people from different cultures behave, communicate and perceive the world around them. Karlfried Knapp defines the intercultural communication as “*the interpersonal interaction between members of different groups, which differ from each other in respect of the knowledge shared by their members and in respect of their linguistic forms of symbolic behaviors* (Kwintessential).” And then the research findings are applied to real situation for creating cultural cooperation between people from different countries within there business.

When people communicate with someone from a different culture, the cultural differences can be expected to have an influence. The cultural differences arise from our different perceptions, which determine how we communicate with people of other cultures. The trend of global village can make interactions difficult if we do not know how to deal with people and cultures which different from our own. By understanding how those holders of different cultures perceive the world and their values, we can better understand what they say and avoid potential intercultural misunderstandings (Jones, 2002).

Besides, language is another very important issue for intercultural communication. According to Samover and Porter (1982) “*Intercultural communication occurs whenever a*

*message is produced by a member of one culture for consumption by a member of another culture.*” The language is a fundamental tool to construct and exchange meanings with one another. Therefore, learning the second language does not only provide us a tool to facilitate interactions on the practical level, but also it brings insight into others cultures and facilitates understanding of each other (unknown, 2005). Whereas, speaking a common language does not always guarantee understanding. Vocabulary, idiom and experience can still cause misunderstandings (Jones, 2002).

The trend of globalization makes demand to study intercultural communication. The more understanding about people from different cultures the more intercultural communication risks can be reduced. And the individual communication competence influences in intercultural communication as well.

## **1.2 About Huawei**

The trend of economy globalization facilitates international business cooperation. It brings increased opportunities to some companies developing business abroad and makes foreign exchange profits. Under the globalization trend, more and more companies “go out” from their own country and build up their branch offices in other countries. Therefore, “localization” has recently become a hot issue in international business world, which can bring lots of advantages for global companies, such local knowledge, low operation cost, direct and convenient service to local customers, etc.

Huawei is this kind of global company from China. It was organized in 1988, which is a world-leading telecom solutions provider focused on building long-term partnerships with telecom operators (See their official website: <http://www.huawei.com/about/AboutIndex.do>). Through years of hard efforts, Huawei is becoming more and more internationalized. Their products and solutions are deployed in over 100 countries and serve many users worldwide. In 2007, 72% of their contract sales were from the international market, and they have set up more than 100 branch offices in order to provide quick services to their customers. The Huawei Netherlands is one of the branch offices located abroad.

This office was built up four years ago by 10 people. Until now, they have become the centre of Benelux with more than 100 staffs. Around 50% of their employees come from the Netherlands and other foreign countries, and the rest of employees are Chinese experts sent by China headquarter. English is the official language there. As its top manager said the final development target is to be localization, however, this way is not such easy.

### **1.3 Problem Finding**

According to the recent internal anonymous survey which was conducted by HR department of Huawei Netherlands, it shows that there are lots of internal communication problems in the office, which already lead to some negative consequences, such as high turnover of employees, problems created by different management styles, lack of training program, etc. Furthermore, more and more communication problems are reported to HR department. For example, lack of direct communication with locals, suggestions are not taken into consideration, etc. Therefore, the top management team and HR department have already taken some actions to solve those problems, whereas the results are not satisfied.

As we known, culture is increasingly finding itself interacting with one another in one society (Li, 1999). People always get used to understand the information and communicate with others in terms of their own culture. But there are differences and similarities among cultures. These cultural differences related to communication expectations might result in miscommunication, offense, or even a loss of profits (Amant, 2001). Being localization means hire local employees to run the company. By doing so, the company culture cannot be unique. If the Huawei Netherlands wants to be localization, the multicultural company environment is an unavoidable trend in their future. Both Chinese and Dutch cultures are involved in, because this branch office must have close contacts with Huawei headquarters, it needs Chinese to work on relevant positions. Moreover, the main positions of managers will be still hold by Chinese people like Samsung Group (a Korean telecom company). Therefore, it is very important to get over cultural differences. Making abundant understanding about both cultures and enhance individual communication competent are necessary. Accordingly, I will first find what types of cultural difference problems exist in Huawei Amsterdam branch office.

Besides, various individual competences also make the communication problems, especially in intercultural circumstance. In the recent intercultural communication studies, "Intercultural competence of individual" has been put forward, and lots of studies (e.g. He, 2005) show that individual intercultural competence is crucial in effective intercultural communication. Moreover, under the intercultural organization, the individual competence has absolute influence, such as language competency (Babcock and Babcock, 1991), anxiety/uncertainty management ability (Gudykunst, 2005), and individual experience etc.

The first barrier is about employees. This company tends to technology-oriented company, and most of current Chinese managers start their career from being technique engineers in China. Some of them learn management skills from books and practical experience. It brings both positive and negative influence. The positive influence is that these Chinese managers

have better understanding on products and technical services. The negative influence is that these managers are easier to apply unsuitable management skills to the field.

The second barrier is about cultural differences. Being localization means hire local employees to run the company. By doing so, the company culture cannot be unique. If the Huawei Netherlands wants to be localization, the multicultural company environment is an unavoidable trend in their future. Both Chinese and Dutch cultures are involved in, because this branch office must have close contacts with Huawei headquarter, it needs Chinese to work on relevant positions. Moreover, the main positions of managers will be still hold by Chinese people like Samsung Group (a Korean telecom company). Therefore, it is very important to get over cultural differences. Making abundant understanding about both cultures and enhance individual communication competent are necessary.

## **1.4 Theoretical base**

There are three approaches are used in intercultural communication studies: 1) the functionalist approach, 2) the interpretive approach, 3) the critical approach (Table 2-1, Chapter 2). The theories of functionalist approach are used to explore how the cultures as a barrier to against intercultural communication. In my case, the four dimensions of Hofstede would be useful as theoretical foundations to identify the different understanding between Dutch and Chinese employees for specific issues and to explore potential problems.

Considering about the features of Huawei Netherlands<sup>1</sup> and my own research limitations, I am going to discuss the cultural differences and individual competence in intercultural communication. In the cultural differences part, the power distance, uncertainty avoidance (teamwork), and indirectness/directness (feedback) are going to be discussed one by one. Those three indicators had already been studied in the field by lots of researchers for quite long time. Accordingly, it may provide me more correct preferences. And there are some relevant topics had already been mentioned by employees in the internal anonymous survey and pre-test interviews (see Chapter 3). In the personal competence part, I am going to study about language competence and anxiety/uncertainty management ability.

As I see, the understanding of power distance can partly or fully determine the management styles that the managers use for their work. And it is normal thing to keep long distance between managers and employees in Chinese culture. In contrast, the short power distance is normal in Dutch culture. According to the situation in Huawei Netherlands, it is necessary to be studied.

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<sup>1</sup> They are Chinese company in the Netherlands, in which Chinese cultural is dominant and conflicts are mainly between Chinese cultural and Dutch cultural.

The second indicator is teamwork. The teamwork is an ordinary working pattern for both Chinese and Dutch employees in Huawei Netherlands. Although all of them are accustomed to work as a team, however, the intentions of working as a team are probably different. Based on that, the Dutch and Chinese employees probably behave differently when they work as a team. During my internship in Huawei Netherlands, I noticed that some conflicts are about cooperation between Chinese and Dutch employees within teams. Hence, I take “teamwork” as one important indicator to explore the intercultural communication problems caused by cultural differences.

The last indicator is about directness and indirectness. This is a very important Dutch characteristic, which is quite different from Chinese culture (White et al., 2006 edition). Feedback giving is one of way to embody this feature. Thereby, I study how employees give feedback to their colleagues from the other culture in Huawei Netherlands.

Besides, the functionalistic approach also tries to establish criteria to determine which characteristics a person needs in order to acquire intercultural competences. In Huawei Netherlands, English is the only available language between Dutch and Chinese employees. The language (English) competence could be the most important factor to influence their communication effect. Therefore, the theories about language competence were taken into account.

Moreover, the anxiety/uncertainty management is also another important personal ability to Dutch and Chinese people in Huawei Netherlands. And this ability could decide their adaptation process, even influence their working performance in Huawei Netherlands. Therefore, the anxiety/uncertainty management theory should be reviewed to understand how Dutch and Chinese employees adjust themselves to the new working environment and the problems they might face in such process.

## **1.5 Targets**

### **1.5.1 About Chinese managers and employees**

All the Chinese managers and employees are sent to Huawei Netherlands by headquarter of Huawei China. Most of Chinese managers have relevant management experience with their technical background either in China or other countries. As I found out through informal conversations with them, the tour of duty includes temporary and permanent. Temporary designation is mainly for technical engineers, it aims to provide technical support for a short

period. Permanent tour of duty means work in Huawei Netherlands at least for three years. This kind of managers and employees are selected from sales, administration, supply chain, technical and HR departments. Their working performance determines how long they can stay in the Netherlands. And the evaluation of working performance takes once a year. Their colleagues and managers are included to evaluate them. If their colleagues give them positive feedback and the evaluation results are positive. The Chinese managers and employees can work in the Netherlands for longer.

### **1.5.2 About Dutch managers and employees**

Most of Dutch managers and employees have already worked in Huawei Netherlands about two years. All of them were recruited from local. The initial reason for working at Huawei is good for their future career. The Huawei is new for Dutch telecommunication market. It requires people who have strong engineering backgrounds and familiar with local market. Moreover, these Dutch managers were also searching for places which could provide more developing spaces and opportunities to exhibit their talent. The Huawei is able to build up such platform to them. Therefore, they decided to take its offers.

These target Dutch managers are selected from sales, technical and HR departments. They are managed directly by General Manager who was sent by Huawei China. Besides, their teams are included both Chinese and Dutch employees. They all experienced the process of confusion, adjustment and adaptation from beginning to the present.

## **1.6 Research Objective and Research Questions**

### **Research objective:**

The research objective is to explore intercultural communication problems in Huawei Netherlands by using theories of cultural differences and individual intercultural competence.

To narrow and specify the research objective, I will do the research from two different levels: cultural level and individual level.

Therefore, the research questions can be formulated as below:

### **General Research Question:**

What are the existing intercultural communication problems in Huawei Amsterdam branch office?

### **Specific Research Questions:**

1. Whether or not power distance acceptance differences between different cultures can lead to the communication conflicts, and how?
  - a) How Dutch/Chinese managers manage their teams? Is there a big difference between Dutch manager and Chinese manager?
  - b) What are the ideas of Dutch/Chinese employees for their team leader(s) from the other culture or from same culture?
  
2. Whether or not cultural differences in intercultural teamwork in Huawei Amsterdam branch office cause the communication conflicts, and how?
  - a) How Dutch/Chinese employees think about the purpose of teamwork and normally how they behave as a team member?
  - b) How Dutch/Chinese employees think about the behaviors of their team members from the other culture?
  
3. Whether or not “directness and indirectness” is important cultural difference, which to large extent influences the performance of cooperation in Huawei Amsterdam branch office?
4. Whether or not the individual language capacity can cause communication problems under intercultural environment in Huawei Amsterdam branch office, and how?
  
5. Whether or not individual anxiety/uncertainty management capability can cause communication problems under intercultural environment in Huawei Amsterdam branch office, and how?

## **CHAPTER 2: THEORY REVIEW**

In this chapter, the relevant intercultural communication theories are reviewed. To get an overview on what has been written by academics and to interpret which theories are useable for exploring the potential problems and achieving the research objective.

There are many theories on the basis of different research purposes of intercultural communication study. As Gudykunst (2005) clarified in his paper, the intercultural communication theories can be theorized into three categories. The first category is, the culture has been integrated with communication process in communication theories, such as Applegate and Sypher (1983, 1988) integrate culture into constructivist theory. Second, the theories have been generated to explain how communication varies across cultures such as Ting-Tomney's (1985, 2005) face negotiation theory. Third, intercultural communication theories have been generated to explain or describe communication between people from different cultures. So far, most of theories belong to the last category, such as Gudykunst's (1995) Anxiety/Uncertainty Management Theory. Furthermore, he also categorized intercultural communication theories into five categories. These five categories are not mutually exclusive: 1) theories focusing on effective outcomes, 2) theories focusing on accommodation and adaptation, 3) theories focusing on identity management, 4) theories focusing on communication networks and, 5) theories are focusing on adjustment to new cultural environments.

Due to the time and ability limitations of this research, it is impossible to study all of them. Therefore, I took the pre-test interviews to help me narrowing down my focuses at the beginning (the detailed account of pre-test interviews is in Chapter 3). Many informants mentioned the nasty experiences of the relationships with their superiors or subordinates who were from another country, or they have to face the tough situation when they work in an international team. As I knew, the HR department already received several reports about such topics during my internship. Meanwhile, I found that such topics had been studied by Hofstede in his four dimensions theory long time ago, and it is a typical theory to study cultural differences between Western and Eastern worlds. Many intercultural communication researchers already applied it as theoretical foundation in their practical researches. Therefore, I decided to apply 'power distance', 'uncertainty avoidance', and dimension as my theoretical framework to explore potential intercultural communication problems in Huawei Technology Co. Ltd in the Netherlands, however, the masculinity/femininity and individualism/collectivism dimension will be excluded, because the results of pre-test interview do not show anything about it and it is not relevant with my case.

Besides, the different expression has to be discussed here. The directness and indirectness expression powerfully effects on communication cases. Many articles said that speaking directly is one of typical Dutch features; in contrast, the Chinese people are used to be indirectly. And some informants mentioned the different communication patterns between them and their foreign subordinates.

In addition, being able to speak second language is important in intercultural communication. Many researchers studied intercultural communication from language to explore how intercultural communication can be influenced by language competence. In the company, many of my informants did not have frequent opportunities to speak English before work for Huawei Netherlands. The language more or less becomes to a barrier to their works. Therefore, the language competence theory is involved in my study.

Finally, the Huawei Netherlands is neither pure Chinese cultural company nor pure Dutch cultural company. In other words, the company involves both Chinese and Dutch cultures. And this situation is complete new for their employees. Adaptation is one unavoidable step if they would like to start working here. Moreover, in the intercultural communication study, Gudykunst's anxiety/uncertainty management theory is focusing on adjustment to new cultural environment which is matching with the current situation of the company. Therefore, I decided to add this theory into the theoretical framework.

A brief introduction about intercultural communication will be presented at the beginning in the following section. And the main five theories : "power distance", "uncertainty avoidance", "low-high context cultures", "directness/indirectness", "language competence" and "anxiety/uncertainty management" theories will be reviewed separate.

## **2.1 Overview of intercultural communication**

### **2.1.1 Definition of intercultural communication**

Intercultural communication has many different definitions. It is difficult to give a universal definition which is accepted by all intercultural communication scholars; however, the intercultural communication could be understood as '*the sharing of information on different levels of awareness and control between people with different cultural backgrounds*' (Allwood, 1985). Culture and communication are two important terms in intercultural communication study.

Culture is a complex concept. It has been defined in many ways --- from a pattern of perceptions that influence communication to conflicts and contestations (Martin & Nakayama, 2003). There is no universal definition of culture, because any definition is so restrictive. Researchers ever found and examined 300 definitions of culture; none of one was the same (Neuliep, 2006). In spite of that, the essence of culture is accepted by most of people. In the mind of most people, the culture can be defined by its value and belief systems and by the actions of its members taking (Neuliep, 2006). The beliefs refer to the basic understanding of a group of people about the world. The values refer to what the group of people define good and bad things. In addition, norms can be involved in culture as well. It refers to rules for guaranteeing appropriate behaviors of people (Lustig & Koester, 2003). People in the same culture generally share similar values, beliefs and norms. Nevertheless, people are not born with a particular culture. People learn their own culture with parents, other family members, and even strangers who are involved in the same culture through daily life. The culture is not only located in the minds of people, but also affect human behaviors consciously or unconsciously. In other words, the understanding of norms, beliefs and values give people guidelines about what things should be done or not, what are important or not (Lustig & Koester, 2003).

Communication is the second term in understanding intercultural communication. Everywhere and everyday people are communicating with someone who around them. The communication has a profound effect on human. People do not only define themselves via their communication with others, but also conduct their lives through communication. Communication is the vehicle which people initiate, maintain, and terminate relationships with others (Neuliep, 2006). Although there are many definitions about communication, however, there are certain ideas which many scholars agree.

The first one, communication is symbolic. Symbols can be verbal and nonverbal. Messages are organized with verbal and nonverbal symbols. By using symbols, people can express their ideas and thoughts through writing or speaking. When the idea has been organized with symbols, it becomes message (Neuliep, 2006). Nevertheless, each message maybe has more than one meaning. We assume that the receivers understand the meaning that we send. But for individuals from different cultural backgrounds and speaking different languages, this assumption might be incorrect. People probably use different symbols and organize messages in different ways (Lustig & Koester, 2003).

Second, the communication is a dynamic process. It continues to change and develop. It is neither stop nor reverse, because communication is irreversible (Neuliep, 2006). Lustig & Koester (2003) also mentioned in their article that communication is not a singular event but is ongoing. It relies on other communication events to develop further. When people negotiate meaning, they are creating, maintaining, repairing and transforming reality. This implies that one person cannot communicate alone; people are actively involved in the communication process.

According to above explanation about these two terms, the intercultural communication can also be understood as *'the intercultural communication occurs whenever a minimum of two persons from different cultures come together and exchange verbal and nonverbal symbols'* (Neuliep, 2006). The relationship between culture and communication is complex. Communication is a way of contesting and resisting the dominant culture. In turn, the culture does not only influence communication, but also is enacted through communication (Martin & Nakayama, 2003). In fact, communicating with people from different cultures does not just enhance mutual beneficial relations and understandings, most often lead to deep and long-lasting misunderstandings. Sometimes, cultural differences are hidden at an unconscious level. Or perhaps people feel that something is a little bit odd, but still be unable to point out what is going on exactly (Paul Verluyten, 2000). Therefore, the intercultural communication needs to be studied.

### **2.1.2 Three approaches to study intercultural communication**

There are several approaches in the social sciences which contribute to intercultural communication studies. These approaches complete each other rather than competing with each other, because each of them studies on a unique way.

The three approaches to studying intercultural communication are: 1) the functionalist approach, 2) the interpretive approach, 3) the critical approach (Table 2-1). These approaches are based on different assumptions about human nature, behavior, and

knowledge nature. Each of them varies in their assumptions about their research goals, the conceptualization of culture and communication with their preferred methodologies (Martin & Nakayama, 2003).

### **1) The functionalist approach**

The functionalist approach is also called social science approach in some articles. It is based on the research in psychology and sociology. This approach assumes that human behaviors are predictable. The goals of these researchers are to describe and predict human behaviors. The researchers often use quantitative methods to gather data at the field (Martin & Nakayama, 2003).

In the intercultural communication study, scholars assume culture is a variable which can be measured. In their view, the communication is influenced by culture (Martin & Nakayama, 2003). In this type of study, when the scholars of intercultural communication are interested in one specific topic, they might measure different understandings of this topic among many cultural groups to understand how different cultures perceive about this topic and the reasons behind (Martin & Nakayama, 2003).

There are many famous intercultural communication researchers applied functional approach. For instance, Gudykunst (1998) was interested in whether people from different cultures changed in their communication strategies to reduce uncertainty. He found that strategies were changed depending on whether people from individualist or collectivist cultures (Martin & Nakayama, 2003). Hofstede's large scale study called '*culture's consequences; International differences in work-related values*' is still a major reference at the present, for its methodologies and findings. Hofstede was working for IBM Corporation in the US. He carried out a large-scale survey into the work-related value systems of employees in IBM branch offices through the world. Based on the survey results, he created 'the four theoretical dimensions'. Afterwards, many subsequent intercultural communication researches were based on his contribution (Paul Verluyten, 2000). Moreover, studies about how travelers adapt overseas found that age, gender, languages, personality and preparation level play a role for adapting into new environment successfully (Martin & Nakayama, 2003).

Although the functionalist approach is useful in intercultural communication study, however, many researchers of intercultural communication field also admit that this approach is limited. First of all, the intercultural communication is creative, not all variables or behaviors can be predicted. Besides, the reality is not only external but also the internal making sense. Furthermore, the researches cannot predict why one intercultural communication is

successful and another not. The last but not the end, researchers may not really understand the culture groups they are studying (Martin & Nakayama, 2003).

## **2) The interpretive approach**

The interpretive approach is based on the research on sociolinguistics and anthropology study. It aims to understand and describe human behaviors. Researchers from this approach see cultures as created and maintained through communication. They assume that not only the reality is external to people, but also the people construct the reality as well. The researchers also believe that experiences of people are subjective and human behaviors are neither predetermined nor predicted easily. Qualitative methods are usually applied in this field of study. Normally, the researchers are used to engage in the target communities which they are studying. By doing so, they can gain insight about how this group of people communicate with each other or with people who from other cultural groups (Martin & Nakayama, 2003).

When intercultural communication researchers are interested in one topic, they probably interview people from two different cultural groups. By doing so, he/she can get insight into a variety of potential responses (Martin & Nakayama, 2003). For example, the space that is one of topics in intercultural communication. When you have conversation with a foreign business partner, the space between you and him/her refer to personal boundary in every culture. The different understanding of space might lead to bad impression from the other side. If the intercultural communication researcher is interested in study about the culture differences between the Netherlands and China, he probably interview both Dutch and Chinese people, as well as engage in these two cultural groups to do participant interview. In this way, the researcher can gain insight about how the space differs between these two cultures.

The interpretive approach emphasizes that communication, culture and cultural differences should be studied in context. This approach is used by many intercultural communication researchers. For example, Gerry Philipsen (1990) who studied about the different communication patterns of one cultural group. Molefi Asante's notion of Afro-centricity provides a framework to understand African American communication (Martin & Nakayama, 2003).

### **3) The critical approach**

The third approach is critical approach. The critical approach includes many assumptions which are similar with interpretive approach. For example, researchers from critical and interpretive approaches emphasize the importance of studying the situation, background and environment which communication occurs, however, the critical researchers are more focusing on macro-context, such as the political and social structures that influence communication. In other words, the critical researchers are interested in the power relations in communication. Identifying cultural differences in communication is important for them when it relates to power differentials. Therefore, their research goals are not only to understand human behaviors, but also to change the lives of everyday communicators.

The critical researchers assume that through examining and analyzing how power functions in cultural situations, they can help people to resist forces of power and oppression. They are used to analyze cultural products, such as media instead of participating in face to face interactions and conducting surveys (Martin & Nakayama, 2003). It makes the first limitation that lack of focus on face to face intercultural interaction. This leads to the second limitation that the critical approach cannot get much empirical data and create practical results. The key scholars include Janice Peck, Tom Nakayama and Dreama Moon etc.

	<b>Functionalist</b>	<b>Interpretive</b>	<b>Critical</b>
<b>Discipline on which approach is founded</b>	Psychology	Anthropology, Sociolinguistics	Various
<b>Research goal</b>	Describe and predict behaviors	Describe behaviors	Change behavior
<b>Assumption of reality</b>	External and describable	Subjective	Subjective and material
<b>Assumptions of human behaviors</b>	Predictable	Creative and voluntary	Changeable
<b>Method of study</b>	Survey, Observation	Participant observation, Field study	Textual analysis of media
<b>Relationship of culture and communication</b>	Communication influenced by culture	Culture created and maintained through communication	Culture a site of power struggles
<b>Contribution of the approach</b>	Identifies cultural variations; recognizes cultural differences in many aspects of communication, but often does not consider contest	Emphasizes that communication and culture and cultural differences should be studied in context	Recognizes the economic and political forces in culture and communication; asserts that all intercultural interactions are characterized by power

Table 2-1: Three approaches to intercultural communication (Source: Martin & Nakayama, 2003)

## 2.2 Cultural differences

As we know, '*Culture is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one category of people from another*' (Hofstede, 1991). Different countries have different cultures. In other words, cultures are nations in the mind of most people. The tendency of globalization makes the distance among countries getting smaller. The intercultural communication study had been related to the understanding of national cultures as the fundamental principle. Moreover, the continuing technical innovation makes people easily to communicate with whom from other countries. International business cooperation is increased. It is inevitable that the cultural differences have impact on business and other interaction forms.

In this case, Chinese and Dutch Huawei Netherlands employees as my studies samples which are showing very cultural conflict when they work together. These two cultures have similarities and differences to various degrees, however, the theories of cultural differences are going to be reviewed here. As we known, culture is increasingly finding itself interacting with one another in one society (Li, 1999). People will always get used to understand the information and communication with others according to their own cultural references. Therefore, cultural differences related to communication expectations, however, can result in miscommunication, offense, or even a loss of profits (Amant, 2001). Accordingly, to review the theories about cultural differences can provide me a precise theoretical fundament to explore intercultural communication problems in Huawei Netherlands.

The concept of culture has been studied in depth. Tylor identified culture with social system in 1871. Years later, Hofstede argued that culture as software of the mind. This software is invisible and not definable. It is a system make of way of behavior and thinking (Battaglia et al, 2004). People notice this essence only when, and if, they are facing different cultures. Among the multitude of researches on culture, Hofstede and Trompenaars went a step further based on Hall's breakthrough changing the point of view among the theories (Battaglia et al, 2004).

I decide to apply Hofstede's four dimensions theory which involves some basic differences among the cultures. The four dimensions theory gives us the most important features of every culture through the index – power distance; uncertainty avoidance; collectivism / individualism; and masculinity / femininity. The methodology of Hofstede's study will not be discussed here; but I do need to give a brief look at set-up of the study. The study was carried out when Hofstede was working for IBM Corporation in the United State. He carried out a large scale survey into the work related value system of employees in IBM subsidiaries all over the world. The country comparison is based on the data from service decisions and

marketing of the company. The data were collected from approximately 117,000 questionnaires and 66 countries and carried out between 1967 and 1973. At that moment, IBM does not have development or manufacturing operations in all the countries where it is present, therefore, many country's values were added later (e.g. China and countries in Central and Eastern Europe), or grouped into clusters ( e.g. Arab speaking countries, East and West Africa) by other fellow researchers (Paul Verluyten, 2000).

According to my thesis research objective, I focus on power distance and uncertainty avoidance except the collectivism / individualism and masculinity/femininity dimensions. The collectivism emphasizes on that the group goals are higher than individuals' goals. In these kinds of cultures, people are seen as members of a group. They think themselves as interdependent with others. Moreover, the responsibilities and accountabilities are shared and collective with others. The individualistic cultures emphasis on that the individual goals are over group goals, and maybe at the expense of other types of goals (Triandis, Neuliep, 2006). The masculinity / femininity explain how gender roles are distributed in a culture. The masculinity pertains to societies in which men are supposed to be assertive, and focus on material success whereas women are supposed to be more modest, and concern with the quality of life (Gudykunst, 2005). In fact, the masculinity / femininity are too abstract for Huawei case, and my study also do not relevant with it. So that, the masculinity / femininity is not considered here. The detail of other two dimensions will be reviewed solely in the following sections.

### **2.2.1 Power distance**

Power distance is about social inequality. In any group, be human or animal, there exists a certain amount inequality which is showed as 'order'. Hofstede (1980) defined power distance as '*the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.*' Hofstede categorized cultures either high or low power distance. In his idea, cultures with a low power distance emphasizes that inequalities among people should be minimized and interdependence between less and more powerful people. In organization, employees engage in participative decision making frequently (Neuliep, 2006).

There is mutual dependence or interdependence. The subordinates depend on their manager, but the manager also depends on the subordinates for feedback and consultation (Paul Verluyten, 2000). On the other hand, in high power distance cultures, the inequality is accepted as part of a natural order of things (Paul Verluyten, 2000). Power is usually centralized where subordinates and managers are treated differently and unequally

(Hofstede, 1980). There is strict hierarchy among company members where managers typically hold authorities, and the subordinates depend on their boss.

For giving readers a direct view, I list the power distance index (PDI) in figure 2-1. These scores are not absolute, but just relative value. They can be used to compare one country with another. The lowest score of power distance is Austria with 11%. This does not mean there is only 11% inequality or almost no inequality in the country. In fact, differences of a few points on the PDI are not significant.

<b>Country</b>	<b>PDI (%)</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>PDI (%)</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>PDI (%)</b>
Malaysia	<b>104</b>	Hong Kong	<b>68</b>	Pakistan	<b>55</b>
Guatemala	<b>95</b>	Poland	<b>68</b>	Japan	<b>54</b>
Panama	<b>95</b>	Colombia	<b>67</b>	Italy	<b>50</b>
Philippines	<b>94</b>	El Salvador	<b>66</b>	Argentina	<b>49</b>
Mexico	<b>81</b>	Turkey	<b>66</b>	South Africa	<b>49</b>
Venezuela	<b>81</b>	Belgium	<b>65</b>	Hungary	<b>46</b>
<b>China</b>	<b>80</b>	Ethiopia	<b>64</b>	Jamaica	<b>45</b>
Egypt	<b>80</b>	Kenya	<b>64</b>	US	<b>40</b>
Iraq	<b>80</b>	Peru	<b>64</b>	<b>Netherlands</b>	<b>38</b>
Kuwait	<b>80</b>	Tanzania	<b>64</b>	Australia	<b>36</b>
Lebanon	<b>80</b>	Brazil	<b>69</b>	Costa Rica	<b>35</b>
Libya	<b>80</b>	Thailand	<b>64</b>	Germany	<b>35</b>
Saudi Arabia	<b>80</b>	Zambia	<b>64</b>	UK	<b>35</b>
UAE	<b>80</b>	Chile	<b>63</b>	Switzerland	<b>34</b>
Ecuador	<b>78</b>	Portugal	<b>63</b>	Finland	<b>33</b>
Indonesia	<b>78</b>	Uruguay	<b>61</b>	Norway	<b>31</b>
Ghana	<b>77</b>	Greece	<b>60</b>	Sweden	<b>31</b>
India	<b>77</b>	South Korea	<b>60</b>	Ireland	<b>28</b>
Nigeria	<b>77</b>	Iran	<b>58</b>	New Zealand	<b>22</b>
Singapore	<b>74</b>	Czech	<b>57</b>	Israel	<b>13</b>
France	<b>68</b>	Spain	<b>57</b>	Austria	<b>11</b>

Figure 2-1. Power Distance Index (source: <http://www.clearlycultural.com/geert-hofstede-cultural-dimensions/power-distance-index/>)

According to Hofstede's research, Neuliep summarized in his book that high and low power distance cultures may value different types of power. The low power distance cultures recognize and respect earned power which is based on an individual's performance and hard work. The high power distance cultures focus on positional power. The positional power is based on authorities. People with positional power can control over rewards, warnings, and information (Neuliep, 2006). In other words, we can say that in high power distance cultures subordinates extremely obey their managers whereas in low power distance cultures subordinates are confrontational with their managers. Managers themselves tend to accept more participative behavior from their subordinates (Paul Verluyten, 2000).

Besides, the power distance cultures are related with communication. When making evaluations of communication between subordinates and managers in low power distance cultures, subordinates are used to focus on the quality of their communication. In contrast, when making the same evaluation in high power distance cultures, subordinates tend to give positive answers most of time. Because they are worried about that giving negative answers would leave bad impressions to their managers and becoming barriers to their future career. (Tyler, Lind & Huo, 2001).

The different understanding of power distance may appear different ways and means. It is normal to arising conflicts when work with someone who hold different understanding of power distance. The managers in low power distance cultures are used to minimize status differences during conflicts, and they prefer their subordinates to assist in solving conflicts together. In contrast, the managers in high power distance culture are used to handle conflicts by themselves, because of authority (Smith, Dugan & Peterson, 1998).

Furthermore, according to Hoecklin (1995), 'It would condition the extent to which subordinates accept that their managers have more power than they have and the extent to which they accept that their managers' opinions and decisions are right because he or she is the manager.' In another word, we can define 'power distance' simply as the distance between managers and subordinates.

In low power distance countries where managers and subordinates are work close and consult each other. They think about each other as or less equal even there is a different education level. The hierarchical systems are changeable depending on circumstances. The hierarchies are flat with a decentralized organizational structure, and a small number of managers who are expected to be accessible for their employees. The degree of unequal treatments is reduced to a low lever within the company. There is an interdependent relation

between managers and subordinates. And the subordinates are involved into the decision-making processes. In contrast, the power distance between managers and subordinates is strict and dependent on the decisions from managers in high power distance countries. The company with high power distance is a centralized organization. The subordinates are expected to obey the orders from their managers, because of unequal idea (Via-web).

In the case of Huawei Netherlands, the theories of power distance are going to be applied to explore how the understanding of power distance exists between Dutch and Chinese groups and potential problems.

### **2.2.2 Uncertainty avoidance**

The uncertainty avoidance is one of dimensions in Hofstede's four dimensions theory. Hofstede (1980) defined uncertainty avoidance as *'the degree to which the members of a particular culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations.'* He contended that the feeling is expressed via nervous and a need for predictability and a need for written and unwritten regulations. He argued that the cultures possess either high or low uncertainty avoidance orientation. In the high uncertainty avoidance orientation cultures, uncertainty is always seen as a continuous threat that must be reduced. The high uncertainty avoidance cultures are guided by the belief which what is different is dangerous. These cultures escape ambiguity in most situations and look for stable structures in their business organizations and relationships. And these people are good at making a self-regulatory style where circumvents uncertainty (Neuliep, 2006).

Conversely, in the low uncertainty avoidance orientation cultures, uncertainty seems like a normal part in life, where each day is accepted as it comes. The people are accustomed to be with ambiguity and are guided by a belief that what is different is curious. These people try to understand and discover aspects of the self and the environment about which they are uncertain. They look for information and engage in activities in order to handle the uncertainty directly (Neuliep, 2006).

On the workplaces, managers from high uncertainty avoidance cultures tend to be specialists rather than generalists. In low uncertainty avoidance cultures, managers tend to be involved in strategy and leave details to be worked out by others. Moreover, they are also more willing to take risky decisions, whereas in high uncertainty avoidance culture, managers are more afraid to tread unknown situation and stick to the certainty of what in know. For subordinates, in high uncertainty avoidance cultures, subordinates themselves prefer to clear requirements and instructions. Broad guidelines only in low uncertainty avoidance cultures (Paul Verluyten, 2000).

The uncertainty avoidance index (UAI) of the different countries is in figure 2-2. As many Latin-American countries, the European countries have high UAI scores. Asian countries do not have particular high UAI scores except Japan. The difference of UAI scores of in Netherlands and China are not large.

<b>Country</b>	<b>UAI</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>UAI</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>UAI</b>
Malaysia	<b>36</b>	France	<b>86</b>	Spain	<b>86</b>
Guatemala	<b>101</b>	Hong Kong	<b>29</b>	Pakistan	<b>70</b>
Panama	<b>86</b>	Poland	<b>93</b>	Japan	<b>92</b>
Philippines	<b>44</b>	Colombia	<b>80</b>	Italy	<b>75</b>
Mexico	<b>82</b>	El Salvador	<b>94</b>	Argentina	<b>86</b>
Venezuela	<b>76</b>	Turkey	<b>85</b>	South Africa	<b>49</b>
<b>China</b>	<b>40</b>	Belgium	<b>94</b>	Hungary	<b>82</b>
Egypt	<b>68</b>	Ethiopia	<b>52</b>	Jamaica	<b>13</b>
Iraq	<b>68</b>	Kenya	<b>52</b>	United States	<b>46</b>
Kuwait	<b>68</b>	Peru	<b>87</b>	<b>Netherlands</b>	<b>53</b>
Lebanon	<b>68</b>	Tanzania	<b>52</b>	Australia	<b>51</b>
Libya	<b>68</b>	Thailand	<b>64</b>	Costa Rica	<b>86</b>
Saudi Arabia	<b>68</b>	Zambia	<b>52</b>	Germany	<b>65</b>
U.A.E	<b>68</b>	Chile	<b>86</b>	UK	<b>35</b>
Ecuador	<b>67</b>	Portugal	<b>104</b>	Switzerland	<b>58</b>
Indonesia	<b>48</b>	Uruguay	<b>100</b>	Finland	<b>59</b>
Ghana	<b>54</b>	Greece	<b>112</b>	Norway	<b>50</b>
India	<b>40</b>	South Korea	<b>85</b>	Sweden	<b>29</b>
Nigeria	<b>54</b>	Iran	<b>59</b>	Ireland	<b>35</b>
Singapore	<b>8</b>	Czech	<b>74</b>	Denmark	<b>23</b>
Brazil	<b>76</b>			Israel	<b>81</b>

Figure 2-2, Uncertainty Avoidance Index (source: <http://www.clearlycultural.com/geert-hofstede-cultural-dimensions/uncertainty-avoidance-index/>)

Based on the research of Hofstede, McGrath, Macmillan and Scheinberg did their research about uncertainty avoidance. They argued that the entrepreneurs are consistent with “low uncertainty avoidance” that are associated with less resistance to change, stronger achievement motivations, more risk-taking, stronger ambition for individual advancement and tolerance of competition. In contrast, non-entrepreneurs are consistent with “high uncertainty avoidance” that associated with reliance on formal structures and fear of failure (McGrath, Macmillan & Scheinberg, 1992).

Moreover, the subordinates from low uncertainty avoidance cultures prefer to think about themselves as more important than the others in the companies. Conversely, the subordinates from high uncertainty avoidance cultures think about their managers and colleagues are more important than themselves. And they are more sensitive to the negative results of their “unknown” futures than people from low uncertainty avoidance cultures (Vitell, Nwachukwu & Barnes, 1993).

This dimension will be applied at teamwork part. Through the pre-test interviews (Chapter 3), I found that there are many different understandings about teamwork between Dutch and Chinese people in Huawei Netherlands. These differences include working patterns of teamwork, intentions of working as a team and etc. And in my opinions, the intentions are one of basic things when people working as a team. It decides their working attitude and working patterns what are used for their work. It is abstract and ambiguous if I directly ask my targets about uncertainty avoidance. Therefore, I take teamwork as a team to study this dimension.

### **2.2.3 Directness/Indirectness**

In this section, the directness / indirectness concept is going to be reviewed from a practical view. Nevertheless, before it, I would like to briefly review Hall's low- and high- context cultures concept, because it may help to understand why some people use an indirect way of expressing something, and others are direct to express.

According to the viewpoint of Hall, cultures differ on the ranges from high to low context. In high context cultures, most of meaning is either implied by physical setting or presumed to be part of individual's internalized beliefs, values and behaviors. The low context cultures prefer to use low context messages, which the majority of the information is vested in the explicit messages (Lustig & Koester, 2003). In Hall's opinions, the Western cultures are considered as low-context cultures and people directly express their ideas and positions. The important purpose in communication is to convey exact meaning. The explicit messages can help to achieve the goal. In contrast, the Eastern cultures are high-context cultures where

communication depends on many situations. In such cultures, the purpose in communication is to promote and maintain harmony with others (Hall & Hall, 1989). People are used to communicate with covert and implicit messages. These messages are always having hidden meanings (Lustig & Koester, 2003).

In this part, I mainly focus on verbal styles of both Dutch and Chinese to give feedback. It is too ambiguous and difficult to answer my questions if I just ask my targets about their conversation with colleagues from another culture. Therefore, I focus on feedback to study direct-indirect concept. "The direct-indirect difference in verbal styles refers to the extent to which people reveal their intentions using explicit verbal communication" (Shachaf, 2005). The expression styles are influenced by their own cultures. These styles can be either direct or indirect which depending on the situation they are in. In a low-context Western culture, sender takes responsibility to encode a clear and understandable message. Verbal messages are very important since people do not look in the environment for information. Usually, the messages are explicitly coded unless they pertain to sensitive issues initiatively. When the messages are encoded and sent, the receiver has responsibility to ask for further explanation if the messages are not clearly enough. In the high-context culture like Chinese culture, there is different information flows. The responsibilities of sender and receiver are different. The sender assesses the communication environment or context firstly, and then encodes the verbal messages. The receiver also assesses the communication environment firstly when receiving the messages. The syntax may be ambiguous and indirect when dealing with sensitive interpersonal issues. During the communication process, immediate feedback and asking for further explanation may not always be an integral part of the communication process in high-context culture (Babcock & Babcock, Unknown).

From a cultural standpoint, "Directness" is an obvious feature in Dutch culture. In the Dutch society, people get used to express their own ideas and comments to others. One thing might be very strange for people from other cultures, especially for oriental cultures: if Dutch people receive one birthday gift from their friend which they already have, they can directly tell their friend to exchange for a new gift, however, in Chinese culture, it will be considered as a rude behavior. Directness is actually reflected in various aspects in Dutch society. In contrast, Chinese culture is almost in the opposition. Chinese people get used to apply "indirect" rhetorical scheme. In China, people use implicit words more than others, and thus the non-verbal communication is important, especially the scenic communication, including gestures, body languages, eye contacting. Even in the business presentation, Chinese people tend to prefer an indirect presentation style that seems to move around the actual topic at hand in circular formation that gradually spirals into the actual point of the presentation (Li, 1999).

Thereby, if there have no effective communication about such cultural differences, this could make misunderstandings between people from different cultures. If all of them do not understand the verbal styles of each other, the people with indirect styles could get hurt from people are used to be directly. In contrast, people with direct styles could not be able to understand the hidden meaning of messages which the opposite group would like to send.

## **2.3 Language competence**

Although the intercultural communication problems can occur as a result of interaction between people from different cultures, however, individual competence also can influence the intercultural communication effects. The intercultural competence of individual refers to the ability that one can apply the target language to communicate correctly, effectively, and appropriately, when the person is communicating with people from different cultures on different intercultural occasions (He, 2005). Hi (1999) puts it as “the competence to obtain effective outcomes in intercultural communication situations”. Some researchers define it as “the overall internal capability of an individual to manage key challenging features of intercultural communication: namely, cultural experience of stress” (He, 2005). Therefore, the second level I divided is individual level. It aims to understand how intercultural communication is influenced by individual competence from academic views.

The intercultural communication usually means interaction between people who speak different languages. The language is such an instrument that allows us to talk with others, to understand or disagree with others, to describe and evaluate objects and experiences that exist in some other locations (Lustig & Koester, 2003). In current global environment, English as international language has played more and more important role in intercultural communication. Babcock and Babcock (1995) found that the proficiency in language application can greatly change dynamics of communication process by language speed and accuracy. I also found that in the Huawei Netherlands, the local employees tend to prefer to talk with high language capable Chinese managers, especially during the beginning of cooperation.

As many researchers consider that without language, culture would not be possible. Nida argued that language is an integral part of culture. Furthermore, the content of language is always related to events, states, processes and relations within culture. And culture depends on language in order to function and perpetuate itself (Nida, 2003). Agar said “culture is in language, and language is loaded with culture” (Agar, 1994). Language reflects culture, and simultaneously is influenced and shaped by culture. In addition, language is kind of symbolic

representation of a group of people, since it comprises their cultural and historical backgrounds, as well as their approach to life and ways of living and thinking (Jiang, 2000). The last but not the final, Brown describes the language and culture are interwoven. Therefore, one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either culture or language (Brown, 1994).

Communication is the final product of language and culture. Some people describe the relationship among them as the communication is the swimming, the language is the swimming skill, and culture is water. Without language, the communication would remain to a limited degree, meanwhile, without culture, there would be no communication at all (Jiang, 2000). Furthermore, Nida argue the relationship between languages and culture as that “language and culture are two symbolic systems. Everything we say in language has meanings. Every language form we use has meanings, carries meanings that are not in the same sense because it is associated with culture and culture is more extensive than language” (Nida, 1998). People from different countries with their own cultures can refer to different things while using the same language forms. For example, the meaning of “lunch” in English and Chinese is the same, however, the specific content is absolute different. The Englishman might refer to pizza or bread. But a Chinese man will refer to rice or noodles. Therefore, there is always interactive influence between language and culture; the two cannot exist without each other (Jiang, 2000).

The groups distinguish themselves from other groups, and maintain their group identifies is through the language they speak. Furthermore, the intercultural communication is the communication exists between these two groups through a common language which they both understand (Neuliep, 2006). When one group of people communicates with another group of people by using the second language which they both understand, they are not only able to know how to speak it, but also understand how to use it in certain social context appropriately (Alptekin, 2002). Language competency has become an important issue to study intercultural communication. English has emerged as the world’s permanent linking language in all international communication. And everyone from around the world is learning English in order to fulfill the role of the linking (Babcock and Babcock, 2001).

The intercultural communication problems can occur as results of interaction between people from different cultures. When different groups encounter one another, the basic problem is that people think differently. When we come across people who have different values, we have to re-evaluate ourselves again. The direct result is we would communicate less with people who come from different cultures in order to avoid any awkward occurrences (Braber). In an international team, members come from different countries with different cultural backgrounds, so their verbal styles might increase miscommunication in intercultural

communication circumstance. Furthermore, the members must speak a common language, typically English. This causes low participation by non-native speakers (Shachaf, 2005). Finally, the language might trigger problems of miscommunication, uncertainty, mistrust and conflict unless these problems are professionally managed (Feely & Wil Harzing, 2003).

In the case of Huawei Netherlands, English is the main available language between Dutch and Chinese employees. And it is not the native language for both of them. The communication results might be influenced by their English competence. Therefore, the language competence is a theoretical base for supporting the exploration of intercultural communication in the field.

## **.2.4 Anxiety/uncertainty management**

To relate with my case study, the Huawei Netherlands is one of branch offices of Huawei China in abroad. This branch office includes Chinese employees who are sent by Huawei from China, and Dutch employees who are recruited from local. Therefore, the culture inside this office is not only Chinese culture, but also involve Dutch culture. These two cultures have different perspectives on some issues which related with their everyday work. Due to working requirements, they all need to interact with other from another country. Such situation perhaps different with their past experience, and they all need to adjust their thoughts and behaviors in order to survive in it.

When people enter into an unfamiliar environment, they are going to face new problem caused by unfamiliar situations. Generally speaking, it requires people to stretch the limits of their usual way of thinking, no matter active or passive. However, everyone is different: someone can adapt themselves to the new environment more quickly than others. It is depending on how quick their “anxiety/uncertainty management” is (Gudykunst, 2005). As I introduced before, “anxiety/uncertainty management” is one kind of individual intercultural competence to adapt into the strange and new environment, which determines how individual is going to get along with his new environment. Gudykunst (2005) used the notion of Simmel (1908/1950) “the stranger and the host” to present the situation, and explained his own proposed theory based on the situation when strangers enter into new cultures and interact with hosts. In Gudykunst’s theory, when strangers enter in a new culture, they have uncertainty and anxiety about the hosts’ attitudes, feelings, beliefs, values and behaviors. It is both not good that the level of that uncertainty and anxiety is too high or too low: too high will make the strangers are not able to predict and understand the

behaviors and messages produced by hosts, while too low will make the strangers are too overconfident and do not question themselves whether or not their predictions are accurate.

The experience of intercultural communication apprehension is one of factors that may affect how people reduce uncertainty when they enter into a new environment. Normally, people will experience a bit of anxiety and apprehension when they enter into a strange environment or meet someone from a different culture at the first time. Neuliep and Ryan argue that because the intercultural communication is loaded with dissimilarity, people may experience anxiety, which request ability to reduce uncertainty (Neuliep & Ryan). In fact, many people will feel anxious when communicating or participate communicating with people from different culture. If people experience anxious through such intercultural communication, they probably try to avoid the interaction with people from different cultures, however, we cannot reduce such uncertainty and the anxiety levels remain high (Neuliep, 2003). Because people with high intercultural communication apprehension may avoid from communication with people from different cultures, thereby the uncertainty cannot be reduced. In contrast, people with low intercultural communication apprehension may communicate actively with people from different cultures, it is helpful for get enough information to adapt into the strange environment. In a word, by engaging in intercultural communication, we can reduce anxiety to new environment and result in more satisfying communication with others (Neuliep & Ryan, 2000).

Moreover, Langer mentions one issue as mindfulness in anxiety/uncertainty management. He argues that mindfulness involves “openness to new things/environment”, “alertness to distinctions”, “sensitivity to different context”, “awareness of multiple perspectives”, and “orientation in the present”. When people are mindful, they are able to manage their anxiety and uncertainty efficiently, and open to communication with strangers (Langer, 1997). Thereby, the competence of anxiety/uncertainty management might influence how fast people adapt into new situation and the efficiency of communication with people from different cultures.

In the case of Huawei Netherlands, the anxiety/uncertainty management theory is related with adaptation into new environment. The Chinese employees need to adapt themselves into new life in the Netherlands from working and living aspects. The Dutch employees need to adapt working for a Chinese company which is complete different with working for a Dutch company.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology used to conduct this research. Overall, three main research steps can be distinguished: 1) definition of research type and units of study, 2) the field work, 3) the analysis of data. I preferred case study, which allowed me to harness the advantages of diverse research techniques and information sources in order to fulfill the exploratory nature of Huawei Netherlands.

### 3.1 Research method

The research method used was qualitative. Since the research objective is to explore potential intercultural communication problems in Huawei Netherlands. Therefore the data needed is qualitative to achieve the objective. The research strategy used was case study. The case study was employed as it was the best approach to gain insight of a phenomenon. It was applied to examine the interplay of all variables in order to provide as a complete understanding of an event or situation as possible (Bronwyn, et al, 2005). It also allowed us to gather information from different sources and methods of data collection (Yin, 2003).

The research units were focused on both Chinese and Dutch employees. The Chinese managers and subordinates were involved into Chinese group, while the Dutch managers and subordinates were both involved into Dutch group. These people were conducted into two connections: first connection was Chinese managers and Dutch subordinates; second one was Dutch managers and Chinese subordinates. Because the research objective is to explore intercultural communication problems, therefore, my research only focuses on the connections within these two units. Further information on the research units was available in Chapter 1: the targets. Accordingly, the connections are expressed in the following figure:

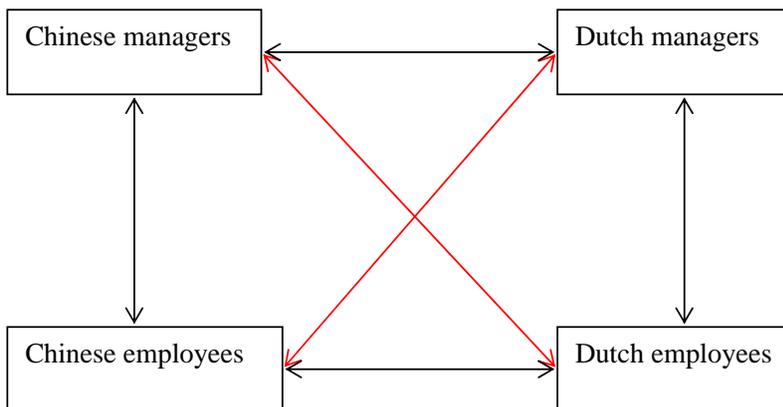


Figure 1: the relations within Chinese and Dutch employees

## **3.2 Techniques for data collection**

### **3.2.1 Pre-test interviews**

There were two ways to help me developing my own research questions. The first way is to do internal survey for the company. This is also my internship task. The objective of company survey is to strengthen existing approaches, which are working well. As well as select appropriate interventions for weakness areas by taking relevant activities in order to maintain the Huawei Netherlands running smoothly. The questionnaire is about quantitative research, which was designed by a professional consultancy company. Huawei Netherlands used it to investigate the potential weaknesses inside the company. The project group added one extra open question to their colleagues who would like to give additional comments. When the questionnaire was ready, it was sent to 67 employees. The targets included 37 Dutch locals and 25 Chinese employees. Afterwards, I got 47 replies. The validity is about 76%.

After calculating the results average and comparing with the company standard, I found that the values of teamwork and communication between managers and employees were lower than the company standard. Moreover, some Dutch and Chinese employees mentioned language was such problem to block them to communicate with their foreign colleagues in the open question part. And other local employees mentioned that the Chinese employees were not independent enough to solve living problems. For example, the Chinese employees always delayed to extent their resident permit if there was no remind from HR department. During the results analytic period, I found an interest phenomenon. Most of Dutch locals gave comments. In contrast, just two Chinese employees gave comments. Some Chinese employees even refused to participant into this survey. In order to understand the reasons behind such phenomenon, I started to search academic information and came up with my own thesis topic afterwards.

The second way is to do pre-text interviews in order to define my research focuses. The intercultural communication was studied by many researchers from different points of view. All these points of view were narrowed down to specific focuses. The time and personal limitations determined I cannot study all of them. Thereby, I must narrow down my focuses. Whereas, I did not know which academic issues were embodied in the field, and those existed

conflicts were related with intercultural communication theories at that time. Thereby, I decided to take pre-test interviews in order to solve my puzzle dom.

The 8 targets were selected from sales, HR, and technical service departments. These targets included four Chinese employees and four Dutch locals. I had already decided to study cultural differences and individual intercultural communication competent at that time. Whereas I was not sure that what cultural differences these targets experienced during their work, so I made open questions to encourage them to talk more. By doing so, I could narrow down my focuses on cultural differences and individual intercultural communication competent under intercultural communication study. Based on the information I got from pre-test interviews, I defined thesis research objective and came up with research questions. Afterwards, it was the step to gather information from field in order to fulfill the exploratory nature of Huawei Netherlands

### **3.2.2 Open questions**

Based on the research questions, I made 23 open- ended questions to explore the nature of Huawei Netherlands. The first part was about culture differences. This topic had been discussed frequently in intercultural communication field. I chose power distance, teamwork, and feedback as research factors to explore potential communication problems in the field. The teamwork was used to study about uncertainty avoidance and effective decision making concepts in the field. The feedback was used to study about low-high context cultures and directness / indirectness concepts in the field. The uncertainty avoidance, low-high context cultures were based on four cultural dimensions theory of Hofstede. The concept of directness /indirectness was got from a practical point of view.

The second part is about language capacity. Generally speaking, the language is the basic to communication. The effects of communication are decided directly by language ability in intercultural communication field. Moreover, especially for Huawei case, English is the second language for both Chinese and Dutch employees, and it is the only available language to be used for communicating between them. Thereby, I want to know whether or not their English ability could cause communication problems in Huawei Netherlands.

The last part is about anxiety/uncertainty management. It is a kind of individual intercultural competence to adapt into the strange place. Huawei Netherlands is a new place for both Chinese employees and Dutch locals. Therefore, I developed certain questions to explore whether or not this factor might cause problems for both of them.

### **3.2.3 Interviews**

In-depth interview was chosen to gain new and deeper insights. The interviews were anonymous and held in semi-structured way. I planed to interview 20 informants from sales, technical service, administration, supply chain and Human resource departments. It included 5 Dutch managers, 5 Dutch employees, 5 Chinese managers and 5 Chinese employees. Unfortunately, I interviewed just 16 informants finally, because four of them refused my invitation.

All my informants were permanent staffs, and most of them had already worked for Huawei more than a year. The interviews took place in the office. It held about forty minutes for each person. At the beginning of the interview, I explained to my interviewee what my research is about in a general term. And assure the information is anonymity and only for school. Afterwards, explain to them it is very important to have their cooperation, and told them that they could interrupt me during the interview if they do not understand questions. Or if they have any additional information that they think it is very important for me to know.

In the field research period, I practiced probing technique. The probing was a technique for encouraging the interviewees to tell me more. The informants were used to look to me for estimate whether or not they were on the right track. At that moment, I did not give any response; I just waited for them to continue. Sometimes, it was helpful to repeat the last thing they said. It showed that I understood what had been said so far, and encouraged them to continue. But there was one thing I should take into account, I should try to avoid showing what I know and avoid asking leading questions. And as I understand, interviews were kind of conversations with others, but I should play myself as a listener.

In addition, I was doing my internship in the HR department of Huawei Netherlands for several months. Due to the position responsibilities, I had contacts with employees from different departments. This experience made me easier to be closer with them. By participating into the internal survey project, I worked with both Chinese and Dutch employees. I am a Chinese, so I really knew how the Chinese people work with others. In fact, the Chinese people were not used to work as a team. In the schools, the Chinese people finished their homework along. In the most of working places, unless the projects involved people from different disciplines, otherwise people were used to work individually. Besides, I have studied in the Netherlands for many years, I experienced that the teamwork existed in my study; most of my reports were finished by a group of people. Therefore, I probably knew more about how to work with Dutch people than those Chinese employees. Such past experience provided me the advantage to estimate the potential problems between Dutch and Chinese employees.

### **3.3 Data analysis method**

The “situation analysis” as “the description of behavior of individuals in a specific situation or series of situations’ (van Velsen, 1967) gave me in depth insights about the field situation and the perceptions that employees understand towards others from different culture. Focusing on the two connections allowed me to know interactions between the Dutch and Chinese employees.

Further I applied “comparative method” to analyze the field situation. It allowed me to understand the differences between them on each research factor. While these results were reflected with the theoretical framework. Finally, conclude about the potential intercultural communication problems based on these differences under each specific aspect. The analytical steps are as following:

Step 1: Defining about focuses. It means that I should really understand the purposes of data analysis and expect results which I would like to get in the end.

Step 2: Get to know my data. It means look across all answers in order to identify differences and similarities.

Step 3: Information categorization. To combine preset and emergent categories together in this step, the preset categories mean themes are identified before I categorize the data, and search the data from text that match the themes. The emergent categories mean categories are defined after I have worked with the data or as a result of working with the data. (Ellen, Marcus, 2003) I start with the categories from research questions. And then come up with new categories when I organize these answers.

Step 4: Summary. This step is for assembling all data that pertaining to relevant research questions.

Step 5: Analysis. This step is for interpreting these data with my own understandings as the consequences finally.

For example, before I start to analyze the data of power distance, I must have a clear idea about what I want to get from this factor. And then, start to identify and categorize this data. Afterwards, connect the data results with theory part in order to know if the understanding of power distance is different, what kind of intercultural communication problems might arise. This is also the result to the power distance factor.

### **3.4 Limitations**

Generally speaking, the main limitations are from interview part.

The first limitation is about establishing trust with interviewees. Although I emphasized that their answers are only used for my thesis at the beginning, but not all of them are such open to answer my questions. For example, it is difficult to get exact answers from Chinese employees about the differences between Chinese and Dutch managers. They are used to avoid telling me their real thoughts. Perhaps they are still worried about relevant managers will know if they talk about negative contents. Although I tried to use some interview techniques, such as, ask same question by different ways in different time, however, the situation was still hard to be changed.

The second limitation is about the content record. Lacks of recorder, all works were taken by hands. This might cause points missing and overtime of interview.

The last limitation is about time limitation. I just had forty minutes from each target. Some interviews were fast; some needed to take longer. But these interviewees did not have extra time for me, because they were so busy with their own work. Therefore, I got surface answers to specific topics which should be discussed in-depth.

## **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS**

The frames of actors (Chinese managers and subordinates, Dutch managers and subordinates) toward intercultural communication problems are analyzed in this chapter. This chapter tries to answer the sub-research questions by analyzing the perceptions from the interviewees, concerning power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism & collectivism, directness/indirectness, language competence, and anxiety/uncertainty management as derived from the theoretical review part (Chapter 2).

### **4.1 Power distance**

Hofstede (1980) defined power distance as “*the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.*” In single organization, the power distance can also be simply understood as the distance between managers and subordinates (Hoecklin, 1995). In his idea, cultures with a low power distance emphasizes that inequalities among people should be minimized and interdependence between less and more powerful people. In organization, employees engage in participative decision making frequently (Neuliep, 2006). In contrast, Power is usually centralized where subordinates and managers are treated differently and unequally (Hofstede, 1980). There is strict hierarchy among company members where managers typically hold authorities, and the subordinates depend on their boss (see Chapter 2). In Huawei case, the power distance will be studied between managers and subordinates based on their experience.

#### **4.1.1 The experience from Chinese subordinates**

##### **Interviewee A:**

Interviewee A already worked in Huawei for four years. She was sent to Huawei Netherlands and arranged at sales department since the third year. Due to her job responsibility, normally she is managed by her Dutch managers, however, she is also managed temporarily by Chinese managers for specific projects. As she experienced, apparently, her Dutch and Chinese managers have different understanding and behave differently on power distance.

She said that the Dutch managers are closer with their subordinates than Chinese managers. A good working performance is important for all the managers. But comparing with Chinese managers, the Dutch manager also takes notice of working process. They use informal and

formal ways to know how their subordinates work going. As the interviewee A said, the informal ways as she experienced were the conversations during the break and lunch time. Normally, the range of topics was broad. They talked about life in foreign countries, local situation, and entertainment, etc. Sometimes, the Dutch manager of A also gave her suggestions about how to work with local clients when she mentioned about her trouble during the break.

The formal communication as she experienced was discussion at or after the group meeting. At the meeting, every subordinate should report their working progress to the manager and other group members. If there were problems they would discuss about possible solutions, and then made further plan to finish the project on time. Another formal communication is individual communication with manager after group meeting. This individual communication is obvious different with the communication in break. The borderline between manager and subordinate is clear. The topics are only about work. As interviewee A experienced, her Dutch manager did not only want a positive working performance in the end, but also cared about the interaction with the subordinates more. A said that she had to report her working progress regularly to her manager, and also she had to report her thoughts about the next steps. Afterward, her manager pointed out his opinions if he thought there were some issues should be took consideration.

In contrast, as interviewee A experienced, the Chinese manager behaved differently. She said that there are strict hierarchy between managers and subordinates. The Chinese managers were used to arrange tasks to their subordinates. The subordinates must achieve them finally, no matter how difficult they are. For example, the sales targets were arranged at the beginning of the year, maybe such targets seem like unreasonable, but most of time these tasks were accepted, and the subordinates did their best to achieve at the end of the year. Because the arrangements from managers are such “orders” and cannot be denied.

Besides, because of the strict hierarchy between managers and subordinates in Chinese culture, interviewee A said that she felt difficult to communicate with her Chinese manager informally. The subordinates are always “afraid” about their managers. If a third part wants to know how her Chinese manager is, probably she just talk about her positive opinions about her manager. Because she worries about such conversation would bring negative results and influent her future career.

### **Interviewee B:**

The second interviewee B is also working at sales department for two years. He also has working experience with both Chinese and Dutch managers. Basically, interviewee B

experienced the same as interviewee A did. Interviewee B felt easily to work with Dutch managers. He said that the Dutch managers were used to communicate with their subordinates frequently. At the beginning, he was not used to talk with managers actively. He just reported his working progress during group meeting or talked about it when his managers asked him. In his mind, he thought that he just needed to finish his work on time and showed expected results to his managers. But everything was changed when he started working at Huawei Netherlands. At the first group meeting, his Dutch manager told interviewee B and other Chinese colleagues, he wanted to know their working progress more than get a good working performance. If they had any problems or they wanted to talk about their work, they could come to his office anytime. He expected that his subordinates could communicate with him actively. Meanwhile, The Dutch managers also asked his subordinates actively about their work. In this way, the interviewee B began to accept this new working pattern, and can take the initiative to communicate with his Dutch manager. He even used this pattern to his Chinese manager and got good effects. After long time, the interviewee B asked to his Dutch manager why he said those words at their first meeting. The managers explained that he had ever worked with some Chinese subordinates, and he detected that those Chinese subordinates rarely took the initiative to report their work, though they really did well. Although he wanted good working effects, but also he cared more about how his subordinates was doing their work. So that, the interviewee B thought his Dutch manager were closer with subordinates more.

Furthermore, B said that he is responsible for contact local clients. There are two purposes in this position. One is to promote new products to existed local clients in order to get long-term business orders. The other one is to develop new local clients for gaining more market share. The interviewee B said that his Dutch manager knew the local market much better than him. No matter from formal or informal communication, he got further understand about this country and the local market. All those information together with guidance of his Dutch manager were all helpful to complete his work.

As he said the power differences are really different between Chinese and Dutch managers. The authorities were very important for Chinese managers. The managers even kept large space with subordinates for sustaining their authorities. And the subordinates did not like to get along with their managers, because they felt tensional with their managers. For example, he could easily make jokes with his colleagues, but he never did the same things with his Chinese managers. Because he understood that he was positioned on different hierarchies with managers. And the Chinese managers did not like to be so closer with subordinates too. Such situation also can be found on informal parties. He said that there were two obvious different atmospheres at team building party before and after Chinese managers leaving there. The atmosphere was tensional when the managers were there, however, everyone can

enjoy themselves very quickly after the managers left. So the interesting thing was that the managers just showed up for a while, and then paid the bill in advance and left.

Actually, most of Chinese interviewees already noticed that there were differences between Dutch and Chinese managers, however, not all people cared about such differences. So the following two interviewees will represent people who do not care about difference of power distance. These subordinates believe that their performance is the most important thing.

### **Interviewee C:**

The third interviewee C was working at technical support department more than one year. Same as the above two interviewees, he was also managed by both Chinese and Dutch managers. Although he experienced the differences between Chinese and Dutch manager, however, he did not really care about such differences. As he said, good working performance was most important than anything. All managers expected their subordinates work hard and creating high profits. To achieve the department annual target had already been a difficult thing, needless to say overseas, meanwhile, he had already spent much energy on his stressful work and dealt with clients who he never contacted with in the past. Therefore, he did not have attention to focus on how to deal the differences between Dutch and Chinese managers.

### **Interviewee D:**

The last interviewee D is also from technical support department and already worked at Huawei Netherlands for one year. As he said, he admitted there was different understanding of power distance between Dutch and Chinese managers, but he still preferred to work with Chinese managers. As he said, he was not accustomed to be managed by Dutch managers. He could not be open to express his opinions directly. Because he thought that his opinions were not such important, the managers could figure out when it was necessary. The only thing for him was to implementation and tried his best to show a good result in the end. So he never talked with his managers actively if it was needed. Besides, he did not like to be close with his managers. As interviewee D said, he felt safe if he kept certain distance with his managers. And he did not know what he could talk except about work.

Other Chinese interviewees who were working at HR and supply chain departments did not have experience to work with the Dutch managers. This is determined by their job responsibilities. The HR manager is needed to have frequent contact with headquarter, so the manager was sent directly from China. The supply chain department always hired Chinese with fluent English speaking competence. Although their manager was recruited from local, however, he was a Chinese and already stayed here for several years. Because this department

has frequent contact with equipment producers in China, and not all those producers are able to speak English.

In addition, from the Chinese managers' point of view, they thought that it was necessary to keep certain distance with their subordinates. They said that they could not be so close with their subordinates, otherwise it would make inconvenience for him to managing them.

#### **4.1.2 The experience from Dutch subordinates**

##### **Interviewee E:**

The first Dutch interviewee E already worked at sales department for 3 years. As he said that he was the one who grew up together with Huawei Netherlands from the beginning. He said that he experience the different between Dutch and Chinese manager, even the differences between the Chinese managers because he had ever managed by two Chinese managers until now. The interviewee E switched to Huawei Netherlands after he worked at a Dutch telecommunication company about five years. The Dutch company was one of local clients of Huawei Netherlands at that time. He said that he was the group member in that project and the initial contact was set up by business cooperation. He noticed that the Huawei Netherlands was a new in this market, it needed someone who familiar with local market. And he were also looking for one place to make himself excited because he found that he couldn't get more from current position. Therefore, he accepted the offer from Huawei Netherlands and started his career when the old contract was over.

At the beginning, he was managed by a Chinese manager. He said that Chinese manager had good technical knowledge, but not well enough at management. That Chinese manager arranged tasks directly and made a deadline to his subordinates when got a new project. So E was surprised by such working pattern, whereas his Chinese colleagues seemed like they had already been accustomed to it. Another different experience was the Chinese manager always stayed in his office, and never asked about E's work actively except E went to his office and talk about his work actively. Moreover, the Chinese manager was always serious. He never went out with his group members for a couple of drinks. They could not find any informal topics except work. So he never got closer with his first Chinese manager until he went back to China one year later.

Later, a young Chinese man took over the work from the old one. The interviewee E thought his new Chinese manager used different ways to manage Dutch and Chinese subordinates. For example, the new annual sales targets were used to be informed at the beginning of each year on company meetings. When these Dutch employees doubted about the feasibility of such targets, they always pointed out directly to the Chinese manager as they were used to do

to the Dutch managers. Although it would not be changed, however, the Chinese manager was patient to listen these doubts and used many data to prove such targets were feasible. But the Chinese manager treated the Chinese subordinates in different ways, and these subordinates would not point out their doubts although they complained the targets were difficult to achieve with other people.

Nowadays, there are regular conversations between managers and subordinates because the company published a new regulation about communication, and this was directly related with the annual performance evaluation of managers. In this regulation, the communication should be took twice a month, and a communication form should be filled and submit to HR department. The Dutch interviewee E thought that this could be a good way to promote communication between Chinese managers and their subordinates at least.

**Interviewee F:**

The interviewee F was working with four Chinese people at administration department about 1 year. As he said, they were in charge of different responsibilities. And he was the only one recruited from local. Generally, he was happy to work with others, because two of his Chinese colleagues had already lived in Holland for several years and could speak fluent Dutch and English, so there were no difficulties to talk with them. Their manager was a young Chinese lady who was sent by Huawei China. He did not experience any problem with her. As interviewee F said, he did not experience that his manager put herself on a high position. On the formal way, he reported his working progress when it was needed, and if there was any thing that he could not solve along, his manager always gave him some suggestions. On the informal way, he thought that the Chinese manager tried to set up a kind of easiest working environment with other subordinates, because the administration department was so small, but workload was large, everybody faced high working pressures everyday. So he thought that the easiest working environment could create a better working performance.

**Interviewee G:**

The interviewee G was working at technical support department. He had been managed by Chinese manager for one year. As he said that he was still not accustomed to the management of his Chinese manager. The Chinese manager was very serious, no more talk except work. And he was used to make decisions by himself. Their group meeting was hold when they got a new project. In the past, the interviewee G chose his work dependent on his specialization. All these things were flexible and could be discussed during group meetings, however, it became impossible to the Chinese manager. The Chinese manager was used to arrange everything to his subordinates and made decisions by himself. Therefore, the first group

meeting just had one objective, which was to arrange tasks to everyone and set up deadlines for each of them. All of these had already been decided by his Chinese manager in advance. The interviewee G tried to communicate with his manager about such issue, but the situation did not have change. The Chinese manager still behaved as usual.

### **Interviewee H:**

This interviewee was working at HR department and managed by a Chinese manager. As she said, she migrated from Eastern Europe to the Netherlands seven years ago and can speak fluent Dutch and English. She felt that there were some common traditions similar with the Chinese culture. So she thought she knew both Chinese and Dutch cultures better than any others. She knew the Chinese managers would like to get more respect from subordinates. To put themselves on high position, keep certain distance with subordinates, or take absolute decision making rights could be understood then. Therefore, she never doubted about her manager, but if there was any different thought, she would speak out her understandings, and let the manager to make decisions, because she knew everybody cared about “face”, but the managers cared more.

For other Dutch interviewees, they experienced the differences between their Dutch and Chinese managers more or less. Although they were still trying to speak out their opinions with Chinese managers as they did to Dutch managers, however, they noticed that not all their opinions would be accepted in the end, because the Dutch interviewees found that the Chinese managers became open to different voices though, but they still hold obvious decision making rights, this is one of things to show the differences between managers and subordinates. At the end of the interviews, one of interviewees told me that he would keep doing as he did in the past. He understood the situation could not be changed at once. But if the company wanted to be successful in local market, they should follow the local regulation and considered the opinions from local employees, because they knew a lot.

Comparing with the Chinese managers, the Dutch managers separate working and non-working time clearly. During the working time, the Dutch managers are serious to their subordinates, however, they also want to get closer with their subordinates during non-working time, because they are all hired by this company, nothing different.

### **4.1.3 Analysis**

In Chapter 2, I had already reviewed the theories about power distance. Hofstede (1980) defined power distance as the distance between high and low position of people. The power is always centralized on high positions. And there is strict hierarchy between high and low positions. We call the power to **authority** (Neuliep, 2006). The power distance index (figure

2-1) shows that the China is a high power distance country, the Netherlands is lower than China about 42%, which means the Netherlands is a low power distance country. Although I uses qualitative research methodology and cannot test how large the different power distance index exists between Chinese and Dutch employees in Huawei Netherlands, however, the above information has already show the different ideas of power distance between Chinese and Dutch employees.

The Huawei is a Chinese telecommunication company in China. It is influenced deeply by Chinese culture. In the power distance culture, the managers are located on high power position. The subordinates are located on low power position. In this company, the managers and subordinates are treated differently and unequally. Moreover, there is strict hierarchy among company member where the managers typically hold authorities, and the subordinates depend on their managers. The managers hold decision making right, they expect their subordinates obeying their orders without doubts. This point has been mentioned by interviewee A and G, For example, the responses to the annual sales targets hand tasks division. The interviewee A and G showed two different responses. A is Chinese who lives in high power distance culture. She accepted the tasks directly without any doubt. G is a Dutch who lives in low power distance culture. He doubted the feasibility and spoke out his worries, because he was used to discuss the feasibility of project with other group members firstly, and then got tasks dependent on his specialization. This is also one of features in low power distance culture. There is mutual dependence or interdependence between high and low positions in low power distance culture (Paul Verluyten, 2000). Although the subordinates depend on their managers, however, they also engage in participative decision making frequently. And their managers also depend on them for feedback and consultation.

Furthermore, the position you are high, the authority you would get more in Huawei Netherlands or in any company of the world. In Huawei Netherlands, the managers can control over rewards, warnings, network and information resources. The authority is related with positional power directly. And this authority is going to be changed when the position changed. For example, I had ever experienced such change. Linda was my colleague when I did my internship in Huawei Netherlands. We were close before she was promoted to being my manager. After the promotion, I could easily feel she became different from her behavior, communication styles, and the ways she treated other colleagues who was on the same positions with her in the past. It does not mean there is something wrong, it just means she is already on different position with us, and she needs to behave like a manager, because of the authority in high power distance culture. Moreover, the interviewee G experienced the power of authority in his group as well. As he said, his manager was used to arrange everything to his subordinates and made decisions by himself. He tried to communicate with his Chinese

manager about such issue, but his manager still behaved as the past. Therefore, I think the field situation is in line with Hofstede idea about authority is a typical feature in high power distance culture. And it is used to identify managers and subordinates inside the company. In high power distance culture, the high position which the manager on, the more authority he holds, while the distance with other subordinates is large.

But it does not mean there is no authority in low power distance culture. The managers emphasize authority to in the working time. Managers themselves tend to accept more participative behavior from their subordinates (Paul Verluyten, 2000), however, the managers have rights to make final decisions. As interviewee A said, all her group decisions were discussed firstly by group members and manager, and the final decisions were made by her manager in the end. The interviewee G also proved it. He said that all the things were flexible and could be discussed with managers when he worked with Dutch managers in the past.

Besides, the managers try to keep a low distance with their subordinates for making harmonious working environment. Both my interviewee A and B all said that they got lot of helpful information about local market and clients from their Dutch managers by informal communication during the coffee break. The Dutch managers use their own experience to advise their subordinates for specific cases.

Moreover, people are not used to talk about their managers in the high power distance culture. They are worried about giving negative evaluation would leave bad impression to their managers and becoming potential barriers to their future career. In contrast, people are open to talk about their ideas. As I said above, there is mutual dependence or interdependence between high and low positions in low power distance culture (Paul Verluyten, 2000). People focus on the quality of their communication more. Therefore, the Dutch subordinates are influenced by the low power distance culture, and they are always communicating with their managers actively, even for negative opinions. Like my Dutch interviewees who are always talk with their Chinese managers, even their opinions cannot be accepted by their Chinese managers. And the Chinese subordinates are deeply influenced by high power distance culture. Like most of my Chinese interviewees who prefer to keep certain distance with their managers and always give positive evaluation to their managers when someone asking.

For most of Chinese subordinates like interviewee D and E, they do not have ideas about how to work with Dutch managers. No new information in the conclusion, best to shift stuff like this to the analysis part. Some of them refuse to change or ignore the relation with Dutch managers directly, because they are deeply influenced by Chinese culture. In fact, this is not a

correct choice. They should change themselves when they are in different situations, because the company is not a pure Chinese company, it combines both Chinese and Dutch cultures, and they are working with locals frequently. So that, it is necessary to understand local culture and use new working patterns appropriately. Otherwise, it will lead confusion about how to work in Huawei Netherlands, if the managers and subordinates could not understand each other.

#### **4.1.4 Conclusion**

In low power distance countries where managers and subordinates are work close and consult each other. They think about each other as or less equal even there is a different education level. The hierarchical systems are changeable depending on circumstances. The hierarchies are flat with a decentralized organizational structure, and a small number of managers who are expected to be accessible for their employees. The degree of unequal treatments is reduced to a low level within the company. There is an interdependent relation between managers and subordinates. And the subordinates are involved into the decision-making processes. In contrast, the power distance between managers and subordinates is strict and dependent on the decisions from managers in high power distance counties. The company with high power distance is a centralized organization. The subordinates are expected to obey the orders from their managers, because of unequal ideas (Via-web).

Therefore, the different understanding of power distance may impact for communication. It is normal to arising problems when work with someone who hold different understanding of power distance (Smith, Dugan & Peterson, 1998). The Dutch subordinates are influenced by their national culture which emphasizes low power distance between managers and subordinates. But the relation between managers and subordinates is different in Chinese culture. The managers used to keep high distance with their subordinates in Chinese culture, because of authority of managers. So the Dutch subordinates are confused when they work in Huawei Netherlands. They try different patterns to communicate with their Chinese managers, but the results are dissatisfied. This is because they just see the phenomena, but do not know the essential is the different ideas on power distance in Chinese and Dutch cultures.

## **4.2 Teamwork (Uncertainty avoidance)**

As I explained at the last paragraph of section 2.2.2, the teamwork is used for discussing uncertainty avoidance between Dutch and Chinese people in Huawei Netherlands. From the results of pre-test interviews, the interviewees talked about their teamwork, except how they worked as a team, and their opinions about a high efficient teamwork performance, they also mentioned about the intentions to work as a team. Through analyzing those results, I decided to focus on studying their intention of working as a team, because as I understood, the attitude is the basic for anything. The attitude of Dutch and Chinese people could decide how they were going to work as the team. To work in an intercultural team is a new challenge, and there are many uncertain situations for both Dutch and Chinese people. Therefore, their attitude about uncertainties is very an important issue. Besides, Hofstede is the professional researcher to study uncertainty avoidance in the intercultural communication field, so I decided to use his opinions as a theoretical base to study the Huawei case.

### **4.2.1 The understanding of Chinese population**

*Differences between Chinese and Dutch managers about teamwork:*

All my Chinese interviewees had already been familiar with teamwork when they worked in Huawei China. And they all admitted that teamwork was necessary for their work. There was anything could be finished alone. But they also admitted that the working patterns of teamwork were different in the Netherlands. One of Chinese interviewee said that he experienced work as a team when he started working at Huawei China. The team meetings were hold three times when they ran a project. The first time was at the beginning of the project. The aim was about tasks arrangement. Their manager would tell each of them what he/she would responsible for in this project. The second meeting was hold at medium-term. They reported to their manager their working progress and got to know further arrangement. The last meeting was hold at the end of the project for conclusion their working performance based on the final project results. As the interviewee said, they used to talk with their manager individually, if there were problems.

The Chinese interviewee was managed by a Dutch manager after he started working at Huawei Netherlands, as he experienced there are different understanding about teamwork between the team under the management of Chinese managers and the management of Dutch managers. Other Chinese interviewees also said, the purpose of work as a team was to exert people's strengths in order to maintain the project would be successful finally in the Dutch team. At the beginning, the task division was based on the specialization of every group members. And they also designed several working plans, and discuss about the

possible one. During the project implementation process, the group meetings were held once a week regularly or temporarily when needed. Each team member should report their working progress on the meeting. If there were any problem, the team manager would like to discuss with other members for coming up with a suitable solution. As this Chinese interviewee experienced, each one should express his/her own opinions no matter possible or impossible to be implemented. Finally, they would also discuss the feedback from their clients together for future improvement.

*Differences between Dutch and Chinese subordinates:*

There is another Chinese interviewee, he told me that he experienced the purposes of working as teams were different between Dutch and Chinese staffs. In the mind of Chinese staffs, the purpose of working as a team was to share the risks. If the project was failed in the end, everybody had to be responsible for that. And it was difficult to find out which part was wrong, because of unclear task division. But in Huawei Netherlands, people work as a team was for brainstorming. The team managers wanted to use the strengths of everyone in order to offset weaknesses. Moreover, when something went wrong, it was easy to find out the negative parts. But he also complained the discussion took so long sometimes, because in his mind, the problems could not be predicted at all, these things could be solved when they really happened. And the plans could be modified dependent on current situation.

*Opinions from Chinese managers:*

From the Chinese managers' points of view, their Chinese and Dutch subordinates behaved differently on team work. The Chinese subordinates got their tasks passively. In contrast, their Dutch subordinates chose their tasks more actively and reasonably dependent on their specializations. He said that this was his first time to be a manager since he started working for Huawei. Therefore, he made a draft about task division based on his members' specializations in his mind. Afterwards, he firstly asked his members to choose their tasks by themselves. The two Dutch subordinates and one Chinese subordinate made their choices firstly, and then he arranged the tasks to the rest of two Chinese subordinates who did not make decisions dependent on his plan.

Actually, most of Chinese managers would like to apply their previous way to manage their teams. As they said, the more changes the more risks they would face. They further explained to me, the company annual targets were arranged by the headquarters which could not be changed. If the Chinese managers chose different ways to manage their teams, they doubted whether or not they would be able to achieve the annual targets, because they were not sure

the new ways were suitable for their teams. So they just used their previous patterns to manage their teams. At least, they knew the results would not get worse in the end.

But there are few Chinese interviewees said that did not care about whether they work as a team with someone or they work individually. In their mind, the most important thing was their work performance. It was the index for their managers to evaluate them at the end of the year. This determined whether or not they could be promoted to higher positions. Therefore, they did their best to finish their tasks as they could.

#### **4.2.2 The understanding of Dutch population**

The Dutch people used to work as team since they were at school. In the college, most of their assignments were group assignments. They grouped and divided tasks based on their specialties. This habit was used until now. As they said, they were still getting tasks dependent on their specializations. If their Chinese managers arranged them an unsuitable task, they would try changing such situation by discussion. But this was not all Chinese managers would like to change their decisions. They said that the teamwork was a good working pattern, the strengths of everyone could be used. And they could get better ideas from other member by group discussion. Working as a team could bring brainstorming and inspiration. They would open to new ideas, everyone felt free to speak out their own ideas, and no matter these ideas were used or not in current projects. Besides, the local employees are familiar with local situation and have strengths on English and Dutch. The Chinese employees are familiar with products and company rules. Both of them can make up mutual weaknesses then.

But they also found that most of Chinese colleagues especially for Chinese engineers who did not used to speak out their opinions on the meeting except they asked for it. Other Dutch managers had the same feeling. They did not understand why their Chinese team members did not share their information frequently, and why they were so silent at the meeting and active after the meeting, even though they had abundant technical knowledge. The Dutch managers said that their Chinese subordinates had good ideas about the project, however, they were too shy to speak out. At the beginning, the Dutch managers were worried about whether or not those Chinese subordinates understood their tasks or how things going currently, because these Chinese subordinates never mentioned. So the Dutch managers asked their worries to their Chinese subordinates individually. And they found these Chinese subordinates had clear clues about the project. They just behaved passive in the teams. But if you asked about relevant issues, they would like to share with you. So the managers noticed about that, and would ask their Chinese subordinates' ideas actively during the meeting.

### **4.2.3 Analysis**

From a theoretical point of view, the ideas of teamwork can relate to uncertainty avoidance in intercultural communication. The degree of uncertainty avoidance affects the efficiency of teamwork. In the low-uncertainty avoidance cultures, people have strong achievement motivations, more risk-taking, stronger ambition for individual advancement and tolerance of competition (McGrath, Macmillan & Scheingberg, 1992). In contrast, people from high-uncertainty avoidance culture fear to failure. People are more sensitive to negative results of their “unknown” futures than people from low uncertainty avoidance cultures (Vitell, Nwachukwu & Barnes, 1993).

On the workplaces, managers from high uncertainty avoidance cultures tend to be specialists rather than generalists. In low uncertainty avoidance cultures, managers tend to be involved in strategy and leave details to be worked out by others. Moreover, they are also more willing to take risky decisions, whereas in high uncertainty avoidance culture, managers are more afraid to treat unknown situation and stick to the certainty of what in know. For subordinates, in high uncertainty avoidance cultures, subordinates themselves prefer to clear requirements and instructions. Broad guidelines only in low uncertainty avoidance cultures (Paul Verluyten, 2000).

Moreover, according to the UAI (Chapter 2), China is a low uncertainty avoidance country (40%), the Netherlands is a high uncertainty avoidance country (53%). But in terms of the information I collected from the field, the situation is totally opposite. The Chinese managers and subordinates are high uncertainty avoidance trend. And the Dutch managers and subordinates are low uncertainty avoidance. Most of Chinese managers are more afraid to treat unknown situation and try new working patterns, because the results are unknown. They cannot take the failed results. Therefore, they prefer to apply their previous working patterns continually. Conversely, the Dutch managers change their ways to work with their Chinese subordinates. To achieve annual targets are the purpose of Dutch managers too, however, they also care about their subordinates' performance when they are working on one project. As the Dutch manager said, he wants to exert the potential of his subordinate in his team.

Furthermore, the subordinates from high uncertainty avoidance cultures think about their managers and colleagues are more important than themselves. And they are more sensitive to the negative results of their “unknown” futures than people from low uncertainty avoidance cultures (Vitell, Nwachukwu & Barnes, 1993). According to the information I got from Dutch and Chinese subordinates, the Chinese subordinates are more sensitive to the negative results of their “unknown” futures. So that, many of them refused to change,

because the results were unpredictable. In contrast, the Dutch subordinates tend to be risk-takers. They thought challenges were part of life. The challenges mean difference and new to them. Therefore, they would accept them when they were facing challenges.

Although the Dutch and Chinese people all changed themselves unconsciously in order to adapt different managers during their work. For example, many Chinese subordinates tried to speak out on team meetings. Some Chinese managers were learning how to listen from their subordinates. The Dutch managers took individual conversation with their Chinese subordinates and etc., however, the teamwork still can not be smoothly, because their purposes of working as teams are different. The Chinese people are afraid about risks and unknown future. So their purpose of working together is about risk sharing. If something goes wrong or faces a difficult situation, they could avoid taking all uncertainties individually; there must be someone else who could share the risks with them. The Dutch people would like to work as teams, because of brainstorming. The teamwork could bring more fresh ideas about the projects, which are helpful to create a feasible scheme at the end of group discussion.

#### **4.2.4 Conclusion**

My information shows different results comparing with uncertainty avoidance theory. In Huawei Netherlands, the Dutch people trend to be low uncertainty avoidance, because they are familiar with local situation, they used to be creative, and they learn things from making mistakes. But the Chinese people trend to be high uncertainty avoidance. Even though I cannot say, the UAI is wrong, because the company is in particular situation. This is a branch office of Chinese company in the Netherlands. The Dutch people are familiar with local situation, however, everything is new for Chinese people. And the headquarters does not change the annual targets dependent on local situation. So uncertainty avoidance index of Chinese people might be high, especially for the Chinese managers. Therefore, my research results are not in line with Hofstede results.

## **4.3 Feedback**

This second aims to explore intercultural communication problems in feedback by applying directness / indirectness concept.

### **4.3.1 The experience from Chinese employees**

As one Chinese employee said, everybody knew how important to give feedback about a particular thing. But as she experienced the patterns of her Dutch and Chinese managers about feedback giving are different. The Dutch managers used to point out good and bad things directly through informal and formal ways. And the Dutch managers preferred to communicate with their employees frequently. The Chinese employees thought that the Dutch managers care about subordinates' emotions when they were busy with projects. The Dutch managers paid much attention on process, though the good results were also important for them. But the Chinese managers are different, they care more about results. Moreover, when the Dutch manager wanted to give negative feedback to his subordinates, he always started from "I think you did something right, but if you could improve this step you will do better". This Chinese employee said that she felt her Dutch manager always tried to maintain her confidence to do her tasks, even though he pointed out her weaknesses directly. She thought that she could accept negative feedback on this kind of way.

But some Chinese employees could not accept the Dutch managers gave negative feedback such directly. One interviewee said that, his Dutch managers pointed out his mistakes on their group meeting directly. Although the Dutch managers would help him to improve afterwards, however, he still felt losing face in the front of his colleagues, because this interviewee thought that his Dutch managers could talk with him individually about his mistakes.

### **4.3.2 The experience from Dutch employees**

As the Dutch employees experienced, the Chinese managers preferred formal ways to give feedback. The communication time was fixed, for example, his Chinese asked their subordinates to write summary about their work progress once a month and sent to him by e-mail. Afterwards, he would give feedback on the last Friday of every month through e-mail too. Moreover, the conversation between managers and subordinates is always about work.

And another Dutch employee said that he could not get the points correctly if his Chinese manager did not directly speak out his weaknesses sometimes. And he said that when you

asked the Chinese colleagues about someone's work performance, his Chinese colleagues always gave positive responses. So he always guessed the true meaning behind these words.

### **4.3.3 Analysis**

In fact, "Directness" is an obvious feature in Dutch culture. In the Dutch society, people get used to express their own ideas and comments to others. One thing might be very strange for people from other cultures, especially for oriental cultures: if Dutch people receive one birthday gift from their friend which they already have, they can directly tell their friend to exchange for a new gift, however, in Chinese culture, it will be considered as rude behavior. Directness is actually reflected in various aspects in Dutch society. In contrast, Chinese culture is almost in the opposition. Chinese people get used to apply "indirect" rhetorical scheme. In China, people use implicit words more than others, and thus the non-verbal communication is important, especially the scenic communication, including gestures, body languages, eye contacting. Even in the business presentation, Chinese people tend to prefer an indirect presentation style that seems to move around the actual topic at hand in circular formation that gradually spirals into the actual point of the presentation (Li, 1999).

As the above information described, the Chinese people care about lose face more. And before the Chinese people give feedback, they always consider about a lot of factors. For example, is it a right place and time to give feedback? If I give negative feedback to somebody, will I leave a bad impression to them? Etc. Therefore, to relate with Hall's low-high context cultures concept, the Chinese people always think about many situations before they give feedback to somebody. Even they give someone their feedback, the real meanings are always hidden within the message. All of these indirect communication patterns are for maintaining the harmony with others. Therefore, if the Dutch people do not understand the above reason, they probably cannot understand the real words what their Chinese managers or subordinates want to say.

In contrast, the Dutch people used to give their feedback directly, because they are in low context culture. The purpose of people communication in the low context culture is to convey exact meanings by using the exact words. They only focus on important issues and ignore the things which they thought that is not necessary to take account.

#### **4.3.4 Conclusion**

Thereby, if there have no effective communication between Dutch and Chinese people about direct and indirect expression patterns in Huawei Netherlands, it could make misunderstandings between people from different cultures. If all of them do not understand the verbal styles of each other, the Chinese people with indirect styles could get hurt from people are used to be directly. In contrast, the Dutch people with direct styles could not be able to understand the hidden meaning of messages which the Chinese people want them to know.

### **4.4 Language ability**

This section aims to explore intercultural communication problems which are caused by individual language competence. As I understand the language competence in intercultural communication has two meanings. First, it is the ability to speak the second language. Second, it is the ability to express their opinions clearly by using the second language. In Huawei Netherlands, English is the only available language which can be used between Dutch and Chinese people. Therefore, being able to speak English is very important for them to make effective intercultural communication. Firstly, I will conclude the information from both Dutch and Chinese employees. And then, apply the theories (Chapter 2) to analyze the real situation in order to find out the problems in the field.

#### **4.4.1 Being able to speak English**

##### **1. The Chinese population in Huawei Netherlands:**

All the Chinese interviewees said that they were able to speak English, because there are some requirements for experts. Being able to speak English is one of them. Besides, most of Chinese interviewees ever took English courses in China. Therefore, all of them have relevant English knowledge, however, everyone's experiences of language are different after working in Huawei Netherlands.

For those interviewees who are working at technical support department, their experienced difficult on English is about English terminology of telecommunication. They said that they had a lot of telecommunication knowledge in Chinese. But they had to translate the knowledge to English when they faced local clients. And this was not easy for them to do so, because they did not have enough vocabulary of terminology.

There is one interviewee from sales department. She is responsible for contact with local clients. As she said, she thought that she English was good when she worked in China. But she still experienced difficulties on English several months later when she started working in Huawei Netherlands. She could not speak more to in-deep communication with local clients. She is worried she cannot better understand requirements of clients and leave them an unprofessional impression.

Another Chinese interviewee is from HR department. She is responsible for experts' management. As she said, she mainly contacted with Chinese employees in the Netherlands and China headquarters. So the English skills were not important to her. Being able to make daily conversation was enough.

## 2. The Dutch population in Huawei Netherlands:

All the Dutch interviewees are from sales and technical support departments. As they said, they had English courses at school, and they often spoke English at work for many years. Therefore, they never experienced any communication difficulties by their own English competence.

### **4.4.2 Ability of English expression**

#### 1. The Chinese population in Huawei Netherlands:

Except the interviewee from HR department, other the Chinese interviewees have difficulties on correct expression of English, especially for their work. So I am going to conclude their responses together in the following paragraphs.

First, difficult to use correct words. Most of Chinese interviewees felt difficult to describe their opinions by use correct words. Although they could understand what their Dutch fellows and clients were talking about, but these Chinese people were hard to speak out as they said. Some of Chinese interviewees said that they felt nervous when spoke English, especially when they could not find words to describe their ideas.

Second, the Chinese interviewees still prefer to talk with their Chinese fellows. Many Chinese interviewees said that they did not know what they could talk with their Dutch fellows except talking about work. Moreover, they were also not confident to talk in English. Therefore, many of them still preferred to get along with their Chinese fellows.

But few Chinese interviewees said that they did not have any problems to talk with Dutch fellows. They got a lot of information about this country and local market through the

conversation with their Dutch fellows. And their English competence was increased by do so, they were not afraid to talk in English. Meanwhile, their Dutch fellows also got information about how to work in the Chinese company. So these Chinese interviewees thought they do not have any problems on English conversation.

## 2. The Dutch population in Huawei Netherlands:

The Dutch interviewees did not experience any difficulty from their own English competence. They used to work in English environment. As the Dutch interviewees said, the main communication difficulty they suffered was from their Chinese fellows. For example, the accent of the Chinese people, some Dutch interviewees said that it was hard to understand their Chinese fellows, because of their accent of English in the beginning. So they repeated the content what Chinese people said in order to confirm they understood correctly. On the other hand, the information transfer is influenced by language issues. One of Dutch interviewees said, the company always posted the newest products information on their internal bulletin board for self-study. As this Dutch interviewee said, this information is useful for engineers and sales to provide more information to their clients. Unfortunately, most of information is in Chinese, so English speakers could not benefit from that. The Dutch engineers tried to ask English version from HR department, but the HR department replied that there was no English version could be provided currently. If they really wanted such information, they had to wait for long time or ask their Chinese colleagues to translate. Therefore, these Dutch interviewees thought the company should provide more English information for English speakers like them.

### 4.4.3 Analysis

Sometimes, the intercultural communication can be understood as the interaction between people who speak different languages. The language is such an instrument that allows us to talk with others, to understand or disagree with others, to describe and evaluate objects and experiences that exist in some other locations (Lustig & Koester, 2003). In current global environment, English as international language has played more and more important role in intercultural communication. Babcock and Babcock (1995) found that the proficiency in language application can greatly change dynamics of communication process by language speed and accuracy.

English is the only available language for both Dutch and Chinese people in Huawei Netherlands. Generally speaking, unless there are frequent opportunities to cooperate with foreigners or work in abroad, people are used to speak mother language with native people in local companies. As these Chinese employees said that there were not many opportunities to

speak English when they were in Huawei China especially for engineers. These Chinese people had ever learned English at school or taken English training. But most of their purpose is to pass examinations in order to get diploma. Unlike Dutch people who had more opportunities to practice their English skills. Therefore, the low English level of Chinese people can be understood.

Moreover, communication is the final product of language and culture. Some people describe the relationship among them as the communication is the swimming, the language is the swimming skill, and culture is water. Without language, the communication would remain to a limited degree, meanwhile, without culture, there would be no communication at all (Jiang, 2000). Therefore, through use English as a communication instrument, people can understand the behaviors, habits of the other culture in Huawei Netherlands, however, because of the low English level, the interaction is less between Dutch and Chinese people in Huawei Netherlands. There are still many things cannot be understood for both Dutch and Chinese people in Huawei Netherlands.

Furthermore, the intercultural communication is the communication exists between these two groups through a common language which they both understand (Neuliep, 2006). When Chinese people communicate with their Dutch colleagues by use English, they are not only able to know how to speak it, but also understand how to use it in certain social context appropriately (Alptekin, 2002). English has emerged as the world's permanent linking language in all international communication. And everyone from around the world is learning English in order to fulfill the role of the linking (Babcock and Babcock, 2001). However, the Chinese people are not confident to speak English and feel difficult to find an interested topic with their Dutch colleagues. So they still prefer to get along with other Chinese colleagues at most of time. This phenomenon makes the Chinese people to lose opportunities to improve their English skills and get more information about local situation. Besides, if the company is not able to provide enough information in English, the Dutch people might lose more information about this Chinese telecommunication company where they are working for.

Finally, the language competence might trigger problems of miscommunication, uncertainty, mistrust and conflict unless these problems are professionally managed (Feely & Wil Harzing, 2003). For example, the Chinese people could not use correct words to describe the things they would like to say. It makes them to deliver their ideas difficultly. Sometimes, the Dutch people cannot understand their Chinese colleagues better, because of strong accent. Although this situation cannot be improved quickly, but they should figure out some solutions in order to reduce problems which are caused by English competence.

### **4.4.3 Conclusion**

In Huawei Netherlands, English is the only available language for both Dutch and Chinese people. Their English competence directly influences the communication between them. Low English competence of Chinese people might make their work to move slowly and directly influence their working performance in the end. On the contrast, although English competence of Dutch people is higher than the Chinese, however, they ever got difficulties when communicate with these Chinese colleagues. These difficulties are mainly caused by accent and words use. Some Chinese colleagues have strong accent, it is really difficult to understand. Furthermore, there are many documents lack of English version. So they cannot get the newest information quickly. As many researchers said, language is the basic thing for intercultural communication. If the Chinese people cannot improve their English competence in short time, and the company cannot provide English documents complete, they should come up with some solutions to solve potential difficulties in order to maintain their work could run smoothly.

## **4.5 Anxiety/Uncertainty Management**

This section aims to explore intercultural communication problems on anxiety/uncertainty management issue. The Huawei Netherlands means differently to Chinese and Dutch employees. In the mind of Chinese employees, they think that they are still working for the same company at a new place. In the mind of Dutch employees, Huawei Netherlands is a Chinese company, which brings them new experience.

During the past three years, both Chinese and Dutch employees had already gotten different experience comparing with their previous working experience in China or other Dutch companies. No matter active or passive intentions, they were influenced by company surroundings, and changed themselves continually in order to adapt to new situation. In other words, it is a durative process from noticing to adaptation these differences. People have to change themselves continually in order to deal with new challenges.

Therefore, based on the information I got from these Chinese and Dutch employees, firstly, I will describe how Chinese and Dutch employees adapt themselves to working at Huawei Netherlands. And then applying “the stranger and the host” theory to discuss the adaptation process and potential problems.

### 4.5.1 Adaptation process

Gudykunst (1992/2005) used the notion of Simmel (1950) “the stranger and the host” to present the situation, and explained his own proposed theory based on the situation when strangers enter into new cultures and interact with hosts. In Gudykunst’s theory, when strangers enter in a new culture, they have uncertainty and anxiety about the hosts’ attitudes, feelings, beliefs, values and behaviors. It is both not good that the level of that uncertainty and anxiety is too high or too low: too high will make the strangers are not able to predict and understand the behaviors and messages produced by hosts, while too low will make the strangers are too overconfident and do not question themselves whether or not their predictions are accurate (Chapter 2).

#### 1. About the Chinese managers and employees

*Before coming to the Netherlands:*

There is only one Chinese manager was worried about how to work in the Netherlands before coming to there. This Chinese employee already worked at technical support department of Huawei Netherlands more than one year. He said that he was mainly worried about his English, especially for oral English. He did not know whether or not he could handle English projects. When he worked in Huawei headquarter, he was responsible for providing technical support to domestic clients. There were few opportunities to speak English at that time. So that, he was worried about his English was not good enough to communicate with local clients. But he accepted this offer from Huawei headquarter, because oversea working experience could bring him advantages for his future career.

Except the above content, he was same as other Chinese staffs were never worried about their life in the Netherlands. As these Chinese people said, they all knew the company would arrange everything for them, such as, the resident permit, healthy insurance, apartment, and meals. And they also knew that there would be something different, they believed that they can adapt well based on their previous working experience.

*After working in the Netherlands for several months:*

Things were not such easy as those Chinese thought. All these Chinese employees experienced a period of difficult time after several months. They used their own ways to adapt in this new situation, no matter active or passive.

Adapting to the management styles of Dutch managers is important to all Chinese subordinates. The interviewee D works at technical support department of Huawei

Netherlands. He said that he unused to express opinions actively especially on the group meetings. But his Dutch manager preferred group discussions more. Every time, they spent time on analysis of potential problems, make perfect business plans with sales department. As interviewee D said, he thought the most important thing was to starting the project. The Chinese employees used to immediately start doing their work when they got a new project. And then adjustment would be taken during the process of implementation. In interviewee D's opinion, discussion was necessary but not the most important thing for a project. Although the interviewee D did not agree with the working pattern of his Dutch managers, however, he did not say anything to his Dutch managers, he just did things what his managers wanted him to do.

The interviewee B works at sales department. As the interviewee B said, he just reported to one manager directly in Huawei China. But he was managed by both Chinese and Dutch managers in Huawei Netherlands, and each manager had different management patterns. As the interviewee B said, he had to change himself very fast and frequently in order to following the different management patterns. But he could not sure whether or not he dealt right before he saw positive results.

As the interviewee of Chinese managers, they experienced many differences from their Dutch subordinates. First of all, opinions were expressed so directly. The Dutch subordinates used to express their ideas in a direct way, however, the Chinese subordinates preferred to use indirect way to express their opinions, or kept silence when arguments emerged. Second, different understandings on tasks arrangement and cooperation. Dutch subordinates preferred to clear tasks arrangement before they started a new project. And the tasks division used to be decided by group discussion. Finally, it is difficult to make common target between Dutch and Chinese employees. Because of different focuses. The Dutch subordinates cared about both working process and performance. The Chinese subordinates just focused on good working performance, because this was directly related with their annual evaluation of working performance.

No matter active or passive, the Chinese managers and subordinates started solving the difficulty. As many managers said, they tried to listen their subordinates' opinions patiently, but they also emphasized that it did not mean they gave decision making right to their subordinates. They said that it was very important to hold authority, because they thought that it was useful to manage the teams.

Some Chinese subordinates firstly thought that they should have a clear understanding about the requirements of their positions in this office. And then they kept communicating with other Dutch colleagues actively when there were arguments. Secondly, they got to know their

Dutch colleagues by formal and informal conversations in order to know what do they like and dislike. on the other hand, do their work as good as they can. But some of Chinese interviewees (subordinates) said that they still felt difficult to communicate with their Dutch managers directly, because their previous experience taught them always to keep a distance with managers.

## 2. About the Dutch managers and employees

### *Before working in Huawei Netherlands:*

In contrast, these Dutch employees thought carefully before they decided to accept offers from Huawei. Some of them asked about working experience from friends who ever worked in other Asian companies in the Netherlands. Or they looked for information about Asian companies from Google. But few Dutch employees did not do any preparation; they just accepted the offer directly if they were interested in that new job. They used to deal cases dependent on their previous experience. No matter what preparations the Dutch employees did, they all experienced a confused period in the beginning.

### *After working in Huawei Netherlands for several months:*

After several months working at Huawei Netherlands, most of Dutch managers and employees had communication problems with Chinese managers or subordinates. My Dutch interviewees told me their Chinese fellows used to express their ideas indirectly. And they were not open to talk. It made hard to these Dutch locals to understand the real meanings from their Chinese fellows. Therefore, the informal communication with Chinese employees was less.

Moreover, the communication among departments was not enough. Each person was in charge of several responsibilities, and lack of clear information to explain. So these Dutch locals were easily confused about who they could contact for specific cases. In addition, the authority scope of the Dutch managers was not clear enough. These Dutch managers were not sure what kind of decisions they were allowed to make directly and not necessary report to top manager.

I do not have more information, so I talk about the Dutch managers' experience to explain how they adapted in Huawei Netherlands. Although these Dutch managers were not able to change the entire situation, however, they were able to handle as better as they could under their authority scopes. They firstly tried to get a clear understanding about their authority scope. And then they started from introducing themselves. They directly told their subordinates about their management styles and the communication styles they prefer on

their first group meetings. If their Chinese subordinates were not good at opinion expression in verbal, then the Dutch managers would ask those people to send E-mail. Because they already noticed that their Chinese subordinates had clearly thoughts about the projects and were good at English writing, although they were not active on the meetings. Afterwards, the Dutch managers would decide whether or not it is necessary to make an individual conversation with senders.

In this way, the Dutch managers were able to understand the thoughts of their Chinese subordinates and provided help in time. Meanwhile, the Dutch managers were still expecting the Chinese ordinates can express their opinions directly especially on their meetings. Finally, these managers said that it was very important to open mind and listen with patience. It was better to discuss problems directly with relevant people in order to reduce the misunderstandings which were caused by different cultures.

For Dutch population, the difference they experienced was about communication routine. The communication routine in the Dutch companies was shorter Chinese company. One of my interviewees from sales department said that there was regular communication with top managers in the Dutch companies. By doing so, the top managers of the Dutch company could directly know what exactly happened inside the company. And had clear ideas about what the employees needed for doing their work. Unfortunately, he had few opportunities to talk about work with top managers directly even none. Moreover, the Huawei Netherlands did not have clear staff training plan. He had to update marketing information or products knowledge by himself.

#### **4.5.2 Analysis**

As I introduced in Chapter 2, “anxiety/uncertainty management” is one kind of individual intercultural competence to adapt into the strange and new environment, which determines how individual is going to get along with his new environment (Gudykunst, 2005). Gudykunst (2005) used the notion of Simmel (1950) “the stranger and the host” to present the situation, and explained his own proposed theory based on the situation when strangers enter into new cultures and interact with hosts.

The Huawei Netherlands involves both Chinese and Dutch cultures. The employees cannot avoid interacting with people from another culture. This situation perhaps different with their previous experience, so they all need to adjust their thoughts and behaviors in order to survive in it. In section 4.5.1 we can compare the different attitude between the Chinese and Dutch employees before they start working at Huawei Netherlands.

The Chinese interviewees said that they did not prepare themselves for working in the Netherlands, because some interviewees thought that they had previous oversea working experience, they could use the experience for reference. Other interviewees thought that the company would arrange everything for them. So they could focus on their work. Moreover, they also thought they had abundant working experience which might be helpful for dealing with strength situation. The above information can show the level of anxiety and uncertainty is low. The Chinese employees are overconfident and do not question themselves whether or not their predictions are accurate.

The Dutch employees collected necessary information before they decided to accept the offers from Huawei Netherlands, because they notice the Huawei is a Chinese company. And the Chinese culture is different with Dutch culture. So they asked their friends who had ever worked for Asian companies or searched information from Google. In terms of this information from my Dutch interviewees, I can say that the level of anxiety and uncertainty is high for the Dutch managers and employees before deciding to work in Huawei the Netherlands.

After working at Huawei Netherlands for awhile, all Dutch and Chinese employees had experience about interaction with fellows from another culture. As one of Chinese interviewees said he unused to communicate with his Dutch manager directly. In his opinion, communication was necessary but not the most important thing for his job. Moreover, some Chinese employees said that they did not know how to communicate with their Dutch managers or fellows. It was difficult to find interesting topics. Therefore, they preferred to get along with Chinese fellows. I think this is a normal phenomenon. Neuliep (2005) argued that many people will feel anxious when communicating or participate communicating with people from different culture. If people experience anxious through such intercultural communication, they probably try to avoid the interaction with people from different cultures, because the intercultural communication is loaded with dissimilarity, people may experience anxiety, which request ability to reduce uncertainty. The Chinese people used to avoid uncertainty, they are not risk-takers. Therefore, to avoid communication with Dutch fellows is a kind of normal behavior to the Chinese employees.

But I think that it is not a right behavior to reduce uncertainty in new environment. As Neuliep & Ryan argued (2000), the experience of intercultural communication apprehension is one of factors that may affect how people reduce uncertainty when they enter into a new environment. Normally, people will experience a bit of anxiety and apprehension when they enter into a strange environment or meet someone from a different culture at the first time. I think communication can help Chinese employees to get more information about the Dutch

society, the local telecommunication market. The information is helpful for Chinese people reducing their uncertainty and adapt in the new environment quickly.

As we saw the situation about Chinese and Dutch people inside the company, we can see the Dutch locals face their questions directly. They collected information and asked their questions to relevant people in order to make a clear picture about the new environment. As Neuliep argued that people with low intercultural communication apprehension may communicate actively with people from different cultures, it is helpful for get enough information to adapt into the strange environment. In a word, by engaging in intercultural communication, we can reduce anxiety to new environment and result in more satisfying communication with others (Neuliep & Ryan, 2000). Through this self- culture study, the Dutch people have primary understanding about the working situation in the Chinese company.

Moreover, “mindfulness” is one issue in anxiety/uncertainty management (Langer, 1997). He argues that mindfulness involves “openness to new things/environment”, “alertness to distinctions”, “sensitivity to different context”, “awareness of multiple perspectives”, and “orientation in the present”. If the Chinese employees are mindful as their Dutch fellows being open to new environment and ask their questions directly, then the Chinese employees will be able to manage their anxiety and uncertainty efficiently. Thereby, the competence of anxiety/uncertainty management might influence how fast people adapt into new situation and the efficiency of communication with people from different cultures.

#### **4.5.3 Conclusion**

The anxiety/uncertainty management is one kind of individual intercultural competence to adapt into the strange and new environment, which determines how individual is going to get along with his new environment (Gudykunst, 2005). If a person enters into the environment which is different with his own culture, then the intercultural communication cannot be avoided. And the intercultural communication apprehension can influence the consequences.

People with high intercultural communication apprehension may avoid from communication with people from different cultures, thereby the uncertainty cannot be reduced. In contrast, people with low intercultural communication apprehension may communicate actively with people from different cultures, it is helpful for get enough information to adapt into the strange environment. In a word, by engaging in intercultural communication, we can reduce anxiety to new environment and result in more satisfying communication with others (Neuliep & Ryan, 2000).

By comparing the above information which I got from both Chinese and Dutch employees, it shows the Chinese employees take passive attitude to manage the uncertainty to new environment. They avoided communicating with Dutch locals. In contrast, the Dutch employees take active attitude to manage the uncertainty to new environment. They are open to the new environment and curious to new phenomenon. Before they started working in Huawei Netherlands, they search information about Asian culture, and if they have friend who ever worked in Asian companies, they also got suggestions from their friends about how to work in an Asian country. Although the situation of each companies is different, however, their preparation work could help them to understand the cultural differences experience are normal thing when they work for foreign companies. In contrast, the Chinese people are interdependent to their company, they did not prepare anything to adapt into the new working environment. Such passive attitude of Chinese employees makes their adaptation process slowly.

## **CHPATER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMENDATION**

The intercultural communication refers to the communication between different cultures. The effective intercultural communication is built on the basis of mutual understanding. But the different understandings about relevant cultural issues cannot be avoided. In order to reduce misunderstanding which caused by cultural differences, people should know what these cultural differences are, how different with people's own culture, and how those people deal with same issues in different cultures. However, both Chinese and Dutch people did not get chance to talk about their own culture openly in Huawei Netherlands. And the company did not provide information to their Chinese people about local culture, and also did not introduce Chinese culture to their Dutch people in the beginning. All of them understood about the other side actively or passively by themselves through their work. This kind of method is not efficient. People are always aware of the cultural differences when the problems emerged.

To relate with my case, there are different understandings about power distance between Dutch and Chinese population in Huawei Netherlands. The Chinese population thought there should exist certain distance between managers and subordinates. The hierarchy and authority ideas have already embedded in their mind. In fact, this thought cannot be removed easily, even though some of them tried to use Dutch way to talk with Dutch population in the company. Contrarily, the Dutch managers used to be closer with their subordinates. They hold final decision making right, however, the harmonious working environment is also important in Dutch culture. The Dutch managers do not only care about the final working performance, but also they pay attention on keeping a harmonious working atmosphere for their subordinates.

The different attitude about uncertainty avoidance exists between Chinese and Dutch people in this company through analyzing the information. But it is not the only reason caused low team working performance. Because people hold different attitude about risks, so they behave differently on the basis of their attitude. The Chinese population complained the Dutch group members spent too much time on discussion. And the Dutch population complained their Chinese colleagues were so silent on team meetings. All of them just saw the surface situation. Nobody asked their foreign colleagues about why they behaved like this. Although the interviews, the Dutch people said that they see the uncertainties are kind of challenges to them, sometime they also feel difficult for something. But working with other people as a team can help them to get over from these difficulties. And they used to discuss potential problems which could be predicted in advance. The Chinese people are also afraid to handle uncertain situation. But the risks could be shared with somebody else. So they

thought there must be someone who can cover them if they do not behave actively within the team. Moreover, working as a team is just available on work, the Chinese people used to work individually when they are at school. Therefore, the Chinese people might do not know the right ways to work as a team.

Moreover, the different expression patterns between Dutch and Chinese population in Huawei Netherlands. The different expression patterns are kind of communication habits. The Chinese people may think about a lot of things before they say something. For example, is the environment safe to say something, will it confuse the audients, is their opinions make sense to others. Especially, they will think about more issues before they evaluate someone. Therefore, the Chinese population used to express their opinions indirectly or keep silence.

The cultural differences would lead communication problems in intercultural communication. In this case, Dutch and Chinese people have different understandings about some issues. Their behaviors are different on the basis of their own cultures. And they did not communicate frequent about their confusions to the other part. Therefore, they could not understand each other more, and could not find an effective method to deal with these differences.

In the intercultural environment, the impact of cultural differences can be reduced by getting to know the culture of the other part. But the problems of cultural differences would always exist. There is no way to clear away intercultural communication problems which caused by cultural differences, except making the cultural environment to become unique, for example, localizing the Huawei Netherlands. But it is impossible for this company now. Therefore, the problems of cultural differences would still exist for long time.

Besides, the individual competence of intercultural communication is also an important thing for intercultural communication. The language becomes a kind of instrument in intercultural environment. Through the conversations with local people, the new people would know more about local situation, for example, laws, habits of local people, social situation and so on. In this case, if both Dutch and Chinese people could speak English fluently, the conversations between them may become easily. They would get to know more about the culture of the other side. Then the impact of cultural differences could be reduced more. And the more understanding about the new cultures, people would be the faster to adapt into the new environment.

Since the Huawei Netherlands cannot be localized quickly, the company has to take actions to reduce the impact of cultural differences to organizational communication between Dutch and Chinese people. The company may not able to notice all different cultural issues inside,

but it probably could ask their employees about the different cultural issues which they already experienced during their work. And then ask their employees to introduce their own culture to people of the other part. Or the company could provide general information about Dutch and Chinese cultures to their employees. This information should be correlative with their situation, for example, introduction about how Dutch people work together, and Chinese people work in China. Although the results of such activities cannot be forecasted now, but they would have a general idea about their foreign colleagues if the company really want to improve current situation.

# APPENDIX

## 1 Questions for Dutch managers and employees

### About cultural differences

1. As you can see, what are the differences between your Dutch and Chinese colleagues on working?
2. How do you work with people from different countries? Are there any difficulties? How do you deal with them?

### 1) Power distance

3. Is there any change according to your previous experiences in domestic company?
4. What do you like to be a manager in Huawei AMS? What kind of difficulties to work here? How do you deal with these difficulties?
5. How do the final decisions be made here?
6. What do you think about the distance (differences) between managers and employees?
7. Do you change your opinions after working here?

### 2) Teamwork

8. Do you prefer work like individual or with others like a team? Why?
9. Is your team a multicultural team? Do you have any communication problems in team work because of culture differences? How do you make it work?

### *As a team member:*

10. How does your Chinese team leader work in your team?
11. Are there any differences with Dutch team leader? What are the differences?

*As a team leader*

12. How do you manage your team?

13. Do you use different methods to work with people from different countries? If yes, what are the differences?

3) Feedback:

14. How Dutch companies (people) give feedback on encouragement and punishment? What are the differences here?

15. How do you give feedback to your Chinese and Dutch colleagues about working progress or staff performance?

4) About language capacity

16. Did you ever face any misunderstanding and difficulties caused by language? If yes, how do you deal with them?

5) About anxiety/uncertainty management

17. What are the differences to work in Huawei comparing with working in Dutch companies?

18. After you know you are going to work in Huawei, do you had any worries about how to work in a Chinese culture company that might be complete different with Dutch companies?

19. Whether you had difficulties? What were those?

20. How you handled them?

21. Whether you are still experiencing difficulties? What are these?

22. In this company, Can you get along well with your colleague from different country? How do you define the "get along with?"

23. As an employee in multicultural environment, what kind of competences and skills do you think you should have?

## **2 Questions for Chinese managers and employees**

### About cultural differences

1. As you can see, what are the differences between your Dutch and Chinese colleagues on working?
2. How do you work with colleagues from different countries? Are there any difficulties? How do you deal with them?

### 1) Power distance

3. Is there any change according to your previous experiences in Huawei China?
4. As a manager, is the management styles that you implement here are different with the styles you used in Huawei China?
5. As a manager in Huawei AMS? What kind of difficulties to work here? How do you deal with these difficulties?
6. How do the final decisions be made here?
7. What do you think about the distance (relationship) between managers and employees? Do you change your opinions after working here?

### 2) Teamwork

8. Do you prefer work like individual or with others like a team? Why?
9. Is your team a multicultural team? Do you have any communication problems in teamwork because of culture differences? How do you make it work?

### *As a team member:*

10. How does your Dutch team leader work in your team?
11. What are the differences which comparing with Chinese leader?

### *As a team leader*

12. How do you manage your team?

13. Do you use different methods to work with people from different countries? If yes, what are the differences?

3) Feedback:

14. Are there any different ways of feedback for encouragement and punishment here comparing with your previous experiences in China?

15. How do you give feedback to your Chinese and Dutch colleagues about their working progress or staff performance?

4) About language capacity

16. Did you ever face any misunderstanding and difficulties caused by language? How do you deal with them?

5) About anxiety/uncertainty management

17. What are the differences to work in Huawei comparing with working in Huawei China?

18. After you know you are going to work in Huawei Netherlands, do you had any worries about how to work here that might be complete different with working in Huawei China?

19. Whether you had difficulties? What were those?

20. How you handled them?

21. Whether you are still experiencing difficulties? What are these?

22. In this company, Can you get along well with your colleague from different country? How do you define the "get along with?"

23. As an employee in multicultural environment, what kind of competences and skills do you think you should have?

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