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# INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN PRACTICE: EMPLOYEE PERSPECTIVES FROM PLECTO

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores how employees at Plecto, a Danish Software-as-a-Service company (SaaS), navigate intercultural communication when working with clients from Denmark, Germany, and the United States, three culturally different, yet key markets for the business. As Plecto continues its global expansion, effective communication across cultural boundaries becomes increasingly important to support strong client relationships, lower the number of misunderstandings, and ensure smooth collaboration between different cultures in this fast-paced, digital-first environment.

Using a qualitative approach and five-semi structured interviews across key client-facing departments: Sales, Customer Success, Partnerships, and Plecto Experts, the study investigates how communication styles, language and emotion, and digital channels shape everyday interactions across cultures in a business setting. The analysis focuses on three core themes: communication style, language and emotion, and digital communication and trust. These areas were identified as central to shaping the success and challenges of intercultural interactions at Plecto. The findings reveal that, while employees adapt intuitively to cultural differences, there is currently no formal training or shared framework to guide them in place, which could lead to damaged client relationships and enhanced employee anxiety. Many employees rely on instinct, coworker input, or previous experiences, which can lead to inconsistencies and increased stress, especially with newer markets such as Germany, where client expectations usually differ significantly from the expectations of Danish and U.S. clients.

The findings are interpreted through Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions and Hall's High- and Low- Context Culture theory. While both frameworks help explain general patterns in communication, some real-world experiences, such as emotional confidence and digital tone, go beyond what these frameworks capture. As a result, this research calls for the need of a more flexible and supportive approach to intercultural communication.

The project concludes with low-cost recommendations to support employees, such as internal guides, onboarding tools, or informal knowledge-sharing sessions. These small steps can help Plecto have a more clear and confident intercultural communication and continue building its identity as a people-first, global company.

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Lastly, I want to thank my friends and my family for offering support during this busy but rewarding period in my life.

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*"Culture is communication and communication is culture."*

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Edward T. Hall, *Beyond culture* (1976)<sup>1</sup>

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*"In international businesses, communication is not about what is said, but what is understood."*

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Erin Meyer, *The Culture Map* (2014)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hall, E. T. (1976). *Beyond culture*. New York: Anchor Press/Double day.

<sup>2</sup> Meyer, E. (2014). *The culture map: Breaking through the invisible boundaries of global business*. Public Affairs Books.

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## 1. PERSONAL MOTIVATION

Throughout my studies in Culture, Communication, and Globalisation at Aalborg University, I have developed a strong interest in how professional communication unfolds across cultural contexts, particularly in international business environments. This interest has been shaped by both theoretical perspectives and an awareness of practical challenges that arise when people from diverse cultural backgrounds engage in work-related interactions. As globalisation continues to shape business practices, I believe that understanding and improving cross-cultural communication is essential for building strong client relationships and maintaining professional trust.

This research is further motivated by my internship experience at Plecto, where I had the opportunity to observe intercultural communication in practice across departments such as sales, customer success, and partnerships. During this time, I became increasingly aware of how cultural expectations can influence communication styles, tone, and interpretations, especially in digital settings. These observations led me to investigate how a global SaaS company like Plecto navigates cross-cultural client communication and to examine potential areas for improvement.

The aim of this thesis is to contribute insights into how intercultural communication is currently managed within the company and to provide suggestions for enhancing clarity, inclusivity, and client satisfaction in an international context.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

Globalisation is a complex and a widely discussed concept, often seen as the driving force behind the increasing connection between cultures, societies, and economies.<sup>3</sup> As businesses expand across borders and work with clients from different countries, cultural diversity has become a normal part of everyday operations. In this international environment, communication plays a key role in building strong relationships, sharing knowledge, and achieving business goals.<sup>4</sup> However, communication is often, if not always, influenced by culture, with the two concepts having a great deal of influence on each other.<sup>5</sup> How people speak, listen, and respond is shaped by their cultural values, habits, and expectations.<sup>6</sup> Because of this, cross-cultural communication can be both a great opportunity and a potential challenge. Misunderstandings or misinterpretations might occur when cultural differences are not fully understood or taken into account.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, the way communication takes place in global companies has changed significantly in recent years. With the rise of digital tools and remote work, many business interactions now happen online through email, instant messaging apps like Slack, or video platforms like Zoom and Microsoft Teams. While these technologies allow for a quick and efficient communication across time zones and borders, they can also create new challenges.<sup>8</sup> In digital settings, non-verbal cues, such as, tone of voice, body language, and facial expressions are limited or lost entirely, making it more difficult to interpret meaning and intent.<sup>9</sup> For companies operating internationally and relying on online communication, cultural misunderstandings may therefore be more likely to happen, especially when communication styles differ between countries.

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<sup>3</sup> Reisinger, Y. (2009). *International tourism: Cultures and behavior*. Butterworth-Heinemann.

<sup>4</sup> Cox, T. H., & Blake, S. (1991). Managing cultural diversity: Implications for organizational competitiveness. *Academy of Management Executive*, 5(3), 45–56. <https://doi.org/10.5465/ame.1991.4274465>,

Reynolds, K. (2025, January 13). *13 benefits and challenges of cultural diversity in the workplace*. Hult International Business School. <https://www.hult.edu/blog/benefits-challenges-cultural-diversity-workplace/>.

<sup>5</sup> Giri, V. N. (2006). Culture and Communication Style. *Review of Communication*, 6(1–2), 124–130. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15358590600763391>.

<sup>6</sup> Reisinger, Y. (2009). *International tourism: Cultures and behavior*. (p. 106).

<sup>7</sup> Reisinger, Y. (2009). *International tourism: Cultures and behavior*. (p.40).

<sup>8</sup> Solomiia Ohinok & Vasyl Hunka (2023). The Impact of Digitalisation on the Efficiency and Competitiveness of an Organisation in the Modern Business Environment. *Економіка розвитку систем*  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32782/2707-8019/2023-2-7>.

<sup>9</sup> Venter, E., 2019, 'Challenges for meaningful interpersonal communication in a digital era', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75(1) DOI:[10.4102/hts.v75i1.5339](https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i1.5339) (p. 2).



In this context, companies that operate internationally should learn how to communicate effectively with clients of different cultural backgrounds.<sup>10</sup> This is extremely relevant for Plecto, a Denmark based SaaS company that provides performance management software to businesses in more than 75 countries all around the world.<sup>11</sup> Plecto's platform allows users to track key performance indicators (KPIs) in real time, integrate data from various systems, and visualise business performance across teams and departments.<sup>12</sup> Since these services are often adjusted to the needs of sales, support, and management teams, clear and effective communication is essential throughout the client journey, from sales and onboarding to ongoing customer support. As Plecto continues to grow its international client base, communication becomes an essential part of building long-term relationships and providing quality services. The company's three largest markets: Denmark, Germany, and the United States<sup>13</sup>, each have their own unique cultural expectations, business norms, and communication styles<sup>14</sup>, all of which may influence the way in which clients experience and respond to Plecto's services. For example, clients in the United States may value directness, enthusiasm, and quick turnaround times, while German clients might put more value on formality, precision, and structured processes. Danish business culture, often described as informal yet collaborative, presents a separate set of expectations altogether.<sup>15</sup>

These differences in communication style and cultural expectations may impact how clients interpret tone, feedback, speed of response, or even how success is defined. In a digital-first company like Plecto, where most client interactions happen through Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or email, these cultural differences are especially important.

Exploring how Plecto's teams navigate these differences can offer valuable insights into the role of culture in client communication and reveal opportunities to improve clarity, trust, and long-term client satisfaction for the company.

Although Plecto already engages in communication with clients from different countries through departments such as sales, onboarding, and customer success, cultural differences

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<sup>10</sup> Sahadevan, Pavol & Sumangala, Mukthy. (2021). Effective Cross-Cultural Communication for International Business. *Shanlax International Journal of Management*. 8. 24-33. 10.34293/management.v8i4.3813.

<sup>11</sup> *About Plecto*. (n.d.). Plecto. <https://www.plecto.com/company/about/>.

<sup>12</sup> *KPI Dashboard Software - Try Plecto free*. (2020, April 2). Plecto. <https://www.plecto.com/>

<sup>13</sup> Appendix „Internal Sources“.

<sup>14</sup> Aririguzoh, S. Communication competencies, culture and SDGs: effective processes to cross-cultural communication. *Humanit Soc Sci Commun* 9, 96 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-022-01109-4>.

<sup>15</sup> Reference: gathered through internal interviews, later shown in the analysis and interpreted through theoretical lenses.

can still create challenges. Each of these departments plays a unique role in the client journey, often requiring specific communication in different stages. The sales team, for example, is usually the first point of contact and must quickly build trust with potential clients, often through persuasive and confident language. During the onboarding process, clients receive valuable information about the platform, which must be communicated clearly and in a culturally appropriate manner to ensure a smooth start. The customer success team, responsible for maintaining long-term relationships, must respond with sensitivity to different client expectations regarding the tone, frequency of contact, and styles of feedback.<sup>16</sup>

The way messages are written, the tone used in meetings, or even the level of formality expected may vary significantly across cultures. While some clients may expect a friendly and informal tone, others may expect a more structured and professional approach. When these differences are not fully understood and addressed properly, there is a risk of miscommunication, unmet expectations, or unintentional cultural bias.<sup>17</sup> For example, a casual tone in an email may be seen as too familiar or unprofessional in some cultures, while a direct question might come across as too blunt in others.<sup>18</sup>

Understanding how these cultural differences manifest in everyday communication is key to improving both client satisfaction and long-term success in global markets.<sup>19</sup> As Plecto continues to provide services to a growing number of international clients, building cultural awareness across client-facing departments may not only prevent potential misunderstandings, but also strengthen relationships and improve overall communication outcomes. This study will explore these themes in more depth, using Plecto's client journey as a tool to analyse how the organisation handles cultural differences in intercultural communication.

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<sup>16</sup> Appendix „Plecto Client Journey“ .

<sup>17</sup> Bennett, Milton. (1998). Intercultural Communication: A Current Perspective. Basic Concepts of Intercultural Communication. Selected Readings. (p. 2),

<sup>18</sup> Hall, E. T. (1976). Beyond culture (p. 113).

<sup>19</sup> Unachukwu, Chika & Akinwolemiwa, Deborah & Eloghosa, Stephen & Kaggwa, Simon & Uwaoma, Prisca. (2023). INCORPORATING DIVERSE CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES INTO BUSINESS STRATEGY: A COMPARATIVE REVIEW. Business, Organizations and Society. 1. 89-95. 10.26480/bosoc.02.2023.89.95.

## 2.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Plecto is a global SaaS platform that helps businesses improve performance through real-time KPI tracking and system integrations. As the company continues to grow and serve clients across a wide range of countries and industries<sup>20</sup>, effective intercultural cultural communication is becoming one of the most crucial factors in the company's business strategy. Among Plecto's largest client bases are companies based in Denmark, the United States, and Germany<sup>21</sup>, each with their own distinct business cultures, communication norms, and expectations.

Plecto works with clients from culturally diverse markets, which can lead to communication challenges due to different expectations and styles. This thesis focuses on how employees at Plecto experience and manage communication with clients from Denmark, Germany, and the United States. Through interview-based insights, it explores how cultural differences influence tone, trust, and digital interaction in client-facing roles, with the aim of offering practical suggestions for clearer, more inclusive communication.

To ensure that the project is focused and not too broad, the following main research question has been developed:

*“How do Plecto employees adapt their communication when working with clients from culturally different markets, specifically Denmark, Germany, and the United States, and how do these cultural differences influence their interactions?”*

## 2.2 PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study is to explore how employees at Plecto experience and adapt their communication when working with clients from Denmark, Germany, and the United States. Focusing on teams involved in sales, onboarding, and customer success, the research investigates how employees navigate cultural expectations in digital, client-facing interactions.

Rather than evaluating communication from the client's perspective, the study concentrates on how employees perceive and manage cultural differences in their day-to-day work. The goal is to offer practical recommendations for strengthening Plecto's cross-cultural

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<sup>20</sup> *About Plecto*. (n.d.). Plecto.

<sup>21</sup> Appendix “Internal Sources”.

communication strategies and to contribute academic insight into how intercultural communication unfolds in a fast-growing, digital-first company.

To help guide the project and focus the analysis, the following supporting questions were developed:

1. What are the key cultural differences between Denmark, Germany, and the United States, and how do these differences influence client communication at Plecto?
2. How do Plecto employees experience digital communication as a way of conducting business, particularly in terms of building trust and maintaining client relationships?
3. How does language, such as fluency, tone, and confidence, shape intercultural communication in Plecto's client interactions?
4. What opportunities exist for Plecto to improve or adapt its communication strategies to better support culturally diverse client relationships?

## 2.3 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This thesis begins by setting the stage in Chapter 1: **Introduction**, where I explain why the topic of intercultural communication matters, especially in the context of today's globalised and increasingly digital business environment. I share how my academic background and internship at Plecto sparked my interest in how cultural expectations shape professional communication. This chapter also introduces the central problem statement, where I express the need to understand how Plecto's client-facing teams navigate communication across three culturally distinct markets: Denmark, Germany, and the United States. From this, I present the main research question and supporting questions that guide the study.

Following this, Chapter 2: **Literature Review**, reviews the academic literature related to intercultural business communication. Here, I explore existing research on cultural frameworks (like Hofstede's and Hall's), emotional and linguistic challenges, and the growing impact of digitalisation on how we connect across cultures. The chapter also highlights a noticeable research gap: while there's plenty of work on large multinational corporations, far less attention is given to smaller, fast-growing tech companies like Plecto, where informal structures and digital communication are the norm.

In Chapter 3: **Methodology**, I explain the methodological approach of the study. I chose a qualitative, inductive design because I wanted to understand how people at Plecto actually experience intercultural communication, not just what theory says. I describe how I developed and conducted semi-structured interviews with employees across four departments who regularly work with clients from the three focus countries. The chapter walks through how the data was collected, coded, and analysed, and it also reflects on ethical considerations, limitations, and my own role as a researcher and intern in the company.

Next, in **Chapter 4**, I outline the **theoretical framework** that supports the analysis. This includes a deeper explanation of Hofstede's cultural dimensions and Hall's high- and low-context communication theory, both of which help make sense of the patterns found in the interviews.

Chapter 5: **Analysis**, presents the core analysis, structured by country, first Denmark, then Germany, and finally the United States. For each country, I explore three main themes that

came up in the interviews: communication style, language and emotion, and digital communication. I link employee experiences to the cultural theories mentioned earlier, highlighting how different values, norms, and expectations shape everyday communication with clients.

In Chapter 6: **Discussion** I discuss the findings more broadly, tying them back to the literature and theory, and reflecting on what they reveal about intercultural communication in modern, digital-first company, Plecto.

Finally, Chapter 7: **Conclusion** concludes the thesis by summarising the main insights, offering practical recommendations for improving intercultural communication at Plecto, and suggesting directions for future research, such as including client perspectives or expanding the cultural scope.

The **Appendix**, which is added as a separate document is structured as follows: *Interview Guide* (including themes and questions), *Interview Transcripts*, ranging from E1 to E5, the transcripts include full interviews conducted between the researcher and the interviewees. *Thematic analysis*, showing a visual representation of it, as well as describing the process in which the analysis was conducted. *Internal sources*, confirming Plecto's key markets, and *Plecto Client Journey*, describing the process of how clients are onboarded in Plecto.

### 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides an overview of key academic literature relevant to intercultural communication in international business, with a particular focus on how these dynamics play out in digital and client-facing environments. The review begins by introducing the concept of intercultural communication and then moves on to introducing foundational cultural communication frameworks, particularly Hofstede's and Hall's cultural dimensions, and briefly discusses alternative or critical perspectives. It then explores emotional and linguistic factors that can shape communication across cultures, including the role of English as a lingua franca. Attention is also given to the unique challenges faced by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), where formalised intercultural training is often lacking. Finally, the chapter examines how digitalisation has changed, and in many ways complicated the way communication happens across cultures, especially through platforms like Zoom and email. Together, these themes provide the theoretical and contextual background for understanding the communication experiences of Plecto employees explored in the following chapters.

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION TO INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

In an increasingly globalised and digitally connected business environment, intercultural communication has become a critical component of professional success. Washington, Okoro, and Thomas in their 2012 *"Intercultural Communication In Global Business: An Analysis Of Benefits And Challenges"*<sup>22</sup> discuss that as companies expand their services across borders, they are required to navigate not only different markets but also diverse communication styles, cultural norms, and expectations. This is particularly important in client-facing industries, such as the SaaS sector, where successful collaboration and long-term relationships rely heavily on effective communication.<sup>23</sup> Misunderstandings or disagreements caused by cultural differences can lead to a breakdown in trust, client dissatisfaction, or functional incompetence.

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<sup>22</sup> Washington, Melvin & Okoro, Ephraim & Thomas, Otis. (2012). Intercultural Communication In Global Business: An Analysis Of Benefits And Challenges. International Business & Economics Research Journal (IBER). (p. 217).

<sup>23</sup> Cherednychenko, M. (n.d.). Localization and Globalization in SAAS: Adapting to diverse user bases. Erbis Blog. <https://erbis.com/blog/saas-localization-and-globalization/>

Moreover, Levent in the 2014's *"Utilising Technology for Intercultural Communication in Virtual Environments and the Role of English"*<sup>24</sup> discusses that the integration of digital communication tools has created new layers of opportunity and complexity in intercultural interactions.

Platforms like Zoom, Slack, and email have made intercultural communication faster and more accessible than ever. However, as highlighted by Joanna York in her 2022 article *"How 'non-verbal communication' is going digital"*<sup>25</sup>, these digital tools often limit or twist non-verbal cues, such as tone of voice, eye contact, and body language, that are essential for understanding and connection. In today's digital workplace, it's not just about knowing how to use the tools, it's about understanding the people on the other side. More than ever, professionals need to combine clear communication with cultural awareness and emotional sensitivity to build trust and stay truly connected, even from behind a screen.

### 3.2 CULTURAL FRAMEWORKS SHAPING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

This section presents the purpose and gaps of the two cultural frameworks used in this exam: Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions and Hall's High- and Low- Context Cultures.

#### 3.2.1 HOFSTEDE'S DIMENSIONS

Understanding how culture shapes communication practices is fundamental for international business. One of the most influential frameworks remains Hofstede's model of cultural dimensions, originally developed through research with IBM employees across multiple countries and later refined by scholars such as Minkov and McCrae. De Mooij and Hofstede in their 2011 article *"Cross-Cultural Consumer Behavior: A Review of Research Findings"*<sup>26</sup> point out that consumer behaviour is deeply shaped by culture, influencing how people see themselves, form opinions, and make buying choices. Understanding these cultural roots is essential for building effective consumer behaviour models and creating strong branding strategies. The model identifies six major dimensions: Individualism-Collectivism, Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Masculinity-Femininity, Long-Term versus Short-Term Orientation, and Indulgence-Restraint. Each dimension influences expectations regarding

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<sup>24</sup> Uzun, Levent. (2014). Utilising Technology for Intercultural Communication in Virtual Environments and the Role of English. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*. 116. 10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.01.583.

<sup>25</sup> York, J. (2022, November 8). *How "non-verbal communication" is going digital.* <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20221104-how-non-verbal-communication-is-going-digital>.

<sup>26</sup> Mooij, Marieke & Hofstede, Geert. (2011). Cross-Cultural Consumer Behavior: A Review of Research Findings. *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*. 23. 181-192. 10.1080/08961530.2011.578057



hierarchy, communication styles, and decision-making processes. For example, the United States, with its high individualism score, tends to favour direct communication, personal initiative, and self-reliance. Germany, while also individualistic, scores higher in uncertainty avoidance, leading to a stronger preference for structure and detailed information in business interactions. Denmark, with its low power distance and high individualism, promotes egalitarianism and informal communication even in professional contexts.

Building on the importance of understanding these cultural dimensions, Ryan Dhital, in his 2023 article "*Applying Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Theory to Analyze Intercultural Communication Differences*," emphasizes that intercultural communication is often challenged by cultural differences in language, communication styles, and non-verbal cues, which can result in misunderstandings and stereotyping. He highlights the significant role that both language and non-verbal communication play in shaping intercultural interactions. To address these challenges, Dhital calls for the development of effective intercultural communication strategies, the cultivation of cultural awareness, and the adjustment of language use. In the context of a globalized and multicultural workplace, where the chance of communication issues is higher, he further recommends applying Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory as a practical framework to identify key communication challenges and develop solutions.<sup>27</sup>

For a company like Plecto, serving clients across Denmark, Germany, and the United States, understanding these dimensions is crucial. Communication strategies that work effectively with Danish clients may need to be adjusted significantly when dealing with German or American clients.

### 3.2.2 CRITIQUE OF HOFSTEDÉ'S DIMENSIONS

While Hofstede's framework remains widely used, scholars, like Wu have criticised its static view of culture. Wu's comparative study between Taiwanese and American businesspeople shows that cultural values are not fixed, instead they evolve in response to political,

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<sup>27</sup> Ryan Dhital. (2023). Applying Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Theory to Analyze Intercultural Communication Differences. *ournal of inguistics and ommunication tudies*, 2(3), 17–23. etrieved from <https://www.pioneerpublisher.com/JLCS/article/view/415>

economic, and technological changes. For example, increased exposure to global norms can shift communication preferences even within traditionally collectivistic societies.<sup>28</sup>

This dynamic view of culture is particularly important in fast-evolving sectors like SaaS, where international exposure and digital interaction accelerate cultural blending. Therefore, while Hofstede's model provides a useful baseline for anticipating differences, professionals must also remain sensitive to individual and generational variations within cultures.

Hofstede's model has been widely applied in various fields to understand how cultural differences influence behaviour, including in business, management, and education. While it provides a useful starting point for identifying national cultural tendencies, several scholars have pointed out its limitations. Signorini et al. in their *"Developing alternative frameworks for exploring intercultural learning: A critique of Hofstede's cultural difference model"*<sup>29</sup>, argue that the framework tends to oversimplify complex cultural dynamics by categorising entire nations under fixed dimensions. It has also been noted that the framework can overlook variations within cultures, such as regional, generational, or contextual differences, and that it treats culture as relatively static rather than evolving. In the context of international communication, whether in business or education, it's important to approach Hofstede's model critically and use it alongside more flexible, dynamic understandings of culture. For this reason, some researchers suggest combining it with other frameworks that better reflect the always changing, experience-based nature of intercultural encounters.

### 3.2.3. HALL'S HIGH- AND LOW- CONTEXT CULTURES

The idea of high-context and low-context cultures, originally introduced by Edward T. Hall, helps explain how people from diverse cultural backgrounds communicate. In high-context cultures, often found in parts of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, communication tends to be more indirect, with much of the meaning coming from non-verbal cues, shared experiences, and unspoken social rules. These cultures place a strong emphasis on relationships, and what's left unsaid can be just as important as what's said. On the other hand, low-context

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<sup>28</sup> Wu, Ming-Yi. (2006). Hofstede's cultural dimensions 30 years later: A study of Taiwan and the United States. *Intercultural Communication Studies*. 15. 33-42.

<sup>29</sup> Signorini, Paola & Wiesemes, Rolf & Murphy, Roger. (2009). Developing alternative frameworks for exploring intercultural learning: A critique of Hofstede's cultural difference model. *Teaching in Higher Education - TEACH HIGH EDUC*. 14. 253-264. 10.1080/13562510902898825.

cultures, like those in the U.S. and many European countries, have a more direct and explicit style of communication.<sup>30</sup>

A recent study *“The consequences of social category faultlines in high- and low-context cultures: A comparative study of Brazil and Germany”*<sup>31</sup>, has also used Hall’s concept of high- and low-context cultures to explain differences in workplace communication and team dynamics. One such study compared teams in Germany (a low-context culture) and Brazil (a high-context culture) and found that communication conflicts were more likely to harm team performance in the German context. In contrast, teams in Brazil were better able to manage similar challenges without the same negative outcomes. These findings support the idea that cultural context plays a crucial role in how people interpret information, respond to tension, and work together, highlighting why a deeper understanding of communication styles is crucial in international settings.

Moreover, Hall’s theory of high- and low-context communication has also been used to explore how people from different cultural backgrounds understand and express meaning. The study *“Informed Communication in High Context and Low Context Cultures”*<sup>32</sup> by Peter Broeder, compared Dutch, Greek, and Japanese participants, and found clear differences in communication preferences. For example, Japanese respondents tended to communicate more indirectly, while Greek participants relied more on hand gestures and metaphors. What is interesting is that Greeks living in the Netherlands adapted their style to be even more indirect and non-verbal than those living in Greece. These results suggest that while cultural norms influence communication styles, they can also shift based on context, reinforcing the value of Hall’s framework in helping to explain both stable and adaptive patterns in intercultural communication.

#### 3.2.4. CRITIQUE OF HALL’S FRAMEWORK

Even though Hall’s theory of high- and low-context cultures is often used in intercultural business communication, it has also been criticised for a few important reasons. In a meta-analysis of over 200 articles, Cardon, in his 2008 *“A Critique of Hall’s Contexting Model A*

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<sup>30</sup> E. T. Hall (1976), “Beyond culture” (p. 106).

<sup>31</sup> Burmann, Kathrin & Semrau, Thorsten. (2022). The consequences of social category faultlines in high- and low-context cultures: A comparative study of Brazil and Germany. *Frontiers in Psychology*. 13. 1082870. 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1082870.

<sup>32</sup> Broeder, Peter. (2021). *Informed Communication in High Context and Low Context Cultures*. 3. 10.34097/jeicom.

*Meta-Analysis of Literature on Intercultural Business and Technical Communication*<sup>33</sup>, found that while the model is very used in academic writing, many of its ideas haven't actually been tested through research. And when they have been tested, like the idea that some cultures prefer more direct communication, the results don't always support what the theory suggests. Cardon also points out that Hall's model can be a bit vague and tends to generalise whole cultures, without leaving much room for differences within countries or changes over time. Because of this, researchers are encouraged to use Hall's theory carefully and to combine it with other approaches that take into account how complex and flexible culture really is, especially in today's global business world.

Although Hofstede's and Hall's models have limitations, they offer practical starting points for interpreting employee experiences in culturally diverse client interactions.

### 3.3 EMOTIONAL AND LANGUAGE CHALLENGES IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

This section explores the emotional and language challenges which may come up in intercultural communication.

#### 3.3.1 EMOTIONAL FACTORS IN COMMUNICATION

While frameworks like Hofstede's explain general cultural tendencies, they do not fully cover the emotional realities individuals face during intercultural communication. Wang et al. in their 2019 article *"The role of emotion in intercultural business communication: Language standardization in the context of international knowledge transfer"*<sup>34</sup> highlight this often-overlooked dimension in their study of a Chinese multinational corporation using English as its corporate language. They argue that language standardisation can create hidden psychological barriers, such as anxiety, frustration, and even feelings of inferiority.

Using appraisal theory, Wang et al. show that emotional responses to intercultural interactions are shaped by culturally rooted values. For instance, assertiveness and obvious self-expression, usual in U.S. business culture, may feel uncomfortable for employees from Northern European contexts, where modesty and indirectness are more normative. In a

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<sup>33</sup> Cardon, Peter. (2008). A Critique of Hall's Contexting ModelA Meta-Analysis of Literature on Intercultural Business and Technical Communication. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* - J BUS TECH COMMUN. 22. 399-428. 10.1177/1050651908320361.

<sup>34</sup> Qiu Wang, et al., The role of emotions in intercultural business communication: Language standardization in the context of international knowledge transfer *Journal of World Business*, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2018.11.003>

company like Plecto, where employees from diverse backgrounds interact with clients from Denmark, Germany, and the United States, emotional tensions can easily appear. International employees may experience discomfort or pressure when dealing with clients who expect certain culturally specific behaviours, such as high English fluency or a direct communication style.

A particularly relevant concept from Wang et al. is "language gatekeeping." Individuals who are more fluent in English may unintentionally dominate conversations, limiting the participation of those who feel less confident. At Plecto, this dynamic could emerge in sales or onboarding meetings with U.S. clients, where linguistic proficiency and assertiveness are highly valued. Over time, such emotional strains can erode team cohesion and negatively impact client relationships.

Cultural factors are increasingly getting recognised as being critical when it comes to shaping communication practices within international business contexts. Dubinko et al. in their 2012 study *"Intercultural Communication and Success in Business"*<sup>35</sup>, argue that effective communication goes beyond language proficiency or procedural knowledge. Instead, it is assumed to be rooted in an understanding of cultural values and behavioural norms. Their study emphasises that communication patterns, such as directness vs. indirectness, time orientation, and approaches to hierarchy are "learned" through deep-seated cultural frameworks that often continue to exist despite globalising forces. For example, what might be perceived as clarity and efficiency in a low-context, individualistic culture may be interpreted as rudeness or insensitivity in a high-context, collectivistic one. These cultural differences can lead to misunderstandings, damaged relationships, and if left unaddressed, ultimately, to business failure.

The authors also examine how organisational values might attempt to get rid of national or cultural norms, but often with very limited success. Through the lens of multinational corporations, they demonstrate that while corporate cultures may promote shared visions and standardised rules of behaviour, these often clash with local interpretations of respect, authority, and collaboration. The persistence of national cultural values within global

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<sup>35</sup> Dubinko, S. A., Klimova, I. I., Dubinka-Hushcha, L. A., & Klimova, G. V. (2021). Intercultural communication and success in business. SHS Web of Conferences, 125, 01002. <https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/202112501002>

organisational settings highlights just how difficult the managing of intercultural teams is and navigating communication across cultures.

Moreover, the study presents a new perspective by analysing how metaphorical language reflects cultural worldviews. For example, Western business conversation often relies on metaphors related to competition or warfare, which may not resonate, and might even increase cultural distance, with professionals from more harmony-oriented cultures. By highlighting these implicit ways of communication, the study argues for a culturally educated approach to business interaction.

Overall, Dubinko et al.'s work supports the idea that cultural awareness is not only an optional soft skill one should possess in business communications, instead, it is a critical competence for effective business communication. Their findings serve as a valuable framework for analysing real-world intercultural dynamics within organisational settings, especially for professionals working in a culturally diverse environment.

In the case of Plecto, where client relationships are largely managed through digital communication platforms, understanding these evolving digital norms is critical. Misalignments—such as delayed responses, misunderstood emoji use, or differing interpretations of meeting formalities—can quickly damage trust with international clients. Therefore, intercultural competence must now extend beyond face-to-face settings to include digital literacy and cultural awareness in online environments.

### 3.3.2 ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA<sup>36</sup> AND COMMUNICATION ANXIETY

Expanding on the emotional challenges of intercultural communication, Rogerson-Revell in her 2007 study *“Using English for International Business: A European case study”*<sup>37</sup> explores the specific dynamics of using English as a lingua franca in European business settings. Her findings reveal that linguistic proficiency alone does not guarantee successful communication. Cultural comfort with communication styles, confidence in expression, and adaptation to conversational norms are equally critical.

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<sup>36</sup> Defined as a language used for communication between groups of people who speak different languages.

Source: *lingua franca*. (2025). <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/lingua-franca>

<sup>37</sup> Pamela Rogerson-Revell, *Using English for International Business: A European case study*, *English for Specific Purposes*, Volume 26, Issue 1, 2007, Pages 103-120, ISSN 0889-4906, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2005.12.004>.

Non-native speakers often experience hesitation, loss of nuance, or even avoidance behaviours in meetings conducted in English. This can affect how professional competence is perceived, especially when dealing with culturally sensitive topics such as client onboarding, troubleshooting, or negotiations.

In the context of Plecto, where English is the primary language for international client interactions (and the official language of the company), these challenges are particularly relevant. Employees who are technically fluent may still struggle to fully express emotional tone, persuasion, or cultural politeness expected by clients from different backgrounds. This can lead to misunderstandings, delays in decision-making, or diminished client satisfaction. Moreover, English as a common language is not completely neutral; it reflects cultural norms from English-speaking countries, like being direct, brief, and promoting oneself. Employees from cultures that value indirectness and humility may find it difficult and uncomfortable to meet these expectations when communicating with clients.

### 3.4 COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES IN SMALL AND MEDIUM SIZED ENTERPRISES (SMES)

While much research on intercultural communication focuses on large multinational corporations, smaller companies like Plecto often face different types of challenges. Saatci in her 2008 *“Problem-Based Learning in an Intercultural Business Communication Course: Communication Challenges in Intercultural Relationships in Internationalizing Small- or Medium-Sized Enterprises”*<sup>38</sup> highlights that SMEs may lack formal training structures or global HR systems, which can make it harder to address cultural misunderstandings in a systematic way. Instead, communication tends to rely more on personal judgment, informal practices, and individual awareness. In culturally diverse environments, this can lead to unintentional missteps if employees are not supported with the right tools or guidance. Although this study does not focus specifically on organisational infrastructure, the literature suggests that offering more targeted training and reflective communication strategies may be especially valuable for fast-growing, digital-first companies like Plecto.

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<sup>38</sup> Saatci, E. (2008). Problem-Based Learning in an Intercultural Business Communication Course: Communication Challenges in Intercultural Relationships in Internationalizing Small- or Medium-Sized Enterprises. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 22(2), 237-260. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1050651907311931> (Original work published 2008)

### 3.5 DIGITALISATION AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

This section explores the influence of digital tools on intercultural communication.

#### 3.5.1 CHALLENGES OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

The shift towards digital-first communication adds an additional layer of problems and difficulty to intercultural interactions. Khalaf in her 2024 article *"Managing Digital Communication In A Diverse Workplace"*<sup>39</sup> argues that remote communication tools, while efficient, fundamentally change the dynamics of intercultural understanding. The absence of non-verbal cues such as tone of voice, facial expressions, and body language can lead to misinterpretations, particularly among culturally diverse clients and teams.

In digital settings, messages which were intended to be brief and professional can easily be interpreted as abrupt or even hostile, depending on the recipient's cultural expectations. For instance, an American client may appreciate quick, to-the-point emails, while a German client might expect detailed, formally structured communication. Meanwhile, a Danish client might prefer informal, friendly messages but still expect high precision.

For a company like Plecto, where client interactions frequently occur via Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or email, managing these expectations becomes crucial. Simple misalignments in communication tone can affect client satisfaction, trust, and long-term loyalty.

Khalaf offers practical strategies to address these challenges, such as consciously using inclusive and clear language, providing additional contextual cues, and actively inviting clarification. Additionally, encouraging the use of non-verbal substitutes like emojis (where appropriate) or tone indicators can help reduce misunderstandings, though cultural sensitivity must guide such practices.

#### 3.5.2 PERSISTENCE OF CULTURAL NORMS IN DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

Although digital platforms have revolutionised communication across borders, they have not eliminated cultural differences. In fact, as Cherkasova's 2021 article *"The paradigm shift in intercultural communication in digital space"*<sup>40</sup> argues, digitalisation has created a "paradigm shift" in intercultural communication: the setting has changed, but the challenges have

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<sup>39</sup> Khalaf, H. (2024, June 26). *Managing digital communication in a diverse workplace*. eLearning Industry. <https://elearningindustry.com/managing-digital-communication-in-a-diverse-workplace>

<sup>40</sup> Cherkasova, L. (2021). The paradigm shift in intercultural communication in digital space. *E3S Web of Conferences*, 273, 11018. <https://doi.org/10.1051/e3sconf/202127311018>.



intensified. Rather than making communication culture-neutral, online environments often expose subtle cultural gaps that would otherwise be smoothed over in face-to-face encounters.

Judijanto et al., in their 2025 article *"Intercultural communication challenges in digital communication: a global perspective"*<sup>41</sup> similarly note that in digital contexts, new variables—such as response speed, emoji use, video call etiquette, and email formality—become culturally loaded. For example, quick, brief responses might be seen as efficient in American business culture but perceived as inattentive or rude in other contexts, such as Germany or Japan.

Eilers<sup>42</sup> in his *"Intercultural communication in a digital world: Some considerations"* further emphasizes that in online communication, the "silent language" described by Hall in 1976, non-verbal elements like physical distance, gestures, and timing—is decreased but not erased. Cultural expectations about turn-taking, politeness, and formality still play out through subtle textual cues and timing in emails, chat messages, and online meetings.

### 3.6 SUMMARY AND RESEARCH GAP

The reviewed literature highlights that intercultural business communication is shaped by a complex combination of cultural values, emotional experiences, language dynamics, and digital communication practices. While globalisation and technological innovation have made cross-border collaboration more accessible, they have not erased cultural differences. Instead, they have introduced new areas, particularly digital platforms, where cultural misunderstandings can emerge and sometimes even intensify.

The frameworks offered by Hofstede and his critics provide valuable theoretical grounding for understanding national cultural differences. Studies by Wang et al. and Rogerson-Revell illustrate the emotional and linguistic challenges of intercultural communication, while Saatci offers insights into the unique pressures faced by SMEs like Plecto. Finally, research by Khalaf, Cherkasova, Judijanto et al., and Eilers shows how digitalization demands a new approach to intercultural competencies, extending them into the virtual realm.

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<sup>41</sup> Judijanto, Loso & Aryani, Vera & Nastiar, Muh Fauzan. (2025). INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES IN DIGITAL COMMUNICATION: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE. 3. 141-147.

<sup>42</sup> Eilers, F.-J. (n.a.). Intercultural communication in a digital world: Some considerations. *Religion and Social Communication*, 17(1), 33–44.

Despite the great number of academic literatures done on the topic of intercultural communication, there remains a notable gap concerning how smaller, digitally native companies manage intercultural client communication across different cultural contexts. Much of the existing research focuses on large multinationals with extensive resources and formalized structures. Less attention has been paid to agile, fast-growing SaaS companies like Plecto, where informal processes, rapid scaling, and multicultural teams create unique challenges and opportunities.

This thesis addresses that gap by investigating how Plecto's employees navigate cross-cultural client communication with Denmark, Germany, and the United States. Through qualitative insights from internal interviews and communication materials, the study aims to provide both practical recommendations for enhancing intercultural communication strategies and academic insights into the evolving nature of global communication in the digital age.

## 4.METHODS

### 4.1 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This project applies a qualitative research design with an inductive approach to explore how Plecto's internal teams communicate with clients in Denmark, Germany, and the United States, and how cultural expectations may influence this communication.

A qualitative approach was chosen due to the aim of the project itself, which is to understand the experiences, perceptions, and reflections of the employees when handling intercultural communication. Since the project is focused on how people make sense of communication across cultures at a workplace setting, it made the most sense to focus on their subjective experiences as culturally neutral service providers, instead of measuring fixed variables.

This research was written by using a constructivist ontological position, which assumes that reality is socially constructed and that individuals might experience and interpret the same event in different ways.<sup>43</sup> The epistemology that this project follows is interpretivism, focusing on understanding how meaning is created through social interaction.<sup>44</sup> Since this project explores how employees interpret their communication with international clients, it made the most sense to prioritise their subjective experiences.

An inductive approach was selected because the research started with observations collected throughout the internship, which heavily influenced how the interview questions, that are the primary source of data, were structured. After collection, the data was then explored to find recurring themes, patterns and insights about cultural expectations of Danish, German, and the U.S. clients. This has been done by analysing employees' interview answers with the help of existing theories: Hofstede's cultural expectations in intercultural communication and Hall's high vs. low context culture theory.

This approach was considered the most suitable due to two reasons. First, the field of intercultural communication is very broad, and focusing too narrowly on one theory from the beginning could have limited the research. Second, the specific way that Plecto's teams work

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<sup>43</sup> Shannon-Baker, P. (2023). Philosophical underpinnings of mixed methods research in education. In R. J. Tierney, F. Rizvi, & K. Ercikan (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of education* (4th ed., pp. 380–389). Elsevier. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-818630-5.11037-1>

<sup>44</sup> Hiller, James, "Epistemological Foundations of Objectivist and Interpretivist Research" (2016). *Books and Book Chapters by University of Dayton Faculty*. 52. <https://ecommons.udayton.edu/books/52> (p. 103).

with international clients, especially in this relatively new, digital environment, is still relatively unexplored, so it was important to keep an open mind and let the data guide the analysis.

Despite the project following an inductive approach, getting familiar with certain, key theoretical concepts such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Hall's high- and low- context cultures, and intercultural communication was very important. These ideas provided a basic foundation of the project in the beginning, however, the study stayed flexible and allowed for new themes to appear during data collection. As interviews were conducted and insights were gathered, two adjustments were made to the original focus to reflect what was the most important and relevant according to the participants. The first is to explore the connections between language fluency and confidence, and the other is digitalisation. Since Plecto is a digitally first company, it was important to explore how that influences relationship and trust building between the employees and the customers.

#### 4.2. DATA COLLECTION

To explore how Plecto's internal teams communicate with clients across different cultural markets, this study used semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection. This approach was chosen because it supports the exploratory nature of the qualitative research and gives space for participants to reflect on their own experiences while still allowing the researcher to guide the conversation around specific themes.<sup>45</sup> A set of guiding questions was developed in advance to ensure that the research goals align with the data collected from the interviews, however, the structure allowed for changes in the order and depth, depending on the flow of the conversation and the interviewee.

Before the formal interviews began, informal discussions with colleagues helped identify two additional themes: digitalisation and language (in the context of intercultural communication). These two topics were not initially considered but were included in the final version of the interview guide as the internship observations allowed me to conclude that these two themes play an important role in intercultural communication. The semi-structured format allowed for this kind of adaptability, which is essential in qualitative

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<sup>45</sup> Semistructured interview. In M. S. Lewis-Beck, A. Bryman, T. Futing Liao (2004.) *The SAGE encyclopedia of social science research methods* (Vol. 0, pp. 1021-1021). Sage Publications, Inc., <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412950589.n909> .

research where emerging themes can significantly add value to the topic and help better understand it.

The interviews focused on employees who work directly with international (and “domestic”<sup>46</sup>) customers across four departments: Sales, Plecto Experts<sup>47</sup>, Customer Success<sup>48</sup>, and Partnerships. These departments were selected due to their frequent and extensive communication with customers from the three key markets: Denmark, Germany, and the United States. The Partnerships representative was included specifically because of their regular interactions with external partners, many of whom play a key role in bringing clients to Plecto. Including this perspective was essential for capturing the “full picture” of intercultural communication processes at Plecto, particularly those happening at the early stages of client engagement. The participants were chosen based on their experience in working with clients of Danish, German, and the U.S. backgrounds, and the fact that they conduct intercultural communication with one of the key markets on a daily basis. All participants were approached and invited to do the interview in person, during normal working hours.

The participants were aware of the key aspect of the interview section- intercultural communication with Danish, German, and the U.S. markets. However, that was the only aspect of the research they were aware of before coming into the interview. Before the beginning of the interview, the participants were given a short description of the research; exploring how Plecto employees handle intercultural communication with the three key markets already named before and how has the company helped in navigating that. Once they were given a short background of the research, they were asked for their permission to record the session, and after, transcription of the interview itself. Once the confirmation was given, recording started and the participants were read their rights, which included stating that this interview was voluntary, being recorded, and that they did not have to answer any questions they felt uncomfortable with answering. The semi-structured nature of the interviews created a relaxed environment in which participants felt comfortable to speak in.

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<sup>46</sup> Domestic was put in quotation marks due to the fact that Plecto is a company operating in Denmark, however, the official corporate language of the company is English, and it is hard to determine whether or not Danish clients should be considered domestic or if they fall under the international customers category.

<sup>47</sup> Employees with a high level of knowledge about Plecto's software, often communicate with clients and onboard them in „Dashboard“.

<sup>48</sup> Responsible for maintaining good customer-Plecto relationships and general/initial onboarding.

It is important to add that all the interviews were conducted individually, at Plecto's meeting rooms. Being allowed to record the interviews presented itself as an opportunity to fully focus on the conversation and make the participants more comfortable and engaged, instead of focusing on taking notes. The interviewees often addressed other relevant topics planned for later in the interview while answering earlier questions, which confirms that the conversation was flowing naturally, instead of strictly following the interview guide. This flexibility was extremely beneficial as it allowed open discussions and many different insights which were then used for the analysis section of this project.

The interview questions were designed with the purpose of being both open and close ended and were grouped loosely around key themes which included: Introduction / Context, Cross-Cultural Client Communication, Culture, Language, and Emotion, Digital Communication, and Internal Knowledge and Suggestions.<sup>49</sup> The interviews began with a simple introductory question about the participants' role and experience working with clients from the key markets. From that point forward, the conversation was led by the questions, however, the participants were allowed to talk freely, with minor pushes back to the original topic, in case some of the interviewees steered away from the original topic. All participants were willing to share their experiences, and in many cases brought up unexpected discoveries which will be discussed in the analysis section of this project.

In total, five interviews were conducted over the course of two weeks. The goal was to interview at least 50% of the employees in sales, expert, partnership, and customer success departments, and that was achieved, interviewing 5 employees out of the 10 working in said departments. The interviews lasted between approximately 15 and 35 minutes, depending on the interviewee. The sample included employees with different levels of seniority and experience, to ensure that a variety of viewpoints were being represented. While not all relevant employees were interviewed, the study acknowledges this as a delimitation. The sample size was intentionally limited to five participants to ensure a scope which was manageable in a deep, qualitative analysis. Although this does not allow full representation of each employee's experience, the focus was on gaining detailed insights rather than statistical generalisation. The findings therefore show some common patterns and

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<sup>49</sup> See Appendix „Interview Guide“ for a full interview guide (including questions and themes).

experiences within the selected group of participants, but they do not represent every possible situation or viewpoint of the other employees not included in the interview process.

All interview data was anonymised to protect participant privacy, and identifying details, such as mentions of the participants' names and nationalities was removed from the transcript. Audio recordings were stored securely and used only by the researcher for transcription and analysis. The data was later organised into themes, which are discussed in the analysis section of this project.

In addition to primary data, secondary sources were used to support the interview design and provide theoretical background. The sources were mainly obtained online through Google Scholar and AAU's online library Primo, including one physical academic source- Yvette Reisinger's book "*International Tourism: Cultures and Behaviour*". These sources were particularly helpful for developing the background knowledge which helped in formulating the relevant interview questions about intercultural communication, and for interpreting key themes such as cultural frameworks, digitalisation, language, and emotion.

#### 4.3 DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS

The data analysis process consisted of three main stages: gathering relevant secondary data to ensure that scientific background exists for a research of this theme, the interview process (coming up with relevant themes and questions, conducting the interviews, and transcribing them), thematic analysis based on the answers provided by the employees, split by the chosen key market and relevant themes, and applying those finding to existing cultural theories: Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions and Hall's High- and Low- Context Cultures.

The first stage consisted of gathering relevant secondary data from academic sources such as: Primo (AAU's official library portal), Google Scholar, and a book obtained during my studies. This was crucial to the project as it provided theoretical context and supported the interpretation of certain themes which came up during data collection project such as: intercultural communication, Hofstede, Hall, digitalisation, and language and emotion. This theoretical background helped to identify and develop relevant interview questions which made the analysis of intercultural communication at Plecto possible.

The second stage included structuring the interview guide, conducting and recording the interviews, and transcribing them. The transcription was done using Zoom's AI transcription

tool, and Spiik, a transcribing app. To ensure accuracy, I have personally identified errors and misinterpretations (AI transcribing the wrong word, common example included transcribing “Plecto” as “black toe”) in the AI-generated text and correcting them manually. This review process ensured maintaining authenticity of the participants’ responses and made sure that every information given in the interview process has been accurately captured.

The final stage consisted of conducting a thematic analysis. The analysis is split into three main themes: Communication Style, Language and Emotion, and Digital Communication and Trust. Each theme is analysed separately based on the key market. This was done by thorough analysis of interview transcripts, which enabled identification of differences by key market. The themes were identified through a coding process of the interview transcripts, where certain codes have been put into certain themes. This has been done through a thorough process that included reading the interview transcripts multiple times and identifying the appropriate codes. Due to me conducting the interviews myself, I have already had certain codes planned, reading through the interview transcripts just confirmed and reassured me the chosen codes are fit for a thematic analysis of this sort. The full process of this project’s thematic analysis is visible in the Appendix “Thematic Analysis” and includes a visual representation of themes and their codes.co

Combining primary data obtained through interviews together with the secondary data obtained from relevant online sources and an academic book made it possible to do a more extensive and theoretically “backed up” analysis, aligning the findings with the existing frameworks and theories.

Together with the thematic analysis, the identified and chosen themes were simultaneously examined through the lens of Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions and Hall’s High and Low-Context Culture Theory. Hofstede’s framework provided a well-structured lens for interpreting how cultural values such as individualism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance may influence communication practices. Hall’s theory of high and low context communication was applied to study how implicit versus explicit communication styles varied between the three markets. Bringing in these theoretical frameworks helped to make sense of the data more thoroughly, allowing the identified themes to be connected with established cultural theories which added depth and clarity to the analysis.



This kind of analysis then served as a “base” for the project’s discussion chapter which focused on the question “*Now what?*” The purpose of the discussion chapter was to identify common behavioural patterns based on the key market, and then identify the gaps in the employees’ behaviour, later followed by constructive advice on how to make sure that the company continues to satisfy and built more stable relationships with its clients.

#### 4.4 RESEARCH REFLEXIVITY

As the researcher conducting both data collection and the analysis, it is important to acknowledge potential biases and influences that may have shaped the research process. As an intern at Plecto, I have had prior knowledge of the organisational context, and I have been exposed to all of the participants. While this came as a strength to being familiarised with the topic and provided a deeper understanding of the company’s intercultural communication dynamics, it may also have influenced how questions were framed and how responses were interpreted. Efforts to minimise this bias included sticking to the interview guide, maintaining a neutral tone during the interviews, and ensuring clarification when potential biases were to appear.

#### 4.5 RESEARCH QUALITY

To ensure proper research quality of this qualitative research, this section will look into the foundational criteria for creating trustworthiness in qualitative research, defined by Lincoln and Guba, and often referred to as the “gold standard” for qualitative research.<sup>50</sup>

These four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, serve as a tool to help researchers to keep integrity of their studies.<sup>51</sup> As discussed by Lincoln and Guba, **credibility** focuses on making sure that the findings truly reflect what participants experiences. This is achieved through spending some time with the participants, observing, and using multiple data sources to verify the results. **Transferability** involves providing enough detail about the study so that the others can judge whether or not the finding might apply to other context or groups. **Dependability** emphasizes consistency in research procedures, ensuring that the findings are stable over time. This involves logging the

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<sup>50</sup> Alexander, A. P. (2019). *Lincoln and Guba’s quality criteria for trustworthiness*. DC International Journal August–October 2019.

<sup>51</sup> Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE Publications. Obtained from Google Books: [Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. \(1985\). Naturalistic inquiry](#) (p. 189)

research process and making it possible for the others to review. And **confirmability** ensures that the findings are based on participants' experiences and not the researcher's biases.

In the context of this exam, credibility was ensured by checking in with the interviewees, confirming that they truly mean what they are saying and making sure they stay objective in relation to me, and subjective in terms of describing their experiences. To avoid subjectivity and biases myself, I made sure to back up my findings with existing cultural theoretical frameworks. Transferability was addressed by providing detailed descriptions of the research context, participant selection, and the data collection process. This made it possible for other researchers to decide if the findings might be relevant in other settings or with different groups. The goal was not to make broad generalisations and claims, but to provide enough context for others to see where the findings might apply. To ensure dependability, I kept records of every step of the research process, including how I came up with the interview questions, and how they were analysed. This process has also been described earlier in this study and made sure my process of conducting this research is transparent and easier to review. Finally, confirmability was about making sure that the findings were genuinely based on what participants said, not influenced by my opinions. To do this, I used data from other academics and academic literature and combined them with certain quotes I obtained from my transcription of the interviews, which helped me to back up the claims stated in this study.

#### 4.6 LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS

This study acknowledges several limitations that may have influenced the findings and their interpretation. First, the relatively small sample size of five participants, while enough for a qualitative, explorative research, restricts the generalisability of the findings to a broader population. The focus on the employees in only four departments may also limit the diversity of perspectives, as other departments might experience intercultural communication differently.

Another possible limitation is my prior affiliation with Plecto, which may have unintentionally influenced participant responses or the interpretation of the data. While I have taken measure to minimise potential biases, such as kindly asking the participants to keep their objectivity in relation to me while answering the questions and keep their subjectivity in

relation to describing their own experiences with intercultural communication, complete neutrality cannot be guaranteed.

The final limitation might include possible typos which might have been overlooked due to a large number of transcription pages and AI inaccuracy.

In terms of delimitations, this study intentionally focused on three key markets: Denmark, Germany, and the United States to provide a more in-depth exploration of intercultural communication within a manageable range. The exclusion of other markets was a strategic decision to make the research more achievable and concrete. Additionally, Plecto's Sales, Partnership, Expert, and Customer Success Teams have a small number of employees, therefore I have decided that interviewing 50% of those teams was more than sufficient. The reason that only the employees working in those teams were chosen is purely because they are the only ones who engage in direct intercultural client communication.

To address the final limitation, I have personally gone through the transcription of the interviews and ensured accuracy. The only possible errors might include one letter mistake or minor punctuation mistakes.

#### 4.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Throughout the study, ethical considerations were prioritised to ensure the protection and respect of all participants. Before each interview, participants were informed of the study's objectives, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to refuse answering certain questions or completely withdraw from the interview without any consequences. Consent was obtained to record the interviews, and participants were assured that their responses would be anonymised to maintain confidentiality.

All identifying information, such as names and specific client references, were removed during transcription to provide privacy. Audio recordings and transcripts were stored securely on a password-protected device, accessible only to me, the researcher. The participants were aware that the full transcription of their interview will be attached as an appendix to this study. The data was used only for the purposes of this study.

To make sure that the participants were comfortable and relaxed, I decided to hold the interviews in a private meeting room at our workplace. I made sure to note that they can

answer any question to the extent that they feel comfortable with, proven by the fact that the interviews range from 15 to 35 minutes.

Another ethical concern was my role as an intern at Plecto and making sure the answers I got and how I analysed them were not biased. The participants were asked to be 100% honest, no matter my role, and their answers were later analysed by using existing theoretical frameworks, ensuring objectivity in my analysis. The inductive nature of this approach also ensured accuracy, as the research does not try to back up certain theories or frameworks with the information provided by the interviewees.

By implementing these ethical measures, the study's data collection process was safe, respectful, and an open environment for participants, allowing them to share their experiences honestly, without fear of judgement or consequences.

## 5. THEORY

Before starting the analysis, key frameworks and concepts that helped shape it will be introduced. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the reader to the two main cultural theories used in this project: Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions and Hall's high- and low-Context Cultures. These models served as foundation in interpreting the findings, especially when comparing the communication styles across the Danish, German, and U.S. markets.

The goal of this chapter is not to get too technical, but to give a clear, useful overview of the tools used to make sense of the interview data and explore how cultural expectations show up in everyday client interactions at Plecto.

### 5.1 HOFSTEDE'S CULTURAL DIMENSIONS

To explore how cultural values shape communication in international business settings, this project uses Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory, which can, outside of sociology, also be used when analysing intercultural communication.<sup>52</sup> Hofstede developed the model in the 1970s through a large-scale study of IBM employees across more than 50 countries.<sup>53</sup>

The model consists of six cultural dimensions which probably influence the way people behave and what they expect in a business setting.

The first dimension is individualism. This dimension measures the degree to which individuals are expected to look after themselves versus being integrated into tight-knit groups. In individualist cultures, independence, personal achievement and direct communication are often valued, while the opposite, collectivistic societies prefer group loyalty, harmony, and indirect communication.<sup>54</sup> The second dimension is power distance. This dimension looks at how much inequality and hierarchy are accepted within a culture. In high power distance cultures, people may be more comfortable with clear authority and formal roles, where in the low power distance cultures, flat hierarchies and informal communication tend to be the norm.<sup>55</sup> Uncertainty Avoidance dimension refers to how

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<sup>52</sup> Nickerson, C. (2023, October 24). *Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory & Examples*. Simply Psychology. <https://www.simplypsychology.org/hofstedes-cultural-dimensions-theory.html>.

<sup>53</sup> MindTools (reviewed by Keith Jackson) | Home. (n.d.). <https://www.mindtools.com/a1ecvyx/hofstedes-cultural-dimensions>.

<sup>54</sup> Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage. (p. 148).

<sup>55</sup> Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. (p. 65).

comfortable a culture is with ambiguity and risk. High UA<sup>56</sup> cultures tend to prefer structure, rules, and clear expectations, while the low UA cultures tend to be more flexible and open to change or informality.<sup>57</sup> Masculinity explores the distribution of emotional roles between genders, but more broadly reflects whether a culture leans towards competitiveness and achievement, or towards care, cooperation, and quality of life.<sup>58</sup> Long-term orientation looks at whether a culture values future planning and perseverance, or tradition, immediate results, and respect for the present (short-term orientation). The final dimension, indulgence, explores the extent to which societies allow free fulfilling of desires and emotions. Indulgent cultures tend to place importance on enjoyment and fun, while restrained cultures tend to regulate behaviour through social norms and control.<sup>59</sup>

All of these dimensions help to illustrate how cultures might approach or react to certain situations in a business setting.<sup>60</sup>

## 5.2 HALL'S HIGH- AND LOW- CONTEXT CULTURES



Source: own work through Canva.

The illustration above makes it easier to see where which country falls as predicted by Edward T. Hall's theory of high- and low-context cultures. On the left are presented countries which tend to have a low context-culture, and on the right are the countries which are typically high-context cultures. The further left, the lower the context of the culture is, and the further right, the higher context of the culture is. The countries placed in the middle tend

<sup>56</sup> Uncertainty avoidance shortened.

<sup>57</sup> Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. (p. 110).

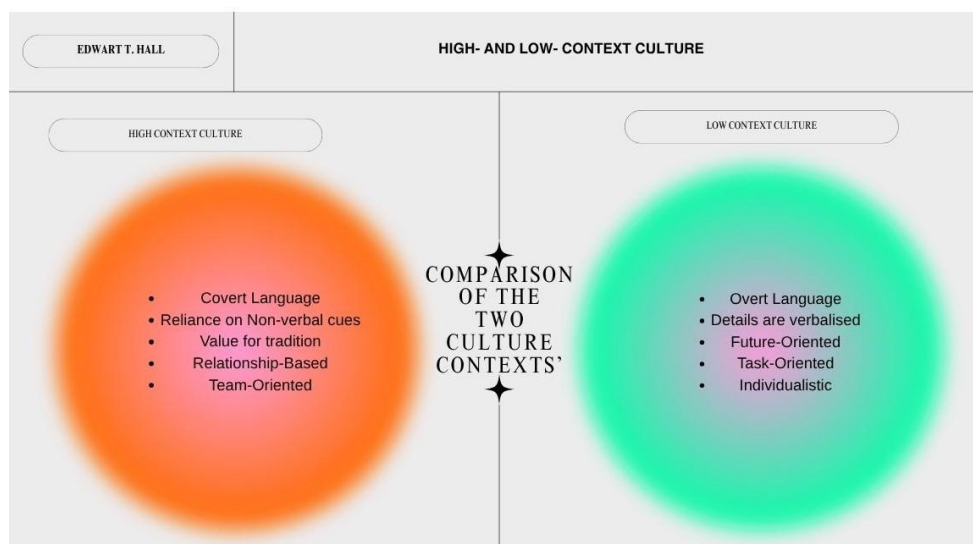
<sup>58</sup> Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. (p. 176).

<sup>59</sup> Claire Neeson *Hofstede Cultural Dimensions | DP IB Psychology Revision Notes 2017*. (2025, January 13). Save My Exams. <https://www.savemyexams.com/dp/psychology/ib/17/sl/revision-notes/the-sociocultural-approach/cultural-origins-of-behaviour-and-cognition/hofstede-cultural-dimensions/>

<sup>60</sup> Vinney, C., PhD. (2024, March 22). *Hofstede's Six Cultural Dimensions—and Why They Matter*. Verywell Mind. <https://www.verywellmind.com/hofstedes-cultural-dimensions-8583990>.

to be a mix of both low and high cultures, however, none of those countries are the key markets studied in this project. The illustration has been created independently, inspired by other work which is cited in the footnote below.<sup>61</sup> Below this text, the reader finds another self-made illustration that describes the characteristics of high and low context cultures.

<sup>62</sup>Source: own work through Canva.



As seen in the illustrations above, Denmark, Germany, and the United States all fall under the category of low-context cultures. Certain characteristics of low-context cultures include clear and direct forms of communication, dependence on verbal communication, individualism, following the rules, low use of contextual cues, and being task oriented. Opposite of this, high-context cultures prefer indirect communication, strong use of non-verbal cues, are usually group oriented and put a lot of meaning into relationship building, do not tend to follow strict rules, and communication is dependent on the context.<sup>63</sup>

This cultural framework has been developed to explain how different cultures interpret communication styles across cultures, especially in terms of how much context is needed to understand a message. Hall believed context is essential in communication because it shapes how messages are understood, and that meaning is not only in the words themselves, but

<sup>61</sup> *Low-Context and High-Context cultures*. (n.d.-b). <https://robsegers.blogspot.com/2013/03/low-context-and-high-context-cultures.html> .

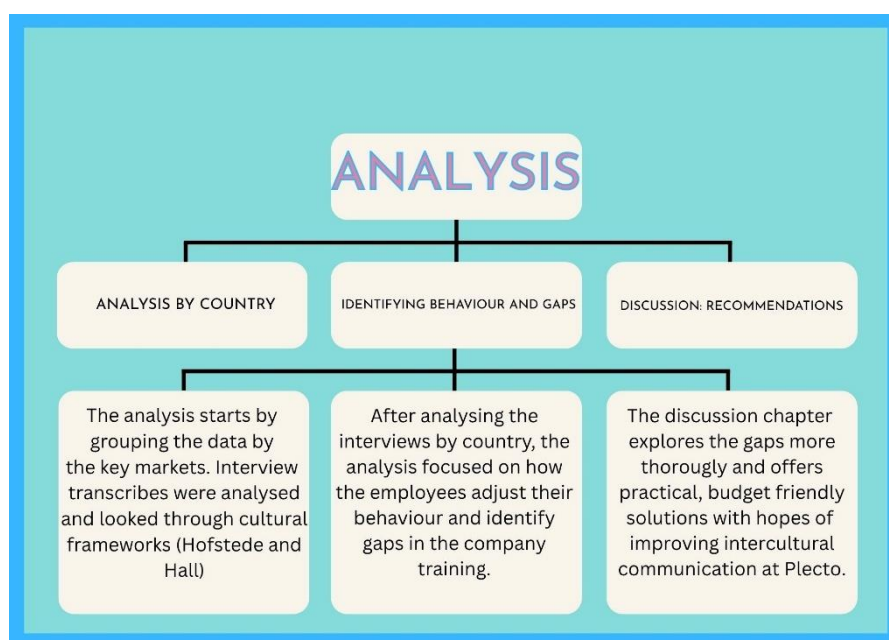
<sup>62</sup> Own work.

<sup>63</sup> Tella, S. (ed.) *Two Cultures Coming Together. Part 3. Theory and Practice in Communicative Foreign Language Methodology*. University of Helsinki Department of Teacher Education & University of Helsinki Vantaa Continuing Education Centre. *Studia Paedagogica* 10. (pp.22–28).

also depends on the relationship, situation, and certain shared background knowledge surrounding the communication.<sup>64</sup>

## 6. ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the main findings of the study, based on the interviews with the previously mentioned Plecto employees who regularly communicate with clients in Denmark, Germany, and the United States. The chapter will explore how cultural expectations shape communication and how the employees experience and adapt to these expectations in everyday work.



Source: Own work through Canva.

To ensure that the clarity of the chapter, a thematic analysis was conducted and structured by country. This makes it easier to identify key patterns in each market and to compare similarities and differences between them. Within each country section, the data is grouped into three main themes that appeared consistently across all interviews. The emerging of the themes is visible in the appendix containing the full thematic analysis, which was conducted by gathering codes from the interview transcriptions and later grouped into three themes. The process of identifying the codes has been described in the Methodology chapter under

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<sup>64</sup> Hall, E. T. (1976). Beyond culture (p. 117-128).



sub-chapter 3.3, but the full description as well as the visual representation of the thematic analysis can be found in the Appendix “*Thematic Analysis*”.

Those themes are:

1. Communication style
2. Language and emotion
3. Digital communication

The findings are interpreted through the lens of Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions and Hall’s High and Low- Context Culture Theory by comparing participants’ descriptions of client interactions with the certain cultural characteristics shown in these models. For example, differences in directness or communication formality were related to Hall’s theory, while different expectations around hierarchy and decision-making were related to Hofstede’s dimensions, such as power distance and uncertainty avoidance. It is important to note that while the theory helps structure the interpretation of data, the focus still remains on the employees’ own perspectives and reflections on their daily intercultural communication experiences.

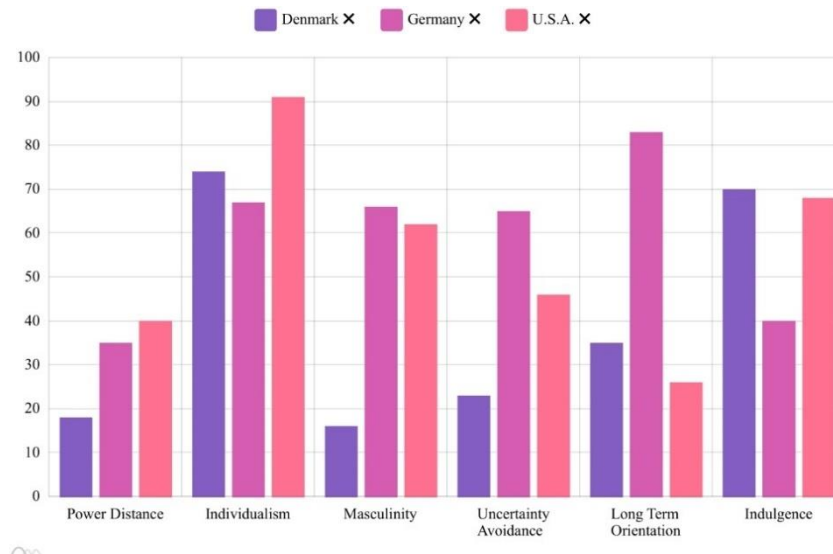
After analysing each market separately, the final section of this chapter explores how the interviewed employees handle and respond to those cultural differences in practice. The analysis will be discussed in more detail in chapter number 6: Discussion.

This chapter will provide a visual representation of Denmark, Germany, and the United in Hofstede’s dimension.<sup>65</sup> This will make understanding the analysis contents easier. A visual representation of Hall’s context cultures is already provided in the chapter above.

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<sup>65</sup> Country Comparison Bar Charts - Geert Hofstede. (2025, February 14). Geert Hofstede. <https://geerthofstede.com/country-comparison-bar-charts/>

Source: listed in Footnote 65.



## 6.1 Denmark

Denmark, as Plecto's home market, is often seen as the cultural baseline for internal communication practices.<sup>66</sup> However, even withing a familiar context, employees reported certain patterns and expectations when working with Danish clients. While the communication style is generally described as informal and relaxed, there are still moments of directness and high expectations, especially in written formats like email.

The following section explores these differences through themes of communication style, language and emotion, and digital communication, as experienced by the participants.

### 6.1.1 Communication style

Denmark's cultural orientation, as described by Hofstede's dimensions, strongly reflects low power distance and high individualism.<sup>67</sup> These dimensions could help explain the communication style often observed in client interactions with Danish clients. In a low power distance society like Denmark (with a score of 18)<sup>68</sup>, hierarchies are flatter, and communication tends to be informal, unbiased, and collaborative. Similarly, the high

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<sup>66</sup> Appendix E3.

<sup>67</sup> See graph above.

<sup>68</sup> See graph above.

individualism score (74)<sup>69</sup> suggests a preference for self-reliance, clear articulation of opinions, and minimal emphasis on hierarchy in professional settings.

These cultural tendencies were clearly reflected in the interview data. Employees consistently described Danish client communication as informal, direct, and easy-going, particularly in live meetings. One of the interviewees noted:

*“Denmark is direct, but they tend to be informal (...) and easy going. They’re often a few minutes late for meetings and that’s fine. Or they’re kind of happy to talk through issues on the phone and figure it out together.”*<sup>70</sup>

Similarly, the interviewee also commented on the purpose of Danish clients using Plecto:

*“I think even the way they use Plecto is largely different (...) in Denmark, it’s very much to maximise the potential of the team and find people who they can help elevate through using the platform.”*<sup>71</sup>

This reflects the claim proposed by Hofstede’s framework, showcasing the absence of hierarchies, giving everyone an equal role, and making it a team effort to maximise individuals’ efficiency.

Further supporting this approach when it comes to communication is the expectation that everyone’s opinion carries value and that open dialogue should be encouraged. This reflects Denmark’s very low Masculinity score (16)<sup>72</sup>, which suggests that Danish professional culture avoids aggressive competition and prefers collaboration, mutual agreement, and modesty over assertiveness or status. The goal is typically to find shared solutions rather than to be dominant or outperform others.

One interviewee described how Danish clients preferred collaboration and did not display frustration when delays or issues occurred, instead opting for a patient, solutions-oriented attitude:

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<sup>69</sup> See graph above.

<sup>70</sup> Appendix E2.

<sup>71</sup> Appendix E2

<sup>72</sup> See graph above.

*“I feel way more comfortable doing it with Danish people, because I know they will not be taken aback if I tell them I’ve never done this before (...) I can try and then get back to them.”*<sup>73</sup>

Such flexibility suggests that Danish clients trust in the expertise of professionals and do not require rigid structure or authoritative answers in every interaction. This kind of trust in the process and informal tone reflects workplace dynamic where autonomy and collaboration are both highly valued.

At the same time, several participants observed that the tone of written communication, particularly emails, could feel more serious or abrupt compared to verbal exchanges. As one interviewee explained:

*“You can get this idea that the person is extremely frustrated in an email. But then you go on a meeting with them and they’re like “Oh, yeah, the reading is not working. But it’s okay.””*<sup>74</sup>

This shift suggests that while Danish clients are generally easy-going in conversation, the clarity and conciseness of their written communication may be interpreted as bluntness. This aligns with Hall’s model of low-context cultures, where the message is expected to be understood through explicit language rather than contextual cues like the tone of voice or facial expression.

Additionally, some participants mentioned that small talk with Danish clients was limited and often felt optional rather than expected. While not unfriendly, Plecto’s Danish clients have a tendency to prioritise efficiency and task-related discussion:

*“(...) for example, like something is loading on the screen. So, I’m like, Oh, so how’s the weather in in Copenhagen? And they’ll be like “good.” I’m like, Okay, thanks. Now we have to wait in silence, you know, or I would just be talking about whatever. But I like. Sometimes they will not reciprocate.”*<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Appendix E5.

<sup>74</sup> Appendix E5.

<sup>75</sup> Appendix E5.

*“(...) Denmark is like the middle child here. They always can be both friendly, but at the same time, the (have) expectations (...)”<sup>76</sup>*

This only strengthens the idea that Danish professional culture leans towards practical, straightforward exchanges, where interpersonal warmth does exist, but is typically subtle. This communication style supports clear expectations and quick problem-solving, and it reflects a professional environment where respect is earned through competence rather than titles.

To summarise, Danish client communication at Plecto is characterised by informality and openness, especially in meetings, directness with minimal small talk, a calm, solutions-oriented tone in verbal exchanges, more serious or blunt expressions in written communication, and trust in expertise and autonomy, rather than formal authority.

These patterns align closely with Denmark’s cultural profile in both Hofstede’s and Hall’s frameworks. Low power distance and high individualism create a business environment where clarity, trust, and equality are the foundation of professional interaction. Meanwhile, the preference for direct but respectful communication reflects a low-context approach, where mutual understanding is built through transparency rather than subtlety.

#### 6.1.2. Language and Emotion

Language proficiency and emotional tone are essential components of intercultural client interactions.<sup>77</sup> In the case of Danish clients, interview participants consistently described a high degree of comfort with using English. This aligns with Denmark’s low Uncertainty Avoidance and high Individualism, as defined by Hofstede, which indicate openness to ambiguity and plans changing overnight, and a strong sense of self-reliance. As one interviewee observed:

*“(...) Denmark is quite (...) well-educated at speaking English. Everybody, at least in my experience, I’ve never had a situation where a customer would turn down my email or*

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<sup>76</sup> Appendix E3

<sup>77</sup> Sarwari, A. Q., & Abdul Wahab, M. N. (2016). Relationship between English Language Proficiency and Intercultural Communication Competence among International Students in a Malaysian Public University: The. *International Journal of Language Education and Applied Linguistics*, 5. <https://doi.org/10.15282/ijleal.v5.494> .

*communication with me as their CSR, only from the perspective that I can communicate in English with them.”<sup>78</sup>*

While Danish clients generally displayed linguistic confidence, some interviewees noted that client with lower fluency tend to express themselves more minimally, yet still maintained active participation in meetings:

*“Danish people are mostly very comfortable. I did have some clients who... they would just be very minimal in their communication, but they would still come to meetings, which I do appreciate. But you can kind of see that, okay, this person’s English is not maybe as great as the other ones, so they will just respond less, be more quiet or be just very direct, which is fine... as long as we communicate, it’s okay. We get things done.”<sup>79</sup>*

This indicates that even when Danish clients are not entirely fluent, they rarely avoid communication, instead adjusting their tone or keeping responses brief. This finding also supports the view of Danish clients as autonomous and task-focused, which are common traits in highly individualist cultures.

When it comes to emotional tone, Danish clients were frequently described as polite and reserved. Emotional expressiveness was not absent but was instead subtle and situational. For example, small talk was sometimes welcomed, but not always reciprocated:

*“Something is loading on the screen. So I’m like “Oh, so how’s the weather in Copenhagen?” And they’ll be like, “Good.” I’m like, okay, thanks. Now we have to wait in silence.”<sup>80</sup>*

*“With Denmark, it’s more about the local stuff (...), but it’s not as long as it would be with U.S. customers.”<sup>81</sup>*

This kind of restrained emotional expression reflects Hall’s low-context cultural communication, where direct language and explicit messaging are prioritised over non-verbal or emotional cues. The interviewees were often required to “feel out” the personality of each client and adjust accordingly:

*“(...) the Danes, it also depends on the person. (...) it depends maybe more a bit more on the person’s personality...”<sup>82</sup>*

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<sup>78</sup> Appendix E3.

<sup>79</sup> Appendix E5.

<sup>80</sup> Appendix E5.

<sup>81</sup> Appendix E3.

<sup>82</sup> Appendix E4.

Some clients were described as warm and engaging, while others preferred a professional tone throughout. As noted throughout the interview replies, Denmark often falls in the middle of between emotionally expressive American market and the more formal German one. This flexibility in emotional tone has made it important for the employees to remain adaptable during calls and meetings.

Feedback from Danish clients also tended to be polite, though sometimes vague. Several participants mentioned that clients did not always express dissatisfaction openly, which could complicate the interpretation of their needs:

*"(...) the Danes could be a bit too polite (...), that would be my impression, that the Danes might be too polite to give you that direct feedback."*<sup>83</sup>

In digital communication, tone was perceived differently than in verbal exchanges. For example, emails were sometimes interpreted as more direct or even passive-aggressive, which may not have reflected the client's emotional state:

*"I feel like people are more brave through the emails, and they will be more direct just throughout the whole nation. I feel like everyone has that more confidence because it's not anonymous, but you're not saying that in this person's face... especially if something is broken, then they tend to be like a bit more passive-aggressive about stuff than they would usually be in meetings."*

While this could create occasional uncertainty, interviewees feel the trust and comfort in work with Danish clients, and that bond typically grows over time. The relaxed and laid-back tone shows to be a positive thing in conducting business, at least from the partnership point of view as the partnership representative interviewee said:

*"Denmark is probably the easiest if you wanna start off because (...) they're a little less direct, a little less stern (...) from a business point of view it's easier to talk them into, you know, yeah the process..."*<sup>84</sup>

This quote could also be directly linked to the Danish "tendency" of trusting the professionals to do their job, mentioned in the earlier part of this chapter "Communication style".

In summary, language and emotion in Danish client communication are shaped by high comfort with English, with minimal language-related obstacles, politeness and

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<sup>83</sup> Appendix E4.

<sup>84</sup> Appendix E1.

professionalism over emotional expressiveness, a preference for clarity and brief communication styles, subtle feedback, especially in the early stages, and email that appear blunt despite friendly intentions.

These findings are consistent with Denmark's low-context, individualistic communication style. Danish clients tend to be pragmatic, respectful, and outcome-oriented, but emotional openness and interpersonal bonding tends to be developed over time rather than being immediate. For the employees of Plecto, this dynamic requires both linguistic sensitivity and an ability to interpret tone beyond surface-level interactions.

### 6.1.3 Digital Communication and Trust

This section analyses how Danish clients interact through digital channels such as Zoom and email, and how that affects the building of trust.

As a digitally-first company, Plecto conducts the majority of its client interactions online, usually through Zoom and email. Employees have noted that Danish clients tend to be comfortable with using digital tools for professional communication. This aligns with Denmark's broader digital maturity and trust in decentralised, autonomous work structures. From a cultural perspective, Denmark's low Power Distance and high Individualism support this independence in communication, while Hall's low-context communication style explains their preference for clarity and directness in virtual exchanges.

Interviewees have noted that Danish clients usually have no trouble adapting to online formats. In fact, some of them even show a preference for digital meetings over in-person ones, viewing them as more time-efficient and less formal. One interviewee noted:

*"It's quicker to send an email than organise a whole in-person meeting. It's quicker to jump on a call, and often they are willing to jump on a call if they really cared about the problem."*<sup>85</sup>

Emails and Zoom meetings were seen as effective and reliable tools for collaboration. However, there has been a difference of tone noted between the written and verbal communication. Danish clients were often perceived as more direct or even passive-aggressive in emails, while showing a more relaxed behaviour in Zoom meetings:

*"I feel like people are more brave through the emails, and they will be more direct (...) passive aggressive about stuff."*<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Appendix E5.



This pattern may reflect a cultural tendency to separate tasks from relationships, something typical in low-context cultures, as the written language is used efficiently and without trying to sound “soft”, while spoken communication allows for a more expressive and emotional approach. As a result of this, certain interviewees initially misread client tone in emails, only to find a much calmer attitude during calls:

*“You can get this idea that the person is extremely frustrated in an email. But then you go on a meeting with them and they’re like ‘Oh yeah, the reading is not working. But it’s okay’”*<sup>87</sup>

When it comes to building trust, participants described Danish clients as open, but not immediately emotionally invested. Trust develops over time and through consistent communication, not necessarily through social bonding or personal closeness. As one interviewee put it:

*“They’re fine if something takes time (...) I feel way more comfortable doing it with the Danish people, because I know they will not be taken aback (...) if I tell them I’ve never done this before.”*<sup>88</sup>

This quote could mean that competence and transparency were more important than emotional warmth in creating trust. Danish clients were described as appreciating honesty and technical expertise more than over-formality or presentations which were perfectly polished.

However, while several participants emphasized the efficiency and comfort Danish clients show when using digital platforms such as Zoom or email, one interviewee described Denmark as a “face-first” market, suggesting that trust may be more easily established through in-person contact:

*“It’s a relationship-based country, Denmark, so face-to-face definitely helps.”*<sup>89</sup>

This may indicate that while Danish clients are comfortable using digital tools, certain client contexts may still benefit from physical presence, particularly in early stages of relationship building. This shorter-term orientation (35)<sup>90</sup> also suggests that Danish clients may focus more on immediate efficiency and practical outcomes than on building long-term

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<sup>86</sup> Appendix E5.

<sup>87</sup> Appendix E5.

<sup>88</sup> Appendix E5.

<sup>89</sup> Appendix E1.

<sup>90</sup> See graph above.

interpersonal relationships. Trust is formed through consistency and usefulness in the present, rather than through extensive future planning or investment in formality.

Employees also reflected on how digital platforms shape interpersonal dynamics. Some differences, such as body language and subtle emotional cues, are less visible over Zoom. Yet, this did not seem to influence customer satisfaction. Quite the opposite, Danish clients seemed to appreciate the convenience that digital tools offer them. This preference for convenience and flexibility can also be linked to Denmark's high Indulgence score (70)<sup>91</sup>, which reflects a culture that allows for enjoyment and relaxation within the work process. Efficiency and personal well-being are not seen as contradictory.

Also, when something needed to be solved or showed visually, Zoom presented as a crucial platform for problem-solving and building/maintaining trust and relationships.

In summary, Danish clients tend to feel comfortable with digital communication tools, they use email and Zoom efficiently, preferring short and practical exchanges, might appear a bit blunt in writing, but more relaxed in meetings, value clarity and competence over emotional bonding, and build trust over time through transparency and consistency, rather than personal connection.

These findings back up the interpretation of Danish communication as low-context and individualistic, where digital tools support rather than weaken client relationships. For Plecto's employees, recognising these preferences has helped create smoother and more effective client experiences across digital platforms.

#### 6.1.4 Conclusion to the sub-chapter

In summary, communication with Danish clients at Plecto is marked by a balance of informality and professionalism. Their preference for direct, efficient exchanges, especially in digital formats, reflects a cultural emphasis on autonomy, low hierarchy, and trust in expertise. While emotional expression tends to be subtle and feedback polite, clients are generally open, solution-focused, and comfortable with English. Trust develops gradually through consistent and transparent communication rather than personal closeness. These patterns align closely with Hofstede's and Hall's frameworks, positioning Denmark as a low-context, individualistic culture where clarity, competence, and mutual respect guide professional interactions.

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<sup>91</sup> See graph above.

## 6.2 Germany

This section will be structured in the same manner as the “Denmark” section before. Instead of focusing on the behaviour of Plecto’s Danish clients, this section will explore their German clients.

### 6.2.1 Communication style

Interview participants consistently described German clients as direct, detail-oriented, and professional in tone. These observations align with Hofstede’s high Uncertainty Avoidance (65)<sup>92</sup> and low Power Distance (35)<sup>93</sup>, as well as Hall’s classification of Germany as a low-context culture. In low-context environments, communication relies on explicit, clear verbal expression rather than shared social context or emotional subtext. This was reflected in how Plecto’s employees engaged with German clients, especially in structured business conversations where precision was highly valued.

One interviewee noted:

*“(…) generally into the meetings with German people I go in expecting them to be more organized, more direct and more demanding. Yeah, they don't fear to tell you what they want.”<sup>94</sup>*

Another participant added:

*“Germans (...) there’s no wiggle room. They’re always short, snappy to the point (...) when it comes to delivery of what’s been promised.”<sup>95</sup>*

Another described German calls as more serious and purpose-driven:

*“(…) Germany is a little more on ‘a tone’, a little more serious. They often come on the calls with a specific plan that they want to achieve by the end of the call.”<sup>96</sup>*

These comments reflect not only directness, but a cultural preference for structure, predictability, and efficiency which are all core traits of high Uncertainty Avoidance. In such cultures, ambiguity is reduced through planning, clear expectations, and well-defined goals.

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<sup>92</sup> See graph above.

<sup>93</sup> See graph above.

<sup>94</sup> Appendix E5.

<sup>95</sup> Appendix E3.

<sup>96</sup> Appendix E2.

Direct communication is seen not as impolite, but as necessary to ensure clarity and shared understanding.

Employees felt that Germans did not hesitate to express expectations, which allowed for efficiency but also created pressure to deliver precise results. This performance pressure can also be linked to Germany's Masculinity score (66)<sup>97</sup>, which reflects a results-driven culture where professional success and competence are critical. This is also consistent with Germany's strong preference for order and reliability, as well as a professional environment where preparation and expertise are expected.

One interviewee noted:

*"But it goes both ways. Since they are always prepared, they also expect the same from our end..."*<sup>98</sup>

This expectation for equal competence reflects low Power Distance, where clients expect a more horizontal relationship, but one grounded in mutual professionalism and individual accountability. In contrast to high Power Distance cultures, German clients do not go to hierarchy for decision-making; they expect each party to come prepared and informed.

Another key feature of German client communication is a strong preference for team-oriented discussions instead of highlighting individual performance. As one employee noted:

*"Germany is kind of one step further where they don't, they don't even really like to look at individual performance. They look at team performance because they don't want anyone to feel like they're being targeted..."*<sup>99</sup>

This reflects a culturally embedded value of equality and fairness, again linked to low Power Distance and a collective approach to workplace dynamics. At the same time, Germany's moderate Individualism score (67)<sup>100</sup> suggests that while team harmony is valued, individual responsibility and technical capability still play a significant role in how communication is structured. Rather than focusing on individual success, Germans often emphasize team effort

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<sup>97</sup> See graph above.

<sup>98</sup> Appendix E3.

<sup>99</sup> Appendix E2.

<sup>100</sup> See graph above.

and shared accountability, which supports a more “democratic” communication environment.

German clients also tend to avoid small talk about themselves, showing a greater interest in the service provider’s expertise and agenda:

*“Germans (...) It’s more about explaining what is your role, what is the agenda for today and how long you have been in the organisation.”<sup>101</sup>*

*“Germany is more process-oriented, and the stereotypes are true to an extent, they typically do a bit more research beforehand and they expect things to be in order...”*

This is characteristic of Hall’s low-context cultures, where small talk and emotional signalling are minimised in favour of clearly stated goals and roles. German clients, as described here, tend to prepare thoroughly and expect the same from the other party, placing higher value on professionalism than relationship building.

A mistake or hesitation in a meeting could threaten credibility, especially given the importance Germans place on knowledge and accuracy. One interviewee shared their strategy of delaying technical troubleshooting until after the meeting to avoid appearing uncertain in real time:

*“I don't want them to see me struggle, in a sense (...) But I don't want to do it in a meeting. I will just do it after and tell them good news.”<sup>102</sup>*

This reflects a fear of appearing unprepared or imprecise which is a pressure that can be explained by high Uncertainty Avoidance, where professionalism and order are closely linked to competence and trustworthiness.

Punctuality also showed up as a culturally important element:

*“If something takes time with German people, I am more mindful of like promising them stuff, because I don't want to say, Okay, I'm going to do it next week. They will really expect me to do it next week.”<sup>103</sup>*

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<sup>101</sup> Appendix E3.

<sup>102</sup> Appendix E5.

<sup>103</sup> Appendix E5.

This cultural expectation for timeliness further reflects Uncertainty Avoidance where late delivery or vague timelines can lead to unpredictability and damage trust.

While moments of personal sharing occurred (visible in Appendix E5), they were brief and did not typically extend into relationship-building behaviours. In low-context, task-focused cultures, professional relationships are often built over time through proven or demonstrated reliability rather than emotional bonding.

In summary, German clients prefer communication that is structured, direct, and detail-focused. Their style reflects high Uncertainty Avoidance, low Power Distance, and low-context preferences: they value explicit information, technical competence, punctuality, and a team-oriented approach to outcomes, all of which shape their expectations and interaction with service providers like Plecto.

#### 6.2.2 Language and Emotion

In client interactions with German customers, Plecto employees observed a communication style characterised by emotional restraint, formality, and cautious use of language. These traits align closely with Hall's low-context cultural framework, where emotional cues are minimal and verbal communication is focused on the task rather than personal connection. Additionally, Hofstede's cultural dimensions, particularly high Uncertainty Avoidance (65) and moderate Individualism (67), provide insight into German clients' preference for clarity, professionalism, and mutual understanding over emotional expressiveness.

One of the more noticeable linguistic dynamics is the variation in English fluency. While many German clients were comfortable using English in professional settings, others preferred more reserved communication or even reverted to German. As one employee shared:

*"With German people, they don't speak as much English as say Denmark. (...) I would speak slower with them, particularly sometimes what we're explaining is quite complex."*<sup>104</sup>

This illustrates the need for linguistic adaptability and patience. High Uncertainty Avoidance may also contribute to a desire for precision and clarity in language, making some clients less comfortable engaging in English when discussing complex or technical issues. Another employee noted:

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<sup>104</sup> Appendix E2.

*“With Germans, since it’s not their first language, it’s understandable that if they don’t use it (...) daily that there might be some language barriers (...) you need to make sure that the relationship is long term, that’s why we will always adjust and make sure that we understand each other for better collaboration.”<sup>105</sup>*

This insight points to the importance of long-term relationship building, even in task-focused contexts. It suggests that trust develops through linguistic clarity, effort to accommodate, and mutual understanding over time, not through emotional bonding.

Formality was another recurring theme, shaping how German clients engage emotionally. Compared to the U.S. or even Denmark, German clients were described as less emotionally expressive and more sensitive to tone and demeanour:

*“Germany is a little more on a tone, a little more serious.”<sup>106</sup>*  
*“I try to match their tone of voice, because if I’m coming across too excited, it almost seems to startle them.”<sup>107</sup>*

These experiences suggest a cultural preference for emotional control and consistency, traits common in low-context and high Uncertainty Avoidance cultures. In such environments, expressing enthusiasm may be interpreted as unprofessional or even unsettling if it is different from expected norms of behaviour.

When emotional warmth was expressed, it was described as subtle and earned gradually:

*“You can still get a laugh out of them, but it would take a bit more work with the Germans compared to say the Americans.”<sup>108</sup>*

Similarly, small talk was not common, but when it did occur, it was perceived as more genuine:

*“Germany (...) I would say they’re a little more genuine when they do the small talk, but typically neither of these countries (U.S. or Germany) are small talk countries.”<sup>109</sup>*

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<sup>105</sup> Appendix E3.

<sup>106</sup> Appendix E1.

<sup>107</sup> Appendix E2.

<sup>108</sup> Appendix E4.

<sup>109</sup> Appendix E1.

This supports the idea that in low-context cultures, personal information being given out is deliberate and meaningful rather than done out of a habit. While the emotional tone is professional and cautious, moments of interpersonal connection do occur, usually after trust and mutual respect have been established through consistent, competent interaction.

Finally, language preferences themselves occasionally became points of tension. One employee noted:

*“Germans, for example, they are more stubborn, in this case (...) prefer speaking in German (...) I have experiences where customers would either continue writing emails in German and not switching to English.”<sup>110</sup>*

This may reflect both linguistic pride and a desire for certainty and control, themes consistent with high Uncertainty Avoidance. In these cases, flexibility on the part of the Plecto employees is key to maintaining smooth communication.

### 6.2.3 Digital Communication and Trust

Digital platforms such as Zoom and email are the most important tools of client communication at Plecto. When working with German clients, employees described these tools as efficient and generally well-accepted, but often more functional than relational. This practical, structured approach to digital interaction mirrors Germany’s high Uncertainty Avoidance, low-context communication style, and a broader cultural emphasis on planning, predictability, and task completion.

German clients were perceived as valuing the functionality of digital tools over emotional engagement. As one participant put it:

*“Germany does not care so much about the relationship as long as the product does his job.”<sup>111</sup>*

This reflects a task-oriented communication culture, where performance and reliability are prioritized over social bonding. In low-context cultures, relationships are built over time through consistency, competence, and results, rather than through informal interaction or small talk, all of which were described as minimal in this context.

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<sup>110</sup> Appendix E3.

<sup>111</sup> Appendix E1.



Employees also noted differences in tone between German clients and those from other markets in virtual settings. For instance:

*“I think the U.S. is easier in person (...) Germany, I’m not too sure about Germany. I feel like it’s, yeah maybe different.”<sup>112</sup>*

In virtual meetings, formality and preparation were expected. Unlike cultures where video calls might be used to foster rapport or brainstorm collaboratively, German clients were more likely to enter calls with a clear agenda and a desire for precise outcomes. This is supported by another quote:

*“They often come on the calls with a specific plan that they want to achieve by the end of the call.”<sup>113</sup>*

These preferences reflect Hall’s low-context model, in which the digital space is treated much like a physical meeting room, a space for direct, communication with a purpose of getting an immediate outcome. Similarly, Hofstede’s dimensions suggest that in high Uncertainty Avoidance cultures, structured communication channels reduce risk and ambiguity, making digital tools a natural fit when used with a clear purpose.

Trust, in this context, was described as something that is earned through technical proficiency, professionalism, and follow-through, not emotional closeness.

*“You need to make sure that the relationship is long term (...) we will always adjust and make sure that we understand each other for better collaboration.”<sup>114</sup>*

Trust is therefore developed gradually through predictable performance and mutual adaptation, especially when language or tone differences exist. This slow, performance-based approach to trust also reflects Germany’s high Long-Term Orientation (83), where clients expect long-term reliability and are more focused on sustainable performance. In this way, digital communication becomes a tool for ensuring reliability rather than fostering relationships.

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<sup>112</sup> Appendix E1.

<sup>113</sup> Appendix E1.

<sup>114</sup> Appendix E3.

Another aspect that surfaced in digital communication was clients' preference for clarity over improvisation. For example, one employee explained how they chose not to troubleshoot live during Zoom calls to avoid showing uncertainty:

*"I don't want them to see me struggle, in a sense (...) I will just do it after and tell them good news."*<sup>115</sup>

This demonstrates the cultural importance of appearing competent and prepared, especially in a digital setting where verbal cues are enhanced and improvisation may be interpreted as unprofessional. Again, high Uncertainty Avoidance supports the preference for certainty and positive outcomes.

In summary, German clients use digital platforms efficiently and with clear expectations. Zoom and email are seen as practical tools for problem-solving and updates, rather than for casual conversation or personal connection. Trust is built through consistent competence and professionalism, values strongly rooted in Germany's cultural orientation toward structure, order, and clarity.

#### 6.2.4. Conclusion to the sub-chapter

In summary, communication with German clients is defined by structure, clarity, and a strong emphasis on professionalism. Direct verbal expression, being sensitive to details, and punctuality reflect Germany's low-context, high Uncertainty Avoidance culture, where ambiguity is minimised and expectations are clearly stated. There are certain language barriers, but trust is developed through technical competence, consistency, and mutual understanding over time. While emotional expression and small talk are limited and rare, German clients value efficiency and the employees being prepared, placing trust in those who are able to show them expertise and deliver reliable outcomes. For Plecto employees, successful collaboration depends on their ability to meet these cultural expectations with precision, adaptability, and being professional.

### 6.3 The United States

The same process is repeated in the context of United States.

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<sup>115</sup> Appendix E5.

### 6.3.1 Communication Style

Interview participants described communication with U.S. clients as informal, fast-moving, and very direct. These traits are consistent with the United States' high score in Individualism (91)<sup>116</sup> and low score in Power Distance (40)<sup>117</sup> according to Hofstede's cultural dimensions. In this kind of cultural environment, communication tends to be assertive, self-directed, and focused on getting things done. People are expected to take initiative, speak up openly, and respond quickly. According to Hall's framework, the U.S. is a low-context culture, which means professional interactions rely mostly on clear, direct language rather than implied meanings or shared background knowledge.

One employee shared their experience:

*"The U.S. They are very definitely direct (...) they tend to want things now, so typically they would do minimum research before coming to us and then if they like you, if they like the product on the spot, they can buy almost immediately."*<sup>118</sup>

This comment backs up both the sense of urgency and the individual decision-making that often characterize business interactions with U.S. clients. The country's relatively low Uncertainty Avoidance score (46)<sup>119</sup> reflects a cultural comfort with quick decisions and last-minute changes. American clients don't usually seem bothered by a lack of detailed planning. In fact, many appear to value flexibility over rigid structure.

Another participant confirmed this impression:

*"The U.S. customers just want it done immediately."*<sup>120</sup>

This focus on quick results is also linked to the Masculinity dimension (62)<sup>121</sup>, which emphasizes competitiveness, success, and getting things done efficiently. In a culture like this, professional credibility often depends on how fast and effectively you can deliver. For service providers, that means adapting to a fast-paced style of communication and being ready to deliver quickly, instead of relying on long processes or relationship-building over time.

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<sup>116</sup> See graph above.

<sup>117</sup> See graph above.

<sup>118</sup> Appendix E1.

<sup>119</sup> See graph above.

<sup>120</sup> Appendix E2.

<sup>121</sup> See graph above.

Compared to clients from countries like Germany or Denmark, who often come to meetings well-prepared with questions or agendas, the U.S. clients were described as more spontaneous. One employee remarked:

*“The Americans, I feel like are super willing to go on meetings, even if they are completely unprepared... But they will come.”<sup>122</sup>*

This kind of naturalness and being so care-free reflects a pragmatic attitude shaped by high Individualism and low Uncertainty Avoidance. For many Americans, just showing up and starting a conversation is enough, even if the details are still unclear or evolving.

Interviewees also noted that communication with U.S. clients tends to be informal:

*“U.S., tends to be (...) less formal.”<sup>123</sup>*

This relaxed tone can be explained by the combination of low Power Distance and relatively high Indulgence (68)<sup>124</sup>, which encourages a more casual, friendly atmosphere. It’s common for American clients to use first names, make jokes, or speak informally, but this doesn’t mean they expect less in terms of performance. As one employee pointed out:

*“Even though Americans come across as generally quite friendly, they expect a higher level of professionalism. There’s less tolerance for mistakes or issues.”<sup>125</sup>*

This contrast can be surprising, especially for those who associate friendliness with sympathy. In the U.S., a friendly tone does not mean there is less pressure to perform. Employees need to recognize that while interactions may feel casual, expectations remain high.

In summary, the U.S. communication style is shaped by strong individualism, low power distance, moderate masculinity, and low uncertainty avoidance. These cultural values create a business environment where initiative, confidence, and quick decision-making are the norm, expressed through a communication style that is informal, direct, and focused on results.

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<sup>122</sup> Appendix E5.

<sup>123</sup> Appendix E1.

<sup>124</sup> See graph above.

<sup>125</sup> Appendix E2.

### 6.3.2 Language and Emotion

When it comes to language and emotional tone, U.S. clients were often described as expressive, open, and quick in how they speak. The emotional tone of their communication often seemed more important than the exact words they used. This fits with the U.S.'s low-context communication style and high level of Individualism (91), where people are expected to speak clearly and say what they think.

Many participants mentioned that Americans often start conversations with small talk to build a friendly connection:

*"Americans tend to spend more time with small talk..."<sup>126</sup>*

This relaxed approach is supported by the U.S.'s low Power Distance (40) and relatively high Indulgence (68), which encourage friendly, informal conversations. However, even though these conversations may seem warm and casual at first, expectations are still high. A friendly tone doesn't always mean the client will be flexible with results.

Participants also noticed that U.S. clients tend to be quite direct when giving negative feedback:

*"I do think the Americans would be a bit more open to say they expected something different or they didn't really like this aspect (...) and harsher..."<sup>127</sup>*

This kind of honesty fits with the U.S.'s Masculinity score (62), which values clear, direct feedback, especially when work performance is involved. Clients usually want feedback to be useful and to the point, not softened just to keep things polite.

Tone of voice was also mentioned as very important. One employee said:

*"Americans, they often aren't listening so much to what I'm saying. They're more listening to the tone of my voice."<sup>128</sup>*

This shows that how something is said can matter just as much as what is said. In cultures with high Individualism and Masculinity, sounding confident and enthusiastic can influence

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<sup>126</sup> Appendix E3.

<sup>127</sup> Appendix E4.

<sup>128</sup> Appendix E2.

how capable someone seems. Employees working with U.S. clients need to focus on both their message and their delivery style.

However, some participants felt frustrated by the lack of follow-up or unclear communication. One noted:

*"I think I just don't like the communication of Americans, because it's like almost a lack of communication... they will just not tell you."*<sup>129</sup>

This could be related to the U.S.'s low Long-Term Orientation score (26)<sup>130</sup>, which means there is more focus on short-term actions and results than on long-term planning. While clients may be very involved at first, their interest can drop off unless the employee keeps the conversation going and confirms next steps.

One participant also mentioned that U.S. clients are sometimes vague about what they want:

*"So Americans, okay, they might not have like a clear idea of what they want. So it gives you a wiggle room."*<sup>131</sup>

This could give employees more freedom to be creative, but it can also make it harder to know exactly what the client was expecting, especially when feedback was late or missing. In these situations, employees had to guess whether the silence meant approval or something else, which was stressful in a fast-paced work environment.

In short, U.S. client communication often combines a friendly tone with strong expectations. People are open, direct, and emotional in their delivery, but they still expect quick results and professional behaviour. Employees need to be able to understand both the words and the emotional signals, ask for feedback, and stay confident and positive throughout the process.

### 6.3.3 Digital Communication and Trust

Digital communication with U.S. clients is shaped by speed, convenience, and pragmatism. Employees described American clients as quick to schedule virtual meetings and eager to jump into discussions, even when objectives were not fully formed. This reflects the

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<sup>129</sup> Appendix E5.

<sup>130</sup> See graph above.

<sup>131</sup> Appendix E5.

combined influence of low Uncertainty Avoidance (46), low Long-Term Orientation (26), and a strong Individualism score (91).

One interviewee mentioned:

*“They will book the meeting really quickly, and then be like, I don’t know what we’re doing here.”<sup>132</sup>*

This behaviour points to a communication style that prioritizes real-time engagement over structured planning. Employees must be flexible, able to clarify meeting goals on the fly, and ready to deliver value even in loosely defined settings.

Speed and outcome orientation were repetitive themes:

*“When it comes to business purposes and also delivering what has been promised, they’re more on top of everything and they want a fast-paced delivery.”<sup>133</sup>*  
*“The U.S. customers just want it done immediately.”<sup>134</sup>*

These expectations reflect the Masculinity (62) of U.S. culture, where results and efficiency are emphasized over process. Digital platforms like Zoom or email are not primarily used for relationship-building, but for tracking progress and holding people accountable. Employees described needing to be both technically capable and responsive in digital interactions, meaning not only solving problems, but doing so quickly and visibly.

Punctuality, however, was described as inconsistent:

*“There’s a tendency for them to be late (to the meetings).”<sup>135</sup>*

This mirrors the short-term orientation of U.S. culture, where flexibility often takes precedence over strict scheduling. While this relaxed time management may reflect adaptability, it can also create friction with service providers who rely on pre-set agendas or efficient time use.

Trust was tied strongly to performance metrics. One employee described how Plecto was used by clients for workforce evaluation:

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<sup>132</sup> Appendix E5.

<sup>133</sup> Appendix E3.

<sup>134</sup> Appendix E2.

<sup>135</sup> Appendix E3.

*“They’ll use it (Plecto) to look at the lowest performers to get rid of them.”<sup>136</sup>*

This is a strong indicator of high Masculinity and Individualism, where competition, accountability, and individual performance play a central role in business decisions. In this context, trust is earned through results, not relationship-building. Clients want to see that problems are solved quickly and transparently and will switch providers if that standard isn’t met.

In summary, digital communication with U.S. clients is rapid, pragmatic, and results driven. While informality and flexibility define the tone, the expectations around competence and performance are non-negotiable. Building trust in this environment requires a careful balance of responsiveness, clarity, and outcome delivery, supported by a strong understanding of tools and confidence in execution.

#### 6.3.4 Conclusion to the Sub-chapter

To sum up, communication with U.S. clients tends to be informal, fast-paced, and driven by high expectations. While their tone is usually friendly and open, they often expect quick responses, direct feedback, and confident communication. Trust can be built quickly but may also be fragile, often depending more on results than on long-term relationships. Emotional tone matters a lot in how messages are received, so employees need to balance being friendly with staying professional. The U.S. business environment reflects strong individualism, moderate masculinity, and low uncertainty avoidance, creating a culture that probably values speed, clarity, and results. For Plecto employees, this means adjusting both how they speak and how they deliver information, while keeping up with the quick pace and focus on outcomes that define working with American clients.

#### 6.4 Cross-Cultural Comparison and Employee Adaptation

After looking into each market individually, it becomes important to reflect on how employees at Plecto adjust their approach across different cultural contexts. This section provides a brief comparison of client expectations in Denmark, Germany, and the United States, followed by an overview of the strategies employees currently use to manage these differences in practice, as well as some of the strategies they might lack or should improve upon.

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<sup>136</sup> Appendix E2.



## **Cross-Cultural Client Expectations**

The interviews confirm that all three client groups: Danish, German, and the United States fall within low-context cultures, as defined by Hall in 1976, where communication relies on direct language, verbal clarity, and minimal use of implicit cues. However, despite this shared communication style, each market shows different expectations in regards to formality, pace, emotional expression, and hierarchy.

Danish clients tend to prefer informal yet well-organized communication. While they often appear relaxed, they still expect messages to be clear and professionally delivered. They are generally slow to express dissatisfaction and do not typically engage in much small talk.

German clients, by contrast, are detail-oriented, direct, and more formal in their approach. They usually come to meetings with precise agendas, expect thorough preparation, and are attentive to emotional tone. Trust is built gradually, based on demonstrated expertise and a structured process.

U.S. clients are characterized by a fast-paced, emotionally expressive, and outcome-focused style. They are comfortable with small talk at the beginning of conversations, but they expect high levels of energy, quick responses, and minimal delays. In this context, trust tends to be more transactional and is closely linked to performance and speed.

## **Employee Strategies**

Plecto employees show clear signs of cultural adaptability in several areas. The most consistent strategy mentioned was adjusting tone and energy to match the perceived preferences of clients in different countries. For example, multiple employees described lowering their vocal excitement and matching a more neutral tone when speaking with Germans, while speaking more quickly and enthusiastically with American clients to match their urgency and pace. This reflects an intuitive understanding of the role tone plays in perceived credibility.

Another common strategy is modifying language and pacing. Employees reported slowing down and simplifying explanations for German clients, especially when discussing complex systems, in contrast to maintaining speed and clarity for native English speakers in the U.S.

This kind of adaptation reflects cultural sensitivity to language proficiency and precision, especially in high Uncertainty Avoidance cultures like Germany.

Some participants also reported initiative-taking efforts to prepare culturally contextualised interactions, such as referencing local events, national holidays, or recent news. One interviewee noted:

*“Prepping (...) for that country’s culture, (...) talk about their local events, sports, (...) positive news, hopefully that is happening within the country (...) to show that you have invested a little bit of time into understanding their culture and their company.”*

This strategy, while not employed universally, shows that employees are aware that understanding local culture can help build trust, especially in settings where relationship-building is slower or more cautious (e.g., Germany and Denmark). Even clients who do not usually reciprocate small talk may appreciate the effort behind it.

In addition, there were signs that employees had developed situational awareness around client personalities and communication preferences. This was particularly noted in the Danish context, where one employee said, “It depends more on the person’s personality,” implying that cultural norms were not always rigid, and that flexibility is required on a case-by-case basis.

### **Gaps and Inconsistencies**

Despite these strengths, cultural adaptation at Plecto appears to be largely informal and reactive. While many employees had developed effective personal strategies, there was little indication of structured training or shared guidelines for intercultural communication. As a result, adaptation relied heavily on individual initiative and trial-and-error, which can lead to inconsistent client experiences across teams or regions.

For instance, employees often reported feeling uncertain about how to interpret silence, especially in Denmark, where politeness may mask dissatisfaction, or in the U.S., where vague feedback may not necessarily indicate approval. In Germany, one employee avoided live troubleshooting to avoid appearing unprepared, showing a good instinct, but it also suggests that employees are learning to “read” clients through experience rather than formal knowledge of cultural patterns.

Another area for development is sustainable relationship management. Several interviewees noted that American clients, in particular, require continued follow-up to maintain loyalty, yet some employees expressed frustration with unclear or inconsistent client communication. Without clearer strategies for managing these differences, relationship-building can become inconsistent and hard to maintain in the long run.

## 7. DISCUSSION

This chapter reflects on the key findings of the research, revisiting the themes identified and used during the analysis process. The themes communication style, language and emotion, and digital communication and trust will be revisited, and the findings will be discussed in greater detail, taking a look into the intercultural communication at Plecto and offer suggestions.

### 7.1. Discussion of the analysis

One of the main takeaways is that cultural differences in communication style are not just abstract theories, based on the data collected, they are real, everyday challenges for employees at Plecto working with different cultures. The participants consistently described American clients as more fast-paced, goal-oriented, and assertive in their communication. On the other hand, Danish clients were seen as more relaxed and informal, with a strong preference for equality and humour in interactions. German clients were described as structured, more formal, and very detail-focused in their communication expectations.

These observations align well with Hofstede's cultural dimensions, however it is important to mention that these cultural patterns were not only identified by theory, but truly experiences by the employees at Plecto, proving the relevance of such frameworks in real business settings.

At the same time, Hall's theory of high- and low-context culture communication was useful in interpreting these patterns. Despite all countries being places in the low-context cultures, the intensity of their preferences varied. The U.S. clients tend to be very explicit and straightforward, while Danish clients, despite being in the same category, showed a more relaxed communication style. German clients, also in the low-context cultures, appeared more formal and precise, just showing that the variations within the same theoretical

context level do exist. These insights highlight the need for cultural adaptability rather than relying purely on generalised expectations.

One strong example of how the theoretical frameworks helped me understand the topic is the theme of emotional safety. This theme can be understood through Hofstede's dimensions, particularly Power Distance and Uncertainty Avoidance. In cultures with lower power distance, such as Denmark, employees and clients might feel more comfortable expressing themselves freely, including when faced with a misunderstanding. However, in higher PD countries, such as Germany, or even the U.S. to some extent, there may be a greater concern about saying the "wrong thing" especially in formal business meeting setting. Similar to this, countries with high Uncertainty Avoidance may be less comfortable with tone ambiguity, pacing, or messaging which can lead to discomfort when communication norms are unclear in digital channels or if the employees are not familiarised with them. These dimensions could help certain employees to achieve better understanding of their clients' cultural backgrounds, but they should also be taken with a grain of salt, as the findings confirm that intercultural communication cannot be "solved" with one, general advice. Each cultural group has its own set of expectations, and employees must be able to adapt their style accordingly, which is something all of them mentioned learning "by doing", rather than through formal training or support.

Another very important insight which emerged from the interviews was the emotional state tied to language use in intercultural communication. Although English is the shared working language of Plecto, the participants reflected how their level of fluency and the clients' level of fluency affected the confidence during interactions. Despite the employees feeling quite secure in their English proficiency and granted that to some of them English is their first language, they have stated that German clients tend to have more trouble using English than others. This sort of problem can create power imbalances or emotional stress, as discussed in the literature review of this project in the section "Emotional and Language Challenges in Intercultural Communication". The German clients in particular felt extra anxiety in using English as the primary communication language that they even continued writing emails in German, despite knowing none of the employees speak the language. This made the process longer, as the employees had to translate the said email to English before they could proceed with the next steps of the communication.

Digital communication added both extra complexity and made the communication easier. The tools like Zoom and email allowed teams to work efficiently across time zones and borders, however, they also stripped away some of the non-verbal cues that help people understand each other. However, since all the key markets analysed in this project belong in the low-context cultures which tend to not focus on the non-verbal cues, this might not be an obstacle to them. It was, however, mentioned by the interviewees, that it might be a bit harder to “read” the client over email or during a video call, especially in different intercultural communication styles. For example, a direct and brief email from an American client might come off as blunt or rude to someone used to a more relationship-oriented tone, but sound perfectly fine to the American client sending the email. It is important to add to this that, while the employees should be cautious of the cultural gaps in digital settings, they should also be mindful of the generational ones, as research shows that younger employees often feel more comfortable with using informal communication styles, such as emojis, while the older employees may prefer a more formal communication style.<sup>137</sup> While not directly linked to cultural expectations, it is very important to be mindful of this gap in communication with clients from any cultural background, of any age.

Trust is also an important segment of this project. Participants noted that building trust with international clients takes more effort than in face-to-face meetings. In digital settings, trust often depends on clarity, consistency, and responsiveness, but also on the softer skills such as empathy and cultural sensitivity. Small misunderstanding in tone or timing can feel bigger in a virtual context and impact how clients perceive professionalism and “care”.

Together these findings show how emotional and technological factors connect deeply to intercultural communication. While existing frameworks like the ones used in this project offer useful ways to interpret communication differences, they do not fully capture the emotional labour and effort needed to adapt to different styles, or the specific challenges which are coming up in the fast-moving, digital-first company such as Plecto. The human efforts to understand each problem and difference individually are just as important as the

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<sup>137</sup> Thomas, S. (2024b, March 19). *How differences in digital etiquette cause generational strife*. Canadian HR Reporter. <https://www.hrreporter.com/focus-areas/diversity/how-differences-in-digital-etiquette-cause-generational-strife/384649> .

theoretical model when thinking about how to support the employees in cross-cultural communication.

## 7.2. Training Gaps and Practical Recommendations

The last part of the interview guide included questions about whether or not Plecto offers formal training to its employees regarding how to handle intercultural communication. 100% of the participants answered no, ranging from the ones that started in the company 6 months ago to the ones that started 4 years ago. While the company offers a supportive and open culture, employees are left to rely on their own experience, instincts, or informal conversations with colleagues when it comes to dealing with cultural differences in client interactions. For new employees or those without prior experience in international roles, this lack of guidance can create uncertainty and inconsistency, especially in high-stakes client situations.

This gap becomes increasingly relevant when considering Plecto's expansion into the German market, which is both relatively new and culturally distinct from the Danish and American ones. As several interviewees mentioned, German clients often come to the meetings with different expectations around formality, structure, and precision. Meetings are expected to be more detailed and agenda-driven, and communication tends to be more reserved and focused on facts rather than friendliness. Without structured support, employees might struggle to adjust to these norms, which could lead to potential misunderstandings, delays, or missed opportunities to build trust.

Since German cultural preferences differ significantly from the informal Danish one and the direct, but friendly American communication styles, it's especially important to prepare employees for these differences early on. Intercultural awareness is not purely a soft skill, it is essential for delivering service that feels tailored and respectful, particularly in client facing roles.

To address this, Plecto could benefit from introducing basic intercultural communication training, especially targeted at employees working with the German market. These trainings do not need to be long or overly formal. Short internal workshops, onboarding sessions, or even online modules that introduce certain key concepts, such as attitudes towards hierarchy, communication styles, or formality in client relations, could make a big difference. Practical, real-world examples from current team members could also help employees

understand what to expect, and those examples could also be introduced in internal workshops.

Another useful step could be the development of a market insights guide, a simple internal document that shares cultural notes, common preferences, and communication tips for working with clients from each culture. For example, notes on how German clients might expect more detailed explanations or prefer written follow-ups after meetings can help employees feel more confident and prepared.

In addition to this, considering the importance of digital communication at Plecto, short sessions on how culture influences tone, timing, and expectations in emails or virtual calls could help minimise the misunderstandings. These could include tips on writing with clarity, understanding when to use more formal and when to use a more relaxed language, or even how silence and speed of response might be perceived differently across cultures.

Finally, offering team reflection sessions or periodical check-ins could help employees share their challenges and insights with each other, particularly as the company continues to grow into new markets. Creating a space to openly discuss cultural communication issues adds to the idea that this is a learning process and not something every employee is expected to perfect right away.

These suggestions are intentionally designed to be low-cost and manageable, which is especially important for a fast-growing company like Plecto. Even small steps and changes can make a big difference, especially when entering new markets where client expectations might be less intuitive. Investing in intercultural competence shows clients that their way of doing business is respected and gives the employees the tools to communicate with greater confidence and clarity.

## 8. CONCLUSION

This project set out to explore how Plecto's employees navigate intercultural communication when working with clients from Denmark, Germany, and the United States. Through five in-depth interviews with employees across key departments, the study has shown that communication across cultures goes far beyond just language proficiency, instead, it touches on emotional confidence, personal communication style, and the ability to read between the lines, especially in digital contexts.

One of the key findings was that although Plecto is a multicultural and open-minded organisation, there is currently no formal training or structure in place to support intercultural communication. Employees are doing their best to adapt to client expectations, often relying on personal intuition, trial and error, or informal advice given to them by other coworkers. While this strategy has worked to an extent, it can also lead to stress, uncertainty, and missed opportunities to build stronger client relationships from the start, particularly when dealing with culturally distinct markets like Germany, where communication norms differ significantly from those in Denmark or the U.S.

In this sense, the findings suggest a real opportunity for Plecto to strengthen internal communication processes and client success outcomes through even basic intercultural training or shared resources. These do not necessarily need to be expensive or complicated, even something simple as internal guides, learning sessions, or creating a space for employees to share cultural insights could help build a more consistent and confident communication approach. Giving special attention to employees working with the German market, especially since it is the newest key market and brings its own set of expectations, could help employees feel more prepared and could prevent misunderstandings before they happen.

This project also found that the use of English as the primary language, paired with differences in emotional expression across cultures, plays a big role in how communication is experienced. Employees often felt that their level of fluency effected their confidence, as well as the confidence of the clients. Meanwhile, digitalisation has added another layer of difficulty, as communication primarily takes place over Zoom or email, where emotional tone and cultural cues can easily be misinterpreted. These factors highlight the need to not only



understand cultural values and preferences, but also to develop emotional and digital communication awareness within international teams.

These findings align with and also challenge existing theoretical frameworks. While Hofstede's dimensions and Hall's contexts were useful in interpreting broad communication tendencies, the interviews also showed that real-world experiences often extend beyond these models. In particular, emotional expression, language confidence, and digital communication added layer of complexity that the traditional frameworks do not fully capture. This suggests the need to apply such models with flexibility and awareness of their limits.

While this study provides valuable insights, it also has limitations. The small sample size and focus on only three cultural markets means that the findings cannot be generalised across all of Plecto's global markets. Furthermore, the research reflects only employee perspectives, without including feedback from clients themselves. Future research could expand the cultural scope, compare internal and external perspectives, or examine the long-term impact of intercultural training in similar business environments.

In conclusion, this thesis does not claim to provide all the answers, nor does it suggest that culture can be reduced to a checklist. But what it does offer is a window into the real, everyday experiences of employees trying to connect with clients across cultures, often with little to no guidance, but a lot of motivation to do it well. With a bit more structure, some shared tools, and a stronger awareness of how culture shapes communication, Plecto has a real opportunity to continue growing as a truly global and people-focused company.

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