

Watching the flowers grow

'Net op tijd!' There was relief in Leopold's voice. Despite the early hour, they had been caught in bumper to bumper traffic as they approached Amsterdam Schiphol Airport where Herr Hartmann's flight from Berlin was to land in about 10 minutes. It was the first time that Leopold accompanied his boss to pick up a client, but not just any client. 'How long have you been working with Blumen-Krause?' Saskia Verbeek smiled watching the arrivals, KL 1818 had landed and so much the better, a lot to do today! 'Oh, for some thirty years, I was a teenager when my father signed his first contract with Helmut Krause after a long discussion in our glasshouse'. Leopold looked around, 'There he is' waving to a tall blond man in a dark suit already heading in their direction.

'It's good to be back in Holland Saskia, if only for one day', Andreas Hartmann had a deep voice, 'and how are you doing, young man?' 'Oh fine, Herr Hartmann, I have learned so much here in only three months, even some Dutch and watching the flowers grow is really great'. Leopold liked his outdoor life amid his cheerful Dutch coworkers, Lisse was a nice place to be. Saskia smiled, 'Leopold is a hard efficient worker'. She had confidence in her young German employee who wasn't afraid to roll up his sleeves. Andreas Hartmann was nodding in agreement, no doubt Krause had been right to send Leopold to their Dutch partner.

'Shall we go, our first appointment is at the World Horti Center, I promised you last time' Saskia was looking at her watch. 'Where is Naaldwijk? I actually read something about the Center in 'Florieren'. Leopold was the first to answer 'Not far from The Hague, Herr Hartmann', before Saskia interrupted him, 'Let me invite you for a seaside lunch after'. Leopold smiled, he still had the sound of the screeching seagulls in his ears.

Neighbours Germany and The Netherlands have a great deal in common. In both cultures people are direct and understand each other well. Both respect punctuality, exactly as they favour equality and consensus.

In Hofstede's model of national cultures however, even with quite similar scores the Germans and the Dutch differ in one dimension. In a 'masculine' culture like Germany where performance is highly valued, people are driven by competition, achievement and success. In a 'feminine' culture like The Netherlands, it's important to keep the life/work balance and the dominant values are 'caring for others' and quality of life. What motivates the Germans, is to be the best, whereas the Dutch will do their best.

Since Lisse and Berlin wanted to be on the same line, Saskia Verbeek knew that accepting German staff participate in her company in Lisse, to watch the flowers grow as Leopold liked to put it, was crucial.

It was 7:30 pm when, after a day full of encounters they said goodbye at Schiphol. Andreas Hartmann looked happy, 'The Earth laughs in flowers', Ralph Waldo Emerson was right', particularly in The Netherlands'. To add, more to Leopold than to Saskia 'The American philosopher'.

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For Etiquette à la Carte
June 2018*

