

USING CULTURAL AWARENESS TO CREATE AN EFFICIENT WORKING ENVIRONMENT



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This thesis aimed at using the concept of cultural awareness to increase the efficiency of a working environment by decreasing the time spent on misunderstandings and conflict, while simultaneously increasing output and revenue. The textile industry and Elis Suisse specifically built the frame for this paper.

After clearly defining the terms Cultural Awareness, Working Environment, Efficiency, and Textile Industry the thesis looked at literature to get an understanding of both the basic theories of culture as well as cultural awareness. Further, it used literary resources to grasp the risks of lacking cultural awareness. From the literature, a questionnaire was formulated and implemented with Elis Suisse. The aim was to assess the following three areas: the level of cultural awareness currently present with the employees, examine the organizational culture and how it influences workers, and what tools would be of most interest to increase intercultural skills.

From the in-field research, it is found that tolerance, open-mindedness, and patience are oftentimes enough to handle most intercultural situations. However, cultural awareness is needed to further hone and master those skills. For industry-wide use, the grill party is determined to be the most appropriate tool when trying to teach employees about cultural awareness. Workshops and other types of courses are understood to have a necessity for tailoring, according to the company's needs and issues. Overall, cultural awareness is still a rather new and scarcely implemented concept that holds promising leads for an intercultural future.

Keywords Culture, Cultural Awareness, Business, Textile Industry, Psychology

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Content

1	Introduction.....	1
2	Theoretical Background.....	2
2.1	Framing the Scope	2
2.2	The Basic Theory on Culture	3
2.2.1	Short Expedition into Culture's History	3
2.2.2	How Culture, Cultural Awareness, and Organizational Culture Are Defined	6
2.2.3	Lacking Cultural Awareness	9
3	Elis Suisse.....	14
3.1	General Facts about Elis Suisse	14
3.2	Current Situation at Branch in Endingen	14
4	Process Description	16
4.1	Explanation of the Questionnaire	16
4.2	Hypotheses.....	18
5	Planning Process.....	19
5.1	Planning Phase	19
5.2	Preparation for the Interviews.....	19
5.3	Evaluating the Interviews.....	19
6	Conclusion	21
6.1	Findings	21
6.1.1	On the Interviews in General	21
6.1.2	On the Personal Opinions of Interviewees Regarding Cultural Awareness and the Ease of Interacting with Different Cultures	22
6.1.3	On the Interest of Workshops and Raising Cultural Awareness.....	23
6.2	Discussion.....	24
6.2.1	Primary Issues and Discrepancies	24
6.3	Recommendations	27
6.3.1	Workshops, Mini-Games, the Importance of Communication and Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions.....	28
6.3.2	Answering the Hypotheses	29
6.3.3	Final Words	30

7	Summary.....	31
8	Acknowledgments	32
	References	33

Appendices

Appendix 1. Paper of Consent and Questionnaire

Appendix 2. Data Management Plan

Abbreviations

CA	Cultural Awareness
CI	Cultural Intelligence
e.g.	Exempli gratia (lat. for example)

1 Introduction

In a world that is slowly turning into what feels like a large village, different cultures will inevitably clash with each other sooner or later. It should not be to anyone's surprise then that being culturally aware, knowing how to interact with different cultures, is a very important and useful skill for the business world of the 21st century. Bearing that in mind, a business leader, or any sort of leader, needs to be capable of understanding different cultures, their ways of life, and how they work. Businesses today create diverse teams, partly because research shows that diverse teams produce more and better work than homogenous teams, but also because there is no way of getting around hiring only a certain type of person or culture anymore (Chipulu et al., 2014). Different cultures have moved around the world and one can find any culture in any place. One may examine restaurants to understand this. Chinese food can be found anywhere, just like Lebanese or typical Mediterranean dishes from Greece and Italy. Thus, it is even more important for target groups to be culturally aware so they can avoid misunderstandings and stereotypes at work.

However, just being culturally aware is not enough for the workforce. Both managers and employees should be regularly trained in being culturally aware. Additionally, target groups should be made aware of how the concept of cultural awareness can be applied to ensure cultures will not come into conflict at any time, while simultaneously contributing to an overall efficient working environment that has less conflict and higher output and revenue. Thus, this practice-based thesis aims at implementing the concept of cultural awareness in the working world by providing tools that can help enhance and maintain cultural awareness. These tools will be based on appropriate literature, paired with conducted in-field research. Further, said instruments should also assist in the increase of efficiency relating to production output.

Different studies have already been conducted on how to raise cultural awareness and laid fundamental pillars for cultural studies (Hofstede, 2010). The appropriate literature will be examined later. The main purpose of this thesis is to find and provide appropriate tools that can help improve cultural awareness within a company.

2 Theoretical Background

In the following chapter, this thesis will approach its research question by finding applicable literature. With that, this section will help gain an understanding of cultural studies and the forming of cultural awareness. For possible solutions to be presented toward the end of this paper, theory and in-field research shall later on be compared and commonalities highlighted, ideally suggesting approaches to increase cultural awareness and with that the efficiency of the working environment.

2.1 Framing the Scope

Firstly, a brief explanation of what exactly Cultural Awareness means shall be made. As the literature will later point out, there are different definitions and explanations of what exactly cultural awareness is. The following statement shall be used as a first introduction to the term: Cultural Awareness is the active effort by an individual to reduce his or her own stereotypes and prejudices in an attempt to reduce misunderstandings as well as increase the collaboration with people from different cultures (Shepherd, 2019). Cultural Awareness is sometimes also coined as Cultural Intelligence, but there is little significant difference between the two terms (Shepherd, 2019). Secondly, the term Efficient Working Environment must be explained. A Working Environment is a space, where employees come together to create a predefined output. In the case of this thesis, it would be all the employees working in a company operating in the textile industry, may that be in the production or somewhere else in the facility. Efficiency is referring to the most basic economic theory of using the least amount of resources and time, to create the largest amount of output possible from those sources. Efficient in this thesis further means, that the employees are not in conflict with each other, as dispute is a primary cause for work delay, insufficient output, and injuries as well as unhappiness and exclusion at work (Arnab et al., 2021). Lastly, the textile industry entails all companies from dry cleaners, laundry facilities to subcontractors.

However, one must acknowledge that the banking industry is more homogenous, speaking in cultural terms than a dry cleaning company (Traquandi, 2016). To suggest the solutions

discovered in this paper could therefore be blindly applied to any industry would be premature.

2.2 The Basic Theory on Culture

The following paragraphs are essential in the development of understanding other people and lays the basis for mutual respect and tolerance regarding the encounter of other cultures.

2.2.1 Short Expedition into Culture's History

Cultural awareness, short CA, relating to business has been largely influenced by a man called Geert Hofstede, who was active mostly in the 1980s (Hofstede, 2010). His model, which will be analyzed in more detail shortly, has been so influential, it is still used to this day. In the opinion of De & Rotterdam, Hofstede is only famous in the management studies discipline. In other areas dealing with culture, he is largely unknown (De & Rotterdam, 2021). However, within business, he is one of the most established theorists (De & Rotterdam, 2021). He worked out different models and later on published a book called *Culture's Consequence*, in which he explains that all people behave in a specific way because they are all members of a homogenous nation and therefore have cultural similarities (De & Rotterdam, 2021). With those national cultures, one can estimate e.g. how a Swiss acts differently from a Finnish person and so forth (De & Rotterdam, 2021). Hofstede explained culture as a sort of mental program that separates members of one group from another (De & Rotterdam, 2021). With that, Hofstede establishes an interplay between society and nation (De & Rotterdam, 2021). What business students usually get introduced to in their first cultural studies class is Hofstede's most famous model; *Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions*. Before examining the model, it shall be acknowledged that, as with all literature, his work must be taken with a fair amount of skepticism. It is De & Rotterdam's opinion that Hofstede's model is faulty at times (De & Rotterdam, 2021). When studying the basic concept of cultural awareness, his work will suffice as it is a good way to compare countries and their cultures with each other (De & Rotterdam, 2021). Hofstede's dimensions are the following:

- **Power distance** is the extent to which less powerful members accept that power is unequally distributed. It explains a society's level of inequality that is commonly accepted within a nation. Naturally, all nations are unequal to some extent. (Traquandi, 2016)
- **Individualism and collectivism** are on opposite sides of each other. In individualistic societies, groups are more loosely connected and everyone is looking out for themselves. On the collectivist end, the group is put above the individual. Therefore, individual needs are often neglected for the greater good of society. While in an individualist society, one's self and immediate family are taken care of, in a collectivist country, extended family is considered as well. (Traquandi, 2016)
- **Long-versus short-term orientation** is about how truth is handled. Long-term orientation cultures are thrifty and perseverant, more forward-moving, while short-term oriented cultures focus more on upholding traditions and each other's faces. (Traquandi, 2016)
- **Uncertainty avoidance** refers to how well a society deals with uncertainty and ambiguity. Ultimately, it measures whether a nation is more focused on the present, and is, therefore, less avoidant or if it focuses more on the future, like saving money for emergencies and so forth. It also examines whether or not a culture feels uncomfortable in unstructured situations. Countries that score high in this dimension oftentimes have more and stricter laws to avoid uncertainties. (Traquandi, 2016)
- **Masculinity and femininity** are, just like individualism and collectivism, opposites. Masculinity and femininity examines the roles assigned to male and female. But it also refers to the values a society emphasizes. In masculine societies assertiveness, dominance, and competitiveness are much more prevalent than in feminine cultures. Feminist cultures are more modest, caring, and less assertive. (Traquandi, 2016)

How a person answers to those different fields can then be calculated and used to create a cultural profile. With these, Hofstede tried to give a concrete manual on how to understand national behaviors and how to make use of that knowledge. Frankly, as mentioned above,

throughout his time Hofstede made some questionable statements concerning the model (De & Rotterdam, 2021). Oftentimes in ways that were beneficial to support his theory, even if there was little to no scientific proof (De & Rotterdam, 2021). For example, Hofstede explained that having sex among the more masculine Germans is primarily for procreation while the more feminine Dutch also have sex for recreational purposes (Traquandi, 2016). This is ambiguous. Despite that, Hofstede paved the way for academic circles to make an effort in understanding culture, especially because he also talked about stereotypes. In that regard, he claimed that they are always so-called half-truths (De & Rotterdam, 2021). Stereotypes can be used as an instrument to reduce complexity, and are indispensable for the recognition of reality (De & Rotterdam, 2021). To increase and deepen the understanding of the world, they should be understood and analyzed.

Shifting the focus of this paper now onto another model found in literature, one comes across the Cultural Wizzard, created by Solomon & Schell. It follows seven dimensions, or characteristics of cultures, and has a similar approach to Hofstede's Dimensions (De & Rotterdam, 2021). However, this paper will not go into further detail about Solomon & Schell's teachings, as the model is no longer in use. The primary reason why it is being mentioned here, is that Solomon & Schell defined organizations as a strong manifestation of the predominant national culture (De & Rotterdam, 2021). But, according to Solomon & Schell, the only way on how to deal with people from other cultures is by studying their habits, and by going beneath people's surface one should influence business settings in a way beneficial only to oneself (De & Rotterdam, 2021). That leaves a rather manipulative aftertaste which is far from what cultural studies are trying to do (De & Rotterdam, 2021). Culture and Cultural Awareness are not to be used to manipulate others into doing one's own bidding. Instead of using Solomon & Schell, cultural differences are now taught with a more progressive approach by Patrick Janssen, who wrote *Intercultural Competences* (De & Rotterdam, 2021). He is a large fan of Hofstede himself and was greatly influenced his work (De & Rotterdam, 2021). Thus, the importance of properly understanding this model is shown.

2.2.2 How Culture, Cultural Awareness, and Organizational Culture Are Defined

Culture

Depending on the literature or scientific paper, culture and cultural awareness are defined differently. To showcase this, different papers shall be listed and their definitions shown. Lastly, a brief explanation of organizational culture shall be made. Solomon & Schell presented a good definition of culture. According to (De & Rotterdam, 2021): “cultural behaviors are the outward sign of deeply held values and beliefs that have built up in a society over time. The visible behaviors, the invisible values and beliefs are unique to each society. These value systems are deeply rooted in society and passed on from generation to generation”. This means, that within nations there are cultures in which individuals share common beliefs and values.

Culture is a set of shared meanings that structure and orient human existence. It is a so-called web of significance. In that web, one’s inner self and culture are inseparably linked. The shared meanings within a cultural group are essentially what is considered to be common sense. This ranges from communication to joint activities over relationships both in private and in business matters. These assumptions and pre-reflective understandings are so common, they become invisible. Those meanings can further be analyzed to get an understanding of how people function and what can be expected from them in certain situations. The term for this is called folk psychology or moral visions. Moral visions guide how people behave, what they think and feel as well as what they consider to contribute to a good life. In the same way, those visions lay out what is frowned upon, immature, or even a sin. With that, it implies also that different cultures have differing views on what can and should be expected which can be a cause of conflict, if those views differ between the interacting parties. In that way, moral visions vary widely across cultural groups, and in conflict, it is often said visions that are clashing. (Christopher et al., 2014)

If one considers Geertz, then there are two overarching dimensions of culture namely worldview and ethos. The worldview essentially models how things ought to be, while ethos

refers to the moral, affective aspects of life. Ethos is the attitude toward oneself and the world. (Christopher et al., 2014)

The same paper brings forth a great example of how cultures can be very different from one person to another. The paper compares the upbringing of children from rural areas of the US and Taiwan. Noting that one's upbringing greatly influences behavior later on in life, it is also useful to understand why people perhaps react in the way they do. In the US, parents boost their children's self-esteem by providing love, affirmation, praise, and opportunities for success and by avoiding shame and harm. Taiwanese culture is different. In their society high self-esteem is undesirable as it leads to unwanted psychological vulnerabilities like stubbornness, weak frustration tolerance, and so forth. Children in Taiwan are educated on moral values and discipline. Parents never affirm a child's worth. The grave difference in child upbringing practices shapes the perception of oneself and others. Neither the American nor the Taiwanese way is right or wrong, it merely depicts how powerful and pervasive culture is. (Christopher et al., 2014)

Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness is the term used to loosely summarize all forms of cross-cultural education. CA was the first structured program of cultural education, originating in the US in 1960. Cultural awareness has a specific emphasis on belief systems with a focus on interaction approaches paired with knowledge of history. The training is often geared towards expanding the cross-cultural knowledge of a person. Cultural Intelligence is a multi-faced concept aimed at recognizing differences and similarities between cultures in any situation. It is the capacity to adjust and cope with unfamiliar cultural situations. It also aims at enhancing the interest in learning new cultures as well as employing these skills in cross-cultural interactions. The hoped outcome of both is the fostering of tolerance and empathy as well as the avoidance of cultural indiscretion and misunderstandings. (Shepherd, 2019)

Cultural awareness is the foundation of communication and includes the ability to stand back from oneself and become aware of cultural values, beliefs, and perceptions. CA becomes central when a person has to interact with people from other cultures. Being culturally aware

means understanding that not everyone is the same, that both similarities and differences matter, and that there are multiple ways of living life and reaching a goal. The following is a concrete example: It can be said that Italians perceive Americans as people who spend most of their day working. Americans talk business during lunch and are constantly traveling. They do not take breaks even when drinking coffee. Does this imply that Italian workers are less productive than American workers? Not at all. It just shows how certain activities, in this case having lunch or drinking coffee, has a different meaning depending on the culture. In Italy, where relationships with others are highly valued, eating lunch and drinking coffee together, have a social connotation. It is about getting to know each other and about spending time together. In the US, where time is money, lunch is used as part of working. Coffee is associated with being productive. Neither the Italian nor the American way is right or wrong. It is merely a cultural difference. Something one must be aware of, as not to offend the other party when interacting with them. (Quappe & Cantatore, 2005)

Organizational Culture

It is the opinion of (Vasconcelos & Dourado, 2017) that companies are oftentimes embodiments of the national culture. However, this does not mean that company cultures are exactly the same as the national ones (Vasconcelos & Dourado, 2017). An organizational culture can be defined as a cohesive set of common attitudes to all those involved in the working context (Vasconcelos & Dourado, 2017). It is a compound of values, beliefs, myths, symbols, and rituals that keep a team tied at the enterprise's core (Vasconcelos & Dourado, 2017). It is a way of thinking, acting habitually and traditionally (Vasconcelos & Dourado, 2017). It must be learned and accepted by new team members (Vasconcelos & Dourado, 2017).

In that sense, employees must identify themselves with the culture and values of the company. A feeling of belonging is of utmost importance (Vasconcelos & Dourado, 2017). Studies show that a feeling of strong inclusion reduces the risk of social exclusion at work and hence a diminishing of work efficiency (Arnab et al., 2021). For that to happen, a strong leadership capable of adapting to organizational changes is required (Arnab et al., 2021). Management must also collaborate and encourage their subordinates. All of these factors will constitute a strong, cohesive culture (Vasconcelos & Dourado, 2017). The same paper

recommends an organizational culture whose foundation is support (Vasconcelos & Dourado, 2017). To ensure that the organizational culture has said foundation, it can be assessed on three different levels: the artificial level, the beliefs and values level, and the basic assumptions level (Vasconcelos & Dourado, 2017). The culture's essence lies in the basic assumptions (Vasconcelos & Dourado, 2017). Hence, if there is a feeling of support, it will transfer to the more superficial levels, almost like a cause-and-effect relation (Vasconcelos & Dourado, 2017).

As previously stated, there are plenty of different terms and definitions of culture, cultural awareness, and organizational culture. In essence, it is all about understanding and showing tolerance towards other people as well as their cultures. The goal is to then use that wisdom to enhance communication, have more patience as well as reduce conflict.

2.2.3 Lacking Cultural Awareness

For a company to be successful, employees must understand cultural differences and what those imply. The intercultural effectiveness of individual members can affect the overall performance of multicultural teams (Chipulu et al., 2014). For that reason, both universities and workplaces alike see the development of cross-cultural competencies as highly important (Lokkesmoe et al., 2016).

To that end, for employees, different levels of cultural awareness can be achieved, which is what this paper tries to evaluate and improve. Becoming aware of one's cultural dynamics is a hard task as culture is oftentimes not consciously perceived (Christopher et al., 2014). It is helpful to gather feedback from foreign colleagues to evaluate one's own behavior and get more clarity on one's cultural traits (Quappe & Cantatore, 2005). Misinterpretations occur when people lack awareness of their own behavioral rules and instead simply project them onto others, assuming they are exactly the same as the people who are projecting (Quappe & Cantatore, 2005). For that reason, cultural awareness must be trained. According to (Quappe & Cantatore, 2005), the following four levels define how employees perceive themselves:

My way is the only way – On this level, people are only aware of their own ways of solving problems. The impact of cultural differences is completely ignored.

I know their way but my way is better – People are aware of other ways of solving problems, but still consider their way to be superior. Cultural differences are perceived as a source of troubles and people tend to ignore them to a point of insignificance.

My way and their way – At this stage, people are aware of the fact that there are multiple ways of solving problems, and they decide to pick whatever works best. On this level, people understand that cultural differences can lead to conflicts and benefits. They are willing to use diversity to create new solutions and alternatives.

Our way – The final stage brings people from all backgrounds together and creates a shared culture. People dialogue with others, create new meanings, and new rules to meet the needs of a particular situation.

Increased cultural awareness means seeing both the positive and negative aspects of cultural differences. Cultural diversity can lead to problems, especially when an organization forces its employees to think and act in similar ways. Diversity always increases complexity and confusion. A high level of diversity makes finding agreements complicated. However, it can also become an advantage when the organization expands its solutions and sense of identity, and accepts different approaches to problem-solving. (Quappe & Cantatore, 2005)

A person's inner self is deeply influenced by social practices, cultural meanings, and moral visions implicit in them, even before they develop cognitive capacities to partially define them. Gaining cultural awareness is far from easy. It needs discipline, time, and effort. However, said knowledge is fundamental to doing meaningful and effective work in cross-cultural settings. Being aware of one's self and how it differs from others, is perceived as exhausting. Essentially, being culturally aware is not being yourself. (Christopher et al., 2014)

Nowadays it is essential to know and speak at least two languages. It helps to better communicate, to better understand any business environment, and to have better hiring chances.

In Europe, cultural diversity is a typical characteristic. Becoming aware of one's cultural dynamics may be hard as it is unconscious to most. Nonetheless, it is of crucial importance to be aware of them, because it is essential to understanding how different cultures work and the meaning that people give certain things. After all, a certain activity can mean vastly different things to people from different cultures, even when speaking about table manners or dress codes. Individuals should be aware of the difficulty of thinking and acting not only in the context of their own culture, but also in a way that does not infringe on the culture of the person sitting across. Being aware of cultural differences reduces the risks of acting inappropriately. That is what must be achieved. Business people should understand the importance of cultural diversity as it is not a temporary phenomenon. There is not much room for misunderstandings in the business world, especially if they occur due to a lack of cultural awareness. People must accept things in others, even if their own culture might forbid them. This will lead to greater tolerance, less conflict, and more efficiency at work. An awareness of cultural differences must be formed. (Constantin et al., 2015)

Concerning the question of how culturally open people are, most overestimate their capabilities (Lokkesmoe et al., 2016). Oftentimes, this overconfidence in one's own openness and intercultural skills leads to blind spots in cross-cultural interactions which in turn causes misunderstandings and inappropriate behavior to occur (Lokkesmoe et al., 2016). These mistakes can have a serious impact on daily business outcomes and personal effectiveness (Lokkesmoe et al., 2016). This realization is quite fundamental. In an effort to see if this case of overestimation is also happening with the textile industry workers, one must assess this in the in-field research. As a department leader, understanding that one's employees overestimate their skills will aid in creating possible solutions to increase the overall CA level. Based on the literature, there is a clear need to teach employees about their level of openness as well as how to improve it. As the literature shows, mere exposure to culture alone does not suffice and additional training is needed. With that guidance and ongoing supportive development activities are meant.

Cultural differences can prevent effective communication and collaboration between co-workers which then impedes an essential skill of daily business. Oftentimes unconscious, these misunderstandings and aggravated prejudices, biases, and stereotypes lead to conflict. Being

able to anticipate different cultures in the business environment due to CA is essential for effective work. Not only can a lack in this area influence productivity but also the well-being of an employee. Oftentimes, communication styles vary extensively across cultures. Additionally, it further depends on the personality of an individual as well as their social origin, education, and so forth. Therefore, having appropriate information is critical for effective work and team performance. If a business is dealing with immigrants, then language as a means of communication becomes a hurdle too. Oftentimes, the spoken language at work is the second language. Thus, understanding how different cultures relate to content and the style of communication is imperative. Furthermore, culture influences the perception of time greatly. In the context of work, this means how an employee relates to a working schedule, being on time, or even understanding the importance of meeting a deadline. Hence, companies must educate their employees on the matter of CA, so that all cultures engaged in the working environment are more aware and can collaborate accordingly. (Arnab et al., 2021)

Lacking cultural awareness and having an organizational culture that does not put forth any effort to increase it, will risk having employees feel excluded. This threat can be based on underlying prejudices, discomfort, unfamiliarity with other cultures, and displeasure with the overarching organizational culture. Exclusion is closely linked to work efficiency because someone who feels excluded will have no desire or commitment to work. Next to low efficiency, this can also bear the danger of high employee turnover. (Arnab et al., 2021)

From what the literature understands, it is clear that heterogeneous, meaning multi-cultural, workspaces generally perform substantially better than homogenous teams. Homogenous as in hiring only people from a certain ethnicity or cultural background. The reason for heterogeneous teams to be more efficient is due to their innovativeness and flexibility in finding solutions to specific challenges. (Chipulu et al., 2014)

If a company understands that its employees are lacking an understanding of cultural awareness, then it should provide not only regular, ongoing training to enhance that, but it should also try creating a supportive, engaging organizational environment (Vasconcelos & Dourado, 2017). The ideal culture in that sense would be participative and engaging while staying committed to the enterprise's projects and employees (Vasconcelos & Dourado,

2017). As the literature shows, cultural awareness can greatly contribute to the overall goal of increasing efficiency in a working environment.

Though the literature on culture and cultural awareness is becoming a large body, there seems to be a lack of tools to actually increase cultural awareness (Lokkesmoe et al., 2016). Both the universities and the workforce are aware of the necessity of increasing cultural awareness but lack concrete methods to do so. In that regard, this thesis hopes to provide a couple of useful tools.

3 Elis Suisse

This paper made an effort to find appropriate studies and theories, and will now apply them to laundry facilities and dry cleaning companies. Both laundry facilities and dry cleaners belong to the textile industry. The reason for picking said specific field is because it is known to hire people from all over the world. Therefore, its workers are exposed to dealing with different cultures on the daily. Hitherto, this thesis will work out possible solutions that can aid in the improvement of cultural awareness. Naturally, the theories created by Hofstede and alike are broad and can be generally applied to all industries. Nonetheless, the tools of this thesis will be specific to the textile industry.

3.1 General Facts about Elis Suisse

Elis Suisse was founded in 1985. With over fifteen production and service centers it provides its service across Switzerland. Currently, eight hundred and fifty people are employed. Every week, Elis Suisse processes six hundred and forty tons of laundry. The company covers a wide range of different industries, namely: catering, accommodation, healthcare and social welfare, industry, trade and retail, services and public authorities, and administration. The company's business model puts a heavy focus on sustainability, in hopes of not only improving humanity's welfare but also the preservation of the environment. This becomes especially important when one understands that Elis Suisse is working internationally, from Finland all the way to Brazil. (Elis, 2023)

3.2 Current Situation at Branch in Endingen

Thanks to Ms. Saner, CEO of Depierraz-Saner, Elis Suisse was informed about this thesis and offered its assistance. During a first meeting, the topic and the general aim of this paper were discussed. Mr. Reisinger, CEO of Elis Suisse, was enthusiastic as he uses a communication based management style himself. Thus, Elis Suisse was determined to be used as a tool for this process. In a second meeting, details were deliberated on how cultural awareness should be measured. The approach of interviewing ten employees was accepted. From that, holding interviews was determined to be the second tool used in this process. Additionally, where the

interviews would take place and what the current possible ideas for the enhancement of cultural awareness are, were discussed. Concerning the conduction of the interviews, it was decided that the branch in Endingen would serve as an ideal site. The primary reason is the organizational change that is currently happening. Mr. Reisinger took over in January of 2023. With his values lying in cultural openness and transparent communication, the branch in Endingen presents itself as the ideal environment for the implementation of cultural awareness. With Mr. Reisinger in place, a shift is happening from a rather traditional management style toward establishing a heterogenous team working in an open-minded atmosphere. This can be an especially difficult time for business leaders, as employees must not only adjust to a new CEO, but also to a new way of approaching work (Vasconcelos & Dourado, 2017). Potential dangers are; a fear of change, a feeling of dissatisfaction with the new management style, and tension between employees who have conflicting views on the matter (Vasconcelos & Dourado, 2017).

According to conversations held with Mr. Reisinger, Elis Suisse was struggling with cases of discrimination in the past. However, he emphasizes clear communication and open-mindedness and wishes to foster these two values. Thus, he was more than excited to participate in this project. Employees in Endingen are hired from all over the world. According to Mr. Reisinger's statements prior to conducting the interviews, employees have misunderstandings between each other, sometimes even with people from the same ethnicity or cultural background. There are other, smaller conflicts happening frequently.

4 Process Description

Based on the literary sources a questionnaire has been written. Afterward, it was to be implemented with the company Elis Suisse in the form of semi-structured interviews. The aim is to see if the theory could be applied practically. The interviews should help estimate the overall level of cultural awareness among the employees of Elis Suisse. If it is found to be insufficient, solutions to improve will be suggested. If it is found, that cultural awareness is sufficient, then tools to maintain the level will be provided. If the interviews bring to light that cultural awareness is not necessary at all, then that is acceptable as well. The interviews will be conducted during the month of March and should not take up more than fifteen minutes per talk. For this thesis, interviews present the ideal tool as it allows to get a direct interaction with the persons affected. It also grants the opportunity to get in-depth answers which makes this tool reliable. The focus lies more on quality than quantity.

4.1 Explanation of the Questionnaire

Having an understanding of culture, and particularly cultural awareness, is crucial to the business world of the 21st century. Even though the foundation for this has been laid in the eighties with Geert Hofstede's *Cultural Dimensions*, the academic findings have oftentimes not been implemented in the working world (Hofstede, 2010). Plenty of studies have been conducted on the meaning of culture as well as CA and how important it is, but most of them fail to show how exactly they can be passed over from academic circles to the working world. Thus, the questionnaire worked out for this thesis tries to examine three different areas. Firstly, it tries to assess the current level of CA with Elis Suisse employees. Secondly, the questions aim at improving the CA level and consequently, how to train cultural awareness. The full questionnaire may be found in appendix one.

From the literature, it can be understood that cultural awareness is influenced by the individual, the organizational culture, and the possibilities provided for a person to train and maintain cross-cultural skills. An individual must have a certain level of cultural awareness, a working environment that enables and promotes cultural communication as well as interaction, and have possibilities to learn and deepen the knowledge of cultural awareness.

The questionnaire was determined to have no more than ten questions and ten interviewees. Considering, that the interviews must cover the three above-mentioned fields, in addition to gaining an understanding of the discriminatory issues mentioned under current situation at the branch in Endingen, it is clear that the questionnaire must cover a wide band. Similarly, to the different fields mentioned, the questions are split into three different sections in hopes of touching upon all the required areas. The first couple of questions are aimed at getting an understanding of how much knowledge regarding cultural awareness is currently present among the employees. As most overestimate their cultural openness, a question in that regard is posed as well. The questionnaire then aims at seeing how misunderstandings and conflict come about and what the possible root of it may be. The questions then transition over to assessing the prevailing working culture, and how much the organization puts forth efforts in enhancing and teaching cultural awareness. Lastly, the questions aim at finding out whether or not a cultural awareness workshop would be of interest. In that regard, CA workshops have been identified by literature as a useful tool, but oftentimes fail due to their shallow performance (Shepherd, 2019). Instead of bringing cultures closer together, workshops underline already existing stereotypes and thus widen the culture cliff (Shepherd, 2019). However, one should not deem workshops as completely useless. In fact, it might be argued that workshops are an ideal tool for enhancing cultural awareness, but simply lack persons who are genuine in making it a fruitful experience. With that, perhaps the failure of workshops lies with their execution and not the concept as a whole. Having said so, workshops are considered to be a possible solution for this thesis and thus must be inquired about in the questionnaire. By implementing it there, this paper hopes to get an understanding of how interested Elis Suisse employees would be regarding such a method of increasing cultural awareness. This does not mean, the thesis is fixated on holding workshops. Perhaps, the interviewees will come forward with other, better ideas while also stating their desired topics, of which they would like to learn more.

The interviews will be conducted in the following manner: Firstly, the consent of all participants will be acquired regarding recording, processing, and using the answers provided by interviewees. The confidentiality of the persons is guaranteed. Secondly, the interviews will be held and all answers shall be voice recorded in an effort to keep the interviews as short as possible and to not keep the workers too long from their daily

business. The material will then be assessed and worked through in the findings part of this thesis. The answers will not be directly transcribed, but instead, the general response and its meaning will be summarized and explained.

4.2 Hypotheses

Based on the literature, the realized questionnaire, and the conversations held with Mr. Reisinger, the following hypotheses shall be established:

H1: Employees are culturally unaware and lack the means to work efficiently with parties from differing cultures.

H2: The company does not provide any support for employees to learn and live cultural awareness.

H3: Employees are interested and willing to learn more about cultural awareness and wish to do so by attending workshops or other events to increase their knowledge.

5 Planning Process

Writing a bachelor's thesis is quite a large project that requires time and planning. The thesis was to be written in the spring semester of 2023.

5.1 Planning Phase

To be ahead of time, figuring out the topic and its related question had been done during the fall semester of 2022. It was also during that time, that efforts were made to properly understand how a thesis was to be conducted and what norms and rules must be respected. During that time, the bachelor thesis badge was completed. Additionally, the support of thesis advisor Eerika Kiuru was ensured. By the end of the year, all was in place for the thesis to be commenced. The official start would be in January, the interviews were set to be conducted in March, and the handing-in date was set to be at end of April.

5.2 Preparation for the Interviews

In order to stay ahead of time, the month of January was spent on finding good-quality literature. For that, HAMK and BFH library were used as primary sources of information. The month of February was then devoted to properly reading and working through the found literature. Simultaneously, efforts were made to find a company suitable for the in-field research. It was crucial to find a business not only willing to have interviews conducted but that had the ideal working environment as well. Fortunately, Elis Suisse came forward in that regard. It was then decided that the interviews were to be conducted in March. Until then, time would be used to write all the different parts leading up to the interviews.

5.3 Evaluating the Interviews

After conducting the interviews, the remaining time of March was devoted to evaluating, comparing, and writing out the findings of said interviews. It was also during that time, the discussion, the conclusion, the abstract, and the acknowledgments were written. The first half

of April was then devoted to re-working and improving the thesis before it would be handed in by the end of the month.

6 Conclusion

The interviews were conducted on March 6, 2023. In total, ten employees of Elis Suisse were questioned. Out of those, nine were female and one was male. The female employees predominantly worked the production or the secretary's office. The male interviewee functioned as the department manager.

6.1 Findings

Prior to discussing the findings, it must be acknowledged that two of the recordings had to be neglected due to their unsatisfactory quality with regard to the depths of the answers provided. The remaining eight were sufficient. In total, seventeen different nationalities work at the branch in Endingen. Therefore, most interviewees differed in their cultural and national backgrounds. The female portion of the interviewees were between the ages of twenty-five and fifty. Most employees have been working in Endingen for a long time.

6.1.1 On the Interviews in General

Before conducting the interviews, a brief conversation was held with the head of the department. He provided helpful insights into daily business and the working dynamics currently in place. He emphasized an interesting relationship between employer and employee. Most of the workforce speaks little German, and most cannot properly write or read in that language. Thus, whenever employees have to deal with municipality issues they reach out to their employer for assistance. In return, Elis Suisse has a very loyal workforce. Some of the workers have been around for more than two decades. The head of department also mentioned that tension between employees does come up, not daily or weekly, but occasionally. He also mentioned that a lot of employees come to him with their personal issues, one of which can be domestic abuse. Further, it was mentioned that certain groups at work with similar languages tend to speak in their native language, which may be understandable, but simultaneously creates a feeling of exclusion for all those who do not speak the respective language.

6.1.2 On the Personal Opinions of Interviewees Regarding Cultural Awareness and the Ease of Interacting with Different Cultures

Most participants have never heard of a concept called cultural awareness. Nearly all were familiar with culture but did not have an understanding of its concepts and theories. All of the interviewees indicated that it is easy for them to interact with different cultures. Some based it off their working background coming from different sectors, while others said that a good amount of tolerance and respect for the other person is enough to collaborate efficiently. Some indicated that there is no attention paid towards skin color or cultural background, but rather on whether they are a good or bad person. All interviewees were adamant that working together does not pose any major hardships even if it is sometimes difficult.

The lower-level employees all emphasized that there are no situations that cause misunderstandings in their daily business due to cultural differences. Some argued that fatigue and stress can create tension in certain situations. Upper-level employees said that misunderstandings happen all the time. It was argued that those misunderstandings have their root in the pride of people. Predominantly noticeable in men. Oftentimes, the temperament of employees prevents them from seeing their faults. However, all around, the workforce agreed that most misunderstandings are not due to cultural differences but rather because of a language barrier. As most are non-native German speakers, they cannot express their exact feelings and needs. Communication styles vary widely across different cultures which only adds to the language barrier and thus the misunderstandings. Some employees stated that due to the language issue, they feel trapped in a bubble of incapability to express themselves properly. Similarly, on the question of when exactly interviewees feel frustrated while working with culturally different people, most said that they never experienced such a feeling. Again, most argued that annoyance can come up due to the language barrier.

According to the interviewees it has happened before that some workers understood certain statements in a racist manner. One instant was mentioned where a worker understood a sarcastic, dark-humor joke as an attack on their skin color. Talks were then had to clarify the situation and enforce more mindfulness when making jokes. Consequently, declaring German as the primarily spoken language at work was put forth as well. The interviewees said that

conflict does occur mainly because of the language barrier or stress. All employees were adamant that solutions have always been found so far whenever conflict occurred.

Secondarily, the interviews should help shed some light on the prevailing organizational culture. From the answers given, it can be concluded that everyone enjoys coming to work and that they feel valued. According to the interviewees, Elis Suisse provides a safe and supportive environment. Teamwork has great importance. The employees also stated that it is no issue for them coming to work with their private matters. They all feel like they are being heard.

6.1.3 On the Interest of Workshops and Raising Cultural Awareness

Varying answers were provided on whether or not the head of department ever did anything to raise the awareness of cultural differences. Some stated that he did occasionally mention the importance of tolerating each other, but it was more on a situation-based frequency. Others exclaimed he had never done anything in that regard. Some even argued that there was no need at all for their supervisor to talk about cultural awareness, as they all work in harmony and with tolerance. All in all, it was clear that no workshops, meetings, or courses were ever held on the importance of raising cultural awareness. The question was posed as to whether or not employees would like to attend a workshop to enhance their intercultural skills. The answers were mixed. All of the participants agreed that they had never attended anything of the sort before. Older employees clearly stated that they would not attend a workshop if it were provided by Elis Suisse, saying that they did not see a need for it. Their perceived level of tolerance would be enough to handle intercultural settings. These employees were clearly confident in their intercultural skills. Younger employees stated they would not mind attending a course of that sort. Therefore, whether or not an interviewee deemed a cultural-awareness-workshop useful, depended on their initial attitude toward its necessity. Most said that they learn about each other's culture during work breaks. They are naturally interested in each other and with a better understanding, they automatically become more tolerant towards each other. One employee stated that the necessity of a CA workshop is low, primarily because everyone is from a different culture. There is no dominant culture present. The person argued that perhaps in a company with both

Swiss and foreign cultures, the situation could be different. To summarize this part, the majority of the interviewees leaned towards there being no need for a cultural-awareness-workshop.

Upon asking whether or not a social gathering such as a grill party would be of more interest, where everyone brings a dish from their home country, was well received. During the BBQ, participants learn about different cultures by sharing food. Even interviewees stating previously that they would not attend a CA workshop, showed great willingness to attend a casual get-together to learn more about each other's cultures.

6.2 Discussion

To briefly summarize the main findings: The employees of Elis Suisse have not heard of a concept called cultural awareness and have not been taught any other theories within the field of culture. Most of them believe tolerance and patience to be key in dealing with intercultural situations. The prevailing organizational culture creates a feeling of belonging and support. Older employees do not see the necessity of attending a cultural awareness workshop, younger workers do. In general, most believe there to be no need to learn about cultural awareness. If it must be done, then the participants prefer having a social gathering over a course that feels like school.

6.2.1 Primary Issues and Discrepancies

Research indicates that most employees, hired from another country, receive barely anything more than a short introduction to the host nation's culture (Lokkesmoe et al., 2016). Consequently, most immigrants struggle to fully adjust (Lokkesmoe et al., 2016). This can be seen in the way that Elis Suisse employees come to their employer for help with private matters, such as filling out forms for the municipality. Inadvertently, the same behavior also creates a strong bond of loyalty between the two parties.

The primary cause of misunderstandings and conflict is the language barrier. The literature provided in this paper predicted this to be one of the main causes of problems. The in-field research confirms this statement. More precisely, the language barrier is the reality that none

of the employees, apart from management, are native German speakers. This finding suggests the language barrier to be an industry-wide issue, considering that most laundry facilities and dry cleaners hire people from all over the world. Whether or not this is completely true must be analyzed in a separate research paper. Further, it was fascinating to examine how higher and lower-level employees' opinions differed on whether there are any misunderstandings or none at all. Management was clearly indicating that its workforce was struggling with cultural differences while the employees themselves said there were no issues at all. From the interviews, it could not be concluded what causes this discrepancy. A possible reason is that lower-level employees fear to speak their minds as they do not want any repercussions. On the other hand, all employees stated that they are having an organizational culture that is open-minded and supportive. Thus, there should not be a fear of raising concerns. Perhaps what management perceives as a problem might not be one on employee level. From that, a conflict of statement becomes visible. An example to showcase this argument: When interviewees are asked if there are misunderstandings, the answer is no. But, when asked if there are conflicts, the answer is yes. This inconsistency might be because some issues are not worth mentioning. In that regard, the answers to the questionnaire must be doubted. Similarly, no translator was used and thus a risk of loss in translation is at hand. Perhaps, employees were not able to fully express themselves and what they meant. They might also have understood the questions differently than initially intended.

Employees do not believe in the necessity of cultural awareness but are interested in learning more about it during a casual social gathering. All participants agree that tolerance and respect paired with open-mindedness are enough to make intercultural settings work. The interviewees do not realize that those three keywords make up cultural awareness. This suggests that most workers naturally use cultural awareness already. It also indicates that there is a certain level of CA present, but that there is also an actual need to train the employees in that regard. This can be brought forward with confidence as one can see how employees are somewhat culturally aware but concurrently still have conflicts. The current CA level of Elis Suisse can be placed at my way and their way (Quappe & Cantatore, 2005). This should not be negatively evaluated. Most of the workforce is aware that there are multiple ways of doing things and they are open-minded when it comes to problem-solving. Still, there

is room for improvement.

Workshops found little interest with older employees. Young employees are willing to attend them. Whether or not a workshop is therefore an effective tool, depends on how Elis Suisse would implement it. The fact that a social gathering, such as a BBQ, is popular but a workshop is not, shows that CA must be taught playfully. In a manner that is fun and engaging, like eating and trying each other's traditional dishes. Or by playing mini-games. This topic will be discussed later on.

The reality of most interviewees being female distorts the findings. Especially since the head of department mentioned men to be problem causers, but then also has barely any male employees. A more mixed group of participants would have probably changed the results. Additionally, age is clearly a factor that affects the results. As the workforce was predominantly middle-aged women, fewer of them saw the need to learn about CA. If the workforce was younger, this might look different too. In conclusion, the findings of this paper cannot be projected onto the whole textile industry. Other companies with more gender-diverse workforces might see things differently. Nevertheless, the general perception that cultural awareness is best risen by making it a playful experience is certainly of value. Having these culture-learning-social gatherings might be the best tool for industry-wide use. This does not discredit workshops by any means. It simply indicates that courses and workshops must be specifically tailored to the respective company and its needs. One of the primary things a workshop will have to address, is for employees to understand the behavioral patterns that make up culture, which is: values and beliefs (De & Rotterdam, 2021). This can also go into the grill party or any other form with which Elis Suisse chooses to teach its employees about CA. One way of developing or improving cultural awareness is by having employees talk about places they have visited and their experiences there. This improves team building and communication skills (Constantin et al., 2015). As the interviews discovered, the participants already do so during work breaks. Nonetheless, it must be thematized during the social gathering.

Cultural awareness demands that humans encounter each other as if their lives, beliefs, and values are essentially equal to their own (Christopher et al., 2014). It needs a learning attitude, including reflection, humility, and appreciation of privilege and cultural contexts (Christopher

et al., 2014). Whether or not employees go in depth on this insight is questionable. However, it seems as if most go by with showing tolerance and open-mindedness. Cultivating cultural awareness can help create appropriate and acceptable psychological interventions that can be applied in cross-cultural settings (Christopher et al., 2014). Cultural awareness can lead to the realization of how alienist some behavior may appear to others (Christopher et al., 2014). With that understanding, the appropriateness of behavior can be estimated (Christopher et al., 2014). Therefore, having interdisciplinary training is an important and useful tool to provide employees with the necessary concepts to think about alternative systems of meaning (Christopher et al., 2014). This might be the missing link to elevate the participants of the in-field research to the final level our way. In that stage, it brings people from all backgrounds together and creates a shared culture. People dialogue with others, create new meanings, and new rules to meet the needs of a particular situation.

6.3 Recommendations

For this practice-based thesis, the following paragraph can be viewed as the end product of this process. Based upon the discussion, the following recommendation shall be made to increase cultural awareness and hence the efficiency of working environments: Elis Suisse is best served by hosting a grill party that invites employees to bring food from their own countries. This will provide an opportunity to learn about each other's cultural backgrounds. Further, Elis Suisse should consider hosting a workshop in the fashion of a team-building-exercise, as described over the next few pages. However, it has to be acknowledged that there is no right tool that works for every company. There are plenty of tools a company can apply to teach its employees about cultural differences. May that be a social gathering, a workshop, or a field trip. It is essential that whatever tool is chosen is appropriate and fitting. What this thesis found, is that cultural awareness is best taught playfully. Bearing that in mind, when offering a team-building activity it is important to lace it with mini-games as they prove to be an ideal way of enhancing harmony at work (Arnab et al., 2021). Workshops can come off as shallow and insincere if they feel forced (Shepherd, 2019). A possible way of getting around this is by having employees present their home country. Having them talk about where they are from, what it is like back home, what they eat, and what traditions are prevalent. It does not deepen stereotypes while simultaneously giving people

insights into each other's backgrounds. It is worth mentioning here, that additional research must be made after the first implementation of a grill party or team-building workshop, to see how the CA level of employees has changed. Whether that might be positive or negative. Additional research should also be made on how appealing and effective mini-games were in this context.

6.3.1 Workshops, Mini-Games, the Importance of Communication and Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

According to (Arnab et al., 2021), another tool could be the implementation of mini-games as mentioned previously. Mini-games are a fun way of learning about cultural awareness and have been proven to increase learners' self-efficacy. Mini-games must be chosen carefully and deliberately, in accordance with what the company needs. They should include an introduction to cross-cultural awareness, understanding different cultures, working with stereotypes, and communication skills. There must be a balance between learning and gameplay. It is a rather new approach but with a concept that has been around for a long time. It has been proven that people learn more and better when engaging with content at their own pace. Learners should study when they feel in the best condition to do so. The same paper also provides evidence that mini-games positively impact study outcomes. One of the big benefits is that employees actively engage with CA material instead of just passively listening. A good online platform for this is; culturalrisk-course.com, which includes fun and useful games. It also argues that the comic and drag-and-drop-games carry the highest results. One of the most important topics in those mini-games has to be communication. How to properly communicate must be taught. As proven by the conducted in-field research of this thesis, the language barrier is the primary cause of problems. People communicate with each other all the time, and they also inadvertently communicate the way they relate to culture-based working styles, such as individualism vs collectivism or low vs high-power distance. (Arnab et al., 2021)

Hence, this leads back to Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions. Having understood how important both Hofstede's concept and communication are, it is imperative to include them in the mini-games or other forms of workshops. Employees, even at the lowest level, must have an

understanding of Hofstede's Dimensions to appropriately and consistently work with other cultures. This underlines why understanding Hofstede's concept is essential, and why it was mentioned in the beginning of this paper.

6.3.2 Answering the Hypotheses

Regarding the first hypothesis, it can be said that according to literature, the employees are culturally unaware as they do not know about cultural studies. However, they do not lack the means of working together. With tolerance and patience, the participants work around the fact that they are all from different cultures. This does not mean that nothing must be done. As multiple interviewees indicated, misunderstandings and conflicts do occur. Thus, employees must be trained in being culturally aware.

The second hypothesis has been proven. Elis Suisse does not provide any concrete support when it comes to enhancing cultural awareness. That does not mean that they are not doing anything. After all, the company is providing a healthy and supportive organizational environment. In that regard, Elis Suisse should consider specific measures to enhance cultural awareness in its workforce. In doing so, the full potential of its efficiency can be harnessed.

Lastly, hypothesis three argued that employees are interested and willing to learn more about cultural awareness, which is true. The workforce does not particularly care much about attending workshops, but is still keen to deepen its knowledge in the field of cultural awareness. Negative feelings are likely associated with workshops. If done correctly, it could be a successful and engaging experience. With that, other forms and means of teaching CA must be found. When doing so, Elis Suisse needs to put focus on Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions and the increase of communication skills. Further actions must be taken towards decreasing the prevalent language barrier. This could be done by financing or providing a German language course.

6.3.3 Final Words

Collectively, it can be said that tolerance and acceptance of others are oftentimes enough to make any intercultural situation work. To further enhance the understanding of each other's cultural differences at work, employees must be educated on cultural awareness. After all, there are still conflicts and misunderstandings happening. Elis Suisse must tailor their solutions to what they perceive as the most important factors contributing to enhanced cultural awareness and the causes of most conflicts. This requires reflection on their part. Employees must understand that learning about CA is essential to having a good working environment no matter the experience or level.

7 Summary

The overall goal of this thesis was to apply the concept of cultural awareness to a working environment to decrease the frequency of misunderstandings and conflict, while simultaneously increasing output and revenue. The frame for this paper was the textile industry and Elis Suisse in particular. The terms Cultural Awareness, Working Environment, Efficiency, and Textile Industry were clearly defined.

The paper worked over the most basic theories within cultural studies, namely Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions. The literature made a point to clearly underline the importance and relevance of having good intercultural skills, and how it can be achieved by exercising cultural awareness. The literature also examined the risks of not being culturally aware. Those are primarily misunderstandings, conflicts as well as stereotypes, and prejudices, next to being unable to find solutions to problems. Using the literary resources as a basis, a questionnaire and three hypotheses were formulated. Both the interview questions as well as the hypotheses aimed at assessing three aspects deemed important to evaluating cultural awareness with Elis Suisse. These were; the level of CA with employees, the organizational culture and its influence, as well as the appeal of tools deemed appropriate to help increase CA.

The in-field research found that the workers have never heard of a concept called cultural awareness or any other theory within the field of culture. Most get along with patience, open-mindedness, and acceptance. It was clearly shown that cultural awareness must still be taught as it helps fine-tune those above-mentioned character traits. For the whole textile industry, the social gathering was deemed to be the most useful tool. For Elis Suisse specifically, a tailored workshop including mini-games could also be an excellent instrument. One of the main findings of the in-field research is that cultural awareness must be taught playfully. Additionally, providing solutions to decrease the language barrier is of need.

The thesis concludes that cultural awareness as a concept is still unknown in the business world, but demonstrates a clear need for its implementation sooner rather than later.

8 Acknowledgments

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Lastly, I would like to thank Ms. Melanie Saner, who connected me to Elis Suisse in the first place. Her input during the planning phase is greatly appreciated.

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Appendix 1. Paper of Consent and Questionnaire

Consent

(respondent's name) hereby give my permission to **Timur Ensar Simsek** (researcher) to write down my replies to a questionnaire and quote my responses in a scholarly research paper. I understand that his work is for academic purposes.

I also understand that I waive any claim for copyright to this material should the researcher ever publish it in a scholarly journal or in electronic format online.

I understand that the Research Title is **Using Cultural Awareness To Create An Efficient Working Environment**.

I also understand that the researcher, hereby named **Timur Ensar Simsek**, will maintain my **anonymity** with regard to my responses to questionnaire items.

I hereby give permission in the form of my signature below:

Signature

Date

Einverständnis

(Name des Befragten) erteile hiermit **Timur Ensar Simsek** (Forscher) die Erlaubnis, meine Antworten bezüglich dieses Fragebogens aufzuschreiben und in einer wissenschaftlichen Forschungsarbeit zu zitieren. Mir ist bekannt, dass diese Arbeit für akademische Zwecke bestimmt ist.

Ich bin mir darüber im Klaren, dass ich auf jegliche Urheberrechte an diesem Material verzichte, sollte der Forscher es jemals in einer wissenschaftlichen Zeitschrift oder in elektronischem Format online veröffentlichen.

Mir ist bekannt, dass der Forschungstitel **Using Cultural Awareness To Create An Efficient Work Environment** lautet.

Mir ist auch bekannt, dass der Forscher, der hiermit **Timur Ensar Simsek** genannt wird, meine **Anonymität** in Bezug auf meine Antworten wahren wird.

Ich erteile hiermit meine Zustimmung in Form meiner nachstehenden Unterschrift.

Questionnaire

Have you ever heard of a concept called *cultural awareness*?

Is working with different cultures easy for you?

Are there situations that cause misunderstandings in your daily business because of cultural differences?

If yes, which situations?

When do you get frustrated while working with co-workers who are culturally different than you?

In what situations does conflict come up between you and others? Please provide examples

Does the prevailing work culture generate a feeling of belonging?

In your opinion, has your supervisor ever done anything to raise your understanding of your co-workers' culture?

Do you feel like arguments with your boss are because he is from a different culture than you?
If yes, can you please provide examples

Have you ever participated in a *cultural awareness* workshop before?

If yes, what were your impressions on it?

If no, would you like to attend one? How useful would you think the course to be?

Have you ever had an opportunity to learn about your co-workers culture and beliefs in an effort to increase each other's understanding?

Appendix 2. Data Management Plan

Storage of the research data

For the in-field research part of this thesis, ten interviews with ten culturally different employees of Elis Suisse were conducted. The basis was a questionnaire consisting of ten questions. Said questionnaire has been based on literary resources.

To not occupy the employees too long, the interviews were voice recorded. The recordings are stored on the Google drive of the author. The audio files will remain there during both the writing of this thesis, as well as the required storing of up to one year after the publication of the paper. Additionally, the audio files were placed on a separate USB-Stick and safely stored at home. Access to the files is reserved to the author.

The processing of the material has been formulated in the paper of consent. There, one can see that complete confidentiality is guaranteed and that all interviewees agreed upon being voice recorded. It is also stated there that the thesis will not make a word-by-word transcript of what has been said, but rather the overall meaning of a statement. The material was primarily processed for the results section of this paper. During that part, literature was compared to the reality of employees.

Processing of personal and sensitive data

The interviews do not touch upon sensitive or personal material such as age, gender, or origin. Of course, the statements made on cultural awareness and their beliefs on whether or not the company is suffering from intercultural differences are personal opinions. Additionally, factors such as gender and age were considered when evaluating the usefulness of the in-field research. However, the way this thesis is written, it cannot be told who said what. As mentioned before, the thesis just summarizes the general opinions of the interview base, not the individual opinions. The author of this thesis wanted to provide the interviewees with a feeling of safety and a guarantee of discretion. This was of utmost importance. No interviewee was forced to answer in a specific way. A lot of care was put into keeping the conversations professional.

Ownership of research material

The author of this thesis, Timur E. Simsek, owns the material as well as the results of this thesis. In the paper of consent, interviewees agreed upon the refusal of copyright claims. The thesis, as a paper is readily available for anyone to read once published on Theseus. Further, it has been sent to Elis Suisse as they requested to see the findings.

Further use of research material after completion of the work

As legally required, the voice recordings will be stored on a USB-Stick as well as on Google Drive. This way, the safety of the data is guaranteed. In that regard, the material for this paper will not be used any further. Once this thesis has been completed, the material will be safely secured from the date of approval. This way, the results can be verified and disposed of safely and securely.