

Instruction: Read each story carefully and determine which of the four interpretations is the most adequate. There may be some truth in each of them, but one is the best.

1. THE DOCTOR

Situation

Devrim is a student from Turkey and severely hurts his knee during a football match. He goes to his general practitioner who refers him to a specialist in the hospital. After an x-ray is made, a young doctor tells him that inside the knee a small part is broken. This could possibly heal of itself when the knee will not be strained too much. He continues: I can give you an injection that will diminish the pain and the strain on the knee. Or I can do a keyhole operation to exactly see how serious it is. Or I can operate on your complete knee and remove the broken part. What do you think of it? Devrim is shocked by this question. He expects a specialist physician as a skilled professional to know exactly what needs to be done and not that he has to tell the doctor what to do. Apparently this doctor is not very experienced or simply incompetent. So Devrim does not think twice, he flies to Istanbul and has his knee treated by a Turkish doctor.

Why did the doctor put forward these options instead of telling Devrim how he would solve the knee problem?

Explanations:

- A. Dutch patients want to know what the medical options are and to decide for themselves what option they want the doctor to carry out.
- B. Liability of doctors and hospitals is a big issue nowadays in the Netherlands. Doctors do not want to be held responsible if the treatment does not work.
- C. Medical care in the Netherlands is strongly market-driven. Patients can choose from a menu with various treatments with different prices.
- D. Since Devrim was of the same age and also highly educated, the doctor treated him as a friend and told him all his options. But he knew what to do.

2. JUST CALL ME PETRA

Situation

The Frenchman Laurent is working since two years at a big Dutch municipality and tells: 'I really have difficulties in dealing with Dutch managers. For example, recently we had a meeting with all project partners and I presented my boss saying: This is our director, she is responsible for the Traffic department and member of the top management team. Later she took me apart and told me that I need not have introduced her so extensively. "I am Petra and nothing more. Just call me Petra". But I cannot even get that out of my mouth, because it's way too deep inside me. In France I would not dare to call the boss of my boss with his or her first name. In Holland, managers don't want to stand on a pedestal. In the beginning, I always said 'Sir' and 'Madam' to my superiors. People always looked at me strangely for that. But I don't think you can get that out of me, that's the way I was brought up."

Why do many Dutch managers insist that their subordinates address them with 'jij' (informal) and their first name, instead of with 'U' (formal) and 'Sir/Madam'?

Explanations:

- a) By law Dutch managers do not have a very strong position and are afraid to be fired when there are too many complaints from their subordinates. So they tend to behave in a jovial way in order to remain good friends with their subordinates.
- b) In a Dutch organisation the skilled operational professionals are considered to be the most important staff, and managers are just seen as facilitators for the professionals, so it's natural that they do not deserve any extra respect.
- c) Dutch employees are very proud of their professional competences and do not tolerate interventions of their bosses that hurt their professional pride. This makes them difficult to manage, so bosses are eager to keep an amiable relationship with them.
- d) For the Dutch it is very important that everyone in the organisation is treated as an equal and those in higher position should not think they are more important than others. So Dutch managers tend to behave in a modest and jovial way in order not to be seen as arrogant and lose the sympathy of their subordinates.

3. DISCUSSIONS

Situation

Hannelore from Germany states: "I am still irritated by this anti-authoritarian behaviour of the Dutch and every time I am wondering why so many issues have to be discussed. In one meeting it was about the fact that we should work in a different way or use other formats, so we were told by the management. And everyone was upset about it, it was hotly debated why you have to do everything differently now, because in the past everything had worked wonderfully. And that there were no good reasons why everything should be changed. I was sitting in that meeting and asked myself if this was really happening or that I was dreaming. Because I really thought, ok the manager said we should do it like this. And then we do it like this and not in another way. It's just incredibly difficult sometimes to understand why in the Netherlands it is not just carried out that way. The issue had to be discussed for ages, all aspects had to be weighed carefully and they demanded to be explained exactly why it should now be done differently. In this situation I had the feeling that the Dutch colleagues felt somehow attacked, as if they had not done well in their job before or something like that. I don't know, but this kind of situation frequently comes back, this anti-authoritarian behaviour: The first thing first they do is to tackle what the boss says."

Why are the Dutch often questioning the decisions of the manager?

Explanations:

- A. The Dutch feel personally responsible for their work and want to do it well. They are often uncertain whether the management values their work enough. That's why they feel easily attacked by feedback or when manager tells them to change their work routines.
- B. The Dutch feel personally responsible for their work, so if changes are announced and they think this lead to unnecessary more work or worse results, they will openly discuss this with their manager. The Dutch want to know why changes are needed, because they are always keen on the most efficient way to do their work.
- C. The Dutch have a strong anti-authoritarian and rebellious mentality. They prefer to do their work completely on their own and to have no boss or manager at all. But unfortunately for them organisations need management. So they are highly suspicious of anything that is proposed or imposed by their managers, directly protesting and questioning their authority.
- D. The Dutch are not at all anti-authoritarian, but simply fond of group discussions and use any opportunity to start one. They see it as a nice pastime which strengthens group cohesion, hearing each other's views and chatting about all different perspectives of an issue.

4. PRIVATE AFFAIRS

Situation

Carlos, a Spanish manager, tells about his experiences working in a company in the Netherlands: “As a manager, I was surprised that the Dutch are so terribly open-hearted and fully explain what they did all weekend, including: ‘I smoked a joint’. And then I really thought: ‘Do I have to know all of this? Do I even want to know?’ I found that rather strange. In principle, I want to know my employees, how they behave at work and how they assess it and not how they are privately. That would have to be my decision, whether I want to know or not. But there are so many moments when the Dutch told so openly about private affairs that I was sometimes shocked and thought: ‘Now I really know everything that the person has done’. I did never get used to this and refuse to tell them about my private life. That may be the reason why they consider me an outsider and some find me arrogant.”

Why do the Dutch like to share private affairs with colleagues at work?
Interpretations:

- A. The Dutch simply have ‘het hart op de tong’ (their heart on their sleeve), they are in alle respects very open and direct, having no inhibitions to share their feelings and private affairs with all their colleagues at work. It is important to always tell the straight truth. They expect everybody to do the same. If you don’t, they may consider you sneaky or hypocrite: you are hiding something or you are being arrogant. So they won’t trust you and might even get a grudge against you.
- B. The Dutch are very keen on preserving equality in relations on the work floor, even in the contacts with their superiors. It is important that all show that they are ‘gewoon’ (common), and not complacent or arrogant. One of the ways to do that is to tell your feelings and about private affairs, demonstrating that you live just the same pleasures and problems as other human beings and downplaying your status in the organisation.
- C. Dutch society is a high trust society. People feel very safe because of the welfare state and low crime rates. So they trust everybody around them, even strangers on the street, and love to share private stories with them, since they see no harm or risk to it.
- D. Sharing intimate feelings and private affairs at work is for the Dutch a way to create a conflict-free friendly atmosphere which they call ‘gezelligheid’ and highly appreciate. By sharing private things you come closer to each other and get more mutual understanding, and in this conflict-free atmosphere they can collaborate more smoothly.