

Appendix 3: Verbatim quotes

Cultural Aspect	Sub-aspect	Verbatim quotes
Preference and respect for hierarchy	Top-down vs bottom-up	<p><i>In Uganda it's just the boss deciding and the others have no word to say. (P1)</i></p> <p><i>I mean, the respect for hierarchy is also quite high in Uganda, especially compared to the Netherlands. Because in the Netherlands, people see each other more as peers. Even if you're a manager or the CEO, I mean, people are open and approachable. Here in Uganda, there is much more respect and also distance, I think, between the top management and the people lower in the hierarchy, in the org chart, let's say. (P2)</i></p> <p><i>If I draw the line between Western leadership and African leadership, here (Uganda) is more formal. And here still the boss is a boss. And here it's all about power. They love it. If you look at the parliament of African countries, you get a little bit the mirror about the social. (P7)</i></p> <p><i>So this top-down thing, this, in my view, maybe too much respect for the hierarchy, too much respect for the elderly, how nice it is, but in a work environment, it's not always easy. (P5)</i></p>
	Expectations for vertical decision-making	<p><i>There is a difference in the kind of role of a manager as a decision-maker versus a manager more as someone that has to, you know, guide a group into a certain direction or facilitate decision-making. And I think, well, where I come from, Belgium, there is more and more that kind of focus on more, you know, a less vertical way of managing teams, more like collaborative style. (...). That is the idea of the organization as a whole that we try to implement. I have to say that in practice, it's often quite a challenge here. (P4)</i></p> <p><i>In Uganda it's just the boss deciding and the others have a word to say. But again, there's so many different businesses, so many different levels. And it's very hard to talk about every business. But I think it would be in that way a bit different than in Europe, that it would be more hierarchical, the higher up the board. If it's the lower, the less you have to say. I guess that would be the general way of working in Uganda. (P7)</i></p>
	Importance of titles	<p><i>It's very much a vertical, a vertical way of working here. You can also see that. I mean, the importance of titles, for example. You know, some people talk to me as Mr. Regional Director. And that's something that you wouldn't see in for example, Belgium. (P4)</i></p> <p><i>It's embedded in the society: It's not bottom-up, it's really top-down, and even if we might not like it, it's the whole society, in the countryside, they call me "Mzee", and that's like a nice title for an elderly person.(P5)</i></p>
	Importance of age	<p><i>If you're an elderly, respect is given by definition, whether you're smart or not, it's your position, as an older person, to be respected. (P5)</i></p> <p><i>I knew there was sometimes some whispering about why would you send such a young guy, a foreigner, to manage us nationals, who have much more experience. And that's especially in the beginning. But then as soon as you get to know people, and as you create some kind of credibility and trust, for example, I think that's something they appreciate. (P4)</i></p> <p><i>For young people coming into the company when they know that they'll have to work with an older person, or especially if they end up being in a higher position than the older person, then there's going to be a clash, with the older person. " You can't be my boss, you're younger than me, there's no way," so it creates issues over there. So, yes, it can be tricky when you have that hierarchy, respect between ages. (P3)</i></p> <p><i>It's just the older generation gets stuck in certain habits and it's very difficult to change them. (P1)</i></p> <p><i>When I started here, I was working with a person of 50 years. It is much harder. That was a really traditional Ugandan, someone who really values the hierarchy and totally doesn't appreciate if nobody is reporting to him because that undermines his value, authority, or status. Maybe 'status' is the best word. You can fight against that, but that is impossible. Those people are used to that for 50 years, so for me, it is very difficult to work with those types of, let's call them, traditional people. So that is why I always go for young, dynamic profiles, and that also fits better in our company culture. (P2)</i></p>
	Reluctance to speaking up, question authority and	<p><i>A challenge is that thing of where people are a bit reluctant to give feedback and are not always speaking up (...) I think it would have been useful for me to know a bit more about how</i></p>

	<p>be critical</p>	<p><i>people perceive managers and how people are more reluctant to criticize, you know, the kind of lack of openness that we sometimes receive. Knowing that could have saved me some frustrations. (P4)</i></p> <p><i>Another challenge I face is the hierarchical culture here. Generally, I lead differently with my international colleagues compared to my Ugandan colleagues. While I receive more feedback from my international team members, it's not as common from my Ugandan colleagues. Questioning hierarchies or authorities is not typical in Ugandan culture, which can make it difficult for me if I'm unsure about something.(P9)</i></p> <p><i>I think, in general, the German management style can be characterized as being upfront and fast-paced. However, we tend to be quicker in expressing our opinions compared to some of our Ugandan colleagues, who may be more observant and hesitant to always voice their own opinions. (P9)</i></p> <p><i>The biggest challenge that has been the toughest sometimes is, I think, like deference to authority. And also like, "you've told me to do this, so I will do that, even if I don't think it's the right thing". Because for example, I think the culture that I grew up in, even where I started my career in, it's very much like, hey, you know what, it's okay to challenge your boss. It's okay to like push back in meetings, to debate. But here, I would give ideas or say, hey, you know, like, what about this? Can we try this? And they say, ok. And then it would turn out that they all thought it was a terrible idea or that it wasn't going to work or that they didn't want to do it, but they wouldn't say anything. (P6)</i></p> <p><i>In Uganda, speaking up can be sometimes a challenge actually, because of that hierarchy, you can't just, you can't just throw ideas, you have to make sure that you are allowed to give the ideas that you have in mind. (P3)</i></p> <p><i>This respect for hierarchy, brings also an attitude of not questioning anything, or not being critical, (...) and even if they see it's wrong, or it's a mistake, they will continue to do it, because it was asked. (...) That's a pity that the critical attitude is not there, but of course, it's a cultural thing. It's also in the political system, the president who is in charge for more than four years, 40 years, so, you don't have the critical attitude there yet. (P5)</i></p> <p><i>I am less interested in university grads, and I'll tell you why, university grads in Uganda are worth a lot less to me because the education system in Uganda has been so, you know, honing to them that, you know, they should not speak out. They should not have critical thinking, not challenge the teacher. They should keep their head down, (...). People who are not from school and had to survive on the streets, selling Rolex, being a waitress, these guys know how to hustle. The same Ugandan kid, you know, didn't go to university and had to survive and try to do anything, you know, be a mobile phone repair or be a garage repair... These guys, they may not have the education, most of them speak English. English level is not great, but they can communicate. These guys are problem-solving. (P8)</i></p>
	<p>Lack of innovative mindset</p>	<p><i>They implement the decisions, but it's very rare that they actually come up with something new or novel. Well, they are clever people, but I think it's just not something that is stimulated. I think you have this kind of very vertical thing here. Whenever you go to university, it's someone telling you, 'this is the appropriation,' and you just reproduce it. Also, in most work contexts, it's very vertical, and you don't stimulate that kind of creativity, that kind of innovativeness.(P4)</i></p> <p><i>Uncertainty avoidance, that's something that you see very much here they will not take too much initiative. (P5)</i></p>
<p>Collectivism among peers</p>	<p>Collaborative way of working</p>	<p><i>They have very long meetings where they try to work together on a document, etc. which is not the most efficient way of doing things. But it is something that they think is the best way for them to make sure that they will incorporate everyone's views. (P4)</i></p>
	<p>Harmonious way of working</p>	<p><i>Another thing is the fact that they can all work together. Even though they're from different tribes, right? So actually, they speak different languages, but they can all speak English. So in a way, maybe we could celebrate the fact that Uganda has 50 different kingdoms or whatever, and 50 different languages, yet they manage under colonial English. They have managed pretty well, somehow. So I don't know because my perception is actually it's pretty harmonious, but maybe other people will have opposing views because my experience has been pretty positive. (P8)</i></p>
	<p>Family spirit</p>	<p><i>People, in general, generally care if someone loses someone, or there's a baby on the way, things are, people will get together and say, what can we do. Or people getting married, you see people getting together to really help that person to reach that goal. In our company, we can help the cousins, the brother, the friends, and hire everyone just because we all need to win. (P3)</i></p>

		<i>So, as you can see, we still have a family culture in Uganda. For instance, the business I'm in is mostly family-related, so inclusion as a Western manager is important. The positive aspect is that you have a group, a group spirit, a family spirit. So that's the good thing. The negative aspect is that you can promote people from your family who are not competent. (P7)</i>
	Not setting apart from colleagues	<i>People also do not try to be outstanding in one way or another, so they would stay in the group, the security of the group, I think that's security; the group gives security. You look around, and you're not going to differ yourself too much from the other colleagues. (...) Of course, they all want promotion, they want more money, but it's not "I'm going to be on the side, I'm going to do it different, and then, maybe I will be picked," no, not too much, no. (P5)</i>
Time orientation		<p><i>The concept of a deadline is very different, like they used to say, you have to watch, we have to time. If you say, hey, guys, that should be finished by that time, you get like a first draft, very first draft by the deadlines. (P5)</i></p> <p><i>There is a phrase that says in Europe people have a watch, in Africa people have time. That is definitely applicable. Here, if it's not done today, then people will do it tomorrow. Of course, we need to meet certain deadlines and expectations from our customers in Europe. That is a constant battle to incentivize people to do things on time. And with the right quality, etc. Because that's our main challenge. (P2)</i></p> <p><i>I think that's one of the reasons why many businesses struggle in Uganda to make a sustainable profit. In my view, the speed of their operations is just too slow. (P2)</i></p> <p><i>If I compare with 10 years ago, definitely, time notion was crazy. You could say we have a meeting at two and it starts at four, it was, madness. I wouldn't understand this, but I feel, now there's still a bit of a difference, definitely, but not, not as much. There might be a difference in the respect of deadlines, I'd say, if you need to submit some proposal, some assignment by that date, often, there will be an issue there.(P3)</i></p> <p><i>People here fear telling others they can't meet the deadline because they worry people would be disappointed, so they prefer not to say anything and wait until the deadline to see what happens instead of being proactive. (P3)</i></p> <p><i>Time orientation depends also on the culture of the organization so our company is a very intense place. Everything is high pressure. (P6)</i></p> <p><i>In general, in Uganda, there's a very different perception of time. But then we also have structures in place within our company that regulate how we use time. There are certain things we can't influence due to these structural constraints. Especially when working with our Ugandan partners, who often belong to smaller organizations or the local government, I take into account that no one will be in the office before 11 a.m. for example, and that the workday may not extend beyond 3 p.m. Consequently, delays are expected, including in the scheduling and commencement of meetings. In organizations like ours, there's a certain level of adaptation to accommodate these differences in how we approach time.(P9)</i></p>
Difference on efficiency as a parameter for work		<p><i>I think there are differences when it comes to how much we focus on efficiency, for example, right? To what extent efficiency is what should really be the power meter for work. I think that is a major difference that I see sometimes, (...) and I don't think there's any good or bad in that sometimes. Of course, efficiency is something that is valued in an organization often.(P4)</i></p> <p><i>But at the same time, I do think sometimes, you know, in our Western background, we're too much focused on keeping things efficient and trying to move forward as fast as possible. Well, that's not always the best way forward, nor is it always very healthy for work-life balance or the kind of pressure we put on ourselves. So I do think that, that is somehow, you know, a bit different, that kind of focus on efficiency type. (P4)</i></p> <p><i>There are cultural disparities in the perception of work quality, efficiency, and effectiveness. It is a challenge to maintain Western standards of quality and efficiency in the work environment. (P5)</i></p>
Difference in communication styles	Personal connection	<i>I had to get used to it. We were very direct, so in an email the first question now would be, 'I hope you're well.' I would never do that in Belgium; it would feel almost like intruding on somebody's personal life. I'm just approaching you in a work-related context, so you would not often do that. Here, it's standard. Of course, it doesn't always carry much weight, this standard thing, but in the beginning, I really had to get used to it (P5)</i>
	Giving feedback	<i>Generally I mean for myself it's the direct feedback in a group that people don't really appreciate. I also need to be careful of that negative feedback it's better to do that in a one on one situation so sometimes we as management including myself make mistakes in this regard. (P2)</i>

		<p><i>Being very direct, especially in a meeting environment, calling someone out in front of others, which is kind of humiliating in any way, that's definitely not appreciated, and things are taken very personally here. So I've seen certain Western managers talking very direct (...). But then they say, no, but this is work, after work, we go have a beer together, and everything is fine. But the thing is, here it doesn't really work that way. (P3)</i></p> <p><i>So sometimes, when I see problems, I will address them directly. I think there were one or two situations where perhaps colleagues didn't feel so comfortable because, from my experience, it was just a correction, something that wasn't done correctly, but they didn't feel comfortable to talk about this because there were other colleagues around. So I think this could be something to think about how, coming back to communication, how things are phrased and addressed if things don't go so well. (P9)</i></p>
	Indirect communication	<p><i>It takes more time, and we would say, hey, it's a good proposal, not a good proposal, and everybody in the meeting will, will they agree or not agree, it's hard here to, to understand if everybody's agreeing or not. (P7)</i></p> <p><i>A yes is a no; it looks like everybody's agreeing, and afterwards I can understand, maybe not everybody was on the same page, but it will not be a turn directly in the meeting. (P5)</i></p> <p><i>On the other hand, the main challenge is that people always say yes. Even if they don't understand something, they say yes. So, if you ask the question, did you understand it? They will always say yes.(P4)</i></p>
Cultural etiquette and protocol	Formalities	<p><i>When you have a party, when it's someone's birthday, et cetera. You know, the boss has to say a few words. It's not my style. It's not really what I do. I don't need that kind of platform. I do it when I have to. But it's not because I really appreciate,(...) But I know it's part of Ugandan culture somehow to do that, you know, that we have a function, you know, all these kind of introductory remarks that are not very interesting. But, you know, I do it. (P4)</i></p> <p><i>If we have a meeting, especially if we have more people in a large group, we have to do the introductions. I remember I used to do the introduction, I said, my God, guys, this meeting could be half a day, not a full day, it's also not only the introductions, it's also the formality, very formal, meetings with the ministry, very formal. (P5)</i></p> <p><i>You can have meetings here with government officials, for example, where the first two hours is just introductions. Every dignitary has to say, well, you know, welcome everyone, welcome and unlist all the people that are at the meeting. It's not something that I think is great, but it's how things are done here. It wastes a lot of time. You know, that's how things are done. (P4)</i></p> <p><i>The introductions, it's like opening a little bit, meaning sometimes it's, it's not bad. There are certain advantages, because you can set the scene, everybody is like, oh, a common goal, what are we doing here today, where do we want to go to (P5)</i></p> <p><i>In the work environment, we also have a practice of starting with a prayer. Often, in external meetings, we pause for this as well. Initially, it may seem time-consuming. However, it contributes to shaping the atmosphere and establishing rapport. Before diving into the meeting agenda, including introductions and formalities, this ritual allows us to set the tone. So, while it may not be efficient in the traditional sense, it promotes efficiency through relationship-building, which is more important in this context (P5)</i></p> <p><i>Christianity is deeply embedded in our teams and among our partners here. Unlike in Germany, where meetings usually start without religious customs, in Uganda, it's common to begin each meeting, especially those with external guests or partners, with a prayer. This cultural norm is an integral part of our work life here. While we have professional goals and program mandates to follow, changing cultural practices isn't something we're tasked with. If it's a longstanding tradition and widely accepted practice, I would be the least person to change it. (P9)</i></p>
	Focus on hospitality	<p><i>Ugandans, for example, find it very important that when you have a meeting, when external people are invited for a meeting that you have lunch with them, that you provide lunch. From a Western perspective, I mean, if I were to invite people for a meeting in Belgium, I would never pay their lunch. Even though I know in the Ugandan culture and context that that is something that is valued. And that is maybe a bit more my Western approach, where I say, well, it's not necessary to do that. Then I know that sometimes people are unhappy with these kind of things. Those are small thing (P4)</i></p> <p><i>For example, if you organize meetings here with government officials, you're supposed to pay for their transport, even for their attendance, right? Which is something that I, I mean, I know</i></p>

		<i>that's something we don't do in Belgium. I know it's something they do here, but I still have principle issues with that. Because why should a government official who's already been paid by the taxpayer to do his job to come to a meeting? At the same time, I do accept that that's a bit of reality. If you don't do that, they're not going to show up. You're not going to get the same kind of results. But I am pushing a bit back against that idea and trying to at least, you know, formalize it a bit more policy, not just, you know, whatever people ask, we'll give them (P4)</i>
Tolerance for mistakes		<i>In the Western world, we follow a different protocol we typically see a progression from a minor error 'slip', to a mistake, and then to a violation of rules. Here (in Uganda), however, they have a different approach. They primarily see mistakes as violations, leading to swift job termination ."(P7)</i> <i>Here in Uganda it's very much like you make a mistake, you get fired. (P6)</i>

Coping strategy	Verbatim quotes
Stimulating innovative mindset and collaborative decision-making	<p><i>I think it is my duty as a manager to stimulate that mindset somehow, and what I do is I just try to take the backseat. I just put them on the forefront, and I'll tell them, it's up to you to do it, because I cannot take decisions on everything, especially on things that I know very little about compared to them, so that's something that I often try to do.(P4)</i></p> <p><i>They try to bring me into meetings where decisions are being made, while I'm actually not supposed to be in that kind of meeting, so I tell them, you take a decision, and let me know what comes out. Just report back at some point, but it's not up to me to always take their hand, accompany them, because when I would be at a meeting, they will be looking at me, and they're not up there. And so, that's something that I try to do. (P4)</i></p> <p><i>It's not always the most effective way, but I think it is somehow my responsibility to kind of empower people somehow, even though that sounds a bit cheesy, but to give them the ability to take decisions, and adapt things, of course, within certain environments. (P4)</i></p> <p><i>In smaller group settings, it's easier to ensure that everyone's voice is heard. However, it becomes more challenging when we gather as a whole team, as discussions may be dominated by a few voices. In such cases, it's important to make deliberate efforts to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to express their opinions. Encouraging participation and occasionally holding back one's own opinion can help create a more inclusive atmosphere. It ultimately depends on one's awareness and sensitivity to the dynamics of the situation. (P9)</i></p>

<p>Creating a safe environment</p>	<p><i>So, they need to have that safe space, for people to dare say, I've not understood that, I don't know how to do that, and I need your advice on this. That's really important, and I think that's not even just here, actually, I think it also comes from when you're in school, and you're a child, back then, and, every time you say something wrong, you get caned, physically.(P3)</i></p> <p><i>Like it's making, you know, let's say the psychological safety important, to say, if you push back, if you make a mistake, it's ok, We'll figure it out together. Which is normally here very much like, you make a mistake, you get fired. (P6)</i></p> <p><i>If I were to ask in a group, what is your opinion, that's very difficult. If they can go to subgroups, and they're again in a safe environment, that might be easier to discuss certain things, or to bring up things. It's like, less direct, but then making sure that your colleagues are in the lead, and making sure that things can be discussed in little groups, so they don't have to come up with their very loud own opinion for the whole group. (P9)</i></p> <p><i>I try at least to have, you know, quite an open way of working and to encourage people to just come and talk to me about things and not make it too formal. of course that's not the golden solution. (P2)</i></p> <p><i>So I communicate with them, which ends up better for me because I get their input, which is valuable as they're experienced at what they're doing. And also they get my input and they're learning also from that. (P1)</i></p>
<p>Adapting communication style</p>	<p><i>So, if you ask the question, did you understand it? They will always say yes. So, in a way, that is, I learned for myself, that is a silly question. You don't need to ask that. You need to ask; can you repeat in your own words now what has to be done or can you summarize it? (P4)</i></p> <p><i>And sometimes people talk like a parent. If I talk to you like a parent, for instance, put you in the position of a child, I will say, don't do. That's not good. So you have to have an equal conversation, actually (P7)</i></p> <p><i>Also approach it from different angles, I adapt my language or my presentation to the people I am talking to, so that is something I try to be mindful of and that I have adapted over the years. (P2)</i></p> <p><i>It's like spending a lot more time on getting everyone on board and making sure that everyone understands, on making sure that I am communicating fairly and using as few idioms as possible. So it's kind of like, it's almost like slowing my work down a bit. Am I asking in a couple of different ways? And I think it's also like, even in the way that I speak and the way that I present. The way that many people here speak, it's almost more storytelling. You repeat the same points many times, you know, you emphasize different, you use your hands, you just take different stances.(P6)</i></p>
<p>Building personal relationships</p>	<p><i>As a Western manager, you have to build on your relationship with the person. Have a good personal relationship with the person and then you will get a good professional one. If you start to build up first your professional relationship, you're going to forget about your personal one.(P7)</i></p>

<p>Mitigating time orientation</p>	<p><i>Remind them from time to time that it's important. For example, if there is a MS Teams call like we do now, especially in Europe or in Belgium, it's not polite if you dial in five minutes too late. Two minutes, people would already apologize. Were here in Uganda. I barely had an external meeting started on time. That is just not important so much unless there are European people that are organizing the meetings So that is something we worked hard on. Also here internally, if a meeting starts at three, everybody is there at three and you don't need to walk in five minutes later or have all kinds of excuses. The greatest excuse for external meetings is that there was too much traffic on the road. There is always traffic on the road. So you just need to anticipate on that. So that is a cultural difference. (P2)</i></p> <p><i>You need to train them. Once they see that it's a better way to behave, they'll understand. They're not stupid; they're just like us. They can learn about time and efficiency. (P8)</i></p> <p><i>I also need to adjust to that. If I don't, I'll just stress myself out. To some extent, I can't change those people, and I don't need to. It's part of Ugandan culture, so I don't have to strive to change it. I can manage it to some extent internally, but if it's external, I just have to deal with it. (P2)</i></p> <p><i>I think it's difficult to cope with, but I would consider it a precondition to be able to react promptly to whatever may arise. Whether in a managerial role like myself or as advisors, whether Ugandan or German, being a very structured person who always follows a certain plan could make for a challenging work environment. But I believe that most people who seek such positions already bring this flexibility and the ability to quickly find solutions as preconditions.(P9)</i></p> <p><i>The big feedback is that whatever works for the West may not work locally. Right. And the issue as a Western manager, we use Western standards or ways to do it. Like SOP, standard operating procedure. And it may not work here. So we really need to understand what motivates your staff and how to localize. Let me give you an example. If it rains and your staff have no transport, yelling at them because they are late due to rain won't accomplish anything. So either you provide transport, right? Or you just know that if it rains, they have no way of getting here. So you have to adjust your schedule. It's not something you're going to be able to bang your head against the wall for because it's raining and none of your staff are on time. It's counterproductive. Right. So maybe you don't schedule your meeting at 9 a.m. if you know that traffic and transport are difficult for them. You know what I'm saying? But you need to understand what your employees have to do to get to work and where they live. Right. Because if you don't understand that and use our SOP or standard operating procedure and impose that on them and then get frustrated because it doesn't work, it's counterproductive.(P8)</i></p>
<p>Expectations management</p>	<p><i>You should not put your expectations too high. I mean, if I'm going to organize a conference in Belgium, and I really want to have this output, and then to at least very strictly organize to get there, and here it's like, hey, see what the output will be. Whatever output, you have to be happy with that one, because you cannot force it, so you have to go with the flow, and if that's a competence, I don't know, going with the flow. (P7)</i></p> <p><i>Cause oftentimes, you know, you want the cattle, you want the, you know, the fancy, you want the best version possible, but you don't need the best version possible. So you begin to kind of accept, let's say the minim viable product. (P6)</i></p> <p><i>You need to be to, you know, to push people to be a bit organized</i></p>

	<p><i>and to respect procedures while at the same time also being sufficiently open that people have different ways of working and that things might take a bit more time, but that actually, you know, you'll get there may be in a better way than how you would do it in Europe. (P4)</i></p>
<p>Expressions on adaptation</p>	<p><i>It might feel a bit frustrating, but I realize the importance of adapting to the culture. The culture won't change for me; I have to adjust to it. Even if there are some aspects that may seem a bit negative or challenging, I have to accept them if I want to integrate effectively. Even with good intentions to support, I must accept that adaptation is necessary; there's no other option.(P5)</i></p> <p><i>It's neither good nor bad; it's just different. It's not a matter of one way being better than the other; they're simply different. I aim to find a middle ground between our corporate culture and the national culture. I'll strive to accept certain aspects while also ensuring that our organization maintains Belgian standards, especially since we are funded by Belgian resources. I can't simply excuse missed deadlines by saying 'that's how it is here'; we need to uphold certain expectations.(P5)</i></p> <p><i>I think full adaptation is not possible. It's a matter of sensitivity to recognize where the differences lie, where the boundaries are that cannot be crossed, or behaviors that are entirely inappropriate. You have to be very sensitive to the fact that you're in a different culture, while also understanding your own identity and knowing where your own boundaries lie. I think it's also quite important to know where you can adapt, but also what you need for your own well-being or mental health. I believe this awareness and sensitivity are crucial when you're operating in a context and a culture that are very different from the one you grew up in. (P9)</i></p>