

Bachelor thesis 2020

## Does it “manner”?

The effect of spoken and written gratitude expressions  
on job satisfaction.

Radboud University Nijmegen, Netherlands

Study degree: B.A. International Business Communication (IBC)

Supervisor: Dr. Julija Baranova

Student: Luka Paul Vethake

Date and place of submission: 15-06-2020, Nijmegen

## **Abstract**

Given the dynamic environment of a human resources (HR) department, there is a wide interest in how to enhance the job satisfaction of the employees in order to improve organisational performance. Gratitude expressions have a central function in human relationships, which means they are a key motivator of job satisfaction. Thus, the research question of this study was if spoken and written gratitude expressions could influence job satisfaction scores and therefore form an essential part of HR communication. The participants of the experiment were randomly allocated to the conditions (no gratitude, spoken and written gratitude). An online task was performed after which the participants had to indicate to what degree they enjoyed it. The results showed that the gratitude expressions did not have an effect on job satisfaction but that, if one had to choose, spoken gratitude is prone to yield higher job satisfaction scores. The conclusion was that gratitude expressions no longer function as a powerful politeness device because they are understood as a redundant obligation and therefore are less intense. Regarding practical implications, HR managers should preferably thank their subordinates in person and companies should review the effectiveness of written gratitude messages such as Christmas cards. This study further contributed to gratitude theories, stating that gratitude is a complicated emotion that is interactively elicited and most effective when conveyed personally.

**Key words:** gratitude, job satisfaction, politeness, expression, written, spoken

## **Introduction**

Good human resources (HR) management is a pivotal element of the economic success of organisations. Apart from hiring new staff, the HR department is also responsible for ensuring job quality, a social workplace or job satisfaction, which has a direct impact on performance outcomes of the company (Cooper & Leiter, 2017). The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2020) recently published a report claiming that 44% of the surveyed organisations had anchored the wellbeing of employees in their corporate strategy and are also reviewing leadership-employee relationships which seem to be one of the highest indicators of stress (p.26).

Simple words can have a disproportionately large effect. Saying “thank you” to an employee may be taken for granted but is actually the exception on a daily basis (Beck, 2016). Managers have a tight agenda which forces them to prioritise. Paradoxically, showing gratitude towards the employees for their work and personally taking care of them is often neglected

(Luthans & Larsen, 1986). Studies have shown, however, that, in organisations, positive practices such as appreciation programmes (i.e. gratitude on an organisational level) can prevent employees from leaving the company (Cameron et al., 2011), correlate strongly with the financial output of the company (Cameron et al., 2011) and enhance job satisfaction (Waters, 2012), to name just a few.

Surprisingly, the state of the art of studies on positive emotions such as gratitude and their role in organisations is relatively immature (Fehr et al., 2017; Waters, 2012). In general, the purpose of this research is to contribute to scientific and societal matters in the workplace. If superiors knew how to communicate gratitude messages effectively to their employees, this could benefit not only the work environment (Emmons & McCoullough, 2004), but also the company's efficiency (Waters, 2012). The societal and social purpose of this research is to understand how humans perceive gratitude expressions differently depending on the communication manner.

## **Theoretical framework**

### *Face, politeness and gratitude*

According to its founding father Goffman (1955, p.222), the concept of “face” denotes “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact”. Brown and Levinson (1987, p.61) add that face is “emotionally invested, [...] can be lost, maintained, or enhanced and must be constantly attended to in interaction”.

Goffman's concept of face is embedded in the politeness theory by Levinson and Brown (1987) which holds that regardless of culture, humans desire to be treated kindly. They refer to the notions of positive face, which is defined as “the desire to be approved of” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p.13), and negative face, meaning “the desire to be unimpeded by one's actions” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p.13). In human interaction, the interlocutors continuously produce face threatening acts, which means that they “run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or of the speaker” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p.65).

Gratitude has been defined as a “warmly [...] attitude for [...] benefits received” (Kerns, 2006). The emotion of gratitude is evoked interactively between a sender and a receiver

(Eisenstein & Bodman, 1993) and communicated in purely linguistic expressions or through tangible gifts (cf. Kerns, 2006). Humans employ a great variety of gratitude expressions. Apart from the obvious candidates such as “*thank you*” or “*cheers*”, intensifiers like “*very much*” (Okamoto & Robinson, 1997) or exaggerations like “*I don’t know how to thank you*” (Eisenstein & Bodman, 1993) are also used to express gratitude. However, the two words “*thank you*” have been proven to be a good fit for a gratitude expression (Dean, 2018; Floyd et al., 2018).

With regard to face, gratitude has a double-edged effect. By saying “thank you”, for example, the interlocutor refers to the partner’s positive face by making him or her feel good but simultaneously mentions that he or she is now in the debt of returning a favour (cf. Brown & Levinson, 1987; Eisenstein & Bodman, 1993; Kerns, 2006). So, it is left to doubt whether gratitude can create satisfaction in the conversation partner or serves as a tool to indicate social debt (Eisenstein & Bodman, 1993) and therefore creates a face threatening act. More contemporary literature points out that face threatening acts do not directly entail negativity because often these are initial steps on a road to mutually reproduced politeness (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003). Being polite at work means that conflicts can be mitigated (Hamel, n.d.) and the working environment is peaceful (Moreira, 2019). In this context, gratitude as a positive politeness tool can serve to facilitate relationships.

### *Gratitude expressions and social relationships*

It was found that gratitude triggers upstream reciprocity, meaning that it stimulates a random pro-social behaviour chain started by a benefited person, and therefore can spread cooperation throughout a group (Nowak & Roch, 2007). More specifically, this mechanism is explained in psychological and behavioural theories such as find-remind-and-bind-theory (Algoe, 2012) or the broaden-and build-theory (cf. Lambert et al., 2012). The former argues that gratitude has the ability to create and sustain a relationship (*find* and *remind*) as well as bonding the sender of the gratitude expression and the receiver of it (*bind*). The latter states that positive emotions such as gratitude have the potential to evoke a multiplying effect; i.e. to make the recipient spread positive emotions associated with gratitude such as helpfulness because he or she feels socially valued (Grant & Gino, 2010). Neuroscientists found that gratitude experiences, for example, through gratitude expressions, evoke neural modulation in the medial prefrontal cortex of the human brain (Kini et al., 2016), which among others is responsible for decision-making and memory storage (Euston et al., 2012). This explains the important role of gratitude in social relationships which are a key element of employee wellbeing because they have the

ability to cushion stress and offer emotional support (House et al., 1988). Employee wellbeing, defined as “that part of an employee’s overall wellbeing that they perceive to be determined primarily by work and can be influenced by workplace interventions” (Juniper, 2011, p.25), has a direct impact on an employee’s satisfaction with the organisation (Waddell & Burton, 2006). Apart from the social wellbeing of employees, gratitude as a relationship facilitator has other positive effects in organisations; for example, on job satisfaction (Johnson, n.d.; Waters, 2012).

### *Job satisfaction and gratitude*

In his book, Muchinsky defines job satisfaction as “the degree of pleasure an employee derives from his or her job” (as cited in Waters, 2012, p.1174). The term job satisfaction juxtaposes not only the satisfaction with the workplace but also the dissatisfaction with it (Ganguli, 1994; Locke, 1969). Albeit primitive, the declaration “*I am satisfied with my job*” reliably summarises the intrinsic and extrinsic circumstances that contribute to it (Ganguli, 1994).

As shown before, gratitude expressions are vital for relationship maintenance and construction. Institutionalised gratitude is defined as “gratitude that is culturally embedded within the organization, through its people, policies and practices, such that thankfulness and appreciation are customary features of daily work life” (Waters, 2012, p.1174) and was found to be a strong indicator of job satisfaction (Waters, 2012). Transformational leadership has been described as “a leadership style that motivates followers by appealing to their higher order needs“ (Men, 2014, p.267) and makes use of emotional closeness and social (relationship) bonding (Men, 2014) by communicating “in a responsive, warm, friendly, empathetic [...] manner” (Men, 2015, p.469). As previously mentioned, gratitude has a central function in relationship construction and maintenance (Algoe, 2012; Grant & Gino, 2010) which explains why Men (2014) (also Sakiru et al., 2013; Saleem, 2015) found that transformational leadership had a large positive effect on job satisfaction. Thus, gratitude, since it is also a “warmly [...] attitude” (Kerns, 2006), apparently influences job satisfaction through the way it is conveyed. Therefore, reviewing the outlined literature and theories on gratitude and job satisfaction, the central research question of this study is:

*Does the expression manner of gratitude (spoken vs. written) influence the degree of job satisfaction?*

In order to provide hypotheses to the research question, diverse communication vehicles in organisations are discussed in the following.

## *Communication in organisations*

In organisations, multiple oral and written communication channels exist to convey messages to internal stakeholders be it via the telephone, in person, company blogs or vlogs, emails or videoconferences. Spoken utterances can make use of intonations, accents and pauses whereas written language only has orthography at its disposal (Newman & Horowitz, 1965). Turn-taking in speech utterances is much more rapid and interchanging which means that compared to carefully selected written words, speech generally is less thought out (Crystal, 2005). Also, while absent in writing, nonverbal discourse like gestures or facial expressions can influence the speech utterance (Crystal, 2005). To give a last example; accents also play a vital role in the perception of voice. Grondelaers and Van Gent (2019) for example found that a Moroccan-Dutch accent was perceived as more dynamic than a Limburg or Randstad accent. Eliciting such phonetic differences is self-evidently impossible in written messages. The aforementioned differences imply that human interaction works differently in speech when compared to writing.

For the present study, preliminary explorative interviews were carried out with five professionals primarily in order to understand and delve into their experience with institutionalised gratitude and to find out what role it plays in organisations (see method section A). The interviewees indicated higher appreciation when gratitude was expressed orally, and the credibility was gauged higher in face-to-face interactions (appendix B). In line with these interviews, Beck (2016) found out that gratitude is most frequently expressed orally to employees (41.4%) and only a small percentage uses written messages (19.7%). Linked to Beck's findings, White et al. (2010) drew conclusions from 147 interviews with employees that face-to-face internal communication is most effective and employees displayed higher job satisfaction. This leads to the assumption that spoken gratitude will have a more positive effect on job satisfaction than written gratitude. Therefore, the first hypothesis is as follows:

*Hypothesis 1: The spoken gratitude message affects job satisfaction more positively than written gratitude message.*

Since (positive) job satisfaction results from an array of positive experiences connected to the job (Ganguli, 1994), it is inferred that gratitude as a positive emotion contributes positively to job satisfaction. On top of that it is known that gratitude has a positive effect on job satisfaction (Waters, 2012). Therefore, the second hypothesis derived from the literature is:

*Hypothesis 2: Both the written and the spoken gratitude messages have a more positive effect on job satisfaction than gratitude not expressed at all.*

## **Method A: Interviews**

### *Instruments*

Before agreeing on the research design, exploratory face-to-face interviews were conducted in order to find out how gratitude is conveyed at the workplace and what the experience with it was. The interviews were semi-structured and certain paths were explored further when participants showed a keen interest or indicated that this particular topic was important to them. The interviews contained a main question which was “Which features of gratitude are valued most?”. Questions 1-2 were used to contextualise gratitude at the workplace; questions 3 and 8 were central and aimed at the preferred manner of gratitude expressions; questions 4, 5, 7 and 10 assessed the reality of gratitude expressions at work and finally questions 6 and 9 dealt with the connection to job satisfaction. All interview questions can be found in appendix B.

### *Participants*

In total, 5 interviews were conducted with 3 female participants and 2 male participants. To be able to draw interesting conclusions about institutionalised gratitude for the follow-up experiment, the selection criterium was that they were working or had worked in a professional environment. On average, the participants were roughly 45 years ( $M = 44.6$ ,  $SD = 14.35$ ) old and displayed an age range of 35 with 27 years being the youngest and 62 years being the oldest. They were active as a waitress, PHD candidate, HR advisor, teacher and one was a former banker.

### *Procedure*

Participants were invited using multimedia or face-to-face communication. Each researcher conducted one interview via phone, email or face-to-face. Given the geographical dispersion of the researchers, the interviews all took place in different locations and lasted approximately 20-30 minutes. The research goal was not explicitly stated but the participants knew it was going to be about gratitude at work. The interviews were recorded and transcribed without a transcription framework or transcription software. The participants were not reimbursed by the researchers. After the interviews, the researcher summarised the main findings and interesting points. They were brought to the research colloquium first via a GoogleDrive document which

was accessible to each researcher and then via a discussion round, where it was decided to focus on the written vs. spoken domain of gratitude at the workplace. None of the interviews were used for further analyses.

### *Ethical considerations*

The participants were given an information letter and a consent form prior to the start of the interviews and were assured that they could leave at any given point of the interview without having to state why.

## **Method B: Experiment**

### *Materials*

As proposed earlier, gratitude is defined as an interactive relationship between sender and receiver; meaning that it is a “warmly [...] attitude for [...] benefits received” (Kerns, 2006). Gratitude was operationalised using the signal words “thank you” (Dean, 2018; Floyd et al., 2018) and the intensifier “very much” (Okamoto & Robinson, 1997). The variable gratitude was subdivided into three levels: written, spoken and no gratitude expressed at all. For each condition there was a separate survey administered through Qualtrics™. Given that the stimulus material had to be the exact same for written and orally expressed gratitude, there was consensus on the following gratitude message: “*Thank you very much for your participation*”. This sentence was in a different font in order to ensure the attention of the participants and to make the message stand out from the rest (cf. Sanford et al., 2006).

### *Figure 1: Written gratitude message*

Thank you very much for your participation!

Please now continue with the follow-up questionnaire.

The spoken gratitude message was recorded by a British English native speaker with a Bachelor’s degree in Linguistics and a follow-up degree in Language Sciences at the UCL in



England. Knowing that voice can serve as a personality judgement predictor (Stagner, 1936), the speaker had an unusually high-pitched voice and was familiar in the field of gender-neutral language. Unfortunately, no publicly available computerised gender neutraliser was available yet.

### *Subjects*

The population consisted out of any working person in the Netherlands from which participants were drawn. Each condition consisted out of 35 participants, making it 105 in total. In the analyses, a total of 103 participants was counted because 2 had not fully completed the experiment. Out of the 103 participants, 34 were in the spoken, 34 were in the written and 35 were in the no gratitude at all condition. 59 (57.3%) respondents identified as females and 44 (42.7%) identified as males. The most frequent completed education degree was Bachelor's (52.4%) followed by Master's (22.3%) and high school graduates (17.5%). The participants had a mean age of circa 26 years ( $M = 25.95$ ,  $SD = 8.20$ ) and ranged from 19 years to 56 years with 22 being the most frequent one. Regarding their nationality, 57.3% reported to be Dutch, followed by Germans (11.7%) and Spaniards (4.9%). Most of the participants indicated not to be religious (62.1%). Religiosity was measured as demographic information but excluded from the analyses. The context variables such as age ( $F(2, 93) < 1$ ,  $p = .976$ ), gender ( $X^2(2) = .32$ ,  $p = .852$ ) and education level ( $X^2(8) = 10.03$ ,  $p = .264$ ) were equally distributed across the three conditions. On average, it took the participants approximately 6 minutes ( $M = 5.56$ ,  $SD = 8.92$ ) to complete the experiment. A Boxplot graphic with task enjoyability on the Y-axis and the condition as the grouping variable identified 7 cases as outliers because those participants had scored significantly lower than the rest of the dataset and thereupon were excluded from further analyses. 3 of those cases were spotted in the spoken gratitude condition and 4 in the no gratitude condition leading to 96 cases in total.

### *Design*

The study contained a 1x3 between-subjects design with one independent variable being gratitude (3 levels: written – spoken – no gratitude) resulting in three conditions. The dependent variable was task enjoyability.

### *Instruments*

As several meta-analyses for job satisfaction scales concluded, measuring this variable with only one question is relatively reliable (Nagy, 2002; Wanous & Reichers, 1996; Wanous et al., 1997). As the definition of job satisfaction; “the degree of **pleasure** an employee derives from his or her job” (as cited in Waters, 2012, p.1174) suggests, there is a central element of pleasure or enjoyability to job satisfaction. Therefore, the concept “task enjoyability” was chosen among others because the participants were given a task (see *procedure*), not a job. Task enjoyability was measured with the question “*In my opinion, the experiment was...*” derived and adjusted to the research purposes from item 35 of Spector’s job satisfaction survey (1985). In alignment with earlier findings on empirical Likert scale usage (Croasmun & Ostrom, 2011), a 7-point Likert scale was used with the two poles 1 = “*very unenjoyable*”, and 7 = “*very enjoyable*”.

### *Procedure*

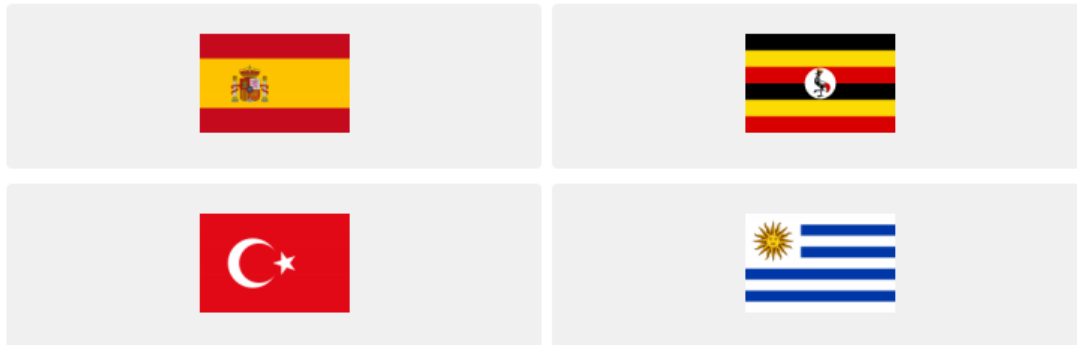
Using a convenience sampling method, each researcher was trusted with providing 21 participants, out of which seven were assigned randomly to one of the three conditions. The participants were chosen digitally by each researcher both via their own personal and professional networks. While approaching a potential participant, no information or clues about the research purposes were disclosed; it was merely stated that the interest lies in measuring cognitive performance with a task online. If the approached person agreed to participate, the researcher used the online randomiser [www.randomizer.org](http://www.randomizer.org) ranging from 1 to 3 (1 = condition 1, 2 = condition 2, 3 = condition 3) in order to provide the candidate with the corresponding questionnaire. The experiment was administered using the own electronic devices of the participants.

The participants were presented with a country flag matching task. In order to be admitted to the task, the participants had to read an information letter and give consent that they were at least 18 years old and were working or had worked in the Netherlands. These questions forced a response with “yes” so no participant could have continued without indicating their voluntary will and eligibility for the study. The task was to match country names, for example Brazil or South Africa, to their respective flags. Per country asked, 4 flag options were given which previously had been decided on collaboratively by the research team. The flags were displayed as pictures and uploaded as answer options in each of the three Qualtrics<sup>TM</sup> surveys. The task and the flag options were exactly the same for every condition. To offer some variety

in the flags, countries from all 7 continents were used. The whole survey is attached in appendix C.

*Figure 1: Example from the country task*

Spain

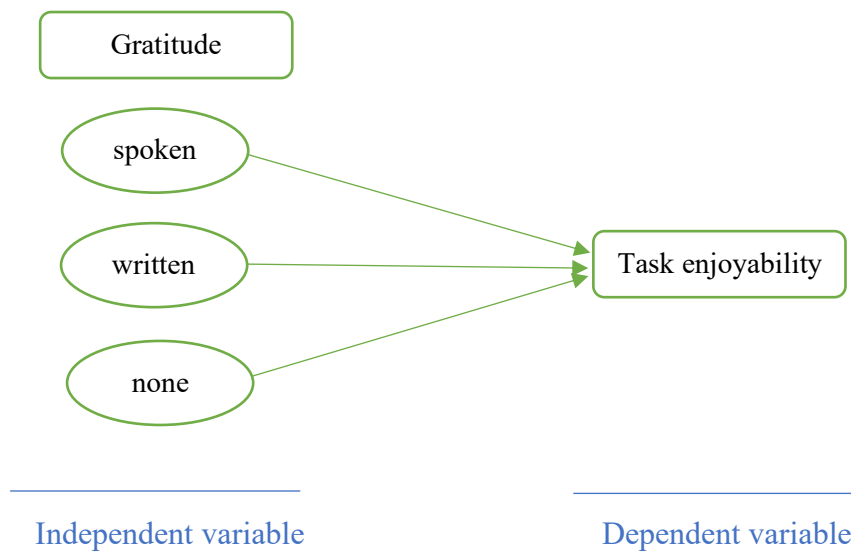


Once the country-flag match task was done, the gratitude message was expressed to the participants in the written and spoken condition with the same content. No gratitude was expressed to the third condition (i.e. no gratitude at all). Participants in the spoken condition had to confirm that they had heard the message. In order not to distort the emotionality of the gratitude message, the task enjoyability question followed directly after it. Upon completion of the experiment, thanks were expressed to the participants regardless of the condition they had been in.

### *Statistical treatment*

A one-way independent ANOVA was used to establish a causal relationship between the gratitude levels and degree of task enjoyability.

Figure 3: Analytical model of the present research.



## Results

Upon the violation of the assumption of homogeneity of variances ( $p = .001$ ), Welch's test was applied to account for unequal variance and differences in the sample sizes. Consequently, a one-way independent measures Welch's ANOVA was conducted with task enjoyability as the dependent variable and gratitude expression as the independent variable (3 levels: spoken, written and no gratitude at all). The condition had a statistically significant effect on the task enjoyability ( $F(2, 57.908) = 4.43, p = .016$ ). Using omega-squared, 6.304% of the total variation within task enjoyability could be attributed to the gratitude expression variable ( $\omega^2 = .06304$ ) which represents a medium effect size.

After executing a Games-Howell post hoc test, it was found that compared to the written condition ( $M = 4.97, SD = 1.73$ ), the spoken condition ( $M = 5.78, SD = .72$ ) triggered a statistically significant higher enjoyability of the task (Cohen's  $d = .900, p = .021$ ). There were no statistically significant differences between the spoken and no gratitude condition ( $p = .208$ ) nor between the written and the no gratitude condition ( $p = .314$ ) regarding the effect on task enjoyability. The highest mean was achieved by the spoken gratitude condition ( $M = 5.87, SD = .72$ ), followed by the no gratitude at all condition ( $M = 5.48, SD = 1.03$ ) and the written condition ( $M = 4.97, SD = 1.73$ ).

Table 1: Results of the one-way ANOVA (condition x task enjoyability)

condition	n	mean ( <i>M</i> )	standard deviation ( <i>SD</i> )
Spoken	31	5.87	.72
Written	34	4.97	1.73
No gratitude	31	5.48	1.03

## Conclusion and discussion

The present experiment was set out to establish a relationship between gratitude expressions and their relative effect on job satisfaction. To answer the central question in this paper, gratitude in a working environment should be communicated orally to trigger a maximum positive effect on job satisfaction. However, it did not matter whether gratitude was expressed or not; it did not influence job satisfaction which challenges gratitude as a predictor of job satisfaction. First and foremost, this contradicts the findings of Waters (2012) who correlated gratitude to job satisfaction. However, the current experiment focussed on gratitude expressions that were not part of the prior research aim of Waters (2012). As Floyd et al. (2018) also point out, the findings of the current experiment do not exclude that the **emotion** gratitude has an impact on job satisfaction; it was merely proven that gratitude **expressions** do not have an effect on job satisfaction regarding the manner in which they are conveyed. The current results find support in Floyd et al. (2018), who showed that cross-culturally gratitude expressions are tacitly communicated because helping others is seen as a social obligation. So, expressing gratitude was not a prerequisite for being satisfied with the task and the participants could have been robust to the intensity of the inserted gratifying words.

Challenging the politeness theory brought forward by Brown & Levinson (1987), it can be stated that gratitude expressions seemingly have lost their value as a politeness device (cf. Floyd et al., 2018). Alluding to the positive face of the participants by thanking them for their participation did not implicate that they perceived the task as more enjoyable and thus, returned their indication of kindness to the sender of the gratitude message.

Dispositional gratitude has been defined as “a generalized tendency to recognize and respond with grateful emotion to the roles of other people’s benevolence in the positive experiences and outcomes that one obtains” (McCullough et al., 2002, p.112). Cain et al. (2019) found that humans who show dispositional gratitude are not necessarily more susceptible to feel more gratitude than others at the workplace. The current study is in line with these assumptions because participants might have been robust to the gratitude message and therefore it did not have an amplifying effect on job satisfaction. Another possible explanation is that apparently it does not matter for people with dispositional gratitude how gratitude is expressed; there is no effect of communication manner on the perception of gratitude. This then poses the question: is there such thing as a “gratitude limit” within humans? What this experiment can affirm is that gratitude is very complex and mediated by factors like dispositional gratitude and subjective understandings of the need for a gratitude expression.

Regarding the research hypotheses, *hypothesis 1* was confirmed. The spoken gratitude message affected job satisfaction significantly more positive than the written gratitude expression. This is in line with studies indicating that gratitude expressions are channelled best orally to employees (Beck, 2016; White, 2014; White et al., 2010). The present study elicited this observation in an experimental setting thereby providing further evidence.

Unexpectedly, the results led to a rejection of *hypothesis 2*. Indeed, the spoken condition showed a higher job satisfaction average score than the no gratitude condition, but there was no difference between groups. The written gratitude condition yielded even below the no gratitude condition, which is remarkable in the sense that one would have expected the opposite. However, no statistical significance could be obtained to further explore this result.

As Emmons and McCullough (2004) outline in their book, gratitude is a very complex emotion that intertwines multiple fields of behavioural research and as this experiment showed, therewith cannot be elicited through a simple, one-way directional “thank you” message online. Tying in with this, gratitude is developed interactively by reciprocal (gratitude) speech turns (Eisenstein & Bodman, 1993) and apparently perceived as more credible with the input of audible intonation (White, 2014). Consequently, the written message might have been perceived as an automated computerised message rather than an honest personalised gratitude message because it appeared very suddenly and although the font was customised, it might not have been enough for the participants to distinguish it from the general Qualtrics™ layout.

Although the written gratitude messages did not enhance immediate job satisfaction - being realistic, it is hypothesised that over a longer period of time, such gratitude expressions

do make a difference. Support for this assumption can be found in Toepfer et al. (2012) who let their participants write gratitude letters for three weeks and found that when compared to non-writers, the gratitude authors displayed higher happiness and decreased symptoms for depression, both factors that the definition by Muchinsky (as cited in Waters, 2012) assumingly encapsulates, influence job satisfaction.

### *Limitations*

The present study is subject to several limitations. Firstly, the high enjoyability scores from the results indicate that the country matching task was in fact enjoyable when compared to usual experimental tasks. Thus, the participants might have been resistant to the effect of the gratitude message. To rule out this problem, it is suggested to modify the nature of the task. One could think of adding a new variable: task complexity. In order to do that, the task could involve, for example, mathematical calculations ranging from low to high in difficulty and from 2 tasks to 6 tasks in duration.

Secondly, the dependent variable “job satisfaction” was measured with merely one question. Although this is arguably valid (Nagy, 2002), for a more profound assessment of the variable more aspects to job satisfaction could be applied. Spector (1985) for example uses features like competence or compensation to measure job satisfaction in a human service staff environment.

Thirdly, it could have occurred that the written gratitude message was not perceived as personal as the spoken message (Crystal, 2005; White et al., 2010). Inserting a picture of the speaker to the sentence and audio recording could arguably shorten the (for online experiments natural) emotional distance between the sender and receiver of the gratifying message and therefore trigger a stronger effect of it. This is because of the dynamic component of gratitude; among others depicted in Kerns (2006). Nonetheless, the absence of a picture could also be regarded as a positive aspect, since pictures of people are known to have the potential of eliciting prejudices in the mind of the humans (cf. Dixon & Lemke, 2007), which could have biased the results on job satisfaction.

### *Future research*

Previous research found out that there are gender differences in the perception of gratitude because women have a lower threshold for gratitude expressions; meaning that they intrinsically have more gratitude at their disposal than men (Kashdan et al., 2009). For example, literature points into the direction that women value gratitude expressions more than men do (Al-Khawaldeh & Žegarac, 2013) and that there are differences in gratitude expression preferences: while both seem to prefer spoken gratitude, men indicate higher appreciation for tangible gratitude expressions, such as money (Beck, 2016). Hence, analysing gender differences in gratitude perceptions at the workplace could be fruitful ground for future research.

In his employee focus groups, Beck (2016) found that sincerity is an important factor for the perception of gratitude, which is in line with the preliminary interviews that were carried out for this experiment, too. There are several features to sincerity by which employees seem to assess how honest a gratitude expression is. Above all, it should be made specific to a task, be personalised, it should follow directly upon the completion of the task and be equivalent to the task complexity (Beck, 2016) or, worded as an outcome of our interviews: the gratitude should match the task (appendix B). Further, there is evidence that facial expressions, the intonation of the voice and addressing previous relationship problems play a role in how honest gratitude is perceived (White, 2014). Future research will have to explore the relationship between gratitude and sincerity and find clear answers how it correlates with, for example, job satisfaction.

Given that organisations have become increasingly more international (Lauring, 2008), future investigations should consider intercultural human interaction as a starting point to analyse gratitude at the workplace. Cultures can be clustered into different communication styles (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988) and cultural dimensions (Hofstede Insights, n.d.; cf. Johnson et al., 2005). Bearing cultural differences in mind, Holmes (2013) for example states that the Japanese language utilises different verbal suffixes to express the appropriate degree of politeness, which implies an orientation to status in the language. The English language on the other hand trusts rather semantic indicators like using the first name or modal verbs such as *would*. Knowing that gratitude is developed mutually and interactively (Kerns, 2006), perhaps it could be of interest to assess intercultural intra-group differences in gratitude communication using experimental tasks. Conversation analysts and psycholinguists could draw valuable conclusions how gratitude is linguistically elicited and perceived in an international group setting.



### *Practical implications*

There is immediate economic desire to implement gratitude strategies in organisations due to the fact that social wellbeing at the workplace also prevents mental health issues in companies (Lambert et al., 2012) which cost US\$16.3 trillion between 2011 and 2030 (Cooper & Leiter, 2017). If spoken gratitude is conveyed genuinely, there is a chance that employees might enjoy their work and their workplace more due to improved emotional wellbeing. Subsequently, this could have a positive impact and lead to better organisational performance outcomes (Fehr et al., 2017).

However, managers or team leaders should not be concerned about expressing gratitude for easy and monotonous tasks. Our experiment showed that they do not require the same frequency or intensity of gratitude expressions. It is important to mention that, since spoken gratitude should play an incumbent role in an organisation, more time and personal contact should be made available for managers to interact and, in this case, thank their employees for example for a completed project or an accomplished business deal.

Also, HR departments should critically review, for example, Christmas cards containing written gratitude messages. According to the findings of this experiment, they could be redundant or at least should be delivered orally to the employees in order to have a meaningful effect on job satisfaction. A schema is a cognitive responsive behaviour motor originating in frequent emotional treatment patterns (Fehr et al., 2017). This means, that an employee frequently exposed to expressions or stimuli of “matched” gratitude could develop a gratitude schema for his or her workplace, lowering the threshold for going to work and contributing to job satisfaction. Further research is needed to show how spoken gratitude messages could be optimised and how they are intertwined with the complexity, difficulty or length of a work task.

### *Theoretical implications*

This research has suggested that it is important how gratitude is expressed in order to stimulate positive effects on job satisfaction, and therefore not only produced answers to the question **if** it matters but also **how** it should be most effectively expressed, which in recent works had been consonantly identified as a literature gap (Cain et al., 2019; Cooper & Leiter, 2017; cf. Fehr et al., 2017; Waters, 2012; Weaven, et al., 2017).

Previous research established a connection between communication channels and job satisfaction (White et al., 2010). Interestingly, this does not count when gratitude expressions are added as a predictor of job satisfaction, which is a major addition of the current study to the juvenile field of gratitude expression effects on job satisfaction.

Furthermore, new light was shed on politeness theory which already has been criticised as outdated (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003; cf. Floyd et al., 2018). It is debatable whether gratitude expressions represent an impactful positive politeness device online because gratitude expressions are increasingly perceived as socially redundant and therefore have a less intense effect. The current study has contributed to the notion that at least this is not the case with the means to increase job satisfaction.

### **Concluding remarks**

All in all, it does “manner” how gratitude is expressed: spoken gratitude is more effective compared to written gratitude. Perhaps gratitude does not have an immediate effect on job satisfaction, but it does play a vital role in our everyday face-to-face communication. Expressing gratitude does not only make the sender and receiver feel better, it also sustains social relationships which is of great importance especially under extreme circumstances, such as social distancing due to the current COVID19 disease.

### **References**

- Algoe, S. B. (2012). Find, remind, and bind: The functions of gratitude in everyday relationships. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 6(6), 455-469. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2012.00439.x>
- Al-Khawaldeh, N., & Žegarac, V. (2013). Gender and the communication of gratitude in Jordan. *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, 3(3), 268-287. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/ojml.2013.33035>
- Bargiela-Chiappini, F. (2003). Face and politeness: new (insights) for old (concepts). *Journal of pragmatics*, 35(10-11), 1453-1469. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166\(02\)00173-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166(02)00173-X)

- Beck, C. W. (2016). Perceptions of thanks in the workplace. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 21(3), 333-351. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-07-2014-0048>
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cain, I. H., Cairo, A., Duffy, M., Meli, L., Rye, M. S., & Worthington Jr, E. L. (2019). Measuring gratitude at work. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 14(4), 440-451. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2018.1484936>
- Cameron, K., Mora, C., Leutscher, T., & Calarco, M. (2011). Effects of positive practices on organizational effectiveness. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 47(3), 266-308. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021886310395514>
- Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2020). *Health And Well-Being At Work: Survey report March 2020*. [https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/health-and-well-being-2020-report\\_tcm18-73967.pdf](https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/health-and-well-being-2020-report_tcm18-73967.pdf)
- Cooper, C.L., & Leiter, M.P. (2017). *The Routledge Companion to Wellbeing at Work*. Routledge Handbooks Online.
- Croasmun, J. T., & Ostrom, L. (2011). Using Likert-Type Scales in the Social Sciences. *Journal of Adult Education*, 40(1), 19-22. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ961998>
- Crystal, D. (2005). *Speaking of Writing and Writing of Speaking*. Pearson Education. <http://www.pearsonlongman.com/dictionaries/pdfs/Speaking-Writing-Crystal.pdf>
- Dean, J. (2018, July 8). Why 'Thank You' Is More Than Just Good Manners. *PsychCentral*. <https://psychcentral.com/blog/why-thank-you-is-more-than-just-good-manners/>
- Dixon, M. R., & Lemke, M. (2007). Reducing prejudice towards Middle Eastern persons as terrorists. *European Journal of Behavior Analysis*, 8(1), 5-12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15021149.2007.11434269>
- Eisenstein, M. & Bodman, J. (1993). Expressing Gratitude in American English. In G. Kasper & S. Blum-Kulka (Eds.), *Interlanguage Pragmatics*. Oxford University Press.
- Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (2004). *The Psychology of Gratitude*. Oxford University Press.

- Euston, D. R., Gruber, A. J., & McNaughton, B. L. (2012). The role of medial prefrontal cortex in memory and decision making. *Neuron*, 76(6), 1057-1070. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuron.2012.12.002>
- Fehr, R., Fulmer, A., Awtrey, E., & Miller, J. A. (2017). The grateful workplace: A multilevel model of gratitude in organizations. *Academy of Management Review*, 42(2), 361-381. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2014.0374>
- Floyd, S., Rossi, G., Baranova, J., Blythe, J., Dingemanse, M., Kendrick, K. H., Zinken, J. & Enfield, N. J. (2018). Universals and cultural diversity in the expression of gratitude. *Royal Society open science*, 5(5), 180391. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsos.180391>
- Ganguli, H. C. (1994). *Job satisfaction scales for effective management: Manual for managers and social scientists*. Concept Publishing Company.
- Glisson, C. & Durick, M. (1988). Predictors of job satisfaction and organizational commitment in human service organizations. *Administrative science quarterly*, 33(1), 61-81. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2392855>
- Goffman, E. (1955). On face-work: An analysis of ritual elements in social interaction. *Psychiatry*, 18(3), 213-231. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00332747.1955.11023008>
- Grant, A. M., & Gino, F. (2010). A little thanks goes a long way: Explaining why gratitude expressions motivate prosocial behavior. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 98(6), 946-955. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0017935>
- Grondelaers, S., & Van Gent, P. (2019). How “deep” is Dynamism? Revisiting the evaluation of Moroccan-flavored Netherlandic Dutch. *Linguistics Vanguard*, 5(1), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1515/lingvan-2018-0011>
- Gudykunst, W.B., & Ting-Toomey, S. (1988). *Culture and interpersonal communication*. Sage Publications.
- Hamel, G. (n.d.). How Being Polite in the Workplace Helps. *Chron*. <https://smallbusiness.chron.com/being-polite-workplace-helps-37914.html>

- Hofstede Insights (n.d.). *Compare Countries*. Retrieved from <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/product/compare-countries/>
- Holmes, J. (2013). *Women, Men and Politeness* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Routledge.
- House, J. S., Landis, K. R., & Umberson, D. (1988). Social relationships and health. *Science*, *241*(4865), 540-545.  
<https://doi.org/10.1126/science.3399889>
- Johnson, R. (n.d.). What Makes Up Employee Satisfaction? *Chron*.  
<https://smallbusiness.chron.com/up-employee-satisfaction-22231.html>
- Johnson, T., Kulesa, P., Cho, Y. I., & Shavitt, S. (2005). The relation between culture and response styles: Evidence from 19 countries. *Journal of Cross-cultural psychology*, *36*(2), 264-277. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022104272905>
- Juniper, B. (2011). Defining employee wellbeing. *Occupational Health & Wellbeing*, *63*(10), 25.  
<https://search.proquest.com/openview/65888b376f379560d4d91f4a1afb1d6d/1?cbl=49149&pq-origsite=gscholar>
- Kashdan, T. B., Mishra, A., Breen, W. E., & Froh, J. J. (2009). Gender differences in gratitude: Examining appraisals, narratives, the willingness to express emotions, and changes in psychological needs. *Journal of personality*, *77*(3), 691-730.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2009.00562.x>
- Kerns, C.D. (2006). Gratitude at Work. *Graziadio Business Review*, *9*(4).  
<https://gbr.pepperdine.edu/2010/08/gratitude-at-work/>
- Kini, P., Wong, J., McInnis, S., Gabana, N., & Brown, J. W. (2016). The effects of gratitude expression on neural activity. *NeuroImage*, *128*, 1-10.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.neuroimage.2015.12.040>
- Lambert, N. M., Fincham, F. D., & Stillman, T. F. (2012). Gratitude and depressive symptoms: The role of positive reframing and positive emotion. *Cognition & Emotion*, *26*(4), 615-633. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02699931.2011.595393>

- Lauring, J. (2008). Rethinking social identity theory in international encounters: Language use as a negotiated object for identity making. *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*, 8(3), 343-361. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470595808096673>
- Locke, E. A. (1969). What is job satisfaction? *Organizational behavior and human performance*, 4(4), 309-336. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0030-5073\(69\)90013-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/0030-5073(69)90013-0)
- Luthans, F., & Larsen, J. K. (1986). How managers really communicate. *Human relations*, 39(2), 161-178. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001872678603900205>
- McCullough, M. E., Emmons, R. A., & Tsang, J. A. (2002). The grateful disposition: A conceptual and empirical topography. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 82(1), 112-127. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-3514.82.1.112>
- Men, L. R. (2014). Strategic internal communication: Transformational leadership, communication channels, and employee satisfaction. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 28(2), 264-284. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318914524536>
- Men, L. R. (2015). The internal communication role of the chief executive officer: Communication channels, style, and effectiveness. *Public Relations Review*, 41(4), 461-471. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2015.06.021>
- Moreira, M. (2019, October 29). Mind Your Manners: Why Politeness Wins in the Workplace. *Welcome to the Jungle*. <https://www.welcometothejungle.com/en/articles/why-politeness-wins-in-the-workplace>
- Nagy, M. S. (2002). Using a single-item approach to measure facet job satisfaction. *Journal of occupational and organizational psychology*, 75(1), 77-86. <https://doi.org/10.1348/096317902167658>
- Newman, J. B., & Horowitz, M. W. (1965). Writing and speaking. *College Composition and Communication*, 16(3), 160-164. <https://doi.org/10.2307/355730>
- Nowak, M. A., & Roch, S. (2007). Upstream reciprocity and the evolution of gratitude. *Proceedings of the royal society B: Biological Sciences*, 274(1610), 605-610. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2006.0125>

- Okamoto, S., & Robinson, W. P. (1997). Determinants of gratitude expressions in England. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 16*(4), 411-433.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X970164003>
- Sakiru, O. K., D'Silva, J. L., Othman, J., DaudSilong, A., & Busayo, A. T. (2013). Leadership styles and job satisfaction among employees in small and medium enterprises. *International Journal of Business and Management, 8*(13), 34.  
<https://doi.org/10.5539/ijbm.v8n13p34>
- Saleem, H. (2015). The impact of leadership styles on job satisfaction and mediating role of perceived organizational politics. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 172*(27), 563-569. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.01.403>
- Sanford, A. J., Sanford, A. J., Molle, J., & Emmott, C. (2006). Shallow processing and attention capture in written and spoken discourse. *Discourse Processes, 42*(2), 109-130. [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326950dp4202\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326950dp4202_2)
- Stagner, R. (1936). Judgments of voice and personality [Abstract]. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 27*(4), 272-277. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0057086>
- Toepfer, S. M., Cichy, K., & Peters, P. (2012). Letters of gratitude: Further evidence for author benefits. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 13*(1), 187-201.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-011-9257-7>
- Waddell, G., & Burton, A. K. (2006). *Is work good for your health and well-being?* The Stationery Office.
- Wanous, J. P., & Reichers, A. E. (1996). Estimating the reliability of a single-item measure. *Psychological Reports, 78*(2), 631-634.  
<https://doi.org/10.2466/pr0.1996.78.2.631>
- Wanous, J. P., Reichers, A. E., & Hudy, M. J. (1997). Overall job satisfaction: how good are single-item measures? *Journal of applied Psychology, 82*(2), 247-252.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.82.2.247>
- Waters, L. (2012). Predicting job satisfaction: Contributions of individual gratitude and institutionalized gratitude. *Psychology, 3*(12a), 1174-1176.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/psych.2012.312A173>

- Weaven, S., Baker, B. L., & Dant, R. P. (2017). The influence of gratitude on franchisor-franchisee relationships. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 55, 275-298. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jsbm.12263>
- White, P. (2014). Improving staff morale through authentic appreciation. *Development and Learning in Organizations: An International Journal*, 28(5), 17-20. <https://doi.org/10.1108/DLO-05-2014-0034>
- White, C., Vanc, A., & Stafford, G. (2010). Internal communication, information satisfaction, and sense of community: The effect of personal influence. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 22(1), 65-84. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10627260903170985>



## Appendix A

### Statement of own work:

Student name: Luka Paul Vethake

Student number: s1007392

PLAGIARISM is the presentation by a student of an assignment or piece of work which has in fact been copied in whole or in part from another student's work, or from any other source (e.g. published books or periodicals or material from Internet sites), without due acknowledgement in the text.

### DECLARATION:

- a. I hereby declare that I am familiar with the faculty manual (<http://www.ru.nl/stip/english/rules-regulations/fraud-plagiarism/>) and with Article 16 "Fraud and plagiarism" in the Education and Examination Regulations for the Bachelor's programme of Communication and Information Studies.
- b. I also declare that I have only submitted text written in my own words.
- c. I certify that this thesis is my own work and that I have acknowledged all material and sources used in its preparation, whether they be books, articles, reports, lecture notes, and any other kind of document, electronic or personal communication.



Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Place and date: Nijmegen, 15.06.2020

## Appendix B

### Qualitative interview transcripts:

I = interviewer, R = respondent

**The interviews might not be grammatically correct due to transcribing errors or conversational errors. Also, they were held by different individuals and therefore yielded different responses and interview (transcribing) styles. Sometimes the order changed, or the questions were adapted in order to maintain the communication flow.**

Interview questions:

1. What's your personal experience with gratitude in your environment?
2. Do you know what gratitude means? / How would you define gratitude?
3. How should gratitude be expressed to you as / how do you express gratitude to others?
4. Do you feel valued at work?
5. How often do you receive compliments/ appreciation from your superiors?
6. What do you think is the best way to create satisfaction in terms of gratitude?
7. When was the last time your manager expressed their gratitude towards you?
8. What is more frequent; verbal or non-verbal forms of gratitude in your work environment?
9. Does your manager let you know when you are doing a good job at work?
10. Would you like to hear 'thank you' more frequently?

### *Interview 1*

I: Thank you for participating in our tiny research. Just to repeat maybe two of the the most important features of this interview: You can leave this at any given point and also it is going to be about gratitude in your work environment. So maybe if you could possibly start with a short introduction of yourself...

R: I'm a teacher at a local secondary school, 53 years old, my subjects are music and English. I've been teaching at this very school for 22 years now and yeah the question of gratitude is interesting. Usually you get a good feeling if especially the principal; so the head teacher, gives you some rewards. Some kinds of gratification for excellent work that could be a lesson off or something like that.

I: Are those monetary rewards or is it-

R: Not really.

I: Could you describe what kind of reward?

R: Well there is monetary reward but this would be in form of extra work and the school board pays you a little extra if you do a certain amount of extra work. That's not the only thing, no; we're talking about the appreciation of what you do. But of course, that doesn't depend on the head teacher only. I think it's feedback you get from colleagues, from pupils you teach... Sometimes they just say "wow I like your lessons" or something like that.

I: Okay. Do you feel grateful the same way if you compare monetary rewards or appreciation as you say and let's verbal or non-verbal let's say it could be anything from 'thank you' to an email stating that "Dear M, we're very grateful to have you here. Good job."

R: These kinds of emails rarely happen but well I must say it doesn't depend on the money, no. It's not that. That doesn't give much gratification at all I would say. It's just the money you get and yeah you work for it and I think you somehow deserve a payment of course but no it's more the gratification coming from the interaction with colleagues and pupils and other members. So it's more the verbal thing like "Good job yesterday!" or concert or yeah as I said feedback from pupils and so on.

I: I feel if you think about those social interactions at your workplace – how, in your opinion, should gratitude be expressed to you? What's – for you – the best way; how would you appreciate it the most?

R: Well I appreciate it the most face-to-face; not in front of a big audience and everyone clapping because this is very often, to me at least, it's an artificial situation and not the honest way: straight from the heart as it-

I: Okay so it should be as you were saying- just to translate it into my world of communication it should be credible and direct(?)

R: Yes.

I: Okay. Thank you. And-

R: And if I may interrupt: You do feel if it's meant from the heart or not. So there's also empty gratification because if you focus on and repeat and if you actually say "I want to show gratitude for what you have done and great achievements" it's somehow the reverse: it's somehow the opposite what is reached by that.

I: So too much is..is-

R: Is bad-

I: -negative. Okay, okay. How do you by yourself express gratitude to others? That's also maybe interesting.

R: Well, basically the same way. I would give a brace to for example the pupil well if I catch them in the hallway saying "Good job today, you've really improved far better than usual" etc. etc. So this would be the smallest step of course. Or pupils I have worked with for over 5 or 6 years who I have known for a long time in other words; well I express gratitude for the chance to play music with them and to build our music community etc.

I: And you do this the same way you would say? Also direct and, well, as you said coming from the heart?

R: Yes, if it is verbally person-to-person, yeah.

I: Okay. How does it change in a written context?

R: Yeah it's kind of more humorous; with a light humour. For example, if I have a chat in which pupils are involved and I want to point out that A did a good job in working for the group, whatsoever, I think pupils have learnt to understand my humour: The lighter it gets, the more serious the effect is because I have realised that the persons actually like this better than if I just formally say "That was very good, pupil X!"

I: So with your pupils you express gratitude in an informal and humorous way, kind of.

R: Yes. Yes. Yes.

I: And how does it then change if your superiors express gratitude to you in a written context? Could you elaborate on that-

R: You mean what has changed or-

I: No, kind of how do they communicate gratitude towards you. If they do, I don't know.

R: In a written context?

I: Exactly, yeah. For sure, if I may, sometimes for example before Christmas when... Do you know where I'm getting?

R: I see yeah yeah. Now I understand. Yeah well this is exactly the formal way "I would really like to thank you for a year full of work for the school" etc. etc. etc. And actually I don't need it and I don't really like it because it's just a collection of hollow phrases; stock phrases expressing this for my superiors. It's quite different from mails I get by colleagues. This is entirely different because they would rather say, straight from the heart, "Good job mate" or something like that.

I: Okay, okay good. Well moving on to the next question: Do you feel valued at work?

R: So if my work is appreciated or if I as a person am?

I: Oh God that's another topic. I guess both but-

R: Yeah you can't separate it-

I: Yeah but through the eyes of well obviously yourself but yeah, go on.

R: So it's... Oh yeah that's really a good question; the feeling...

I: Or what makes you feel valued at work?

R: Okay, well that's very simple: If I get the same respect that I also pay to everyone. This is actually the basis. And that's where any kind of value starts. I- well as you say here in Germany it's called "*dutzen*", we say you in the informal way: I've got only 2 colleagues out of almost 100 which I find arrogant and have never come to terms with and all the others are on eye level: they can be 30 years old or 65; it's not a question of experience or age no, we're all the same.

I: And with the colleagues that you don't get along so super well do you use like the formal terms? Like "*Sie*"?

R: Yeah. Exactly. Just to keep a distance because I'm not really...

I: Language can be used for so many things; also as you said for social positioning. So yeah that's not far off at all. This is also really interesting: How often do you get compliments or appreciation for your work?

I: Well at school this is rather seldom in a way because your position as a teacher you have to make the pupils work and achieve something and you also give marks and you see it's another kind of gratification they get, the pupils, but not all are content with their achievements and sometimes they blame it on to you , the bad mark but well thinking about it: appreciation can be attention. Sometimes, when you really have the feeling that this is really interesting for the pupils and that they are engaged in conversation and contribute something: This actually happens. Not with all of the pupils all of the time that would be far too optimistic and even naïve but you know you do your job well when you see that they are here; I really opened up the pupils minds and yeah..

I: Of course yeah. Would you like to hear thank you from superiors as in forms of appreciation more?

R: More often? It depends for what. Well a simple thank you is something I would like to or everyone likes to hear – so do I. It just depends for what would I get a thank you. What do you mean? I mean it could be a very simple everyday situation or is it related to your job?

I: It's more related to yeah I guess to the job then. When... It can also I think... I personally think it also depends what type of let's call it job act, job action you've just performed and how gratitude is expressed to you because well I think if you receive.. Superogity it's called I think ; it's like highly explicit super overloadedly expressed gratitude for a simple task then I think it also becomes less credible.

R: That's right.

I: So the question – I think – also is to some extent how do you balance gratitude in an organisation no? In order to motivate employees-

R: Yeah..

I: Which actually leads me to the question: Would you feel more motivated or satisfied with your job if you received gratitude but let's call it "matched gratitude" more frequently? If it matches the task you performed.

R: If it matched the task I've performed yes. Otherwise it's... It easily gets well they easily develop some kind of inflation of praise. This is exactly what nobody needs and which is even as I said before adding to the contrary: Not so much creating a good feeling.

I: Okay but you would say in general, it does contribute to your job satisfaction?

R: It would, if it's meant seriously and if also – and this is perhaps strange but if it's also connected to critical feedback. So if there's a culture in an organisation or company or here in my school – if we talked more openly about what's really good and praising or giving gratitude to individuals and ALSO not closing our eyes to what's not going down so well that would be even better. So it's not only gratitude that helps it's also kind of openness that goes along with that. I mean openness to self-criticism.

I: Yeah yeah, I think I understand what you're on about. So actually, when was the last time gratitude was expressed to you? Let's start with your superiors ..

R: Okay well after I performed a week of rehearsing with a lot of pupils I was asked how it was and I everything went fine. And then I was very satisfied so great and thanks... That was the last one. So that's about 3 weeks ago or something.

I: 3 weeks ago? Okay. Does your superior actually let you know when you did a good job?

R: Yes. And...it's a she so she absolutely wants to but there's sometimes an embarrassing situation because I ... I-

I: What's going wrong when she tries to express gratitude?

R: I sense she comes to me and approaches me and Do(es) know I've done something great like performed a concert or whatever and it's... yeah well the atmosphere is... she wants to say something nice and say thank you and give gratification in that form but she overdoes it. So it's like like not inflation in words but in intensity so this doesn't get very believable.

I: Okay. Okay yeah.

R: Or convincing or...even not natural in a way. See; you can really do something really wrong by doing something like this.

I: Yes, yes of course. Yes, absolutely. Yeah..

R: But I wanted - if I may add something the last time I was praised was just 2 hours ago by a pupil who said "Wow you look good in your carnival costume" and so on or "You're my favourite teacher" that's what the little ones usually say if they don't know what else to say. I think this is really nice and I really appreciate it very much.

I: So actually gratitude occurs more between colleagues or let's say downstream gratitude and upstream from your students that sense; so your superiors do not express gratitude adequately.

R: No. Sometimes they repeat over and over again that this was really great so it's too much and sometimes I feel a bit... Not ignored but-

I: Not taken seriously?

R: Taken seriously rather than that. So it's not the frequency of thank yous but more.. yeah indeed.

I: Okay. What is the best way to create job satisfaction at work? And this is the last question.

R: Okay. Well as a superior in my opinion you should not only create the feeling that everyone is taken care of but you should actually take care of your employees. So in other words: You should focus on a healthy and clean work environment and also...

I: What does that mean?

R: Well it starts with rooms: temperature, equipment so that you feel physically well yes and also that you as an employer or as a superior take care about the mental health of your colleagues so having a good eye on who seems to be strained and overstressed or stressed out and take measures accordingly. So to both prevent further deterioration and also to enhance the identification and therefore the happiness at work or the contentment.

I: So there should be a personal relationship between the superior and the teachers in this case?

R: Yes. Yes is of course of tremendous add. The other side would be a head teacher who sits in his office all day long and lets the teachers do their business, their work but never gets in touch. So this would be not suitable at all, no.

I: And I think I cut you off when we were talking about job satisfaction right?

R: Yeah...

I: Sorry for the intervention-

R: Yeah no can we... We have somehow been spinning off this thing: What was the question exactly?

I: Yeah: What is the best way to create job satisfaction at work? And you started with physical needs and for your superior let's call it observe the staff...

R: Yeah well observe....Take care of the needs



I: Be there-

R: Yeah be present but, and this is the second part actually, that you create the feeling of trust, so that you trust in their employees that they will do their job fine and that you as an employee; teacher in this case; have the feeling that I can do my work alone; I'm capable of and this is also seen by my superior. I don't need any control or guidance really. Help yes but too much control and guidance is actually not productive.

I: Acknowledgement of your skills-

R: Yes. Yes-

I: In that sense.

R: Right.

I: Okay. Okay. Well then if you think about it, a lot of things are on the table now; if you think more in a written context; how could you improve job satisfaction?

R: Written context means anything I get...?

I: Anything any... In this case it's not corporate but any institutional email leaving the head office. For example.

R: The head office or rather that would be a superior board maybe yeah-

I: Do you think there's a need for more employee communication like... Would your workplace be enriched if there was a sort of communication specialist in the head office that can actually design those as I said institutional messages in a way that employees feel more valued feel more happy or-

R: I'm not too sure. I would rather say no because it's different. We have to sit through so many letters or emails each day that we rather not be actually overly thankful if we're emailed with something positive because it gets lost in the vast amount of other texts but well if I think about gratitude at work it's about being noticed. And once you've got a complaint for the higher board if you write to them, since I'm the speaker of my colleagues, I wrote a letter and never got response. A constructive letter about some critical issues it doesn't matter here but so it's also about non-gratification if nobody cares what you write or think about. So this is the thing: if your noticed in both your needs and wants but you don't get any response that would be bad. But okay that's not what my actual superior does but in general, as you asked.

I: Okay. Okay so yeah also it's a question of frequency and intensity absolutely.

R: So too much is definitely harmful but not at all is not good either.

I: Okay well thank you very much for this interview, we're done already: 25 minutes more or less.

R: I hope I could give some input at all...

I: Yes.

R: Of course, a business is a different organisation than a school but interaction works either way so..-

I: Exactly and it actually serves our research purposes...

R: So then I have not lived in vain.

I: Thank you very much. Good bye.

R: You're welcome. Bye.

### *Interview 2*

I: What's your personal experience with gratitude in your environment?

R: In the family environment, gratitude plays a horrendous role. This is in contrast to the attitude towards gratitude in the work environment.

I: Do you know what gratitude means? / How would you define gratitude?

R: To appreciate someone's work to be able to say/show how thankful you are.

I: How should gratitude be expressed to you as / how do you express gratitude to others?

R: For me it would definitely be enough to know that my colleagues and bosses are happy with my work. Every now and then it is needed to simply mention, that someone does good work.

I: Do you feel valued at work?

R: It depends on the persons. In general, I do.

I: How often do you receive compliments/ appreciation from your superiors?

R: Once every half a year during a periodical meeting. Additionally, in case she presents my results, she mentions my name, which is a kind of appreciation from her.

I: What do you think is the best way to create satisfaction in terms of gratitude?

R: As mentioned in 3. While discussing different topics/results of work, mention (although the results are not convincing) that someone does great work.

I: When was the last time your manager expressed their gratitude towards you?

R: December 2019

I: What is more frequent; verbal or non-verbal forms of gratitude in your work environment?

R: Verbal

I: Does your manager let you know when you are doing a good job at work?

R: Sometimes.

I: Would you like to hear 'thank you' more frequently?

R: Yes, I would love to.

### *Interview 3*

- **Question 1:**

If you put gratitude in the small version, it is not so much of importance I would say, but once you put it in a bigger perspective, in a holistic perspective, then it is a major important instrument but I would like to come back on that later.

- **Question 2:**

As I said already in question number one, of course I know what it means and it depends on how you look at it. Do you look at it on the small version or do you look at it with a holistic perspective? Because that makes the difference in defining the word. The word is nice but how do you load the word, that is the most important thing.

- **Question 3:**

Again, you need if you are using instruments as a leader or if you get is as an employee, you should always be able to load it, to load the term. I mean, uh, you say thank you to an employee, which, well, it is nice but it works for maybe 10 seconds you know if a boss says thank you to his employee. But to load it, that has a much

more impact. This is what you want as a leader, you want to have impact on your employees. Uhm, so, yeah that is my answer.

- **Question 4:** (question modified to the respondent's circumstances: did you feel valued at work, when you were still working?)

Yeah, but mainly by my employees. I have been a very independent leader in the past, that means that sometimes it is very easy, but it means, practically it meant that if I had any confrontations it was usually with MY boss or with the shareholders or with the board of directors where I also was part of, uhm, so when it comes to do you feel valued at work then I would say I got it more from my employees: the interaction between employees and myself. And, then again, I have the privilege to feel very independent so I didn't really care if I got compliments from my bosses because it was nice and it was there but it didn't have to. But what is important: employees! Because they make or break you. They are the most important!

- **Question 5:**

Not often, but I was also not asking for it and it was not in our culture so much on that level, it was not a common thing to give or receive compliments.

- **Question 6:**

Yeah, yeah, and now we get a little bit to the holistic area, right? I would say that the word gratitude, uh, I would take the word gratitude in a wider perspective. If you as a leader can offer a pack of instruments which can influence the vitality of employees and psychological basic needs of employees, being: competence, autonomy, relatedness, and meaning, and I will come back on those 4 elements, if you can offer them, then I know, and this is scientifically proved by my dear friend professor W. who by the way has been awarded one of the top 1 professors in the world, then, then you can have a REAL impact on employees and THEN you can use gratitude, again, if you see the in-depth perspective of these 5 elements (again: vitality, competence, autonomy, relatedness and meaning) if you can really LOAD those terms, then you get somewhere! Then you are getting REALLY somewhere with gratitude.

- **Question 7:**

Haha, today my manager is my wife! (laughs). No just kidding haha, but the last time gratitude was expressed I don't recall.

- **Question 8:** (question + additional explanation: ‘so, what did you experience more, was it in the form of verbal communication like people saying ‘thank you’ or was it more non-verbal like you could read of their faces that they were very happy with you as an employee or as a boss or a leader. I mean, how did you experience that?)  
Well, actually I experienced it in the numbers: the increasing revenue numbers and the increasing profit numbers and increasing happiness and the increasing mental energy of my employees. We measured that every year by Aon Hewitt at that time, Aon Hewitt was measuring the mental energy of employees in companies across Europe. Here we talk about the employee engagement level, the mental energy level, that is sort of the school report for the CEO, because THAT says ‘Hey boss, I am happy to work for you and I will make sure I am never sick, I make sure I give you the revenues and the profits’ (sick as in ill so that the employee can’t go to work).

I: Would you link that skill to employee motivation as well?

DEFINITELY!

- **Question 9:**  
Well, I as a manager let my people know that they were doing a fantastic job, YES! Every month, I had the figures: the increasing numbers of revenues and increasing numbers of profit and cashflows. I learned my people how to read the balance sheet, I learned my people how to read the profit and loss account, so that they could follow, with me, the development of our company and by THAT I am coming back to the relatedness thing of the 4 items that I used before. People loved it! And then, at the same time, I told my employees that these results were their efforts. This is what we did together! So, yes, this is the way how I did it every month.
- **Question 10:**  
Only if it is loaded! Else it is just a useless thing! If I did something good, really something outstanding, then yes, of course, I want to have my credits. But a good employee comes to his boss and says ‘hey, I want your compliments now because I have done something f\*cking good!’.

I: well, thank you for your time, we are now done with the ten questions!

#### *Interview 4*

I: What’s your personal experience with gratitude in your environment?

R: Well, besides people saying thank you for your help and your advice, sometimes people give me a card of something else to express their gratitude for my help to them.

I: So you sometimes receive a card? How does that make you feel?

R: Yes, it is very nice when people do something extra to make you feel happy. I also receive messages from people expressing their thanks.

I: Do you receive those often?

R: No not very often, they are more like an exception than a rule. And they mostly come from clients.

I: Okay. Do you also receive gratitude from your supervisor sometimes?

R: Yes, I do and those expressions are the nicest. Sometimes in a verbal form and sometimes in the form of a present.

I. Do you know what gratitude means?/ How would you define gratitude?

R: When people express their sincere feelings they have, because you helped them with something or in a particular situation. It can be an expression with words, a small present or by just giving them a hug.

I: What do you think is most common

R: Just saying thank you very much, so using words. The most important thing about showing your gratitude is taking an effort for someone, which I appreciate.

I. How should gratitude be expressed to you as / how do you express gratitude to others?

R: It depends why I want to express my gratitude and to whom

I: On what does it depend?

R: It depends on the relationship. If you give someone flowers or just a hug or a more expensive present.

I: Okay. And to whom would you give a hug and to whom flowers?

R: When you have a more friendly or family kind of relationship you would give a hug sooner. In a business relationship you would express your gratitude in terms of a card, flowers or just by saying thank you.

I. Do you feel valued at work?

R: Yes, I do.

I: Okay. How is that expressed to you?

R: It is expressed by words, by reflecting on what went well in a group and by saying that you did a good job and that your work is appreciated.

I: Okay. And do you get that mostly from your supervisor or from you colleagues?

R: More supervisor than colleagues, but I receive gratitude from both.

I. How often do you receive compliments/ appreciation from your superiors?

R: Normally about once a month.

I: do you think that is enough

R: Yes I think that is enough. I do not want a compliment every day, because I think it would not be realistic any more then.

I: What would be not realistic anymore?

R: That your effort is appreciated.

I: So you think someone needs to express their gratitude at some point, but not every time you do something good?

I: I think showing gratitude is very important but is must not be something to be done easily, because uhm...

R: Because it will become common?

I: Yes. You should not forget it, but it should not be too common in order to be realistic.

I. What do you think is the best way to create satisfaction in terms of gratitude?

R: Well, I think that when you are working on a project and sometimes you have an evaluation with your team and then it is good to realize okay what are we doing, what did we achieve and how did we do it. Then it is good to say what went well and what went wrong and to express your gratitude about it in order to motivate everyone to finish their job. So it is a positive thing to mention everyone's achievements when you want to have a feeling of satisfaction.

I. When was the last time your manager expressed their gratitude towards you?

R: During Christmas

I: Okay. And what did you receive?

R: I could pick a Christmas present a liked.

I: And do you find that valuable?

R: Yes.

I. What is more frequent; verbal or non-verbal forms of gratitude in your work environment?

R: Verbal

I: Like?

R: You did a great job. Thank you. We finished this project very well.

I. Does your manager let you know when you are doing a good job at work?

R: Not on a daily or weekly base, but now and then, yes.

I: And that is mostly verbal?

R: Yes.

I: Do you ever get something tangible when perfectly finishing a project?

R: Sometimes.

I: And why do you get that?

R: Because then you went for the extra mile and you did something extra, which is being appreciated. For finishing normal projects, you usually do not receive some form of non-verbal gratitude.

I. Would you like to hear 'thank you' more frequently?

R: That is a difficult one. Not particularly, but if I would not receive it anymore, I would miss it.

I: Okay, so you are satisfied with how things are going in the workplace regarding gratitude?

R: Yes, all things considered, I am satisfied.

I: Okay, thank you for your time and information.

### *Interview 5*

I: How would you define gratitude?

R: Ughm, it's like, it is like an **expression how you say thank you** or you show other people your appreciation or kindness.

I: What is your personal experience with gratitude in your environment?

R: In my environment, at work, for instance, I really like when you work hard, or simple things you do and your co-workers **thank you or say 'nice job' or something simple like that is very nice** to hear from your co-workers or people that work together with you showing that they appreciate that you work hard.



I: How should gratitude should be expressed to you? How do you express gratitude to others?

R: Sometimes I... if people offer me help, I don't know, helping me with the job/ work, I really do appreciate it and I always try to **say thank you**; those simple things are very nice.

I: Do you feel valued at work in this sense?

R: Sometimes.

I: Could you elaborate, please?

R: Like what do you mean?

I: Do you feel valued from your manager – do they do something special to show their gratitude?

R: For me personally, when the manager or the supervisor **says thank you or say something simple you do a nice job**, it somehow makes me feel better, let's me know that I did something good at work.

I: Alright. And how often do you receive compliments or appreciation from your supervisor/ manager?

I: Not very often, but also not really... I don't know... Mostly, every day that I work, especially when it's busy or during the weekend, they always **say 'Thank you'**. Mostly the managers.

R: Uhm... Is it only about saying 'Thank you' for you?

I: It's more like about **the attitude** that you are not just working there, but you are also appreciated that you are there at your work, they appreciate it, so I like it.

I: What do you think is the best way in creating satisfaction in terms of gratitude for you personally?

R: Let me think... I don't know, to be honest. **'Thank you' is enough** for me at the moment.

I: Alright but if you think in perspective?

R: Ughm...

I: Is it something like you want to receive an email like '...name... has done a good job', a dinner with the team as an appreciation, is it something that should be shown with a smile, is it something to say?

R: In this order, maybe a little bit appreciation, maybe **a nice email would be suitable or a small gift** (e.g. free drinks when you are handing with your friends at your work place) or any other branch of the hotel. Yes, maybe that is nice.

I: And do you remember the last time your manager expressed their gratitude towards you?

R: Ughm... It was before the last he worked before his vacation.

I: Alright, and what did he do?

R: He just **said ‘Thank you for being here today and see you again after the holiday’** as he was on a vacation. But 2 days ago, or something, the supervisor said to me: ‘Thank you for your help today’.

I: What is more frequent in your opinion at your workplace – verbal or non-verbal forms of gratitude.

R: **Verbal, I like it** when the manager or supervisor or even the other people you work with **say ‘Thank you’**. Because then you know that you are being appreciated or you know that you are doing a good job.

I: So, you said your manager lets you know when you are doing a great job.

R: Yes, something like that.

I: Alright. And would you like to get more gratitude from you manager or supervisor?

R: Ughm... Maybe from some people that do not appreciate my efforts. However, for now I am alright with the manager and the supervisors because I think that **if you always hear thank you all the time, sometimes you don’t know if it is real thank you or they say it just to be nice.**

I: So, could this have a cultural part of it?

R: Yes, yes, definitely.

I: So, you have to be polite because maybe that’s what people usually do.

R: Yes, yes, yeah, yeah, yeah, true.

I: And how often do you give compliments or show gratitude towards other people?

R: Not often, but **I try to compliment or to show my gratitude** who help me and even to people that work in the same day with me because it's nice to have somebody else happy when you work with them the entire shift.

I: Is it a disappointment for you if you do a good job and they show you gratitude?

R: For me personally, no. Sometimes if the supervisors or the manager keep saying thank you or show the gratitude everyday – it might not come across as genuine. For now, I am good. Yeah. No disappointment

I: Technically, it doesn't have to occur all the time, but do you think then showing gratitude is an important part for your job satisfaction that you want to stay with the company for a long time?

R: Yeah, I think so.

I: Could you elaborate, please?

R: Even if you do small thing, even if you are new at your workplace, **I think it is still very nice to compliment your employee a little bit**, so, that they know that they are doing a good job. I think it is just nice if somebody came to you and they appreciated what you do even though you do a lot of mistakes. It is always nice if people give you the positive attitude about how you work and how you are there and they appreciate that you are there.

I: Alright, so you say that it is very important for your satisfaction that the management shows their gratitude.

R: Yes, yes.

I: Having the current situation, would you keep working there or would you like to quit, e.g.

R: Yes, for now, I am pretty satisfied, I am still planning to work for a few more months ahead.

I: Alright, and the last question I would have for you would be, if you were to choose a workplace, what kind of a workplace would you choose – a job that shows gratitude on every milestone and constantly, **a job that shows gratitude occasionally on some milestones** or a job that pays well but no gratitude at all?

R: I think the second one – because it is not too much, but also not too fake, I don't know how to say it properly.

I: Could you elaborate, please?

R: I think it is nice if you work at a place where your bosses appreciate your work not too often, you know, because for me personally I don't want to hear the gratitude every single day because it's a bit too much, you know.

I: Yes, I understand that. Thank you very much, this is the end of our interview thank you very much for your participation.

R: No worries, you are welcome!

## Appendix C

### Layout of the survey (written condition):

Dear participant,

You are invited to participate in a research project about cognitive mechanisms of perception in a working environment for which you are asked to complete a country task and follow-up questionnaire. This research project only requires participants working or that have worked in the Netherlands and is being conducted by International Business Communication students from Radboud University. Joining this experiment should take approximately 10 minutes.

The data collected during this study is anonymous and cannot be traced back to you. Such data will be used as part of datasets, articles and presentations exclusively for the purposes of this research.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You can withdraw your participation and consent at any time without giving a reason, and all of the collected data from you will be permanently deleted.

Should you want more information about this research, or in case you have any questions / complaints, please send an email to [l.bottcher@student.ru.nl](mailto:l.bottcher@student.ru.nl).

Note: If you do not meet the following criteria, we kindly ask you to quit the survey.

I am at least 18 years old.

Yes

No

I am currently working or have worked in the Netherlands.

Yes

No

I have read the information text and give consent to participate.

Yes

No

In the following part, you will complete a task, in which you will be asked to match countries with their corresponding flags. You will be presented with a country / continent name and 4 possible answer options. Please indicate which flag fits the country / continent.

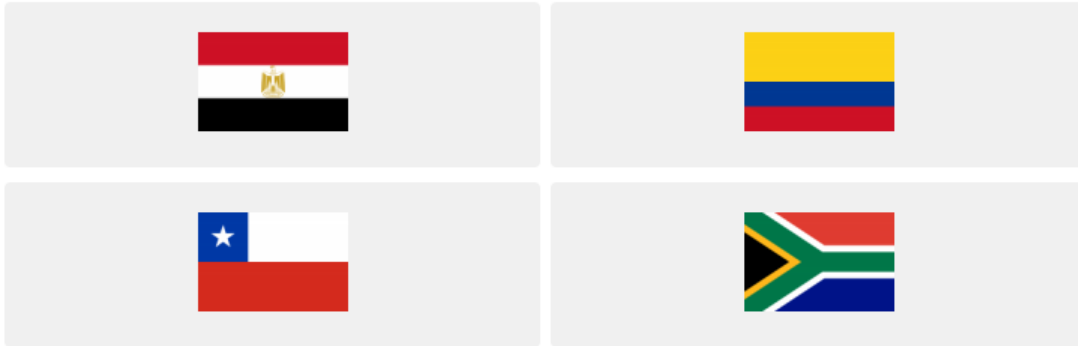
Brazil



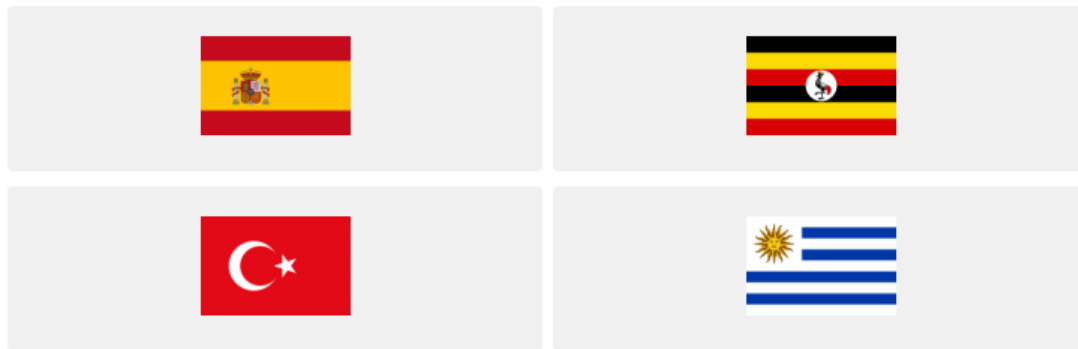
Antarctica



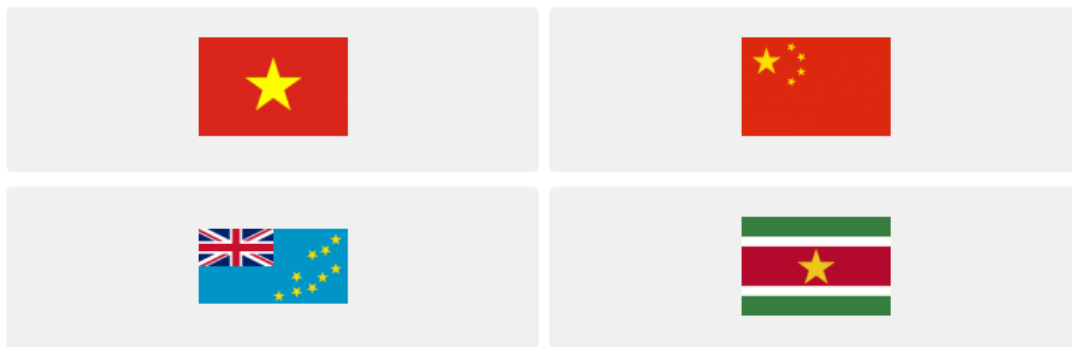
South Africa



Spain



China



USA



New Zealand

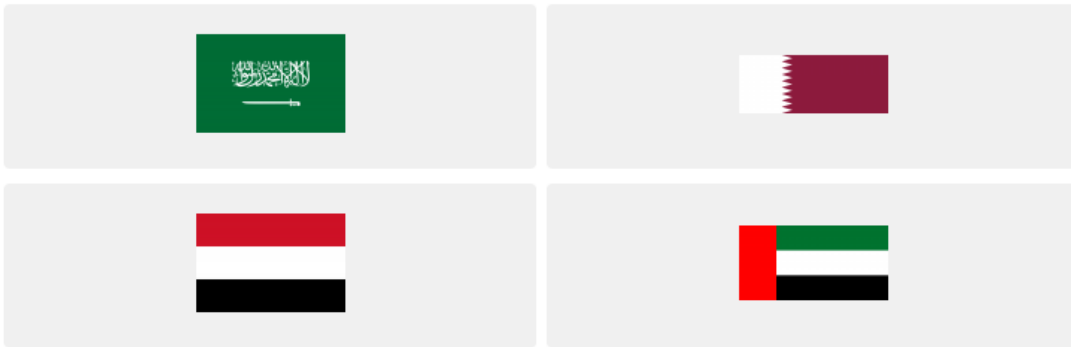


Kenya

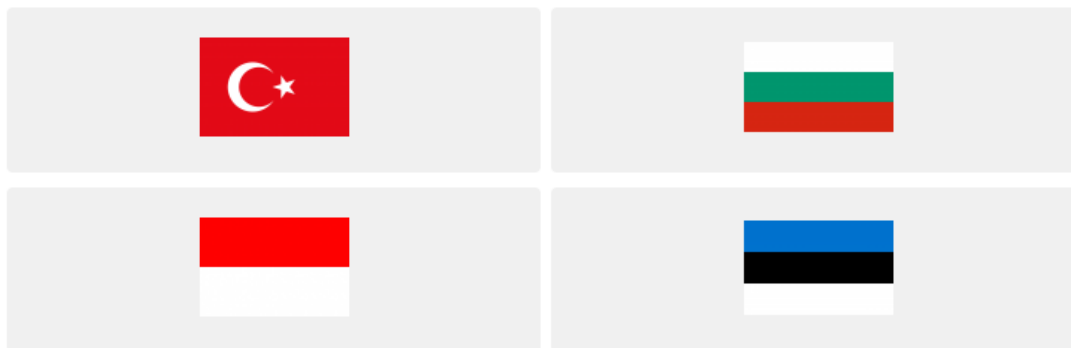




Qatar



Turkey



Thailand



Romania



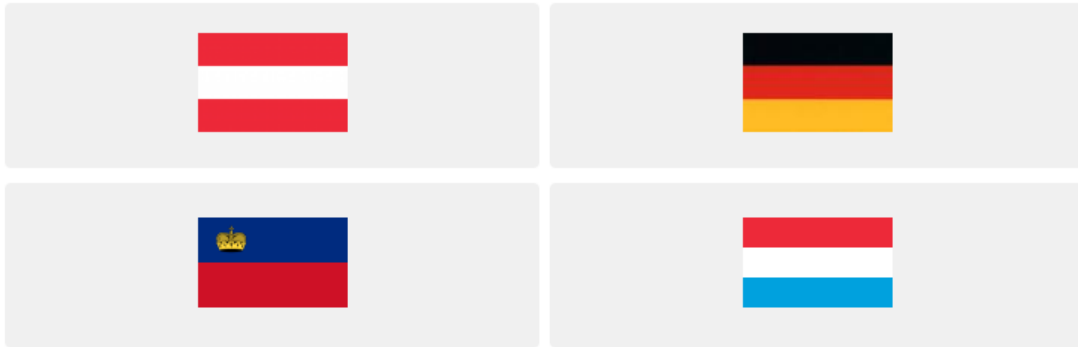
Tanzania



Bulgaria



Germany

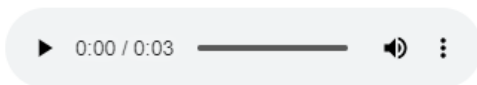


Thank you very much for your participation!

Please now continue with the follow-up questionnaire.

or:

Please make sure your audio is ON to hear the following recording.



*Please now continue with the follow-up questionnaire.*

*Please now continue with the follow-up questionnaire.*

Were you able to hear the message?

Yes

No

In my opinion, the experiment was...

Very  
unenjoyable

Unenjoyable

Somewhat  
unenjoyable

Neutral

Somewhat  
enjoyable

Enjoyable

e

My gender is:

Male

Female

Other

My age is:

My nationality is:

My highest education degree is:

Less than high school degree

High school degree

Associate degree (2-year)

Bachelor's degree HBO & WO (3- or 4-year)

Master's degree HBO & WO

Doctoral degree

How religious do you consider yourself to be?

Not religious

Neutral

Religious

Thank you so much for taking your time to complete the survey! You really helped us a lot!

