

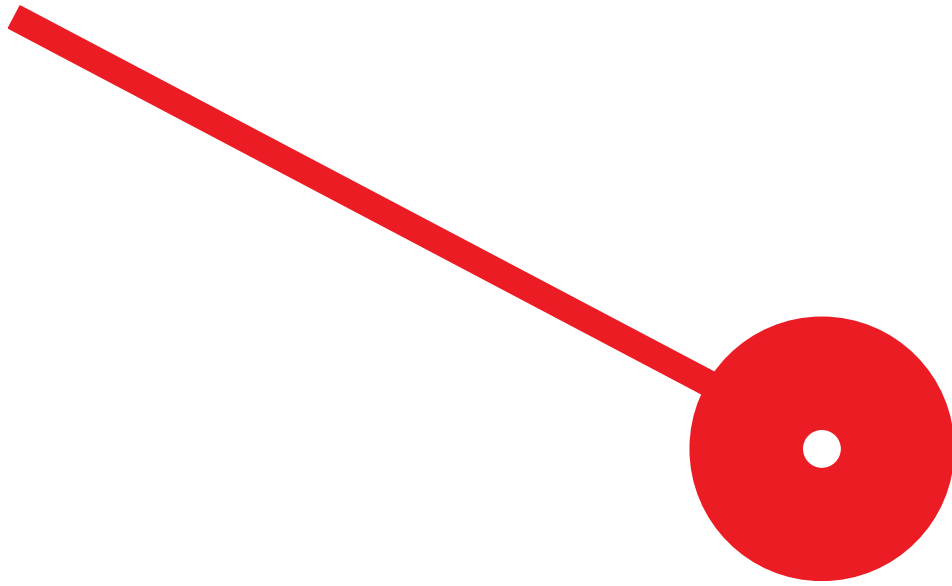
Unveiling Organizational Culture Diversity in the German Automotive Industry: A Cross-Cultural Study between Germany and Portugal

Marta Vieira Dias

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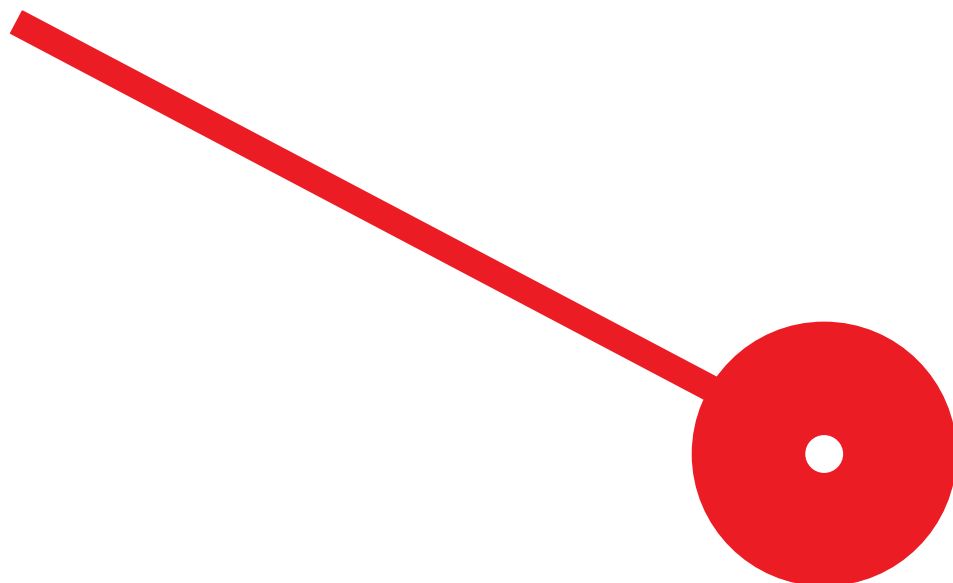
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Marta Vieira Dias

Master's dissertation presented to Instituto Superior de Contabilidade e Administração do Porto to obtain the Master's degree in Intercultural Studies for Business under the guidance of Professor Marco António Cerqueira Mendes Furtado.



Dedicatória

Esta dissertação, que simboliza a finalização desta etapa tão importante do meu percurso acadêmico é dedicada a todos os que me apoiaram e nunca me deixaram desistir. Sem vocês nunca teria sido possível.

Ao meu padrinho, continua a olhar por nós e a guiar-me em todas as etapas da minha vida.

Agradecimentos

Ao meu namorado, que sempre me apoiou neste processo e nunca me deixou desistir. Acompanhaste-me na saúde e na doença, em noites mal dormidas, em momentos de pânico e de incerteza, sempre com palavras de reafirmação. Obrigada por me convenceres todos os dias que, apesar de todas as dificuldades, eu sou capaz. És o meu melhor amigo e o meu parceiro de todas as horas, por isso, este trabalho é meu mas também teu, que me ajudaste a revê-lo mais de uma vez.

À minha mãe, a quem sou eternamente grata por nunca me ter faltado nada em toda a vida e por ser graças a ela e ao seu esforço interminável que tenho esta oportunidade. Serás sempre a minha melhor amiga, a minha confidente e um dos meus maiores apoios.

À minha madrinha, que sempre teve uma palavra de carinho e apoio para me dar e que durante o decorrer deste ano atípico me mostrou o verdadeiro significado de força. Obrigada por seres o meu porto seguro e a minha avó emprestada.

Ao meu pai, que me apresentou a paixão por automóveis e que me deixou acompanhar essa paixão durante toda a minha vida. Obrigada por me apresentares esta paixão e por constantemente a partilhares comigo. Podemos falar horas sobre este assunto que nunca se tornará cansativo, obrigada por também teres contribuído para a construção do tema deste trabalho e obrigada por manteres o Golf vivo aos seus jovens 26 anos.

Abstract:

This dissertation summarizes the concepts and theories learned over the two years as the conclusion of the master's degree in Intercultural Studies for Business.

Organizational culture is a concept that can be considered a company's heart since it consists of its values, legal matters, results, and employees. During this final work, this concept and different approaches will be explored and it will be justified why organizational culture is so important for companies.

Since the Master's consists of Culture and Business, creating case studies about companies was an option to join the two main pillars of the course. The German Automotive Industry is considered one of the biggest in the world and it strongly emphasizes the importance of their corporate culture. Audi AG, Mercedes-Benz, and Volkswagen AG were the chosen companies to study and evaluate since they are some of the biggest in the industry. Due to this, it was possible to analyze the relation between the companies' cultures and their results. The German culture is strongly rooted in the business as well.

When studying these companies, it was also possible to compare the contrast of cultural backgrounds and compare the same companies' culture and environment in two different countries: Germany, the headquarters, and Portugal, with the branches. For this, a study on the differences between Portugal's and Germany's work cultures was conducted to proceed with the analysis of the brands and their respective comparisons.

Key words: Organizational Culture, Intercultural Communication, Automotive Industry, Business

Resumo:

Como conclusão do Mestrado em Estudos Interculturais para Negócios, esta dissertação tem como objetivo comprimir conceitos e teorias que foram adquiridos ao longo dos dois anos do curso.

Cultura Organizacional é um conceito que pode ser considerado o coração de uma empresa uma vez que consiste nos valores, assuntos legais, resultados e funcionários da mesma. Durante a realização deste trabalho final, este conceito e diferentes abordagens serão explorados e será justificado o porquê de cultura organizacional ser tão importante para uma empresa.

Uma vez que o Mestrado consiste em Cultura e Negócios, criar casos de estudo sobre companhias foi uma opção para juntar os dois grandes pilares do curso. A Indústria Automóvel Alemã é considerada uma das maiores no mundo e enfatiza fortemente a sua cultura corporativa. Audi AG, Mercedes-Benz e Volkswagen AG foram as empresas escolhidas para ser estudadas e avaliadas uma vez que são consideradas umas das maiores da indústria. Devido a isto, foi possível analisar a relação entre as culturas das empresas e os seus resultados. A cultura Alemã está fortemente enraizada também no negócio.

Aquando do estudo destas companhias, também foi possível comparar o contraste de origens culturais e também comparar a cultura das mesmas empresas em países diferentes: Alemanha, onde se situa a sede e Portugal, onde se situam as sucursais. Para isto, um estudo sobre as diferenças entre a cultura de trabalho de Portugal e da Alemanha foi concluído de forma a proceder com a análise das marcas e respetivas comparações.

Palavras chave: Cultura Organizacional, Comunicação Intercultural, Indústria Automóvel, Negócios

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INTRODUCTION

Organizational culture is a key factor for a company's success, since it symbolizes its identity, and values, and is reflected in its results.

In the context of the German Automotive Industry, one of the biggest industries in the world, organizational culture plays a vital role in its success and contributes to its reputation as an innovative industry. This industry is not only a crucial economic support for Germany, but it is also for Europe and, during the Second World War was even considered the savior of Europe's weakened condition. World-known German brands such as Volkswagen AG, Mercedes-Benz, and Audi AG defend a strong organizational culture that comprises values of social inclusion, and, in most technical terms, these brands defend a highly skilled workforce. German companies are known to invest in innovation and learning programs, always aiming for improvement and preserving the brands' quality and efficiency.

As successful brands, these companies have branches around the world and, in certain countries, due to different cultural backgrounds, it is not always easy to follow the corporate values established in the headquarters. This dissertation aims to explore and unveil the concept of organizational culture and analyze the difference of cultures between the German workforce and the Portuguese workforce. As a complement to this analysis, the research of three brands, Audi AG, Mercedes-Benz, and Volkswagen AG, resulted in case studies that unveil the brands' history, and corporate culture and contrast the experience of employees of Portugal and Germany.

Studying and understanding the key concepts of organizational culture, and intercultural communication and diving into theories about it is important to be able to analyze how companies have strategies to apply their corporate values and legal compliance codes.

CHAPTER I – OVERVIEW OF THE GERMAN AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Germany is globally known as one of the greatest producers and sellers in the automotive industry, having a rich historical background that is vital to understand when studying and analyzing its great impact nowadays.

The first petrol-powered car to be invented in Germany was announced in 1864, by the German inventor Siegfried Marcus. He was a technician and engineer in Vienna, making mechanical and electrical equipment as a job, making him more familiar with what he was creating. The car was similar to the design of a handcart. Year by year, improvements started to happen and in 1888, a model designed by Marcus and built by Märky, Bromovsky, and Schulz was closer to what is known to be a car nowadays. The American Society of Mechanical Engineering named it a “Historic Mechanical Engineering Landmark” and it is disposed of in Vienna’s Technical Museum (ASME, n.d.).

Marcus’ designs were not very practical and adequate for families, due to this, the existence of a need for improvement appeared. This is when the Benz, nowadays Mercedes-Benz, entered the history of the automotive industry. The first automobile that went into full production was designed in Mannheim in 1885 by Karl Benz, being named the Benz Patent-Motorwagen. This invention is considered part of the World Documentary Heritage by UNESCO¹. The digital support of the design and plan of this historical object is available online thanks to UNESCO’s project. The automobile still had some parts missing to look like what we know as a car since it only had three wheels and resembled a wagon (Mercedes-Benz, n.d.).

In 1888, Bertha Benz, Benz’s wife, took the Motorwagen to the longest ever-known ride of 104km to visit her mother, proving that the car could long-distance travel. Due to this, the production of the car began and in 1899 due to the sales growth, Benz had to expand the factory, being now considered the largest automobile in Germany with 430 employees and 572 produced units. A year later, the car was considered a global inspiration, and mass production started in France and the United States. The car industry was now producing 900 cars per year in Germany. In the early 1920s mass production was not only a benefit but also a problem since the manufacturers were not able to produce fast enough to meet the demand. Due to this, the global marketplace was opened to American manufacturers to speed up production. America saw potential in the German

¹UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

designs, opening a subsidiary in Germany in 1925 named Ford-Werke. In 1929 General Motors had already taken over Opel. The First World War had a huge negative impact on the German Economy, reducing the existence of 86 auto companies to only 12. Benz and Daimler agreed to standardize their design and production in 1926 to avoid the downfall of the companies. From there on, all the cars produced by the company were named Mercedes-Benz (NES Fircroft, 2021).

Throughout times, competition arose like BMW, Porsche, Volkswagen, and Audi making the market richer and turning Germany into one of the greatest automotive manufacturers in Europe and of the World.

The Second World War was an event that destroyed Europe's economy and, especially, Germany since it was the stage of the war. The automotive industry had a great impact on Europe's economic recovery.

Volkswagen was an important economic hero in the aftermath of World War II since its exports made up part of 50% of all German automobile exports. The US dollar did not have the same value, which weakened the competition from the United States and the other opponents could not produce as much as the German industry. The company's support from the federal government contributed to international openness to trade and export. During the 1950s, the export business continuously expanded, and Volkswagen was able to reach Europe, America, and Africa. The Volkswagen Beetle model was considered the hero of West Germany's economic recovery, and it was essential for Germans to understand the importance of the industry and how they needed it for their country to develop economically (Volkswagen Group, n.d.).

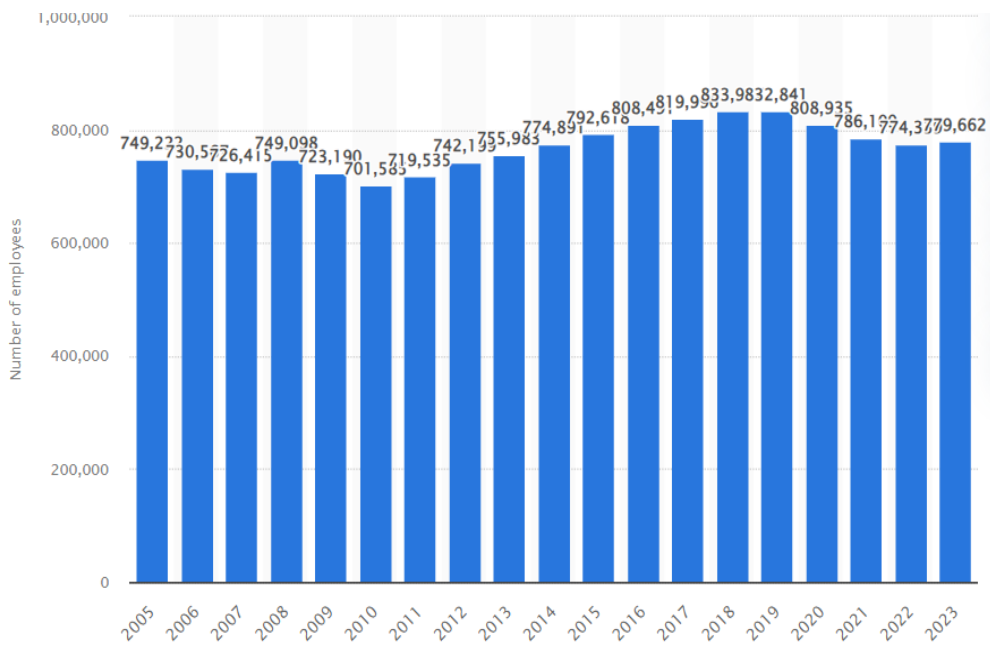
The 1980s and 1990s were a period of constant growth for the German Automotive Industry. German Manufacturers started to expand and buy plants across Europe, Asia, and America, increasing their market share and expanding the taste of German brands to Mexico, Brazil, Turkey, and China. German companies also started to acquire luxury brands like Bentley, Bugatti, and Lamborghini, which were purchased by Volkswagen. This revolutionized German automotive companies, bringing luxury to their names and even new models and opening doors to the constant evolution of the industry.

By the year 2010, Germany produced nearly six million vehicles per year and German brands delivered 5.5 million cars overseas (Statista, 2024). Germany is among the biggest automobile manufacturers in the world, sharing the podium with the United

States, China, and Japan. Germany is a country known for its investment in technology and research and the industry truly reflects the essence of the country. Brands keep continuously developing and accompany the evolution of the world and the new electric era that the car industry is entering.

The German automotive industry is considered the industry that mostly employs people. Even though the industry has been cutting jobs since 2018, it is still successful in sales and in hiring new talents. In Figure 1, it is possible to see that from 2022 to 2023, the employment of new people increased by around 1% due to the successful sales of vehicle manufacturers.

Figure 1: Germany's employment rates in the Automotive industry



Source: Statista, 2024

German car brands were still at the top of global sales. Volkswagen was considered one of the biggest sources of revenue until May 2024 (Carlier, 2024). Even though Germany still rules on sales, it is considered that it is behind other countries on the run for electric mobility. The selling of electric vehicles is estimated to decline in Germany since the German government chose to cut the electric car subsidies and people will not be able to buy an electric vehicle so easily (Kaufmann, 2023).

Unfortunately, the scenario is not always the same and the market is always changing. Arno Antlitz announced that Volkswagen has been spending more money than it has been earning for some time and expects a decrease in the brand's sales of 2 million cars. The decrease in sales in Volkswagen and the situation exposed that can be

considered almost bankruptcy not only had negative impacts on the brand and Germany but also all-around Europe, since it is responsible for around a quarter of the European market share. Volkswagen is now trying to find solutions that do not consist of closing factories and centers (Kiderlin, & Meredith, 2024).

The German car industry is one of the biggest in the world and it is crucial for Europe's economy, but due to market situations, it is also affected economically. Due to the continuous inflation over the years, it is harder for people to buy a car, and it leads to the decline of the industry's sales.

CHAPTER II – ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE’S THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Organizational culture is a concept that refers to the sharing of values, beliefs, and patterns, including language by members of a company. This concept can be analyzed with different theories and points of view. Organizational culture has been studied over the years, and various analyses appeared.

Experts in management science and organizational behavior and communication see organization culture as an explicit product of the choices that a group of people make with respect to accepted behavior as they interact with one another and key stakeholders outside of the organization (e.g., customers, suppliers and regulators) and attempt to develop ways to confront their broader social environment (Gutterman, 2023).

There are many types of Corporate Culture in companies around the world. Each one has its unique culture, and it ends up reflecting on the company's results. It is essential to understand the concept of "Corporate Culture" and to be aware of it to conduct a company on the right path, to obtain better results, and even to improve the relationship between employees.

Each company has a way of changing its culture and deciding on which image it will create for the market and the environment that it will consist of. Providing an image of cooperation, open communication, and cultural awareness will attract new potential employees and increase the interest of the market in the company.

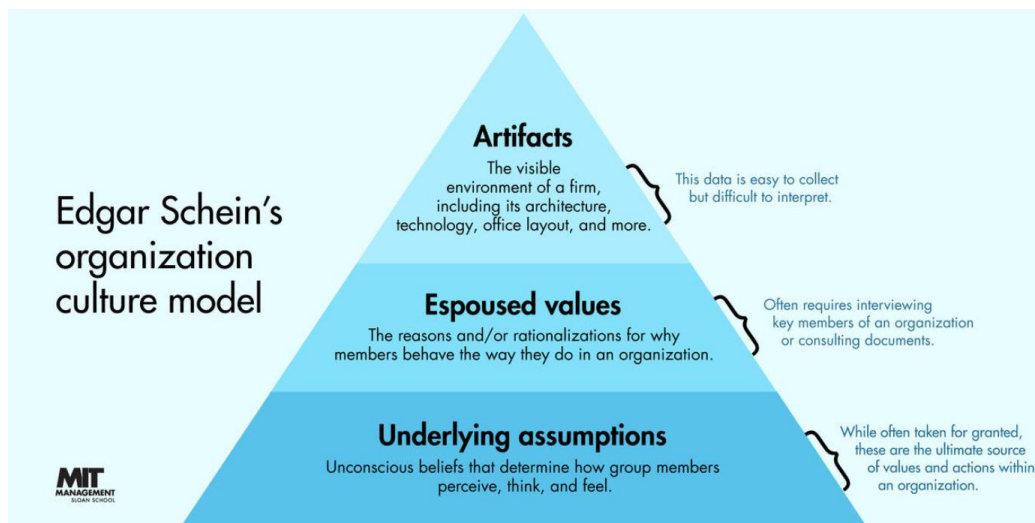
Sometimes, companies establish their concept of Corporate Culture, but it does not mean that it is the same in every country where the company has branches. It depends on various factors, like the workforce as a team, the country's political and economic factors, and even cultural fields.

2.1. Edgar Schein's Organization Culture Model

Edgar Schein, a professor at the MIT Sloan School of Management² and a business theorist, created a model of organizational culture levels for business analysts and consultants to study the different cultures they deal with. Schein created this model since it became a necessity for those who invest, study, and daily deal with companies and their culture. Schein's (1985) levels of culture are unbiased and seen as an observer, making it possible to study it without any value judgments attached.

² The MIT Sloan School of Management is a business school in Cambridge where Edgar Schein was a teacher.

Figure 2: Edgar Schein's organizational culture model



Source: MIT Management Sloan School, 2023

The first level, as it is possible to observe in Figure 2, refers to “Underlying assumptions” and it is where the organizational culture study begins. “Underlying assumptions” include thinking and reflections on the organization’s target and topics that are not spoken about but are thought about. Schein (1985) believes that the “Underlying assumptions” will originate “Espoused values” that are easier to think about and to expose. This level requires communication with employees to understand their behavior and what is needed or possible to change in the organization.

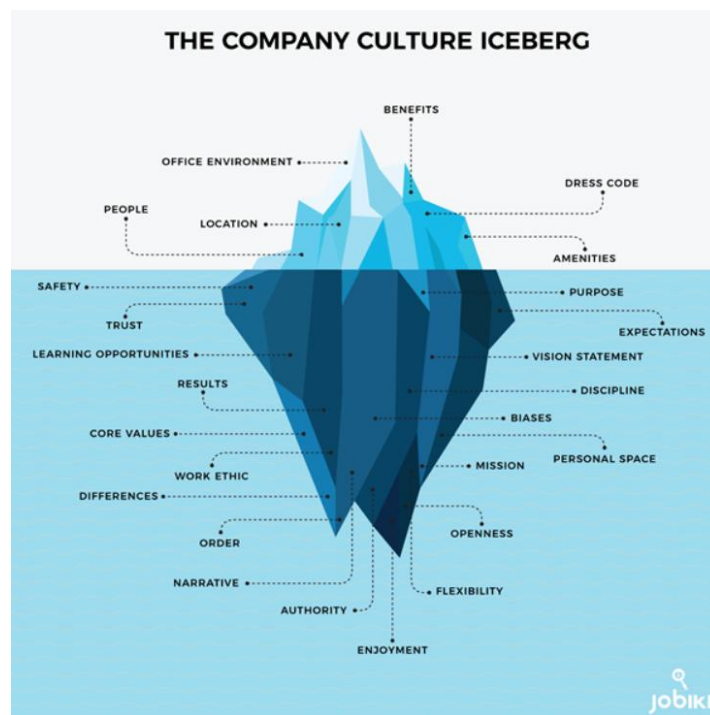
“Underlying assumptions” must be understood to study the “Espoused values”. All these studies and efforts to understand will, in the end, lead to the “Artifacts”, considered the last level of Schein’s model.

The “Artifacts” is the level that can be easily seen, since it refers to the company’s image as mentioned in the figure, “The visible environment of a firm, including its architecture, technology, office layout, and more” (MIT Management School, 2023). It is considered the last model because it is what results from the other two levels, reflecting the image of the company. This is why Schein (1985) considers it vital to understand the “bottom part of the iceberg” since Artifacts are easy to observe but the underlying part such as underlying assumptions and espoused values are what is truly needed to study and comprehend to successfully investigate the organizational culture of a company.

This model can be applied originally or in reverse. It is possible to study the subjective part, the company's artifacts, and then study the deeper levels of the company to understand where the company's image comes from and what is behind it.

On the other hand, we can start at the bottom of the pyramid and try to understand the company's people, environment, goals, and different perspectives to reach its artifacts more clearly and conclude from where it comes from.

Figure 3: The Company's Culture Iceberg



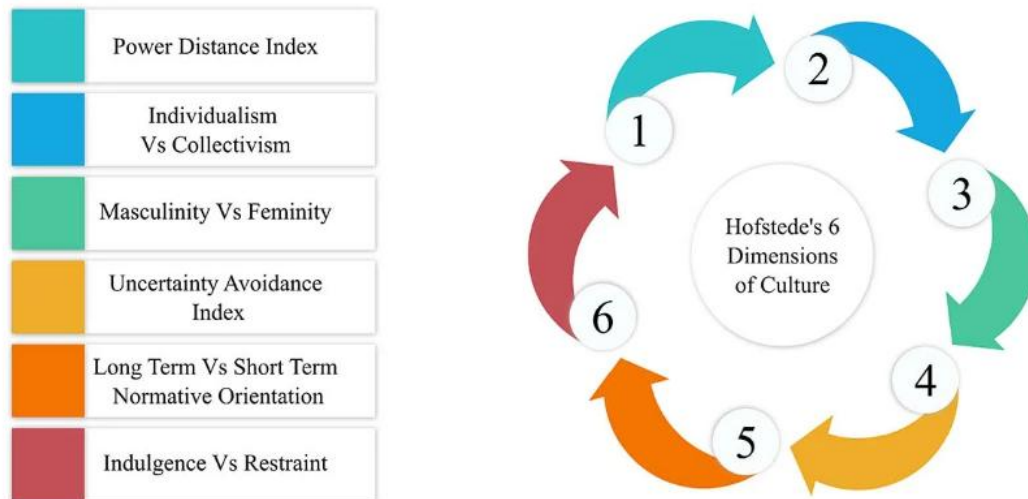
Source: INC42, 2020

2.2. Hofstede's Dimensions of Culture

Geert Hofstede, a Dutch professor of Organizational Anthropology and International Management was well-known for his devotion to creating his way of measuring and evaluating cultural dimensions. Hofstede was considered a pioneer in cross-cultural studies.

The “Culture Dimensions Theory” was developed in the late 1970s, resulting from a study conducted by Hofstede on around 100,000 employees of a company. The study aimed to examine people’s values inside of the company and it was possible to observe a dichotomy in each dimension (Wale, n.d.).

Figure 4: Hofstede's 6 Dimensions of Culture



Source: *SimplyPsychology, 2023*

To understand Hofstede’s system, it is vital to understand each dimension.

1. The Power-Distance Index measures what individuals accept regarding the work environment. This index is also used to reflect on equality inside the company and society. When applying this study, Hofstede concluded that a higher society has a higher level of inequality since it will probably be hard for a superior, manager, or boss to see their employees as equals. On the other hand, coworkers who share the same lower positions often see each other differently since they share the same tasks, positions, salaries, and workplace.
2. Collectivism versus Individualism relates to how individuals behave inside the company and from their different perspectives. Individualism reflects people or a work culture focusing on individual success where the competition tends to be higher. Collectivism is an environment where individuals have a true team spirit and emphasize relationships and common goals. In companies with this kind of spirit, usually, the environment is healthier, and the group of people focus on objectives and tasks as one. Curiously, Hofstede (1980) considers that individualistic societies have more direct communication than collectivistic

societies, which makes sense since collectivism aims to not have conflicts due to the common goals between team members.

3. Femininity vs. Masculinity is another dimension that reflects gender differences in professional roles and society in general. Hofstede (1980) considers that a society with a high score of masculinity values strength, and competition, while a feminine society defends more cooperative relations and quality of life. Hofstede even gives an example of the contrast between a society that possesses a high score of femininity, and a society that has a lower score. The society with the higher level of femininity considers that women play an important role in its development and usually higher professional roles are attributed to women.
4. The Uncertainty Avoidance Index is a dimension where Hofstede explores individuals' tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity. This dimension dives into managing expectations and avoiding uncertainty, as mentioned in its title. Companies and individuals tend to avoid uncertainty, and when uncertainty avoidance is high, the tolerance for uncertainty is low.
5. Short-term versus Long-Term Orientation shows the dichotomy between a society that thinks about results that can be near and a society that focuses on long-term results. A society that thinks twice before taking steps into a process has a long-term orientation because it aims to conquer results in the future, showing signs of persistence, effort, and perseverance. A short-term orientation society focuses on the near future and on being successful as fast as possible. It often values the results more than the process of conquering them.
6. Restraint versus Indulgence is a dimension that measures and evaluates how a society tries to satisfy its desires. A restrained society often has more cultural and societal norms and traditions and sticks to them, compressing its desires and passing them to a second plan. An indulgent society values the more superficial aspects like money, and luxury and lives the day like it's their last. Indulgent society tends to spend more money on superficial things, while restrained society plays safely and focuses on savings and safer choices (Nickerson, 2023).

Hofstede's theory can be a major tool for business managers and companies to deal better with their culture. It also helps companies to adapt their business opportunities and products to different cultural scenarios. Organizational culture is the key for

companies and businesses to work properly and succeed. Companies need to understand their employees, their customers, and their culture to achieve success.

2.3. The concept of Intercultural Communication and its importance

Intercultural communication is crucial for businesses and companies, as well as social harmony since it comprises a lot of skills and care that an individual should have when communicating with people from different cultures. It is also mandatory in organizational culture.

Middlebury Language Schools (2023) states that Intercultural Communication is:

The capacity to communicate with people from diverse cultures is referred to as intercultural communication. Interacting effectively across cultural lines requires perseverance and sensitivity to one another's differences. This encompasses language skills, customs, ways of thinking, social norms, and habits.

It is important to understand that Intercultural Communication is important for a company's success. A company needs to pay attention to some topics to ensure that it complies with the true meaning of intercultural communication. It is harder for a company to ensure intercultural communication than for an individual since it is managed and composed of many people from different cultural environments.

Intercultural Communication requires adaptation from everyone to each other and respect for each cultural background. This communication can be a great tool for a company to develop and achieve a great and competent team. Successfully established intercultural communication will lead to avoiding conflicts that can arise because of cultural differences or misunderstandings in communication. This way, companies' teams will openly dialogue and discuss different points of view and opinions without leading it to a discussion. If each employee can communicate interculturally, it will be easier and faster to reach a consensus. An example of this should come from leadership since a superior who guides an intercultural team needs to have experience in this field and should be able to demonstrate how easy it is to communicate and to be culturally aware. Leadership should create a comfortable environment where everyone can openly dialogue and not feel excluded. When a bond of trust is achieved between leadership and employees, the company will be closer to success and be culturally diverse.

Cultural diversity is a positive attribute of a company because when having an international team, ideas will be more creative and marketing can be adapted around the

world since each member of the team will know how their homeland views advertising, products, and even services that the company will sell.

Some advertisers can be seen as funny to the marketing team of a company but, in some cultures, it can be offensive.

In 2017, Pepsi launched a video advertising its products in collaboration with the model Kendall Jenner. The video shows the police force stopping a manifestation but when the model gives a policeman a Pepsi can, he drinks it, and Kendall returns to the manifestation smiling. The ad was criticized around the world but mostly in the United States of America since the population saw it as a parody of the manifestation of the movement Black Lives Matter³. Other people also pointed it as a recreation of the arrest of a Baton Rouge protester in 2016 (Victor, 2017).

Nivea and Dove were also brands that failed the concept of cultural awareness when advertising their skin products. The advertising of these two brands was seen as racist around the world and the brands ended up deleting it. Dove created a video where a black woman uses its shower gel and, when she takes the t-shirt, she is wearing, she turns into a white woman. This advertising was truly offensive and considered racist since it portrayed an image of black people being dirty (BBC, 2017).

³ Movement Black Lives Matter is a political movement focused on the fight against racism and police force brutality.

Figure 5: Nivea's Facebook post shared on X, social media platform



Source: X, Sakita (X user), 2017

Nivea also launched an image for its deodorant that does not stain the clothes where the sentence “White is purity” can be seen. The brand was heavily criticized and deleted the post on the same day (Adams, 2017).

On the other hand, some companies try to engage with and respect different cultural environments, traditions, and values. Adidas created a video where different celebrities from different cultural environments joined and sat together to discuss different ideas. Its title is “Calling All Creators” showing the company’s openness to different ideas and its respect for cultural diversity. These celebrities also have different jobs in completely different areas. The brand aims to show that diversity enhances creativity and that it is important to respect each other to achieve success, no matter what each one’s culture (Adidas, 2018).

In 2018, Volkswagen launched a video showing its new car, the T-Roc model alongside the Canadian model Winnie Harlow. The company aimed to show that being different is an opportunity to confidently stand out, identifying the model with its new car model. This made people who suffer from the same skin condition as the model feel more accepted to see the ad as an incentive to be confident the way they are (Automotive World, 2018).

Figure 6: Winnie Harlow advertising for Volkswagen's T-Roc in 2018



Source: Autoevolution., 2021

Companies that are culturally aware will have a higher probability of attracting customers and potential business partners around the world. The values of inclusion that the company passes to the community will make the company get more engagement from the public. These marketing strategies are used to reflect the brand's value, but they are also aimed at attracting potential customers and partners, being a strategic move.

2.3.1. Challenges of Intercultural Communication

Companies often struggle with challenges regarding this topic. A good example of a challenge that companies face is the language barrier. As mentioned before, many people from different cultures work for companies and each has its language, whether physical or vocal. If the individuals do not speak the same language, it will be hard to maintain communication and it will lead to a lack of dialogue and understanding. In some countries, some gestures are seen as offensive. Handshakes are seen as a normal procedure in Portugal when meeting potential partners or even work colleagues. It is also seen as a more formal gesture when presenting to someone. In some Asian countries, it is considered impolite, and this is where it can be concluded that cultural awareness is essential for business and for a company to develop.

Cultural Awareness Training has long been implemented by companies to avoid this kind of situation. Some companies support initiatives and events to prevent cultural exclusion and enhance the meaning of intercultural communication. For example, since

2013, Volkswagen has supported the “Rainbow Bridge Project” ⁴with approximately 180,000 euros.

This project was launched by the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries. The objective is to establish a bridge between the various possibilities and networks available to major companies and the social needs of Chinese provinces. Since 2013, Volkswagen Group China has supported the project with about €180,000 (1.5 million RMB). Apart from vocational training based on the German model, the main emphasis is on soccer coaching for young people in four Chinese provinces where economic conditions are poor (Volkswagen US, 2014).

These kinds of projects and investments will help in combat for an improvement in intercultural communication, and it will also increase the possibility of new market opportunities between the company and the countries with different cultural backgrounds.

Mercedes-Benz is also a company that invests in cultural diversity and focuses on international recruitment.

We want to bring together different perspectives at all hierarchical levels. That is why we promote intercultural competence in our workforce and focus on targeted recruiting. For example, since the start of the programme, 40 % of the recruitments through our leadership development programme Inspire – the Leaders' Lab ⁵– have been international candidates. In addition, we believe in international assignments for our employees: Think globally, develop personally, get to know new cultures and working environments – this opportunity is offered to our employees in foreign assignments all over the world (Mercedes-Benz Group AG, 2024).

In this globalized world, companies acknowledge that implementing cultural awareness measures and initiatives is crucial to keeping the business developing and even opening the door for more international opportunities. It is also important for companies to integrate this awareness to invest in a culturally diverse team that will allow the company to approximate its products and services to meet international customers' desires and tastes.

⁴ Volkswagen's “Rainbow Bridge Project” is a project that aims to create a bridge for big companies to attend to small Chinese provinces' needs.

⁵ “Inspire – the Leader's Lab” is a Mercedes-Benz program consists of a 24-month program where people have the chance to enhance their career skills by participating in top projects and trainings.

2.3.1.1. Covid-19 context

The pandemic of Covid-19 negatively affected the world in aspects such as general health, economic situation, and social, intercultural communication, and organizational culture were also affected. Companies saw the need to find strategies to combat various possible scenarios for their employees such as mental breakdowns, exclusion, and detachment from team colleagues, creating a barrier for dialogue, which would have been easier when it was possible to work directly in the workplace.

Some cultural work identities had to be adapted during the hard times of the pandemic and companies started to be more open and flexible to employees. The pandemic introduced a new working concept that, nowadays, some companies still work that way, the work-from-home type. In 2020, when the lockdown was announced, companies had to search for solutions since employees could not get out of their homes to avoid contact and a high possibility of contagion. After the pandemic, it has been hard for companies to try to go back to 100% presential work. Employees adapted to working from home and wished for a hybrid model.

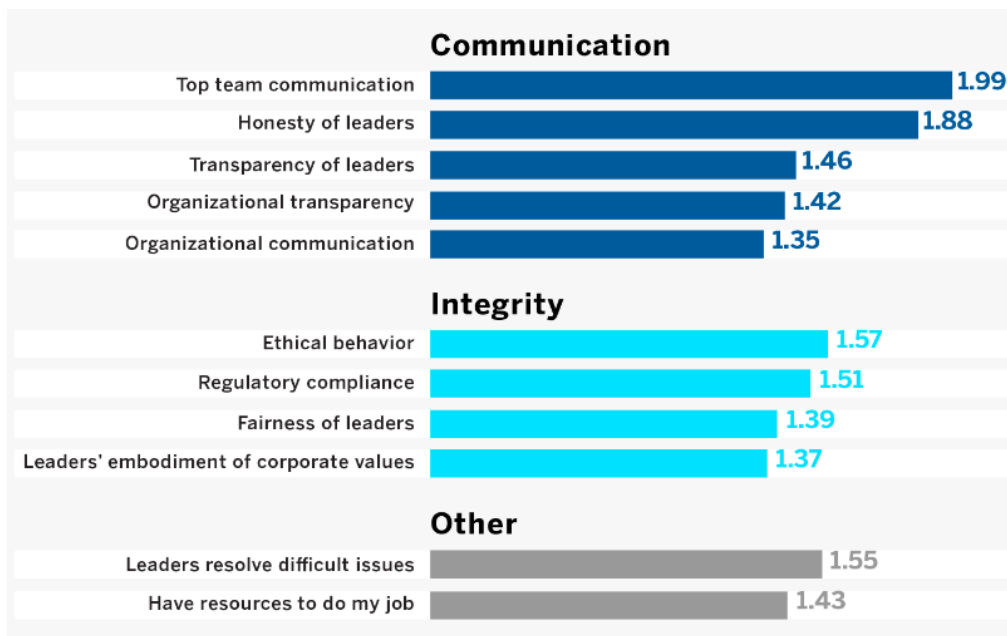
According to Lewis Beck, in an interview conducted by BBC's reporter Lilian Stone (2024), he mentions that "companies have really struggled to redefine the role of the office". The reporter also concludes by stating that "Office culture that was once meant to get employees excited doesn't have the same pull when workplaces are only one-third full."

Employees from around the world have adapted to that system of work and do not want to change since it is now easier to conciliate their personal lives with their professional lives. The concept of "digital workplace" is born and companies enter a new era (Chadha, 2020). Working remotely was a test for every company's cultural values since adapting to new methods and being away from the office and from leadership and team colleagues required a team effort to collaborate and keep the company's values alive.

This does not mean that the lockdown only made companies struggle to find new strategies. It also made companies reinforce their organizational culture and find ways to improve communication. MIT Sloan Management Review conducted a study on 1.4 million employee reviews on the Glassdoor website and concluded that from 2015 to 2020 culture and values ratings increased considerably during the lockdown period in the

United States of America. During the first six months of the pandemic, employees gave a better review to their leadership pointing out the improvement of communication since they considered it honest and transparent.

Figure 7: Employees' general reviews from March to August 2020



. Source: MITSloan Management Review, 2020

Covid-19 was a break in communication around the world and intercultural communication struggled as well. Traveling was prohibited and all of the countries around the world closed borders. The lockdown brought a lot of negative effects on individuals. People were closed for a long and it seemed that they did not know how to properly communicate with people outside of their houses anymore. The lockdown was also a threat to social equality and racism and xenophobia increased considerably. Since the first cases of COVID-19 appeared in China, some people have commented on the Chinese population's habits and culture. In a speech, the former US President, Donald Trump, named Covid-19 as the “Chinese virus”, encouraging the country’s population to xenophobic thinking and eventual hateful discourse (Hart, 2021).

In May 2020, António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General appealed to all governments to take measures to help fight against xenophobia and racism. It seems like the pandemic destroyed the concept of intercultural communication in social and professional scenarios. Refugees and non-local residents were also victims of the perpetuated discrimination during the pandemic. Mansouri (2020) exposed the rising

social and ethical problems in his work “The socio-cultural impact of COVID-19: exploring the role of intercultural dialogue in emerging responses” by stating:

There have been reports worldwide of raids on, and detentions of, migrant workers and refugees, and in a number of countries incidences of racist discourses have emerged, blaming migrant workers for spreading the disease. [...] For refugee and asylum seekers, especially those held in immigration detention or in refugee camps, the pandemic poses additional threats to their already vulnerable lives.

During COVID-19, populations around the world assisted in the concept of interculturalism dying. It is important to analyze that interculturalism and multiculturalism are not the same. Multiculturalism can be considered less inclusive than interculturalism since intercultural societies adapt to other societal values and accept them. In this globalized world, Interculturalism must continue to be present and be practiced correctly in all branches. According to Professor Ted Cantle⁶ (2012):

Interculturalism presents a new set of policies and programmes. It seeks to replace multiculturalism and provide a new paradigm for thinking about race and diversity. Multiculturalism may have had some success in the past but it has simply not adapted to the new age of globalisation and super diversity. Interculturalism is about changing mindsets by creating new opportunities across cultures to support intercultural activity and it's about thinking, planning and acting interculturally. Perhaps, more importantly still, it is about envisioning the world as we want it to be, rather than be determined by our and separate past histories.

COVID-19 can be considered a crisis and a reinforcement of Intercultural Communication. Adapting to new ways of communicating and to an almost complete digital era was not easy but it was an opportunity for companies and society in general to search for innovative ways of doing it. As mentioned before, some employees of some companies even think that communication between leadership and employees was improved and clearer. The pandemic showed the importance of intercultural communication daily. Society was able to not let Interculturalism die and was able to find new ways of keeping it alive and even renewing it due to adaptation.

2.4. The dichotomy of work cultures: Germany and Portugal

Each country has its own culture, and its reflection on social relations and communication is also noticeable in business. It is important to acknowledge each one's culture when doing business with a country that has a different culture from our own.

⁶ Professor Ted Cantle is the founder of the Institute of Community Cohesion and researcher and expert on intercultural studies and relations.

Germany and Portugal may seem very close countries, and both belong to the European Union, but they differ in their work culture. German Automotive brands have their headquarters in Germany, and even though their branches in Portugal belong to the same trademark, the cultural environment contrasts between the countries due to their own culture. Autoeuropa, a subsidiary of Volkswagen, located in Palmela, Portugal is the biggest contributor to the country's economic development since it accounts for 71,7% of the country's automotive sales. (Ferreira, 2023). German branches are generally seen as a symbol of innovation and boost the manufacturing and productivity of countries where it has rooted its branches.

It is interesting to analyze the dichotomy between both countries and how it reflects in business, especially when the brand is the same. The differences between each one can be concluded by economic results but it also depends on how each country's management and employees follow the organizational culture of the company. Each country adapts a company's cultural values to its cultural values since they are rooted in each individual and the company is composed of a team of different people with different cultures and different perspectives.

2.4.1. Portugal's Work Culture

The Portuguese population is usually considered easy to talk to and very welcoming, which eases the possibility of interaction and dialogue. Portugal is a country that truly honors its history and values, and this is also reflected in its business practices.

Portugal's work culture is considered a mixture of relaxed and strict at the same time. The establishment of bonds between members of the team of a company is seen as important and Portuguese consider that it will contribute to the well-functioning of the firm. Bonds are also established with customers and potential partners. That trusted link makes companies more recognized and contributes to their success. As a personal example, I work at a company where I need to contact customers, and colleagues of other departments and discuss topics with my superiors. I must find a way of bonding with my colleagues and my superiors for the work to flow as normally as possible. For customers, if my contact is good quality and I am attentive to what the customer is saying, we create a different bond of trust. The trust of the customer is earned, and I can be able to dialogue more clearly and fluidly. These bonds that I can accomplish are positive for me and the company since toxic environments are avoided and direct communication is possible to

be reached. Every month, I have a meeting with my team leader to discuss feedback in both ways and it is always easy to express what could be done to improve and what I think is wrong or right. This kind of point is valued in the Portuguese work culture because it is also valued in the social life of the Portuguese population. Companies that establish a good environment and give the employees openness to express themselves will be closer to have a great team with positive results in Portugal.

As it is possible to observe, the Portuguese population values personal relations and, due to that, the family of employees is usually seen as a priority. Portuguese consider that it is vital to take time outside of work for family and to enjoy leisure activities. This necessity of taking time for themselves leads to measures and rights that companies or the government implement. Parents have the right to parental leave of 120 days or 150 days after the child's birth. The mother of the child, before these days, has the right to have 42 days off. Employees who have children under 12 years old or who suffer from chronic illness or other incapacitating illnesses can adapt their work schedule to their needs. They can also request a 100% home office or the hybrid option depending on what the job requires. Usually, this option is only available to people who work at offices (Government of Portugal, n.d.).

Regarding the hierarchy, Portuguese employees see their superiors as people who are in a higher position and have control of the team and what happens. Employees usually have special respect for managers, supervisors, and team leaders. The relationship between employees and superiors is not as relaxed as it is with other employees who share the same position inside the company. It can be considered that there is an invisible pyramid where the superiors such as managers and supervisors are at the top, team leaders in the middle, and other employees who share common positions at the bottom. Some Portuguese employees do not feel comfortable expressing their opinions to superiors, especially when it is different since they feel that they are in the company to do the tasks their superiors attribute to them. It can be concluded that hierarchy differences are strongly present in the work culture, but it does not mean that all employees feel oppressed by their superiors and cannot express different points of view.

The working schedules in Portugal are as common as in other European countries. The daily shift is 8 hours, usually 1 hour for lunch, and the most common working hours are from 9 am to 6 pm, resulting in 40 working hours per week. There are also part-time options available that are mostly attributed to students and younger people who are

entering their professional path. Portuguese are considered hard-working and sometimes work weekends and extra hours to gather money. Working extra hours is common since the Portuguese population is mainly dissatisfied with their salary (Taborda, 2024). The minimum wage in Portugal is 820 euros per month and, due to continuous inflation, the Portuguese struggle to have a stable financial status. In Portugal, companies usually close in August and the week of Christmas and New Year's Eve so that employees can spend time with their families.

In more formal occasions like meetings with potential partners, Portuguese also have some topics that are appreciated due to their culture. When Portuguese employees have meetings the dress code is usually formal. Men tend to wear suits and women tend to wear skirts or suits as well. This dress code is more seen in bigger industries that have been in business for a long time and older generations value it more. On the other hand, recent companies, start-ups, and younger generations tend to wear more relaxed outfits like the ones they wear in their normal routine. When having interviews, Portuguese also dress more formally due to the importance of the event since they aim to make a good first impression (Taborda, 2024).

In meetings, punctuality is valued since being late is not seen with good eyes by the Portuguese. Arriving on time shows respect for the other members attending the meeting and is appreciated. Sometimes, it is common to give gifts to potential clients in meetings that have a special meaning. These kinds of gifts are usually expensive and pass the image of luxury and respect for business partners (Barbosa, Bernardo, 2024). Employees usually receive gifts as well at special festivities like Christmas. It is common for most companies to give employees wine, a gift basket, and chocolate. At Christmas, it is also normal for companies to organize Christmas dinners to thank the employees for their hard work during the year.

Non-verbal is important to the Portuguese work culture since it passes messages that are not vocally passed. Making eye contact when speaking shows that the other part is paying attention to what a Portuguese is saying, especially in business meetings. It is highly appreciated when the listener shows interest in the dialogue that he is having with the Portuguese. Regarding non-verbal communication, it is usual for Portuguese employees to give a handshake to possible partners when welcoming others to formal meetings and even to greet people who attend job interviews. It is seen as a usual

procedure that symbolizes welcoming and it is odd for the Portuguese culture when in these scenarios there are no greetings (Lisbon Founders Club, 2024).

What can be concluded from the Portuguese work culture is that Portuguese employees truly reflect their values in their professional lives. Working is fundamental to living but family is always the priority. The country's culture strongly influences the organizational culture of companies, emphasizing flexibility, trust bonding, adequate work-life balance, and conflict avoidance. The Portuguese workforce can be seen as a contrast between traditional and innovative, which can turn out in positive effects for companies since the country's values are preserved and companies accompany the evolution of the market and search for new business opportunities.

2.4.2. Germany's Work Culture

Germany is considered one of the European countries with the most innovative and qualified workforce and that evaluation happens because of their work culture.

Germany's Work Culture values productivity, efficiency, and innovation, and aims to achieve the greatest results. In Germany, it is crucial to respect companies' work culture and follow the established procedures to reach the highest levels of quality. Some companies such as Volkswagen, BMW, Adidas, Mercedes-Benz, and many more reach extremely successful results due to the pursuit of excellence established by the country's culture that is also practiced in the organizational culture of the companies.

For Germans, it is important to show up on time in every scenario, especially for work and meetings. When someone is late, it shows a lack of interest and responsibility for their workplace. This topic can also be applied to tasks attributed to employees that should be done in a certain amount of time. If deadlines are not respected, leadership will consider it unprofessional and disrespectful since it is expected that employees will comply with what is required from them. This also leads to companies' work ethic since it relies on commitment and discipline (Students from the University of Europe of Applied Sciences, 2023).

German employees deeply respect their leadership since the work culture of the country defends a strong hierarchy. Usually, employees approach leadership and superiors with formal titles such as "Herr" for males, meaning the same as "Mr." and "Frau" for females, which is the same as "Mrs". or "Ms.". The use of titles also creates

clear signs of how hierarchy is important in a company and how leadership is respected and represents the authority presence that employees with higher positions have (Moutushi, 2023). Regarding communication, it is also important to highlight that German companies value direct communication since it will be easier to share constructive criticism between employees and discuss what can be done for improvement. Clear dialogues will also contribute to facilitating the sharing of ideas and opinions, resulting in new strategies for the company to develop (Berlin School of Business and Innovation, 2024).

Generally, Germans believe that direct communication will enhance the possibility of developing new business projects. Direct communication conducted by employees is also important for teamwork. The fact that Germany has a work culture that focuses on excellence and results does not mean that companies defend competitiveness. Companies value collaboration between employees.

Since Germany is a country focused on constant innovation, companies often invest in continuous training. Companies' employees must look up to staying updated and motivated to upgrade professionally since it will contribute to a company having a more specialized and effective workforce. This continuous looking for improvement truly reflects the country's essence of innovation and proficiency. Quality is requested in every task that is done. From presentations to usual daily tasks should be carefully planned and as close as excellent as possible. This excellence of the work that is executed is reflected in companies' products and services and that is why German companies focus so much on planning every project, meeting, or any other task.

While searching for a path to excellence, German companies also consider that it is important for employees to rest and take time for their families and leisure. Students from the University of Europe for Applied Sciences (2023) state that:

Germany also has a 'German Work of Hours Act' designed to protect the rights and well-being of workers in Germany. According to this, the maximum working time for employees is eight hours per day and 48 hours per week. In addition to limiting working hours, employees are entitled to a minimum of 30 minutes of rest time for every six hours worked.

Bundesagentur für Arbeit (n.d) states that "The average working hours in Germany is 8 hours per day. This can be extended to up to 10 hours per day for a short period. A rest period of 11 hours is normally prescribed between 2 shifts." This statement proves that Portugal and Germany are not so different regarding working hours.

Parental leave can last until 3 years for parents to see their child grow but they are unpaid. Parents have other options like working part-time or applying for “a parental allowance from the government which can range from 300 to 1800 euros each month”, according to the University of Europe for Applied Sciences in 2023.

German’s work culture concludes that when employees take time for personal interests, resting, and taking time with loved ones, they will contribute in a better way to society and will also have a more cheerful outlook at work. Work-life balance will lead to companies’ productivity and quality improvement.

2.4.3. Comparative analysis of the countries’ work culture

It is possible to see that Germany and Portugal’s work culture is similar in some respects but also very different in others. It can be considered that Germany has a stricter and development-focused culture and Portugal has a culture that also focuses on results, but values trust bonds and is more open to personal relationships.

Table 1: Differences between Germany's and Portugal's Work Culture

Germany	Portugal
Direct communication	Indirect communication
Formal and valued business attire	Formal, especially in important meetings but also relaxed in daily contexts
Build trust by focusing on presenting results	Builds personal trust bonds
Respect hierarchy and strongly emphasize the differences between leadership and employees as a sign of authority	Respect hierarchy and take every order that leadership gives. The environment between leadership and employees tends to be tense in a certain way.
Punctuality is highly valued.	Punctuality is appreciated and shows respect.
Work-life balance is successfully achieved, and companies want employees' mental health treated well.	The work-life balance is harder to achieve due to the need for employees to work extra hours.
Gift-giving is not common.	Gift-giving is typical.
Teamwork is essential to reach goals.	Personal relationships are valued, and teamwork is vital.
Employees work a maximum of 48 hours per week.	Employees’ normal working schedule is 40 hours per week, but they often work extra hours.

Value eye contact and avoid facial expressions.	Values body communication as much as verbal communication
Try to discuss conflicts and solve them by dialogue.	Avoids conflicts.

Own elaboration, 2024

When comparing both countries, it is visible that the economic scenario is not the same. Germany is considered a strong and strategic economic point of Europe and strongly contributes to Europe’s financial development. The biggest economic factors of Germany are the manufacturing and the automotive industries. Germany is ready to give new professional opportunities to people who are looking for it and to develop alongside the market.

Figure 8: Economic comparison between Germany and Portugal

Economy		
Details for Germany and Portugal		
	Germany	Portugal
Currency:	euro (1 EUR = 100 Cent)	euro (1 EUR = 100 Cent)
Unemployment rate:	3.0 %	6.5 %
Inflation rate:	5.95 %	4.31 %
Cost of Living: (USA = 100%)	79.47 %	63.45 %
Commercial taxes and contributions:	48.80 %	39.80 %
Average income:	53,970 US\$	26,270 US\$
Average wage:	49,121 US\$	21,961 US\$
Central government debt (% of GDP):	45.95 %	118.77 %
General government debt (% of GDP):	63.60 %	99.10 %
Corruption index:	22 (good)	39 (moderate)

Source: Worlddata.info. n.d.

In Figure 8, it is possible to observe the economic differences between both countries. Germany is a more economically stable country than Portugal and can “open the doors” for people who are looking for new opportunities. Portugal has a 3,5% higher rate of unemployment than Germany, showing its economic instability (Worlddata. Info, n.d.). These economic differences play a major role in the employees’ working schedules and life balance.

In Germany, it is possible to conclude that employees work their usual working hours and if they work extra hours, it is probably just another day. In Portugal, employees struggle to have an adequate work-life balance because due to inflation rates and due to the salary, that is not able to accompany expenses, they need to work extra hours to cover it.

The work culture of both countries is different because economic disparities between both are also a factor. While Germany is a huge country with the biggest industries in Europe, Portugal is considered smaller and does not have the same economic impact. Nowadays, Portugal is starting to invest in innovation as well since the country needs to accompany the wishes of the market.

Since Germany is considered an important point of Europe, it will be stricter and more demanding to achieve results. Processes of decision-making take time and they are planned carefully. Portugal does not have the same impact, so it adapts to a more relaxed position. Since Portugal's work culture values teamwork and trust bonds, when deciding about an important topic, every employee should agree, otherwise the decision will not be taken.

Both countries value punctuality and complying with deadlines established. None of the countries' work culture views lack punctuality and commitment with good eyes. It shows signs of disrespect and no interest in companies' norms. In Portugal, it is seen as disrespectful but in Germany, it also shows an attitude that goes against their values, since German work culture searches for perfectionism and efficiency.

What can be concluded is that the work culture in Portugal and the work culture in Germany contrast with each other due to each country's culture. Germany is an innovative country with a focus directed to constant innovation and development and its workforce works the same way as its cultural identity. Portugal is a country that preserves tradition, and the population tends to be very communicative and easy to talk to which is why employees in companies value the development of trust bonds. Portuguese need to have a good environment at work since it will motivate them more. The countries may have similarities in their work culture, but it is each one's culture that defines the differences between making each other unique and adapting their culture to their professional sectors.

**CHAPTER III – CASE STUDIES ON AUTOMOTIVE BRANDS’
ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE**

The German Automotive industry plays an important economic role for the country and the rest of Europe since it composes almost a quarter of the European economy. This industry reflects the country's values which reflect an effective workforce and the pursuit of excellence and constant innovation.

For an industry company to succeed it needs to have a strong organizational culture that depends on various factors. The work culture of each company is shaped not only by the business's success but also by who works for it and how they manage it. It is interesting to explore companies' culture and understand how it directly impacts their results.

For this chapter, three case studies on three German automotive brands consist of understanding each brand's organizational culture and trying to understand how a country's culture can impact how the same company can work differently. The chosen brands were Audi AG, Mercedes-Benz, and Volkswagen AG and this chapter's research aims to understand each company's values and how the companies shape it into their employees, customers, and partners. The case studies are also a tool to study the real concept of organizational culture and how different companies apply it.

A comparative analysis between Germany and Portugal was also researched to observe if each country's culture influences the companies' culture. It is important to understand that when a company establishes its values and its culture, it should be universal, but since every culture is different, the company's culture also adapts. The fact that it was easier to find employees' or former employees' reviews for the company in Germany than in Portugal, already shows how each country's cultural background is different. It was possible to see that German employees rate companies as clearly as possible and do not have a problem stating what is wrong and what is right. This shows the importance that the German culture gives to work. As mentioned before, most of the German workforce practices direct communication because it will be easier to avoid mistakes and to improve, and, in the reviews of websites like Indeed and Glassdoor, it was possible to observe it.

On the other hand, it was hard to find reviews in Portugal. Of the few reviews that it was possible to collect, the Portuguese workers would complain about toxic leadership and the low salaries for the highest amount of work. In Chapter 2, it was mentioned that the Portuguese culture usually uses indirect communication and does not like conflicts,

and maybe because of this, Portuguese employees are not so open to giving reviews if their experience is bad. Audi AG was the hardest company to find reviews for, but the one that it was possible to find did not point out the negative aspects of working for Audi. It was interesting to see the dichotomy even in the reviews of the companies that can be concluded exists because of each employee's cultural background.

This research's goal is to unveil each company's organizational culture and understand its responsibility towards factors that are entirely related to the company and initiatives that the company also has social impacts.

3.1. Audi AG

3.1.1. Historical context of the brand

The history of Audi AG begins in the 19th century. In 1899 August Horch founded his own company, A. Horch & Cie., in Cologne.

August Horch was born on October 12th, 1868. In 1890, Horch concluded his studies at the Technical University in Mittweida. Horch worked for Karl Benz, at Benz & Cie., as Manager of the Motor Car Construction Department in Mannheim. August Horch left Benz & Cie. in 1899 because he had his ideal automobile ideas. He joined Salli Herz, a cloth dealer, and founded A. Horch & Cie. in Cologne, Germany.

At first, A. Horch & Cie. was only a company that repaired engines, but Horch wanted to be bigger, always trying to create his official first car. Sometime later, he was successful and created an automobile with a revolutionary technology that included for the first time in history “friction clutch and cardan shaft” (German Patent and Trade Mark Office, n.d).

Unfortunately, Horch’s creation was too expensive and did not have commercial demand. Due to this, the founder had to search for investors, leading him to Zwickau in 1904, where he turned the company into a joint-stock corporation. After this transformation, the sales started to be successful with an acceptable value attributed to the vehicles and Horch started to participate in races, driving himself his creation.

In 1909, Horch left the company due to the divergence between perspectives and the dissatisfaction of shareholders since races did not have the expected success. Due to this, Horch then founded a new automobile firm that was supposed to be named “August Horch Automobilwerke GmbH”, but Horch’s former company sued him, making it not possible to name the company with his name.

The current name of the company “Audi” came from an original idea. Horch had a business partner whose son studied Latin, and he had the idea to translate the founder’s name into Latin, resulting in Audi. The signature with the company’s name was registered in 1998.

The first Audi to be created was on August 24th, 1910. Horch also started to be successful in races, presenting his Audi Type C and the 1914 Alpine Tour.

At the beginning of 1920, Horch became a member of the Supervisory Board and eventually Audi started to decline. The company had been hit by the consequences of the global crisis and Audi was forced to merge with the company Zschopauer Motorenwerke (DKW)⁷ and Siegmund Wanderer-Werke⁸. Due to this merger, “Auto-Union”, a group of companies, was born with its headquarters in Chemnitz. This group of companies was formed and was considered one of the biggest German car manufacturers after Opel.

In 1945, Auto Union AG went through some difficulties due to the Second World War since the Soviet forces occupied its location and the company was removed from the Commercial Register of Chemnitz in 1948. Due to this, in 1949 Auto Union GmbH was established in Ingolstadt.

The company had to find a strong partner, and, in April 1958, Daimler-Benz AG bought 88% of Auto Union’s shares and, a year after, the company became a fully owned subsidiary.

Daimler-Benz was a great help to the company since it brought Ludwig Kraus⁹ as the Technical Director for the development of a new project car, accomplished in 1963. In 1965 the first car of Auto Union AG was launched. Auto Union AG is now Audi and due to advertising, it has become a great success. In 1966, the company became a subsidiary of Volkswagen AG.

Audi does not have a location in Portugal like in Spain, Mexico, Hungary, Germany, Slovakia, India, Belgium, Brazil and China. The brand is represented in Portugal by Volkswagen AG.

⁷ German company that produced two-stroke engines and was first founded in 1902 in Chemnitz.

⁸ German manufacturers of cars, bicycles, and motorcycles that was also founded in Chemnitz in 1885.

⁹ Ludwig Kraus was a mechanical engineer.

3.1.2. History of the Brand's Logo

Figure 9: The Auto Union four rings



Source: AUDI AG, n.d.

Audi's image is known nowadays by its four rings that were born from the merger of four automobile companies.

The four rings of the Audi symbol represent the Auto Union AG, which consists of the merger of Audi, Zschopauer Motorenwerke (DKW), Horch, and Wanderer.

DKW was originally founded in 1902, in Chemnitz with the name Rasmussen & Ernst. In 1907, the company moved to Zschopau. DKW only produced and sold exhaust steam oil separators, vehicle mudguards, lights, and related. The founder of the company, Jørgen Rasmussen started to experiment with a steam-driven vehicle in 1916. The company's name was registered in 1922 as DWK, diminutive for Dampfkraftwagen, meaning steam-drive vehicles.

Wanderer began in 1855 when Richard Adolf Jaenicke and Johann Baptist Winklhofer opened a bicycle repair workshop in Chemnitz. The business partners soon started to produce their bicycles due to the high search in the commercial field. The company officially started to produce bicycles under its name Wanderer Fahrradwerke AG. The firm produced its first motorcycle in 1902 and in 1913 the first car was officially created.

On June 29th, 1932, the companies merged into one because of the initiative of the State Bank of Saxony. Each brand had its sector, Wanderer was dedicated to midsize cars, DKW to motorcycles and small cars, Audi to midsize cars, and Horch to luxurious cars at the top of the market. Later, Auto Union AG got to only be Audi AG.

3.1.3. Corporate Culture of Audi AG

Audi's Code of Conduct belongs to the compliance and integrity program "Together4Integrity" from Volkswagen and, due to this, it follows the same values. The brand ensures that it follows all the conduct and necessary processes to ensure integrity and proximity to customers, partners, and every employee of the company.

The company believes that to contribute to society it needs to follow three principles.

1. "Engage" refers to donations, events, and even cooperation with nonprofit organizations. Audi AG also tries to create a social impact by promoting projects. With all of this, the brand's goal is to create a positive social impact that will contribute to the wellness of the company and those who engage with it.
2. "Educate" is also one of the principles that the company follows. Audi believes that helping education progress is fundamental by working with universities and offering educational programs.
3. "Empower" is the last principle that Audi presents. The company encourages its employees, customers, and partners to follow sustainable paths. This principle also covers volunteering and pictures Audi as an intermediary in the fight for better sustainable choices and conditions.

Audi organizes some events to promote its Corporate Social Responsibility and to show how it makes efforts to maintain good relations with all that surround and support the brand.

Audi created the event "Audi Social Day" which happens every two years. This event was created on 24th June 2023. Employees from every Audi location made part of this event. In Brussels, Stephanie Van den Keybus, Head of Human Resources at Audi started collecting goods for refugee minors for facilities of the Belgian immigration agency Fedasil. The building of the agency was also cleaned, and Audi also built a playroom for children.

In San José Chiapa, Mexico, Audi's employees also volunteered to plant 210 trees in a local community. In Győr, Audi supply chain specialists alongside around fifty employees renovated a building for local aid organizations. In 2022, Audi was also a great

help during the Ukraine War. Employees volunteered to help, and the brand made donations to help the country. These are only some examples of Audi's volunteering and social activities that show how Audi's commitment to society.

Regarding Corporate Culture and Values, Audi also believes that it is vital to respect Human Rights and that it is important to provide employees with a safe environment so that teams work better and achieve success. Audi also believes that flexibility is important because it provides the possibility of hybrid work and is open to hearing employees' ideas and perspectives.

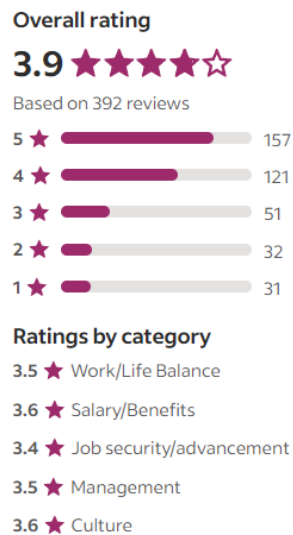
3.1.4. Employee reviews of work for Audi AG

After researching former employees and current employees' perspectives on working at Audi AG, it was possible to conclude that all of the experiences are different, and opinions are a mix of good and bad.

On the Indeed website, working at Audi is classified with a 3.9-star general rating.

While some consider it a great company to work for, others point out its conditions and the environment between colleagues by considering it bad since the colleagues are not satisfied.

Figure 10: Overall rating of working for Audi



Source: Indeed, n.d.

In Germany, the overall reviews are good, the company is classified between four and five stars.

Figure 11: Review of a former employee of working at Audi Germany

4.0
★★★★☆

Productive workplace. Colleagues are interactive.
Software Developer Intern (Former Employee) - Ingolstadt - 15 June 2017

 **Indeed featured review**
The most useful review selected by Indeed

A typical day at work was to provide user support to the internal users of an application tool.

I was the administrator for a software application tool which exported car software to all the worldwide testing locations.

I learned time management and effective communication.

The hardest part of the job was to debug errors which have the highest priority.

The most enjoyable part of the job was the constant encouragement of my manager to get the most out of me.

✓ **Pros**
Delicious lunch, German Bundesliga tickets, Flexible working hours

✗ **Cons**
Short breaks


Source: Indeed, 2017

As Figure 11 shows, a former employee considers that the best part of working for Audi was his manager since he always got words of encouragement and motivation, which shows that the team environment was positive.

Figure 12: Review of a current employee of working for Audi in Portugal

4.0
★★★★☆

Local agradável para trabalhar têm boas condições
Ajudante de Bate-Chapas (Current Employee) - Lisboa - 25 September 2016

 **Indeed featured review**
The most useful review selected by Indeed

Montagem e desmontagem de carros, como a minha formação não é de bate-chapas, embora já tivesse alguns conhecimentos adquiridos com o meu pai tenho aprendido e desenvolvido os meus conhecimento, tenho uma boa relação de trabalho com os meus colegas.

✓ **Pros**
Refeitório

✗ **Cons**
não tenho

Source: Indeed, 2016

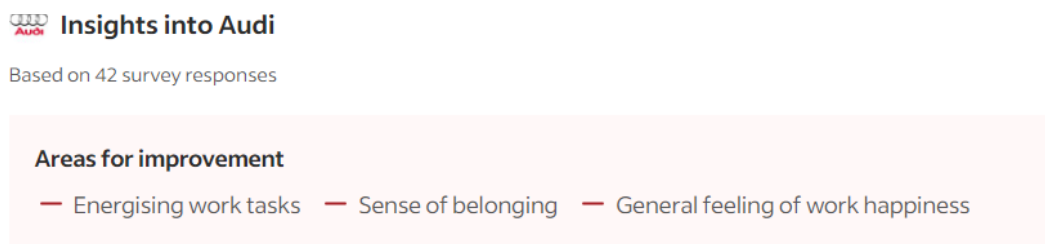
In Portugal, there was only one review, but the company was considered a good place to work and the employee pointed out the good environment between colleagues and the opportunity to deepen knowledge about his tasks. In Figure 12, it is possible to see that a current employee from Lisbon considers Audi a “pleasant place to work and they have good conditions”. He also states that even though the section he is working for is not his especiality, he has been developing knowledge about it and has a good relationship with his team colleagues.

By doing some further research it was also possible to see what employees around the world consider that it would be important to change in the company.

On the website, Glassdoor was also possible to obtain some insight into working for the company, where it can also be concluded that, in general, Audi is considered a good company to work for.

Most employees also would recommend other people to work for Audi and consider the interview process simple and accessible.

Figure 13: Insights about working for Audi.



Source: Indeed, n.d.

In Figure 13, based on a survey created by the Indeed website management team, Audi’s employees consider that the company could adopt some measures or initiatives to avoid exclusion and increase happiness at work.

3.2. Mercedes-Benz

3.2.1. Historical context of the brand

Mercedes-Benz came to life when Gottlieb Daimler and Karl Benz founded separate companies to produce the first fast motors for the proper vehicles. To navigate through the history of the brand it is necessary to know its creators and how the idea of the brand was created and gained form.

Gottlieb Daimler was born on March 17th, 1834, in Schorndorf, Germany. He studied Engineering at Stuttgart Polytechnic. After this, he decided to work for some engineering companies to gain experience with engines and deepen his knowledge.

In 1872, Daimler became the technical director in the company of Nikolaus Otto, also a very important name in the automotive industry since he invented the “four-stroke internal-combustion engine”. Ten years later, Daimler left the company and joined his coworker Wilhelm Maybach to start their own business as an engine-building shop.

1885 was a remarkable year for the partners since they were able to develop a carburetor, making it possible the use of gasoline as fuel. The first gasoline engines were used on a bicycle, a four-wheeled carriage, and a boat. The efforts of Daimler and Maybach resulted in a four-wheeled vehicle, beginning the concept of an automobile, in 1889. A year later, on 28th November 1890, Daimler-Motoren-Gesellschaft was founded at Cannstatt by Daimler, due to the costs of testing and trials, alongside Max Duttchenhofer, entrepreneur and industrialist, and Wilhelm Lorenz, his business partner.

Disagreements soon began between the partners since Daimler wanted to be focused on producing vehicles, while Duttchenhofer wished to create "stationary engines".¹⁰In 1891, Maybach resigned due to issues with the contractual terms. It is not because of this that Maybach stopped producing engines with Daimler, but due to the tense relationship between Max Duttchenhofer and Wilhelm Lorenz, Daimler ended up being excluded.

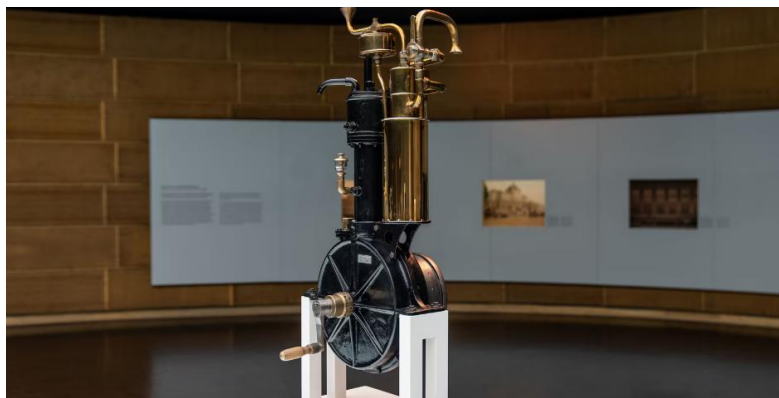
Due to general financial issues, technical development stopped, and the company saw a need to reintegrate Maybach in 1895. Maybach only would agree to come back to the company if Daimler could come back as well. Due to the loyalty that Maybach had

¹⁰ A stationary engine is an engine that does not move and always stays in the same position.

for Daimler, he refused to come back, but after commercial pressures, the company saw, once again, the need to reintegrate both.

The return of Maybach to the company was, without a doubt, revolutionary since his creation, the “Phoenix Engine”, composed of two cylinders, expanded its popularity internationally. English industrialists were prompted to invest 350,000 Marks for licensing rights. Due to all of this, Maybach was promoted to Technical Director of Daimler-Motoren-Gesellschaft and Daimler was appointed to a position on the Technical Board, becoming the Inspector General of the Supervisory Board. The return of the founders to the company contributed to its growth and continuous improvement. Unfortunately, Daimler passed away on March 6th, 1900.

Figure 14: The Grandfather Clock



Source: Mercedes-Benz, n.d.

As mentioned earlier, Karl Benz was also an enormously important name for Mercedes-Benz. Karl Benz was not a person with many financial possibilities, but these conditions did not stop him from attending a Grammar School and studying Mechanical Engineering.

In 1871, Benz aimed to create his first company and joined August Ritter in creating “Karl Benz and August Ritter, Engineering Workshop”, in Mannheim. Karl Benz realized that his partner was not reliable and, using his wife’s Bertha Ringer’s funds, he bought his partner’s part of the company, establishing now his own business. The company was renamed to “Karl Benz T 6, 11, Iron Foundry and Engineering Workshop” (Mercedes-Benz, n.d.). Since Karl Benz was not in the best economic situation, he built his building on his property calling it “Metalworking Machine Factory”. Since 1878, Benz worked and studied intensively to create a gas-driven two-stroke engine. Finally, a year later, he succeeded by being able to start the engine for the first time. This event led

to the founding of “Gasmotorenfabrik Mannheim”, the Mannheim Gas Engine Factory in October 1882. Even though it was Benz who founded the company, he did not have much influence on it and, due to this, he left the firm in January 1883, joining Max Rose and Friedrich Wilhelm Esslinger¹¹. Together, they founded “Benz & Cie” in October 1883 and launched the “System Benz” engine¹². Benz struggled once again with a different vision of his partners, making him search for new investors for the company. It was in May 1890 that he replaced his partners Julius Ganss and Friedrich von Fischer.

The business was successful, but Karl Benz aimed to focus only on vehicles, experimenting with improvement, and letting go of the business of only engines. Due to Benz’s decision, he created the company “Karl Benz Söhne”, in Landeburg in 1906. It was only six years later that he passed the management control of the company to his sons. Karl Benz was, without a doubt, a remarkable name for the brand until the end of his life and is still remembered that way. The first Mercedes to appear was created and designed by Maybach. It made huge success at the “Nice Race Week”¹³ in March 1901 since it symbolized the end of traditional carriages and the beginning of the new era of automobiles (Mercedes-Benz Public Archive, n.d.).

Figure 15: The first official Mercedes



. Source: Mercedes-Benz public archive, n.d.

¹¹ Max Rose and Friedrich Wilhelm were shareholders that left Benz & Cie.

¹² The System Benz engine is a two-stroke engine.

¹³ The Nice Race Week happened in 1901 and it was when Wilhelm Werner piloted a Mercedes and conquered the victory.

3.2.2. History of the Brand's Logo

Behind the history of the creation of Mercedes-Benz, there is also a history of its logo.

On October 10th, 1910, the symbol of Benz & Cie., entered the Register of Trademarks¹⁴. The symbol was composed of the Benz logo surrounded by a golden laurel wreath symbolizing victory, passing a clear sign to competition.

Figure 16: Mannheim – home of winners: Benz logo with laurel wreath, registered as trademark on 6 August 1909



Source: Mercedes-Benz Group, n.d.

The logo was not always as it is known today. Daimler's sons chose this symbol because in 1872 their father sent them a postcard that marked the exact location of their home with a three-pointed star. Since the brothers were always involved in their father's business, they used the star as the brand's trademark to honor their father.

On June 24th, 1909, Daimler-Motoren-Gesellschaft requested legal protection for a graphically designed version of the logo. This symbol entered the Register of Trademarks on February 9th, 1911.

On the other hand, simultaneously, the Stuttgart firm also applied for the protection of a symbol for the brand, but this one was composed of a four-pointed star. However, the symbol that represented the "face" of the brand was always the three-pointed star. The star was first used on the radiators of the vehicles.

¹⁴ The Register of Trademarks is the only way that it is possible to legally protect a trademark, making it impossible to use it without the owner's permission.

In its first years of existence, the Mercedes star did not have a surrounding ring as it has today. Since the brand always searched for improvement and evolution, the star had a new design with light and dark colors on the background, and the name “Mercedes” below it. This new design arose in 1916. It also had four small golden stars on the dark background. The design was new and refreshing for the brand, but it was still hard to recognize when a car passed through.

Figure 17: New design idiom: Daimler three-pointed star with circle, 1916



. Source: Mercedes-Benz Group, n.d.

In 1925, the three-pointed star and the laurel wreath were combined into only one symbol. The merger of Daimler-Motoren-Gesellschaft with Benz & Cie. resulted in this new logo, giving birth to Mercedes-Benz.

Nowadays, Mercedes-Benz’s logo is easily recognizable internationally and the three-pointed star keeps its legacy, even though it now has fewer colors and has only a silver outline. These modifications of the symbol show the efforts of the company to keep ahead of evolution and modernization.

3.2.3. Mercedes in Portugal

Mercedes arrived in Portugal in 1936. Mercedes's history in Portugal started with the company C. Santos since it started to include automobiles and then extended to all of the vehicles produced by Mercedes.

In 1946, Sociedade Comercial C. Santos, Lda¹⁵. established its business as an import and retailer of some brands, including Mercedes-Benz. It held the Mercedes-Benz representation in Lisbon.

The companies always kept a stable relationship, even during the Second World War and, especially after, since the sales of vehicles increased considerably.

In 1989, it all changed when Mercedes-Benz AG bought its brand's representation and Mercedes-Benz Portugal was created. Mercedes-Benz Portugal belongs to DaimlerChrysler AG, now only known as Daimler AG since 99% of the stakeholders of the company agreed to this name change. With globalization, this company intended to improve competitiveness and to engage with the importation, sales, and distribution of vehicles and respective parts (Soc. Com. C. Santos, n.d.).

Mercedes-Benz keeps having great success in Portugal. 2023 was the ninth running year that Mercedes-Benz is considered the most-sold premium brand in Portugal, since it sold 14.810 units of automobiles, placing itself in third place on the national market. This was a considerable increase in sales compared to 2022, precisely a difference of 22,6%. Hybrid and electric automobiles keep on being one of the best sales of the brand since 56% of the total sales of 2023 were automobiles of that type (Mercedes-Benz Portugal, 2024). Mercedes-Benz is once again reaffirmed as one of the most trustable luxury brands in Portugal by accompanying the new electric era that the automobile business is entering.

¹⁵ Sociedade Comercial C. Santos Lda is a society that made part of the EMINCO holding together with another societies. It was founded in 1946.

3.2.4. Corporate Culture of Mercedes-Benz

Like any other company, Mercedes has its own Corporate Culture, which is vital for business to succeed.

Mercedes-Benz possesses a list of values that describe its culture, the company shaped these values in 2003 and keeps them alive until today.

1. “Integrity, openness & respect” is the first value on the list. The company believes that it is vital for its customers, employees, and partners to trust it to succeed. Mercedes considers that cooperation and stable business relationships can only exist if it is transparent and respectful.
2. The second values on the list are “Inspired, empowered & diverse people” referring to the importance of the people that work for the company. Mercedes considers that its employees are its major strength and contribute to diversity in all topics. Different opinions and points of view contribute to the development and constant evolution of the company.
3. “Financial & social responsibility” is also on the list, where Mercedes states that it is not only important for the company to develop in the economic sector, but it is also important for its employees and municipalities where the company keeps being active. Mercedes also mentions that it makes efforts to analyze carefully risks and possible opportunities.
4. The “Customer Focus” value is probably considered one of the most important for the company. Mercedes considers that it adapts to customers’ needs and their satisfaction is important to it.
5. “Commitment to Excellence” reflects the pursuit for new objectives, conquests, and improvements. Mercedes searches for continuous upgrades to ensure the high quality of its products and services.
6. Lastly, “Sustainability” is part of the company’s values. The responsibility to save resources. Electric mobility can also be included in this topic since recently Mercedes has been launching new electric vehicles standing for the protection of the environment.

Mercedes-Benz's commitment to its employees is also reflected in compensation and benefits. The company believes that it is important to ensure "fair opportunities and a healthy working environment.". Salaries are determined by performance, motivating employees to work the best way possible, and contributing to the well-functioning of the company.

The brand also believes that flexibility is important so that its employees can create a balance between their professional and personal lives. Mercedes offers various working schedule options. Hybrid work can also be seen as a flexible option since employees can work for some days in the comfort of their houses. Katharina Walla, the Market Manager in Sales of Mercedes-Benz (n.d.), considers that the hybrid working model is beneficial for the company and its employees by stating:

I think it's great how well mobile working works and how much trust there is in the team. Of course, mobile work also saves time, so I can effectively use the time I spend in the car driving to work for other things. On site, I benefit from the personal exchange with colleagues, with my manager, as well as with neighboring teams.

There are also special and flexible options for parents, for example, there are eleven locations in Germany that offer daycare centers so that parents can work knowing that their children are safe.

Mercedes also supports the LGBTQIA+¹⁶ community by collaborating with companies that also stand for the Pride movement. The company commits to the mission of defending that everyone should have the right to choose what gender they identify with and who they choose to be their partner. Mercedes also takes part in PRIDE parades ¹⁷and different events around the world. In 2018, Mercedes joined the UN¹⁸ Global Company to combat discrimination against the LGBTQIA+ community.

Mercedes also focuses on team-building activities and on contests or prizes that motivate workers. In 2023, Mercedes-Benz Mobility AG in collaboration with Workz A/S¹⁹ introduced the "Strategy game" as a board game for the employees to understand the strategy of the business and search for customer's approaches to apply. These kinds of activities reinforce the sense of teamwork and competitiveness.

¹⁶ LGBTQIA+ - Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, asexual community

¹⁷ A Pride parade is an event to celebrate all the sexual and gender orientations.

¹⁸ UN- United Nations

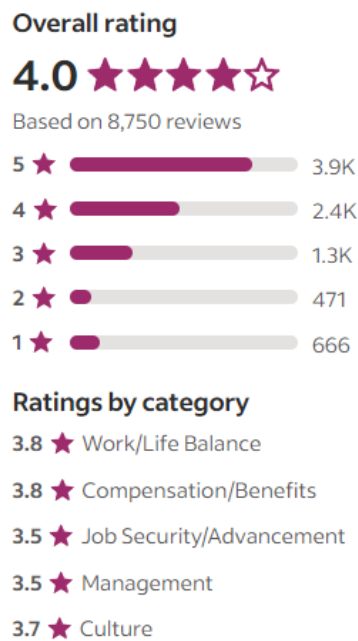
¹⁹ Workz A/S is an agency that works with themes like leadership, management and teamwork.

“Handelsblatt Mindshift Award” is also an award that ensures employees truly commit to the company. This activity consists of fourteen employees from ten different teams and six nationalities coming together to support the corporate culture of the brand.

3.2.5. Employee reviews of work for Mercedes-Benz

After searching for the environment between employees in Mercedes, it was possible to gather different opinions and perceptions of working in the company. The website Indeed shows an overall good rating for the company of four stars. The most of reviews of working at Mercedes are from employees or former employees from the United States of America.

Figure 18: Overall rating of working for Mercedes-Benz



Source: Indeed, n.d.

Indeed presents 638 reviews from Germany, and a student considers it a good job with a good salary. On the other hand, we have a former employee who points out the environment inside of the team, not identifying with it and considering something that does not follow the values of the company.

Figure 19: Former employee's review of working at Mercedes-Benz in Germany

4.0 ★★★★★
salary good for student
Worker (Former Employee) - [germany](#) - July 28, 2024

Indeed Featured review
The most useful review selected by Indeed

salary is good for student working holiday job, working at least 1 month in nightshift can earn you at least 2,4k, which is good as you don't have much taxes

Source: Indeed, 2024

Figure 20: Former employee's review of working at Mercedes-Benz in Germany

1.0 ★☆☆☆☆
OK, if you just want to play politics and crawl into the boss's (top boss's) poppssss
Financial Analyst (Former Employee) - [Leinfelden-Echterdingen](#) - August 8, 2024

What is the best thing about working at this company?
The salary is pretty good at HQ.

What is the most stressful thing about working at this company?
Bad company culture. Very selfish and ruthless. No teamwork

What is the work environment and culture like at this company?
-selfish
-ruthless
-political
-hierarchical

Source: Indeed, 2024

There are always distinct opinions concerning working at Mercedes-Benz, but, on an overall analysis of the reviews, it can be concluded that Mercedes-Benz's organizational culture follows its values. Not all of the places around the world can be managed the same way since those are composed of different people, but since Mercedes has a list of values that apply to the company as a whole, it will depend on each employee to follow the integrity of the company.

In Portugal, it is hard to gather information since there are only 26 reviews for the company, which can also show a difference in the cultural values between the countries. Even though there are few reviews, it is also possible to observe a dichotomy between opinions. While some consider Mercedes-Benz a great company to work for, others consider that the experience is not good, pointing to the salary values and the organization inside of the company.

Figure 22: Former employee's review of working at Mercedes-Benz in Portugal

5.0 ★★★★★

Company with great people and great culture

Software Architect (Current Employee) - Lisbon, Portugal - September 10, 2022

 **Indeed Featured review**
The most useful review selected by Indeed

Good: People are very kind and always available to help.
Bad: A very big company with very rigid processes which makes things to be slow to change, and this is not the best for an IT department.

Source: Indeed, 2022

Figure 21: Review of a Mercedes-Benz employee in Portugal

2.0 ★★☆☆☆

bad salaries, deceitful after-sales managers

Mecanico (Current Employee) - Sintra, Distrito de Lisboa - June 5, 2024

- Salaries below €1,000
- A lot is asked of workers but little is given
- "pizza party" policy
- While the value of labor has almost doubled in the 6 years of the current administration, salaries have remained practically unchanged.
- +People are generally friendly

Source: Indeed, 2024

3.2.6. Corporate Social Responsibility

Mercedes-Benz considers that the commitment should not just stay inside of the company but also outside of society.

The company is funding a fellowship program for young people. The project aims to support different young people around the world in developing sustainable projects from the program, allowing them to learn more and improve their curriculum. The name of this project is “beVisioneers” pointing to its goals. In 2023, the program was accessible to participants from India, South Africa, and some European countries aged between 16 and 28 years old. The DO School chooses the participants. During the period of hybrid learning, the participants are provided with a personal mentor and the employees of Mercedes are encouraged to participate as mentors in the project.

beVisioneers aims to create a relevant impact, one that benefits its young participants, their local communities and the environment. As part of our corporate citizenship strategy, we are very proud to fund this unique initiative, which empowers a new and diverse generation of innovators. We wish all fellows every success as they make their visions a reality (JungoBrünger, n.d.).

Mercedes-Benz Group also supports the Global Nature Fund, a program that “promotes ecological sustainability and in this way reflects essential elements of the corporate citizenship strategy” (Mercedes-Benz Group, n.d.). This program aims to protect the Mangrove forests in India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. Mangroves are considered fundamental in the fight against climate change since the forests with these trees hold more carbon than any other. Mercedes has been involved in protecting these forests since 2004 alongside the Global Nature Fund. This Fund implemented the Sustainable Integrated Mangrove Aquaculture with a project in the Sundarbans, also protected by UNESCO.

More than 300 solar lamps have been developed, tested, built, and replace the paraffin lamps of the fishermen at Lake Maduganga. With the help of Mercedes-Benz, the GNF²⁰ can extend and expand the center's reach beyond the region in the current projects. The increasing demand for education and approaches to solutions shows the growing importance of this exemplary education initiative (Mercedes-Benz Group, n.d.).

There are also some more examples of Mercedes-Benz's commitment to society and the community. The company makes efforts to create local initiatives and to be in

²⁰ GNF – Global Nature Fund

constant contact with the community walking on a path to educate the younger generation and improve conditions around the world.

3.3. Volkswagen AG

3.3.1. Historical context of the brand

The Volkswagen Group was born on May 28, 1937, when the German Government founded it intending to create a “People’s Car Company”, by creating cars everyone could afford. The company was under the control of Adolf Hitler and its Headquarters are still located in Wolfsburg, Germany.

The first name of the company, given by the National Nazi Party was “Gesellschaft zur Vorbereitung des Deutschen Volkswagens mbH” that, later that year was renamed “Volkswagenwerk”, symbolizing the concept of the brand, a car for all people.

Adolf Hitler had the ambition to build throughout Germany a network of autobahns and limited access highways. Still, his biggest goal was to mass produce a vehicle that could offer speed and comfort at a low price, and that could be sold for less than 1,000 Reich marks. To put this plan in progress, he needed someone who would create the design for the vehicles and that is when the Automotive Engineer Ferdinand Porsche entered the history of this remarkable German corporation. In 1938, at a Nazi rally, Hitler announced the first Volkswagen car as being an “answer for the transportation needs and intended to give joy”. Unfortunately, shortly after the display of the car at the Berlin Motor Show in 1939, the Second World War eloped, and the German brand had to suspend production.

Regarding Volkswagen sales, in the United States, the sales of the brand were initially slower than in some parts around the world, especially due to the connection that the brand had to Nazis and even for its design. The first marketing campaigns of the brand started to appear. The first advertisement of Volkswagen, launched in 1959 was made by the advertising agency “Doyle Dane Bernbach” which named the car the “Beetle” and promoted its small size as a great quality for the consumers to buy (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.).

Volkswagen became one of the best-selling companies regarding sales in the United States.

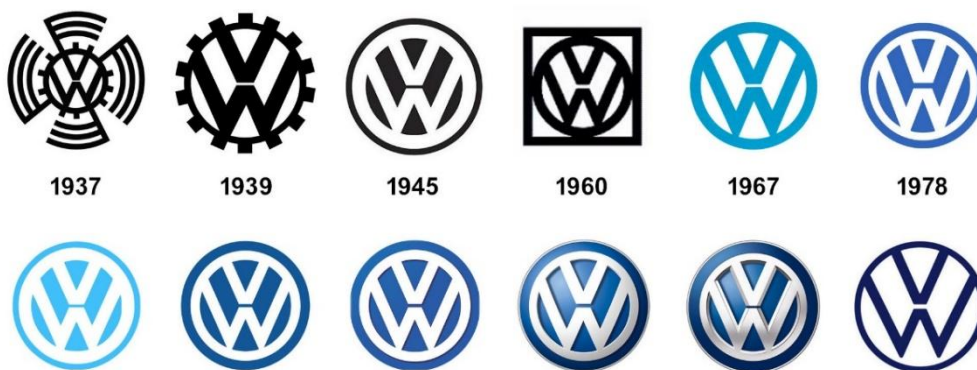
In 1960, the German government managed to sell 60 percent of Volkswagen’s stock, denationalizing it. The Beetle was the most well-known model of Volkswagen

recording a worldwide production of 15 million vehicles in 1972 (Volkswagen Group, n.d.). Volkswagen also started to create sports models like the Rabbit and later the Golf, which was an instant success, resulting in the substitution of the classic Beetle.

In 2015 Volkswagen gained the recognition of being the “world’s largest car manufacturer by volume after surpassing Toyota Motor Corporation” (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024). Unfortunately, in the middle of the company’s success, it faced a public crisis when the United States of America Environmental Protection Agency “determined that the manufacturer’s diesel-powered cars contained software that altered the vehicle’s performance to pass emissions tests.” (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024). Volkswagen admitted the scandal and many officials of the brand were found guilty of various crimes, but this was not a stopper for the increase of Volkswagen’s sales.

3.3.2. History of the brand’s logo

Figure 23: Volkswagen Logo along the years



Source: Wikimedia commons, 2017

With the constant development of the brand and the evolution of its products, Volkswagen had to adapt its logo, reflecting its ambition to create something better for its customers.

The first logo, from 1937, was made to reflect the brand's main idea, creating a car at a low price that almost everyone could afford. Since this was Hitler’s plan, the logo represents a cogwheel that forms the swastika, also reflecting the Nazi ideals. Due to the

Second World War, only two years later Volkswagen removed the swastika from the logo but remained the cogwheel, to keep the image of the company's efficiency. The main letters of the brand, “V” and “W” got bigger, and the symbol became closer to what it is today.

After World War II, the logo kept being changed and it had a more futuristic look since the cogwheel fully disappeared. This symbol was the longest running one of the brand, lasting 15 years until the 60s. It was in 1960 that the first and only logo in a square form appeared and this happened because the Wolfsburg firm was opened to international markets, and due to this, a new design was needed to keep a global and adjustable image.

Since 1967, the logo changed its colors to blue and white, which are maintained today. From that year to 2019, the logo kept changing to reflect Volkswagen’s evolution and its step into electric vehicles and mobility.

3.3.3. Volkswagen in Portugal

Volkswagen arrived in Portugal on April 17, 1950, with the Beetle, or so-called “Carocha”. English brands mainly dominated the market, but Volkswagen arrived to revolutionize the market, presenting a whole new concept to the Portuguese Market. It had the image that Hitler aimed for, a car with low expenses regarding consumption and maintenance.

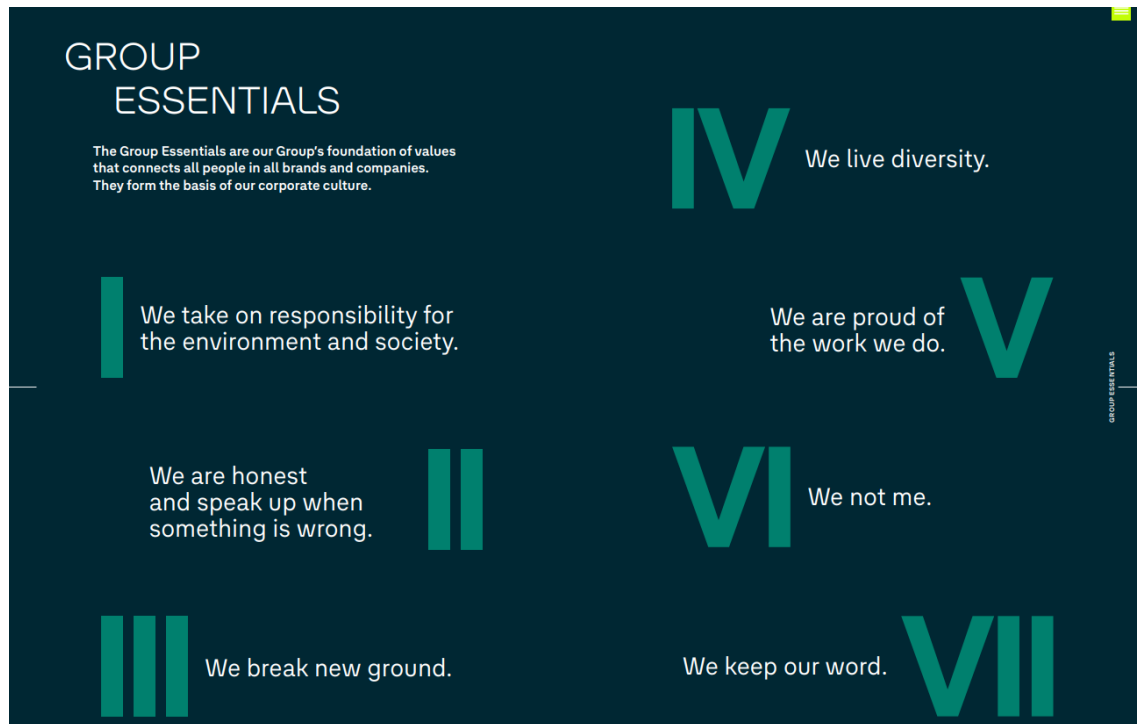
The history of Volkswagen in Portugal resembles the history in Germany. The brand’s sales continuously grew and in the 60s the Beetle sales were already up to 30,000 units. The Volkswagen’s model Golf arrived in Portugal in 1974 and nowadays more than 155,000 units circulate on the Portuguese roads (LinkedIn, n.d.). It was seen as a family car and there was only one more reason for the Volkswagen sales increase even more.

1987 was a remarkable year for the brand in Portugal when SIVA (Society of Imports of Automobile Vehicles) turned into the official importer of Volkswagen. Since then, until 2012, “there were sold more than 530,000 units” of the brand.

Nowadays, according to the Volkswagen Group, the main headquarters of the brand in Portugal is considered SIVA in Vila Nova da Rainha, Azambuja.

3.3.4. Volkswagen's Compliance Code

Figure 24: Volkswagen Group Essentials



. Source: Volkswagen Group, n.d.

Volkswagen's Compliance Code consists of its Corporate Principles that are presented in its Code of Conduct.

In the image above, Volkswagen reflects its seven principles as a group.

- I. The first Group Principle, “We take on responsibility for the environment and society” (Volkswagen Group, n.d.) shows an image of awareness by the company towards the environment when producing its products and that it is also part of society. The fact that the company states that it is also a part of society allures for the fact that it complies with Social Responsibility and awareness towards society.
- II. The second one, “We are honest and speak up when something is wrong” (Volkswagen Group, n.d.) aims to show the ability that the group has to speak their inner thoughts openly and that it is important to listen to others to form a good team and achieve results easily and faster. It also shows that the group

is not afraid to expose something wrong within the company and discuss possible solutions to improve it.

- III. “We break new ground” shows a clear message that the Volkswagen Group is not afraid to try new things, and to innovate. It also reflects the company’s goal to always innovate, in “shaping the mobility of tomorrow”. (Schönwalder Bianca and Dr. Mesterharm, Michael, 2023).
- IV. “We live diversity” (Volkswagen Group, n.d.) stands for the openness of the group regarding cultural differences and Human Rights. Volkswagen aims to show that it is inclusive and treats everyone with respect.
- V. “We are proud of the work we do” (Volkswagen Group, n.d.) reflects the pride that the company holds regarding its products and the work that it does. It also shows the group's passion for their company and their work.
- VI. “We not me” is as clear as it should be. Volkswagen Group defends teamwork at its highest level. “We work together. Unconditional and uncomplicated. Worldwide. We are bridge builders. No gate guards. Unbeatable together. We stand up for each other. We are a team.” (Schönwalder, Bianca & Dr. Mesterharm, Michael, 2023)
- VII. The last group principle, “We keep our Word” shows that the brand is reliable and makes efforts to regain trust that was lost due to prior legal complications as mentioned before.

Regarding Legal matters, Volkswagen also has principles to follow, like the prohibition of corruption and insider trading. The company follows worldwide rules and laws and highlights clear examples of what employees should avoid doing. Employees are not allowed to accept bribes, gifts, and benefits that will cause trouble for the company.

Sharing internal information about the company is also not allowed. If someone who has access to this type of information shares or sells it, it will be against the company’s corporate principles and its data protection policies. This can also be included in the “Fair Trade” company policy. The employee should not share any information with anyone, for example, a friend who works for a competition. The employee must not share any information that will risk the company’s projects by sharing it with competitors.

Volkswagen also follows some norms that usually most of the companies around the world follow as well. These norms include environmental and sustainable policies,

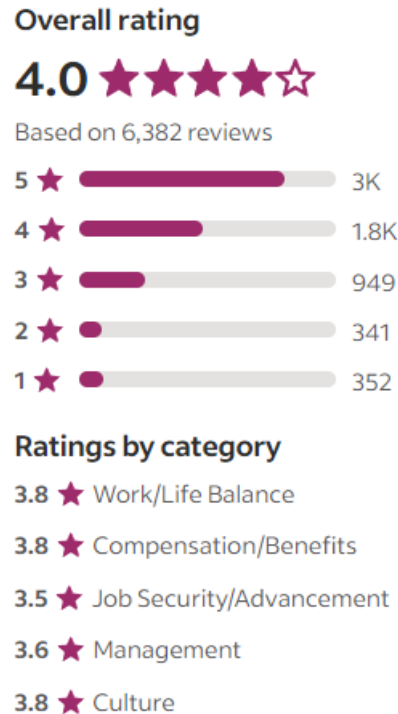
security of the IT systems of the company, including data protection, taxes and Customs laws, and compliance of cross-border trades.

These norms are general and between Germany and Portugal, the Volkswagen Group principles are the same, which makes sense since the branch in Portugal is part of the company's concept, regarding the country.

Kurt Michels, Group Chief Integrity and Compliance Officer of Volkswagen AG states "We live integrity and compliance out of conviction. Attitude and value-based actions following our rules offer the best protection for our company, our employees, customers, and business partners.". These words truly reflect the company's essence and its corporate principles.

3.3.5. Employee reviews of work for Volkswagen AG

Figure 25: Overall rating of working for Volkswagen AG

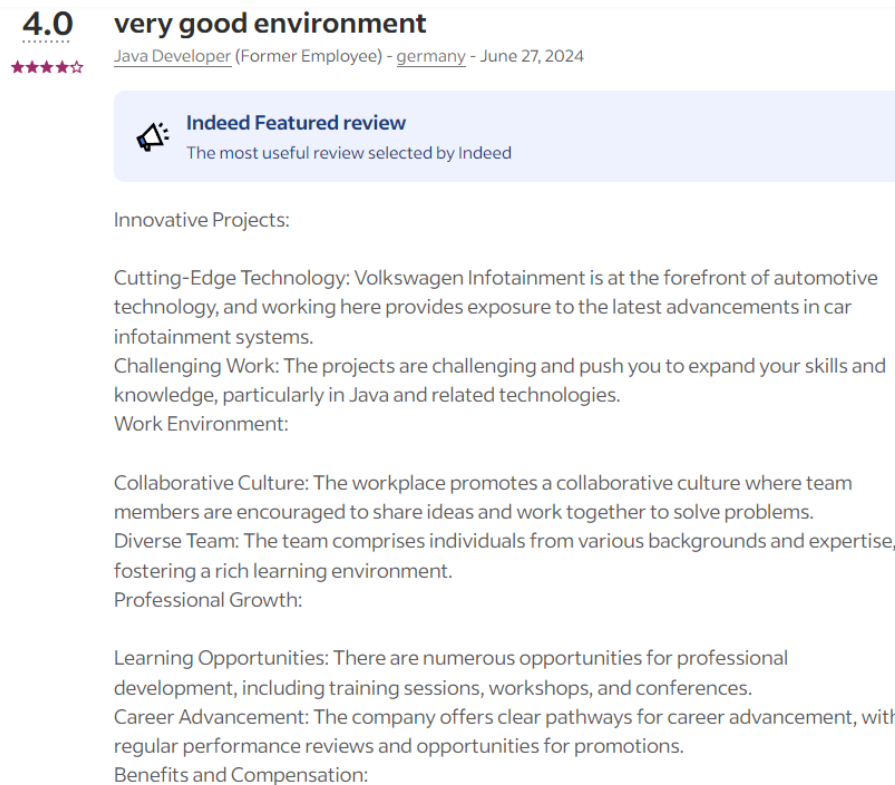


Source: Indeed, n.d.

When researching Volkswagen's employees' reviews, the website Indeed presents an overall rating of 4 stars, as it is possible to observe in Figure 25. The culture and work-life balance have the highest score attributed by employees, with 3.8 stars, which shows the company's efforts to spread its culture and preserve it.

Overall, the German brand seems to be a good company to work at, since the contrast between reviews around the world have a big contrast between each other. The brand is voted as a 5-star rated company to work at. Negative reviews altogether do not even reach half of the good ones since a 5-star rating counts 3000 reviews and a 1-star and 2-star rating count 693 reviews.

Figure 26: Volkswagen's former employee's review, Germany

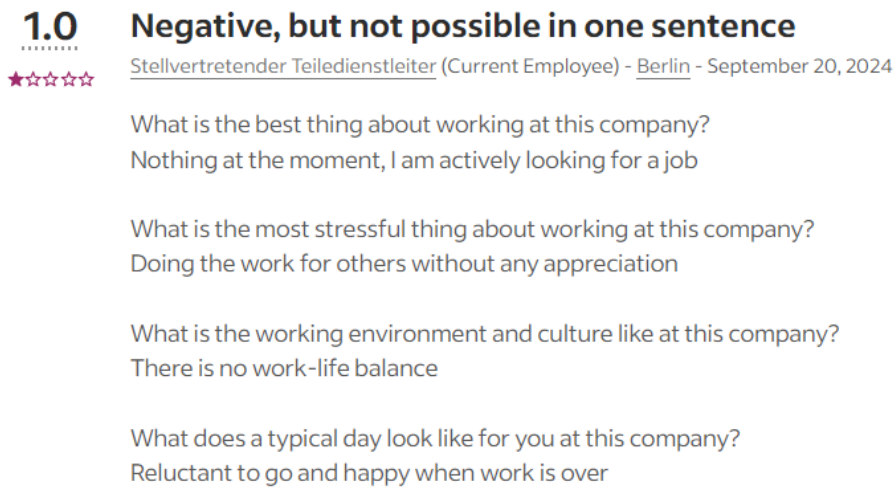


. Source: Indeed, 2024

In Germany, employees rate the company as a qualified company that offers a good cultural environment and searches for ways of working as a team to achieve results. Besides good salaries and benefits, Volkswagen is considered a company that comprises tasks that the employees consider that make them work harder but also make them improve their knowledge and skills. Employees feel encouraged to continuously learn and often feel proud of being part of a globally known company such as Volkswagen.

On the other hand, some employees think that working for Volkswagen is too demanding and the company does not show recognition for their work, as shown in Figure 27.

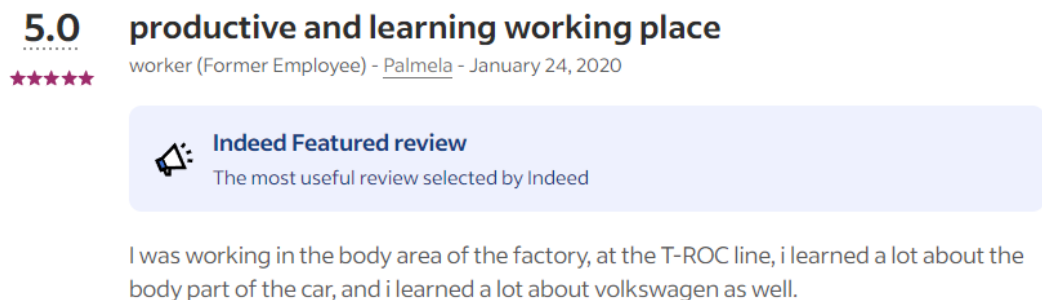
Figure 27: Volkswagen's current employee review, Germany



Source: Indeed, 2024

In Portugal, as in the other brands, Volkswagen has fewer reviews than in Germany, which makes it harder to contrast the company's culture in both countries.

Figure 28: Volkswagen's former employee's review, Portugal



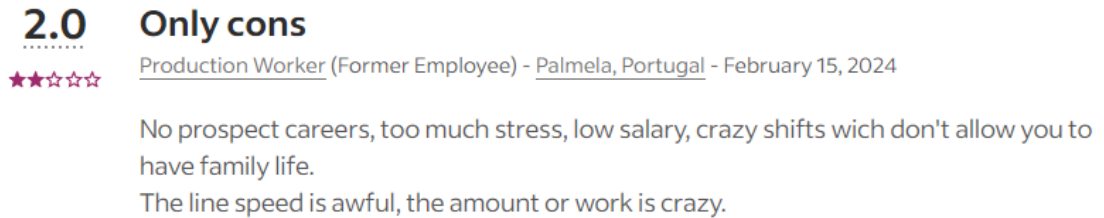
. Source: Indeed, 2020

Of the 24 reviews available in Indeed, most reviews are positive and employees and former employees attribute a 4-star score to the company. Employees also state that they can learn more and point out that the job is demanding. Some of Portugal's Volkswagen employees understand that the speed needed in their tasks can focus on quality that the brand is always focused on preserving and improving.

It is interesting to observe how from 24 reviews in Portugal it was easier to find a bad review. This bad review, represented in Figure 29, is due to the excess workload and how the job demands so much work for a low salary. The lack of time for the family is also a topic referred in the review, since, as stated in Chapter 3, the Portuguese culture

values their time, especially to spend it with their family and loved ones. If an employee does not have time for his family, it will be hard for him to enjoy working for the company and this also goes against Volkswagen's values.

Figure 29: Volkswagen's employee's review in Portugal

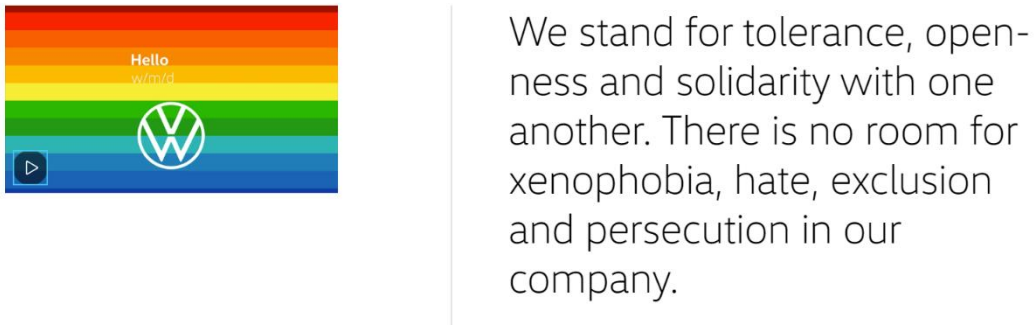


Source: Indeed, 2024

3.3.6. Social Values of Volkswagen

Volkswagen AG is a company that stands for its employees' wellness with continuous benefits and with an inclusive spirit that reflects its Corporate Culture and Social Values.

Figure 30: Volkswagen Group advertising standing for the LGBTQIA+ community rights



Source: Volkswagen Group, n.d.

The company ensures that diversity is lived, by having a special program designed to “sensitize” its employees to be aware of it.

Volkswagen stands against any type of hate, exclusion, racism, and other type of prejudice towards its employees, stating that “there is no room” for it. Cultural awareness is a high standard value for Volkswagen due to its concept of “We not Me”. The company also integrates employees with disabilities, having initiatives to address their needs.

One example of this approach is a programme called Work2Work that we initiated in 2001 with the aim of providing new work opportunities to employees whose abilities have declined as a result of their health, age or other factors. Several hundred employees currently have Work2Work jobs in approximately 130 different areas in Wolfsburg (Volkswagen Careers, n.d.).

In terms of benefits and remuneration, Volkswagen does not differentiate the salary regarding gender or other factors like cultural background. The company claims that its employees only get hired or promoted due to their high qualifications for the tasks that are requested. So, due to this, remuneration and career progression are only meant to be evaluated by the employees' performance, excluding any other factor.

The company also has childcare programs in Wolfsburg so that its employees can work with someone to take care of their children. Wolfsburg headquarters works with municipal childcare services to provide these benefits to its employees. This includes the company's preoccupation with its employees' work-life balance as well.

In Germany, Volkswagen offers a lot of benefits like, for example, an Anniversary bonus, commuter tickets, a profit-sharing scheme, and additional remuneration. It also offers other benefits regarding health, flexibility, and development. When someone is looking for a job at Volkswagen, these bonuses and characteristics make the job announcement sound appealing and almost impossible not to apply for.

On the other hand, in Portugal, when a candidate is looking for a job at Volkswagen, the website does not present the same appealing character as the German one. It only shows the benefits for people with a bachelor's degree to do an internship at Volkswagen, stating that it will be an irrefutable opportunity. Due to this, the fact that it is the same company does not mean that it will work and follow its values in every country the same way.

Volkswagen also supports culture and artistic fields. It makes sustainable partnerships with artists able to reach an even more dynamic and bigger audience. The company also supports cultural education programmes reflecting once again its inclusive character. A good example of this is the participation of Volkswagen in the exhibition "Flashes of Memory. Photography in the Holocaust", which occurred in Museum für Fotografie in 2023. The company supported the exhibition which is a memorial in the name of the victims of the Holocaust (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, n.d.).

Figure 31: "Flashes of Memory. Photography in the Holocaust", exhibition view Museum für Fotografie 2023



Source: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin / David von Becker, 2023

3.3.7. Corporate Social Responsibility

Volkswagen defends sustainability as being an innovative and transformative factor for the company. It has many sustainable projects within the company and all over the world, like for example “Recycling and upcycling projects steering towards a sustainable future” and, in India “The Integrated Watershed Management” program.

Figure 32: Sustainability results of Volkswagen



Source: Volkswagen Group, 2023

This thesis focused on studying the concept of organizational culture and its role in German companies and their branches in Portugal.

It was possible to conclude that companies are not able to work properly without their organizational culture and each country has different behaviors in the corporate world due to their own culture. The theories of Schein and Hofstede were analyzed as a complement for the concept of organizational culture and different approaches can be applied since this concept is general because it applies to values that each company has. Both models aim to study a company's culture and the profound values that are part of the company's employees. These theories are also methods used by management to understand their employees better and search for ways of improving the company's culture.

Even though Portugal and Germany are two European countries, their culture is different, and it was possible to examine that Germany has a stricter culture than Portugal. While the German work culture is focused on results and achieving perfectionism, the Portuguese culture adopts a more relaxed position. This does not mean that the Portuguese work culture works less than the German one. Portuguese employees tend to work extra hours but value family time above all.

During the realization of the case studies and searching for employees' reviews, these cultural differences were clear. For the three German car brands, Volkswagen, Audi and Mercedes-Benz, most employees in Germany attributed high scores to the companies and always pointed out how innovative they are and how efforts are made to maintain or improve the quality. German workers seemed to understand that the jobs were demanding because it was aimed at the results. If employees work fast and reach the goals that leadership attributes them, the company will also end up having positive results. This is where it is possible to conclude that the country's innovative culture is rooted. Employees use teamwork to achieve results and understand why the company has such demanding goals.

On the other hand, Portugal's reviews were harder to understand and to extract information. Firstly, there are a lot more German reviews than Portuguese. Secondly, German reviews are complete and more detailed, which makes it easier to understand each company's culture. In Portugal, employees claimed that the workload was too

demanding and that some companies would pay a low salary, but, as in Germany, companies had mostly good reviews.

The contrast between the two European countries was interesting to analyze and provided input on how similar and different their culture can be.

The conclusion extracted from this thesis is that organizational culture is the pillar of companies and, if that pillar falls, the company will fall as well. The culture of a company is not only established by its rules and culture but also by each individual, since each employee can have a different cultural background. Companies must be ready for cultural diversity in employees, customers, and potential partners, and having strategies for these situations is important.

International companies struggle to perpetuate their values the same way in every country, but it will probably always happen since each location around the world has its unique culture and it cannot be changed because it is rooted in each person. The companies adopt strategies for this and, throughout the year, it has been more visible.

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