

***The Turk and the Yankee:
A Cross-Cultural Comparison between
Turkish and American Managers****

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ABSTRACT

With Turkey's developing role as a lead nation among emerging markets, the field of cross-cultural management becomes a key contributor to the interactions between Turkish and American professionals in the workplace. This study uses models of national cultural differences based primarily on the findings of Hofstede (1984), but it also incorporates those of Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) and the GLOBE project (2002), resulting in a comparative cross-cultural management analysis. In combining both academic theory and actual international experience, this paper illustrates that, through effective cross-cultural management, profound understanding and harmony can exist between international managers.

KEY WORDS Cross-Cultural Management; Authority; Individualism; Structure

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Living, working, and traveling in a world so culturally diverse is a fascinating experience. The impact of such an experience does not diminish over time—there is continual pleasure and intellectual stimulation in experiencing worldviews different from one's own. While simply celebrating cultural diversity would be pure bliss, it is imperative that a careful analysis and accommodation of cultures be implemented when conducting business globally.

The manager working in an international or multicultural environment does not always have the luxury of enjoying this colorful, engaging side of our world. Profound and interesting cultural differences in international friendships or vacations can soon become frustrating challenges in the real world of cross-cultural business management. This reality is particularly true in stressful business situations when meeting deadlines, protecting large financial resources, overcoming travel exhaustion, struggling with language limitations, and dealing with time-zone differences combine to create culturally induced stress.

The purpose of this discourse is to help human beings understand differing cultural backgrounds and learn how to work more effectively with varying cultures. More specifically, this study seeks to address cultural issues that Turkish and American managers may face in the workplace. A comparative model of national cultural differences will be employed, enabling identification of several professional differences resulting from the Turkish and American cultures. Through both empirical data and actual examples from workplace situations, an illustration of how cultural differences may lead to more effective cross-cultural management practices will be resolved.

THE CROSS-CULTURAL MODEL

In the workplace, the best way to learn effective cross-cultural management is to employ experienced managers who have worked significantly with the cultures involved. In the absence of these “culture brokers” or “culture intermediaries,” the next best source of information for the international manager can be discovered within cross-cultural models. A specific model of national cultures with Turkish and American scores on important cultural value dimensions is the most useful model. These scores will highlight the similarities and differences between Turkish and American cultures. In general, the areas of greatest culture differences—where the scores are the widest apart—are generally the same areas in which the greatest cross-cultural management conflicts occur in the workplace.

There are a number of models on culture, but most originate from fields outside the academic disciplines of management and business administration. These models range from the work of anthropologists Levi-Strauss (1955) and Edward Hall (1959) in the 1950s to modern scholars such as Geert Hofstede, a Dutch organizational psychologist (1984; Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010), Fons Trompenaars, a Dutch business author and consultant (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1998), and the GLOBE project carried out by 170 investigators in 62 cultures (House et al. 2004). In addition to these

universal models of culture, an extensive documentation of Turkish sources on cultural value differences affecting the workplace is also used to enhance understanding of these two cultures (Cukur, Guzman, and Carlo 2004; Ebren 2009; Kabasakal and Bodur 2008; Kagitcibasi 1982).

In introducing this paper's cross-cultural model, it is important to emphasize that human behavior and human culture are too complex to predict. A single-dimensional model attempting to predict or explain culture would be too simplistic to be useful; thus, a multidimensional model combining separate cultural value dimensions is used to better understand and reflect the complex intercultural workplace.

This paper uses the cultural-values rankings from the work of Geert Hofstede, "the father of cross cultural databases" (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1998:x). The definition of culture for this study will also be taken from Dr. Hofstede: "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another" (Hofstede et al. 2010:6).

Hofstede uses five dimensions to plot cultural characteristics and their relative differences. The diverse positions of countries on these dimensions reveal how their comparative systems of cultural values lead to different approaches in management styles in the workplace (Hofstede 1984). This study compares the attitudes and values held by 116,000 employees of IBM in 50 countries and three regions (Mead 1998).

Applying Hofstede's model to the present study indicates that the significant cross-cultural differences between Turkish and American managers lie primarily within three dimensions: Authority, Individualism, and Structure (Adler 2002).

- **AUTHORITY:** extent to which less-powerful members of organizations accept an unequal distribution of power
- **INDIVIDUALISM:** degree to which people in a country prefer to act as individuals or members of a group
- **STRUCTURE:** extent to which people in a society feel threatened by ambiguity and therefore try to avoid ambiguous situations by providing greater certainty and predictability

Table 1 presents the scores for Turkey and the United States on each of the dimensions (Hofstede 2002).

Table 1. Scores in the Dimensional Model

Dimensions	Turkey	USA
Authority	66	40
Individualism	37	91
Structure	85	46

CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE AUTHORITY DIMENSION*Authority Dimension Defined*

The first national cultural dimension is *Authority*—the degree of inequality among people in one culture that is accepted as normal. In a high Authority country, such as Turkey, people accept differences in power or inequality more willingly and therefore have more hierarchical tendencies. In a low Authority country, such as the United States, people do not accept differences in power as readily and have more egalitarian tendencies (Hofstede et al. 2010).

Hofstede appropriately names this dimension the Power Distance Index because it is originally based on the differences in the amount of power that people of certain status hold in different parts of society. In all societies, these differences are universal and easily recognizable. Regardless of the society, one can expect to see the following:

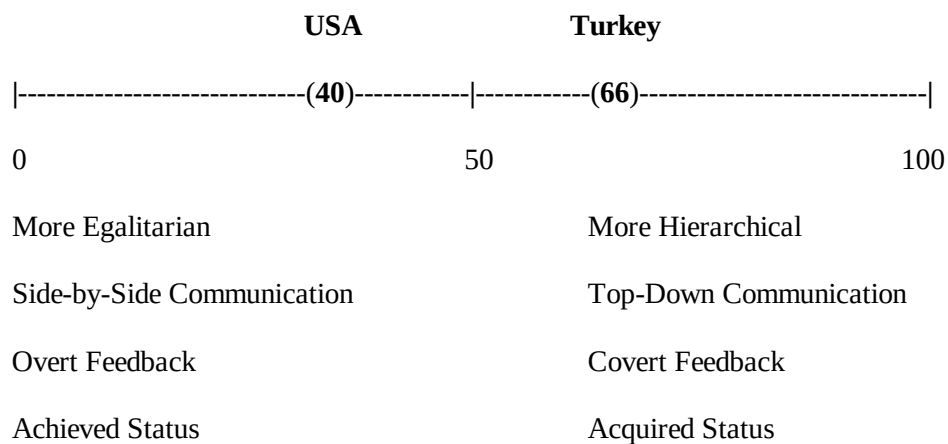
<u>More Power</u>	<u>Less Power</u>
Parents	Children
Teachers	Students
Employers	Employees
Government	Citizens

These differences in power are not negative; moreover, they can be seen as simply a functional and effective method for human beings to interact within groups. Through the Authority dimension, we will see that despite all societies having an unequal distribution of power, some cultures are more accepting of these universal differences than others. The opposite ends of the Authority continuum can be defined thus:

- Low Authority cultures = countries that are *less* accepting of power differences and therefore tend to be more *egalitarian*
- High Authority cultures = countries that are *more* accepting of power differences and therefore tend to be more *hierarchical*

The Turkish and American cultural value scores on this Authority dimension are plotted in Figure 1.

Figure 1. National Culture Dimension: Authority



Authority Dimension and Cross-Cultural Management

Observing the historical development of this cultural dimension through various stages of human society provides excellent insight into understanding how Authority differences impact cross-cultural management. Using the concept of culture as frozen history, a relationship is established between history and individual behavior in the international business workplace. Table 2 summarizes the key differences in the workplace due to the Authority dimension.

Table 2. Managerial Implications: Authority

USA (score = 40)	Turkey (score = 66)
More egalitarian leadership	More hierarchical leadership
More democratic management style	More autocratic management style
Side-by-side communication	Top-down communication
Achieved managerial status	Acquired managerial status

A notable characteristic of a high Authority relationship in the workplace is top-down communication. In traditional Turkish culture, which is continually changing among the urban and higher-educated segment of the population, the ideal manager is a more paternalistic figure, much like a wise father who, in the end, “always knows best.” The communication process tends to begin, remain, and end in the managerial levels, with subordinates expecting to be directed. This managerial structure has been reinforced by deeply embedded cultural and historical traditions (Askun, Oz, and Askun 2009).

American managers lead from the top as well, but because they come from a more egalitarian, low Authority culture, they expect the learning process to be shared. This shared experience assumes subordinates will enter into dialogue, pose notable questions, and exhibit interactive responses. Given the aforementioned Turkish subordinate relationship, being an equal part of the learning process through substantial interaction is both uncomfortable and unproductive for Turkish professionals. They are accustomed to being passive recipients of a manager’s top-down, one-way communication style. This Turkish perception of communication can frustrate American managers, who will often suggest the time sensitivity of a certain task rather than give explicit instructions. Despite making such a suggestion, an American manager often finds the assignment’s completion is neither timely nor complete because the Turkish professionals felt a lack of clear command.

In high Authority societies, an unequal distribution of authority or power is more acceptable and even expected at the managerial level. As lower-status individuals, Turkish employees will sometimes be treated with what in an American context would be considered unnecessary rudeness. Even so, they accept such critical treatment from superiors as beneficial.

In high Authority cultures, subordinates tend to develop a strong sense of loyalty to the manager along with dependence for advice and wisdom. Such dependence is most prominent with the powerful manager, who is generally expected to protect employees

and take responsibility for their academic careers and welfare. What often surprises American managers is that in exchange for the subordinate's extreme loyalty, the manager is expected to reciprocate with an almost godfather-like role, potentially shouldering the extra responsibilities of the subordinate's personal life and private welfare. American managers working with Turkish subordinates will regularly be blindsided by a level of employee dependence that is quite different from that of the more independent employees they are accustomed to in the United States.

American managers in Turkey are often pleasantly surprised to find tremendous respect and obedience associated with their positions; however, it is important to distinguish that, unlike in American culture, in Turkey, respect and obedience are given to the position itself (acquired status) rather than to the individual (achieved status). In Turkey, this respect can be given formally to higher-status individuals as a type of cultural ritual, yet the dichotomy is that subordinates often do not internalize the outward respect they exhibit.

The reality of Turkish and American managers working together in a multinational company in Istanbul or New York will most likely lie somewhere between the ends of the Authority continuum. For example, both managers may be urban, university-trained engineers, and the powerful shared subcultures of the city life, university education, and engineering industry may bring them much closer together in the workplace than would their differing Near Eastern and European national culture backgrounds. Similarly, the profile of the Turkish manager selected for employment in New York will most likely be someone who has completed his or her studies at an international university, is already familiar with the variance in cultural awareness, and is equipped with the ability to find solutions to multicultural issues within the corporate, social, or political environment.

When working in Turkey's high Authority and hierarchical culture, the American must learn to treat Turkish superiors differently than Turkish subordinates. American managers can be viewed negatively if and when they do not regard differences in age, seniority, and status as importantly as do their Turkish colleagues. For example, differences in status in high Authority cultures require varying patterns of greetings, seating arrangements, gift giving, levels and types of outward respect, and the like. Behaving in the proper, respectable manner requires that each person first know what is appropriate for his or her role and then act accordingly.

Age is one of the most common sources of seniority and status in Turkish business environments. Managers and subordinates are expected to show immense respect to those older than 50 years of age, despite the extent of the individual's status in the workplace. If the senior individual does not speak English and the American manager is communicating through interpreters, he or she has to learn to regularly look at and address the senior person rather than the interpreter.

The consequences of an Authority dimension mismatch can be illustrated through an interaction that took place between an American sales manager on a plant tour in Ankara with his Turkish client. While talking with a mid-management engineer, the

American inadvertently walked past the company executive vice president, his Turkish host, who was seated in the front of the bus and saving a place for the guest. The American continued to the middle of the bus and sat next to his conversation partner. After this happened, the executive vice president's behavior toward the American began changing and his attitude became more cold, distant, and disobliging. The low Authority American had subconsciously treated his high-status Turkish host in an informal manner, just as he would an American contact. It is obvious that this American unintentionally demonstrated both ignorance and disrespect toward Turkish customs in the Turkish high Authority business setting.

CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE INDIVIDUALISM DIMENSION

Individualism Dimension Defined

The Individualism dimension is the single most important of the cultural dimensions for Turkish and American managers in the workplace. This dimension is largely centered on the basic differences in communication styles, which, as one can already surmise, is the most prominent barrier. Cross-cultural management consultants working with American and Turkish professionals agree that most differences are attributed to this dimension.

The more extreme scores of this dimension illustrate the separation between Turkish and American cultures, with the latter being the single most individualistic country in any set of cross-cultural databanks in the world. The difference between the two sets of scores is a dramatic indication of why this dimension reflects a majority of the potential cross-cultural conflicts between Turkish and Americans in management.

Individualism is defined as the degree to which people in a country prefer to act as individuals rather than as members of groups. Individualism exists when people define themselves as primarily separate individuals who are committed to themselves. This is exhibited in loosely knit social networks in which people focus primarily on taking care of themselves and their immediate families (Adler 2002).

The opposite of individualism is collectivism, which pertains to "societies...which from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continues to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty" (Hofstede et al. 2010:92). Collectivism is characterized by tight social networks in which people distinguish strongly between their own group and other groups. Furthermore, collectivist cultures tend to hold more common goals and objectives than do individualistic cultures, who aspire to more self-serving goals.

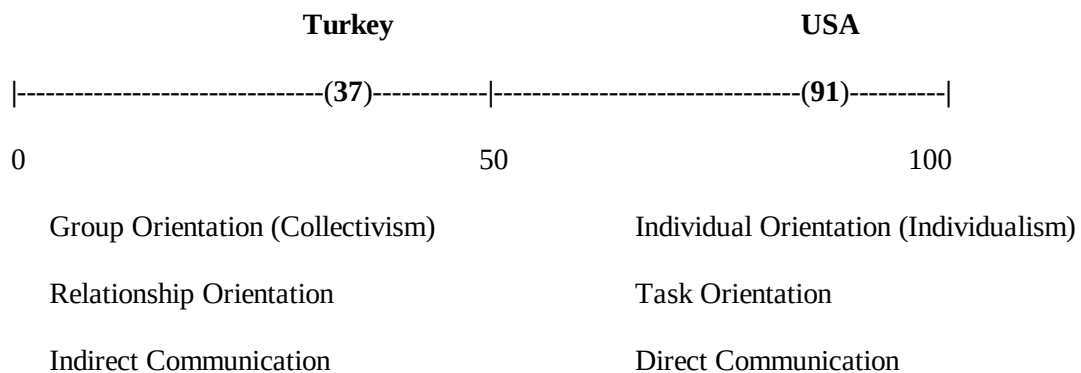
In collectivistic societies such as Turkey, children learn to respect the groups to which they belong—usually the family—and to differentiate between in-group members and out-group members (that is, all others outside of the family, regional or ethnic group,

locale, etc.). When these children grow up, they remain members of their in-groups and expect the in-groups to protect and support them when they are in need. In return, they are expected to provide a tremendous degree of loyalty to their in-groups.

When viewing culture as frozen history, we find that the Turkish economy has been based on agriculture over a long period of time. Because group relationships were necessary to plant and harvest the crops, collectivism and intense social contact were natural developments for Turkish culture. Maintaining such harmony with the environment and the family has extended over time into many facets of Turkish society (Cukur et al. 2004; Ebre 2009; Goregenli 1997).

The Turkish and American cultural value scores on the Individualism dimension are plotted in Figure 2.

Figure 2. National Culture Dimension: Individualism



Individualism Dimension and Cross-Cultural Management

The Individualism dimension deals with the tendency to manage groups versus the tendency to manage individuals. Table 3 summarizes the key differences in the workplace.

Table 3. Managerial Implications: Individualism

Turkey (score = 37)	USA (score = 91)
Indirect communication	Direct communication
Low or subtle feedback	High or required feedback
Relationship orientation	Task orientation
More context-based	More content-based

In a more group-oriented workplace, employees think in terms of “we,” while in a more individual-oriented workplace, employees operate more in terms of “I.” Because they are more group oriented in the workplace, low Individualism cultures place a higher emphasis on genuine relations within the group and tend to prefer harmony and mutual consensus over open conflict. Along with the idea of harmony is the idea of “face”—a profound and important societal standard of low Individualism cultures. Low Individualism cultures also tend to make a distinction between behavior in groups as opposed to private behavior. High Individualism cultures, in contrast, primarily motivated by their own individualistic goals, tend to have a lesser emphasis on group harmony and more readily accept conflict in business relationships; they also tend to have only one set of behaviors for both public and private settings.

Business behavior in collectivistic cultures is characteristically different for those who are part of their subjective and relational in-groups than for those outside their objective in-groups. In high Individualism cultures, people tend to have only one dominant business behavior and the ideal is to make that behavior professional and objective at all times. This means that it is more difficult for American professionals to be managers in Turkish business settings than it is for Turkish managers, who are accustomed to dealing with others in more than one way, in group or individual settings.

Some specific examples of the different approaches can be seen in the area of rewards and employee motivation. Bonuses for a single individual or for only the top 15 percent of a group can be very inappropriate in a collectivistic culture because such rewards ultimately demean the value of the rest of the group by singling out an individual or small group, so it is important for high Individualism American companies to carefully

think through their use of reward programs such as “Employee of the Month” before implementing them in Turkish business settings.

Another important aspect of the Individualism dimension is the idea of relationships taking precedence over tasks rather than tasks taking precedence over relationships. In a collectivistic culture, the significance of relationships supersedes that of tasks. People often view themselves as interdependent with their social surroundings, as opposed to the individualistic view that they are independent and separate from the people around them. Although it is common for the behavior of Americans to be independent of their personality and unique internal characteristics, the behavior of Turks is more dependent on the role or relationship they have with the people with whom they are communicating. Consequently, American managers need to recognize that when they are attending a lengthy social itinerary of formal banquets, personal visits, tours, and so on in a collectivistic society, relationships will often be more important than tasks. Once a relationship has been established, it can positively affect professional and personal interactions in the future.

With a group-oriented culture, personal relationships are emphasized more than in an individual-oriented culture and it is not uncommon to hear about first-time business lunches in which a task-oriented American salesperson pushes his product while his Turkish counterpart pushes to build a relationship. The Turkish businessman may inquire whether his guest is enjoying his or her time in Turkey or offer to take the guest around for a short private tour of points of interest in that city. Often, there are negative reactions from both sides in a first-time business meeting like this: The Turkish client feels the American is too cold, uncaring, and only concerned with making money, and the American is puzzled as to why his Turkish counterpart does not seem interested in doing business and is communicating in an unfocused and elusive manner. Like most differences in cross-cultural management, this difference is subtle. The high Individualism American salesperson also values the relational aspects of doing business, and the Turkish businessperson also values task-oriented business conduct. Although their differences are subtle, the dismissal of them can lead to cross-cultural crises.

This issue of indirect and direct communication based on a relation-oriented versus a task-oriented culture is probably one of the single greatest issues between Turkish and American professionals in the cross-cultural management workplace. Because communication is the basis of relationships and human relationships are the basis of doing business, this issue overlaps with all other areas on the Individualism dimension. In the business lunch example, the Turkish manager is beginning the business meeting with a nonbusiness emphasis and is using an indirect communication approach. By emphasizing the relational aspect of doing business, he is “backing in” to the task side of business. The more direct American, in contrast, tends to go right to the task side of business and will often choose to leave the socializing, touring, and other relational activities to the end or after the meeting.

A final major issue arising from indirect versus direct communication is the key international business need of feedback. Indirect cultures will not give feedback in the same open and immediate manner that direct cultures are used to. American managers regularly say that the most frustrating issue for them while working in Turkish culture is the lack of such feedback; American managers do not receive the amount of feedback they are accustomed to in their own business culture, and their Turkish employees rarely give any negative feedback at all.

CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE STRUCTURE DIMENSION

Structure Dimension Defined

The Structure dimension deals with accepting uncertainty versus avoiding uncertainty and tends to be more complicated because it has an individual human as well as a sociocultural element. On the individual human level, for instance, people can only withstand so much change and uncertainty. If the fire alarm goes off in a building, smoke pours under the door, and people are screaming, everyone in the room, regardless of cultural background, will dash to get outside.

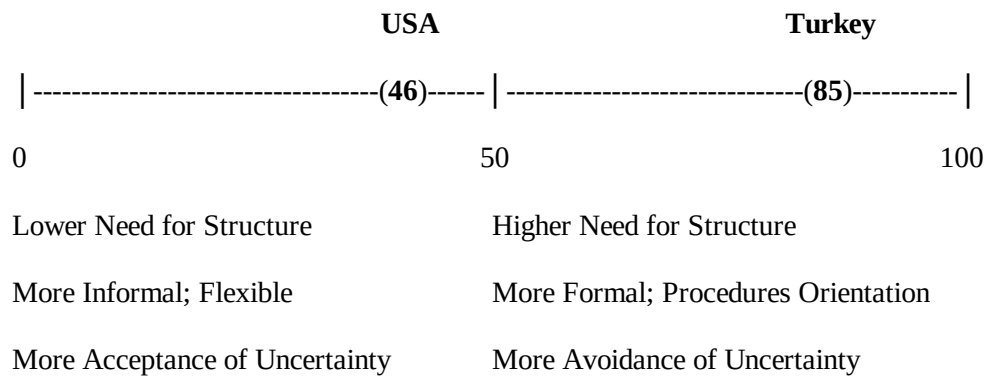
On the level of national culture, this dimension has to do with how much a group of people accepts uncertainty in comparison to other groups of people. In low Structure cultures, people have more tolerance for and acceptance of life's uncertainties, while in high Structure countries, people tend to have less tolerance for life's uncertainties. Individuals from cultures with high uncertainty avoidance tend to require more structure in their lives because such things as structure and order can make people feel they are more in control of their lives and can reduce the anxiety of life's uncertainties (Pasa, Kabasakal, and Bodur 2001).

In another example of the previously mentioned concept of culture as frozen history, there is a strong correlation a high Structure score and countries with much political violence—particularly outside invasions—in their pasts. Whereas the United States has not experienced prolonged warfare on its own soil since the American Civil War in the 1860s, over the same period, Turkey has experienced numerous invasions.

In addition to correlating with how much cultures either accept or avoid uncertainty, the Structure dimension also has to do with informal versus formal communication and behavior. People tend to act and speak more formally when they are in settings where they are uncomfortable, so it is not surprising that high Structure cultures tend to be more formal in their dress, behavior, and communication styles. This formality helps to neutralize their discomfort with the uncertainty around them. Specific examples of this formality can be seen when people in a high Structure culture make heavy use of titles and surnames as well as put more emphasis on clothing. In contrast, people from low Structure cultures tend to put less emphasis on clothing, use first names, and may not even put their titles on business cards. This explains why when income levels have been

factored in, high Structure Turkish individuals will always tend to be both better dressed and better groomed than their American counterparts. (The Turkish and the American cultural values of this dimension are plotted in Figure 3.)

Figure 3. National Culture Dimension: Structure



Structure Dimension and Cross-Cultural Management

In terms of informal versus formal work settings, people from the low Structure American culture will have a greater inclination to use first names, have “dress-down Fridays,” and dispense with people’s titles or degrees compared to people from higher Structure cultures like Turkey. (See Table 4.) The majority of high Structure cultures have languages with two different address forms: the informal used for friends, children, and relatives and the formal language spoken when addressing higher-ranking individuals such as managers, supervisors, and elders. In contrast, the language of most low Structure cultures will be more informal, having only one address form.

Table 4. Managerial Implications: Structure

Turkey (score = 85)	American (score = 46)
Accept uncertainty = flexibility	Avoid uncertainty = procedures/rules
Informal communication style	Formal communication style
More accepting of diversity, innovation & risk	Less accepting of diversity, innovation & risk

Several times, one of the American authors of this paper has experienced a challenge specific to individuals from low Structure cultures. For instance, an American businessman accompanied his international partner in Turkey to call on a mutually important client. The American began using an overly informal style when marketing to this key client. The Turkish manager later said, "I've been dealing with this same important Istanbul client for over a year, and I'm still on a surname basis. This American came in and immediately threw our client off balance by using the client's first name, slapping him on the back, and making personal jokes. He has set back our company's relationship with that client by six months!"

There are differing comfort levels with the amount of structure built into one's business environment. Individuals in low Structure cultures can feel too constricted and restrained by what they consider too much structure; we might refer to such individuals as antibureaucratic. There is an American English slang term—going postal—that refers to a person who becomes extremely angry and violent in the workplace environment, often as a result of too much regulation in his or her job.

Individuals in high Structure cultures are uncomfortable if there not enough structure or detailed rules are built into the job description; structure is perceived as a healthy way of neutralizing the uncertainties of the workplace. Often, employees in high Structure cultures are more motivated when additional security is built into their jobs than when they are rewarded with financial bonuses or raises.

The lower the scores on the Structure dimension, the less the emotional need for structure and order, while the higher the scores on the Structure dimension, the higher the emotional need for structure and order. With low emotional needs for structure and order, people tend to be more open, tolerant of differences, and flexible. With high emotional needs for structure and order, people tend to feel more comfortable staying within those boundaries and have the view that what is different is dangerous.

Within a culture overall, there is a correlation between having more or less tolerance of diverse, innovative ideas and having more or less openness to entrepreneurial risks. When low Structure cultures are more relaxed about the uncertainties in life, they tend to be both more accepting of risks, constant change, and other threatening situations in the workplace as well as more willing to take business and entrepreneurial risks in their society. While there are successful entrepreneurs in both low and high Structure cultures, the difference lies in the concept that in low Structure societies, individuals can fail or go bankrupt several times and there is not as major a social stigma as if someone in a high Structure society were to fail even once. Because of this, we tend to say that low Structure businesspeople become entrepreneurs *in order to succeed* while businesspeople in high Structure cultures become entrepreneurs *in order not to fail*.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As Turkey continues to successfully transition out of an emerging economy, newer models are gradually replacing previous systems of management. An increasing level of education, a demand for new approaches, and a development of new technical skills is developing among Turkish managers and subordinates.

This article makes its contribution to the cross-cultural management field by addressing the cultural issues that Turkish and American managers often face when working together. The study particularly adds to knowledge in cross-cultural management between the United States and Turkey, one of the strongest currently emerging markets in global business and for which less research is currently available. Specifically, a simplified model was introduced as a framework for developing an effective cross-cultural management approach. Although the article's cross-cultural model uses numerical scores from Hofstede's research, these cultural values dimensions have been used by, and come from, a number of different culture scholars. Like most of the culture theory used in this paper, these culture dimensions are based on open knowledge derived from across the field of cross-cultural studies—an area of study spanning from the beginning of the last century until the present.

This paper used country-specific rankings to illustrate three cultural dimensions that have been identified as being particularly helpful in understanding differences in cross-cultural management between Turkish and American professionals. The first is the Authority dimension and the issue that Turkey has historically been a high Authority, hierarchical society in which higher-status employers tend toward one-way, top-down communication with employees while Americans have a greater tendency toward egalitarian workplaces with two-way communication and high amounts of feedback. Second, Turkey is a more collectivistic culture, low on the Individualism dimension, with emphasis on relationship building and the subsequent indirect communication versus the more extreme American individualism, direct communication, and emphasis on tasks above relationships. Third, under the Structure dimension, there tends to be a higher level of comfort with structure and formality in the Turkish workplace, contrasted by the informality and lower tolerance for structure in American management.

A challenge in any study of this sort is that cross-cultural management models indicate only which orientation *most* members of a cultural group are likely to adopt in routine situations (in other words, there many differences in the areas of regionalism, gender, ethnic subcultures, and so on). The model maps out central tendencies only, as national cultural values are concerned with collective behaviors and are not inflexible predictions that will apply in every individual case. Any academic model should only and always be used as a foundation and starting point in understanding culture value differences in the workplace. Because the multicultural Turkish–American milieu is too complex to be consistently and perfectly captured by a simplified model, cross-cultural

professionals need to move beyond a model's starting point and continue on their own, doing their own thinking, asking, observing, listening, and analyzing in the field.

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