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CRISIS PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND THE EFFECT OF NATIONAL CULTURE UNDER CRISIS: A STUDY FROM TURKEY

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ABSTRACT

Crisis management is a critical function in organizations, specifically developing and emerging countries dealing with crisis in a minor and major scale frequently. Crisis in projects should be handled immediately and professionally in where the projects threat the reputation of a company. In traditional organizations, most common organizational behavior under crisis seems to take the risk with no supported mechanism. Project management based organizations practice risk management under project management methodologies, surprisingly we cannot find many companies are prepared for crisis. This behavior may associate with national culture, especially Hofstede's extensive work on national cultures. Therefore, this paper investigates cultural characteristics of Turkish business culture under crisis, and identifies the relationship with the natural culture dimensions and crisis project management. Two-stages survey questionnaires are employed and data analyzed using different statistical analysis. Our results indicate that power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientations are the national cultural dimensions observed significantly under crisis situations. Further investigation and recommendations are discussed.

Keywords : Project management, crisis management, Turkish business culture, Hofstede's national dimensions
JEL Codes: M14, M16

1. INTRODUCTION

Managing "crisis management" becomes a key factor for management strategies. In projects, it is expected to find variations which may lead to crisis, yet not handled appropripraetly, allocated time to solve crisisis considered to be waste cost for companies at the end of the day. Crisis is defined by various scholars in the literature. Keown-McMullan (1997) analyzed different definitions, and identified most common points such as a sudden progressive process; a threat for existence targets and performance of the organization and as well as how a normal situation develops into a crisis. Under normal conditions, a company sustains its process with predetermined rules, scenarios and organizational culture. In crisis periods, failure of project and customer dissatisfaction can reach a level that threats the reputation of the company or organization. Therefore, experienced managers with high leading and decision making skills come into prominence, and decision mechanisms centralize and control mechanisms work more concentrated on the issue. This structure may be more visible in some industries than others, ie; construction vs service industry. There is as well no best method for every crisis. Due to this premise, crisis management in the literature mostly is studied under different industries and different countries in order to understand the reasons of crisis. In this paper, our goal is not to repeat industry based studies, and we are not mainly interested the reason of crisis but we are interested in investigating how Turkish business culture impact crisis management in project based companies.

Turkey, as one of the developing countries, exhibits a unique business culture that is worth to explore. This uniqueness may be associated with many reasons such as being late in industrial revolution, long period of wars such as Independence War and applying liberal economic model long after many countries. This specific

business culture shows its effects on the professional life, specifically in project-based organizations as well as in project teams. We expect that Turkish business culture as well as national culture impact the reaction to crisis management strategies and response to actions in projects. One of the observations taken from the national culture is that Turkish companies tend to ignore the control mechanisms or governance mechanisms for any crisis. Very common organizational behavior is to take the risk while there is no supported mechanism. In project-based organizations, it is critical to practice risk management, but when it comes to crisis, surprisingly we can not find many companies are prepared for. This type of behavior may associate with national culture, and perhaps it can also be linked to Hofstede's extensive work on national cultures for Turkish culture.

Geert Hofstede's original work on national cultures is one of the widely-known references to understand a culture (Hofstede, 1983). According to his cultural dimensions theory and research of his colleagues, there are six key factors characterizes a national culture. These factors/dimensions are named as power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, and the last two-added later on are long term orientation and indulgence. Determining these values in a crisis situation regardless of the reason of crisis help understanding the relationship of business culture and crisis management in project based organizations.

The rest of the paper organized as follows. The following part present a brief review on current literature, and provide a background for the research idea. The next section, research methodology, discusses the method used in this paper. The section also evaluates findings according to Hoftede's national culture dimensions. Lastly, the paper concludes with results, and provides a set of recommendations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This part of the paper aims to create a background on project crisis management in twofold: Evaluating the previous research results can be used as a precaution for possible future prediction and application errors about crisis management in project based organizations. Second, with the help of well-accepted culture research comparing the level of different behaviours would be possible.

Origin of the crisis management concept initiated with crisis-risk process as in a project and needs to be managed with guided principles. In 1979, one of the pioneers in project management literature, Dr.Harold Kerzner, who introduced the system approach to project management, integrated the concept into his work. If one looks for some examples in application from near history, the first one to come up is Tylenol Story. In 1982, there were some serious deaths due to usage of Tylenol medicine by Johnson & Johnson, which is turned into a crisis in a very short time. Managing this difficult crisis by Johnson & Johnson was very effective so that this applied methodology generated some principles and became a milestone for crisis management concept. When the crisis was over, company not only gained back its organizational reputation but also its brand name back. Crisis concept is a reality emerges in all sectors regardless of public or private. Turkish business culture then would be associated with processes of emergence and intervention.

Recent publications about crisis management start also with the concept and defining its importance for organizations in Turkish culture. Ofluoglu and Misirli (2001) evaluated the crisis concept in three levels: before crisis and predictive activities, during crisis and after crisis i.e.: solution plan and methodology. Literature relates to studies in government and public sectors are mostly cited in Turkey from Ömer Dinçer's book titled "Strategic Management". His work links to crisis management and strategic management. Later studies are formed and specialized with the needs of public and private sector. Kalpaklıoğlu's work titled "Efficient crisis management in tourism as a sensitive sector towards crisis" is one widely cited example for private sector studies (2010) in Turkey.

Cultural differences create conflict and call for different reactions under crisis situations such as how risk must be taken. Liu et al., (2015), in that sense, studied different construction projects in different countries: Poland, Singapore and China. National cultural dimensions examined using Hofstede's national dimensions, yet each country associated themselves with different cultural dimensions from each other even though some scores were similar. Results show that national culture plays a more important role in contractor's risk management for international projects as consistent with findings of previous research. They concluded project risks are

perceived and managed differently in different national cultures. Individualism and Uncertainty Avoidance are determined as the most significant factors (Liu et al., 2015).

Chipulu and his colleagues (2014) studied the impact of cultural values on project performance and the effects of cultural values on the perceived importance of project success/failure factors. They used snowballing sample method in eight countries including Brazil, China, Greece, Nigeria, Thailand, the UAE, the UK and the US. Factor analyses are used as a methodology and all Hofstede dimensions are investigated with different country characteristics and also the age, gender and experience as demographic specifications. Turning to the size of the effects, the largest differences in the importance individuals assign to project control and extra-organisational goals are likely to coincide with differences in levels of masculinity. In contrast, cultural values that are associated with the greatest differences in importance attached to project team management/ development and intra-organisational goals are different for men and women: for women, the largest differences are likely to be observed as a result of variations in individualism, whereas for men it would be uncertainty avoidance. Findings reveal insights on how best to match the cultural values of project participants to project characteristics. (Chipulu et al, 2014).

Tang and Koveos (2008) investigated economic dynamics and institutional stability again using Hofstede dimensions on business practices. Their findings show that uncertainty avoidance and masculinity mainly reflect stable institutional traditions, hence they don't change easily. As opposed to this work, strong masculinity would be expected in Turkish business culture on business practices.

Merkin R.S. (2006) is interested in one of Hofstede's cultural dimensions to analyze facework communication. Hofstede's assertion of uncertainty avoidance (UA) in this case was indeed a significant player. Uncertainty avoidance compared in facework communication in six countries. Results showed that when people try to initiate communication with members of strong-UA cultures, it is important to take into consideration their responses to the introduction of uncertainty during communication Merkin R.S.(2006). We similarly expect a strong-UA be the case for Turkish culture that is highly sensitive about their rituals.

As a summary, studies related with Turkish culture and Hofstede's dimensions are found to focus more on organizational culture, and linked to commitment issues in organizations. For Turkish culture, under crisis situation, a complete study on national dimensions to link it to crisis behaviour does not exist based on our review and up to date knowledge. Therefore, in this paper, we investigate all dimensions under crisis situation to compare with original scores. Results will provide an insight for crisis management, and help companies under such situations.

3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

In this paper, we first followed an approach consisting of a two-phased survey questionnaire. In the first part, we evaluate the concept of risk and how it impacts the projects in Turkish business. In the second step, we customized our survey based on initial results, and used more focused survey to evaluate cultural dimensions under crisis. Then, average national cultural dimensions are compared with Hofstede's dimensions. As a last step, we performed a factor analysis, in order to evaluate hypthoses that we proposed. The steps and results are explained in the rest of the section.

In the first phase, as an earlier working version of this paper, a survey was conducted with one-hundred and seven professional and was analyzed it in order to understand the perception of crisis and its impact on project management in Turkish business culture. Half of the participants have defined the most important steps for a project is the inititation and R&D process. On the otherhand, this step has also defined the most problematic process as a crisis reason in the project. Accordingly, the need for the crisis management emerges from early steps of the project, and has seen as a success contributor. In crisis periods, companies' customer satisfaction expectancy reduces and most of them feel as the direct threat for their reputation and existence. However, majority of the participants thinks crisis occurrence and intervention points concentrates at the end of the projects. Even though half of the participants identify the importance of the inititation step for to be prepared for crisis, yet crisis management process successfully finalized at the last step of the project. Turkish business culture concentrates at the last moment efforts rather than a good planning and proactive management.

As summarized above, we find out some evidence that Turkish business culture is more expose to ad-hoc unplanned type of project work rather than planning at the beginning. However, crisis management requires continuous efforts and proactive management. Turkish business culture, on the other hand, intends to manage the crisis after when it is happened. This result could be linked to organizational culture as well as the individual's culture in the project teams. When we look at the current literature in crisis project management, studies relates to Turkish business is mostly conducted in construction. Since it is a developing country, it is understandable that scholars more favorable on industries that will be impacted from financial crisis such as construction. In our initial work, our survey was also focused mostly construction and electronics companies, yet regardless of industry, from our findings, we believe that Turkish business culture are not likely to create environments that prepare companies to react under crisis. We found that is associated national culture and there may be some similarities between Turkish cultural dimensions from Hofstede's work and project crisis management. Based on this premise, we conduct a follow up research to explore the issue. We conducted another survey with relatively smaller group but targeted at specifically professionals working as project managers and company owners who practices project management.

Hofstede's six cultural dimensions are asked in the survey using 10-point Likert scale to compare Turkish national cultural dimensions on power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long term orientation and indulgence with the one's originally found. Comparing these values under crisis regardless of the reason of crisis would help understanding the relationship between business culture and crisis management in project based organizations.

In overall, we analyzed sixty-four responses that can be used in confident. Based on demographic data of the sample; average participant age is in the range of between 31 and 35, and half of the participants have post graduate degree. The experience in business life is in the average range of between 7 to 10 years, and only 3 participants have not worked in a project before, yet average knowledge of the group in crisis management was ranked above the average. From demographics of population, we are confidence that we have a quite experienced sample population that mostly works in same domain such as IT/Information technologies jobs. Despite the experience and knowledge of individuals in crisis management, only five participants indicate that they have a crisis unit in their companies. So then responses show that the rest of the participants' companies handles the crisis management with either in a post-active way or with executive control and top management meddling.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this section, we first compare Hofstede's country dimensions on national culture with our results in terms of average. The following two tables represent the standardized country means for Turkey. First table shows the original scores from the work of Hofstede, while the second one shows the scores from our survey based on average scores.

Table 1: Hofstede dimension values for Turkey (Original research)

Power Distance	Individualism	Masculinity	Uncertainty Avoidance	Long-Term Orientation	Indulgence
66	37	45	85	46	49

Table 2: Hofstede dimension values in a crisis situation for Turkey (Our research results)

Power Distance	Individualism	Masculinity	Uncertainty Avoidance	Long-Term Orientation	Indulgence
74	29	30	40	60	37

According to Professor Hofstede and his colleagues power distance for Turkey scored a large average as 66 among other 53 countries in where original research conducted. This simply explains the character as a

manager or owner dependent working environment in a strict hierarchical structure. According to our results under a crisis situation, this dimension score is found larger than the original as of 74. The relative increase in average is an important sign that speaks to a need for a leader, whom should be in charge of the situation and states what should be done under crisis situations. This result is also significant to understand the need for pre-defined crisis scenarios and a formal crisis management system. Referring to demographic distribution of our sample, male participants showed strong power distance than female participants and this perhaps rooted in Turkey's paternalistic culture characteristics.

Hofstede's individualism dimension of Turkey is averaged as 37, which is a quite low score, and would be interpreted, as "we" is more important than "I" for the organizations. In a crisis situation though, this score decreases to 29. As the need of harmony in the organization increases, collectivism increases as well. Individuals do not try to be a hero despite of their commitment to the organization strengthens. Especially female workers identify themselves more with organization and may be even considered tightly coupled.

Third dimension of masculinity of Turkey is orginally scored on the feminine side with a score of 45. Basic characteristics of feminine side are explained by the research as to ignore the problems (conflicts), to solve those with consensus and to care more about family, friends and the organization. Our results make this feminine side of Turkish business culture more visible under crisis conditions with a score of 30. Possessing the current position and life standards for both organization and individuals are more important than doing the best and getting a better position in a crisis situation. Turkish business culture demonstrates more affection than ambition level for individuals.

Uncertainty avoidance is the most remarkable dimension for Turkey among others. According to Hofstede's work, Turkey has a stronge score as of 85, which means rules, policies, and regulations are critical and very much needed in place. As we expected from the literature findings, Turkish culture avoids ambiguity both in the professional and individual life. Such strong aviodance is expected to create an environment that provides clear directions or plans to reduce ambiguity in business culture. However, ambiguity reflected in Turkish business culture is treated as a-let-it-go situation rather than as-a-risk-taken situation. Therefore, we found out surprisingly, uncertainty score decreases to 40 under a crisis situation. Taking a risk under crisis conditions and dealing with it as it happens is not the best strategy. So to interpret of this spesific result, we believe every crisis in Turkish business culture is seen as an existence challenge; and indicates that the projects start with a risk level already. This radical change of general behavior definetely calls for further research.

Turkey's long-term orientation score of 46 from the original work is increased to 60 under crisis situation. Under crisis conditions, pragmatism level can be explained with long-term efficiency and educational enhancement. This result is an indicative of a positive support with R&D processes and developments in the future of project management and crisis management area. Nevertheless, a high score in this dimension could be criticized, because it is also an indicative of the lack of critical decision ability and practical thinking.

The last national dimension of Hoftede, Turkey's indulgence dimension is determined with a score of 49. According to our findings, Turkish culture demonstrates a reserved environment for to respond crisis with a score of 37. This shows that controlling is increasing in a crisis scenario even though Turkish culture does not show that behaviour in general.

In summary, the results of survey on national culture dimensions indicate that Turkish culture shows moral reactions under crisis conditions mostly. Struggling for protecting the current position and reputation, increasing the controlling efficiency can be considered as typical characteristics for a successful crisis management in Turkish business culture. On the other hand, wrong perception of risk, avoiding the problems, high dependency of management and organization can be evaluated as negative approaches for a crisis management process.

In addition to national culture dimensions, survey participants evaluated the crisis occurrence in different project phases, crisis reasons based on project life cycle phases and crisis solution processes. Possible crisis occurs in a project at the initiation and closing stages as we also found out from our earlier investigation. Even though the reason for crisis already exists at the beginning of the project, in Turkish business culture this fact

might be ignored or not be realized. Towards cultural research results, communication problems, avoidance and late intervening concludes the same results as well.

4.1. Hypotheses and Analysıs

As we have compared the dimensions in the previous section, we noted the differences and changes within dimensions. There were two significant findings observed:

1) A significant delta occured in *uncertainty avoidance* dimension. A dramatic decrease is observed under a crisis situation that requires further testing. 2) *Power distance* is expected to be very important in Turkish business culture, yet the results are not confirmed as important as expected under a crisis situation. Change is less then expected, and we believe it requires also further testing.

Therefore, we further investigate these two-dimensions with following hypotheses:

H1. *Under a crisis situation, uncertainty of avoidance dimension for Turkey may observe a significant change comparing Hoftede's original research*

H2. *Under a crisis situation, power distance dimension for Turkey may observe a significant change comparing Hoftede's original research*

For hypthoses testing, we used factor analysis in order to verify commonalities. Factor analysis (confirmatory) to validate classifications is commonly used in the literature and the results of comparison from earlier data lead us to examine in detail using the factor analysis. Based on final rotation (orthogonal-varimax) of factor loadings and rotation matrix can be seen in the table.

Table 3a: Rotated factor loadings

Factor	Variance	Difference	Proportion	Cumulative	
Factor1	1.90235	0.13132	0.1359	0.1359	Power distance
Factor2	1.77103	0.04243	0.1265	0.2624	Individualism
Factor3	1.72859	0.02936	0.1235	0.3859	Masculinity
Factor4	1.69923	0.22492	0.1214	0.5072	Uncertainty Avoidance
Factor5	1.47432	0.33442	0.1053	0.6125	Long term orientation
Factor6	1.13989	-	0.0814	0.6940	Indulgence

Table 3b: Factor Rotation Matrix

	Factor1	Factor2	Factor3	Factor4	Factor5	Factor6	
Factor1	0.6845	-0.3838	0.4110	0.4432	0.1370	-0.0082	Power distance
Factor2	0.2166	0.6982	-0.2214	0.5393	-0.2233	-0.2753	Individualism
Factor3	0.3989	-0.0039	-0.7118	-0.1148	0.5168	0.2324	Masculinity
Factor4	-0.1230	0.4974	0.4834	-0.0405	0.6962	0.1320	Uncertainty Avoidance
Factor5	-0.5470	-0.2803	-0.1841	0.7037	0.2356	0.1940	Long term orientation
Factor6	0.1051	0.1980	0.0883	0.0527	-0.3523	0.9028	Indulgence

Participants point out somewhat high score of change in some cultural values. Specifically, results indicate that *power distance* and *indulgence* are confirmed by factor analysis, and *uncertainty avodiance* indeed have a significant change with 22 % difference. Together with *power distance*, *uncertainty avoidance* account for more than 50% of the total variance. The results indicate that our both hypotheses' significant contribution by factor analysis are confirmed.

5. CONCLUSION

An unexpected result from factor analysis significantly account in total variance is Long-term Orientation. In our comparision with original scores of Hofstede, we concluded that a high score in this dimension could be criticized, because it is also an indicative of the lack of critical decision ability and practical thinking. Under crisis conditions, this variance can be explained with long-term efficiency and educational enhancement. In the

literature, the link between crisis management and leadership among demographic differences is traceable, since there are significant differences between different educational levels (Soysal,Paksoy, and Ozcalici, 2011). Asunakutlu and Safran (2003) reached some findings about prediction of crisis is directly related with the educational level. From our earlier research, we found out almost half of the participants (%46 of the participants) don't relate their position at work and educational background is related; and only %49 of these participants considers that is acceptable. This is then requires further investigation. These results show the importance of the internal training processes and forming strategies for companies. Adding crisis management into company training courses would make companies robust in distinguishing crisis signals, applying crisis scenarios and generating back-up plans. Unwillingness of companies to use their sources about internal training courses and not intervening until becomes unmanageable are two main critical mistakes made by organizations. As to give an example in education, according to European Union regulations and acts of Turkish assembly, Turkey managed to bring some standards about occupational health and safety. This shows the applicability of crisis management is also possible. Since crisis management is a significant element for national economy, company owners and top level managers can be trained on it as well. Crisis management can be taught in universities at bachelor's degree and master's degree levels. The companies applying pro-active management plans could be encouraged with some financial benefits. Thus employers would work in a reliable and self-esteem atmosphere and consequently a more reliable and low risk economy can be created.

As we find out in our initial research, customer and the sales person in projects accept the importance of customer satisfaction rather than the price. This indicates also the sales and contract processes are other milestones for the project when both customer and sales team expectancies are mainly the same. Contract defines a guideline for a project and a good contract will prevent possible crisis, scope changes and unpredicted over-budgeting. When there is no contract, a good project plan including project charter and scope management will be in help to foreseen some of the risks may turn into major crisis.

As discussed, ambiguity during crisis periods decreases motivation and performance of the organization with uncompetent managers results in worse. It could also uncompetent managers can turn to be a leader by critical decision making in crisis periods when the normal conditions and procedures are not operative.

In a successful crisis scenario the situation should be comprehended, damage control should be done and healing process should be started. Crisis is a two-sided process reducing the vertical levels of organization; strengthen the communication channels, making control mechanisms more efficient are the lessons can be taken from a crisis management period. These lessons learned would develop organizations' prediction mechanism for possible future crisis.

Our research findings supported the importance of the crisis management as in line with the literature. In our current research, our findings may also be important determining the reasons and impacts of national culture under crisis in Turkish business. In Turkish business culture, crisis management techniques in projects still cannot be used very effectively while organizational maturity about crisis management is a developing process for companies in emerging countries. Using the critical personnel of the organization as project managers, creating a crisis for a resolvable problem or ignoring problems till it turns to be a crisis are some important common mistakes in the business culture.

Public and private sector companies create value for their stakeholders and employers as well as they improve economy. In developing global conditions, financial rivalry, wide use of social media, decreasing natural resources, dynamics of the business life can change immediately. Any crisis when effectively handled does reduce all the negative effects on these conditions. For further research, detailed comparison within different national cultures should be investigated as we find out that national culture is an important influence on crisis management in projects.

According to our research findings and comparisons with Turkey's Hofstede dimensional scores, one of the dimensions are found significant in the time of crisis. Eventually in a crisis scenario, there is a need for more power, more control and dealing with the situation seriously.

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There is only one dimension shows reverse characteristics in a crisis, which is uncertainty avoidance. Hofstede comments on this score with some religious reference unique to Turkish culture. This may be a cultural difference associated with spesific society as well as professionals by the rationalistic point of view.

Our survey population exhibits quite experienced project managers with knowledge of crisis management; only few of the companies have crisis management departments. When we look at the correlation scores between uncertainty avoidance, which is one of the important dimensions of Turkish culture and project experience and crisis management knowledge, the results are not found statistically significant. From the results, we can conclude that the experience and as well as the knowledge on crisis management are not adequate assets for companies to establish crisis management in companies.

Crisis occurs at the final stages of the project is a typical situation which is also supported with the research results. However the results show that intervention for the crisis begins before the occurrence of the crisis according to the previous research results. This could not be interpreted with the general principles of crisis project management in theory and practice. So this point needs to be investigated further. On the other hand this may be showing that a crisis was predicted or known and tried to be prevented before it gets uncontrollable. If this perspective is taken as a business culture problem and it is possible referring to current research results, there might be some communication channel rearrangements in the project team from sales to operation and maintenance to prevent possible crisis. Beginning the projects with a high risk and trying to solve this during process can be another problem unique to the business culture as well.

Further research must investigate more on uncertainty avoidance dimension, and long-term orientation due to inconsistent findings relates to Turkish culture. One can also investigate the relationship between power dimension and uncertainy avoidance based on demographics i.e, gender, year of experience and so on. As mentioned in the literature (Chipulu et al, 2014), also believe cultural values that are associated with the greatest differences in importance attached to project team management/development and intra-organisational goals are different for men and women: for women, the largest differences are likely to be observed as a result of variations in individualism, whereas for men it would be uncertainty avoidance. Further research on how best to match the cultural values of project participants to project characteristics would be a valuable input under crisis situations.

We attempt to explain variations in values found in current study. We found significant contribution by all variables in this work, yet some values are changed comparing the original values of Hofstede's work. As Hofstede stated that changes in cultural values over time are expected. Changes in power distance might change the expectations in leadership style, i.e. changes in the governance exhibit this type of changes in business culture. Changes in uncertainty avoidance might change the motivation, performance, problem solving, and leadership process as well. Consequently, majority of the crisis could be classified as expected crisis, then with the help of project management and crisis management principles; organizations would be more resilient to change in business culture over time to reach maturity.

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