Culture in the Workplace

Culture inhabits all behaviors, whether you're at home interacting with friends and family, or at work interacting with coworkers, bosses, and subordinates. While there are no doubt some workplace norms that transcend culture and are common to everyone, no two cultures think about or carry out workplace activities in exactly the same way.

In this section of the workbook, you will be looking at the dimensions of culture that have particular significance for the workplace, including the manager/subordinate relationship, attitudes toward uncertainty and toward work, the key to productivity, and the source of status. This is not to suggest that the topics covered under the other chapters, such as building blocks (chapter 2) or styles of communication (chapter 3), don't also apply to the workplace, for they do indeed, but only that the topics covered here relate more specifically to how people conceive of and carry out their work.

*The [folks] of my own
  stock
They may do ill or well
But they tell the lies I am
  wonted to,
And they are used to the
  lies I tell;
And we do not need
  interpreters
When we go to buy and
  sell.*
        —Rudyard Kipling
          "The Stranger"

Exercise 4.1

Dialogues

You will begin your consideration of workplace cultural issues in the same way you did in chapters 2 and 3—by trying to figure out the following four dialogues. As always, the task here is to read these brief conversations, each of which illustrates a cultural difference between the two speakers, and try to identify what that difference is.

Once again, the differences won't necessarily jump out at you, but they are there if you can find them. If you can't find them, don't despair; the information in the rest of this chapter will enable you to get to the bottom of the dialogues. After you have worked on the dialogues, you should go on and complete the other exercises. Later, you will be asked to return to this exercise and reread it in light of what you will then know about culture in the workplace.

1. Database

ALEXEI: Did you hear? We won't be getting a new staff person after all.

MARTHA: I know. We'll never get our database caught up.

ALEXEI: Well, we can resubmit the request next fiscal year.

MARTHA: Actually, I've got a better idea. I've heard about some new software that makes adding to a database much easier than the system we're using.

ALEXEI: Has it been tried in organizations like ours?

MARTHA: I'm not sure, but I've heard they give it free to nonprofits like us.

ALEXEI: We'd have to train everyone in it.

MARTHA: For sure.

2. Rough Edges

DEBBIE: I'd like you to work with Peter on this project.

MIKO: Yes, ma'am.

DEBBIE: Is something wrong?

MIKO: Excuse me, ma'am, but I don't work very well with Peter. It's my fault, I'm sure.

DEBBIE: No it isn't. I know about Peter. But don't let him get to you. Sure, he's a little rough around the edges, but he really knows programming. And that's what counts.

MIKO: Yes, ma'am.

3. One Less Headache

AMANDA: I think we'll have to hire two part-time workers to get through this period.

HASSAN: I don't see any other way.

AMANDA: I'll call personnel tomorrow to get the paperwork started.

HASSAN: Did you speak to Ali?

AMANDA: The chief? He's in meetings all day. Besides, it's my division, and I've got hiring authority.

HASSAN: Yes. I'm sure he'll approve.

AMANDA: Well, that's one less headache.

4. Dr. de Leon

JULIE: I heard the board has chosen a new CEO.

CARLOS: Yes, they've appointed Dr. Manuel Cabeza de Leon of the de Leon family.

JULIE: Who is he?

CARLOS: It's an old family with large landholdings in Guadalajara province.

JULIE: But what's his background?

CARLOS: I just told you.

JULIE: I mean has he worked in textiles before? Does he have any experience in the business?

CARLOS: I don't know.

JULIE: You don't know? Do you think he's a good choice?

CARLOS: Dr. de Leon? I'm sure.

Exercise 4.2

Power Distance

The hierarchical nature of Indian society demands that there is a boss and that the boss should be seen to be the boss. Everyone else just does as they are told, and even if they know the boss is 100% wrong, no one will argue.
— Gitanjali Kolanad
Culture Shock: India

One of the most important and frequently troublesome work-related cultural differences involves the phenomenon known as power distance.[1] The significance of power distance actually extends well beyond the workplace, having as its focus the attitude of a society toward inequality—how cultures deal with distinctions between people in their access to power and their level of status—but it manifests especially strongly in workplace relations. In its most conspicuous manifestation, it determines the proper role of managers and subordinates and the nature of their interactions.

Brief descriptions of the two poles of this concept, *high* and *low power distance*, are given below.

> *High Power Distance*: These cultures accept that inequalities in power and status are natural or existential. People accept that some among them will have more power and influence than others in the same way they accept that some people are taller than others. Those with power tend to emphasize it, to hold it close and not delegate or share it, and to distinguish themselves as much as possible from those who do not have power. They are, however, expected to accept the responsibilities that go with power, especially that of looking after those beneath them. Subordinates are not expected to take initiative and are closely supervised.

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[1] The exercises on power distance and uncertainty in this chapter build upon the groundbreaking work of Geert Hofstede. See Recommended Reading.

Low Power Distance: People in these cultures see in-equalities in power and status as man-made and largely artificial; it is not natural, though it may be convenient, that some people have power over others. Those with power, therefore, tend to deemphasize it, to minimize the differences between themselves and subordinates, and to delegate and share power to the extent possible. Subordinates are rewarded for taking initiative and do not like close supervision.

No culture, of course, will be exclusively high or low in power distance—all cultures will have elements of both poles—but cultures do tend to be *more* one than the other. As always, individuals in any given culture, because of personal differences, can be anywhere along the continuum, and may very well be at one spot in one set of circumstances and somewhere else in another set. On the whole, however, you should expect to find most individuals on the same side of the dichotomy as their culture in general.

The exercise which follows asks you to take the definitions of *high* and *low power distance* presented above and apply them to specific examples of behavior. Below you will find a list of thirteen items, each of which is more representative of one pole of this dimension than the other. Read each item and put an *H* next to those behaviors more consistent with high power distance and an *L* next to those more consistent with low.

_____ 1. People are less likely to question the boss; students don't question teachers.

_____ 2. Expressing your ideas openly could get you into trouble.

_____ 3. Expressing your ideas openly is encouraged.

_____ 4. The chain of command is mainly for convenience.

_____ 5. Workers prefer precise instructions from superiors.

_____ 6. Subordinates and bosses are interdependent.

_____ 7. Bosses are independent; subordinates are dependent.

_____ 8.   Elitism is more common and more easily tolerated; those in power have special privileges.

_____ 9.   The chain of command is sacrosanct.

_____ 10.   Authoritarian and paternalistic management style is more common.

_____ 11.   Consultative and democratic management style is more common.

_____ 12.   Interaction between boss and subordinate is formal.

_____ 13.   Interaction between boss and subordinate is more informal.

Suggested Answers

_H_ 1. Superiors are shown more deference in high power distance cultures.

_H_ 2. It's better to see what superiors are thinking.

_L_ 3. Superiors are not threatened by differences of opinion.

_L_ 4. In high power distance cultures, the chain of command should be strictly observed.

_H_ 5. Workers don't want to make mistakes and get criticized for doing so.

_L_ 6. Bosses are independent of workers in high power distance cultures.

_H_ 7. Rank has its privileges.

_H_ 8. It's accepted that the higher up you go, the more privileges you will have (to go along with the increased responsibility).

_H_ 9. Skipping people in the chain of command can be seen as trying to usurp their power.

_H_ 10. Managers flex their management muscles.

_L_ 11. A manager is just one of the team.

_H_ 12. The distance between managers and subordinates is emphasized.

_L_ 13. We're all in this together.

Exercise 4.3

Comparing Workplace Norms across Cultures

Few Germans would sell their umbrella in the desert; it just might rain.

—Philip Glouchevitch
Juggernaut Hill

In this final continuum exercise, you will be comparing the workplace norms of your own culture with those of the target cultures you are interested in. Once you see your culture's view of various workplace issues and the view of your target cultures, you will have identified major cultural differences that are a likely source of and explanation for common misunderstandings and misinterpretations.

Once again, you will use the continuum technique to make these comparisons. You will find five continua, with the poles or extremes of each topic described at either end. For each continuum, read the two descriptions and put a vertical line somewhere along the continuum, depending on which explanation you think more accurately describes the view of people in your culture in general on this issue. Not everyone will take the same view, of course, but try nevertheless to make a generalization about the "typical" or average person from your culture.

For example, on the continuum marked Power Distance, if you think the description under Low (left side) more accurately describes your culture's position on this issue, you will put your mark nearer to the left. For purposes of marking, remember to think of each continuum as being divided into five segments, starting at the left:

extreme left	Put your mark here if the text at the left describes your culture very accurately.
halfway to the middle	Put your mark here if the text at the left is more or less accurate about your culture.
in the middle	Put your mark here if your culture is a true combination of the text at the right and left.

| halfway from the middle | Put your mark here if the text on the right is more or less accurate about your culture. |
| extreme right | Put your mark here if the text at the right describes your culture very accurately. |

The first continuum presents the concept of power distance, already introduced and examined earlier in this chapter. The other four, however, deal with concepts you have not yet encountered: attitude toward uncertainty, attitude toward work, key to productivity, and source of status. While certain of these concepts have implications outside one's work and job, all four are especially significant for understanding norms and expectations in the workplace.

The essence of each of these concepts should be clear from the explanations given on the chart, but a brief word here about each might also be helpful:

Attitude toward uncertainty *refers to how a culture feels about change and tradition and about what is new and different. It also examines cultural attitudes toward taking risks and failing.*

Attitude toward work *examines what motivates people to work, what they want to get out of their work, and the proper relationship between the demands of work and one's personal life.*

Key to productivity *looks at what behaviors are valued and rewarded in the workplace and the relationship between employer and employee.*

Source of status *refers to how people come by their status, rank, and position—in society in general and in their organizations.*

After you have marked all five continua, you can then use the chart to compare your own culture with your target culture (or cultures) and identify important differences. You can do this in one of two ways:

1. You can give the chart to someone from the target culture and ask that person to complete it the same way you did, following the instructions given above.
2. You can consult the master list on pages 140-41. This list locates a number of cultures or cultural groupings on the chart.

What do these marks mean? While these are all generalizations and therefore not predictive of what individuals in any given culture might think, each mark represents how the people in that culture in general feel about that item on the continuum. More precisely, the marks indicate

- what the people in that culture think of as natural, normal, right, and good;
- how these people assume everyone feels about these issues; and
- which perspective these people use to interpret and judge the behavior of others (including you).

Where there is a wide gap between your mark and that of someone from the target culture, you can assume that you and that person may not see eye to eye on this matter. He or she may think your behavior or attitude is strange or surprising, and you may think the same about that person. And each of you is likely to misinterpret or misunderstand the actions of the other in certain situations.

This doesn't mean that you and that other person will never understand each other or be able to work together successfully, but it does mean that you may have very little intuitive understanding of the other person with regard to this particular item, and vice versa. In other words, each of you will have to make some effort and exercise patience in trying to understand the other.

Finally, remember that context determines everything in human interaction. Nothing happens "in general"; things only happen in context, in specific circumstances. And depending on those circumstances, another person's position on power distance or source of status, for example, may or may not play a role, or at least not a deciding role, in a particular interaction. But these cultural characteristics are always there as a potential, waiting for an opportunity to show themselves.

Power Distance

|—————————|—————————|—————————|—————————|

Low   **High**

Democratic management style; power is not usually jealously guarded, manager shares authority with subordinates; subordinates take initiative and are not overly deferential to managers; subordinates do not like to be micromanaged; decision making tends to be consultative; okay to say no/disagree with the boss; manager/subordinate relations are fairly informal; rank has few privileges.

Authoritarian; power is centralized; one defers to authority; managers hold on to power, not much delegation of authority; subordinates do not take initiative but wait for explicit instructions; decisions are made at the top; one does not openly disagree with/say no to the boss; rank has its privileges; manager/subordinate relations are formal.

Attitude toward Uncertainty

|—————————|—————————|—————————|—————————|

Positive   **Skeptical**

People are not afraid of taking risks or of failing; trial and error/experimenting is how we learn and improve our products and services; what is different is interesting; change is positive; new is often better; tradition is not valued for its own sake; the "way we have always done things" is not necessarily the best way; what we don't know can't hurt us.

Taking risks and failing have strong negative consequences and should be avoided if at all possible; one doesn't try something until one knows it will work; what is different can be dangerous; change is threatening; new is not necessarily better; traditions should be respected and are a good guide to the future; there's a good reason for "the way we have always done things"; what we don't know can be troubling.

Attitude toward Work

|————————————|————————————|————————————|————————————|

Achievement

People are motivated by achievement; ambition is rewarded; being successful means moving up, getting ahead, and having greater power and responsibility; professional opportunity/the chance to make more money is more important than job security; if people have to choose between work and family, they may choose work; one lives to work.

Quality of Life

A better quality of life is what motivates people to work; a pleasant work setting and good relations with coworkers are as motivating as the chance to make more money and move up; having time to spend with family/friends is as important as the lure of achievement; more power and responsibility are not automatically attractive; success means you are admired and respected by others; one works to live.

Key to Productivity

|————————————|————————————|————————————|————————————|

Results

Focusing on the task ensures success; what matters most in employees is their productivity and output, which are related to technical skills and experience; conflict is sometimes necessary to clear the air and move forward; getting results is ultimately more important than how you get them; employee/employer relationship is often opportunistic; employee loyalty is not as important as performance/productivity.

Harmony

Harmony in the workplace ensures the success of an organization; what matters in employees is their ability to get along/work well with others, which is related to personal qualities (more than technical skills); conflict should be minimized because of disruptive consequences; how you get results is as important as the results themselves; employer/employee relationship is like a family; loyalty is expected and reciprocal.

Source of Status

Achieved

Meritocracy; rank, status, and respect must be earned and do not come with the position or title; family name and social class do not confer automatic status; people are respected and promoted based on their performance and achievements, regardless of age or seniority; age/seniority do not guarantee respect or status; it is relatively easy to change your status (to move up); people of higher rank/status should not act superior to/better than those of lesser.
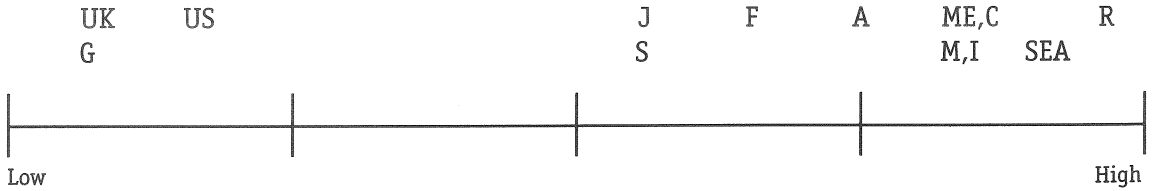
Ascribed

Autocracy; rank, position, and title confer automatic status and respect; social class/family name confer initial status (but it can be lost if you do not perform well); achievements are important for promotion, but age and seniority are also highly valued; age and seniority confer automatic status and respect; it is difficult to change your status (especially to move up); people should be careful not to behave above/below their station in life.
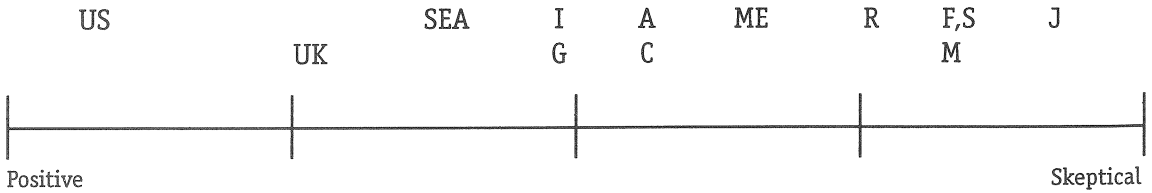
Position of Selected Cultures

A number of cultures or cultural groupings have been selected for inclusion on this chart. The positions given here reflect either where nationals of these countries/regions have consistently placed themselves on this chart in numerous workshops and training seminars given by the author or where the author has placed these cultures after consulting various surveys and studies in the literature of the intercultural field. Remember that these placements are approximations and that they indicate the position of a culture as a whole on these matters, not of individuals. Even then, it's possible the reader may not agree with where his or her culture has been placed or even where other cultures have been placed. The best way to use these continuum charts is not to take our word for any of this but to hand them to a person from another culture and let that individual speak for his or her own society. If any of your target cultures do not appear on this chart, you may be able to infer their position by noting the placement of a similar culture.
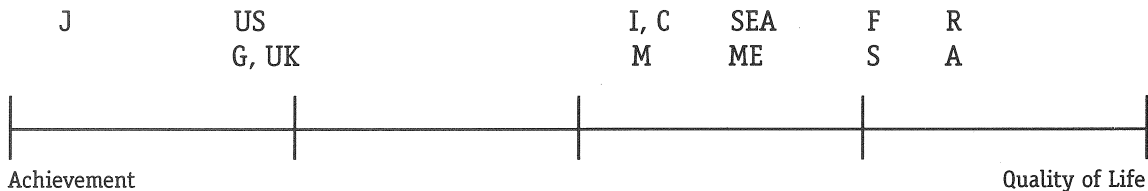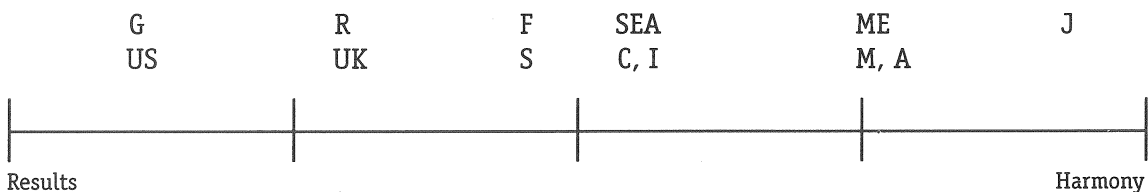
Power Distance

```
    UK      US                          J       F       A       ME,C          R
    G                                   S                       M,I     SEA

 ├──────────┼───────────────┼───────────────┼───────────────┤
Low                                                                         High
```

Attitude toward Uncertainty

```
    US                      SEA     I       A       ME      R       F,S     J
                    UK              G       C                       M

 ├──────────┼───────────────┼───────────────┼───────────────┤
Positive                                                               Skeptical
```

Attitude toward Work

```
J              US                        I, C     SEA      F       R
               G, UK                     M        ME       S       A
```

Achievement   Quality of Life

Key to Productivity

```
        G              R          F       SEA           ME              J
        US             UK         S       C, I          M, A
```

Results   Harmony

Source of Status

```
    G   US         UK                  J   F, M          I           A
        R                              C   S, SEA                    ME
```
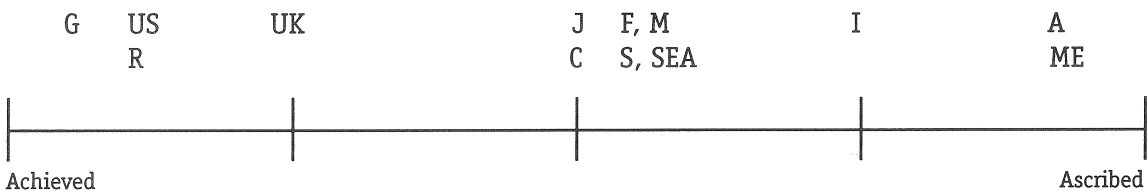
Achieved   Ascribed

A—Africa   C—China   F—France   G—Germany   I—India   J—Japan
M—Mexico   ME—Middle East   R—Russia   S—Spain
SEA—Southeast Asia   UK—United Kingdom   US—United States

Exercise 4.4

What Would You Do?

The following four incidents describe workplace conflicts which occurred because of a cultural difference. Your task is to read each one and, using what you have learned about culture in this and the preceding chapters, indicate in the space below the incident what you would do or say if you were faced with this situation.

1. Offshore Partner

You are a team leader in the technical support division of a large manufacturing company in a low power distance culture. Your company is famous for its informal and flat organizational culture: there are few layers of management and your engineers work for the most part on their own, only coming to you when they have a problem or a question. Your company has recently entered into an agreement with an offshore partner (in a high power distance culture) to provide you with software programmers for one of your important projects. These programmers will be with you for an eighteen-month period, and now, after the arrival of the first group, there are some problems.

The programmers do not seem willing or able to work without very close supervision and, in fact, seem unwilling to take responsibility for their work. They expect you to make even the most routine decisions, and they always check with you before undertaking even moderately important tasks. In dealing with internal clients (divisions that you and these foreign programmers are developing software for), they always defer to you and do not give these clients answers to their questions or responses to their requests on the spot, although it is well within their job description to do so. All this means you're having to spend a lot

more time with these people than you should, so much that you have almost no time for your other employees. What should you do?

_____

_____

_____

2. Trial and Error

You have been posted overseas with a nonprofit foreign aid organization. Your area of expertise is environmental cleanup, and the country in which you work is trying to recover from decades of abusing its natural resources, especially water. You are in charge of setting up a demonstration water-filtering plant in a certain district, but you are encountering strong resistance from the district supervisor. He wants to know if this technique has been tried anywhere else in his country, and when you say no, he asks why he should let you "experiment at [his] expense."

You point out that it's very important to see if this technique will work in his country. If it doesn't, then how much better it will be to know that now before going ahead and installing these plants in every district. He will be a hero for sponsoring this trial.

He says he will lose his job if this high-profile experiment fails and asks you why you can't know ahead of time if the plant is going to work. If you're not sure it's going to work, then you should spend more time perfecting the technology. "When the technology is perfect, then you can try it out in my district," he says. What do you do?

_____

_____

_____

3. Peer Teaching

You are an expatriate adviser working in an AIDS education program in a developing country. Your sponsoring organization has designed a peer teaching project that involves training high school seniors in basic AIDS prevention techniques, which they then teach to younger teenagers in special after-school workshops. Research in your own culture has shown that when teens get this particular message from other, older teens, they pay much more attention than when an adult lectures them on this topic.

Your organization has conducted a number of training sessions around the country for the seniors, a cadre of whom have already begun to hold the after-school workshops. At a meeting with an official from the Ministry of Health today, you heard that there have been numerous complaints about these workshops from teachers around the country. The teachers maintain that to have high school seniors holding classes undermines the teachers' respect and credibility. Apparently, there have already been discipline problems in some schools. "We put teachers on a pedestal in our culture," this official explained to you, "because of the high regard we hold for knowledge and a sound education. To have students teaching other students makes our teachers look bad." Now what?

_____

_____

_____

4. Know-How

You are an expatriate from a low power distance culture living in a high power distance country. You were about to return to your home culture when a large corporation in the overseas country hired you. They were looking in particular for the kind of marketing expertise your company is famous for. Now that you have been on board for a few months, you're not having a good time. Although these people say they hired you for your marketing know-how, whenever you try to make suggestions or changes in the way your new company does business, you meet with resistance.

Today your boss has had an unusually frank discussion with you, laying out the reasons for the trouble you're having. He says your problem is that you are too outspoken and don't know your place. You disagree with your superiors in front of others and sometimes correct them in front of others when they say something wrong. You also make too many decisions without checking with other people, even though, as your boss admits, you know more about the subject than those people do.

Now you're confused. You thought you'd been hired for what you know, but whenever you try to put what you know into practice, your supervisors seem offended. What do you do now?

_____

_____

_____

Discussion

1. Offshore Partner

You obviously need to encourage your expat programmers to work more independently. The problem is that they are now in a low power distance culture, but they are continuing to behave the way they would if they were back home. They aren't trying to upset you; they simply assume that you expect and appreciate this kind of behavior. In other words, you and they have the same goal: that these expatriates will be effective and successful in their assignments. What they don't realize is that the *way* one is effective and successful in your culture is very different from the way one is in theirs.

Seen in this light, your task here becomes easier. You need to explain to your expatriate programmers that while you understand what lies behind their behavior (that it is well intentioned), it is unexpected and counterproductive in your culture. Explain that managers here actually do want employees to work independently, with a minimum of supervision, and to make decisions on their own (if it's part of their job). Assure them that mistakes are more readily understood and forgiven in this environment than in their home culture, especially with new employees. Point out that managers in your culture don't expect much deference to authority figures and fully expect subordinates to use any authority that is delegated to them.

Once these norms are made explicit to your expats, once they understand what behaviors and attitudes are necessary to succeed in your culture and company, they will most likely try to change their counterproductive behaviors. One word of warning, however: don't assume that once you communicate your expectations, your expats will be able to change all their behaviors overnight. It takes a little longer than that to change years of habit, but they will come around if you give them time, especially if their efforts to do so are rewarded.

2. Trial and Error

The central cultural issue here involves the attitude toward change and taking risks. In high uncertainty avoidance cultures where change is viewed with suspicion, where it is avoided if at

all possible, then trying something new is by definition a non-starter.

Your approach here should be two-pronged: convince this man that the risks of what you want to do are minimal and that the possible rewards are considerable. He needs reassurance. If it's feasible, you should try to implement your project in bite-sized chunks, small increments which minimize the consequences and visibility of failure. A big risk may be more than he can handle, so give him a series of small risks.

You might try to get more data from other places where this scheme has been tried or bring in people the supervisor respects and will listen to and have them defend the project. The best approach is to get people above him to support the project and identify themselves with it; this gives him protection in the event that things go wrong.

Whatever you do, you will have to proceed much more slowly and cautiously in this culture than in your own. You will probably want to add several months to your projected completion date.

3. Peer Teaching

There is probably no reason why peer teaching can't work in this society, though you might want to reexamine your data showing that messages received from peers are more likely to take hold. If this is a culture where status is ascribed, where teachers teach and students listen, then blurring the status distinctions isn't going to win you any friends. In any case, your best chance here is to involve the teachers much more in the program and at the same time redefine the role of the peers. You may want to have teachers leading the workshops, with the seniors participating in a more subordinate role. The seniors can still give the exact same input but in a show that is clearly run by teachers. Or you may want to try some variation on this theme.

The main point is that students should not be crowded onto the same pedestal heretofore reserved for teachers. Any redesign of the project that makes it clear that seniors and teachers are not equals should at least lower the volume of the criticism. Strictly speaking, this would no longer be peer teaching, but it

would still accomplish the goal of peers telling other peers about safe sex.

4. Know-How

Your low power distance behaviors are getting in the way of your effectiveness here. The problem isn't that people don't value and need your technical expertise; that's why they hired you. The problem is in the way you're delivering your expertise. Being a technical expert doesn't excuse you from the necessity of observing cultural norms, and apparently one of the norms in this culture is that you defer to authority figures. And this deference extends even to situations where they say things that are incorrect or offer suggestions that make no sense.

It's not that you say nothing at such times or that you're not supposed to bring your expertise to bear in these situations; it's all in how you give your input. To begin with, you can take your colleagues aside and get your message across privately, which will allow them to save face and retain the respect of their subordinates. Or, if you feel you must say something in a meeting, phrase it as delicately as possible, drawing attention to anything your colleagues said that was right and making only a passing reference to what was incorrect or ill advised. Don't worry that you are being too vague; in cultures such as this, people readily understand indirect, oblique references.

As for your decision-making style, once again the problem isn't that you shouldn't be making these decisions but that you shouldn't make them without consulting your superiors. While it's quite true your superiors may not have anything substantive to contribute, it's common courtesy in high power distance cultures to keep senior management informed at all times and also to ask permission to decide what you have already decided.

In many cultures style is just as important as substance. At the end of the day in such cultures, the expert with the right style prevails as often as the expert with the right answers.

Dialogues Revisited

Now that you have completed this chapter, reread the dialogues in the diagnostic exercise (exercise 4.1) on pages 128-29 to see whether you have any new insights in light of what you have learned about workplace cultural norms in the foregoing exercises. Then read the analyses below for descriptions of the cultural differences that were being illustrated in the dialogues. (It's possible you will have seen differences other than those described below.)

1. Database

This dialogue illustrates certain key differences between high and low uncertainty avoidance cultures. Both Martha and Alexei want to find a solution to the staffing problem that has just resurfaced in their office, but their approaches are notably different. Martha favors trial and error, experimenting with the new software to see if it might work and, if it doesn't, then trying something else. She's not afraid of taking risks or of failing. She sees failing as part of problem solving, the price you sometimes have to pay to learn what you need to learn, but not as a problem in and of itself. Failing is a means to success, not the opposite of success.

Alexei has a different view of failing; it's not necessarily a way station on the road to succeeding but the proverbial end of the line. It's important, therefore, to avoid failure if at all possible—and if it's not possible, then to think twice before even risking it. Alexei only wants to try things he knows will work ("Has it been tried in organizations like ours?"), not to try things to see *if* they will work.

These two also differ in their attitude toward change. For Martha, change is natural and inevitable, something you simply handle when it comes up. For Alexei, change is much more daunt-

ing; you first decide *if* you can handle it before you allow it to come up. Change shouldn't be undertaken lightly, and in many cases it shouldn't be undertaken at all.

2. Rough Edges

What constitutes the ideal worker varies from culture to culture. For Debbie, technical expertise, the actual skills needed to do the job, are high on the list of desirable attributes. But for Miko, what seems to be equally important is the ability to get along with coworkers. Peter's rough edges might be overlooked in Debbie's culture because he can get the job done, but in cultures where the *way* you get the job done is as important as completing the task, his lack of interpersonal skills would be a serious drawback. Imagine, for example, those cultures which value harmony, the saving of face, and teams which work well together; how would Peter's apparent abrasiveness be regarded there?

This doesn't mean, by the way, that more individualist cultures would not also be put off by Peter, only that they might draw the line in a different place. High achievers, which Peter seems to be, are given more latitude in some cultures than others. Also, this does not mean that collectivist cultures don't care about an employee's technical abilities, but they might place relatively more emphasis on interpersonal skills.

3. One Less Headache

This dialogue touches on the concept of power distance. In Amanda's low power distance culture, managers don't normally want or expect to be consulted on routine decisions, especially decisions subordinates have been given the authority to make on their own. Managers in these cultures would particularly not appreciate being consulted on such decisions when they're busy with more important matters. Managers in low power distance cultures delegate authority and fully expect subordinates to use that authority without checking in with them.

Apparently this isn't how it works in Hassan's high power distance culture. When he says he's sure Ali will approve the hiring of part-time workers, Hassan doesn't mean, as Amanda thinks he does, that there is therefore no need to run this plan

by Ali; he is saying, rather, that Ali will of course say yes when Hassan asks for permission. Which he had better do, for in these cultures managers may technically delegate authority, but they very much appreciate and expect the courtesy of being asked for permission to use that authority. Subordinates routinely check in with management in such cultures, even if it's only a formality; indeed, formality is one of the cornerstones of the manager/subordinate relationship in high power distance cultures.

As the dialogue ends, Amanda has misread Hassan, who has in fact just advised her to check with Ali. Amanda isn't planning to, naturally, and probably fancies that Ali will thank her for not having bothered him with such a minor matter. Stay tuned.

4. Dr. de Leon

This dialogue compares cultures where status must be achieved to those where status is ascribed. In the former, status is earned through one's accomplishments, the things you have done. When someone reaches a position of prominence and responsibility, it is because that person has worked hard for the status that has been conferred upon him or her. Or so Julie believes, which is why she keeps pressing Carlos for evidence of how Dr. de Leon has earned his new position.

For Carlos, however, from a culture where status is more ascribed, Julie's questions aren't making any sense. Dr. de Leon's qualifications for the CEO position are not primarily a function of what he has done but of his social and economic standing, the family he was born into, and the people he knows. You don't necessarily earn status in such societies; you either have it or you don't. You may be able to add to it, of course, or to lose some of it, but a certain amount of status adheres to you based on accidents of birth. Indeed, it's not so much that this position confers status on Dr. de Leon, but that he brings his status to the position.

This is a classic distinction between a meritocracy and an aristocracy. In the former, you get the status in life that you have worked for; in the latter, you work to deserve the status you have been given.