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ACAR BALTAŞ

M. Sc. Dr.

Managing in Turkish Culture

Acquiring Global Success
With Local Values



Remzi Kitabevi

MANAGING IN TURKISH CULTURE / Acar Baltas

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*To my wife Zuhail, who has worked
hand in hand with me through the journey
which started from university library,
leading to the harmonious individual maturity.*

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Preface

This book is a take on the working life from the point of view of a psychologist. Owing to their background, psychologists tend to view their surroundings and people in general differently from those who have not been schooled in this discipline.

We all strive to make sense of and interpret life and make certain judgments about it based on occurrences and facts we've come to know. These judgments may be in relation to simple matters that directly influence us, e.g. "My work colleague is not a team player; they view compromise as defeat and want to have their own way each and every time." These may also be in relation to other matters that, while prompting us to ask questions, may not be of direct significance to us, .e.g. "How can someone assume that corporal punishment is in any way useful in disciplining their child and proceed to put them in the hospital based on that! What are these people thinking and what is their state of mind?"

Other times we are annoyed by our children not tidying their rooms or the fact that every report handed in by the sales rep is full of errors and assume that these individuals either don't understand our instructions or don't value our input. Now and then we marvel at a hard-working and highly skilled subordinate, whom we see as having a bright future, when we see them meet quarterly targets by transferring the sales made by another employee to their own account through trickery and deceit. We're stupefied: "Why? How can this be?"

However, in such cases, a seasoned psychologist with a well-grounded education will perceive things differently, knowing as they do that any event is generally a result of what was done previously and that to understand such outcomes depends on understanding

the underlying causes. Furthermore, they will be aware that the solution to a problem depends “not just on being right, but on being consistently right” and conduct their relationships accordingly. They will seek the solution that’s not only right for them, but is also the least problematic for others.

When figuring out the meaning that underlies the actions of the person who sees the physical disciplining of a child as beneficial and the behavior of the gifted subordinate, they take into account how crucial values are in life and know that the answer to the “Why?” question resides in these values. With that in mind, they would further be able to understand the devastation caused by the greed that runs rampant in the financial world.

A psychologist knows that the carelessness displayed by their child or their colleague is not due to a lack of understanding or a disregard for themselves, but to their personality. The scientific understanding that the psychologist has accrued about personality provides them with the tools to understand what they can and cannot change and, thus, channel their energy more judiciously. This way, they avoid emotional turmoil without also aggravating others and thus damaging relationships. They fret about individuals who hold up others as exemplars to their children, telling them that, “You’d succeed if you tried; you’re smart but you’re lazy,” or people who constantly argue with their spouse, whom they expect “to be as they want them to be”, and erase any trace of affection in the relationship. Indeed, they are well aware that there are things people simply cannot accomplish, no matter how hard they try. They know that people are born into this world with a certain plan of action and eagerly assist their spouse, children, their subordinates and their friends in making the most of their winnings from the genetic raffle.

In this book, I invite you to go on a journey, with a mental health professional as your guide, to find renewed meaning in our lives and in our work by meditating on a series of studies that showcase what is special and sublime about us – not just in terms of our genetic heritage, but also in terms of our cultural leanings.

PART I

Laying the Foundation

Leader or Manager?

One point of contention that never seems to be resolved has to do with the meanings that are assigned to the concepts of the manager and the leader. Mostly we tend to remember the more utilitarian definitions or those that are more proverbial such as, “A leader does the right job, whereas a manager gets the job right”, which may ring true at first but is actually rather vague.

The following line of thought, which we refer to in our training efforts, is widely favored: “Any action that changes an outcome is the action of a leader. A leader is someone who has impact and influence and gets positive, sustainable results with the aid of his subordinates.” Viewed from this standpoint, it is even possible for someone far down the pecking order to display leadership qualities.

When we say, “A business leader is someone who gets outstanding results and sustains their success in a competitive environment”, we assign leadership qualities to the lowest-ranking departmental manager, because continued success relies on encouraging, inspiring and motivating people rather than coercing them by dint of a higher position. And this requires the leader to make the task at hand more meaningful and convey this emotion to those around him. The will to do this is essential.

Another argument is that leadership is not a “position” to be attained by climbing the managerial ladder. According to this view, managers cannot become leaders by simply “growing”. There’s a fundamental difference between a leader and a manager. The leader sets his gaze outside the organization. The leader sets a destination, defines the target and formulates a strategy. This leadership function is concisely defined by a Turkish proverb: “The eye sees beyond the

mountain while the mind sees what is to come". Likewise, the manager surveys the inner workings of the organization and makes sure the daily operations are running according to plan. Managers cannot simply become "leaders" by rising through the ranks, since qualities required to fulfill these functions differ wildly. Thus, leaders are those who stand atop the organization while the managers under them are more than likely to remain where they are.

I personally don't believe someone can be a leader without first becoming a good manager. One doesn't need to be great at a pursuit to properly manage it. However, I don't think it's possible to manage a group of people engaged with a certain task without knowing the intricacies and steps involved. As such, not everyone with a history of success in business and management is suited for a leadership role. Good leadership is underpinned by a significant understanding of what the job entails and the processes required to carry it out.

An ethnographic study carried out using focus groups and detailed interviews revealed that leadership was perceived by members of the Turkish culture as a "more superior" rank than manager.⁽¹⁾ It is widely believed that management is something that is learned through training and experience, whereas leadership is a quality that is born out of a person's character. Leadership incorporates a series of talents, like being able to seize the opportunities that come with change, speculating on the future, recasting projections as messages to inspire others and getting people motivated behind a cause, whereas management is considered to be based more on routine, technicalities and rules. Moreover, leaders are believed to be more emotional and passionate, whereas managers are seen as more rational and objective. Motivating others is both the job of the leader and the manager; however, the manager generally accomplishes this through a system of rewards and penalties, while the leader prefers a different, more creative approach. Generally speaking, leadership is perceived as a more arduous yet superior position.

(1) Chhokar, J. S., Brodbeck, F. C., House, R. J., *Culture and Leadership Across the World: The Globe Book of In-Depth Studies of 25 Societies*, p. 852, London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007.

Studies

The Hofstede Study

In his wide-ranging study, Professor Geert Hofstede of the Maastricht University analyzed data from 74 countries to demonstrate the ways in which values in the workplace were influenced by cultural factors. Hofstede's study was unique in that it managed to empirically link cultural orientation to perceptible organizational differences across countries.

The Power distance index: This index attempts to show the "unequal distribution of power" in any given organization (workplace, family, etc.), as perceived by and accepted by its "powerless" members. What's significant here is that the unequal circumstances are accepted and endorsed, not by those at the top (leaders) of the hierarchy, but by those at the bottom (followers).

World average / Turkey: 55/66

The individualism index: This index indicates the way in which individuals define themselves. Social ties are comparatively lax in individualistic societies where people categorize themselves as independent units. The individual is only responsible for themselves (or their immediate nuclear family).

In communal cultures, however, individuals describe themselves as part of a family or another grouping. Such communities attach significance to values such as protectionism and loyalty.

World average / Turkey: 43/37

The success-relationship index (Masculinity-femininity): Societies that tend to be achievers value power and success, whereas those that value relationships ascribe more importance to interpersonal compatibility and compromise.

World average / Turkey: 50/45

