A cross-cultural comparison of British and Turkish managers in terms of Protestant work ethic characteristics

Mahmut Arslan

Theoretical framework

This paper discusses work attitudes of Turkish and British managers in terms of Protestant work ethic (PWE) characteristics. Max Weber broadly argued that Protestantism, in particular Calvinism, played an important role in the development of capitalism in the West (Weber 1985). He believed that Protestant societies had a particular work ethic which was quite distinct from non-Western societies. Weber explained the contribution of Calvinism to the development of capitalism through ‘the spirit of capitalism’. He believed that a new morality, ‘the spirit of capitalism’, encouraged hard work and productivity by means of the religious beliefs of some Protestant movements. He argued that ‘the spirit of capitalism’ could be taken to be unique to these Protestant groups.

It should be noted that Weber did not argue that a non-Protestant society could not produce ‘the spirit of capitalism’; he simply emphasised that Catholicism and Islam had not developed such a spirit (Weber 1985). A Muslim society could hardly produce PWE-like values because, Weber argued, three factors prevented the development of ‘the spirit of capitalism’ in Islamic societies (Weber 1982). These are Sufism, warrior ethic and oriental despotism.

- Sufism was an obstacle to the development of a capitalistic spirit because of its other-worldly character. Weber believed that Sufism encouraged a fatalistic way of life.
- Warrior ethic or ‘the spirit of conquest’ was seen as the antithesis of the productive capitalist spirit.
- Weber argued that the despotic character of Islamic empires restricted property rights and hence capital accumulation.

Although some non-Christian religious groups, such as the Japanese and the Jains of India, have succeeded in achieving considerable economic success, the main discussion on this topic has been conducted in the context of the Judeo-Christian ethic (Ali 1988), and most of the research on the Protestant work ethic has been done in the West. The need for further studies on the work ethic of non-Christian groups still remains (Ali 1992). For instance, Turkey, as a cultural bridge between the West and the Islamic world, represents a potentially interesting research opportunity to look at changes of work values in an industrialising Muslim society.

Although there is no well-defined statements on the actual dimensions of the Protestant work ethic (PWE), the broader meaning of the PWE refers to one or more of the following beliefs and attitudes:

- taking hard work and industriousness as religious duties,
- a negative attitude to leisure activities,
frugality and productivity,
- punctuality and time-saving,
- pride in work,
- commitment and loyalty to occupation and organisation,
- need for achievement,
- honesty,
- taking idleness, wasting time and money as vices,
- internal locus of control (one first must blame himself or herself instead of others),
- taking ambition and success as the signs of God’s favour,
- taking poverty as a universal indicator of sin while taking wealth as a sign of God’s favour (Furnham 1990).

From a management point of view the PWE may be seen as a cultural input into organisation structure which can affect organisational culture and effectiveness. Organisational culture is defined as dominant values adopted by an organisation that create a common understanding among members about the nature of organisation and the desired behaviours of the members (Can 1991). Some important characteristics of organisational culture are directly or indirectly related to the PWE such as individual initiative, risk tolerance, identity, and reward system (Robins 1989). Individual initiative refers to the degree of responsibility, freedom and independence that individuals have. Individual initiative overlaps individualism and internal locus of control of the PWE. Risk tolerance shows the degree to which employees are encouraged to be aggressive, innovative and risk taking. This also overlaps risk taking and innovative attitudes in the PWE. Similarly, identity is contained in the PWE as loyalty to organisation. Finally, the reward system refers to the degree to which reward allocations are based on employee performance criteria in contrast to seniority and favouritism. The PWE encourages reward systems which are based on productivity.

My main concern in this paper is to explore whether managerial attitudes of Muslim Turkish managers are similar to or different from their Protestant British counterparts in terms of PWE values. Although few researchers make comparisons of PWE values in Islamic and Western societies (Ali 1988, 1992, Furnham and Muhiddin 1984) there is no comparison between Turkey and Christian cultures based on PWE values.

Turkey, as an emerging capitalist economy, is becoming the first industrialised Muslim nation with a secular regime. For example, Hefner (1995) believes that the time will come when Islamic nations become developed economies; that time may have already arrived in two of the most important countries in the Muslim world, Turkey and Indonesia. These two non-Arabic countries are important since both are experimenting with capitalism and cultural pluralism in a way never undertaken in the Muslim world. A study of PWE values of Turkish managers and its comparison with British managers will therefore contribute considerably to our knowledge of the cultural aspects of Turkish business.

Britain was chosen for the comparison because of its original and rich PWE heritage. Weber (1985) took British and Anglo-Saxon societies as ideal examples of the PWE. He addressed the importance of non-Conformist tradition and its role in developing the ‘spirit of capitalism’ in Britain and in the US. Although present-day British society is known as a post-Christian society, I chose particular Protestant groups to pursue PWE beliefs. The relationship between PWE endorsement and religious affiliation has been examined in many cross-cultural studies. For example, Kim (1977) showed that there was no significant difference between Protestant denominations and Catholics. Ray (1982) investigated PWE in Australia and found that Catholic/Protestant differences were not significant. McCarrey et al. (1984) argued that there was a strong similarity between Anglophone and Francophone Canadian managers. Ma (1986) showed that for Taiwanese PWE scores were not related to religious belief or affiliation. Similarly, Furnham and Reilly (1991) found that PWE values were not related to religious affiliation. Furnham et al. (1993) measured PWE values in 13 countries and results showed that participants from richer, First World countries tended to have lower scores than those
from Third world countries. Niles (1994) found that Sri Lankans had as strong a work ethic as Australians had. Ali (1988) claimed that Arab executives had higher PWE levels than their Scandinavian and American counterparts.

Method

Mirels and Garrett’s PWE scale (1971) was used to examine whether Turkish and British managers had similar or different attitudes towards work. This scale includes 19 items, and is one of the most frequently used scales for the cross-cultural examination of the PWE. Although it does not contain all dimensions of the PWE it is a good measurement tool to make the sample larger. Each item has a scale ranging from (1) to (7), representing ‘strongly disagree’ and ‘strongly agree’ in a Likert scale. The scale was translated into Turkish for the Turkish group and a re-translation was also conducted. The scale exhibited a satisfactory reliability score (Cronbach Alpha = 0.84).

To make the sample more representative, I chose practising Protestant managers from certain non-Conformist movements such as Quakers, Pentecostals, Calvinists, Presbyterians, and Methodists because Max Weber argued that Calvinist-Puritan Protestantism with its this-worldly asceticism or religious individualism was the core of ‘the spirit of capitalism’. Similarly, I chose practising Muslim managers in Turkey from an Islamic businessmen’s association, and some adherents of famous religious movements such as the Light and the Nakshibandiyya movements were included. The sample consisted of randomly chosen 100 British and 74 Turkish first- and middle-level managers between the age of 35 and 55. Respondents were personally contacted during the data gathering process. Every effort was made to assure the comparability of the samples and procedures for the study.

A factor analysis with varimax rotation revealed five dimensions of the PWE. These PWE characteristics are ‘work as an end in itself’, ‘money and time saving’, ‘internal locus of control’, ‘hard work brings success’, and ‘negative attitude to leisure’. Five items were excluded because of lower factor loadings. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted for overall results and univariate t-tests were performed for each item.

Results and discussion

A multivariate analysis of variance in Table 1 shows the overall results that there is a significant difference between Turkish and British managers at the 95 percent level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Name</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Exact F</th>
<th>Hypoth. DF</th>
<th>Error DF</th>
<th>Sig. of F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pillais</td>
<td>.48162</td>
<td>10.55161</td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td>159.00</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotellings</td>
<td>.92907</td>
<td>10.55161</td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td>159.00</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilks</td>
<td>.51838</td>
<td>10.55161</td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td>159.00</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roy</td>
<td>.48162</td>
<td>10.55161</td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td>159.00</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: F statistics are exact.

Observed Power at .0500 Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEST NAME</th>
<th>Noncent.</th>
<th>Power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(All)</td>
<td>147.723</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: p < 0.05
Since overall results showed a significant difference between the groups, univariate t-tests were performed for each item; these results are summarised in Table 2. In the first PWE characteristic, ‘work as an end in itself’, participants did not differ in two items: however, Turkish managers had a significantly higher score in one of the items. It indicates that Turkish managers attach more importance to self-fulfilment at work compared to British managers. In the second characteristic, ‘money and time saving’, there were significant differences in all items, and Turkish managers showed a higher level of frugality than their British counterparts. The groups were also significantly different in ‘internal locus of control’ which expresses self-responsibility and independence; Turkish managers displayed higher scores here. In the fourth PWE characteristic, ‘hard work brings success’; Turkish managers showed significantly higher scores in three items. And finally, in the fifth characteristic, ‘negative attitude to leisure’, Turkish managers showed a higher level of acceptance than their British counterparts. There were two reverse items in the fifth characteristic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PWE characteristics</th>
<th>British Mean</th>
<th>British SD</th>
<th>Turkish Mean</th>
<th>Turkish SD</th>
<th>t-stats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work as an end in itself</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>1.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ The most difficult college courses usually turn out to be most rewarding.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ There are few satisfactions equal to the realisation that one has done one’s best at a job.</td>
<td>5.27</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>6.04</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>-3.63*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ I feel uneasy when there is little work for me to do.</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>4.92</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>-1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money and time saving</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>4.74</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>-2.23*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ The credit card is a ticket to careless spending.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Money acquired easily (e.g. through gambling and speculations) is usually spent unwisely.</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>5.78</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>-4.53*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Most people spend too much time in unprofitable amusement.</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>5.58</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>-6.17*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal locus of control</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>-5.69*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Most people who do not succeed in life are just plain lazy.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ People who fail at a job have usually not tried hard.</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>-7.67*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard work brings success</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>-1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Hard work offers little guarantee of success.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Any man who is able and willing to work hard has a good chance of succeeding.</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>5.47</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>-2.91*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ If one works hard enough he is likely to make a good life for himself.</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>5.58</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>-5.75*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Life would have very little meaning if we never had to suffer.</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>5.47</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>-5.56*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative attitude to leisure</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>4.69</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>-3.90*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ People should have more leisure time to spend in relaxation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Life would be more meaningful if we had more leisure time.</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>5.47</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>-4.42*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: N= 174  * t-statistics are significant at p < 0.05
Since reverse items were converted in the data analysis process, the higher scores were interpreted as being against leisure activities.

Univariate results showed that Turkish managers had higher PWE scores than British managers in all characteristics. The results of this study are in harmony with Furnham et al. (1993) and Furnham and Muhiuddin (1984). They found that participants from richer first world countries tended to have lower scores, than those from third world countries. For example, the Malaysian group showed a higher PWE level than the British group. Here we have exactly the opposite situation from that described by Weber in his study almost a century ago. However, it should be noted that Weber did not claim that Islam could not produce ‘the spirit of capitalism’, but rather that some historical conditions in the Islamic world presented obstacles to the development of such a spirit. In other words, Weber argued that individual belief in Islam was not an obstacle for capitalism, but that the Islamic state and its inefficiency, together with Islamic Law, had hindered the development of capitalism in Islamic societies. (For instance, he saw Turkish Tartar people as modern entrepreneurs in Russia in his time.) He emphasised the irrational and arbitrary character of the Islamic state as a result of oriental despotism, particularly with respect to prevailing property rights practices (Turner 1974).

According to Weber (1992) warrior ethic, Sufism, and oriental despotism were the main disadvantages for capitalism. Warrior ethic was the opposite of productivity, Sufism encouraged a fatalistic way of life, and oriental despotism restricted property rights and free labour. It is worth noting that in the republican era in Turkey, which starts from 1923, all Sufi movements were outlawed and tekkes, Islamic monasteries, were closed. The idea behind this policy was that tekkes were encouraging fatalism in society which was against the progressive spirit of the Republic. Islamic law was replaced with a secular European law, and Islam became a religion for individuals. All the successive republican governments encouraged hard work, industriousness, and rationalism. As a result, influential Sufi orders started to advocate a modernist and this-worldly Islam.

For example, in the editorial of a special issue on entrepreneurship in Ilim ve Sanat, a Turkish monthly published by the influential Nakshiban-diyya movement, ascetic Sufism was condemned.

‘A powerful Muslim is better than a weak one. Those who encourage ascetic Sufism do not serve Islam.’ (Ilim ve Sanat, March, 1997: 2)

Since practising Muslims lost worldly power in Turkey, a kind of this-worldly asceticism dominated the Islamic stance. Practising Muslims may have developed a political minority psychology which encouraged a work ethic. Some Islamists argued that Islamic identity could be protected through business activities:

‘Muslims must follow the Prophet’s saying in business; “a giving hand is more blessed than the taking one”. If we want to protect our Islamic identity we have to export our products to the Western markets.’ (Gurdogan 1997: 24)

In addition to political conditions mentioned above, the Islamic way of life also encourages work-oriented values of practising Muslims. Hard work is seen as a worship of God. Wasting time and money is considered as a sin. Many leisure activities based on a secular way of life are forbidden according to their religious belief, or at least discouraged, such as gambling, dancing, drinking alcohol, seaside holidays, watching secular TV channels, films, plays and so on.

It is also to be noted that the warrior ethic and oriental despotism had no place in the republican ideology. Property rights were secured since the 1876 constitution. For the first time in the history of Islam, an Islamic state was transformed into a secular organisation. This was arguably as radical a revolution in the Islamic world as was the French turn to Republicanism. It is very likely that even practising Muslim managers were affected by the progressive spirit of the Republic, despite the fact that many of them are against republican policies, in particular secularism.

Secularist policies in Turkey created an isolated environment for practising Muslims. They were excluded from the government agencies and public life until recent times. In cities, trade and industry were the only areas in which they could act freely.
Islamic opposition saw business activities as important as politics to come to power.

There are other ways in which the particular development of Turkey can foster the ‘spirit of capitalism’. It is argued that the Ottoman heritage and the prohibition of usury can motivate the risk-taking attitudes of practising Muslim managers. According to Sencan (1997) the conquering spirit of the Ottoman Empire was transformed into a risk-taking attitude of Muslim businessmen. As he states:

‘The conquering spirit of Ottomans should live in economic activities. We do want to develop the spirit of entrepreneurship among us, so our political system must not be based on autocracy; rather it must develop entrepreneurship. In addition, a creative hard working spirit will solve a lot of problems we have got so far.’ (Sencan 1997: 38)

A Muslim economist, A. Sayi (1997) suggests that the reason for the prohibition of usury in Islam was its risk-free nature. He argued that a risk-free income could not be reconciled with entrepreneurship.

Most practising Muslim managers come from a new emerging social class in Turkey. This nascent class consists of middle-level new capitalists from developing Turkish cities, and they are competing with Istanbul-based well-established large companies. As an emerging class they are very enthusiastic, and it appears that they can have more achievement motivation than those who work in large companies. Further empirical studies are necessary to examine the differences between secularist and religious managers in Turkey.

Conclusion

In short, the higher PWE values of Turkish managers can be explained by their belief system, and by the political and economic situation in which they work. Five factors should be considered in explaining the higher PWE values of Turkish managers.

■ First, the negative impacts of Ottoman despotism on the Turkish work attitudes seem to be fading away. Democratic reforms, starting from 1839, secured property rights. The Republican governments encouraged the growth of the private sector.

■ Second, it appears that traditional Sufism has transformed itself into a modernist, this-worldly Sufism. The political struggle against the secularist establishment encouraged practising Muslims to adopt the modernist idea of economic progress.

■ Third, a minority psychology possibly helped to develop a work ethic.

■ Fourth, Islamic values of a new emerging economic class, small and medium-size Anatolian business, have become more influential in Turkish business life. The rising Islamic entrepreneurial class in Turkey is bringing its own work ethic. It includes most of the Protestant work ethic characteristics.

■ Fifth, the Islamic way of life forbids certain leisure activities such as gambling, drinking alcohol, and dancing. It is believed that this Islamic Puritanism discourages consumerism and fosters a saving-oriented attitude among practising Muslims.

This research emphasises the importance of the relationship between religious culture and business practices. The results of this paper show, firstly, that the nineteenth-century Weberian criticism of Islam in terms of economic behaviour is not valid in the Turkish case. Secondly, it seems that religious motives are still important in business life. A clear conclusion of this research is that Turkish Sufi movements are playing a role which is similar to eighteenth-century Calvinism in Northern Europe. In practice, the role of the Islamic ethic and heritage should be considered an important factor in business ethics in Turkey.

References

Ilim ve Sanat, 1997, Basyazi (editorial), No. 43.