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# **Cultural And Subcultural Differences And Similarities Between The Iran And New Zealand Based On Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions**

As the second largest economy in the Middle East and North Africa Region, Iran (the Islamic Republic of Iran) is a very important trade partner for New Zealand. In 2017, New Zealand exported \$120 million of goods to Iran and imports totaled \$6.8 million. Despite the uncertain global environment, the trades between the two countries are still increasing in a steady way. As managers in the two countries increasingly find themselves working across borders, their list of cultural contradictions continues to grow. There are many profound challenges of diversity in the two countries, such as diversity in regulations, business practices, and culture. This article will compare cultural and subcultural differences and similarities between the two countries based on core cultural dimensions. Since comparing cultural dimensions may provide only a thumbnail sketch of some general trends between the two cultures, some detailed information about the two countries cultures will be discussed in the third part. At last, some advice will be given for managers who work across these two countries to build mutually beneficial interpersonal and multicultural relationships with people in different parts of the world in order to overcome these challenges and take advantage of the opportunities presented by the turbulent global environment.

Iran (also known as Persia), with a population of more than 80 million, is home to one of the world's oldest civilization, locating in West Asia. Iran is considered as a multicultural country due to its numerous ethnics and linguistic groups. Iran also is a special country that is integrated with politics and religion. Zoroastrianism is the national faith of Iran, which has had a significant influence on Iranian culture, therefore, most innate beliefs, values, and patterns of social behavior can be traced back to their religion. For example, Iranian business persons tend to do business in a very formal and conservative manner; Women and children's rights in Iran are described as seriously inadequate; Friday in Iran is deemed as a dead day, except in some restaurants, nobody will go to work. However, contrary to Iran, New Zealand is a democratic country, which is immersed in western cultures. The cultural norms of New Zealand have distinct differences from that of Iran. For example, New Zealand people tend to business in a quite casual way; employees are likely to think of their personal interests before making decisions.

According to Nardon and Steers (2009), about six models of national cultures, proposed by Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, Hofstede, Hall, Trompenaars, Schwartz, and House and his GLOBE associates, are widely cited and utilized in studying cross-cultural communications. However, each of the six models highlights different aspects of societal beliefs, norms or values. Another Chinese scholar Tony Fang proposed an dialectical approach (six above models were deemed as bipolar paradigm) to study national cultures and international cross-cultural management, which sees the whole world as an ocean and each national culture linking to the ocean as having a life of its own full of dynamics and paradoxes in the era of globalization. To some extent, we have to admit that globalization has led to nations becoming more and more alike. Although the use of cultural dimensions is considered as only the beginning of a more detailed study, it can be helpful to understand differences in cultural trends between the two locales. So

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in the following parts, we will use the most popular core cultural dimensions, which is a convergence of the six models, to analyze the cultural differences and similarities of Iran and New Zealand.

#### Power distribution (hierarchical-egalitarian)

Based on the scores from Hofstede country comparison, we can see that Iran and New Zealand have a big difference on power distance, Iran high to 58, while New Zealand 22. Iran, as a high power distance society, would easily accept the hierarchical order in most of the organizations where everyone has a place and there is no need for further justification of inequalities among people. According to Javidan and Dastmalchian (2003), Iran's culture also bestows excessive privilege and status on those in positions of power and authority and does not tolerate much debate or disagreement. Therefore, Iranian people prefer to be addressed with their titles to show their social statuses, like Vice president Mr. Muhamad. At the same time, the culture has strong orientation on organizational or personal achievement and performance due to its prosperity in the past history. While in New Zealand, the hierarchy is just a structure for organizations to operate their companies and employees in an efficient way. Leaders and managers are always accessible and individual employees are highly respected and relied on in the organization. People prefer to be addressed by their names directly. For example, frontline workers could sit at the same table to have a lunch with their managers, discussing how to improve productivity, while this scenario would seldom happen in Iran.

Another big difference in power distance between the two countries is women's right. Women workers are strictly restrained by laws or social security regulations in Iran. For example, in Iran, according to the law, married women must get their husbands' permission to obtain a passport, so many companies will not hire women on extensive travel jobs. However, in New Zealand, women are considered to have the same right as men.

#### Social relationships (individualistic-collectivistic)

Compared to New Zealand's 79, Iran, with a score of 41, is considered as a collectivistic society. According to Hofstede's research, in a collective society, individuals are likely to belittle their own personal goals and compromise to the rules made by collectives. Individuals are primarily motivated by the social norms or family duties related to those collectives, which highlight their family loyalty and in-group orientation. In Iranian culture, the family unit is not only the greatest foundation of the society but also the strongest social institution. For instance, in Iran, all the family members live together until they get married and are ready to begin their own lives. Promotions or hiring in the business, always takes account of a person's family or groups. Notably different, New Zealand people are quite independent to their extended families. It is a kind of a shame to live with parents when a kid growing to a certain age. The decision of hiring or promoting employees is based on their merits or capacities rather than social status or family relationships.

#### Environmental relationships (mastery-harmony)

Environmental relationships could be explained partly by using Hofstede's Masculine/feminine dimension. We can see that Iran is a relatively feminine society with a score of 43. In a feminine society, people strive for quality of life and focus on welling-beings, but one difference is that Iran has a strict social status as we stated in the previous paragraphs, which is opposite to its

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feminine characteristic. From June to August, most Iranian businessmen would be on holiday, and people spend most of their time with families. New Zealand scores 58 on this dimension and is considered a “Masculine” society. Based on masculine, New Zealanders are more likely to work for achievements in life, and people strive to be the best when working or studying. But actually, New Zealand is not a typical masculine society, New Zealanders, to some extent are quite thoughtful to keep a good relationship with their surroundings. Like Iranians, New Zealanders pay a lot of attention to the quality of life. Two countries have different entertainment, New Zealanders are extraverted, like outdoor sports, Iranian are more conservative, more family activities.

Based on the environmental relationship, both countries tend to live in harmony with their surrounding environment. However, Iran tends to give more power and privilege to authority and dignity. In New Zealand, people are more equally treated.

#### Time and work patterns (monochronic-polychronic)

According to Hall (2000), all cultures with high technologies seem to be the combination of both monochronic and polychronic functions. The more recent study taken by Beckham (2017) in 2017 illustrated that Iran could be considered as a polychronic culture, which means persons in Iran can do multiple things at the same time. For example, Iranian businessmen tend to interact with different people simultaneously, therefore, their schedules are quite tight. Furthermore, Hall (2000) still found that polychronic culture is easy to create the hierarchy; maybe this could partly explain that Iran has a higher score of power distance. According to Lewis' study (2013), New Zealand is relatively a monochronic culture. Such cultures tend to be focused on the precise planning and arranging of each and every moment. They are ruled by precision to calendars and schedules like monochronic cultures.

Similarly, New Zealanders and Iranians are quite punctual. However, doing business with Iran is quite time consuming because Iranians are good at negotiating and very hard to come to terms. New Zealanders are very efficient, and all jobs are done based on rules.

#### Uncertainty and social control (universalistic-particularistic)

Still based on Hofstede's culture dimension, New Zealand scores 49 showing no preference for avoiding social uncertainty. It proves that New Zealanders are not eager to control the future and just let it happen. People feel quite relaxed with the current situation. However, with a score of 59, Iran is considered a high preference for avoiding uncertainty. Members in a high culture of uncertainty have an emotional need for rules (even if the rules may not work) to avoid uncertainty. People in this culture always feel unsafe for their job security, social well beings, and their future, so people are quite realistic and lack of innovation. For example, it is very hard to build long-term business relationship with Iranian businessmen because they are easy to swerve if your rivalries offer more benefits.

New Zealand is marked as a typical universalist cultural country. People place a high importance on laws, rules, values, and obligations. They try to deal fairly with people based on these rules, but rules come before relationships. However, the culture is more complicated. People prioritize family relationship while still believe that each circumstance, and each relationship, dictates the rules that they live by. Their response to a situation may change, based on what's happening in the moment, and who's involved.

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In a word, the culture of Iran and New Zealand share a lot of similarities, for example, both value kindness, commitment to others as well as respect to the seniors. However, distinct differences are visible, such as the obedience to authority, business work patterns. In the following part, some recommendations will be given for managers who working across these two countries.

Being multicultural competent is very important to work successfully across cultures. Multicultural competence can be described as a cross-cultural sensitivity, understanding other cultures, or culture openness. People always interpret others' behaviors, values, and beliefs through the lens of their own culture. To overcome this tendency, Haghirian (2014) advised that a manager must have a global mindset, be interested in the deepening of cross-cultural understanding and open to new ideas and innovative management processes (products), (consumer preferences), and values. For example, it is super important for people who involved in cross-cultural management to have an accurate overview of the two countries in terms of social, economic and religious backgrounds as well as the way of doing business.

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