

**KAZAKHSTANI MANAGEMENT CULTURE:  
PERCEPTION OF FRENCH MANAGERS**

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## **KAZAKHSTANI MANAGEMENT CULTURE : PERCEPTION OF FRENCH MANAGERS**

The purpose of this paper is to provide an understanding of how French expatriate managers perceive major aspects of the business culture of Kazakhstan. This country, rich in natural resources, recently became open to the world. To succeed in an highly competitive environment of foreign companies installing in Kazakhstan, one should be aware of how to deal with a new market, how to deal with people, how to cope with cross-cultural differences. Based on literature review about culture, the paper is using the cultural dimensions developed by well-known researchers (Hofstede, Schein, Hall, Trompenaars, Adler, etc.) and summarized by Schneider and Barsoux (1997). The empirical study is based on a qualitative research method – an adaptation of the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954) – to explain the peculiarities of Kazakhstani management culture that create problems and difficulties for the 15 interviewed French managers. The results support the argument that the most important difference is about the *nature of reality and truth* dimension stressing the difference between the rationality of French managers as opposed to non-rational behaviors of their Kazakhstani counterparts. The findings of this study indicate also that French managers consider Kazakhstani management culture as a *"being rather than doing"* culture with a *higher degree of uncertainty avoidance; a more collectivist* (family-oriented) and *more particularistic* culture where social orientation prevails over task orientation.. Lastly, the differences in *hierarchical* dimension are only moderately significant for French managers.

**Key words** : cultural dimensions, managerial perceptions, Kazakhstan, cross-cultural research, qualitative studies, critical incident method, French expatriates, international mobility.

L'objet principal de cette contribution est de fournir une compréhension de la perception de managers Français expatriés sur les aspects principaux de la culture "business" au Kazakhstan. Ce pays, riche en ressources naturelles, s'est ouvert récemment au monde entier. Pour réussir dans l'environnement très compétitif des entreprises étrangères qui s'installent au Kazakhstan, on devrait être conscient de la façon dont on aborde un nouveau marché, on interagit avec les personnes, on aborde les différences interculturelles. Sur la base d'une revue de la littérature sur la culture, l'article utilise les dimensions culturelles développées par des chercheurs connus (Hofstede, Schein, Hall, Trompenaars, Adler...) et résumées par Schneider et Barsoux (1997). L'étude empirique est basée sur une méthode de recherche qualitative – une adaptation de la méthode des incidents critiques (Flanagan, 1954) – pour expliquer les particularités de la culture managériale Kazakhe qui créent des problèmes et difficultés pour les 15 managers Français interrogés. Les résultats confirment l'argument selon lequel la différence la plus importante concerne la dimension de *la nature de la réalité et la vérité* mettant en évidence la rationalité des managers Français qui s'oppose aux comportements non-rationnels de leurs homologues Kazakhes. Les résultats de cette étude indiquent aussi que les managers Français considèrent la culture managériale Kazakhe comme une culture plus basée sur *"l'être que le faire"* avec *un haut degré d'évitement du risque*, comme une culture également *plus collective* (orientée famille) et *plus particulariste* dans laquelle l'orientation sociale est plus importante que l'orientation productive. Enfin, les différences sur la dimension *hiérarchique* ne sont que modérément significatives pour les managers Français.

**Mots-clés** : dimensions culturelles, perceptions managériales, Kazakhstan, recherche interculturelle, études qualitatives, méthode des incidents critiques, expatriés Français, mobilité internationale

## Introduction

As one of the largest countries in the world in terms of land area with vast natural resources, Kazakhstan recently became open to the world after the break-up of the Soviet Union. Favorable geographic position (it is located on two continents, Europe and Asia) grants Kazakhstan an important Eurasian geopolitical crossroad, a bridge between West and East. The world of business is becoming global. To succeed in this highly competitive environment, one should constantly look for new markets, new relationships and partners, new sources, etc. Working in emerging markets is a risky process.

One of the key determinants of success in this increasingly global business environment is the extent to which its actors are able to cope with cross-cultural differences. The effective coordination of multinational companies becomes more and more dependent on the success of international or global assignments. According to organizational researchers such as Black, Gregersen, Mendenhal and Stroh (1999), transportation and communication technology, cultural diversity, and geographic dispersion are the main factors that create difficulties in the day-to-day business of international corporations.

This paper is focusing on one of the factors cited by Black et. al (1999) as being a major source of complication in the international business environment: *cultural diversity*. Segalla and Besseyre des Horts (1998) claim that at the present time, there are two main waves of cultural researches in the field of Human Resources management: convergence and divergence theories. While the supporters of the first theory argue that the way of management and enterprise behavior of different countries are becoming similar (universalistic approach), their opponents believe that the world is not becoming homogenous but on the contrary, the cultural differences are strongly maintained. According to Segalla and Besseyre des Horts (1998), the supporters of divergence theory are dominant in cross-cultural research.

After a review of scholarly literature about culture, this paper describes in more detail the specifics of Kazakhstani management culture. Similarly, a rapid review of the characteristics of French culture is provided in order to formulate five research propositions about the perceptions of Kazakhstani management culture by French managers regarding some key dimensions (uncertainty avoidance, being versus doing, nature of truth and reality, universalism versus particularism, individualism versus collectivism). The research methodology proposed in this paper is based on the critical incident method (Flanagan, 1954) with data collected from 15 French managers working in Kazakhstan. Results indicate that French managers perceive Kazakhstani management culture as more oriented than French culture towards higher uncertainty avoidance, being rather than doing, different approaches to truth and reality and human nature, particularism and collectivism.

## Review of the Scholarly Literature about Culture

### Definitions of Culture

A generally accepted definition of Culture is that offered by Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952 cited in Adler, 1986, p.8-9):

*"Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiment in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of future action..."*

According to Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998), all cultures are similar in the problems and dilemmas they have but cultures vary in the way they solve these problems and reconcile dilemmas. Hofstede (1991) defines culture as "software of the mind". It is "*the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another*" (p. 5). By using the word "software", Hofstede stresses the fact that by knowing the mental programming of a particular culture it is possible to understand a people's reactions and behavior. Hofstede emphasizes that culture is learned, not inherited. Edward and Mildred Hall (1990) consider culture as communication. "*The essence of effective cross-cultural communication has more to do with releasing the right responses than with sending the "right" messages.*" (p.4). Another imaginative and interesting definition of culture is given by Black, Gregersen, Mendenhal and Stroh (1999). The authors view culture as a tree, with its visible parts above the surface (tangible aspects of a culture or artifacts) and with its invisible parts below the surface (the values and assumptions). Thus, culture is the set of artifacts, values and assumptions shared by people (explicit aspects) as well as the set of assumptions and values that influence and guide people's behavior and that is passed on from older to younger generations(implicit aspects).

Edgar Schein (1985) distinguishes three interconnected levels of culture: artifacts and creations which are visible manifestation of a culture (language, technology, art); values and ideology which are the rules, principles, norms, values, moral and ethics; and basic assumptions and premises which are unconscious, invisible and create the essence of culture. The set of basic assumptions have evolved over time and are passed on from one generation to another. These assumptions serve to solve the problems of external adaptation (how to survive) and internal integration (how to stay together).

Susan Schneider and Jean-Louis Barsoux (1997) propose to consider cultural dimensions through the perspective of the Schein's definition and synthesize all basic dimensions relevant to management using the works of the following authors: Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961); Schein (1985); Adler (1991); Hofstede (1980, 1991); Hall (1960); Trompenaars (1993).

Schneider and Barsoux organize all above-mentioned dimensions in three patterns: the assumptions to solve the problems of external adaptation and internal integration, and linking assumptions.

The description of cultural dimensions proposed by several well-known authors is given following the above-described schema.

### Dimensions of Culture

#### *External adaptation : relationship with nature*

- *Control* : Do people believe that they can control environment or they accept the force of nature? In many Western countries people believe that nature can be controlled. On the other hand, in many Oriental societies, people believe they have to live in harmony with nature. Cultures vary in the degree to which they believe they have control over the environment and have the capacity to change it.
- *Uncertainty avoidance* : This dimension was proposed by Geert Hofstede (1991). It is the extent to which people accept the uncertainty and ambiguity prevalent in situations and the extent to which they try to avoid such situations by establishing more formal rules, rejecting deviant ideas and adopting a belief in absolute truth. In the countries with a high degree of uncertainty avoidance, people try to establish as much regulations and rules as possible to reduce ambiguity and to make relationships and events clear and predictable. In the countries with a weak degree of uncertainty avoidance, regulations are established in the case of extreme necessity and they can be easily reformulated if needed; problems are often solved without formal rules. Hofstede (1991) points out that technology, law, and religion help people to avoid uncertainties in their life. Technology deals with uncertainties caused by nature, law – with other people behavior, and religion – with more ambiguous and incomprehensible things.

#### *External adaptation : nature of human activity*

- *doing versus being* : this dimension relates to the willingness to act and attitude to the essential question of doing or being: whether people create their own destinies or they should react to and enjoy whatever is provided. People in doing society are more active because they believe that everything is in their hands. In being society people are more passive, they experience their life rather than try to create it.
- *Achievement versus ascription* : The way people judge others is different in different cultures. In an achievement culture, social status is based on one's achievements. In an ascription culture, the status is based on factors such as age, gender, social class, social connections, education or profession. Who you are is therefore more important than what you do.

#### *External adaptation : nature of reality and truth*

Truth may be objective or subjective; it may be based on facts and figures or on the interpretation of facts and figures, on the logic that lies behind them. This dimension is also about what is reality and how it is determined. The way people act and the way they define what information is relevant and what is not are different.

#### *Internal integration : Human nature*

This dimension relates to the perception of human nature as good or evil. In some cultures people are considered as originally evil and sinful. It is supposed that they have to ask forgiveness and have to deserve "paradise". In these culture there is a tendency to suspect people and mistrust them. In other cultures people are considered as basically good and trusted implicitly. It can be interpreted as "people are generally lazy" versus "people work with a pleasure

because the work is natural for human being". In management application it is presented by theory X and theory Y offered by McGregor (McGregor *The Human Side of Enterprise*, McGraw-Hill, 1960 cited in Adler, 1986, p.30).

#### *Internal integration : relationship with people*

- *Universalism versus particularism (social versus task orientation)* : Universalistic cultures are rule-based culture in which all persons should be treated equally with no exceptions. Attention is paid to law, rules, and regulations. The preferential treatment of people is considered as a violation of the rules. Hiring relatives or friends is nepotism. On the other hand, in particularistic cultures, relationships are based on exceptions. People treat others according to the believe of importance to them, not according to any rules, and sometimes despite the rules. Special relationships, such as friendship, are more important than abstract rules. In order to do business, one has to establish trustful relationships with business partners first. Hiring relatives and friends is seen as less risky than hiring a stranger.
- *Affectivity* : This dimension is referred to as neutral versus emotional: the degree to which a culture accepts displays of emotion. There are cultures where emotions are considered as the obstacle for successful or efficient work. In other cultures one's feelings are part of one's work; and it is appropriate to express them.
- *Femininity versus masculinity* : This is the extent to which people prefer values of success, competition, assertiveness, acquisition of money over modesty and concern for others. This dimension was proposed by Hofstede (1991) who clarifies the terms "masculinity" and "femininity". Thus, the masculine behavior is aggressive, tough, and competitive while feminine behavior is more tender and caring. Masculine societies are societies in which "social gender roles are clearly distinct" (Hofstede, 1991, p.82), i.e. men are tough, aggressive and focused on material success, women are tender, modest and focused on family life. Feminine societies are societies in which there is no clear distinction between social gender roles, both men and women are supposed to be modest, not aggressive, and focused on the quality of life.
- *Hierarchy or power distance* : This is the extent to which the less powerful members of society accept unequal distribution of power, the extent to which hierarchy is respected. In other words, it describes how people in different cultures perceive inequality. The Power Distance Index (PDI) calculated by Hofstede (1991) shows the degree of dependency of subordinates on their bosses. In small power distance countries, the dependency is limited, contradiction to a boss is possible, the preference is given to consultation rather than to order, subordinates and superiors are considered equal, hierarchical system is flat.. In large power distance countries, the dependency of subordinates on their bosses is significant., power is usually centralized and hold by a few managers on a high level of hierarchical scale.
- *individualism versus collectivism* : this is the extent to which people are expected to look after themselves and their family only. Individualism, as opposed to Collectivism, is characterized by a loosely versus a tightly knit social framework. In collectivist-oriented societies, people define themselves as members of groups or clans, the interests of the group prevail over the interest of the individual. In individualistic societies, the emphasis on personal characteristics is made, the interests of the individual prevail over the interests of the group. People in these cultures are weak on team, their relationships in the group is less permanent. In work situation people act according to their self interest, therefore the work should be organized in a way that matches the interests of employee and employer.

#### *Linking assumptions : space*

The social context of this dimension was described by Trompenaars, F. and C. Hampden-Turner (1998) as specific versus diffuse, or the range of involvement. It is explained by the authors through the notion of U-type (American) and G-type (German) "life spaces" firstly presented by Kurt Lewin. In the view of researchers, the personality can be considered as a series of concentric circles with "life spaces" or "personality levels" between. The most private space is near the center and the most public space is at the peripheries. U-type circle is the circle with more public than private space, segregated into many specific sections. This is *specific* involvement. By contrast, G-type circle, which is the circle with much more private than public space, one can not enter into your space as easily as in U-type circle. However, if the person is accepted, he (she) is accepted to all spaces: not only public, but private space also. This is *diffuse* involvement.

#### *Linking assumptions : language*

Vern Terpstra and Kenneth David (1991) define language as the repository of the four cultural operations - classifying, coding, prioritizing and justifying reality. It is not a universal means of communication, but a means of communication within a particular culture. The view and perception of the world changes with the changes of the language. Language is one of the strongest forces that unifies or separates communities.

Many authors use a metaphor defining language as the mirror of culture. Czinkota, Rivoli and Ronkainen (1992) consider four important roles of language in international business:

- Gathering and evaluation of information: the manager is more efficient when he/she can rely on his/her personal impression, i.e. when he/she is able to speak the language of the country of his/her work.
- Access to local society;
- Importance to communicate within the company;
- Ability to interpret the context because language is not only the method of communication, it is also the way of living and thinking. The meaning of a message may be lost during the process of translation.

#### *Linking assumption : Communication*

Hall and Hall (1990) make distinctions between high context and low context cultures. "Context is the information that surrounds an event. A high context (HC) communication or message is one in which most of the information is already in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message. A low context (LC) communication is just the opposite; i.e. , the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code." (Edward T. Hall, 1976 cited in Hall and Hall, 1990). Thus, in low context culture, communications are supposed to be clear, direct, and should be assessable, information spreads rapidly and flows freely. Meanings of events are universal. In high context culture, the access to information is a privilege, communication is situational, personal, and subtle: non-directness and ambiguity are encouraged, information is highly focused and controlled. It is an instrument of management and control. The meaning of words and actions depends on the context, on who, why, and under what condition is speaking.

#### *Linking assumption : time*

- *monochronic versus polychronic*

Monochronic time means paying attention to and doing only one thing at a time. In this system, time is experienced and used in a linear way, it is scheduled and compartmentalized. The schedule is extremely important and not a subject to disrupt. Time is extremely valuable and is linked with efficiency. Time is "spent", "well used" or "wasted". On the contrary, in polychronic cultures, time means being involved with many things at once. It is more important to pay attention to human relationships than to schedules and efficiency. Time is less tangible and can be compared to a single point than to a road in this system. Punctuality, deadlines may not have a high value in such societies.

- *Short-term versus long-term orientation*

Hofstede (1991) introduces this new dimension called "Confucian dynamism" or long-term versus short-term orientation to his previous well known framework. This is the extent to which people prefer future-oriented perspective (dynamic thinking) over present-oriented perspective (static thinking).

Summarizing the description of basic cultural dimensions, it is worth to emphasize that culture is always more than just the above-mentioned assumptions and that all discussed dimensions are interrelated (Schein (1988), Schneider and Barsoux (1997)). For example, the character of the relationship with nature has the implications for the nature of human activity and truth. If nature is perceived as dominant in the culture, i.e. people do not believe that nature can be managed, the being activity has a priority, the person himself is more important than what he does. It means that the priority of the ascription is over achievement, relationships are over task performance, the group over the individual, etc. One dimension is always linked with another, and some of them are often presented together.

### **Kazakhstan: General Information and the Management Culture Literature Review**

Kazakhstan declared its independence in 1991 after being one of the republics of the Soviet Union for 70 years. Natural resources, land, a skilled and cheap labor force, political stability, and a favorable geographical location are among the major factors which attract foreign companies to do business in Kazakhstan. The country has enormous rich natural resources. 99 elements among 110 elements of the Mendeleev periodic system are found in the depth of the country. Ethnical kaleidoscope of the country (Kazakhstan counts more than 100 nationalities) is unique because of nationalities' diversity and variety of religions: apart from Kazakhs and people living in neighboring countries such as Russians, Kyrgyzs, Uzbeks, Uighurs, Dungans, etc., there are Koreans, Tatars, Germans who were transferred respectively from Vladivostok, Krym and Volga region by Stalin.

Kazakhs represent the transitive race between European and Mongolian South-Siberian race. In the language respect, Kazakhs belong to the Kipchak group of the Turk languages. Kazakhs are Sunni Muslims (web page of Kazakhstan,

1997). The original lifestyle was herdsmen or nomads till 1930s, when the period of forced collectivization started in the Soviet Union. During the collectivization period, which was characterized by execution and famine between 1926 and 1939, the Kazakh population in the Republic decreased from 3.7 to 2.3 million that is by 38% (Kolstoe, 1995). Part of Kazakhs emigrated to China and Mongolia, but significant decrease in population was due to the execution and starvation. Kazakhstan was the only republic in the Soviet Union in which the titular nation was in minority: 38% of Kazakhs as against 40% Russians in 1930s, 30% as against 42.4% in 1959 (Kolstoe, 1995).

Kazakhstan has undergone the strongest "russification" during the Soviet Union period because of the strong concentration of Russians and also because of the low status of the Kazakh language in the Soviet Union. According to the research made by Kolstoe (1995), less than 1% of Russians in Kazakhstan could speak Kazakh language, and it is the smallest percentage of Russians speaking the titular language among the former Soviet Union republics. At the present time, there are 34% of Russians living mostly in the north of the republic. This significant presence of Russians explains the country's internal policy, late proclamation of the independence and recognition of the Russian language as the language of communication (not the official language) in particular. Kazakh intellectuals declare that only 60% of the Kazakh youth master their native language (Kolstoe, 1995). Russian was and still is the language of conversation in large cities where "elite" is linguistically russified. The last time, nevertheless, rather fast derussification process and the process of national identity are observed: the law imposing the use of Kazakh language was adopted. Cultural organizations directed to the preservation and development of national language, culture, tradition, etc. appeared last time.

In their paper prepared for the research workshop "Privatization in Kazakhstan", Dana Minbaeva and Nigel Holden (1998) propose to use the term *Kazakhstani* management culture as opposed to Kazakh management culture because of ethnic heterogeneity. The percentage of ethnic present in the country with total population 16.5 million is as following (web page of Kazakhstan, 1997): Kazakhs 48%, Russians 34%, Ukrainians about 5%, Germans 3%, Uzbeks 2.4%, Tatars 2%, other ethnic groups are presented in less than 1%: Belarussians, Koreans, Uigurs (more than 100 nationalities in total).

It is reasonable though to describe the Kazakhstani business culture as the synthesis of all ethnic groups' cultural components, but it is true that the business culture is mostly the mixture of Kazakh and Russian components with an influence of other ethnic groups elements. However, it is not as simple as that: the Soviet time had a strong influence upon the management culture. In addition, at the present time of constant changes toward the market relations, the increasing influence of western-type management culture on Kazakhstani culture is observed. The significant presence of business schools providing the western concepts of a free market economy is one of examples.

#### *Political system, law, and economy.*

The Republic of Kazakhstan is a democratic, secular, and unitary state. The President of Kazakhstan is the head of the state. The Parliament of Kazakhstan is bicameral and consists of two chambers. The head of the executive branch of power in the country is the *Government*, which is appointed, reports to the President, and is subject to approval by the Parliament. The Government consists of the Prime minister, two Deputies of the Prime Minister and 12 Ministers (web page of Kazakhstan).

Despite the attempts of the government, the legislative policy is loose because it directs to fulfil a short-term needs of the country in transition (Taylor, 1997). Laws are changed frequently that can be explained by the meeting short-term needs, the parliament is slow to approve them. Some business and activities are still regulated by the old Soviet legislation. As a result, the corruption exists at all levels of highly complicated hierarchical scale. In such atmosphere of bureaucracy, it is crucial for every businessmen to have good connections in order to manage the problems of registration, licensing, transport, taxation, and security (Taylor, 1997). Good connections means the connections with right people: family, friends, friends of friends, etc. However, it mostly means blood relatives (Holden and Minbaeva, 1998).

Kazakhstan was formed and remained as the raw material's adjunct in the economy of USSR: the country has the primary economy, mining industry and agriculture (web page of Kazakhstan). At the present time, the country is the biggest producer of ferrous and non-ferrous metals, uranium, coal, oil, corn, and products of stock-breeding. Even now, the country remains dependent on Russian economy because Russia is the biggest major trading partners.

To overcome a crisis, Kazakhstan began the privatization process in 1993. The policy to attract foreign capital is announced. The establishment of joint ventures, representative offices, and subsidiaries was aimed to encourage the foreign investments in the economy. It included small and medium scale, mass, and case-by-case privatization. The program was ambitious, but slow in implementation. However, there are some inefficient enterprises and public assets



such as education and medical organization, organizations of social infrastructure which require enormous government subsidies. Besides, government support are required to resolve the problems of inter-enterprise difficulties: e.g. inefficient enterprise is incapable to pay its debts blocking the activity of its partner.

#### *Hierarchy and Managerial career.*

In Kazakhstan as well as in the countries of the former Soviet Union, the successful management career traditionally means the vertical promotion from “rank-and-file to the top of the government or political establishment rather than a company level” (Zhuplev and Kozhakhmetov, “Business Education in Kazakhstan : Ramification Under Transition », p. 69, 1997). To be a member of *nomenklatura*, hierarchy of positions in the key functional areas of government and business administration, is to be a member of the wealthy and powerful group. Elements of nepotism and relations are still important for successful management career in state enterprises. According to Holden and Minbaeva (1998) state organizations are still highly complicated, centralized and vertically structured, they still have a rigid decision-making structures.

In the opinion of Chinese researcher Chzhen Kun Fu (1999) who spent five years in Kazakhstan studying geopolitical problems of the country, one of the main reasons of the crisis is the people mentality. He claims that more than seventy years of communist ideology could not pass without trace: the people mentality, their habits, the way of work remain the same.

#### **French Business Culture**

In order to understand the perception of Kazakhstani business culture by French managers better, one has to be acquainted with their business culture: how French business methods are perceived in the world, what place this culture has. Philippe d'Iribarne (1989) claims that it is the logic of the honor that reigns in French society. People have a very strong sense of honor: honor is more important than everything else: money, career, etc. The logic is to accomplish the duties that are set by habit: it is by these duties that groups are identified. The logic is to do the job well: there is a proud of the work that is well done. The job's duties and privileges together characterize the identity of each group.

#### *Hofstede (1991) cultural dimensions*

Concerning the dimension of hierarchy, France is considered as a large *power distance* country where there is a considerable dependence of subordinates on bosses. Barsoux and Lawrence (1991) assert that France has a long tradition of hierarchical rigidity, respect for authority, and centralization. According to them, French companies are highly hierarchical with the *président-directeur-général* (PDG) at the head. D'Iribarne (1989) writes about existing classic images of French hierarchy: centralization, the strong power of the boss, the distance between superior and subordinate.

Hofstede's (1991) findings concerning *masculinity and femininity* place France on 35/36 position (among 53 countries). Thus, France is rather moderate feminine culture where more tender, not aggressive behavior for both women and men is appreciated. The compromise and negotiation rather than good fight or even physical violence, are the methods of conflict resolving.

As far as *uncertainty avoidance* is concerned, French culture is found to be rather strongly oriented towards an high level of uncertainty avoidance. It means that French culture is characterized by the existence of many rules regulating the duties and rights of workers. Hall and Hall (1990) write about famous rigid French bureaucracy with high centralization.

France has a reputation of *individualistic* society with all attributes of it: e.g. they are not good team players from the American perspective, they are not responsive to other people's needs, they don't like to follow the crowd (Hall and Hall, 1990). One has to understand the importance of pride and self-respect of the French to motivate people to cooperate because France is the country of *individualists*: individuality is highly respected.

#### *Other cultural dimensions*

The individualistic dimension is related to the *Social versus Task* dimension. As in an individualistic society, in France, hiring persons from the family may be considered as nepotism and is undesirable. From this point of view, France could be considered as universalistic culture where task prevails over relationships. However, there is a specific network of graduates of "Grandes Ecoles" which plays significant role in the government and business structure of France. People at the top levels are mostly people of this elite group of graduates who maintain school ties after graduation (Hall and

Hall, 1990). Therefore, speaking about French culture, one has to keep in mind the importance of the professional network of elite schools graduates. Personal contacts are extremely important for making a business.

In addition, Hall and Hall (1990), in their comparative study of French, German, and American cultures, mention the importance of not only professional, but social connections also: they point out that it is possible to find the general director of the company who has his position through the marriage or connections. D'Iribarne (1989) highlights the fact that the informal relations keep significant place in French management practice. It is very important that people 'have contacts'. To achieve a high level of professional cooperation, one needs positive relations. Some characteristics of previous dimension are also the characteristics of *Space* dimension. The importance of the connections goes further to the close long-term relationships of the salespeople with their customers as one of examples (Hall and Hall, 1990). According to the researchers, these are important for making a business in France.

One of characteristics of French businessmen is their capacity for quantitative thought and the importance they give to the numbers (Barsoux and Lawrence, 1991). The strategy formulation process highly depends on the number processing. This characteristic could be considered from the perspective of *Nature of reality and truth* dimension. The requirements of strong mathematics knowledge and skills for entrance into "Grandes Ecoles" and Universities is the confirmation of this. French business people require all figures they can see when studying another company: to estimate the situation, they need to analyze everything and to have their own conclusion. The summary reports made by the management of the company are not enough. There is an admiration and respect of logic: the logic is the basis of French managers thinking.

Another feature of this dimension is that French managers prefer the *written communication*, all commitments should be get in writing (Barsoux and Lawrence, 1991). Foreign managers, especially managers of those countries where commitments could be done verbally, should be careful: French people like formality and written arrangements.

In comparison with German and American, French business culture is considered as *high-context* and *polychronic* (Hall and Hall, 1990). It means that the information does not flow freely, subordinates do not have some information from their bosses often, people like doing many things at the same time, interruptions are possible.

## **Research Propositions**

The theoretical assumptions described in the previous pages are guidelines to explain the peculiarities of Kazakhstani culture that create problems and difficulties for French managers. These assumptions serve as tools to highlight important dimensions of the studied culture which will not be deciphered fully and profoundly.

The main differences between French and Kazakhstani cultures can be explained by the notorious differences between Soviet and Western systems. Soviet administration is famous for its high centralization, strong hierarchy, and planned organization. This system still works in state enterprises and organizations of Kazakhstan. Even if the system is constantly changing, the problems of the former methods of organization remain. People used to live in strongly planned and centralized environment with numerous rules and regulations, they used to obey to a higher power. All decisions were taken by the Center and had to be implemented by the rest of the organization. It means that initiative was dangerous, passive behavior was encouraged. Thus, Kazakhstani business culture can be described as a highly centralized hierarchy, preference to a being behavior with strong uncertainty avoidance (according to Hofstede, 1991's cultural dimensions). Therefore, one may expect that the main difficulties experienced by French managers are problems relating to hierarchy (power distance), uncertainty avoidance, and doing versus being dimensions.

In this perspective, the following research propositions may be formulated :

**Proposition 1:** French managers perceive Kazakhstani management culture as a *higher uncertainty avoidance* culture than the French management culture.

**Proposition 2:** French managers consider Kazakhstani management culture as a *larger power distance* culture than the management culture of France.

**Proposition 3:** French managers perceive Kazakhstani management culture as *being rather than doing* culture.

**Proposition 4:** French managers perceive Kazakhstani management culture as a culture built upon *different nature of truth and reality* compare with the French management culture : non-rational versus rational .

Other anticipated differences relate to individualism versus collectivism dimension. The family-oriented, relational culture of Kazakhstan should be different for French people who have the reputation of individualists. As it was mentioned above, all cultural dimensions more or less interrelated. The dimension of individualism versus collectivism is closely related with the social versus task and space dimensions. The strong sense of family, which is one of

characteristics of Kazakh culture, influences the work behavior of people from the perspective of all these three dimensions. Therefore, the following research propositions may be formulated:

**Proposition 5:** French managers perceive Kazakhstani management culture as more *particularistic (social rather than task orientation) culture* than the French management culture.

**Proposition 6:** French managers perceive Kazakhstani management culture as more *collectivist* culture than the French management culture.

## **Research methodology**

*Data collection method : critical incident approach (Flanagan, 1954)*

The study uses qualitative research method that allows to understand the differences between two cultures perceived by French managers. The study uses an adaptation of the *critical incident method* developed by Flanagan (1954). A critical incident is defined as a procedure for collecting certain important facts concerning any observable human activity in a defined situation. A critical incident in this study is an event or behavior that defines the problems of French managers when working in Kazakhstan. In other words, critical incidents are specific for French managers characteristics of a new for them Kazakhstani business culture. A record of incidents (a number of specific observations of particular differences) are collected and analyzed in order to provide a relatively objective description of Kazakhstani business culture peculiarities perceived by French managers<sup>1</sup>.

To identify critical incidents, the interviews with French managers of Joint Ventures and French companies in Kazakhstan were conducted and audio-taped. Each interview was about 20 minutes (the shortest one) and more than one hour-long (the longest one). The anonymity of data was provided. In the case of unwillingness of interviewees to record the conversation on the tape, the tape recorder was not used. The list of French companies and joint ventures was received in the Kazakhstan embassy in France. The initial contact with French managers was done by fax indicating the general aims of interview asked. In total, thirteen interviews were conducted. Among them, only one was not allowed to be audio-taped, it was written up during the conversation. A tape recorder was used for the rest interviews. However, it is worth to emphasize that some managers were very cautious in describing their problems while working in Kazakhstan, and they have not had a strong desire to say "bad things" about Kazakhstani management culture.

Fifteen managers took part in interviews: two interviews were conducted with two managers together each. The gender composition is the following: twelve men and three women. Interviews were conducted in French. Interviewees were asked to describe the circumstances of the specific situations in which they experienced problems. Questions asked are as follows:

- *"Entering a new country is not an easy process. The differences between cultures of your country and Kazakhstan may sometimes cause problems. Can you describe, in detail, when you feel bad about your job working with Kazakhstani managers. Could you provide me with examples from your own personal experience?"*
- *"I am trying to learn in detail what differences in business cultures exist between Kazakhstan and France"*
- *"What do you advise to French managers to know about Kazakhstani management culture before they come to work in Kazakhstan?"*

Multiple incidents were collected from each interview. The problems were sorted and categorized into cultural dimensions described in the review of the scholarly literature. Some of the generated critical incidents were dropped because they were not relevant. All items were inserted in the table that lists each category (cultural dimension). The list of the sorted and categorized problems made for each interview is presented in the appendix. The next step is to determine the size of each category (frequency of critical incidents' emerging). For all interviewees, the table is arranged in the following way:

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<sup>1</sup> Schein (1988) emphasizes that to uncover cultural assumptions one has to

- avoid the subjectivity bias of outsider who "inevitably imposes his own categories of meanings onto observed events, and these interpretations are incorrect to an unknown degree" (p.113), and
- overcome internal invisibility of insider who has difficulties in defining the basic assumptions as they are taken for granted.

Cultural dimensions	Interviewees	1	2	..	13	Frequency of emerging	Percent %
<b>External adaptation</b>							
Relationship with nature:							
- control		X			X		
- uncertainty avoidance				X			
Nature of human activity :							
- doing versus being		X		X			
- achievement versus ascription		X			X		
Nature of reality and truth				X			
<b>Internal integration</b>							
Human nature					X		
Nature of human relationships :							
- social versus task orientation (particularism/universalism)		X		X			
- affectivity		X			X		
- femininity/masculinity		X		X			
- hierarchy (power distance)		X		X	X		
- individualism/collectivism					X		
<b>Linking assumptions</b>							
Space		X			X		
Language		X					
High-low context communication				X			
Time			X				

X - this sign means that the problem concerning the particular item appeared during the interview.

#### Validation of research propositions

It was determined that the category size of more than 50% could be used to validate propositions. For example, if the size of the category *collectivism versus individualism* is more than 50%, the proposition 6 stating that French managers consider Kazakhstani management culture as more *collectivist* culture than the management culture of France could be considered as validated proposition.

By defining the largest critical incident categories the method allows to determine the degree of significance of problems that French managers experience working in Kazakhstan. The levels of frequency of critical incidents' emerging or the sizes of each category are classified following the quarterly percent interval. The intervals and their coding are as following:

Interval (%)	Frequency of emerging	Coding
0 – 25%	Very low	The problems caused by the existence of the differences in the cultural dimension are <b>insignificant</b> for French managers working in Kazakhstan
25% - 50%	Low	The problems caused by the existence of the differences in the cultural dimension are <b>moderately significant</b> for French managers working in Kazakhstan
50% - 75%	High	The problems caused by the existence of the differences in the cultural dimension are <b>significant</b> for French managers working in Kazakhstan
75% - 100%	Very high	The problems caused by the existence of the differences in the cultural dimension are <b>highly significant</b> for French managers working in Kazakhstan

#### Research limitations

One of the research limitation concerns the fact that almost all interviewed managers work in Almaty. The city which has been the capital of Kazakhstan till very recent time (Astana is the present capital since 1998) is still economical, business, and cultural center of the country. All foreign enterprises, embassies, organizations, etc. have their offices in Almaty, many of them are present only in Almaty. The mentality of people, the infrastructure, the general development of the city are different from those of all other cities and parts of Kazakhstan. One can't judge the management culture of Kazakhstan taking into account the peculiarities of the only city, the center. However, it is the representative of the country. Only a few of interviewed managers have an experience of working outside of Almaty.

Another limitation concerns the validation of research interpretation. Critical incidents collected from each interview were sorted and categorized by the main author. This categorization, i.e. research interpretation was not discussed with interviewed managers.

A last research limitation relates to the fact that French managers contributing to this research are managers of companies of various types of organizations. Some key factors affecting perceptions of these managers have not been controlled in this study : the corporate culture of each company, the size and business sector.

## Results and Discussion

The final table with collected and categorized critical incidents is as following (the lines underlined in gray color correspond to the research propositions stated above) :

Cultural Dimension / Interviewees (number)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	Frequency of emerging	Percent %	Level of frequency
<b>External adaptation</b>																
Relationship with nature:																
- control											X			1	7.7	Very low
- uncertainty avoidance		X	X		X	X	X		X	X		X	X	9	69.2	High
Nature of human activity :																
- doing versus being	X		X	X	X	X			X	X				7	53.8	High
- achievement versus ascription														0	0	
Nature of reality and truth	X	X	X	X	X		X	X			X	X	X	10	76.9	Very high
<b>Internal integration</b>																
Human nature	X			X	X	X	X			X	X		X	8	61.5	High
Nature of human relationships :																
- social versus task orientation (particularism/universalism)		X	X	X			X	X	X	X		X		8	61.5	High
- affectivity														0	0	
- femininity/masculinity		X									X			2	15.4	Very low
- hierarchy (power distance)	X			X	X			X	X	X				6	46.2	Low
- individualism/collectivism	X	X	X	X						X	X	X		7	53.8	High
<b>Linking assumptions</b>																
Space	X		X				X	X		X	X	X		7	53.8	High
Language	X	X		X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	10	76.9	Very high
High-low context communication		X						X			X	X		4	30.8	Low
Time		X		X	X		X	X		X				6	46.2	Low
Corruption		X	X	X		X	X			X				6	46.2	Low

Before going deeper into discussions of the difficulties that French managers have when working in Kazakhstan, it is important to clarify things and give some details observed by interviewees themselves. First of all, the clear distinction should be made between state own organization and privatized enterprise styles of management. Secondly, almost all managers have emphasized the difference in mentality of younger and older generations: while older generation (people who are more than forty years old) still have some kind of nostalgia the former, stable, and habitual for them Soviet time and style of work; the younger generation is more flexible and have a strong desire to learn new methods of work, foreign languages, etc. This opposition of generations underlined by the majority of the interviewed managers is important to remember.

### *External adaptation :relationship with nature*

#### - uncertainty avoidance

This category, presented by Hofstede (1991) relates to the extent to which people of different cultures accept uncertain situations. People of cultures of higher degree of uncertainty avoidance establish more rules and regulations in order to reduce uncertainties encountered in everyday situation.

The countries of the former Soviet Union have experienced highly centralized control for more than 70 years. Centralization helped to reduce uncertainty avoidance and to have a powerful control over all parts of people's life. This is a main reason of a great fear to make a mistake, to take initiative. People of the older generation have a strong sense of helplessness and they are afraid of taking decisions.

France, in the studies of Hofstede (1991), has a relatively high score of uncertainty avoidance index. However, differences of this dimension create problems for French managers. A high frequency of critical incidents' emerging of this dimension (69.2%) illustrates the point. Many interviewees mention difficulties which relate to uncertainty avoidance degree: heavy bureaucracy, centralization, detailed and strict law. In order to avoid the repetitions only some expressions highlighting the difficulties connected with this dimensions are quoted:

*"...work is difficult here because of hyper centralization, strict regulations, numerous personal categorization..." [9]*  
*"...great difficulties are observed on the administrative level. There are more rules here, the law is more strict than in France, fees are more important. You have to justify yourself in a more precise manner everywhere: in bank, juridical instances, etc. If you have mistakes, it is more difficult to justify... We spend many time on administration. In France, it is also complicated, but it is easier there..." [6]*

However, despite the fact that the situation is changing in a positive direction, not only French, but all western managers suffer from the existence of heavy bureaucracy and administration which is one of the biggest obstacles for them to work in Kazakhstan.

To avoid ambiguities in the work, in other people behavior, there is a high concentration on law and regulation design. It causes difficulties for French managers:

*"There is a lots of paper! I have twice as many accountants as I need. I do not need so many, but everything must be precise. There is a focus on details or substances" [7]*  
*"you have to know the law very well to work in Kazakhstan... It is very prescriptive and detailed. In France, we used to do business almost without law, i.e. by experience! Here, law interferes in your work without stops: this you can do, this - not. You think that you can do something like in France, but it could be forbidden. Here, there is no experience, many things did not exist before, it is a law that dictates directly what you can do and you can not." [12-2]*

In summary, perceptions of French managers are likely to validate proposition 1 according to which they consider Kazakhstani management culture as a higher uncertainty avoidance culture than their own culture.

### *External adaptation : nature of human activity*

#### - doing versus being

As it was mentioned earlier, the "being" takes priority over the "doing" behavior in the cultures where people do not believe to dominate the nature. While people of doing cultures are more active and try to achieve something in their life, people of being cultures exhibit passive behavior. The interviews with foreign managers prove the assumption that Kazakhstan is being rather than doing culture. The Soviet regime influenced people's behavior. Initiative was not encouraged, the slogans were: continue to work like you work now or do what you are told to do. The passivity, the absence of initiative create difficulties not only for French but for all western managers. The level of frequency of the dimension problems emerging is high (53.8%). The majority of interviewees complained about these problems. There is no willingness to take initiative, to take responsibility :

*"...I would say people have 'ostrich behavior': they know the problem, but they hide their heads. The problem remains. The reason, I think, is in the Soviet Union heritage: standardization of everything, people follow norms and rules: it kills the initiative, it makes people passive. People have instructions and procedures, there is no desire to take initiative, to change things..." [5]*

While the western system is run by the notion of profitability, to gain money, receive profit, obtain interest, the Soviet system had different objectives.

*“...the labor cost did not exist. In western countries, it is extremely expensive because of salary, social security, etc. It is not the same way to understand and view things. There are no capitalist references: interest was to MAINTAIN PRODUCTION. Everything was organized by the state, there were no costs, everything was public...” [1]*

It is worth to emphasize that in this case, working for state or privatized enterprise does not play an important role. Managers from both types of organization: state and private notice the problems of initiative, creativeness, passivity, and responsibility :

*“There is not much initiative. People do not come with many ideas. I think because people, especially older employees, they are still in Soviet style, for them it is difficult to change. Before, there was no need to make profit, the whole system was based on that everybody has equal sharing of profit, revenues, etc. If you are not successful, you still could survive due to authorities. Now, it is changing, people get used to the fact that they have to make money to survive, they have to eat.” [1]*

It would be worth to highlight the difference between the mentality of old and young people once more. In the opinion of some interviewees, the process of adaptation of the younger generation to a new style of work is extremely fast; but it is difficult for the older generation:

*“for people who always lived in a different way from our society it is almost impossible to change. Nobody was responsible, it was the kingdom of impersonality. The state, impersonal state is a monster which created anonymous society where there is no personal responsibility.” [1]*

Thus, one can observe the negative influence of the Soviet system on the levels of passivity, lack of initiative and responsibility, and the absence of creativeness among the older generation. The system called by one of the managers "anonymous society" had a different economic view. The elements of this anonymous society such as total standardization, existence of norms, work segmentation, high hierarchical administration scale, total centralization, and false equality were the cause of all problems mentioned in this paragraph. There are unquestionable elements of validation of proposition 3 that hypothesizes the perception of Kazakhstani management culture as "being rather than doing" culture by French managers.

#### *External adaptation : nature of reality and truth*

The way of determining truth varies from one culture to another. People of different cultures judge the reality differently. The majority of French managers experience difficulties relating to this dimension. This category turned out to be one of the largest category. The level of frequency of critical incidents' emerging is very high (76.9%). The reality was perceived differently during the Communist era. All decisions were imposed from above, employees were supposed to follow their bosses without any right for their own opinion. As a result, the notion of personal responsibility was transformed into the notion of collective responsibility: everyone is collectively responsible, but nobody personally. There was a gap between what has to be done and what is the reality. These problems are noticed by many managers: contracts, signature responsibility, data etc.:

*“...I notice the following thing. Kazakhstani managers sign the contract, but they have no money. It happens often. It is the inverse process: they are looking for the sources to perform contract after the signature, not before like in France..” [3]*

*“I have seen it many times. People sign contract, project starts, and then, suddenly, in the end of the month your partner stops his activity.” [7]*

*“...the level of management is zero, it is nothing, it is catastrophic. Management never knows what situation it has now, where they are now on the level of performance. They did not understand why it is important. There are reports, etc., but the numbers in these reports are not good at all, they are not true... Local managers do not hesitate to remake numbers in order to follow standards, they invent something easily. All statistics are false. People tell their bosses what they want to hear, not what is in reality. Balance performance is awful. They change figures of profit and loss account to have a good balance.” [5]*

Taking into account the importance French managers give to numbers and logic it is easy to understand why French managers experience great problems relating to this dimension. One can conclude that the rational approach used by French managers to describe truth and reality rather strongly contradicts with their perception of truth and reality in Kazakhstani management culture. The evidence collected in the interviews validates proposition 4 regarding the difference of perception of truth and reality in Kazakhstani and French cultures.

#### *Internal integration : human nature*

The frequency of critical incidents' emerging of this dimension is high (61.5%). The perception of human nature by French and Kazakhstani managers is different from the point of view of French managers. One of the observations made by many managers concerns the service notion. The service notion reflects how people treat each other, how they perceive the human.

One of the relics of the Soviet time Era is the absolute absence of such notions as *service and customer*. The western slogan "the customer is king" was completely alien to the soviet way of administration and management. French managers were shocked by different mentality.

*"...people mentality is the biggest problem ... It is difficult to work with people: there is no notion of service at all, no willingness to anticipate customers' desire. The great challenge that I had with my staff was to make them understand the service notion. People have problems with the smile, they do not understand that with a smile they can achieve much more than with the manner they act."* [10-1]

One of the managers is surprised by the existence of the gap between the complete absence of service notion in the administration and the ability of Kazakh people to serve personal guests in the best way. He is pleased to note the Kazakh hospitality, politeness, tact, correctness, curiosity, ability to learn and serve without losing dignity. He said that in the personal sphere the notion of service is working very well: people know how to receive guests. Unfortunately, a high appreciation of people traditionally kept by Kazakhs was not transferred to the soviet style of working where people were more demanders rather than a customers.

The former ideology of total suspicion, control, and verification has had a deep influence on people mentality. *"In Kazakhstan, you are guilty a priori; in France, you are not guilty a priori..."* [6]

In the opinion of this manager, there is a tendency to suspect people and mistrust them. His view is shared by other managers:

*"...the first people reaction is mistrust and suspicion. They say to themselves: attention, he wants to have us. I think it is not only toward foreigners: it is my partners, Kazakh partners who deal with customers, with other companies, etc. For example, when you introduce a new product to them... They think immediately whether this product is a true product or it is a falsification. It is difficult for me to understand. They always doubt. You have to always create the trust atmosphere, present the certificate. However, as soon as you created good relations you do not have such problems."* [4]

The mistrust and suspicion could also be explained by the economic situation of the country at the present time. During the transition period from soviet era where there was no choice at all to new market relations where many new products and types of service invaded the country, there are enormous kinds of "pirate" things, falsified products, etc. People have had many problems with that, as a result, there is a certain suspicion which is reasonable in this situation.

One of the manager notices *"management paradox in Kazakhstan. There are so many norms and standards to be kept, people know about all of them, and they follow them formally, but not profoundly. You can easily observe a bad quality of the work because of this. You have to always check. There is no trust, you have to be always behind people to check that they are working well"*. [6] In other words, this manager applies the theory X described in the theory observation (McGregor, 1960 cited in Adler, 1986). In this theory, workers are supposed to be lazy and need to be supervised and controlled.

#### *Internal integration : nature of human relationships*

##### - social versus task orientation (particularism/universalism)

Do French managers view Kazakhstani business culture as universalistic (task orientation) culture where rules reign the society and where all people are treated equally? Or do they view it as particularistic (social orientation) culture where relationships are more important than rules, where people are treated on the basis of relations? 61.5% (high frequency of critical incidents' emerging) of French managers consider Kazakhstani management culture as a culture of social rather than task orientation. It is the country of *particularism*. It is the rule of the Kazakhstani society to always help family and friends. Cheating in order to help friends during exam is the question of honor, giving the job to cousins rather than to unknown people is normal. People easily break rules in the favor of their relatives and friends. From universalistic point of view such an attitude is a corruption. French managers perceive nepotism as corruption. Interpersonal relations are very important for Kazakhstani people.

*"...connections... It is important. To do a certain business, you have to know certain people. Big positions in the administration are always given on the basis of acquaintance: the husband of top manager's daughter, relatives, friends, etc."* [10-2]

*"The main problem for me is to make people understand that we have different system: it is the equality that rules our organization. In local organizations it is not. They treat customers differently. They treat them on the basis of personal attitude: if he is M. X, he has advantages; there are preferential problems."* [9]



“...it is relational country. It is necessary to create warm atmosphere with your partners and customers to work well...” [7]

As it was mentioned earlier in the description of French business culture, social connections and relations are important in France. However, Kazakhstani culture is perceived by French managers as more social oriented than their own culture. Thus, proposition 5 is validated: French managers perceive Kazakhstani culture as more particularistic than the French management culture.

- hierarchy

The main idea of this dimension is about how people perceive inequality. This is the extent to which hierarchy is respected. As it was mentioned before, the studies of Hofstede (1991) show that France is considered as a relatively large power distance country. France has a long tradition of hierarchical rigidity, respect of authority, and centralization. Soviet centralization and control with a highly hierarchical bureaucracy contributed to the creation of a strong respect and obedience to the authority. The status and position were more important than a person himself.

As it was discussed earlier, being versus doing dimension is interrelated with the present dimension. The problem of initiative is the problem of hierarchical scale organization: “...the notion of initiative is different. In France, you have to discuss possible solution to problems to find right decision. In Kazakhstan, it was dangerous to be initiative as the proposal could be wrong. You became guilty: you destroy or damage the industrial machine. In France, initiative comes from a lower level to the top. If it is good (the verification and approval is done by top management level), it is applied and implemented. It is never dangerous because it makes people think. In Kazakhstan, it is not possible. It is always the top management who decides what, where, when, and how things should be done. Nobody in a lower level of hierarchical scale pays attention whether it is a good idea or not, they just do it. For older generation who have always worked like this, it is impossible to change. There is the fear of initiative, the fear to recommend something to a boss because he/she may not like this idea.” [1]

According to French managers' observations, Kazakhstan in comparison with France is the culture with a higher degree of power distance acceptance. In this larger power distance atmosphere, the dependency on the boss is high, contradiction to a higher authority is almost impossible, people easily accept the dependency.

“The notion of hierarchy is stronger here, much stronger than in France. In some societies, and it is in Kazakh mentality,... there is one boss, and then...around him there is nothing...very often, there is no responsibility delegation. It seems to me that it is rather new - to delegate responsibility. It is ever-present in government and administration. The boss decides, others execute.” [4]

The absence of the delegation of responsibility is one of characteristics of a highly centralized system and a strong hierarchy. The phrases like “People tend to often accept what higher people tell them to do” [10-2] are typical for French managers expressing their opinion about Kazakhstani culture.

The situation described above is typical for state owned organization where the soviet high centralized administration is still in presence. It is also true for places where older people are the majority of the employees. In private and foreign companies the situation is changing: “...yes, it is changing due to young people. They are very eager to learn, to change, to know new ways of working. For them, it is an advantage to have the possibility to speak, to propose things, to take decisions together...It is a part of my work here, the pedagogy. It is extremely interesting to create a team, to trust, to work together well.” [1]

On can not conclude that Kazakhstan is the culture of a larger power distance in comparison with France: a low level of frequency of critical incidents' emerging (46.2%) does not allow to validate proposition 2. The differences of hierarchy dimension are moderately significant for French managers working in Kazakhstan. The rigidity of French hierarchy was underestimated. However, almost a half of the interviewed managers mention the difficulties they experience concerning hierarchy. French managers indicate that there are characteristics of autocratic leadership style with the lack of responsibility delegation, low emphasis on participation, and the authority by position and rules in Kazakhstan.

- individualism/collectivism

The size of this category is as large as expected (the level of frequency of critical incidents' emerging is medium to high : 53.8%). France is considered as the country of individualists : the interests of the individual prevail over the interests of group. Kazakhstani mentality is collectivist mentality for French managers: the family and the tribe are important, the interests of group prevail over the interests of individual, people define themselves as members of a group. Everybody knows to what tribe and zhuz (clan, there are three zhuzes called senior, medium, and junior) his/her family belongs. To

know one's tribe, the names of one's predecessors (at least seven) is the kind of one's pride and dignity for Kazakh people. To help one's relative is one's duty, moral obligation. Many managers recognize the importance of the family.

*"The weight of the family is specific here. As I know, such notions as region where people live or their ancestors lived, and zhuz are very important for Kazakh people. It is fundamental what family, region, and zhuz you are from. Origin is important. People judge each other on the basis of this, on the basis of their history. There is a very strong family obligation."* [1]

Kets de Vries (1998) mentions the "mir" (literal translation from Russian are "world" and "peace" at the same time) mentality of Russians which contributes to the collectivist vision of life, importance of the group, clannish loyalty, conservatism. However, despite collectivist vision, Russian culture is considered by French managers as less collectivist than Kazakh culture. One of the French managers mentions differences between Kazakh and Russian mentality:

*"The mentality of Russians is closer to European than to Kazakh mentality. Russians of Kazakhstan are different from Russians of Russia, it is intermediate position between Kazakh and Russian. I know that many Russians try to go to Russia to live, but some of them return because their mentality is different... They try to leave Kazakhstan because, in my opinion, they are not integrated in Kazakh relations well. Here, even the government was created on the basis of the family connections and relations."* [3]

The majority of French and other western managers emphasize the collectivist character of Kazakhstani culture. It is family oriented culture with well developed understanding of group belonging. The family values have priorities over the rest.

*"Without the risk not to be right I can say that it is a clan culture."* [12-1]

*"In Kazakh family... They never leave somebody of their family outside. If somebody has difficulties, all family members add him/her, they give money if needed, etc. Everything for him or her to survive..."* [2]

The empirical evidence gathered with the interviews tends to validate proposition 6. French managers perceive Kazakhstani management culture as more collectivist culture than the French management culture.

## **Conclusion**

The main idea of this study was to give the vision of French managers, their perception of the management culture of Kazakhstan.. All cultures are different, there are no two cultures that live according to the exactly the same norms, seeing the world in the same way. People of one culture apprehend another culture through their perspective. Parochialism which is "*viewing the world solely through one's own eyes and perspective*" (Adler, 1986, p.5) is something that is extremely difficult to avoid. That's why, while reading this paper and getting acquaintance with Kazakhstani business culture, one should take into account the biased vision of managers of one culture working in another.

It is also important to view this study in the context of its limitations. One of them is the fact that French managers are managers of companies in different types of activities and structural arrangements. However, this study provides evidence that French managers working for different companies emphasize for the most part the same differences that exist between two cultures.

Other concern highlighted by the majority of French managers is a significant difference that exists between the mentality of younger and older generations. The methods of work and behavior of young people who have an experience working in foreign companies or who have received their business education abroad or in western type schools of Kazakhstan are completely different from those of older generation who still work following soviet time standards.

This study provides evidence that French managers working in Kazakhstan have many difficulties related to cultural differences.

As expected, French managers consider Kazakhstani management culture as *being rather than doing* culture with a *higher degree of uncertainty avoidance*. The burden of soviet system with a highly centralized administration, planned organization with numerous rules and regulations to be respected, and a strong hierarchy resulted in the existence of people passive behavior and the needs of strict regulations to avoid uncertainties. The absence of initiative, lack of creativity, and passivity (*doing versus being dimension*) are the main characteristics of people behavior that cause problems for French managers. Managers have difficulties coping with the existence of numerous regulations and law that constantly interfere the business activity. They also experience problems with the complicated administrative documentation that takes time (uncertainty avoidance dimension). In addition, law of the country in transition is always in the process of changing that is difficult to adapt to.

The findings of this study indicate that differences in *hierarchy* dimension are moderately significant for French managers. Proposition 1 is not confirmed: one can not say that French managers consider Kazakhstani management culture as a culture of a larger power distance than the management culture of France. The rigidity of French administration and its strong hierarchy were slightly underestimated. None the less, the size of this category (46.2%) is close to the size indicating that problems of the dimension are significant for French managers. Apparently, French hierarchy is not as strong as the hierarchy of the soviet system where people used to be managed and to obey to a higher power. It means that even if problems of this dimension are not among the most important, they create some difficulties for French managers. French managers reveal the characteristics of the Kazakhstani autocratic management style such as the concentration of the power on the top of the hierarchical scale, authority based on position and rules, a low emphasis on participation in decision making process, a lack of responsibility delegation, obedience to higher authorities.

The problems caused by the existence of the differences in the cultural dimension of *nature of reality and truth* are highly significant for French managers working in Kazakhstan. This category turned out to be one of the largest category, i.e. the problems of this dimension are mentioned by the absolute majority of interviewed managers. The perceptions of reality and truth by managers of two countries are different. For French managers who respect given information, who try to find the logic behind numbers, it was a great shock to discover a false presentation of important documents. The soviet heritage with its false self presentation is still in presence in many state owned organizations.

The findings indicate that French managers consider Kazakhstani management culture as *more collectivist* and family-oriented. It is also, in the opinion of French managers, *a more particularistic* culture where social orientation prevails over task orientation: people treat professional partners or customers on the basis of relations. Results also suggest that Kazakhstani management culture is considered by French managers to be *diffuse rather than specific involvement (space dimension)*: people tend to mix private and professional life, i.e. people do not separate their "life spaces". To have good results in the work, one has to create good relationships with people.

A discovery of the study relates to differences in human nature perception. The problems caused by the existence of the differences in the cultural dimension *human nature* are significant for French managers working in Kazakhstan. In the soviet era, people were supposed to be guilty a priori. French managers notice a tendency of suspicion and mistrust among Kazakhstani business people. People are supposed to be supervised and controlled. The service notion so common in France is something that has appeared very recently in Kazakhstan. However, as soon as French managers created friendly relations with their partners, customers, etc., the situation completely changed. Mistrust and suspicion disappear, people start to enjoy a warm atmosphere where there is the above-mentioned mixture of professional and private life.

Language difficulties are highly significant problems experienced by French managers working in Kazakhstan. The majority of French managers highlight the importance of mastering the Russian language for successful business activity in Kazakhstan. Apart from the advantages of direct conversation such as gaining time, better understanding people's behavior, and independence from interpreter, the ability to speak the language helps to create good relationships with partners and customers.

In conclusion of this paper, the opinion of one of the interviewed managers is worth to be considered. According to him, many problems of Kazakhstan relate to the youth of the country, its recent independence, and its transition period. Trying to build a new market relation economy, the country faces the difficulties to find people who are able to manage in a new way. The absence of business education, nonexistence of many disciplines and notions in the past cause problems when creating completely different economic system. It is the absent experience in many domains of business activity that is difficult to cope for foreign managers. People from different economic systems need time and patience to understand each other.

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## APPENDIX

### Categorization of critical incidents (words and phrases) according to the cultural dimensions scheme (underlined dimension is perceived by French managers as dominant in Kazakhstan)

#### *Individualism versus collectivism:*

- Importance of the family
- Strong family relations: there is no outsiders
- Importance of Zhuz (tribe) relations
- Russians are good in team work
- Strong sense of family and friendship
- More collectivist (close to family) style of life  
Clan culture

## External adaptation

### *Uncertainty avoidance: high versus low*

- Many rules, procedures, regulations
- Heavy bureaucracy
- Centralized and complicated administration
- Existence of soviet rigid standards and norms
- Very strict, detailed law; rules are often stupid
- Long time to change law and rules
- More strict and complicated rules
- Long time spent on administration
- Existence of many written norms and standards
- Old people obedience and easy acceptance of these norms
- Need of additional staff because of complicated rules and laws
- Company was registered few times because of constant law changing
- Highly structured management system with many regulations
- Numerous personal categorization (categorization of work positions)
- Heavy administration
- Existence of numerous documentation
- Constantly changing legislation
- Detailed law that constantly interferes in the activity

### *Doing versus being:*

- Lack of initiative
- People need somebody to help them to solve the problem
- Inability to face problems
- Initiative inertia
- ‘Ostrich behavior’ of people: avoiding to face the problems
- No desire to take initiative
- Passivity of people
- Lack of creativity
- Difficulties in taking responsibility: people do not used to be responsible for the whole job, they worked at different segments
- Absence of initiative
- Absence of responsibility

### *Nature of reality and truth*

- High importance is given to written things, stamp
- Possibility to say “black” and do “white”
- Inverse process of signing the contracts: people sign firstly, then they are looking for sources to perform the contract
- No signature and word responsibility concerning contracts
- False presentation of figures, etc. in reports
- False statistics in state enterprises
- People do not hesitate to remake and change numbers to follow norms
- No importance of the contract signature value: people break easily signed contracts
- Oral words count more than written things
- Doubt: whether received information is true or false
- False self presentation of enterprises: false, unreasonable, and not understandable decision making process that could damage company reputation

## Internal integration

### *Human nature: "evil"*

- Fear to be guilty
- No service notion
- No trust to people a priori, people are suspicious and cautious in the beginning
- People are perceived as guilty a priori
- People do not apply norms profoundly, they need to be checked and controlled
- People have problems of welcome and smile on the level of administration
- No smiling, gentle welcome
- Fear to be controlled, negative perception of auditors
- Not polite manner of phoning and of the way of people behavior toward unknown person in the beginning. Warm attitude after making acquaintance or talking

### *Social versus task orientation: Particularism versus Universalism*

- Strong fraternity and interpersonal relations: you help me, I help you
- Everything is done by relations
- Incompetence of some people because of nepotism
- Relational net is very strong in administration and government
- Need of a collaboration and good relations creation to succeed
- People work with people whom they know only
- Need to create good relations with customers to work well
- More cordial type of relationships with customers and partners
- Treatment of the customers on the basis of interpersonal relationships
- Taking position by acquaintance
- Trials to enter somebody's relatives and friends into his/her business sphere

### *Power distance (hierarchy): Larger power distance*

- Vertical hierarchy, decisions come from the top, no initiative from the lower level of hierarchical scale
- Obedience to the boss
- The fear to recommend something to a boss
- Stronger hierarchy: people know who is a boss; others are subordinates
- No responsibility delegation
- People tell bosses what they want to hear (lying)
- People accept the patronage of their bosses
- High centralization: one boss who decides everything
- Different conception of secretary job: no responsibility delegation
- Hyper centralization of all levels of management
- People perceive their bosses as a superior, they are afraid of the boss rather than respect him/her