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## **Power distance and its implications for upward communication and empowerment: crisis management and recovery in hospitality services**

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This study explores the influence of power distance in a relatively high power distance culture (Turkish) and a relatively low power distance culture (British) from the viewpoint of the expressions used by subordinates when communicating with their superiors in situations of service crises and recovery. The findings suggest that in Turkey subordinates use much more mitigated and indirect expressions when faced with service crises which may lead delays in the identification and solving of customer problems. This, in turn, is believed to cause a failure in the formation of customer loyalty and an increase in the customer switching behaviour.

**Keywords:** empowerment; human resource management; organisational communication; power distance; service recovery; services marketing and management; Turkey

### **Introduction**

Over the past few decades, the services sector has shown a phenomenal growth. This growth reflects itself both in terms of the contribution of the services sector to the gross domestic products (GDPs) of various developing and developed countries and also to the levels of employment in these countries. For instance, the services sector constitutes as much as 78.5%, 77.6%, 73.8%, 79.7%, 72.8%, 71% and 65% of the GDPs of the USA, the UK, Japan, France, Italy, Germany and Turkey, respectively ([World Bank 2011](#)).

The fast growth rate of services is attributable to a number of factors ([Bovee and Thill 2010](#)). These factors include the following: (1) a relative increase in the disposable income of consumers compared with the past; (2) changing demographics and lifestyles, e.g. urbanization and smaller families; (3) an increasing need for professional advice, e.g. legal, financial, psychological; (4) the advent of complex goods and advancement in technologies (for instance, the positive influence of passenger airplanes on tourism); and (5) the relatively low barriers entry for service businesses. Based on the above factors, service sector businesses have sprouted in both numbers and variety, causing services management and marketing to become a major field of study. Given the growing importance of the service sector and the management of services, this study aims to explore the influence of a particular cultural variable on the subordinates' communication patterns with their superiors in situations of service crises and recoveries in the hospitality sector. The study particularly investigates the influence of power distance in Turkey (a relatively high power distance culture) and in Britain (a relatively low power distance culture) in terms of level of mitigation of the expressions used by subordinates when

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communicating with their superiors during situations of service crises and service recovery.

### **Culture and services management**

Service encounters, which distinguish services from manufacturing operations (Batt 2000), are interactions between customers and service personnel and they can be considered as social exchanges (Patterson, Cowley and Prasongsukarn 2006; Scott, Laws and Prindeaux 2008; Gruber, Szmigin and Voss 2009). The interaction during a social exchange is a significant element of satisfaction for the customer, which in turn may or may not motivate her/him to continue her/his relationship with the same service provider. According to Doyle (2008), while products (goods/service products) account for 14% of all switching behaviours, dissatisfaction during social exchanges account for 67% of all switching behaviours.

The social interaction between the service personnel and the customer may be significantly influenced by the culture of service personnel, as culture is believed to shape people's values, preferences, attitudes and behaviour (Choi and Markus 1998; Schutte and Ciarlante 1998; Tebeaux 1999; Worchel 2005; Mosquera, Uskul and Cross 2011). A number of recent cross-cultural studies in the field of services marketing and management, particularly in tourism and hospitality sectors, have demonstrated that cultural norms and values play a significant role in the evaluations of service encounters (Sizoo, Plank, Iskat and Serrie 2005; Sharma, Tam and Kim 2009), service quality expectations (Li, Lai, Harrill, Kline and Wang 2011; Pookulangara and Koesler 2011), referral behaviour (Patterson et al. 2006; Luoh and Tsaor 2007), the nature and strength of customer relationships (Gopalan and Narayan 2010; Kokkranikal, Wilson and Cronje 2011) and how service staff may interact in service encounters (Koc 2010; Lin and Liang 2011; Montoya and Briggs 2013).

As one of the often-studied cultural variable *power distance* refers to the degree to which less powerful members of a society expect and accept the unequal distribution of power (Hofstede 1991). Power typically symbolizes a higher status, respect, more rights and wealth. In lower power distance cultures, inequalities among the members of society are expected to be minimal while decentralisation of activities to be more likely. Moreover, in a low power distance society subordinates expect to be consulted by superiors and privileges and status symbols appear to be less evident.

On the other hand, in higher power distance cultures, inequalities among the members of the society are considered more appropriate and there is greater reliance by the less powerful on those people who have power, centralization is the norm and subordinates are likely to be separated from the superiors by wide differentials in salary, privileges and status symbols (Hofstede 1991; Patterson et al. 2006; Botero and Van Dyne 2009; Reisinger and Crotts 2010; Chen, Okumus, Huan and Khaldoun 2011; Bisel, Messersmith and Kelley 2012).

In high power distance cultures, people in general may consider legitimacy as irrelevant (Hofstede 2001) and they tend to value obedience and conformity and share a willingness to subordinate themselves to autocratic, paternalistic managers (Merkin 2011). As people in high power distance cultures are afraid of deviating from what is expected of them and disagreeing with others, they tend to engage more in obedient, peaceful, cooperative communication strategies that allow compromise with or collaboration with others (Kirkbride, Tang and Westwood 1991). In high power distance cultures, there is substantial dependence of subordinates on their superiors (Hofstede 1991; Botero and Van

Dyne 2009; Low, Varughese and Pang 2011; Merkin 2011). Compared with low power distance cultures, in high power distance cultures it is expected that less powerful members, i.e. subordinates, of the society are more likely to engage in face saving indirect communication and mitigated speech when communicating with people who have more power, i.e. with their superiors (Ting-Toomey 1988; Brew and Cairns 2004; Manzur and Jogaratnam 2007; Xie, Raue, Tseng, Su and Zhao 2009; Koc 2010; Chen et al. 2011; Merkin 2011).

Mitigated speech is a linguistic term describing *deferential* or *indirect speech*, opposite of direct communication, involving the use of explicit statements to the other party in communication. Mitigated speech can be manifested in both spoken and written speech (Low et al. 2011; Merkin 2011). When people resort to mitigated speech they tend to *downplay* or *sugarcoat* what they say rather than stating their real intent (Merkin 2011). Inherently, mitigated speech may cause delays in correct decoding of a message and hence incorrect and delayed responses. The ensuing delayed and incorrect responses after a mitigated message may have serious consequences, especially in situations of crises where rapid and correct response is required (Low et al. 2011).

### **The main thrust of the study and the rationale**

Fischer and Orasanu (1999), Fischer (2000) and Orasanu, Davision and Fischer (1997), who studied the causes of passenger plane crashes have argued that the tone of communication between pilots of different ranks (between subordinates and supervisors) during flights may have detrimental effects. In low -power distance countries, such as the USA, the subordinates' (first officers, i.e. the second pilots) communication with their supervisors (captains, i.e. the legal commander of passenger aeroplanes) to a large extent was not mitigated, whereas in high power distance countries, such as South Korea, the subordinates' communication with their supervisors was to a large extent mitigated due to a readily accepted subservient role. In the study of plane crashes, Fischer and Orasanu (1999) found that while captains felt comfortable giving commands, the first officer, charged with monitoring environment and plane conditions, found it difficult to make clear, direct and non-mitigated remarks regarding the courses of actions to be taken under conditions of emergency in high power distance countries. Fischer and Orasanu (1999) argue that mitigated statements by first officers were not taken seriously by captains and their statements created additional confusion in the cockpit during emergencies. In another research study, Tam and Duley (2005) found that Taiwanese and Korean pilots preferred relationships where an authority figure conferred with subordinates about decisions. However, most of these pilots stated that they operated in cockpits that were authoritarian in nature and the captain had sole discretion in making decisions.

Fischer and Orasanu (1999) claim that many airplane crashes of the Korean Air in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s were attributable to a lack of clear, direct and non-mitigated communication between first officers and the captains. Mitigated statements were not very helpful in an airplane cockpit on a stormy night with an exhausted pilot trying to land on an airport with insufficient facilities for landing. Later, following a series of training programmes on communication the Korean Airlines' safety record has reached a satisfactory level.

Service crises, though their consequences are not as detrimental as plane crashes, may require a clear, direct and non-mitigated communication for recoveries to be made swiftly. Based on above framework, this study aims to analyse the types of communication used by lower level service staff members when communicating with their superiors in situations

of service crises/failures. The particular objective of the study is to compare communication patterns of Turkish (a relatively high power distance culture with a score of 66) and British (a relatively low power distance culture with a score of 35) (Hofstede 2010) hospitality business employees towards their managers during service failures and crises.

The study is important from the point of the fact that the services sector in Turkey is growing rapidly. The contribution of the services sector to the GDP of Turkey has grown from 37% in 1968 to 64% in 2005 (World Bank 2007). In addition, the employment in services has increased from 26% in 1980 to 46% in 2005.

As one of the important service sector industries, Turkish tourism was ranked ninth in the World Tourism League in 2005 with 20.3 million tourists representing 2.5% of all tourist arrivals in the world (WTO 2006). In terms of tourism revenues, with 18.2 billion dollars and 2.7% share of the total market, Turkey ranked as the eighth country in the world. It is important to note that European countries such as Germany, Austria, England, Finland, Denmark, Holland and Sweden constitute almost one-fifth of total tourists visiting Turkey, a much higher proportion of tourist in terms of tourism receipts (Turkish Travel Agencies Association 2010), on average have power distance score of 29 against Turkey's score of 66 (Hofstede 2010). The above shows the importance of high-quality services management and marketing research, especially in the hospitality and tourism sectors.

### Service failures

It is known that service businesses providing higher levels of service quality tend to generate higher levels of customer satisfaction and loyalty, which in turn generate higher profits (Jacobson and Aaker 1987; Bradley and Sparks 2009; Neir, Casielle and Iglesia 2010). In fact, in many instances customer satisfaction may be determined by the quality of a single service encounter (Czepiel, Solomon and Surprenant 1985; Solomon, Surprenant, Czepiel and Gutman 1985; Sparks and McColl-Kennedy 2001; Bhandari and Polonsky 2011). Thus, one single negative service encounter, or service failure, may permanently lower consumers' overall satisfaction and, in turn, may prevent the formation of customer loyalty. A decrease in customer confidence as a consequence of exceptional service failure (depending on the number of customers negatively influenced and/or the degree of impact of the failure) can occur in any organisation, and because of the enormous effects on stakeholders and business viability (Marwa and Zairi 2008; Neir et al. 2010) it is an important area for management and academic concern (Pearson and Clair 1998; LaPlant 1999; Bradley and Sparks 2009).

Service failures may refer to some consumer-perceived breakdown in a firm's system (e.g. flight delays, underprepared food, noisy and uncomfortable hotel rooms, packages delivered to wrong addresses, incorrect account balances). These failures can prove to be extremely costly for firms, as customers often switch providers after such experiences (Folkes 1984; Folkes and Kotsos 1986; Carley and Lin 1995; Gruber et al. 2009; Mostert, De Meyer and van Rensbur 2009; Neir et al. 2010; Lin, Wang and Chang 2011). Moreover, costs may include not only visible losses (such as the defection of a loyal customer) but also the not-so-apparent costs of alienation of other and potential customers due to negative word-of-mouth referrals. Brown and Reingen (1987) argue that dissatisfied customers may on average complain to as many as 9–10 people, while satisfied customers may on average express their content to only 4–5 people.

A service failure may occur in any business at any time. If the business does not respond to the service failure immediately, then the service failure may escalate into a crisis or even a catastrophe (Neir et al. 2010; Lin et al. 2011). The process of handling service failures is referred to as service recoveries (Sparks and McColl-Kennedy 2001; Bradley and Sparks 2009). Tax, Brown and Chandrashekar (1998) suggest that a service firm's ability to recover service failures contributes significantly towards customers' positive evaluations of the service and the organisation, thereby increasing the potential for customer loyalty, retention rates and bottom-line performance. Many studies show (Keaveney 1995; Gruber et al. 2009; Bhandari and Polonsky 2011; Lin et al. 2011) that service crises and failures, and the way they are handled, are the main causes of customer switching behaviours.

### Service recovery and the significance of speed

As briefly introduced above, service recovery relates to how an organization goes about *doing it right the second time* (Zemke and Bell 1990), or how the organization uses its *second chance to make a first impression* (Zemke and Bell 1990; Rondeau 1994; Bell 1994; Bradley and Sparks 2009). Ineffective handling of customers' complaints during service failures increases frustration and dissatisfaction and reinforces negative consumer reactions and harms a marketer's reputation (Hart, Heskett and Sasser 1990; Hoffman and Chung 1999; Mattila 2001; Neir et al. 2010). In other words, failure to handle consumers' complaints promptly provokes consumers' negative word-of-mouth or exit intentions and this can have catastrophic effects on a business (Yuksel, Kilinc and Yuksel 2006).

Human beings are motivated to satisfy their needs the moment these arise. When an individual becomes aware of a need, she/he starts searching for solutions to satisfy that particular need. This is due to the fact that an unsatisfied need creates a feeling of deprivation and tension. Tension felt by an individual increases and is exacerbated as time passes without the satisfaction of that need (Maslow 1943). Service failures are situations where individuals are tensed and frustrated, as they cannot get what they had planned to get in the first instance. For this reason, the speed of recovery is highly important for an individual, as the time passes her/his feeling of dissatisfaction, tension and frustration will increase.

Several studies on service recovery, especially in the tourism and hospitality sectors, have concentrated on the negative influences of waiting, the *speed* of response and the *speed* of recovery (Thwaites and Williams 2006; Scott et al. 2008; Gruber et al. 2009; Kim, Kim and Kim 2009; Neir et al. 2010; Askari and Askari 2011; Lin et al. 2011). According to Karatepe and Ekiz (2004), the speed of response in acknowledging/rectifying service failure is one of the most prominent activities for resolving customer complaints in the tourism and hospitality and sectors. Bamford and Xystouri (2005) have found that speed of decision-making is the key to service recovery in the airline transport sector. Patterson et al.'s (2006) study on hospitality sector shows that the speed of response and the speed of recovery after a service failure have paramount of importance and that speed on its own has a significant influence on the overall perception of procedural justice felt by the customer. The speed of recovery is also important from a justice theory (Patterson et al. 2006) perspective, as the speed relates to the perception of *procedural justice* by consumers.

However, it should be noted here that service staff may not need to communicate with their superiors in all instances of service failures, if given appropriate empowerment as explained later under the heading of Human resource management and training

implications. In addition to the availability and the level of empowerment, a variety of other factors such as the type and the severity of service failure may necessitate service staff to communicate with their superiors or not.

## Methodology

As indirect and mitigated forms of communication delays the response time, and the implementation of recovery actions in cases of service failures, studying of the influence of power distance on communication patters of subordinates in situations of service failures/crises in the hospitality sector may have important implications from a services marketing and management perspective. Based on Hofstede's (2010) comparative cultural variables figures, subordinates working in the hospitality sector in Turkey, a relatively high power distance culture and Britain, a relatively low power distance culture have been determined to be compared in terms of their communication patterns.

To understand the communication patterns of subordinates in situations of service crises, a questionnaire has been prepared with two different scenarios of service failures/crises (see Table 1). To provide realistic scenarios, the questionnaires and the scenarios have been prepared in conjunction with the information received from key informants working in the hospitality sector. The expressions to be chosen in communication have been developed by making certain modifications to Fischer and Orasanu's (1999) original model.

Table 1. Scenarios and the choices of expressions for the participants.

Scenario 1  Likely expressions (Please put a tick (against the appropriate box)	One of the guests at your hotel claims that the price she/he has been given when she/he made the reservation was 15% cheaper than how much she/he was actually charged when she/he came to the hotel. <i>Expression 1:</i> There is a 15% difference in prices, between the one we have charged and the price this guest was informed when she/he first made the reservation. We have got to solve this problem quickly. She/he wants to speak to the manager. <i>Expression 2:</i> There appears to be a problem somehow. The customer is 15% overcharged against the price she/he was given earlier on. How shall we handle the problem? <i>Expression 3:</i> The customer claims that there is a 15% price difference between what she/he was told earlier when making the reservation and what she/he has been charged now. There may be a problem. What shall we do? I did not want to give her/him a response straightaway. Would you like to look into the problem?
Scenario 2  Likely expressions (Please put a tick (against the appropriate box)	A business firm is having its annual meeting with its distributors at your hotel. They are a valuable client of your hotel. You have overheard one senior business firm official talking to another official and he was saying that he was dissatisfied with the snacks and beverages served, and the overall quality of the service. <i>Expression 1:</i> We have a problem here. The client is not happy with the snacks, beverages and the services. We have got to do something immediately. <i>Expression 2:</i> What did this business firm ask to be provided in the first instance? I do not know why but somehow they are displeased with the snacks, beverages and the service. I think we have to do something about it. <i>Expression 3:</i> I got the inclination that this client may not be happy with the snacks, beverages and the quality of service. It might not be a big deal. What shall we do about it? How shall we go about it?

The questionnaires have been sent out to 40 different hotels (accommodation establishments), 20 in Turkey and 20 in the UK, to be filled in by subordinates/lower level staff members, i.e. receptionists, clerks, front desk supervisors, guest relation clerks, reservation clerks, front office managers, etc. working in accommodation establishments. The hotels have been selected on a convenience-sampling basis. Accommodation establishments ranged from small bed and breakfast type establishments to five star and over five star hotels. A total of 91 responses have been received, 55 from Turkish and 36 from British accommodation establishments.

The staff members working in accommodation establishments (have been asked to indicate the likely expressions they would choose when they communicate with their supervisors in situations of service failure/crisis described in the two short scenarios (see Table 1). The scenarios included one specific service failure (its causes and implications are apparent) and one non-specific service failure (its causes and implications are not so apparent). The reason for forming two different scenarios is to investigate the differences in communication patterns of subordinates when they are faced with both relatively lower levels and higher levels of uncertainty and risk.

Respondents have been asked to tick the appropriate option that described their likely response best in the two different scenarios of service failure/crisis. Expressions ranged from being non-mitigated/direct (Expression 1), i.e. direct, to somewhat mitigated (Expression 2) and mitigated/indirect (Expression 3). The expressions reflected a continuum that enabled making calculations. For instance, for a group of respondents, say females, when the expressions ticked from one to three are added up together and then divided by the number of females, it would be possible to see that whether the responses of the females are most likely to be near to non-mitigated/direct or mitigated/indirect. The responses have then been analysed comparatively between Turkish (a relatively high power distance nation) and British (a relatively low power distance nation) employees by taking into account their ages, gender and levels of experience.

**Findings, analysis and interpretation**

The findings show marked differences between the responses of Turkish (a relatively high power distance nation) and British (a relatively low power distance nation) employees (see Table 2).

While on average Turkish employees (see Table 2) preferred mitigated and indirect expressions (2.15 for Scenario 1 and 2.51 for Scenario 2), British employees tended to

Table 2. A summary of the responses of Turkish and British employees.

<i>Respondents</i>	<i>Scenario 1 (1: Non-mitigated/direct; 2: Somewhat mitigated; 3: Mitigated/indirect)</i>	<i>Scenario 2 (1: Non-mitigated/direct; 2: Somewhat mitigated; 3: Mitigated/indirect)</i>
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Turkish (males)	1.88	2.36
Turkish (females)	2.37	2.63
Total (Turkish) – males and females	2.15	2.51
British (males)	1.27	1.40
British (females)	1.33	1.71
Total (British) – males and females	1.31	1.58



prefer relatively more direct non-mitigated expressions (1.31 for Scenario 1 and 1.58 for Scenario 2). For both nationalities, Scenario 1 (a more specific scenario) scores were relatively much lower, i.e. less mitigated, than those for Scenario 2. It is especially noticeable that Turkish respondents have chosen much more mitigated (2.51) expressions for Scenario 2. Given that Turkish culture can be classified as a high uncertainty avoidance culture (Hofstede 1991; Koc 2010), an inability to cope for uncertainty of Turkish employees emerges in this study too. This may mean that when the service problem is more specific and clear, in both cultures employees tend to be more prompt and direct. This in turn increases the likelihood of a successful recovery of the service. When the problem is more specific and direct, the subordinates may feel more self-confident and may express themselves more directly.

When responses have been compared (see Table 2) it is seen that females tend to use more mitigated expressions than their male counterparts (*Turkish*: males with figures of 1.88 and 2.36 for Scenario 1 and 2 and females with figures of 2.37 and 2.63 for Scenarios 1 and 2; *British*: males with figures of 1.27 and 1.40 for Scenarios 1 and 2 and females with figures of 1.33 and 1.77 for Scenarios 1 and 2). Although women's roles have changed substantially in both cultures over the past 50 years or so, females in work environments may still choose to or may be forced to take a more subservient stance. It is known that gender egalitarianism is especially low in Turkey compared with many European countries (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman and Gupta 2004; Koc 2010) and hence may result in a much more subservient role in work settings.

On the other hand, when responses are analysed from the perspective of the ages of employees, no clear-cut relationships can be observed (Table 3) in neither of the cultures in terms of the level of mitigation. For instance, for Turkish males in the age group 1 (i.e. ages between 24 and 30 years), while scores are 2 and 2.33 for Scenarios 1 and 2, respectively, for Turkish males in the age groups 3, 4 and 5 (i.e. ages between 31 and 40 years, 41 and 50 years, and 51 and 60 years) the scores are 2 and 2.25. The figures show that there is no meaningful difference between age and level of mitigation.

This may be due to the fact that cultural codes are already established/learned early in childhood (Mead 2005; Perkins and Shortland 2006) and these codes may override the age variable. Likewise, the same appears to be true for the work experience variable too (see Table 4).

For instance, for Turkish males and females in the Experience Group 1 (i.e. subordinates with up to one year of work experience) while scores are 2 and 2.58 for Scenarios 1 and 2, respectively, for Turkish males in the Experience Groups 3–5 (i.e. subordinates with 4–10 years or more work experience) the scores are 2.05 and 2.43 (see Table 4). While with the increase in work experience (from up to 1 year experience 4–10 years or more work experience) there is a negligible increase from 2.00 to 2.05 in Scenario 1 and a negligible decline from 2.58 to 2.43 in Scenario 2 (see Table 4). Hence, it may be stated that there is no meaningful difference between subordinates' years of experience and level of mitigation used in communication. This again may show the overriding influence of culture on the expression chosen by the respondents.

Finally, the findings of the study indicate that there is a significant difference between Turkish (a relatively high power distance culture) and British (a relatively low power distance culture) employees who work in accommodation establishments. This means that Turkish accommodation establishments are less likely to identify and solve problems on time in service crisis/failures and recovery situations. The delays in service recovery are expected to result in a decline in customer loyalty and cause customers to switch service providers.

Table 3. Responses of Turkish and British employees according to their age and gender.

Respondents	Scenario 1 Mean	Scenario 2 Mean	Respondents	Scenario 1 Mean	Scenario 2 Mean	Respondents	Scenario 1 Mean	Scenario 2 Mean
Turkish males age group 1	2.00	2.33	Turkish females age group 1	2.22	2.67	Turkish males and females age group 1	2.17	2.58
Turkish males age group 2	1.92	2.62	Turkish females age group 2	2.47	2.80	Turkish males and females age group 2	2.21	2.71
Turkish males age groups 3, 4 and 5	2.00	2.25	Turkish females age groups 3, 4 and 5	2.33	2.17	Turkish males and females age groups 3, 4 and 5	2.14	2.21
British males age group 1	1.50	1.00	British females age group 1	1.75	2.00	British males and females age group 1	1.63	1.50
British males age group 2	1.00	1.50	British females age group 2	1.23	1.62	British males and females age group 2	1.13	1.57
British males age groups 3, 4 and 5	3.00*	2.00*	British females age groups 3, 4 and 5	1.25	1.75	British males and females age groups 3, 4 and 5	1.60	1.80

Notes: Age group 1: 17–23 years; age group 2: 24–30 years; age group 3, 4 and 5: 31–40 years, 41–50 years and 51–60 years, respectively.  
 \* Only one respondent. Hence, it has not been considered as significant.

Table 4. Responses of Turkish and British employees according to their experience and gender.

<i>Respondents</i>	<i>Scenario 1 Mean</i>	<i>Scenario 2 Mean</i>	<i>Respondents</i>	<i>Scenario 1 Mean</i>	<i>Scenario 2 Mean</i>	<i>Respondents</i>	<i>Scenario 1 Mean</i>	<i>Scenario 2 Mean</i>
Turkish males experience group 1	2.00	2.63	Turkish females experience group 1	2.00	2.50	Turkish males and females experience group 1	2.00	2.58
Turkish males experience group 2	1.83	2.17	Turkish females experience group 2	2.50	2.69	Turkish males and females experience group 2	2.32	2.55
Turkish males experience groups 3, 4 and 5	1.82	2.27	Turkish females experience groups 3, 4 and 5	2.30	2.60	Turkish males and females experience groups 3, 4 and 5	2.05	2.43
British males experience group 1	1.00	1.00	British females experience group 1	1.00	1.25	British males and females experience group 1	1.00	1.17
British males experience group 2	1.40	1.40	British females experience group 2	1.33	1.83	British males and females experience group 2	1.36	1.64
British males experience groups 3, 4 and 5	1.00	1.67	British females experience groups 3, 4 and 5	1.33	1.50	British males and females experience groups 3, 4 and 5	1.22	1.56

Notes: Experience group 1: Up to 1 year; experience group 2: 2–4 years; experience groups 3, 4 and 5: 5 years, 8–10 years and more than 10 years, respectively.

### **Human resource management and training implications**

As mentioned above, various studies have pointed out the importance of speed of action in service recoveries, especially in tourism and hospitality settings (Thwaites and Williams 2006; Scott et al. 2008; Gruber et al. 2009; Kim et al. 2009; Neir et al. 2010; Askari and Askari 2011; Lin et al. 2011).

The findings of this study point out that in a high power distance country (Turkey), subordinates' communication can become rather mitigated/indirect in situations of service crises. This may mean that service recovery may be delayed, in turn, causing customer dissatisfaction, an inability in the formation of loyalty and eventually the demise of a service business. From a training perspective, accommodation businesses in high power distance cultures may be recommended to take the development of an effective and efficient corporate culture efforts more seriously and systematically. The negative aspects of high power distance can be alleviated through the formation of a corporate culture, a planned and designed culture, which is more appropriate for the needs of a particular service business.

Moreover, as employees who interact closely with customers generally are in the best position to know how to respond and respond speedily to problems during a service encounter (Patterson et al. 2006; Scott et al. 2008; Gruber et al. 2009; Zhang and Begley 2011), empowering service staff becomes an essential ingredient of service recovery and service quality in general (Bowen 1990; Hart et al. 1990; Lawler, Mohrman and Ledford 1992). Hart et al. (1990) and Bowen (1990) argue that frontline service employees need to be empowered to make on-the-spot decisions, especially in cases of service failures. Inadequate corrective response by service employees in a service failure can be primarily attributable to a lack of empowerment (Mostert et al. 2009; Lo, Stalcup and Lee 2010; Ro and Chen 2011). However, the appropriate levels and the types of empowerment given to employees may depend on a combination of the complexity or variability of customer needs and the degree of task complexity or variability involved in delivering the customer needs, and hence a contingency approach may be adopted in empowering employees (Rafiq and Pervaiz 1998; Mostert et al. 2009; Ro and Chen 2011).

In addition, giving empowerment and autonomy to front-line service employees to handle a service recovery situation may significantly increase these employees' job satisfaction (Hocutt and Stone 1998; Mostert et al. 2009; Lo et al. 2010; Hur and Adler 2011). Many scholars argue that there is a strong relationship between how employees feel about a service business and how customers feel about the service they receive from that particular business (Schneider and Bowen 1993; Chi and Gursoy 2009; Kim, Ok and Gwinner 2010).

Therefore, service businesses, those especially operating in high power distance cultures, are recommended to establish empowerment through various staff training and organisation development programmes. It must be borne in mind that empowerment cannot solely be established through staff training programmes, as it requires special conditions to exist (Daft 2008). For the effective establishment of empowerment in a particular business, the required conditions are participation, innovation, access to information and accountability (Daft 2008). In addition to staff training programmes, training programmes geared towards managers and organisation development interventions are required to establish these prerequisite conditions, especially in high power distance cultures where managers are not so familiar, or not content, with the concept of empowerment and its implementation.

### Conclusions and limitations

This study has explored the implications of power distance on service recovery in terms of subordinates' communication with their superiors and offered advice on training interventions. The study shows that employees working in Turkish accommodation establishments have a tendency to use more mitigated and indirect expressions when communicating service crises to their superiors. As explained above, this may result in a delay in the identification and the solving of the customer problems, and hence a decline in customer loyalty and customer switching behaviour is more likely in Turkish accommodation establishments.

The results of this study have implications not only for Turkish accommodation establishments but also for service – a wide variety of service businesses operating in various other high power distance cultures. Manufacturing businesses may also benefit from the study as the service component has increasingly become important in the manufacturing sector, e.g. in automobiles and consumer electronics. It must be borne in mind that, once Levitt (1972) proposed: 'There is no such thing as service industries. There are only industries where service components are greater or lesser than those of other industries. Everybody is in services' (p. 41).

Finally, another thing that must be considered is that creating and/or increasing awareness about the negative influences of power distance in Turkey is especially important as (1) Turkey has a growing service sector and (2) Turkey is in the process of joining the European Union, where there are many countries with lower power distance scores than Turkey.

The study has certain main limitations. First limitation is to do with the size of the study. A total of 91 questionnaires have been used for analysis and interpretation. A higher number of responses would strengthen the generalizability of the findings. Second, though this study has not found contradictory results, several years have passed since Hofstede's dimensions were originally formed, and many social, economic and political changes have occurred since then. In addition, this study has looked at the mitigation in communication from the subordinates' perspective. Therefore, a future study may investigate the ability of managers in decoding the mitigated messages of their subordinates.

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