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# Cultural Factors Behind the Adoption of e-Learning in Turkey

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## Cultural Factors Behind the Adoption of e-Learning in Turkey

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### Abstract

*This paper aims to examine ways in which cultural factors shape the adoption and use of information technology for online teaching. This research focuses on influential early adopters in the tertiary education sector in Turkey who have become change-agents by inspiring small networks of their peers. The study examines the operation of trust and inspiration in networking and teamwork in the Asian academic environment. Findings from this research can assist individuals and institutions to better understand ways in which to optimize the online teaching and learning experience for staff.*

### Keywords

Cultural factors, e-learning, education, online learning and teaching, social network

### Introduction

The influence of human factors in general, and cultural factors in particular, in online teaching and learning, have received little attention in the literature. This is despite the fact that cross-cultural factors have become increasingly significant as tertiary institutions have turned to online technologies to increase the reach of their courses and crossed geographical and cultural barriers. Whilst breaking down the geographical boundaries, many of these technologies are changing classrooms from the traditional face-to-face environment to a faceless online environment, where instructor and student interact via text (Bower, 2001). The adoption of these online technologies affects both students and instructors (Barton et al, 2006).

Online learning can be defined as the delivery of teaching programs using information and communication technologies related to the internet (Chadha and Kumail, 2002). The online learning environment takes the form of a virtual environment in which teaching and learning take place and is comprised of the various delivery and communication modes and interfaces (including chat room and other discussion modes, email, voice and video communication) through which students interact with each other, their lecturers and tutors and with the learning material itself (which includes content presented in the form of text, still images, moving images, and sound). Obviously, many aspects of the online learning environment differ markedly from those experienced in traditional face-to-face teaching and learning but even in this traditional, physical environment extensive use is increasingly being made of large screen data-projection for text and images and here the difference with the online environment is not so great as might be imagined. Moreover, all learning environments revolve in large measure around the reading of texts. In the online environment students can generally choose whether to read text directly from a computer screen, which has certain advantages (scrolling, scanning, digitally searching) as well as several well-recognized disadvantages due to the physical qualities of the viewing screens (in terms of resolution, contrast, eye strain, and ease of manipulation). These latter limitations are steadily being addressed

but in the mean-time it should be remembered that online learners generally have the option of printing and reading from hard-copies of their texts as well, of course, as using books and other conventional text formats rather than attending face to face classrooms and interacting with the teacher and other learner. Therefore, the introduction of online learning environments transforms the education practice by the teachers as well as the students.

Some studies have investigated cultural factors in student interaction for online class discussion (Djojaputro et al., 2005; Campbell 2004), and found different cultural backgrounds and prior learning experiences shapes the way students learn. However, little literature was found exploring how cultural factors shape the attitudes and behavior of educators in this online environment. The objective of this research is to explore cultural factors shaping the attitudes and behaviors of educators involved in pioneering online teaching and learning. This paper explores cultural issues associated with the online learning environment as experienced by educators and extends previous research (Barton et al 2006). Specifically, the research focuses on influential early adopters who have become change-agents by inspiring small networks of their peers. It is intended that the findings from this research will allow individuals and institutions to better understand ways in which to optimize the teaching and learning experience by recognizing and responding to the needs and preferences of individuals from a variety of cultural backgrounds so as to better motivate them by building trust and facilitating inspiration. The following section will discuss the current literature on culture, gender and online education. This will be followed by two vignettes exploring the adoption and creation of social networks increasing the user buy-in and adoption of online education. A discussion will be provided highlighting implications for practice.

## Current Literature

Many universities were quick to adopt the web for basic promotional marketing and public relations purposes and for the sharing of useful information when the first user friendly web browsers appeared in the early 1990s. According to McPhail (2002), by 1990 the Internet was used substantially by people who had significant computer programming experience and with the creation of the World Wide Web, the mouse, icons, browsers, and search engines that were user friendly, Internet use expanded globally and rapidly. From the outset there were high expectations expressed by some academic teachers and university managers that the web would revolutionize teaching through online delivery of course materials and interaction between students and staff. Students who moved from face-to-face to online learning perceived there was a lack of feedback or contact with their teachers because there was not a daily face-to-face contact with teachers, which on-campus students regularly received. It is believed that this missing link must be restored and may include institutional efforts and institutional policies must to be put in place. Keegan stated that “the link must be restored through overt institutional efforts so that the teaching-learning transaction may be ‘integrated’” (Keegan, 1986, p.120). Students who do not receive sufficient interaction will eventually drop out from the institutional system (Sheets, 1992). After an initial burst of activity during which universities established websites to publicize their programs and to act as virtual brochures and handbooks to get their niche in the market, by the end of the decade development had slowed. Although by this stage, universities across the world had begun to explore online teaching. One of the overriding motivations is to attract more students. There was very little concern in engaging the teachers and discussing with them regarding their perspectives and motivating them.

Universities adopted various technologies such as WebCT, FirstClass and Blackboard. These technologies varied but shared similarities with their focus being on the learner’s perspective, that is, providing competitive advantages, expanding student base and international market place. Online teaching and learning literature focused on the identification of advantages and disadvantages from the learner’s perspective which includes the convenience in terms of time and place, self directedness, and controlling learning pace. Some researchers (Djojaputro et.al, 2005; Campbell, et al, 2004) explored cultural factors which influence the learner’s learning style but not from the teachers’ perspective. Although there are some teachers willing to learn new technologies, many are reluctant and resist changing their teaching practices. One reason educators may resist is due to their cultural background, influences and ideologies (Hyland, 2003). Some feel fear and anxiety of lack of technical experience and confidence. There are some who feel fear of losing their jobs (Bates, 2000) suggested that fears relating to professional job security were significantly high amongst teaching academics who had fear and concerns brought on by the introduction of online teaching and learning. There is very little mention about cultural factors in going online. As a result, there is a perceived lack of understanding from the educators’ experiences and perspective in terms of these cultural factors.

## Cultural dimensions

Hofstede (1991) has provided an in-depth discussion on culture and the various dimensions of culture, which have been widely accepted and used in a variety of disciplines (Corbitt et al., 2004). One of the virtues of Hofstede's writing is its lucidity and concrete expression, particular in the area of culture. Hofstede's view (1991, p. 5) of culture is that it is "learned, not inherited. It derives from one's social environment, not from one's genes. The collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another." Through this, Hofstede (1991, p.10) argues that culturally, everyone belongs simultaneously to several different kinds of groups and is variously influenced by different layers of mental programming within themselves:

*a national level according to one's country ( or countries for people who migrated during their lifetime); a regional and/or ethnic and / or religious group(s); a gender level, according to whether a person was born as a girl or as a boy; a generation level, which separates grandparents from parents from children; a social class level, associated with educational opportunities and with a person's occupation or profession; for those who are employed, an organizational or corporate level according to the way employees have been socialised by their work.*

Hofstede (1991) identified five independent dimensions of national culture, each rooted in a basic problem with which all societies have to cope, but on which their answers vary. He describes the dimensions as follows:

- **Power distance**, which is related to the different solutions to the basic problem of human inequality.
- **Uncertainty avoidance**, which is related to the level of stress in a society in the face of an unknown future.
- **Individualism versus collectivism**, which is related to the integration of individuals into primary groups.
- **Masculinity versus femininity**, which is related to the division of emotional roles between men and women.
- **Long-term versus short-term orientation**, which is related to the choice of focus for people's efforts: the future or the present.

Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner have conducted research that parallels that of Hofstede (2001) in several important respects. They discuss about not so much stereotypes as the need to understand individuals. They too draw their study sample from a business environment and arrive at a series of oppositional dimensions of culture, settling on six axial pairs (2003, p.8):

- **Universalism versus Particularism** - Universalism is focus more on rules than relationships. Whereas, particularism focus is more on relationships than on rules.
- **Individualism versus Communitarianism** - Individualism is about the rights of the individual and frequent use of "I" form. Communitarians sees group-focus and frequent use of "We" form and achieve in groups and assume joint responsibility.
- **Specificity versus Diffusion** - Specificity is direct and to the point, and purposeful in relating. Whereas, diffusion is indirect and seemingly "aimless" forms of relating.
- **Achievement versus Ascription** - Achievement use of titles only when relevant to the competence brings to task and respect for superior. Ascription extensive use of titles especially when status in the organisation and respect of superior in hierarchy is seen as a measure of commitment to the organisation.
- **Inner direction versus Outer direction** - Inner direction is about thinking and personal judgment, that is, 'in our heads'. It assumes that thinking is the most powerful tool and that considered ideas and intuitive approaches are the best way. Outer direction is seeking data in the outer world. It assumes that we live in the 'real world' and that is where we should look for our information and decisions.
- **Sequential time versus Synchronous time** - Sequential time sees events as separate items in time ie. one after another. It finds order in a series array of actions that happen one after the other. Synchronous time sees events in parallel, synchronised together. It finds order in coordination of multiple efforts.

While the above cultural factors have been found as important in understanding people's attitudes and competency in general business practice (Hofstede, 2001; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2003), what is much less well understood is the ways in which cultural background shapes their attitudes and competency with respect to adopting and using technologies for online teaching.

Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner argues that communitarians see group-focus and assume joint responsibility. From the study by Djojoputro et al. (2005), students seem to seek friends and relationships before they feel comfortable with each other. The research found that students were not only feel at ease with the names provided online but they would feel much more comfortable when they first met face-to-face. According to Hofstede (2001), students from the power distance and collectivism culture tend to feel and find comfort in a communal and dependency environment. Hofstede (2001) argues that in the high power distance culture, students tend to have a dependant style of learning. The finding above supports this argument indicating that this dependency still can be seen among these students. Even though there is an indication that the power distance is reduced in online learning environment, the students still expect that the knowledge comes from the lecturer rather than building the knowledge themselves through discussion and interaction. Essentially, the findings Djojoputro et al. (2005) indicate that the interviewed students from a collectivist and high power distance culture want to be guided by the lecturer in the online learning environment. These students relied heavily on the lecturer's information and answers whilst studying that subject during the semester.

Utilising Hofstede's (2005) work, there is a distinction between members of an individualist society and members of a collectivist method in the way they operate. Members of the individualist society typically focus to look after their own or his immediate family (Hofstede, 2005, p76). However, in a collectivist society, members typically work in a communal sense, through networks and associations. In the Chinese culture, this is typically referred to as *guanxi*. This concept draws together considerations of social linkages, group behavior and social capital.

The concept of *guanxi* has been rediscovered by a number of writers in recent years. Davies (1995), for example, defines *guanxi* as "the social interactions within the network place and its members". Similarly, Corbitt and Thanasankit (2001) begin with the observation that *guanxi* are "cultivated through a person's network of connections". In their study the researchers have begun to explore the role that *guanxi* dynamics play in individual motivation and change management behavior amongst academic faculty members involved in the pioneering of online learning information technology. In their study the researchers have begun to explore the role that *guanxi* dynamics play in individual motivation and change management behavior amongst academic faculty members involved in the pioneering of online learning information technology.

*Guanxi* is a specifically Chinese term for networking. It is used to describe high-trust, long-term relationships that allow individuals to assist one another in a synergistic fashion. The pattern of *guanxi* is, however, endemic to academic environments around the world. Guru-disciple; supervisor-postgraduate student; mentor-mentored: this is the warp and weft of academic life. When inspirational, visionary early adopters mentor groups and networks of willing learners profound change is possible. Productive *guanxi* can form spontaneously but there is much that management can do to facilitate, encourage and empower them. Though little is researched, it is clear that cultural factors must influence the development of trust. Cultural factors clearly shape the ways that enthusiasm is inspired and that guidance is given and received.

Academic *guanxi* are found all around the world but their characteristics, development and dynamics are very much culturally influenced. *Guanxi* networks entail reciprocity, obligation, and indebtedness among actors, as well as the aesthetic protocol that comes with cultivating these relationships (China Business Review, 2004). *Guanxi* means connection/s.

This study employs the concept of *guanxi* (particularistic ties built on individual trust) to understand the operation of trust and inspiration in networking and teamwork in an Asian academic context (Corbitt and Thanasankit 2001). Particular attention will be given to examining differences between academic teachers based on gender, cultural orientation (shaped by ethnicity and educational background), and social milieu (determined by education, profession, environment, and related personal preferences including cultural affinity).

## Research Approach

### Research Method

This study takes the form of an ethnographic study of the adoption and use of online teaching using two Turkish tertiary institution academics involved in leading or contributing to small teams and networks pioneering online teaching. This paper draws heavily on vignettes of a number of academics interviewed by one of the researchers but the selection and interpretation of this material is influenced significantly by interviews with dozens of other academics, most of which, for the sake of clarity, are not directly referred to here. An ethnographic research method (Hammersley, 1995) was chosen for this study because it is the approach most suitable to research seeking a deeper understanding of social behaviour and subtle human factors through interacting with and 'living' in the communities of online educators. By employing an inductive data analysis approach, ethnography

allows a rich theory to emerge from a thick description of the human interactions and cultural context under study.

## Research Setting and Data Collection

The researcher worked in this environment whilst technologies supporting online delivery of university subjects were being established. The main participation of the researcher was to share experiences in helping academics both in Western and Asian universities with the use of online technology and learning management systems. As such, a range of academics participated in observations and interviews. However, this paper focuses on a community of representatives or pioneers from a Turkey Higher Education Institution.

The contemporary Turkish Education system was established in 1924 after Atatürk closed the religious schools, set up new secular schools. The Economist Intelligence Unit (Economist Intelligence Unit in cooperation with IBM Corporation, 2007) state that as far as Turkey's e-readiness is concerned, Turkey appears to be almost ready internationally. In their survey in 2007 on the e-readiness of 69 countries, Turkey was ranked 42<sup>nd</sup> for this year and 45<sup>th</sup> for 2006. A recent study by Aydin and Tasci (2005) reported that universities are ready for the adoption of e-learning in terms of skills and expertise. However, the adoption of e-learning in Turkish universities by the teaching staff and students is still at an early stage, the on-line teaching and learning practice is still rather ad hoc and the level of integration between on-line teaching technologies and teaching and learning practice is still rather fragmented and low.

Participants were chosen from a selected sample of tertiary academics in Turkey, with as broadly varying cultural backgrounds as possible, and specifically from amongst academics involved in teams and networks pioneering the development of online learning. This paper reports findings drawn from two Turkish online learning pioneers and academics, Naili and Basir from six academic participants in this study. The study was structured to maximise the aspects of longitudinal study by observing the same individuals over a period of two to three years. Contact with these academics commenced in late 2005. The ethnographic data was collected via participants' interactions and regular dialogue, including *semi-structured interviews*, *observation* and *documentation* (Fetterman, 1998). Notes were taken during observations of their online teaching activities and interviews were digitally recorded. Each interview was then transcribed in full or in part, for later analysis.

The research was carried out by an international research team comprising of four Australian researchers from different cultural backgrounds including both Asian and Western cultures. The two researchers from a Western culture have rich experiences of living and working in SE Asia and speak different Asian languages.

## Data Analysis

The data gathered was largely qualitative in nature, consisting of interview transcripts, information and notes taken from observations and related supporting documentation. Meaning condensation method (Kvale, 1996), was employed to undertake an inductive qualitative data analysis. This entailed organizing, arranging and chronologically ordering the data, condensing large data texts and describing their meaning in the form of shorter statements, then analysing them and searching for recurring themes or patterns that represent the participants' perspective. Based on the findings of this research, the researcher was able to put forth a set of relational assertions about the cultural impact of using online technology for teaching using the language and terminology of the participants. Some of the key findings are discussed below in this paper.

### Naili's Story: Making an Effort to Reaching out and Engaging with

#### Background

Naili, in her late 30s, is a Thai academic who works at Turkey's largest distance education university. She stands out amongst her colleagues as someone who is constantly making an effort to reach out and engage with people in her direct, face-to-face encounters. Her online style closely matches her face-to-face style of communication. Naili is a classic example of someone who has learnt how to use technology to engage people and minimize distance. Naili has her undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications from America. Her mastery of English works to her advantage and she is generally perceived as a modern, western "American" lady. Naili makes good use of *power distance* in her relationship with her students. She has formed strong networks with peers and mentors from America, the UK and all around the world.

#### Teaching eMBA Program – Using Technology

Naili developed and established the eMBA online program in which she teaches. She constantly initiates online discussions with her students and earnestly encourages her students to participate in online discussions and communication. She regularly seeks feedback from students and counterparts from State University of New

York (SUNY), with whom her university has a partnership program, to improve her eMBA course. Naili has lots of interaction both professionally and personally with her students and uses this to help her constantly refine and develop her eMBA program.

She observes that, “...my students will email me 24/7 and because I’m often online, I reply to them. During semester breaks, [when] I go overseas for conferences, I still engage my students as long as there is internet connection.” She laughingly adds “They don’t know whether I’m here in Turkey or Thailand.” Naili was happy to share plentiful anecdotes about her teaching experience and is quick to see the humor in situations that she finds herself in. For example, she related that: “I am constantly involved in online discussion with my students. One day, a Turkish male student confided and shared about his problems with me regarding his problems and difficulties in studying as an adult. Being a professional teacher, I responded and thought that person was a female student. Low and behold, when we met face to face during our one week seminar, we both were shocked to find out that I was not a male teacher and he was not a female student.” She added: “I have to be more careful in my assumption regarding my communication during online communication.”

It is clear that because Naili herself feels comfortable with holding discussions online, she naturally elicits the trust and confidence of her students and close colleagues.

Revealingly, Naili volunteered that: “good friends here are hard to come by. So I very often have a cup of coffee with my good trusted friend, Shabby who is from South America.” Naili uses her heritage to build her network and influence her students and colleagues to use online technology in teaching. Shabby is also a migrant from South America and married to a Turkish man who is also one of her colleagues. Naili often encourages and shows Shabby how to use online technology to improve her teaching. During their weekly informal chats, both Naili and Shabby often discuss about their online experiences with students and ways of making incremental improvements to online course delivery.

Naili also explained that: “I’m a go-getter and willing to try everything to motivate students to study online.” She continued to explain that: “I formed network and trust with peers and mentors from States, UK and all around the world.” Naili gets along very well with students studying online. She is very opportunistic and therefore she gets things done especially in motivating her students to be involved in online teaching and learning activities. Her external cultural experience is useful for her in developing an appropriate approach to teaching and learning online where she interacts with international students from America and Turkey.

In summary, Naili uses online technology such as online chat rooms and emails to gain a network of support from her colleagues as well as from students to share stories of her online teaching experiences with colleagues (to mentor them and to learn from them) and to encourage students to learn and communicate with the teacher on-line.

### **Drinking Çai – Establishing Good Friendship**

Even though she originally comes from Thailand (high in power-distance relationship), her regular mannerisms and way of doing things are very much low power-distance relationship) suggesting that her extensive western education from an early age has shaped her approach. It is clear that she does not feel entirely comfortable with some of her older Turkish male colleagues and is irritated by attitudes that she perceives to be patriarchal and small-minded. Nevertheless, it is also evident that deep down she believes in building network and relationship with her peers who share the same interest and values with her. She is very selective with who she interacts with on a deeper level.

Naili notes that, “Drinking çai together is a good way of establishing friendship here.” She continues that drinking çai is very important in building good friendships and networks, a dynamic that parallels modes of interaction in Thai society. This also relates to Barton et. al (2006) Ariel’s case of bamboo networking and social networking. Despite her western influence and ways of doing things, her Asian outlook and up bringing continue to influence Naili. Certainly it seemed clear to the researcher that she related very well with her because she saw her as someone very much like her self: of similar age and background, an Asian woman married to a non-Asian, a career minded person who enjoyed motherhood but did not wish to remain at home.

Naili strongly believes that online technology is the way forward. She struggles with peer support in moving forward and finds both encouragement and disinterest. Her academic dean is a female professor and has been very supportive but some of her colleagues find her threatening and her enthusiasm disruptive.

Naili really uses online and offline informal and formal communication mechanisms to encourage students and colleagues to learn and teach on-line and engages people in online communication rather than just simply following a top-down approach. While other colleagues are hesitant or reluctant to changes, through informal and formal communication mechanisms, Naili builds a network of with her students and colleagues, an academic *guanxi*, to support her early adoption of on-line technologies in her teaching practice.

## **Basir's Story: Building Trust to Build Network of Support**

### **Background**

Basir is Turkish mid 30s male academic teaching at the same mega distance university in Turkey as Naili. Like Naili he teaches in the eMBA course uses online technologies in all of his courses. Unlike Naili he is entirely locally educated - he did his undergraduate and masters program at his current university and is currently enrolled in a PhD program at his university. Although he has never studied abroad nor lived outside Turkey for a prolonged period of time, Basir travels frequently to Europe and America for partnership course exchanges with his university.

### **Using Technology and Building Trust in Teaching eMBA**

Basir is fluent in both Turkish and English but is, understandably, more comfortable in Turkish than English. Basir generally uses Turkish when communicating with his students in both online discussions and in face-to-face teaching. Although many of his students have excellent English language skills and he himself is articulate and comfortable when speaking English he seldom uses English to communicate with his students. He explains that he feels he could reach out to a wider community by using Turkish. Basir feels that he gains sympathy and support from his locally-based network.

He was very actively involved in conventional distance education (his university has an enormous conventional, paper-based, distance education program) before he started using information technology to deliver his course content online.

Basir said that, *"In Turkish culture trust is very much my thing. My students trust me because I give them information and knowledge to learn."* He further explained that trust was very much an individual thing and is generally not given easily. He builds his trust and network with his students. He has the "power" – *power-distance* online relationship with his students. He communicates and gives feedback very frequently using discussion groups and instant messaging with his students.

With his colleagues or peers, Basir admitted that he did not feel that he could easily trust his colleagues with certain things and that he had a fear of losing his "intellectual property" if he were not careful and allowed people to steal his ideas. Basir explained that he believes that information and knowledge are very powerful and that he felt the need for caution with many of his peers and colleagues.

Basir explained that although Turkey is very much a male dominated patriarchal society this was not without positive attributes. Basir makes a point of mentoring younger colleagues and advanced student, continuously building what he describes as a "boys" network with his peers. He explained that even though he has this "personal trust" with his "male" colleagues, he still could not share his professional "intellectual" work or writings with them.

### **Building Trust through Leadership and Experience Sharing**

Together with Naili, Basir is one of his university's pioneers in online teaching and learning. He first made use of IT deliver methods when he began emailing weekly power point notes to his students in 2003. Then, in 2005, he began to use Instant Messaging (IM) to conduct weekly discussion forums.

Basir's weekly IM forum discussions expanded to daily discussions and even 24/7 online discussion and chat with his students. By 2006 he was in near constant discussion with his students across Turkey and beyond and had initiated hundreds of discussion threads.

After observing his extensive usage of this technology and the enthusiasm with which his students responded to the opportunity for free and open discussion online, Basir's university began to call upon his expertise and seek his advice on adopting this technology more broadly. Beginning in late 2005 the university developed a localized Learning Management System (LMS). Basir became the leading contributor to the new LMS, which is currently widely used. He continues to run workshop sessions marketing and explaining the new LMS.

Apart from the LMS itself, Basir has shared with his colleagues other ways of using IT tools for online learning. Unfortunately, due in part to a general lack of resources, his time spent in getting other staff to use the system was not adequately compensated. Nevertheless, because he strongly believes that online technology delivery is the way forward, he continues to build groups of experts in different areas. Because of his outgoing nature and personality, he had persuaded many of his colleagues to use different online technologies. Also because they know him, his sharing of experiences and his seniority at the university has enabled him to gain trust.

The eMBA at Basir's university was initiated with the State University of New York (SUNY). Basir and Naili together pioneered the program. He looks after groups of Turkish students and his counterparts in America look after American students involved in the same program.

It is evident that Basir has helped his Turkish students overcome fears of using online technology by spending a lot of time in answering their queries and simplifying the online delivery process. He generates reports from the discussion threads and uses them to enhance his online teaching methods. At the same time he has analyzed and researched ways to improve the course based on students feedback. Basir believes that establishing trust and building sound relationships with his students helps him and his students in online teaching and learning. From the findings of Djojoputro et al. (2005) indicate that the interviewed students from a collectivist and high power distance culture want to be guided by the lecturer in the online learning environment. These students relied heavily on the lecturer's information and answers whilst studying that subject during the semester. This also applies to Basir's online teaching delivery with his students.

Hofstede's (2001) power distance is another cultural dimension refers to the different solutions to the basic problem of human inequality among members within a society, which can develop into inequalities in power and wealth. In high power distance environment, teachers and educators are treated with great respect and honour and have lots of influence and power in the classroom (Hofstede, 2001).

## Conclusion

In the vignettes discussed above the experiences of Naili and Basir are broadly indicative of our overall research finding that key academic teachers making an effort to reach out and engage with people and to build trust have played a significant role in the development and establishment of online teaching and learning in Turkey.

Although keen, self-starting academics like Naili and Basir are, undoubtedly capable of operating independently of top-down initiated programs it is clear that a proactive approach to supporting such academics could significantly increase their number and influence. By identifying and promoting champions, mentoring them and helping them mentor others, a much larger pool of technology pioneers can be built-up, and built-up more quickly, than would occur without this proactive engagement. Even more importantly, a high priority needs to be given to fostering a collegial culture of trust and strong social relationships amongst academics if innovation and initiative is to be nurtured and broadly reproduced.

This finding fits with that of one of our previous studies (Barton et. al 2006), which showed that key early adopters become change-agents by inspiring small network of their peers and via their social networks. It is also discovered that motivation is not simply an individual matter but is also bound up with groups and peer networks or communities of exchange and encouragement. These networks motivate individual teachers through the encouragement that they find in personal connection, friendship and networking (Corbitt and Thanasankit, 2001; Chen and Chen 2004) enabling them to become effective and consistent change agents. Without such lower and middle level pioneers taking the initiative to develop online teaching programs in their areas top-down attempts to push such developments are unlikely to succeed.

Like clumping bamboo, whilst the local clusters tend to be easily seen the longer-range 'subterranean' personal connections are generally not nearly so immediately obvious. These connections are often the product of previous mentorship relationships, including the relationships between influential academics and their former postgraduate students. These relationships tend to work like bamboo runners (Barton et.al, 2006) they run off in multiple directions below ground and unseen and then throw up new clumps which grow up and then send out fresh runners of their own.

One important implication that is already clear, for reasons explained in this paper and also in the Malaysian context of Barton et.al (2006) paper is that although top-down implementation of technology, and direction of its use, is necessary it is not sufficient in itself. Instead a more proactive approach to developing and nurturing peer mentoring networks, or *guanxi*, amongst academics is much needed. Pioneers and 'champions' need to be identified and encouraged. Middle-down team building initiatives need to be seeded and cultivated. And most importantly, a collegial culture of trust and strong social relationships amongst academics needs to be steadily established and developed. Sadly, this is rather challenging for the academic community as many universities tend to adopt an economics-driven view toward online teaching and learning (Corbitt et.al, 2006)!

The instrumentalist world of the modern university, with its obsession with economic efficiencies and metrics of maximum throughput, presents a formidable environment in which to exercise the sort of visionary leadership required to do what is right for the long-term development of the kind of online teaching that genuinely adds to the student's learning experience rather than merely presenting short-term economies to the institutions that promote it. What is required rather is leadership that is committed to understanding and nurturing the role of peer-to-peer networks, and facilitating the spontaneous mentoring that accompanies them, if online teaching is to

achieve its true potential. This represents a fascinating and somewhat surprising finding given that previous studies have tended to suggest that in high power distance cultures, people generally take and follow top-down directions from management. But from the research and finding from this paper, the Turkish academic community seek and commit to building their trust and network with their students and colleagues. The Turkish academics tend to rely on their network of support and learning from each other in small communities built on trust and reciprocal exchanges and mutual encouragement. These collegial communities and networks enable online learning pioneers to build on their long-term orientation (Hofstede, 2005) and strive to enrich the teaching-learning exchange with their students through the online environment.

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