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**Grandfils Nicolas**, *Master Degree Student*  
*Bauman Moscow State technical University*  
[nicolas.grandfils@gmail.com](mailto:nicolas.grandfils@gmail.com)

## **USING CROSS-CULTURAL MANAGEMENT TOOLS TO OPERATE THE DEVELOPMENT OF FOREIGN ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES**

**Abstract:** The purpose of the present article is to study cultural differences between the French and the Russian management styles and cultures and to better understand the reasons behind these differences in order to manage more effectively work teams in a growingly international context. Thus, the present study discusses the best-suited cross-cultural tool for an in-depth analysis of cultural differences between the French and the Russians. Hence, it presents Erin Meyer's framework called "the country mapping tool" that is then used to expose both theoretical and practical aspects of these cultural differences. As a result, the present article suggests a range of measures that a business in an international context can use to optimize its cross-cultural management between French and Russians.

**Keywords:** Cross-Cultural Management, Management Theory, Cultural Dimensions Theory, Country Mapping Tool

**Гранфис Николая**, *магистрант*  
*Московский государственный технический университет им. Н. Э. Баумана*  
[nicolas.grandfils@gmail.com](mailto:nicolas.grandfils@gmail.com)

## **ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЕ ИНСТРУМЕНТОВ КРОСС-КУЛЬТУРНОГО МЕНЕДЖМЕНТА ДЛЯ РАЗВИТИЯ ВНЕШНЕЭКОНОМИЧЕСКОЙ ДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТИ**

**Аннотация:** Цель статьи состоит в исследовании различий национальных деловых культур России и Франции для определения их причин, что необходимо для повышения эффективности управления межнациональными командами при реализации внешнеэкономической деятельности. В статье

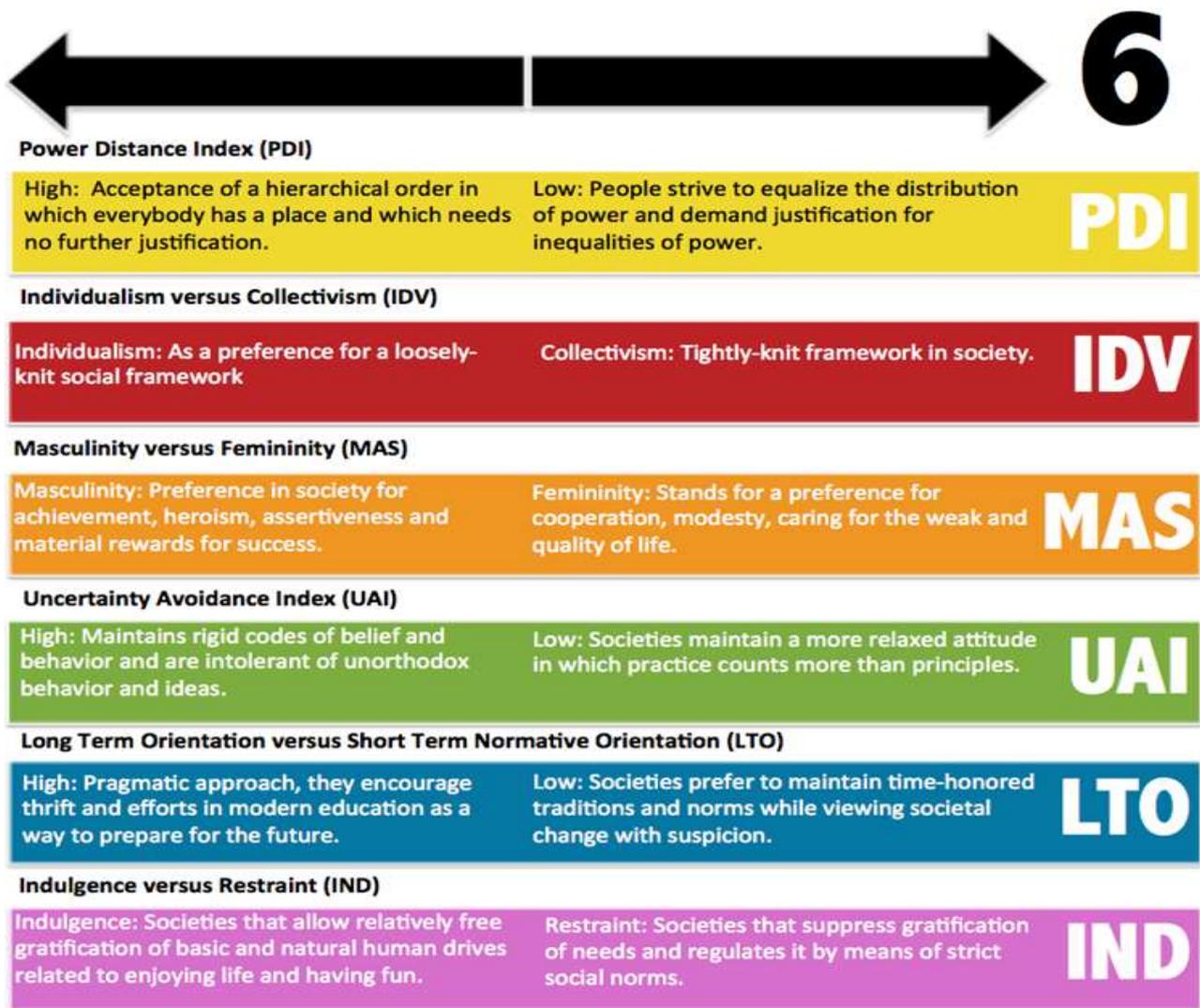
рассматривается наиболее релевантный инструмент кросс-культурного менеджмента в области изучения межнациональных различий – модель Э. Майер «инструмент картирования стран», рассматривающий теоретические и практические аспекты межкультурных различий. В статье предложен ряд мер оптимизации взаимодействия в команде представителей России и Франции.

**Ключевые слова:** кросс-культурный менеджмент, теория менеджмента, теория измерений культуры, инструмент картирования стран.

In a growingly globalized world, it has become useful, but also crucial to be able to understand cultural differences between two countries, may it be for exporting means, or to allow an enterprise to settle in another country successfully. It is for instance the case of France and Russia, two countries highly involved and relying on globalization to develop their economy. Thus, it is crucial for these two countries to better get to know the management and work culture of each other, in case of a mutually beneficial exchange.

A first attempt to understand how a given culture and mentality of a country influences the behavior of an individual, within the company, has been drawn by Geert Hofstede [1], creating a framework including the five “dimensions of culture”. This framework has then been enhanced and now includes a sixth dimension, as follows in the figure 1.

However, despite the popularity of Hofstede’s cultural theory, it is not exempt from criticism [2]. In terms of methodology, the collective scale has been said to be unable to correctly predict individual behaviors [3]. Moreover, some authors stated that the results cannot be generalized, given that they were obtained in a single company, namely IBM [4] [5] [6]. Some authors went even further, and denounced a western ethnocentric bias [7] [8]. Some alternative methods can be found in the works of Philippe d’Iribarne [9] [10], who promotes cross-cultural studies based on an ethnographic approach.



**Figure 1** – Refined Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions Theory with all six dimensions

Although Hofstede’s method has been widely criticized, it is still one of the most used cross-cultural tools. It has been completed by Hofstede and the GLOBE project to answer the critics, and it is also the basis of numerous works, such as Erin Meyer’s country tool [11].

This tool is a field-tested model, composed of eight scales that correspond to eight pivotal problem areas marked by cultural disparities. The position of a given country in one of the scales is not absolute, as it measures the relative position of a country compared to another one. Hence, it is possible, using a great amount of qualitative interviews with local managers, to place a country on the eight following scales:

- Communicating: explicit vs. implicit (or “Low context” vs. “High Context”)

- Evaluating: direct negative feedback vs. indirect negative feedback
- Persuading: deductive vs. inductive (or “Concept-first” vs. “Application-first”)
- Leading: egalitarian vs. hierarchical
- Deciding: consensual vs. top down
- Trusting: task vs. relationship based
- Disagreeing: confrontational vs. avoid confrontation
- Scheduling: structured (or “linear time”) vs. flexible

Thereby, the present work will use the method of Erin Meyer, partly inspired from Geert Hofstede initial theory, so as to compare Russian and French management styles and work culture. A lot has already been written on this subject, using Hofstede’s method (Ardichvili, Muratbekova-Touron, Elenkov), or Erin Meyer’s country tool. Meyer’s country tool findings are summarized in the table 1.

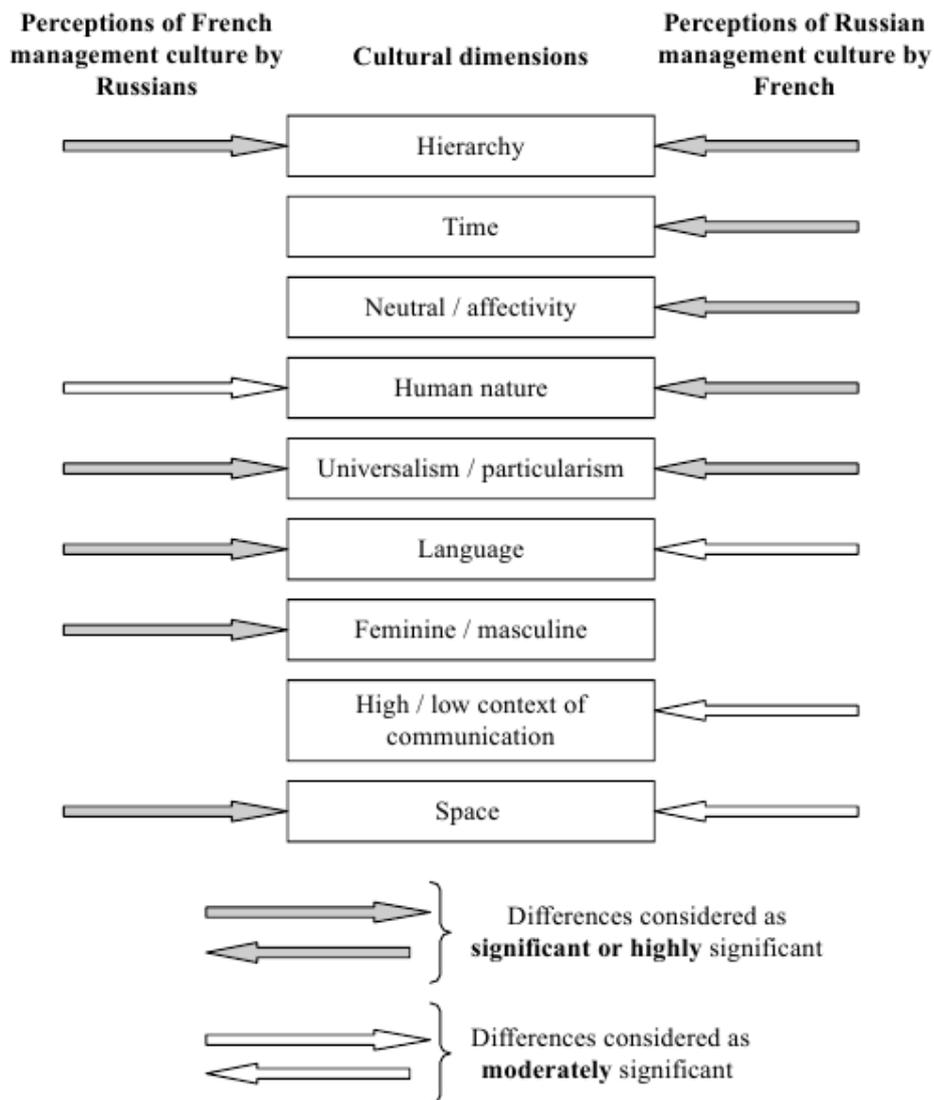
**Table 1** – Comparison of Russian and French management styles according to Erin Meyer’s Country comparison tool

French approach	Title of Meyer dimension	Russian approach
Moderately implicit communication.	Communicating	Also implicit communicating, at approximately the same level as the French.
Direct negative feedback.	Evaluating	Even more direct negative feedback.
Concept-first arguments	Persuading	Also concept-first arguments, but slightly less.
Leans more towards a hierarchical structure.	Leading	Definitely hierarchical structure, enough to create issues when working with the French
More top-down than consensual.	Deciding	Also top-down, but a bit more than the French counterparts.
Mixed between task and relationship, but a bit more relationship-based	Trusting <sup>1</sup>	Can be defined as relationship-based, that is to say, a bit less task-based than the French.
Frankly confrontational.	Disagreeing	Also confrontational, but slightly less.
Mixed between linear and flexible time, but a bit more flexible than linear.	Scheduling	Leans visibly more towards flexible time

<sup>1</sup> Meyer introduces the metaphor of « peach vs coconut » metaphor to explain how building relationships works within a culture: friendly, then reserved (peach, soft on the outside but hard inside) vs reserved, then friendly (coconut, hard on the outside but sweet inside). According to her, both French and Russian cultures are coconut-like.

Some of the findings include: the Russian and the French have an implicit communication style (“high context communication”), approximately the same [11], and, while in the two countries, direct negative feedback is acceptable, the Russians are said to be more direct when it comes to negative feedback [11]. On the other hand, the French tend toward deductive argument more than the Russians, even though Russia, like France, focuses more on the concept than on the application [11]. Russians are also said to prefer more hierarchical and top-down decision making than French, even though the latter have a hierarchical and top-down approach [11]. The Russians tend to base trust on the relationship over tasks performed, and to have a more flexible approach to time than the French, while the latter embrace more confrontation than the Russians [11][12]. It should be noted that these differences, compared to the differences between the countries overall, are not that important; nevertheless, they are significant enough to take them into account and notice the differences in management.

These findings are confirmed by a study, led by Muratbekova-Touron, that compares the mutual perceptions of Russian and French managers: the differences are numerous, but for the French, the most significant are the ones related to hierarchy, relation to time, affectivity, mix of professional and private life, and the fact that one has always to check the work of the subordinates [13] [14]. Their Russian counterparts tend to think that, indeed, the French are less hierarchical, more feminine (as of Hofstede’s model), and they don’t mix private and professional life, and that the French are touchy when it comes to not mastering their language [13]. These findings are summarized in the figure 2.



**Figure 2** – Mutual perception of French and Russian managers, according to Muratbekova-Toulon

As for Hofstede’s method, the findings of Ardichvili, about the leadership style in manufacturing enterprises in Russia, the ones of Elenkov, about the cross-cultural comparison of Russian and American management concepts, and Hofstede Insights, do not always correlate [15] [16] [17], but it may be explained by the small amount of participants, as well as the age of the two papers, since Hofstede’s dimensions are updated every year at least. Despite all the differences between these papers, it is indubitable that Russia does score high on the dimension of “power distance” and “long term orientation”. For Elenkov, power distance is also the factor that explains the Russian leadership style, and what makes the difference with the American leadership style.

Thereby, it appears that the works of Meyer, completed by the study of Muratbekova-Toulon, clearly exposes the major differences between Russian and French cultures. Moreover, these differences usually cause some tensions, but even bigger issues (for instance, Muratbekova-Toulon mentioned the fact that some French enterprises preferred to hire only French managers since they distrust Russian managers, even when they are based in Russia).

Thus, it appears crucial to find some solutions to these cross-cultural tensions: we propose to teach the managers from either side to learn and better acknowledge the cultural reasoning underlying behind the observed – and often criticized – behavior. This should be taught explicitly, so the concerned managers can ponder it and stand back. Likewise, it could be useful to identify the given situations that could trigger a lack of understanding with the help of the theory, to make the managers even more aware of possible misunderstandings so as to reduce the risk of them occurring.

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