A cross-cultural material development project to train Turkish development personnel in the Southeastern Anatolia Regional Development Project (GAP)

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Abstract

The southeastern region of Turkey has been undergoing extensive water and human development efforts since the 1970s through the Southeastern Anatolia Regional Development Project, known worldwide by its Turkish acronym—GAP (Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi). This project has its goal the building of 22 dams along the Tigris and Euphrates river valleys that will provide 22% of the nation’s hydroelectric power and irrigate 1.7 million hectares (4.2 million acres) of land. The region contains some of Turkey’s greatest cultural and social diversity, and is home to significant populations of Turkish nationals of Kurdish and Arabic heritage. Considerable concern exists among the GAP Administration that Turkish development personnel, who, for the most part, are urban-educated in the cities of Ankara or Istanbul and find themselves assigned to work in the southeastern region, lack sensitivity and knowledge about issues related to cross-cultural communication and interaction. An established Memorandum of Understanding between the GAP Administration and Kent State University led to an invitation to provide training in intercultural communication, with the goal of developing training materials designed for use within the region. This article documents the collaborative undertakings that occurred between 2001 and 2002 that included initial training of GAP employees, joint material development based on the culture general assimilator (Cushner and Brislin, 1996), a concurrent training of trainers effort, application of
the developed materials by trained GAP employees supported by a grant from the British Embassy, and evaluation of the impact of training by an external agency.
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**Keywords:** Cross-cultural training; Evaluation of cross-cultural training; Turkish intercultural relations; Culture and development

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**1. Introduction**

The southeastern region of Turkey has been undergoing extensive irrigation and human development efforts since the 1970s through the Southeastern Anatolia Regional Development Project, known worldwide by its Turkish acronym—GAP (Guneydogu Anadolu Projesi). This project, that has as its goal building 22 dams along the Tigris and Euphrates river valleys, will provide 22% of the nation’s hydroelectric power and irrigate 1.7 million hectares (4.2 million acres) of land.

Turkey is a culturally diverse society. At the signing of the Lausanne Peace Treaty in 1923, however, the Turkish Republic recognized only three of its constituent ethnic groups as official ethnic minorities; Greeks, Armenians, and Jews. The remaining 44 ethnic minority groups that lived in Turkey during the founding of the Republic were assumed to assimilate into the greater Turkish society and accepted as “Turks” by government officials (Andrews, 1989). Until recently, only Greeks, Armenians, and Jews were given the right to practice their cultural, religious and linguistic traditions.

The southeastern Anatolia region, where the GAP project is located, is heavily populated by Kurdish and Arabic communities. There has been limited intercultural interaction among these groups in terms of cross-cultural marriages, shared cultural celebrations or the ways in which public space is used. And, until recently, the region experienced quite tense and complex difficulties as a result of PKK (Kurdistan Worker’s Party) activity. It is only as of August 2002 that the Kurdish community was allowed to establish Kurdish language classes and have limited radio and television broadcasting in the Kurdish language. Added to this, the relative limited interaction between this area and the rest of Turkey has contributed to a lack of understanding between these regions and other parts of the country.

**2. Culture and development**

Sustainable human development, which lies at the core of the GAP project, can be defined as a process whereby future generations will benefit as much or more per capita than the current population (Serageldin, 1996). Sustainable human development is also built on the supposition that an investment in training and education, in other words human capital, has both societal as well as individual benefits. A growing body of empirical evidence suggests that in addition to the training and
education components of development work, the density of social networks and institutions as well as the nature of interpersonal interactions that underlie them significantly affect the sustainability of a development program (Grootaert & van Bastelaer, 2002).

The social networks and institutions coupled with the interpersonal interactions are often identified and function as social capital (Landry, Amara, & Lamari, 2002). While social capital may assume many functions, some that are economic and others that are not, the social networking and the interpersonal interactions stimulated by development activities cause groups to interact in new and different ways. In the case of the GAP project, investment in social capital can have an economic effect that is not always evident in the local market place. Persistence of the various functions of social capital is vital to sustainability of both GAP’s human and economic development in southeastern Turkey.

The social capital of a society, thus, includes the institutions as well as the existing relationships, current attitudes and the values that govern interactions among people and contribute to the sustainable economic and social development of a region, as well as to the nation as a whole. Social capital in the GAP region encompasses the interpersonal interactions of the various heritage groups in the region, the interpersonal interactions found in gender differences, the disparity of socio-economic roles as they apply to interpersonal interactions, as well as the institutional networks of the different governmental and non-governmental agencies who must coordinate actions that create an array of vertical and horizontal interactions often characterized by relationships and unequal power distribution among constituencies.

Social capital, vital to the development project in southeastern Turkey, has costs as well as benefits. Reilly and Phillpot (2002) found that a liability of social capital is the phenomenon of clan, tribal or other forms of micro-ethnic group identity. Extremely high levels of internal social cohesions and trust are evident among the various tribal or ethnic group behavior that is so prevalent in this region of Turkey. Each of these different constituencies have different social capital-shared norms, values, levels of trust, attitudes and beliefs. Landry et al. (2002) refer to this form of social capital as cognitive social capital. While tribal or ethnic group behavior has high levels of internal social cohesions, minimal levels of these same desirable qualities are evident when promoting the formation of networks and linkages between different institutions. In light of this, social capital becomes a liability. Instead of bridging ethnic differences and creating new kinds of working relationships, the internal social cohesions make it difficult to break down ethnic ingroup attachments, often resulting in conflict between groups or individuals. Intercultural communication training, thus, becomes vital to the development of social capital in sustainable human development projects like GAP.

Trust building is an integral part of both intercultural communication training and to the benefit of positive cognitive social capital. For example, one of the 12 studies analyzed in The World Bank’s study of social capital (Grootaert & van Bastelaer, 2002) indicated that a central element of cognitive social capital was interpersonal trust (Reid & Salmen, 2002) such as that which is attained between a farmer and the development worker, between two farmers of different ethnic groups in a water
cooperative, or between development workers in the field and representatives of a national administration like GAP. Thus, trust can be as, if not more, important as the technical skill training of development work. Simply put, effective two-way communication and its subsequent level of trust-building are essential components of development activities that involve indigenous people and diverse organizations. Intercultural communication training, especially when conducted with the use of simulations and critical incidents, creates an awareness of the hidden differences in values, attitudes, and beliefs that so greatly affect communication. In any intercultural encounter, whether it exists between institutions or between members of different tribal or ethnic groups, people’s emotions are quickly flamed when people encounter behavior to which they are unfamiliar. Providing experiences which sensitize the person to these emotional states of anxiety, ambiguity, rejection, and addressing cognitive differences in cultural norms, attitudes and beliefs can lead to more accurate judgments about why a person or institution is behaving in a particular way. This allows the development worker, the interagency facilitator, or the co-operative spokesperson to be less cultural bound and develop a deeper understanding of how others perceive the world. This increased awareness helps to build trust, thus assisting in the development of social capital.

Personally developed social capital can be differentiated from institutional social capital. Institutional social capital is constituted by the resources inherent to that institution and thereby available to contacts both within and with that institution (Brinton, 2000). Public coordinating institutions in development work, like GAP, have multiple goals and interests, and must collaborate with different constituencies. GAP personnel, for instance, work not only with the varied populations within the southeastern region, but must also cooperate with a variety of governmental agencies, international institutions as well as non-governmental organizations that are critical to the irrigation and hydropower infrastructural changes currently underway in the region. GAP development programs and projects have placed great emphasis on participatory approaches for promoting and supporting community involvement in the planning, management and evaluation of projects. Experience has demonstrated that involving users in decision-making, goal setting, design and management increases the likelihood that facilities will be used fully and looked after properly. When the stakeholders are intimately involved in all aspects of a project, there is less risk of inappropriate design, under-utilization, and long periods of disrepair. Social capital thus becomes vital in support of self-governing political institutions (Knack, 2002). The end goal is not to simply increase the numerical participation of citizens in a region but to optimize fruitful participation by upgrading peoples’ capabilities in order to achieve sustainability through human development.

Participatory project appraisal and management require effective communication with the target groups in the region. Thus, enhancing interpersonal as well as interinstitutional communication skills become vital to building the trust necessary for development in the social sphere. Without attention to the cognitive social capital, however, development work can be hampered by the organizational and historical cultures of the constituencies (Grootaert & van Bastelaer, 2002). In its
attempt to enhance the cognitive social capital, GAP has been interested in the application of cross-cultural communication strategies and its interplay with group decision-making practices.

3. Establishment of a cross-cultural training program and material development project

Although there have been a variety of training programs run by national or international organizations in the GAP region in the last 20 years, the intercultural communication training program discussed in this article is the first of its kind. From February 2001 to November 2002, a series of seminars were developed in consultation with the training division of the GAP Administration that address issues of intercultural communication and interaction, showing that it is possible to address such sensitive issues in a productive and collaborative manner.

In light of the sensitivity of the topic of intercultural relations, especially in the region that not long before had been under considerable stress and tension with regard to relations between the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) and the Turkish community, the seminar title, ironically, could not reflect issues related to culture and communication. Since the times of Ataturk’s formation of the Republic of Turkey, the idiom “Ne mutlu Turkum diyene—How happy is one who considers himself a Turk” indicated that ethnic differences in Turkey were to be minimized, as reflected in the fact that at its founding, only three ethnic groups were officially recognized by the nation. The initial offering of this workshop, thus, was marketed in the region under the title of “Conflict and Communication in the Community and Workplace,” a rather generic title that would allow workshop presenters to slowly introduce the concepts of most concern. Because of the sensitive nature of the topic and a desire to remain as neutral as possible, it was decided that a culture-general approach to training would be most beneficial. Training, thus, was based on the 18-theme culture-general framework (Cushner & Brislin, 1996) designed to introduce trainees to the kinds of experiences they are certain to encounter as they embark upon significant intercultural interactions regardless of the cultural groups which are to interact. Such an approach would allow participants to begin to address some of the more sensitive issues indirectly while they were developing greater understanding of intercultural relations and communication in general.

The first weeklong workshop involved 25 participants including representatives from GAP, DSI (the General Directorate of State Hydraulic Works), as well as university personnel and social service providers, took place in February 2001 at the GAP regional training center of Sanliurfa (Urfa), the reported birthplace of the prophet Abraham. Although GAP administration officials were initially reluctant to use the words cross-cultural or intercultural in communicating about the program, it was not long after the start of the workshop; in fact within the first day; that participants were actively exploring the role that culture plays in communication, problem solving, and intergroup interactions. Throughout the week, a variety of training methodologies and approaches were employed, including: an introduction
to culture assimilators or intercultural sensitizers (Cushner & Landis, 1996); familiarity with the 18-theme culture-general framework (Cushner & Brislin, 1996) that allowed for a focus on cultural concepts in general and not on any single group; development of critical incidents that allowed participants to explore culture-general issues in their own culture-specific context; introduction to a number of simulation activities; and mini-lectures on content of relevance to the group. Issues of gender quickly emerged as a major point of discussion and debate. By the end of the workshop, all were comfortable with use of the term “intercultural,” and received certificates of completion that reflected the words “Intercultural Communication” in the title.

A follow-up workshop was conducted in June 2001 with the primary purpose of developing materials that could be used to sensitize GAP employees and others in the region to relevant concepts of intercultural interaction and decision-making that were more culture-specific in nature. A coordinating material development team was identified that consisted of two representatives from the training division of GAP, two faculty members from Kent State University, and one faculty member from the University of Bahcesehir, Istanbul, who had participated in the first workshop. This group, along with 10 GAP employees from the original workshop and an additional eight participants from the region reflecting a variety of ethnic backgrounds, formed the basis of this second workshop that had the special task of developing a number of culture-specific critical incidents, based on the 18-theme framework, which would form the basis of a training manual. Thus, throughout the week, while continuing to expose participants to additional concepts and experiences surrounding intercultural communication and training, a number of GAP- and region-specific critical incidents reflecting interactions between GAP employees and Arab and Kurdish communities were developed.

Six months later, the five member material development team came together at Kent State University to edit the critical incidents and to prepare content and PowerPoint presentations that would become the basis for the training manual, The Intercultural Training Resource Guide for Improving Intercultural Understanding in the Southeastern Anatolia Region (Cushner, Cakmak, Kirca, Robertson, and Tugrul, 2001). A Turkish language edition has since been prepared.

4. Use of locally developed materials by local trainers

The Turkish members of the material development team became the first to use the training guide in a 1-day workshop in the region in February 2002. The American members were invited as observers and consultants to the process. With the success of this workshop, it was felt that the objectives of the project had been achieved; that is, development of context-specific materials and effective training of local trainers. The materials were officially introduced to the Turkish public through a joint GAP–Kent State University–University of Bahcesehir Intercultural Communication Workshop and Conference, supported by the Swedish Consulate in Istanbul the same week.
A 3-day regional training seminar that used the Resource Guide was conducted by GAP trainers at the Zeugma Training Facilities in the southeastern region of Turkey in March 2002. The workshop, supported by a grant from the British Embassy, was expected to bring benefits to NGOs engaged in a variety of socioeconomic and human development projects, including the integration of nomadic groups into local communities; development of multi-purpose community and youth centers; various agricultural and infrastructure-development projects in the region; professional development of personnel from local municipalities and grassroots public institutions that are actively engaged in project planning in the region; as well as representatives from the Ministries of Health and Education.

Twelve male and five female participants attended this first training seminar conducted by the Turkish team, of which 14 completed the 3-day workshop. Twelve of the participants held university degrees, nine of the men and three of the women. The age of participants ranged from 21 to 86 years of age; the average for males being 35 years and for females 30.6 years. Participants were agricultural engineers (N = 4), economists (N = 2), development experts (N = 2), and one each of social worker, psychologist, mining engineer, veterinarian, administrator, and academian. The majority of the participants were relatively new in their positions, with average employment being 3.5 years in their current roles. Two of the participants were from Ankara and Istanbul, with the remaining from the Eastern and Southeastern provinces of Diyarbakır, Erzurum, Malatya, Mardin, Mus, Adana and Sanliurfa. Wide language variability was also evident among the participants, three participants being monolingual in Turkish, and the rest speaking up to four different languages, including Kurdish, Arabic, Daghsthan, English, and other European languages. Of the 14 participants who completed the training, 11 of them elected to attend and three were assigned by their supervisor. A formal evaluation of the training was undertaken as a requirement of the grant.

5. Evaluation of training

The major aim of the workshop, as stated in the program materials and thus the focus of the evaluation, was to help participants gain an understanding of key concepts in cross-cultural communication, help participants understand the relationships between culture, communication and language, as well as the role of such concepts as stereotypes and cultural values in the process of making intercultural decisions. An external evaluation team from Ankara (SÜRKAL, 2001) designed and implemented the evaluation. In order to understand participants’ initial expectations as well as the degree to which the workshop goals were realized, the evaluators developed a series of pre- and post-program questions related to the topics of culture, communication and language, cultural values, and intercultural decision-making. This became the basis of Phase One evaluation. Phase Two of the evaluation was designed to look at the impact 4 months after the training.
5.1. Phase One evaluation

5.1.1. Culture

As the evaluators note, in cultural studies, the concepts of social class, gender, religion, region, sex, ethnicity, race, age, and occupational status are among the significant elements that determine one’s cultural identity. Prior to training, the majority of participants considered economic factors such as social class and occupational status as the two most important concepts that defined people’s identities, with gender and region being next in importance. Race and religious sect were the two categories that had the least importance. This was assessed again immediately after the training seminar. While social class and occupational status remained in the top two positions, age and ethnicity gained some importance for participants, with ethnicity being identified five times in the post-test, up from three in the pre-test, and age increasing from zero to two. Religion remained the least important factor.

5.1.2. Culture, communication and language

Factors that participants perceived to impact cross-cultural communication, as well as what they thought were the causes of intercultural communication problems and difficulties, were also assessed. According to the participants, education and language reportedly had the greatest influence on cross-cultural communication, with religion, again, perceived to be of least importance. The majority of the participants identified prejudice and educational differences as the major causes of the difficulties and problems people have during cross-cultural communication. The fact that people came from different religious groups did not appear to be an important contributing factor in intercultural communication conflicts. This was explained by the evaluation team as the result of people in the region, the cradle of the three religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, having developed relatively tolerant attitudes towards these differences. At least for these participants, religious differences were not thought to be the starting place of most conflicts.

Slight differences in this category were identified in the post-program responses, with education losing some of its support. In the pre-test, 14 participants identified education level as first or second in importance, while in the post-program, only 10 participants stated the same.

Considerable change from pre-test to post-program in factors that cause conflicts during intercultural communication were not observed. Most of the participants still considered prejudice as the most important cause of intercultural conflicts, while maintaining that differences in religion had little, if any, affect.

5.1.3. Cultural values

Understanding differences in cultural values was another theme emphasized in the workshop. To operationalize the impact of the training, the following pre-test
question was asked of the participants:

All societies and communities have their values, in their human relations, to understand and explain the world. These values, however, change and differ from one society to another and from one community to another. Can you give an example to this situation?

While 10 participants responded to the question in the pre-test, only three of them were able to provide examples that related to the issue at hand. In the post-test, 13 participants provided examples, all reflecting a solid understanding of the concept. Thus, this was considered to be a success of the training.

5.1.4. Intercultural decision-making
The final section in Phase One evaluation focused on the intercultural decision-making process. The following question was asked of the participants:

It is assumed that the following methods are used in the decision-making processes of groups of different cultures. Please list the three that you consider as most important.

- To have a consensus on different interests
- To lean on power
- To set the mechanisms of dialogue and negotiation working
- Different cultures finding/creating their specific intermediary solutions
- Emergence of conflicts hard to settle

Before the workshop, participants considered “having a consensus on different interests” \( (N = 6) \) and “different cultures finding/creating their specific intermediary solutions” \( (N = 6) \) as the most important. In the post-program analysis, the category “to set the mechanisms of dialogue and negotiation working” gained importance (from \( N = 4 \) to \( N = 7 \)), whereas “different cultures finding/creating their specific intermediary solutions” lost support \( (N = 3) \).

A summary of Phase One findings suggest that while little change occurred in participants’ perception of major factors that influence cultural identity or communication, some minor shifts were evident. Perhaps of more importance, however, is that individuals appear to have developed an ability to apply some of their newly attained knowledge and understanding of values and intercultural decision-making to practical settings (Table 1).

5.2. Phase Two evaluation

Seven of the participants were selected to be interviewed in Phase Two of the evaluation. This group reflected geographic variability, with participants coming from the cities of Diyarbakır \( (N = 2) \), Mardin \( (N = 1) \) and Sanlıurfa \( (N = 4) \). Six of the seven in this group were males. During the interviews, participants were asked to reflect upon a number of issues, including the perceived impact of training in their professional as well as personal life, their reaction to the training process, as well as to the evaluation itself.
### Major issues recalled from training

Participants tended to recall both theoretical concepts and practical activities from the workshop and were able to apply much in their professional and private life. Theoretical concepts such as the role of culture in cross-cultural communication, the existence of stereotypes and the importance of intercultural communication were recalled, as hoped, by most of the participants. One of the respondents put it this way:

> Until I participated in this seminar, I did not know that intercultural communication was such an important and complex issue. The main lesson that I learned was that we should learn how to listen to each other, and people should not be treated according to the stereotypes that reflected their religious beliefs, ethnic or language differences. The concepts that were discussed in this seminar covered exactly what I have experienced in my work and private environment.

#### Table 1

**Summary of Phase One evaluation findings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Pre-training</th>
<th>Post-training</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Culture</strong></td>
<td>Considered most influential in defining cultural identity:</td>
<td>Considered most influential in defining cultural identity:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social class</td>
<td>Social class</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Occupational status</td>
<td>Occupational status</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Considered least influential in defining cultural identity:</td>
<td>Considered least influential in defining cultural identity:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Race</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication and</strong></td>
<td>Considered most influential:</td>
<td>Considered most influential:</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>language</strong></td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Language</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prejudice and education perceived as major cause of intercultural conflicts</td>
<td>Prejudice still perceived as major cause of intercultural conflicts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Values</strong></td>
<td>Three of 10 respondents provided relevant examples</td>
<td>13 of 13 respondents provided relevant examples, reflecting solid understanding of concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intercultural decision-making</strong></td>
<td>Considered most important:</td>
<td>Considered most important:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finding consensus on different issues</td>
<td>Setting mechanisms of dialogue and negotiation in motion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Different cultures finding intermediary solutions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2.2. Impact of training methodology

The implications of the simulations and case studies were also examined by participants. Although the use of simulation activities is not a common pedagogical practice in Turkish education and training, all participants commented on their effectiveness. Most recalled that the simulations Star Power (Shirts, 1969) and Barnga (Thiagarajan & Steinwachs, 1990) emphasized the need to adapt to new and changing conditions while stressing the importance of collaboration when individuals are somewhat powerless. One of the participants put his thoughts regarding his participation in Star Power, a simulation that engages participants in the struggles of mobility between hierarchical social and/or economic groups as follows:

At the beginning of the trade simulation (Star Power) the points we had were not sufficient; bargaining and collaboration with others helped people to make their conditions better. This was striking, as in this region change and transition are typically not so rapid. When the region experiences rapid transformations, NGOs (non-governmental organizations), for example, must collaborate with one another and lead the transition. Collaboration can result in increased power. This was the main lesson I learned through participation in the simulation. Of course, there is always the danger that such collaborations may damage the existing structure. The powerful NGOs can exploit the powerless ones, and subsequently mistrust may evolve towards all kinds of organizations. When one becomes powerful, s/he can easily forget the powerless. This was the second lesson that I learned from this simulation.

Another stated:

During Star Power, we observed how social positions are formed. It also showed how people can be selfish—when somebody has the chance, they apply the rules in the direction of their own benefits.

It was apparent that participants recalled more about the simulations and the active exercises than the theoretical discussions, and that the simulations were considered to be positive teaching techniques. Only one of the participants argued that those simulations were not well interpreted and relevant, perhaps reflecting his own discomfort with the process. He said

The application of the simulations was nice but I did not get what was the message. In some respects, they were showing our conspiracy theories regarding the different cultures. But I did not find that any of the simulations reflected me.

5.2.3. Impact on professional life

Participants discussed the many facets of their professional life that were impacted by the training. Some felt that they gained necessary new perspectives about other cultures with whom they work, and learned the importance of creating empathy
towards others. Regarding this issue, one participant stated:

I realized that I had strong negative stereotypes about other cultures because of having lived in this region. After the seminar I observed that some of my own stereotypes were dismissed. For example, recently I started working in Erzurum. I was surprised when I first saw so many veiled women on the streets. Now, instead of criticizing them I try to understand the motives behind their behavior. I would evaluate the situation from a much more narrow perspective before I participated in this intercultural workshop.

Another participant stated that:

I have learned to be more careful in my intercultural communications. After the seminar I observed some changes in my management style. I tried to listen and develop empathy toward others. For example, in the past when the teachers complained about any student here at the center I would have automatically believed the teachers. But after the seminar, I began to listen to the all the stakeholders and tried to find resolutions for their conflicts. One day, our folk-dance group experienced disagreement within the group and decided to dissolve. I called each person one by one, and listened to them and at the end I could tell them that they were right. This created trust among the people at the center. The seminar also helped me to realize the importance of staying calm while communicating. For example, at the center’s garden the players were practicing a folk-dance by holding hands. One of the neighbors, who could see those performances from his window got angry as the girls and the boys were playing hand-in-hand. I visited this neighbor and explained to him that this was the only way of doing a folk-dance. Once he realized that I respected him, he changed his hostile attitude toward us. Briefly, this seminar taught me the importance of listening to others and struggling to understand their different views.

Some of the participants also stated that they shared the seminar material with their social group and even distributed lecture notes among their friends. As one put it:

I shared the knowledge and information I gained with my friends. I come from an Arabic ethnic background and I am the child of a tribe in this region. I can speak Turkish, Arabic, Kurdish as well as English. I know well the differences between the local people and the elites, and try to make the right contact with the people in the field. Such training seminars are very useful as they teach us “how to fish”. For example, since the seminar, I pay more attention to understanding the farmers’ problems regarding the water canals. While I believe that such seminars should cover all the people working in this region, I am not sure it would be beneficial to invite the upper level bureaucrats to those seminars. The local people should have priority, especially the ones who are faced with the intercultural communication problems during their everyday field applications.

Some people tried to apply the concepts and simulations in their work environment, but found that it was not as easy as applying concepts from other
seminars they had taken in the past. This was expressed as follows:

I am employed in an office where we are working mostly with Kurdish and Arabic ethnic groups. Sometimes, people develop stereotypes towards each other when they have different cultural backgrounds than the others. This is, in fact, very wrong. Because I now believe this, I shared the seminar information with my colleagues and tried to pass this message to my friends at the office. It was difficult for them to fully understand what I had experienced, more difficult than applying many others skills I have learned.

Another one said

We have contacts with many different institutions and people. I tried to apply some of the issues covered in the seminar. For example, I was out of the region for the last 10 years. Many of the issues covered in the workshop reminded me of what I faced when I returned back to my home region. I was accused of having changed significantly and that my views were now quite different. But I didn’t think they had changed.

And

I shared my seminar experiences with 40 people for almost 45 minutes during another seminar I was attending. In the past, I would approach opposite viewpoints with hostility. After attending the intercultural communication seminar, I was not doing this anymore. I tried to listen to the others and tried to reply without hurting or injuring their feelings. Also, after the seminar I could express myself much better. I think the seminar helped me a lot to enlarge my own self-esteem.

A final striking comment follows:

New dimensions were added to my knowledge. I started paying more attention to teamwork after the seminar. In addition to this, the seminar taught me the importance of thinking at macro levels and to delegate power to the others if necessary. Love and trust are the inevitable parts of the work, and people must be rewarded for motivational efforts.

As was obvious, most of the participants felt very positive with regard to the impact of the seminar on their work environment. One participant, however, stated that they did not feel that they gained much from the seminar:

I did not share the information of the seminar with anybody. Our workload was very heavy during that time after the seminar so I could not find time for sharing those materials with others. In my work, I also did not use those materials. You know why? Because I have already known those concepts as I am a social worker. I did not gain a different perspective at this seminar.
5.2.4. Impact on personal life

Some discussed how the training affected their personal life.

I shared what I learned with my wife, children and friends. I especially tried to pass the message to others that collaboration with different cultures can lead to having more power in many positive directions. This seminar reinforced my own beliefs about the importance of intercultural collaboration, not only at work, but also in one’s private life.

Showing how aspects of training were generalized into other arenas in life, another said

Before the seminar, there were misunderstandings and disagreements between my girlfriend and me. For example, she was getting upset that I was spending too much time at the youth center. As a result of the seminar, I learned ways to reconcile the differences between us and to try to balance the things in my life.

5.2.5. Reflections on the evaluation process

Participants had much to offer with regard to the evaluation process itself. By and large, the group believed that evaluation is important as it can contribute to future applications in terms of identifying weaknesses as well as strengths of the seminar. This group also considered the pre- and post-program survey as a useful application, especially to test whether there were any differences before and after the seminar. In addition to this, some of the participants appreciated that the evaluation team visited them in their own region. One of the participants puts this in words as follows:

You visited the region and us in order to evaluate the impact of the seminar. For me, this indicates how seriously the training was being taken. This also implies that we as individuals were valued. You came all the way here and wanted to observe my work environment. For me, all these are very important. In addition to this, it is also good to see that an independent agent carried out the evaluation. This results in more trust.

But some of the others were not as welcoming to the idea of the project evaluation. For them, it was time consuming and an unnecessary exercise, and something that can be instructive to trainers. Two of the participants stated their views regarding the evaluation as follows:

I do not believe that such evaluations are useful. They all turn into useless reports. In all other similar areas, such as rural development and the role of women in development, experts spend too much time and energy but cannot come up with any results. If I would not have known you, I would not have spent so much time with you.

... ... ...

I do not believe that this evaluation will be helpful. Outsiders are coming here (the evaluation team), getting the information from us, and then they even do not
thank us later. There is no need for this evaluation; the seminar can be applied in the future.

But the most striking interpretation was given by one of the participants. For this respondent, evaluation is very important as it helps the program planners to make some sort of cost–benefit analysis.

I think the evaluation of the seminar should certainly be applied. We are attending such seminars so often, but we never know how much we benefit from those efforts. I believe that all training seminars should be evaluated in this way. For example, in the intercultural seminar there were 30 people [not accurate—author's note] who stayed away from their work for 3 days. This means $30 \times 3 = 90$ working days. In other words, that training seminar cost the absence [equivalent] of one person for 90 working days. I think all those calculations should be taken into consideration when people are invited to such seminars.

All of the participants appreciated most of the training, and the majority felt that there was no need to carry out the evaluation phase. Specific feedback on training methodologies was provided for the trainers as well. Participants, for instance, reflected upon the culture-general nature of the training compared to a culture-specific approach. Most of the participants reported that the culture-general nature was effective, certainly at the start of training. Some comments, however, reflected a concern over the effectiveness of the trainers and their ability to bridge the culture-general to the culture-specific task effectively, and this is something all trainers should consider.

It would be useful if the seminar organizers were more effective at moving from the general theoretical concepts to the local issues. The theoretical debates were too dense; maybe they could be simplified or shortened. In other words, the concepts discussed should be supported by regional examples. It was good to hear different cultural applications, even the international ones, but it would have been better if they were compared with examples from the Southeastern region of Turkey. Hence, the seminar would have been more efficient if all those theoretical discussion could be joined with the regional examples more effectively.

The majority of participants felt that the length of the seminar was too short and that they would have appreciated more. The interaction among the participants was also seen as important. Some felt that people from different agencies or regions should be invited, primarily because others would benefit from the training, but also to add richness to the mix of participants. While all felt that the seminar should be repeated, some felt that some selection criteria should be applied before participants were invited. Some recognized the importance of the role of experience in culture learning. They suggested that the participants from this region might have such a seminar in a completely different part of the country, thus having the opportunity to have a cross-cultural experience themselves while learning about the concepts. Some, recognizing the importance of sharing the content, wanted more direction and
guidance so they could conduct similar workshops in their own agencies, and requested a “training of trainers” workshop.

All in all, it was felt that the seminar achieved its aims. This was put in words so well with one of the respondents:

I believe the importance of this kind of training. Only through educating the people we can overcome the intercultural conflicts in this region.

6. Some concluding thoughts and reflections

Regardless of the sub-regional variations, the structural attributes of the southeastern Anatolia region are shaped by a variety of ethnic, religious, gender, and socio-economic dissimilarities. These variations not only shape people’s thinking, behavior, and perception of others, but affect the communication between various institutions, social groups, and individuals as well. In order to promote efficient sustainable development projects and to create effective institutional cognitive social capital in such a diverse region, personnel at all levels should possess a wide range of intercultural communication and group decision-making knowledge and skills. In this way, development personnel can approach the target groups in the field and reach others with empathy and understanding, and thus, build trust.

It is precisely because of these factors that addressing concepts related to intercultural communication and interaction has been a crucial theme for the GAP Administration in recent years. The organization of these training seminars was necessary, important and a valuable step in this direction, and as the findings of the evaluation report suggest, were welcomed by local communities and should be repeated. If trust is a key element in the development of social capital, it seems necessary to begin with a deep understanding of intercultural communication. As such, additional research on the role of intercultural communication as an investment toward building social capital should be investigated.

There are a number of lessons we have learned that might benefit others embarking on similar projects. For one, such content is relatively new for many people. While people may be experienced trainers in their respective work environments, it was increasingly evident to us as a team that workshop facilitators must have a thorough grounding in the concepts that are central to the training. This is especially true when such concepts are introduced in areas where there has been significant intercultural conflict and tensions. Likewise, a facilitator’s ability to draw inferences and show relationship to the local situation is of extreme importance. Effectively moving from the general to the specific as well as from the theoretical to the practical is a critical skill. Thus, selection, identification and adequate preparation of trainers and facilitators are essential. In a similar manner, facilitators must be skilled in the use of the often highly charged simulations that are commonly used in cross-cultural training programs to simulate the experiences one encounters in intercultural interaction. Of most concern here is skill in debriefing these exercises.
to both defuse strong emotion and to help participants draw appropriate meaning from the experience.

Translation in such a venture is always a concern. Confusion over conceptual equivalence, especially when discussing issues related to gender and social status, often led to productive discussions, not only between trainers and participants but among the material development team as well. Thus, working as an international team on such a training program provided us with an opportunity to develop a broader perspective of cross-cultural issues in a specific cultural context. We, as a multinational team, were able to compare and contrast why and how certain cultural practices and beliefs differ across groups, as well as experience the effect of cross-cultural communication problems; providing us all with a firsthand experience from which to draw from as well as greater understanding of one another.

Another issue worth considering and perhaps discussing with participants is related to the concept of re-entry (Wang, 1997). Many individuals who have received training and/or have spent a considerable amount of time living or working for an extended period of time with people different from themselves experience a significant shift in perception of self and others. Returning to one’s home community espousing ideas and practices that may be in conflict with traditional beliefs and values can create unexpected obstacles and stress. Trainers should be sensitive to this possibility, and explore with trainees how they can most effectively integrate their new knowledge and skill into both their current work as well as their home community.

References


