The main theoretical concepts and practical matters of cross-cultural management have been subjected to numerous studies throughout the years. Yet the issues relating to cultural differences continue aspiring scholars and managers alike to find new ways of explaining and dealing with these differences in the workplace. The international perspectives on both Organizational Behavior and HRM have also received their fair share of attention in the literature, including relatively recent significant contributions by Jackson (2002), Dowling & Welch (2004), Brewster (2003), Adler (2001), etc.

In her book, Punnett aimed at prolonging this esteemed list by introducing a more understandable and down-to-earth approach to complex concepts and theories of cross-cultural management and its applications to such OB and HRM topics as motivation, leadership, communication, ethics, gender relations, etc. The main focus of this book is on culture and its role in forming various behaviors affecting the workplace. The book also concentrates on the role of geography, history, politics, economics, and language in shaping these behaviors. It is structured into 12 chapters, each of which covers a separate issue in the framework of the book’s title.

From the very beginning, the author succeeds in setting up a main platform for her argument by presenting the notion of globalization and its effects on attitudes, behaviors, and managerial practices that are commonly associated with globalization and internationalization of enterprises. This is a good introductory chapter that could be used as an additional reading material for the undergraduate students majoring in international business.

Chapter 2 is entirely devoted to culture and its implications. The discourse, however, is practically limited to Hofstede’s cultural dimensions and Kluckhohn and Strodbeck’s value orientation model. The latter, by the way, is rarely even mentioned in the international management literature and hardly ever used in practice, which makes it difficult to understand why it was included in the book. On the other hand, there is not enough discussion of other approaches to cultural differences, such as models developed by Schwarz, Trompenaars, etc., which are widely used in both scholarly works and managerial practices. However, not everything is that “dark” in this chapter – the author provides readers with very interesting and original comments on subcultures, their meanings, and significance to international managers worldwide.

Chapters 3 to 6 are also talking about cultural impact on business environments in which companies operate. I really enjoyed reading about the influence of geography, history, and traditional values on international business practices. However, I was very surprised getting to the conversation about world’s major religions in Chapter 5 and not finding anything about Judaism, except an explanation that
it belongs to the category of “other religions” (p. 108). The author missed somehow the fact that all major world religions, such as Christianity and Islam, both have their roots in Judaism, and to oversee this fact is just a pure blunder. Although it does not directly concern the issues of international management, such an obvious omission may disappoint a reader and prevent him/her from fully engaging into book’s discussions. Overall, the monologue about different world religions, as well as about economic development in Chapter 6 seemed to me overly simplistic, even from the viewpoint of “plain and understandable” language.

Chapters 7 to 9 cover both direct and indirect impact of cross-cultural environments on various managerial practices, as well as on motivation, leadership, and communication. I think that these are the best chapters in the book. The author gives readers a wealth of information on various motivation theories and thoroughly explains the role of equity, rewards, expectations and goals in motivating the international workforce. Especially, the concluding part of Chapter 7 provides an excellent explanation of cultural contingency of motivation and general faultiness of using ethnocentric (only North American) approach to motivation theories as a universal point of reference. The same could be said about both chapters 8 and 9, where the author was able to clearly identify nearly all major concepts of leadership and international communication, fully justifying the culturally bound approach to both of these important topics.

Chapters 10 and 11 are devoted in their entirety to the issues of human resource management, such as managing expatriates and choices managers have to make when dealing with the multicultural workforce. While Chapter 11 provided an interesting and informative account of expatriate experiences, Chapter 10 fails to accomplish its goal of identifying ways in which human resource allocation can be optimized in an international firm. I felt that instead of talking about optimization possibilities, the author simply limited her discussion to descriptions of various notions and concepts pertaining to international HRM. Although this description may prove to be useful for some readers, the main goals of the chapter have not been achieved with this method.

The last chapter deals with special issues, such as religion, gender and race relations in the multicultural environments, as well as discusses both universality and cultural contingency of approaches to managerial ethics in decisions affecting individuals in an organization. The author has handled these topics with the outmost compassion, which allowed for an outstanding overview of these sensitive issues.

After reading the entire book, I felt that its major weakness is in over-concentrating on the North American continent (including the Caribbean region), which might prevent the reader from looking at problems and issues presented from a different perspective. For example, the ethical standards are discussed from the North American point of view, which limits readers to only one opinion. Although we are all striving for universal ethical standards in business, it is necessary to realize that these standards are still very much culturally contingent, and presenting just one viewpoint really defeats the purpose of the entire discussion. For the fairness’ sake, it is necessary to note that the author is trying to overcome this weakness throughout the book by constantly reminding us about cultural dependencies, but she is not always successful in her endeavors, which hurts her arguments presented in the publication.

The ultimate purpose of this book, however, was to provide readers with a clear understanding of the factors that are paramount when managing across cultures, and especially those factors that influence individual behaviors and HR options. I think that the author succeeded in achieving her overall objective. We also have to agree with the author emphasizing the fact that in her book she uses plain and simple language to explain sophisticated concepts, which makes the book universally accessible to anyone, starting from university freshmen to members of general public interested in the subject. In my opinion, as a whole this could be a good secondary book for the introductory
international management course.

References


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