This volume, a collection of invited chapters, is a most welcome addition to the books written within the field of cross-cultural organization and management studies. Organized and presented as a handbook it signals and reflects the maturity of this relatively young discipline.

The book’s eighteen chapters written by eminent scholars cover all the major areas of management from a cross-cultural perspective. The chapters are grouped into six parts: “frameworks for cross-cultural management”, “strategy, structure and inter-organizational relationships”, “managing human resources across cultures”, “motivation, rewards, and leadership behaviour”, “interpersonal processes”, and “corporate cultures and values”.

The authors come from various disciplines notably sociology, psychology and economics. The writing and debating style, approach and length of the papers vary greatly and as a result give a lively and dynamic feel to the book.

The multi-disciplinary nature of the book reaffirms appropriateness of the multi-perspective approach that many cross-cultural researchers have taken in their work; it also encourages the new comers to cross-cultural management try out a holistic way of doing research: from the choice of topic, to research methodology, to making linkages between different aspects of the phenomenon under investigation.

However, given the importance of national culture and its bearing on management, which all the authors and the book’s editors emphases, it is surprising that a social anthropologist is not among the contributors. In addition, the book would have been enormously enriched if the authors had also come from varied national backgrounds and brought with them their respective world-views and perspectives to the book first-hand and not as reported by some of the contributors in their literature review sections. A handbook such as this could thus have been a genuine multicultural forum for debate. As it is, the vast majority of the authors come from and work in the US and Canada, with a few from Europe. One wonders why some of the eminent scholars from Asian, Australian and African universities are not present here. (One of the authors, Mike Peng is of Chinese origins but he lives in the US and works at the Ohio State University).

In terms of structure, the chapters follow more or less the same blue print: review of the relevant literature, followed by discussions and conclusions. Some chapters present findings of empirical studies; some discuss practical problems encountered by foreign companies because of their incomprehension of host cultures; some others are confined to theoretical models and/or draw conclusions on the basis of previously reported findings. Almost all chapters review studies conducted in different parts of the world.
Many papers do not contain genuinely original and new contributions to knowledge. Those readers who are familiar with the contributors’ research and publications will not find anything that they did not know about their stances and arguments. But the book does bring together under the same cover salient discussions and views related to its focal topic. As such, it is an excellent resource for the newcomers and a great reference point for the old hands.

In terms of quality, strength and originality of thought, some chapters stand out a head and shoulder above the others, especially those written by Triandis, Peng, Engelhoff, Mendenhall et al., Steers and Sánchez-Runde, Early and Laubach, Gelfand and McCusker, Johnson and Cullen, and Robertson.

Steers and Sánchez-Runde’s chapter on “Culture, Motivation, and Work Behavior”, for instance, gives an extensive critical review of motivational theories. They not only discuss in detail the implication of national culture for these theories but also evaluate the soundness or otherwise of the research methodologies employed in the various studies behind them. In addition, they raise a pertinent point, very succinctly, in relation to motivation theories which is also relevant to all cross-cultural studies:

“Today, most contemporary management scholars realize that cultural differences can have a profound impact on work motivation and job attitudes. What remains elusive, however, is a solid understanding of how and why culture influences fundamental motivational processes.” (p.191).

Quite. This kind of analysis takes the quality of the discourse from a mere description of who said what on what issue, to a much higher plane, which would provide bench-marks on how to conduct a sound cross-cultural study, from a rigorous theoretical base, to sampling procedures, to the choice of research instruments. A hard hitting paper like this injects a large dose of realism into our blood and is a welcome wake up call for us all. I would imagine many researchers and aspiring young doctoral candidates would be tempted to follow these scholars’ lead and build upon their work in future projects.

Robertson’s chapter on “Business ethics across cultures” in particular is topical and more immediately of interest to many students of international management, given the recent unethical practices by a few world-class companies. It also encourages a non-US way of looking at various issues, which is very refreshing.

The author focuses not so much on the findings of the various studies reviewed but on what the role of such studies should be and how they should be conducted. Criticizing the US-centred perspective of some researchers, the author emphasizes the importance of looking at ethical issues from the perspective of those who work and live elsewhere without taking relativism to absurd extremes in which any action no matter how abhorrent can somehow be justified. Here is an example of her gentle yet firm warning to US researchers:

“The fact that formal corporate ethics practices may not exist in a country’s firms should not lead to the conclusion that these firms are less ethical than US firms.” (p.391)

I was rather disappointed by the lower quality of some of the papers, especially knowing what their authors have written elsewhere; these papers will give a misleading impression about them and their outstanding track record to newcomers.

Having said all this, a huge congratulation to Martin Gannon and Karen Newman is in order for their pioneering work; it must have involved a great deal of hard work, dedication and perseverance.

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