

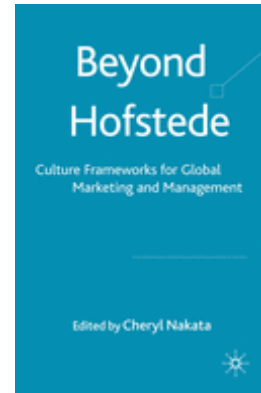
Nakata, Cheryl, (Ed), *Beyond Hofstede: Culture Frameworks for Global Marketing and Management*

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Reviewed by Dr. George F. Simons at diversophy.com

As Aristotle to scholastic philosophy, so Hofstede to intercultural studies. The question is, of course, “Where would we be without him and how far can we go with him?” *Beyond Hofstede* is a highly academic treatment of the question from the perspective of marketing and management studies, but not without interest for those who both teach and do consulting and training in intercultural matters.

As a practitioner who is frequently called upon to sit on academic committees for the dissertations of students seeking advanced degrees, I have been struck with the lack of interdisciplinary research and creativity in the assignment and approval of research work. On the one hand, it is essential to know the boilerplate of the field, while on the other hand it is important to creatively expand intercultural perspectives and not simply apply and verify what we have long been using. There is both a fear and a need to move forward in new directions.



Intercultural marketing has the advantage of concrete feedback on the application of intercultural know how—products either sell or do not sell strongly on the basis of cultural fit among other factors, and “getting it right” is essential to commercial enterprises. Unlike management and diversity consultants’ struggles to demonstrate value added, ROI is concrete and more measurable in marketing.

Since the inception of Geert Hofstede’s seminal research and, despite its ongoing replication and development, some core concerns have arisen that impel us to both examine the extent of its validity as well as to take into account new societal developments. These factors demand that we enlarge the scope of intercultural inquiry and its applications. Since Hofstede’s original inquiries and the development of its exploratory framework, internationalization and globalization have spread exponentially. Moreover, our understanding of culture and cultures themselves have become increasingly complex due to mobility and exchange of personnel and practices. Certainly it has become clear that broadbrush definitions of cultures as national and ethnic are at best starting points for viewing the diversity that flourishes within these entities and, in fact, this approach may incline its users to overlook this diversity all too easily. Today’s researcher must ask: what are the units of cultural attribution and, how much granularity can be allowed before the boundaries of meaningful cognition are reached? Quite a few of the essays in this book struggle with this dilemma in the background.

Predictive or reflective? While not able to predict behavior, cultural theory and its applications help us interpret it and respond with greater insight and appropriateness. So the questions that need regularly to be asked are: At what levels of aggregation is it beneficial to research cultures and apply the findings? What are the useful perspectives from which we can define and look at culture? Do we begin with values or behaviors, or...?

The diverse authors of this anthology broaden our perspective of the complexities found at the organizational and individual levels, both psychological and social. Certainly the globalized membership of today’s organizations and the swelling numbers of bi-and multicultural individuals among us demand not just greater awareness and adjustment on our part personally. They also beg

new perspectives and fresh mental models on the theoretical level, to say nothing of an expanded panoply of tools and resources for addressing our intercultural challenges, whether in marketing, as is the focus of *Beyond Hofstede*, or in the worlds of organizational management, education, politics or diplomacy.

In Chapter 11, for example, Liu and Dale examine the use of mental models in the study of culture with a focus on how the dynamics of mental models are shared and converge between individuals. If “mental models” sounds a bit clinical and abstract, we need to remember that humans invest them with feeling and significance and they often take on the clothing of story and metaphor. Establishing and relating these mental models is another way of looking at the tasks of intercultural communication, negotiation, advertising, etc.

Another way to examine the effects of culture in our lives is to research the circumstances under which culture “kicks in” in a big way to affect our perceptions, judgments, motivations and decision making. Significant work has been done here, but it is a moving target which demands ongoing attention to the dynamics and circumstances under which people are motivated to take decisions. There is certainly a difference in how people make decisions if under stress and want, in contrast to how they are motivated to decide and act if they are operating in an environment of abundance.

The authors of *Beyond Hofstede* generally write in high context of their expertise and there are exceeding few examples, stories or cases to illustrate their perspectives. However, several of the authors review the literature of the field they are concerned with in comparative frameworks, nicely charted, that help us to see the progress of critical thinking in the intercultural field over the past few decades.

Towards the close of the volume, the author attempts an overview and a framework for the approaches that are found in the literature cited and in the work of the contributors to this study. She looks first at ontological traits, essentially views of culture as a “thing” that is cognitive in nature, bounded and fixed, coherent and unified. My sense is that theoreticians are more likely to get locked into this perspective rather than those of us who are engaged in the nitty-gritty of everyday interaction where we more easily recognize diversity, flow and complexity.

She then turns to the epistemological structure. Here there are likewise theoreticians who maintain culture as driving and deterministic as opposed to those whose epistemology focuses on organic development of culture as a phenomenon to be studied, classified and verified. This is subject to rational analysis according to modernistic philosophical and scientific tenants, largely where intercultural studies are focused in the Hofstedian and similar models. This shades off, however, into the tendencies of postmodernism where reality and certainly culture are seen as socially constructed and, given the marketing focus of this book, the place where the symbols and stories we fabricate determine the reality we experience as well as being our creations.

Readers should be prepared for quite a few highly technical discussions that require a mastery of statistical and other research technologies. It is easy to become resentful of the flood of opaque terminology, often undefined in its context and certainly not aimed at enabling readers, particularly if they don't share either the field or the English tongue at higher levels. In addition, it is important to read the various analyses with the perspective of the history of philosophy in the background—how the waves of thinking about thought have shaped the theory and inquiry we produce at various points in time. Finally, *Beyond Hofstede* is a provocative resource for suggesting research directions that are more flexible, more interdisciplinary and more creative as we acknowledge the contributions of Hofstede as well as reframe cultural exploration.