

## ***Cambridge Handbook of Culture, Organizations, and Work***

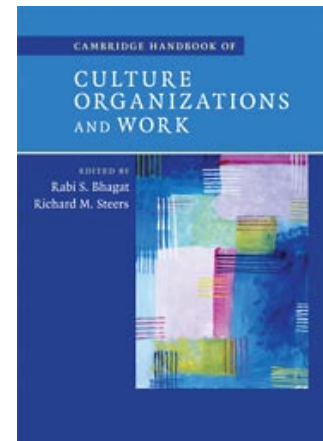
**Bhagat, Rabi S. and Richard M. Steers, eds.**

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This encyclopedic volume focuses on the cultural dimensions of organizational theory and behavior as well as the authors' views of where theory and research are and should be going in fields where culture is a qualifying factor.



Much of the research and interpretation found in this book is caught in extension the traditional essentialist framework of Hofstedian and other classical frameworks that are currently under critical review in the intercultural field and are occasionally questioned here. The authors, numbering well over thirty, are largely scholars of business and management rather than per se interculturalists and so appropriate much of the intercultural boilerplate to look at how culture affects theory of organizational design, mergers and acquisitions, knowledge transfer, creativity and innovation.

Likewise these intercultural theoretical underpinnings are frequently used to look at how people work in organizations, how they exercise the functions of leadership, manage teams, affect individuals' motivation and work behaviors and attitudes, how they negotiate, create and build trust, manage stress and gender issues as well as conduct training.

Nonetheless, there are some quite interesting questions raised that point us in the direction of progressing our understanding of the dynamics of culture and our study of it. High on my list is Chapter 2 by Leung and Ang where effort is given to "creating a cultural map of the world," less focused on dimensional values than on behavioral axioms with a view of indigenous and ecological perspectives. It advocates a wider use of anthropological and psychological, an integration of both objective and subjective data instead of being confined by legal, political and economic frameworks.

Chapter 3 discusses a question that very much qualifies how we use our stock of cultural knowledge, namely, "When does culture matter?" While we may be inclined to say, "Always," the fact of the matter is that one can drown in a sea of cultural information if one does not have the sense to attach oneself to something that floats. In other words, all too much cultural formation and fascination with the different and

the exotic can paralyze the individual who needs to be decisive in various organizational contexts. What do people of any given group see, believe and value in their cohesive mindset about themselves and their world? Here the authors, while admitting that culture always matters, attempt to sort out the conditions under which culture matters more and those where it matters less.

While the concept of *inclusion* has been a buzzword in diversity circles and the search for and development of talent in individuals, it has not really addressed the group and organizational levels of enterprises. Here all too often globalization is consciously or unconsciously neocolonial in its outcomes. Chapter 4 presents and analyzes a variety of culturally diverse organizational frameworks and how these affect the roles of the participants, leaders and managers and how these differences affect the pace and activities that result from them. Much more research needs to be done on the interface between differently structured organizations in their global encounters.

Mergers and acquisitions are the meat of Chapter 5 where both Hofstede and a number of other research perspectives attempt to explain and minister to organizational life after the organizational nuptials, when the parties need either to establish a productive identity together or head for a divorce. Post-merger, differences do make a difference, but they are not the only factors and parties to be attended to in the real-world struggle to address threats to stability and cohesion.

The next chapter on “Globalization and Organizational Processes” looks at the process of homogenization and convergence in organizations, professional roles and behavior patterns in global enterprises. While the presentation seems coherent, the reader struggles in every case to assess the degree to which the universalization described is being realized. In some cases one is tempted to see it as a relatively thin veneer paid expedient obeisance, while in other cases immigrants to the globalizing world are eagerly seeking acculturation. The authors close this essay with a clear admission that historical context tells us a lot about how and why globalization is happening as it does, and a confession that much more historical research is necessary to make sense out of these trends.

Chapter 7 addresses the role of culture in the creation, diffusion, and transfer of knowledge. This is a massive topic and the authors do a good job of defining the kinds of knowledge and the specific organizational cultural conditions and factors that affect how it is constructed and shared. They lay out their findings in understandable tables and diagrams, at the same time laying emphasis that much of the success of knowledge creation and transfer rests on the ability of the individuals and organizational cultures

involved to create meaningful relationships and an environment of corporate and personal trust.

Equally fascinating is the 8<sup>th</sup> Chapter, looking at cultural variations in the shape that innovation takes in different environments and how it changes over time. Then authors provide as a focal point for the discussion innovation in the healthcare industry and look at everything from how innovation is recognized (e.g., in the system of patents) to how it is adapted in various highly developed Western contexts and among the Japanese. This is a difficult excursion, because while culture is in the background, how it is used and shaped by political and economic interests is where the action often takes place. It was interesting to read this as massive corruption scandals in the pharmaceutical industry are coming to light in the USA. Innovation is also shaped by two sets of stakeholders, those at the design or macro level who identify problems or challenges that ask for innovative action and, then, by the stakeholders at the operational level who once an innovation is diffused will shape its implementation in various directions given their culture and circumstances.

When we arrive at the third section of the book on how culture affects organizational behavior, we are in the territory of language and practice where qualitative research would be more illustrative than statistics gathering. We start with two chapters on the “Understanding of leadership across cultures” and “Global leadership: progress and challenges.” Research on this topic is extensive and worth a serious look, particularly at a time when “leadership” is the buzzword and advertising slogan of a lot of intercultural as well as general management marketing of training and consulting. The Anglo-Saxon word and concept is largely being used because native terms like *jefe* and *Führer* and other native language terms are often contaminated and unsavory given the behavior of those who have the title of leader both historically and currently. Here again the Hofstedian dimensions and the Globe Study results are both used and called into question when used to classify behaviors and areas in the exercise of leadership across cultures.

Here as elsewhere there is little indigenous scholarship to stem the neocolonial tide of management science in its search for “universals.” The currently so-called “Transformational Leadership” movement appears to be more of an article of faith than a viable praxis where the cultural differences and expectations of who leaders should be and what they should do are substantial. There is in fact insufficient research and evidence regarding whether traditional leadership theory and practice is or may be evolving into a global leadership pattern. Of course, the desire for “one size fits all” is in

the financial interest of global enterprises. Much more country specific research is needed.

Chapter 11 looks at virtual teams. This is a study of studies about virtual working and teamwork, describing a gamut of cultural issues that can be related to dispersed working. Unfortunately, the world and its technology have moved on, so that while there are useful insights about the dynamics of working virtually described here, the interpretative paradigm has now shifted to the nature of teamwork itself, as larger and larger portions of all work are global and virtual and online collaboration is becoming in most areas the rule rather than the exception. The chapter does provide a convenient table of researches in the area.

What does culture have to do with why and how we work as we do? Chapter 12 looks at the cultural drivers of individuals, their values, motivations and attitudes, what we expect from work and what we get out of it and how these areas may be effectively responded to by action, rewards, and compensation on the part of organizations, managers and employers. Are we more performant as individuals or part of a team or a group? What is the right balance of work and leisure? The authors review the research on these and other questions and provide a generic overview of satisfaction steps according to several classical cultural dimensions.

Inevitably workplace conflict and its resolution are complicated by culture. The research on this is dealt with in Chapter 13. Cultural considerations must be a part of the needs-currency analysis of negotiation, where each party identifies their own needs, tries to explore those of the other party, and then, looks into their resources for what they can offer to close the rift. Cultures determine how and why disputes are resolved and what the guidelines for this may be (legal anthropology). The authors dip into many different disciplines to come up with the cultural settings and influences conducive to successful workplace conflict resolution and they plead for more interdisciplinary research efforts.

Trust and trust development have entered into a number of the chapters and in Chapter 14 they are developed explicitly. Is there a kind of relationship accounting system in which trust grows or disintegrates? The authors have assembled a good table of elements affecting the trust process, personal, cultural and contextual and the findings of research about each. Trajectories for the trust formation and loss of trust are created for Western European and East Asian cultures. It may be helpful for the interculturalist to know about potential cultural differences in the creation and

maintenance of trust, but in fact this is a place where one has to work with the local context, team and individual processes surrounding trust.

Next in Chapter 15 we turn to stress and coping with stress on the job as it appears in varying cultural contexts. Certainly globalization, mergers and acquisitions as well as expatriation dynamics will pile new stresses on all involved and raise the question of how cultural dimensions come into play and affect which coping mechanisms come into play, e.g., internal, external or some combination of the two. Stress is managed on three levels: first, by reducing stressors by changing environments or tasks; secondly, by learning self-management techniques on the part of the person experiencing the stress, and, finally, by providing care for mental or physical effects of stress on those who bear them. There can be a mind-numbing number of variables, given area cultures, organizational cultures, temporal and environmental contexts, and the mechanisms of individual personalities. Changes in operational and communication technology as well as generational differences further complicate the picture. Both the largely Western orientation of stress theory and the enquiries made as well as of the research tools used for them beg significant investigation.

Chapter 16 takes into account the positions and roles of women in the workplace. The authors start in with notions of progress in this area and make country comparisons that examine positive and negative aspects of women's participation in the workforce. In my work I have frequently maintained that this is not a side issue but that gender differences may in their various manifestations be even more critical than national or ethnic differences and help us understand them better when looked at. De facto male dominance of managerial posts and career tracks has long been the object of organizational studies in this respect. There is an unfortunate comparison of feminine and masculine societies which is at best simplistic and at worst a reiteration of stereotypes. I would opine that this happens largely because these areas have been mostly resulted from studies of women's condition, studies that have not been paralleled by proportionate examination of the male experience.

The last chapter in this section of the book explores research about intercultural training and is most likely to attract the interest of the majority of readers of this review. It presents them with familiar names. It will also probably prove to be the most disappointing. While presenting a competent overview of research into the theory and practice of training this chapter is rife with models, buzzwords, borrowings and chestnuts from the past. This is more of a criticism of the field's own developmental stasis than a criticism of the authors' redaction. The closing discussion seems to beg for

more of the same and is impoverished in terms of looking forward creatively for innovative resources. Perhaps these point to a field turned in on itself. Not to long ago I was asked by an eminent interculturalist about the three books that were most contributory to my development as an interculturalist during the past year. None of the three I offered were authored from within the intercultural field.

Part 4 looks at future directions in intercultural theory and research. Its first chapter examines robustness in research instruments and methods, and the second addresses the future research agenda.

Research results need more comparability and yet must become more multilevel and account for more variables, a bit of a Catch 22. Attention needs to be paid to coherent construct measures, research samples, aggregation of findings, as well as translation and meaningfulness when instruments are employed across cultures, etc.

Moreover, researchers, in the reviewer's opinion, need to examine their own desire to know. "Pure research" is rarely pure, and perhaps should be preceded by serious stakeholder analysis. The authors address this somewhat in examining sources of bias in cross-cultural assessment, but here they are focused largely in intrinsic methodological bias. Both research institutions and those providing funds for research have, consciously or unconsciously a point of view and an interest in the outcome that may combine to play a bigger part in the work than we may admit.

In looking at the future agenda, historical realities should play a bigger part in the design and interpretation of research. History's absence is frankly described in the eyes of the authors, as "intellectual laziness," perhaps not a character fault so much as a resulting too often from a colonialist mentality favoring Western theories, paradigms, research tools and procedures as well as lack of access to publication for indigenous authorship. The treatment concludes with brief reiterations of the importance of progressing the critical themes already addressed in other chapters of the book.

I suspect this book will be of most use to those contemplating research and needing organized access to the literature of the field. All in all, this heavy volume is less of a read and more of an annotated and analytical bibliography that would be more easily accessible as an online data base than as a dust-jacketed kilo of paper. Its availability as an eBook is perhaps a useful innovation that is pointing the way to the future for such anthological reviews. Given the size of this volume the reader is assisted by the existence of references and bibliography at the close of each chapter rather than at the end of the book.