

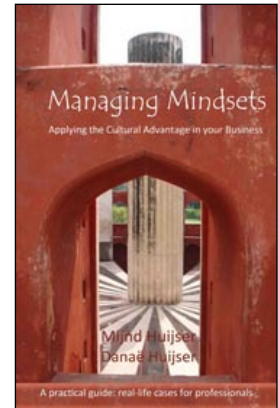
Huijser, Mijnd & Danaë Huijser,

Managing Mindsets: Applying the Cultural Advantage in your Business

Ayn Press, Haarlem, 2011. www.ayn-press.com

Reviewed by Dr. George Simons at diversophy.com

This slim volume is essentially a set of one dozen case studies and the authors' commentary detailing intercultural challenges that are addressed through professional interventions using the *Model of Freedom*. This is a tool developed by Mijnd Huijser and administered by a group of certified intercultural practitioners, among them are those who contribute their first hand experience in these case studies. The areas exemplified by the cases include: Cross-cultural Coaching, Mergers and Acquisitions, Organizational Change and Social Integration.



Dissatisfaction on the part of academic researchers, practicing interculturalists, marketers, and managers with the seminal work of Intercultural Studies developed by Hofstede and Trompenaars is a topic increasingly addressed in current literature. This has led these founding fathers to further explore, research, refine and expand their models. It has also spawned a number of new models and approaches, some based on the earlier ones, others taking new directions. For example, the *Cultural Detective* model which this reviewer has been engaged in, works by addressing core values of a culture as seen from the inside. This makes it possible for us to see that the generic label of "collective," applied to certain cultures, is quite a different reality. One only need compare the structure of collectivity in each culture and the responsibilities and behaviors it generates. *Affiliation* (France), *Druzhba* (Russia), *Utang na Loob* (Philippines), etc., are animals of quite varied stripe. This diversity is further complicated, as *Managing Mindsets* notes, by differences in interpretation of the same values among individuals sharing a culture.

The *Model of Freedom* takes a different approach, in that it both simplifies adds perspectives to the foundational Western models. It is built on the recognition that essentialist labeling of cultural characteristics fails to recognize critical modifiers, viz., when, where, how, and with whom people behave in these ways. As an expat looking at my US culture from a distance, for example, it is interesting for me to observe how my so-labeled "highly individualistic" compatriots very easily adopt a herd mentality in given circumstances.

There is no contradiction between being a unique individual and sharing a cultural identity with the communities we are born into or find ourselves in, given the various collective frames in which our lives are acted out. From family to multinational conglomerate we will also find ourselves stretched between how authority is exercised and how systems function. The conjunction of where we fall between self and community on one hand, and authority and systems on the other, can be sounded by a profiling process, and this provides the operational core of the *Model of Freedom*. The quadrants provided by the intersection of these axes, yield four cultural orientations that both help us understand our preferences and guide us to recognize and respond to others' orientations with greater insight and behavioral success. Plotting one's profile on these quadrants one can then see where one is in harmony with or at a distance from others, using an average profile for different cultures or, where the profiling is being done by both parties, by comparing their particular profiles. The case studies give examples of both kinds of interventions.

Those already familiar with the *Model of Freedom* can launch into the case studies and their commentary directly. If not, this reviewer would suggest going immediately to where the naming of the model is described in the epilogue, and more importantly, to the *Model of Freedom* itself, which is explained in Annex 1 in simple and direct fashion. This is followed by a second Annex giving information on the assessment toolkit that is provided by the purveyors of this method. With this introduction and occasionally flipping to these resources, the book is a relatively easy read.

There are important lessons to be learned in each of the cases. They are short and easy to read and I don't want to "spoil the ending" by exploring them in detail here, but I would like to mention a handful of refreshers and insights that I pulled from them:

- Having a model to work with reduces emotional static. It allows one to more dispassionately observe and address conflicting differences. In addition, it recognizes the often overlooked cultural gap that may exist between coaches and their clients, when both seem to be focusing on the cultural challenge that the clients face when interacting with others' differences. This is a truth hinted at in the practice of NLP where we are encouraged not only to position ourselves to observe our interactions, but also to observe the observer.
- The reminder that while integration in mergers may follow the pattern of technical then political then cultural stages, in fact the process is from beginning to end weighted with cultural factors that need attention.
- That the *Model of Freedom*, nor any other model for that matter (despite the contemporary flair for hype and branding), is not a standalone process nor a one size fits all model. One sees practitioners in the case studies employing a variety of tools and processes, including appreciative inquiry, coaching and facilitation techniques, etc. Professional competence in intercultural work, as elsewhere, requires a multifaceted set of attitudes and tools.
- Concern with societal applications as well as commercial ones is an important part of intercultural work. Your business may not be a business! Despite the fact that the social case study is the last area explored in *Managing Mindsets*, it is nonetheless there and well analyzed. Social factors are also at stake in organizational life and should not be forgotten but may and sometimes must, in fact, be a part of our cultural analysis and interventions.

Reading this book will not make you an expert in the *Model of Freedom*, but it will convince you of the importance of both relooking the technologies you choose to work with as an intercultural or human resources or social professional. It will suggest ways to reframe them. It will ask you to sort out what you know and do in this field. I like to feel that our work requires us to frequently "move house," and that implies deciding what to leave behind and what to pack up and take with us, as well as to list what we will need as we enter a new environment.

30 January 2011