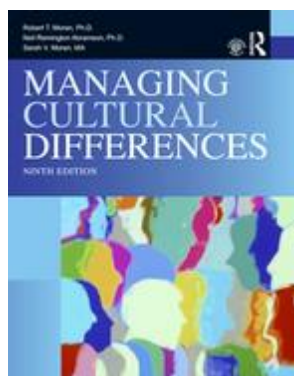


**Moran, Robert T., Neil Remington Abramson & Sarah V. Moran,
*Managing Cultural Differences, 9th Edition***

2014, Taylor & Francis. ISBN-13: 978-0-415-717-34-2

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



Once commonly described as “the Bible of Intercultural Studies”, this classic work has once again been refreshed and updated to provide a new generation of learners with a beginner’s *vademecum* for the global business world. If “*vademecum*” is too ambitious a word for over six hundred pages of glossy paper and colorful text, the book is available as an e-book, both purchasable and rentable, making it fit both pocket or purse in size and price.

Robert Moran has coordinated a refreshed author team to update and refocus the content and process for maximum utility. As in previous versions, the book deals both with big picture cultural phenomena in international and global contexts, but continues to provide sampled awareness to behavioral detail of gesture and language in communicating across cultures. Updated seems almost an understatement as in many places the book provides fresh and articulate, almost journalistic commentary and resources that make the reader feel at times like she or he may be watching a commentator on daily news via live streaming. Yes, there is grounding in and references to older works and citations from more venerable sources, but validated in terms of present relevance and reliability. Just flipping through the volume on its arrival on my desk, it was hard to resist the temptation to just dip in wherever the pages opened before me. Maybe that is the result of curiosity about a newly attired old acquaintance as well as of the increasing net serendipity that others and I are trending toward, but few books tease me as this new edition did on the first flipthrough.

We are fully aware that we can play the “cultural cards” for both corporate and personal gain and Gordon Gecko temptations to do so are ever present. Consequently, the reader is considerably impressed by the fact that the authors are conscious of and committed to business that is both fair and sustainable and that ultimate market advantage lies in respect for peoples and their cultures. Eyes are open to the potential damage of exploitation in both human and ecological terms. Both psychology and ethics are specifically addressed and make their way into observations underway in other parts of the book.

Managing Cultural Differences launches out with a look at the meaning of global leadership, a topic all too fuzzy and buzzy today, taking the challenges and responsibilities that those terms should imply and spelling them out in practical terms. It cites the variety of intercultural models and theories, as useful background but does not wax dogmatic about them. Rather it sees them as contributory to the essential and wide-ranging cultural sensitivity needed to exercise real leadership at this moment in history. Stories and examples bring this kind of leadership to light and to life. Old wineskins can still hold new wine if one is careful not to pour too much into them.

Next, negotiation. Having personally trained international negotiation programs for a number of years at a major development bank and in many international organizations, I have been fully aware via abundant stories of the infinite ways in which culture can show up and sabotage the well-intended but ethnocentric search for agreement. In the search for mutual benefit, it is important to be aware of the minutiae as well as the overall goals of the negotiation process. The treatment here provides such a mix. Yes, there are cultural specifics here that might be easily take for stereotypes, but in fact they are common expressions of cultural bent that may or may not appear. In any case, they do reflect priorities and preferences that can emerge at moments in a variety of ways. It is a reminder that “typical behaviors” are the result of the sense

of self and group that may have multiple forms of expression. They are learning points and an incentive to look deeper and further whence comes the comportment of “the other.”

Learning from others and from change requires the ability to observe from multiple points of view as well as to flex our behavior in unfamiliar directions. We live and work in times where identity is being negotiated on a day-to-day basis, both our own identity narrative and those of the nations, groups and organizations we are part of. How to keep our eyes open when there is too much to see, when flashes of insight may seem blinding and we are tempted to look away and fall back into our ethnocentric mindsets. Often we discover that we are not the people we taught ourselves and believe ourselves to be when others confront us with the realities that we represent for them. It is hardest to build bridges to places where we are not dressed for the weather and, if avoidable, we would rather not go. This textbook provides tools and tips that good teaching and mentoring can bring to life and encourage bridge-building even in blustery circumstances.

Then, the challenges. Some seem enduring such as gender, some new and fluid such as motivating the global workforce and exploring strategies for emerging markets. Transitions and relocations are dealt with in a brief exploration of the tools and processes for assisting transferees in coming and going, though, of course, most of the book is also critical learning for sojourners and immigrants across cultures. Global and multicultural teams are briefly explored and likewise their members need these same critical learnings.

Roughly the second half of the book is dedicated to exploration of world cultures by region, a feature common to previous editions, overviews to be sure, but updated with fresh perceptions and trends as well as conveying cultural thinking, priorities and behaviors in everyday business life and personal encounters. The focus is often generic going into detail about specific countries where the size, development and forces of change are factors. I was disappointed to see scant mention of Mexico in the mix.

No longer part of the current author team, but still present in inspiration for this work is friend and mentor to many of us, Philip R. Harris.