

**Aycan, Zeynep, Rabindra Kanungo, Manuel Mendonca,  
*Organizations and Management in Cross-Cultural Context***

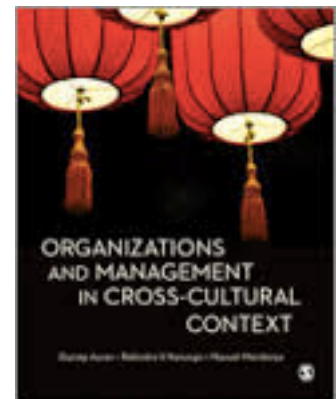
SAGE Publications Ltd. 2014.

ISBN: 9781412928748

***Reviewed by Dr. George Simons at [diversophy.com](http://diversophy.com)***

This textbook aims at bringing out the cross-cultural perspectives and questions involved in a large number of the fundamental theoretical approaches in the areas that its chapters address: leadership, teamwork, motivation, communication, conflict management, ethics, corporate social responsibility and organizational structure and change.

It can be said that scientific theories and models are “studied perceptions of reality awaiting further corroboration.” When it comes to management theory and practice, it can move in several directions. The first, which we have seen too much of and which knows no sign of letting up, is that of colonization. The missionary position has been required not just by religious evangelism but by academic and organizational proselytism. The second is that of calling into question the assumptions drawn from one context before they are imposed in another. The latter is what this book attempts to do, though given the state of the art, a largely Western and Anglophone corpus of theoretical perspectives are the subject of examination. There is a historical completeness to the work, attempting to cover management thinking from Taylor to today, over 100 years of theory and models, much it familiar to me from my undergraduate and graduate studies half a century ago.



The increasingly visual and interactive nature of communication and learning driven by new technology, while it has not yet made paper textbooks obsolete, it has driven up their prices to the point where it is difficult for individuals to purchase them (I now begin to see rental schemes set up by the publishers themselves). It has also required them to become more visual and interactive accompanied by online references, websites and blogs. This book is no exception. The companion website is right up front, and a “Guided Tour” section uses images of actual pages to describe the eight kinds of reflective content and activities proposed in the body of the volume. This, of course, is a good argument for electronic versions of books, where a finger’s touch on an iPad can bring up a reference link for review, as few students will be inclined to engage in the frustrating task of typing out long URLs on their laptops.

The book does not purport to bring forth new or replacement theories for those examined. Rather it most often examines the existing ones to see where they may work and do not work, most specifically in terms of crossing cultures. Most of the cultures addressed the theoretical perspectives in this book are national cultures, however, one may certainly see that regional, organizational etc., cultural thinking and practices can equally put these theories to the test, if, in fact, not put some of them to rest. Sections on “key challenges” indicate where the relevance is lacking or questioned in the theories and sometime suggest strategies for policies and behaviors to bridge the gap. Unfortunately too many of these are platitudinous responses based on stereotypical interpretations of traditional dimensional approaches to culture and the more recent *Globe* studies rather than contextual analysis, which, one hopes, would at least be addressed in the classroom.

As in so many studies of intercultural impacts on other fields of study, cultural dimensional models are used as a handy way of opening the discussion about differences, though these themselves are born from the same kinds of Western theoretical perspectives as are the management theories being examined in the light of their findings.

Chapter Five on leadership styles largely compares this so-called “Charismatic Leaders” with “Paternalistic Leaders” in search of an ideal leadership style making broad brush differences in behavior clear, but not providing much in terms of adapting to one or the other style or describing synergizing behaviors.

Chapter Six on teamwork opens with a description of “The most powerful team leading the world (2008-2012)” touting the diversity of the Obama Administration. True that from a US perspective and definition of diversity by races and places of national origin, the “team” seems diverse. However, if one takes acculturation and US identity narratives into account, this pales into insignificance and the presentation of this team as multicultural seems indeed bizarre. Identity discourse determines cultural difference at the most basic level but its degree of relevance is contextual. The degree to which diversity is relevant in this “team” should be measured by how the diverse background and talents of the participants are identified, and exploited in the achievement of the team’s objectives. That discussion is missing. Real cultural assessment of management practice should start with an examination of the urculture of US domestic and foreign policy and how its values drive the behaviors used in executing it, then only with reflections on how the participants’ defined identities and “multicultural” synergy is a may or may not contribute to this.

Here as well as in following discussions, e.g., teamwork, feedback and work-life balance, there is little information about how to synergize rather than colonize with US and other Western perspectives. It becomes a question of intent versus impact, where the authors’ expressed intentions are to easily frustrated by the state of the subject matter, There is too much analysis about why “other” systems don’t work and little examination of the indigenous perspectives and indigenous efforts to correct and improve them. Such information, we suspect is absent here because it is lacking in the dominant literature and in the available approaches to the study of the dynamics of other cultures. Lack of language skills may be an important factor in creating this lacuna. We can ask, for example, is work-life balance desirable in itself, or just one more advanced management strategy for greater productivity? Perhaps it is the subtext that “worklife balance” is in fact “work-family balance”, and therefore a question of over application of the individual-collective dimensional thinking as well as Western definitions of the forms of justice. Certainly there are additional factors, besides family, to be more amply considered in such a discussion.

When the book turns to organizational structure in Chapter Eight, it examines the different kinds of organizations in respect to their function, social, cultural models, and their strengths and weaknesses in regard to dealing with growth and change, as well as everyday management. I cannot help but be struck, perhaps shocked, by one of the book’s many quizzes, found here, whose title was, “Can you Delegate or are you a ‘Control Freak’?” This, to my mind, besides biasing the questionnaire by the use of such language, was one more reflection of the frequent dualistic and dyadic mentality and high level of judgmental assessment found in the book, in itself an important cultural feature that seems not to be recognized and dealt with adequately.

The book concludes with chapters on human resource management and the dilemmas of corporate social responsibility. Again, dimensional thinking tends to obscure a more culturally

specific and contextual understanding of other people and their systems, though the final chapter returns to the important point of cautioning that differences in behavior across cultures is not necessarily an indication of ethical inferiority.

Were I a professor choosing to use this textbook, I would certainly do so with a great deal of caution and ample reflections on the both conscious and unconscious judgments that it makes. This is not to say that the authors are deliberately and consciously endorsing dichotomous thinking, but in fact so much of this is written into the models and resources existing in the field of management studies that it emerges inevitably if one presents them authentically. This added to the use of models of culture that easily lead to dichotomous and stereotyped thinking provides a rather dangerous cocktail that needs to be sipped and tasted very slowly and carefully if one is to discern its components.