As U.S. organizations continue to explore overseas business opportunities, they will be challenged to adapt to the new markets local characteristics, legislation, fiscal regime, sociopolitical environment and cultural system. Riding the Waves of Culture shows international managers how to build the skills, sensitivity, and cultural awareness needed to establish and sustain management effectiveness across cultural borders. This revised edition is updated with new research and statistics. More than an encyclopedia of cultures and customs, this essential guide: Describes successful and failed cross-cultural business transactions of multinational organizations such as AT&T, Heineken, Motorola and Volvo Offers techniques managers can use to anticipate and mediate some of the difficult dilemmas of international management Uses country-by-country graphs, examples, and other comparisons to illustrate how different cultures regard and respond to various management approaches Includes a CD-ROM of graphs, charts, and exercises to help readers evaluate their effectiveness as a global manager.

This book was used as the core text in a Master Level course I took in Global Leadership.

It frankly is one of the best books I have ever read which surprises me even, given that it was used in this context from a primarily academic point of view. I did not expect this book to be as readable and as practical as I found it to be.

First, its important to note the books own disclaimer from the earliest pages. This is not a book that assumes nor is it designed to explain to the reader how other cultures think and function to where a reader will come away with a complete grasp of other cultures. Frankly, that is a nearly impossible task. If you're looking for a book on cultural etiquette that will catalog and recount all the possible missteps and misunderstandings that can occur when different cultures meet, this is not your book.

What this book does is break cultural elements into general categories and through the use of an extensive database of about 50,000 managers from around the world, it demonstrates how different cultures, defined primarily
by national boundaries, approach universal challenges and compares them by use of a sliding scale between two identified extremes.

This is done for 7 different cultural elements. An example and the first element explored, would be the tendency toward Universalism versus Particularism. Universalism is the tendency of people within a specific culture to appeal to concepts of social justice, absolute values or the like and guide their individual decisions on that basis. This is a fairly high tendency with the United States for example. Particularism, on the other hand, is the tendency to define such choices more on the basis of one’s relationship to the people involved rather than principles that apply in every situation. Russia and Venezuela (interestingly enough, both nations which seem perpetually at odds with the US and criticized by Americans for being corrupt) are examples of nations that score higher in this realm.

While it can be a little dry to read through these elements, the authors do a good job of balancing data and theory with illustrations from real life and a continuing scenario that is returned to several times illustrating these elements in the context of a multi-national firms managers meeting.

The primary value of this book for me has been the ability to suspend and step outside of my own biases, prejudices and stereotypes and from a more objective position, see and understand how different cultures approach situations. When that can be achieved then there is a better chance of coming up with a solution that will make sense and achieve a desired end, than when the noise common to cross-cultural or multi-cultural situations is left to reign free.

The authors are European and management consultants in the field. As a revision to a prior edition, this most recent book has expanded the value of the base concepts by including 2 additional chapters. One looks at South Africa which is a case study of multiculturalism within a single nation and it helps to identify what is no doubt true in other nations as well, namely that even with the measurements and objective evaluations of the earlier chapters, it is still important to do your homework and recognize that cultural nuances exist within the country by other factors such as ethnic group.

Illustrating this point even further is the final chapter which focuses upon the differences found within management task roles in the same firm and the same country. This is a little anticlimatic in some ways as it serves to diminish the value of the generalizations drawn earlier in the book, but it does serve to reinforce the warning of assuming too high a level of familiarity and thus moving from confidence into arrogance.

This book should be required reading not only for the business community moving toward multi-nationalism or transnationalism, but also for diplomatic personnel, world travellers or anyone wanting to raise their cultural IQ and sensitivity to different situations.
5 Stars. Buy this one to keep in your professional reference library.

Bart Breen

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