

Book Review

Beyond Hofstede: Culture Frameworks for Global Marketing and Management

Edited by Cheryl Nakata, Palgrave-MacMillan, 2009

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This book attempts to go beyond Hofstede by offering new perspectives for cross-cultural research in marketing and management. On the cover page, "*Beyond Hofstede*" appears in very large letters, while the second, and probably most promising part of the title ("*Culture Frameworks for Global Marketing and Management*") appears in a much smaller font. In Chapter 1, Cheryl Nakata explains how Hofstede's framework has become the dominant cultural paradigm in business studies. She argues that it is now time to look beyond, because the world has become more complex, more fluid, and more globally integrated. As a consequence, new theorization of culture and alternative paradigms of culture are needed for scientific investigation in varied and dynamic terrains. The book is the outcome of a symposium held in May 2008 at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Chapters are individual contributions from the symposium participants who are leading scholars in the field. Two chapters are contributed by the editor alone, the starting and the finishing chapters, which are both quite prudent vis-à-vis Hofstede.

The easiest solution would have been to just ignore Hofstede, if the project was to go beyond the "commander statue" (as in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*). Strangely however, a number of chapters provide a critical approach of Hofstede's contribution. The most critical is Chapter 3, entitled "Beyond Hofstede: Challenging the Ten Commandments of Cross-Cultural Research", by Vas Taras and Piers Steel. They list and discuss 10 assumptions underlying the Hofstedean framework, including the identity between cultures and values, the extreme stability of cultures, their association with geographical boundaries and the possibility to represent them through questionnaires, mean scores, and matched samples. Assumption 10, namely that the Hofstedean framework is the only viable framework to study culture, would certainly not be supported by Hofstede himself. Chapter 4, authored by Cheryl Nakata and Elif Izberk-Bilgin ("*Culture Theories in Global Marketing: A Literature-Based Assessment*") is a content-analysis based literature review of culture theories. This systematic undertaking reviews 587 research studies in total, 141 of which use culture theories. Based on this

empirical approach, Hofstede is arch-dominant with 68% of the articles being based on his "universal culture paradigm", Edward Hall being the main challenger (14%) and Harry Triandis to a lesser extent (3%). The method followed may overestimate the dominance of Hofstede's framework in the cross-cultural literature in marketing and management. In Chapter 6, entitled "*Reflexive Culture's Consequences*" (one more sign of the Commander statue?), Søren Askegaard, Dannie Kjeldgaard, and Eric Arnould contrast the approach of market globalization by Levitt(1983) - based on the denial of culture - and that of Hofstede, whom they credit with having reintroduced culture but whom they criticize for his simplistic approach to cultural differences. They argue in favor of bypassing the dichotomous debate by considering homogenizing (globalizing) and heterogenizing (localizing) processes as part and parcel of globalization (p. 109).

The second group of chapters describes alternative culture frameworks and is therefore less preoccupied to position themselves against Hofstede. I do not describe them in order as Parts III, IV, and V are labelled and composed in a rather arbitrary manner. Assembling contributions in a logical order was a difficult task. Chapter 8 by Wendi L. Adair, Nancy R. Buchan and Xiao-Ping Chen offers an interesting portrait of Edward Hall's contribution, that is, the rediscovery of a 50 year-old cultural framework. Chapter 8's title, "Conceptualizing Culture as Communication in Management and Marketing Research" reflects Hall's high-low context communication paradigm and its all-encompassing cultural framework with proxemics, monochronism/polychronism, etc. Of great use to researchers is Chapter 8's detailed review of articles addressing Hall's theory of communication and culture (pages 156 to 160). Chapter 5 by Mary Yoko Brannen (entitled "Culture in Context: New Theorizing for Today's Complex Cultural Organizations") and Chapter 10 by Fiona Moore (entitled "Shifting Perspectives: Multiple Cultures and Community Embeddedness in an Anglo-German MNC") share an orientation to ethnography and the study of organizational culture. They clearly focus on culture as complexity and organizations as cultural entities. Simultaneous memberships, fuzzy boundaries, context-embedment, interpretive approaches, and culture understood, not *per se*, but through its impact on management are key tenets of this line of research which has constituted a strong alternative paradigm for many years now. Another alternative perspective is offered by Chapter 11, by Leigh Anne Liu and Claudia Dale, which focuses on the use of mental models to study cross-cultural interactions. They define culture as shared mental models in social interaction, "a cognitive network comprised of interrelated informational, relational, and emotional elements of knowledge", helping individuals to make sense of

specific situations (page 225). Chapter 11 summarizes previous work on individual mental models (page 228-235) and offers a comprehensive review of the implications of mental models for communication, negotiation, and organizational life. The role of context in cross-cultural research is emphasized in much detail by Susan P. Douglas and C. Samuel Craig in Chapter 7. Their chapter is marketing-centered and offers a review of how culture ("a complex, amorphous, and ambiguous concept" (page 127)) has been integrated in the field. Chapter 7 explains how research methods and designs can account for different aspects of the contexts when comparing across countries. In Chapter 9, Donnel A. Briley proposes a dynamic view of the influence of culture on consumer motivations and decisions. This dynamic view is presented in a model on page 185, which emphasizes the combined influence of chronic and situational forces on individual cognitions in terms of goals, and, through them, on decision outcomes in terms of both judgments and choices.

The final chapter (12), by Cheryl Nakata, critically comments on the ontology of culture as it is used in business studies (culture is cognitive, bounded, immutable, coherent and unified). She associates this ontology with an idealist-superorganic epistemology whereby culture appears as "an abstract entity with strong causal force" (page 254). In contrast to this approach, she proposes a realist-organic epistemological structure which better fits with a weakly bounded, unsettled, and changeable view of culture. This chapter appears to be an ambitious attempt to bring together the different perspectives in the book to establish a common epistemological basis. Cheryl Nakata's rival framework (see Figure 12.2 page 256 and Figure 12.3 page 261) is applied to global marketing issues in a Table that spans over 6 pages (263-268).

As noted previously, this book somewhat curiously portrays Geert Hofstede as the Commander statue. The book is literally haunted by Hofstede, a very influential Dutch academic, born in 1928 and retired in 1993. It is rather critical of his theories. I participated in an academic conference in his honour in Maastricht, the Netherlands in 1993. In my view, neither his person nor his theories are fully recognizable in this book. In the process of submitting papers with non-Hofstedeian frameworks to academic peer-reviewed journals, did the authors of this book feel mistreated by unimaginative reviewers? Did they feel constrained in the choice of methodologies by the (apparent) dominance of a value, nation, and survey based view of culture. Frustration is relatively obvious and may be fully justified. In any case, Geert Hofstede is not responsible for it. It is the peer review and the journal ranking systems

that create conformity to dominant paradigms and sometimes obviate originality in the creation of knowledge.

For Europeans, as well as for many Asians, the close association between national boundaries, language, and culture, is an enduring reality. In this respect, this book appears rather Americano-centric, with a clear emphasis on universalism rather than particularism, commonalities rather than differences. The most surprising - and revealing - chapter is Chapter 2 contributed by P. Christopher Earley. It is entitled "So What Kind of Atheist Are You? Exploring Cultural Universals and Differences." I did not previously mention this chapter even though it is situated early in the book, because it is, in a sense, the most interesting, provocative, and telling. It clearly favours cultural universals. Arguments abound, although debatable (e.g. no clear difference between organizational and national culture). Some statements are very sincere (e.g. "We have enough of these value-based, large scale surveys..."), but the most telling is proposition 4 on page 35: "People are people, so why can't we just set aside our differences?". However, willingly ignoring cultural differences - real or perceived - is not the best path to an understanding of what is common. The great absent in this book is language. Language matters, however, because an increasing number of people on our planet are proficient in English without being acculturated and without the corresponding mindset (see for instance the interesting contribution by Luna et al. (2008) on monocultural bilinguals).

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References

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