BOOK REVIEW

Barry Tomalin, Mike Nicks, The World's Business Cultures and How to Unlock Them. Special Chapters on: China, USA, Germany, UK, Russia, India, Brazil, France, Italy and Japan, Thorogood Publishing London, 2007, 270 pages, ISBN: 1 85418 369 9, 978-185418369-9

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Although a not very recent publication, Barry Tomalin and Mike Nicks' book on cultural differences and their manifestations in international business is a useful and up-to-date work - in spite of the five years' lapse since its publication date, as people's mental programming is not subdued to rapid change - both for theoreticians and especially for practitioners. The book's great merit lies, beside the pertinent and thorough information it conveys, in its readable, informal style in accordance with the authors' cultural conditioning. They know how to dose theoretical information just in the right proportion to assure scientific seriousness and reliability, but not by diminishing the user-friendly features of the book. "The World's Business Cultures and How to Unlock Them" does not claim to be a scientific work on cultural differences, as cultural awareness and knowledge have to do almost exclusively with practice, it adopts a practical approach, thus meeting business people's needs in their everyday cross-cultural relations. This practical approach is supported by numerous concrete examples, short case studies and even the authors' experiences in the matter. As they do not want to seem real gurus in intercultural competence, they are ready to display in front of the reading public their human side by presenting their own mistakes or cases of ignorance regarding cultural style. This approach of informing and teaching but not with the forefinger raised brings the work close to the reader.

In the foreword to the book, the authors speak about their concern as follows: "We have written it to help international business travellers build relationships and achieve deals instead of running into dead-ends or committing embarrassing blunders. We want to help you to see the world from the other person's point of view: the process is called cultural awareness and, in the era of globalization, there has never been a greater need for it". (p. iv).

The book is structured in two main parts divided into eleven chapters completed by some so-called "Fact files" to the ten countries presented in detail in the last chapter of the book and a list of other topic-related works. If the first

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part - chapter one to ten - has a mainly practical approach, the second part of the work - including only one chapter, chapter eleven - deals exclusively with cross-cultural business practice offering precious data upon the top ten-to be countries from an economic point of view by the middle of the century. This chapter presents the cultural profile of the future ten most influential countries in the world, synthesizing all the data and aspects business people should know when trying to establish contacts to them. In the first part of the book, the authors give a synthesis of the information presented by ending each chapter with conclusions and key learning points revealing to some extent their pedagogical background - Barry Tomalin is a cross-cultural consultant, a former language teacher, editor and marketing director of the English language teaching division of the BBC, while the journalist Mike Nicks works both as a media and business coach.

The first chapter, entitled "Risky business" tries to arouse people's awareness of cultural diversity, its manifestations in everyday and professional life and of the importance of taking it into consideration from the very beginning of a new business relationship. Key ideas of the chapter are: there is no universal business model fit for every culture and situation, there should exist a concern for intercultural competence when initiating a relationship, not just after communication has failed and the relationship has broken down, managers should gain cultural awareness, beside their technical and organizing skills because "International business without understanding local business culture is risky business." (p. 9.) - as the authors see it.

One may find an answer to the question "How to unlock any culture in the world?" by reading chapter two - the book's most theoretical section - and making acquaintance with the Trust model built on two basic elements: rapport - the ability of building relations - and credibility - the means of demonstrating one's ability by matching, for instance, one's communication style to that of his/her counterpart -, the three ingredients of culture (attitudes and values: cultural knowledge and behaviour), the five C's of culture (cultural knowledge - information about the other culture -, cultural behaviour or profile of a country, cultural values and attitudes - do's and don'ts in different cultures -, cultural preferences and cultural adaptation). Furthermore, it is important to avoid stereotyping and generalizing and to show sensitivity for issues like race, religion, sexual orientation or disability and support team members if affected by neglect or discrimination.

Chapter three "How people think" tries to give support for understanding different values and attitudes by presenting, on the one hand, what factors influence the way people think and act and, on the other hand, the components these attitudes build on, such as: core values; cultural fears; motivation (financial or status issues, search for security or fun); space (personal distance) and time (attitude to time).

All these elements contribute to the formation of a cultural behaviour tackled in chapter four according to the models of Richard Gesteland and Richard Lewis. In this section the authors answer to the natural question, why one needs to adapt to another culture and not vice versa by stressing that this gesture might represent a key for success in business.

Chapter five offers the readers some recipes "How to increase your cultural sensitivity" by inviting to create one's Personal Cultural Profile based on items like: communication style, working style, discussion style, business attitude, leadership style, business relationship, decision-making style, basis for decision-making, attitude to time, work/life balance by marking one's position between the two extremes, such as: direct-indirect, formal-informal etc. and comparing it with other cultures' profile.

This chart will create later, in chapter eleven, a basis for comparing the UK's - the authors' homeland - cultural profile with that of the future ten most influential countries in the world. The core message of this chapter can be summed up in a simple formula: 80/20, i.e. 20% change in one's attitude can provoke 80% difference in one's counterpart's behaviour.

Chapter six deals with written and oral communication, possible obstacles for its success, such as: poor language knowledge, the use of slang or idioms, unexplained acronyms and initials, as well as ways of doing it right by uttering simple and short sentences in the active voice, building empathy and smiling when speaking to others. Cultural differences should be minded at this topic, as well.

In chapter seven, "Leadership and decision-making", one can learn about the cultural conditioning and background of the issues mentioned in the title. Thus, depending on the importance of status, power and hierarchy in a society, there are examples for top-down or egalitarian management style, consensus-based or individual decision-making. Related to all these issues is the possibility and frequency of delegation which - and this is a key point to learn from this chapter - is no guarantee for taking ownership, i.e. embracing the delegated task by the person in charge of it simply because of not considering to have the authority to do so.

Chapter eight deals with types of teams, selection of team members, ways of motivating and giving feedback. It is interesting to see what representatives of different cultures look for when creating a team: some (the Nordic countries, Germany, France) will lay emphasis on technical expertise; for others (used to a top-down management system) seniority or longevity (loyalty to the company) count and there are also teams (in Anglo-Saxon companies) having a generalist as member. Authors point out that international teams may have members selected according to different criteria and that it depends on the team leader's knowledge about it and his/her skills to emphasize and use each team member's strengths.

In the next chapter on "Meetings and negotiations" the authors tackle issues like: venue of meetings, participants, ways of arranging meetings, their targets, if meetings are run according to agendas or not, negotiation styles and offer some pieces of advice for a successful negotiation.

As gift-giving and hospitality are important elements of cross-cultural relations, chapter ten presents some major aspects related to the topic, such as do's and don'ts, respect for formalities, acceptance and attendance of hospitality sessions as key elements in relationship-oriented cultures, table etiquette and good manners in general.

As already mentioned, the last chapter of the book - the most extensive one - has an exclusively practical orientation offering an image of what business is like in the ten countries - China, the USA, India, Japan, Brazil, Russia, the UK, Germany, France and Italy - predicted by Goldman Sachs to be the world's largest economies in 2050. The great strength of this chapter lies in the charts representing in each section the cultural profile of the country dealt with. These charts are a concise and, at the same time, precious synthesis of what the section is focused on.

The direct, in some places colloquial style of Tomalin and Nicks' work does not diminish the book's quality in offering up-to-date, easy to follow and reliable information, as well as patterns of behaviour to be applied in cross-cultural business practice. For all these reasons, this reference reading should not be missing from the library of any international business traveller.