

## **Still on the crest of a wave**

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Trompenaars, F. & Hampden-Turner, C. *Riding the Waves of Culture: Understanding Cultural Diversity in Business* (Second Edition) London: Nicholas Brealey (1997), 265pp, £14.99 UK, paperback.

A person who wants to make a study of organization is confronted with a dilemma; whether to concentrate on relating input variables to the outputs of the organization or on the processes which connect inputs to outputs. This dichotomy is frequently reflected in differences of methodology, with the former outlook being associated with a quantitative approach to data collection, appealing to objective measurement of variables, whereas the latter outlook is more associated with qualitative, interpretative accounts of what people do and say, and their subjective feelings. In the climate of 'scientific' rationalism which currently pervades many institutions, the quantitative approach is applied to evaluation for the purposes of accountability; however, although it may be fit for the purpose of describing what the organization has achieved, it is not so good for explaining how what has been achieved was achieved. The preceding discussion, of course, is not news to anyone familiar with the issues surrounding organizational evaluation, but the point that I wish to make is that there appears to be a continuing contrast between those approaches which focus on inputs and products, on the one hand, and processes, on the other. In the framework of contemporary thinking about educational evaluation this can be seen in the contrast between 'policy mechanic' and 'classroom culturalist' approaches (Fuller & Clarke 1994). The publication of a new edition of a well known book on cultural diversity in organizations, *Riding The Waves Of Culture*, enables us to revisit some of these arguments and consider how they might be applied to the study of a particularly interesting set of culturally diverse organizations, namely international schools.

There has been an expanding literature about cultural diversity in organizations over the past couple of decades and an influential voice in this field has been that of Geert Hofstede, who reported a massive study conducted by questionnaire among employees of the various national branches of the multinational IBM corporation (Hofstede 1980, 1991). Factor analysis of attitude data at the level of countries yielded four discrete factors around which Hofstede constructed four dimensions: Power Distance, Individualism, Masculinity and Uncertainty Avoidance. Construction of scaled indices in each dimension enabled Hofstede to resolve different national cultures and describe them. This approach has not been without its critics but, as Hickson (1996) comments, Hofstede had 'frail data, but robust concepts'. The extent to which his concepts have been used as a paradigm for further research is reviewed by Søndergaard (1994) and there can be little doubt that Hofstede's ideas have been very influential on the work of many researchers.

Hofstede worked within a particular concept of culture as an independent variable; he identified it as the input variable, among others, which showed the strongest statistical correlation with the output variables, measured in terms of responses to questionnaire items. This presents a view of culture as an attribute which the nation or organization 'has', but a contrasting view of culture as what the organization 'is' can also be identified (Smircich 1983). Thus, not only can culture be viewed as an independent (input) or dependent (output) variable, but it can also be viewed as a process. This is

the view articulated by Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner who propose that 'culture is the way in which a group of people solves problems and reconciles dilemmas' (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1997). It is the view that culture resides in the ways in which its explicit and implicit aspects are used, rather than in the aspects themselves. Culture is 'how we do things around here'.

Their book appears to have an interesting history. It was first published in 1993 under Trompenaars' sole authorship, although the acknowledgements indicated that Hampden-Turner had made 'a major editorial contribution' to it (Trompenaars 1993). Authorship of the second edition is attributed to both Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner and this reflects the contribution made by the inclusion of a new chapter on 'Reconciling Cultural Dilemmas' which covers material previously discussed in *Charting The Corporate Mind* (Hampden-Turner 1990). This is to be welcomed, since many of the chapters from the previous edition are now expanded by the incorporation of charts which identify bifurcations, display vicious and virtuous circles, and map cultural space, using Hampden-Turner's methodology and making it more explicit. The authors previously collaborated to write *The Seven Cultures Of Capitalism* (Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars 1993) and the seven 'valuing processes' described in that book form the basis for the chapters on 'Relationships and rules', 'The group and the individual', 'Feelings and relationships', 'How far we get involved', 'How we accord status', 'How we manage time', and 'How we relate to nature'. There is also a chapter on 'National cultures and corporate culture', which appeared in the first edition, and two new chapters on 'South Africa: The Rainbow Nation' and 'Gender, ethnicity and functional diversity'.

The validity of the seven-dimensional model of national cultural differences was challenged following reanalysis of Trompenaars' published data (Hofstede 1996). It was claimed that, as a result of correlation and factor analysis at the country level, only two dimensions could be identified, both of which correlated with Hofstede's 'Individualism' dimension. This provoked a response (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars 1997) which made explicit the differences in approach between them. They presented two contrasting lists of assumptions which could be attributed to the work of Hofstede and themselves respectively. Part of their critique of Hofstede referred to the uses to which the two contrasting approaches could be put. According to Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars, there is: 'no better place to start on the seven dimensions but moves to integrate and reconcile values lead to superior performance'. This was contrasted with their view of Hofstede's approach which was to quantify cultural values in various dimensions and place different countries at 'static points on dual axis maps'. What was the point of this procedure, they asked, when it gave 'no better place to be on the quadrant maps and no answer to the questions 'So what?' and 'Where should we move?' Hofstede's approach is very strong on analysis, but he is restricted in his approach while Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars are more eclectic. Hofstede's approach appears to be about the dissection and analysis of the variables of national cultures, whereas Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars are more involved in the processes of cultural creation. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) write that 'all cultures are similar in the dilemmas they confront, yet different in the solutions they find, which creatively transcend the opposites'.

What is the relevance of this book to the international school? In the context of managing international schools 'it would be helpful to acknowledge that some effort

must be made to understand how different philosophies and cultures could lead to misinterpretations and disagreements' (Hawley 1995). Teachers and students have a lifetime's exposure to their respective national cultures but, in an international school, they have to construct an effective organizational culture in a very short time. I recommend this book as an introduction for those who actively seek to understand cultural differences and reconcile cultural dilemmas.

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