

BOOK REVIEWS

Management and cultural values: **The indigenisation of organisations in Asia.** Edited by H. S. R. Kao, D. Sinha, & B. Wilpert. 1999. Sage. Pp. 332.

The ethos of this book is pluralism. Right from the opening chapters, "indigenisation" is taken to mean the process of blending the old with the new, and the traditional with the modern. This book is therefore in the business of cross-fertilisations of new management ideas, both within Asia and between Asia and the rest of the world. As one contributor points out, the principle of equifinality means that "given objectives can be reached by different means" (p. 42), and the potential for us to learn something new for our region is what I used as a yardstick for evaluating the publication as a whole.

Certainly the book makes the point that Asia is increasingly un-accepting of Western management practices and the values that underlie them. The concept of need for achievement, for instance, has been inherently individualistic, de-contextual, and outcome-focused, rather than collectivistic, inductive, and process-based. Increasingly, countries like Japan are turning to indigenous concepts, such as *Bushido* (or the code of the Samurai) in order to re-invigorate economic development. Melding such concepts with "globalising" management best practices has been held up in the book as potentially placing Japan in the economic driving seat for the world during the 21st century.

Among the biggest bogies for the new millenium will be the globalising inequity of income distribution, the growing power of big business, and the related issue of relative deprivation. Familial work organisations are a form of buffer against such pressures, and "the need to achieve a fit with cultural assumptions about family

and work life" (p. 120) has been a fundamental feature of organisational success in both Japan and India. That most fundamental cultural institution, the book argues, will not be brushed aside by globalisation.

One of the factors differentiating generally more successful organisations, in Japan, from generally less successful ones, in India, has been the paying of greater attention to not simply copying outside managerial practices - which then fail to sustain, or backfire badly. Thus, without instilling a sense of *social* achievement within a company, family and clan pressures from outside can interact with competitive ethos inside to produce relatively 'cut-throat,' unrestrained competition.

Islam preaches that commerce and trade can be worthy activities that not only contribute towards society as a whole, but also enhance both the self and salient others. Similarly, the Chinese and Confucian concept of *Bao* extends the over-individualistic boundaries of Western Exchange and Equity theories, towards affective reciprocity and social equity. In Australian organisations that are arguably over-transactional in their cultures, and where litigation is soaring and social capital is rapidly becoming exhausted, perhaps managers could use more emphasis on building relationships and developing a sense of cooperation between groups of managers and groups of employees. Similarly perhaps, rewards and resources need to be distributed on the basis of both material and socio-emotional needs (p. 179). Once corporate core values recognise both sets of need, a synergistic work culture can develop. One of the critical incidents separating successful from unsuccessful workplace teams has been whether level of "participative" leadership was actually what followers wanted and valued.

Evidence from India reflects this pluralistic synergy in illuminating ways. Among managerial beliefs, we are shown survey windows that contain belief in both competition and a selfless approach to work-life; among managerial practices, we learn of the promotion of both internal competition and respect for age and experience as an organisational value. As one organisational writer cogently remarked, "Truth does not pay homage to any society, ancient or modern" (Vivekananda, 1958, cited in Chakraborty, p. 209). A beautiful example of such hybrids of ancient and modern is to be found in the chapter on "corporate statesmanship," which manages to fuse both business and Confucian ethics, creating a model of leader behaviour that is at once both entrepreneurial and civil (in the sense of governance) [p. 232].

Such fusions may be necessary to manage the rise of inter-group tensions in contemporary organisations. Chinese CEOs, for instance, sometimes apply Theory Y to in-group subordinates and Theory X to out-group subordinates. This can produce a virtuous attributional-affective circle with the in-group, but a vicious one with the out-group. An alternative way of managing leader-subordinate relationships, seen in Taiwan for instance, is for the manager to rely on *chin-shins*, or traditional core social networks, to finesse the leading. Thus, when needing to scold unruly subordinates, a deputy from one's *chin-shin* may play the complementary role of disciplinarian (to one's own relationship focus), or relationship mender (to one's task specialism), as the situation (and face-work) requires (p. 258).

Leadership is often linked to management in this book. The Thais for example have a concept of effective leadership known as *Baramee*. In some contexts, traits like

politeness, even if we link this with the 'big five' trait of agreeableness, are considered relatively peripheral to workplace performance. In Thailand however, politeness and consideration are generally considered more central. Effective Thai managers are often 'soft' on the outside yet tough as nails on the inside; or as one student suggested to me, the very opposite of what is expected in South Pacific countries like Australia.

Such leadership concepts resonate with others, like *Bao* and J. B. P. Sinha's Task-Nurturance. The final chapter however is a perfect example of how these indigenous concepts can synergistically fuse with others from other regions. Pareek's theory of the influencing styles of managers, for instance, manages to combine elements of the above with a broad framework of Transactional Analysis. Across a range of organisations within an Indian context, the most effective managers tended to be perceived as both paternalistic/patronising and supportive, as well as being problem focused on organisational task. Such nurturant-task combinations are the very stuff of this book, and form the core, pluralistic thrust of real indigenisation as defined at its outset. Managers may have much to learn by sharing the pluralism of Asia with that of our South Pacific region.

Stuart C. Carr
Northern Territory University
Darwin, NT 0909,
Australia.

MacLachlan, Malcolm 1997 **Culture and Health**. John Wiley & Sons: West Sussex, UK.

Malcolm MacLachlan, Director of the Health Psychology Unit at Trinity College, Dublin, specialises in the interplay between health and culture and the implementation of health-promoting programs. He is the author of the third volume in the Wiley Series in Culture and Professional Practice.

The author makes it clear in the Foreword to the book that he has not been exhaustive in coverage and that many ideas may be somewhat raw in their newness, and thus need to be deliberated and refined. The aim of the book is to illustrate the impact of cultural orientations on concepts of health and illness and how to improve health care through improved understanding and communication between professionals and clients.

Chapter 1, Culture and Health, examines definitions of culture, race, ethnicity, health, illness and wellness and then moves on to examine community health and ecology. The chapter presents an integrative model of the human ecosystem, The Mandala of Health, for understanding and remembering an array of factors that can influence health. The model views human ecology as an interaction of culture and environment and incorporates a holistic, multidimensional view of health.

The second chapter, Understanding Cultural Differences, examines key research attempting to empirically identify psychological dimensions relevant across all cultures. The results may be interesting and useful at the policy making level but they are limiting at the individual level because of the reduction in variation between people of the same culture and 'cultural stereotyping.' As an alternative, the author presents a technique for

understanding the person's presenting problems within a pluralistic context. The Problem Portrait Techniques builds, through words and images, a likeness of the presenting problems in an eco-cultural context: the individual foreground and cultural background according to the person's perspective. This gives an impression of the person's beliefs about their presenting problems and how these beliefs stand in relation to the perceived beliefs of family members, others in the community, their culture and significant others. The portrait is used to measure and weigh up different influences and relate them to the person's belief about different treatment options. Although this chapter is primarily concerned with migrants, the technique is translatable to countries with an indigenous population and a 'colonizing' cultural group.

Chapter 3, Culture-Bound Syndromes, examines assumptions underlying beliefs about what is and is not a culture-bound syndrome. The term "culture-bound syndrome" is ethnocentric and a misnomer as it can lead practitioners to believe that 'our own' syndromes are not influenced by culture. These "syndromes" have order and function when viewed within salient cultural beliefs and the understanding of cultural context demystifies certain behaviours. The author uses anorexia nervosa as an illustrative example. The cause-experience-expression-consequence chain is discussed and the author argues that culture makes a progressively greater contribution further along the chain.

The fourth chapter, Cultural and Mental Health, uses the understanding of depression across cultures as a model for analyzing many different mental problems. Depression has been studied from comparative, cultural minority and transitional approaches and the author presents the key research from these approaches. He argues for a multi-

factorial approach, with an understanding of the interaction between variables. This is more achievable than identifying the salient content of causation across cultures. The use of “Western-based” diagnostic tools may lead to the classification of some cultural behaviour as a disorder and the author uses Personality Disorders to illustrate this.

The following chapter, Culture and Physical Health, argues that psychosocial processes can affect physical health in terms of psycho-physiological hyperactivity, disease stability and progression and host vulnerability. Cultural variation in genetically determined disease, acquired disease and traditional healing and iatrogenic diseases is discussed. Cultures can understand the same illness in different ways and the author uses pain, deafness and HIV/AIDS as examples. The chapter concludes with a caution relating to the destructive results of the negative perceptions of the interplay between health and culture, namely racial hygiene and ethnic cleaning.

Culture and Treatment discusses the importance of the healing relationship and the author presents a generic matrix for understanding the interaction between faith in the healer and faith in the intervention and a 3-dimensional Faith Grid for understanding the therapeutic process between people from different cultures. Culture as treatment is discussed in relation to programs for alcohol and drug misuse in indigenous groups. Of particular interest is the questioning of the appropriateness of grafting traditional First Nation North American customs into contemporary Australian Aboriginal alcohol-misuse treatment programs.

Chapter 7, Culturally Sensitive Health Services, compares transcultural, cross-cultural and multicultural care and argues that the latter is more appropriate with its

concern for total systems of care within the community. The health system consists of popular, folk and professional sectors and together these constitute a matrix that informally interlocks in some places and contradicts in others. Individuals develop an explanatory model for each episode of suffering and each model may involve beliefs from each sector. Practitioners have their own explanatory models and the meeting of practitioner and client involves understanding each other’s model and negotiation to produce a model each can work with. The chapter discusses the importance of training in cultural sensitivity, defining culturally competent training and mechanisms for ensuring high priority for such training. The chapter ends with consideration of health care policy and administration guidelines to drive culturally sensitive community health centers.

The final chapter, Promoting Health Across Cultures, presents the top ten salient issues in the process of prevention across cultures and these are a useful checklist for the development and implementation of health promotion strategies and interventions. The chapter identifies five key pathways to wellness and stresses the need to understand the social mechanisms in each community to maintain stability, harmony and the well-being of its members. Health promotion needs to focus on incremental improvement by integrating small-scale changes into the socio-cultural fabric of community life and practitioners can act as facilitators of social change. The benefits of community health promotion programs are discussed.

The book is very easy to read and the ideas are presented clearly, often explained with metaphor and practical examples (plus the occasional injection of humour). Each chapter concludes with a section called Guidelines for Professional Practice and

these are also useful summaries. The theme of the book emphasizes the importance of keeping the individual foreground and cultural background in perspective and treating each community as if it is a separate culture. This book would be a useful text for health and social science students as the material can stimulate much thought, discussion and debate. For example, it could prompt the re-examination of the “Western” psychological model and biologically-based medical model, both of which locate the origin of psychological pathology in the individual. These individualized models do not consider culture and, therefore, assume universalism. Students could examine psychotherapies as products of their own culture and the possibility that practitioners engage in Western psychological colonization and unwittingly become a “missionaries of the mind.” This book would also provide valuable material for health and allied health practitioners to consider and evaluate in their practice, particularly those who have had little training or experience in the continuum of cultural sensitivity to cultural competence.

Book Reviewed by: Dr Bridie O’Reilly,
Senior Lecturer Social Work, School of
Humanities and Social Science, Northern
Territory University, Darwin, NT.