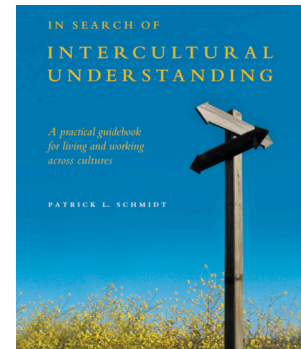


# In Search of Intercultural Understanding



Book Review by Matthew Hill, SIETAR and dialogin.com member

Patrick Schmidt has set himself an ambitious goal of conveying the essence of intercultural theory and best practice to the "average" person. Additionally he offers to throw in, at no extra charge, details of American, German and Chinese culture. He knows that this will have to condense and present the work of the fathers of culture - Hofstede, Hall and Bennett. His succinct summary and explanation of Hofstede's original dimensions of difference is to the point and refreshing. It is delivered in a way suitable both for the novice and as a reminder for the seasoned academic or professional who has perhaps deviated from the original message.

Schmidt gives us welcome contrast, from high culture to real business and political episodes adding visual reinforcement of the key learning points in the form of paintings, engravings, photographs and cartoons. Perhaps for the first time we have an accessible book that informs and entertains while it propels the reader from unconscious incompetence to conscious intercultural competence in less than 150 pages. Quizzes are placed at the end of the chapters to embed learning, measure progress and stimulate thought.

With at least 5 fonts, plenty of white space, images and scattered quotes in text boxes, the book distances itself from academic papers or single theory books. It positions itself as a tool for the dilettante, the busy professional or the culturally curious.

Schmidt is not afraid to talk of language and grammar limiting perception and these, with non-verbal behaviour, shaping tribal values

and norms. He pays particular attention to the Ethnocentric / Ethnorelative shift of his own cultural father - Milton Bennett. I venture to say his light and approachable style may take the professional cynic from "denial" to "acceptance" in six pages.

This is not simply a positivist book of do's & don't. It does raise awareness and promote a relativist's informed sympathy. However an emphasis on context, active listening and cultural bridging may begin a life's journey taking the reader toward the constructivist's empathy that is so often missing in international business.

What shines through is Schmidt's wide reading, his passion for collecting stories that illustrate cultural truths and his commitment to reducing theory, jargon and stereotyping to sound principles for cultural understanding. Schmidt shares with us his personal pointers for building global teams, developing personal cultural skills and becoming better international negotiators.

All reviews must answer the question "who should read this book?" Answer - Master's students and their teachers, HR managers and CEO's. Also the international business professionals and the curious academics that wish to have other facets of culture revealed to them.

In conclusion Patrick Schmidt has achieved his ambitious goal of articulating the field of culture for the average reader. In an accessible, provoking and subtly witty way he affects the reader who will ask questions of his or her conditioning, country and corporate context and personal perception.