Elisabeth Plum 2007. *Kulturel Intelligens.* **In cooperation with Benedicte Achen, Inger Dræby and Iben Jensen. Copenhagen: Børsens Forlag. ISBN 978-87-7664-213-6.**

Culture and cultural diversities influence the bottom lines of companies. The authors offer an alternative angle to the comprehension and perception of culture as well as to related methods for professional practices. It is a case-based "how-to-do" book, builds on applied advanced theory, and communicates complex approaches in a culturally intelligent way.

Simply to translate the Danish title of this recommendable book into 'Cultural Intelligence' would be a serious misinterpretation. First of all, it would establish a false link between an outmoded descriptive, empirical and essentialist understanding of culture and an innovative concept. Secondly, such a translation would line this book up with a recent American concept of 'Cultural Intelligence' or "CQ". This actually happened in an online review by the book's own Danish publisher (www.borsensforlag.dk/Books, accessed 24.09.2007). The authors explicitly distance themselves from that concept put forward by researchers of organization and management (Early/Ang 2003; Early et al. 2006 in: Plum 2007: 50ff). In order to both remain true to the authors' intentions, and to stress these very important distinctions, I desist of translating the concept. In the following, I denote the concept by the Danish abbreviation "KI".

CQ originates from management and organizational psychology. It is measured on a scale and represents a prescriptive approach to the impact of individuals' cultural background on their organizational behaviour and effective business. In contrast, KI denotes the ability to create positive results from the cooperation with people who think and act differently from oneself by creating mutual understanding and using the synergy of cultural diversities in diverse fields on both an individual and an organizational level. KI is an integrated element in value based management and represents an emergent approach to the broad specter of human activities creating and recreating organizations.

Intercultural commitment, communication and the comprehension of culture's impact on all communication are the three dimensions of KI. KI covers competencies to act open mindedly and responsibly and to improve contact in any encounter. KI is based on a constructionist approach to communication. In Scandinavian intercultural communication research, this approach is represented by Øyvind Dahl (2001) and Iben Jensen (1998; 2005). It follows a relational and process-oriented understanding of situatedly generated culture. Neither successful nor failed communication is a function of culture; culture does not determine communication. Intercultural communication can therefore not offer a general prescriptive model for what to expect and what to do applicable

to any encounter. All communication between humans is a cultural negotiation process; therefore, all communication is intercultural communication, whether it occurs in mergers, job interviews, international and global cooperation or organizational communication. Communication in encounters between people has to deal with perceptions of difference and sameness which lead to otherization. Otherization does neither derive from, nor is it limited to ethnic or national differences. Communicative otherization includes categories such as gender, professions, educational background or job positions. In order to secure successful communication, the authors show why and how the three dimensions of KI may be developed in a variety of situations and contexts.

All chapters provide useful insights by combining none-theoretically mediated yet theory based considerations with a wide variety of illuminating praxis examples which are analyzed from the angle of KI. Related to the subject of each chapter, the authors introduce comprehensible methods, point to how they combine the different dimensions of KI, and discuss how these appropriately might be applied.

Chapter one deals with the three dimensions of KI and their interrelationship with culture, intercultural communication and intercultural commitment. Concluding, the authors discuss KI in relation to pre-existing conceptualizations of the widely contested term 'intelligence'.

KI is based on a dynamic understanding of culture as a process. In *chapter two* this complex understanding of culture, the fundament of the book, is extensively explained. The definition of culture is twofold. Culture is defined as the praxis between people in a variety of situations and within the communities they build together with other people in diverse contexts. By culture the authors also refer to the filters for interpreting our lives according to the systems for orientation we act on.

In *chapter three* the authors make a strong case for the need of workplaces to pay far more attention to the diversity professional cultures consist of. If both professional competency and inter- professional cooperation are valued and handled professionally, this diversity strongly and positively impacts cooperative communication within the organization. KI workplaces are characterized by making encounters of professional cultures an everyday practice of task oriented cooperation on all levels of the company. The authors introduce four methods for getting diverse professional competences into play in order to obtain successful interdisciplinary problem solving, knowledge sharing and innovation as measurable results of KI.

According to the authors, the success of cross cultural cooperation is to be judged by its innovative and useful results rather than by good intentions and considerations. The book itself serves as an excellent example for meeting the

requirements for successful cross cultural cooperation, since the authors themselves are consultants and researchers and as such professionally diverse.

Quite in line with their process-oriented approach to culture, the authors convincingly discuss in *chapter four* mergers defined as change processes and cultural encounters. This approach is in Denmark represented by Anne-Marie Søderberg among others (Søderberg 1999; Vaara et al. 2003). Culture in terms of sensemaking processes strongly impacts cultural integration. Successful mergers result from the management's ability to create synergy of complexities on all levels of the organization. A variety of methods for KI work and approaches to dealing with diverse aspects of mergers are discussed. In the context of a merger, and dependant on the specific situations which occur in this context, the three dimensions of KI can be successfully combined and implemented in order to lead the process of creating a new organizational culture to success.

Stereotypes not only influence encounters between people of different gender, but also of diverse national and ethnic backgrounds. In *chapter five,* the authors hold that the negative impact on cooperative relations, both within and between companies, are best dealt with from the angle of KI. A precondition for the successful implementation of the principles of KI is to develop the awareness of one's own national self-perceptions as well as own prior understandings of other nations and ethnicities. Without this awareness and a personal willingness for change it is hardly possible to develop the ability to act in cross cultural meetings by taking individual situations and patterns of diverse cultures into consideration without straining the cooperation by stereotypical thinking.

In *chapter six,* the authors apply a constructive approach to how ethnic differences on the Danish labour market are treated and mistreated. With outset in the KI of ethnic diversities, the authors give guidance into how to deal with discrimination at Danish workplaces and in job interviews.

The previous chapters convince the reader of the need to act according to the dimensions and principles of KI. Reading this book is but a first step. When getting to *chapter seven*, the reader is eager to go on and to learn how to further develop her own individual KI. The authors discuss how the methods introduced in the previous subject related chapters individually can be transferred to and applied in diverse situations and relations. Inspiration is also given for companies for how to tackle and develop KI in their own organizational practices.

This book is refreshing, considering the "special provincialism we deal with in Denmark" (43) both on a professional and on a societal level, and the problems that arise from that in a world cooperating across boundaries and with increasingly diverse workforces to be involved in the creation and development of organizational cultures.

This book is the outcome of a successful cooperation between business

practitioners and University researchers. It is relevant to managers and key persons dealing with HRD, project organizations, cross-national cooperation, innovation or the management of mergers. Apart from this intended target group I strongly recommend this book to teachers of intercultural communication classes not only at business schools – because of the many case examples, but not least because approaches based on a complex understanding of culture still are rarely taught in business as well as rarely found in business-related literature and research. It is regrettable that the book is written in Danish and therefore not accessible to wider audiences such as English speaking researchers, students and practitioners.

References

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