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Book review:

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Cross-cultural management, culture and
management across the world

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Book review

Jean-François CHANLAT, Eduardo DAVEL, &
Jean-Pierre DUPUIS (2013)
Cross-cultural management, culture and
management across the world¹.
London; New York: Routledge.

Reviewed by

Michaël VIEGAS-PIRES

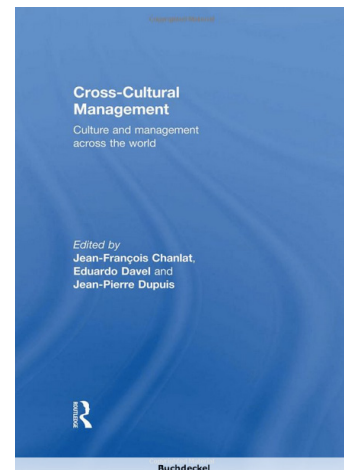
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When I first started writing this review, I decided to describe the book as accurately as possible so that interested people could know exactly what to expect from reading it. I explained what the purpose of the book was, conscientiously summarized each chapter, and strove to put forth a critical reading of the book's content. When it came down to it, though, I could not find much to say at all, other than that I enjoyed reading the book, and felt that it was very well structured. My review was really quite boring and I quickly realized that no one would ever read it. After all, anyone interested could just take a look at the book description on Amazon to form an opinion, rather than spending their time reading my rather lacklustre thoughts. So I decided to throw away my pages of text (which is never easy when it comes down to actually doing it) and started my review from scratch. I knew I had to give an original reading of the book, but no matter how I looked at the problem, I was unable to find a starting point, until I decided to share my difficulties with some of my colleagues around the coffee machine. One of my colleagues asked me why the journal wanted this book to be reviewed. "Well, the fact is that it is the English version of a French book², so I guess that it's important to discuss it for English readers," I said, and our conversation moved away to other topics. Back in my office, I thought about my colleague's question again and realized that my answer had not been very satisfying. An important part of research in intercultural management is performed by French-speaking researchers. At the same time, the number of English books edited by Francophone scholars remains somewhat limited, so the publication of this translated version is in itself important. "So what?" I thought. Why is it so important, except maybe for the Francophone scholars themselves? What could English readers expect from this book that they could not find elsewhere? Broadly speaking, what makes Francophone research original? In other words:

Is there a Francophone school in intercultural management?

To address this question, I hypothesize that Cross-Cultural Management, Culture and Management across the World (abbreviated here to Cross-Cultural Management) is emblematic of what a Francophone school in intercultural management could be. The editors of this book, as well as the contributors,

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1.This book is available in various formats, including as an e-book. This review is based on the Amazon Kindle edition of Cross-Cultural Management. Unfortunately, this version does not support page numbers. It uses location numbers that are specific to each line of text. We will refer to these locations instead of traditional page numbers.

2.Chanlat, J.F., Davel E., Dupuis, J.P. (Eds), *Gestion en contexte interculturel, Approches, problématiques, pratiques et plongées*, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2009

are renowned Francophone intercultural management scholars. Most of them have published books or articles and regularly participate in conference tracks on the topic. They can be considered active members of the intercultural management research community to the extent that if a Francophone school existed, they would very probably be part of it. That being said, considering the existence of such a school involves defining its boundaries. This means discussing the extent to which Francophone intercultural management research distinguishes itself from other research. To do so, I first give a short overview of Cross-Cultural Management. Then, I strive to highlight some of its key characteristics. These characteristics are exemplified by various chapters of the book. Finally, I discuss the extent to which these characteristics differ from other intercultural management works, and especially from what I would call mainstream research. This leads me to confirm that a Francophone school in intercultural management certainly exists.

PURPOSE AND CONTENT OF CROSS-CULTURAL MANAGEMENT

In the preamble to the overview of this book, it is worth noting that Cross-Cultural Management was conceived as a multimedia volume with an accompanying website providing additional content. Unfortunately, this additional content seems not to be available yet. There is no doubt that Routledge will solve this problem soon, but in the current state of things, I am not able to give a complete picture of this multimedia volume and my comments concern the book only³. The book's standpoint is clearly stated in its introduction. It postulates that in international settings, cultural differences play a critical role and can affect cooperation, collaboration and, in turn, performance. It advocates that an attitude of openness and an acceptance of such differences are critical to the success of business in international settings. The book's first purpose is therefore to help readers to develop sensitivity to cultural differences. It seeks to make readers aware of the need to avoid both ethnocentrism and any belief in the universality of their own worldviews. The book also aims at demonstrating how such differences can affect business. It seeks to offer a comprehensive view of key problems in intercultural contexts. Finally, it aims at providing readers with some reflections on the actual practices of international managers and the possible solutions to the problems associated with cultural diversity in business contexts. This book is intended to provide help to readers in acquiring certain skills. It starts with a comprehensive review of various approaches to intercultural analysis (Part 1). Through this review, we are provided with solid theoretical knowledge and intellectual resources that allow for a better understanding of the intercultural dimension of business activities. Readers are then invited to reflect upon the issues associated with this intercultural dimension (Part 2). These issues are exemplified by various situations such as international mobility and international negotiation. This helps to make the key intercultural problems more concrete. The book subsequently invites us to reflect on how to handle intercultural issues, by addressing the types of management practices that evolve in international contexts (Part 3). Cross-Cultural Management includes nine chapters, brief descriptions of which follow. Chapter 1, "Intercultural analysis and the social sciences" by Jean-François Chanlat discusses fundamental issues in intercultural analysis such as otherness, misunderstanding, language and communication.

3. It is nonetheless possible to get an idea of the companion website content by taking a look at the French version. This version included a DVD with experts' and professionals' testimonials and in-depth descriptions of national cultures and their influence on management practices in different regions. This helps to make intercultural issues more concrete and provides readers with practical experience

Chapter 2, "Intercultural analysis in management: decompartmentalizing the classical approaches" by Jean-Pierre Dupuis, recalls some key characteristics of the main approaches in intercultural management and suggests an integrative perspective to overcome their respective limits. Chapter 3, "An interactionist approach to intercultural management analysis", by Olivier Irrmann, addresses communication and interpersonal interaction in intercultural contexts. In Chapter 4, entitled "The international manager", Philippe Pierre discusses the socialization of mobile managers and the influence of international mobility on identity building. Chapter 5, "International negotiations", by Jean-Claude Usunier, discusses how national influences shape some key dimensions of the international negotiation process, such as appropriate behavior and strategies. In Chapter 6, "The effect of culture on business ethics", Philippe d'Iribarne explores a variety of ethical constructs, drawing in particular on a comparison of business ethics between France and the United States. Sylvie Chevrier, in Chapter 7, "Managing multicultural teams", offers a comprehensive view of multicultural teams and discusses practices for managing such teams. Chapter 8, "Managing multiculturalism in the workplace", by Eduardo Davel and Djahanchah Philip Ghadiri, examines multicultural personnel management practices, and Chapter 9, "Managing international alliances", by Fabien Blanchot, addresses the impact of cultural differences on the success of international alliances. This brief overview of Cross-Cultural Management brings two comments. First, this book addresses various management situations, such as multicultural teams, international alliances and international negotiations. This book is based on a broad understanding of intercultural management situations as contexts "where people of different cultures must communicate with each other in business settings" (Loc. 514). This gives Cross-Cultural Management a very general scope. Second, along with a solid theoretical grounding and a strong research basis, the book also has a practical orientation. The content is intended to speak mainly to graduate students and business managers who wish to improve their ability to evolve in an intercultural context. However, this does not imply that academics will not be interested in reading this book. Academics can expect a comprehensive synthesis from the book that may be useful for their own research. Cross-Cultural Management is also a valuable resource for teaching.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF CROSS-CULTURAL MANAGEMENT

A focus on national culture

Although Cross-Cultural Management acknowledges that seeing organizations through a cultural lens involves several cultural layers (regional, organizational, occupational, etc.), it mainly focuses on national cultural differences. Some chapters include reflections on the various cultures at work in business contexts, but overall it is implicitly assumed that national culture has the most important influence. In other words, the book supposes that “intercultural” mostly means “international”.

A multidisciplinary approach

Another important characteristic of Cross-Cultural Management is its multidisciplinary approach. Different experts, with various sensitivities, have written each chapter and the book draws from anthropology, sociology, psychology and other fields. Of course, this entails the risk of making things more confusing for non-skilled readers, but the choice not to sacrifice conceptual richness for simplicity was clearly made by the editors. This evidently benefits the reader by offering multiple intellectual tools to understand intercultural contexts. However, it also requires an effort to navigate between different theoretical backgrounds. The first chapter, by Jean-Francois Chanlat, is typical of this approach. Table 1 gives an overview of the topics addressed in this chapter and the discipline on which it draws.

Table 1. An overview of Chapter 1

Topic	Disciplines
Individual and group reactions to otherness	Psychology, Anthropology, Sociology, Biology, History
Sources of intercultural misunderstanding	Anthropology, Linguistics, Sociology
Historical perspective on intercultural encounters	History, Sociology

The chapter starts from the observation that otherness often raises negative attitudes. It recalls that for psychologists, the discovery of the other and fears associated with this are intrinsically related to an individual's development. It also recalls that anthropology has shown that every society tends to place its culture at the center of the world, creating representations of the other accordingly. This helps the group to build its own identity, but does not in itself explain why human beings tend to see others negatively. From here, the author mentions several explanations, including biological ones, such as natural human cruelty, and more sociological ones, such as a community's tendency to encourage particular stereotypes at different steps of its social history. Finally, the chapter offers a broader picture and describes a group's reactions to otherness as a process involving mental categorization, the building of hierarchies between categories of humans, and the rational justification of these hierarchies. Chapter 1 also discusses the various sources of misunderstandings in intercultural relations. Drawing on linguistics, anthropology and sociology, it reviews the textual, co-textual and contextual elements of intercultural communication. It emphasizes cross-cultural differences in the meaning of words, the structure

and locutions of language, the relation to language, the style of conversation, and the relation of individuals to their mother tongue. It mentions the work of anthropologist Edward T. Hall (1984) to underline that our relations to context, space and time are culturally relative. It also refers to d'Iribarne (1989) to highlight that each culture conveys its own tacit conception of social relations. All of these categories of cultural differences have a great potential for misunderstandings. When the message and the behavior of the sender are interpreted in the light of the recipient's culture, its ascribed meaning may be very different from what was intended. Finally, Chapter 1 concludes with an historical perspective on relationships between peoples. It discusses three cases in particular: France's relations with Americans, with Quebecers and with North Africans. These examples illustrate how past relations between peoples can and must serve as frameworks for interpreting current relations.

A subtle understanding of culture

Cross-Cultural Management defends subtle understandings of the concept of culture and, notably, seeks to depart from the assumptions of the seminal work of Hofstede (Hofstede, 1991; Hofstede, 2001), while acknowledging its contribution. Chapter 2, "Intercultural analysis in management: decompartmentalizing the classical approaches" by Jean-Pierre Dupuis, illustrates this position very clearly. In this chapter, the author examines the two main research approaches in the field of intercultural management by discussing the respective works of Geert Hofstede and Philippe d'Iribarne. The author discusses what we can learn from these two approaches and proposes to combine them for a better understanding of management in intercultural contexts. He also contends that along with national culture, other cultures such as local, regional and cross-national ones, deserve to be taken into account. The chapter begins with a presentation of Geert Hofstede's work, perhaps the most influential approach in intercultural management. As Jean-Pierre Dupuis recalls, the strength of Hofstede's work lies in several elements. It is based on an impressive sampling size and is very careful with controlling variables other than national culture⁴. Hofstede strives to thoroughly validate his results by comparison with those of other surveys. His concept of culture has strong anthropological foundations and, most importantly, this concept is operationalized through four universal dimensions: Individualism (versus Collectivism), Power Distance (large or small), Uncertainty Avoidance (weak or strong) and Masculinity (versus Femininity). All of these characteristics of Hofstede's approach are well summarized in Chapter 2. The author also recalls some of the main criticisms toward Hofstede's approach, both methodological and conceptual (see also: McSweeney, 2002; d'Iribarne, 1996; Williamson, 2002). Chapter 2 continues with a presentation of d'Iribarne's work. It draws on d'Iribarne's most well-known study, namely *The Logic of Honor* (1989). In this study, d'Iribarne analyzes three subsidiaries of a multinational organization through observation and interviews. These subsidiaries, respectively located in the USA, France and the Netherlands, had officially all adopted an American style of management. D'Iribarne nevertheless observes important differences in the management practices of these subsidiaries and interprets these differences as being the results of various cultural logics. In the United States, organizations function according to the logic of the contract, while in France the logic of honor prevails and in the Netherlands organizations

4.The survey was conducted in a single organization, namely IBM, and concerned people with similar training, education and social class profiles in such a way that it could reasonably be assumed that observed differences were related to national cultures.

follow a logic of consensus. My point here is not to summarize d'Iribarne's results, which would require more than just a paragraph in a book review. Jean-Pierre Dupuis, however, summarizes d'Iribarne very well. For instance, he proposes a synthetic table of the three aforementioned cultural logics (Table 2.4., Loc. 1781). He also discusses the strengths and weaknesses of d'Iribarne's study. My point here is to illustrate that Cross-Cultural Management does not only draw on the dominant approach in intercultural management, as embodied by Hofstede's work. It also develops a symbolic approach to cultures in management, as the use of d'Iribarne's work illustrates. From this perspective, culture is a shared context of meaning, in which sharing a culture means using the same symbolic categories to make sense of reality, although not necessarily attaching value to the same reality (d'Iribarne et al., 1998). Such sensemaking patterns are quite stable (d'Iribarne, 2009) and represent constraining forces, especially as regards legitimate ways of coping with social interactions within organizations. In other words, in this perspective also, management practices must fit with (or make sense in) the country's national culture. The author puts Hofstede's and d'Iribarne's works into perspective. Interestingly, he suggests that the latter gives flesh to the skeletal approach of the former. Both also help in distinguishing different management models. Dupuis also underlines that both result in the identification of broad culture areas in the world. He suggests treating such areas as cultural entities in themselves, and discusses other possible global cultural breakdowns, such as the divide between modern societies and traditional societies. He goes on to point out that cultural diversity exists within national cultures as well. He discusses the various factors of this internal cultural diversity, such as cultural and linguistic minorities and geographic isolation. To conclude, Jean-Pierre Dupuis invites us to a cautious use of intercultural knowledge, recalling that such knowledge is not a complete, definitive knowledge of cultures but instead represents a starting hypothesis from which we can explore cultures and management across the world.

A strong focus on interactions between cultures

Cross-Cultural Management adopts a clear intercultural interaction perspective (Sackmann & Phillips, 2004). This is plainly reflected in Chapter 3, "An interactionist approach to intercultural management analysis" by Olivier Irrmann. This chapter questions the usefulness of the comparative perspective in intercultural management and suggests instead focusing on interactions between people. It first reviews the various intercultural communication problems resulting from deviations from the standard use of a language. Such deviations are related to problems of vocabulary, grammatical competence, pronunciation and a lack of mastery of communication codes and conversational norms. Chapter 3 continues with a discussion of the implications of these problems for the three main functions of communication in management contexts: convincing, communicating and interpreting the signs of credibility, and gaining compliance or giving orders. It illustrates how strategies and practices in these three areas of management differ across cultures and discusses how this can result in deep misunderstandings in the context of intercultural interactions. It also argues that such misunderstandings are critical to managerial performance. From here, it discusses the different sources of communication dissonance and addresses their implications for the

definition of intercultural competence. These sources include language-related deviations and differences in acceptable scenarios for action (differences in obedience strategies, logics of decision and leadership preferences). Finally, Chapter 3 integrates these elements into a model of cultural dissonance and uses the real case of a Franco-Finnish corporate acquisition to clearly illustrate its point. Overall, the chapter's originality comes from its focus on interactions between cultures and its view that cultural dissonance is, above all, communication dissonance. Differences in decision making, leadership and obedience strategies are considered not only as pertaining to management practices, but also as belonging to the realm of communication, because management techniques use language as their primary tool.

A reflection on intercultural management practices

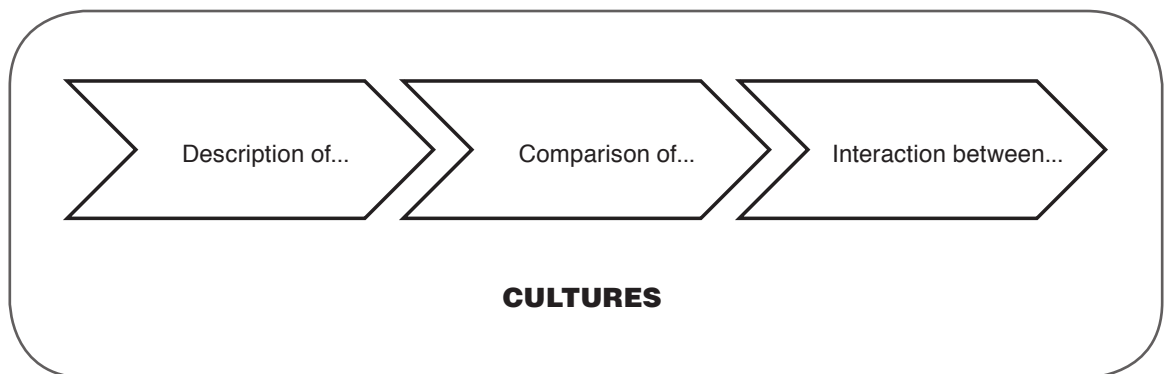
This book strives to move away from the mere declaration of principle that cultural differences deserve to be taken into account in management situations. It seeks to foster reflections on how to handle intercultural issues. This can be illustrated with Chapter 7, "Managing multicultural teams". In this chapter, Sylvie Chevrier first reviews the main characteristics of multicultural teams and discusses how they affect team work. By combining these characteristics, she suggests a typology of multicultural teams. She also reviews the main cultural differences that can affect teamwork, including both observable differences (for example language or behavior) and implicit cultural conceptions. The relationships between intercultural issues and organizational context are also addressed. Beyond this comprehensive overview of multicultural teams, the chapter offers insights into the actual practices of international managers and suggests possible solutions to intercultural problems. Sylvie Chevrier identifies four strategies to accommodate cultural differences, discusses their advantages and drawbacks and describes the situations in which they can fruitfully be applied. The first strategy consists of relying on the ability of team members to adapt to each other. This is a minimalist approach to intercultural management in which managers implicitly or explicitly choose not to pay attention to cultural differences. It assumes that staff openness (the willingness to adopt unfamiliar ways of working) and staff tolerance (the acceptance of behaviors that would otherwise be rejected) are sufficient to minimize the potential negative consequences of cultural diversity. The second potential strategy consists in encouraging adaptation by developing conviviality. Here, intercultural team managers try to favor the development of friendly interpersonal relationships, for instance by organizing social events outside of work hours. Intercultural team managers may also capitalize on common transnational cultures. This third strategy relies on the existence of transversal cultures, such as organizational and occupational ones. These transversal cultures are expected to contribute to homogenizing practices and minimizing differences, or at least to provide team members with a common background. Finally, the fourth strategy, building intercultural synergies, requires the participation of intercultural mediators to help managers and team members understand their respective worldviews and jointly build mutually

agreed work practices.

ON THE ORIGINALITY OF FRANCOPHONE INTERCULTURAL MANAGEMENT RESEARCH

In this section, I discuss the extent to which the aforementioned characteristics of Cross-Cultural Management could represent key features of a Francophone school in intercultural management. I will compare each of these characteristics with those of mainstream research in intercultural management. In comparison to the history of managerial thought and practice, intercultural management is a relatively recent concept. It is not a clearly identified discipline of management and is still being developed. However, as S oderberg and Holden (2002) point out, many scholars agree that it involves managing workforces with different cultural backgrounds and decreasing the influence of cultural differences on the execution of management tasks. According to Adler (2008, p.13), cross-cultural management "describes organizational behavior within countries and cultures; compares organizational behavior across countries and cultures; and, most important, seeks to understand and improve the interaction of co-workers, managers, executives, clients, suppliers, and alliance partners from countries and cultures around the world". This definition underlines the three components of cross-cultural management (Figure 1).

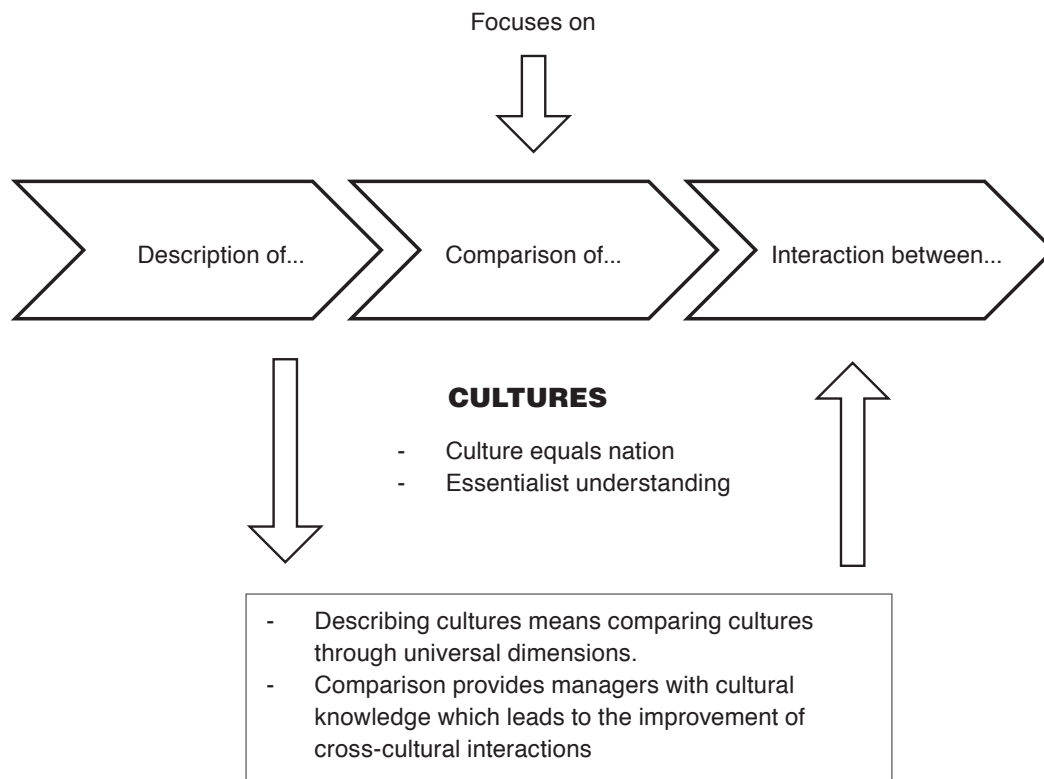
Figure 1. Three components of cross-cultural management



In their mapping of paradigms in cross-cultural management, Primecz, Romani and Sackmann (2009) highlight that the bulk of intercultural management research is grounded in the positivist paradigm and adopts a cross-national comparison perspective. This perspective involves an essentialist understanding of culture, in which culture is viewed as a stable shared system of values and norms. Research in this perspective is based on the assumption that cultural boundaries can be equated with nation-state boundaries (S oderberg & Holden, 2002; Sackmann & Phillips, 2004) and explores the variation of values across nations. It is guided "by the quest for identifying universally applicable dimensions [...] that would help managers navigate in different countries while doing their work" (Sackmann & Phillips, 2004, p.372). This of course includes the seminal work of Hofstede (1991; 2001) as well as other studies that investigate cultural dimensions (among others: Schwartz, 1994; Trompenaars, 1998; House et al., 2004). With regard to practice, mainstream research promotes adaptation, adjustment and intercultural

training as means to improve cross-cultural interactions (Søderberg & Holden, 2002). At a general level, it suggests that raising managers' sensitivity to cultural differences and cultural relativism of management practices is crucial to international business success. At a more specific level, it seeks to provide managers with basic knowledge about different cultural environments through broad descriptions and comparisons of cultures. It serves as a map for managers to navigate between different cultural environments. Overall, mainstream research assumes that managers' awareness of intercultural issues, whether general or country-specific, is the most important factor in enabling them to adjust, or, in other words, to be cross-culturally competent and efficient in international contexts. To some extent, mainstream research considers the transition from knowledge to action to be almost automatic. To conclude, among the three components of intercultural management identified above, mainstream research mainly focuses on comparison and proposes that describing cultures mainly involves comparing cultures. It also suggests that improving interactions requires knowledge about intercultural issues at both general and particular levels. Lastly, it considers comparing cultures to be the best way of achieving a high level of cultural knowledge. Figure 2 summarizes these key characteristics.

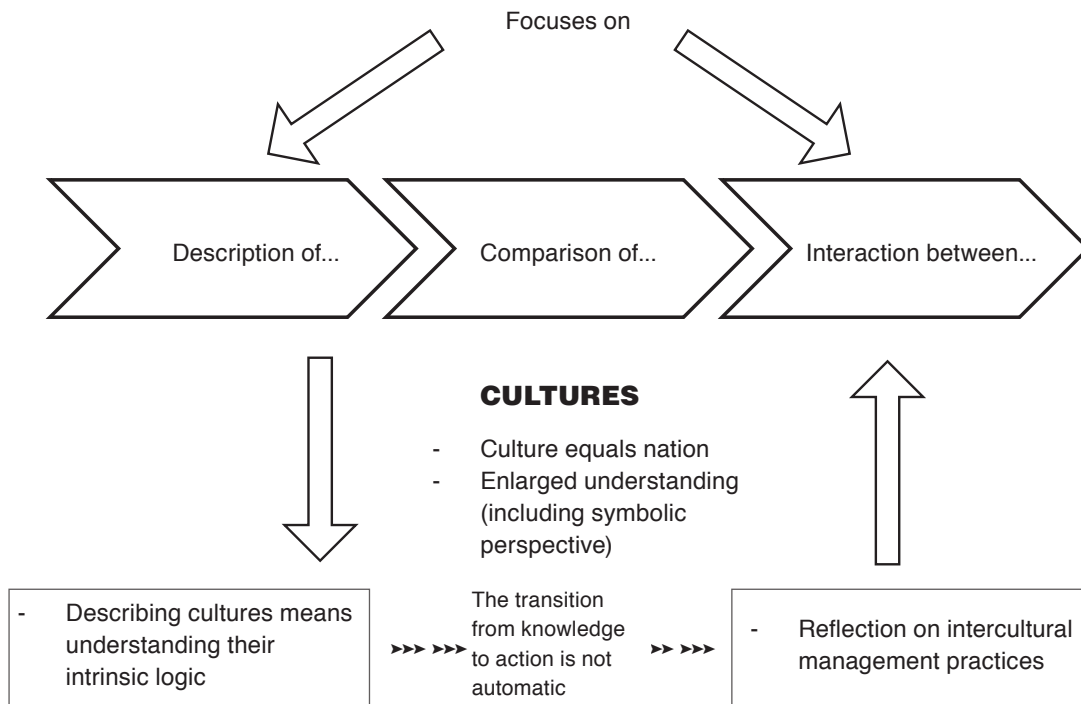
Figure 2. Description of mainstream research



5. Justifications of this relevance in a symbolic perspective can be found in Chevrier (2009).

By comparing Figure 2 with the key characteristics of Cross-Cultural Management, we can conclude that if a Francophone school of intercultural management exists, it shares some traits with mainstream research. Cross-Cultural Management and mainstream research both focus on national cultural differences. In the mainstream approach and from the symbolic perspective as well, national culture is considered the most relevant category of analysis, even if both acknowledge that some other cultural areas exist⁵. In the same way, it seems difficult to conclude that the multidisciplinary approach is specific to Francophone research. Although mainstream research gives an important place to the methods of social psychology, with the use of attitude scales, this research also draws on anthropology and other social sciences, as the work of Hofstede illustrates. Despite sharing many traits with mainstream research, some other characteristics of Cross-Cultural Management could represent specific traits of a Francophone school, specifically when these characteristics are taken together. By enlarging its understanding of culture to the symbolic perspective, Cross-Cultural Management gives more room to description (rather than comparison). What matters in this perspective is not so much comparing cultures as understanding the intrinsic logic of each culture. This explains why the ethnographic methodology prevails in this perspective. This shift in focus allows Cross-Cultural Management to go beyond simply describing differences and reflect on interactions, adopting a real intercultural interaction perspective (Sackmann & Phillips, 2004). The assumption that what international managers need is just knowledge about cultural differences (as provided by international comparisons) is removed and the path to reflections on actual intercultural management practices is opened. The transition from knowledge to action is no longer considered to be automatic. Figure 3 summarizes the possible traits of a Francophone school of intercultural management.

Figure 3. Possible traits of a Francophone school



CONCLUSION

Throughout this book review I have strived to identify what the specific traits of a Francophone school in intercultural management could be. My analysis is based on the assumption that Cross-Cultural Management is emblematic of Francophone research, which may of course be questionable. Non-Francophone scholars may identify with my description and disagree with my conclusion that these traits are specific to Francophone research. It can also be argued that my description refers to other well-established perspectives, such as those identified by Sackmann and Phillipps (2004). Some others may also feel that my attempt to show that Francophone research differs from other research merely reflects my own ethnocentric orientation. They may be right, but I hope that I nevertheless have modestly contributed to their reflections on what the field of intercultural management encompasses, or failing that, that I have raised their interest in reading Cross-Cultural Management and forming their own opinion.

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