

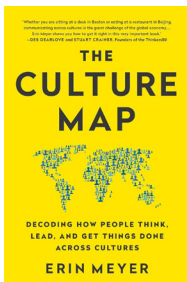
Book review

The Culture Map: Decoding how people think, lead, and get things done across cultures

Author: Erin Meyer

New York: PublicAffairs, 2014

Paperback ISBN 978-1610392501



Australia is one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world with 51.5% of Australians being born overseas (29.3% first generation) or having at least one parent born overseas (22% second generation).³ My father

was born in Greece and my mother in Australia, with her parents coming from the same Greek Island of Kythera as my father. I spent four years growing up in Kythera attending school locally and learning English by correspondence before returning to Australia to start Year 1 in 1981. I am used to navigating cultural differences between Greece and Australia, and have had to broaden these skills when working both overseas and in Australia and living with an Irish husband!

Think back to your own family or travel experiences or if you have been in a situation where someone has said ‘yes’ but they really mean ‘no’. *The Culture Map* by Erin Meyer superbly uncovers these cultural norms

and differences, which are most evident when seen from the outside, such as when travelling overseas.

The Culture Map presents a simple framework and practical applications for understanding cultural differences in human interactions, using the author’s 10+ years of research and practical experience to detail the impact of cultural differences on business systems. This book is an absolute joy and truly enlightening read. Full of well-chosen and well-articulated anecdotes that beautifully, and often humorously, illustrate the points being made; it is a ‘must’ read.

The ability to recognise, understand and proactively manage cultural differences is relevant to medical training, including specialist general practice training, as well as clinical primary care plus personal relationships. With further reading and discussion, layer upon layer is revealed.

The book provides a systematic, step-by-step approach to understanding the most common communication challenges that arise from cultural differences and offers measures for dealing with them more effectively. The process begins with recognising the factors that shape human behaviour and methodically analysing the reasons for that behaviour. This allows the application of clear strategies to effectively solve cross-cultural misunderstandings or to avoid them altogether.

Subtle differences in communication patterns and the complex variations in what is

considered common sense from one country to another have a tremendous impact on how we understand one another, and ultimately on how we get the job done.

If you go into every interaction assuming that culture doesn’t matter, your default mechanism will be to view others through your own cultural lens and to judge and misjudge them accordingly ... You need to have an appreciation of cultural differences as well as respect for individual differences. Both are essential.

We also need to consider organisational, individual and professional differences. Cultural patterns of behaviour and belief frequently impact on our perceptions, cognitions and actions.

Meyer outlines eight scales to show how cultures vary along a spectrum from one extreme to its opposite and the importance of relative differences. The eight scales are communicating, evaluating, persuading, leading, deciding, trusting, disagreeing and scheduling, and these have been mapped for 67 different countries.

The culture sets a range of acceptable or appropriate behaviours in that country, and within that range, each individual makes a choice – culture and personality both at work.

When examining how people from different cultures relate to one another, what matters is not the absolute position of another culture on the scale but rather the relative

position of the two cultures. It is relative positioning that determines how people view one another. Cultural relativity is the key to understanding the impact culture has on human interactions.

The culture of my country has a strong character that was totally invisible to me when I was in it and part of it. (Page 26)

This book has highlighted to me my own multicultural experiences of growing up in Australia with Greek heritage and having lived for various periods in Europe at different ages and stages.

Catherine and I highly recommend *The Culture Map* – be prepared for many ‘aha’ moments!

Authors

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Competing interests: None.

Reference

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). Snapshot of Australia: A picture of the economic, social and cultural make-up of Australia on Census Night, 10 August 2021. ABS, 2022. Available at www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/snapshot-australia/latest-release [Accessed 3 December 2024].

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