

The field of intercultural research received significant cross-fertilization from many academic disciplines, such as anthropology, behavioural science, communication studies, economics, linguistics, political science, psychology, sociology and, lately, neurology, with researchers starting to investigate how the function of our brain is influenced by culture. Each added welcome new insights and perspectives; alas, integrating these different perspectives into a holistic context often proved complex.

Harry C. Triandis, a social psychologist who is now a professor emeritus at the University of Illinois, embraces this complexity in his book *Culture and Social Behavior*. He uses the concepts of *emics*, culture-specific, unique elements that apply within the system of a culture but do not offer much value when contrasting different ones, and *etics*, universal cultural elements whose study helps in finding and formulating cross-cultural generalizations.

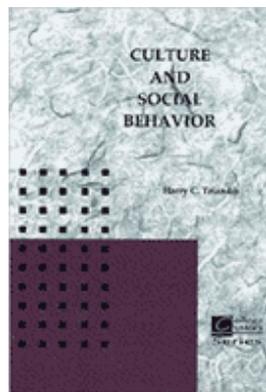
The important point, the author argues, is to find *convergence* between different methods of understanding reality. Triandis suggests this approach as a foundation for both, understanding and comparing cultures. Even concepts that translate easily across languages, he warns, do not have identical meanings, so one

must pay attention to many aspects when aiming to analyze subjective culture.

Two chapters of the book serve to explore this in greater detail, offering an integrative overview across a wide range of related research. Subsequent chapters analyze cultural differences in social behavior, from social relations and communication to aggression, helping, dominance and conformity. The final chapters of the book discuss diversity, intercultural relations, and intercultural training.

Throughout this work, Triandis emphasizes concepts that others in the field often overlook. For instance, he contrasts loose cultures and tight ones, distinguished by their degrees of tolerance for deviation from cultural norms. This distinction is paramount when evaluating other interculturalists' models, such as the "cultural dimensions" that became popular in intercultural training since the 1980s and are still widely used. Similarly, the author highlights the need to understand intergroup relations, as opposed to interpersonal ones, in assessing stereotypes and conflict potential.

Bottom line, *Culture and Social Behavior* is a valuable resource for those looking to acquire a deeper understanding of the value, and of the caveats, of studying behaviors across cultures.



Lothar Katz is the founder of Leadership Crossroads. He has a wealth of experience in achieving productive cooperation across cultures and driving business success on a global scale.

A seasoned former executive of Fortune 500 company, Texas Instruments, he regularly interacted with employees, customers, outsourcing partners, and third parties in numerous countries around the world, including many parts of Asia. Mr. Katz is the author of "Negotiating International Business" (2007) and "The Global Business Culture Guide" (2014).

