

Praise

Yvonne van der Pol excellently presents compelling insights into the challenges of intercultural communication, unfolding with each article the complexity of intercultural craftsmanship. Her book offers a rich array of vivid empirical examples illustrating and explaining the phenomena under discussion.

Prof.dr. Wasif Shadid - Emeritus Professor Intercultural Communication, Tilburg University and Leiden University

A wonderful book that describes into the finest detail how cultural differences affect our interactions.

Ursula Brinkmann, PhD - Director Intercultural Business Improvement

Yvonne leads us into the all familiar, sometimes hilarious and other times uncomfortable, situations one comes across in our cross-cultural work. Yet her stories provide priceless references to thought-provoking theory on intercultural communication leaving the reader inspired to learn even more. A small treasure.

Jeanne Abdulla - Director of Programmes Human Security Collective

This book is both informative and pleasant to read. The author shows that a text need not be complex to make you think. I can wholeheartedly recommend it to anyone with an interest in cross-cultural communication.

Ype H. Poortinga - Emeritus Professor Cross-Cultural Psychology

With her rich and deep blogs Yvonne van der Pol knows how to get across the message of the complexity of dealing with diversity in a surprisingly simple way. I was even touched by some of these blogs.

Nirupa Shantiprekash - Policy Officer Diversity and Inclusion

Take a deep dive into the hidden layers of culture. Great reading if you work at international interfaces and want to discover your social auto-pilot. Absolutely recommended!

Stefan Meister - Managing Director intercultures

Reflections on Intercultural Craftsmanship

Reflections on Intercultural Craftsmanship

Yvonne van der Pol

Brave new Books

For my parents, who let me explore the richness
and diversity of the world from a young age

“It is frequently the most obvious and taken-for-granted and therefore the least studied aspects of culture that influence behavior in the deepest and most subtle ways”- Edward T. Hall



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Foreword

Recently, my parents found an old school jotter from my childhood, containing drawings of an American Indian woman, an American Indian man, a tepee and other non-typical Dutch drawings. We concluded laughingly that I, even then, as a young Polder girl, clearly already had the unstoppable urge to explore the world. Curiosity about other people, cultures and perspectives continues to be my driving force. In my work as an intercultural advisor, trainer and coach, my mission is to contribute to the advancement of creating a better understanding between people.

That understanding between people all over the world seems to be more and more under pressure lately. International developments that once seemed impossible to us, are now more than possible and nowadays, are even followed closely by each other in rapid succession. International financial crises, ruthless violence and an unprecedented influx of refugees, major ecological disasters, unforeseen political upheavals, polarisation and the increasing pressure on civil liberties are just a small few of the global concerns. How can we, in this turbulent international context, continue to operate effectively?

Well, in order to do so, we have to give the culture factor its rightful place. From my work as an interculturalist, I have observed that two tendencies play a major role. On the one hand, many people tend to think that culture in these times of globalisation is less important, even believing that 'culture' is an old-fashioned concept. However, nothing could be further from the truth. The more intensively we collaborate with people from different cultural backgrounds, the more often we encounter deeper lying

assumptions and presumptions. In uncertain times, this is even more reinforced by people tending to search for something to cling on to within their own identity and cultures.

On the other hand, there are also people who only look at their international work through cultural eyes and then just act from that perspective, in which case, the risk of perception, stereotyping and generalising is enormous. The 'them-and-us' mentality, polarisation and exclusion are in this instance, only one step away. The challenge therefore remains for us to always see and treat every person as a unique individual, with regards to the context, as well as to cultural and diversity aspects.

One of the most important aspects of intercultural craftsmanship is, therefore, to be able to understand the true relevance of the cultural factor. Discussing the intricacies of intercultural craftsmanship is the focus of the columns in this collection. The majority of which were previously published online by Vice Versa, as well as being extracts from inspirational newsletters sent out by Luz azul. For this publication, all of the columns have been updated and a number of more current topics have been added.

Browse through this book at your leisure, in your own way, just as you make your own way through this ever-changing world. I sincerely hope that my reflections can contribute to your intercultural craftsmanship.

A question of perspective

Intercultural craftsmanship is about effectively managing diversity and (learning about) the bridging of cultural and other differences. Crucial to this is the recognition of your own perspective and relating that to other perspectives.

The blogs in this collection were originally written in Dutch, by a Dutch author for Dutch professionals working internationally. In the first pages of the English translation of this book, I find it important to emphasise the dominant perspective that unavoidably shines through the blogs. That perspective could be summarised by the term that has been used by psychologists for a number of years: WEIRD. That stands for Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic. And for the readers who are already familiar with the terminology of cultural dimensions, I can add: individualist, low power distance and feminine.

I was very aware of the fact that the translation of the Dutch version to English would not only be a grammatical exercise, but that it would also be a cultural conversion. During this process, I have foregone a total rewrite of the columns in order to achieve a completely double perspective. That would, in my opinion, unnecessarily blur the text and diminish the impact. Instead, what I have done is clarify the dominant perspective where necessary. The person who has supported me enormously with this task is the translator of this book, Lorna Verling-Morrison. As a native Irish woman, who lived and worked in the Netherlands for more than 20 years before relocating to Mallorca, where she still works as a Dutch-to-English translator, she was able to assist me like no oth-

er with such dilemmas and adequately comprehend and correctly articulate my words in English.

I hope that you as the reader, irrelevant of your background and perspective, can recognise yourself in the intercultural challenges described in this book and that you can benefit from them. No matter how *weird* those challenges might be.

Yvonne van der Pol

1. Nothing so personal as culture

