COMMUNICATING ACROSS CULTURES

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MAUREEN GUIRDHAM

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PREFACE

The impetus behind the writing and publication of this book has been a utilitarian one: there is a widespread and urgent need to improve the ability of people at work to understand and be understood by others whose different backgrounds mean that they communicate differently. Ironically, this need is greatest where it is least recognised, among the members of the dominant groups in society. The members of the 'minority' groups have accommodated so well and the cultural sensitivity of the dominant groups has been so poor that the latter do not, in the main, realise that ways of communicating other than their own exist, persist and have validity; nor that, by imposing their own way, they limit their ability to understand those with whom they work and lose the potential benefits of diversity. In the UK, acknowledgement of the issue is largely confined to a weak complaint that 'We are not very good at learning languages'. Only in the field of international business is there any real sense that something is amiss.

Therefore, my purpose in this book is a focused one: to help the need for intercultural communication skills at work to become better recognised and to contribute my understanding of the knowledge and skill areas required. For this reason, the aspects of subjects such as culture and communication which are covered are those I deem central to this purpose. I realise that others may disagree with my selection and/or the fact that I have not attempted complete coverage of subjects which are foundation disciplines for my study nor argued my epistemological and ontological positions nor entered the post-modernism debate. I hope that readers will nevertheless find the book useful.

The book is dedicated to my children, Damon and Oliver.

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