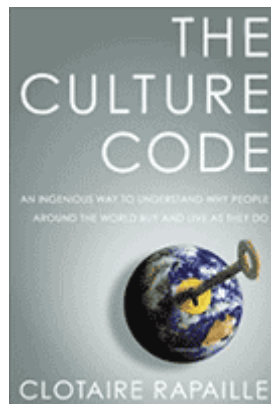


French-born political scientist, psychologist, and anthropologist Clotaire Rapaille has a reputation as an advertising consultant to leading American corporations, helping them discover the culture-specific codes that unlock the door to successful marketing.

In *The Culture Code*, Rapaille exhibits rather “un-French” traits: he provides simple, at times even simplistic, answers to complex questions. He starts with the compelling, though hardly new, argument that asking people what they want is usually a waste of time as it brings out logical arguments, while the true forces behind most consumer decisions are strong emotional preferences. The author’s prescription to solving this dilemma are “codes”, attempts to capture the essence of such emotional decision making. Such codes, Rapaille argues, are largely determined by cultural context.



For instance, the author identifies the US code for an automobile as “identity,” whereas in Germany, it is “engineering.” Another example is food, the codes for which are “fuel” in the US and “pleasure” in France. Rapaille goes on to explain how these differences create opportunities for marketers looking to reach their target audience. He lists a wide range of codes for the US: fat = “checking

out,” doctor = “hero,” hospital = “processing plant,” money = “proof,” work = “who you are,” quality = “it works,” perfection = “death.” While some of them may seem intuitively right, others appear funny if not borderline ridiculous, even when trying to follow the author’s rationale. This opens the door to criticism that things aren’t quite as simple and that some of the terms and supporting definitions are too stereotypical to do much good.

Another criticism is that the author, who has been living in the United States for a long time, seems to have adopted overly culturally biased and one-sided views of the rest of the world. While aiming to provide universally applicable concepts, most of his points become harder to buy when countries other than the U.S. are concerned.

Nevertheless, the value of *The Culture Code* may well lie in its very simplicity: it dares reducing complicated concepts to their essence. If nothing else, the author stimulates valuable thoughts about culture in general and marketing in particular.

To those willing to look beyond what is presented in the text, *The Culture Code* offers interesting perspectives and suggestions about fundamental value differences between countries and cultures. As such, the book is beneficial not only for marketers and advertisers, but for anyone seeking a broader perspective on working and managing 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 a Fortune 500 company, he regularly interacted with employees, customers, outsourcing partners, and third parties in more than 25 countries around the world. These included many parts of Asia, e.g., China, India, and Japan. Mr. Katz is the author of “Negotiating International Business – The Negotiator’s Reference Guide to 50 Countries Around the World”.

