Critical analysis of a text: 3

# Text (reference details)

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| Bhawuk, D (2009) Intercultural communication in a dynamic environment: preparing managers of developing and developed countries using cultural standards, *Psychology and Developing Societies* 21, 2: 161-181 |

**1. What review question am I asking of this text?**

(e.g. What is my central question? Why select this text? Does the Critical Analysis of this text fit into my investigation with a wider focus? What is my constructive purpose in undertaking a Critical Analysis of this text?)

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| *What conceptualizations have been developed to understand problems in business communication between different countries?* |

**2. How and why are the authors making this contribution?**

a. What type of literature is this (e.g. Theoretical, research, practice, policy? Are there links with other types of literature?)

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| *It is primarily theoretical literature. It develops a normative conceptualization of economic characteristics that are either reflected in or constitute contrasting cultural standards adhered to by managers in developed and developing countries. It employs a model of communication to show how these standards might be surfaced in training to identify and overcome cultural barriers to business communication between managers from developed and developing countries.* |

b. How clear is it which intellectual project the authors are undertaking? (e.g. Knowledge-for-understanding, knowledge-for-critical evaluation, knowledge-for-action, training?)

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| *The intellectual project is clearly training. The author wishes to inform training programmes. He advocates the use of his theoretically grounded set of comparative economic characteristics. They are held either to be reflected in or to constitute managers’ contrasting cultural standards. He advocates that this typology of cultural standards and the communication model are adopted in the preparatory training of managers from developed countries to work in developing countries and vice versa (p178).* |

c. How is the intellectual project reflected in the authors’ mode of working? (e.g. A social science or a practical orientation? Choice of methodology and methods? An interest in understanding or in improving practice?)

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| *The training project is reflected in the author’s approach. He develops the conceptual basis for a new element of training, though he does not go so far as to produce the training design itself.*  *First, he articulates a typology of comparative economic characteristics. [It is unclear how far the author is concerned with the extent to which these characteristics are empirically warranted.] The characteristics are held to be reflected in, or to comprise, managers’ contrasting cultural assumptions or ‘cultural standards’ which, in turn, can be used as a novel focus for preparatory intercultural training.*  *Second, he puts forward a simple model of one-to-one communication as a vehicle for showing how managers subscribing to contrasting cultural standards may be implicated in intercultural communication barriers and how these barriers may be overcome.*  *Third, he points to how the economically originating cultural standards and the communication model may underpin training involving critical incidents that help business managers to surface their implicit cultural standards, to consider those held by others, and to accommodate them in order to work together productively.* |

d. What value stance is adopted towards the practice or policy investigated? (e.g. Relatively impartial, critical, positive, unclear? What assumptions are made about the possibility of improvement? Whose practice or policy is the focus of interest?)

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| *The author is supportive of global capitalism, since he values responding positively to the globalization of business (p162) through intercultural training for managers in developed countries who are preparing to work with counterparts from developing countries and vice versa. He is equally positive about the practical value for promoting globalized business of the economic characteristics linked to contrasting cultural standards, and of the communication model he articulates as the theoretical basis of a training tool (p178).* |

e. How does the sort of intellectual project being undertaken affect the research questions addressed? (e.g. Investigation of what happens? What is wrong? How well a particular policy or intervention works in practice?)

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| *The author does not articulate research questions. But the intellectual project of training apparently drove his theoretical investigation: developing the typology of contrasting economic characteristics linked to or comprising managers’ cultural standards and the model of communication, cultural barriers and their resolution explicitly as means of raising managers’ awareness of different cultural standards in preparatory intercultural training.* |

f. How does the sort of intellectual project being undertaken affect the place of theory? (e.g. Is the investigation informed by theory? Generating theory? Atheoretical? Developing social science theory or a practical theory?)

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| *The intellectual project of training leads the author to develop practical theory in the form of contrasting economic characteristics reflected in or comprising managers’ cultural standards, linked to a model of communication conceptualizing intercultural communication barriers and their resolution. The practical orientation is indicated by the author’s expressed hope that the substantive characteristics, cultural standards and model, plus the theoretical approach adopted, will improve (‘enrich’ as stated in the abstract) the scope of intercultural training.* |

g. How does the authors’ target audience affect the reporting of research? (e.g. Do the authors assume academic knowledge of methods? Criticize policy? Offer recommendations for action?)

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| *The target audience is obliquely referred to in the abstract (161): intercultural trainers and academics with a related interest in the field of business. The article is in an international academic journal concerned with ‘developing societies’. So it is likely to reach academics who are interested in intercultural barriers to communication within a wider audience of academics studying aspects of individual behaviour relating to developing countries.* |

**3. What is being claimed that is relevant to answering my review question?**

a. What are the main kinds of knowledge claim that the authors are making? (e.g. Theoretical knowledge, research knowledge, practice knowledge?)

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| *In the abstract the author states that he is presenting a ‘theoretical framework’, designed to ‘be adopted for education and training purposes’. Thus he offers a form of theoretical knowledge. It is based on (a) the claims to knowledge expressed in the typology of economic characteristics reflected in or comprising managers’ cultural standards, and (b) the related model of communication, associated cultural barriers and their resolution.* |

b. Excluding aspects that are obviously not relevant to the review question, what is the content of each of the main claims to knowledge and of the overall argument? (e.g. What, in a sentence, is being argued? What are the three to five most significant claims that encompass much of the relevant detail? Are there key prescriptions for improving policy or practice?)

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| *The main claims to knowledge relating to my review question about conceptualizations of problems with business communication between different countries are that:*   *Economically developing and developed societies (as stated in the abstract) or countries (as stated in the article title) can be conceived as differentiated according to ten economic characteristics that are implicated in communication problems between managers of developed and developing countries.*   *These theoretically grounded characteristics are either reflected in or constitute contrasting economy-linked ‘cultural standards’ held by managers from developed countries. These characteristics govern the thinking that underlies their own managerial strategies and expectations about the strategies employed by managers from developing countries, and vice versa.*   *Adherence to contrasting economically-linked cultural standards in developed and developing countries is a cause of intercultural communication problems that can inhibit the efforts of managers from developed countries their counterparts from developing countries to work together productively.*   *A simple theoretical model of one-to-one communication can be used effectively to highlight intercultural barriers to communication that relate to (a) contrasting economically-based (and other) cultural standards and (b) how they may be resolved. This model may be adopted to improve the range of theoretical frameworks underpinning intercultural training for business.*   *This approach for developing and applying practical theory to training design is novel (p178) and has potential as a means of developing other bases for promoting mutual assimilation by members of different cultures.*  *The overall argument is that preparatory training for managers from developed and developing countries helps them to overcome intercultural business communication problems related to their contrasting economic circumstances, because when managers become more aware of these cultural assumptions, relate them to potential intercultural communication barriers, and discuss how these problems might be overcome, they are alerted to the possibility of such barriers and work successfully to overcome them in practice.* |

c. How clear are the authors’ claims and overall argument? (e.g. Stated in an abstract, introduction or conclusion? Unclear?)

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| *The claims are clearly stated in the abstract and at several points in the main text. In the introduction to the section on ‘cultural standards of developed and developing countries’ (p164) the author indicates that the characteristics will be identified as a basis for deriving cultural standards that can be used in training through the development and use of ‘critical incidents’. [Critical incidents are not defined. I assume that the author expects members of his target audience to be familiar with this training technique.]*  *I’m unsure about the linkage between claims regarding the economic characteristics and the associated cultural standards. The author states that he is identifying economic characteristics that differentiate developed and developing countries ‘to derive 10 cultural standards’ (p164). But then he seems to imply that the characteristics are the same thing as cultural standards: for instance, on p169 he refers to the characteristics just articulated as ‘the above 10 cultural standards’. Might the author be assuming that the economic characteristics he identifies are both empirically grounded and directly reflected in the dominant ways of thinking of most or all managers from developed or developing countries? Or might he just be claiming that managers from developed and developing countries subscribe to different cultural standards linked to their assumptions about their own or others’ economic circumstances, whether or not these economic characteristics are empirically grounded?*  *The major claims making up the conclusion of the overall argument are clear. But the author does not provide evidence warranting his view that the advocated training based on his theoretical framework or other frameworks relevant to intercultural training actually works in terms of pre-empting intercultural communication problems. His own framework does not appear to have been implemented yet as a training tool, nor have others gone on to develop and apply alternative frameworks informed by the author’s ideas.* |

d. How consistent are the authors’ claims with each other? (e.g. Do all claims fit together in supporting an argument? Do any claims contradict each other?)

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| *Most claims seem to flow logically one from the other. But I’m unclear about the relationship between each economic characteristic identified and the associated cultural standard that managers are held to subscribe to. Are they different or the same thing? Is the author trying to show that the model of economic characteristics is empirically grounded, or just that managers might subscribe to these characteristics within their cultural standards framing their thinking and practice? Is the author showing how widely managers actually do, empirically, subscribe to such cultural standards?* |

**4. How certain and generalized are the authors’ claims?**

a. With what degree of certainty do the authors make their claims? (e.g. Do they indicate tentativeness? Qualify their claims by acknowledging limitations of their evidence? Acknowledge others’ counter-evidence? Acknowledge that the situation may have changed since data collection?)

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| *The author makes claims with a relatively high degree of certainty, since there are few explicit indications of tentativeness. However, the sections on characteristics and intercultural communication barriers are presented using ‘would be x’ rather than ‘is or are x’. If this usage of ‘would’ is the conditional, then the linguistic distancing suggests that the author is signalling some uncertainty – maybe implicitly, say ‘if this characteristic were empirically warranted, then it would be indicated by this observed phenomenon…’ However, if ‘would’ signals generic truth (‘would in all circumstances be the case’) then the claims are being made with a very high degree of certainty.*  *Tentativeness is signalled over how effectively the author’s approach to conceptualizing and applying cultural standards for intercultural training purposes might work as a training tool. In the abstract (p161) the author states that ‘it is hoped that other such frameworks will be explored to enrich the training toolkit…’ and in the conclusion (p178) he indicates his hope that his framework will be useful. I interpret these statements as signals that the effectiveness of this approach has yet to be verified through the development and application of his own framework and other interculturally relevant frameworks derived in a similar way.* |

b. How generalized are the authors’ claims – to what range of phenomena are they claimed to apply? (e.g. The specific context from which the claims were derived? Other similar contexts? A national system? A culture? Universal? Is the degree of generalization implicit? Unspecified?)

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| *The author’s claims relating to developed and developing countries are highly generalized – apparently to all such countries. Though which countries are to count as developed or developing isn’t defined. Similarly, these claims appear to be held to apply to all managers in developed or developing countries because the author does not use qualifying language (such as ‘some’ or ‘most’ developed countries, ‘some’ or ‘most’ managers…). The use of conditional language (‘would’ not ‘are’) suggests that the author might be signalling the high degree of generalization to be only conditional. But he might also mean ‘would in all circumstances’, so implying a very high degree of generalization to all instances of the phenomena covered.*  *The claim about the approach to conceptualizing and applying cultural standards for intercultural training purposes is very moderately generalized. In expressing the aspiration that this (p178) and other such frameworks (p178) will be useful for intercultural training, the author signals that he is not generalizing beyond the realm of intercultural training.* |

**5. How adequate is the backing for these claims?**

a. How transparent are any sources used to back the claims? (e.g. Is there any statement of the basis for assertions? Are sources adequately specified?)

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| *This paper develops practical theory. Not surprisingly for this type of literature, there is very little explicit warranting of the theoretical framework through empirical evidence for its prevalence or effectiveness. [It may be that because his intellectual project is training, the author is more concerned to provide a starting point for reflection and discussion than to put forward a model that is well-warranted empirically.]*  *Such backing as is given for the claims about economic characteristics, cultural standards and intercultural communication barriers and their resolution is transparent and specific, in that the author makes regular reference to items from the academic literature to warrant them. But it is not transparent how far the literature sources themselves are based on empirical evidence. I do not know the source literature well enough to be sure. So I would have to check these items (and search for other relevant literature) to verify the extent and appropriateness of any empirical backing for supporting the author’s claims about economic characteristics, associated cultural standards, barriers to intercultural communication and how they may be overcome, and the assumption that implementing this framework in preparatory training will pre-empt managers’ intercultural communication problems.* |

b. What, if any, range of sources is used to back the claims? (e.g. First-hand experience? The authors’ own practice knowledge or research? Literature about others’ practice knowledge or research? Literature about reviews of practice knowledge or research? Literature about others’ polemic? Is the range of sources adequate?)

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| *The range of sources seems to be largely confined to others’ practical theories connected with the economics of developed and developing countries and communication. How far these theories are grounded in research evidence isn’t specified, and I would have to go to other texts to check.* |

c. If claims are at least partly based on the authors’ own research, how robust is the evidence? (e.g. Are there methodological limitations or flaws in the methods employed? Do the methods include the cross-checking or ‘triangulation’ of accounts? What is the sample size and is it large enough to support the claims being made? Is there an adequately detailed account of data collection and analysis? Is there a summary of all data that is reported?)

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| *The author gives no indication that he’s conducted his own research on the theoretical framework he presents, though he refers at one point (p176) to his personal experience. In the acknowledgements (p161) he indicates that concepts developed in the paper were presented at a workshop as part of an international academic conference. He may have received feedback on these ideas from participants, though he does not say that this happened.* |

d. Are sources of backing for claims consistent with the degree of certainty and the degree of generalization? (e.g. is there sufficient evidence to support claims made with a high degree of certainty? Is there sufficient evidence from other contexts to support claims entailing extensive generalization?)

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| *I think the author hasn’t explicitly provided adequate empirical backing for the apparently highly certain and generalized claims about economic characteristics, cultural standards and communication barriers and their resolution. This may be because he is concerned to offer a stimulus for reflection and discussion in training, not to develop a model of economic characteristics, and of associated cultural standards subscribed to by managers, that is empirically well-warranted. However, he has provided citations to his sources, so they could in principle be followed-up to check the strength of empirical backing.* |

**6. How effectively does any theoretical orientation link with these claims?**

a. How explicit are the authors about any theoretical orientation or conceptual framework? (e.g. Is there a conceptual framework guiding the data collection? Is a conceptual framework selected after the data collection to guide analysis? Is there a largely implicit theoretical orientation?)

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| *The theoretical orientation is made very explicit, supporting the detailed conceptualization relating to managers’ intercultural communication problems. I am unclear how distinct the economic characteristics are from managers’ cultural standards associated with them. This may not matter for the intellectual project of training pursued by the author. But it is important to check what empirical grounding there is, if I wish to base part of my own empirical study on the communication problems he identifies.* |

b. What assumptions does any explicit or implicit theoretical orientation make that may affect the authors’ claims? (e.g. Does a particular perspective focus attention on some aspects and under-emphasize others? If more than one perspective is used, how coherently do the different perspectives relate to each other?)

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| *The theoretical orientation is explicitly cultural. So it strongly emphasizes how managers from developed countries may all share assumptions and perceptions about how others do or should think and behave, while those from developing countries share different assumptions. But, therefore, it does not draw attention to the extent that managers from similar economic backgrounds can nevertheless have different assumptions and perceptions – might these national managers’ cultures might be more pluralistic than the author appears to assume? What such managers don’t all share might also be significant for intercultural business communication problems. I wonder if the approach to conceptualizing problems with business communication between different countries may overstate the extent to which all managers, even from the same country, share the same cultural standards.* |

c. What are the key concepts underpinning any explicit or implicit theoretical orientation? (e.g. Are they listed? Are they stipulatively defined? Are concepts mutually compatible? Is the use of concepts consistent? Is the use of concepts congruent with others’ use of the same concepts?)

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| *Most key concepts are both made explicit and stipulatively defined (e.g. culture, cultural standards), though the key distinction between developed and developing countries is not. But I am aware that many theorists define culture very differently, highlighting, say, how people differ in their power to impose their cultural preferences on others, or how cultures are fragmented and ambiguous and often divided into interacting subcultures, rather than relatively homogeneous. Such aspects are not engaged with here.*  *I notice that the author defends his use of a very longstanding communication model (footnote, p172). He acknowledges that there has been a lot of research since, but refers to the prevalence of this model in current textbooks for warranting his claim that the original model remains appropriate for his purpose of exploring intercultural communication. It would be possible, in principle, to check this claim by looking at the relevant literature to see how far the original model is still supported by others in the light of the communication research that has been conducted since 1960. I wonder if the communication process is nowadays seen to be more complex and ambiguous than this model can cater for.* |

d. How convincing are any diagrams presenting relationships between concepts? (e.g. Is the relationship between components clear? Are links hierarchical? Causal? Sequential? Is the purpose and direction of arrows convincing?)

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| *The diagram is only moderately convincing because it is visually complex, and although the author gives a detailed description of the components and their relationships and also provides a key, neither are fully consistent with what is depicted. For example, the straight line Z1 is described as a curve, the hatching for ‘Contact debris in Culture A does not match the hatching for the relevant area of the diagram. Also, neither the text nor the key makes explicit what the straight and wavy arrows represent. Additionally, the author uses two metaphors to facilitate readers’ understanding. One involves a jellyfish that lives in seawater and one that lives in freshwater meeting and communicating; the other relates more directly to the diagram and involves signal transmission and transformation. But it is not made clear in the text how either metaphor applies in any detail to the components, lines and arrows in the diagram itself.* |

e. Do the authors justify their choice of theoretical orientation and if so, how? (e.g. Reference to empirical evidence suggesting that the theorization captures an important feature of the phenomenon? Reference to landmark texts adopting this orientation?)

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| *The author refers to two sources of theoretical ideas informing the model depicted in the diagram: the work of his mentor, whose work is extensively cited in the text, and a very longstanding communication model. He does justify his use of this model (see sub-question 6c above), but not on theoretical grounds, only that is widely presented in current textbooks and still captures fundamental aspects of communication.* |

**7. To what extent does any value stance adopted affect claims?**

a. How explicit are the authors about any value stance connected with the phenomena? (e.g. A relatively impartial, critical or positive stance? Is this stance informed by a particular ideology? Is it adopted before or after data collection?)

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| *The author does not explicitly state his value stance. But his positive stance towards globalized business and the removal of barriers to associated intercultural communication is evident in the text (see 2d above).* |

b. How might any explicit or implicit value stance adopted by the authors be affecting their claims? (e.g. Have they pre-judged the phenomena discussed? Are they biased? Is it legitimate for the authors to adopt their particular value stance? Have they over-emphasized some aspects of the phenomenon while under-emphasizing others?)

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| *The author’s positive stance towards business within globalized capitalism appears to have influenced his focus on intercultural training for managers from developed and developing countries, and his choice of economic factors to compare and contrast. I noticed that he didn’t identify any characteristics that might show globalized capitalism in a negative light, such as, say, (a) the unequal capacity of managers from developed versus developing countries to stipulate the terms of joint ventures, or (b) whether developed country interests might be served at the expense of developing country interests (e.g. taking advantage of low wages, unregulated working practices and poor safety standards in a developing country to produce goods as cheaply as possible for sale in developed countries).* |

**8. To what extent are claims supported or challenged by others’ work?**

a. Do the authors relate their claims to others’ work? (e.g. Do the authors refer to others’ published evidence, theoretical orientations or value stances to support their claims? Do they acknowledge others’ counter-evidence?)

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| *The author’s claims about economic characteristics and communication barriers are supported by claims that the author refers to in the published literature that he cites. I could, in principle, check how empirically well-warranted these cited authors’ claims are, and also check other relevant literature.* |

b. If the authors use evidence from others’ work to support their claims, how robust is it? (e.g. As for 5(c).)

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| *The author largely uses reference to the claims in the literature he cites to support his own claims, without explicitly indicating how far these claims in the literature are based on evidence. So empirical grounding is not actually provided, but the means of checking this is made available through the citations.* |

c. Is there any evidence from others’ work (including work you know, but the authors do not mention) that challenges the authors’ claims and, if so, how robust is it? (e.g. Is there relevant research or practice literature? Check any as for 5(c).)

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| *To assess this I would need to check the literature the author cites, other literature relating to economic characteristics of developed and developing countries, and communications research. But I am already aware of literature that exposes negative aspects of globalized capitalism and associated business practices involving developed and developing countries. Some of this literature might, implicitly, challenge the author’s claims.* |

**9. To what extent are claims consistent with my experience?**

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| *The substantive claims about economic characteristics resonate impressionistically with my general experience in a developed country. But they seem very generalized and so to underplay the likelihood of significant differences both within and between different developed and developing countries.*  *The theoretical claim about the approach to developing a theory-based typology of contrasting economic characteristics, linking them to cultural standards and a model of communication to explore barriers and how to overcome them as the basis for training is reasonably consistent with my experience as an educator and trainer in a developed country. I have often worked with managers from both developed and developing countries. But this experience suggests that the typology is so generalized that it should only be used in training as just one starting point for reflection on communication barriers, where participants are encouraged to evaluate the extent to which the generalizations hold in their experience, and where they are invited to critique the typology and suggest characteristics that they feel are most salient for informing their practice.* |

**10. What is my summary evaluation of the text in relation to my review question?**

a. How convincing are the authors’ claims and why?

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| *As one potential tool for training, the author’s theoretically grounded claims are moderately convincing. The author’s citations make clear the sources from which he has derived his typology of economic characteristics reflected in, or comprising, cultural standards, and culturally-based communication barriers. So he’s put me in a position to check their empirical backing if I want to refer in detail to the business communication problems he identifies. The author gives a very clear account of his approach to developing and applying this typology as a point of departure for intercultural training. If I use his paper to help answer my review question I could comment on the reason why he conceptualizes business communication problems as he does: because he is pursuing his intellectual project of training, articulating economic sources of communication problems, and the problems themselves, as a stimulus for training. But the author is not able to provide evidence in this paper to warrant the implicit claim that this approach will be effective in enabling managers to identify potential communication barriers and to overcome them.* |

b. How, if at all, could the authors have provided stronger backing for their claims?

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| *The author could have given more indication of the empirical backing for the economic characteristics of developed and developing countries and for the prevalence of the related communication barriers he identifies. But I can see that for the purposes of his intellectual project (training) these characteristics need have no greater status than comprising an additional starting point for managers’ practical reflection, warranted by being drawn from relevant theoretical literature.*  *The typology could augment existing intercultural training tools that do not currently address economic considerations related to cultural misunderstandings. While the author is concerned that the economic characteristics and communication problems he identifies do have some grounding through his reference to the theoretical literature, I accept that he is not primarily concerned with demonstrating the validity of each item in the typology. He is more concerned with providing a stimulus for reflection to be used in training programmes that has some ‘face validity’: it does draw on other theoretical literature, and the author hopes that it will have resonance with managers’ own experience.* |