Instructional text for critical analysis no 3 (Bhawuk)

# Summary

This paper explores a theoretical framework that the author hopes might inform the design of training programmes for business managers from contrasting economic backgrounds (developed versus developing countries), to help them work together productively. The first part of the exercise involves completing a critical analysis form, to help answer a ‘fact-finding’ review question about how business communication problems involving different countries have been conceptualized. We have provided our own version of the completed form, plus a short commentary. The second part of the exercise is for you to plan how you might use make use of literature to check the extent of empirical backing for the author’s conceptualization.

# Part one instructions

Read the paper and complete a Critical Analysis, using the template, and addressing the review question: ‘What conceptualizations have been developed to understand problems in business communication between different countries?’ Remember to focus on what is relevant in the paper to answering this review question.

## Commentary on part 1

Now compare your completed Critical Analysis with ours. Your responses are likely to differ from ours as you will come to your own critical judgements in evaluating the paper.

We will focus our commentary on why we gave the responses we did on Critical Analysis Question 2 (on how this author makes his contribution through the type of literature that he has produced, and why he does so through pursuing his intellectual project).

### Critical analysis question 2, sub-question a (focusing on the type of literature produced)

We judged this paper to be theoretical literature because the author links together a lot of ideas to create a theoretical framework which he hopes will be useful for training. We interpret his endeavour as setting out to develop practical theory which could help to improve practice. So the content of the paper is about putting forward sets of concepts, defining them and showing how one set of concepts links to another in interpreting an aspect of the social world.

We were also convinced that this is theoretical literature because of what the author *doesn’t* try to do. He doesn’t provide empirical evidence from his own research (as in research literature), though he does cite several other authors’ empirical studies. Nor does he provide evidence from practical experience (as in practice literature), except for one short reference to his own experience. Evidence from both research and practical experience might have demonstrated how far his theoretical framework does capture significant and widely prevalent patterns in this aspect of the social world. Nor does he indicate any attempt to inform the policies of governments or major companies (as in policy literature) interested in improving business communication involving managers from developed and developing countries.

### Critical analysis question 2, sub-questions b-g (focusing on the sort of intellectual project for study being pursued)

To work this out, we referred to Table 9.1 in our book. This table sets out the different features of intellectual projects, or reasons for studying, that are reflected in the six sub-questions (b-g) for Critical Analysis Question 2 that are relevant.

b) The author makes his rationale for the paper very explicit: to improve managers’ practice through the use of his theoretical framework in training programmes. The intellectual project of training is concerned with improving practice through training provision or other interventions such as giving consultancy advice. Therefore we judged quite quickly that the author’s intellectual project is probably training. Our answers to the other sub-questions confirmed our initial view.

c) Most of the paper consists of assembling linked sets of theoretical ideas which the author hopes will be used as a new stimulus for training. So although he doesn’t create the training resource itself, he does create the basis for one.

d) His value stance is also consistent with the intellectual project of training. He is positive about the phenomenon he is addressing: promoting globalized capitalism through facilitating joint business activity between managers from developed and developing countries. The author is also clearly positive about all the ideas he has assembled and the training approach involving the development of ‘critical incidents’ to help surface managers’ cultural assumptions.

e) While the author doesn’t articulate any question about the social world, we felt that it was implicitly something like: ‘how can business managers from developed and developing countries be trained to work together more effectively on joint ventures?’ He is trying to find a way of improving their practice through the new basis for training that he has put forward.

f) The author states that he is developing a theoretically grounded framework that he hopes will enrich training. So we felt that he is interested in developing practical theory that is capable of informing efforts to improve practice. While we were aware that much literature driven by the intellectual project of training is atheoretical, in this case we were impressed that the author sets out to assemble a framework by drawing on theoretical literature: about economic characteristics of developed and developing countries, and on cultural communication barriers and their resolution.

g) The author makes his target audience explicit in the abstract, right at the beginning of the paper: intercultural trainers and academics involved with training. Although he doesn’t directly address practitioners (managers in this case), he does wish to help inform the efforts of intercultural trainers and academics to improve the effectiveness of their training provision.

So all the sub-questions relevant to identifying authors’ intellectual project pointed here towards training as this author’s intellectual project behind the production of his paper.

# Part two instructions

How might you plan to make use of literature if you wished to check the extent of empirical backing for the author’s conceptualization?

We think that one consequence of the author developing a contribution to theoretical literature driven by the intellectual project of training is that he provides little warranting based on empirical evidence for his conceptualization of intercultural business communication problems, their origin or resolution. Suppose you wanted to use the author’s conceptualization as part of the theoretical framework for your own dissertation. You might be interested in conducting an empirical investigation of business communication problems, and so wanted to be able to justify why you used this conceptualization.

Part of your justification might be to demonstrate how much evidence there is that these problems are widely prevalent. Specifically, you might therefore seek to determine how far there is empirical backing for the barriers to intercultural communication that the author claims are founded in the contrasting economic circumstances of developed and developing countries. How might you go about doing this?

In this exercise, you don’t need actually to read any more resources – just identify what you *would* read. First, look for the most relevant literature sources cited by the author in the paper that you could check to see how well warranted by empirical evidence are the author’s typology of economic characteristics and the associated set of intercultural communication problems. Which are the three to five sources which you think stand to be most useful for this purpose? To establish this, go back through the paper, looking for places where the author cites other literature sources in support of his typology of contrasting characteristics of developed and developing countries, and the intercultural communication problems that the author claims are related to these economic characteristics.

For each of the three to five sources you identify, state why you think it will be particularly useful.

## Commentary

You might come to a different list from ours, depending on which claims you most wish to check the empirical backing for. When we did this exercise, we felt it would be good to start with these references, for the following reasons.

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| Reference | Reason |
| Toffler 1985 | The author says (in the footnote on p165) that he derived the cultural standards for developed countries from this text as a starting point for constructing the typology of ten contrasting economic characteristics. It would be worth finding out how much empirical evidence Toffler was drawing upon. But we also note that the reference is dated 1985, and would be interested in checking whether the characteristics Toffler identified more than a quarter of a century ago are still evident today. |
| Porter 1990 | This work is referred to in support of several claims about contrasting economic characteristics of developed and developing countries. The author indicates (p165) how Porter argued that nations go through stages of development, so his book clearly compares nations that are more and less developed in some way. Therefore, it would be worth checking how far he offers empirical backing. The same issue as noted above applies – the reference is dated 1990, so we would wish to keep in mind whether the contrasts he makes between developed and developing countries still hold. |
| Hofstede 1980 | We think it important to check the evidence for the reference (p173) to collective mental programming that is held to result in managers from different cultures having different – and possibly incompatible – mental programmes. The reference is quite old (1980). So we wonder whether, even if Hofstede had strong evidence, this contrast in mental programming would be so applicable today because of the massive development of global communications since then. |
| Triandis 1975 | The author refers to the work of Triandis in several places, most significantly for us in the claims made about removing business communication barriers related to attitudes (175). We would like to check what evidence Triandis had for the ‘isomorphic attributions’ that members of one culture might learn to make about those from the other culture. |

We would start with the four references above, but would expect also to scrutinize the references made by these authors, if we wanted to check the evidential backing for their claims further.

We leave you with a second task to consider for yourself: what other areas of literature might you explore, and why? Which other areas of literature could help you to establish a) how strong the evidence is that managers from developed and developing countries might experience the barriers to communication that the author highlights, and b) how far these barriers relate to cultural standards based, in turn, on contrasting economic characteristics of developed and developing countries?