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**CRITICAL AND INTERPRETIVE SOCIAL SCIENCE THEORY:
A CASE STUDY APPROACH**

This article focuses on the link between interpretive theory and critical theory using the case study research. The paper discusses how different research approaches provide fundamentally different ways of looking at a case. It demonstrates how theory can provide useful yet markedly different interpretations of organizational events. Critical theory and interpretive theory operate from within what can be termed the transitive epistemological dimension, and tends to emphasize the importance of ontological issues. Each has important things to say about the situation and improves our overall understanding. The paper argues that for the particular case under examination, critical realism provides the most useful tool from the employee's point of view.

Keywords: critical theory, interpretive theory.

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**КРИТИЧНА Й ІНТЕРПРЕТАЦІЙНА ТЕОРІЯ В СОЦІАЛЬНИХ
НАУКАХ: МЕТОД СИТУАЦІЙНОГО ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ**

У статті коротко розглянуто зв'язок між інтерпретаційною та критичною теорією з використанням практичних прикладів. Показано, що різні підходи до дослідження забезпечують принципово різні способи аналізу, продемонстровано, як теоретичний підхід впливає на інтерпретацію подій. Критична й інтерпретаційна теорії оперують в рамках так званого перехідного епістемологічного виміру, і, як правило, підкреслюють важливість онтологічних питань. Кожна з теорій містить важливі положення аналізу ситуації і в цілому покращує її розуміння. Для конкретного розглянутого випадку критичний реалізм є найефективнішим інструментом аналізу діяльності працівників.

Ключові слова: критична теорія, інтерпретаційна теорія.

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В СОЦИАЛЬНЫХ НАУКАХ: МЕТОД СИТУАЦИОННОГО
ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ**

В статье кратко рассматривается связь между интерпретационной и критической теорией с использованием исследования практических примеров. Показано, что разные подходы к исследованию обеспечивают принципиально разные способы анализа, демонстрируется, как теоретический подход влияет на интерпретацию событий. Критическая и интерпретационная теории оперируют в рамках так называемого переходного эпистемологического измерения, и, как правило, подчеркивают важность онтологических вопросов. Каждая из теорий содержит важные положения анализа ситуации и в целом улучшает ее понимание. Для конкретного рассматриваемого случая критический реализм является самым эффективным инструментом анализа деятельности сотрудников.

Ключевые слова: критическая теория, интерпретационная теория.

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Introduction. Critical theory has some similarities with postmodernism. Critical theory focuses on the inherent connection between politics, values and knowledge and, thereby, provokes a deeper consideration of politics and values which underpin and legitimize the authority of "scientific" knowledge (Alvesson and Willmott, 1988). In this paper the authors focus on 2 potential categories of readers. The first are fellow academics who will judge it by usual academic criteria. The second are professional practitioners, possibly in marketing or other fields. Clearly, in order to be academically successful, the authors need to satisfy the first group. However, the second group may gain the greatest value. The authors hope to affect a focused adult pedagogical source of information and communication that will allow others improve their practices. By writing and detailing the authors' experiences and what was learned, the authors can present a picture that enables the transfer of insights into your own field and utilising knowledge to solve similar problems. In this sense, this article is an educational narrative. It is also within the interpretive approach, where reality is only given meaning by understanding social interactions and social construction of reality (Luckman, 1969). Hence, understanding may not depend upon the revelation of some hitherto unknown scientific truth but rather on human behaviour, situational context, leading to appropriate generalisations. As Crotty (1998, p. 9) put it, "meaning is not discovered but constructed".

Interpretive social science theory describes and interprets how many people conduct their daily lives. It contains concepts and limited generalisations, but does not dramatically depart from the experience and inner reality of the people being studied (Neuman, 2000). The term for the study of interpretation is called hermeneutics after the Greek god Hermes who was the messenger of gods. Socrates (in common with most Greek thinking at the time) regarded words as a vehicle for ambiguity and possibly dishonesty and trickery (Couzen-Hoy, 1981). Given marketing's poor reputation for sophistry it may be that he is the rightful true patron saint of this craft.

Hence, this paper describes a case vignette focusing on the link between interpretive theory and critical theory with case study research. It then examines how research may be developed from a critical and interpretivist perspective.

Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991) classified case study research traditions as basically following 3 major philosophical approaches — positivist, interpretive and critical, the interpretive and the critical responding to shortcomings in the positivist. In its neglecting of contemporary realist approaches such a division reflects a commonly held view equating realism with positivism. This article calls for a recognition that modern realist approaches can also address many criticisms of positivism.

The Case Vignette.

When the author (PhD candidate) joined the planning group in the mid 2000s, the DHL had completed the first draft of its new Global Marketing Business Plan (GMB Plan). The plan formulated along the same lines as other internal business plans (covering money, assets, and people, respectively), formed a part of a detailed planning process that involved planning at corporate, business, and branch levels across the globe.

At the time, any organization could be characterized as a traditional engineering-focused organization with little time for global marketing, as the supply chain was seen as a cost centre with a primarily non-core role. The development of the first

global marketing business plan was a major coup for the supply chain department, in that it placed the importance of marketing at the same level as other organizational businesses, that of money, assets, and people. This enthusiasm was however, short-lived, as soon after the completion of this the organization began to move towards the outsourcing of non-core activities.

Prior to the decision to outsource, the organization saw the supply chain department as providing a service function:

The organisation in those days saw supply chain as a domain department. They were focused on one of 2 things, logistic or financial considerations, and the supply chain was something they had to have, but they didn't really want to spend any money on it and all the money they had spent, was considered too much — 'where was the return on the investment?' — that was the continual question (Interview, Marketing Planning Manager post outsourcing).

The development of the first Global Marketing Business Plan was a major achievement in an engineering-focused organization, yet there was a degree of opposition to this idea as an employee later pointed out:

The prevailing view of executives at the time was that it was completely inappropriate to describe the information thing as a business. That caused quite a bit of grief and controversy — it is merely a process. No way is it a core business, it is just a support process or function.

In order to properly complete the Global Marketing Business Plan (GMB Plan) there was an initial need to examine the information requirements of various business processes — marketing manager led this modeling exercise. Over the period 2000-2003 marketing manager developed the Global Marketing Business Plan and continued work on process modeling and investigations into outsourcing of non-core processes:

On the practical side of delivering a service we were starting to shine, we were winning TQM awards, the quality of our service was very good, and we were getting accolades in the press, the cost of our service was benchmarked internationally in the top 6 in the world. So things were going very, very well (Marketing Manager).

This observation was confirmed in later interview with the then managing director. He indicated that the supply chain department benchmarked being one of the leaders internationally within the sector as well as being in the top in similar industries.

Marketing manager originally felt that the investigation into outsourcing was simply an exercise with no real plan to move ahead with outsourcing:

In fact I went to a board meeting where the question was raised "Why the hell are we looking at outsourcing supply chain, when we've just had supply chain successfully benchmarked internationally; we know we run efficiently, effectively — we've just given these guys the first TQM award in the organisation because they're working so well. So why the hell do we even bother looking at it?" And what came back was it's a governing directive that we look at it. So we really told the staff, don't worry, it's an exercise that the governing powers wants to go through and that we know that the results and figures will show there's no way people can come and run it any cheaper than we do. And that wasn't true, the exercise was "this gets outsourced, whether it was economic or not". It took a while for me — I believed, and my director believed that this was a paper exercise and we were

looking at outsourcing of many areas. It was an agenda simply to force supply chain out whether it was economic or not (Marketing manager).

Supply chain department came to be considered as non-core and was one of the first areas to be targeted for outsourcing. In the mid-1990s the outsourcing project was initially termed a Global Marketing Business Plan (GMB Plan) project. Staff initially accepted this GMB Plan tag but over time they came to reject the term, as they felt that it did not reflect what was actually happening, they felt that the study was basically an investigation into the feasibility of outsourcing, not GMB Plan. This dissatisfaction emanated from the planning manager and other staff and prompted a change in the title of the project to corporate repositioning and then again, at a later date, to outsourcing. According to supply chain manager at the time, the term GMB annoyed staff:

Well, the staff simply refused to call it that "Let's call a spade a spade-Bugger this, we won't call it GMB Plan any more," they said-"It's a false term. Let's not pretend." After a while it became obvious what the agenda was and some of the directors who pushed GMB Plan objected themselves to hiding outsourcing under the term GMB Plan.

The Research Question.

Critical Theory. Critical theory has lofty aims in that the purpose of critical theory is seen as enabling members of a society to alter their lives for better by fostering in them important self-knowledge and understanding of social conditions under which they operate, thus providing a basis for emancipatory change.

Alvesson and Willmott (1992) argued that "central to critical theory is the emancipatory potential of reason to reflect critically on how the reality of the social world, including the construction of self, is socially produced and, therefore, is open to transformation. The task of critical theory is to combine philosophy with social science to facilitate the development of change in an emancipatory direction". Flood and Jackson (1991, p. 49) saw emancipation as an interest in freeing "individuals from constraints imposed by power relations and in learning, through a process of genuine participatory democracy, involving discursive will-formation, to control their own destiny". The individual's power to reason and consequent self-emancipation plays a major role in critical theory.

Habermas (1984) highlights the important role that language and communication play within critical theory when he suggests that people can follow 2 fundamental postures in a social situation-achieving success or communication. Actions directed towards achieving success (purposive rational) can be either instrumental or strategic. Instrumental action treats participants as inanimate constraints who can be manipulated to serve self-interests of the main actor. In contrast, strategic action treats participants as intelligent, involved players with their own self-interests and aims, thus requiring a strategic approach to achieve properly the main actor's self-interest.

The second fundamental posture that actors may represent is that of communication — the primary desire is to achieve consensus and understanding. Hirschheim and Klein (1994) argue that a communicative orientation is directed towards sense making — an emergent process that involves mutual understanding and shared appreciation of situations based on common shared background assumptions and beliefs. Where such a common base does not exist, discursive action may ensue. Discursive

action may result when participants have some doubts as to clarity, truthfulness, correctness, or appropriateness of any communicated message. Instrumental and strategic action fundamentally emphasizes control, whereas communicative and discursive action emphasizes sense making and argumentation.

For the case example critical theory could emphasize the role that language plays in social situations. The name change from GMB Plan to outsourcing could be presented as an example of the important role that language plays in social situations and how language can implicitly construct a particular reality. Critical theory emphasizes the importance of identifying inequitable structures — such identification providing the opportunity for understanding and consequent self-emancipation. This emphasis on understanding and description suggests the research would be directed towards examining the role that language plays in the corporate change process and the possible emancipatory opportunity provided by changing the name of the change process. There would not be a single research question in the base of the research but an emphasis on identification and understanding.

Interpretive Theory. Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991 p. 13) present interpretivism emphasizing the social nature of reality:

Interpretivism asserts that reality, as well as our knowledge thereof, are social products and hence incapable of being understood independently of social actors (including researchers) that construct and make sense of that reality.

Klein and Myers (1999, p. 69) describe interpretive research from the practical, method-based focus:

Case study research can be classified as interpretive if it is assumed that our knowledge of reality is gained only through social constructions such a language, consciousness, shared meanings, documents, tools, and other artefacts.

They suggest a number of principles for good interpretive practice and specifically argue that a major problem with many interpretive projects is their failure to clearly define the emergent nature of research — "we are [often] given little understanding of how the researcher's analysis is developed over the course of the project. As it stands, we are presented with a finished piece of interpretive research with few indications of its emergent nature" (p. 84).

Walsham (1993, p. 4) suggests that interpretive methods of research focus on understanding the context in which the information system is placed and how the information system influences and is influenced by that context. He states:

Interpretive methods of research start from the position that our knowledge of reality, including the domain of human action, is a social construction by human actors and this applies equally to researchers. Thus, there is no objective reality which can be discovered by researchers and replicated by others... Interpretivism is thus an epistemological position, concerned with approaches to the understanding of reality and asserting that knowledge is necessarily a social construction and thus subjective (p. 5).

Subtle differences between 3 definitions of interpretivism emphasize the divergent nature of research approaches within this paradigm. Walsham and Klein & Meyers present a weaker constructivist argument than Orlikowski and Baroudi who suggest that reality itself is socially constructed. Walsham, Klein and Meyers suggest that interpretivism presents our knowledge of reality as socially constructed rather than the reality itself.

Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991, p. 18) summarize the weaknesses of the purely interpretive approach (based on Fay, 1987):

First, the interpretive perspective does not examine the conditions, often external, which give rise to certain meanings and experiences. Second, research in this perspective omits to explain the unintended consequences of action, which by definition cannot be explained by reference to the intentions of the humans concerned... Third, the interpretive perspective does not address structural conflicts within society and organisations and ignores contradictions which may be endemic in social systems... Finally, the interpretive perspective neglects to explain historical change; that is, how a particular social order came to be what it is, and how it is likely to vary over time.

Klein and Meyers incorporate critical aspects within their underlying principles and suggest a critical interpretive approach in their demand for suspicion and contextualization. The principles they suggest help to address the shortcomings identified within Orlikowski and Baroudi's article.

For the case example, an interpretive approach would attempt to critically describe and understand the happenings from the perspective of organizational players. Such examination may well reflect on the low level of morale over the time of outsourcing examination and the anger of lower level management as they come to realize the dishonesty of naming the change process a GMB Plan process. Perhaps the researcher may have an important role in initiating this process through their questioning of the reasons behind the GMB plan.

The research question may well be vague at the outset of the project in that the research is largely emergent from interaction and subsequent reflection. Multiple perspectives need to be appreciated and included — such variance helping to negate the criticism that interpretivism tends to ignore external structures and their effects. Often junior levels of management may not have sufficient knowledge to be able to fully describe impacting influences. The neglecting of senior management levels is not, however, an immediate failure for the interpretive researcher in that the target is to appreciate the situation from the perspective of those interviewed — as long as the limitations of knowledge derived are made clear such description can still be valid. Similarly, the concept of the hermeneutic circle can help to obviate this neglecting of external influences (or macrolevel impositions) through reflection based around the continual movement from the whole to the parts and back again.

Clearly, for the interpretive researcher there are 2 major stories — one for the researcher and one for the researched — each story needs to be told. Reflective examination of the extent to which each are affected by the other also needs to be included and continually examined.

Conclusion. Clearly, this article is realist in focus. It suggests that critical theory, interpretive theory and interpretive approach can provide useful insights into a research situation but the conclusions generated are largely dependent on the particular approach selected.

The authors aim to gain insights that can be used to build up a framework from which theory can evolve. Hermeneutics originally was concerned with ancient religious texts and hence designed to give meaning to the unfamiliar and alien (Moustakas, 1990). Whilst the reader may not consider marketing especially "alien", postmodernism does not seem to take adequately into account the shifting structures

of capitalism (Morgan, 2003). Indeed, some writers regard postmodernism to be but the cultural arm of multinational capitalism (Stephanson, 1989). Popular protests in Wall Street and London in 2012 following a deep global recession perhaps reflect it is not so much alien, but the process of alienation.

However, the key point that the authors wish to make about interpretation is that it grounded in something that we have in advance, "Vorhabe" (Heidegger, 1962), our own understanding of the context colours the picture that we are seeing. Interpretation is not something that one does, it is something that one is directly involved in (Gallagher, 1992). Praxis (Schwandt, 2002) is the name given to the engagement embedded in communally shared understandings and values and depends on their everyday linguistic usage (Dunne, 1993). Hence, the 2 categories of readers of this article will necessarily receive slightly different interpretations of what the authors are saying because their "vohabe" and experiences are also different. This may or may not be desirable, but it is most certainly unavoidable.

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