



MASSEY UNIVERSITY

**Academic Knowledge and Learning for  
Postgraduate Assignments**

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Centre for Teaching and Learning

*Write down what you think these words mean:*

**Perspective** \_\_\_\_\_

**Theory** \_\_\_\_\_

**Critique** \_\_\_\_\_



# What is Academic Knowledge?

<b>Informal knowledge</b>	<b>Academic/Scientific Knowledge</b>
<p data-bbox="85 331 784 443">Knowledge that people use to make sense of their daily lives</p> <div data-bbox="85 529 873 874" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"><p data-bbox="85 555 819 858">So many people are being bullied at work in this country! And it's a really serious problem because it causes misery for victims and headaches for the organisation.</p></div> <p data-bbox="85 938 824 1050">The audience does not generally expect proof for claims made</p> <p data-bbox="107 1082 595 1129">Belongs to everybody</p> <p data-bbox="107 1168 784 1273">Information is often general rather than specific or detailed</p> <p data-bbox="94 1337 631 1439">Language is informal or conversational</p>	<p data-bbox="931 331 2208 507">Knowledge that scholars, experts or scientists create to understand the world, explain how things work, and suggest how they can be improved</p> <div data-bbox="931 529 2204 1264" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"><p data-bbox="931 555 2159 1241">Workplace bullying is recognised as a major concern among researchers internationally (Salin, 2008) and has been identified as a widespread problem in New Zealand. In one study, O'Driscoll et al. (2011) surveyed over 1700 employees of 36 organisations in New Zealand. Nearly 18% of these employees reported being bullied at work. Workplace bullying is associated with negative consequences for the victim, including health and emotional problems (Aitkens, 2010) and also for the organisation, including decreased staff satisfaction, low morale and high staff turnover (Brownley, 2011).</p></div> <p data-bbox="945 1289 2038 1337">Proof/evidence is required when a claim is made</p> <p data-bbox="945 1375 1868 1423">Belongs to the researchers/organisations</p> <p data-bbox="945 1455 2007 1560">Information is specific, detailed, and expressed formally and objectively</p>

# Generation of academic knowledge

## Primary research

Researchers collect data, analyse it and reach conclusions

They **publish** their research in

- scholarly journals
- books

Interviews

Observations

Experiments

## Example:

Branch, S., Ramsay, S., & Barker, M. (2007). Contributing factors to workplace bullying by staff – An interview study. *Journal of Management and Organisation*, 13(3), 264-281.



# Generation of academic knowledge

- Research contributes to *theoretical knowledge* on a topic

## **Example:**

Branch, S., Ramsay, S., & Barker, M. (2007). Contributing factors to workplace bullying by staff – An interview study. *Journal of Management and Organisation*, 13(3), 264-281.



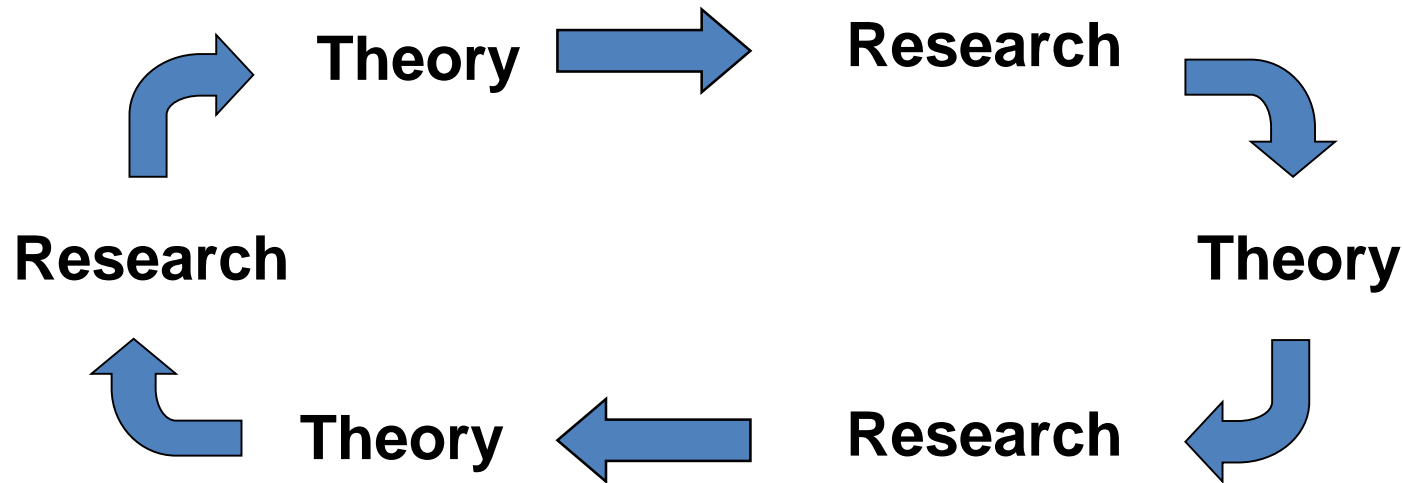
Contributes to understanding of workplace bullying – some aspect(s) of *how* it occurs, *why* it occurs and what can be done about it

- Theory develops as new evidence emerges from research



# Relationship between theory and research

- Theory develops as new evidence emerges from research



- Researchers review and build on previous knowledge to develop new knowledge in a field



# There are multiple theoretical perspectives in any topic area

Educational  
strategy

Organisational  
structure

Change  
management

Emotional  
development

Leadership

Internationalisation

Stress

Culture

- Similar perspectives and competing perspectives
- Each has its strengths and limitations

*Underlying any perspective is a definition...*



## Definitions: The foundations of different perspectives

### *Categorisation: What is it?*

An axe is a tool which is used for chopping wood.

*Components/attributes/features*



*Defining an object*

### *Categorisation: What is it?*

An axe is a weapon which is used for killing people.

*Components/attributes/features*

Academic definitions :

**Name of concept + Categorisation + Components/Attributes/Features**



# Why are definitions so important?

- They are the lens through which you view the concept
- They form the foundation for your discussion of topics in your assignments
- They form the foundation for theoretical models



*Compare these two understandings of aggression:*

Aggression is a natural behaviour.  
It is triggered by threats from  
others in the environment

Aggression is a learned behaviour. It is  
learned by observing this behaviour  
rewarded in others in the environment .

*They would require different  
approaches to finding solutions*

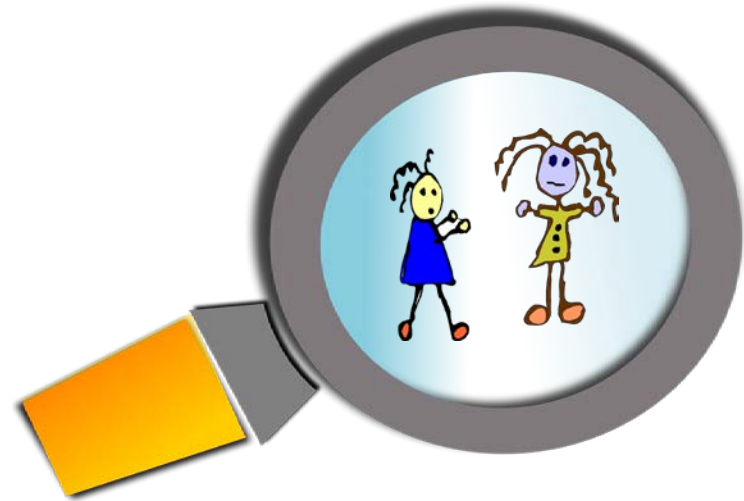
Identify sources of threats in the  
environment and minimise them.

Identify situations in which  
aggressive behaviour is rewarded  
and minimise them.

*What if we view aggression as a combination of  
individual and environmental factors?*

## A theoretical framework for aggression might explain:

- What is it? (Definition)
- How does it occur?
- When does it occur?
- Where does it occur?
- Why does it occur?



### Can help practitioners like teachers to:

- Recognise the signs
- Predict when it's likely to occur
- Explain why it has occurred in a particular situation



### So that they will be better equipped to:

- Manage the situation when it *does* occur
- Prevent it from occurring in the future

# Critical use of theory in academic study

*As a postgraduate student you will be expected to:*

- define the concepts you are discussing or researching
  - beginning of essays/reports/literature reviews
- acknowledge that there are different perspectives/views of the concepts you are discussing or researching
- compare these perspectives
- evaluate these perspectives in terms of specific contexts
  - strengths and limitations in terms of your research topic or your area of practice



# Working with theory and research in assignments

- Applying the theory and research on a topic to analyse organisations and situations
- Critiquing the theory and research available on the topic

We'll be using Hofstede's (1980) model of cultural variance as an example of what this means



# Identifying the elements can help you understand and use definitions

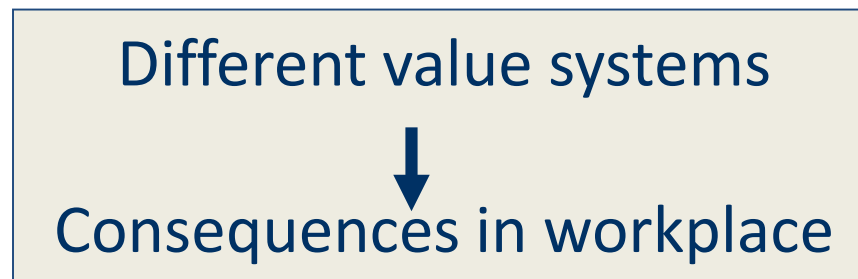
Hofstede (1980) defined culture as follows: “Culture <sup>1</sup> is <sup>2</sup> the collective programming of the mind <sup>3</sup> which distinguishes one human group from another. Culture in this sense is a system of collectively held values” (p. 25).

- 1. Name of concept** – followed by verb (is/can be defined as/ is defined as)
- 2. Categorisation** – crucial element of definition
- 3. Features** – components/characteristics



# Geert Hofstede's IBM study (1967-1973)

- Examined how values in the workplace are influenced by culture



- Published his research in a book: *Cultures consequences: International differences in work-related values* (1980)

***Seminal text – very important or key text***

# Hofstede's IBM study (1967-1973)

**Aim:** To identify universal dimensions of culture that differ among countries

*Aspects of culture that can be measured relative to other cultures*

## **Method: How did he do it?**

Analysed data from a survey of middle managers in an international corporation (IBM) with sites in 66 countries

## **What did he find?**

Identified four dimensions in original study (1980)

- individualism versus collectivism
- power distance
- femininity versus masculinity
- uncertainty avoidance

*Added* - long term vs short-term orientation (1991)

*Added* - indulgence versus restraint (2010)



# Hofstede's model of national cultural differences

*Six cultural dimensions:*

Individualism versus collectivism

Power distance

Femininity versus masculinity

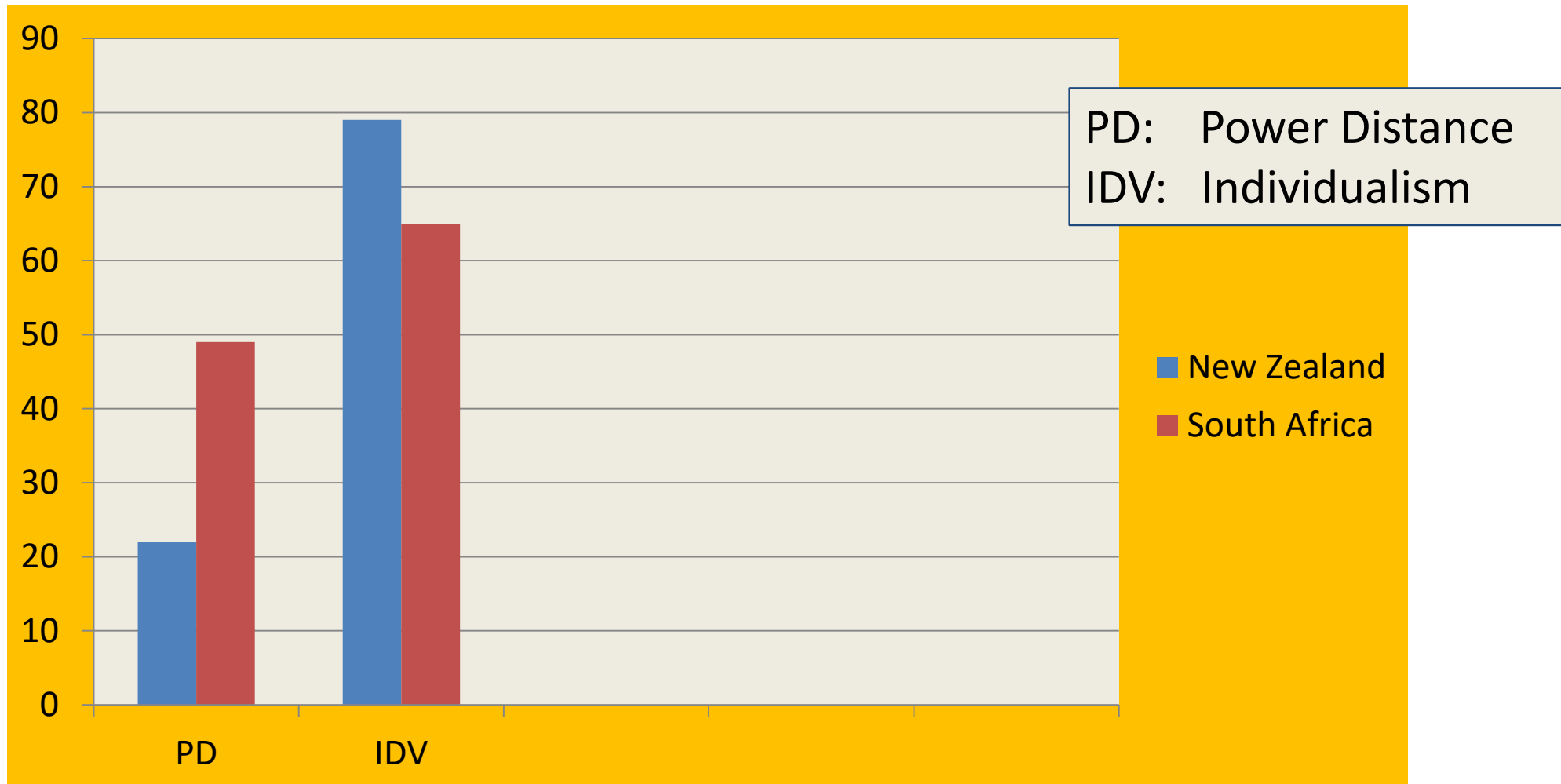
Uncertainty avoidance

Long term versus short-term orientation

Indulgence versus restraint

Hofstede's framework can be used to predict how and why people behave as they do (Robock & Simmonds, 1989).

## New Zealand and South Africa



### Power Distance

The extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) expect and accept that power is distributed unequally (Hofstede, 2001)

You are going to meet your lecturer/supervisor Professor Andrew Sinclair face to face for the first time at a departmental function. What will you call him?



- Professor Sinclair
- Andrew
- Sir
- Mr Sinclair
- I won't call him anything!

- Professor Sinclair?  
Titles create distance



# Theoretical models are applicable to research in multiple contexts

## **Power Distance**

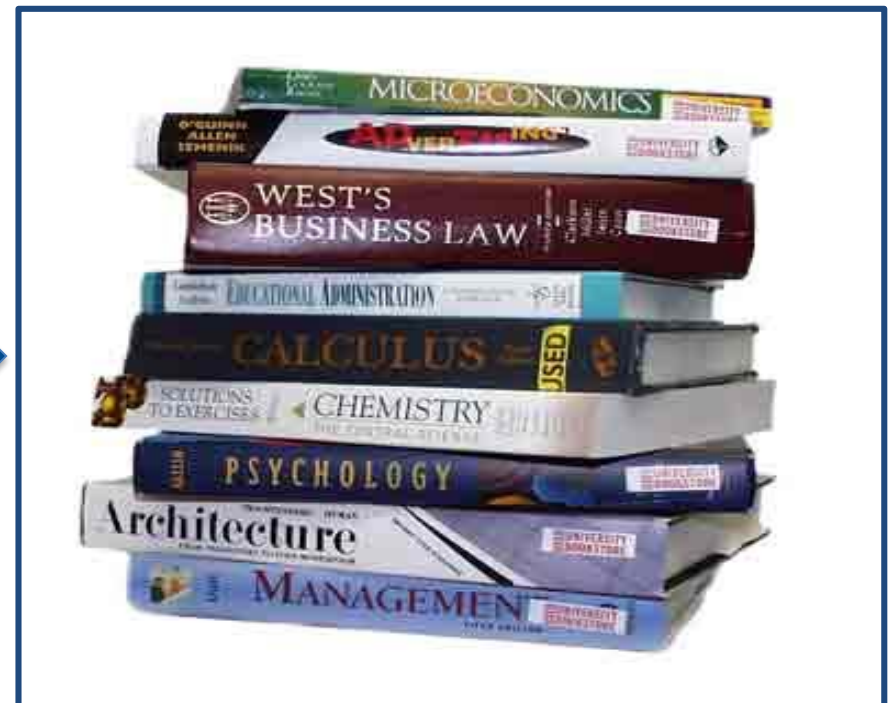
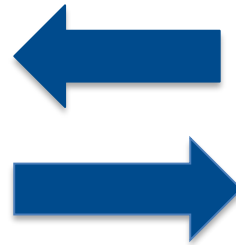
The extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) expect and accept that power is distributed unequally (Hofstede, 2001)

*How could teachers/social workers/managers (business) use this information?*



# What are you expected to do with theory and research in your assignments?

- Apply theory and research from your readings to analyse organisations and real life situations
  - to develop an argument on a specific issue
  - to analyse a case



## Consider the following case...



Michael accepts an assignment to teach in a rural school in a developing country overseas. When he begins his first class he finds that the students are chatting to each other as he speaks and don't appear to be paying attention to him. After a while he's had enough. He calls out "Excuse me class!" and tells them that he finds their behaviour rude and unacceptable. The students stare at him in astonishment, clearly not understanding his objection. Michael later finds that during tests the students' eyes wander to the efforts of others. Local teachers in the school do not object to this behaviour which Michael considers to be cheating.

## ...in the light of Hofstede's theory



**Individualism versus collectivism:** Individualistic cultures emphasise individual achievement and self-sufficiency. Collective cultures place more value on the co-operative effort of the group in reaching a goal and they emphasise group loyalty and harmony among group members (Hofstede, 2001).

How would Hofstede's dimension of individualism versus collectivism explain the difference in expectations shown in the case?

# Applying the theory and research to analyse cases or situations

*Example:*

*Main idea – topic sentence*

**One possible explanation** for these different expectations regarding appropriate student behaviour is that Michael comes from an individualistic culture while the culture of his pupils and the local teachers is collective in nature. Hofstede (2001) characterises individualistic cultures as those that emphasise individual achievement and self-sufficiency while collective cultures value group loyalty, co-operation and harmony among group members. Brislin, Worthley and Macnab (2006) argue that when students from collectivist cultures talk to each other during the teaching process, they are fulfilling their obligation to share their knowledge with other members of the student group in a co-operative effort to understand the material being presented by the teacher. Likewise, sharing information during exams fits their cultural expectation of group co-operation in attaining goals and the maintenance of good relations amongst members of the group. In their survey of schools in... Beaton and Brajinsky (2003) found that co-operative effort was valued...

# Where does my *own* opinion fit in?

- You will be viewing the familiar world through the lens of theory and research
- You need to demonstrate that your opinion on an issue is sound by referring to evidence
- Support your opinion by referring to theoretical concepts and evidence from research



# What are you expected to do with theory and research in your assignments?

- ❑ Apply the theory and research to analyse organisations or situations
  - to develop an argument on a specific issue
  - to analyse a case
- ❑ Critique the theory and research on a topic
  - critique is central to academic writing



# Critiquing research

*Involves examination of both usefulness and limitations*

Examine the **research method**:

## **Example:**

- Sample based on a single multinational organisation
- Subjects predominantly middle class males



# Critiquing research

*Involves examination of both usefulness and limitations*

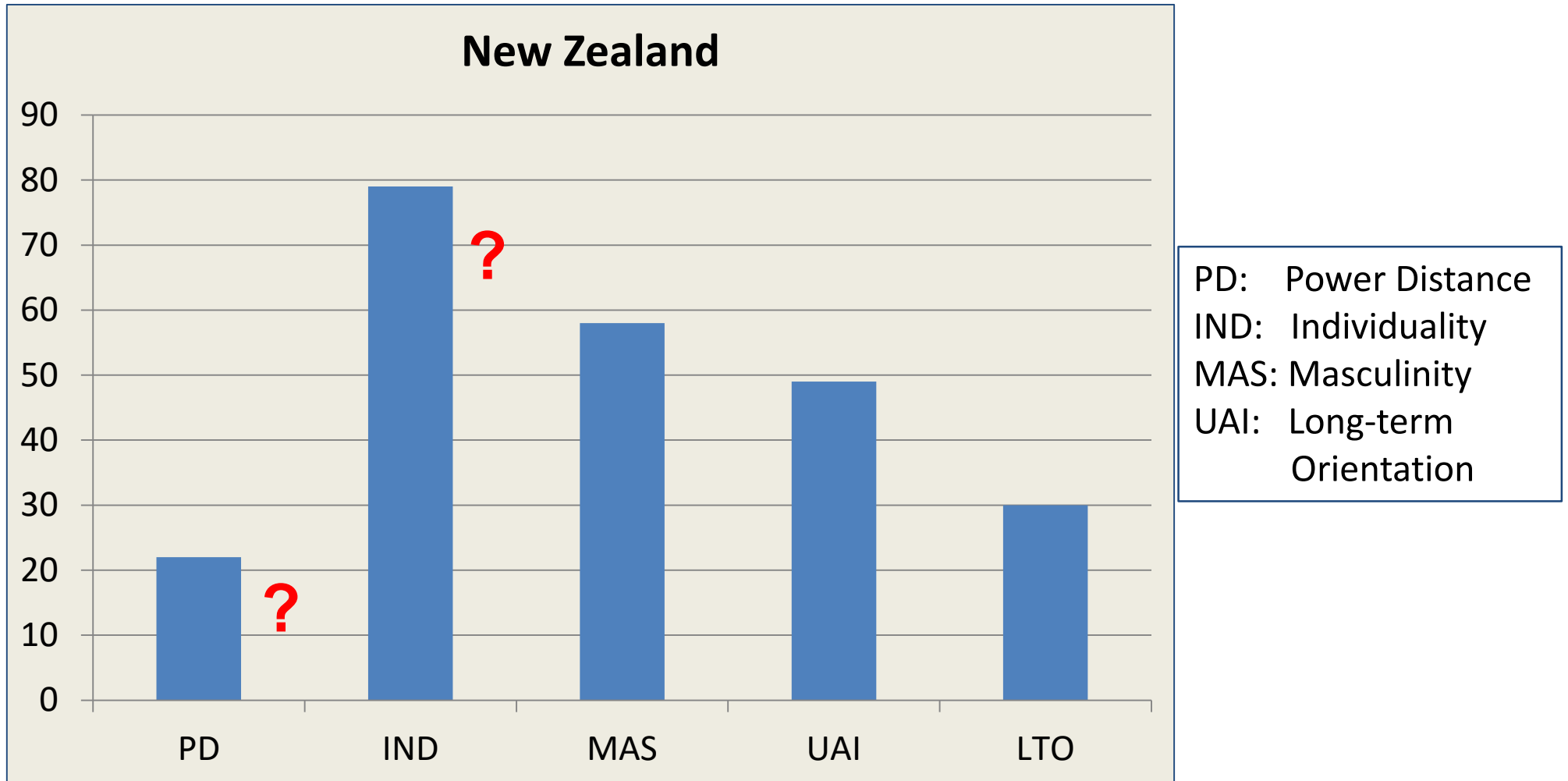
Examine the researcher's **assumptions**:

## **Example:**

- Does culture systematically cause consequences?
- Can culture be measured?
- What about sub-cultures?
- Are cultures static?



**Table 1: Hofstede's Five Cultural Dimensions**



Is this an accurate reflection of New Zealand society?

## Comparing perspectives on a concept

### Combination of cultures unique to individuals:

Straub et al. (2002) provide an alternative to categorisations of culture as systems of shared values or problem solving. In their review of the conceptualisation and measurement of culture, they suggest that “an individual’s social identity represents that amalgamation of cultures across boundaries (national, organisational, professional, etc.) **which** fuse together to create one’s overall culture. The combination is unique to each individual” (p. 18).

### ***Review article: Critical overview***

Straub, D., Loch, K., Evaristo, R., Karahanna, E., & Srite, M. (2002).  
Toward a theory-based measurement of culture. *Journal of Global Information Management*, 10(1), 13-23.



# Critiquing Research: Relevance of theoretical models in today's world

- How has the world changed since the research was published?
- How do these changes affect the relevance of the model in research and practice today?
- What new research is available on the topic?

*Critical analysis is central to academic knowledge and your assignments will reflect this*



- Sometimes a whole assignment is a critical analysis of a particular theoretical model(s) in a specific context

Example 1:      *Nursing practice/Human Resources Management*

How useful is Hofstede's model of cultural variance in the context of the New Zealand secondary school classroom today? Discuss with reference to your own teaching situation.

- Provide a *brief* description of the theoretical model
- The rest of the assignment must consist of critical analysis
  - what does the literature say about the model?
  - is the model relevant to the given context?
  - what are the strengths and limitations of this model in the context?
  - which other model might be more appropriate in the context?

- ❑ You may be asked to use current theory and research on a topic to critically analyse **policy** and **practice** in a specific field

**Sample assignment:**

With reference to current literature on the topic, critically analyse current policy and practice relating to the care of elderly hospice patients in New Zealand.

**For example:**

- What theoretical framework is at the foundation of the policy and practice? Eg. Definition of 'well-being' in this situation
- Is this framework appropriate in New Zealand?
  - Eg. Consider the multi-cultural population
- What does the literature say about best practice and how does current practice in New Zealand measure up against this?
- What are the areas of agreement/disagreement in the literature? What are the *gaps* in the literature on this topic?



- ❑ Sometimes the whole assignment is a critique/critical analysis of a single scholarly article

**Sample assignment:**

Write a critique of the following journal article:

Pio, E. (2005). Standing in the foyer: Work experiences of Indian women migrants in New Zealand. *Equal Opportunities International*, 4(1), 58-75.



# So...what do we know about theory and research?

- Theory changes as new evidence emerges from research
- There are multiple theoretical perspectives on a single topic
- Researchers use and adapt theoretical models for the context of their research
- Theory is always used *critically* in research
  - strengths and limitations are explained
  - other theoretical perspectives are acknowledged
- Critical analysis is central to what you will do as researchers in your assignments



## Recommended books on academic writing available from Massey's Library

Pyrzack, F., & Bruce, R. (2005). *Writing empirical research reports* (5th ed.).

Los Angeles, CA: Pyrzack Publishing. **(808.06615 Pyr)**

Swales, J.M., & Feak, C.B. (1994). *Academic writing for graduate students:*

*A course for nonnative speakers of English.* Ann Arbor, MI: The

University of Michigan Press. **(808.042 Swa)**

Swales, J.M., & Feak, C.B. (2000). *English in today's research world: A*

*writing guide.* Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.

**(808.042Swa)**

Swales, J.M., & Feak, C.B. (2004). *Academic writing for graduate students:*

*Essential tasks and skills* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) Ann Arbor, MI: The University of

Michigan Press. **(808.0428 Swa)**

# Recommended books on academic writing available from Massey's Library

## Specific to areas of study:

Burton, L.J. (2002). *An interactive approach to writing essays and research reports in psychology*. Sydney, Australia: John Wiley & Sons.

**(808.06615 Bur)**

Cargill, M., & O'Connor, P. (2009). *Writing scientific research articles: Strategy and steps*. Oxford, England: Wiley-Blackwell. **(On short loan at library)**

Emerson, L. (Ed.) (2005). *Writing guidelines for business students*. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) Southbank, VC: Thomson Dunmore Press. **(808 0663 Wri)**

Emerson, L. (Ed.). (2007). *Writing guidelines for education students* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Auckland, New Zealand: Thomson Learning. **(371.30281 Wri)**

Emerson, L. (Ed.). (2005) *Writing guidelines for social science students* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Southbank, Australia: Thompson Dunmore Press. **(808.06665 Wri)**

Hampton, J., Emerson, L., & Mackay, B. (Eds.). (1999). *Writing guidelines for postgraduate science students*. Palmerston North, New Zealand: Dunmore Press. **(808.0666 Ham)**

# Massey's OWLL site

**Academic writing:** <http://owll.massey.ac.nz/academic-writing.php>

**Academic writing e-book:** <http://owll.massey.ac.nz/academic-writing/academic-writing-e-book.php>

**Assignment planning calculator:** <http://owll.massey.ac.nz/academic-writing/assignment-planning-calculator.php>

**Computer skills:** <http://owll.massey.ac.nz/computer-skills.php>

**Postgraduate assignment types:** <http://owll.massey.ac.nz/postgraduate-study/postgraduate-assignment-types.php>

**Referencing:** <http://owll.massey.ac.nz/referencing.php>

**Sample assignments:** <http://owll.massey.ac.nz/sample-assignments.php>

## References

- Hofstede, G. (2001) *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations across Nations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sligo, F. (2000). *Effective communication in business*. Palmerston North, New Zealand: Software Technology (N.Z.)



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