Interdisciplinary perspectives on interpersonal relations and the evaluation process: Culture, norms, and the moral order

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Abstract

This paper builds on the recent increased interest in interpersonal relations and evaluative judgements, especially in relation to intercultural interaction. It explores three key questions: (1) what or who is evaluated; (2) what warrants underpin the evaluations; and (3) the role of culture, if any, in the evaluation process. It draws on work on norms and the moral order/moral foundations in pragmatics, moral psychology and cross-cultural psychology to help identify the key issues of debate. It then analyses some authentic intercultural business interaction data, along with follow-up comments from the participants, to gain insights into these questions. The paper ends with a suggested flow diagram of the evaluation process in intercultural interaction and recommends further research to explore several elements of the process.

Key words

Norms; culture; moral order; evaluation process; interpersonal relations; (im)politeness.

Highlights

- When norms are violated, both behaviour and agents are evaluated;
- The performance/breach of norms can have different 'meanings' to different people;
- Norms and the moral order should be conceptually separated;
- Valuable insights can be gained from moral psychology and cross-cultural psychology;
- Culture can affect awareness of others' norms and moral foundations priorities.

1.   Introduction

Many years ago, Fraser and Nolan (1981, p. 96) argued that words and phrases are not inherently polite or impolite, but rather are judged as such by participants. Yet, as Kádár and Haugh (2013, p. 60) point out, for many years there was remarkably little research into the process of interpersonal evaluation. Recently this has begun to change, with a number of papers (e.g. Chang & Haugh, 2011; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2016; Fukushima, 2013; Haugh & Chang, 2018; Kádár & Márquez-Reiter, 2015) reporting empirical studies of people's evaluative judgements. In the last few years there have also been a number of publications (e.g. Culpeper, 2011; Davies, 2018; Haugh, 2013b; Spencer-Oatey & Kádár, 2016) that have aimed at theorising the evaluation process. Nevertheless, Davies (2018, p. 122) maintains that "the enthusiasm for the concept of evaluation in discursive approaches to (im)politeness has overtaken the degree to which it has been theorized," suggesting that there is still more work to be done. This article addresses this need. It builds on the conceptual work done so far and extends it by incorporating additional insights from moral psychology and by

exploring how they apply to intercultural interaction. After an initial discussion of key conceptual issues associated with the evaluation process, it analyses some authentic intercultural interaction data that offer some valuable new insights. The conceptual issues are then re-evaluated in the light of the findings and a flow-chart of the evaluation process is suggested.

2.   Key conceptual issues

There are several conceptual issues associated with (im)politeness/relational evaluations that are currently being debated and three key ones are reviewed here: the elements and sequence of the evaluation process, the warrants underpinning the judgements, and the (potential) impact of cultural factors.

2.1   The elements and sequence of the evaluation process

Eelen (2001, p. 109) argues that "the very essence of (im)politeness lies in the evaluative moment." This raises a fundamental question: what, or who is being evaluated? Eelen does not discuss this, but from his comments the implication is that it is the behaviour that is being evaluated, as he only refers to this; for example:

> In everyday practice (im)politeness occurs not so much when the speaker produces behaviour but rather when the hearer evaluates that behaviour. (p.109)

> As it [an evaluation-centred model] no longer assumes that a specific behaviour will automatically trigger a specific hearer evaluation, it has to wait for a hearer evaluation to occur in reality before it can examine its link with the preceding speaker behaviour. … a non-predictive evaluation-centred perspective permits the researcher to actually *question* the link between behaviour and evaluation. (p.111)

Haugh (2013a, p. 53) likewise focuses on 'interactional practices', arguing that we need to pay careful attention to these if we are to explore the grounds or warrants of (im)politeness evaluations. The same is true of Kádár and Márquez-Reiter (2015) who, in their exploration of bystander interventions, understandably focus on the evaluations of the wrongdoers' actions. Nevertheless, their data show not only bystander evaluations of the behaviour but also evaluative comments of the wrongdoers themselves. For instance, in their Example 3 (p.251), the intervenor not only says "You do not push a woman out in public", but also "You are just a little punk-ass kid".

This distinction between evaluation of behaviour and evaluation of the performer of that behaviour is one that Davies (2018) develops very explicitly. She proposes that there are three different elements or 'levels' (as she calls them) to evaluations: classifications of (im)politeness, assessments of persons, and argumentivity or rationales underlying these judgements. This is similar to the three aspects of moral judgement specified by the psychologists, Malle, Giuglielmo, and Monroe (2014) in their theory of blame. They refer to evaluation of events, evaluation of agents, and the appeal to norms. In terms of evaluation of events, they suggest people hold seriousness thresholds. These could presumably be subject to cultural and/or individual variation, although they do not discuss this.

Perhaps because of their interest in the notion of blame, their conceptualisation of the evaluation of agents is particularly detailed, including distinguishing between agent causality, agent intentionality, agent obligation and agent capacity. They suggest the following flow of evaluative reasoning:

- did the agent cause the event?
  - if no → no blame
- If yes, did the agent cause the event deliberately?
  - If yes, what were the reasons?
- If no, was the agent obligated to prevent the event? (i.e. should they have prevented it?)
  - If no → low/no blame
- If yes, could the agent have prevented the event? (i.e. did the agent have the capacity to do so?)
  - If no → low/no blame
  - If yes → agent blamed

Building on this further, Voiklis and Malle (2018) propose another interpretive flow, this time providing a little more detail around the evaluation of the event and also incorporating the notion of a warrant that underpins or justifies the evaluations. Figure 1 below combines their two related flow diagrams into a single representation.

For evaluation: Unexpected event → Norm violation? → No → Stop / Yes → Seriousness of norm violation → < Threshold → Stop / > Threshold → For evaluation: Agent → Agent causality → No → No blame / Yes → Agent intentionality → Yes → Explore Reasons / No → Preventive obligation → Preventive capacity → High/low → Judgement (possibly suspended) of culpability of agent / Unsure → Explore Reasons. Warrant ↔ Seriousness of norm violation and Judgement (possibly suspended) of culpability of agent.
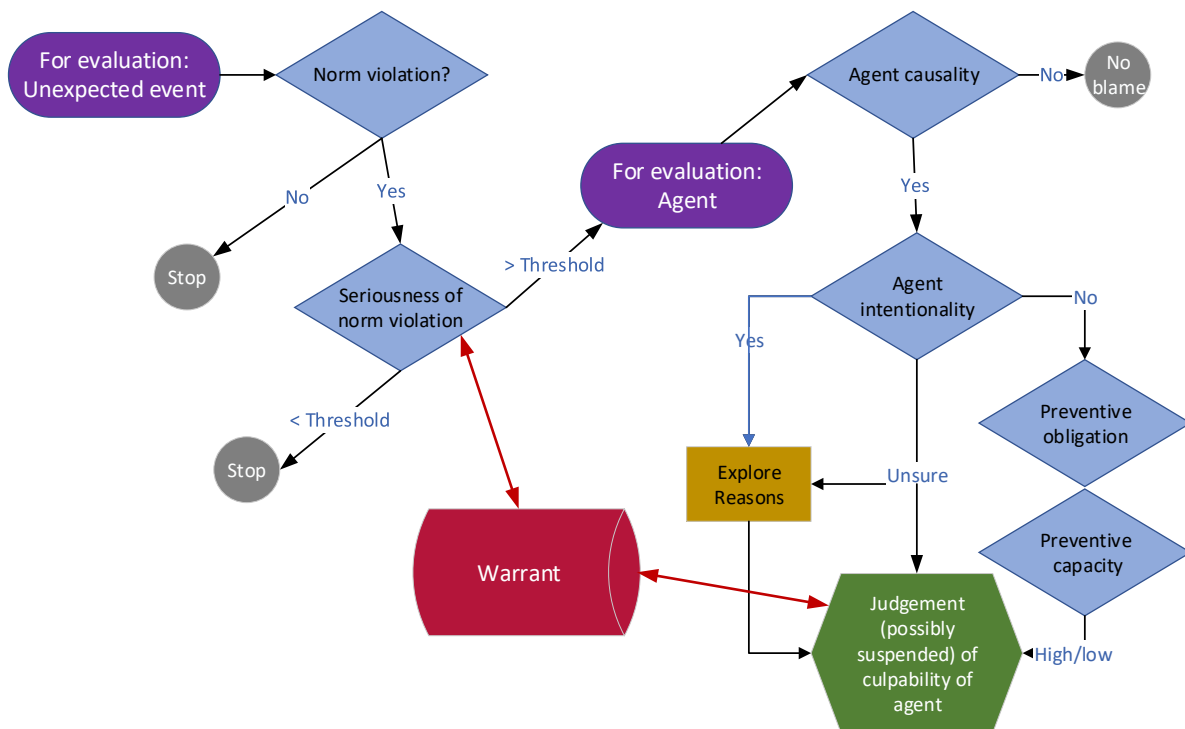
Fig.1: Flow diagram of the evaluation process, derived from Malle et al. (2014) and Voiklis and Malle (2018)

As can be seen from Figure 1, Malle and his colleagues incorporate intentionality in relation to the agent and the attribution of blame. Within pragmatics, the notion of intentionality is a highly contested issue, especially when interpreted as an *a priori* state (e.g. see Haugh, 2008 for a discussion). Within politeness theory, as Culpeper (e.g. Culpeper, 2011; Culpeper & Hardaker, 2017) points out, it is often incorporated into definitions of impoliteness; for instance, Culpeper and Hardaker (2017, p. 203) include it in their definition of impoliteness (their emphasis):

Impoliteness comes about when: (1) the speaker communicates face-attack *intentionally, or* (2) the hearer *perceives* behaviour as *intentionally* face-attacking, *or* a combination of (1) and (2).

Haugh (2008, p. 101) suggests that it is more usefully seen as a *post facto* attribution, used to account for norm violations; in other words, as an element of the evaluation process. He also points out that "full intentionality is not a necessary condition of impoliteness" and this can be because the agent is unaware of the impoliteness effects they have caused and "for not predicting those effects". The multiple steps of the evaluation process illustrated in Figure 1 offer further explanation and support for this position. On the one hand, evaluations are made of events as well as agents, and intentionality only applies to agents not to events; on the other, as Malle et al. (2014) argue, even when the agent has no intention to offend, if s/he does not prevent the offence, when both obliged and capable of doing so, then some blame may still be attributed to the agent.

The literature thus suggests that when an unexpected event occurs, evaluations are made of both that event and the agent(s) associated with it. This leads us to the next question: what criteria or underlying warrants do people use in making those evaluations?

2.2   Evaluations and the underpinning warrant

The underpinning rationale or warrant for people's evaluative judgements is widely known as the moral order (e.g. Haugh, 2013a, 2013b; Kádár & Haugh, 2013; Spencer-Oatey & Kádár, 2016). Garfinkel (1964, p. 225) explains this as follows:

> A society's members encounter and know the moral order as perceivedly normal courses of action-familiar scenes of everyday affairs, the world of daily life known in common with others and with others taken for granted. […] For members not only are matters so about familiar scenes, but they are so because it is morally right or wrong that they are so.

Garfinkel's explication seems to treat norms and the moral order as almost synonymous, and a similar stance has been taken by Haugh (2013a, 2013b) and Kádár and Haugh (2013). For instance, Haugh (2013a, p. 57) links the expectations that constitute the moral order with the norms that "somehow afford or constrain the behaviour of members". In other words, these various theorists seem to be arguing that the moral order refers to the norms that members of a sociocultural group hold.

Eelen (2001) does not use the term moral order, but links evaluations with appropriateness, expectations and social norms. He argues that social appropriateness is closely linked with hearer expectations, and that hearer expectations are based on norms. He further explains that "the norms that govern appropriateness are *social* norms. They are not individual norms held only by the hearer, but rather pertain to situations and cultures" (p.128). Yet he also says (p.37) that evaluations are intimately connected with social values.

All this paints a rather confusing picture and one that is replicated to a certain extent within psychology. Cialdini (2012) distinguishes between two types of norms: 'descriptive norms' and 'injunctive norms'. He explains the difference as follows:

> In contrast to descriptive norms, which specify what is done, injunctive norms specify what ought to be done. They constitute the moral rules of the group … whereas descriptive norms inform behaviour, injunctive norms enjoin it. (Cialdini, 2012, p. 297)

Yet as both Spencer-Oatey (2008) and Culpeper (2011) point out, a descriptive norm can gradually become an injunctive norm, in that when something happens frequently enough, people can start to believe that it 'ought to' happen.

This raises another question that has been debated for many years within psychology: is there a distinction between social norms and moral norms? Traditionally, theorists from both disciplines (e.g. Huebner, Lee, & Hauser, 2010; Kádár & Márquez-Reiter, 2015; Turiel, 1983) have regarded them as different. The basic idea is that some norms seem to be just a matter of convention – they are local and simply facilitate social interaction through a shared understanding of group etiquette. There does not seem to be a strong moral underpinning to them. These are known as social norms. In contrast, moral norms seem to proscribe behaviour that is more wrong and more punishable, with the wrongness being more authority independent. So, for example, if a child fails to raise his or her hand in class (when that is what the teacher requires them to do), most adults would interpret this as less 'bad' than someone physically hitting another child so hard that the latter is injured. Hand raising would be regarded as a social norm or social convention while avoiding physical or emotional harm to others would be regarded as a moral norm. Presumably breaches of both kinds of norms can affect interpersonal relations.

The psychologist, Elliot Turiel (1983), many years ago proposed a set of four features that clearly distinguish moral transgressions from social transgressions. He argued that moral transgressions are (a) more wrong, (b) more punishable, (c) independent of authority structures, and (d) universally applicable. Since then, there have been numerous studies in psychology to test his claims, such as those by Huebner et al. (2010). Huebner and his colleagues have carried out many studies on the distinction between social and moral norms, using scenarios such as the following:

> One night Michael goes to a fancy restaurant. He orders a T-bone steak and when it arrives he picks it up and eats it with his hands rather than using his silverware.

> One night Joshua goes to a fancy restaurant and orders at T-bone steak. When it arrives he throws it as hard as he can into the face of a man sitting nearby.

> (Huebner et al., 2010, p. 6)

Almost everyone would agree that the second scenario entails a moral transgression, but what about the first? It does not seem to be a moral transgression, but rather a social one. Some people may notice it as unusual but may simply dismiss it as actually practical and sensible. Others may evaluate the event as 'inappropriate' and may judge Michael to be ill-mannered. Perhaps such differences in reaction reflect disparities in people's violation thresholds (see Figure 1). However, for those who form negative evaluations, whether of the first or the second, what would their rationales be?

Davies (2018, p. 146) maintains that it is not always possible to attribute a moral rationale to an evaluation. In analysing some media comments on an incident in which a defendant made a rude gesture to a judge, she reports that the following comment had to be left uncategorized in terms of its rationale:

> (28) Mike, USA
>   You must respect those judges.

However, Spencer-Oatey and Kádár (2016) suggest insights can be gained from moral foundations theory (MFT) proposed by Jonathan Haidt (e.g. Graham et al., 2018; Haidt & Graham, 2007; Haidt & Kesebir, 2010). Haidt and his colleagues have identified five moral foundations, as shown in Table 1. Using MFT to consider Davies' example, it is clear that Mike is appealing to the authority/respect moral foundation – that this value underpins his judgement of the defendant's 'rude' behaviour.

Table 1: The moral foundations of Moral Foundations Theory (MFT)
(Graham et al., 2018; Haidt & Kesebir, 2010, p. 822)[1]

Moral Foundation	Explanation
Care/harm	Concerns for the suffering of others, including virtues of caring and compassion.
Fairness/cheating	Concerns about unfair treatment, cheating, and more abstract notions of justice and rights.
Loyalty/betrayal	Concerns related to obligations of group membership, such as loyalty, self-sacrifice, and vigilance against betrayal.
Authority/subversion	Concerns related to social order and the obligations of hierarchical relationships, such as obedience, respect, and the fulfillment of role-based duties.
Purity/degradation	Concerns about physical and spiritual contagion, including virtues of chastity, wholesomeness, and control of desires.

In terms of Huebner et al.'s (2010) scenarios, the MFT framework offers some clear insights into the second one: it is a violation of the moral foundation of care. But what about the first one? None of Haidt's moral foundations seem to apply clearly and in fact it does not seem to be a moral transgression, but rather a social one. Some might argue that a few of Haidt's foundations could be plausible. For instance, the onlooker might feel it was a betrayal of in-group standards of behaviour (loyalty/betrayal moral foundation); or the onlooker might regard it as subversion of traditional standards put in place by our seniors (authority/subversion moral foundation); or perhaps the onlooker might regard it as unhygienic (purity/degradation moral foundation). These all seem to be possibilities, and perhaps different people might appeal to different moral foundations, according to the relative strengths of their different cultural values. However, without further evidence, such links remain speculative.

In one of their latest publications, Graham et al. (2018, p. 213) state that "there likely are many other moral foundations," but they offer no rationale for what should or should not be included as additional moral values. In contrast, Janoff-Bulman and Carnes (2018) in their model of moral motives (MMM) propose such a rationale by linking approach/avoidance processes (prescription/proscription) with levels of analysis (intrapersonal/interpersonal/group). This yields a 6-cell matrix, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Mapping the moral foundations of Moral Foundations Theory (MFT) against the Model of Moral Motives (MMM)

	Self (Intrapersonal)		Other (Interpersonal)			Group (Collective)	
	MMM	MFT	MMM	MFT		MMM	MFT
Protect (Proscriptive regulation)	Moderation		Not harming	Care/ harm		Social order	• Ingroup loyalty/ betrayal • Authority/ subversion • Purity/ degradation
Provide (Prescriptive regulations)	Industrious-ness		Helping/ Fairness		Fairness/ cheating	Social justice	

Janoff-Bulman and Carnes (2018) point out that the five foundations of MFT fall into only 3 of the cells of their MMM model (see Table 2, MFT items or gaps highlighted). They argue that two (care/harm and fairness/cheating) fall within the interpersonal level, with harm/care straddling the proscriptive/prescriptive distinction), while the remaining three (ingroup loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, purity/degradation) function primarily as mechanisms of social order and so fall within the proscriptive cell of the group level. They point out that MFT does not identify any moral foundations at the intrapersonal level (moderation, industriousness) nor does it include social justice at the collective level.

Moral foundations are thus deep level values that underpin judgements of a wide range of norms and breaches of norms. More research is needed in order to assess the relative strengths of MFT and MMM for providing insights into the rationales underpinning evaluations of normative breaches, and the data discussed below provides an opportunity to do this.

Returning to the question as to whether all breaches of norms are moral breaches, there are still significant differences of opinion within moral psychology (e.g. Knobe, 2018; Stich, 2018). Nevertheless, Huebner et al. (2010) conclude from their empirical studies that adults readily distinguish between moral and conventional transgressions for a wide variety of situations, but that there is probably a continuum that stretches from mere matters of personal preference to serious moral violations, rather than a clear-cut distinction. This suggests that while breaches of all types of norms may affect interpersonal relations, some (i.e. those closer to the moral end) may affect our judgements of other people more fundamentally and substantially than others, and hence have a more profound influence on interpersonal relations. This leads us to the third question: what is the role (if any) of culture in the evaluation process?

2.3   The role of culture

Kecskes (2014) points out that common ground between interlocutors is needed for effective communication and so the extent to which people share social and moral norms will affect (*inter alia*) the evaluative judgements they make.

Kecskes (2014, p. 19) suggests that in intercultural interaction, as compared with intracultural interaction, there is sometimes a greater reliance on prior context than on actual situational context. So what kind of 'mental content' or 'prior context' can be regarded as 'cultural'? Traditionally in psychology the focus has been on values (e.g. Hofstede, 2001; Schwartz & Bardi, 2001; Schwartz et al., 2012), but recent research (e.g. Fischer & Schwartz, 2011) has demonstrated that there is as much, if not greater, variation within national groups than across national groups in the values that people hold. There has simultaneously been an increased interest in the interconnections between culture and norms, with many papers being devoted to the topic in special issues, such as Morris, Hong, Chiu, and Liu (2015) in a special issue entitled 'Social norms and cultural dynamics' and Zou and Leung (2015), guest editors of a special issue entitled 'Intersubjective norms'. Research is also emerging (e.g. Stanley & Fischer, forthcoming) on the impact of values such as tightness–looseness (e.g. Gelfand et al., 2011) and monumentalism–flexibility (e.g. Minkov et al., 2018) on the interconnections between norms and behaviour.

All of this psychological research supports the concerns raised by Eelen (2001) regarding variability and lack of sharedness, which seem to undermine the argument for the impact of culture. These are complex issues with no easy resolution. However, it is important to separate two elements that are often conflated: the notion of cultural groups (the people among whom regularities are supposed to

be shared), and the extent to which group members truly share those practices and perspectives (for further discussion, see Spencer-Oatey & Žegarac, 2018). With regard to the first, in the intercultural field, cultural groups were traditionally treated as almost synonymous with national groups, but more recently there has been much greater recognition that cultural patternings exist in many other types of groupings which can range considerably in size. In fact, within linguistics/pragmatics, Holmes, Marra, and Vine (2011) and Kádár and Haugh (2013) refer to the nested nature of such groupings, with smaller groups such as teams or departments belonging to larger groups such as companies or universities. Regarding the second question, it is also now widely accepted that everyone belongs simultaneously to multiple cultural groups, so as Chao and Moon (2005, p. 1128) point out, "An individual's unique collage of multiple cultural identities yields a complex picture of the cultural influences on that person". They refer to this as a cultural mosaic, with people's cultural identities comprising numerous 'cultural tiles'. The impact of those 'tiles' will vary for each individual, with the 'tiles' exerting different degrees of influence in different contexts in dynamic and complex ways during the co-construction of interactions. The fewer the 'cultural tiles' that people share, the more challenging communication is.

In the following sections, we analyse two authentic examples of intercultural interaction to explore the three issues raised in this section: who and/or what is evaluated; what warrants underpin those evaluations; and what role, if any, culture plays.

3.   Data and methodology

The extracts analysed in the next section come from data previously collected by the authors as part of a study of rapport management in Chinese–British business interactions. The interactions took place in the UK at the headquarters of a British engineering company that designs, manufactures and sells an engineering product throughout the world. In every contract signed in China, the company agrees to host a delegation of up to six people who are involved in some way in the deal. The official purpose of the visit is to inspect the products purchased, receive some technical training, and to have a good time sightseeing. The visits normally last about 10 days.

Three types of data were collected for analysis throughout three delegation visits: (1) video recordings of all the official meetings; (2) field notes of supplementary aspects of the visit; and (3) interview and playback comments made by the participants. The British and Chinese participants were interviewed separately. In all aspects of the data collection, we endeavoured to maximise the validity and reliability of the data. In the months prior to starting the project, we developed very good relations with staff at the host company, and one of us spent as much time as possible socially with the Chinese visitors in order to build a good rapport with them (e.g. accompanying them on sightseeing trips). We were very satisfied with the ways in which everyone seemed to 'conduct their business as normal' and with their cooperation during the follow-up sessions, although we acknowledge that our presence may still have affected the proceedings to a certain extent.

Previous analyses of the data (e.g. Spencer-Oatey & Xing, 2003, 2004, 2008) focused on face and rapport. For the purposes of this paper, the source data have been re-analysed from the perspective of evaluation processes, exploring the following research questions:

RQ1: What elements are associated with the evaluation process?

RQ2: What warrants underpin people's evaluations?

RQ3: How do cultural factors affect people's evaluations?

The welcome meeting from one of the visits has been selected for detailed analysis, as it is particularly rich in evaluation issues. This meeting was attended by 6 Chinese visitors (all male) and 6 British staff (5 male and 1 female). There was also an interpreter (male) present – a Chinese national studying for a PhD in engineering at the local university – who attended all the meetings. He was not trained as an interpreter and was recruited by the host company because of his technical engineering knowledge.

4.   Analysis

The welcome meeting analysed was highly problematic in relational terms, despite the company's experience over many years of handling such visits. The six Chinese guests were so annoyed with it that they cancelled all the training sessions that had been arranged, requested changes to the planned social programme, and asked to move to a hotel in London (far away from the company). Needless to say, neither party was pleased and after the delegation had left, the British staff made the following summative evaluative comments:

Extract 1: Interview/playback comments

Project engineer: off the record, they haven't any ethics, you know they had no due respect for their hosts, it was all sort of like we are more important than anything else. if I went to someone's house, to travel, I wouldn't say no I'm not interested in your product and I just want to go out and do things that I like

Project administrator: their interests were totally different. … they just wanted to shop.

Proposals engineer: they thought they were important, they simply had no interest in our product which they bought, they demand this and demand that

Here we can see that the British staff negatively evaluated the delegates' behaviour (their requests for different things and their lack of interest in the products they were supposed to be inspecting and learning about). This led to a negative evaluation of the visitors, with them judged to be 'demanding' and to have 'no ethics'.

In terms of the warrant underpinning their evaluations, there seem to be two key elements: (a) that this is unexpected behaviour when you are a guest somewhere, and (b) that it breaches the contractual/professional expectation to show interest in the product that one's company has purchased. Digging a little deeper and thinking in terms of moral foundations, the former seems to appeal closest to the MFT foundation of care/harm – that the visitors were self-centred and only interested in themselves and did not show the mutual consideration that 'good visitors should display'. In other words, in the eyes of the British staff, they breached the norms associated with 'good guest behaviour' by being self-centred and hence did not uphold the moral foundation of care. The warrant underlying their lack of interest in the product does not seem to map onto any of the MFT foundations but could link with the MMM intrapersonal level (see Table 2). Their lack of interest in the product that their company had purchased could be seen as a lack of industriousness and their excessive focus on shopping suggests a lack of moderation.

There is no indication that there are any cultural factors associated with these breaches of expectations. However, let us now examine some of the interactions that helped give rise to these summative evaluations.

Hosting incident 1: Seating arrangements

The welcome meeting took place in the host company's conference room. This room was rather small in size and had a large oblong table placed in the middle of the room. There were four chairs on either side, and a fifth at one end of the table. Four Chinese visitors sat on one side and two sat on the other side with the interpreter. One seat was left empty. The British chair of the meeting sat at the end of the table, and the five other British staff, who were present for the first part of the meeting, were located away from the table, with most either standing or sitting behind the Chinese visitors. The room arrangements made it physically difficult for people to move around to shake hands and to present business cards.

Both the British and Chinese participants felt that the venue for the meeting was inappropriate. Afterwards, the British chair commented as follows:

> **Extract 2: British chair interview/playback comment**
>
> Chair: When I came in what surprised me was obviously the number of people in the room … it was quite clear that we were in a little bit of a disorganised state. there were not enough seats for people, it was genuine chaos. it was just in the wrong venue for the number of people there … the support staff were pressed up against the wall … there were quite limited options of how they could sit in this room. that didn't really bother me, and to sit at the head of the table didn't bother me as usually it's the best way to address a group anyway, because at least you could see everybody, you should speak to them face to face, um, so that wasn't too bad, that was OK.

We can see from this that although the British chair felt things were disorganised and chaotic, he was not fundamentally disturbed by it. There was a shortage of seats, so he made sure that the visitors were seated at the table, thus prioritising their status as visitors, while several of the British staff had to stand. He clearly felt that it was OK for him to sit at the head of the table, as this would enable him to see all the visitors and could make eye contact with them when welcoming them and later when giving them an introductory talk about the company. In other words, he focused on the communication practicalities of the situation, while also allocating them the 'best seats' (i.e. seats at the table, not places behind these seats) – perhaps reflecting the underlying MFT moral foundation of 'care'. For him, the event was not problematic in relational (im/politeness) terms.

In stark contrast to this, the Chinese visitors, and especially the head of delegation (HoD), attributed great significance to the seating arrangements, as can be seen from Extract 3.

> **Extract 3: Chinese delegation interview/playback comments**
>
> HoD: 中 *in terms of the seating arrangements, it shouldn't have been that he was the chair and we were seated along the sides of the table. with equal status, they should sit along this side and we should sit along that side, shouldn't we. that's the right way. you see in this situation they were chairing and we were audience, which naturally means you do what you are told* 中
>
> [Other delegates chorus: 中 *right right* 中]
>
> HoD: 中 *they were, right from the start, they were commanding, in control, contemptuous. in actual fact we should have been given equal status* 中

Xu: 中 *if such an occasion had taken place in China, the hosts and the guests would be seated along the two sides of the table* 中

HoD: 中 *yes the hosts and the guests should be seated along the two sides of the table. when they go to our factory to negotiate business, we always do that, they are seated along that side and we along this side. generally the heads are seated in the middle, the junior staff at the ends* 中

As can be seen, for the Chinese delegates, and especially for the HoD, the arrangements were highly problematic. The visitors held clear injunctive norms as to how they should have been seated and because these were breached, the HoD attributed a range of negative qualities to the British hosts (commanding, controlling, contemptuous). The rationale underpinning his evaluations related to the MFT moral foundation 'authority/subversion'. He claimed that the British had subverted relations by treating them as inferiors rather than equals.

So from an evaluation perspective, both the British hosts and the Chinese delegates evaluated the behaviour (i.e. the seating arrangements) negatively. However, for the British this was merely poor planning/ arrangements, with no associated (im)politeness/relational implications. For the Chinese visitors, on the other hand, the situation was very different. They held clear injunctive norms as to how the seating should be arranged, and these were linked explicitly with relative hierarchy: equality for negotiating partners (sitting on opposite sides of the table) and status or rank for the members within each party (with the senior staff in the middle and more junior staff towards the ends of the table). When these norms were breached, the Chinese visitors assumed that this was deliberate (i.e. that it was intentional) and hence were extremely offended.

Neither the British chair nor the Chinese delegates were aware of each other's differing norms and simply evaluated the arrangements without realising, or even suspecting, that the other party's interpretations might be different. They were each drawing on their own cultural norms for handling (cross-national) business meetings. For the British chair, his norms were associated on the one hand with consideration and care (give the guests the best seats) and on the other with practical matters (being able to see the visitors clearly and communicate easily with them). For the Chinese visitors, however, their norms for seating arrangements were closely associated with the MFT foundation of authority/subversion.

Hosting incident 2: A return speech

Once the meeting got started, the British chair gave a very brief welcome speech and then asked each of the British staff to introduce themselves. They each did that briefly, giving their name, their job title, and what they are responsible for. After this, the chair asked the visitors to each introduce themselves (Extract 4, lines 1-2). The HoD turned to the other delegates commenting that they are each to introduce themselves (line 5) and one responded saying he should do it on their behalf (line 6). The HoD then started to give a brief return speech (line 7), but was immediately interrupted by the interpreter, telling him not to do that but simply to introduce himself, giving him the exact words to say (line 9). The HoD seemed disconcerted by this and just repeated what the interpreter had suggested. Two other delegates (lines 13 and 16) then offered other pieces of information he should include and on each occasion he added that. Then Ma introduced himself (line 19) and the four other delegates in turn did likewise.

Extract 4: Introductions in the welcome meeting

1. Chair: could could I now ask if if the members 。 could each introduce themselves
2.   so that we can learn 。 um 。 who they are and what their interests are.
3.   [Int interprets into Chinese]
4.   [HoD turns to the other delegates]
5. HoD: 中 *we each introduce ourselves* 中
6. Shen: 中 *you just do it on our behalf* 中
7. HoD: 中 *first of all to <name of host company>=*中
8.   [HoD looks down in front of him. Chair looks at him, smiling]
9. Int: =中 *no no. he said you introduce yourself* 。 *I am from <name of company>*中
10.   [Chair still looks at HoD]
11. HoD: 中 *I'm Sun from <name of company>* 中
12.   [Int interprets into English; all visitors start looking at colleagues and Chair]
13. Chen: 中 *say what you do* 中
14. HoD: 中 *I'm involved in design* 中
15.   [Chair nods at HoD]
16. Xu: 中 *give your full name* 。 *full name* 。 *full name* 。 *say you're a design engineer* 中
17. HoD: 中 *design engineer* 中
18.   [Int interprets into English]
19. Ma: 中 *I am director of the <name of product> Department, of <name> Company* 中
20.   [Int interprets into English]
21.   [Chair nods at Ma].
22.   [4 more people introduce themselves as Ma did]

For the British chair, this was a confusing few moments. He thought he had requested something very straight forward (that each person introduce himself) but this led to a noticeable amount of discussion among the Chinese which he could not understand. In the follow-up interview/playback session, he commented on this when he saw the video recording of this part of the meeting (Extract 5). The researcher then explained that the HoD was trying to give a return speech and that the interpreter interrupted him, telling the HoD they should introduce themselves. The Chair then attributed responsibility for the problem to the interpreter.

Extract 5: British chair interview/playback comment

Chair: that's where you wonder well what did the translator say. you know, because they, they went on and there was clearly some discussion about, amongst the group, as to who who is the most important, who should start, who shouldn't, and, 。 。 。 。 。 you know it is chaos […]

Res: [Explains that the HoD was trying to give a return speech but that the interpreter interrupted and told them to introduce themselves]

Chair: and that's interesting, so it goes back to the point of our concern about interpretation, because if the interpreter said to me that they are just making a return speech, then it would have been fine.

Res: so you didn't expect the return speech from them, did you?

Chair: no, I didn't, well sometimes you do sometimes, like the times when we do it more formally

As far as the British chair was concerned, the Interpreter's interruption gave rise to some confusion and this (along with the general quality of the Interpreter's interpreting) led to a negative evaluation of the Interpreter's competence. However, he was completely unaware of any other evaluative problems it might have led to. These are revealed in the interview/playback with the Chinese delegation.

Like the British chair, the visitors were dissatisfied with the performance of the Interpreter, but the HoD was particularly offended that he had not been given the opportunity for a return speech. He commented that it was normal to do so which others agreed with (see Extract 6, lines 1-7) and this led to a discussion among the delegates as to who was responsible for this omission (the Interpreter or the British chair) and therefore how they should be evaluated (Extract 6, lines 12-23).

Extract 6: Chinese delegation interview/playback comments

1	HoD:	中 *according to our home customs //and protocol, speech is delivered* \
2	Xu:	中*/to follow customs and protocol*\\中
3	HoD:	*on the basis of reciprocity. he has made his speech and I am expected to say*
4		*something* 中
5	Ma:	中 *at moments like this the interpreter should not have interrupted* 中
6	Lin:	中 *that's right* 中
7	Xu:	中 *from the Chinese point of view, it's normal to say a few words* 中
8	Ma:	中 *in fact let me say something unpleasant, <name of interpreter> was just a*
9		中 translator, 中 *nothing more on this occasion. ... he shouldn't take part* 中
10		[several turns omitted where they continue to comment negatively on the
11		interpreter and wonder why he interrupted the HoD]
12	HoD:	中 *maybe they didn't want me to speak.* 中
13	Ma:	中*it is true that they didn't ask you to speak.* 中
14	HoD:	中*I was speaking and if they didn't want me to he wasn't wrong. you and I*
15		*are not familiar with things here, that is, perhaps the British look down upon*
16		*us Chinese. from this point of view, that's what was implied. in fact I was*
17		*reluctant to speak, and I had nothing really to say. but I had to, to say a few*
18		*words. it was like that, right? but you didn't let me speak, you had finished*
19		*your speech, and you each introduced yourselves, doesn't that clearly imply*
20		*this? that you look down upon Chinese people.* 中
21	Ma:	中 n*o no. in this this whole thing I felt <name of interpreter> I still remember*
22		*it very well. I felt <name of interpreter> played a very important role at this*
23		*moment.* 中

All the delegates agreed that the HoD should have had the opportunity to give a return speech, so the evaluation of the British hosts rested on the delegates' interpretations of the Interpreter's behaviour. Since he was recruited by the British company, the HoD thought perhaps the Interpreter knew the British did not want him to give a return speech because they look down on Chinese people and that therefore the Interpreter was acting appropriately for his role (lines 12, 14-16). He concluded that the British looked down on Chinese people. On the other hand, another delegate, Ma, disputed this, arguing that the Interpreter's behaviour was critical here (lines 21-23). After this, the discussion turned to the issue of self-introductions. Delegates commented that in China they would not give their names in such circumstances and that this resulted in further confusion. They

ended their review of this part of the meeting by reiterating that the HoD should have been allowed to give a return speech.

In this section of the meeting, therefore, the British and Chinese participants held different norms (and associated expectations) with regard to protocols for welcomes and introductions in business meetings. The British assumed that the chair would give an initial welcome and that each person on the British side would then introduce themselves, giving their name, role and responsibility. The chair also assumed that the Chinese delegates would introduce themselves individually. He did not anticipate that the Chinese HoD would be expecting to give a return speech, nor that they would be expecting the HoD to handle all the introductions on behalf of each delegate.

For the Chinese, however, the British chair's behaviour breached their norms and associated expectations, as did the Interpreter's behaviour, and this resulted in negative evaluations of them both. They criticised the Interpreter for overstepping the responsibilities of his role, saying that he should not have stepped in, but should simply have interpreted what each party said. The warrant underpinning this evaluation seems to relate directly to a belief that people should keep to their role responsibilities; it seems to link with the MMM foundation of moderation. The warrant underlying the HoD's evaluation of the British chair is very clear. He linked it explicitly with authority/subversion, maintaining not simply that the British chair was condescending towards Chinese people, but generalising it to all British people and treating it as evidence that British people look down on Chinese people. The British staff were completely unaware of this.

Shortly after Extract 4 (i.e. after the delegation had introduced themselves), all the British except the chair left the meeting and the chair gave a presentation to the visitors about the company. In the follow-up meeting, the delegates had some further critical comments to make about subsequent aspects of the meeting, but for reasons of space these are not included here.

5.   Discussion

We now re-visit the research questions in the light of the findings.

RQ1: What elements are associated with the evaluation process?

The data show clearly that both the British and Chinese participants evaluated two elements: the behaviour of the other party, and the people themselves. In terms of the evaluation flow sequence, Hosting Incident 2 (the return speech) offers the greatest amount of insight. The Chinese first evaluated the unexpected event – that the HoD was not given the opportunity to give a return speech. This was judged to be a norm violation that breached the seriousness threshold. This then triggered a second evaluation – that of the agent (i.e. the British chair). This is in line with the flow shown in Figure 1.

In terms of evaluation of the agent, the HoD and another delegate, Ma, held different views as to the causality. Ma felt the Chair was not responsible, that it was the Interpreter who caused the problem. On the other hand, the HoD regarded the Chair as responsible. In terms of Figure 1, Ma would exit the flow at 'Agent causality' with regard to the HoD but would continue it with regard to the Interpreter. The Interpreter deliberately interrupted the HoD and so this takes us to 'explore reasons'. The most likely explanation is that he thought it was his job as an interpreter to convey clearly the message of the other person and that this was his reason for interrupting. However, although this seems to be Ma's interpretation, for the HoD this was not the case. He thought the British Chair might have told the interpreter not to allow a return speech (Extract 6, lines 12 and 14),

because the British look down on the Chinese. Here he generalised from one individual to the whole British nation to attribute agent causality and intentionality for the breach of norms.

This unpacking of the flow of evaluation processes indicates that Figure 1 needs to be slightly modified so that 'explore reasons' is activated earlier in the flow. This has been incorporated into a revised figure (see Figure 2 below).

RQ2: What warrants underpin people's evaluations?

In terms of the warrants underpinning people's evaluations, the moral foundations identified in Haidt's MFT (Graham et al., 2018; Haidt & Graham, 2007; Haidt & Kesebir, 2010) and Janoff-Bulman and Carnes' (2018) MMM were both found to be relevant (see Tables 1 and 2). The Chinese participants were explicitly concerned about issues of hierarchy, equality/inequality, and from that perspective MFT is more useful in that it explicitly identifies authority/subversion as a moral foundation. In contrast, MMM's foundation of 'social order' is too broad and vague to capture the specific issues. Both British and Chinese participants were concerned about consideration and care and this seems to be captured slightly better in MFT's foundation of care/harm than MMM's specification of 'not harming' on the one hand and helping/fairness on the other.

On the other hand, there is nothing in MFT to capture the concerns of both sets of participants about professionalism[2]. All were concerned about the quality of the Interpreter's performance and the British negatively evaluated the Chinese delegates for just wanting to go shopping and for not showing any interest in the product that they were supposed to be inspecting. The warrant underpinning these negative evaluations relates to MMM's intrapersonal foundations. The Chinese felt the Interpreter overstepped the boundaries of the role of an interpreter (Extract 6, lines 8-9) and this could be seen as a breach of moderation. The British staff negatively evaluated the Chinese visitors for wanting to spend so much time shopping (while on a business trip) and that too can be related to a breach of moderation. The British staff also negatively evaluated the Chinese delegates for their lack of interest in learning about the product that their company had bought. The warrant underpinning this negative evaluation could be related to industriousness.

The two moral foundations frameworks, MFT and MMM, thus have strengths and weaknesses. In certain respects, MFT provides valuable greater detail than MMM. On the other hand, MFT does not include any intrapersonal foundations, which in fact are useful. Superficially it might seem that only interpersonal and group foundations are relevant to (im)politeness evaluations. However, Janoff-Bulman and Carnes (2018, p. 226) explain that "industriousness, which benefits the self, also has implications for the group; hard work, persistence, and conscientiousness ultimately serve to advance the community's knowledge, skills and resources." They also report that in two separate studies in which open-ended responses about morality were coded, a work ethic category needed to be added. The findings from the data from this delegation visit offers further support for the need for this category.

In terms of the relation between norms and the moral order, the findings support the position that the two need to be distinguished. Norms are associated with behavioural regularities or patternings and are either descriptive or prescriptive/proscriptive (Cialdini, 2012). However, there are warrants that underpin or provide the justification for people's evaluations of any breaches of the norms, and Haidt's MFT (Graham et al., 2018; Haidt & Graham, 2007; Haidt & Kesebir, 2010) and Janoff-Bulman and Carnes' (2018) MMM both offer valuable insights. On the other hand, neither framework is comprehensive enough on its own and more research is needed gain a fuller picture. This is in line with Haugh and Chang's (2018) comment that moral foundations are not sufficiently granular to

account for participants' rationales. In terms of the potential distinction between social norms and moral norms, the data do not offer any definitive new insights. However, none of the breaches seem strongly morally wrong but also are not simple breaches of conventions, which seems to offer tentative support to the continuum standpoint (Huebner et al., 2010).

RQ3: How do cultural factors affect people's evaluations?

Both parties had quite explicit ingroup/outgroup or 'them and us' orientations (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011). This was particularly obvious in the HoD's evaluation of the British Chair's failure to invite him to give a return speech. He interpreted the omission in British versus Chinese terms, saying that the chair may have acted like this because of his (along with other British people's) condescending attitude towards Chinese people.

While he presumably held those kinds of attitudes prior to the meeting, it was two specific breaches of norms for hosting business people that brought them to the surface during the visit. According to the follow-up interview/playback data, all the Chinese delegates agreed (a) on the 'proper' seating arrangements for a visit of this kind (i.e. the two parties should sit opposite each other on the long sides of a rectangular table, with the more senior persons in the middle), and (b) that each party should have the opportunity to give a speech. This therefore raises the following question: were these interpretations representative of Chinese interpretations more generally or were they idiosyncratic to this group or context? As discussed above, sharedness, which is central to many conceptualisations of culture, is a problematic concept because of the variability among cultural group members. In fact, norms typically apply to specific roles and contexts and thus are not usually widely generalisable. Brennan, Eriksson, Goodin, and Southwood (2013, p. 158), for example, comment that "Many norms are intensely role-specific."

Interestingly, in terms of the return speech, there is some evidence from other data that the expectation did not apply only to this particular group. Another Chinese delegation that visited the same British engineering company faced the same issue; on that occasion, the HoD simply grasped the opportunity near the end of the meeting to give his return speech. Likewise, Wang and Spencer-Oatey (2015) report such an incident during a visit to the USA of a group of Chinese government officials.

> At the morning meeting, the HoD was not asked to give a return speech. However, when the American officials announced that the floor was open for questions, the HoD took the first turn to deliver a five-minute-long speech. The Americans' facial expressions betrayed their surprise and confusion at certain points, but they, too, did not comment on it. In the evening, the Chinese officials commended the HoD's move as a fight for face.
>
> D6:   But the HoD did a very good job by making up for our return speech after the floor was open. This implied our firm position.
> D14: Absolutely! The HoD's move indicated our consciousness of this right and fought for our *face*. This was especially meaningful.
>
> Wang and Spencer-Oatey (2015, p. 59)

This suggests that the norm of return speeches is shared among Chinese business people or government officials who are taking part in formal business/negotiation/exchange meetings. However, there can be another source of variability. People may evaluate the seriousness of any breach in different ways; for example, the other delegation that visited the same engineering company were much less upset about the omission. Various context-specific reasons may help account for this, including the exact roles of the people concerned (in the other meeting most

members were technical engineers; in this meeting they were more senior sales managers; see Spencer-Oatey & Xing, 2003, p. 42).

In terms of the seating arrangements, there is also a certain amount of broader evidence for norms on this. Wang (2013) found that the Chinese government officials visiting the USA were very conscious of the physical setting of their meetings, and Spencer-Oatey (personal experience) found the same when managing exchange meetings for the eChina-UK programme.

All this suggests that there may be shared norms, but these may be very context specific (e.g. in terms of both participants and type of communicative event) and people may react to breaches of those norms in different ways. However, there is another key element that seems to be rarely discussed: the meaning that people attribute to the performance or breach of the norm. Brennan et al. (2013, p. 156) comment as follows:

> Doing certain things in a context where norms exist *mean* certain things that would not and could not have been meant had the norms not existed. (emphasis in the original)

The implication of this is that the establishment of common ground for shared interpretation of meaning can only occur where both parties have shared norms or else are aware of each other's respective norms. In the data reported here, the Chinese and British participants were not aware of each other's norms and thus the behaviour 'meant' different things to the two parties. This suggests that more conceptualisation work is needed on the 'meaning' of norms – not just whether or not people conform to a norm or disapprove of a breach, but what that normative behaviour means or signifies and hence what a breach 'means'.

We propose, therefore, that the flow diagram of the evaluation process shown in Figure 1 be modified to incorporate the new insights from this study: (a) that consideration of reasons for agent behaviour occurs earlier in the sequence as it seems to inform thinking about agent causality and agent intentionality, and (b) that the role of interpretation of the meaning of normative behaviour influences people's threshold judgements and also provide a link with the underlying moral foundations. Perhaps it is the combination of people's interpretations of the meaning of normative behaviour as well as their underpinning moral foundations that provide the warrants for people's evaluative judgements. The revised conceptualisation is shown in Figure 2.
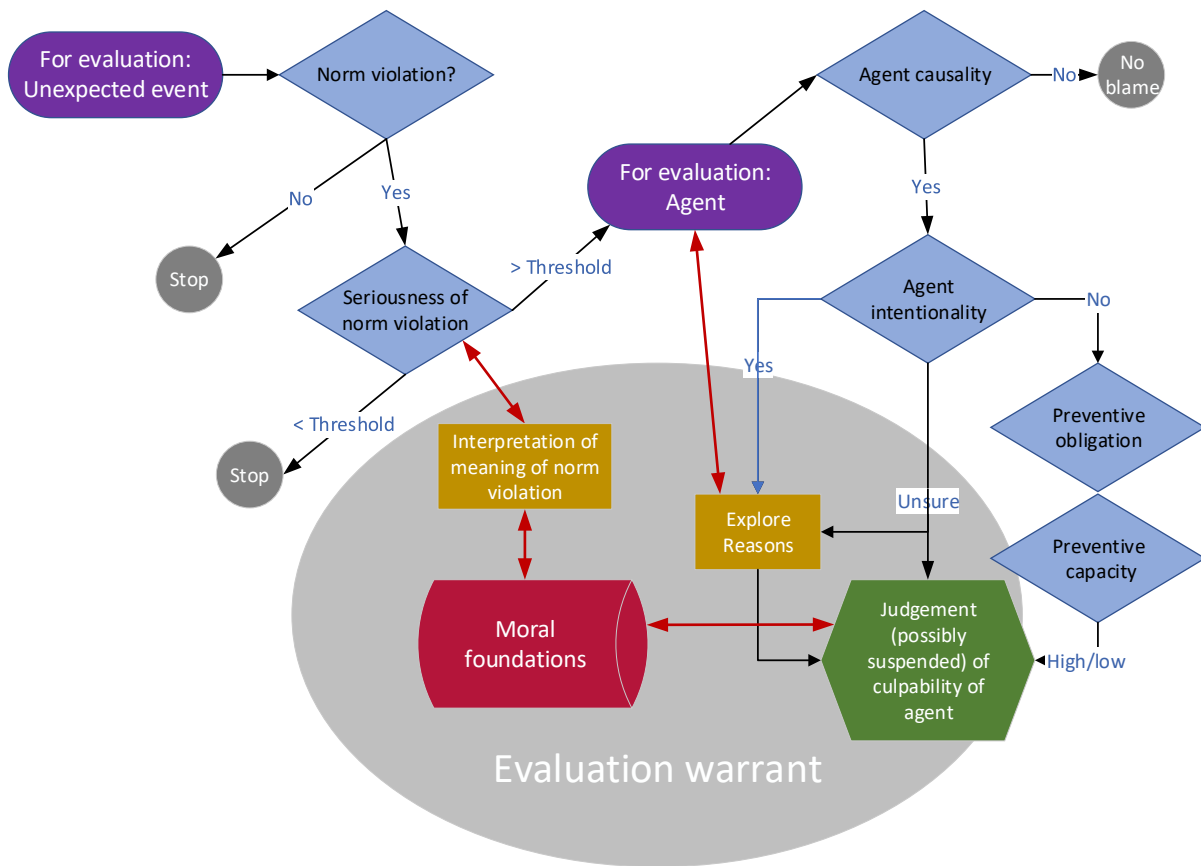
Fig.2: Flow diagram of the evaluation process in intercultural interaction

6.   **Concluding comments**

In this paper we have argued that the evaluation process entails a number of elements which need to be conceptually separated out. These include: behaviour, agent, norms, and moral foundations. There are also various reflective processes associated with these key elements that also contribute to the evaluation and we have tentatively suggested a flow diagram to try to capture these. We acknowledge that this is no doubt a simplification of reality, but we hope that it will stimulate further thinking and conceptualisation.

We argue that in intercultural interaction, if one participant is unaware of an injunctive norm held by another participant, the 'meaning' of the performance or of the breach of that norm will not be the same for the two participants. If the performance or the breach is of high importance (perhaps for ideological reasons) for one participant, and the other is unaware of this, the probability of mismatches in their evaluations is likely to increase. We suggest therefore that future research in particular examines the 'meaning' of norms and how that relates both to the evaluation process and to the notion of moral foundations.

Abbreviations and Transcription conventions

HoD	Head of delegation
Int	Interpreter
Res	Researcher

All names are pseudonyms

Original Chinese of translated sections are available in Xing (2002)

[Chair looks at HoD]	Explanatory comment
<name>	Anonymisation of personal or company name
//and protocol\	Simultaneous speech - first speaker's utterance
/to follow customs\\	Simultaneous speech - second speaker's utterance
=	Latching, i.e., no discernible pause between utterances
中 *according to* 中	English translation of original Chinese
…	Omitted text/comments
。	Pause of up to one second
。 。 。 。 。	Pause of five seconds or more noted in brackets

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[1] There are slight differences in terminology between earlier and later works by Haidt and colleagues. This table uses the labelling used in the most recent publication, Graham et al. (2018).

[2] Sometimes negative judgements about lack of professionalism could be linked with fairness (putting undue pressure on others), but this does not seem to be the case here.