SYSTEM MAPPING APPROACH TO TEACHING INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

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Concept mapping tools allow instructor and students to depict visually a system of relationships by creating a map that describes them (for example, cause-effect relationships, category and sub-category relationships, and so forth). Concept maps are a form of visual thinking.   Most people are better able to remember a visual representation—such as a chart or graph—than a table full of numbers.   The objective of this paper is to introduce a pedagogical tool, the Comparative Political Economy System (CPES) Matrix, which can be used to develop a students' understanding of the global business environment and how that environment affects a firm's business decisions. To gain such understanding, students can use a concept matrix to plot several countries' political economies into a single, compelling image. The resulting comparative system matrix often provides an "Aha" moment for students, because they have now a visual image and can begin to understand how the various components in the matrix interact together.

This paper begins with a discussion of system mapping, its benefits and evidence of efficacy, followed by a brief discussion of system matrices, an introduction to comparative system mapping in the context of an international business course, and concludes with the advantages of system mapping as a pedagogical tool.

System Mapping

System mapping, also referred to as concept mapping, is the process of creating a visual tool that depicts a given system or relationships. A system is a group of interacting, interrelated, and interdependent components that form a complex and unified whole (Coffman, 2007). A system's purpose is achieved through the actions and interactions of its components.

There are a number of different approaches to mapping a system in representing its elements and/or connections. For instance, player maps indicate which individuals and/or organizations are key actors in a system and how they are connected; mind maps highlight various trends in the external environment influencing the issue at hand; and issue maps lay out the political, social, or economic issues affecting a given geography or constituency (Cook, 2015).

Benefits

Concept mapping compels the student to identify connections, and capture them more deeply, than traditional approaches such a reading or writing about a concept can do. Moreover, concept mapping makes use of dual coding; that is, students learn the material both from the text label found on the concept map as well as the visual structure of the map. Concept mapping can improve students' cognitive capacity by allowing them to focus on essential relationships, rather than on decoding a written text.   Concept maps are a form of visual thinking, which for many people is a better representation of relationships than a table or paragraph full of numbers and/or facts.

Evidence of Effectiveness

In a meta-analysis of learning with concept and knowledge maps, Nesbitt (2006) found that in comparison with activities such as reading text passages, attending lectures, and participating in class discussions, concept mapping activities were more effective in attainment and transfer of knowledge. Concept mapping was found to benefit learners across a broad range of educational levels, subject areas, and settings.

System Matrices

System matrices, while similar to system or concept maps, use a grid structure (Schuldt, 2005). Weimar (2002:174) defined matrices as "a grid with defining characteristics across one axis and categories on the other."   This grid is a non-linear, multidimensional tool, which assists students in organizing concepts and understanding relationships. Hence, I developed The Comparative Political Economy System Matrix drawing on a four-quadrant grid model.

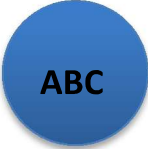## The Comparative Political and Economic System Matrix

National differences in political, economic, legal and sociocultural systems influence the benefits, costs, and risks associated with developing and doing business in different countries. For businesses with international operations, a question of importance is how a country's political economy affects its business investments and business practices.   The Comparative Political Economy System Matrix addresses this question from two perspectives: First, how different are the political and economic systems among countries around the world? Second, how do these differences in political and economic systems influence doing business in those countries?

The CPES Matrix is an issue or system map, which lays out the political and economic systems affecting a given number of countries or geography.   The matrix is represented by four quadrants on two defining dimensions, the political system (democracy or totalitarian) across one axis and the economic system (open versus closed economy) on the other.   Each dimension is defined by a plus or minus sign on the grid, which represents the degree to which a political or economic system is (more or less) enforced. The political economy of a country will be depicted by placing it strategically in one of the quadrants in the CPES matrix.   An example of a CPES matrix is shown in Exhibit 1, which visualizes relationships among countries in relation to their political economy in a system map. The CPES mapping exercise is offered in Appendix.

Exhibit 1
Comparative Political and Economic System Matrix

	+ more Democratic less -	- less Totalitarian more +
+ O p e n M a r k e t -	ABC DEF	NOP QRS
- C l o s e d M a r k e t +	GHI KLM	TUV WXY

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Advantages of System Mapping

The advantage of using system mapping as a tool for learning is that it creates instant visual images of similar and/or contrasting relationships—here, clusters of countries with similar and contrasting political economies. Students get an instant image of the complexities associated with doing business globally and an appreciation of the deep contrasts in how business is conducted around the globe.   Moreover, creating a comparative system map in the classroom delivers almost instantly a lively discussion of where a country "belongs" on the political economic map. Such discussions create a dynamic classroom environment and stimulate critical thinking.

In today's new media world, students respond well to visualization complimented with an interactive discussion. The comparative system map provides just that, a visual snapshot of important relationships.

Ellen A. Drost is Associate Professor of Management at California State University, Los Angeles. She is the author of over 100 refereed journal articles, conference papers, case studies, and book chapters. Her work has appeared among others in the *Academy of Management Journal*, *Human Resource Management*, *Asia-Pacific Journal of Human Resource Management*, *Cross-Cultural Management*, *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior and Research*, *International Entrepreneurship Review*, *Thunderbird International Business Review*, *The CASE Journal*, and numerous edited volumes in international business and management. Ellen received her Ph.D. in International Business and Management from Florida International University. She received her management experience in Amsterdam and Brussels as a business manager and controller for an international marketing organization.

Appendix
Developing a Comparative Political Economy Systems Map

National differences in political, economic, legal and socio-cultural systems influence the benefits, costs, and risks associated with the development of and doing business in different countries. For international businesses with international operations, a question of importance is how a country's political economy affects their business investments and practices. We will address this question from two perspectives: (1) how different are the political and economic systems among countries around the world, and (2) how do these political and economic systems shape doing business in those countries.

You will use your text, lecture notes, class discussions, films, and outside research, to describe and compare the political and economic systems of the following countries: U.S.A., Brazil, Russia, India, China, Hungary, Norway, Morocco, Jordan, Vietnam, and Ghana.   We will use the United States as our base (or anchor) country.

The narrative part of your assignment (one paragraph per country, single-spaced) should cover the following:

1. Country's geographic location and population demographics
2. Country's political system (democracy or totalitarian) and political risk factors
3. Country's economic system and its macro-economic indicators (i.e. market/open versus closed economy, GDP and GDP per capita, economic growth rate, inflation and unemployment rates)
4. Type of business most suitable in the country.

Your paragraph will describe and explain how a country's political economy and the indicators you provided affect doing business in that country. Subsequently, you will place U.S.A. and the assigned countries strategically in one of the quadrants in the Comparative Political Economic Systems Map.

You must type the country's name or abbreviation thereof in the appropriate (strategic) place in one of the quadrants. You will not receive credit for a handwritten system map.   Your assignment must be typed in 12 pitch font and not exceed 3 single-spaced pages.   Please put your name in the top right-hand corner of your assignment. No cover page, please.

Comparative Political and Economic Systems Matrix

	+ more Democratic less -	- less Totalitarian more +
+ O p e n M a r k e t -		
- C l o s e d M a r k e t +		

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