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THE IMPLICATIONS OF DIVERSITY AND GLOBALIZATION IN A GENERAL EDUCATION CORE CURRICULUM

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As students from American Universities prepare to enter the workforce they must be prepared to meet the issues of gender, as well as ethnicity and other multi-cultural factors caused by the cultural variety of the United States and the globalization of the markets (Adler, 1986; Jamieson, 1991; Johnston, 1987). The growing importance of global trade has created a demand for individuals skilled to work with persons of other cultures and backgrounds (Jamieson, 1991; Johnston, 1987). So why have many American institutions neglected the proper management of diversity or internationalization? First, the United States came out of World War II with an undamaged ecomony, with an intact infrastructure, and with an abundance of natural resources (Adler, 1986). These allowed American industries to dominate world markets at will and without significant competition. Second, the American global business dominance allowed the dissemination of the English language becoming the international business language (Adler, 1986; Ball, 1990). The combination of economic and its technological powers, the dissemination of the English language in business, and the geographical position of the United States promoted the development of an ethnocentric (better than other cultures), and parochial (acting alone) posture by corporations and individuals (Adler, 1986; Ball, 1990; Graham, 1983). In addition, the fast proliferation of technology and the growth of scientific management in the United States helped to promote the industrial expansion of the nation and to further support the parochial and ethnocentric attitude of Americans (Adler, 1986; Kohls, 1984). This expansion accelerated the emergence of technical and business programs at American universities, with an eventual transfer of American management styles and technology to other countries (Adler, 1986). However, with the core of research and development staying in the United States, most technical and business programs have been developed with American ideas primarily for Americans, with minimal developmental effort to applying ideas from other countries (Adler, 1986; Hofstede, 1980; Otero, 1993).

However, the undisputed global power of the United States is rapidly being redistributed to other nations, nations with different customs, cultures, and languages. Many nations have absolute dominion of many international markets once dominated by American companies. The redistribution of economic and political powers has forced American institutions (e.g., corporations, academic institutions) to adopt new and innovative measures, to re-evaluate customers' requirements, to better serve customers' needs, and to abandon parochial and ethnocentric behaviors (Adler, 1986; Betances, 1991; Jamieson, 1991; Tung, 1990). It is an indisputable fact that the United States is linked to the international community, and that the welfare of this nation is dependent on

the elimination of acting alone and acting as better than other cultures. It is obvious that, for any American institution, resistance to changes in the 90's is a self-defeating behavior.

Self-defeating attitudes are evident when a monolingual professional is relocated to a new facility in Mexico or when an ethnocentric professional has to deal with international customers, locally or abroad, or when an American parochial professional has to deal with a Japanese or French supervisor (Adler, 1986; Betances, 1991; Graham, 1983; Schonberger, 1982; Tung, 1990). Self-defeating attitudes are fueled by ignorance, fear of changes, and apathy. Nonetheless, the best vaccine against ignorance, fear and apathy is education. Many American institutions realized the devastating realities of ignorance, fear and apathy when they materialized as waste, poor management, indifference, and self-defeating practices that eventually ate away many American companies (Adler, 1986; Baker, 1989; MacCoby, 1988). Organizational subsistence is subject to the eradication of self-defeating practices, the effective utilization of limited resources, and productive workers capable of performing with fewer resources and in less time.

While corporations demand excellence in order to effectively compete in global markets, the higher institution establishment of the United States must derive innovative and effective methods for the academic preparation of the workforce (Jamieson, 1991; Tung, 1990; Watkins, 1993). Connected to the need for high performers and innovative methods are the demographic changes and changing demands of the new workforce. In accordance with the **WORKFORCE 2000 REPORT** the United States is moving rapidly to a new era composed of a diverse workforce where the needs and desires of the workers are completely different from the workforce of the post-war era. Today's workers call for a different treatment, policy changes to accomodate personal needs, and advancement opportunities (Jamieson, 1991; Johnston, 1987). The needs of workers and institutions must be met in order to prevent further frustrations, and declines in productivity.

> The challenge is great: As managers unlearn practices rooted in an old mindset, change the way organizations operate, shift organizational culture, revamp policies, create new structures, and redesign human resource systems, they will assist in gaining the diversity advantage (Jamieson:7).

Meeting the Challenge

Meeting the challenge effectively with innovative ways requires the acceptance of a new flexible paradigm (Baker, 1989). This paradigm should attend the issues of diversity, internationalization, and the development of high performers (Betances, 1991; Jamieson, 1991; Thomas, 1990). However, by virtue of human nature, new and flexible could be perceived as problematic and controversial. The important aspect is to observe and learn from the achievements of others. For example, the Japanese adopted our quality measures to help them gain complete control of many of our domestic markets and to

become a world economic power. Paralleling the Japanese, many other countries learned from American experiences, used American technologies, and educated many of their students in our universities (Otero, 1993). Although we look at the Japanese, there have been many instances when ingenious Americans came with alternatives to well established paradigms. Ford used to sell you the car of your dreams as long as it was black. Then came General Motors with cars in different shapes and colors to satisfy a long overlooked customer demand. We all know the rest of the story: G.M. became the automotive world leader, and it all happened here in Michigan. The time is here for the adoption of ways reflecting distinctive American ingenuity and resourcefulness.

A close look at the **WORKFORCE 2000 REPORT** and the industrial needs of the nation yields some clues about educational innovations and starting points. First, the industry is demanding workers capable of handling multiple tasks. Second, workers are expected to perform in a short period of time with a minimum of in-house training. Third, those same workers must adapt to the new wave of teamwork. Finally, the education of the new diverse labor pool requires educational methodology re-adjustments to ensure the proper evolutionary process of the system. Let's look at some of the implications for the educational system, especially to General Education curriculum.

Implications

The present American workforce has a variety of challenging circumstances. For example, an American engineer may be working for a Japanese manager and supporting products in Latin America. Twenty years ago an outlandish situation, today a common occurrence in the United States. A foreign language major may prepare general documentation or marketing literature using computers with an array of software applications. A computer scientist may work as a system administrator who has to deal with many inhouse departments and outside vendors. A recently graduate teacher could be assigned to a school with a multicultural core of students and required to handle academic and administrative tasks. A business major could be assigned to work with international accounts using sophisticated computer equipment or working in an import-export operation. Females supervisors may be in a so-called white male traditional occupation, for example, engineering or finance. How about a Hispanic marketing manager working with international customers? Or as we have seen recently, an African-American Chief of Staff running a full scale war in the Middle East? Or a Hispanic female as Surgeon General of the United States? Not least in importance, the United States, Canada and Mexico are in a common market alliance where many individuals with at least four different languages and a mix of cultures will be interacting and conducting business.

Blended with the international and culturally diverse ingredients are the high performance expectancy with a minimum amount of training (Adler, 1986; Ball, 1990; Byrne, 1993; Oster, 1993; Watkins, 1993). The development of a worker or professional capable of handling multiple tasks and duties requires the accumulation of knowledge and experiences from many disciplines outside the intended specialization (Byrne, 1993). In

an effort to reduce costs and to stay alive, companies are demanding high productivity at a low cost. The new employee is expected not only to learn fast but also to have, in many cases, a solid understanding of complex computers, softwares, office machines, and administration principles (Byrne, 1993; O'Reilly, 1994). The concept of a Core Curriculum for General Education should serve this same purpose by compelling the student to take courses from a variety of academic disciplines to insure a basic foundation for handling some of the complicated and diverse issues of the new work place.

One of the most challenging situations of the new workforce is the propagation of teams in a country with a strong individualistic culture (Adler, 1986; Byrne, 1993; Hofstede, 1980; Kohls, 1984; O'Reilly, 1994). According to Dyer (1987), teams are collections of people who must rely on *group collaboration* (italics added) if each member is to experience the optimum of success and goal achievement. New developments in the business and general organizational world seem almost to demand more effective teamwork. More and more corporations are increasingly promoting team formation and relying on decisions germinating from empowered teams. A worker is not limited to rotation between many tasks, but also among several units and teams with different responsibilities from one temporary system to another. "Team" does not mean managing by committee; it is a unified, cohesive group of people who have special functions. In a team each person needs the resources and support of others to get the job done in accordance with pre-established parameters. However, in a society that rewards individual achievements, it is very difficult to transmit the true meaning of a team, an environment where many individuals fuse into one working unit. College work is based on individual achievement, not on cooperative work. In the few cases where group projects are performed, usually a few students take over to complete the task, while the rest enjoy the free ride (Dyer, 1987). In order to promote the team concept, every higher institution should incorporate into the curriculum the principles and development of team building skills. Teachers should be prepared to teach the principles and relevance of teamwork, using teamwork building techniques in the classroom.

Other related classroom techniques should take into account the social reality of the nation: more minorities with different cognitive styles and complicated social challenges (Diaz, 1992; Mangan, 1993). In a pluralistic society like ours, the eduactional establishment, independent of lower or higher status, must open to accommodate student learning styles which are known to vary in accordance to cognitive styles (Diaz, 1992; Modgil, 1988). Examples of such learning styles are the Field Independent Learners and Field Dependent Learners (Diaz, 1992; Modgil, 1988). Educational institutions should provide a curriculum which take students cognitive styles into account, rather than attempt to treat all as if they were identical culturally and psychologically (Modgil, 1988).

In addition to cognitive styles, the industrial demands have temporal effects on the curriculum. A good model comes from the Engineering School at Grand Valley, where Gen-Ed courses have a temporal importance in relation to the Engineering Curriculum. Engineering is a challenging field in which technical and non-technical performance is

expected from day one of employment. Technical skills are implemented from the very first semester, when students are required to take courses in mathematics, hard sciences, computer science, and engineering. In addition, the extensive lab work of the courses requires good writing skills. Therefore, the student must add to the technical classes English composition courses during the first semester. However, the bulk of the Gen-Ed classes are circumscribed in the last two years of the program. The primary reason for this format is to build the necessary technical skills needed to be hired as an apprentice engineer after four semesters of college. After the first co-op term (there are 3 non-consecutive co-op terms) the student returns to complete a full load of engineering courses and Gen-Ed courses. The acquired working experience should root in the student a different perspective about the workplace. An excellent example is a 20 year old, engineering co-op student, who for the first time in his life must face the complex issues of ethnic diversity. After that first co-op experience, he or she should appreciate more the importance of a foreign language class or a class on the immigrant experience in the United States, since he or she has had to work with co-workers, customers or supervisors with different ethnic backgrounds. The same thing applies for a class on ethics in the professions: a first or second year student probably would care less for the importance of ethics. Academic departments, in a proactive way, should adapt to the changes and demands of society and industry.

It should be clear that academic institutions in pluralistic societies like ours, in an era of continuous technological changes must accomodate in a proactive way academic programs and student services to the cultural diversity and progressive demands of the whole community.

Conclusion

We must accept that we are living in an era of fast technological changes, instantaneous information, accumulation of knowledge, globalization, and culturally diverse. Therefore, we must accept the elimination of self-limiting practices, the embracement of changes, and the recognition of diversity as a valued resource rather than a problem. The proper recognition of the many issues affecting our industry and society should lead to the implementation of synergistic mechanisms leading to the continuous improvement of the academic curriculum. A General Education Core Curriculum addressing in a timely manner the various issues presented here should provide the student with the complementary skills necessary to effectively compete in our society. To ignore differences furthers the utilization of parochial and ethnocentric practices nurtured on the different-defective dyad. Instead, we should always strive for the incorporation of attributes which will improve our educational institutions.

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