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Education and Business - Partners in Transition.

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Abstract

Business education courses, such as those being taught in Vietnam and elsewhere, generally draw on the concepts advocated by the likes of Weber, Fayol, Taylor, Barnard, Mayo and Mooney etc. The experiences of such theorists that have largely contributed to today's canon of management and organisational theory, primarily draw from management theorists who lived in the early 19th – mid 20th centuries. Until now, such concepts have had their rightful place in modern management thought, especially Fayol's stress on long-range planning - an idea as important today, as it was in his own time.

However, circumstances change, and in business there can also be limitations to the present day application of historical theory. In business, it is expected that the appropriate people with the appropriate qualification will perform the right actions that will ultimately yield the desired results. Controls are implemented to guide the actions that take place at different levels in an organisation. These can be further classified into behavioural restrictions, pre-action appraisal, and action accountability. But what of, for example, the cultural, contextual and other pertinent influences and impacts?

Today, investigation by some commentators suggest that we may be witnessing the emergence of a unique social phenomenon not witnessed previously: five generations of people are shortly to be working alongside each other. A multi-generational workplace is either going to be a happy and productive place of engagement or, challenging and stressful. In a large part such outcomes will arise from the type and style of management that is implemented in a particular setting, derived from the education and understandings that we, as educators, seek to instil in those that will take their place in this new workforce paradigm.

In anticipation of this inescapable quantum shift in organisational relationships occurring, perhaps it is time now to re-think and realign certain fundamentals in business and management education.

This Paper considers such necessary aspects as:

- Future business needs and present day education development;
- Attitude variables and job performance;
- Behaviour and Engagement.

The Paper suggests a possible refocussing of higher education and training beyond the usual subject-by-subject level of engagement, thereby helping learners towards, for example, a greater level of embrace and understanding regarding diversity.

Key Words: Higher Education, Management, Multi-generational Workplace, Behaviour, Competencies, Diversity.

Conference sub-themes addressed in this Paper

Leadership and Management – Creating Future Leaders; Teaching and Learning

Introduction

*‘ You must remember this....
The fundamental things apply,
As time goes by.’¹*

Once upon a time, in a working environment as time would march on in a linear fashion, younger workers entered the workplace to replace older workers – it was the natural order of things; a churn, somewhat insufferably and predictably bland. But there is no rule that says that one age group should always make way for another.

Such a stereotypical analysis of the young replacing the old has tended to dominate government, educational and perhaps business thinking towards trying to engineer an appropriate fit between education and training towards appropriate workforce participation. In short, a shaping of programs to cater for the largest common denominator, also guaranteed to offend the least number of participants.

If a trend (e.g. courses in business education) became popular, the engines of education, business synergies, and a supportive governmental environment can converge to make it huge. Things are changing, the workplace is changing, so perhaps the seemingly dated homogenised educational approach to the business environment needs further attention and revision.

Further, changes to courses subject delivery to also include on-line methods (or a blended mixture) are also creating additional factors worthy of consideration. For example, the general profile of the average on-line student is:²

- Female (70%);
- 33 Years Old;
- Working and earning a salary; and
- Studying business (34%).

The future workplace will be one of multi-generations working side by side. In considering this overall issue, there are a number of possible enablers that might contribute towards facilitating alignment of employee competencies towards sustainable organisational success. However, for the purpose of this Paper, necessary educational underpinnings towards this new workplace world will be the primary consideration. One reason for this is that if educational enhancement towards the new paradigm may not be seen as necessary, then it follows that student enhancement is likewise not necessary; and this is not so. It is not logical to ignore that which will be the case. Thus, it may be time to consider making an educational transformational leap to cater for the new situation arising, as the impact on the employer-employee and employee-employee relationships is bound to be huge and wide ranging.

In tandem with this, persuasion of educational authorities (and other related stakeholders) towards a re-think of the construct of, for example, business courses may need to be cast in terms relevant to necessary motivation – this also means as an economic argument - without

¹ Lyric drawn from the song: ‘*As Time Goes By*’, written by Herman Hupfield, 1931. See also: URL=<http://www.durango-songwriters-expo.com/as-time-goes-by.html>

²Source: URL=<http://www.franklin.edu/blog/profile-of-the-average-online-student/>

precise knowledge of the pending situational needs or the possible consequences of action towards this.

1. The Coming Workplace World

A scan of the working environment of the near future reveals developments that have not been experienced before – a multi-generational workforce consisting of four-five generations working side by side.

Those at the more senior end of the working life are extending their careers for various reasons; those that are younger and with appropriate qualifications are expecting to find employment otherwise there would be no point to it all. A pessimistic view of this multi-generational workplace is that it could be destructive in the working environment; behaviour patterns, age perceptions and relations are deeply in-grained. But an optimistic view is that the traditional, inherited or more established way of approach, especially by way of education, may not necessarily be a precondition for future sustainable business development. Thus, we can study and work towards bringing about a new way.

The question to consider is what type of education development may be feasible to address the workplace condition that we know is coming?

In the relatively near future, the five generations working side by side will be:³

- Those born prior to 1946;
- Those born between 1946 and 1964;
- Those born between 1965 and 1976;
- Those born between 1977 and 1997; and
- Those born after 1997.

Just by identifying the various age groups, however, does not create either an identifiable correlation between similarities, or the possible depth of interaction between actors that may exist in the multi-generational workplace.

Enablers, for example, such as Information Technology should also be factored into the equation. Further, in a globalized world, it also cannot also be assumed that cultural antecedents may necessarily be coherent. For example, an employee in the 2020 workplace may be born in one country, educated in another, work in a third, and be on-line studying in a fourth. Thus, we cannot make the usual artificial distinctions (e.g. those born 1946-1954 act may have certain definable characteristics, those born 1977-1997 may have others) as such may create a synthetic subjectivity when attempting to view interpersonal interaction.

There appears to be ample literature regarding, for example, variations of culture on behaviour and associated organisational practices (e.g. Schneider and DeMeyer (1991); Pagellet *al.*, (2005)). But a question for this Paper also relates to how future workplace performance, where such might be affected by certain cultural attributes and practices, might also be addressed.

³ URL = <<https://hbr.org/2009/10/are-you-ready-to-manage-five-g/>>

1.1 The 2020 Workplace

According to Meister and Willyerd (2010), companies are already preparing their strategies to attract the most suitable employees. They suggest that the '2020 Workplace' will be one that is intensely personalised and socially networked to attract, develop and engage employees across generations and geographies. We, as educators need to prepare for this, similarly.

Those wishing to enter the workforce are growing in greater numbers, yet the workforce in many countries is also ageing. Different countries are also ageing at different speeds. For example, looking at Australia in the year 2020, the median age will be almost 40 years (1980: 29 years), with more people aged 50 than any other age. The present median age in Australia is 37 years.⁴ In Vietnam, by contrast, the present median age is 30 years; in 2020 it is expected to be 33 years.⁵

There can be several explanations for an ageing workforce including socio-cultural influences that can affect the supply and demand situation for older workers, attitudes towards extending a person's working life, and the age-productivity profile concept which sees productivity viewed in terms of job context, job requirements and age, and perhaps also differing industry sectors (Mahlberget *al.*, 2013). Perhaps, as part of the working environment that to date has had overall 'aged related' considerations, it might be more appropriate to contextualise such as an 'age free' environment, where behaviour and influence might become a primary determining characteristic towards organisational success.

Understanding the specific nature of the changing workforce and then seeking to educate towards a generational divide falls to us as the educators of *now* that will be training the business leaders of *tomorrow*. Training in business matters aside, the educational attributional approaches such as personality theories, trait theories, behaviour theories and the like will need to be utilised more dimensionally – to correlate between implicit beliefs with actual reality; in terms of Task Performance Vs. Contextual Performance. But how might the workplace organisation of tomorrow be viewed to give us a necessary framework towards educational action?

Schein (2010), suggested that organisations should be thought of as:

' ... a complex social system which must be studied as a total system if individual behaviour within it is to be truly understood.'

Given the forthcoming multi-generational workplace, there are further considerations needed to be addressed to enable us to educate towards an education-organisational equalising effect. Some of these are considered below.

1.2 Dissecting the 2020 Workplace

The modern and forthcoming workplace might be less about organisational loyalty than it is about team work, collaboration, relationship-building and a form of '*aggregated*

⁴Source: URL = <<http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/population-by-country/>>& URL = <<http://www.yourmarketingmentor.com.au/a-snapshot-of-the-future-australia-in-2012/>>

⁵Source URL = <<http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/vietnam-population/>>

individualism'. This also finds traction in a common and recurring theme between engagement, meaningfulness and identification – elements of employee cognition, emotion and behaviour. And it is for the organisation to manage the situation (Pech and Slade, 2006).

Thus, organisations might be seen as being essentially about behavioural interaction. Any consideration of an appropriate educational course design to assist students grapple towards being part of an organisation that will be competitive based, should also consider (and perhaps accommodate) the constraining institutions and influences (Braithwaite, 2004), notably behavioural matters in this context. Behaviours are functional in nature. Thus, less functional behaviours can create negative consequences and/or involve direct costs to the individuals that comprise the organisations, and to the organisations themselves (Griffin *et al.*, 1998).

Argyris (1993), identified the inevitable tensions in this area. As just one example, he identifies there must be some basic incongruencies between the growth trends of a healthy personality (explosive) and organisational requirements (limiting). Argyris suggests that such changes can reside on a continuum. This is illustrated in the Figure below.

Figure 1: The Immaturity/Maturity Continuum⁶

Insert [Figure 1: The Immaturity – Maturity Continuum] here

But let's take this one step further. Many new employees joining an organisation, while being within the adult age range (i.e. over 18 years of age) are not mature adults. They may no longer be adolescents, but they are not yet adults – perhaps '*emerging adults*' (Arnett, 2000). For that matter, maturity is not dependent on age. What organisations may encourage is a shift from dependence to interdependence (rather than autonomy) – a helping and cooperative system of relationships.

1.3 Implications for the Education System

In an organisational setting, validating opinion, group belonging and behavioural relationships would appear to be intertwined. In this regard, Lopes *et al.*, (2007) consider that when groups are structured by way of individualism with a high independence among their members, heterogeneity flows within the dynamic (e.g. consensus to attribute validity to an opinion); whereas with groups of high interdependence (collectivism), groups use an overall construct of consensus, rather than that of heterogeneity.

To enhance business education towards a strategic match with the forthcoming business environment requires consideration of contextual variables, task uncertainty, and effectiveness of organisational structures. There are necessities facing both the organisational environment and primarily for educators as the feeders to this environment.

Wollfe (1979) suggests:

⁶ Source: Drawn from URL = <http://www.accel-team.com/human_relations/hrels_06ii_argyris.html>

‘ ... individuals create, not groups, and individuals tend to become dissatisfied and leave if they feel the organisation does not recognise that they want to be recognised for their individual contributions.’

Thus, business education should not seek to preserve the ‘*status quo*’ by way of the structure of courses. We need a strategic re-orientation of educational thinking from educating towards what ‘*is*’ towards ‘*what will be*’.

2. Educating for an Equalising Effect

2.1 Education Considerations towards Integrative Change

Those presently studying business courses are the future organisational leaders and future key influencers towards organisational competitive sustainability. Presumably, and in this space, organisational competitive sustainability might also relate to educational institutional sustainability. So, in considering the direction of business courses to take account of the forthcoming multi-generational workplace, the probability of that which is forthcoming is known, we are just dealing with uncertainty regarding an appropriate correlation of education in the ‘*now*’ towards a temporal distance.

Here there is a situation of clear choice, but there will be distortions in appropriately quantifying the scale of the probability and there is also the problem of country workforce homogeneity to consider as the workforce becomes increasingly globalized (both actual and virtual).

Further, and as just one example, the call for international business education to include strategic fit with business and sustainability with landscapes has been announced via the United Nation’s (2008) Principle for Responsible Management Education initiative.⁷ Principle 5 states:

‘ Partnership: We will interact with managers of business corporations to extend our knowledge of their challenges in meeting social and environmental responsibilities and to explore jointly effective approaches to meeting these challenges.’

It is acknowledged that this will be no easy task. Integrating such concepts into the education curricula presents challenges that are abstract, theoretical and practical. Such education will need to be both ‘*transformative*’ and ‘*transformational*’ (Mezirow *et al.*, 2009).

2.2 Educating for Appropriate Graduate Outcomes

‘Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.’⁸

Education always takes meaning from context – it never gives meaning to context (Thompkins, 1992). If we are to knowingly embrace the forthcoming multi-generational workplace, then there is a pressing educational need to change and enhance the delivery of

⁷Source: URL = <<http://www.unprme.org/>>

⁸ Attributed to Albert Einstein (1879-1955). German-born theoretical physicist.

business education courses, although this is coupled with a somewhat pervasive uncertainty regarding the level of speed necessary to achieve the required objective.

Certainly, given the forthcoming workplace situation identified, the present educational atmosphere should be anything but calm, and yet it is. The pressure of global business expansion coupled with an expanding workplace age demographic appears to collide directly with the present system of business education that has been pursued for decades. The general level of aspiration and expectation of those studying business subjects and that we, as educators, seek to reinforce will also commence to change (if it has not, already).

The workplace is becoming an increasingly sophisticated relationship environment and we must seek to provide that workplace with uniquely skilled persons, not only in terms of grades and marks which are highly subjective, but by, perhaps, also adding subjects to the business canon that might also have a predictive value from an interpersonal relationships perspective.

The essential issue therefore, is what should be permitted to be included in courses now as a basis for addressing the multi-generational workplace. The unbreakable, but generally unacknowledged, rule is that there must be an expanding totality of learning experiences for the student (Thompkins, 1992). Thus, perhaps as educators towards the multi-generational workplace, the learning experience that needs to be created should be sociological as well as pedagogical. What may count for future successful employment for those we teach, will be information beyond the traditional forms of business analysis education, to give perspective, thereby creating working professionals accurately equipped by education and training to provide the kinds of skills that the multi-generational workplace will demand.

Knowledge is the essence of any skill that can be used to solve a problem (Leplat, 1990). So, translated to the workplace, information will become knowledge when people understand, interpret, put into practice, and integrate information into their duties (Lee and Yang, 2000). Lyotard (1984), identified that knowledge in the modern society can be regarded as '*exteriorised*' that is, there are '*knowers*.'

Exteriorisation further gives rise to the view that knowledge might be seen a commodity, so it has both tangible and intangible value. This is also important when the 'value' of education and training is considered in the wider context. Thus, as educators, we seek to instill knowledge capital in our students which, all things considered, will then convert this into organisational value and profit as employees. Hence, there is the economic argument to seek to ensure that the knowledge we seek to instill has actual value, now and into the future.

Effective education towards the multi-generational workplace will give students opportunities for skills, knowledge, attitude, and aptitude development; the obvious flow-on effects to organisation need not be stated. Appropriate education and training will also be an effective tool to cope with change (Rae, 2001).

What is clear is that the current range of business courses need enhancement beyond the traditional business strategy approach - towards a combined synthesis of analysis, behaviours, and response. This Paper has sought to show that the underlying issues are very complex. As to the appropriate actual subject makeup of business courses towards the forthcoming multi-generational workplace, this is a matter for further research.

Conclusion

In seeking to ascertain tomorrow's organisational landscape for which we might educate today, this Paper has sought to draw together various threads to weave them into an overall narrative that has meaning.

The forthcoming multi-generational workplace presents many challenges towards those seeking to educate in the business discipline. The literature shows that the behaviours of those within organisations are consequential; an individual's behaviour within an organisational setting can arise from a range of sources that have genesis in extremity, certainty, importance, knowledge, intensity, interest, direct experience, accessibility, and non-commitment. Although all of these might be seen to be conceptually and operationally distinct from each other, in an organisational setting they become part of a necessary structural construct that will have repercussion on the organisation's competency.

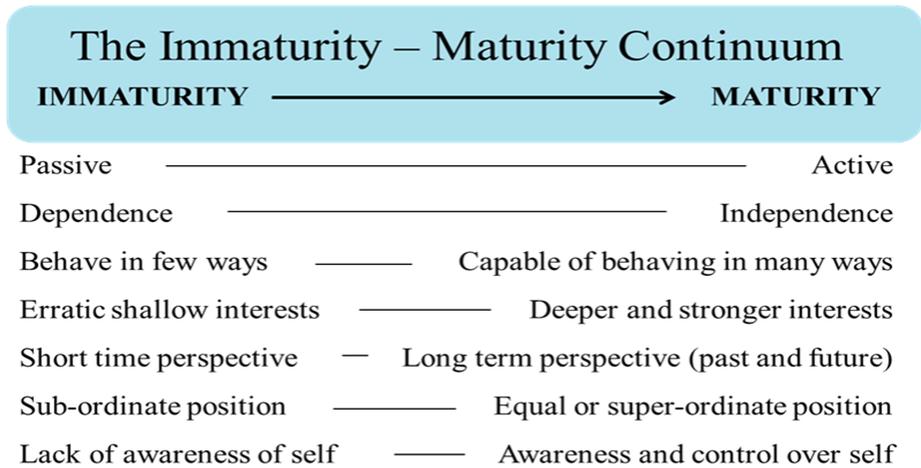
So, in preparing our graduates for the forthcoming workplace world, it is not only '*business intelligence*' that is a necessary guider, it would appear to be also a matter of including '*emotional intelligence*' as a strong and desirable graduate attribute.

Further, any consideration regarding amending the curricula will also require an analysis of a range of additional issues. These might include, but should not be limited to, appropriate texts to study, considerations regarding future appropriate graduate outcomes, disciplinary subject interlinking and a series of objective criteria for considering the future of an individual's contribution to groups as part of the future multi-generational workplace.

In light of the information presented in this Paper, it would seem a sensible approach to consider these varying dimensions as a set of underlying influences, and thus devise an appropriate educational response towards preparing for the inevitable.

Figure 1 insertion

The Immaturity – Maturity Continuum



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APPENDIX

About the Authors of this Paper

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Nhat completed her MIB at La Trobe University in Melbourne, Australia, in June 2009. She presently lives in Hanoi, Vietnam and is a researcher for the Canadean Group. Nhat's primary research areas include corporate social responsibility, corporate governance, distance and virtual education, especially at the high school and undergraduate level. Nhat has been involved in e-commerce in Vietnam, and has been a researcher into such areas as electricity, telecommunications, pharmaceuticals, and commercial banking. Nhat is planning to undertake her PhD with a focus on corporate governance and organisational behaviour.