Global business education in the 21st century



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THE world of business in the 21st Century contends with many new, dynamic and powerful influences. Business people are faced with a rapidly globalising economy, volatile economic markets, technological innovations, a greater emphasis on quality (Phipps 1992), environmental and social responsibility, and increasingly commonly, an internationally-spread work force. The business world of the 21st Century therefore demands that managers possess a broadened cultural understanding and perspective and decision-making skills which extend beyond the domestic and traditional. The need for global business education can no longer be regarded as optional it is becoming mandatory (Townsend and Cairns 2003).

There are numerous paths leading toward the objective of globalised business education. For instance, many business schools have been striving for some time to internationalise their curriculum. While a consensus regarding the need for internationalising the curriculum may exist, no such agreement exists regarding how this task might be accomplished. Nor does agreement exist regarding the type of skills business graduates need to possess in order to successfully operate in the global business world. Adler and Bartholomew (1992) attempted to identify the skill set as including broad-based sociability, cultural flexibility, a cosmopolitan orientation and a collaborative approach. The question remains as to how to operationalise a curriculum that delivers graduates who possess these hard to measure characteristics and skills (White et al. 2005).

In response to the globalisation of business, educators are increasingly acting to globalise not only their curricula, but also their classrooms. In a global classroom delivery of materials and learning processes is interactive and flexible; in addition to interacting with their compatriots students may debate issues with their peers in other countries through computer networks; they may take their core curriculum in a foreign language. Instructors faced with developing their understanding of a global business environment are also facing the challenge of developing multicultural perspectives their own and their students'. One way of doing this may be to include international students and to have them relate or enact their own experiences to their classmates. The experiential exercise draws upon a student's experience and perspective in globalising the curriculum by means of a structured role play in the classroom (Blanchette and Brown 1993). Blanchette and Brown (p.10) conclude that the international student can make a difference in changing the attitudes of domestic business students by broadening their cultural perspective, challenging traditional style decision-making and sensitising students to the competitive disadvantage that results from an ethnocentric or xenophobic perspective.

Others argue that pedagogical strategies reinforcing service learning and cultural immersion produce graduates who exhibit a broad multicultural perspective and appropriate decision-making skills (White et al. 2005). Service learning involves student participation in course-related community programmes designed to enhance the integration of course material with real-world experience (Petkus 2000). Jacoby (1996) stressed the potential synergistic benefits to the students, businesses, instructors, university and community when describing service learning. While it may be difficult to implement and manage, the benefits of service-learning are obvious. Service learning provides a chance for students to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world business problems (White et al. 2005; Petkus 2000). The value of cultural immersion for tomorrow's global managers has been stressed by Holm et al. (1996) and White and Griffith (1998), as a means to learn to understand different cultural perspectives.

We can look forward to a very public and continuing debate about business education delivery and quality as educators continue to restructure and innovate in the pursuit of educational programmes which are most efficient in producing students able to operate effectively in the global business environment.

References

Adler N, Bartholomew S 1992, Managing globally competent people, *Academy of Management Executive*, Vol. 6, No. 3, pp. 52-65.