

Globalization, Technology and Continued Professional Education

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Globalization of Business and Social Services

Large jumps or changes in social organization and technology often transfigure human history. Examples from antiquity would be the mining and smelting of metals, the domestication of animals and grains, and the harnessing of the wind for sailing boats. Subtler, yet equally powerful, was the development of geometric tools to permit the measurement of land and buildings and the creation of standards of weights and measures to further trade. Trade and standards of measurements gave us the impetus for coinage and that permitted even greater amounts of trade.

The last two centuries have seen numerous discoveries that have produced numerous, jagged jumps that have dislocated communities and nations. Railroads, electrification, air travel, telegraphs, telephones, television, mass production, nuclear fission and fusion, crop technologies, antibiotics, and vaccinations are illustrations of achievements that created sharp, jolting changes. One of the most profound jumps of the last two decades of the 20th Century has been the continuing dissolution of national barriers in trade coupled with ever more rapid and low cost communication via the internet (Friedman, 1999).

Today, agricultural, energy, and manufactured products move in a global network unimagined even in the 70s. A consequence of this global trade has been the imposition of global rules on the labor market. High labor cost societies such as the United States have rapidly exported low and medium skilled jobs such as assembly work and high volume manufacturing to low labor cost countries. Resultantly, most consumer electronics such as televisions are manufactured in Latin America, more complex electronics in Asia, fresh fruits and vegetables are more and more grown and picked in Mexico and Central America, and clothing is made in the Caribbean, India, and China. The loss of jobs

in the United States in these businesses has caused severe dislocations for rural farm laborers, Detroit autoworkers, steelworkers in Pittsburgh, and other employees in manufacturing in city after city. Even when jobs are not lost, the global nature of markets has caused more and more corporations to have facilities in other countries.

Thus global trade makes labor—wages, employment levels, and benefits global as well. Such changes are most visible along the Mexican border of the United States. With hourly wages in Mexico inclusive of benefits averaging between 1 and 5 dollars an hour unskilled and semi-skilled jobs have moved across from the U.S. to Mexico. This movement leaves behind growing levels of unemployment in American communities that provided this type of labor and necessitate continuous growing amounts of job retraining.

Thus, global trade pressures social services to respond to this global environment by both creating services for displaced workers as well as refugees and immigrants. There are other consequences. In many cases, social services must be able to transfer cases to other countries and provide services to persons recently moved into the community from another state or country. Moreover, in many communities social services must struggle to find ways to fund services when lowered wages deplete tax and contributory sources of operating funds. Again, here the examples from the border areas are instructive (Lauderdale, Postle, & Kelly, 1988; Lauderdale, 1986).

One result of global markets is to heighten competition in businesses through intensified demands for both higher quality and lower costs in products and services. These expectations for businesses increasingly are directed to social services as well. If a commercial mail order firm can be available to a customer 24-hours a day, why cannot social services? Consumers expect better services at lower

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costs, more convenient hours, and to be treated as "customers" in every transaction. Governments and other purchasers of services faced with such demands now look to using market mechanisms to lower costs and provide models of services. Health, welfare, mental health, corrections, and public safety are all traditional social services that now are challenged by profit making firms that seek to provide quality services with lower costs and greater flexibility. The global forces that are changing business and financial markets are inexorably forcing much greater rates of change and innovation in social services.

**New Organizational Challenges:
The Learning Organization**

Social agencies, just like American companies, must both adapt and innovate in a global market or face rapid dissolution. Thus, social services, like business, must invest more heavily than ever in training and technologies that will permit those organizations to continually "re-invent" themselves to meet new challenges. Like businesses, social agencies must become "learning organizations" that fully engage the creative energies and talents of all organizational members to meet a complex, changing, and often threatening environment.

In the absence of development and learning strategies, many social service organizations fail to monitor the environment, detect changes or provide adjustment to changing conditions. This lack of preparation for change may have unfortunate consequences for social services. As an example, for over 25 years the authors provided management development and continuing education to state welfare organizations in the mid-west and southwest. An extensive study of managers in one of these agencies showed that they depended upon informal mentoring to identify and develop new management personnel. The absence of systematic management growth and development resulted in an over dependence on internal standards for judgment, a discouragement of external information gathering, and a defensive orientation to change in

general. While providing stability, this "silo" thinking generally reduced the ability of the organization to respond to change.

Research has demonstrated the necessity of employee involvement and continuous learning in the development of responsive, quality oriented services (Lauderdale, 1999; Moore & Kelly, 1996; Moore, Kelly, & Lauderdale, 1998). The approaches that must be used to develop more capable, learning organizations is to create procedures that make the acquisition of knowledge for employees continuously available. Two recent developments directly address the need. The first is the development of "asynchronous learning networks" and the second is "just-in-time-training."

Asynchronous Learning Networks (ALN) stress that provision and consumption of the learning need not occur in the same place and at the same time. ALNs thus provide an attractive alternative to cost conscious organizations hardened against the direct and indirect costs associated with face to face training. To be considered ALNs "delivery of educational materials must be asynchronous and involve networks of learners, who are tied together via an asynchronous knowledge distribution medium" (Bourne, 1997). Most often the medium is likely to be the Internet or organizational intranet. Organizational ALNs, delivered via their intranets, provide up-to-date information and training directed to continuous development and learning. In-service training professionals and educators develop the topics.

As a natural outgrowth, universities have become involved with ALNs both at the research and degree levels (Mayadas, 1997). University research activities may range from techniques for improving inter-person communication to studies of whiteboard technology, asynchronous video and audio and other media. This research is then applied in the offering of courses and degrees in an asynchronous fashion. ALNs represent a partnership of learning between organizations and universities.

As an example, the University of Texas School of Social Work, conducts the Survey of Organizational Excellence for all state agencies on a biannual cycle. The information is returned to the organizations via the Internet, which allows all members to the organization to review the responses. This feedback is coupled with learning activities directed to the organization's needs and provided in-house or in combination with the School. Now is its 10th year, the survey has proven to be an effective learning method helping organizations provide better quality services. Indeed, web site activity suggests that this effort is far more intensive in providing continuing education services than the School's older and far more expensive traditional continuing education program (Lauderdale, 1999).

The second development expands the asynchronous concept to include regular staff development cycles. Each individual in the organization is then provided with training just when they need it to continue their growth—that is, “just in time.” Think of it as on demand training and continuing education topics.

Just-in-Time (JIT) training stresses reduction of the time from training need identification to training provision. When training can be implemented for one person as effectively as for a large group, less time is lost. The organization does not have to wait until enough people need training to justify the expense of a face-to-face session and this results in better service quality. For example, the author's studies of state child welfare agencies indicated that often workers would be carrying caseloads before they had attended basic training.

JIT training expands training-on-demand and individualized training incorporating more self-paced instruction while addressing particular learner needs, performance, and styles of learning. JIT training helps an organization achieve its goals by targeting organizational goals and merging both work and training processes to effect desired change with as little time and cost as possible.

Learners are given exactly the training they need when they need it. For example, new staff come on board at varying times with varying needs. Some may have extensive experience while others may be completely new. Some may be professionally trained; others may not. Diagnostic tests and skill test can be conducted and training modules carefully matched to the trainee's needs (ASK International, 1998). Training is most effective when presented at “the exact moment when the representative needs it.” When employees are able to retrieve training content on an as-needed basis, it will improve their effectiveness and self-confidence. “Trainers benefit from software tools that allow them to track the progress of individual employees through the curriculum, enabling them to provide individualized instruction where needed, while management can track entire groups of employees looking for patterns of professional development” (Just, 1998).

Computerization of the Workplace

How wide spread computerization of organizations will change social work continuing education is part of a larger question of how computerization is affecting the workplace. Burris (1998) addressing this question reviewed the sociological literature concerning computerization effects on organizational structure, authority relationships, and worker skill levels. She concluded computerized work organizations typically have fewer hierarchical levels, a bifurcated workforce, less formal structures, and depend less on internal labor markets relaying instead on external credentialing.

Some studies suggest that computerization may have at the least unintended or at the most deleterious effects. Burris (1998) cites Braverman (1974), Feldberg and Glenn (1987), and Shaiken (1984), among others, who suggest social and technological change have created a “centralized, neo-Taylorist work organization, de-skilling the labor process and reduced worker autonomy.” Other studies conversely suggest the same forces have promoted post-bureaucratic organizations with decen-

tralization and reduced hierarchy. In these organizations a kind of democracy and worker autonomy is combined with the up-skilling and centrality of knowledge workers (Attewell, 1992; Bell, 1973; Block, 1990; Clegg, 1990; Hirschhorn, 1984; Piore & Sabel, 1984).

Computerization, and the accompanying social forces, seem to be responsible for a number of new organizational forms even in traditional bureaucracies. The restructured bureaucracies rely more on temporary ad hoc teams and task forces. Emerging are more flexible forms that are more organic, integrative, flexible, adaptive, and innovative. For professionals as well as managers these organizations relax the traditional bureaucratic constraints and allow more creativity. As a consequence, there seems to be a greater dependence on external credentialing of employees and less internal mobility and training (Burris, 1993, 1998).

For professional continuing education, the key question is how computerization effects professional work. Changes in organizational systems and reimbursement mechanisms have had very pronounced effects on professional independence (Lauderdale & Kelly, 1998). In these new administrative structures as well as in the computerized workplace, professionals may lose a certain amount of autonomy when becoming part of the internal teams; however, they tend to retain or expand their discretion over professional work (Burris, 1998).

How much autonomy and discretion remains seems to be related to how important the professional knowledge is to the organization. In any regard, computerization of the workplace has a rich potential for professional continuing education. Providing the skills necessary to thrive in the changing workplace may be as important as the base professional knowledge.

Blurring the Distinction Between Formal Education and Continuing Education

For higher education in general, one of the more pressing issues today is how to deal with the growing demand for computer support for all aspects of education. This campus debate takes many forms from discussion of on-line versus print journals in the library, to administrative support by electronic grade books and advising manuals, to making e-mailing of assignments mandatory and on to placing whole degree programs on the web. Extension programs and extended (or independent) study divisions, the more traditional forms of "outreach" to non-matriculating students, have been joined by broadcast and narrow-cast instructional television (ITV) divisions and, more recently, by computer mediated programs including ALNs, web courses, email assisted, and computer intensive or computer delivered courses. All of these forms are often "lumped together" under the general topic of distance education.

As the various delivery mechanisms have increased and intensified, increasing numbers of degree programs are now offered as well as more typical short course and individual topics. This proliferation has had the general effect of blurring the traditional distinction between "outreach" and "campus" programs and, now, with just-in-time training and an emphasis on external credentialing, between preparation for practice via degree programs and continuing competence via continuing education.

Further muddling the situation is an unprecedented demand from new undergraduates for computer assisted and delivered information. It seems that these newer students, having grown up with the computer and other forms of electronic entertainment and education, expect that they will be able to reach their instructors at any hour via e-mail. They expect to have the capacity to do their research from home or dorm via electronic full text libraries, and send their completed papers as e-mail attachments or from their own web pages. Further, they

expect information on classes, such as syllabi and schedules to be on the web along with advising, course planning, and grading information. Keeping up with the "demands" for these services have become a student retention issue as universities compete on the support services they offer.

As schools respond to new students, the distinctions between "on and off campus" and "in and out of class" become difficult to maintain. The same technology that delivered distance education, augmented by Internet capacity, is now used to support "on campus" students. The term "distributed learning" is often used to describe the conjuncture of the student requirements for technology with all forms of outreach.

This blurring may have many benefits for those who provide continuing education. It certainly has improved the legitimacy of the efforts on campuses. Further blurring may occur if entertainment and education merge. Imagine a scenario in which an entertainment giant, say Disney Corporation, and a software giant, say Microsoft, Inc., jointly approach a state legislature, say the state of California, offering better quality education at lower cost than that provided by the state universities. Reaction to such a possibility, sometimes seen as a lighthearted jest and sometimes as ominous threat, and the fear of competition from new internet universities could pull all higher education together.

Global forces grow in their impact on organizations especially as a consequence of new technologies. Public health authorities now know that any new epidemic is but a half-day plane trip away. The Internet provides quick access to information around the globe as well as greatly enlarging mischief and problems that can come from the use of the technology to further the interests of pornographers or terrorists.

The Intertwining of Concepts

Technology which makes globalization possible means that individuals and organizations must harness the technology to maintain expertise and even minimum competencies. Continuing education must be ready to respond to changes that occur because of increased globalization. A war thousands of miles away can exacerbate tensions among community sectors and require service agencies to be prepared to deal with such tensions and even refugees. Violence in a high school in one state can promote copycat acts in hundreds of schools and call for the need of social service expertise that can work with such problems.

The only possible way that continuing education can effectively respond to such rapid change is to be able to, in turn, tap the capability of the Internet. Continuing education programs must learn to use the Internet to post files that contain needed expertise for practitioners. Even more helpful are programs that are interactive and permit users to be able to pose questions and individualize their need for information and training.

In the world of the internet, continuing education programs must have a presence that is more than just formal course offerings available in face-to-face and via computer (web based and asynchronous). The web is a market place of information that is continuously patrolled by individuals with information to sell. They provide basic information to draw inquiries, they answer questions, and they "sell" the further services to individuals and organizations with information (training) needs.

The CE programs that are the most effective will enter this marketplace of ideas and information. They will advertise their strengths and availability by helping solve user problems and by giving information. They will be ready to offer in depth training and information to meet identified needs via mechanisms they do not involve moving people to information. They will be available in an asynchronous mode.

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