The “Global Project”: Embedding global skill sets within management curriculum

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ABSTRACT

Global scale perspectives and global mobility skills are fast becoming crucial to effective business strategy and operations, decision making and an essential ingredient for professional effectiveness in contemporary business and management practice. As a result these perspectives and skills sets have become a key issue in the education and training of university graduates and professionals. The paper will explore trends in international mobility and international HRM; developments in business education; developments in the Australian context; global skill sets (global competencies, cultural literacy cultural intelligence, and global mobility skills); and the global learning framework before introducing the concept of the “Global Project”. The “Global Project” is presented as a pedagogic approach to embedding global skill sets specifically within management and business curriculum.

Keywords: management training/education/development, management courses/curriculum, skills development and training, cross-cultural training, cross-cultural competence, cross cultural management

INTRODUCTION

The borderless global economy provides the backstage for the future professional education and management of business discipline graduates and leaders. Global scale perspectives and global mobility skills are fast becoming crucial to effective business strategy and operations, decision making and an essential ingredient for effective communication on the global stage. Institutions of higher education have a responsibility to ensure business and management graduates are equipped with these skills so that the complexities of decision making and the management of organisations which participate on the global stage are better understood, and the actors better informed (Cameron 2008). This paper is a conceptual exploration of the current international and national trends that are creating an impetus for the inclusion of global scale perspectives and global mobility skills within higher education curriculae. Literature from the fields of IHRM, global leadership and graduate attributes are discussed along with international and national trends in business and management development and education.

The notion of the “Global Project” is introduced for undergraduate business and management education. The “Global Project” attempts to integrate studies from across core and elective units within a program and therefore aims at infused and holistic approaches to content specific issues and realities. The essence of the “Global Project” is the embedding of innovative and integrated global scale perspectives and
global mobility skills within undergraduate business and management education which acknowledges the increasingly global interconnected world.

**TRENDS IN INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY**

Since the 1990s significant global developments have been impacting the fields of business and management. These include the growth of multinationals in emerging markets, increased direct foreign investments, growing cross-border alliances (intensification of international development with a growing use of international joint ventures, cross border mergers and acquisitions) involving firms from emerging markets, trends in business process outsourcing and the present global financial crisis (GFC) (Budhwar 2009: para 1). All of this has combined to result in higher levels of international mobility with more middle management level technical and commercial employees being exposed to international partners and perhaps greater international responsibility (Edwards & Rees 2006).

GMAC Global Relocation Services in the UK has been conducting a Global Relocation Trends Survey (GRTS) since 1993. A report produced by this organization looked at the trends from the surveys over a ten year period (1993-2004) and found a downward trend in the number of assignments that exceed one year in length from 49% in 1997/8 to 11% in 2003 (GMAC Global Relocation Services 2004: 3). The report also found that over the history of the survey there has been an increase in participation by companies with small expatriate numbers (1 to 25) and a decrease in participation from medium sized and large expatriate staff populations. An interesting finding was related to the management of overseas assignments by companies. The report found there was a growing emphasis from companies at the corporate level on two types of preparation for global expansion. These include: determining business objectives and planning for long term careers paths. The rates for the former range from 77% to 90% and the rates for the latter being between 40% and 47% (GMAC Global Relocation Services 2004: 2). The results from the 2007 GRTS found that 35% of respondents believed that the overseas assignment had led to faster promotions, 29% believed it assisted them to find a new position within their own company more easily and 22% felt it assisted them in gaining a position outside the company (GMAC Global Relocation Services 2008: 14).

Overseas assignments are becoming significant in the long term career planning for business professionals
and the need for cross cultural training and cultural competence has increased. Not all business and management graduates will engage in physical international mobility however this does not diminish the need for global scale perspectives given the increasingly global nature of the world's economies. The expatriate pre-departure course in cross cultural training (CCT) is no longer satisfactory for the preparation of business and management graduates for the global stage and underestimates to a considerable degree the range and depth of skills required of the contemporary business graduate. The increasing interest in global skill sets associated with global competencies, cultural intelligence and literacy and global leadership skills is a testament to this realisation. These trends when combined with recent international developments in business and management education forms a strong impetus for the necessity of the substantial infusion of global scale perspectives and global skill sets with the higher education curriculae.

INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS FOR BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT EDUCATION

AACSB International

The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) International is a professional grouping of over 1,100 educational institutions, business and other organizations in 70 countries that are dedicated to the advancement of management education worldwide. The AACSB is the international accreditation body for institutions offering undergraduate, master and doctoral degrees in business and accounting through a set of Standards for business education. In 2005 AACSB mapped the impact of management education on individuals, organizations and society and came up with the following:

Management education:

- Provides graduates with a portfolio of competencies that facilitates meaningful contributions to organizations engaged in a variety of enterprises and pursuits
- Produces well-rounded graduates who can help to strengthen the connection between business and society
- Provides significant life-long economic benefits to graduates
- Produces cutting edge ideas and theories that help to advance organizational efficiency and effectiveness
- Provides a fertile environment for the development and incubation of new ideas
- Contributes directly to society by facilitating economic development and service and
• *Facilitates access to opportunity and wealth creation to an increasingly diverse population*  
  (AACSB International 2005).

AACSB International claims the actual impact of management education is incalculable, nonetheless the content, quality and pedagogies associated with business and management education do impact the effectiveness of international business and the management of human resources across increasingly diverse workforces. Business and management educators are responsible for developing relevant, responsible, high quality business and management graduates. A recent development through the UN Global Compact adds to the impetus for responsible management education.

**UN Global Compact**

The United Nations Global Compact is a framework for businesses that are committed to aligning their operations and strategies with ten universally accepted principles in the areas of human rights, labour, the environment and anti-corruption. It is the world's largest, global corporate citizenship initiative. The Global Compact’s primary aim is to demonstrate and develop the social legitimacy of business and markets. As part of this initiative academic participation is encouraged through two programs. One of these is the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME), launched at the 2007 Global Compact Leaders Summit in Geneva. The PRME provides an engagement framework for academic institutions to advance corporate social responsibility through the incorporation of universal values into curricula and research. All business schools and management-related academic institutions are invited to consider the adoption of these Principles for Responsible Management Education.

Despite the long standing role of the AACSB International in monitoring quality standards in business education world wide the UN Global Compact is signaling a new era in globally responsible business and management education. In addition to this is a growing need for global competencies with increased rates of global assignments, the rise of culturally diverse work teams and organizations and the impact of global supply chains. This paper will now explore developments in the Australian context that have added to this impetus for global scale perspectives and global skill sets, especially in terms of the education of future business and management professionals.
DEVELOPMENTS IN AUSTRALIA

The 2020 vision for Australia’s future business leaders

In 2006 the Innovation & Business Skills Australia (IBSA) commissioned The Boston Consulting Group (BCG) to undertake a study into how the role of Australia’s senior managers is likely to change between now and 2020. The purpose was to identify the skills and attributes needed of Australia’s managers and leaders, so that Australia’s international competitiveness continues to grow into the 21st century. The report is titled, *2020 Vision; the Manager of the 21st Century* (Naim & Nicholson 2006). The goal of the IBSA in commissioning this report was to ensure that organisations have a useful model on which to base their leadership and management development strategies over the coming years, so as to enable Australia’s leaders and managers and their organisations to continue to compete effectively with the best in the world. This report refers to the new global economic order:

*The combined effect of the economic rise of India and China, the massive continuing shift of industrial activity to low cost economies, and the emergence of the offshoring of services activities will have a major impact on the organization and structure of business globally. It will create more complex supply chains, more diverse workforces and new challenges for service delivery to both external and internal customers. The world in which executives will operate in future will be more complex and less familiar* (Naim & Nicholson 2006: 12).

The report predicts that Australian executives will need to increase their focus on markets outside Australia and they will travel more and spend more time outside Australia as their careers progress. They will need to take the building of language and inter-cultural skills more seriously as well as to increase their understanding of offshoring, diverse workforces and supply chain management. ‘The age of the generalist manager is coming to an end. In the changing workplace, executives will need to demonstrate deep industry and/or functional expertise as well as advanced communication and team building skills’ (Naim & Nicholson 2006: 24).

The Report points to lessons for educators to ensure the next generation of managers are able to operate in a dynamic and global environment. Key recommendations are as follows:
Maximise Opportunities in a Changing World

- Maintain an international perspective and be continual learners
- Be flexible and able to move confidently between different global markets and cultures

Manage Diversity in a Changing Workplace

- Gain insights into the motivations of a diverse workforce, and be creative in designing the right incentives to attract and retain talented staff


The Report argues the new skill sets needed for tomorrow’s managers and executives will require a new type of executive education that includes interpersonal and intercultural skills.

Graduate Attribute Frameworks

The higher education sector in Australia is utilising a graduate attributes framework to guide the development of generic graduate skill sets. Graduate attributes, as conceptualised in the Australian higher education sector, originated through the West Review in 1998, which provided a framework of generic attributes. The graduate attributes are defined as, ‘the qualities, skills and understandings a university community agrees its students should develop during their time with the university’ (DEST 2002: 12).

All Australian universities have now developed their policies and specific generic graduate attributes. It is interesting to note that some Australian universities are including graduate attributes which include additional skills with broader social commitments such as social justice (Murdoch University), ethical practice and social responsibility (Monash University) and academic excellence (University of Melbourne). What is of most interest to this discussion is that some universities have identified global skills. The University of New England has a graduate attribute related to global perspectives and the University of Wollongong has an attribute that lists the appreciation and valuing of cultural and intellectual diversity and the ability to function in a multicultural or global environment (BIHECC & AiG 2007: 12). The University of Sydney has recently revised its generic graduate attributes policy and attributes framework. This involves a configuration of three overarching graduate attributes: Scholarship, Lifelong Learning, and Global Citizenship – which reflect the research intensive nature of the University, its scholarly values in relation to research-led teaching, and the place of its graduates in a global society.
Graduate attribute frameworks are becoming increasingly important in the international context since the signing of the Bologna Process. The Bologna Process involves 45 European countries undertaking a series of reforms intended to create an integrated European higher education area by 2010. Signatories to the agreement have agreed to work towards greater consistency in areas such as degree structures, credit transfer and quality assurance systems (DEST 2002: 1). Australia’s response to the Bologna Process is prefaced by the following note by the then Minister of Education Science and Training, ‘It will have important implications for Australian higher education providers as we work to enhance our existing success and reputation as a provider of world-class education to both domestic and international students [and to]…harmonise approaches to facilitate the movement of an increasingly mobile skilled workforce’ (DEST 2002: 1).

In March 2008, the Australian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education Minister the Hon. Julia Gillard MP, initiated a review of Australian higher education sector to examine and report on the future direction and options for reform of the higher education sector. This resulted in the Review of Australian Higher Education Final Report December 2008 (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent & Scales 2008). The report noted the need for Australia’s higher education sector to prepare students for the global workforce:

There is growing demand from employers for tertiary qualifications with a strong international component – both from the perspective of the curriculum content and through exposure to different cultures to develop intercultural and language skills and competencies ... Knowledge of other cultures and their languages is an essential life skill for future graduates if they are to engage effectively in global professional practice...As well, Australian students need more and better opportunities to go abroad on study programs, or to acquire international experience through internships or volunteering opportunities related to their education programs and to their future employability and productivity (Bradley et al., 2008: 104).

The internationalization of higher education and the international mobility of higher education students and graduates as highly skilled migrants have been of particular interest to the OECD (2001; 2009).

SKILL SETS FOR GLOBAL MOBILITY

There is a growing need for business managers to have a wide range of cultural skill sets in today’s global environment characterised by new and emerging markets, economies and trading partners. Bennett and
Bennett (2004:149) defined intercultural competence as ‘the ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations and to relate appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts’. Professional effectiveness on the global stage is not something that can be developed quickly through an expatriate placement. It requires not only experiential learning and emersion but also deep and sustained learning. The fostering of intercultural competence for today’s business leaders ‘is vital at a micro level and will help advance the leadership process at a macro level for many years to come’ (Moodian 2009:5).

Global competencies, intercultural communication and effectiveness, cultural intelligence, cultural literacy and global leadership skills are becoming common terms in the fields of international business and IHRM. Thomas and Inkson (2004) have coined the notion of cultural intelligence which relates to global management and cross cultural relations in global business practices. Perkins and Shortland have compiled an extensive list of international competencies for executives (Perkins & Shortland 2007). Espirit Global Learning has developed twenty strategies for successful cross-cultural interaction. These strategies reflect the global mindset and cultural literacies needed to build ‘…effective relationships with diverse employees, collaborative alliances with suppliers, and strong connections with customers’ (Espirit Global Learning n.d.).

Schneider and Barsoux (1997) identified a number of competencies required for managing diversity abroad and at home. These include:

- Interpersonal (relationship) skills
- Linguistic ability
- Motivation to live abroad (cultural curiosity)
- Tolerance of uncertainty and ambiguity
- Flexibility
- Patience and respect
- Cultural empathy
- Strong senses of self
- Sense of humour

Global leadership is a relatively recent and emergent field of inquiry which draws upon multidisciplinary theoretical frames (Osland 2008: 18). A large and prominent study in the area of global leadership skills is the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) Research Project. GLOBE is a:
...multi-phase, multi-method project in which investigators spanning the world are examining the inter-relationships between societal culture, organizational culture, and organizational leadership. Approximately, one hundred seventy social scientists and management scholars from 61 cultures/countries representing all major regions throughout the world are engaged in this long-term programmatic series of cross-cultural leadership studies (GLOBE Foundation 2008).

The Thunderbird School of Management has developed a research programme around the concept of the global mindset. This has involved the design of the Thunderbird Global Mindset Inventory (TGMI). This is an online psychometric tool that, as at 1 January 2009, has a database of 5000 completed inventories. A global mindset is defined as:

...the ability to influence individuals, teams, organizations, and systems that are different from you and your own... Individuals with a high stock of Global Mindset can navigate cross-cultural issues, and understand the nuances of global business. They understand the complexity associated with global integration, know how to manage global supply chain relationships, are aware of political and economic influences, and understand global competitors and customers (Thunderbird School of Global Management 2009).

The Global Mindset Inventory measures the social, psychological and intellectual attributes that allow successful global managers to lead diverse individuals, teams and organizations. The Global Mindset has three crucial components: intellectual capital, psychological capital and social capital:

- **Intellectual Capital**: knowledge of global organization, industry, value networks and cultural complexities
- **Psychological Capital**: passion, excitement, respect, flexibility and openness toward other cultures
- **Social Capital**: ability to build sustainable, trusting relationships with others from diverse parts of the world

(Thunderbird School of Global Management 2009).

Mendenhall and Osland’s (2002) literature review found fifty-six global leadership competencies and concluded that global leadership is a multidimensional construct with a least six broad categories of competence:

1. Cross-cultural relationship skills
2. Traits
3. Global business expertise
4. Global organizing expertise  
5. Cognitive orientation  
6. Visioning

This focus on global competencies has been the basis for many training and development interventions within IHRM through pre-departure training programs, relocation assistance and executive development programs. Morris and Robbie (2001) conducted a meta-analysis on the effects of cross-cultural training literature and noted that traditional training methods underestimate the complexity of business life on the global stage where this particular stage involves complex assignments across multiple cultural contexts over time and space.

**GLOBAL LEARNING**

There have also been some interesting developments in the field of global learning in recent years with universities taking much greater interest in this aspect of professional education. Melbourne University in Australia conducted a seminar in 2006 titled ‘Defining and Developing Global Graduate Attributes’. RMIT University, also in Australia hosted the inaugural conference for ‘Partnerships for World Graduates’ in 2007. The theme for the 5th International Conference on Intercultural Communication Competence held in Kansas, USA in 2008 was: ‘Global Learning: Educating the World Citizen’.

Professor Rimmington and associates from the Office of Global Learning at Wichita State University in the United States have been developing a model to assist in developing global learning based on the “cage” model of communication by Mackay. This model has been tested in the field with one undergraduate and two graduate courses (Rimmington, Gibson, Gibson, & Alagic 2004). Rimmington, O'Reilly, Gibson & Gordon (2003) have looked at assessment methods for global learning and define global learning as;

> ...the combination of global reach, using modern communications technologies, with global perspectives, achieved through interaction of learners living in diverse geographic locations with different cultural backgrounds, to produce the global graduate. This graduate exhibits the requisite communication and team work skills for successfully achieving learning outcomes in a global context plus the attributes required by accreditation bodies in their chosen program.

Macquarie University in Australia has a Global Leadership Program (GLP) that although not an official
award course it is published on the student’s academic transcript upon fulfilling the program requirements. The GLP allows students to enhance their degrees by undertaking the program through core and elective colloquia. These are some of the recent educational and pedagogic developments emerging around global competencies and mobility skills within the higher education sector in Australia and overseas.

THE “GLOBAL PROJECT”

This paper proposes a global scale approach to the design, conduct and delivery of business and management education. Central to this global scale approach is the notion of the “Global Project”. The “Global Project” is a concept that is integrated and weaved across the program of study commencing with core units and extending into business and management majors (HRM, marketing, accounting and finance). The “Global Project” is a concept that combines both formative and summative assessment across core and major units of a program of study and would stand alongside individual unit content assessment in a supplementary and complimentary relationship. The “Global Project” could be a combination of pedagogic process and assessment outcome and could involve a wide range of innovative activities and processes. For example, internships, work integrated learning (WIL), service learning, attendance at a series of colloquia, study abroad, virtual international teams, projects with international students and International Student associations and multicultural organisations, global perspective projects and a variety of more traditional assessment practices aimed at fostering global-scale perspectives. This could be further enhanced through student and academic exchanges and input to the content and delivery of such programmes from culturally diverse stakeholders. Australian universities with overseas partners could begin to create and develop innovative learning spaces for the “global project”.

The “Global Project” needs to go hand in hand with an internationalised curriculum to combat the tendency towards ethnocentric treatment of business and management studies. A global scale perspective would be needed in all curriculum content, design and delivery. This would involve greater use of a wide range of culturally diverse research and literature from emerging economies as well as, established economies. Critical management perspectives would need to be central to the philosophy underlying the curriculum, whereby the dominant cultural perspectives of business and management disciplines are open to critical debate.
Fundamental change would need to occur before the notion of the “Global Project” could be effectively implemented. Major philosophical and structural change would be required to enable a reframing from traditional approaches to business and management education to a truly internationalised curriculum that embeds the global scale interconnections of business and management practices. These practices cover a myriad of global scale contexts and dimensions (local, regional, national and international). As those of us involved in business and management disciplines are aware, the praxis of managing change is not without its challenges. Nonetheless, a broad institutional impetus for such change could come from the desire and need to become accredited with the AACSB and/or signing up to the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME). A source of potential resistance may come from challenges to disciplinary identity (Kraus and Sultana 2008) as the “Global Project” by its nature requires a holistic perspective that integrates business and management fields across a range of global scale contexts and dimensions.

CONCLUSION

The developments reported in this paper, along with the changing nature of international mobility in an increasingly globalised economy is signaling a new era in the education and development of future business and management leaders. The United Nations Global Compact and related Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME), the Bologna Process and the review of the Australian higher education are sending signals to business and management educators about the role they play in producing high quality, globally competent business professionals for the world stage. As a result, there is growing impetus and an emerging body of literature related to global skill sets for the global stage. The challenge for business and management educators is to embed these skill sets within the core business and management units of study across the range of business and management discipline fields. This would need to be accompanied by pedagogic approaches for developing global mindsets and requires a combination of fresh, innovative, diverse, multi-dimensional, experiential and transformational activities that exposure undergraduates to meaningful and holistic global learning experiences (Oddou & Mendenhall 2008). Most importantly, these experiences need to go ‘beyond ethnocentric approaches to intercultural competence’ (Lamont Hill 2009: 282). The concept of the “Global Project” has been introduced as one such approach.
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