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CREATING THE GLOBAL LEARNING ORGANIZATION (GLO)

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Creating the Global Learning Organization (GLO) is an action research model to assist U.S.-based corporations in creating an organizational culture that is globally inclusive in theory and practice at all levels. It is based on the principles of Organization Development (OD) (including learning organizations), Human Resource Management, and change theory to move the corporation from an ethnocentric a geocentric corporate world view in all its business and people practices, policies, procedures, and technologies

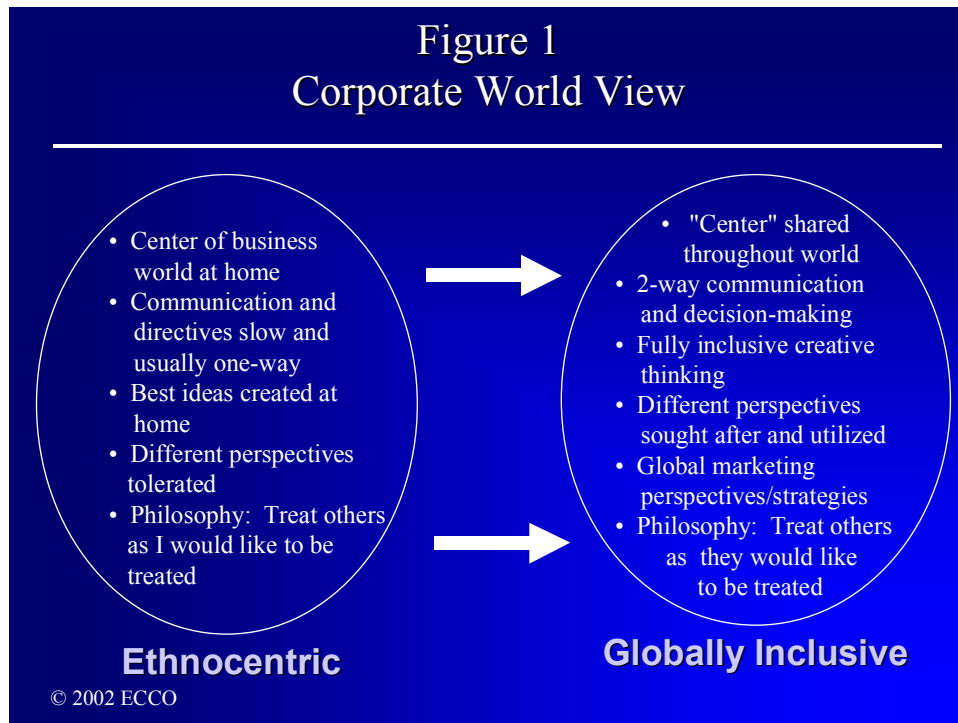
With the fast-paced global changes facing the corporate sector and increased competition in the marketplace, globalization and diversity issues are ever more crucial to the survival and success of business organizations. Many U.S. businesses are just beginning to understand the importance of these global challenges. However, few have truly embraced globalization to the extent of creating a corporate-wide culture that is globally inclusive in practice and theory at all levels.

Problem Statement

Only 43% of service companies responding to a survey conducted by A.T. Kearney Executive Search indicated that they have a formal globalization/diversity process in place, while 32% indicated that they had no immediate plans to initiate such a process (Jarvis, 1997). The roots of corporate culture are so deeply embedded in many U.S.-based companies that promoting change on global issues is difficult and often resented or challenged by well-meaning employees.

The business research question is, How does a U S.-based business create an organizational culture that is globally inclusive in theory and practice at all levels? One of

the greatest challenges for U.S. transnational corporations is shifting a long-time corporate paradigm from an ethnocentric worldview to a geocentric one (Heenan & Perlmutter, 1979).



Global Learning Organization

Lodge (1995) described globalization as a process that is both technological and human. Global information and communication foster the linkage of global agents--multinational corporations--while the globalization process is pulled by customer desires and pushed by talented corporate managers with global managing skills.

Friedman (2000) provided this definition:

Globalization...is the inexorable integration of markets, nation-states and technologies to a degree never witnessed before--in a way that is enabling individuals, corporations and nation-states to reach around the world farther, faster, deeper and cheaper than ever before, and in a way that is enabling the world

to reach into individuals, corporations and nation-states farther, faster, deeper, cheaper than ever before. (p. 9)

More often, this word simply means doing business abroad. Rhinesmith (1996), however, pointed out that doing business abroad is only the first step instead of the complete story. To be global, a company must also create “a corporate culture and value system that allow it to move its resources anywhere in the world to achieve the greatest competitive advantage. ... Being global requires a mindset and skills that extend far beyond the current scope of most organizations” (p. 5). Rhinesmith emphasized the importance of people whose global mindset and behavioral change are largely what globalization is about. For many, developing the right people is what “thinking globally” really means (Donlon, Darwent, Cabral, & Grub, 1996).

Friedman (2000) viewed globalization as "not simply a trend or a fad but is, rather, an international system." He described it as the system that has replaced the old Cold War system. The new system, according to Friedman, has "its own rules and logic" that "directly or indirectly influence the politics, environment, geopolitics, and economics of virtually every country in the world" (p. ix).

The Global Learning Organization (GLO) is a result of a proactive process used to transform corporate culture at all levels to a geocentric and globally-inclusive organization. This process and initiative address critical global diversity and change issues meant to attract and retain the best employees; gain a marketing advantage through enhancing customer service, innovation, and awareness of global and domestic diversity issues; increase employee creativity, quality, teamwork, and innovation; reduce costs

associated with marginalization of employees and lower productivity; and obtain buy-in at all levels for corporate global diversity and change efforts.

Globally inclusive organizational cultures are characterized by:

- Executives who recognize that they are responsible for setting the organizational climate.
- Systems and procedures which are constantly examined to ensure that they support diversity, creativity, and global thinking.
- Recruitment, promotion, and employee development processes that are based on input from a variety of sources and are closely monitored to ensure that they are consistent with the organization's global philosophy.
- The maintenance of cultural awareness as a clear and consistent organizational priority.

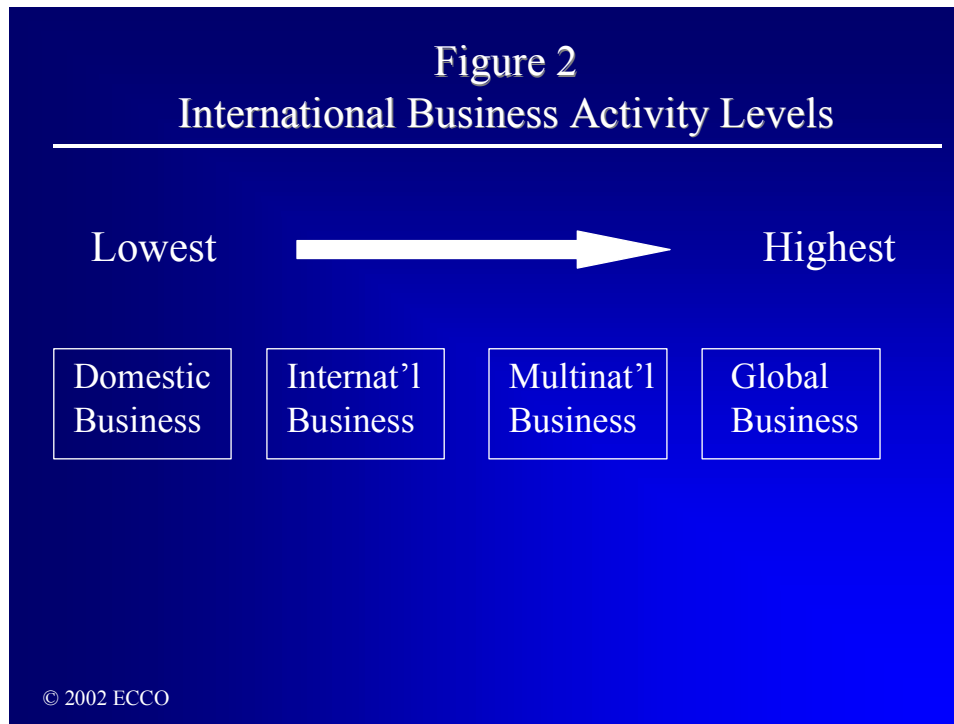
The first step in the process of transforming organizations into GLOs is creating in the workforce an understanding of the need for change (Bennis, Benne, & Chin, 1985). This buy-in to the need to change must be based upon the concept of learner readiness while instilling in all functions and levels of the organization the pressing and strategic need to create new cultural roots and a globally-conscious mindset.

An attitudinal change typically precedes actual organizational change. A positive diversity-related attitude must be present prior to a behavior change because it demonstrates an individual's degree of readiness to behave in a certain manner toward co-workers or customers who are different (Henderson, 1994). Efforts to bring about real change without employee input and buy-in, however, can and often do result in strong

resistance. Providing employees with the opportunity for input facilitates the attitudinal change that is the foundation for a geocentric focus.

Resistance is also minimized when the change process utilizes the principles of Organization Development (OD) (Burke, 1982; Rothwell, Sullivan, & McLean, 1995), Human Resource Management (HRM), and the Learning Organization (Kline & Saunders, 1993). The GLO model proposed in this paper should assist businesses in creating and sustaining structures, practices, policies, and values that will imbue the concepts of globalization and multiculturalism throughout the organization. It will also engage the business in a strategic planning process in creating and maintaining a globally-inclusive organizational culture (O'Hara-Devereaux & Johansen, 1994; Rhinesmith, 1993; Trompenaars, 1993).

While the model is intended to be general in scope, it is also designed to be modified for specific application to an individual business. Its focus is on process and the art of becoming. A systems approach with synergistic benefits is intended to tailor the model to needs of specific companies and even within different operations in different countries and cultures. No single OD intervention is intended. Rather, the model focuses on a strategic process that encompasses multiple interventions that may change over time as additional issues and problems emerge. Likewise, the model's attempt to create a geocentric organizational culture is not meant to fit each specific difference of the various cultural dimensions of different countries. The phrase, "think globally, act locally," is apt (Kanter, 1995). Each company must determine on a continuum what its desired business activity should be and adapt the model to its business plan.



The concept of the learning organization was popularized by Senge (1990). Nevis, DeBella, and Gould (1995) described the learning organization as "an organization that has woven a continuous and enhanced capacity to learn, adapt and change into its culture. Its values, policies, practices, systems and structures support and accelerate learning for all employees" (p. 73). A long list of the characteristics of a learning organization are shown in Marquardt and Reynolds (1994), and includes, among others:

...Embraces change; encourages managers to be coaches, mentors, and facilitators of learning; has a culture of feedback and disclosure; has a holistic, systematic view of the organization and its systems, processes, and relationships; has shared organizationwide vision, purpose, and values; ...has systems for sharing learning and using it in the business; ...provides frequent opportunities to learn from experience; ...spreads trust throughout the organization; strives for continuous improvement; ...views the unexpected as an opportunity to learn. (p. 23)

These are the conditions that are essential for a global learning organization, as well as a domestic one. The assumption of the model is that the cyclical, continuous improvement principles of learning organizations, consistent with the values of the Action Research Model of Organization Development, are critical for the long-term success of an organization that is seeking to be global.

It is important to view the model presented here as a process model, not a blueprint for the creation of a geocentric organization. Use of the *process* outlined in the model will help each organization create its own blueprint; one that is fully customized to its specific needs. While no two blueprints will be identical, at the heart of each will be an organization that is truly globally inclusive. At its most basic, the model is intended to change the roots of organizational culture by affecting the very heart and emotional core of the corporation and its people. By placing emphasis on process and the affective dimensions of organizational culture, the model produces a transformation of the existing culture. It does require that the organization accept thought processes and paradigms that are consistent with Organization Development.

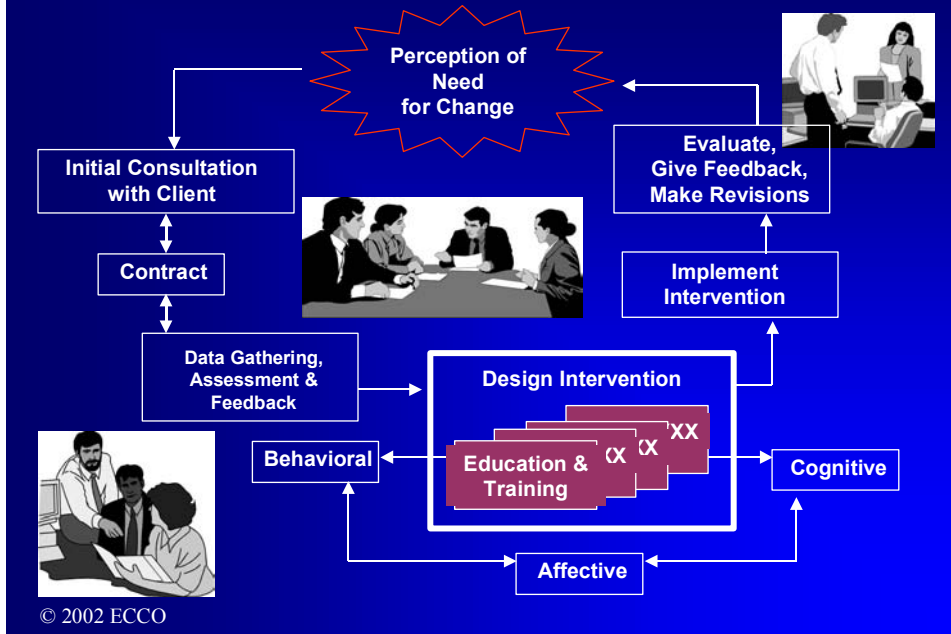
Model Description

The full model, displayed below in Figures 3 and 4, targets the current organizational culture, including all systems, such as HR practices, business strategies, technology functions, marketing strategies, and R&D practices, and all employees. As all are targets of the change, all can also be agents of change.

Figure 3 - Global Learning Organization (GLO) Model



Figure 4 - Organization Development Toward Creating the G.L.O.



Implementing culture change is an on-going process guided by strategies that are flexible and holistic that allow leadership to factor in external and internal dynamics that affect the marketplace and the business. This process approach may appear to be too amorphous for many bottom-line managers but, when founded securely upon sound theories and principles, can provide a framework to allay such fears.

The following are tenets within which the globally inclusive GLO change process is conducted:

- Create change buy-in and enrolment at all levels
- Provide effective leadership modeling and articulation of global vision
- Conduct culture audit, qualitative and quantitative, for designing OD interventions
- Create ownership of OD change interventions at all levels and functions
- Provide extensive team-building and empowerment opportunities
- Focus on personal and organizational work at the cognitive, affective, and behavioral levels
- Design training and education processes around learner readiness
- Build accountabilities for globalization into employee and executive performance
- Link globalization efforts with all other corporate initiatives
- Provide measurement for progress around OD change efforts
- Provide challenge and support for all employees.

These tenets should be considered when implementing the GLO model.

Implementation of concepts is dependent on the specific organization and a number of

variables including leadership commitment, other corporate initiatives in place, the level of globalization achieved to date, the organization's track record around diversity/globalization work, economic considerations, and organizational resources.

Implications for Human Resource Development

When McLean and McLean (2000) explored definitions of HRD from around the world, several differences were found within countries and between countries. The definitions collected varied according to three dimensions: scope of activities included in the definition, intended audience for development, and the intended benefactors of the outcomes of development. Factors influencing the definitions included the country's economy, government and legislative roles, and the influence of other countries through the impact of multinational companies, students studying HRD in other countries, and the predominance of the English literature coming from the United States, the United Kingdom, and, recently, India. The authors provided the following definition as an attempt to begin exploring a global definition for HRD:

Human Resource Development is any process or activity that, either initially or over the long-term, has the potential to develop adults' work-based knowledge, expertise, productivity, and satisfaction, whether for personal or group/team gain, or for the benefit of an organization, community, nation, or, ultimately, the whole of humanity.

This attempt does not, however, negate the ambiguity associated with trying to create a single definition of HRD, especially across multiple cultures (Mankin, 2001; McLean, 2000). What is also clear, regardless of the definition referenced, is that the root of HRD is primarily education.

The OD and training implications of the GLO model, within this context, have already been articulated in part. In addition, management development is key to the success of the GLO. One of the most difficult aspects of change--both interculturally as well as in the direction of a learning organization--is for management to change the paradigms in which it is accustomed to operating. To develop an organization that holds to the tenets outlined above, managers will need to have significant, perhaps life-changing, events. They need positive international and cross-cultural experiences, including worldwide travel. Executive and management coaches who understand the components of a GLO will be needed to help organizational leaders to develop, articulate, and implement the core tenets necessary for a GLO. Assignments to other parts of the world can be extremely beneficial, but only if the assignment is planful, the manager has an opportunity to reflect on the experience with others, and the organization plans for meaningful and productive repatriation. As specified in the tenets, however, the responsibility for globalization does not lie solely on the managers. Employees need similar positive experiences with international and cross-cultural situations.

Learning to work in cross-cultural, and often virtual, teams is also critical. Such training will include learning what makes teams more effective, as well as team building. Modeling of appropriate team facilitation will be essential, and most teams will also require coaching, as team members develop appropriate team behaviors and learn team-based roles. Cross-cultural conflict management skills will also be needed and must be developed.

Some employees will have the opportunity for assignment in other parts of the world. HRD, and management, must take these assignments more seriously than has

typically been the case. Employees and their families will need extensive pre-departure preparation, on-site support, and meaningful repatriation, including utilization of the newly developed globalization understandings and skills.

A culture of continuous improvement must exist for the transformation to move smoothly and for employees to feel that they have the freedom to suggest needed improvements in the globalization process and that they will be rewarded for such behavior. HRD will also need to teach both feedback seeking and feedback receiving skills among all employees. Communication skills, particularly within cross-cultural settings, will need to be developed.

The concept of cyclical design for change undergirds continuous improvement, as exemplified in the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) Cycle. This is similar to the cyclical nature of the action research model built into the Organization Development model. Readiness for change can be enhanced through an understanding of the cyclical nature of change. Another cycle that is critical for training is the application of the basic ADDIE (Analyze-Design-Develop-Implement-Evaluate). While this concept is standard within training departments, the first and last steps of the cycle are often omitted. For successful implementation of the GLO, the complete ADDIE cycle must be used--including the Analysis and Evaluation steps, the two steps often overlooked by trainers..

The Research Task

As with any model, the research task addresses the validity, appropriateness, completeness, and practicality of implementing the model. Among other approaches that could be used, one approach would be the use of action research within an organizational

case study (or multiple case studies) context. Specifically, the questions that need to be addressed by an organization that is attempting to develop a GLO are:

- What are the major problems encountered in attempting to implement the model?
- What are the barriers within the organization's culture that hinder implementation?
- What modifications are needed in the model (additions, omissions and changes)?
- Does the model work in certain types of organizations better than others, e.g., structure, size, industry, locations, pre-existing culture?
- Is it possible to change an organization that is ethnocentric to one that is geocentric or one that does not affirm globalization to one that does?
- What are the factors present within the culture that support these changes if they do occur?
- The model was created with U.S. organizations in view. How should the model be revised if the company is headquartered in some other country? What is the impact of various cultural contexts on the implementation of the model? Will the model need to be modified based on the countries in which the organization does business?

Obviously, this is not a complete list of questions to be explored, nor will it be possible to answer all (or even many) of these questions through one research study. However, using the action research approach in combination with organizational case studies will allow insights related to these questions (and more) over a period of time. It will take a concerted research focus on behalf of those charged with implementing the changes to add to the theory and knowledge about the usefulness of this model and the many theoretical constructs that serve as its foundation.

Summary

The ultimate goal of any global OD change process is to infuse all members of an organization with such respect for globalization that an organizational culture is created in which all elements of diversity exist and are expressed in a natural and sustaining process. In effect, the process becomes second nature to the organization, and overt OD global interventions are constantly being requested and implemented at all levels of the organization. The organization, at that point, will have become a Global Learning Organization (GLO).

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