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### **Globality and Futurity: Innovation Frameworks for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Training**

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Of all the descriptors that might be applied to the initial decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, surely that of fierce competition will be at the top of the list. Moreover, today's hyper-competitive economy is historically unprecedented. Survival has replaced growth as the first order of business. But why now? What is so special and urgent about the current and near term?

Companies are beset. Everything is a challenge. Nothing is assured. Unexpectedly, the sources of competition not only are worldwide but also accompanied by often unbridgeable wage and price differentials. Nor is the traditional consolation of superior domestic quality available. Toyota is passing GM; and from US plants! Indeed, the proverbial enemy is no longer outside but inside the gates. Superior American technology and process have not only been copied abroad but also exported there by our own American multi-nationals. Indeed, outsourcing has reached the point where it has spawned a new consulting American enterprise – that of human resources outsourcing (HRO).

The impacts are dramatic. The long range has been replaced by contingency plans. We are backing into the future. We are involved in piece-meal tradeoffs to survive. We downsize incessantly. Employees are asked to take salary cuts to offset global wage differentials. Pension support is being abandoned and replaced by federal bail-outs. In essence, what is taking place is an economic version and replay of all the ecological trade-offs in the past. Workers are now in the same category as air or water. They are grist for the mill of survival. The only difference is that this time the tragedy of the commons is not abstract and limited to Nature but applies directly to Nurture itself. The immediate impacts of this new situation are loss of employee loyalty, talent shortages, and an obsession with innovation. Although all are symptomatic of a radical divide, the last one drives home and perhaps best defines our current dilemma as well as points to some ways out.

#### **WHAT'S NEW?**

Not surprisingly the literature about innovation is growing at an almost exponential rate. Indeed, in volume and dominance it is matched only by its training versions. But all the current analyses of innovation are surprisingly familiar. Innovation is essentially defined as the production of the new. The

most recent advocates apply it to the behaviors of organizational cultures. But what defines the new? Is there only one kind? And is the new enough to be a magic bullet?

Because training interventions on behalf of innovation have to be targeted, the new needs definition. But innovation is not singular. It exhibits differences not only of degree but also of kind. Its basic and most familiar version is the incremental. The Japanese, schooled in Deming, are particularly adept at such continuous improvements. Technology itself obsessively links novelty to obsolescence. All the current enhancements of cell phones are in the final analysis only add-ons. But when cell phones first appeared they exhibited a different version of innovation – they were disruptively new. They signaled such a totally new version of communication that they changed the market itself. Many abandoned their land lines altogether. Communications became totally mobile. Ties to local connections were no longer necessary. In short, innovation was not only newly disruptive but also now defined by its being world-wide – sometimes in origins but always in application. In other words, one test of the innovatively new is that it is not only a product of but also defines the range of a global market.

Disruption has a twin – discontinuity. Different in both degree and kind, it is ahead of its time. It has future power. It is a time leap or a time warp. Discovered it has the power to grant current businesses new leases on life. Neglected it can be a death blow. All exhortations to cutting edge advantage or thinking outside the box are really calls for finding next generation products and services. They are in fact time creations and more resemble science fiction scenarios than strategic planning projections.

Thus, three versions of the new operate. The incremental alters the market, the disruptive creates new markets, and the discontinuous leaps ahead to future markets. Past-oriented companies constantly benchmark and define the new as the incremental. Present-directed companies focus on what is newly emerging and sufficiently different to disrupt the current market and position themselves accordingly. Future-driven companies seek to be ahead of existing markets and identify what in effect will either put them out of business or eliminate their competitors; and thereby grant the temporary illusion of a monopoly. Which one to pursue? The augment here is to embrace not only all three, but also the two frameworks that in fact preside over their emergence.

To survive and to flourish, company cultures and training agendas have to exist at the intersection of globality and futures. These are the new contexts for innovation. But embedding innovation in globality requires going beyond conventional factoring in of international markets, stationing representatives abroad or even establishing plants or offices there. It involves a total policy shift and repositioning.

Current company policy follows national policy. Both pursue national advantage. Both brand their operations with the signage of “Made in the USA.” Basically they are self-directed and self-benefiting, gain is unidirectional. The company and the country remain at the center. Globality is peripheral and serves only as its operational market arena. But the new nature of world-wide competition requires placing globality at the center. Such repositioning immediately defines exchange as multiply reciprocal. It is the proverbial win-win, plus one more win. Three players benefit: initiators, receivers and the interdependent global context. Indeed, the sign of a true global policy is that it redefines the bottom line as interoperable gain-sharing.

To date, such a global perspective has largely been advanced by the green movement. It places Nature at the center and argues for respecting its laws of design and conservation. It calls for enlightened self-interest and stewardship: the need to husband limited ecological resources or they will not be around very long to husband us. To enlist corporate support, the notion of sustainable or green products and processes has been introduced. And many companies have routinely added ecological considerations to

the development of the new and innovative. But in many instances it remains an add-on to satisfy or pacify EPA requirements. Ecology remains an object not a subject, a factor not a partner.

## **CHARLES DARWIN & ADAM SMITH**

What is missing is the fusing of competitions: Darwin with Adam Smith, evolution with capitalism, survival of the fittest with survival of the most innovative. Nature as a design model has value only when it is paired with that of economic evolution. Happily, such interoperability is to be found in the dynamics of current globality. The historical convergence of ecology and economics has created such a new level and scale of competition that only an equally comprehensive global framework has the ability to accommodate and hopefully integrate all into a new whole.

But putting globality in the driver's seat is not easy. It is not a familiar or comfortable operating assumption. The customary notion is that reality is located here not abroad; it is self-possessed not shared. The world is a stage not a player. To build a global case, its impacts have to be tallied and a case made. The slogan – “Think globally, act locally” – needs the alignment of details. Specifically, global frameworks of all existing operations have to be developed and applied as overlays. Spelling out in detail the impacts on company operations and its workforce would establish the credibility of globality as the dominant driver of convergence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The training version requires a total review of all programs to determine the extent to which they support a global perspective. Not everything need be scrapped. Cross cultural communications and leadership styles may with adjustment be retained. But all must display the new content of globality by spelling out how it affects and colors every aspect of company operations. Indeed, all training needs to supplement its e-designation with a g-prefix. The net result is the gradual emergence of a new collective company identity now guided by new global vision-mission statements.

There now remains including the other partner – futures. Happily, just as all globalists have also to be ecologists so they also must be futurists. It has to be that way because extrapolation and projection are the allies of both Nature and History. Together they function as early warning and/or opportunity systems. They alert us to abysses ahead of time to prevent demise or collapse. But “futures” does not just buy time for turnaround. It also is a problem solver in its own right, often an innovative one.

Futurity focuses on the disruptive and discontinuous. It involves time travel. Thinking out of the box is really thinking beyond the limits of time and space. It requires imagining new companies and countries with little or no previous baggage approaching challenges with new assumptions and beginning with the state of the art. It requires simulating new starts, with no predetermined preconceptions of limits or constraints. Not only is the entire world available for such reflection but all outer space and depths of the oceans. World-class design would carry new meaning – that of global testing and application.

## **1 + 1 = 3**

The net result is that globality and futurity define and extend each other. Together, they generate the math of one plus one equals three. The only way to save the world is to embrace and respect its totality; the only way to preserve the future is to operate as its ally; and the only way to stir innovation is to require it to be worldwide and ahead of its time. That way competition serves a double-edged sword, expanding the arena and time-lines of operations, and challenging innovation to perform newly in its new frameworks.

Such aspirational training goals may be the only way fierce competition can be met and managed; and innovation stirred to new levels of mastery. The training goal is thus to persuade every employee to

be a globalist and a futurist: to be not only a national but a global citizen, no longer time and space bound; and to supplement the declaration of independence with a declaration of interdependence.

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**POINTS FOR THE CLASSROOM** (send comments to [forum@futuretakes.org](mailto:forum@futuretakes.org)):

- *The article states that employees have become “grist for the mill.” This has potential implications for human life and dignity. Is there a countertrend?*
- *As the article notes, some employees are asked to take salary cuts to offset global wage differentials. Will the differentials close or widen, and why?*
- *Is there a general trend toward innovation that is incremental – or toward innovation that is radical – and why? Or will incremental innovation characterize some industries and radical innovation characterize others?*
- *Will new utility functions (used in economics) characterize the different levels of innovation and investment therein?*
- *The article proposes a training goal of persuading every employee to be not only a national but also a global citizen. What will be the primary sources of one’s identity in 2025 – humanity, one’s nation-state, one’s occupation or profession, one’s socioeconomic group, or one’s “tribe” (ethnicity)?*