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JOURNEYS THROUGH THE ECOLOGICAL NICHE

An Introduction to and Overview of the Textbook

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In the 21st century, leadership success may be unattainable without intercultural competence. Concurrently, in today's global environment, contemporary leaders must display a keen ability to interact effectively with individuals of different cultures. This book specifically focuses on two principal aspects of leadership and cross-cultural competence. First, the text will focus on the understanding of the role of cultural diversity and intercultural issues in the modern workplace. Second, the text will build on this understanding to demonstrate how cultural diversity can be used as a tool to build successful organizations. Too often it seems as if issues of diversity are viewed as a liability within organizations. However, as stated so eloquently in the introductory commentary, an ability to embrace and adapt to diversity is one that will pay dividends for the leaders of today.

In recent times, there have been tremendous advancements in both societal and managerial responses to cultural diversity. For example, in *Managing Diversity*, Gardenswartz and Rowe (1998) explain that

affirmative action alone is not an adequate management philosophy. Instead, there is now a three-part approach that includes affirmative action, the valuing of differences, and the managing of diversity. In *Basic Concepts of Intercultural Communication*, Bennett (1998) counters the Golden Rule of treating another as one would want to be treated with the intercultural philosophy in which differences are not minimized and one who is truly interculturally competent is able to practice mutual adaptation and integration within various cultural settings.

To apply this to organizational studies, take an example such as the process of employee engagement. Perhaps the most critical element of the success of a high-performing organization is the level of engagement among the organization's employees. It goes without saying that a leadership commitment to empowerment and an embracing of concepts such as equifinality will result in an increase in individual motivation on a micro level and an engaged workforce on a macro level, ultimately positively affecting bottom-line results (Tubbs, 2006). Those organizations that are highly political and ridden with fear and distrust will ultimately receive apathetic conformity among the employee base, similar to what Freire (1970/2003) refers to in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as the result of the "banking concept of education." An oppressive environment results in a lack of passion and accountability for the purpose and vision of the organization.

However, there is one particular area of emphasis that is growing rapidly in its importance—an organization's response to a culturally diverse employee base. Today only 10% of the countries in the world are racially or ethnically homogeneous (Harris, Moran, & Moran, 2004). This means that in an increasingly global environment, the cross-cultural dynamics of an organization can no longer be approached as a liability. Ultimately, to create a high-performing organization with an engaged employee force, a total commitment to diversity and inclusion must be prevalent throughout all levels—from senior management to hourly labor.

This contrasts with the historical response to issues of diversity, which has focused on assimilating individuals into the ideological philosophy of the majority. This response transitioned to a structural/system imbalance approach in the 1980s, in which diversity was stressed, but at a superficial level. Today we realize that the optimal management of a diverse workforce is achieved through an intercultural approach or through one of mutual adaptation between leadership and employees (Hammer, 2002). Employee engagement may be unattainable without a focus among leadership on incorporating cross-cultural competence training.

How much is lost in major organizations owing to a lack of cross-cultural competence among leaders? In the United States, for example, concepts such as "thinking outside of the box" and risk taking are valued and considered vital to success (Hofstede, 1980). However, maintaining an ethnocentric leadership philosophy among a diverse workforce will offer negative consequences when trying to engage employees and will ultimately downgrade the performance of the organization. If leadership is a primary effect on behavioral engagement, a complete commitment to diversity and continued training related to intercultural competence development will play a vital role in engaging employees and aligning them toward the organization's goals.

In many chapters, this book will utilize specific definitions for the concepts of leadership and intercultural competence. Northouse (2004) defines leadership as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common

goal" (p. 3). Meanwhile, Bennett and Bennett (2004) define intercultural competence as "the ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations and to relate appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts" (p. 149). Developing intercultural competence is not something that can easily be accomplished simply through exposure to an international assignment (Moodian, 2007); there are various factors that must be implemented for this to occur. The point at which the two concepts intersect is the focus of this book.

♦ *Evolution of the Textbook*

The idea for this text was first spawned after I participated in the Intercultural Development Inventory workshop (presented by the Intercultural Communication Institute) in Portland, Oregon, in 2005. Originally, the vision of the text was one in which there would be a compilation of chapters that related specifically to instruments used in intercultural training (an expansion of Paige's [2004] chapter in the *Handbook of Intercultural Training*). However, after further conceptualization, it was determined that the instrumentation component was one piece of a much larger puzzle. Thus, the instrument chapters evolved into Part IV: Measuring Intercultural Competence. Parts on understanding cultural diversity's evolving role and applying cultural comprehension to organizations were added to provide an all-encompassing overview of topics.

PHILOSOPHY, APPROACH, AND USE

Many chapters are presented from the view of an organizational leader in the United States; however, the goal of this text is not to be centered on an American perspective only. There are components of multiple chapters that focus on effective leadership from a global perspective. The principal approach of the book is to blend theory with practical applications. The intended audience includes graduate-level MBA, international business, human resource management, organizational behavior, educational leadership, public administration, and organizational leadership students, as well as senior corporate managers, human resource practitioners, and government leaders.

The textbook is organized into five separate parts—Part I contains the introductory chapters, Part II focuses on understanding the evolving role of cultural diversity in the workplace, and Part III focuses on applying cultural comprehension to organizations. The focus of the book will shift in Part IV, where various chapters that detail specific tools to measure intercultural competence are presented. Part V contains the final chapter and a concluding commentary.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

In a world embedded in ethnocentrism and androcentricity, this book is intended to contribute to the growing body of literature related to the understanding and development of intercultural competence. The growing importance of fostering such competence within the world's leaders is vital at a micro level and will help advance the leadership process at a macro level for many years to come. A noted philosopher once said, "Three things make the superman [or superwoman] and they are the greatest gifts of divine generosity: a fertile mind, a deep understanding, and a cultivated taste" (Gracian, 1637/1993, p. 173). The theories, insights, and philosophies of the accomplished contributors to this

text are intended to help nurture such a fertile mind, promoting this deep understanding and cultivated taste among both emerging and experienced leaders.

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