Chapter 5
Teaching Cross-Cultural Competence in a Smart Machine Age:
The Role of International Service Learning in the Business School Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

The business world is in a state of flux due in part to the advent of disruptive technologies such as artificial intelligence, smart robots, and nanotechnology. The dawn of this 'Smart Machine Age' has significant implications for business education, which will need to be transformed with a new focus on imparting knowledge, skills, and abilities suitable for the new workplace environment. Among the skill sets that are in highest demand according to employers is cross-cultural competence (CC). Scholarly interest in CC has grown exponentially in recent years and there is an emerging consensus that it is best taught through non-traditional pedagogies centered on experiential learning. This chapter explores the efficacy of international service learning as a tool for teaching CC, with a focus on an innovative social entrepreneurship project undertaken at Florida International University. The project involves a partnership between a student organization, an NGO, and a women's self-help group in India.

INTRODUCTION

The business world is in a state of flux, due, in part, to the advent of disruptive technologies such as artificial intelligence, robotics, and nanotechnology. According to Hess (2018), this new 'Smart Machine Age' will redefine work and transform how companies are staffed, operated, and managed, with many more jobs being performed with less (and in some cases no) labor. The world first glimpsed this emerging reality in 2018 when Chinese online retailer, JD.com, opened a fully automated, 40,000-square-meter warehouse in Shanghai, staffed by four human employees who exist merely to service the industrial robots that fulfill the orders (Hornyak, 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic, meanwhile, accelerated the speed at which companies across a variety of sectors adopted labor-saving technologies and virtual communications platforms, leading to what some have termed a "low-touch economy" (Kang, 2021).

These technological advances, coupled with the continuing march of globalization, have significant implications for business education, which will need to be transformed with a new focus on imparting the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) required to thrive in this new workplace environment – in much the same way that leading American business schools transformed themselves in the 1940s to meet the challenges posed by World War II (Tufano, 2020). Chief among the KSAs essential for workplace success over the next decade, according to the Institute for the Future (2020), are 'sense-making' and 'novel and adaptive thinking,' broadly understood as critical thinking and analytical reasoning. Such 'soft skills,' the Institute notes, are important because, unlike the routine, algorithmic functions performed by smart machines, higher-level thinking skills cannot be codified – at least for now. Unfortunately, American business schools fall short when it comes to teaching students how to think critically (Belkin, 2017; Wilkie, 2019), with arguably little progress made over the past several decades (Haber, 2020).

The Institute identifies several other KSAs essential for future workplace success, including social and emotional intelligence (i.e., the ability to connect to others in a deep and direct way), computational thinking (i.e., the ability to process and make sense of vast amounts of data), and 'trans-disciplinarity' (i.e., the ability to understand concepts across multiple disciplines). For business schools aiming to train future cadres of global executives, there is an additional skillset of paramount importance: cross-cultural competence (CC).

Defined as "the ability to think and act in inter-culturally appropriate ways" (Hammer, Bennet, & Wiseman., 2003, p. 422), CC, also known as cross-cultural intelligence and intercultural competence, has long been considered a key attribute of successful global managers (Gersten, 1990). Such individuals require the mental ability to decode complex cross-cultural situations and think beyond narrow cultural boundaries when making global decisions (Andresen & Bergdolt, 2017). Although scholars disagree on CC's constituent elements, there is general agreement that three dimensions are fundamental: knowledge (understanding of cultural differences, for example), skills (foreign language competence, for example), and personal attributes (values, beliefs, and personality traits, for example) (Johnson, Lenartowicz, & Apud, 2006). According to Johnson and colleagues (2006, p. 530), CC may be defined as "an individual's effectiveness in drawing upon a set of knowledge, skills, and personal attributes in order to work suc-cessfully with people from different national cultural backgrounds at home or abroad."

Research suggests that managers with high levels of CC are better equipped than those with lower levels to handle various international tasks. This includes choosing foreign business partners; managing cross-border mergers, acquisitions, and joint ventures; and conducting negotiations with overseas sup-pliers (Johnson, Lenartowicz, & Apud, 2006). Managers who have a high a level of CC might also have an edge when it comes to carrying out expatriate assignments (Tung, 1988), and managing culturally

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