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Educating Professionals Leveraging Diversity in Globalizing Education

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Abstract

Globalization leads to an intensification of worldwide social relations linking distant localities (Giddens, 1990), which will result in greater cultural diversity in educational settings. This article is based on the premise that this diversity can be leveraged into enhanced learning capabilities, which, following Ashby's law of requisite variety (1956), every system needs that is confronted with growing complexity and dynamism in its environment. However, whereas globalization enables closer contacts among different cultures; it does not inform us how to employ cultural differences. The challenge posed by globalization is therefore how to actually combine the varied ideas, knowledge, and skills of different cultures in such a way that diversity can indeed be seen as a constant source of critical inquiry, learning, and innovation? Furthermore, how can higher education institutions leverage diversity most productively and, in that way, help shape globalization? This article reports on how the Department of Information Management of the University of Amsterdam prepares itself for the effects globalization has and will have on higher education. This department has a long record of experimentation with education design and the organization of learning processes, both relating to regular bachelor and master programs as well as to postgraduate lifelong learning and continuing education initiatives. Out of these experimentations and innovations the learning by sharing framework has evolved that is based upon a social learning theory. The purpose of this article is to show how diversity can be leveraged through learning by sharing. The article is organized as follows. First, the mutual relationship between globalization and diversity is explored. Then, five categories of globalization implications for higher education are distinguished, which are all further detailed and explained. Next, the learning by sharing framework is presented as one bottom up response of one department that is increasingly facing the challenge of globalization and leveraging diversity. Furthermore, three recent education initiatives of the Department of Information Management are discussed, showing how the five categories of globalization effects on higher education can be exploited in concrete educational settings. They also indicate that leveraging diversity is a learning process in itself. The lessons that can be derived from the three education initiatives are therefore explicitly discussed in the final section.

Keywords: Globalization, diversity, lifelong learning processes, learning by sharing, post graduate education, higher education

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Educating Professionals Leveraging Diversity in Globalizing Education

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Introduction

Globalization leads to an intensification of worldwide social relations linking distant localities (Giddens, 1990), which will result in greater cultural diversity in educational settings. This article is based on the premise that this diversity can be leveraged into enhanced learning capabilities, which, following Ashby's law of requisite variety (1956), every system needs that is confronted with growing complexity and dynamism in its environment. However, whereas globalization enables closer contacts among different cultures; it does not inform us how to employ cultural differences. The challenge posed by globalization is therefore how to actually combine the varied ideas, knowledge, and skills of different cultures in such a way that diversity can indeed be seen as a constant source of critical inquiry, learning, and innovation? Furthermore, how can higher education institutions leverage diversity most productively and, in that way, help shape globalization?

This article reports on how the Department of Information Management of the University of Amsterdam in the Netherlands prepares itself for the effects globalization has and will have on higher education. This department has a long record of experimentation with education design and the organization of learning processes, both relating to regular bachelor and master programs as well as to postgraduate lifelong learning and continuing education initiatives. Out of these experimentations and innovations the learning by sharing framework has evolved that is based upon a social learning theory. The purpose of this article is to show how diversity can be leveraged through learning by sharing.

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Globalization and diversity

Surrounded by complicated issues, globalization is heavily debated. Some critics, for instance, equate it with worldwide capitalism and focus on the unrestricted movement of capital and the increasing domination of nation-states by global financial markets and multinational corporations (Greider, 1997; Soros, 2002). They also warn against market values infiltrating domains of social practice where they do not belong, and ultimately against cultural homogenization resulting in the gradual disappearance of local

cultures. What they envisage is a strong form of globalization that asks for the production of similar kinds of human beings on a global scale (Friedman, 1994).

Others, however, assert that the strong form of globalization underemphasizes the adaptive and creative role of all the actors involved — countries, governments, firms, and other existing or emerging institutions and local practices. They see globalization as a multi-pronged development suggesting that economic forces are sometimes reinforced and sometimes contested by social, political, and cultural processes (Held et al., 1999; Scheuerman, 2002). Also, globalization affects each actor in a different way due to each actor's individual history, traditions, culture, resources, and priorities (Lash & Urry, 1994; Yang, 2003). Local actors operating in situated contexts, therefore, always influence the uptake and use of globalization processes. Moreover, they are not confined to the passive assimilation of the outcomes of globalization processes, but can actively exploit the opportunities offered by globalization to carve new spaces of their own and make use of the changing conditions for reaching their own ends (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1998; Kloos, 1999).

In this alternative view on globalization, the terms of the new world order will not be simply imposed “from above,” but rather be negotiated by a diverse multitude of social practices and institutions. What globalization is and will become is dependent upon the dynamic interplay between top down forces and bottom-up initiatives, between “globalization from above” and “grassroots globalization” (Appadurai, 2000). This weak form of globalization is reflected in the definition of globalization as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away *and vice versa*” (Giddens, 1990: 64; italics added). In other words, globalization simultaneously affects and is affected by many localities and, therefore, by cultural diversity.

The mutual relationship between globalization and cultural diversity presents a major challenge for all the actors involved. The reasoning is as follows. Ashby's law of requisite variety (1956) states that the complexity and speed of an actor's response have to increase with the complexity and speed of change in the environment. Due to globalization, most, if not all actors are faced with growing complexity and dynamism in their environments (Wilson, 2003). Hence, more is required from their learning capabilities to keep up with the changing conditions. According to Ashby's law, then, they need more variety or diversity as a constant source of learning, critical inquiry, and innovation to be able to reach the demanded higher levels of complexity and speed.

Diversity can be described (cf. Dewey, 1927; Swann et al., 2004; April, 2004) as the amount of inter-individual variability across several demographic and functional categories (e.g., value systems, sex, education, work, and socio-economic background). The good news is that globalization provides new opportunities to embrace and use diversity, for the intensification of worldwide social relations by

definition implies a closer contact between different cultures. Closer contacts, however, do not automatically result in learning and creative performance. The challenge therefore is how to actually combine the varied ideas, knowledge, and skills of different cultures in such a way that the potential for creative synthesis is enhanced? How can local practices such as education institutions leverage diversity most productively and, in that way, help shape globalization?

Globalization and higher education

Globalization impacts higher or tertiary education. We see five categories of implications that higher education institutions can address and potentially enhance in their efforts to create a sustainable future: 1) a need to harmonize education structures, programs, procedures, and agreements across countries, 2) a need to meet more varied and changing learning needs, 3) a need for generative learning, 4) a need for grounding education upon a social learning theory, and 5) a need for identification. These categories of implications are further detailed below and summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 Implications for higher education

A need for harmonization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internationalize education structures, programs, procedures, and agreements • Face growing competition and establish alliances on the global education marketplace • Take a stand on globalization issues
A need to meet varied and changing learning needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase flexibility and variation in curriculum design and implementation • Include learning and learning-to-learn capabilities in curricula • See the learners' ability to take responsibility for their own lives and learning processes as the point of education
A need for generative learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combine knowledge transfer with knowledge creation • Focus on learning capabilities to foster confidence and trust in students' sense-making abilities and abilities to deal with real-world issues • Apply an interdisciplinary approach • Use real-world complex issues to practice action learning • Apply open staffing to bring in different perspectives, ideas, and insights
A need for a social learning theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ground learning programs upon a social learning theory • Translate the community of practice idea to educational settings • Provide a common frame of reference • Remove boundaries between the roles of teacher, student, researcher, and practitioner
A need for identification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be an institution enabling personal and social identification • Shape learning environments serving economic and non-economic needs • Compete for the attention of students

1. A need for harmonization

To play a role in a globalizing world, education structures, programs, procedures, and agreements need to be harmonized across countries so that students, teachers, and researchers can move freely and choose the organizations, networks, and communities of their liking. Examples of harmonization are the creation of international student exchange programs, the adaptation to a unified course-credit system, the conformation to international quality assessments, and for many universities outside the Anglo-Saxon academic world the implementation of the bachelor-master structure as well as teaching in English. Such acts of harmonization, bringing an international dimension to higher education, can be seen as first steps towards embracing diversity and achieving higher levels of complexity and speed. Without harmonization, the potential payoff of globalization in terms of leveraging cultural differences is severely diminished.

Another implication of harmonization is the emergence of a global education marketplace where each institution has to compete for funds, faculty, and students. This growing competition increasingly takes place on a worldwide scale, as is indicated by joint degree offerings among institutions in two or more countries (“twinning”), off-shoring through franchising or branch openings, and using the Internet as a new delivery channel. As a result, higher education is ever more seen as an economic sector in itself and treated as a business enterprise, which also attracts new and often private providers to the market and sometimes results in alliances with the private sector.

Exemplary in this regard is the attempt of multinational corporations and some government agencies in the developed countries to include higher education in the framework of the World Trade Organization through the General Agreement on Trade in Services proposal. The idea behind this proposal is that knowledge is a commodity like any other product, which should be traded freely around the world while ensuring protections for the owners of knowledge products.

Prospective benefits of this marketization of higher education – sometimes referred to as “McDonaldization” or “Americanization” (Appadurai, 2000, Altbach, 2004) – are a strong motivation for traditional institutions to innovate and generate new academic environments, increase the supply of education, improve access for students, and diminish their dependency on public funding. However, as many critics contend (Yang, 2003; De Vita & Case, 2003; Altbach, 2004), tensions between academic and commercial based motives are rising as market-driven globalization does not necessarily serve non-economic yet basic human needs. Other issues involve, amongst others, the compromised sovereignty of nation-states to establish national education policies, the global dominance of the English-speaking education institutions, and the inequality between the developed and developing countries. Globalization requires from each participating actor to take a stand in these issues.

2. A need to meet more varied and changing learning needs

Due to globalization, higher education institutions need to display more flexibility and variation in curriculum design and implementation to meet the increasingly varied and changing needs of learners. Learning needs become more varied because the student population attracted worldwide will show more diversity in terms of their education and socio-economic backgrounds, value systems, and preferred learning styles. Moreover, as a result from the dynamic developments in most academic disciplines and the requirement to remain well informed, many people will engage in lifelong learning. Another reason for experienced workers to regularly return to the university is that most organizations are involved in almost constant change programs leading to many vertical and horizontal career shifts over the workers' professional years and, thus, to specific and changing learning needs.

Furthermore, in dynamic and complex environments the purpose of education is no longer simply to transfer knowledge. Such environments require a different education that emphasizes learning and learning-to-learn capabilities so that people are better prepared to take responsibility for their own lives and learning processes. According to Rowe (2004: 5), taking responsibility is the point of education, because if "...people do not assume authority over themselves, they cannot use their creativity and curiosity to the full, nor discover the art of living wisely."

3. A need for generative learning

As globalization causes greater dynamism and complexity, people, organizations, and societies are increasingly confronted with problems, issues, and dilemmas that are clear-cut nor well defined. Much of social and organizational life today is uncertain and ambiguous. Nevertheless, in large parts of the academic world education is still seen as a formal process of instruction to convey formal, existing knowledge. A typical example would be business schools relying on case-based education in which lessons learned elsewhere are copied, cloning students or professionals. Another example from the fast developing practice of management and organization is education proceeding from hype to hype, which results in the accumulation of rapidly deteriorating knowledge.

In uncertain and ambiguous environments, however, learning should be generative, implying that education should change from "looking in the rear view mirror" to "exploring horizons for new developments," from imparting existing knowledge to experimentation and exploration allowing learners to create knowledge and meanings for themselves. Generative learning also means that learners become familiar and comfortable with abstract, fundamental theories and with crossing the borders of the often rigid academic disciplines to develop interdisciplinary understandings and insights. In that way, they improve their conceptual capabilities, which aids in the continuous need to make sense in uncertain and ambiguous realities and in facing such realities with confidence and trust. Such education can be enhanced by practicing in action learning environments in which real-world complex issues are explored for which there are no valid answers available beforehand. Lastly, generative learning can be promoted

by open staffing, meaning that “outsiders” — teachers, researchers, and practitioners — are invited to complement faculty and bring in different cultures, perspectives, ideas, and insights.

4. A need for a social learning theory

Leveraging diversity is more than enabling close contacts between diverse people. In comparison to homogeneous groups, members of diverse groups can be less committed to each other and to their employers, communicate relatively poorly, experience more conflict, and take more time for decision-making (Swann et al., 2004). These causes of ineffective behavior show that learning is not just a cognitive and individual activity, but also a social and sensitive process in which new meanings are collectively negotiated. They also illustrate that learning is just as dependent upon social qualities such as tolerance, reciprocity, trust, and a sense of belonging as upon personal cognitive skills. Turning diversity into a genuine source of inspiration, critical inquiry, and learning is therefore a real challenge that requires more than bringing people together. For higher education this implies that learning programs should preferably be based upon a social theory of learning. In many academic institutions, however, students are approached as individuals solely seeking cognitive content, skills, and personal development, even if group assignments are a regular part of the curriculum.

A social theory of learning is nowadays strongly associated with the idea of communities of practice. Communities of practice are “groups of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise” (Wenger and Snyder, 2000: 139). Academic institutions can translate this idea to educational settings by establishing platforms on which diversity can be expressed, both on-line and off-line, and to guide learners to leverage this diversity into creative and motivated performance. Part of this guidance can be the provision of a common frame of reference, both as a shared point of departure and as an always temporal point of arrival, to help shape learning as an interactive journey exploring new horizons. Moreover, in education communities the traditional boundaries between the roles of teacher, student, researcher, and practitioner blur as all participants are challenged to integrate these roles as part of their learning.

5. A need for identification

To a large degree, people derive their identity from the networks and communities in which they participate and to which they belong. When globalization makes them aware that they live in one big world that is capable of directly influencing their local practices, identity issues can arise. Questions such as “who am I?” and “Where could I, or should I, go?” inevitably challenges one’s identity (Kloos, 1999). As Bauman (2001: 126) portrays, the issue “...is not so much how to obtain the identities of their choice and how to have them recognized by others, but *which* identity to choose, and how best to keep alert and vigilant so that *another* choice can be made.” As a result of its sheer size, the emerging global economy inherently lacks possibilities of personal and social identification. Markets are impersonal. Even worse, market-driven globalization may undermine the social conditions of networks and communities (Adler,

2001). From this perspective it is not surprising that identity and communities of practice as “homes of identity” (Wenger, 1998) have recently attracted so much attention. “Just as community collapses, identity is invented” (Young in Bauman, 2001: 128).

In the global economy, there is a need for institutions enabling personal and social identification. Unlike this economy, universities can contribute to this need as they provide identification possibilities related to professional and knowledge domains. Implications are that they have to serve economic as well as non-economic human needs such as social engagement and mutual commitment among students, teachers, researchers, and practitioners to create invigorating learning environments, not just in the classroom but also during the other hours in the week. We are only just beginning to learn how such demands can be reconciled with mass student recruitment and decreasing public funding. The answers we can imagine, however, could very well be a major factor in the growing competition among education institutions competing for the attention of students who are constantly evaluating a multitude of interesting “distractions” in their efforts to balance personal, social, and economic value (Thijssen and Vernooij, 2004). Higher education is just one of them.

Learning by sharing

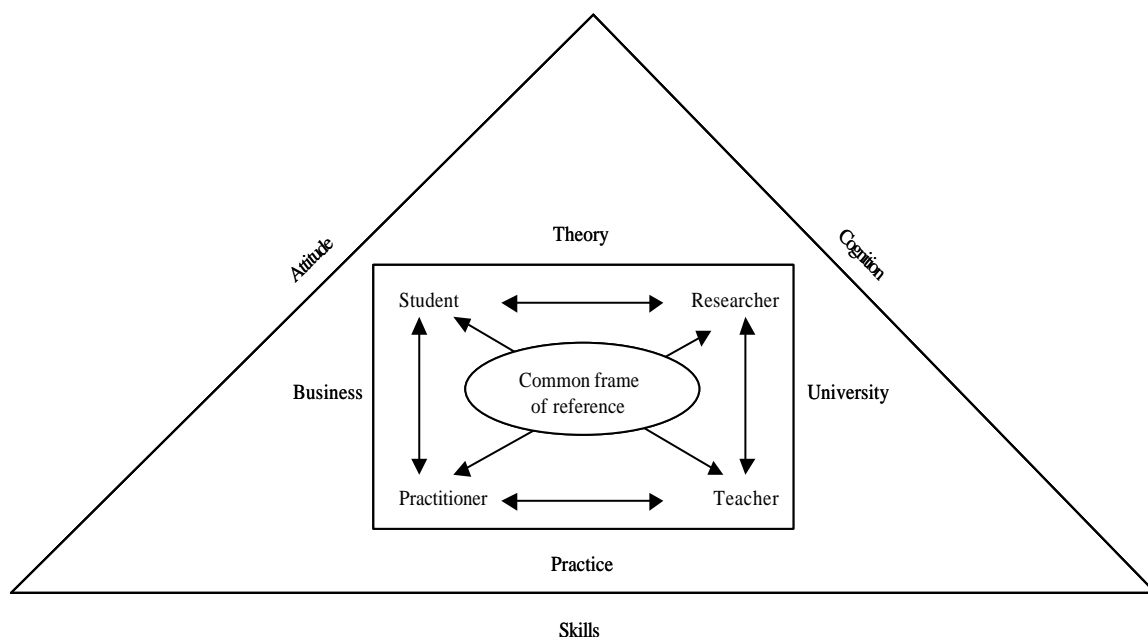
The five categories of globalization implications discussed in the previous section offer significant degrees of autonomy and initiative for all the actors involved to carve a space of their own on the emerging global education marketplace. As shown above, much of the literature on globalization is focused on the marketization or “Americanization” of local cultures and the attendant fear of cultural homogenization. Globalization, however, is a much broader issue. As to higher education, the harmonization of its institutions will inevitably lead to closer contacts among cultures. The resultant cultural diversity in the classroom on its turn will influence how local education will be shaped and evolve. Local education institutions will differ in their responses to these developments, not only because of their varying individual histories, traditions, cultures, and resources, but also because they will actively differentiate themselves while competing and cooperating globally.

We posit that leveraging diversity can and will be used as a major distinguishing factor in the search of a unique position in the global education market space. That is, universities, their faculties and departments will differ in the way they will address the portrayed needs for meeting varied learning needs, generative and social learning, and for institutions facilitating genuine identification with professional and knowledge domains. The ultimate effects of globalization on higher education are dependent on how such bottom up globalization initiatives interact with the relevant top down forces.

“Learning by sharing” is the social learning framework upon which the bottom up initiatives of the Information Management Department of the University of Amsterdam in The Netherlands are based.

Providing education to academic students ranging from first-year newcomers to experienced lifelong learners, the department's ambition is to build a lively community with a global presence with which those sharing an interest in information management can identify. The department is involved in regular, publicly funded bachelor and master programs. For 17 years now, it additionally provides a privately financed, two year postgraduate executive course on information management offering practitioners with at least five years of experience the opportunity to acquire an accredited executive master degree. Currently, this MBA-like course is also offered in-house at the Dutch police. The maximum enrollment of 24 students annually underlines the small-scale nature of the course allowing all participants to build personal and social commitment, while private funding enables worldwide recruitment of renowned teachers (open staffing). The more than 350 students who have attended this program are united within the Amsterdam Association of Information Management. Moreover, information management researchers – faculty, practitioners as well as foreign and local researchers – channel their projects and publications through the PrimaVera research program. All these initiatives are supported by web sites and intranet technology enabling all participants to share ideas, work on projects, and expand their community.

Figure 1 Learning by sharing



The learning by sharing framework (see Figure 1) has evolved out of these education and research experiences and will continue to evolve as new initiatives and experiments lead to adaptations and refinements of its guiding principles (Thijssen et al., 2002; Maes, 2003). The guiding principles are first reflected in the use of a common frame of reference that is applied in all educational settings of the department and that is the focal point of attention in the department's research activities (for those interested in this common frame of reference, see Maes, 2003 and primavera.fee.uva.nl). With regard to

this frame of reference, community members can play four roles: student, practitioner, teacher, and researcher. The arrows between these roles indicate that the boundaries among these roles blur as members proceed from the periphery of the community towards its center. They also show that learning involves close interactions among fundamental, interdisciplinary theory and culturally diverse practices as well as among business and university that are jointly engaged in action learning exploring new horizons that are both theoretically and practically relevant. Furthermore, “cognition, attitudes, and skills” reflect the emphasis on generative learning capabilities enhancing the participants’ abilities to take responsibility of their own lives. They express that learning is about personal and social change aimed at improving individual and collective meaning making capabilities, which are increasingly needed to continually make sense out of a rapidly evolving and globalizing world. Finally, there is value in diversity. The best way to realize this value is to shape learning as a social process in a critical yet committed community. Membership of this community is open to all those who want to identify with information management in a broad sense and who wish to participate in the department’s activities in one way or another.

Experiments in educating professionals and the organization of learning

As mentioned, learning by sharing is the overall learning theory of the Executive Master in Information Management program at the University of Amsterdam, as discussed in Maes (2003), of regular programs at bachelor’s and master’s level, of derived, targeted programs and of initiatives in continuing education. The remainder of this section shows three recent initiatives, taken respectively from regular programs (Course Information Management in Practice), continuing education (I+M Fellows) and derived programs (Investigative Course in Experience Economy). Each experiment is shortly described after which their basic assumptions are related to the categories of implications for higher education as summarized in Table 1. Together, they prove that consistency in the approach taken in itself contributes to the preparation of professionals who can operate in an open, global and diversified world.

Experiment I: Information Management in Practice

This course, part of the master’s programs in Business Information Systems and in Business Studies (80% and 20 % of the students respectively), was for the first time organized in the academic year 2003-2004. Its unequivocal objective is to confront master’s students with professionals working in real-life *and vice versa* (remark the unmistakable reciprocity): learning by sharing between students, reflective practitioners, and the accompanying teaching staff.

Traditionally, students from Business Information Systems at the University of Amsterdam have diverse ethnic and social backgrounds; the 31 students taking part in this experimental course represented 12 different nationalities, ranging from Surinam and India to former Yugoslavia and the Netherlands. Including the teaching staff, there were even 14 nationalities working together. The professional

organizations involved were municipal services from the city of Amsterdam, in itself a growingly multi-cultural city. The projects undertaken were equally unusual: projects *together with* the city services *for the benefit of* the citizens.

The course got unanimous approval. Practitioners as well as students, the municipality as well as the teaching staff were enthusiastic, not to say lyrical about the outcome of the projects, but even more about the personal lessons learned through this open confrontation at the edge of the thinkable (brought in by the students), feasible (id., by the practitioners) and makable (to be realized in cooperation). It was generative learning from diversity in optima forma.

As to the need for harmonization mentioned in Table 1, it can be said that the University of Amsterdam has implemented the bachelor-master structure in 2003. Moreover, the already common practice of giving specific courses in English will be extended to full bachelor and master programs in 2005. While conducting new experiments, the information management department takes such acts of harmonization as a given. However, while increasing diversity is expected as a result of further harmonization, the department has already gained much experience with diversity for considerable time now as the Netherlands has become a multi-cultural country over the past decades. In that sense, globalization is not a new phenomenon for the department.

One way to deal with diversity is to meet the varying individual learning needs and engage students and other participants to help each other fulfilling these needs. This aspect was overtly addressed in this experiment, in terms of clearly deviating learning methods and style, being driven by the individual learning needs of all participants involved (including those of the non-students), aiming at personal above professional learning. In fact, this aspect was the *raison d'être* of this experimental course.

Generative learning also played a central role in the course. The projects chosen were all ill-defined, most of them basically existing in the mind and experience of the (badly understood and highly diverging) citizens and other actors participating. A great part of the efforts spent were in making sense out of these divergent signals and in dialoguing with practitioners as well as with citizens. The cursory part of the course was completely problem- and student-driven. There was no formal program, meaning that meetings were organized according to the emerging needs of the participants. Staffing was open: university teachers, including faculty from other universities, practitioners as well as students themselves were bringing in quite different perspectives.

The need for community building based on a social learning theory needed great care. In particular at the beginning of the course, the social aspects of learning required specific attention due to the different backgrounds of the participants and the university culture, where “staying in your own comfort zone” is both reassuring and safe. The project teams were made up based on maximum diversity and an open and

trustworthy atmosphere was explicitly aimed at. For instance, students not showing up were called and told that they deprived other participants from their own input. Heavy use was made of a QuickPlace electronic learning environment, where personal and social learning as well as gossip and joking were integral part of. The end result was a warming feeling of a community of practice as well as of togetherness, which is quite different from normal practice at the University of Amsterdam.

As to the need for identification, this aspect is partly dealt with in the foregoing discussion on social learning theory and community building. Besides, students were overtly and positively talked to on their social and racial background. This open encounter was highly appreciated by the participants, contrary to common belief.

Experiment II: I+M Fellows

I+M Fellows is the continuing education sequel to the postgraduate Executive Master in Information Management (EMIM) program mentioned earlier. In the first year of this experiment, 20 alumni participated. These are professionals, being employed as information managers, consultants in information management, and so on. In many instances, their career was boosted by successfully finishing the EMIM course.

The Fellows initiative is aiming at professional and personal growth and at close cooperation with the PrimaVera research program of the organizing department. It is highly participant-driven, where participants are actively invited to set their own learning agenda, to go around together in shared learning projects, and to find each other in collegial learning. Apart from the alumni, external experts and teachers from the EMIM course, two of the latter in the role of dedicated learning facilitators, are participating. Topics chosen in the first year were, for example, learning from your own mistakes, the Socratic dialogue, and personal power in relation to professionalism. Apart from the bimonthly meetings, active study groups (e.g. on “the lively organization”) and reading groups are stimulated, a study tour is organized, etc.

The initiative was facing some start-up problems, especially due to the uncommon approach taken directed at personal growth and group’s initiatives, and the fact that only a few pre-programmed activities had been scheduled. It is clear that professionals operating in a highly competitive environment have difficulties in overcoming barriers of time, belonging to, and loyalty. Nevertheless, the experiment was experienced as a fruitful year, where the second year will be endeavoring after more concrete output and hence will be more in balance between professional and personal learning. The driving idea behind this experiment, that personal development is at the heart of professional success, was however not at all questioned.

Reflecting on the implications of globalization on higher education, I+M Fellows suits the need to meet varying learning needs in that alumni with a special interest in personal growth were given an extra learning opportunity in addition to the other education offerings of the department. Moreover, as there was no formal, pre-planned program and students could set their own learning agenda, also the variation of learning needs that could be expressed within the “curriculum” design was maximal. The combinations of professional and personal learning as well as the personal initiatives expected were addressing the learning-to-learn capabilities. It appeared that the participating professionals had to overcome serious barriers in taking up that responsibility. This could be due to the fact that the EMIM program in which they were previously involved, was more supply-driven. Closer investigation, however, reveals that there is an area of tension between personal learning and growing needs (individualized) and expectations from the employer (more standardized). To a certain extent, one could say that present-day organizations, as a result of the immense pressure under which they are supposed to attain short-term results, are not exploiting the full potential of their high-level employees. It is our belief that innovation and intrapreneurship are deep-rooted in personal development and creativity as sought after in this Fellows program.

The objectives of personal development and creativity indicate that generative learning is at the heart of the Fellows initiative. Subjects dealt with are by definition interdisciplinary, even crossing the boundaries of cognitive learning. Two examples are: (1) the subject of information infrastructures was tackled by inviting the participants to actively develop ideas for the crucial and real-life start-up of a major cultural infrastructure – a former industrial plant transformed into a cultural breeding ground, and (2) the first meeting of the second year, dedicated to coping with major transformations, is centered around the eventuality of the Netherlands being inundated due to a major natural disaster. In both cases there are no pre-defined answers to the challenges posed. Participation, therefore, requires creativity and out-of-the-box thinking to create new knowledge and meanings.

Next, the Fellows program is set up as a community of practice of and in itself, including the use of a QuickPlace digital environment for intermediate communication and collaboration. It however appeared that participants all subscribe the idea of learning by sharing, but find it difficult to implement it: a number of initiatives (working groups in particular) started enthusiastically but were not continued after the first period of thrill. It was agreed upon that this initial zeal could probably be better sustained by fixing clear and tangible targets for each of the initiatives taken, which might be opposite to the original aim of open-ended learning.

As to the need for identification, this aspect was hesitantly taken up. Only at the end of the first year, participants were identifying themselves with the personal, transgressing and even confrontational learning style of the Fellows program. This common identity, transcending the day-to-day solicitudes, is

nevertheless experienced as one of the main reasons to participate; we believe that we just need more time to establish it.

Experiment III: Investigative Course in Experience Economy

This course is organized by the European Centre for the Experience Economy, a centre associated with the initiating Department of Information Management through the PrimaVera research program. The purpose of the Centre is to conduct research and to organize courses in order to ground the practice of the Experience Economy (Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004) in theory and to build a community of practice around this emerging concept.

The four-day course is organized according to the learning by sharing principles, where each of the participants successively plays the different roles involved. Participants are executives interested in introducing elements of the experience economy in their organization, university researchers, Ph.D. students, consultants, etc. The “course,” which was organized twice until now, is more than a course in the strict sense of the word in that common meaning building, developing new ideas, and grounding the concepts of the experience economy in theoretical research are integral part of the experiment. A great part of the course is in the form of a highly interactive, generative workshop.

The underlying idea of the course is that the current state-of-the-art in providing experiences as a business proposal is too limited, as customers more and more demand authenticity and true value. Understanding the value seeking process of individuals is considered key in positioning the experience offering. The quest for this authentic need asks for innovative approaches to both research and teaching.

Relating this course to the implications of globalization for higher education as mentioned in Table 1, a first observation is that it underlines the point that local actors operating in situated contexts always influence the uptake and use of globalization processes. At first glance, the experience economy seems a global issue that is part of globalizing world trends. Again and again, however, it appears that new business concepts and ideas, which often originate in the USA, cannot be exported to other cultures on a one-to-one basis. The idea underlying the course is therefore to make the experience economy concept adaptable to the European scene and hence more culture-dependent. In fact, the very existence of and apparent need for an European Centre proves this point. Paradoxically perhaps, by translating the concept of the experience economy to local contexts, the global application of this concept increases. This observation puts the need for harmonization, in particular the need of harmonizing education programs, and the fear for Americanization in a different perspective.

Participants in the course come from different European countries. The quite diverse composition of the participating group, ranging from “hardcore” business people to equally “hardcore” university researchers, implies very different learning needs and styles. The complementary nature of the learning

goals is nevertheless experienced as an essential component of the course that can be leveraged by approaching the experience economy through critical inquiry, as a business opportunity, a research subject and part of the globalizing world where cultural variety and identity play a prominent role. This approach emphasizes generative learning, as the outcome of the course is not established beforehand but constructed during the investigative course and in mutual interaction. To promote knowledge creation, the approach taken also entails the participation of a wide range of experts, for instance, a professional chef introducing the role of the senses in designing experiences, and a group decision support system as part of the technical support for the course.

As to the need for social learning theory, the investigative nature of the course could not be attained without the explicit adherence to the learning by sharing format. Building up the feeling of a real community of practice is, given the divergent composition of the group, an integral part of the course, though not always easy to realize from the very beginning on, as traditional attitudes regarding participation in a course are at right angles to the generative way of social learning.

Finally, with regard to the need for identification, the experience economy is addressed as an economic, social and cultural phenomenon, going beyond the original intentions behind the concept and hence as a part of the identity of modern society.

Lessons learned and conclusions

The five categories of globalization implications on higher education summarized in Table 1 leave ample room for individual universities, faculties, and departments to construct responses of their own to globalization. Learning by sharing is the bottom up response of one department of one university that expresses how this department is preparing itself for a globalized world. Globalization leads to an intensification of worldwide social relations linking distant localities (Giddens, 1990) and as such leads to greater cultural diversity in educational settings. A basic assumption behind learning by sharing is that this diversity can be leveraged into enhanced learning capabilities, which, following Ashby's law of requisite variety (1956), every system needs that is confronted with growing complexity and dynamism in its environment. The Department of Information Management of the University of Amsterdam sees it as its responsibility to help shape education in such a way that diversity does result in improved learning capabilities of individual learners, and hence of the organizations they work for and the societies they live in.

The three recent initiatives of the Department of Information Management discussed in this article show in more detail how the five categories of globalization effects on higher education can be employed in concrete educational practices. They also illustrate that leveraging diversity is a learning process in itself. The lessons learned relate to all the categories of globalization implications described. As to the need for

harmonization, harmonizing education structures, programs, procedures, and agreements should be viewed as a necessary yet insufficient condition to embrace diversity. Harmonization enables closer contacts among different cultures, but does not tell how to exploit such differences. That is where the other implications of globalization come into our discussion showing that harmonization is not the end of globalization, but rather the beginning of major transformations in higher education. Requiring much time and energy, such transformations need to be balanced with the speed of change that is considered necessary to keep up with the changing conditions. Although individual universities, faculties and departments have their own responsibility in this and can pro-actively prepare themselves, preserving this delicate balance is primarily a task for national and international higher education institutions and governmental agencies.

Another implication of harmonization is the emergence of a global education marketplace, which, according to many (Adler, 2001; Yang, 2003) would result in the marketization of education undermining the social conditions of networks and communities. Market-driven globalization would predominantly serve economic needs and disregard human and academic values such as integrity, disinterestedness, and trust. This article shows how the Department of Information Management attempts to reconcile both kinds of needs. Although there is an economic motive involved in extending the supply of education with continuing education initiatives and derived, targeted programs, the three recent initiatives indicate that the human and academic values dominate in learning by sharing. The dominance of these values becomes clear in the explicit recognition of the need to provide opportunities for personal and social identification that markets simply cannot deliver and in organizing learning in communities with which people can identify themselves. As globalization proceeds, we expect these elements of learning by sharing to become even more important than they already are.

With regard to the growing need of identification and using communities to shape learning processes, important lessons learned can be derived from the three experiments described in this article. Most importantly, the building and maintenance of communities require constant care. As all three experiments indicate, there is a tension between professional, personal, and social learning, between individual learners having their specific learning needs and employers who are paying for their education, and between career and private life that every learner has to balance. The lessons learned are that the value added of every education initiative must be clear in advance and that a learning rhythm (Wenger, 1998) should be created that fits the community members. This latter point relates, amongst others, to the regularity of physical meetings, the time and effort needed to participate, and the support of on-line facilities. The right rhythm can only be discovered through experimentation and fine-tuning programs according to the feedback given. Moreover, the knowledge and experience gained through experimentation help tremendously in achieving the department's ultimate ambition of building a lively community around information management with a global presence.

Compared to communities creating a sense of belonging, increasing flexibility and variation in curriculum designs to meet varied and changing learning needs is relatively easy to implement. The lesson learned here is that it is increasingly rewarding to see students as lifelong learners and offer them a large variety of education programs in an inspiring academic environment. In particular when the extra funding generated is used to improve this environment, a virtuous cycle of continuous innovation can emerge.

Lastly, the three experiments discussed in this article show that generative learning always meets great enthusiasm on behalf of all participants – students, practitioners, researchers, and teachers alike. However, such learning is particularly suited for master’s students who have finished their bachelor’s and for experienced managers returning to the university. As learners proceed from first-year academic education to postgraduate programs, the emphasis can be put on generative learning, on learner-guided education in which the learners themselves are responsible for their own learning agenda, and on blending learning and working. It is the combination of being familiar with existing knowledge and being challenged in generative environments that enhances people’s learning capabilities and their abilities to take responsibility over their own lives.

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