

BUSINESS EDUCATION FOR 'PEOPLISM'

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Recently a British newspaper published the provocative headline 'Capitalism is dead... now 'Peoplism' is the new business philosophy'. This emphasised the recognition of the importance of the human resource in contemporary economic development. For many years business education programmes in the West have included both personal development, and also human resource management skills development. During the 1990's transitional economies also recognised the need to modify university teaching to include these topics, and consequently several REAP projects in this region have included such developments.

The popularist term 'peopilism' conveys a recognition of both the magnitude of contemporary investment in workforce education, and also the importance of personnel training for business success. A recent edition of 'Belarus Business' (No. 3(2000)) included a series of articles which gave examples of the importance of human resources for several Belarus businesses. This edition could easily have been titled 'In Praise of Peoplism'!

Several REAP projects, at the stage of their pre-project study, identified the main educational demands for graduates as perceived by employers. (Ref: Kingston, Manchester Metropolitan, Nottingham and Surrey Universities). The very informative REAP project study by Noble and Hoborough of Surrey University (Ref. REAP Symposium, Minsk, 1999) showed variations in the nature of personal skills development sought by employers at different locations in Belarus and Russia. It emphasised the requirement to balance technical and knowledge based skills with personal and process based education. Such conclusions were mirrored elsewhere including in the two REAP projects, in Minsk, which work with Kingston University, and focus on educational developments for future SME managers.

The response to these conclusions was cooperative development in REAP projects of syllabus content and also education for 'peoplism'. This has included methodologies aimed at empowering the individual with qualities such as decisiveness, persuasiveness, communication skills, team working and self-reliance. Early recognition was given in many former Soviet Union (FSU) universities to 'active learning' as a methodology for personal development. However where educational authorities constrained the assessment methodologies to those of Soviet times such educational processes could be ineffective because of failure to match them with appropriate assessment strategies.

Business education for 'peoplism' includes:-

1. Personal Development Courses
2. Dissertations based on real or case study business experience
3. Human Resource Management

The challenges for Business Education in transitional economies, when it is desired to include these topics in educational programmes are:-

1. Introduction of assessment methodologies relevant to the educational process
2. Availability of relevant local case studies
3. Syllabus content which accounts for personnel management in a transitional economy

Assessment Methodologies

The REAP project studies, and others, have shown that employers in transitional economies seek graduates with high levels of contemporary personal skills development. Therefore it is a challenge to universities to ensure that the measure of students' abilities matches such employers' demands. REAP projects which included business English language education in their programmes most easily found fertile ground for assessment methodologies appropriate to active learning involving communication, discussion and team working skills. Other areas of business education have been less successful in introducing new assessment methodologies. Many FSU courses which

aspire to regionally relevant business and economics education still require to find ways of including assessment methods appropriate for:-

1. Group Presentations and Team Working
2. Business Games (including those using Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs))
3. Work based learning (or assessment of practical work skills in the workplace)

Techniques for assessing these are employed in most Western business schools, and several REAP projects provide good examples. It is notable that whereas many students at FSU universities participate in team work and business games in competitions, their presence as parts of formal assessment procedures is less prevalent. Clearly there is the potential to apply to official student assessment some of the methods used in this region for student competitions which involve team work, business games or oral report presentations.

Case Studies

Interviews of post-graduate students in Minsk indicated a student demand for a balance between both international 'good practice' and also local 'practical' business case studies.. The sample interviewed had experienced case studies mostly from American business schools, They considered that an approximately 3:1 ratio of international: local case studies would be appropriate. Given that the students included many persons working in enterprises, with a full awareness of their practical educational requirements, this is a conclusion which should be noted carefully by academics in this region. There is a need for more members of the local business community to assist academics to develop more regionally relevant case studies. Given the very substantial work involved, Carreras suggested a barter system for business case studies at the 1998 Minsk REAP conference, and to date there appears to have been little activity to match this area of student demand. The REAP 'dissemination' phase may be able to provide a vehicle for exchange of such regionally produced educational materials.

Personnel Management for Transitional Economies

Entrepreneurs have a major challenge to match economic transition with a transition in work place attitudes and service mentality of employees. Enhancing quality of service by personnel at the point of service delivery, and increasing worker motivation, are two of the many challenges to obtaining increased business efficiency in post-soviet economies. These challenges can only be met by a change of managerial attitudes towards the workforce, improved methods of personnel motivation and a reduction of administrative or documentation work at the point of service. In Belarus, banking and tourism (including hotels and restaurants) are two of many possible examples of service industries which merit the urgent attention by managers to develop a more client oriented service approach. It is likely that the management education of many contemporary managers was badly suited to the current business environment. The role of universities and other state educational establishments in rectifying existing managerial training deficiencies merits further consideration. It is encouraging to note that several REAP projects have developed opportunities for post-diploma, mainly Masters level, adult education.

Conclusion

Universities and other training establishments require to give greater recognition to the changing educational requirements of the worldwide changes in work organisation, including the increasing emphasis on investment in human resources. This requires renewed efforts, particularly in transitional economies, to enhance active learning and assessment opportunities, for students, and others who are prepared to acknowledge the contemporary need for lifelong learning. The forthcoming REAP dissemination phase is timely in this respect. If it utilised effectively and widely, then it can assist with the provision of the further educational needs of countries undergoing a continuing economic transition to a market economy.

Abstract

Business education which includes an explicit programme of personal development and human resource management is essential to maximise the effectiveness of graduates who enter businesses where the main investment, and value of the business, is in the employees. This paper discusses the educational implications of the worldwide shift of importance from capital investment, or capitalism, to human resource investment, — or 'peoplism'. Many educational establishments in transitional economies already recognize the change in business and economics subject content which such a new investment orientation involves. However, challenges still exist for universities to incorporate more appropriate active learning and assessment methods to match these developments. Sharing of the best practices in assessment methods, case study development, and personal skills development will help disseminate enhanced business education practices for 'peoplism'.

CREATING VALUE THROUGH PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Personal Development Module is one of the results of international partnership between Kingston Business School and International Graduate School of Business and Management of Technology of Belarus State University.

The course is innovative for Belarusian education both in its contents and in teaching techniques employed to achieve course objectives.

The objective is to enable students to successfully implement important managerial activities by drawing on the appropriate competencies and support skills.