

**RESEARCH, LEARNING AND SHARING:
ABSTRACTS PREPARED BY 1999-2000 VISITING PROFESSORS**

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PREFACE

The Research Program in Social and Organizational Learning at The George Washington University hosts visiting professors for periods of several months or an academic year. In the 1999-2000 academic year the Research Program hosted nine visiting professors. Seven were from Russia, and two were from Ukraine. They were all part of the Junior Faculty Development Program. This program is funded by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Each visiting professor is assigned a GW faculty member as a mentor.

Several of the visiting professors made presentations at the annual Faculty Research Forum of the Washington Consortium of Business Schools. The Forum was held at Gallaudet University, April 17, 1999. Abstracts 1,2,4,6,8, and 9 were presented at the Faculty Research Forum. Abstracts 5 and 7 were presented at The European Meeting on Cybernetics and Systems Research, held in Vienna, Austria, April 25-28, 2000. The abstracts seemed to be concerned with "research, learning and sharing."

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Teaching English in a Russian Context Through American Culture

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I am designing a course aimed at teaching English to Russian students by teaching American culture. Though there are some common features in Russian and American cultures, there are many characteristics that are different in the two societies. The main goal of the course is to understand, distinguish and evaluate cultural similarities and differences while teaching English. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, any culture “lies on the verge”. That is, a culture cannot be comprehended by those within it but rather in comparison with other cultures. Thus, the purpose of the course is to educate and maintain the “inward culture” of Russian students by offering them an opportunity to compare their native culture with the American one.

The course is designed to be taught at a Russian university. The peculiarities of the Russian teaching culture, such as teaching and learning style, teaching techniques, and expectations, have influenced the course design.

Each unit includes vocabulary, texts (abstracts from belles-letters and poetry), American audio and video material, exercises aimed at developing speaking, writing, listening and reading skills and practice in comprehending, analyzing and absorbing another culture. Some of the materials will describe the American business culture: entrepreneurship, quality improvement methods, innovation, business ethics, etc. The materials will be made available via CD ROM which is presently a viable educational technology in Russia, unlike the Internet. Given the lack of reliable, affordable Internet access in Russia at this time, the use of CD ROM disks provides a means of presenting instruction in an interactive, reliable and affordable manner.

American-Russian Collaboration in Teaching Strategic Environmental Management

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Currently the Russian natural environment is in a state of severe ecological crisis. The direct impact of the former Soviet Union's use of nuclear, oil, and gas energy sources has significantly reduced the present and future quality of life for the average Russian citizen. Though environmental degradation can be attributable to some types of economic growth, strong economies can provide support for environmental cleanup and for conservation policies and initiatives. Progress on the environment would be greatly aided by strengthening the education system in the field of Environmental Management and Strategic Environmental Management.

The American and Russian education systems are different in important ways. It would be helpful if there were courses in Environmental Economics and Environmental Management in Russia. Unlike American Universities, the Russian education system does not offer courses in Strategic Environmental Management, a very important subject in the current period of ecological crisis. The purpose of new courses would be to prepare managers to make strategic decisions that are both economically successful and sensitive to the Earth's natural environment. More specially, these courses are designed to provide managers with the following: (a) a basic understanding of environmental science and environmental issues as they relate to business activity; (b) an understanding of sustainability, including its biophysical, ethical, cognitive, and economic dimensions; and (c) strategic decision-making frameworks and tools that will aid them in their search for long-term economic success within the limits of the ecosystem.

The Environmental Management Programs at The George Washington University are well known. The American experience of environmental teaching allows students to develop environmental projects for solving ecological problems in this country. Through their projects students receive not only theoretical knowledge about the environment but also practical skills needed to improve the environment.

Customer Service and the Year 2000 Computer Crisis

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Customer Service will be affected by the Year 2000 Computer Crisis. Products and services that rely on non-compliant equipment or suppliers will not be delivered as customers expect. Mortgage payments may look like debits, utility services may be interrupted, and some core business processes may shut down. Managers in all types of organizations are working to achieve Year 2000 compliance. Are quality improvement professionals more involved than other workers in these efforts?

Quality improvement professionals have special skills for doing this work. They can schedule and monitor the replacement or renovation of non-compliant equipment. They can work to redesign business processes using only compliant equipment. They are accustomed to working with suppliers. If a firm must limit its product and service offerings because of the Year 2000 problem, quality improvement professionals can help to determine which products and services are most important to customers.

This paper describes an investigation of the applicability of quality principles to the Year 2000 problem. The study asked quality professionals about their involvement in the work to cope with the Year 2000 problem. There were two objectives: 1) to sensitize people to the issues involved; and 2) to acquire information regarding the effect that the Year 2000 problem has on an organization from a quality perspective.

Understanding Organizational Change During A Period of Globalization

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Globalization is one of the key variables defining the way organizations change in the 21st Century. This trend is having a dramatic impact on our understanding of organizational change. Below we shall analyze some of the influences based on a review of the literature.

Organizational change is becoming a global issue in that the directions of change are more homogenous. Organizations are sometimes influenced more by globalization than by the local social and economic environment. At the same time, methods of change differ among organizations caught by globalization at different stages of development. Unless current trends stop influencing organizations, the change process can now be considered as continuous development. Earlier, a change process was considered as something temporary. Most of the existing models of organizational change describe stages in the change process. After achieving certain results through a change process, an organization completes the change and adopts the new routine. The change process was seen as something different from day-to-day organizational practice. Continuous change, on the contrary, is a process that is a normal part of day-to-day organizational life.

Management of a change process has traditionally been considered either as a change in organizational variables or as organizational learning. Of these two approaches the importance of the second has dramatically increased. There are several reasons for this change. Organizational variables usually are classified on a “hard”- “soft” continuum. Organizational structure is considered “hard”, and organizational culture is considered “soft”. For example, with the increased speed of changes in the global economy, the “hard” variables defined by the responsibilities assigned to organization members can hinder organizational capacity to respond flexibly to new challenges. Previously, one of the important features of an organization was the ability of its members to perform their responsibilities. Now the focus has shifted to the inability to rethink and redesign those responsibilities.

Organizational learning is a more holistic but less tangible approach to organizational change. Learning occurs on two levels: the organization and the individual. The importance of individual learning has increased recently. The task of employees now is continuous improvement of their intellectual capital. The task of managers is better use of this capital.

A Y2K Point of View on Economic and Cultural Developments in the US and Russia

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January 1, 2000 was not marked by any significant Y2K disruptions. However, this fact does not make the problem less interesting for analysis. The first draft of this paper was prepared when the Millennium bug was the subject of forecasts and action oriented analysis, the traditional American research strategy. This approach can be explained by the fact that the problem was especially important for the US due to the important role that technology plays in the economy of the country. In this work, we take a different, ex post facto descriptive approach. We compare how the problem was approached in the US and Russia. We have found more differences than similarities. However, the outcome was the same in both parts of the world, although for different reasons. The outcome supports our previous forecasts and allows us to look at the current economic and cultural differences from a “Y2K” point of view.

How to Teach Business and Marketing in Russia: The View from the USA

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The American system of business education is different from the Russian system. The main obstacle for teaching business courses in Russia is the lack of a close connection between the Universities and people from the business world. This is why Russian students do not have practical, hands-on opportunities to participate in making business, marketing and entrepreneurial decisions in large companies or in small and medium- sized enterprises. In order to overcome this limitation, Russia needs new methods for teaching business, principally by having students do consulting work with actual organizations.

The modern business world is being transformed by the knowledge revolution. Today a sustainable competitive advantage and further long-term success in the market require companies to stimulate creativity and initiative among their employees in order to meet customer needs more effectively. Market-oriented organizations differ in their capability to focus on the target market and achieve the inter-functional coordination that is the basis of cross-functional teams. It is important for business students to understand how to work in a team. Working in teams prepares students by helping them to learn methods that have added-value for small and medium-sized entrepreneurial businesses.

The experience of teaching Entrepreneurship/Small Business courses at The George Washington University shows how students are able to develop projects for local business owners or managers. There is a wide array of business courses that students need in order to learn the proper entrepreneurial skills. In the process of studying various methods, the emphasis is on gaining practical experience by having student teams consult with local business, meet with successful entrepreneurs, and do collaborative projects.

Some Implications of the Year 2000 Computer Crisis for Academic Disciplines

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The year 2000 computer problem became the largest technical project in human history and the greatest management challenge since World War II. It led to unprecedented peacetime cooperation. It was the first major problem of a knowledge society. What will be the effects on academic disciplines? This paper suggests ways in which a variety of disciplines may be affected. The year 2000 problem can be used to test social science theories. Theorists have made predictions of effects, which can be tested against events. Activists helped organizations and communities prepare and in so doing learned a great deal about how people respond to hypothetical, technological dangers. The failure to foresee, or correctly to perceive, the year 2000 computer problem may lead to changes in research programs in several disciplines.

**Why the Century Date Change Occurred so Smoothly:
A Report on a Conference**

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A conference at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California, January 24-25, 2000, brought together y2k program managers from several countries, large corporations, and international organizations. At the time, people were genuinely surprised that the century date change had gone so smoothly. This paper will explain who was at the conference, will describe the format of most presentations, and will answer several questions: What actually happened on January 1? Was there really a problem? Why was there so little disruption? Why were there no problems in countries which seemed to be less prepared, such as Italy? Why were there concerns about Russia? Why were Americans not evacuated from foreign countries thought to be most at risk? The paper will review some common themes that appeared in the presentations, and it will consider what has been learned from the y2k experience that may be helpful in the future.

The Problem of Personal Responsibility in Russia

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This paper addresses the problem of how Russian psychologists can help clients accept personal responsibility for their lives. A high level of personal responsibility correlates with healthy functioning and fast resolution of problems. According to psychological research many clients in Russia are ready to be an object of therapeutic influence but do not see themselves as active participants in counseling. Positive psychology considers this position as victimized when a person prefers to be managed by other people. Greater success would be achieved if clients would take a more active role, both in the counseling sessions and in their personal lives.

The changed lifestyle after the collapse of the Soviet Union has broken down many stereotypes. The system of values has been changing but there has been little change in the so called ‘collective thinking’ of Russian citizens. The problem of personal responsibility emerges also in labor relations which have become more difficult in the current collapsed economic situation. A growing occupational vulnerability has led to despair as people wait for outer control and management. This is a dangerous tendency for society since an extremist movement may arise.

The reasons for the passive position are rooted in cultural phenomena, in the bad system of medical insurance, and the absence of a tradition of paying for counseling service. This paper suggests a strategy of emphasizing personal responsibility while counseling clients with different kinds of problems. Russian counselors could make more use of assessment instruments to examine the client’s level of activity, locus of control, and experience of being a victim.