

6-1-2012

The Culture Shock of Thinking New Thoughts

Steven Meisel
LaSalle University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.shu.edu/omj>



Part of the [Organizational Behavior and Theory Commons](#), and the [Organizational Communication Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Meisel, Steven (2012) "The Culture Shock of Thinking New Thoughts," *Organization Management Journal*: Vol. 9: Iss. 2, Article 5.

Available at: <https://scholarship.shu.edu/omj/vol9/iss2/5>

TEACHING & LEARNING

The Culture Shock of Thinking New Thoughts

Steven Meisel¹

Co-Editor

¹*Management and Leadership Department, School of Business, La Salle University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA*

Moving to a new line of thinking is a lot like moving to a new country. It takes some courage and a sense of purpose but is exciting, challenging, and disorienting all at the same time. Pedersen (1995) identifies these feelings as “culture shock” and the Teaching & Learning (T&L) section in this issue presents two articles that can have that sort of paradigm-shifting effect on the reader. The first article, by Jeffrey Nesteruk, is “Business Teaching, Liberal Learning, and the Moral Transformation of Business Education.” In this work, Nesteruk comments on teaching business ethics from a variety of perspectives but suggests that “business as a discipline—or, more precisely, as a cross-disciplinary field—might itself find an intellectual home within liberal education” (p. 114). At first reading, one might think this is a good idea and without consequences. It is a bit like Pedersen’s initial stage of culture shock—the Honeymoon Phase. At this stage of development the differences between the old and new culture seem exotic and even romantic. We embrace the new idea and our new thoughts and insights into the attraction of a new culture of cross-disciplinary business education. Nesteruk identifies this as a “blending model” that specifically rejects the more familiar “bridging model’s” assumption of business and the liberal arts as two separate domains. However, like many new experiences this eventually leads to some discomfort as we attempt to reconcile our familiarity with “business” ethics with a new appreciation for the liberal arts. In culture shock terms, this attempt at reconciliation is known as the Negotiation Phase, in which we try to communicate our unfavorable encounters with a strange language and unsettling local customs. That is, people in the liberal arts teaching business ethics do not speak our language and their ways of looking at things are not our own.

Address correspondence to Steven Meisel, Management and Leadership Department, School of Business, La Salle University, College Hall 413, 1900 W. Olney Ave., Philadelphia, PA 19141, USA. E-mail: meisel@lasalle.edu

We can grow accustomed to a new culture though, and, in time, begin to make sense of different customs or places. Our second article in the T&L section is “Culture Shock: Hiding in Plain Sight—An Experiential Exercise,” by Mary Trefry and Valerie L. Christian. This is a highly textured design in which participants explore the potential influence of both national and organizational culture differences on communication, interaction, and reaching agreement. It is a sensemaking exercise using role playing as participants plan a three-day meeting between different parts of a multinational company. The “employees” work to find an acceptable way to meet and negotiate. The learning outcome is that participants begin to understand the differences that can bring them together. Pedersen calls this the Adjustment Phase of our culture shock.

In time and with some effort and luck, we can be immersed in the new culture and work with comfort and understanding. We “get” the nuances of language, understand some of the humor, and know how to order what we want for breakfast without causing laughter in restaurants. This is the Mastery Phase of engaging the new culture and involves maintaining our old identity while developing an expanded repertoire of interaction and thought. Nesteruk poses the idea that we can better understand and teach business ethics through use of “the moral character of liberal education . . . in the way it fosters in individuals the development of specific and morally significant dispositions.” These are “awareness of the needs of others, respect for their differences, recognition of the dignity of all, and an engagement with the public good” (p. 115). Clearly, these are a good jumping-off point for teaching business ethics and in no way contradict the business-school cultural norms of the subject. In the Trefry and Christian article, the Mastery Phase is encountered as learners work across organizational and national cultures and realize the usefulness of engaging in “cultural due diligence”.

If we are trying to open our thinking to different ways of teaching business ethics or to finding ways to collaborate with colleagues from other world cultures, we have to embrace

some change. It is helpful to know that the culture shock we experience can be overcome through the use of interesting road maps provided by these authors in pursuit of effective teaching and learning.

REFERENCE

Pedersen, P. (1995). *The five stages of culture shock: Critical incidents around the world. Contributions in psychology No. 25*. Westport, CT: Greenwood. Retrieved from http://www.enotes.com/topic/Culture_shock