Transnational Ergonomics:
Imagery Supporting a School of Transnational Human Resource Management

SYMPOSIUM ABSTRACT

FORMAT: In this symposium a media presentation by Allen Engle and Mark Mendenhall (University of Tennessee-Chattanooga) of about 20 minutes will be followed by a series of comments and responses by the panel. The symposium will conclude with a fifteen-minute question and answer session with the presenters, the panel and the general audience. The presentation will deal with the implications of the transnational strategy for human resource academicians and practitioners. A tentative outline covers:

I Overview, introduction of topic and participants

II A. Introduction of the Transnational Strategy

1. Transnational Definitions
2. Potential capabilities
3. “Mind Matrix” and social control
4. Potential advantages - combining local customization with global standardization and the diffusion of innovation

IIA. Implications of Strategy on Macro Human Resource Issues

1. Focus shifts to strategic and not comparative Human Resources (HR) - comparative HR is now subsumed as a portion of the HR capabilities (dealing with the local customization issues).

2. In the transnational firm HR replaces structure and the primary strategic control mechanism. Person and not job is the primary unit of analysis and we change from "Strategy leads to Structure, Structure leads to Jobs, and HR ensures that job happen" to "Strategy leads to HR competency capabilities, HR capabilities lead to tightly integrated HR processes" (i.e. Recruitment & Selection, Training and Development, HRIS, HR planning and Compensation and Benefits). This is related to a piece that Yvonne Stedham (University of Nevada - Reno) and Engle presented at Paderborn in 1998. Boudreau, Ramstad and Dowling (2002) talk in terms of "Global Talentship," Nohria and Ghoshal (1997) talk about this in terms of the increased need for integration in their "differentiated network" book and Galbraith (2000) talks about "coordination across networks" in chapter 7 of "Designing the Global Corporation." This is a significant role redefinition for HR.

3. Structure is not eliminated, but if plays a support role (see Egelhoff's piece redefining structure in the Blackwell Handbook of Cross Cultural Management (2002)) to more flexible networking and integration mechanisms. If even Egelhoff admits there is more to control than structure we must pursue this relationship. The new, reversed relationship between structure and HR's role in very interesting. How can HR directly provide the much-needed integration? How can the HR processes of Recruitment and Selection, Training & Development, Human Resource Information Systems, Human Resource Planning and Compensation and Benefits focus more on integration requirements and less on vertical and horizontal differentiation issues?

4. Everyone, from Bartlett and Ghoshal to Nohria and Ghoshal to Galbraith to Egelhoff, talks about the need to use cultural control/socialization (Ouchi’s clan control) rather
than agency theory or external bureaucratic controls as the primary control technique in the complex, turbulent transnational world. How can HR (throughout all its processes and not just the traditional cultural repositories of Recruitment and Selection and Training and Development) provide this indoctrination to cadres coming from very different functional, cultural and technical backgrounds?

5. How can HR systems overcome cross-cultural, cross-functional and cross-product differences and provide a globally integrative system of communication and coordination? What imagery, strategy and practices can HR provide to enhance this critical integrative “glue”?

IIIA Transnational Roles

1. Ghoshal & Bartlett present three new roles (the roles of Global Culture Guru, Regional Mentor and Expeditor and Local Entrepreneur) in their 1997 book “The Individualized Corporation” to replace the vertical “Russian Dolls” model of managerial and executive development. How are these three roles to be supported by HR processes?

IIIB Implications of these roles on Micro Human Resource Activities

1. Transnational Planning Processes. In 1999 Yvonne Stedham and Allen Engle presented a piece on the planning implications of the transnational idea at a HRPS symposium at Cornell. How is HR planning different in the transnational environment? Is planning really capability or capacity planning rather than traditional planning in terms of moving from preset location one to preset location two?

2. Transnational Competencies - John Boudreau, Peter Dowling and Co. have recently published some very interest ideas related to this. Engle, Mark Mendenhall and others presented a piece on this topic at Barcelona June 2001.

3. Transnational Decision Support Systems - Engle and Mendenhall presented a piece at Barcelona in 2001 on this topic, just a quick reference to the idea of the model and how it relates to the potential role of HRIS in facilitating the integrative “glue” from item IIIB-5 above.

4. What are the Recruitment and Selection implications of Ghoshal and Bartlett’s three transnational roles? What personality characteristics are of interest? What work experience is germane to the various roles? In addition to family issues and competency testing, how can we recruit and select based on an applicant’s “social capital”? How do we validly assess the applicant’s network of relevant “cadre” connections, connections that are both role specific and strategically relevant in terms of cultural, functional and product competencies available through this personal network? How do we conceptualize and measure these now valuable qualities?

5. What are the Training and Development implications of Ghoshal and Bartlett’s three transnational roles? How do transnational firms develop horizontal, role relevant careers?

6. What are the Compensation and Benefit implications of Ghoshal and Bartlett’s three transnational roles? Engle and Mendenhall will present a paper to this same Limerick conference presenting a model on “Transnational Roles and Total Rewards” outlining base pay, incentive, reward and career development configurations for each of these three roles.

Panel of discussants: Chris Brewster, London South Bank University, U.K.; Helen DeCieri, Monash University, Australia; Peter Dowling, University of Canberra, Australia; Scott Snell, Cornell University, U.S.A.