

Critical Thinking in the Globalized Business Classroom: The Existential Imperative

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Abstract: This paper examines today's globalized business school classroom and connections between critical thinking skills and existential philosophy. The development of critical thinking skills has historically been a core objective of higher education and it is more important than ever with the increasingly diverse international classroom of the millennial generation. Critical thinking is requisite for the individual to have an existential awareness. Moreover, this awareness is foundational to understanding the self in the workplace, and allows the individual to "go against the herd" and challenge conventional wisdom of the day. We argue for a broader view of our teaching of critical thinking, set against the backdrop of an increasingly global classroom environment.

Key Words: critical thinking, existential awareness, international students

Introduction

Most scholars and lay people alike would agree that a business degree should prepare a young person for the challenges of the work world in an increasingly globalized society. The Conference Board of Canada's Employability skills 2000+ lists the following as core skills needed in the workplace: to be able to communicate, manage information, use numbers, think and solve problems, demonstrate positive attitudes and behaviours, be responsible, be adaptable, learn continuously, work safely, work with others, and participate in projects and tasks. Tacitly identified and yet explicitly missing from the list is critical thinking. Critical thinking is defined as "the

art of analyzing and evaluating thinking with a view to improving it” (Paul & Elder, 2008, p. 2). It is arguably a key component of most, if not all, of the employability skills listed above. Most scholars and lay people alike agree critical thinking is or should be the primary objective of higher education (Katsioloudes & Tischio, 2001; Pfeffer & Fong, 2004; Willingham, 2007). “Understanding critical thinking is essential since it touches many aspects of our lives, and many of these aspects are interrelated” (Flores, Matkin, Bubach, Quinn & Harding, 2012, p. 213). Counterpoised with this objective is the nature of the university classroom in the 21st century. The typical Canadian business school classroom is now largely composed of the Millennial generation, and these students come from all over the world, and with a wide variety of backgrounds. They are constantly bombarded with a near excess of information and live in a world that provides an abundance of opportunity and therefore choices. Informed and aware choice is at the heart of critical thinking, decision making and existential philosophy.

Adding to the challenges faced by both the Millennial generation and their educators is the apparent paradox of progress currently taking place in Western society. Technology has changed our lives incredibly, we live much longer, and life for many people is far more comfortable and with more choices. However, at the same time, we have increased levels of anxiety, depression, use of medication, and suicide. We also seem to have a trend toward superficiality (materialism, celebrity worship, internet obsession), and there are indications that people are hungering for a more meaningful existence (Cottingham, 2003; Easterbrook, 2003; Myers, 2000; Seligman, 2002; Wattanasuwan, 2005; Whalen, 1999).

The modern era has produced a qualitatively superficial but quantitatively staggering knowledge of the world. In these terms, human beings have sought to understand themselves through external images provided by the scientific and technological society and have consequently dehumanized and despiritualized their essential being (Bowles, 1989, p. 409).

Howard Gardner, author of the ground-breaking *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (1983), suggested in his latest work, *Multiple Intelligences: New Horizons in Theory and Practice* (2008) that there may be an “existential intelligence” which promotes people to ask questions such as, “Who am I?”, “What is the meaning of life” and “How should I live?”

Allan and Shearer (2012, p. 21) note that, “considering existential issues and making sense of one’s existence may be important for optimal human functioning. However, people differ considerably in how often they contemplate these core issues.” In this article we argue that existential questions naturally arise when a person has strong critical thinking skills, in turn leading to enhanced existential thinking. We suggest that this has the likely consequence of empowering contemporary university students to understand the self in the workplace, to “go against the herd” and to challenge conventional wisdom. We first characterize aspects of today’s globalized business classroom, and then consider the linkages between critical thinking and existential philosophy. We then conclude with some recommendations and future directions for this line of reasoning.

Today’s Globalized Classroom

Students are flocking to college because the world is more complex, turbulent, and more reliant on knowledge than ever before. But educational practices invented when higher education served only the few are increasingly disconnected from the needs of contemporary students. (Greater Expectations, 2002, p. viii)

From a demographic perspective, today’s Canadian university business classroom is a very different one than it was thirty years ago. In the 1980s the student body consisted predominantly of white males. The classroom is now increasingly diverse, in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, and nationality (AACSB Business School Data Trends, 2013; AUCC Trends in Higher Education, 2011; Gudrais, 2011; Statistics Canada). The majority of students are the Millennial generation or Generation Y, usually defined as those born between 1982 and 2000 (Shaw & Fairhurst, 2008). Millennials are also referred to as the Net generation, Echo boomers, the Nexters, the Nintendo generation, generation N, and the Digital generation (Feiertag & Burge, 2008; McHaney, 2011; Partridge & Hallam, 2006).

The Millennial generation is defined by technology as they have grown up with computers. They are called the ‘connected’ generation and the most “techno-savvy” generation (Feiertag & Burge, 2008; Fogarty, 2008; Shaw & Fairhurst, 2008). While Millennials are very tech-savvy, their effective communication skills, both

writing and verbal are questionable (Feiertag & Burge, 2008; Turkle, 2012). This may be related to the emergence of the smartphone where information is readily available and texting is the main method of communication (Tapscott, 2009).

Millennials are socially embedded and they greatly value teamwork and the opinion of their peers (Fogarty, 2008; Smith & Clark, 2010). Most enjoy collaborating with others and working in groups. They have been brought up with a value of positive self-esteem (Fogarty, 2008): “The power of positive thinking appears to have won out over the school of hard knocks” (Fogarty, 2008, p. 370). Many argue that Millennials have been overly valued and over-protected by their parents (Fogarty, 2008; Smith & Clark, 2010; Winograd & Hais, 2011), and this approach may render the Millennial less able to analyze situations and to come up with workable solutions independently. Parents of Millennials are described as “helicopter parents” since they tend to swoop in to help solve their children’s problems (Howe & Strauss, 2003). Smith & Clark (2010, p. 1) note that, as a result, students may still be reliant on their parents to deal with problems and challenges they face at university.

This does not mean however, that Millennials live stress free or without expectations (Howe & Strauss, 2003). Many students have stressful, long days and are more likely to have a part-time job than previous generations (Marshal, 2007). They are very busy and university may be only one of their priorities at the moment. According to Statistics Canada almost 16% of teens label themselves as workaholics, 39% feel under constant pressure to accomplish more than they could handle, and 64% get less sleep in order to get what they want done in a day (Marshal, 2007). These reported challenges seem indicative of the origins of Millennials reported expectations for their career to offer a reasonable work/life balance, good pay and benefits, opportunity for rapid advancement, meaningful work experiences, and a nurturing work environment (Ng, Schweitzer & Lyons, 2010). In recent years universities have created a variety of programs to help students deal with stress, notably during exam periods. Dalhousie University in Halifax now has a “petting room” where students can interact with animals to relieve stress.

Many, if not most Millennials, tend to regard the purpose of university as getting a needed credential, i.e., job training (Pfeffer & Fong, 2004). They are highly focused on grades, which is logical given the societal importance placed on university marks and GPA. However, university faculty members note that today’s students

tend to be “either very good or very poor performers” (Stewart & Bernhardt, 2008, p. 597).

Not surprisingly, networked and highly technologically capable Millennials are also said to be more narcissistic than previous generations (Stewart & Bernhart, 2010; Twenge & Campbell, 2009). In fact, Stewart and Bernhart (2010) found empirical support for increases in narcissism and impulsivity when comparing 2004–2008 undergraduates versus pre 1987 undergraduates. The ability to regard a concept or situation from outside of one’s own perspective and apply concerted and sustained effort in doing so is a hallmark of critical thinking. Consequently, increases in narcissism and also in impulsivity are likely detrimental to pursuing an agenda of teaching critical thinking as a practice.

An increase in narcissism also appears to be further supported by the substantial time spent maintaining social networking identities:

When asked why they are so strongly drawn to a “virtual” world, millennials explain that it enables them to live out their wildest dreams and achieve a high level of skills appreciated by their peers. While many of them excelled in high school and college, they don’t seem attracted to the current structured world of work. Many of them seem to explore their options, waiting for the right moment or opportunity to come along, and are not in a hurry to proactively chase it. (Holt, Marques & Way, 2012, p. 81)

Consequently, some describe them as the “entitled” generation, and this has implications for educational situations (Twenge & Campbell, 2008). For example, Millennials don’t seem to relate well to their university professors believing that the professors are “out of touch” with their generation (McCabe & Trevino, 1995):

Business school faculty often find that their students are cynical, responding with disbelief when their professors argue that business is built on trust and ethical conduct, or that good guys get ahead. Many students view their professors as ivory-tower types who do not know what it is like in the trenches. (McCabe & Trevino, 1995, p. 213)

This characterization of professors as detached from contemporary concerns is compounded when combined with inattentiveness in the classroom. Millennials are easily bored (Tapscott, 2009) and

they are used to being entertained (Partridge & Hallam, 2006). This puts pressure on professors to “entertain” students in class, a role which many faculty undoubtedly do not agree with. In some cases this pressure to entertain has resulted in interactive teaching where the teacher acts as a “game-show host” throughout the class (Tapscott, 2009, p. 131).

Perhaps useful in aiding understanding of the Millennial Generation is Arnett’s (2010) proposal of a new lifestage, “emerging adulthood”, which goes from the late teens to at least the mid-twenties. This new theorized lifestage may help to explain the situation of the Millennial Generation which in effect, argues that Millennials are delaying becoming adults (Stewart & Bernhardt, 2010). “Instead of entering adult roles of marriage, parenthood, and stable work shortly after high school, as most young people did in 1976, today most wait until at least their late 20s to make these transitions” (Arnett, 2010, p. 89). As a result, the Millennial generation are going through a new period of adulthood which may possibly become the norm. “Generations—and glib generational generalizations—may come and go, but emerging adulthood is here to stay” (Arnett, 2010, p. 91).

Additionally, most business schools now attract a growing number of international students, particularly from China, the Middle East, and the Caribbean, but increasingly from all over the world. According to Statistics Canada, international enrollment increased from 36,822 in 1992 to 87,798 in 2008 with the majority going into business programs (Statistics Canada). These students come from a variety of cultural and educational backgrounds and life experiences. For many of them, English is their second language (and one that they are still improving upon), which makes higher education an even greater challenge. Many international students hope to go onto graduate education or work in Canada after completing their degree.

In short, today’s globalized classroom is not a homogenous group but composed of a diverse group of students with varying backgrounds and abilities. As a result, Minter (2010) argues that we need to pay much greater attention to the individual student—learning styles, biases, etc. Tapscott (2009) states that the teaching model needs to change from “one size fits all, to one size fits one” (p. 139). It is clear that today’s globalized classroom is a very different one than the past and these differences make the teaching of critical thinking more challenging, yet simultaneously more needed than in the past.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking came before schooling was ever invented, it lies at the very roots of civilization. It is a corner stone in the journey human kind is taking from beastly savagery to global sensitivity. (Facione, 2011b, p. 11)

Critical thinking is viewed from a variety of perspectives, defined in many ways, and the term itself can be misleading (Facione, 2010a; Katsioloudes & Tischio, 2001; Krupat, Sprague, Wolpaw, Haidet, Hatem & O'Brien, 2011; Lipman, 1988; Minter, 2010). The concept of critical thinking (CT) can be traced back to Socrates' famous quote, "the unexamined life is not worth living" (Anderson, 2008, p. 176). Socrates argued that everything, how we live and how society develops, should be questioned. Elder (2007) defines critical thinking as "self-guided, self-disciplined thinking which attempts to reason at the highest level of quality in a fair-minded way. People who think critically consistently attempt to live rationally, reasonably, empathetically. They are keenly aware of the inherently flawed nature of human thinking when left unchecked" (p. 1). Giancarlo and Facione (2001) describe critical thinking as "purposeful, self-regulatory judgment, a human cognitive process. As a result of this non-linear, recursive process, a person forms a judgment about what to believe or what to do in a given context...a person engaged in CT uses a core set of cognitive skills—analysis, interpretation, inference, explanation, evaluation, and self-regulation—to form that judgment and to monitor and improve the quality of that judgment" (p. 31). Others note that critical thinking involves getting people to 'think about their thinking': "Part of the process of getting students to become critical thinkers involves getting them to practice meta-cognition, that is, they must become aware of not only what they are thinking but also how they are thinking" (McGlynn, 2005, p. 16). Lipman (1988) describes critical thinking as, "skillful, responsible thinking that facilitates good judgement because it (1) relies upon criteria, (2) is self-correcting, and (3) is sensitive to context" (p. 39).

In addition to describing the process of critical thinking, some definitions emphasize that critical thinking requires an attitudinal or dispositional component (Browne & Keeley, 2007; Halpern, 1996; Lampert, 2007). Facione (2011) uses the term, the "critical spirit" to describe such an attitude. Browne and Keeley (2007) state, "lis-

tening and reading critically—that is, reacting with systematic evaluation to what you heard and read—requires a set of skills and attitudes” (p. 2). Thus, in order to teach students to think critically, educators must teach the key skills of questioning and also foster a critical thinking attitude, i.e., encourage them to want to be critical thinkers. This encouragement should be against a backdrop of desirability, as strong critical thinking skills are related to numerous factors including creativity, empathy, lifelong learning, engaged citizenship, and simply being able to navigate life successfully on a day to day basis (Browne & Keeley, 2007; Minter, 2010; Moon, 2008; Terenzini, Springer, Pascarella & Noura, 1995).

One of the debates on critical thinking concerns whether or not it is a general skill or if it is domain specific (Mingers, 2000; Mulnix, 2012). Domain specific means that critical thinking is specific to one area and therefore is not a transferable skill. Others believe that critical thinking is a general skill; one that can be applied to any area. This relates back to the disposition required for critical thinking. A person with a “questioning attitude” is probably far more likely to embrace critical thinking across many domains.

It has been said that we are “drowning in information but starved for knowledge” (Naisbitt, 1982, p. 24) and Paul, Elder & Bartell (2004) note: “Human thinking left to itself often gravitates toward prejudice, over-generalization, common fallacies, self-deception, rigidity, and narrowness” (p. 2). The cost of weak critical thinking is great, as poor thinking skills have been linked to lost revenue, patient deaths, job loss, ineffective law enforcement, gullible voters, poor communication, combat casualties, leadership problems, imprisonment, bad decisions, financial mismanagement, academic failure, drug addiction, and other problematic behavior (Facione, 2011; Flores, Matkin, Bubach, Quinn & Harding, 2012).

Unfortunately, at the very time that educators recognize the overwhelming importance of teaching higher-order thinking skills, it also seems that it is not being done effectively (Doherty, Hansen & Kaya, 2005; Flores, Matkin, Bubach, Quinn & Harding, 2012; Reid & Anderson, 2012; Willingham, 2007). Teaching critical thinking to students has always been a challenge for university educators and many argue it has historically been done poorly (Pfeffer & Fong, 2004): “Although higher education has been tasked with producing critical thinkers, the results have been unsatisfactory to date” (Flores, Matkin, Bubach, Quinn & Harding, 2012, p. 227). The nature of critical thinking and approaches to teaching and assessing it in tertiary education are debatable.

The often unstated assumptions seem to be that students will develop as critical thinkers by osmosis, and that critical thinking will be assessed predominantly in written assignments. Some students may be able to enroll in stand-alone critical thinking subjects, while others may receive little overt instruction in critical thinking. (Tapper, 2004, pp. 199-200)

Business students are well-served by a broad curriculum that emphasizes careful, responsible, and reflective thinking about discipline specific knowledge (such as management strategies), as well as about the actual social and economic conditions they might face in the workplace (Katsioloudes & Tischio, 2001, p. 48). Millennials have remarkable access to information, which makes strong critical thinking skills more important than ever in order to allow them to sift through and evaluate information (Doherty, Hansen & Kaya, 2005; Hood, 2012). The juxtaposition of having large volumes of information available and needing to be able to navigate and evaluate such information is at the heart of the identity of technologically embedded Millennials.

Jaime S. Fall, a vice president at the HR Policy Association puts it well when he states that young employees “are very good at finding information, but not as good at putting that information into context”. He goes on to state that, “They’re really good at technology, but not at how to take those skills and resolve specific business problems.” and says that “colleges can’t be either/or anymore—a trade school or a liberal arts college. We need skilled people with well-rounded backgrounds and the ability to think constructively.” (Tugend, 2013, p. 1)

Strong critical thinking skills are not only a goal in itself but are also a necessary pre-requisite in order to study most business subjects, for example ethical behavior, strategic management, and Human Resource Management. How does one discuss complex global problems with students if they don’t have at least a basic ability to think critically? Understanding complicated and multifaceted issues requires an ability to appreciate and analyze different points of view. These needs dovetail exceptionally well with the needs of the modern business student, but “business professors too often forget that executive decision makers are not fact collectors;

they are fact users and integrators. Thus, what they need from educators is help in understanding how to interpret facts and guidance from experienced teachers in making decisions in the absence of clear facts” (Bennis & O’Toole, 2005, p. 101).

There have been a wide variety of methods proposed to effectively teach critical thinking including using meaningful discussion topics, professors modeling critical thinking, encouraging and providing time for students to engage in thinking, showing examples of critical thinking, and assessing on critical thinking (Browne & Keely, 2007; Halpern, 1996; Moon, 2008; Paul, 1992; Terenzini et al, 1995). Unfortunately, no one seems to be quite sure how to teach critical thinking to today’s globalized Millennial classroom. Feiertag & Burge (2008) note: “It should come as no surprise that university administrators, faculty and students do not necessarily see eye to eye on how Gen N learns” (p. 460). And perhaps the bigger question is “how do we engage the international millennial classroom in higher education?”

We argue that the answer to many of the dilemmas graduates are facing today stem from a lack of an existential perspective. The management philosophy and pedagogy literatures recent forays into existentialist philosophy (see MacMillan, Yue & Mills, 2012, 2013; and Yue, 2010) and compatible critical perspectives on work and career (e.g. MacMillan, 2009; Yue & MacMillan, 2013; MacMillan & Yue, 2012) may add insight into the need for critical thinking and especially important, how we might frame teaching it.

The Existential Imperative

Existential Philosophy

Existentialism is a philosophy of human existence focused on the individual Self and how the Self is continually transformed (Baggini, 2005; Breisach, 1962; Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Cotkin, 2003; Grene, 1959; Kaufmann, 1989; Reinhardt, 1960; Reynolds, 2006; Schrag, 1977; Tanzer, 2008; Tillich, 1952). It is a school of thought dating back to Søren Kierkegaard in the 1800s, however it did not come into prominence until after World War II when Europeans were experiencing anxiety and despair, and seeking a philosophical direction (Allen, 1973; Barrett, 1962; Breisach, 1962; Cotkin, 2003; Kierkegaard, 1956; Reynolds, 2006; Tanzer, 2008). Existentialism has been viewed in many ways as various philosophers (and psychologists) have contributed to our understanding (Nietzsche,

1999; Beauvoir, 1983; Sartre, 1956, 1963, 1970; Heidegger, 1967; Camus, 1967, 1972; Tillich, 1952; Yalom, 1980). However, despite the varied views, there are key Existential themes (such as freedom, authenticity, choice, death, contingency) which provide insight into understanding the dilemmas and challenges of human existence.

Existentialism is based on the premise that “existence precedes essence”—that we have no predetermined essence but that we create our essence through the lives we choose (and subsequently experience) (Sartre, 1970). Existentialism argues for the “authentic life,” the consciously chosen life which is meaningful to the individual. “Meaning in life is obtained through an authentic existence. The conditions for achieving this kind of existence are commitment to actualize one’s possibilities to choose and decide about the possibilities and to act on them” (Orbach, 2008, p. 284). Therefore, the onus is on the individual to create meaning by his/her choices, the resulting experiences, and the reflection (reflexivity) upon those lived experiences. “The Existential philosopher insists that what I really know is not the external world as such, but my own experience; for him the personal is real” (Roubiczek, 1964, p. 10).

The opposite of the authentic life is the unauthentic (or inauthentic) life, known in existential terms, as living in Bad Faith. “All the existentialists accept authentic vs. unauthentic modes of existing as a basic distinction which divides men [sic] at the root of their very being, and is manifested at every level of their concrete existence” (Wild, 1966, p. 126). To live in Bad Faith is to live the “unexamined life,” the life that is not questioned and therefore not consciously chosen. “We say indifferently of a person that he shows signs of bad faith or that he lies to himself... [we] shall willingly grant that bad faith is a lie to oneself, on condition that we distinguish the lie to oneself from lying in general” (Sartre, 1956, p. 48). However, Bad Faith is difficult to avoid as authenticity is a dynamic state of existence and is thus a continual challenge for the individual.

Many existentialists consider humans to be a “tortured” species, living in an absurd world and unable to comprehend life (Camus, 1967; Sartre, 1956). The world and ourselves are a mystery to us, but despite this, we must somehow navigate through life and try to make sense of that life. Sartre (1956) tells us that we are thrown into this world, and Barnes (1959) reminds us that “One has to play the game, but one is never given a book of rules” (p. 49).

Existentialism also highlights the contingent nature of human

existence, the fact that many factors are out of one's control. Since little of life can be predicted with certainty, the future self is a mystery to the individual and contingent upon unknown factors, which therefore results in a state of anxiety. Each day we are faced with a variety of choices and possibilities; many of which we are fearful of, since the results could be positive or negative. Moreover, while aspects of our daily existence are predictable, an existentialist perspective highlights the uncertainty that is simultaneously present in our daily lives (Thompson, 1995, p. 504). To exist contingently also means that how we view our lives (and past experiences) will probably change with new circumstances of life and as the Self changes. Therefore, what may be meaningful at one point in time, such as one's career, may have little meaning at a different point in time.

Ultimately, the most significant contingent factor that we face is death and the end of our existence. Death is arguably one of the most important themes of existentialism. The recognition of our inevitable death causes "anguish" as it ends all choices and possibilities, and we rarely know when it will occur. We may live to an old age or we may die at a very young age from an accident or fatal disease. From an existential point of view, the fact that we know that we will some day cease to exist, provides incentive to ignore the trivial aspects of life and gives us the freedom to live the authentic life. Awareness of one's mortality is a precondition of a life of meaning (Heidegger, 1967; Stokes, 2002).

Existential philosophy gives us insights into the nature of the individual self, the circumstances and dilemmas of everyday life, and in particular, it gives us a way to view the creation of individual meaning, i.e., the authentic life in existential terms. Golomb (1995) notes, "the existential question today is not whether to be or not to be, but how one can become what one truly is" (p. 200).

Critical Thinking & Existentialism

There are many connections between the ideas of the self, anxiety, choice, and authenticity that link existentialist thought to the context of the globalized millennial student. Existential thinking is defined as "the tendency to engage with ultimate concerns and the capacity to carry out a meaning-making process that locates oneself in relation to these existential issues" (Allan & Shearer, 2012, p. 22). Minimally, the existential search for meaning and the authentic good life are seemingly similar to the hopes and expectations of the

modern millennial student. Existentialism emphasizes the question of “how is one to live,” a difficult question to answer in contemporary times given the abundance of information Millennials have (literally) at their fingertips. Strong critical thinking makes it possible to understand how choices, experience, and reflexivity continually transform the self—the impact of the choice of work, the transformative experience of work each day, and accept the benefits of going “against the herd”.

For the Millennial generation the risks of falling into the inauthentic trap of living up to the expectations and roles offered by others are especially poignant in a heavily evaluative and coercive socially networked world. In order to live authentically, the individual must freely and consciously choose the importance of work in one’s life and the type of work itself. But Millennials are faced with a very different work landscape than previous generations, which makes choosing work a more onerous task. In order to recognize and evaluate the many choices they have about work they need to be able to critically evaluate the vast amounts of information in their individual world. “The issue of critical thinking cannot be separated from how students view their information universe” (Weiler, 2004, p. 47)

Above all else, existentialism is about awakening or rebelling from the “ordinary person” syndrome, the routine pattern of existence that society can inadvertently or overtly place on people (Olson, 1962; Reynolds, 2006; Wild, 1966). Breisach (1962) contends that, “Existentialists have asked for a life in which man [sic] continuously questions his purpose and accepts responsibility for his actions, one which truly reflects man’s special position in this world” (pp. 4–5). From birth, different societies ingrain in individuals an imperative to live a certain way, and so one may become continually dependent on “getting along”. However, citizens in an increasingly globalized world have the opportunity (and we believe responsibility) to speak up against injustices of the day, whether they are domestic or international. For example, the divide between the haves and have-nots has become greater in recent decades and governments seem unwilling to address the growing inequity. Market capitalism itself has proven to be problematic as the belief that increased wealth and materialism would be the path to fulfillment and happiness has not materialized. “The great self-confidence of the Western technological nations, and especially of the United States, was in large part because of the belief that materialism—the prolongation of a healthy life, the acquisition of

wealth, the ownership of consumer goods—would be the royal road to a happy life” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999, pp. 822). Moreover, many are arguing that the increasing emphasis on wealth and materialism is resulting in a “meaning deficit” for the individual and society (Fox, 1994; Fromm, 1976; Maslow, 1971; Needleman, 1991).

The very pragmatic need for critical thinking in an information rich, and yet meaning poor situation is precisely what is seen as having spawned contemporary existentialism post World War Two. This is especially relevant to a generation of young people who highly value relationships and who may be especially susceptible to peer pressure. Heidegger says that we “fall” (fallenness) into inauthenticity and become what is expected of us in the “public arena” and behave according to the norms and rules of society. We escape from our true selves into an organized life, which is untrue or false. In effect, one becomes an actor at work and plays a role that may not be in line with one’s true self. The Millennial generation’s challenge is to “discover” themselves in a vastly different world, a more complex one, peopled with many demands and new work options. Strong critical thinking is necessary to understand the pressure to conform to others, and to accept going “against the herd”, a key existential concept (Heidegger, 1967). Failure to go against the herd can result in bad faith decision-making, unethical behavior, and complacency about important societal issues, and how society evolves.

Towards a Broader View of Critical Thinking

Current critical thinking development is too narrow and with a broader perspective, improved opportunity to meaningfully teach critical thinking opens up. To frame critical thinking attitudes and skills as being of personal importance and relevant to more concrete aspects of one’s life helps situate the subject within the Millennial generation’s quest for meaning. What might this look like? To encourage consideration of our argument, we offer a few specific suggestions.

Recommendations

How to marry the needs and characteristics of the millennial student in the globalized classroom with the requirements for critical thinking and the insights from existential thought? Our thoughts

on the challenges and the opportunities in considering this question arise from our work as teachers and as philosophers.

We are convinced that the universal nature of the topics that existentialism broaches is an important part of the answer. This contention is underscored by our earlier discussion about how issues of meaning in life are predicated upon a consideration of the contingent nature of our existence and that we enter our lives against a backdrop of the social, which is already in process. Thus we already possess a lived sense of entering a game for which we do not know the rules. We as individuals have already had the experience of trying to understand the conditions under which we live our social existence with nothing but observation, thought, and consideration as our touchstones. With this in mind we first propose that educators openly discuss issues of meaning and choice in the classroom, being that every individual has some lived experience of having to practically manage the unknowable, even if this experience is buried in the past of one's own childhood. To expose students to the idea that they have choice at the most basic of levels (that of identity and self) is both seemingly trite and quite radical at the same time. We can present the university as a place where students realize the impact of their choices, and "discover themselves" through chosen experiences.

Second, we suggest that the business school curriculum incorporates a critical perspective on global problems such as poverty, racism, conflict and inequity. In a sense this second suggestion is two-pronged in conception. The first suggestion above is to make use of self-interest and self-knowledge on the part of the student to galvanize a sense of radical empowerment around choice. This second suggestion is to then situate this self-determination, at the most basic and experiential levels within a real world of consequences. Business students need to understand the world they live in, and in particular how self-interests at times conflict with the greater good of society. As earlier discussed, Millennials have many preconceived notions of work and the world, and they would benefit from the ability to challenge these beliefs. Such challenging, when grounded in a sense of capability in terms of choosing meaning in one's life, results in an individually grounded authenticity.

Third, we maintain that courses that deal with workplace interaction such as Organizational Behaviour, Leadership, and Human Resource Management are the obvious locations in which to focus on how daily choices, subsequent actions, and reflexivity transform the individual Self and others in the workplace. This becomes es-

pecially poignant when working in a multicultural workplace composed of a wide assortment of people with varying backgrounds, beliefs and values.

Overall, we believe that business schools need to take a much broader approach to the curriculum, and challenge students beyond the traditional business school model. Universities need to be a place where students can make choices on how they will live and in what kind of society and world they wish to live.

Conclusion

We have characterized the millennial student as living in an information rich, well connected, and yet meaning poor social context. The vexing problems and challenges faced by Millennials are similar to the sense of restlessness, of ennui, that lead to a modern resurgence in interest in existentialism post World War II. We have argued that the development of strong critical thinking skills is a necessary prerequisite for the development of the existential self and the self's ability to live the authentic life.

We live in strange times, in which we have more easily accessed knowledge than ever before and thus have many more choices. From an existential perspective, critical thinking is the most basic and necessary life skill needed in order for the individual to freely choose his/her life. Educators have ample opportunity to work with students to develop critical thinking in business schools as we have some existing courses, content and structures that support good decision-making. Applying these techniques to matters of individual importance, such as career planning and development, has the potential to build a sort of applied credibility that may resonate more effectively with the millennial generation. This has the consequence of providing a lived example of the utility of adopting a critical thinking attitude, surely fertile intellectual ground for critical thinking skills enhancement.

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