

Abstract

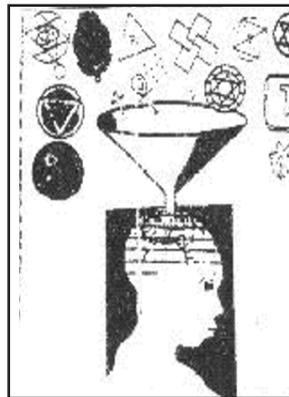
This case immerses students in the everyday, palpable environment of an old-school financial services environment as it struggles to change its culture to enter the 21st century. The case enables students to assess the progress of the intended diversity efforts within a large firm, as well as develop an ability to critique the pitfalls due to continued symbolic thinking on the part of the actors. (Per Edgar Ridley, symbolic thinking, a learned behavior, causes individuals to mythologize and think superstitiously, seeking secondary meaning instead of an acceptance of facts.) Students develop the ability to identify and appreciate symptomatic thinking in management. Symptomatic thinking, which is innate to the neurological processes of the human brain, allows individuals to see things as they really are; to implement policy and evaluate individuals free of superstition and mythology. Unlike symbolic thought, symptomatic thought and behavior is natural, requiring no effort.

Introduction

Considerable research has revealed that attempts at diversity are clumsy at best; and spurious at worst. The challenge for actors has been to develop a “business case” for why those contributing groups represented by women and people of color should be promoted to levels of leadership within the corporate environment. The unfortunate result, after decades of trial and error, is an industry designed to tighten the grip of white males on business through the creation of artificial heights, the levels of which only

a few from the affected groups can reach, with a tenuous hold. Cutting-edge research on symbols and symptoms tells us that the refusal to examine in totality the history of discrimination and racism allow us to perpetuate a mythology that prohibits any real growth. That mythology, of white male supremacy, is enhanced through impotent diversity programs repeated throughout corporate America.

Figure 1 – Stimuli (natural signs) funneling into the human brain. Symbols do not exist until they are processed by the human brain.



Reference:
Edgar J. Ridley,
The Golden Apple:
Changing the Structure of
Civilization, 2008.

Methodology

This case examines the implementation of symptomatic thinking in a corporate environment with an aim towards encouraging authentic leadership in a world of changing demographics. The point of view will be that of a primary protagonist, an African-American woman, and the venue will be a major commercial bank based in the United States. For the purposes of confidentiality, all names will be changed. The case will follow the trajectory of a manager of color who happens to be a woman, incorporating research from multiple areas including, but not limited to:

Catalyst studies on women in corporations, including women of color;

Empirical studies done by *Ella Bell and Stella Nkomo* on comparative challenges faced by women of color and white women in corporate America;

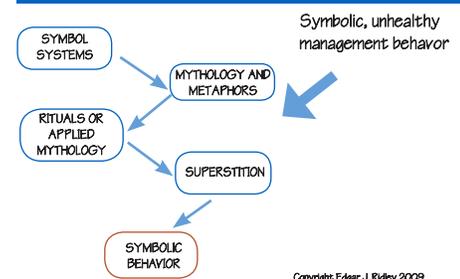
Empirical studies conducted by *Hekman, Foo & Yang* on the negative impact experienced by women and minorities who attempt to diversify their firms;

Cutting-edge qualitative research conducted by *Edgar Ridley* on the negative impact of symbolic thinking and the liberating influence of symptomatic thinking;

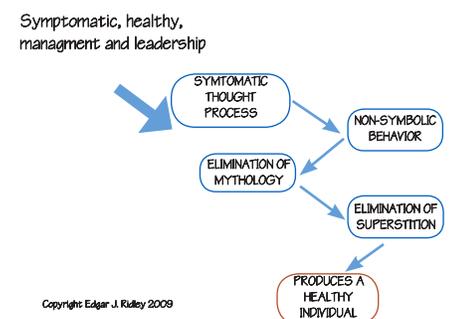
Empirical research from *Thomas Shapiro* on wealth inequality; and

Qualitative research from renowned American thinkers such as *W. Edwards Deming and Albert Einstein*.

Results



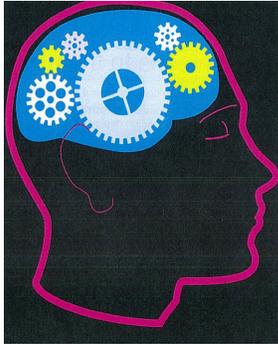
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A New Approach

Eliminating
symbolic thinking



Introducing
Symptomatic thought

Discussion

Traditional approaches to diversity learning are remarkable in their consistent gaps when it comes to addressing historical inequities as an avenue to understanding future opportunities for business when inclusion is emphasized.

The current environment of changing demographics, not only domestically but globally, requires, indeed deserves, a more focused approach to addressing this multicultural landscape as the majority/minority language takes on a different shape.

This case provides the background and substance to educate the reader.

Conclusions

After reading, assessing and implementing this case study, students are able to:

Analyze and evaluate symbolic vs. symptomatic interaction in a multicultural environment

Develop insights into the economic and business implications of changing

demographics.

Demonstrate knowledge of the multiple aspects of identity [gender, age, race, ethnicity (including White identity) religion, class, national and regional identity] and intercultural communication.

Analyze and evaluate how differences in social culture influence values in the workplace

The case ends with the protagonist trying to solve a dilemma generated by the firm's expansion into new regional markets.

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For instance, symbolic thinking in the Hostos environment creates a reinforcement of the unfortunate stereotypes applied to our student population. As Ridley (2008) tells us, “When one thinks symptomatically, one is led by the symptoms of one’s experience. Instead of mythologizing, one reads the symptoms of their existence like a language, to which they respond accordingly. This means they do not mythologize the events in their life, nor do they approach their life with a symbolizing attitude (p.140). Rather than allowing the disadvantaged environment that surrounds our students to dictate our response to them, we want to encourage our students to excel at every encounter!

As teaching methodologies have evolved, an applicable approach has been that of “flipping the classroom”. In such an environment, the instructor utilizes technology to facilitate learning outside the classroom, thereby liberating classroom time for fertile discussion, inquiry and reflection. I have found great utility in the use of the Panopto lecture capture tool, which allows me to record lectures that students can view at their leisure. The result is amplified student engagement in the classroom, as they transition from passive learning to increased interaction with the instructor.

An effective approach toward changing student behavior is to challenge first-year students with a semester assignment on immigration. Many Hostos students are living the experience, and the assignment gives them permission to reflect, especially in the midst of today’s challenges surrounding the immigrant experience. Their mandatory deliverable is to take a position on the pending immigration legislation and defend their point of view. Their subsequent research enables them to identify and link the potential economic benefit gained by the contribution of the many undocumented workers in our population. Naturally, this assignment provides an illumination not experienced previously – the students gravitate towards the content with enthusiasm, including personal stories of themselves or family and friends.

An additional teaching moment is to invite students to link their classroom inquiries into ad hoc, extra-credit presentations as a way of having their question answered. This activity, earlier noted as “flipping the classroom”, leads students down an unexpected path of research and investigation that is new to them, including

preparing and presenting presentations to educate the entire class - and the professor! Very importantly, the students’ lack of self-confidence and general lack of self-esteem is significantly and collectively diminished.

Assignments were accompanied by full-semester messaging regarding the students’ potential for capitalizing on the nation’s changing demographics. Emphasis is always placed on diminishing and/or eliminating the tendency to think symbolically, which hinders learning. Students are reminded about their correct place in history – this goes a long way towards encouraging full development. The outcome is a strengthened resolve to overcome future obstacles in school and in life.

Summary

For a true 21st century teaching and learning environment, professors are advised to:

- Implement the *Symptomatic Thought Process* (STP) to confront inappropriate stereotyping and unfortunate belief systems (also known as symbolic behavior).
- Remember that the *Symptomatic Thought Process* (STP) offers the objective to “see things as they really are void of superstition or mythological assumptions” (Ridley, 2008, pp. 137-139).
- Discontinue symbolic thinking – poor outcomes should be evidence-based, not imaginary. Symbolic thinking is a learned activity; it is not innate to the human brain.
- Practice thinking symptomatically – be acutely mindful of the potential for deeper engagement with ESL learners.
- Symptomatic thinking is natural, it is innate to the human brain.
- Do not assume silence infers lack of knowledge.
- Be creative with the construction of pedagogy.
- Flip the classroom to intensify engagement and encourage enthusiasm.

About the Author

Linda is a tenured Lecturer at CUNY's Hostos Community College, where she teaches *Principles of Management (BUS 201)* and *Introduction to Business (BUS 100)*. Additionally, she is an Adjunct Professor and Industry Expert at CUNY's School of Professional Studies in the M.S. program for Business Management and Leadership, where she teaches *Organizational Behavior and Leadership (BUS 600)*, and *Managing Diversity in a Global Economy (BUS 633)*.

As a complement to her teaching, Linda is CEO of Edgar J. Ridley & Associates, Inc., an international management consulting firm specializing in change management. Linda has been designated an Expert Consultant by the Asian Productivity Organization (APO) out of Tokyo, Japan, and she services global clients, conducting workshops and training seminars in workplace effectiveness. Linda has conducted training for women entrepreneurs from companies and organizations throughout Southeast Asia. Linda has the additional prestige of being on the faculty of the American Management Association, where her portfolio includes corporate training in analytical topics such as *Critical Thinking*, *High-Impact Decision Making*, and *High Performance Accountability*.

Linda studied at Virginia Commonwealth University; she earned her Masters in Business Administration from the Mason School of Business at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. She and her husband, Edgar, reside in Harlem, New York City.

TOUCHSTONE CALL FOR PAPERS

**Jason Buchanon, Assistant Professor, English
Editor-in-Chief**

In linking the power of teaching to a broadening of our vision, Eugenio María de Hostos affirmed the power of education. In honor of our namesake's belief, Touchstone, a journal devoted to the scholarship produced by the community of Hostos, was created. The journal is published yearly by the Magda Vasillov Center for Teaching and Learning.

The goals of Touchstone are to increase awareness of the scholarly and creative work of the faculty at Hostos and provide an outlet for work that is on its way to outside publication. In accordance to these goals, Touchstone publishes a diverse range of scholarship from the Hostos Community. This diversity of imaginative and creative work represents the many talents of the faculty here at Hostos.

Touchstone accepts works in English or Spanish on any of the following:

- Original scholarship on teaching and learning
- Scholarly articles from any discipline
- Best practices
- Conference presentations or reports
- Classroom-based research
- Teaching challenges, experiences, and lessons
- Personal essays or editorials
- WAC and beyond
- Book reviews
- Creative works

In addition to the above criteria, Touchstone would be interested scholarship, essays, or pedagogical material connected the Book of the Year: *Americanah*.

Dr. Jason Buchanan is the new editor of Touchstone. The journal accepts a wide range of publications, so it's very amenable to any work in any stage of production. Send your articles using discipline appropriate citation to Professor Buchanan (jbuchanan@hostos.cuny.edu) by December 31, 2018. The entire editorial staff at Touchstone eagerly awaits your submissions!