ONLINE EDUCATION AND DIVERSITY SCHOLARSHIP: THE CENTER FOR WORKPLACE DIVERSITY RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

University of Phoenix has been consistently working on increasing high-quality scholarship among its faculty and doctoral students through its online education approach. Last year, the School of Advanced Studies, the school in charge of the doctoral programs, developed and implemented an innovative research center model. Nine research centers that investigate relevant research topics, and are in charge of developing solutions to real-world problems, were created in 2014 to streamline and support its academic community.

Among these nine centers, the Center for Workplace Diversity Research (CWDR) is the one developing research related to the diversity in the workplace and the development of a workforce that can successfully address challenges posed by an increasing globalized economy. CWDR has become a synergistic environment for scholarship, helping its affiliates to publish in peer-reviewed papers and deliver presentations at national and international conferences, in various areas of knowledge, including Business and Management, Education, Humanities, and Social Sciences.

This article will provide readers with a comprehensive overview of the framework developed by the center to address diversity in the workplace. It also highlights the main achievements in its first year of existence, and starts a reflective dialogue on how diversity impacts us all today.

KEYWORDS: Diversity, Globalization, Higher education, Online education, Scholarship, Workforce

INTRODUCTION

In developing and implementing doctoral online programs, universities have to face challenges on a regular basis. One of them is how to keep all relevant stakeholders fully engaged with a high-level research and scholarship. To overcome this challenge, University of Phoenix, a North American provider of fully online doctoral education decided to create research centers in the 3 main areas of knowledge that the university offers doctoral degrees: Business and Management, Education, and Healthcare. Among the three business and managers centers, the Center for Workplace Diversity Research (CWDR) is the one which is going to be described in this paper. CWDR serves as a synergistic environment for alumni, faculty and students who have an expressed interest or research agenda associated with a variety of topics, issues, and challenges associated with cultural, generational, learning, thinking, and managerial diversity existing in the workforce and in the workplace. The Center is recognized as a place where graduates, students

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and faculty can find the collegiality and socialization necessary for an advanced community of learning and scholarship. Research is cultivated and supported in a variety of ways through direct affiliation with the center and its research agenda, such as research contributions as one of the selected Research Fellows, a Grant recipient, or another scholarly contribution. The stated mission of CWDR is to create and promote opportunities for developing research agendas and applied solutions in areas related to Diversity in the Workplace, such as business education, soft managerial skills, social responsibility and sustainability, cross-cultural management, integrative thinking, multiple intelligences and learning styles, and workforce diversity. CWDR focuses on producing new knowledge and on creating innovative, applied solutions for meeting the challenges of the diverse emerging workforce and the workplace encompassing them.

**ConcePtual FrameWorK**

Diversity is intrinsically connected to the fact we are human beings, and it can be found in all dimensions of both our personal and professional lives.

Can you look at the world that surround us and not think of or see diversity?

The Center for Workplace Diversity Research was conceived to include not only the traditional dimensions of Diversity, the ones usually considered by people and companies like gender, race and ethnicity. CWDR embraces a more comprehensive view of Diversity in the Workplace as can be seen in Figure 1.

The framework presented in that figure represents a dynamic and current status, with new areas being added in the future as center’s research and scholarship leads affiliates into new areas related to diversity.

**Figure 1. How CWDR Embraces Diversity**
The center is composed by people. They are the vital force behind the research and scholarship. University of Phoenix, through different channels, has disclosed and advertised the Research Centers in an effort to create awareness and also foster the academic community to benefit from the opportunity of the extra support in developing their scholarship. An event named Knowledge Without Borders happens every month in a different location of the United States, and alumni, students, and faculty are invited to attend to hear the message conveyed by each center. All attendees are invited to join one center as a research affiliate. The university also open four research fellowships for each center every 8 months.

The research fellows are special affiliates that have the duty of proposing a new research topic and publish at least once in a peer-reviewed journal during their fellowship period. For that they receive some financial compensation, but also commit to support the center leader in diverse activities hosted by the center. The Center for Workplace Diversity Research has currently seven fellows among its affiliates, each one developing a research that it is intrinsically connected to one of the many dimensions of diversity in the workplace:

- Dr. Robert W. Robertson - Building Local Workforce Skills to Compete in the Global Economy. The Case of Tampa, Florida
- Dr. Bethany Mickahail - Corporate Implementation of Design Thinking for Innovation and Economic Growth
- Dr. Pamela Gordon - Generational Cohort Work Satisfaction in Hospital Nurses
- Dr. Karen Robinson - Generational differences in the attitudes of women in leadership roles
- Dr. Doreen McGunagle - Meeting real work demands of the global economy
- Dr. Ronald Rojas - Assessing Diversity Capacity Across Cultures: A Hispanic Workforce Perspective
- Dr. Ramon Moran - Conceptualization and Integration of Workplace Spirituality in Police Departments

BUILDING LOCAL WORKFORCE SKILLS TO COMPETE IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY: THE CASE OF TAMPA, FLORIDA

The proposal is to outline the existing structure and organizational efforts to support economic development and specifically to improve workforce skills in Florida and more directly in Tampa. This research is a case study of a local response to the increasing need for a globally competent workforce. Specifically, the research will outline and explore issues and concerns related to the development and implementation of a formal strategic skills gap. The case study can serve as a model for consideration by other local jurisdictions.

CORPORATE IMPLEMENTATION OF DESIGN THINKING FOR INNOVATION AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

Numerous studies have been conducted on changing corporate culture over the last two decades. However, even as the need for change is recognized, the question arises how strategic decisions
are made in order to have transformative alterations in corporate management to promote new innovative products and resources. It is anticipated all levels of these thriving corporations aim to immerse their employees in Design Thinking principles and implementation, for enduring positive change. The quantitative survey research method to be conducted in this project will critically examine the facets of the change process associated with top corporate executives’ implementation of Design Thinking in their companies for new innovations and growth.

**GENERATIONAL COHORT WORK SATISFACTION IN HOSPITAL NURSES**

This qualitative research study will explore hospital nurses’ perceptions of work satisfaction. The 12 selected participants will be representative of the three generational cohorts currently in the workforce. Each cohort will be represented by four non-managerial nurses who work in a large community hospital in South Florida. The objective of the interview will be to have these participants share their personal perceptions related to work satisfaction criteria (pay or reward, professional status, interaction and cohesion, administration, task requirements and any other factors shared) to see if specific themes emerge within generational cohorts.

**GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN THE ATTITUDES OF WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP ROLES**

Recent articles have highlighted that much of the work conducted to-date on women in leadership has taken a fairly narrow look at women and has generally failed to account for generational differences within the demographic (Taylor, Stein, 2014), despite other emerging bodies of research that demonstrate significant, though often mixed, differences in the viewpoints and attitudes of women from different generations (i.e., Parry & Urwin, 2011; Stark, Kirk & Bruhn, 2012). This initial exploratory study will attempt to identify potential areas of difference using a cross-sectional survey of women in leadership roles in order to identify areas of future study.

**MEETING REAL WORK DEMANDS OF THE GLOBAL ECONOMY**

To meet the demands of the global economy requires an education that embraces the changes needed in the workforce. Carnevale, Smith, and Strohl (2013) research noted that the fastest growing occupations will be in Science, Technology, Engineering & Math (STEM) along with Healthcare Professions, and Community Services. These occupations will require higher levels of education to compete for positions. Carnevale, Smith and Melton (2011) study reflects on trends in STEM fields that have a direct impact on innovation and productivity in the United States (US). These occupations are the highest paid in the global economy and second only to healthcare which is the fastest growing occupation. Half of all STEM positions are in the manufacturing, health care and construction industries.

Determining the workforce attributes that predict success creates a better alignment between skills that employers require for high wage and high-demand jobs (Carnevale et al., 2013). Creating a talented pool of workers is important to the U.S. labor pool. There is a lack of published research about the transition of graduates into the workforce (Finch et al., 2013; Wickramasinghe, Perera, 2010; Ball, 2003; Connor, Shaw, 2008; Holden, Hamblett, 2007). The problem is there is a lack of information available that is specific to the factors that contribute to the success of college graduates in the Global A&D Industry. The purpose of this case study is to explore the employer’s
perspective on the skills that influence the success of college graduates.

**ASSESSING DIVERSITY CAPACITY ACROSS CULTURES: A HISPANIC WORKFORCE PERSPECTIVE**

The main purposes of this research project are to (a) validate a currently available diversity assessment instrument for a Hispanic cultural setting outside of the US and to (b) compare diversity capacities between a US and a Hispanic population and (c) provide a better understanding of the cultural contributions and challenges of diversity capacity of the workforce in Southern Puerto Rico. Accordingly the research question for this project is presented as “What are the effects of a Hispanic national culture on the assessment of diversity capacity for business organizations?” For this study, diversity capacity refers to the ability to respond constructively to challenges of competing or opposing personal values, whether these values originate from an influence of organizational culture or from the broader realities of national cultures. Diversity capacity is one of the features of the Reaction to Diversity Inventory (RDI), a tool developed over a three year period supported by three different studies and concurrently validated with another diversity scale (DeMeuse, Hostager, 2001).

**CONCEPTUALIZATION AND INTEGRATION OF WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY IN POLICE DEPARTMENTS**

There is currently much interest in how workplace spirituality can contribute to organizational effectiveness, employee human development and more recently, in how it may contribute to police well-being and effectiveness (Willis, 2010; Tuck, 2009; Charles, 2009). However, there is a lack of research and understanding of the integration of workplace spirituality into police training and its inclusion in administrative policy objectives. To better understand how workplace spirituality may be integrated into police training and conceptualized within administrative policies, a content analysis of the literature (i.e., police training curriculum, police administrative policies and published law enforcement articles and research) may yield data findings for extrapolation of common categories of salient concepts, practices, constructs and meaning, that can help in articulating the practice of integration of workplace spirituality in police training and administrative policy objectives.

The anticipated research study goals include: to contribute to a better understanding of how workplace spirituality may be beneficial to police officer well-being and effectiveness; to contribute knowledge that would facilitate increased discussion and interest in the benefits of integration of workplace spirituality; and to contribute data that could be helpful in contributing to a common set of terms and concepts regarding what workplace spirituality is.
THE RESEARCH AGENDA

Diversity is actively present in most areas of knowledge and that is clearly portrayed in CWDR’s Research agenda, as it can be seen in Figure 2.

![Figure 2. CWDR Research Agenda](image)

THE RESEARCH COMMUNITIES

In order to streamline research and scholarship among the Center's affiliates, and at the same time create clusters of excellence related to different dimensions of diversity in the workplace, a decision was made to create Research Communities within the Center. Under the leadership of one of more members of the Center, usually a Research Fellow, the research communities focus on results that can bring benefits to the internal academic community as well to external stakeholders. Those external stakeholders include organizations and companies that need that research to perform better and face their marketplace challenges on an advantageous condition. As of July 2015, the Center for Workplace Diversity Research has 7 active research communities and 1 extra specifically devoted to the I/O Psychology doctoral program, but this number is likely to be increased to accommodate new research projects and lines being proposed by those who are affiliating with the Center. A blog is usually paired with each one of the Research Communities.
as a form of dissemination of the knowledge and best practices developed by each and every one of them. A list of the current Research Communities follows with a brief description of focus and goals for each one of them:

- The Competency-Based Education Research Community
- The Design Thinking Research Community
- The Gender, Race, and Ethnicity in the Workplace Research Community
- The Generations in the Workplace Research Community
- The LGBTQIA Inclusion in Education and Workplace Research Community
- The Spirituality in the Workplace Research Community
- The Talent Management Research Community

**THE COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION RESEARCH COMMUNITY**

The Competency Based Education Research Community represents the Workplace Diversity Research Center’s scholarly discourse in an emerging field in Education that suggests an alternative paradigm to traditional online education. Although some competency based programs are just emerging on the higher educational market, others have been providing competency education for decades successfully. Several of the institutions are openly discussing their process, while other institutions are not as forth coming about development and design. Due to the lack of research on this methodology, there are several opportunities to research best practices of the design, development, implementations, continuing to maintain competency assessments and student success. This research community intends to build upon the scholarly literature on Competency-Based Education with quantitative and qualitative research projects that align and promote the context of current and developing CWDR outcomes.

**THE DESIGN THINKING RESEARCH COMMUNITY**

The Design Thinking Research Community is associated with the research currently being developed by one of the Research Fellows, Dr. Bethany Mickahail, entitled “Corporate Implementation of Design Thinking for Innovation and Economic Growth”. In recent years as the global economy recovers from the Great Recession, more and more companies seek to have the uniqueness of product development and subsequent growth that Apple, HP, Google and others embody. The legendary successes of these Design Driven companies demonstrate that their products can replace the outdated products, expand existing markets, and create new one opportunities for growth. This has caused many disruptions in companies which are often thwarted in their pursuit of success in the global market. The golden egg of innovation is a prize most valued by the corporate community.

This research Community aims to discuss the concepts, principles and cases of application of Design Thinking in companies that want to perform better and foster innovation. An interface with Brazilian companies is being worked by Dr. Bethany, in order to provide an international perspective to the discussions, and make possible a comparison of best practices in different countries.
THE GENDER, RACE, AND ETHNICITY IN THE WORKPLACE RESEARCH COMMUNITY
The Gender, Race, and Ethnicity in the Workplace Research Community encompasses different research projects that will shed new light on the complex dynamics of diversity in business, and highlighting emerging trends, opportunities, and challenges related to gender, race, and ethnicity present in the workplace.

Women in Leadership is one of them. With a re-invigorated focus on women in leadership roles, spurred in part by popular publications like the book Lean In, a more granular focus is needed to truly understand the representation gaps of women in leadership roles. This includes understanding the attitudes of women about work and leadership, and the conditions that encourage (or inhibit) movement into leadership roles.

The Research Community is also engaged in discussions on Race and Ethnicity in the Workplace, taking advantage of the extensive professional experience of some of its members in both the Academic as well as in the Business World. One line is focused on topics related to women of color in professional roles, relying on evidenced-based research and business experience on the topic of gender, race, and ethnicity to provide important insight into how women of colors’ intersecting social identities affect their career development process and ascension into leadership roles. A particular focus is given to the career and leadership development process for Hispanics women in legal profession. Another research line related to Race and Ethnicity in the Workplace is based on the research developed by one of the affiliates that produced a groundbreaking, analytical method and tool, the Racial Identity Development Criticism (RIDC). A practical, interventionist, pedagogical approach to reading and discussing race, RIDC responds to the need for practical tools in multicultural education and discourse.

THE GENERATIONS IN THE WORKPLACE RESEARCH COMMUNITY
The Generations in the Workplace Research Community is associated with various studies being conducted by CWDR fellows and affiliates on the impact of the different generational cohorts in Education and in the Workplace. Organizational leaders are well aware that challenges exist when managing the different generational cohorts existing within the workforce – (Traditional or Veterans), Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, and Millennials. Learning to genuinely value and effectively utilize the unique skills, knowledge, and talents of these diverse cohorts leads to improved organizational sustainability. Concerns may arise when the perceptions of value and utilization differ between cohort members and the leadership team. One way to alleviate this disconnect is to incorporate the use of a survey instrument that assesses how generational cohort members perceive organizational leaders recognize their contributions and appraise their level of value to the organization.

This Research Community aims to discuss the many aspects, needs, values, and expectations of the different generational cohorts co-existing in the educational environment and in the workplace, in order to come out with a better understanding of the differences that exist, and how to use those differences to leverage a better educated and performing workforce. The current definition of generational cohorts is completely culture-dependent, and the classification currently used is only valid within the USA. What needs to be done to find models that are valid across cultures is another research line currently being studied by this community.
THE LGBTQIA INCLUSION IN EDUCATION AND WORKPLACE RESEARCH COMMUNITY
The LGBTQIA Inclusion in Education and Workplace Research Community represents the Workplace Diversity Research Center’s scholarly discourse in an emerging field in education and the workforce that investigates a paradigm shift in the field of LGBTQIA inclusion and integration. The discussions are exploratory and intended to create thought about current LGBTQIA issues, such as inclusion, and performance. Although LGBTQIA people have slowly been mainstreamed into US culture, there is still much work to be done. Tolerance and acceptance have improved; however, suicide and hate crimes are still prevalent. Through open cooperation, collaboration, and investigation, however, the community can slowly change the tide and create a more feasible transition toward LGBTQIA inclusion in education and the workplace.
LGBTQIA research was largely ridiculed and ignored in the past, but a new shift is occurring where a thirst exists for new research and ideas. The present community exists to create dialogue where scholars bring in new knowledge, qualitative and quantitative research plans, and literature to the Community. Because of the changing times, new knowledge and innovation is imperative.

THE SPIRITUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE RESEARCH COMMUNITY
The Spirituality in the Workplace Research Community represents an emerging field within the business disciplines that suggests an alternative paradigm to understanding the dynamics of Workplace Diversity. Current discussions are exploratory in nature and are intended to delineate concrete areas of leading edge research compatible with CWDR objectives.
Over the past decade formal research of spirituality in business has been recognized by various respected research centers and organizations, such as the Academy of Management, the International Association of Management, Spirituality & Religion, and the International Institute for Spiritual Leadership. Examples of peer review publications for the field include, The Journal of Management Spirituality & Religion (AOM/MSR), The Journal of Spirituality, Leadership and Management, and the Journal for the Study of Spirituality (BASS).
This research community intends to build upon the scholarly literature on Spirituality in the Workplace with quantitative and qualitative research projects that align and promote the context of current and developing CWDR outcomes.
THE TALENT MANAGEMENT RESEARCH COMMUNITY

The Talent Management Research Community is associated with the research currently being developed by Dr. Robert W. Robertson for the Center for Workplace Diversity Research, entitled “Building Local Capacity in a Global Economy: Workforce Development Programs in Tampa, FL.” Increasingly, we see the rise of cities as dominant engines of economic growth globally. Cities compete for investment, jobs and economic development. This research community explores the efforts to assess the local workforce in terms of skill sets available to local employers; the gaps that exist in the skill sets within the community; and, the efforts being undertaken to bridge that gap. These efforts are designed to build a globally competitive workforce as required by both current and future employers.

CURRENT ACHIEVEMENTS AND FUTURE STEPS

Having existed for one year, the Center for Workplace Diversity Research has already find its place in the academic community, internally and externally. With about 150 affiliates in July 2015, among faculty, students and alumni, CWDR is receiving the recognition for its achievements in different venues and through different groups of people. Its leader, Dr. Carlos Tasso E. De Aquino, has recently participated in a Diversity Employment Day, moderating a panel on diversity in which representatives of important companies, such as Boeing, Thyssen-Krupp, and Swedish shared their own experience with diversity and inclusion. Other events like that are scheduled to be hosted in other cities in the USA later this year, and the CWDR leader was also invited to participate. Research fellows and affiliates are increasingly being invited to be guest editors for special issues on diversity and related topics in high quality peer-reviewed journals around the world. Their academic production is also being accepted for presentation and publication more often. Only the Center’s leader and the Research Fellows have presented or published in more than 40 venues in CWDR’s first year.

CWDR will continue this journey of providing the right support to and fostering stakeholders to develop even further their scholarship, applying their knowledge and skills to create a more diverse and productive world of business, in which differences are not only respected but used to leverage a better life.
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