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P. O. Box 8081 Laguna Hills, CA 92654 USA

Toll Free: (800) 880-1091 Fax: (949) 589-2360

e-mail: [info@intedco.org](mailto:info@intedco.org) Web: <http://www.intedco.org>

**The Worker of the New Millennium**

By Dr. Gil Fonthal

The 21st century will bring the full development of the information and communication era, which will be accompanied by rapid changes in nearly all aspects of the human endeavor. These rapid changes will take place through the phenomenon of globalization that in turn is fueled by technological innovation. Globalization is characterized by rapid changes in almost all aspects of our lives and, and especially, the economy. Intense relations among human capital, labor, new knowledge, and networking also typify globalization.

Scholars have identified at least three major driving forces within those changes including market demand, social movements, and renewed leadership. Additionally, there are other relevant factors impacting the global economy such as macroeconomic policies, political climate, public policy, and human capital.

Labor relations is perhaps the area of the economy that suffers the highest impact from globalization. Traditionally since the industrial revolution, workers and employers have subscribed a social contract based on reciprocal rights, in which employers on the one hand provide long-term

job security along with benefits, and on the other hand employees commit to good work and loyalty. This relationship has changed in the global society, where the social pact is disappearing, only to be replaced by a loose relationship between the worker and employer.

As in the past during drastic changes, old structures are renovated and new opportunities arise. Due to globalization national borders are permeated. Small business is able to compete in the international front, delivering services and products across borders. Worldwide outsourcing will allow individuals and organizations to satisfy global market demands with customized services and products more efficiently and at lower costs. For example, offshore expending in the United States has reached more than 10 billion dollars in 2004. Telecommuting will be the standard modality of work in the new era, where the physical location of the worker is irrelevant.

Consequential to globalization, workers in the labor market exercise individual freedoms that enable their performing self-directed initiatives in response to their professional and income expectations. In order to be successful, workers need access to high-quality education that provides them integrative knowledge. This kind of knowledge - oriented to service - will equip workers to move across business, allowing them to perform different and changing tasks. Workers will bear a flexible knowledge portfolio readily adaptable to new job definitions, to conduct research, to make complex decisions quickly, to be prepared to innovation, to identify and avail

of opportunities, to find non-conventional solutions, and to be tolerant of risk.

Research has shown that the demand for highly educated workers has gradually increased around the world during the last two decades. Research projections also indicate that in the next decade 80% of high school graduates will intend to enter college. It is interesting to note that currently around 70% of freshmen in college attend remedial courses. This could be an indication of the gap existing between high school graduation requirements and college academic expectations. This is an area that needs to be addressed through the definition of academic standards at both levels, high school exit and college admission.

Knowledge alone is not enough to secure a rewarding job. Workers need to expand the context in which this knowledge is applied. This context includes the development of expertise in critical thinking, analytical thinking, problem solving, research skills, technology awareness, and tolerance to failure and risk. Workers with quality content knowledge and adequate context abilities are more able to adjust to new situations, learn new tasks quickly, move across non-conventional jobs, and discover new methods to solve complex problems. Additionally, due to the rapid generation of new knowledge and the constant changing of contexts, workers need to become life-long learners. In sum, integrative knowledge, which includes quality content and expanded context, is the kind of knowledge needed in our global society today.

Higher education institutions are traditionally the providers of content knowledge. However, the market demands are moving faster than the response the universities can do in terms of curriculum renewal. Universities not only need to adapt their curriculum to the new knowledge, but also they need to include context issues within their study plans. As an example, in the new era, university students will learn how to conduct research, how to process, and how to systematize the disparate information located on the World Wide Web. This information, then, needs to be transformed into integrative knowledge by adding the context component in order to be assimilated, used, and applied quickly in the society. Therefore, higher education institutions need to keep pace with the current global trends by imparting quality content and expanding the context of their students.

Drastic changes, thus, are needed in terms of curricular upgrades in higher education institutions especially in developing countries. Some regional universities are already starting to create new academic disciplines associated to global studies. These courses and seminars include themes embedded into interdisciplinary frameworks. Among them are topics like local impact of global issues, foreign linguistic skills, diversity and inclusion, cross-cultural issues, global citizenship, civic and social responsibility, service learning and fieldwork, environmental issues, and human rights.

Developing countries have an additional disadvantage compare to industrialized nations in dealing with globalization. In Latin America, for example, the phenomenon of the informal economy is growing rapidly. There

are at least two local reasons. First, massive obstacles and onerous regulations impede the creation and launching of new businesses. Secondly, people interested in opening their own small businesses do not possess the adequate knowledge or training in commerce and basic economy. For those reasons, we can presume that frustrated entrepreneurs populate the informal economy in Latin America. Hence, universities of the region have to fulfill this second need by imparting quality knowledge along with its corresponding context to the future entrepreneurs. Additionally, the governments have to adequate their policies to the new era in order to address the first necessity.

Gil Fonthal, Ph.D.  
fonthalg@intedco.org