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Workplace Learning in the Global Context

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Education and the Global Knowledge Economy

- Knowledge Economy: Win-Win Scenario
- Once, we worried about a global arms race. The challenge this century is a global skills race and that is why we need to push ahead faster with our reforms to extend education opportunities for all.

Gordon Brown.

Global Corporate Strategy and the Future of Skills – ESRC Project

- **Seven Countries** - Britain, China, Germany, India, Singapore, South Korea, and the United States
- **Four Core Sectors** – Automotive, Financial Services, Electronics and Telecommunications

Company Interviews:

- 125 company interviews = 105 outside of UK

Policy Interviews:

- 65 policy interviews = 43 outside UK

Global Skill Webs

- **Competitive advantage → ‘leverage’ global supply of skills, knowledge, talent., etc.**
- **Internationalisation/De-nationalisation of HR/Skills Strategies**
- **Value is created through *skill webs* that cut across traditional relationships between employees, suppliers, companies, universities, etc. within the global economy**
- **TNCs will take different forms, but common ‘pressure points’, esp. intellectual arbitrage**

Globalisation of High Skills

- Global 'doubling' of tertiary level enrolments:

33.4 Million (1995)

62.9 Million (2005)

- By 2010, more than 90% of all scientists and engineers in the world will be living in Asia!!

US Business Roundtable 2005

Quality and Price

‘We have to drive innovation, we have to be at the leading edge at reasonable cost...That’s it. And this can be transferred to the labour market. We have...to try to get higher skills at reasonable cost and high flexibility.’

Head of Global HR, German Telecommunications.

Where to Think?

‘We have an “inside out” model which is very clever. It gives us more flexibility over what to do where’

Senior Indian Manager, EU Electronics, Mumbai

‘What is really different here is research, we generate ideas for the frontline to use...These are the areas that we find that talent is delivering to an even higher standard than expected. We’re not doing those menial call centre type jobs. It’s global work and that’s where we think we’ve been able to add a lot more value than what was initially expected and that will continue.’

Senior Indian manager, US Bank, Mumbai

Digital Taylorism

(Knowledge Work → Working Knowledge)

‘Standardisation in terms of IT has become huge...not only standards for a single customer but across countries...technology is the ultimate equaliser...it will drive globalisation, drive change...I hope that people don't get reduced to the state of drones...but I think increasingly employment will shrink.’

Chief Information Office, Financial Services

War for Talent

‘...you first of all have to globally identify your talent base...we were not sending what we call our A players overseas, we would send B and C players and guess what? You send a B and C player, they don’t actually help you at all in fact if anything they make things worse because the local nationals that get receipt of this hairy arsed American, people look at him and say “this is the best they have got, you know”.’

Director of HR, U.S. Automotive

High Skills *and* Low Wages

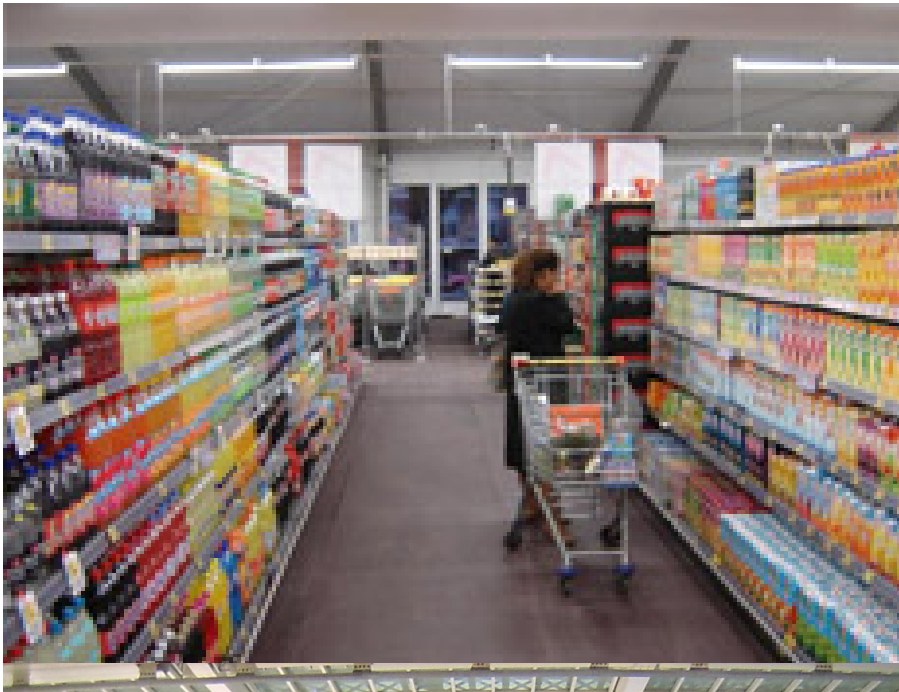
(Reverse Auction)

‘There is so much pressure on management to show greater profitability they are now reducing the number of people in the USA and opening campus here and hiring people in India because they are cheaper. Accenture started out in 2001 with 200 people it’s now got 40,000 employees in India...and they are rapidly scaling up.’

CIO, US Company, Bangalore.

Conclusion

- High Skills – A Declining Advantage
- Human Capital → ‘Transitional’ Case:
- UK High Skills, Low Wage Workforce?
- Education and Digital Taylorism
- New ‘Great Debate’ on the Future of Skills



Research Methods

- Multi-sector study of relationship between learning in the workplace, the organization of work and performance
- Qualitative methods – interviews, ‘work shadowing’, observation, photo elicitation
Quantitative – surveys of employees, ‘learning logs’, development of ‘better’ survey questions

Importance of Context for Learning

- Learning in the workplace arises from everyday workplace activity plus specific need (e.g. technological change)
- Learning can be deliberate, unplanned, individual or collaborative, incidental, productive, subversive
- Workplace context shapes the learning environment



Worlds within Worlds: Locating Work within its Productive System

- **UK organisations operate within a liberal market economy - short-termism, bottom-line focus, lack of government industrial strategy**
- **Accent on flexible labour process -diminution of trade union role**
- **‘Modernisation’ imperative for public sector**
- **External regulation from government, EU, professional bodies, head office, City of London**
- **Ownership - foreign, stock market, family, self-employed**
- **Role of customers and supply chains**

The Workplace as a Learning Environment

- **Workplaces are structured environments – can be analysed on an ‘expansive-restrictive continuum’**
- **Learning treated as homogenous ‘good’ - subversion, complacency, bad practice ignored**
- **Learning anchored in and manipulated by context**
- **Managers crucial to supporting and sustaining learning**

Implications for Policy and Practice

- ‘one size fits all’ policies not appropriate
- pressure of external regulation could be turned into catalyst for increased learning
- focus on qualifications out of kilter with employer behaviour/need
- employers need help to create more effective learning environments – big role for education and training providers