

## Globalization

The initial stimulus for writing this book is the experience of travel. Not just travel in the literal sense of the term, i.e., physically moving from one country or place of work to another (Clifford, 1997). Travel also brings people@work toward us, rendering work life into travel-without-moving. Travel might thus be a useful metaphor for re-appreciating the way that work behavior continues to evolve (Hermans & Kempen, 1998).

Metaphors become useful by eventually extending our understanding of work behavior (Inkson, Arthur, Pringle & Barry, 1997). To achieve that extension of understanding, however, a metaphor has to first resonate with people's existing experiences (Ottati, Rhoads & Graesser, 1999). So, how well does the concept "travel" resonate with "work" as we know it in its present form? Most of us will recognize diversity in our work – whether in the people we meet, the technology we use, or the processes and practices that we encounter and enact every day of working life: Our local workplace is increasingly international. As one commentator pithily observes, "the differences between cross-national and intra-national diversity have become increasingly blurred" (Schneider, 2001: 342). Travel, therefore, is a promising and timely metaphor for work, because it reflects the everyday familiarity of diversity heading toward us.

Contained within this familiar experience of diversity is one particularly salient – some might even say overriding – example of travel-without-moving. This is commonly referred to – in everyday work life and beyond – as our encounters with globalization.

### 1. What is Globalization?

To many, if not most of us, globalization means influence by stealth, and from a particular direction. True, once in a while, some idea or practice perceptibly emanates from outside of the Western hemisphere, either penetrating "the West" or, more likely perhaps, migrating to other "non-Western" settings (e.g., Posthuma, 1995). But, by and large, most of the influence in globalization appears to emanate and diffuse outwards from *within* "the West." "The West" is, in turn, often just a euphemism for the United States of America (USA). In the study of work behavior, for example, few scholars would deny that research and theory from the USA has for some time been represented disproportionately in the behavioral literature. This book is a response to that imbalance. It speaks directly to a sense of disquiet that many of us feel: That there is actually far, far more to work behavior than "the literature" – from its home base in the USA – would have us believe.

Using our travel metaphor, a logical way of beginning to articulate this disquiet is to take a closer look at what it is, precisely, that is perceptibly traveling toward us. Take, for example, a paper published by Lawler and Finegold (2001), entitled, "Individualizing the organization: Past, present, and future." As the title

amply suggests, the paper sees as a “core issue” in organizational dynamics “how to design organizations and jobs that meet individuals’ needs” (2000: 1). These needs purportedly span, for instance, personalized employment contracts, pay and benefits packages, and personalized leadership styles. Lawler and Finegold consider the satisfaction of individual needs such as these to be vital to attracting and retaining the best employees; to improving customer satisfaction with service; and to stimulating profitability. In fact, Lawler and Finegold conclude that, “variety within species is critical to their survival. To the degree that this is true of organizations, it suggests that organizations that are individualized are more likely to outlive those that aren’t” (2000: 14).

Neo-Darwinist conclusions such as these make excellent mantras for the globalization of individualism. Their take-home message is that radical individualism has already arrived, at least for the most perceptive among us. By championing that call, esteemed writers such as Lawler and Finegold position themselves in the vanguard of a globalization of individualism at work. At the same time, they also attempt to position the rest of us as camp followers, in a “libertarian” train of change and innovation.

This insinuation may be partly correct, insofar as individualistic thinking and assumptions, overt and implicit, already pervade much research and writing on work behavior. But despite that somewhat depressing possibility, there are also significant contradictions within the libertarian thesis, and the broader zeitgeist whose bidding it performs.

The most obvious of these contradictions is that the thesis undercuts its own arguments against standardization. It is arguing for individualism *itself* to become a standard, and in that sense for it to become just another manifestation of “one size fits all.” This standardization of individualism does not respect, for instance, all those millions of employees and managers alike, who often prefer – for reasons either personal or cultural – to give more emphasis to the group, and to social, rather than personal, achievement. Even to the more individualistically minded among us, making prized possessions out of a minority of high-flying “core resources” (2000: 12) positions the majority as commodities of a lower sort, whose lot in work life is to be the base of a demeaning “performance pyramid.” This is socially divisive, offensive, and oppressive. Thus, the radical individualization that Lawler et al. proclaim is actually, in point of fact, anathema to the mutually respectful workplace that they claim to envision.

A second contradiction in the message of the paper is that many of its supposedly individual differences are actually group similarities. Prime illustrations of this are “cultural” and “gender” differences. In many work situations (e.g., in bicultural workplaces), and during gender discrimination cases, groups like this, and their supporters, readily identify with each other. They find more to unite them into groups than to divide them up as individuals. Variance between groups temporarily exceeds the variance within. In Lawler et al.’s field of vision, bonds like that are overlooked. This short-sightedness is all the more obvious because it ignores a vast but predictably “non-American” (predominantly European and Australasian) literature (for an overview, Hogg & Terry, 2000). That literature tells us that, in many settings, the work behavior of individuals is governed not so much by their individual identities, as by a shared, social identity. Thus, it begins to look as if