A PERSONAL ODYSSEY THROUGH THE EARLY EVOLUTION OF INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS PEDAGOGY, RESEARCH AND PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION

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The best career advice I ever received was from Melvin Copeland, one of the pioneer faculty members of the Harvard Business School. I went to Harvard after World War II to combine my geological engineering with business competence and become a mine manager. So what should I do when Professor Barlow offered me a job as a case writer for a course in Foreign Trade Management?

Copeland’s contribution was that, in his experience, success came from judicious seizure of opportunities. From a man who had left Harvard College’s established halls to be part of an embryonic business school, the comment was worth some thought. I couldn’t hope to see the magnitude of the opportunity for me any better than Copeland saw his, 40 years earlier. But I sensed that there was something worth pursuing in the field at that place at that moment. Actually, my first year at HBS was a limited experiment, but that decision marked the point at which the geologist started the metamorphosis that resulted in joining the vanguard of international business educators.

As I reflect back on my career, I see the disparate pattern of my activities falling into three periods: the decade at Harvard when all the main facets emerged sequentially; the first half of my period in New York in which the primary emphasis was on curriculum development at Columbia and New York University and on the national projects; and the second half of that period in which I focused on research and writing.

LAUNCHING A CAREER: A DECADE AT HARVARD

The essence of my Harvard years was the sequential emergence of all the basic facets of my career: curriculum design, research, textbook writing, executive programs, professional association activities, and publishing a periodical. They were quite distinctive activities. What they all had in common was the extent to which they were new both to me and in the field. Thus the essence of the period in my memory is that of being a pioneer.

The Apprentice Phase

The five years from mid-1948 and to mid-1953 were a hodge-podge transition process in which I acquired the beginnings of essential skills upon which to build my academic career.

My first year at HBS was exhilarating. The junior faculty, consisting of a score of young research assistants and instructors, were bright and friendly. The caliber of the group is suggested by its including George Kosmetsky
and Abraham Zaleznik. We were a bunch of young couples getting along on minimal budgets. The social life was simple and agreeable.

The case writing was tremendously educational for a young fellow whose work experience had been limited to geological surveying and the army. I had an excellent orientation in how business functions from research visits to a spectrum of companies ranging from the big General Electric operation in Schenectady to the small Hood Rubber unit in nearby Watertown. Barlow was a rigorous teacher and I learned much from our editing sessions on my cases.

I got an extra boost from a chance event. A book was being put together on the case method at HBS.¹ The junior faculty were invited to compete for a $500 prize in writing a chapter on case writing. I won. The prize meant a lot to us in those days (my annual salary was $3600), and the award enhanced my feelings about the whole situation.

The case writing job had been conceived as a tentative experiment. By the end of the year I was pretty much sold on the academic life. So, I had started work on a doctorate. As Barlow was not entitled to a case writer for a second year, I joined a pool of young faculty available to fill miscellaneous assignments.

I was plugged into the #2 spot in Elements of Administration General, the fancy name for the first-year report writing program. Every week the students wrote a report. The subjects varied—finance, marketing, etc.—and professors from the subject areas supervised the case selection and grading. There was a core staff consisting of two instructors, a case writer and twelve graders. My main function was talking to students who got low grades on reports. It was the type of job of which one says, "I learned a lot that year," but elaboration of "a lot of what" is difficult.

The #1 man learned enough so he got himself promoted into teaching a regular course. That put me in line to be chairman for the next year, which positioned me in the midst of the faculty committee which picked the cases, set grade standards, etc. That process started off with a bang when the committee proposed that the first report should be ungraded "to give the students an unpressured chance to get the feel of the course." I objected that it would give them a good chance to put minimal effort into the first report while they concentrated on other courses. I lost the argument but turned out to be right in what the students did—a great combination for a young instructor starting off the year with a group of senior professors. It was all reasonably amiable but EA-general was losing appeal for me quickly.

Before long, Uncle Sam intervened. I was recalled as a reserve for the Korean War in January, 1952. It happened that at the same time HBS was recruited to make a study of materials procurement for the Munitions Board. A team of young faculty members were dispatched to Washington to handle the job. Our dean observed that it was ridiculous to ship another of the same kind off to Korea. So after a few phone calls, my orders directed me to report to the Munitions Board. I did a necessary job there in the processing