Preface

The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present . . . .
As our case is new, so must we think anew and act anew.

A. Lincoln, 1862

Civilization is not static: periods of stability are succeeded by periods of tumult, disorganization, struggle, and change. Eternal verities are not necessarily so eternal. Once, the Roman Empire must have seemed invincible. Once, the sun never set on the British Empire. And once, America was the indisputed "Kingdom of Commerce." Until very recently, the military-industrial complex, fueled by the Cold War, was the engine of an almost sui generis economy; America, protected by tariffs and duties, enjoyed virtual economic independence, mining its own resources, processing these with its own labor, selling its goods to its own population. But that world is gone, gone as surely as the Roman Empire.

The Berlin Wall fell to rubble, statues of Marx and Lenin tumbled from their pedestals, and Kentucky Fried Chicken opened in Beijing. GATT, NAFTA, the PRC, the Information Highway—words not even in our vocabulary a blink ago—are now dominant facts of life. "The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present." In business and in business education, our case is dramatically new, "so we must think anew and act anew."

We live in a world in which, perhaps, the greatest change is the rate of change. This fact has taken a severe toll on the
traditional relationship between the worlds of business and academia. Our two worlds have become gears that no longer mesh.

The pipeline has become too long. Historically, business schools researched the world of business, developed principles, embedded them in the curriculum, and inculcated them into students. These students then graduated into industry and worked their way to positions of power and influence. At long last they could deploy strategies based on the principles they had studied. Well, Asia, Europe, the PRC, and other emerging nations in the global market will simply no longer wait for us to learn and teach and deploy the principles we need to compete globally.

If American business is to compete successfully, and if American business schools are to remain relevant, the relationship paradigm between business and business schools must change from sequential to simultaneous. The two worlds must come together; they must cease to be parallel universes. Today’s corporate leaders cannot employ principles based on yesterday’s reality to address the challenges of today’s reality.

Continuous, lifelong education must be a part of a new paradigm of symbiosis and synchronicity. “Lifelong learning” cannot remain a platitude. Our graduates must commit to continuous training and education as they enter the business world and move up the corporate pyramid. They must not only remain current in their original disciplines but also broaden their studies to include subjects relevant to their new and expanded responsibilities.

Have business and business schools ever faced bigger challenges, more exciting horizons, more interesting new relationships?

I am proud to present this first in a series of Occasional Papers from the School of Business at Rowan College as a testament to our efforts to “think anew and act anew.”

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