

MANAGEMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Development of a Community Engaged Immersive Learning Project for a Human Resource Management (HRM) Course, Applying Cura Personalis and Reflection to Develop Business Leaders Able to Address Social Justice Issues with HRM

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Xavier University, the IMP, and my mentor for providing the Ignatian Mentoring program and supporting its goals. Cura personalis was a new term for me when I started at Xavier but it has been a core personal value and a way of life for a long time. Thinking of others and their needs and how business leaders can integrate this as a business strategy is a key interest of mine. I believe Human Resource management can and should be driven by individualized attention to the needs of the other and how to synthesize this focus with a sustainable business plan. I expect students to see that business and HR in particular can have cura personalis as a lasting influence providing a perspective to strategic human resource management decisions. This lens can provide a competitive advantage as others, including employees, realize the value it provides in improving the quality of life for employees, the strength of the community, and the sustainability of the business.

Overview

This alternative project is designed to integrate HR processes and issues related to “finding dignified, stable work that offers sufficient pay and benefits” in order to provide a quality of life for the worker and their families. These goals are challenging in ways not typically considered, but they are made real from generational poverty and inconsistent work histories. Students are introduced to a corporate partner that gives a brief overview of the HR department and the typical applicant experience. Students will discuss how things should work for applicants and businesses as they move through the hiring process. Next students walk to a non-profit support partner that provides services for individuals who are in need of services to help them find, apply for, interview for, and maintain a job for at least a year.

One year at work is a goal for our agency partner and also a statistically significant milestone for individuals in their quest for gainful employment. Students will learn about the career coaching that is designed to help individuals understand what to expect through the hiring process and deal with challenges as they seek to remain employed at the same place for long term. Other processes discussed, along with challenges faced by the individuals receiving services include crafting a resume, applying for a job, how to network and budgeting to help keep a job. The goal that everyone has is reaching a mindset of thinking about a career path and how to traverse it from entry-level jobs on to promotions and upward mobility into management or other higher-level positions.

Project

Students will make their own way, typically by public bus, to a base of operations in downtown Cincinnati. This is the beginning of their immersive experience to see first-hand some challenges faced by individuals who do not have a car or reliable transportation. Students will walk to

several locations in downtown Cincinnati to visit several businesses and service providers focused on learning about HR issues from several perspectives. Students will have the opportunity to interact with these organizations as well as individuals who current or in the past have dealt with the issues being discussed. Students will spend the night as a group downtown. The group will be led through reflective discernment as they process the events of the day.

The following morning, students will meet with other partners in the business community and take a guided tour of a downtown Cincinnati neighborhood with a focus on some of the concerns and issues residents face every day. The day ends as the students walk back to our base of operations for more guided reflection. Students will produce a series of reflection reports as part of their class graded requirement. These reflection and the immersive learning experience replace a project that students would typically complete during class time and outside of class from the Xavier campus.

Immersive Learning outing

Friday

Noon

- Travel to base of operation, as start of introduction to everyday challenges faced by individuals, students must make their own way to the downtown designed meeting place
- Quick brief on activities and introductions

Afternoon

- students walk to several business and service providers for meetings
- Meet with “traditional” organization, HR seminar
- Meet with “non-traditional” organization, HR seminar
- Meetings with “non-profit service” provider, discuss HR related challenges and HR related social injustice issues

Evening

- students walk back to overnight accommodations
- guided reflection and report on day’s activities and what was learnt

Saturday

Morning

- several mini-seminars with guided reflection highlighting HR/social injustice
- guidance on producing a report on the immersive outing

Midday

- students participate in guided “tour” of neighborhood
- discussion on challenges faced by residents
- watch relevant “movie” followed by discussion, making connections to previous outing experiences

Evening

- closing reflection and discussion
- each individual makes their own way back to Xavier

Cura Personalis component of Immersive outing

The Jesuit value of Cura Personalis is based on the premise of caring for the whole individual (Mooney, 2002). To the faculty, this requires attention to the needs of students beyond basic requirements of the classroom. Students are guided to take care and attend to personal challenges including mind, body, and spiritual well-being while most importantly, also focusing these same consideration onto others.

Ideally in the business fields, cura personalis is provided to the student by faculty and the student provides cura personalis to others through their field specific touchpoints. The HR student learns how to be attentive to the mind, body, and spiritual needs of others through the HR processes they implement. Teaching the student to bring to bear cura personalis in their everyday career efforts helps bridge the divide between spiritual and professional, economic and personal, acting as mere laymen and finding God in all things.

The immersive learning experience is designed to give students an exposure to social injustices and a lens for dealing with this new knowledge. Reflection is a key part of the growth aspect of immersive outings. Reflection, also a key Jesuit value, provides a framework for discovering the meaning in our experiences and a consideration of the value of our knowledge and decisions. It allows us to test our reality and where we fit within it (Yandell, 2005; Traub and Mooney, 2010). The student is guided through several activities designed to see deeper than the textbook presentation of concepts and experience the challenges individuals face in the context of specific HR processes.

The profession of Human Resource management provides many opportunities to care for the whole individual, but the profession tends to focus narrowly on guiding the person through legally required pathways in the name of strategic implementation. However, our students have a unique opportunity to not only study ethical and moral dilemmas that help us to see opportunities to apply cura personalis, they will be provided the opportunity to see and experience the needs that produce such dilemmas. What is typically perceived as a dilemma tends to focus on opposed goals between the employee and employer. HR has the charge of dealing with these situations which provides an opportunity for cura personalis based yet business friendly solutions.

The key to the value of the immersive experience is helping to develop the students' lens. If the student sees the social injustice, they can choose to do something about it. If the student is shown the intersection between their workplace needs and their cura personalis driven attention to the whole individual they can develop innovative solutions that benefit all parties. If the student can help others in the course of their work, they themselves are helped and healed in ways that address mind, body and spirit. The immersive learning experience aims to address specifics. How can we improve our interview (selection process) knowing that some individuals do not own a suit or professional attire? What can we focus on and what should we overlook when considering experience based questions in order to avoid unintentionally disqualifying worthy individuals based on their socio-economic position? Can HR address needs of a parent such as safe and reliable daycare located conveniently in relation to the workplace so that a single parent that is qualified can be selected based on their qualifications?

Conclusion

The field of HR revolves around the individual (employee) and it is faced with many opportunities to practice *cura personalis*. There are a few reasons why we miss many of those opportunities. First, the effort involved is considered to be inefficient by many. Reflection would help us understand what we can do to be more caring of the needs of others and how we can do this without a loss of efficiency. But, if we are not aware of the need it is much harder to be part of the solution. An experience such as the planned immersive learning outing helps us to see the needs.

Second, HR is taught with a focus on legal defensibility and economic efficiency aimed at producing competitive advantages. The ethical and moral opportunity to do more, to provide *cura personalis*, is typically not a focus of the profession, at the educational or practitioner level. Immersive learning and the incorporated reflection is a first step in developing the lens that allows us to discern with the needs of the other and to work with the whole person as our focus instead of narrow, economic, cookie-cutter efforts aimed to appease.

Third, hearing from our brothers and sisters who live and understand the needs of those suffering social injustices is frowned upon as not the job of HR. It is perhaps easier to focus on laws and policies that diminish individuals to readily managed simplifications but *cura personalis* leads us to understand that we are each of us complex and needy in ways that our fellow human beings can help us.

This immersive experience with a focus on applying and developing *cura personalis*, will open the eyes of participants, elevate the needs of the employee as human beings that would greatly benefit from a caring helping hand. The exposure and guided reflection provided in the immersive experience will allow faculty to address the cognitive, emotional, and spiritual development of our HR students. We will give them insights, knowledge, experience, and tools they can apply in their careers as HR and business leaders with applied compassion, humility, love, justice, and responsibility for everyone they interact with; *cura personalis* as a Jesuit value for work at work without compromise.