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PROCEEDINGS OF THE INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON TRANSFORMATIVE IDEAS IN A CHANGING WORLD

THE GLOBAL SOLIDARITY CRISIS

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CONTENT

Proceedings of the International Symposium

On Transformative Ideas In A Changing World: The Global Solidarity Crisis

Committee	iii
Preface from Editor	
Dr. Agustinus Ryadi	iv
Welcome Remarks from Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy at Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University, Surabaya, Indonesia	
Untara Simon M.Hum.	vi
Greetings from Steering Committee Head at the International Symposium on Global Solidarity	
Dr. Ramon Eguia Nadres	viii
Plenary Session Speakers:	
1. Opportunities and Challenges of Virtual Learning for Multicultural Education	
Dr. RR. Siti Murtiningsih	1-5
Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy at Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia	
2. Can Transitions be Peaceful? International Relations Theory and Thoughts on China's Foreign Policy	
Dr. Robin Michael Garcia	6-15
Assistant Professor at the Political Economy Program of the School of Law and Governance of the University of Asia & the Pacific, Pasig City, Philippines	
3. Global Solidarity Under Serious Challenge – and What Can We Do?	
Prof. Frans Magnis-Suseno	16-21
Professor Emeritus at Driyarkara School of Philosophy, Jakarta, Indonesia	

Parallel Session Papers:

A. Anthropology:

1. Refugee Crisis in Europe and Selective Solidarity
Dr. Irene Ortiz22-29
Universidad Autonoma de Madrid, Spain
2. Crisis and Camaraderie
Baiju P. Anthony (Candidate Ph.D.)30-39
Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Pilani, India
3. Living in Dialogue in the Light of the Personalistic Vision of
Karol Wojtyła/ John Paul II
Dr. Aloysius Widyawan Louis40-54
Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University, Surabaya, Indonesia
4. The Presence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Human Anxiety from the Perspective
of Existential Philosophy
Dr. Agustinus Pratisto Trinarso55-63
Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University, Surabaya, Indonesia
5. Anthropological and Ethical Bases of Global Solidarity
Dr. Cecilio Magsino64-74
University of Asia and the Pacific, Pasig City, Philippines
6. Religion as a Source of Societal Solidarity amidst the Global COVID 19 Pandemic:
The Case of the Catholic Church in the Philippines
Dr. Nicomedes Alviar75-84
University of Asia and the Pacific, Pasig City, Philippines
7. From the Faceless Pandemic
Dr. Emilio Sierra García85-92
Universidad CEU San Pablo University and School of Philosophy (Madrid, Spain)

B. Education:

1. Dewey, Habermas, and Bakhtin: The Epistemology for Autoethnography and Narrative
Inquiry
Mateus Yumarnamto Ph.D.93-106
Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University, Surabaya, Indonesia

2. Bani and AI in Education: A Human Approach to Cooperation in Overcoming Polemics Dr. Cicilia Damayanti	107-119
Indraprasta PGRI University, Jakarta, Indonesia	
3. Education in a Wrestling Match with Standardization Dr. Ramon E. Nadres	120-132
Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University, Surabaya, Indonesia	
C. Truth, Media, Communications:	
1. Bounded Rationality and Global Solidarity Economy Herlina Yoka Roida Ph.D.	133-138
Faculty of Business of Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University, Surabaya, Indonesia	
2. The Double Standard in War Journalism and Its Effect to the Global Solidarity Crisis Christine Susanto	139-153
Institutum Theologicum Ioannis Mariae Vianney Surabayanum (IMAVI), Surabaya, Indonesia	
D. Economics:	
1. Shodakoh Market: The Formula for Building Solidarity in the Midst of Crisis FX. Wigbertus Labi Halan, S.Fil., M.Sosio.	154-163
Lecturer of University's Basic Courses, Surabaya, Indonesia	
2. Ethical Consumers: Does Deontological Evaluation Play a Role in Purchasing Organic Food Products?	164-169
Dr. Mahestu N Krisjanti Universitas Atma Jaya, Yogyakarta, Indonesia	
3. Human Capital Development and Cultural Values for Nation Building Dr. Josette Reyes	170-177
University of Asia and the Pacific, Pasig City, Philippines	
Backgrounder of the International Symposium	178

Human Capital Development and Cultural Values for Nation Building

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University of Asia and the Pacific, Pasig City, Philippines

Abstract

The human centric approach to growth and development is grounded on the rational nature of persons who are inclined to doing good, and even choosing the higher good among many choices. The act of making a choice is influenced by family background, social interactions, educational levels, experience in the field of work and conditions that are within the socio-cultural realm.

Nation building is only possible if the value-laden human centric approach is adapted in decisions that have repercussions in daily existence. The Philippines, with its 100m constituents, is a home to Filipino cultural values. In this paper, *malasakit* is one of the values that define the way of showing concern to others. If imbibed in each Filipino, human capital development will further nation building.

Through a comprehensive definition of human capital development, this paper will explore the socio-cultural issues with a person-centered approach towards nation building.

Keywords: human capital, human capital development, Filipino cultural values, education, human-centric

Introduction

Working towards any development initiative, be it in the field of economics, culture, politics, health, science and other domains of global interest, springs from experiencing the benefits of addressing some of the basic human needs of food, shelter, and health. In this context, education plays a crucial role in the process of improving the quality of all human lives and raising peoples' living levels (Todaro & Smith, 2012). From the lens of human capital development, education extends to socio-cultural realities that enable person-centric interactions among individuals of varied backgrounds to work together for an objective that will benefit the basic human needs for nation building.

The aim of this paper is to have a broader and an in-depth application of human capital development. In the discussion, I will delve into the meaning making of human capital with the person at the core of any development, the elaboration of an application of a select Filipino cultural value to forge personal and collective development, and finally, the interconnectedness of human capital development and a Filipino cultural value to nation building.

Human Capital

Originally used in economics, human capital derives its historical roots from the tenets of three pillars namely: the author of the *Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith, the English philosopher John Stuart Mill and lastly, one of the founders of neoclassical economics, Alfred Marshall. They theorize that human capital consists of individuals and society deriving economic benefits from investments in people. The orientation of the theory focuses on the economic value of the people. Going beyond economics, Theodore Schultz proposed the term human capital as any other type of capital invested in education, training and enhanced benefits that lead to an improvement in the quality and level of production (Investopedia, 2022).

Who popularized the term Human Capital? Gary Becker, a student of Theodore Schultz, developed the theory of human capital (Becker, 1993). He and Jacob Mincer, considered the father of modern labor economics, are both leaders of the so-called Chicago School of Economics, who viewed human capital, notably education and on the job training, as the stock of personal skills and qualities that constitutes explanatory principle for several economic issues (Teixeira, 2014).

As defined by the World Economic Forum in the 2017 Global Human Capital Report, human capital goes beyond the definition of Becker and Mincer. The concept is viewed as enhanced over time, growing through use—and depreciating through lack of use—across people's lifetimes. Human capital means the knowledge and skills people possess that enable them to create value in the global economic system. With this definition, human capital is understood not solely through formal education and skilling. Human capital gains its value when utilized in the exchange of goods and services in the market.

Through the years, the concept continues to have a wider scope in the way it is used. In the United States Economy, apart from education, training and skills, human capital includes health and strength that people bring to their jobs. This is corroborated by another definition where throughout the lifecycle, human capital is the sum of the knowledge, skills, and attributes acquired by investment in education and health (McMahon, 2009). Further to all these ideas and other related literatures in the grand scheme of studies on human capital up to this date, another dimension of the definition revolves around a collection of features, life trade, knowledge, creativity, innovation, and energy, which people invest in their work (Weatherly, 2003). A more generic way of defining human capital is provided by Oxford as the stock of human capabilities and knowledge.

Another meaning of Human Capital

In the interest of enriching the meaning of human capital, this paper offers another definition that supports the core of the rational nature of persons and ultimately, making choices that leads to whole-person development. It makes more sense when the human nature is at the helm because it is an underlying element behind human capital which may not be directly implied

by the other types of capital, i.e., financial and cultural. With this background, I will now proceed to introduce the definition applied by the University of Asia and the Pacific (Tiongco, 2022) in the course offered under the School of Education called “Human Capital Development”.

As derived from the foregoing background of human capital, current definitions are largely drawn from or inspired by economics and economic theory and are mainly focused on the creation of “economic value”. Moreover, human capital is mainly considered from an aggregative or macro perspective as observed in the international, national, regional, and institutional sphere. There is a need for a more nuanced and encompassing definition—one that recognizes several key realities about what constitutes human capital.

One of the key realities is the notion of subjectivity. The subjectivity of human capital has nothing to do with the other meaning of subjectivity where there is a lack of an objective basis or a biased view or understanding of reality. Human capital is subjective in the sense that it pertains or belongs not to an object which is referred to as something, but to a subject which is referred to as someone. This subject is a human being with a rational nature, a person who is self-aware, thinks, feels, learns, acts, communicates, interacts, and forms relationships with other subjects. Thus, the idea of human capital is inseparable from the person as the subject of certain human attributes and as the protagonist or primary author of his or her own growth and development.

Second, human capital has a highly personal and discretionary character. The idea of human capital is rooted in the exercise of personal freedom and responsibility. What is freedom? It is the radical capacity to be the protagonist of one’s life. It is an immense gift that puts into play all our potential and decisively marks our character and destiny (Burggraf, 2012). When an individual exercises the right use of freedom, it is a manifestation of responsibility in action. The capacity to act allows the individual person to use the stock of knowledge, skills, and other attributes for one’s own good or for the others. Nonetheless, Evans et al. (2000) noted that

“Although human capital may be increased by high-commitment work practices, the success of efforts in developing, challenging, motivating and rewarding individuals depends on their willingness to invest their personal human capital. This decision is *discretionary*.” (p. 30, italics added). Moreover, “... Human capital is not the people of an organization per se. That’s because people exercise control over their human capital and are *free to invest* it as they see fit in different aspects of their lives: family, community interest groups, observance of religious beliefs, physical fitness pursuits, other outside interests, and work” (p. 1, italics added).

Third, its holistic nature. Human capital involves the whole person and all human faculties and powers. From the use of human intellect and human will, the whole person is radically differentiated from other types of beings as part of the environment we move about. There are animals on land, in the sea and on air. There is vegetation, wildlife and mountains

surrounding us. The materiality of the environment leads the human being to transcend himself or herself and reach the heights of spirituality.

Fourth, its moral-ethical dimension. Most definitions overlook this dimension, especially good habits, or virtues. Early in 1996, Novak emphasized the inseparability between good habits and human capital. He wrote: “Capitalism depends on *human* capital most of all, including the human capital constituted by virtuous habits” (p. 96, italics in the original). He added: “The integrity of business practices depends on the virtue of the people who constitute its many firms” (p. 98) and “To perform well in all ... fields of activity—and to perform well on demand, with excellence, and with pleasure—is to draw on considerable human capital, derived from inherited and acquired habit” (p. 103).

Fifth, being simultaneously a macro and micro phenomenon, human capital in the macro level refers to the human capital of a region, country, state or province, community, institution, or organization while the micro level pertains to the human capital of a person.

Sixth, openness to progressive and lifelong deepening, broadening, and enrichment from within and from outside towards a transcendence which goes beyond personal interest. The capacity to offer oneself because of this enrichment is a display of how one is willing to cross borders for the sake of offering one’s resources.

Seventh, the uniqueness of each person’s human capital is obviously an evidence that persons are different and unrepeatable. The individual’s identity is unique.

Eighth, human capital is related and relevant to social enterprise. To co-exist with other individuals requires the generation of societal benefits, including its contribution to cultural enrichment, social upliftment and welfare, and the common good.

While the ideas mentioned in the preceding discussions on human capital presented a wide scope of attributes, the premium given to the individuals as human persons with an infinite capacity of development and choice to make bears the mark of the working definition of human capital.

In the broadest sense, human capital is defined as the stock of knowledge, expertise, talents, skills, experience, good habits, and other capabilities (intellectual, moral-ethical, and physical) that a person (on his or her own or with the help of others) builds up over time, and thus enables him or her to become a productive and self-regulating member of an organization, community, economy, or society, and that he or she chooses to invest (i.e., deploy and make use of) for his or her own benefit and/or for the benefit of others. Simply put, human capital is the stock of intangible personal assets or resources that a person builds up over time and that he or she chooses to invest for his or her own benefit and/or for the benefit of others. An important and key idea of the definition lies on the person’s decision to invest his or her stock of intangible personal assets or resources. It means that if there is no investment, there is no human capital.

Some examples of the stock of intangible personal assets or resources as culled from the various definitions are knowledge, expertise, talents, skills, experience, values, good

habits, motivation, physical health, mental health, personal charisma, social graces, and personal network. The investment of all these assets or resources shapes the meaning of human capital. Additionally, human capital is a fitting term when referring to capital as the “head” (i.e., in Latin, the root word *caput* means head) because of the direct and clear reference to the human mind or to the capacity of a human person to think and learn.

Human Capital Development

In relation to development, there are formal and informal processes that build up human capital over time through investments in education, training, experience, and health of persons. These processes happen in the family, the school, the workplace, the community, the affiliations derived from one’s profession, hobbies, advocacies, etc. Human capital development implies a lifespan view and lifelong perspective of learning. In their own way, these are considered human capital developers: parents, teachers, religious ministers, managers, learning and development experts, government leaders, professionals from various disciplines of psychology, guidance counselling, health care, media, technology, and social workers.

Human Capital focusing on a cultural value with a human-centric dimension

In the ambit of socio-cultural factors where the developmental process takes place, a common observable reality where human capital is manifested is in the value formation of the individuals in the families. In the Philippine setting, the family is at the center of nation building. Article XV of the Constitution of the Philippines underscores the special place of the family, where it states that “The State recognizes the Filipino family as the foundation of the nation. Accordingly, it shall strengthen its solidarity and actively promote its total development (Section 1)”. With this background, when the values correspond to good habits that promote the welfare of the family members and those around them, then the repercussions trigger the ripple effect in the entire community, spreading these good habits far and wide to the other sectors of the society.

Regardless of one’s cultural background, Schwartz (1992) found out that values are universal as observed in contents and structure and basic to the nature of the human condition, i.e., having social interactions, having individual needs as biological organisms, and having the welfare needs of groups. The valuing aspect comes out because of socio-cultural realities involving the manner people do things as they connect to choices for the good of oneself, other individuals, groups, and organizations. This can be illustrated in the wake of how each country reacted to the 2020 pandemic caused by the Covid-19 virus. People are people no matter their race, whether Malay or Caucasian or Chinese. For this reason, those afflicted by the virus are attended to by the medical personnel or health workers in the manner that befits their human condition. When there is an investment of concern which demonstrates the values, as well as knowledge, skills, experience in preventing the spread of the virus backed by the willingness to take action to end the pandemic, human capital development is at work.

The relational aspect of the human condition calls for a more conscious effort to assess the practice of the cultural values with a person-centered focus. Among these values, I have singled out *malasakit* which is visible in education, public administration, and other socio-cultural issues. The application of *malasakit* as a Filipino cultural value varies according to the acceptable social relations and norms within a given space. What matters most is the focus on the whole person, starting from the basic unit of the family up to society it belongs to.

How do we define *malasakit*? *Malasakit* means the Filipino tendency of feeling one with his fellowmen (Andres, 1994). It also refers to mutual care or concern for each other (Santos, 1978). In its truest sense, the practice of *malasakit* is directed towards the others.

In nurturing knowledge, *malasakit* as a cultural value contributes to elevating the human dignity through the practice of doing what redounds to the good of the others and the entire community. As suggested by Talisayon (1990), in education, values should be taught in line with the constitution and in harmony with indigenous Filipino values.

Having mutual concern for each other as the context of *malasakit* in public administration is working with the idea of serving the society bereft of selfish motives. What is of national interest is tantamount to knowing what is good for the young, adults and the elderly in the society.

It goes without saying that all socio-cultural interests must be grounded on the human person and the primary elements of survival: food, clothing, shelter, intangible needs, social relations and spiritual needs. Having this mindset offers a safe space for operationalizing a cultural value like *malasakit* in the dynamic process of human capital development.

Towards nation building

When there is a shared identity made known to the citizens and manifested by the individual member's desire to be a part of this identity, the concept of nation building redounds to a relationship: a mutual beneficial relationship with a cohesive belonging to the group. In the Philippines, the shared identity as a people is much to be desired. As defined by Sodaro (2001), a nation is "a large group whose members believe they belong together on the basis of a shared identity as a people". For this reason, I contextualize nation building as relationship building for a better grasp of what human capital development is all about. At the forefront is *malasakit* to guide the relationship builders in the effort of educating people to show the self-less and otherness bias in living and working, as well as to instill the desire for continuing learning and self-development.

When the stock of knowledge, skills, values, and other human attributes is satisfied by way of collaboration, the national interest becomes the interest of the citizens. Attending to this national interest is presumably a real mark of a nation. More importantly, action at the individual level is a real mark of one's contribution to the society. This action happens when a

person chooses to invest (i.e., deploy and make use of) for his or her own benefit and/or for the benefit of others his or her human capital.

Considering all the discussions, one can say that human capital is a personal matter. It belongs to the person who has built it up and who ultimately decides how, where, and when to invest it. The challenge organizations face is to revisit the manner of treating human capital. It is a challenge to create an environment or culture that will make their people want to stay and to invest as much of their human capital as possible in the organization and its future.

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