

La era cognoscitiva

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Muchas de las transformaciones recientes en el mundo de los negocios (y en el mundo en general) han sido "explicadas" como consecuencia de un proceso de globalización que ha ido borrando las fronteras y que ha expuesto a las empresas y organizaciones a la competencia "en el otro extremo del mundo".

En un reciente artículo de *The New York Times*, David Brooks plantea que el paradigma de la globalización es muy atractivo para los políticos de cada país, porque presenta a los cambios sociales y económicos como una gran guerra mercantilista, con los políticos actuando como los generales al mando que pueden proteger a su gente re-escribiendo los tratados comerciales.

Brooks argumenta que aunque los recursos financieros fluyen en el mundo, el 90% de la inversión de capital en el mundo es local, y que aunque los países más desarrollados han perdido muchos empleos por la migración de éstos a países en desarrollo, la cantidad de empleos "perdidos" por el desarrollo tecnológico es muchísimo más grande, y que esa "pérdida" de empleos (o transferencia de los mismo de un sector a otro) se da en ambos tipos de países.

Brooks dice que "El proceso central que causa los cambios no es la globalización. Es la revolución de habilidades. Nos estamos moviendo hacia una era de mayor demanda cognoscitiva. Para progresar, la gente requiere mejorar su capacidad para absorber, procesar y combinar información". Bueno, entonces los que se están entrenando en Análisis de Decisiones van por buen camino.

El artículo también expresa que el paradigma de la globalización inclina a la gente a ver el desarrollo económico como una forma de política exterior en el que esas abstracciones como "los chinos" o "los indios" están haciendo tal o cual cosa, mientras que el paradigma de la era cognoscitiva enfatiza psicología, cultura y pedagogía: los procesos que favorecen el aprendizaje. El paradigma de la era cognoscitiva "enfatiza que las diferentes sociedades están siendo tensadas de manera similar por mayores demandas en el capital humano. Si usted entiende que está viviendo al inicio de la era cognoscitiva, se enfocará en la fuente real de prosperidad, y entenderá que su ansiedad no está siendo causada por un extranjero".

Aunque el concepto de cambio de paradigma ha sido sobre-usado, me parece que el autor está señalando un rasgo fundamental de nuestros tiempos. Les anexo un fragmento de este breve pero importante artículo.

Un cordial saludo.

Roberto Ley Borrás

The New York Times. May 2, 2008

The Cognitive Age

David Brooks

If you go into a good library, you will find thousands of books on globalization. Some will laud it. Some will warn about its dangers. But they'll agree that globalization is the chief process driving our age. Our lives are being transformed by the increasing movement of goods, people and capital across borders.

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The globalization paradigm has turned out to be very convenient for politicians. It allows them to blame foreigners for economic woes. It allows them to pretend that by rewriting trade deals, they can assuage economic anxiety. It allows them to treat economic and social change as a great mercantilist competition, with various teams competing for global supremacy, and with politicians starring as the commanding generals.

But there's a problem with the way the globalization paradigm has evolved. It doesn't really explain most of what is happening in the world.

Globalization is real and important. It's just not the central force driving economic change. Some Americans have seen their jobs shipped overseas, but global competition has accounted for a small share of job creation and destruction over the past few decades. Capital does indeed flow around the world. But as Pankaj Ghemawat of the Harvard Business School has observed, 90 percent of fixed investment around the world is domestic. Companies open plants overseas, but that's mainly so their production facilities can be close to local markets.

Nor is the globalization paradigm even accurate when applied to manufacturing. Instead of fleeing to Asia, U.S. manufacturing output is up over recent decades. As Thomas Duesterberg of Manufacturers Alliance/MAPI, a research firm, has pointed out, the U.S.'s share of global manufacturing output has actually increased slightly since 1980.

The chief force reshaping manufacturing is technological change (hastened by competition with other companies in Canada, Germany or down the street). Thanks to innovation, manufacturing productivity has doubled over two decades. Employers now require fewer but more highly skilled workers. Technological change affects China just as it does the America. William Overholt of the RAND Corporation has noted that between 1994 and 2004 the Chinese shed 25 million manufacturing jobs, 10 times more than the U.S.

The central process driving this is not globalization. It's the skills revolution. We're moving into a more demanding cognitive age. In order to thrive, people are compelled to become better at absorbing, processing and combining information. This is happening in localized and globalized sectors, and it would be happening even if you tore up every free trade deal ever inked.

The globalization paradigm emphasizes the fact that information can now travel 15,000 miles in an instant. But the most important part of information's journey is the last few inches — the space between a person's eyes or ears and the various regions of the brain. Does the individual have the capacity to understand the information? Does he or she have the training to exploit it? Are there cultural assumptions that distort the way it is perceived?

The globalization paradigm leads people to see economic development as a form of foreign policy, as a grand competition between nations and civilizations. These abstractions, called "the Chinese" or "the Indians," are doing this or that. But the cognitive age paradigm emphasizes psychology, culture and pedagogy — the specific processes that foster learning. It emphasizes that different societies are being stressed in similar ways by increased demands on human capital. **If you understand that you are living at the beginning of a cognitive age, you're focusing on the real source of prosperity and understand that your anxiety is not being caused by a foreigner.**

It's not that globalization and the skills revolution are contradictory processes. But which paradigm you embrace determines which facts and remedies you emphasize. Politicians, especially Democratic ones, have fallen in love with the globalization paradigm. It's time to move beyond it.

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