



## Articles & Commentaries



### p-Watch — USA



by Michael Manson, long and closely associated with the APO when he was the Assistant Director of the East-West Center's Institute of Economic Development and Politics in Honolulu. He helped to initiate a number of collaboration programs between the APO and the East-West Center. Manson also served in the Asian Development Bank, and was Director of Communications with the State of Hawaii's Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism. He is presently an educator, and a regular contributor to this column.

#### Footsteps of Change

Research has repeatedly told us that change is uncomfortable for people, and no doubt managers and politicians would heartily endorse that observation.\* We would be disappointed, however, if our business and political leaders blindly followed past practice. We look to them to chart new avenues toward positive change. Given the right cues and rewards, the majority of us will move to accept change in our natural, work and political environments. But we can get desperately hung up by what we would consider "positive" change. The recent meeting of the Group of Eight in Genoa, Italy drove home in dramatic fashion that the idea of a global economic village certainly represents change, but can we say it is "positive" change for humanity. There are respected spokespersons on both sides of the argument. Differences show no sign of quick resolution, nor perhaps should they as the stakes are large and the results will go a long way in defining the direction of nations and the world community in the 21st century.

**"Education is an international endeavor with broad-based world ownership."**

If we put our ear to the ground, however, we can hear footsteps of change on a smaller, but no less important scale. I would like to elaborate on three of those footsteps and propose, regardless of our ideological bent, that these footsteps will not falter and will continue to make an increasing imprint on our lives.

The first of these is concern over the environment. Certainly this is not new territory to the APO which introduced the Green Productivity Movement and has energetically supported activities on this topic. In retrospect, I believe we will be in debt to the APO for its tenacity in bringing environmental issues to the forefront in the productivity movement. America, being a large and moderately populated country, can more easily push environmental degradation out of sight and mind. As an American I am guilty of environmental complacency, but my complacency was shaken by a very important and undeniable force in American society - its youth.

In a study I was involved in earlier this year 3,000 students from six states were asked to identify the key issues facing today's world and how the U.S. should respond to those issues. Yes, the environment topped the list. The biggest concern of these students was "damage to the global environment will become irreparable." There was strong support for "helping to negotiate strict international standards to address global warming and other environmental threats." The uproar ignited by President Bush's initial environmental policy statements - denial of global warming and disregard for energy conservation - offered further evidence that the American public is raising its environmental consciousness.

The second footstep that can be clearly heard is that of democratization and globalization of education thanks to new communications technology. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) shocked many with its announcement that it will place on the Internet the content of its courses and anyone can access those courses free. The cost of attending MIT, one of the most prestigious institutions in the world, is about \$30,000 per year. Now this is being offered to anyone with an Internet connection. Although you do not have contact with professors and cannot earn a degree, you do have access to a wealth of knowledge developed by some of America's best minds.

The MIT announcement coincides with a frenzy of activity by American (and foreign) universities to join hands and offer courses and degrees online. This is particularly true among business schools. Four private sector educational companies are leading this effort: UNext.com, Quisic, FT Knowledge, and Pensare. Online education promoted by these companies is drawing an elite following. For example, the five founding members of UNext.com are the University of Chicago, Columbia, Stanford, and Carnegie Mellon universities and the London School of Economics, representing some of the most respected names in higher education. From a business vantage point, this is a tantalizing market having a suggested one trillion-dollar market potential with Asia being the key geographic growth area for e-learning.

**"Forty-one percent of information technology workers in the U.S. are women and half the adult online users are female."**

Statistics from the Chronicle of Higher Education underscore the trend toward online education in America today: 60 percent of U.S. colleges now offer online courses; 65 percent use online programs as part of traditional courses; and 97 percent of university students use the Internet. Online degree programs are also beginning to emerge. Columbia University's business school is teaming up with the London School of Economics to offer an EMBA-Global. Stanford and Harvard are creating a new entity to deliver online programs to major companies worldwide.

The evidence is fast accumulating that education is an international endeavor with broad-based world ownership. The message being sent by these innovative, collaborative, and high quality educational initiatives is knowledge is no longer the domain of an elite or a particular country. It is free for the taking and will result in an unprecedented sharing of knowledge and unprecedented opportunities for the motivated. The Group of Eight acknowledged this in its recent meeting in Genoa by establishing an action plan to bridge the digital divide that separates rich and poor countries.

The third footstep that is being heard with ever increasing intensity is the

contribution of women to the economic landscape and in particular to information technology. Examples abound in individual successes as well as statistically. Marjorie Scardino, CEO of Britain's Pearson, recently gained attention with her \$7.5 billion worth of acquisitions in educational publishing which she is linking to online education. Other examples of women executives contributing to the New Economy are Hewlett-Packard CEO, Carleton Fiorina; Yahoo senior vice-president Heather Killen; and Anne Mulcahy, president of Xerox, to name a few. Statistics tell us that 41 percent of information technology workers in the U.S. are women and half the adult online users are female. Also for the first time more women than men are entering U.S. law schools. And for the doubters, a recent study documents that women executives outperform men in almost every management skill. Women do better in motivating others, fostering communication, producing high quality work, and listening to others. This certainly is a challenging footstep to the status quo.

*\* The current best-selling book *Who Moved My Cheese?* by Spencer Johnson, Putnam Publishers, explores how people react to change.*



[Back to list](#)

---

To top of page