

Running head: SOCIO-GEOGRAPHIC FACTORS

# SOCIO-GEOGRAPHIC FACTORS

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## Introduction

Man's survival has been in large part due to the capacity to rationalize, use the imagination and engage in social relationships. Rationalization involves assessing one's environment full of stimuli; this process utilizes the senses to absorb information. Once the information is appropriately assimilated, it is synthesized allowing conclusions to be drawn. The imagination demonstrates man's capacity to think of what does not exist in the physical world. Combinations of elements can be twisted, turned and pieced together in the mind before manifesting them materially. Finally, social relationships provide access to resources one may have difficulty in acquiring on one's own. This benefit has long been recognized by our ancestors.

The concept of social relationships influenced nearly every sector of what defines a society. Animals with superior size in the past could pose a danger to a single individual. A group of people working together lowered the risk of fatality or injury. These scenarios might have formed the basic social relationships and contracts. Individuals could assess a situation and form temporary agreements with others to accomplish a particular goal. The results or "spoils" of the achievement would be divided accordingly among the participating members. Groups would utilize their rationality and imagination to create plans of action. Skills of members were analyzed and used in their appropriate mediums to maximize potential for success. In these interactions which may appear primitive in present society's perspective were the seeds of business contracts and relationships experienced in today's civilization.

Because resources are scarce, there exists a finite amount of these resources for all parties interested in acquiring them. Competition manifests and this inevitably leads to people understanding and implementing methods to acquire scarce resources more efficiently than

others. This phenomenon occurred throughout our human history. Social and economic classes developed from this competition for resources. Each class could be perceived as having its own collective state of mind and perceptions on life resulting from the subsequent values and cultural norms established. Those members comprising the group who owned the highest percentages of resources experienced and perpetuated different value systems just as the mindset of the business owner differs from the mindset of the employee working for the business. Fast-forward centuries and the reader can deduce this system of capitalizing scarce resources remains, albeit manifesting in different forms. Kottak and Kozaitis state the class determinations of “income and education correlate with job security and satisfaction, family size, political attitudes, and cultural values. Poverty is associated with a short life expectancy. Wealth correlates with elite education.” (Kottak, Kozaitis, 2003, p. 213)

Education in today’s globalized environment is considered a valuable resource. This involves the realized quality of the education as well as the brand reputation of the educating institution. In today’s society, the level of education acquired signals to employers and the social world the degree of accumulated knowledge gained. Respect is strengthened and further opportunities can be sought out for those who took the necessary paths to achieve this. Chief among these statuses is the accumulation of power, or the “ability to exercise one’s will over others—to do what one wants” (Kottak, Kozaitis, 2003, p. 217). Power enables an individual to follow paths towards the achievement of material and social possessions. Power tends to expand a person’s level of prestige which strengthens the person’s “esteem, respect, or approval for acts, deeds, or qualities considered exemplary” (Kottak, Kozaitis, 2003, p. 217). The capacity of a well-developed prestige elevates an individual possessing it above social classes and in some cases caste systems. Upward mobility demonstrates a correlation with an increase in wealth,

classified as “material assets, including income, land, and other types of property” (Kottak, Kozaitis, 2003, p. 217). The combination of these factors appears to the author to determine the acceptability and convenience of a person’s social and economic class. The lack of these factors or a weakening of them can cause an individual to reevaluate one’s position in life. This evaluation is reflected within a class consciousness, formed as “recognition of collective interests and personal identification with one’s economic group” (Kottak, Kozaitis, 2003, p. 217). Based on one’s strength of ambition, willpower, knowledge and social networks this acknowledgement of the economic group will manifest acceptance or dissatisfaction.

The definition of family also experienced transformations throughout the years. In the United States, the American Dream was defined by its liberties and the family unit. Two parents, a mother and father were expected to be present in the household to raise children. The husband worked to provide financial and material support while the wife remained home in the function of support role to the husband’s lead; she maintained the home environment and applied greater attention to the rearing of children. Liberation of women’s abilities applied to the work environment brought on a shift in this familial expectation. Women began entering the work force and, while working for minimal wages at the time, began a trend that would alter how families would be perceived and accepted. Two income earners existed in the household rather than a single and women became more independent through providing financial support for themselves. They were no longer bound by their husband’s rules due to reliance on money and materials; both partners worked to support themselves, leaving the importance of set marriage roles behind.

The focus on the work life intensified to such a level that it gradually intruded on the family life at home. Employees, men and women alike allocated greater amounts of time to

work. Coworkers began taking on attributes of second-tier family members, with the organization functioning as a second home. Friendships, both platonic and romantic develop as coworkers spend more time with each other. Supplemental activities outside of the workplace reinforced these relationships. Executives at higher levels of organizations spend an increased amount of time with their peers to discuss business, attend trips and recreational activities.

The focus on family in the work environment leads the author to inferences on the selected company Target Corporation. Established as a leader in providing quality products and services at low prices, the organization's career headquarters features the diverse distinctions and goals within the corporation. As in any organization, job classes are defined with specific organizational goals to accomplish. The allocation of resources, training and development form unique mindsets and capacities geared towards directing energies for successful implementation. Additionally, hidden within each class one can deduce the types of social and economic classes that influence the motivation of employees to continue.



(Target Corporation Organizational Chart, 2009)

Target Corporation's executive level includes members of the organization who demonstrated proficiency in leadership, management, productivity and value-creating capacities. With Gregg Steinhafel as Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, readers can perceive the class distinction of these executives with the rest of the organization. Higher salaries, stock options, increased bonuses and more decorated compensation packages illustrate the level of wealth accumulation among executives. Increased compensation and benefits provide executives with the freedom of time to travel and enjoy their lives with relatives and activities outside of the work environment. These individuals would be considered high class, having their basic necessities of food, shelter and clothing comfortably met. Ideals of luxury and leisure are at their disposal. The elements of wealth, prestige and power are attainable if not already possessed, which cumulatively enhances the executives' senses of well-being. Members of this class may enjoy indulging in the accumulation of wealth. The group can be dissected into those who worked to build wealth for generations, those who enjoy working for work's sake and those born into such luxuries. The values of each of these sectors may differ and converge simultaneously. Working to build for future generations shows an importance placed on legacy and family. Spending time with children and other relatives are of vital importance, thus the need to work

and achieve levels of wealth which would provide the time to do so. Those under the focus of working for work's sake value the competition involved in business. Executives at Target face strong competitive pressures from organizations such as Walgreens and Wal-Mart. They relish the similarities of battle this competition creates. Excessive work hours and sacrificing time with family are factors one might consider as drawbacks, but to these individuals they are expendable. Those born under the helm of prestige, power and wealth may have had political connections which raised their status faster than those having to demonstrate prowess more thoroughly. The value in this instance is expectation, the expectation to take on higher level responsibilities and receive compensation equivalent may be expected.

According to the Target Corporation website, the company encourages potential candidates to “use your business, leadership and people skills to inspire exceptional performance” and to “ensure great guest service and team member satisfaction” (Target Corporation, 2009). These statements are provided to the employees at the lower levels of the organization. From the pharmaceutical to store management to food science and quality assurance, these leadership and managerial levels demonstrate a class the reader could infer as mid-level. Their compensation packages are smaller compared to the executives and are required to accomplish responsibilities closer to day-to-day activities. Prestige within the organization may appear to have less impact due to decreased visibility to shareholders and other stakeholders. Reduced income and benefits may lead to financial constraints unfelt by the executives in private life. Opportunities to travel may be lessened at this level if members do not handle their wealth accumulation successfully. Managers may also lack the abundant financial resources and options to support family in luxurious settings taken advantage of by executives. Consequently, social perceptions outside of work may appear more common; prestige may exist

with family who highly respect the employee, but inner self-esteem may not be as solid a foundation. This may be especially so if the employee possesses ambition and desires to elevate. Managers attained this level due to work demonstrated as competent and worthy of excelling. This shows they exhibit and value ambition and upward mobility. This group could be seeking further advancement within the organization, but the overall sense the author realizes is the capacity to exceed a glass ceiling is an important value for them.

At the ground level are the sales associates. These are customer service representatives who work directly with customers. They must be tactical, capable of defining needs, wants and how to integrate the two within a positive, welcoming experience upon arrival. Even though sales associates, cashiers and customer service representatives have the most daily, direct experiences with consumers, they are compensated the least. Compensation packages and salaries may be minimal due to the pay scale for these types of positions. Job classifications illustrate the reduced level of strategic responsibilities and a greater number of repetitive and tactical responses to the daily work day. Employees at this level may be working because of lack of options or just beginning their professional careers. Social statuses outside of the workplace may not contain strong levels of wealth, prestige or power. New professionals and under-qualified workers do not have the luxury or leisure time to spend with family, take vacations and raise their levels of prestige in networks. To reach for such a level they must begin working at the foundational status. Value systems in this class can be dubious; a portion of members of this class may value hard, diligent work ethics. They understand that putting this energy into work will eventually lead to excelling in life and raise the level of living standards, leisure and luxury. Another sector of this class may abhor diligence and thus provides the reasoning behind being satisfied working as a mere sales associate. Ambition may be lacking in this section, although the



values of leisure time and luxury are present. Overconsumption may be frequent here, as in the class of executives.

## Conclusion

Through reflecting on the patterns of history in defining social contracts and relationships, the author illustrated how these mechanisms shaped the fabric of human relations and basic economic standards. The acknowledgement of scarce resources transformed into competition for scarce resources; social relationships evolved into groups which analyzed and refined methodologies of acquiring those scarce resources. Because this knowledge was not open sourced, some groups utilized this knowledge more efficiently than others and employed those techniques to excel at owning resources rather than merely using them. Social classes arose out of this evolution of owners and consumers, and the author explained how these engagements take place in today's globalized business environment. Hosting Target Corporation as a focus, the author extrapolated from the existing job classes the social and economic classes hidden within each. The author revealed the tendencies and potential values these classes harbored which drove their motivations to work in the positions they held and how they potentially interacted with their home environments.

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