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Carol Blaszczynski, Ph.D.

California State University, California, USA, cblaszc@calstatela.edu

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## The Slow Living Movement: Implications for Business Education



Dr. Carol Blaszczyński  
California State University, Los Angeles  
Department of Information Systems  
Simpson Tower 608  
5151 State University Drive  
Los Angeles, CA 90032  
(323) 343-2866  
Email: cblaszc@calstatela.edu  
USA

### Abstract

The slow living movement is one that has come to the forefront due to the global economic uncertainties that currently exist. By introducing this concept to business educators, it is hoped that this concept can be integrated into future curriculum. Slow living can bring balance to working life, social life, and personal lives. We are reminded to live mindfully by paying attention to what is going on around us. Through the concept of slow living, there can be positive implications for the business education classroom globally, socially, and personally!

### Introduction

In 1936 Richard Gregg coined the term voluntary simplicity to describe the willingness of a segment of the population to streamline their lives (Wikipedia, 2010b). Over time the movement has accelerated, prompted in part by the Great Recession of 2008 and its aftermath. An icon of voluntary simplicity, especially in the United States, is Henry David Thoreau; Gandhi and the Dalai Lama are other icons (Buell, 2005). Voluntary simplicity has begun to be studied by academics in marketing and consumer behavior (Bekin, Carrigan, & Szmigin, 2005; Cherrier, 2009; Chieh-Wen, Shen, & Chen, 2008; Oates, McDonald, Alevizou, Hwang, Young, & McMorland, 2008; Pepper, Jackson, & Uzzell, 2009; Shaw & Moraes, 2009). Rooted in the principles of voluntary simplicity, the slow living movement had its genesis in Italy during the 1980s and is rooted in the principles of voluntary simplicity.

The slow living movement is spreading worldwide, especially in economically advanced countries, and is being written about in the popular press; for example, the

January 2010 issue of *Good* was devoted to slow living. Babauta (2009) emphasized the power of doing less and achieving more in both one's personal and work lives. Slow living is about balance and may be described by the following advice: "Be fast when it makes sense to be fast, and be slow when slowness is called for. Seek to live at what musicians call the *tempo giusto*--the right speed" (Honore, 2004, p. 15). According to Parkins (2004b), slow living "involves the conscious negotiation of the different temporalities which make up our everyday lives, driving from a commitment to occupy time more attentively" (p. 363). In other words, slow living or *la vita lenta* is about living mindfully (Footprint Choices, 2010a; Parkins, 2004b). Living mindfully involves paying attention. Kabat-Zinn (Footprint Choices, 2010a) links mindfulness with awareness of all things: the senses, the mind, and the body.

### **Purpose of the Article**

The purpose of this article is to introduce the slow living movement and its major components to business educators and to provide implications of the slow living movement for the business education curriculum.

One goal of the National Business Education Association (NBEA) Standards for Business Education (2007) is "understanding the global business environment--that is, the interconnectedness of cultural, political, legal, economic, and ethical systems" (p. 100). More specifically, standard II.A, level 3, requires that students "analyze the value and use of time in various cultures" (NBEA, p. 102), which is at the core of the slow living movement. In addition, Standard VIII.A, level 3, under international marketing, refers to the ability to explain the intertwining of technological, cultural, geographic, political and social factors and how they affect consumer behavior in various cultures (NBEA, p. 110). These underpinnings are critical to understanding slow living.

### **Recent Related Research**

Bekin, Carrigan, and Szmigin (2005) found that those practicing a simple lifestyle in the United Kingdom appeared to enjoy life; however, mobility was a challenge. Many simplicity devotees held jobs that were part-time or flexible in terms of hours. "With more time (or the perception of more time) people could reengage in activities that are meaningful to them" Bekin, Carrigan, and Szmigin (2005, n.p.). The special interest tour preferences of those practicing a lifestyle of voluntary simplicity were investigated by Chieh-Wen, Shen, and Chen (2008). They determined that diverse interest people preferring special interest tours had attained higher educational levels than others. Healthy, aggressive people who practice simplicity exhibited a higher degree of art and history traveling preference and would be potential consumers for organizations that specialize in history and art.

Pepper, Jackson, and Uzzell (2009) studied values that motivate frugal and socially conscious consumers in the United Kingdom. Not surprisingly, frugal purchasing was related to low levels of materialism. Further, socially conscious purchasing was negatively related to materialism. In another study, sources of information for sustainable technology purchase decisions were compared among non-simplicity practitioners, those beginning to practice simplicity, and experienced simplicity practitioners. While information seeking was common among all three groups, the

sources used to make those decisions differed. Members of the experienced simplicity group used word-of-mouth plus environmental network members as trustworthy information sources more frequently than did the members of other groups (Oates, et al., 2008). This research identified common channels that are most effective for marketers.

The research studies cited indicate that marketing experts are interested in the behaviors of consumers who are practicing simplicity in its many forms. As the numbers of slow living movement followers increase, additional research will be conducted among this market segment.

### **Elements of the Slow Living Movement**

This section describes some of the major components of slow living, including slow cities, slow travel, slow food, slow books, and slow schools and slow education.

*Slow cities.* Slow cities or citta slow originated in Italy. In fact, Italian towns joined together to form the Slow Cities movement organization. The organization determines which cities can be labeled as slow and which cannot. A slow city may not have a population over 50,000. Slow cities exist in 19 countries including Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, South Korea, Sweden, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States (Wikipedia, 2010a).

The manifesto for slow cities has 55 criteria or pledges a city must make. Among these pledges are six assessment categories: environmental policy, promotion of local products and produce, hospitality and community, Citta Slow awareness, urban fabric quality, and city infrastructure (Footprint Choices, 2010c, n.p.). Sunday, September 26, 2010, will commemorate the first international day of “good slow living” or CittaSunday (Cittaslow, 2010). While not an official member of Citta Slow, Portland, Oregon, a pedestrian centered city that features light rails has a bustling downtown life (Honore, 2004). The influence of Citta Slow has spread to London, England, with its SlowLondon organization (Footprint Choices, 2010c).

*Slow travel.* Slow travel centers on cultural connection by becoming a part of the surrounding culture. Those who engage in slow travel stay at a site a minimum of week to explore the locality on bike and by foot. These forms of slow transportation allow travelers to interact more readily with the local citizenry and experience the culture (Footprint Choices, 2010f, n.p.). For example, the world's first slow island is Stratford Island, which is located near the coast of Queensland, Australia (Footprint Choices, 2010d, n.p.). The island has instituted speed limits to discourage driving and to encourage interaction among people.

*Slow food.* The goal of the slow food movement is to preserve the distinct cuisines of cultures and, as a result, preserve the seeds, plants, farm and domestic animals that inhabit an eco-region (Footprint Choice, 2010d, n.p.). Slow food is the antithesis of fast food. In addition, slow food emphasizes community with “Piu Tempo a Tavola” (more time around the table) (Parkins, 2004b, p. 371). More time around the table honors the importance of eating meals mindfully. Rather than consuming fast food, food is

prepared carefully, consumed at a leisurely pace (not packed in standing up or while working at one's computer), and enjoyed in the company of good friends and family.

The slow food movement had its genesis in Italy during the 1980s, and the International Slow Food organization acted to save endangered foods and lobbied the European Union about agricultural policy and trade. Since 1995 the international food movement founded by Carlo Petrini has 55,000 members in 42 countries. "The pleasures of food preparation and consumption among friends and family help develop social and cultural capital. Some cities are attempting to be recognized as slow food destinations" (Footprint Choices, 2010d, n.p.).

Further, the slow food movement has demonstrated a commitment to teaching children about the taste and origins of food. In so doing connection is established with the food that is being consumed and grown (Footprint Choices, 2010d, n.p.).

In the Pacific Northwest, the FoodHub network, consisting of 611 members, features an online directory that also functions as a marketplace (Cole, 2010). This marketplace serves as a means of connecting regional food buyers and sellers to facilitate locating one another and conducting business. This interactive online tool was launched in early 2010 by Ecotrust, a Portland, Oregon, based nonprofit organization.

*Slow books.* The slow book movement encourages people to read daily to enjoy quiet time. Benefits of reading on a regular basis include reduced stress, increased creativity, being inspired and motivated by certain books, being entertained and developing broadened cultural perspectives (Footprint Choices, 2010b, n.p.). Rather than reading sound bytes or a one-minute bedtime story (Honore, 2004), readers can enjoy a book at a leisurely pace, savoring a particularly well-turned phrase or reflecting upon a thought-provoking idea and how it might be applicable to one's life.

*Slow schools and slow education.* While some people believe that slow schools and slow education describe an effort to bring slow food to the school site, others believe that the ramifications are far greater, including connection to tradition, knowledge, and moral purpose. "In this sense it refers to the curriculum, the way it is delivered, the process of learning, management of the school, and even if school is the best vehicle through which to educate our children" (Footprint Choices, 2010e, n.p.).

Fast schools may focus him on standardized tests; on the other hand, slow schools concentrate upon the learning process--showing students how to education. Many of the learning activities slow schools are real-life experiences in which students learn by doing through hands-on, experiential education. One example of such learning is planting, tending, and eating from a school garden (Footprint Choices, 2010e, n.p.).

### **Implications for the Business Education Classroom**

The global trend of slow living has the following implications for the business education classroom globally, socially, and personally:

1. While some people perceive that the slow living movement is a reaction against globalism, the movement has actually helped to make products and produce, such as the Sun Crest peach native to Northern California it are ms, available in more countries (Honore, 2004). Research has been conducted about consumer behavior and marketing/distribution channels for

practitioners of voluntary simplicity, of which slow living is a subset. Developments such as the FoodHub network allow for slow food partnerships to develop both locally and globally.

2. The slow living movement in all its forms provides opportunities for entrepreneurs to launch products and services that cultivate deliberateness. The slow living movement has already begun to impact the demand for certain types of products and services. Further, new products and services are being and continue to be developed to meet the needs of the slow living movement followers. Students enrolled in business education courses need to be aware of the slow living movement not only to achieve an understanding of a growing global cultural trend, but also to be able to identify changes in the trend and how they would promote products and services targeted to slow living movement followers. Slow education is natural for business educators with its emphasis on hands-on, experiential learning and mastery.
3. In addition, business students may develop an increased awareness about how participating in the slow living movement might be an option for them as citizens and consumers, particularly during an era of frugality. Bonnici and Scherban (2005) asserted that voluntary simplicity is the most prudent way for students to build wealth. Slow living, closely allied with voluntary simplicity, encourages “the virtues of hospitality, community and sustainability and embodies the possibility to think differently and creatively about how we live” (Parkins, 2004a, p. 270). Creative thinking is a coveted learning outcome for business education students.

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