

REDESIGNING THE MBA: A CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT SYMPOSIUM

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The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) organized a symposium on redesigning the MBA curriculum in October 2011 at Singapore. Below we give an unusually detailed description of the symposium presentation as these presentations provide very rich material for curriculum redesign at Pakistan business schools.

The keynote speaker of the symposium was Srikant M. Datar, the Arthur Lowes Dickinson Professor of Accounting at Harvard University. He is a co-author of *Rethinking the MBA: Business Education at a Crossroads* published by Harvard Business Press. The symposium commenced with his presentation on the theme.

The presentation focused on the declining trends in enrollments in full time MBA programs over the last few years across the globe. A probe into this decline led to interviews with the deans of business schools and recruiters in the United States, Europe and some parts of Asia. This research identified the need for bridging the gap between the academic research carried out by business schools and competencies and skills needed by practicing managers and that too little emphasis is laid on a change in the curriculum- a shift to real world management issues. Students are taught analytical frameworks and qualitative

techniques and not organizational skills. The schools that use the case method help students learn to assess and weigh different approaches to problem solving and do not train students to implement solutions to day to day problems. To quote a Dean, “We are training people to do what we faculty know how to do. We are analysts. We are weak in equipping people to run something— ——— motivating, building teams, or building consensus. Most of our faculty have never tried to do something through a team outside academia.” Despite the fact that the faculty are research oriented and excel in their respective fields, the focus is on analytical courses that include outdated concepts and theories. In addition, there is a need to focus on relevant research. As reported, there has also been a lack of student engagement. A need to train the graduates in areas in business administration that have a global perspective was also highlighted.

Leadership development is a broadly recognized need as identified by executives. Although the missions of most of the business schools include the goal of developing leaders, the trait is still not seen in the graduates. The executives also identified the need for encouraging students to develop an accurate self awareness that leads to good leadership skills. It was quoted as the “starting point” of leadership development. Other traits that are required by executives are Interpersonal skills, critical thinking skills, decision making, communication skills, innovative thinking, ability to work under complex situations, adaptability to cope with change, global thinking, learning to work in a team and ethical behavior.

To quote a Dean, “What executives want from students is about how to execute. A good decision well executed will always beat a perfect decision poorly executed. Students analyze too much and don’t pull the trigger when they should. Unfortunately, nobody teaches them well.”

In terms of pedagogy, lectures were cited as passive and case studies though active but bounded and already narrowed down by the instructors. The cases make students describe issues and suggest solutions but do not train in applying as does experiential learning.

The goals identified in the above discussion can be further categorized as three components of leadership: knowing, doing and being. Knowing involves understanding theories, approaches and challenges. Doing means working effectively as a team member and being means the awareness of personal strengths and weaknesses, the preferred treatment of others and the purpose and goals of organizations.

Some business schools have started offering leadership laboratories to develop leadership skills that involve practice, feedback and reflection on the part of students, exercises and situations that push the participants to come out of their comfort zones and reflect. Assessment tools before they join the laboratories give information on participants' style and approaches to problem solving. Leadership Laboratories train in "doing" and "being" capabilities more than the traditional classrooms. Self awareness helps them provide pitfalls as they enter practical scenarios.

The presentation also discussed various learning programs by business schools as a result of the demand in changing the MBA curriculum. These programs were aimed at "leadership in action." Some schools design outdoor experiences involving teambuilding exercises; others make students work on real-world projects for business clients or that involve interaction with employees, staff and salespersons, etc. These interactions help them develop empathy and teach how motivation would work.

Experiential learning requires more commitment and time from the faculty and management and substantial financial resources.

An innovative example quoted was Stanford's Critical Analytical Thinking Course (CAT). A first-quarter course, includes topics that have no right answers such as: Should K-12 education be publicly provided? publicly financed? or rules vs. discretion in the context of torture? in the context of key employee retention? But the "real" content is how to attack questions with basics of deductive/inductive arguments and causative and analogical reasoning. How do you reason and argue? How do you read/listen critically? How do you present your arguments? (clarity and soundness rather than persuasion) **Students are taught in the seminar format. It helps students infer, ask questions, be critical, and use logic and reasoning. A writing coach will grade on style whereas the faculty member on content.**

Another example is Creating Infectious Action: Stanford Design School emphasizes learning by doing and focuses on preparing future innovators to be breakthrough thinkers and doers, using design thinking to inspire multidisciplinary teams, fostering radical collaboration between students, faculty, and industry, tackle big projects and use prototyping to discover new solutions and enabling students to deduce principles through their own projects by observing themselves and team. Students work on "open-ended" problems and create a demo, test it in the market, iterate and test again.

"Gaining a Global Perspective: Stanford's Global Context of Management" course is yet another example. The course covers political, economic, financial, and cultural drivers of the global marketplace, helps students understand global and individual markets, prepares students to ask questions and take action when entering a new market. It develops experiences around

location or industry. During a weekly class in the fall, faculty lead discussions on the country or the focus of the winter trip, and students hear perspectives from outside speakers. This is followed by small group projects and presentations on industry, political situation, or general economic issues in the country where students will travel. Groups of 25 students travel to different countries during winter break to meet business executives and local leaders.

The emphasis on experiential learning in MBA programs is gaining strength as the faculty, deans and executives realize/recognize that the most important and critical aspects of leading and managing are learned through practice rather than through traditional classroom based pedagogy. The business schools that have already started the increasing the content of experiential learning are Michigan, MIT, Cornell, Case Western and Harvard. This approach can be traced back to scholars like John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget. David Kolb further built on the work of these scholars.

Designing the New Course: “Design and Strategic Management”

Dong-Sung Cho

Professor of Strategy, Seoul National University

The presentation described how the course of “Design and Strategic Management” was designed and taught. The objectives of the course were to help business students understand the importance of design and to help them realize they can “create.” The course involved self-introduction, lectures on course design theory, out-of-box experimentation (performance in a theatric play) and project work with company designers. The first class was held in Fall, 1996 at Seoul National University. Since then, it is conducted every year in the Fall

semester (uninterrupted until 2010) and since 2011, every semester (twice a year). The projects included:

1. Designing management of a nation (Korean Peninsula for Tourism Industry). The content included coordination of locations, size, and other aspects of natural parks, amusement parks, museums and monuments.

2. Designing management of a manufacturing company: Kia Motors

One co-teacher and Vice President in Design, Kia Motors + 5 designers/managers were involved in training students. The content included 10 issues in R&D, production, marketing, physical distribution, HR and financing in auto industry.

3. Designing management of a computer game

It involved Nexen (the global leader in the on-line computer game industry) One co-teacher and CEO, Nexen were involved and the content included 10 design ideas proposed by Nexen.

4. Designing management of physical distribution

The company students worked with was Lotte Department Store (1st in Korea, and 8th largest in the world in the physical distribution industry). One co-teacher & CEO, Lotte Department Store were involved. The content included 10 design ideas proposed by Lotte. The major lessons learned were that young people are neither opportunistic/ egoistic, nor conservative.

To quote the presenter, “If we judge young people as such, it is because we did lead them to become opportunistic, egoistic and conservative. When young people are set free, and provided with the stage to play in, they become their own selves and creative.

Focused Redesign: Managing in a Global Context

a. The Asia Pacific Business Course Within The NUS MBA

The presentation detailed the course of Asia Pacific that studies the evolution of the Asia-Pacific business environment in the context of industrialization and modernization. It presents the trends of political and social change as well as economic development, while emphasizing the economic, political and social institutions of the region. The course includes projects on specific open ended research questions.

b. Focused Redesign: Managing in a Global Context
ANINDYASEN

Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta

The presentation listed a number of courses offered with an international dimension as a part of diploma and post graduate diploma in management. The courses are designed to enable students gain an in-depth understanding of the processes of globalization, the international context and the international rules and learn the skills and global mindset so that they become “global managers.” Special emphasis was given on companies from emerging markets that are trying to globalize their operations. The courses included global marketing, institutions, markets and firms: growth and structural change in China and India, International Economics, law and Policy of International Trade,

Country Risk Analysis, HR management in multinational corporations and many more.

Focused Redesign: Leadership Development

**Lydia J Price Associate Dean and MBA Program Academic Director
CIEBS MBA Program**

CEIBS MBA students have worked on more than 60 projects over the last two years, that deal with sustainability in China as part of the Responsible Leadership Project (RLP). RLP is an integral part of the school's curriculum. Students work with top corporations, government agencies, social enterprises and NGOs on projects that explore economic, environmental, societal, and business sustainability. RLPs range from 'green' marketing to volunteerism, elderly care, and food safety issues. In fact, CEIBS is the first top-tier business school in the world to have included an exhaustive project on leadership in the curriculum. CEIBS has earned an excellent reputation in China as well as internationally, as an institution that has taken leadership and sustainability issues very sincerely. "The secret recipe", explains CEIBS Associate Dean and MBA Program Academic Director Professor Lydia Price, "is to provide students with the tools they need for their projects, and then give them free rein to be innovative enough to meet their clearly defined goals".

Leadership Development Programs at SPJIMR

**Abbasali Gabula
Professor and Deputy Director, External Relations and Administration**

The Institute offers a Post Graduate Program in Management (PGPM) which is an eleven month, residential program. The mission of the program is "to create and nurture

value-based future leaders taking on higher management roles in transforming organizations”. SPJIMR realized the need of the industry for responsible leaders at middle level management and, therefore, developed the PGPM course. The program which is in its sixth year, has challenged the traditional courses for working executives values and ethics. The courses are based on cases, discussion, activities and role plays. Students work closely with NGOs and the public sector during the course of study. No text books are prescribed. Students are given readings and activities material. The students also utilize the Personal Growth Laboratories at the institute designed to encourage the “being” component.

Focused Redesign: Critical Thinking and Communication Skills

Managerial Thinking Course Efforts of bringing “Rethinking MBA” into Practice

Xueli Wang

Associate Professor, Tsinghua University

The MBA program at Tsinghua is designed to focus on the core learnings to its students: “the theories and frameworks used by top managers to make decisions (the “knowing” component), the techniques and skills needed for students to become strong, effective managers (the “doing” component), and the values, attitudes and ethics that will guide them as future leaders in China and the world (the “being” component).

The objective of the Managerial Thinking Course is to help students to understand the basic principles of management and their roles as managers; facilitate students to develop the needed mindset regarding managerial issues, forming a whole picture of different mindsets and help students to strengthen their habit of comprehensive thinking when facing real managerial issues so as to improve their managerial skills. The course is

highly related to real business issues (especially in the class activities), more “managerial” instead of more “philosophical”.

‘Communicating Across Cultures’
Singapore Management University (SMU)
Instructors: Gregor Half & Ong Siow Heng

The main goal of this course is to introduce corporate communication as a business function of international and trans-cultural corporations. It helps students understand that culture is a pivotal basis once communication crosses borders. The grading is based on projects, participations and essays with open-ended situations with (cultural) ‘differences that make a difference’. SMU provides exceptional access to the business community as it has close ties with over 700 business recruiters. This network extends from Singapore across the region and around the world.

Experiential Learning: Vivek Chaudhri
Monash MBA Director

The objective of the course is to hone managerial skills and capabilities in real world settings. It involves a course Syndicate Community Research Action Project (SCRAP) that makes student syndicate teams engaged with a client organization in the community or not for profit sector so as to reinforce the importance of the individual and business being situated in the wider community.

Another course, Sponsors’ Consulting and Research Individual Project (SCRIP), focuses on the ability of students to hone managerial skills in an individual ‘in-company’ project. During SCRIP (4 weeks in company full time) students are matched with opportunities with host company input and once a project is allocated, both an organizational mentor and academic advisor are assigned. The scope of initial project is modified with client

input and assessed. The assessment includes weekly briefings to academic advisor and final written and oral deliverable to senior management and academics.

Your First Hundred Days

Professor Patrick Turner, INSEAD

This elective is intended to provide a taste of what it is like to assume managerial control of a company a student and his/her team of fellow managers have just bought. After a preliminary session during which students will sign all the contracts, covenants, etc. associated with their acquisition, the course really gets under way as they walk into their new company to take over the reins. It then takes them through a series of events and crises simulating what they might well experience in the real world.

This is not a 'simulation exercise' involving the taking of decisions and the feeding of those decisions into a computer program. It is more in the nature of a 'reality show', attempting to give participants the sensation that they are actually living through the first hundred days in their newly acquired company, and as such, there will be many surprises along the way.

Their mission will vary according to the event. Sometimes they will simply have to state what they as a management team propose to do. At other times, they will actually have to go and do it. Above all, they will need to react to each situation in such a way as to ensure that the buyout will succeed in the long run.

Redesigning the MBA Curriculum: Implementation Challenges
Srikant M. Datar

The concluding presentation summarized the theme of rethinking MBA and discussed the response of some universities as follows:

Curriculum change at University of Virginia, Darden School of Business was a result of continuous improvement approach with extensive faculty engagement, discussions between the Dean & faculty that revealed concerns which the Dean shared widely and the appointment of a faculty review committee by the Dean to lead a facilitated process of data collection and brainstorming. A two-day, off-site meeting with all faculty and staff resulted in unanimous commitment to propose 18 major changes, pilots, and new directions. The examples included a curriculum designed around competencies as well as integrated curricular and co-curricular activities.

Curriculum Change at Yale SOM

Large-scale planned curricular changes built around an overarching theme of Integration was recently brought about. Multiple committees of mainly faculty, especially key opinion leaders, and some students as well as the Dean's involvement resulted in a new curriculum. Large-scale planned curricular changes in sequence, structure, and content of courses were brought about.

Curriculum change at Stanford GSB was a result of consultation between faculty, alumni, and students. A proposal was developed and the Dean set up and chaired an oversight committee to guide implementation.

Further Reading

1. Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), 2011. Redesigning

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2. D.M. Srikant, Garvin A. D. & Cullen G.P. (2010) *Rethinking the MBA: business education at crossroads*. Boston: Harvard Business Press.
3. Singapore Management University available at: <http://www.business.smu.edu.sg/MBA/downloads/SMU%20MBA%20Brochure.pdf> (Accessed: October 31, 2011).
4. Tsinghua University School of Economics and Management available at: <http://mba.sem.tsinghua.edu.cn> (Accessed: October 31, 2011).
5. S. P. Jain Institute of Management & Research Available at: http://www.spjimr.org/pgpm/pgpm_home.asp (Accessed: October 31, 2011).