

# Need for Reforms in the Pedagogy of Management Education

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## Abstract

Business schools are undergoing a fundamental transformation in response to changing student values, the internet, globalization, shifting demographics, and severe economic pressures. The need of the hour is that business schools innovate, refocus, and restructure, or they will end up creating unemployable students. Managerial decision making depends as much on the communication and inter personal skills, team management skills and leadership abilities of the executives as on their skills as strategic thinkers. May be business schools are doing an average job of preparing their students for challenging careers but average is not good enough anymore due to intensity of competition & cut throat fight for survival. Business schools should be known more for the effectiveness of its education program than for the efficiency of its admissions personnel. That doesn't serve the school, the students, or the employers. Management education has become a major profession that attracts considerable attention across the world.

**Keywords:** Pedagogy, Management education, Leadership

## Introduction

Steven Dekrey, senior associate dean, Hong Kong University of Sciences and Technology once said , "New challenges require new business models". He was participating in the 7<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the Global Business School Network (GBSN) where delegates from international business schools, industry and development professionals came together to discuss the issue of shortage of management talent in the developing world. Management education has a crucial role to play in current business scenario. Everything is changing at a very fast pace and so it is difficult for organizations to survive the growing competition. This has led to the need for business schools to impart relevant education to students, which reflects the changes in society. Sound management helps in maximizing output and minimizing costs. It maintains a dynamic equilibrium between an organization and its ever changing environment. Management is responsible for the creation, survival and growth of organizations. The importance of management has

increased tremendously in recent years due to the following factors:

- (i) Growing size and complexity of business.
- (ii) Increasing specialization of work,
- (iii) Cut throat competition in the market,
- (iv) Growing unionization of labor.
- (v) Sophisticated and capital intensive technology,
- (vi) Increasing complexity of business decisions,
- (vii) Growing regulation of business by the Government,
- (viii) Need for research and development,
- (ix) Turbulent environment of business.
- (x) Need for reconciling the interests of various groups, e.g., owners, workers, customers and the public,
- (xi) Need for optimum utilization of scarce resources.

It is extremely important that education in business schools is in sync with the needs of the industry so that the future managers can handle the challenge of

increase in the size and complexity of organizations, turbulent economic environment, globalization and growing responsibilities of business.

John Reed, longtime chairman of Citicorp, accepted the Academy of Management's Distinguished Executive of the Year award in 1999, and in his acceptance speech spoke the following words "The business community knows full well that business schools perform a useful function [in] sorting potential hires," he said. "The schools sort out from the general population those who are more ambitious, more energetic, more willing to subject themselves to two years without income.... But the real question is: Do you give these students a set of skills that is going to serve them well over their careers?"

The globalization process is significantly affecting the economic and commercial life of nations. Changing economic conditions and intensification of global competition have given management education an increasingly central role in the success of individuals and corporations. Global competition is changing the relationship between management education and business. The efforts for building leadership pipelines in organizations have intensified in the last 10 years. Continuous changes in both technology and economic systems, along with the speed of change, require executives to be engaged in a continuous learning process. Traditional MBA, which usually focused on general management, accounting, finance, operations has a hard time producing the type of product leaders companies are currently looking for. Curricula of most of the B schools lacks special focus on themes around leadership skills, technology, globalization etc. Senior professionals look at capability building, applied learning through industry immersion, developing soft skills, and leadership skills beyond the "tag" value from such programs. Some B-schools in US have already done an excellent job in creating a collaborative learning environment with senior industry practitioners and making the learning for participants more relevant. HEC, a top French business school is going to the extent of setting up formal departments with companies like Google for the domain of digital business.

### Research Methodology

An exploratory research based on literature review and 4 focus group discussions, the group comprising of experts in management education, with 10 participants in each group, has been done. There were 20 in depth interviews conducted with middle and senior level managers from the industry to get more insight into the topic. The purpose of this paper is to engage all concerned in a serious discussion with a view to revamping management education (pedagogy) in India as a prelude to better participation and viability in the global economy.

### The Gulf

In an article by Stanford Graduate School of Business professor Jeffrey Pfeffer published in the inaugural issue of *Academy of Management Learning and Education* Professor Pfeffer and coauthor Christina Fong, argued that, with the exception of perhaps a few top schools, MBA programs provide little of use in the real business world and are especially lacking in on-the-job experience, leading and managing others. The teaching learning process in any management education institution largely depends on the pedagogies been adopted to facilitate and enhance the learning outcomes among the participants. Without a larger practical component, business schools may not be able to impart knowledge that positively impacts graduates' performance. Companies today demand creative, collaborative thinkers and good communicators who cooperate to solve problems, not just good analysts who blindly apply business-school formulae. Moreover corporate is scouting for talented specialists who have specialized knowledge useful to particular professions while business schools are more likely to deliver generalists who have trouble understanding special fields due to lack of training. Today corporate is looking for leaders who can effectively articulate ideas, orally and in writing, to provide motivation and mentorship. But business schools focus on learning by rote does not provide opportunity for free articulation of ideas through debates, discussion and brain storming. There is a strong case for curriculum reform and also redesigning the pedagogy of teaching in business schools. The curriculum reform need not be a radical overhaul: We can search for a middle road, in

which good business schools preserve the strengths they have today, especially in teaching quantitative and strategic skills, but redesign some aspects of their curricula and change their teaching methods.

There may be number of causes for the drawbacks evident in the quality of MBA education. One could be that business schools mistakenly defer to students when they're designing their curricula, reacting to the demands of students who prefer the fun of strategy. That is the reason why MBA programs are not attentive to the intricacies of problem solving and other competencies that employers demand. It is unfortunate that in most B schools students are not taught to pose the question "why" and to persist with asking why until they cannot ask it anymore, this is a very important element of effective problem solving.

Another cause of the problems with MBA education is that a large majority of MBA programs are very similar to each other. Once upon a time Harvard was known for producing great general managers, Wharton or the University of Chicago was known for producing great quantitative analysts, and Stanford was known for great technologists. But now the graduates from all these programs are very similar to each other, as programs become more and more generic and less and less impressive in any one area. Convergence undoubtedly is of great help in competing in the rankings, but it when it comes to competing for jobs, one-size-fits-all does not work. For example students going into consulting, those going to bank and those going to the finance department of an automotive company all need different skills. Companies do not get the well-rounded top talent they're looking for from business schools.

The unique position of business schools in the management education marketplace centers on their role as research institutions. New knowledge developed through the intellectual creativity and research efforts of business school faculty both shapes the content of business curricula in degree and non degree education and enhances business practices. This unique role is threatened, however, by the turbulent marketplace in which business schools operate. The marketplace for business schools today is characterized by relentless change. Increasing competition from non accredited schools and

globalization of the business education market are among the root causes of the instability.

It is a new era for leadership education. Gone are the days when the topic was relegated to a class in introductory management or organizations courses, and when leadership development on college campuses only meant extracurricular activities or non-academic workshops. Leadership has moved onto the curricular main stage — it is a growing field of scholarly study, a cornerstone in graduate management education, the core of executive and professional development programs, and a possible major for undergraduates. It can be argued that survival in today's fast-changing, technology-driven, global world requires more people to assume the functions of leadership in their daily lives and communities. The present proliferation of leadership training is a good sign but what if present leadership pedagogies and methods are not good enough? If expanded efforts and best practices cannot produce the needed results? What if doing more of what we traditionally do in the name of leadership education is not the answer? The last question is a powerful one. As management educators, we do not have a strong history of critically questioning teaching methods to understand the implications for student learning (Gallos, 1993), solid evaluation practices for testing the effectiveness of pedagogies and methods, or established models for selecting among available instructional options. If present management programs and teaching methods produce graduates who are not prepared to tackle the realities of the professional world, as public- and private-sector organizations repeatedly remind us, how can we assume that our approaches to leadership education work any better?

Leadership education today has glaring gaps. In the leadership classes in business schools, educators contrast leadership and management. They examine the distinctions between leadership and raw power, explore a variety of leadership arenas and propose strategies for responding to diverse organizational needs. The educators dissect leadership into compartmentalized skills and work cognitively and experientially to teach those competencies, offer perspectives and insights into the leadership process, glimpses into the lives of those who lead,

and opportunities for students to develop their own competencies and skills that will make them better leaders. They plan exercises, simulations, cases, and projects to offer a safe forum for leadership practice. Does all this — any of this — create leaders? Is offering knowledge, skill-building, self-awareness, and rehearsals the best we can do? The answer is “No.” Then what is missing?

## **Bridging the Gulf**

### **1. Business Schools Should Change the Pedagogy of Teaching Leadership Skills**

Missing from our traditional leadership pedagogies is the realization that leadership is not just the accumulation of knowledge, experience, and skills. It is also desire, conviction, and will. It is drawing up the internal courage of convictions and drive in the face of opposition, risks, or apathy. It is motivating everybody to work for a common mission, yet keeping their individuality intact, not letting the similarity of goals submerge their individual identity. We need methods that go beyond the static definitions that fill leadership texts and standard academic approaches that emphasize terms, traits, and skills. There is a need to create multi-dimensional educational experiences that capture the complexities and dynamism of modern leadership and strengthen student awareness of the human elements of leading. What does pedagogy of leadership look like? What are the key components? How does one teach it? Answering those questions requires stepping back and first exploring the unique challenges of modern leadership. It is no revelation to say that leadership today is complex and challenging. Global living in the age of technology and “winner-take-all” markets (Frank and Cook, 1995) means companies, systems, and individual lives and careers at a maddening pace. Information flows far and wide with ease: technology provides the world at the end of a telephone line & knowledge grows at unprecedented speed. All this at a time when customer satisfaction reigns supreme (Wind and Main, 1998) and employee diversity and expectations for involvement in decision making have reached their peak, problems are more pressing, multifaceted, and interconnected; new collaborations and partnerships — the only hope for lasting

solutions (Luke, 1998) — are more difficult to forge in a diverse world struggling to live peacefully and productively with its differences. We are down-sizing, uploading, engaging in life-long learning, re-engineering, cashing out, and simplifying our lives, struggling to cope with the overwhelming changes around us. As Tom Peters (1987) sees it, we’re living in a world turned upside down. How does pedagogy of teaching help to ensure that our students will lead — not merely survive — in an increasingly competitive, diverse, chaotic world? The driving force for a pedagogy of creating effective leaders begins with the important distinction between teaching leadership — instruction and activities about leadership — and creating leaders — providing a wide-range of integrated learning experiences that maximizes the likelihood of appropriate action in the face of a leadership challenge. The pedagogy should be steeped in action-oriented learning. In the language of Argyris and Schon (1974), it fosters the development of appropriate theories-in-use and essential abilities to recognize gaps between intention and action. It teaches people to value learning about their own effectiveness, question the core values that govern their behavior, and develop learning-based strategies for informed choice. A basic criterion for selecting a leadership curriculum or instructional activity, then, is its relevance for learning how to take effective action. Learning about leadership is a means, not an end in itself. The emphasis on effective action points to the need for a broad and holistic approach to leadership. Human behavior is complicated & any pedagogy that teaches about leadership should value the interconnectedness that is at the heart of leadership. An appreciation of multiple perspectives on the same reality and a respect for a systems perspective — how parts affect the whole and the whole affects each part should be in-built into the pedagogy of teaching. Finally, a pedagogy that is experience-based. It is built on the core assumption that nothing creates future leaders better than tasting the deep satisfaction in leading, so providing opportunities to lead through activity based learning and giving an opportunity to the students to make mistakes.

**2. Business Schools Should include more Courses in Communication, Human Resources, Psychology, and other Fields that Provide Graduates with People Management and Team Management Skills.**

The way to do this would be make the students work on collaborative projects that emphasize the development of people skills on top of regular classroom lectures, reading, and paper writing.

Projects could be individual or group, but the emphasis should be on applied learning that forces students to question, think deeply, weigh alternatives, and create. Project work also involves more management skills — listening, influencing, judging, and selling. There are several business schools that have adopted team-based projects to simulate on-the-job situations.

We can take an example from the University of Chicago that offers a LEAD course, a mandatory one-year experiential leadership course for first-year students. This course uses role play and other techniques, and develops expertise in negotiation, organizational development, interpersonal communication, and leadership. In one three-day seminar, students give an “elevator speech” and then a “pitch.” Professors videotape presentations to give detailed feedback. In another module, students learn team dynamics. Second-year students serve as teachers and mentors in the course, which reinforces what is learned in the first year. The course runs along with more conventional course work, so students have opportunities to practice their new leadership skills while studying the regular curriculum.

**3. Business Schools need to Introduce and Lay Stress on Courses that Offer the Basic Skills and Tools need for Problem Solving.**

These skills would include data gathering, data analysis, and innovative problem-solving methodologies and tools. MBA graduates often stop short of getting to the root of the problem because they have not practiced these tools & techniques in class.

**4. More and Better Foundation in Theories of Economics, Measurement, Governance, Psychology, Human Behavior, and Leadership.**

This would help students go beyond case studies to analyze problems and devise solutions to problems they have never encountered before. If students learn the theories and nuts and bolts of microeconomics, for example, they may be more prepared, say, to develop a good competitive pricing strategy. If they have strong foundation in theories of human behavior, they may be more prepared to suggest solutions to team or solve motivational problems. Diving deeply into theory, the students can create more appeal in the mind of their employers by showcasing their specialized knowledge of a subject.

**5. Business Schools should make Changes in their Curricula so that Students can Integrate their Learning and Apply Multi-disciplinary Approach to any Job.**

Most of the times students are usually forced to learn about each of the fundamental business disciplines (such as finance, strategy, operations, and marketing) treating each as a water tight compartment when in actual life there is integration among so many streams while managing and solving problems. MIT’s Sloan School’s “Leaders for Manufacturing Program” is an example of a curriculum that integrates subjects ranging from manufacturing processes and operations management to leadership and change management, and that emphasizes on-the-job and classroom training. The Leaders for Manufacturing program runs two tracks of learning at the same time, one covering traditional classroom subjects and the other covering “leadership and integrative” activities outside the classroom. The non classroom track includes leadership seminars, 15 plant tours each year, and a thesis. In the second year, each student spends six and a half months as an intern at one of 20 partner companies.

**6. Business Schools should Motivate the Students to take Full Advantage of Courses outside the Traditional Core Curriculum.**

Most of the students do not wish to diversify their course load. This leads to a lack of differentiation

among the graduates. Business schools offer plenty of electives but most of the MBA students are sticking to finance, operations, and strategy. Graduates who wish to go into management consulting, for example, would gain by exploring deeply such subjects as microeconomics, competitive dynamics, and statistics in addition to their broader-based management training.

### **7. Business Schools should have the Commitment to Re-create Differentiation in their Curricula.**

This is not to say that Business schools should leave the mainstream courses, but MBA programs can offer courses to students that allow them to concentrate on an industry. For example, schools can offer students who want to go into investment banking a tailored course of study that specifically prepares them for these fields, not just by offering electives, but by creating a discrete set of courses and experiences. Schools should ideally follow a “practicum” approach in which a large portion of a student’s credits are related to supervised real work in his or her area of concentration. This is not the same as an internship, which is typically not under direct supervision of the business school.

### **Conclusion**

Over the last few decades several business schools did make drastic changes in their curricula and in the pedagogy of teaching in response to widespread corporate dissatisfaction with MBA graduates. But still business schools didn’t change enough to take care of serious curriculum weaknesses in such areas as communications, relationship management, leadership, and problem solving. Moreover, even where course offerings in nontraditional areas were added, it did not lead to necessary changes in the all-important core course work, or the ways in which students are taught. Students need more opportunity to work collaboratively on projects that give them practical experience and training them for collaborating with teams. A blind focus on traditional lecture and case discussion over more complex experiential learning is not the way to go in this time and age. The problem is severe because instructors

themselves are more comfortable using traditional teaching methods. Student transformation will not happen if business schools are not open to partnerships with companies. That doesn’t serve the school, the students, or the employers. By working with employers while designing an industry focused curriculum and pedagogy, business schools can redouble their efforts to meet employer needs. With the largest talent pool of technology managers in the world, it is time to bring more relevance to management education with a focus on creating global leaders from India. Managerial decision making depends as much on the communication and interpersonal skills, team management skills and leadership abilities of the executives as on their skills as strategic thinkers. Guiding teams comprising people from diverse backgrounds, ability to manage crisis emerging from communications conflicts due to a diversified work force, executives need to analyze: “Do they have skills that are going to serve them well over their careers?”

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