Pedagogy Innovation in Business Education

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Abstract: In recent years, several studies have been devoted to rethinking the content of educational programs in business, in hopes that it will respond even better to the demands of the students and the business world. However, few endeavors only have focused on rethinking teaching methodologies applicable to business education in order to generate innovative proposals that facilitate the teaching-learning processes. This paper presents and discusses the main teaching methods used in business schools, and, furthermore, highlights their strengths and weaknesses which will serve as a starting point in the discussion on innovative methods in management education.

Index Terms: Business education, education, pedagogy

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, several studies have been devoted to rethinking the content of educational programs in business, in hopes that it will respond ever better to the demands of the students and the business world. As a matter of fact, quite high number of studies undertaken over the years in different countries (e.g., Boyatzis & Renio, 1989 – in the USA; Ishida, 1997 – in Japan; Kagono, 1996 – in South Africa; Nabi & Bagley, 1999 – in the UK; Neelankavil, 1994; Pesulima, 1990 – in Indonesia; and Tay, 2001 – in Malaysia) showed that MBA programs contribute to developing graduates’ management capabilities and competences that are relevant to the business practice. The most comprehensive and recent work belongs to Datar and Cullen (2010); in their empirical study of MBA programs in Europe and the United States they found that business school research is relevant to the business practice and that the engagement of MBA students in academic matters is deficient. As such, they concluded by suggesting that business schools need to reassess their value proposition by reviewing the facts, frameworks, and theories they teach and, at the same time, by rethinking their curricula in terms of developing both hard and soft skills, along with values and attitudes, which are at the core of the practice of management. In an analysis performed across MBA programs, they outlined opportunities to innovate and change the curricula and they identified eight “Unmet Needs of Management Education”: (a) the need for students to get a real global perspective; (b) leadership development, improved emotional intelligence, and the ability to motivate, delegate, and lead ethically; (c) the need to integrate concepts through a multidisciplinary approach that permits students to solve problems; (d) power and politics-students must understand how organizational processes work and develop a good sense of how the business world works, as well; (d) the need to pursue creative and innovative thinking; (e) the need to develop both oral and written communication skills – students must be capable of expressing their ideas in a clear and convincing manner; (f) the need to understand risks and how those risks affect other people beyond oneself; and (g) the need to balance practice, theory, and experience.

However, studies dedicated to rethinking the methodologies of teaching business education have not yet been conducted. A number of teaching methods have been used in business education, some with more benefits than others, and some more disseminated or recognized in business education than others. This paper presents an analysis of the main teaching methods used in business schools and, furthermore, highlights their strengths and weaknesses with regard to learning objectives. Figure 1 provides a summary of the main teaching methods used. Each business school chooses its own educational model according to its own ends.

2. EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING (LEARNING BY DOING), ACTION LEARNING

Experiential learning is the process of building meaning from direct experience. In short, experiential learning is learning from experience. The experience can be gradual or left open. Experiential learning in place is often termed as a dynamic learning experience. Experiential
learning is contrasted with rote or didactic learning, and focuses on the learning process for an individual. An example of experiential learning is going to the zoo and learning through observation and interaction with the zoo environment, as opposed to reading about animals in a book. Therefore, one makes discoveries and experiments with firsthand knowledge, instead of hearing or reading about the experiences of others.

Experiential learning consists of activities in which “the learner is directly in touch with the realities being studied….rather than merely thinking about the encounter or only considering the possibility of doing something with it” (Datar, 2010). It is the acquisition of knowledge or skill through direct experience of carrying out a task. Learning by doing often happens under supervision, as part of a training or orientation process.

Action research is a reflective process of progressive problem solving led by individuals working with others in teams or as part of a “community of practice” to improve the way they address issues and solve problems. Multidisciplinary Integrative Projects and Study Trips can be considered as ways to apply experiential learning.

2.1 Multidisciplinary Integrative Projects

Integrative projects are executed in collaboration with a wide range of organizations, with the support of the faculty. The characteristics of these projects are:

During their education period, students have to develop Multidisciplinary and Integrative Projects. Projects are opportunities of experiential learning (learning by doing). Projects allow students to participate in important applied research projects that benefit them and have an impact on the academia, systems, ports, industrial sectors, regions, or producers.

The projects are worked in teams of students with different professional backgrounds, what allows them to learn from each other and use everyone’s experience to create a better outcome. The subjects of the projects include a wide variety of enterprises from very diverse industrial sectors, as well as a variety of government entities. A project is done during the period the students attend the course, with specific dates to turn in drafts, therefore receiving constant feedback throughout the elaboration process.

All work is closely supervised by the course professors. Students apply all of the concepts they have learned to analyze alternative strategies for a sub-sector, considering the particular competitive aspects and presenting strategic proposals for the future, with the ultimate goal of creating value for all of the parties involved. Table 1 presents examples of multidisciplinary projects in business education:

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<th>Multidisciplinary Integrative Projects</th>
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<td>Strategic management</td>
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<td>Innovative business</td>
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<td>Entrepreneurship</td>
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2.2 Study Trips

Currently, the majority of business programs include a study-abroad component as an integral part of the students’ global education. During their study trip abroad, students get the opportunity to experience a foreign culture first hand, taking classes, participating in cultural activities, and interacting with foreign students and professors.

3. Critical and Analytical Essays

There are certain skills that are acquired through practice, and these include communication skills and critical and analytical thinking skills. The elaboration of essays permits the development of both skills in students. An essay is a written document that analyzes, interprets, and evaluates a topic. It usually has a maximum of 5 pages and consists of four parts:

(a) Introduction. This section explains mainly what the topic to be treated in the essay is. It should not exceed 10% of the length of the essay, and should include four aspects: a map of what is to be treated, a background
5. MULTIDISCIPLINARY GROUP WORK

Multidisciplinary group work happens when professionals from a range of disciplines work together to develop experiential projects. Group work is included and expected from students in every MBA course taught. Students with varied but complementary experience, qualifications, and skills work as a team to achieve a greater quality in their work.

Multidisciplinary Group Work permits students to learn team values such as:

a) Good communication and the ability to work out conflicts or issues.
b) Unity in the commitment to the objective.
c) Team trust.
d) Effective leadership.
e) Team support - both internal to the team and external.
f) Flexibility and the ability to adjust.
g) Negotiation skills.
h) Technical and interpersonal skills.

6. CASE METHOD

Case studies present the greatest challenges confronted by leading companies, nonprofit and governmental organizations — enriched with the constraints and imperfect information found in real business issues — and place the student in the role of a decision maker.

The case method is a dynamic process of exchanging perspectives, countering and defending points, and building on each other’s ideas. Students become proficient at analyzing issues, exercising judgment, and making difficult decisions — the hallmarks of skillful leadership.

7. FACE-TO-FACE AND ONLINE LEARNING (BLENDED)

The blended system combines online learning with face-to-face teaching in each and every course. The benefits of such an approach include the following:

a) Internet offers business schools the chance to change the way they teach. Even when a particular class finishes, the learning process can continue outside of the classroom thanks to the available technology that allows reinforcing face-to-face classes by means of employing interactive online tools.

b) Thanks to the integration of technology with traditional teaching methods, students are able to participate more intensively.

c) A much deeper interaction between participants and professors is created by means of sharing their experiences and knowledge, as well as by means of debating questions, current topics, and issues of
cases are chosen by the students themselves. Students have to make industry visits and have discussions with the entrepreneurs and the staff of the companies in order to adequately prepare the case. The case is submitted to the course professor and to the company.

Students gain a number of benefits by preparing actual cases:

(a) Investigating the company, its structure and processes, and then writing the case and a teaching note is an excellent way to test the understanding of theories and to connect theory with practice. In particular, the creation of teaching notes requires students to reflect on relevant learning aspects of the situation in question, linking theory with practice.

(b) Students are provided with valuable insights into the actual running of an entrepreneurial venture.

(c) Presenting the case to the company allows students to develop their interpersonal soft skills, as well as their time management and communication skills.

(d) It enables entrepreneurs to attract talented professionals for their businesses. Entrepreneurs can contribute to the education process by incentivizing students to share their experiences with other students and, thus, gain new perspectives on their business, while also gaining exposure through publications and business case competitions.

9. Research

This method consists of a rigorous procedure, formulated in a logical manner, that the researcher - student must follow in his pursuit of knowledge. For this, the use of observation, induction, deduction, analysis, and synthesis is required. Some examples are:

9.1 Applied Research

Strategic Planning: This is characterized by an emphasis on the implementation, use, and practical implications of knowledge. It seeks to know, to do, to act, to build, to modify. Strategic Planning is planning in order to fulfill the fundamental purposes of the organization. It includes the process of establishing and clarifying the objectives and the establishment of the resources and major means (Strategies) through which these objectives will be pursued.

9.2 Pure Research

This consists of a research effort, rigorous in content and methodology, with significant creative input from the side of the graduate on a particular issue within the discipline. It includes
the systematic collection of pieces of data and information as well as their analysis in order to propose appropriate recommendations.

9.3 Literature Review
It involves describing, comparing, contrasting and evaluating theories, arguments, issues, methodologies, approaches, and controversies on matters of academic interest. Furthermore, it consists of a state of the question or state of the art in which everything that has been said about a specific topic is examined and evaluated, establishing its relevance in the academic area in which the work is found. It is not a mere annotated bibliography, nor a summary of academic information or a description. Rather, it must relate ideas and theories to identify the main issues and variables that exist on the specific topic investigated, and suggest solutions.

9.4 Business Case Study
This is a detailed explanation of a real business situation, describing the dilemma of the protagonist, who is a real person with a real job who faces a real problem. One can also define it as a description of a current situation that usually involves a decision, a challenge, an opportunity, a problem, or a situation that is faced by a person in an organization (Leenders, Mauffette-Leenders & Erskine, 2001).

9.5 Comprehensive Research
This is a written and oral presentation in which the MBA student demonstrates his or her subject knowledge acquired throughout the development of the program, along with his or her ability to integrate different pieces of information on the subject. This approach permits the student to deepen, broaden, interrelate, document, and apply his knowledge on a topic of his choice in a professional area in which he wants to perform in the future.

9.6 Narrative Case Study
The Narrative Case Study as “social research methodology, shares the approach that it is hermeneutical and alternative to positive ways, in which life’s experiences or the world recover an important role in research” (Bolivar, Domingo and Fernandez, 2001). As indicated by the authors, it is giving all its importance to the discursive dimension of individuality, in the ways that people live and give meaning to their world through language.

10. Benefits of Each Methodology
Table 2 summarizes the benefits of each teaching method. Different business schools choose and define their own educational model based on one or more of these methods.
Table 2. Benefits of Teaching Methodologies in Business Education

11. CONCLUSIONS

A very important aspect is that the rethinking of business education in the world should not only cover the program content or its “architecture”. Business schools also need to be able to develop increasingly effective learning methodologies that enable meeting the challenges facing management education today. Enabling students to develop competencies such as obtaining a global perspective of the business world or being able to integrate theory, practice, and experience has to be achieved through innovative learning methods that are appropriate for management education.

REFERENCES