

Issues and Strategies in Management Education: A South African Perspective



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This paper is based purely on the review of literature and indications emerging from the review. This paper covers the impact of changing business environment on the functioning and offerings of management education. International research studies in this field of enquiry identify dynamic technological environment and growing globalization as major drivers. These studies also indicate that in order to cope with the challenges of changing business environment, business schools are carefully selecting markets, products, their positions and strategic partnerships. This paper discusses management education in South Africa and identifies challenges and issues faced by business schools in South Africa. Finally, key questions which are likely to influence the strategic agenda of management education development are advanced.

Keywords: Management Education, Issues and Challenges, Strategic Agenda, South Africa

1. Introduction

Management education has shown better growth in this century than many other disciplines of social science education (Engwall, 2007). He attributed this growth to the ability of management education to offer a “wide range of employment opportunities” (p 28). From some time management education is under the scrutiny of policy makers and researchers (Rayment and Smith, 2010) and the recent financial crisis added fuel to this debate (Banister, 2009). The review of management education is not limited to the one part of the world but is wide spread across the continents. South African management institutions are also facing the similar issues but their strategic priorities also reflects need to addresses some contextual differences.

This paper starts with the introduction of the theme and leads to the section on literature on the changes in management education in the world. It further covers work of researchers on drivers of these changes. The next section explores context i.e. management education in South Africa. This section is followed by the discussions on the issues in front of management education institutions in South Africa and their responses. The paper concludes with the salient questions guiding strategic initiatives towards sustainable management education in South Africa.

2. Change in Management Education

While discussing past 50 years of management education, Friga, Bettis and Sullivan (p234, 2003) highlighted that management education has evolved from “*corporate based era*” to “*faculty based era*” and termed present era as the “*student based era*”. They highlighted shift towards higher age group, increasing number of females and increasing diversity in management students as major trends. Growing adult education and continuous education were the trends identified by Bronner and Kailiski (2007). Ishida (1997) indicated growing internationalization, diversification of curriculum and emergence of more market oriented courses as trends in management education in Japan. Friga, Bettis and Sullivan (2003) indicated that the transformation was seen in syllabus, practice and in the widening of scope and scale of marketing in business schools.

These changes at curriculum level, created growing demand of inclusion of foreign language proficiency (Panella, 1998), entrepreneurial orientation (Ishida, 1997; Adcroft, Willis and Dhaliwal, 2004), critical perspective (Catterall, Maclaran and Stevens, 2002), multi-culture management (Cant, 2004), service science (Maerki, 2008), customer focus (Abraham and Karns, 2009), behavioural competencies (Rubin, 2009), ethical perspective (Clarke, Gray and Mearman, 2006) and social and interpersonal skills (Clydesdale, 2008; Abraham and Karns, 2009) in the syllabus. At course level, growth of executive education (Lorange, 2005), industry specific and profession based courses (Banister, 2009) were another aspect of this change. Changes in the area of mode of delivery were observed (Jamali, 2005) and it was identified that there was a rapid adaptation of online mode (Dykman and Davis, 2008; Wishniewsky and Radovilsky, 2009) either fully or partially (Millson and Wilemon, 2008).

Besides transition in demographics, curriculum, courses and mode of delivery, some changes were also observed in the providers and stakeholders of management education. Elliott and Glaser (1998) identified industry-education relationship, diversity of programmes and technology as major element of changing landscape of management education. Consultancies, corporate universities and ranking agencies also became part of growing landscape of current management education (Engwall, 2007). Lorange (2005) indicated growing communication and interdependence between management education and its various stakeholders like business, government and society. Thomas (2007) brought forth growing importance of relevant and rigorous research directed by real life as an important feature of current management education. He further indicated managing several opposing forces like managing networks, incorporating research and practice in teaching, arrangements of funds and technology management as major challenges influencing present management education dynamics.

Drivers of Change

The review of literature in the field of management education indicates that it has been changing with the changes in business environment for education sector and in the response of the demands of its stakeholders. Tienari and Laurila (2007) indicated that the environmental forces are shaping the transformation of management education and believed that such pressures will keep on impacting its future. Friga, Bettis and Sullivan (2003) identified globalization, privatization, cutting edge technologies and changing demographics as major drives shaping functioning of management education. Similar were the findings of Thomas (2007) who brought forth that besides growth of globalization, new technology and reduction in government funding, demographic

changes like increase in average living age, growing number of double income families and changing needs of students as important drivers of transformation in the education environment. He also highlighted that major changes in competitors' environment were growth of corporate universities, consultancies run by influential faculties, universities offering programmes in partnership and distance learning providers. Dykman and Davis (2008) identified that emergence of better technologies and cost effectiveness of online education contributed to the online mode and mixed mode of delivery in management education. Growing quality consciousness contributed to the growing importance of accreditation in management education (Engwall, 2007).

3. Future Trends and Implications

Friga, Bettis and Sullivan (2003) stressed that the management education industry is going to witness further geographic expansion, growing number of non-traditional competitors like private education firms, technology firms which later result into consolidation of industry. They also indicated that management education institutions who (a) ensure loyalty among present students, (b) attract students from countries with younger population, (c) handle diverse product portfolio satisfying needs of different groups like executive, sectors and distance learners and (d) sought a strategic partnership with some key enablers are going to perform better.

Engwall (2007) identified that market forces or corporate are going to influence funding and thus are going to gain more influence over functions of management education. He also indicated consolidation in management education as another future trend. Ahlawat and Ahlawat (2006) stressed that competencies like international outlook, knowledge of different culture and comfort with foreign language are going to be in the demand list of future managers. Mohamed (2009) identified skills important for future managers which were skills related to diagnosis, logical and critical thinking, broader knowledge of various subjects including international markets, specialization, interpersonal skills, communication and basic technology skills.

Brotheridge and Long (2007) identified linking "*education-training dichotomy*" (p840) and making management education accommodative to the issues faced by managers helpful in future scenario of management education. While, Armstrong and Sadler-Smith (2008) highlighted that management education is going to be more flexible to accommodate various pace of learning.

Some researchers suggested keeping close association with various stakeholders of management education like employers, alumni and corporate leaders (Jamali, 2005) and government and society in general as strategies to remain competitive in future (Schoemaker, 2008). Broadening base of management education, action research, faculties with qualities of a leader and inclusion of societal aspect in management education is going to become part of tomorrow's scenario (Birnik and Billsberry, 2008). Studies indicates that research and research based teaching gain importance in future as research improve teaching and make it more relevant to the changes (Burke and Rau, 2010). Inclusion of soft skills in curriculum (Mitchell, Skinner and White, 2010) and research focused undergraduate programmes (Syvertsen, 2008) were identified as elements of future winning strategies.

4. Management Education in South Africa

Some of the challenges for management education sector are similar to the rest of the world like managing growth of distance mode of learning, growing importance of incorporation of soft skills in the curriculum, the need to incorporate indigenous knowledge and the revision of curricula on regular basis (Council on Higher Education, 2004). However, besides these similarities, there are some unique issues in front of South African management education which are more contextual in nature. Pre 1994 context has some lagging effect on education environment (Council on Higher Education, 2004). Human and Hofmeyr (1991) highlighted strong influence of socio-political environment on management education and indicated complex past of country is going to influence education sector in future as well. During apartheid, the education system witnessed discrimination in the access to higher education and in the quality of education facilities for different racial groups which has contributed to present scenario of skills shortage in the country (April and April, 2007; Bruton, 2008; Heaton, 2008).

Moja and Hayward (2000) analysed shift in the strategic directions of education system during 1994-1998 which was moving towards gaining equality and other social objectives. Although post 1994, management education witnessed some important changes like growing number of institutions providing MBA, growing number of female students and growing number of students from previously disadvantage category yet the equality is not achieved in management education (Council on Higher Education, 2004). As per this report there was growth in distance mode of delivery of education. Management skills were identified as a scarce skill by the department of labour (South African Department of Labour, 2008). Developing a skilled workforce with management related skills like analytical, entrepreneurial, problem solving, research, numerical, language, communication and negotiation related were identified a main challenge for management education in South Africa (Council on Higher Education, 2004). Post 1994 changes in policies has influenced the management education sector (Moja and Hayward, 2000), and by 2005, there were 19 accredited MBA programmes (Council on Higher Education, 2005). This report also indicated that 74% universities has contact mode of education while 26% universities deals in distance mode of education. In 2010, in South Africa, there were 23 public higher education institutions out of which 11 are categorized as universities, 6 as comprehensive universities and 6 as university of technology (Council on Higher Education, 2009). As per this report, there were also 78 registered and 22 provisionally registered private higher education institutions. In South Africa, similar to the other countries of the world, the number of students enrolled in business management courses during 2000 to 2007 grew up at the rate of 7.4% per annum which was higher than growth of students in other disciplines (Council on Higher Education, 2009). Moreover, the average age of students was also higher than the average students' age in other countries for similar courses (Council on Higher Education, 2009). This report also highlighted the trend of growing number of non-south African students (mostly from other African countries) in the overall student population. It is interesting to observe that approximately half of the African students were from the South African Development Community (SADC) countries (Council on Higher Education, 2009).

5. Issues and Strategic Agenda for Management Education in South Africa

Many research studies (April and April, 2007; Bruton, 2008; Heaton, 2008) indicate that management education in south Africa has massive challenges including accessibility to masses, empowering youth, promoting entrepreneurship and remaining relevant to the context and to the challenges of growing globalization. It is also realized that understanding the technological advancements and market needs, few players in the market are exercising various mode of delivery which ranges from traditional and effective

contact classes, distance education model, open distance learning and mixed mode of learning (Council on Higher Education, 2004). The management education sector also observing emergence of programs specifically designed for poor and previously disadvantaged mass population like Community and Individual Development Association (CIDA) model (Bruton, 2008; Heaton, 2008). In order to accommodate demands of context, some addition to curriculum were subjects like communication, leadership, societal welfare, entrepreneurship, and sustainable development (April and April, 2007). It is also observed that the curriculum in management education is becoming responsive to the needs of government policies, social needs, equity, globalisation, entrepreneurship and business ethics (Council on Higher Education, 2004 and North, 2002). As far as the market development strategies are concerned, some management education providers are trying to increase their presence in other African countries especially in Southern Africa (Council on Higher Education, 2009).

6. Future Implications for Management Education in South Africa

Reviewed literature so far indicated that efforts by various stakeholders of education in bridging gap between management education in South Africa and international standards. The literature also indicates that in South Africa, the demand for management education is higher than its supply (Bruton, 2008) and this situation makes this market attractive. As indicated by Mahajan (2008) in his book "Africa Rising" that the younger population of Africa is going to be the main source of demand for various products specially products related to youth and education is one such product. It seems that management education institutes understand these scenarios and are focusing on managing the challenge of keeping balance between academic and research rigour, affordability and accessibility (Council on Higher Education, 2009). This report also indicated their ambitions for international expansion which so far seems focused on Africa. Another trend which is at present in infancy is forming alliances with education institutions from other countries (Obamba and Mwema, 2009). From the foregoing it is clear that educators and management education policy makers will need a sober reflection and a clear domain of implementable scenarios to work from in order to address the complexity of forces of change in management education described above in the medium term to long term. The following salient questions could guide any strategic initiatives towards sustainable management education in South Africa:

- What is the position of South Africa among other African countries in offering management education and impact on the issues of globalization, privatization, technology advancement and changing demographics?
- What are appropriate modes of delivery – are there typical modes or hybrids to suit different environments?
- What are overarching and key knowledge base areas for sustainable skill?
- What are appropriate models for bridging the gap between research and practice as building blocks for sustainable management education?
- What is the nature of demands from employers (private and public) and professional organisations on continuing professional development (CPD)?

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