INNOVATION IN MANAGEMENT LEARNING

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Abstract

In the past ten years, management learning has been evolving around various elements such as learning topics, skill sets and their applications in the real world, transferability, its impact on job and career aspiration, and the modes of teaching and learning. This article aims to reflect upon the innovation in management learning in the past decade, management knowledge and skill set requirements to meet the challenges in the global landscape, and the value-adding services sought by students and executives in their learning today. This paper makes a contribution to management learning by opening new directions for conventional providers of management education, who need to be alert of its rapidly changing nature, the changing needs of employers and their employees in management development, to adapt to the new global business landscapes, and to take innovative approaches in their development of management learning programs.

Key words: *innovation, management, learning*

INTRODUCTION

Towards the end of the 20th century, management studies encompassed several categories of management such as human resource management, financial management, information technology management, marketing management, operations management and strategic management. Business has become more global and increasingly competitive over the century. In order to be ahead of the crowd tomorrow, executives need to be able to think, act and react with a global perspective. They need to be able to manage effectively teams comprised of different cultures to unleash the power of diversity and generate creativity and innovation. They also need to understand how to view opportunities both in their local environment and across the global landscape.

In this article, the following issues would be examined: What are the innovations in the scope of management learning in the past ten years? What is the speed in the development of online and distance education in management learning in recent years? What are the requirements in management skills for global managers today? What is the importance of academic partnership in the provision of international management programs worldwide? How do management education providers meet the needs of employers in the local and international contexts? References have been made to the innovative development of programs in renowned, reputable, and contemporary management schools.

With the aim to reflect upon the main developments in management learning in the past decade, and to open new directions for conventional providers of management education, this paper would start with a review on the changes in the scope of management learning. It will then focus on the rise of online and distance management learning programs, the support expected by students and executives taking part in them. The paper would then discuss about the impact of globalization on managers and how renowned management schools help students to meet the challenges ahead through innovation, as well as the significant role played by local academic partners in the delivery of management programs in the international platform. Finally, how the schools meet the employer needs and reinforcing the necessity of lifelong learning in management.

CHANGES IN LEARNING SCOPE

A research conducted at Pepperdine's George L. Graziadio School of Business and Management (GSBM) has identified a list of critical skills for effective managers in the 21st century. These skills include:

1. 'Communication and interpersonal skills'
2. 'An ethical or spiritual orientation'
3. 'The ability to manage change'
4. 'The ability to motivate'
5. 'Analytic and problem solving skills'
6. 'Being a strategic/visionary manager'

The research findings revealed that 'the effective 21st century manager is likely to be a transformational leader, that is, a masterful change agent who, through the use of outstanding interpersonal skills and analytical application, is able to motivate others by sharing a strategic vision, while at the same time adhering to a rigorous ethical code.' (Mallinger, 1998)

Soft skills become hard targets

Sarvesh Gulati, writing in his book, "corporate soft skills", succinctly delineates nine essential components of soft skills (Gulati, 2006).

1. 'Business communication skill'
2. 'Emotional intelligence'
3. 'Time management'
4. 'Leadership skill'
5. 'Team building'
6. 'Customer relationship management'
7. 'Persuasion & negotiation skill'
8. 'Business & social etiquette'
9. 'Stress management'

Soft skills are becoming increasingly essential in the global market where executives conduct business across cultures and social settings. They can make the difference between success and failure in today's highly-competitive business environment. 'Extra-curricular learning and development aim at putting meaning into life-wide learning' (Heffernan, Feng, Angell, Yan, & Coxon, 2012); management schools are providing optimal life-wide learning opportunities for executives, running workshops in topics like: Managing in Adversity; Change Management; Project Management; Innovative Strategic Management; Transformational Leadership; Creativity, Innovation and Entrepreneurship; and Ability in Captivating an Audience. These workshops enable executives to take home skill sets such as entrepreneurial development, how to build quick rapport with customers and colleagues, and becoming more resilient to change. The core content of these soft skills courses and workshops are framed for immediate application (Hong Kong University School of Professional And Continuing Education (HKU SPACE), 2015a).

Strategic leadership: the essential skills

Organizations today are faced with challenges of real leadership, change management, talent retention, risk management and business ethics compliance. 'The more unpredictable the environment, the greater the opportunity – if you have the leadership skills to capitalize on it. An adaptive strategic leader – someone who is both resolute and flexible, persistent in the face of setbacks but also able to react strategically to environmental shifts.' (Schoemaker, Krupp, & Howland, 2013)

Over the years, apart from providing opportunities to attain high level of academic qualifications in management studies, renowned management schools help business executives to cope with new challenges by equipping them with the latest skills leading to professional and personal enrichment. The revamped 'Said Business School MBA offers leadership skills fit for a new age - developing effective managers to help address organizational challenges, using cases, simulations and field projects that tie with concrete organizational situations and build upon essential theories and effective management practices' (University of Oxford Said Business School, 2015a). In collaboration with its partner, Hong Kong University School of Professional And Continuing Education (HKU SPACE) operates Master of Science in Business Management (Leadership and Innovation) program, which equips students with an approach to management that blends leadership skills and the ability to synthesize innovative solutions to problems of modern management (Hong Kong University School of Professional And Continuing Education (HKU SPACE), 2015b). In every case, class, event, and activity in Harvard Business School MBA, 'you are asked not only to study leadership, but to demonstrate it' (Harvard Business School, 2015).

Leaders today and tomorrow face increasing complex problems, these courses aim at facilitating the experiences of their students so that they could grow both personally and professionally, and be prepared for the challenges ahead.

Functional and professional development

In addition to recruiting new staff with better skillsets, employers are seeking to create working environments where staff can achieve professional growth by pursuing various developmental opportunities. These training opportunities include functional and professional development courses that can help employees achieve their individual career goals. In a world where the business landscape is constantly changing, employees may be given new challenges such as collaborating on a team project, leading projects, rotating jobs, international assignments, development dialogue, and mentoring and coaching responsibilities. These tasks create and drive the need for quality training in functional and professional areas, including basic finance, business law essentials, project management, research skills for managers, coaching and mentoring skills, to name a few.

Conventional management programs may not be able to satisfy employers' expectations. In recent years, reputable management schools have developed series of executive education programs to address the above market needs. They have assembled a team of experienced faculty who are an inspiring mix of entrepreneurs, change agents and innovators. All are experts in their fields with real-world, practical, hands-on experience of working with, and consulting for, sizable organizations in a wide variety of industries. Orchestrated by expert faculty, executives will learn from each other and explore new and complex ideas. They will reflect on new business and people management models, and gain the confidence they need to make an impact in their job. The Chinese University of Hong Kong Business School 'offers a range of programs for executives who are looking for inspiration to address business needs and challenges in the changing environment' (The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) Business School, 2015). The London School of Economics and Political Science 'offers a range of executive education, from short courses and master's degrees for individuals to programs created for organizations' (London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), 2015).

RISE OF ONLINE AND DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMS

The internet, high-speed electronic communications, and computers have transformed the way of teaching and learning. Social media today provides strong boost to online learning. Busy executives increasingly prefer to study distance-learning and blended mode programs due to their flexibility. Some employers regard someone who finishes a distance-learning course, such as MBA, a more committed and discipline person. 'ChinaEdu in China has over 311,000 online students in both degree and non-degree programs – the second-largest online student population in the world after the University of Phoenix Online in the US. In December 2013, ChinaEdu reported 211,000 students enrolled in their online degree programs, a 14.5% increase over the year before.' 'Korea National Open University has more than 200,000 online enrolments and is the largest university in South Korea in terms of enrolments. In addition, by September 2014, 24 cyber-universities were operating in South Korea.' 'The Open University Malaysia has more than 90,000 online students. The Open University of Japan is the largest online education provider in the country, with over 85,000 students enrolled.' (Huge Growth in eLearning in Asia, 2015). Heriot-Watt University MBA has more than 11,900 active distance learning students from 160 countries, more than 17,900 alumni, and 25 academic partners across six continents (Heriot-Watt University Edinburgh Business School, 2015). EdX is an on line platform 'empowering learning around the globe; based in Cambridge, Massachusetts and is governed by MIT and Harvard, it offers interactive online classes and MOOCs in business and management from the world's best universities, colleges and organizations' (edX, 2015).

According to The 2013-2018 Asia Self-paced eLearning Market report, there is a massive demand for self-paced e-learning content in Asia. 'Asia will generate the second-highest revenues for Self-paced eLearning after North America throughout the forecast period. The growth rate is 8.9% and Self-paced eLearning revenues in Asia will reach $12.1 billion in 2018, up from $7.9 billion in 2013. Forecasts for twenty-one countries are included in this report: Australia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China (including Hong Kong and Macao), India, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar (Burma), Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam. In 2013, the top five buying countries were China, South Korea, Japan, India, and Australia, respectively. By 2018, the top five buying countries will be China, South Korea, India, Japan, and Indonesia. Malaysia will come in sixth by 2018.' (Ambient Insight, 2014).

However, it has been identified that there are additional needs of the students who have enrolled in online and distance learning programs. The students need value added local academic supports such as face-to-face tutorials and workshops, academic counselling, consultation by local teaching and administrative staff. In the last ten years, top universities in UK have appointed Approved Learning Partners (ALP) globally to support their operation of online international programs, examples are University of London International Programs at Foundation and Bachelor levels, University of London Royal Holloway School of Management MBA in International Management, Heriot-Watt University MBA, Leicester University MBA programs. These are all distance-learning postgraduate programs where students can learn at their own pace. Students in these programs have built their own learning communities, and ALPs play a pivotal role in learning activities support including but not limited to workshops, plenary sessions and professional seminars. Hong Kong University School of Professional and Continuing Education (HKU SPACE) collaborates with a wide range of academic institutions globally (in the UK, Australia, the USA, Mainland China and Hong Kong) in offering adding value student services support to its partnership programs at all levels (Hong Kong University School of Professional And Continuing Education (HKU SPACE), 2015c).

GLOBALIZATION IS THE FUTURE

Challenges in the global landscape

Globalization and the rapid development of the knowledge economy mean that today's business executives are faced with increasing challenges to adapt and compete. Companies seek improved results through business innovation, marketing expansion, merger and acquisitions, along with process

optimization and cost rationalization. In addition, corporations face the added challenges of managing risk in compliance with new standards of control and governance.

Managing global teams across changing markets is demanding. Global Executive Business Management program prepares managers to handle the challenges of leading a global team by developing their business abilities, alongside their personal and leadership skills. 'WU Executive Academy's Global Executive MBA's curriculum extends well beyond the walls of the classroom. Participants in the program work with international faculty members, complete international residencies in Russia, India, China and U.S.A. They gain in-depth knowledge of business theory and practice in both emerging and mature markets' (Vienna University of Economics and Business WU Executive Academy, 2015a).

Management schools help executives meet these challenges head-on by equipping them with the most up-to-date interdisciplinary knowledge and skills. Students in the Oxford 1+1 MBA program benefit from 'training across disciplines in their two-year postgraduate experience, which combines the depth of a specialized, one-year Master's degree with the breadth of a top-ranking, one-year MBA' (University of Oxford Said Business School, 2015b).

Today, most organizations operate internationally, twenty-first century teams are increasingly likely to be multicultural and traditional management training is no longer sufficient to develop the skills that business leaders require. Management skills for international business 'develop an understanding of cultural differences, the skills to manage internationally, and the knowledge to navigate the complexities of international organizations' (INSEAD Graduate Business School, 2015a).

The importance of partnership

It is important to establish collaborations between universities which can bring in international learning experiences and global connections to students studying their programs. Local students can have the chance of visiting overseas university through student exchange on semester base, summer school, and study trip, which are great opportunities to widen their horizon. An internationally recognized qualification may enhance students' employability in multi-national companies, and thus earning them a better position on the global stage.

Tomorrow's market leaders in management education must have global reach, the Alliance between the Wharton School and INSEAD 'combines the resources of two world leaders in management education to deliver top-quality company-specific and open-enrolment programs to executives across four dedicated campuses: INSEAD's in Fontainebleau (France), and Singapore and Wharton's US campuses in Philadelphia and San Francisco'. The Tsinghua INSEAD Executive MBA is 'a conscious effort by the School of Economics and Management at Tsinghua University in China and INSEAD to forge an international program for Asia's business community. Tsinghua's unique expertise, cultural heritage and place in Chinese society complement INSEAD's long-held expertise in international management'. (INSEAD Graduate Business School, 2015b).

The powerful partnership of two of the most prestigious ranked business schools - the Carlson School of Management at the University of Minnesota and the WU Executive Academy of the WU (Vienna University of Economics and Business) offers students access to the global network of both schools – and means that 'they finish the program with an MBA from Europe and the USA' (Vienna University of Economics and Business WU Executive Academy, 2015a).

Employer needs analyses

There is usually a gap between those who teach management programs and those who practice management in corporations and agencies. Management schools need to adapt to changing knowledge and skill set requirements in the business world so that graduates are better prepared to meet the challenges in the global landscape. It is common practice for management schools to collect feedback from employers, professional bodies, students, teachers and practitioners on regular base via formal

and informal meetings in order to update the curriculum of their management programs; real and update cases sharing, latest business ethics compliance in the industry are all valuable input for the development of new programs or revamp of existing courses. Regular networking with corporate clients to identify the training needs for their employees has been a routine practice of the executive education providers, findings are being analyzed and corporate training programs are being developed with customization to meet their specific requirements.

In a Market Trends and Salary report by Ambition, 'when employees feel their career have come to a standstill, 21.82% of the employees would take up a relevant course to upgrade themselves, 62.06% of them would make a career switch' (Ambition, 2014). These figures reinforce the need of lifelong learning in management where all the soft skills, leadership and professional developments are transferable across careers and industries. And reputable management schools have been playing a pivotal role in filling the gaps of learning to maintain the employees' aspiration, and to enhance the employability of their graduates.

CONCLUSION

Traditional management training is no longer adequate to develop the skills that business leaders require today. It is a norm for renowned management schools to keep a good mix of qualified academic staff and highly experienced practitioners in the industry as their teaching team, to invite influential industry players to be advisors of their management programs so that they gain a more comprehensive view of the changing knowledge and skill set requirements in the real world. In the past ten years, management learning has been evolving around various elements: learning topics and scope, skill sets and their applications in the field, transferability, its impact on job and career aspiration, the modes of teaching and learning, and last but not least, the value adding services support requirements of students enrolled in distance learning programs. As providers in management studies, conventional management schools are encouraged to be more alert of the latest needs of the employers and their employees in learning and development, to make better adaptation to the exciting business landscapes, and to take innovative approaches in their development of management learning program.

The purpose of this article has been to reflect upon the innovation in management learning in the past decade, and to open new directions for conventional providers of management education. Management schools are encouraged to keep a good balance between traditional, contemporary and pragmatic approaches in their program development; to support the research and review with academia and management practitioners; and to advocate further exchanges between management academia from the East and the West.

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