CALL FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT IN THE QUEST FOR ADVANCED BUSINESS SCHOOLS

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Abstract

The demands of the globalise business community have impacted greatly the way business schools of today educate their graduates. Many business schools take cognisance of the need to increase its students' academic mobility as a means of enhancing the value of its graduates. Various possible alternatives and action plans must be considered in the light of challenges and intended end-state objectives. This article documented the best practices that ought to be embrace by business schools, in particular those schools that are embarking into global education arena. The strategies discussed will serve as input in proposing the areas of focus towards becoming top business school in the country or region. The strategies to improving MBA students' academic mobility, the rationale for adoption, some implementation issues and the way forward also been discussed. In arriving at the recommendations, the comments and critiques of MBA programmes by renowned management educators are referred to, so as to shape the benchmark in guiding the future direction of emerging business schools around the globe.

Key Words: MBA Programme, Advanced Business School.

Introduction: brief history of MBA programme

The Master of Business Administration (MBA) is a master's degree in business administration that originated in the nineteenth century United States, as the country industrialised. In particular, it was the desire by Wallace C. Sabine, the dean of Harvard Graduate School and the Economics Professor Edwin F. Gay to establish a university management programme based on Frederic Winslow Taylor's works in business that crafted the landscape of management education in 1908. Although Taylor was reportedly insistent upon his belief that management could only be learned in concrete work settings, the Harvard Business School was set up as a dedicated graduate school for management education (Dery, Mailhot & Schaeffer, 2007). Originally, the intent of the MBA programme was to equip technically qualified personnel especially engineers with the understanding of management so that they could administer the factory floor more competently. The driving motivation was to ensure improved productivity through more efficient administration of the production floor.

The earlier MBA curricula which were basically, descriptive, began to draw criticism from industry after World War II. Subsequent to this, MBA schools in the US and elsewhere accommodated the desired change to introduce analytical elements, for instance, by requiring skills in calculus, set theory and probability theory as a prerequisite for understanding statistical analysis and making marketing courses take on a quantitative approach. This era too, saw the introduction of theories into the management and marketing disciplines and that intuition and judgment being replaced by "scientific" processes (Hughes, 2005). This trend at making MBA programmes more "scientific" was amplified by the preference of funding entities such as the Ford Foundation and Carnegie Foundation for programmes that applied such an approach. This "scientification" process of management courses, according to Bennis and O'Toole (2005) is a manifestation of the "physics envious" phenomenon among social scientists, a term coined by many social science critics (Flyvbjerg, 2001).

Criticism of Current MBA Programmes/ Schools – The Issues

Over the years, this brand of MBA has become the default operationalising mode adopted by almost all business schools worldwide. There was a groundswell of obsession with the "scientification" of teaching materials and curriculum through quantification and measurement till this date. "Analysis" and "analytical ability" of graduates became the buzz words sought. The emphasis was on the need to perform an activity in a linear and reductionist manner, that is, in a predicted sequence where the activity (the whole) is reduced or broken up into smaller parts, following on the

practice of classical science under the Newtonian-Cartesian regime. Due to this tradition, even business activities were viewed as made up of smaller parts such that it is not surprising to expect a business school to offer an MBA programme that demonstrates the functions of a business such as marketing, accounting, finance and human resource management as separate disciplines and taught in silos (Minztberg, 2004). In addition, the cause-effect phenomenon "borrowed" from Newton's Second Law appeared as the doctrine for management decision-making, taught and upheld in management and management related research. The wide spread practice took place although by around 1950s, the new sciences founded upon the work of quantum physicists have shown that much of the foundations of classical science are proven incorrect.

Given that in the real world of business, no such separation of functions exists and that rather, the functions are in fact inter-connected, the continued breaking up of management as reflected in the teaching of management at business schools in the 21st century has become an issue that received tremendous criticism. Since the very aim of MBA programmes are supposedly to make managers more competent with their administration skills in a real life work place setting, the non-representation of the work place in MBA classrooms is contradictory. Minztberg (2004) argued that MBA programmes are producing NOT managers but functionaries.

Towards addressing this criticism, many MBA schools began looking into ways that could limit the shortcomings of the curriculum structure that is separated into different disciplines. Teaching methods began taking centre stage. The Case Study method for instance, which has for a long time been claimed as the panacea to bridge the gap between theory and practice, became more popular. But could the case study method really address the problem of non-integrated and non-interrelatedness between the different functions of business as taught in MBA schools? The argument here is that a product that is an output of a misaligned mould would not be able to be "re-corrected" merely through cosmetics. It is the mould that has to be retooled and reshaped. In the 21st century where knowledge organisations and economies are the features, the relevance of the approach that had worked during the 17th to 19th century industrial ages now is suspected.

Mintzberg hinted in his interview that the other contributory factor towards producing non-relevant graduates lies in the misperception of management educators of the happenings within management practices (Vogl, 2004). To Minztberg, management educators from the MBA programmes "pretend to create managers out of people who have never managed". In other words, students who are accepted into the programme are those without the right background. As such, what is taught in business schools cannot be visualised and related to the context of the reality of the

work place. Minztberg also believes that part of the problem is due to the distinction made between leadership and management. To him, leadership should not be glamourised. "The more we train for leadership that is independent of management, the more we get hubris - the idea that the leader is somebody big and important, separate from the someone who has to deal with the daily nitty-gritty of running an organisation" (Minztberg as reported by Vogl, 2004). A leader, to Minztberg, has to be a manager, and a manager has to be a leader, that is, someone who knows what's happening in the business. But then again, what can we expect of management educators who themselves have never managed and lead businesses?

Apart from the critiques highlighted in the earlier sections, the manner in which MBA schools measure their academic excellence to Bennis and O'Toole (2005), is self-defeating.

> Instead of measuring themselves in terms of the competence of their graduates, or by how well their faculties understand important drivers of business performance, they measure themselves almost solely by the rigor of their scientific [classical Newtonian-Descartes science] research. They have adopted a model of science that uses abstract financial and economic analysis, statistical multiple regressions, and laboratory psychology. Some of the research produced is excellent, but because so little of it is grounded in actual business practices, the focus of graduate business education has become increasingly circumscribed – and less and less relevant to practitioners. (p. 98)

The issue of the relevance of business schools' research or rather lack of it as impressed above, has now become a point of contention among many parties. Business and management educators are heavily fixated with conducting research that is highly quantitative, hypothesis-driven and esoteric so that as a result, it is almost universally unread by real-world managers. Perhaps business and management research is not deliberated with managers' needs in mind, nor is it communicated in the journals they read. For most part it has become a self-referential closed system irrelevant to corporate performance. The AACSB International—The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) is also reportedly keen to evaluate research in terms of practical relevance but is expected to face strong opposition at the faculty level. Apart from it being a natural tendency of academics to resist interference in their work, the psychological barrier of "physics-envy" among business educators intensifies the resistance (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002).

From the earlier sections, it can be deduced that management educators have manifested their "physic-envious" quality through emphasising on similar approach in conducting management research as that of the traditional science. The introduction of theories into management in the earlier years too, demonstrated the fascination among management educators of emulating the sciences. But what exactly then, is management all about? Is it a discipline of science or social science? Or is it a professional discipline like accountancy, law or engineering? Before we embark further on the development of management to where it is presently, it is first beneficial to understand where management stand from the perspective of the bigger picture of epistemology. In order for us to build that big picture, we need to decide on the point of departure. A most appropriate point is to visit the era during which the events that led to the existence of science, social science and management took place.

Epistemology, Science, Social science and Management

Epistemology is about human knowledge including the study of its origin and how human attains knowledge. History shows that the Church has had a profound impact on epistemology during the Middle Ages up to the seventeenth century. It is during this period that pursuit for knowledge was separated between that of the Magisterium (Church authority) and the "scientist" community. The freedom to practise science without the demarcation between material and non-material or metaphysical came to a halt due to the differentiation of the cultural value spheres which especially signified the differentiation of art, morals and science. The church, according to Wilber (1998), defined what science could and could not do. The aim of this 'modern' science was no longer ontological but empirical knowledge. Science, during that time, began to limit its realm within the confinement of material matters, denying virtually all the tenets of religion and consciousness mainly due to the absence of credible empirical evidence. Despite the narrow scope of science which is grounded only on the sense perception (physical senses), the belief was that there was no reality save that revealed by science, and no truth save that which science delivered. Hence, non-material knowledge or knowledge that could not be empirically tested and observed was not considered knowledge.

During the seventeenth century, Newton made his discoveries of science (material). Naturally, Newton's discoveries were taken as an endorsement of the earlier decision to view knowledge as comprising only that which could be empirically tested and observed. The worldview was that science was in total conflict with revelations. Epistemology was thus limited to material science only. Newton's work later became the basis of Comte's positivist Religion of Humanity and social science. Comte's positivism ideology then took the term "scientism" due to the so-claimed

strong link to Newtonian's science. Given that Comte was the champion of social science, we see that it is only natural that social scientists working on social science phenomena tend to adopt the material science approach. Observer and the observed are taken as separate and revelation as source of knowledge has been rejected. Effectively, this means that social science is void of non-material knowledge so that any model to represent social phenomenon would only be limited to include only those that are observable and measurable. Whether this was and indeed is the representation of reality was not an issue of concern.

During the industrial age (till the early twentieth century) when the focus of social science including management research was basically towards improving productivity, such a view was non-detrimental. Rather, it fits neatly into the ambit of "Man being Machine" as portrayed by Descartes and Le Mettrie. Frederick's Taylor's scientific management theory appears to explain the workings of the organisations that are set along the expectations of meeting a standard performance index by job specifications and division of labour, very appropriately. The emphasis on cause-effect relationship to "manipulate" employees' performance was overwhelming. Likewise, Weber's bureaucratic theory of management and Fayol's administrative theory that focused on hierarchies and line of authority and command both uphold the cause-effect mechanism. Subsequent behavioural management theory (Theory X and Theory Y), often called the human relations movement, espoused employees to be viewed as individuals, resources, and assets to be developed and worked with, rather than as machines. Yet, as in the past, their approach in conducting their research and the manner in which their models were developed was still very cause-effect-based, very much like the approaches of material science and earlier management theories. Later, the various branches of management science theory provide rigorous quantitative techniques that give managers more control over their organisation's use of resources to produce goods and services. The stress on the importance of studying the organisation's external environment became more prominent after the development of open-systems theory and contingency theory during the 1960s. A main focus of contemporary management research is to find methods to help managers improve the way they utilise organisational resources and compete successfully in the global environment. Strategic management and total quality management are two popular approaches adopted to help managers make better use of organisational resources.

On the basis that the development of management theories has been based on the approach adopted by natural scientists, management educators have been happy to claim that they too are being scientific in their work hence reliable. The issue of contention is not the use of any of the so-called theories or techniques but rather on the fundamental underpinnings of the theories. What becomes an issue is that, the works of the new generation of scientists beginning with Max Planck on black body radiation

and later Einstein on photoelectric effect showed that the principles of the cause-effect of classical Newtonian science were no longer correct. What this means is that, in essence, the models are based on the foundations that are now found flawed! Quantum physics too, demonstrated for instance, the principles of non-locality and subjectivity and several others that later became the foundation of a new worldview of science in the 20th and 21st centuries. Today, quantum mechanics is already responsible for more that 30% of the world's business activities.

Despite the acceptance by everyone including the social scientists and managers alike of the material developments of science due to quantum physics, many do not reflect the implications of the meaning of quantum physics in their approach to management practices. This phenomenon is widely reflected too, in the manner in which the MBA schools design their MBA curriculum, conduct these programmes and perform research activities. Hughes (2005) was critical of this ignorance of management educators and their resistance to accept the implications of the new sciences. Notwithstanding these schools' lost opportunities, more importantly is their failure to provide their students with an education that truly reflect the subjective world as in reality.

To surmise, five main issues have been raised on the manner in which business schools run their MBA programmes:

1) curriculum that is detached from the reality of the work place since it is based on the functional areas of business and treated in isolation to one another;

2) academics who do not possess experience in the management and leadership of businesses;

3) students admitted into the programme without the necessary management experience;

4) appraisal of business school academics' achievement based on publications and research output that are not relevant to industry; and

5) attitude of management educators who are obsessed with wanting to be scientific yet are unaware of the development of real science.

MBA Schools: the way forward

Curriculum

Most of the business schools of the world suffer from the similar predicaments in terms of its curriculum. Yet another challenge that most MBA schools faces is the desire to offer a curriculum that addresses the seemingly perpetual criticism addressed to all business schools, that is, of the imbalance in emphasis between theory and practice and the disconnectedness between classrooms and the workplace. Most leaders of world-leading business schools agreed that efforts were needed to link between their schools' MBA curriculum and how management plays out in today's business world (Mumford, 2004; Pfeffer, 2004, Pfeffer & Fong, 2002). The MBA programme that has been offered in many business schools were designed based on the functional areas of business. Hence, subjects like marketing, accounting, management, finance and so forth have always been offered in silos. This is because the MBA programme at most business schools has been designed based on the Western model, which is the only model that presumably most, if not all management academics in Asia Pacific Region are familiar with, based on their training.

Another issue with respect to content is the need to integrate in all courses, the elements of ethics, irrespective of whether a stand-alone ethics course is offered or not. Business managers and leaders need to possess strong moral values in order to uphold corporate integrity. Warren Buffet for instance, has demonstrated the importance of choosing leaders with integrity and values in selecting stocks that could sustain growth over a long-term period. It has been shown too, that it is unethical practice that has led to many corporate scandals. The approach of inculcating ethics into the curriculum through a stand-alone course only rather than embedded in all courses has been strongly criticised as a failure to acknowledge that ethics and governance are values-based and originate from within. The approach to offer ethics as a 'stand-alone' course only is viewed as an "after-thought patchwork" to cover a fundamental oversight. This practice also gives an impression as if ethics is an element that is stand-alone and detached from other business functions. Ethics issues, according to Dean W. Krehmeyer, the Executive Director of the Business Roundtable Institute for Corporate Ethics, "don't come packaged in neat little boxes that identify themselves as ethics issues." Faculty should engage in talking about a firm's ethical responsibilities in all courses and not restrict the discussion to the ethics classroom.

In terms of the pedagogical method, most of the courses in MBA schools were taught on teacher-centred basis with some using the case study method, albeit its shortcomings. Recognising that the work place does not allow for problems to happen in silos of business functions, the present-day business schools must introduce the problem-based learning (PBL) to address part of the limitations of the curriculum

structure. Business schools should gradually use PBL as the primary teaching method in more courses over time, given that these problems are practice-based and more reflective of the real business world. The PBL system was developed in medical schools in the nineties is extremely appropriate in the constantly changing world of business.

In PBL, instead of the lecturer haranguing the students with a plethora of facts and ideas, the lecturer sets a platform on which the students search for the facts and ideas themselves and the lecturer facilitates them in their searching. The students work in groups to search out and present the material that once the lecturer would have provided. The students then come together from their library and computer searches and each group shares its findings within themselves, working from whiteboards placed around the room. In essence, in PBL, practice and research are thoroughly mixed (Bridges & Hallinger, 1995). At the end of each problem, as a result of their group discussions, members of each group make presentations to the whole class followed by a debriefing session by the lecturer/facilitator. During the debriefing session, it is the task of the lecturer/facilitator to help students synthesise the essence of each problem whether in relation to the course as a whole or to the working environment.

With this, it is highly anticipated that students would be exposed to the interconnectedness of the business functional areas and that the approach to problem-solving should not be to reduce the whole into smaller parts. Yet still, the problems are discipline and course-based. Therefore, the curriculum must be revised over time, so that the MBA programme at business schools eventually could be offered in terms of modules, rather than by courses to represent the inter-relatedness of the functional areas of business. It has been reported that PBL adopted in that manner allows for a higher level of representation of real world environment into the classrooms (for example at the Mahidol Graduate School of Management).

To facilitate and promote the use of PBL method, a PBL Committee is strongly suggested to be formed so that a dedicated team could monitor and oversee all issues relating to not only the challenges of adopting the PBL pedagogical approach but the general teaching quality of all instructors. Given the extra effort needed to conduct a class in a PBL manner as compared to a conventional one, a Graduate Assistants (GAs) comprising senior students at the school should be assigned to each class running in the PBL mode.

Business schools are encouraged to foresee the benefits of appointing GAs to assist instructors in facilitating the classes. With input from the GAs, an up-to-date database of the teaching pedagogy applied in all classes could be built. The problems that were used in the class should digitally compile. An on-going training programme

for the instructors is essential, thus need be designed and implemented. New students must be trained at the beginning of each semester on the PBL approach as well to avoid any shock as they were used to traditional method of teaching-learning. Although the trend of PBL-conducted courses generally upward, some business schools might foresee instructors reluctant to adopt PBL. In many cases this situation is common and will shade out over time.

Although in some leading world renowned business schools, the practice has been to allow for diversity of teaching and assessment methods, in most circumstances instructors could be requested to submit students to a common final examination while allowing for diversity in the use of the problems and course work. The rationale is that at leading business schools, the instructors are individuals who themselves are world authority in the subject matter and use texts that they themselves authored. However in most business schools, since that has not been the case, the possible gap between the classes should be minimised. Students should not be made to feel short-changed by being in a class under one instructor as opposed to the other. This change, although might be initially resisted, gradually anticipate to be accepted albeit with reservation.

Students

Students admitted into the MBA programme are selected on merit. Unfortunately, the issue of students not having managerial experience as highlighted by management education critiques is a reality at many MBA schools. Despite the MBA supposedly being a programme meant to expose technically qualified personnel to the tools of management, the profile of the students at many business schools has been skewed towards the non-technical-based students. Through the PBL approach, the lack of articulation ability among students whether in writing or orally, will be uncovered. The lack of working experience too, limits the students' ability to contribute to the subject matter.

Recognising these limitations, business schools should use a criteria-based selection process for all applicants into academic programmes. MBA schools must embark on a promotion drive to organisations targeted at attracting working adults. Advertising campaigns could be dedicated to the business magazines. To address the issue of the lack of mastery of articulation skills, the Business Communication course must be made compulsory for all MBA students. This endeavour raises the standard of students and prepares them with attributes towards becoming more resilient and ethical beings so increase their potential mobility and adaptability. A communication module aims to improve the clarity and effectiveness of their written and spoken English. Many of the students, both local and international, are fluent in several languages, but

they may have problems with the international language, English. Students should spend a considerable proportion of the time learning to recognise and correct the errors and ambiguities speakers of other languages tend to make in business English. Each student should be able to speak to the class about some business-related topic, supporting his or her material with slides and distributing a one-page handout. They must be videotaped individually so they can see themselves as others see them, and in future avoid any distracting mannerisms they may have and build on their personal strengths. To promote team-working traits among the students, the Corporate Strategy "War-game" Simulation also should be considered compulsory for all MBA students.

The course, Human Governance™, as a means to operationalise a more fundamental concept of preparing graduates towards becoming a holistic corporate individual with ethical values should be introduced. In the Human Governance™ course, emphasis should be given to the need for the individual to act according to the potential of being a human being rather than to act as following the norm. In short, this course calls for a move from a rule-based to principle-based governance. Through upholding to one's conscience, it is hoped that the individual will be able to differentiate between performing an act that may be considered acceptable yet unethical. In this course too, the link between western thought process and eastern philosophy is highlighted so that students can make meaning of their every day life better, holistic rather than discrete.

The differentiating characteristics should reflect MBA schools' philosophy in upholding principle-based practices and where the decision making architecture of life is looked at in the context of "This Business Called Life™". This "Business Called Life™" concept views life as a series of dilemmas and the decision making process involving risk which is attitude-dependent. The risk governance in place should be one that is principle-based. This principle-based governance looks at axiology, encompassing the traits of values, religion, belief system, culture, and ethics. Aristotle knew this 2000 years ago, when he wrote that "we shall need laws for the regulation of adult behaviour as well, and generally speaking to cover the whole of life; for most people obey necessity and compulsion rather argument and ideals'. Hence, if we want to change corporations to be more 'socially responsible', we must change human behaviour. But human behaviour is not easily changed. To achieve real transformation, we have to change the motivations that drive behaviour, traditionally shaped on the premise of "man as machine". As a machine, man is therefore governed by the basic scientific theory of Classical Mechanics of Newton and Descartes. But Classical Mechanics is based upon a mechanical picture of nature that is fundamentally incorrect (Stapp, 1997). Classical Mechanics is now replaced by the new sciences which encompass Quantum Physics, Chaos and Complexity Theory. This scientific development should underlies business schools' decision to adopt the last and perhaps

the most significant of the strategies to increase the students' mobility, grounded in the new sciences in which relationships are all important.

Organisations and companies need to be viewed as living and evolving ecosystems of the business world. Today's increasingly interconnected economic ecosystems require in-depth understanding of the inter-relationships among the parts in order to develop a coherent and successful strategy. To transform organisations, we first need to understand the natural change process embedded in all living systems. It is with this understanding that we can design processes of organisational change accordingly and create human organisations that mirror life's adaptability, diversity and creativity. The understanding of human organisations in terms of complex living systems is likely to lead to new insights into the nature of complexity and thus help us deal with the complexities of today's business environment. This holistic approach is in contrast to the reductionism, popular since Newton's time where a system is reduced to its constituent parts. With reductionism, the approach to solving problems has been to understand the constituent parts of a system and changing the constituents in isolation before recombining into a whole.

Business Schools must ensure students realise that much of the world dances to nonlinear tunes that has given birth the new science of complexity (Lewin & Regine, 2001). Complexity theory is the study of systems composed of many and varied parts that interact in complex and non-linear ways. It is recognised that such systems cannot be understood simply by understanding the parts. The interactions among the parts and the consequences of these interactions are equally significant. Hawking (2001), declared that the twenty-first century will be the century of complexity.

Another area of new science that bears significance to today's approach to viewing the business world is chaos theory. With the introduction of chaos theory, students, rather than tidily absorbing and regurgitating facts and figures, will find that both scholarship and organisation in the world of business are achieved through an interconnecting web so vast that it is a challenge to find the pattern within it. "Chaos," writes Cartwright, "is order without predictability"(1991, p.44). Students must be challenged to discover that strange and wonderful order. However chaotic or complex the system is, they have the adaptive attribute to converge into order. This phenomenon is called the complex adaptive systems. According to (Lewin & Regine, 2001), if complex adaptive systems in the natural and business world share fundamental properties and processes, then the science offers something that most management theories do not. The argument is that most management theories are not really theories but merely techniques for managing in a certain way.

Within science too, another paradigm shift is the concept of the 'heart brain'. It was popularly believed that human beings had a token amount of control over their

minds and emotions and the thought process is dictated by the brain's responses to external stimuli. In the 1960s and 1970s, Lacey and Lacey observed this model only partially matched actual physiological behaviour. They said the heart has its own peculiar logic which frequently diverged from the command of the autonomic nervous system. It is the heart that sent meaningful messages to the brain which could alter a person's behaviour. Gahery and Vigier (1974) concluded that the heart and nervous system were not simply following the brain's directions. Armour (1991) introduced the concept of functional 'heart brain' when he discovered that the heart also contains a cell which synthesise and releases neurotransmitters once thought to be produced only by neurons in the brain and nerve ganglia. Relating this back to the Human Governance™ concept where the underlying arbiter is not only conscience but also consciousness. While conscience is the ability of the mind to tell between right and wrong, it must be impressed here that it is the heart that is the seat of consciousness.

Academics

In terms of the academics, the lack of industry/ business experience is glaringly apparent in most business schools. With the exception of a few accounting instructors with professional qualification, it has been noticed that most of the academic members whether from management, marketing or human resource (the areas most related to management) have never worked in a business setup or are not maintaining close relationship with industry. If there is an explanation to the reluctance of instructors to adopt the PBL method of delivery, perhaps the lack of industry experience would be the most probable cause. Instructors might voice the difficulty in designing problems, given that problems should not be theoretical or book-based.

This "hollowness" of depth of the academics is a fact that cannot be denied. Given such a situation and the notion that a business school is valued from the perspective of its graduates having skills and knowledge relevant to industry, the business schools, must attempt to bring in more instructors from the industry to meet a target of at least a 50% ratio. Recognising the constraint in attracting full-time industry-experienced academics, business schools should target to attract more part-time staff to handle a course individually or to share part of the course with full-time non-industry-experienced academics. This attempt will help in bridging the gap between theory and practice. The challenge which remains to this day is to maintain a steady flow of instructors from industry. While the distance between many MBA schools from the industry is itself a poser, the non-flexible reward system based on academic qualifications leaves the offer unattractive. Another skill set that is usually considered a given among academics in business schools is the mastery of English and

articulation skills. While the capability of some could be explicitly commended, others might display a level that needed to be improved. In view of the above shortcomings among academics, it is proposed that future selection of academics would be subject to a criteria-based selection so that only those meeting the identified criteria would be tenured in MBA schools.

Non-relevant publications and research output

The criticism that the publications and research output by business school academics are not relevant to industry is almost applicable. This is due to the emphasis by the university on scholarly works as represented by publications in citation-indexed journals and other academic-based work. More recently, the AACSB has suggested equal prominence given to professional journals and industry-impacting work. Yet, no distinction has been made between the assessment criteria for academics teaching and those at other faculties to allow for MBA school academics to concentrate on publishing in industry-related research publications.

This issue proves a little difficult to be resolved. One possible temporary solution to improve the dissemination of research output by MBA School academics in publications read by the business fraternity is for academics to target such work as being over and above the minimum standard already set in place similar to other academics. A more long-term measure to contribute towards addressing this issue is for the university authority to stress and accord equal importance to the contribution by business management academics to practice. Publications in professional journals and adoption of ideas into policies are examples of academic contribution to practice. Holding membership at board levels of public listed companies and committees of professional bodies for instance, are more direct ways of industry assimilation and constitute contribution to practice too. Considering that not many of academics from business schools enjoy such respect from industry to get invited to hold such positions, those that are should be appropriately appreciated by academia.

Non-awareness of the subjectivity elements of science

While much has been written on this issue, the work by social scientists has always remained Newtonian-Cartesian. This world-wide phenomenon, similarly, prevails in many business schools. Many social scientists tend to adopt the “positivist” style of quantitative-based research so that non-material elements are excluded for fear of being labeled “non-objective”, hence non-scientific. Indeed, as pointed out by Hughes (2005), this presents an opportunity that should not be missed should MBA

schools wish to maintain a culture of research that is truly scientific and develop models that represent the reality of the world. Steps must be taken to introduce the reality of science to research students at MBA schools. The Research Methodology course should now include a discussion on the evolution of science within its Philosophy of research topic. It has been the belief that PhD scholars must be knowledgeable of the meaning of knowledge itself and not be oblivious to the meaning of social science, management and the genesis of positivism as based upon the classical Newtonian-Cartesian school. It is only through such knowledge that new theories which are relevant in practice and meet human needs could be generated by the PhD scholars.

The experience provided to the students will induce the spirit of questioning and debate on established theories and concepts, otherwise taken as given. Throw our observation, some students showed improved academic and research maturity and were able to justify their choice of a research decision responsibly. This trend is indeed welcoming for at the PhD level, a candidate should understand the requirements of the scholarly pursuit, the major ones being to posses an inquisitive mind and to develop a culture of "piercing the veil". But given that the majority of the academics are only familiar with the cause-effect reductionist method of inquiry, more needs to be done before a research culture that seeks to uphold the truth as reflecting the reality of the universe could be inculcated at business schools. The veil of familiarity tends to overwhelm whatever little curiosity there is, to allow for an open mindset. Regardless of the current established worldview that real science is about subjectivity, most academics still reflect manifestations of cause-effect and command-control not only in their research work but also in their approach to teaching and academic pursuits. While the trend of the world has even gone further to show that science and spirituality are converging (The Shift Report, 2007 & 2008), it is sad that the attempt to share the reality of science is viewed with doubt.

Conclusion

In conclusion, business schools must continue to adopt approaches that enhance students' academic mobility. For this purpose, various strategies need to be identified and action plans acted upon. These include some out-of-the box practice of applying the concepts of new science into management. Business schools should believe that there is a need to impress upon the graduates that running a business, like life, must be based deeply on the human enterprise. MBA schools must guide the students on a journey of exploration beyond the reach of their five senses, opening their eyes to the existence of intangible realities and taking them beyond the external world, deep into the realm of the soul. Indeed the thought mirrored from Albert

Einstein, Response to atheist, Alfred Kerr (1927), as quoted by Kessler in *The Diary of a Cosmopolitan* (1971):

> Try and penetrate with our limited means the secrets of nature and you will find that, behind all the discernible concatenations, there remains something subtle, intangible and inexplicable. Veneration for this force beyond anything that we can comprehend is my religion. To that extent I am, in point of fact, religious. (p.157)

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