

# **RESETTING COLLEGE MISSION AND VISION WITH ENHANCED STRATEGIC THINKING**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Well-run Colleges of Business generally make value proposition statements about their rigidity in adherence to mission and established strategy, yet also appear willing to engage in the flexibility required to accommodate the changing student needs over time. This paper reviews the role of formalized strategy in Business Schools and sets it next to today's student, revealing an increasing gap in goal congruence. When mission and strategy ideas are not synchronous among the various players in the academic market, dysfunctional decision making, apathy, and blurred vision occurs.

The environment external to the academy cannot be ignored, and those events cannot be controlled. However, we can use that information to help develop appropriate strategy, minimizing threats, and maximizing potential gains in not only course and curriculum development, but in overall institutional advancement. The authors examine factors and trends that may identify areas where strategic shift occurs, including the economic, political, legal, global, technological and socio-cultural. The paper concludes with a summary listing of action plans that could be used by institutions to address those critical areas.

## **THE SUPPLY SIDE: THE BUSINESS SCHOOL DILEMMA**

For those faculty with the luxury of teaching MBA students, the quantity of areas needing fixing are far less pronounced than in undergraduate curriculums, where student inputs vary significantly. Strand [2011] observes that the more common fabric of sustainability in business and education is generally understood by MBA students and that contributes to desire and stronger outcomes in learning. Many undergraduates acquire their first exposure to business in the survey setting of principles of accounting and principles of economics courses.

David and David [2011] find the major disconnect between the training rendered to students and the needs of practicing managers hurting not only business students, but B-Schools, business firms, and American society as a whole. College rankings are another hotly debated area. Some prestigious schools invest resources in benchmarking their success in attracting new students with high admission test scores and other criteria. Institutions may find some of these strategies harmful in the event of backlash created by the discovery of fraudulent numbers reported [Diamond and Schneider, 2012].

Trends on the part of universities to supply quality education at a reasonable cost have been recently documented by the business press [Banchero, 2012 and Wessel, 2012]. Wessel points to studies that face-to-face learning and totally online learning can provide similar individual outcome achievement, but suggests that totally online is deficient if the objective is to lower the attrition on those students who lack the discipline to complete the online requirements. A hybrid model may well assist in getting the additional face time needed. Banchero lists key institutions such as California Institute of Technology, Georgia Institute of Technology, Duke University, Johns Hopkins University, Rice University, and others, providing free online classes through *Coursera*, developed by Stanford University computer-science professors, and having 111 introductory courses already converted, with more planned [Banchero, 2012].

Such movements could easily sway B-School mission writers to promote language of “broad access” and “diverse curricula.” The successes being measured at secondary level on “flipped learning” where the lecture and didactic tools are used without live teacher present, either in homework or through laboratory sittings, to allow live teacher presence is a subsequent session to focus on practical aspects of the material could see a ripple in higher education.

Enrollment management by many colleges targets growth in a student body. In the University System of Georgia, Complete College Georgia advocated by Governor Nathan Deal is already strongly on course, and consistent with the drives in many other states and Complete College USA [Complete College Georgia, 2012].

An institution which separates mission statement from vision statement may be better able to design strategy – provide the limited resources in such a way to meet the needs of stakeholders. Difficulties must be managed to main operational excellence while executing business fundamentals and going to the next step a strategy plan. May [2012] distinguishes between vision—a long-term perspective and the reason for being, the answer to the “*why* you are in business?” and mission—a current, operating focus, the answer to the “*what* you do?” question.

## **THE DEMAND SIDE: STUDENTS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS**

Individual students have much less bargaining power than institutions. Those students gaining entrance with relatively weak high school GPAs and standardized test results could be at special peril. Are students seeking a school that will impose less rigor, or simply providing better value? Is value in the student mind the long-run gains from quality education in the college setting, or simply getting sufficient financial aid this academic term? Nelson [2012] addresses these issues and raises the undesirable outcome where students switch institutions quickly in response to the next avenue of financial aid.

Not all students are financial aid hoppers. Some are interested in base knowledge within B-School curriculum and some even thirst for answers beyond memorizing procedures, and

actually seek reasons “why,” not just the “what” and “how.”. Strategic thinking by administrators and faculty would respond to these student needs by providing forums for integrated case studies providing wide perspectives to students, yet still unobtrusively throwing in the seeds of accounting, economics, marketing, and the other traditional disciplines. Singh, Bisht, and Rastogi [2011] find that faculty members face serious challenges when they do not deal appropriately with conflicts between monetary and sustainability issues in the courses. The denial of the existence of social costs and determinants of quality of life contributes little to life-long learning for our students.

The next wave of leaders will come from the new breed of students. Symonds [2011] concludes that students will demand more involvement with growth markets, flexibility in workspace, embracing of social media, new destinations for study, distance and blended learning, greater classroom diversity, and options for executive MBA and other alternative programs. Demand conditions change with economic conditions over time. With the plethora of accounting scandals in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, perceived needs increase for greater involvement in business ethics and corporate social responsibility. Liederkeke and Demuijnck [2012] imply that if B-Schools do not adapt, they will flounder.

Institutions must understand their student body and determine the composition of its salient parts. Sargent and Matheson [1996] report that Beard found two major types of business students—either the Octopus, or the Star Fleet Captain. The former are those individuals who want to be in control and seek concepts that maintain that position. The latter are individuals who seek self-fulfillment and wish to become effective leaders, to “boldly go where no one has gone before.” Sargent and Matheson charge that it is the unintended emphasis by the business schools to develop octopi rather than star fleet captains that is the cause of much deterioration in the learning.

Who are the students and does their chemistry matter? Zhao and Qiu [2009] found that cultural rather than biological factors play a greater role in Asian-American student development. Loh, Smith, and Restubog [2010] found that in comparing the cultural background of 120 Australian university students with 120 Singaporean students, both with control groups, that trust and cooperation were more strongly influenced by the workgroup membership and far less by cultural factors. Haynes and Gebreyesus [1992] concluded that sociocultural basis is important and that collaborative learning can be a strong driver in learning among African-American children. Other studies suggest that minority groups may actually develop a culture in opposition to schooling, or develop a further resistance to be creative if the college does not challenge them [Downey, 2008 and Lim, 2010]. These studies collectively suggest appropriate team play may be important for the future of education. Perhaps an analysis of trends in corporate America, the employer base, where team performance is required, would provide guidance on resetting the academic strategy.

## **OTHER TRENDS—INFLUENCE OF ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY**

A positive trend within corporate America is developing greater concern for human welfare, and enterprise success is measured on the basis of qualitative and non-financial factors as well as the financial [Kan, 2011]. Many of these atypical performance measures arise at the business level, or through the auspices of key executives. Microsoft founder, Bill Gates, and wife have invested heavily in the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Another leader in these endeavors is P&G, a company that proposes to fund other organizations for sustainability and social responsibility [P&G, 2012]. The increasing roles that large entities are playing either directly, or indirectly through their foundations, in philanthropy and social causes, may demonstrate a shift away from individual contributors to larger entity donors. Grants and other incentives are used to spur social investments.

Should the moves by corporate America and its various constituencies be emulated by colleges and its stakeholders? A 2007 white paper discusses the concept of a “Wholly Sustainable Enterprise,” where value is derived overall by all parties through the value orientation of products and services, workforce, workplace and the management and governance [Deloitte, 2007]. Using this concept, a holistic strategy may emerge that transcends departments and curriculum, that looks to both the short-run and the long-run (student perhaps as both product and customer), and provides synergy in higher education that is not evident today.

An increasing number of companies are moving toward improving the overall sociocultural framework of their organizations, through implementation of best practices, and with an eye toward success in bottom line profitability, not just doing good things for society [Heffes, 2010; Burnett, Skousen and Wright, 2011; and Gupta and Benson, 2011]. The problem of “buy-in” exists in the education market. Companies can add or delete non-performing workers as they see fit, and on a timely basis. The education market is not so neat, and uses such tools as slow grading feedback to distinguish between success and failure for students, and commits the Type II error where other faculty and administrators award undeserving tenure on unproductive faculty.

With today’s students having an ever-increasing short-sighted time run of taking one course or box of knowledge at a time, and arriving at a satisfactory grade, the parallels are limited when making comparisons to the employees who want to “get up the organization chart” or “make partner” soon as possible. On the other side, faculty are notorious for not buying into paradigm shifts when the expected rewards are based upon research and other measures extremely far removed from the student and other stakeholders. Faculty may strive for “points” on annual review and promotion and tenure forms. Perhaps fixing the student and faculty evaluation processes would do much to promote an environment where good strategy can be planned, and more importantly, where efficient and effective learning occurs.

Recent studies find that academic research is important to the higher education system, careers of individuals, and the publishers involved with rewarding the fruits of that research, but leave open the question of whether such heavy duty research has any significant positive impact on teaching or professional practice [Parker, Guthrie, and Linacre, 2011]. Other research suggests specifically that business undergraduates have much to gain by having courses developed around the concept of sustainability, green issues, and qualitative factors in measuring enterprise performance [Rudell, 2012]. Kinder, gentler type of research by professors could be conducted that has direct value and classroom application for the students.

David and David [2011] present 14 changes that business schools could implement to improve their service to both their students and local businesses:

1. Revise mission to become more practitioner-oriented.
2. Revise curriculum to provide more training on specific skills graduates need on the job.
3. Develop specific tracks within majors to tailor courses to business needs.
4. Revise specific courses to encourage licensure or certification.
5. Design new courses for employers in the university's market.
6. Offer meaningful internship experiences.
7. Work toward reduced class size to involve more practitioner-oriented pedagogy.
8. Expand "professionally qualified" (PQ) faculty in areas where their expertise is a plus.
9. Encourage AACSB and other organizations to look at standards in light of above.
10. Alter promotion and tenure guidelines to reward practitioner-based research/consulting.
11. Include a section on "Implications for Practitioners" in every journal article published.
12. Adopt a practitioner theme in text and resource selection.
13. Establish and revolve executive-in-residency and faculty-in-residence programs.
14. Focus on real-world practice as does medicine, law, architecture, not general A&S.

Those of us interested in the relevancy of our profession would do well to try to influence the Dean's suite and strategic planning committees to consider making more changes along these lines. David and David [2011] also cite that Dickinson, Herbst, and O'Shaughnessy in 1983 noted that "Professors routinely suggest that corporations should be responsible to society, but few prestigious academics have suggested that business schools should be more responsive to their environments." The gap can be and should be narrowed.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Operate the B-School with a dedicated strategic planning committee, breaking down individual and department silos of interest in favor of addressing vision and mission that address the desired outcomes.
- Build on prior successes, but discard old baggage, and use zero-base planning when needed.

- Ignore the pleas of those who voice “we tried that before and it did not work” and other excuses that stand in the way of innovation; consider appointing those with objective views to working committees.
- Build a student body that is collegially oriented—instill a specific and positive culture, that your institution is better than the cross-town rival, but all of us have to work harder to maintain the results.
- Inspire students with challenging assessments; discard the trite and trivial; good practical experience trumps many standardized testbank questions.
- Provide the students with what they many times do not obtain from the media, their softer courses, and sometimes, even their parents; instill the concept of exceptionalism regardless of sociocultural background, and the notion that we can all win if we work at it.
- Reward faculty on what matters; design systems that correspond with institutional needs and the markets for the graduates, rather than narrowly considering what we did last year, what the College of Arts & Sciences is doing, what the cross-town rival institution is doing, and what might be thought to be the expectations of accrediting agencies.
- Encourage outplacement for those who are not of like-mind in creating winning solutions; use a post-tenure review process to assist faculty; recruit and collaborate with others both inside and outside the institution; surround ourselves with great deans, department chairs, faculty, and staff.

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