
Designing an industry effective high impact MBA program in a non-linear world: A Critical Perspective

Prof. Dr. ABHIJIT GANGULY

Professor and Research Guide

University of Northwest Europe, Netherland, EU

Sr. Lecturer

London School of Business and Management, London, UK

Program Head -MBA & Sr. Lecturer

British Institute of Technology, London, UK

Sr. Faculty, Management Program

Westford, University of Wolverhampton, UK

Abstract:

The germination of this thought provoking article stems from the fact that business schools (B-schools) globally facing credibility challenges to make the management education more industry effective and creating bigger employability. Non-linear world is having elements of volatility, uncertainty, complexities and ambiguity as popularly known as VUCA. Therefore, this article strives to highlight the challenges being faced by the leaders rather think tank of business schools across the globe to design an effective MBA (Master of Business Administration) program which can offer a unique value proposition to industry. This unique value proposition, if delivered, creates high impact on the performance of the industry or business. The integration of curriculum with industry and understanding of business drivers is a step forward towards creating high impact MBA. This article will also highlight the suggested approach towards making the required changes to bring back the glory of MBA or Management Education which can add real value to industry. Therefore, it offers a simple actionable blueprint to make the necessary transformation and also the expectations for further research on this area.

Key words: Germination, Unique Value Proposition, Challenges, Integration, Curriculum, Non-Linear, VUCA

OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of run of the mill MBA program rather management education around the globe has taken the sheen away from this once prestigious and coveted professional qualification in Business Administration. The resultant effect of this proliferation is seen in wide discrimination in the professional employment market in terms of attaching value and respect to the qualification by industry. The author is of the view that the acid test of professional education like MBA is largely dependent on the industry recognition and potentiality to create employability.

Therefore, the key focus of this article is to bring a perspective on designing MBA program which works and makes it a value generating sought after program from the stakeholders' point of view. The critical question before the educational establishment irrespective of shape and size is to design the program which can really be termed or valued by the industry as Meticulous Brilliant Achievers and not just Master of Business Administration.

Over the years Business schools have gone off the track. The respectability of MBA programs in general in academia and industry have not gone up significantly as it was earlier reflected in the prestige, placements in blue chip companies and pay packages of graduates. Today, however, the situation is different. Globally MBA programs encounters severe criticism for various failures such as imparting useful skills, preparing leaders, instilling codes of ethical behavior—and even failing to lead graduates to good corporate jobs. These criticisms do reflect the concern of various stakeholders such as students, employers, media and deans of some of America's most

prestigious business schools, including Dipak Jain at Northwestern University's top-ranked Kellogg School of Management. Professor Henry Mintzberg, the most outspoken critic, of McGill University, says that the main culprit is a less-than-relevant MBA curriculum. There are some reforms being strived to undone the damage. But genuine reform of the MBA curriculum remains elusive and need to be done more sincerely and scientifically. Author believes that mere changing of curriculum is not going to help as it is the effect, not the cause, of what plagues the progressive rather forward looking business school.

The genesis of crisis situation in management education stems from the cultural shift in business school and therefore it is bigger in scope. Many Business Schools have taken a careless approach towards adopting a curriculum which is self defeating. It failed to adopt a comprehensive curriculum which can help design MBA program or management education which can catch and deliver or at least meet the aspirations of the immediate stakeholders such as students and industry captains or head hunters.

Now, the critical question before responsible Business Schools or Educational Institution is how to redesign and transform the course and curriculum, pedagogy including the delivery mechanism which will prepare the students to stand up to the challenges in this volatile, uncertain, and ambiguous environment and industry ecosystem. Another critical task comes to the table is how they learn and practice the art and skill of ideating to profiting so that these future leaders and managers not just become a Mediocre Business Administrator (MBA) or so called MBA but a real Meticulous Brilliant Achievers (MBA) who got the right attitude and action bias to achieve ambitions or aspirations.

Futurisation of business schools highlight the need for configuration of different kind of MBA programs which can deliver different business leadership to deal with different

management challenges emerging in this multi polar world and century. The future is surely going to bring more unsustainabilities and therefore will challenge the linear paths that any organisation or economy will pursue. The 'Future' will be beset with more disruptions in business models, policies, technology developments etc., and therefore will enhance the scope of disruptive innovations to respond to the challenges, and address the industry and business need of non-linearity, out of the box thinking etc., Therefore there is a distinct need of trained workforce who can think innovatively and bend the linear paths to create more sustainabilities.

The perception of Business Schools, combined with these unsustainabilities, provide both an opportunity and responsibility as suggested by Prof. Richard Lyons (2011) of University of California, Berkley. The need of the hour for any responsible business school is to think innovatively on design element of MBA program which will have a profound impact on supplying the trained managers and leaders and to take on the responsibility of creating sustainability in otherwise highly unsustainable and volatile business world. In doing so, Business Schools need to clearly differentiate between "adaptation" and "innovation". Adaptation can be defined as the natural ability to respond to the external changes without having an ability to anticipate them. Innovating is about anticipation of those changes and making the organisation ready to deal with them effectively and to encash the opportunity of growth.

But, it's easier said than done. If Business Schools like to deliver into both the opportunity and the responsibility, they have to make changes in many areas including designing of MBA programs which need to have a high level of collaborative approach to develop and deliver innovative leaders to meet the aspirations of the business world and the industry.

Author believes that any future proof architecture of such high impact MBA Program has to start with building

culture. If business schools are going to deliver into both the opportunity and the responsibility, we will have to make changes in many areas. It is highly imperative for every aspiring business school to chalk out its strategy and way to develop the next generation of innovative leaders.

Therefore the need of the hour is to make a conscious move from culture to curriculum design and delivery as suggested by Prof. Richard Lyons of Hass Business School at University of California Berkley, USA. In a slow growth global economy, it makes a compelling case where survival of the fittest has become the buzz word by pursuing aggressive growth agenda with agility. Critical to success in this volatile economy depends on the ability of the MBA graduates to think strategically and innovate with execution biasness. Many grand success stories of MBA graduates from different globally reputed business schools showcase exemplary visionary leadership skills who launch their own start-ups from scratch and commercialise their inventions or products.

RESEARCH METHOD AND ANALYSIS:

Considering the nature of the research, author employed case analysis to understand real world situation and to get a hang and feel of application of critical steps to revive and sustain.

Accordingly, author applied case of Haas Business School, University of California, Berkley to drive home the understanding and application.

Challenges and Issues:

Haas being one of the world's best business school was facing tremendous challenges of reinventing or innovating their MBA programs which can produce a great value proposition to industry and their graduates can enjoy an enviable reputation of being employed by the best global corporations.

Their biggest challenge was to bring strategic innovation for long term survival of the brand with a distinct competitive edge. The edge which will continue to place them in top ranking league of world best business schools. Therefore the critical test for HAAS was to occupy the top slot as a trend setter in management education. They focused on the critical areas like culture, capabilities and experiential learning.

Approach and Actions initiated:

HAAS was focusing on innovative thinking and strategic actions developed an entirely new life-cycle curves.

The primary importance they accorded is to change the cultural DNA towards making it more explicit involving key stakeholders in the strategic planning process by holding discussions with faculty, students, alumni which helped them to have a varied perspective. Once they defined the principles, they started embedding those principles in every functional areas e.g., admissions, curriculum development and delivery, career services etc.,. So cultural code became more important for undertaking any actions or even behaviors. They also initiated 360 degree evaluation of behavior across the level to check how it accords to HAAS principles and cultures and the level of variance.

HAAS also focused on bringing innovative leaders who can build the organization. Think tank of HAAS business school designed and developed an effective campaign plan which inspires potential talents.

The hallmark of Berkley –HAAS MBA program towards building innovative leadership capabilities by delivering the specific knowledge and required skills. This is popularly known as Berkeley Innovative Leader Development (BILD). Curriculum is designed and set of organizing themes developed towards the same. A comprehensive competencies framework was developed which helps the students to learn to identify

opportunities, challenges, defining and farming problems , choices and risk management.

Following four principles anchors HAAS culture:

1. Question the status quo,
2. Confidence without attitude,
3. Students first
4. Shared mindset and beyond oneself.

The afore mentioned four principles are embedded in all of their processes and practices, including admissions, hiring, orientation, curriculum design, delivery of teaching, and events.

They also initiated **experiential learning** by undertaking an innovative course in **Problem Finding and Solving**.

Another major strategic initiative undertaken by HAAS is to revamp the curriculum by making it Capabilities-Integrated Curriculum from just Coordinated Curriculum.

HAAS revamped curriculum capabilities-integrated which include knowledge and skills around defining opportunities, such as problem framing and experimentation; around making choices, such as risk selection; and around building organizational capacity, such as influencing people and managing conflict.

Next focus on building the skill of students to make choices in a non-linear world.

MAKING CHOICES

1. Revenue Model Innovation: In a Non-linear world, the trend is towards business disruption rather disruption of revenue models, with new entrants of ten getting paid differently from incumbents. Established organizations have to think in new ways about where ultimate sources of value lies that includes trends towards advertising-based revenues, data-generation- based revenues, and new pricing models. Curricular

extensions include the role of aligning complementary players in an industry, pricing, growth strategy, and open business models.

2. Valuation of Ideas: Ideating to Profiting is the guiding force towards understanding growth engine of economic value. The technique of filtration of ideas based on potentiality of creating long term returns.

3. Risk Identification and Selection: More disciplined approaches to business risk identification and selection. Students are taught to take high level business decision which produces high market value. Curriculum design also include real options, choosing among alternative proposals, capital budgeting for strategy, and decision- making under unknown probabilities in an uncertain or unpredictable market situation.

Building Organizational Capacity

1. Influence Without Authority: Infusion of huge element of organizational skill to work in a flatter organization with shared mindset. This capability includes meaning- making (showing how people's efforts translate into larger results that matter), effective feedback and coaching, and leading organizational change. Curricula extensions include skill building for change management which includes leading change by using social networks, building alignment inside and outside of the organization, and links between influencing and problem framing.

2. Managing Ambiguity / Conflict: This is one of the biggest trait of a leader as the organization structure is becoming more fluid placing bigger weight on stakeholders with conflicting interests. Successful leaders understand other people's perspectives and recognize assumptions that are implicit in

those perspectives. They are conflict-managers and sense-makers. Therefore, Curricular extensions include managing social dilemmas, alignment limitations, and segmentation.

Therefore, the suggestions for integrating capabilities in curriculum come from social sciences, dynamics and research and the market dynamics and industry requirements as valued by recruiters.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS:

A fundamental truth which endures in the business world is change. There are non-linear changes happening across the industry spectrum which creates high growth opportunities but also can threaten established businesses, trade and commerce. Education industry is no exception to this. It is also experiencing onslaught of globalization, digital technology, demographic shifts, regulatory changes. In order to address these changes and to create sustainability, growth of the brand in the industry league table, Business Schools are undergoing transformations right from recrafting cultural DNA to building capacity to innovate and integrate. Therefore the designing part of the MBA program need to be given strategic importance in order to make it more thematic and connected.

Having done the analysis of critical issues, challenges that run of the mill MBA program is facing and the kind of strategic initiatives and efforts undertaken to create a sensible approach towards designing and delivering value to primary and secondary stakeholders which definitely includes industry, author recommends a set of actions for designing and delivering world class top ranking management education rather MBA.

Author firmly believes that implementation of following recommended actions could create a new value proposition to management education.

1. Continuous monitoring of external business climates and make the necessary changes in the curriculum, pedagogy etc.,
2. Create a clear vision and maintain relentless focus on research and various actions to the value its create to stakeholders
3. Prioritise and institutionalize the best practices that adds most values
4. Leadership and management of Business Schools should have the practices and governance through well crafted strategy and execution
5. Continuous focus on professional development to upgrade skills and competencies of faculties and staffs
6. Design an effective collaboration framework for active collaborative partnership with industries and research based institutions

FUTURE RESEARCH

Further research can be done on the designing part of high impact MBA highlighting how MBA program can be designed to be made more thematic and connected to industry requirements. Also, further research can be done on understanding theme based approach which can be used as building blocks of an industry effective MBA which should address to build requisite knowledge ,skills and attitude. The focus of future research could be on finding out how Business Schools can maintain consistency in value delivery to stakeholders.

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