Introduction

Social debate is one of ESADE’s missions. The institution aims to exercise its social influence in a responsible manner, in order to contribute to public debate, act as a platform for the transfer of knowledge, and also to encourage and facilitate reflection and dialogue with and between stakeholders.

ESADE is a meeting point for numerous entrepreneurs, managers, academics, legal experts, politicians and representatives of civil society. Around 80,000 people take part in the 1,100 plus events organised by the institution each year, many of which are in collaboration with ESADE Alumni.

Two significant examples of social debate at ESADE are:


2. The VII Conference, offering reflection and discussion in Sant Benet de Bages: "Transformed by the crisis. From resistance to transformation: A change that can be positive" by the ESADE Chair in Leadership and Democratic Governance, in collaboration with Caixa Catalunya.

Challenges

When she began her mandate in September 2010, the Director General of ESADE, Eugenia Bieto, expressed her wish to "continue to progress in order to create an increasingly socially responsible academic institution."

In order to integrate ESADE’s social responsibility (SR) into the Institutional Strategic Plan, the Director General convened a task force made up of experienced ESADE managers and professors to reflect on this issue and draw up a Social Responsibility Master Plan (SR-ESADE) for 2011-14.

The basic aim of ESADE’s SR Master Plan is to help achieve the objectives set by ESADE for 2020: "To be a globally recognised academic institution, which inspires and prepares individuals and organisations to develop innovative, socially responsible leadership in order to build a better future."

In order to achieve this, ESADE used one of its own models (Losada, Martell, and Lozano, 2011), which, in a systemic and cross-cutting manner includes all the strategic areas – training, research and social debate – as well as organisational culture and institutional policies.

ESADE is present in social debate through the talks, conferences, seminars, and forums it organises, the prizes it awards, the reports, studies and proposals it prepares and broadcasts, its alliances and associations with other stakeholders, as well as through the opinion articles it publishes and the impact it makes in the national and international media, etc. The institution has also become one of the leading Spanish business schools in terms of the number of opinion pieces published in the international press.
After a comprehensive analysis and diagnosis of the social debate (typology of events, topics, media impact, etc.) were carried out, it was concluded that there was a need to create the social debate strategy at ESADE.

The principal challenges of this are:

- To rethink the social debate model;
- To strengthen the synergies of all social debate actions with research and training activities;
- To assess the impact of the various actions.

**Actions taken**

**Step 1 – Preparation**

The General Management entrusted the Secretary General, Francisco Longo, with the task of creating and developing the new social debate strategy. In order to achieve this, a team made up of experienced ESADE managers and professors was created to review the background to and evolution of social debate at ESADE, confirming strong quantitative growth, as well as the need for a greater focus on strategic alignment. This team created a shared interpretation, defining social debate as "the exercise of ESADE’s social influence, in order to be present in public debate on certain issues, to broadcast messages, encourage and/or facilitate reflection and promote actions and change in the public sphere."

The objectives of the strategic process and the expected results were then defined as:

1. The Social Debate model
2. Lines of work
3. Strategic indicators

**Step 2 – Strategic framework**

In defining the new social debate strategy, several meetings were held with key stakeholders (professors, alumni and corporate units) in order to obtain their input regarding the definition of the strategic framework.

Among the many thought-provoking contributions, emphasis was placed on the importance of the lines of ESADE’s mission – education, research and social debate – highlighting the importance of consistency between them. It was mentioned that: "People will not understand why research is being carried out in some issues and, at the same time, social debate is dealing with others," adding that for us to focus on social debate, "there has to be coherence between education and research, and contributions have to be made from a standpoint of diversity."

Referring to the issue of diversity, comments were made regarding the importance of "safeguarding freedom of speech." It was acknowledged that ESADE is plural and that faculty members enjoy academic freedom. "We shouldn’t think in terms of a rigid strategy, but rather in terms of guidelines, which do not exclude plurality."
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Some other reflections were put forward in the form of questions:

- What would be the priorities and how can we give content to the social debate?
- Do we want to have an influence on different subjects or serve as a platform?
- What would we have to do to transform ‘presence’ into ‘impact’?

The need "to take social media presence into account" was also mentioned.

Once the strategic framework had been defined, it was presented to various stakeholders (board of trustees, executive committee, professional council, faculty, administrative and services staff) to get feedback.

It was reaffirmed at these meetings that social debate is a responsibility of the first magnitude, and "defining priority issues, given that practical success means focussing," was recommended. Research activities once again play a key role in doing this. "The discussion should be focused on those aspects in which we can demonstrate that we are leaders in research."

Another of the issues discussed had to do with the definition of indicators. "How will we know within three years whether the new action plan has been successful? Metrics are very important, we should further explore this and link it to value creation."

After listening to the various stakeholders, the aims of the social debate strategic framework were outlined, including:

- To focus social debate activities on priorities regarding the contents and approaches used by ESADE to create value in accordance with its mission, values and corporate strategy;
- To align ESADE’s external activities with the institution and to ensure that they are carried out in a co-ordinated and coherent manner;
- To reinforce ESADE’s social influence.

**Step 3 – Action plan**

As part of the 2013-2014 action plan, and in accordance with the lines that make up the social debate strategic plan, a project focused on a topic of high social impact, job creation, has been set up. The project has a high degree of faculty involvement and includes a research project.

**Results**

Progress made in defining the social debate model includes the definition of the contents selection criteria, including consistency with the institutional strategy, relevance of the topic, connection with the SR-ESADE social responsibility policy.

Moreover, the following general areas have been identified in the definition of the priority social debate contents: changes and keys to addressing new challenges, optimal business model in entrepreneurial and social terms, society with the highest level of equity and integration.

**The role of PRME/sustainability principles**
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- The PRME initiative has helped enrich our SR Master Plan, as well as enhancing our focus as a business and law school with a serious commitment to social responsibility, ethics, and sustainability.

- PRME provides a global learning network and facilitates the possibility of identifying valuable practices and possible areas for improvement.

- The Sharing Information on Progress (SIP) reports have been a highly valuable tool in taking stock of our progress and have helped us to take into account new challenges and initiatives in our strategic plan.