Introduction

ESPAE, created in 1983 as the first business school of Ecuador and based at Escuela Superior Politécnica del Litoral (ESPOL), emphasises leadership, innovation, entrepreneurship development, and application of information technology in business. At ESPOL-ESPAE Graduate School of Management, we believe that teamwork is critical when you value diversity and innovation. The experience that follows responds to the need to strengthen collaboration 1) among students and 2) among faculty members and staff, under the assumption that working in teams facilitates the recognition of value in diversity, develops tolerance and acceptance, and most of all builds trust, which is indispensable for collaboration and inclusion.

Challenges

The ESPAE Mission states that the school should “contribute to the improvement of managerial and business capacity of private, public, and non-profit organisations in Ecuador, as well as their integration into the global economy by providing graduate education to experienced professionals that is focused on entrepreneurship, ethics, and social responsibility as core values. We enrich our education through applied research and the school participation in development projects and consulting.” Three axes of actions derive from the mission: Entrepreneurship, global perspective and social responsibility. We expect our curricular emphasis as well as our behaviour as a school, to develop around those axes.

Actions taken

Study teams: After becoming signatory to PRME in 2007, ESPAE began organising study teams in 2008 composed by diverse and complementary members. For the conformation of study teams, we take into account demographics, the admission test, etc., and conduct team building sessions at the beginning of each programme. We also assist students with their conflict resolution during their masters. At the beginning the emphasis in study teams was in response to the need to develop soft skills in MBA and other specialised masters students, as well as encouraging team work as key skill for entrepreneurship and innovation.

Once the project of building study teams was in place and conflicts arose, we recognised a higher scope for the study teams – learning to find value in diversity. However, to exploit the benefits of study teams, we also needed to train our faculty. Our first thoughts were to encourage faculty to design the courses accordingly – develop team exercises, evaluate teamwork as well as individual work, and the like.

Faculty teams: During our faculty discussions, we discovered that they also needed to develop the ability to work in teams. We recognised that ethics and social responsibility are not silos.
Consequently, it is important to promote discussion among faculty and encourage them to integrate such topics, through interdisciplinary collaboration, into diverse courses and research. In an effort to achieve this goal, a seminar on teamwork was conducted for faculty and staff members in September 2009. The objective of the workshop was to “learn to apply tools that allow effective teamwork by students and encourage teamwork among faculty members.” Also, the role of teams in education and research was discussed.

Teamwork among professors brings value in extending or broadening the scope of their research, provides a better knowledge of societal problems, which generally require a multidisciplinary approach, and allow them to engage in development projects, etc.

Results

After four years we have improved the management of the study teams. In a recent focus group conducted with MBA alumni for a regional study, we found they that indeed value their team experience, their classmates, and the opportunities that they found through the networking that this form of organisation promoted. We have not evaluated the effectiveness of our faculty teamwork, however we have seen more multi-disciplinary work among faculty of economics and entrepreneurship, organisational behaviour, International business, and management education.

The role of PRME/sustainability principles

PRME helped to:

- Focus school decisions and actions
- Signal our values to our community
- Facilitate the achievement of our mission
- Facilitate dialogue with alumni