

November 2008

New Learning Methodologies and PRME

PRME Working Group

Third draft

1. Our *mission* is to enquire about the changes in instructional techniques needed to make management education an effective learning experience for future leaders and professionals with the purpose to support them committing to embed the values of sustainability and corporate citizenship at the core of the strategy and operations of the corporation they work for.
2. Our *starting point* is that the aim of teaching and learning methodologies is to facilitate a paradigm shift¹, from a view of the firm centered on the shareholder moral mandate to another encompassing all the stakeholders of the company, from the rationale of short-term profit maximization to sustained long-term financial effectiveness and growth, through sound risk management and social legitimacy to operate, and through innovation and value creation on the basis of values such as sustainability and social responsibility. Since this is our view of the company in the 21st century, the educational change we advocate implies a shift from reductionist to systemic learning, with all the implications that this signifies concerning teaching and learning methodologies.²
3. For the sake of discussion we suggest a definition of sustainability, that allows us to base our work on, but that is open to discussion. Ben-Eli³ suggests the following definition of sustainability: *A dynamic equilibrium in the processes of interaction between a population and the carrying capacity of an environment, such that the population develops to express its full potential without adversely and irreversibly affecting the carrying capacity of the environment upon which it depends.* He derives five sustainable principles out of this definition, each in turn related to another “domain”.
 - The spiritual domain: which identifies the necessary attitudinal orientation and provides the basis for ethical conduct.

¹ Walter Baets, Euromed Marseille

² Peggy Cunningham of Queen’s Business School and Walter Baets touched upon this point.

³ <http://bfi-internal.org/sustainability/>

- The domain of life: which provides the basis for appropriate behavior in the biosphere with respect to other species
 - The social domain: which provides the basis for social interactions
 - The economic domain: which provides a guiding framework for creating and managing wealth
 - The material domain: which contributes the basis for regulating the flow of materials and energy that underlie existence.
4. However, we do not intend to a search for radically new methodologies abandoning some successful instructional techniques, such as case studies or simulations. There is no single “best” learning methodology.⁴ Rather, we will look for ways to better adapt existing methodologies such as case studies⁵ to the new paradigm shift and, if necessary, consider the opportunity of expanding the range of learning methodologies.
 5. Teaching and learning are twin concepts of a two-sided process. Teaching looks at professors and their pedagogical approaches when addressing a class. Learning is related to students, and to each one of them and their individual effective gains in the variety of areas related to their professional capacities: vision, technical and conceptual knowledge and skills. We prefer to focus on *learning methodologies*, rather than on “teaching”. The implication is that, in the course of our inquiry, we will have to test our views with survey exercises, especially among students, and collect good examples, proving the learning effectiveness of the solutions we advocate.⁶
 6. Business Schools’ students acquire a diverse range of *capacities* throughout their MBAs and management studies. We will start by defining the different capacities provided by business schools; these are:
 - *Vision*: this is the most crucial and pivotal capacity of a future management professional and corporate leader. Vision relates to the set of values internalized by the student, the general framework he adopts concerning markets and

⁴ Ed Ahnert, School of Business Hong Kong Baptist University

⁵ Paul Beamish, Ivey Business School

⁶ Ed Ahnert, School of Business Hong Kong Baptist University

⁷ We believe that these

methodologies are not sufficient. If we want to allow learners to develop a systemic understanding of vision, and not just a multidisciplinary one, we might want to consider more hands-approaches, learning-by-doing, learning-while-doing, or field projects.

- ***Conceptual and technical knowledge***: there is a wide variety of conceptual and technical knowledge acquired in a MBA and other management-related studies, specifically in the areas of Human Resources, Organizational Behavior, Marketing, Financial Analysis, Accounting, ICT, Entrepreneurship and Operations. These disciplines are the strategic core of any MBA, and here is where the contradictory message concerning the basic paradigm of the firm lies, especially in disciplines such as Financial Analysis or Accounting. Generally speaking, these conceptual/technical disciplines are taught mainly through case studies and quantitative classroom simulations. Through case studies, students learn how to organize and analyze data according to a given framework and how to assess a given problem on the basis of the framework and the technical tools they have been provided. Since data analysis and assessment (usually through the application of highly technical and narrow methodologies) are of overriding concern in case studies methodology, there is little emphasis on the soundness of the decisions taken with regard to the overall business setting of the firm.

⁷ Steve Olson, J. Mack Robinson College of Business, Georgia State University

- *Development of competencies and capabilities*: the last block of capacities learnt in business schools relates to competencies and capabilities. Usually the capabilities provided are negotiation (and mediation), time management and communications. Competencies are more profound and systemic, and need more time and experience to be mastered. Hence other learning methodologies need to be considered. For competencies we think about adaptability to change, motivation of teams, becoming a learning coach, leadership and eventually the development of the “self”. and change Although these competencies are very diverse, it is important to highlight the crucial role for learning, that is played by leadership learning and the development of the “self”. Components of such learning must include a focus on meaning, practice, community and identity⁸. Positioning learning within leadership, highlights the role of collaborative engagements that involve crossing social and linguistic boundaries where distinctions between self and other are likely to be heightened and problematised (Beech and Huxham, 2003). Re-thinking learning for individuals means that learning is to be considered as an issue of engaging in and contributing to the practices of their community. These skills are not acquired through discussion of case studies or quantitative simulations, but through workshops based on role-playing/trial-and-error techniques/simulations, and, sometimes, outdoors exercises and situations.
7. Our *assessment* of existing methodologies for the different learning blocks is based on the perceived need for more systemic learning methodologies, targeting a more systemic understanding of management. and our recommendations are:
- a) Concerning *vision* learning, we think that the methodologies used to date (case studies, site-visits and guest speakers) are not good enough if the aim is to place sustainability and social responsibility values at the heart of the vision acquired in management studies. Traditional methods have to be combined with opportunities for the students to examine management theories from the point of

⁸ Maria Humphries, Waikato Business School

view of the stakeholders of the company⁹. We are convinced that the facilitation of a shift to a new sustainability paradigm has to come especially from the basic vision of the company as responsible and accountable to its stakeholders.

Therefore, methodologies that put students in contact with the stakeholders of companies is a basic innovation that should be brought into the new instructional techniques. In this area there are many possibilities that should be explored, around the basic concept of experiential learning¹⁰ or action learning¹¹: from service learning, placing MBAs as management consulting teams to local non-profits, to internships or learning periods in exemplary companies where students can go for a period of time.¹² Additionally, if the general principle we are suggesting is, in terms of vision creation, the need to provide opportunities to see the company from the point of view of its stakeholders, then new on-line communication technologies and new media-based technologies could be the ideal vehicle to achieve this without much economic cost and time invested¹³.

- b) Concerning *technical and conceptual learning*, we think that the methodologies used (case studies and quantitative simulations) should be extended in all disciplines to encompass topics related to sustainability and social responsibility issues. An exemplary case in mind is the production of Global Compact case studies by some business schools¹⁴ specifically on issues such as human rights, labor standards, environmental concerns or anti-corruption. Another instance worth mentioning is the existence of academic networks specialized in the production of case studies on CSR.¹⁵ PRME should ideally partner with existing institutions in this respect and eventually, only if necessary, organize its own network of case studies production. The PRME Working Group on Learning Methodologies should convey this conclusion to the PRME Working Group on

⁹ Maria Humphries, Waikato Business School

¹⁰ Markus Krekebaum, European Business School at Schloss Reichartshausen, Germany

¹¹ Markus-Oliver Schwaab, Hochschule Pforzheim

¹² Steve Olson

¹³ Charlene Dykman, Cameron School of Business University of St. Thomas

¹⁴ Ivey Business School

¹⁵ SEKN, or Social Enterprise Knowledge Network

Research. As a general principle for the conceptual/technical disciplines, we favor the idea that learning methodologies, whatever their nature, should not introduce only the technical aspect without showing the interdependence with the social facts.¹⁶ This is particularly, but not exclusively, relevant in disciplines such as Accounting and Financial Analysis, where the introduction of financial debacles, such as the Enron case, should be considered.

- c) Concerning *the development of competencies and capabilities*, we believe that among the existing skills which are learnt, we should focus specifically on leadership learning and personal development, in which the new values of sustainability and corporate responsibility should be presented as core content of the leader's vision. Consistent with the systematic approach to a new paradigm of the firm, new skills should be thought too, such as "Dialogue with Stakeholders" and "Awareness of the social environment of the company". From a methodologies point of view we anticipate seeing more project-based learning, workplace learning, (co-)coaching, and in general situated approaches.
- d) From a sustainability point of view, we might want to start considering methodologies that are more flexible, less travel and time constraint and that are based on information and communication technologies. However, we need to avoid re-creating the same pedagogical methodologies that we would like to see evolving in class room situations, into a virtual environment. Rather, virtual approaches are able to allow in particular the creation of more systemic learning experiences. Once we see co-learning, over boundaries, languages, cultures, etc, as essential in the realization of the PRME, then learning technologies, community learning, communities of practice, etc become value adding methodologies.

¹⁶ Nihel Chabrak, of TELECOM & Management SudParis (ex INT) CEREQ-DRM Paris Dauphine