



Case method use in shaping well-rounded Latin American MBAs[☆]



Ezequiel Reficco^{a,*}, María Helena Jaén^b

^a School of Management, Universidad de Los Andes, Calle 21 # 1-20, Bogotá, Colombia

^b IESA, Avenida IESA, Edificio IESA, San Bernardino, Caracas 1010, Venezuela

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 1 April 2015

Available online 3 July 2015

Keywords:

Management education

Case method

Environmental sustainability

Social responsibility

Business ethics

ABSTRACT

Latin America's deteriorating socio-environmental conditions and widely publicized corruption scandals have in recent years led concerned citizens to expect business to play a more constructive role in society. How did Latin American business schools react to societal demands for a *rounder education*? What adjustments in content and pedagogical methods did those changes imply? This paper seeks to extract lessons from those changes by probing into methodologies likely to be conducive to shaping well-rounded leaders. The analysis shows that the introduction of values in Latin American MBA curricula went hand-in-hand with a change in methodologies used for teaching courses on social responsibility, environmental sustainability and business ethics. The redefinition of B-schools role – from training centers for functional specialists, to catalysts for positive societal change – carries with it an expanded role for active learning methodologies.

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1. Introduction

Deteriorating social and environmental conditions and widely publicized corruption scandals have in recent years led concerned citizens around the world to expect business to play a more constructive role in society (GlobeScan, 2013). These concerns are particularly acute in Latin America: Transparency International reports that corruption in Latin America exceeds the global average. “Two-thirds of those do not even make it to the middle of the global ranking – indicating that corruption is a serious problem in many countries” (Salas, 2012). From a Latin American perspective, Leme Fleury and Wood Jr. claim that “business schools should look (...) to encourage the development and dissemination of knowledge related to (...) social responsibility, sustainability, entrepreneurship, and the needs of the emerging ‘bottom of the pyramid’” (2012, p. 16).

Educational institutions that train business leaders have responded strongly to such concerns (Locke, 2006), for example, by partnering with the United Nations Secretariat of the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) and the Global Compact Office, vowing to internalizing sustainable practices. Business educators came to recognize their collective responsibility in bringing about a shift in outlook, away from the wasteful paradigm of industrial activity and towards a

novel approach, friendlier to the environment and society (Marshall, Vaiman, & Napier, 2010). Materializing that paradigm shift challenged the role the traditional role of educational institutions as “training center for functional specialists”, towards the role of a steward who “helps improve organizations and companies in their functionality for society” (Bieger, 2011, p. 104).

This change in role implies sweeping adjustments in the way business schools operated for decades (Giacalone & Promislo, 2013); adjustments that constitute the focus of this study: the authors examine the response of some of the leading Latin American business schools (hereafter, LatAm B-schools for short) to societal demands for a *rounder education* – defined as one that infuses the curriculum with greater social, environmental and ethical (hereafter, SEE for short) concerns. Specifically, this paper seeks to identify the adjustments in content and pedagogical methods brought about by the aforementioned societal demands, and to extract lessons from them. Holland and Albrecht (2013) identify curriculum development and the pedagogy involved in the teaching of business ethics among the “most important issues that business ethics academia will face in the coming decade” (p. 778).

2. Method

2.1. Grounded theory research strategy

This study takes a grounded theory perspective, which seeks “the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 2). The authors follow Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton's constructivist approach, seeking to glean the “way in which organization members go about constructing and understanding their experience” (2012, p. 12).

[☆] The authors would like to thank Professor Silvana Dakduk and Research Associate Melanie Pocater, both of IESA, who provided invaluable assistance in the early stages of this project. We would also like to thank Prof. Enrique Ogliastris, INCAE and IE, and Prof. Henry Gómez, IESA and Universidad de Los Andes, for their valuable insights and comments along the writing process.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +57 1 339 4949x1176.

E-mail addresses: e.reficco@uniandes.edu.co (E. Reficco), maria.jaen@iesa.edu.ve (M.H. Jaén).

Following standard practice in grounded theory, the authors articulated “a well-defined phenomenon of interest” (namely, LatAm B-Schools response to societal pressure to offer a rounder education) and framed research questions that sought “to surface concepts and their inter-relationships” (Gioia et al., 2012, p. 12): (a) How did LatAm B-Schools react to societal pressures for a rounder education? (b) What changes in content and methodologies did that adjustment bring about? (c) What lessons can be gleaned from those changes?

Because of the methodological choices made, the authors have refrained from carrying out an extensive a priori review of the literature. “An effective strategy [in grounded theory research] is, at first, literally to ignore the literature of theory and fact on the area under study” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 37). In this approach the researchers' primary concern is not testing hypotheses inspired in the extant literature, but building theory from data. “Grounded theory's very strong dicta are: a) do not do a literature review in the substantive area and related areas where the research is to be done, and b) when the grounded theory is nearly completed during the sorting and writing up, then the literature search in the substantive area can be accomplished and woven into the theory as more data for constant comparison” (Glaser, 1998, p. 67). Hence, relevant theory appears later in the text, intertwined with the substantive findings of the study.

2.2. Data gathering

The sample consists of leading B-schools in Latin America, as per the *America Economía* 2011 ranking, the region's most influential. From that ranking, the authors selected the leading institution in each of the region's ten largest economies – in terms of its 2010 nominal GDP (Appendix A). The analysis focuses on the MBA, which is the flagship program for all sampled organizations.

From each of those schools, the authors picked a set of three key informants, knowledgeable agents considered proxies of their organization (Lavrakas, 2008). Two of them were faculty specialized in what the authors defined as value-intensive SEE courses. In this context, specialized means that those courses represent a substantial portion of the faculty member's teaching load. The third informant was the senior manager in charge of the MBA; while in most cases this person was the program's director, in a few cases the authors interviewed deans who were directly involved with program management. Each

semi-structured interview took about 90 on average, preserving flexibility to adjust interview questions based on informant responses. All interviews were recorded and transcribed on paper. A team of four researchers carried out data gathering and the ensuing analysis. To the extent possible, interviews were carried out face-to-face. When unfeasible, the authors used videoconference tools. Each interview followed a protocol (Appendix B) that differed according to the profile of the interviewee (deans or MBA program directors, or faculty members).

In the process of identifying emerging concepts, themes and aggregate dimensions, the authors went through a number of iterations, comparing notes and contrasting viewpoints. To prevent personal bias, the authors requested the assistance of two colleagues to craft first-order concepts from collected data, assuring consistency among the viewpoints of all four members of the team.

2.3. Data analysis

Maintaining the integrity of the 1st-order (informant-centric) terms, the authors coded or “fractured” data (Strauss, 1987, p. 29) in order to rearrange it into categories, with computer aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). The authors then clustered those codes into 2nd-order (theory-centric) themes through call axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) – the organization of the categories and concepts that have been developed during open coding (those drawn from data) into wider categories. Finally, the authors distilled 2nd-order themes into aggregate dimensions, and crafted a set of emerging propositions.

3. Results

This section presents findings grouped in three categories: a) contextual pressures on LatAm B-Schools for a rounder education; b) the response of LatAm B-schools to those pressures, and c) what the authors have learned from the studied phenomenon. The conceptual map (Fig. 1) summarizes the relations found through axial coding.

3.1. Contextual pressures on LatAm B-schools for a rounder education

When asked about how their school's curricula integrated SEE values, interviewees describe a process heavily influenced by external

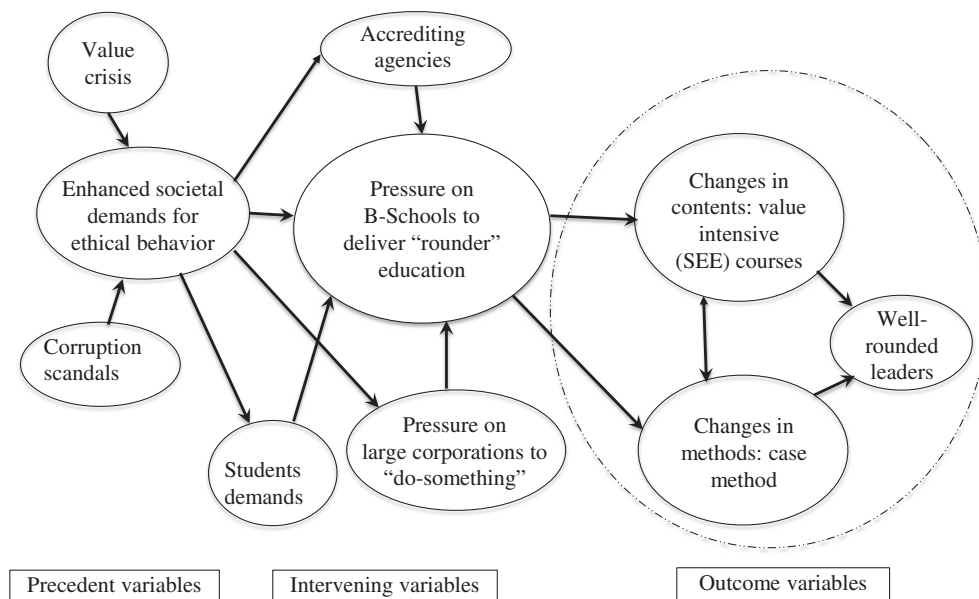


Fig. 1. Conceptual map – societal demands for ethical education and business schools' changes in content and methods.

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