

Teaching and Learning for Real-World Relevance in Management Education – Developing a Model

Michael Skipton
Memorial University of Newfoundland

Thomas Cooper
Memorial University of Newfoundland

Real-world relevance in business schools is even more important than ever. Focusing on undergraduate business degree programming, this paper explores practical issues and concerns around teaching for relevance. We present a conceptual model to outline some of the potential solutions for addressing problems of relevance in teaching and infrastructure within business schools. We discuss practical issues in teaching and learning for real world relevance and identify barriers to moving to relevance. We conclude that some fundamental changes are needed if schools are to be able to move to more relevant teaching and learning in management education.

INTRODUCTION

Since at least the 1970s, organizations have continued to hire an increasing number of business school graduates while, over the same time, there have been continuing concerns that graduates have been lacking real-world relevance in doing their management jobs. See, for example, Hall, 1986; *Fortune*, 1991; Hayes & Abernathy 1980; Doria, Rozanski & Cohen, 2003; Mintzberg 1989, 2004; *Management Education at Risk*, 2002; Bennis & O’Toole, 2005. Apparently, over all of this time, the steady increase in recruitment of business school graduates was unaffected by these continuing expressions of concern. Recently, however, corporate recruiters appear to be seeking graduates who are more real-world relevant, and this is causing top-ranked business schools to move towards more relevant programming (*Business Week*, 2006; *Canadian Business*, 2006). The current economic downturn also may mean that organizations will look for new graduates who can contribute effectively and immediately – their training and experience will become even more relevant to business models and organizations in the near future.

Business schools generally are being driven towards more relevant programming as graduate employers and prospective students are seeking some form of quality assurance for schools and their programs. To provide this assurance schools must seek accreditation from bodies such as the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business International (AACSB), the accreditation and representative body for business schools in North America and, now, internationally. The *AACSB Eligibility Procedures and Standards for Business Accreditation* are aimed to cause accredited business schools to improve the real-world relevance of their programming.

Real-world relevance is even more important than ever. Events starting in Fall 2008, in the real-world of North American business corporations and their management, have become very relevant to everyone

and are likely to be powerful drivers for more pertinent programming in business schools (*Business Week*, 2008a). Another driver for change is the transformation in student expectations and demands. According to *Business Week*, (2008a), so-called Millennial applicants and students are demanding courses and pedagogy that are relevant to the real-world as they see it. As well, these Millennials expect individual coaching and tailoring of course requirements to their needs and career aspirations.

Increasing infrastructure support and the need for individual coaching lead to two major concerns for more real-world relevant teaching and learning. First, as students do more individual, real-world based learning assignments there will be new and increasing demands on a business school's teaching and learning support infrastructure. Second, workloads for course teachers may increase significantly in more real-world relevant courses, as student work becomes further individualized. No longer can students simply be classified as a group, normalized and examined using content-based standards. If learning resources and support infrastructure are not in place, individual teachers will be left on their own to somehow fill this gap. The result may be a huge increase in workload unless the numbers of students that business school instructors teach are drastically reduced.

Focusing on undergraduate business degree programming, and based on our and others' arguments (cf. Starkey and Tempest 2008; Lorange 2005; Selen 2001; Mintzberg 1989) and perceptions of what is needed for real-world relevant teaching and learning, this paper explores practical issues and concerns as well as teaching for relevance. Finally, we present a conceptual model to outline what we believe are some of the potential solutions for addressing problems of relevance in teaching and infrastructure.

TRADITIONAL AND NON-RELEVANT BUSINESS SCHOOL PROGRAMMING

An effective starting point for moving to more relevant programming is in making sense of the apparent historical contradiction between the continuing hiring of business school graduates and concerns for their lacking real-world relevance. Many authors (cf. Alvesson and Wilmott 1992a; Alvesson and Wilmott 1992b; Barley and Khunda 1992; Parker 2002; Ghoshal 2005) have argued that the corporate management agenda in reality always has been about the selfish exercise of power and money-making, and that this agenda has been a hidden agenda that must include the means of hiding itself, i.e., management discourse. Arguments have been put forward (cf. Reed 2002; Summers et al. 1997; French and Grey 1996) that the traditional role of management education has been to provide content for management discourse as a mask for power and, as such, management education always has been inherently unreal and non-relevant and largely dominated by teaching to the textbook. For example, Skipton & Gupta, (2006) classified graduates of traditional business school programs as "Spectators" who can only be lookers-on, and inherently non-relevant to real-world here-and-now situations.

Normative-illustrative knowledge in general-contextual application, and prescriptive-exemplary knowledge in type-situational application, is the basis of textbook theory content and learning for Spectators (Skipton & Gupta, 2005). Knowledge is seen as theory content that is of general application, or is applied to type-situations from the outside (Grant, 2008). Knowledge is not seen as process learning to be able to derive content and understanding inside here-and-now situational reality. Accordingly, the knowledge subjects and courses that constitute business school programs can be structured as a collection of self-contained "functional silos". The result is that business schools have come to organize themselves based on these artificial functional 'knowledge-based' structures (Mintzberg 2004; Bennis & O'Toole, 2005). Where the knowledge is theory content and its application is outside situational reality (Pfeffer and Fong 2002) there is no incentive for cross-functional integration. Not surprisingly, it has been said that: "...the London Business School teaches manipulation. And part of that manipulation is to present the art of manipulation itself as truth – as knowledge (Saul, 1993, p.118)."

Traditional university business school organizations and culture, together with their subject content and classroom teaching and learning processes, have been significant barriers to students to learning for real-world relevance. We describe three of these significant barriers.

Barrier 1 - Textbook Rules for Tenure and Promotion

The first barrier has always been that faculty members must “publish or perish”. Now, it also is becoming important to obtain high scores in student evaluations for teaching - and with no student complaints! Teaching to the textbook is a straightforward and effective means to minimize time spent on teaching (so as to maximize time spent on research and publication), and to try to ensure good teaching evaluation scores from students. A “mainstream” textbook can be adopted, along with its instructor package containing classroom presentation material and multiple-choice examination questions, and used as the basis for the course. So long as students learn the theory content they will get the marks. Faculty members left on their own to teach their courses can hardly be expected to do anything else, and teaching to the textbook is what students in business school programs have come to expect. The lack of critical or reflective thinking becomes apparent when students graduate and must grapple with real-world situations (Markides 2007; Currie 2008).

Barrier 2 - Textbook Theory Divorced from Practice

The second barrier to enabling students to learn relevant content and thinking processes is the divorce of textbook theory from practice. For example, the business functional silo of Marketing Management has become an influential theory subject-area but the practical activities of actually identifying and selling to customers may be less and less subjects for discussion. In SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analyses, students can be taught to say what should be done by the management (generally and normatively) and what the manager should do (type-situationally and prescriptively). Theory norms and prescriptions can simply be stated by students without their having any understanding of what is involved in doing things in reality (Wehrich 1982; Pitcher 1995; Ghoshal 2005).

As well, textbook approaches or theories can be given the status of undisputed facts. For example, there is only one “Organization Theory.” Students cannot know that there are other perspectives on, concepts of, and approaches to organizations and organizing because they are neither told nor required to find out for themselves. The lack of critical thinking results in a focus on memorization or regurgitation with less concern being placed on how the theory may apply in practice.

Barrier 3 - Textbook Cases and SWOT Pedagogy

Along with textbook theory, business cases and so-called SWOT Analysis have become important elements of orthodox pedagogy. As textbook cases already have been written, the situational critical thinking has already been done by the case writer - everything has been arranged and neatly packaged for students to read. Real world situations and what constitutes them are never pre-sorted – it is for the analyst to sort them! Case exercises, as traditionally written, appear to be vehicles for mostly contextual, normative or illustrative, or type-situational exemplary, interpretation by teachers and students (Hill and Westbrook 1997).

Case teaching usually is put forward as most relevant pedagogy (cf. Garvin 2007; Simms and Felton 2006), and it may be argued that SWOT Analysis has become the dominant pedagogical vehicle for discussion of case exercises by students in the classroom or in assignments (cf. Grant 2008). Unfortunately, the manner in which a SWOT Analysis discussion usually is carried out in the classroom demands neither real-world situationalization nor analysis. Students can take at face value what the case says, simply pick out of the case some words or phrases that illustrate or exemplify SWOTs, and simply list these items under what they see as appropriate headings. There is no need, and usually no expectation, for students to do any supporting situational investigation and analysis. For example, students can see the phrase “growing market” and they can then write this down in their “Opportunities” list, and if they see the phrase “market share” they can put this under “Strength,” and so on. At best, students might “eyeball” some of financial information but they can be allowed to largely ignore it. Students are sadly misled into believing that intuitively picking words and phrases out of the case and putting them into unorganized lists is situational analysis. Even worse, traditional SWOT Analysis pedagogy appears to be teaching students the processes of non-relevance while at the same time causing them to believe that they are being real-world relevant!

MOVING TO MORE RELEVANT BUSINESS SCHOOL PROGRAMMING

Significant barriers to real-world relevance – textbooks, theory divorced from practice and inappropriate pedagogy – have developed. Skipton & Gupta (2006) have offered a conceptual analysis of traditional, non-relevant management educational discourse. They argued that healthy skepticism and critical thinking would be expected to be mostly absent from traditional business school degree programs, simply because these things would involve explicit discussion of the powerful corporate management agenda, and this is taboo. For this reason also, students cannot be expected to develop a robust moral compass regarding the uses and exercise of power. (See also Reed, 2002.)

There are, however, means to overcome these barriers and make teaching and learning in business schools more real-world relevant. Fundamentally, real-world relevance in management education requires a skeptical, situational critical thinking approach (Elder & Paul, 2005; Currie 2008). This is so that students can become “Players” who can put themselves inside the here-and-now business or organizational management situational reality, where knowledge is derived in and of the situation at the time. As such, Players inherently must be real-world relevant Skipton & Gupta (2005).

Building on this conceptual argument, Skipton & Cooper, (2008) suggested a sequence of three required management courses for more real-world relevant undergraduate business programming:

- (1) Introduction to Business in Society (First year)
- (2) Managing in the Business Enterprise – Situational Factors and Integration (Mid-way)
- (3) Strategic Management – Contexts and Situations (Final year)

In these courses, there is a focus on the process rather than the content of learning. Specifically, the courses are focused on situations and incidents combined with critical thinking. Only situation-analytical knowledge derived in and of the here-and-now situation requires critical thinking in reality and is learning for Players (Skipton & Gupta, 2005). This demands real-world situational pedagogy and it follows that content and pedagogy of each of the three courses in the sequence from first year to final year would be increasingly real-world focused and situational. Student progression through the courses would increasingly require them to undertake their own self-directed work involving situational information search and critical, analytical thinking.

A Concept of Relevance in Student Learning

Based on the arguments of Skipton & Cooper, (2008), for business school students to be able to graduate as real-world relevant Players, they demonstrably must be able to:

1. **Orient themselves contextually and situationally**, i.e., in the real-world situational here-and-now, and think critically, including thinking investigatively, analytically, integratively and decisively (Skipton and Furey 2008).

In our view, real-world-based, situational critical thinking must include:

- A specific and meaningful subject vocabulary and set of knowledge structures and frameworks.
 - Explicit discussion of power in organizations and society – including types of power and examples of the normative impact of power.
 - A more societal and stakeholder-oriented approach, rather than simply taking for granted that the only things that matter are maximizing shareholder and manager wealth.
 - Corporate social responsibilities, including natural environmental sustainability and ecological issues.
 - Moral principles and ethical behaviors in the use and exercise of power.
2. **Formulate research methodology and search orientation and direction**, e.g., problem, opportunity, general situation, etc., undertake logical and directed information search and demonstrate information literacy. (cf. Rousseau 2006; *Association of College and Research Libraries*, 2008).

- 3. Communicate their work** in well-researched, logically argued, well-written and professionally presented reports using good writing.

A textbook may be useful only for student learning of subject area vocabulary and basic knowledge structures and frameworks, as content. Every other item in the concept of relevance described above is process learning and must be learned by doing. Activities and assignments must be the vehicles of this type of learning.

We are aware that this list is in the context of management teaching and, as such, limited. The entire complement of so-called “soft-skills”, including interpersonal behavioral and communicative skills, teamwork and leadership skills, also is needed by students to become most effectively real-world relevant. Following Elder and Paul (2004), we would argue, however, that critical thinking in the real-world situational here-and-now must be fundamental to the development of powerful soft skills.

Unfortunately, a major impediment to moving to teaching and learning for real world relevance is how business students currently are taught in business schools.

ISSUES FOR TEACHERS

As traditional courses may be changed to become more student-centered and real-world-based we believe that teachers will be impacted by increasing work-load and qualitative changes in the nature of their teaching work. These quantitative and qualitative forces, left unaddressed, will cause a huge increase in the work effort requirements for individual faculty members traditionally left on their own to teach the courses they are allocated. This is a major reason for individual faculty members not to move to teaching for relevance – even if they want to do so.

From Student Group Work to Individual Learning – an Increasing Workload

Group-work is a characteristic of many business courses. The stated rationale appears to be the students should learn to work in groups because they will have to do so in their jobs after graduating. There is a less obvious downside for students, and this is that group work can encourage, and even intensify, individual functional specialization. For example, students who are concentrating in accounting subjects will do any accounting items in the group assignment, and so on for other business functions. The student who is already the best writer usually will do the final draft. Group-work therefore can lead students to not learn anything more than they already know. For some students, there is, however, an upside to group work in that they can “free-load” on the group and do little or no work, knowing that the other group members will do the work so as to get a good mark. Also, some other students may well contribute to the group but they are using the group mark, i.e. the efforts of others, to enable them to make up for low marks in individual assignments or examinations.

Ideally, learning activities and assignments should be done individually by students, for them to learn across specialist functional areas or core competences. In addition, individual learning activities and assignments enable individual learning to be properly assessed. It may be appropriate for some experiential or project learning activities to be done in groups. However, the expectations on what are student learning objectives (i.e. group dynamics or project management) may be much different and will need to be communicated.

In practice, the primary driver for group work may be that teachers simply do not have the time or resources to support and mark individual assignments. For example, in a class of 48 students, twelve submissions from groups of four students is a lot less student advising and marking than 48 individual assignments! To the extent that individual assessment is adopted the quantitative advisory and assessment workload for teachers must greatly increase, based on the size of the groups that were previously used. For example, if the size of groups previously used in a course was four students, and the course is revised to move to individual assessment, the advisory and assessment workload can be expected to increase four times.

From Controlled Content to Student Process Learning – an Increasing Teaching Effort

As suggested above, traditional business school teaching is text-book based and closely controlled by the teacher. Theory content material is bounded and self-contained, contextually normative-illustrative and type-situationally prescriptive-exemplary, and positioned outside any situational reality. Moving away from this, to more student-centered, process learning that is reality and situation-based and involves critical thinking and information search is explosive along a number of dimensions.

First, learning activities and assignments cannot be standardized so that students all do similar activities that are intended to produce the same results in varying degrees depending on student aptitude and effort. This means also that assignments cannot be standardized for marking. Each and every student assignment must be assessed on its own merits. Not only will workload increase significantly because all assignments will be individually done, the nature of the work contained in these assignments will extend and become more variable. One faculty member on his or her own is likely to have neither the time nor the breadth of knowledge and expertise to be able to advise on assignment content and to be able to assess the final results. This will be exacerbated with more integration between subjects.

A breadth of different subjects along with a requirement for integration brings some important considerations for teachers and for schools. For example, if in a more relevant management course an assignment requires students to undertake some analysis of financial reports, how is this to be handled? Should this analysis be part of the content for a finance course in the same semester? Should the more relevant course be team-taught so that a financial subject specialist can lead or advise students on how to do the required analysis? Should students be expected to know how to do the analysis or be left on their own to find out how to do it? Should students be provided with support “labs” staffed by teaching assistants, e.g., graduate students, to help and advise them on doing the financial analysis? As well, there is also not only a technical analysis component to be learned, but also the incorporation of this analysis into the overall investigative and search process relating to the situation or the problem under study.

Second, information search and analysis by students takes more time and effort in terms of support and advice than is required by bounded and self-contained materials such as case and other exercises. Indeed, a powerful reason for using such traditional materials is that they limit and direct students along standard routes to predetermined destinations. Students can be left alone to find their own way and the final results are similar and straightforward to mark.

Third, what should be the nature and amount of support that should be provided for undergraduate students carrying out real-world-based research? At one extreme, students can be told what is required, e.g., Identify and Critique the Strategy of a Major Corporation, and left to work out for themselves how to do it. At the other extreme, there can be more “hand-holding” of students through the research project, coupled with project management by the teacher, so that the student is progressed through various stages from scoping the research proposal to final report.

Fourth, what should be an appropriate level of process support for students? Provision of such support has academic considerations, e.g., students’ stage in the program, and pre-requisite knowledge, but also administrative operational considerations, such as availability of other faculty members to advise students on technical items, and teaching assistants for running student advisory “labs.”

Fifth, regarding research content support, should students simply be told that there is a library, an Internet and then left to their own devices? On the other hand, should students be provided with support and guidance regarding information sources, search techniques and information literacy? This again has academic content and administrative resourcing implications. For example, should students be provided with a list of useful databases and authoritative Internet sites that they can rely on as starting points for their research? If such a list is not provided to students, how are they likely to know where to go to find authoritative and reliable information? On the other hand, who is going to put together any such list of databases and websites for students to go to? As well, who is going to assess students’ information literacy, including validating the veracity of the sources that they obtain information from? Because they are subject-specific, providing authoritative and reliable information sources, validating student sources, and assessing students’ information literacy appear not to be responsibilities of the library. Will faculty members teaching more relevant courses be required to assume these responsibilities?

Finally, standards for good writing are well known. For example, expectations and standards for good writing at one university are included in the institution's Academic Regulations. According to the regulation, "*Regardless of the method of evaluation, good writing skills are required for effective communication...Students are, therefore, expected to demonstrate proficiency in logical organization, clarity of expression and grammatical correctness in their writing*". The regulation characterizes good writing according to the following categories: Content, Organization, Style and Mechanics. In practice, however, teachers cannot assess good writing if they are given neither the time nor the support resources to do so – but will faculty members teaching more relevant course be required to assess student writing anyway? (The point has already been made that, in group submissions, the final report usually is drafted by the group member who is already a good writer. The other group members simply remain as they are – from the less good to the very bad.)

ISSUES FOR BUSINESS SCHOOLS

Traditional university business school organizational custom and practice appears to be based on individual faculty members who are left to be responsible for teaching on their own the courses that they are allocated. Any resources are provided to the faculty member, rather than to the course. As little or no resources may be provided to individual faculty members, they have every incentive to teach to the textbook. Doing so also enables faculty members to minimize time spent on teaching (to be able to spend more time on research). Faculty members also can use teaching to the textbook to try to maximize student evaluations of teaching, as students seem to like the neat packaging and presentation, and easy regurgitation of textbook theory content.

To be able to move to more relevant courses and teaching, business school resource allocation and operational processes likely will need to recognize and, ideally, be determined by course requirements for pedagogy and student learning. This would be a big change in academic and administrative practices in many university business schools, and may be resisted by administrators (who are likely to be jealous of their powers) and by academics (who are likely to be jealous of their freedoms).

One element of business school organizational custom and practice is the manner in which faculty members are viewed by the school's administration. Many schools are searching for local relevance by establishing so-called outreach institutes such as technological innovation and enterprise development incubators; enterprise and small business advisory and assistance units; community and economic development advisory and assistance units; and employee and management training and development units. Are such units effectively part of the administrative core of the business school so that faculty members effectively are excluded from them or are faculty members involved? Is any involvement of faculty members on a casual and individual basis or is this involvement formally part of a school's overall operational activities? Where faculty members are effectively excluded from local outreach activities they, and the students they teach, are not likely to become relevant to the local real-world of the business school.

Resources Are Not for Courses

For schools where organizational custom-and-practice has maintained, and even solidified, the traditional gap between academic matters versus administrative concerns, including resource allocation and teaching operations, closing the academic versus administrative divide will not be easy. To the extent that a business school's culture is individualistic, each and every faculty member can be expected to object to more resources being given to individuals who are teaching more relevant, and more resource-intensive, courses. Moreover, any resources that may be obtained from, or allocated by, the Dean's Office to those faculty members who are teaching more relevant courses are most likely to be perceived by others as simply resulting from favoritism or political 'pull'.

Traditionally, as faculty members are individually responsible for the courses that they teach, i.e., they are the only resources, it has not been necessary for business schools to have developed mechanisms for considering resources for courses. Perhaps so much so that resourcing has come to be seen as *ultra*

vires to collegial discussion of academic matters. As well, and for obvious reasons, no individual faculty member is likely to question the administration's allocation of resources!

Questions emerge as to whether faculty members can be expected to spend time designing and obtaining collegial approval for the academic components of courses with more relevant pedagogy. This is especially so where resource and operational requirements required to support these academic components cannot be talked about because they are administrative items. If it should happen that more relevant courses do become incorporated into academic programs, but the resources and support required for their more relevant pedagogy simply do not exist because they could not be talked about, what are individual faculty members to do? Some options are: they can try to avoid teaching such courses; they can simply do non-relevant teaching; or, they can grieve under their collective agreement, to try to get resources that they need in order to be able to teach the approved course content and pedagogy. Faculty members are left on their own to teach, coupled with no mechanism for allocating resources to courses, appears to be a significant organizational roadblock to relevance.

Problems with Copyright

As contemporary subjects, teaching and learning of business and management can be made more effective by using current materials that are real-world based. It appears, however, that publishers of business information, Canadian copyright law and its associated jurisprudence, as well as university administrative policies and procedures, militate against instructors using such materials in the classroom. While it is possible to obtain reprints of articles for incorporation into course packages, reprints are not the most effective means of bringing current issues or information into the classroom, or into course websites. More relevant pedagogy is likely to bring a requirement to use current, real-world materials in classroom presentations, either by the teacher or by students. It appears, however, that it is difficult, if not impossible, for individual teachers to obtain written permissions for using published materials in classroom presentation equipment, and this is a barrier to teaching for relevance.

As far as we are aware, written permission must be obtained from the copyright holder to put any paper or electronic copy of any printed or downloaded material into classroom projection equipment and project it on a screen in front of the class. If prior permission is not obtained it is a violation of copyright because it is not an approved use of the material. This also raises the question of copyright fees and whether the school has any budget to pay such fees for instructional copyright permissions. University business school administrative policies and procedures generally include a prohibition against illegal acts, so that teachers may be concerned that they may be subject to administrative discipline for violating copyright. Teachers also may be concerned that they may be personally sued by a copyright holder for any violations. There is also the question of whether instructors can be held liable for any violations of copyright by students in their classroom presentations. Although there may be a "workaround" that allows classroom use if the university library has contracted with a provider of an electronic version of the article, this may depend on the specific terms of the contract.

University business schools need to establish clear guidance and protections for individual faculty members regarding copyright, and specifically the use of copyright materials in classroom presentation equipment. Until then, sensible faculty members will stick to the textbook and avoid using any current, real-world material in their presentations.

Problems with Real-World Research by Students

One effective means for leading students to become more real-world relevant is for them to carry out research in or for real companies local to the business school. This may be known as "student consulting" and can be beneficial for the students and for the sponsoring company. It brings with it, however, some issues for teaching and administration. These include:

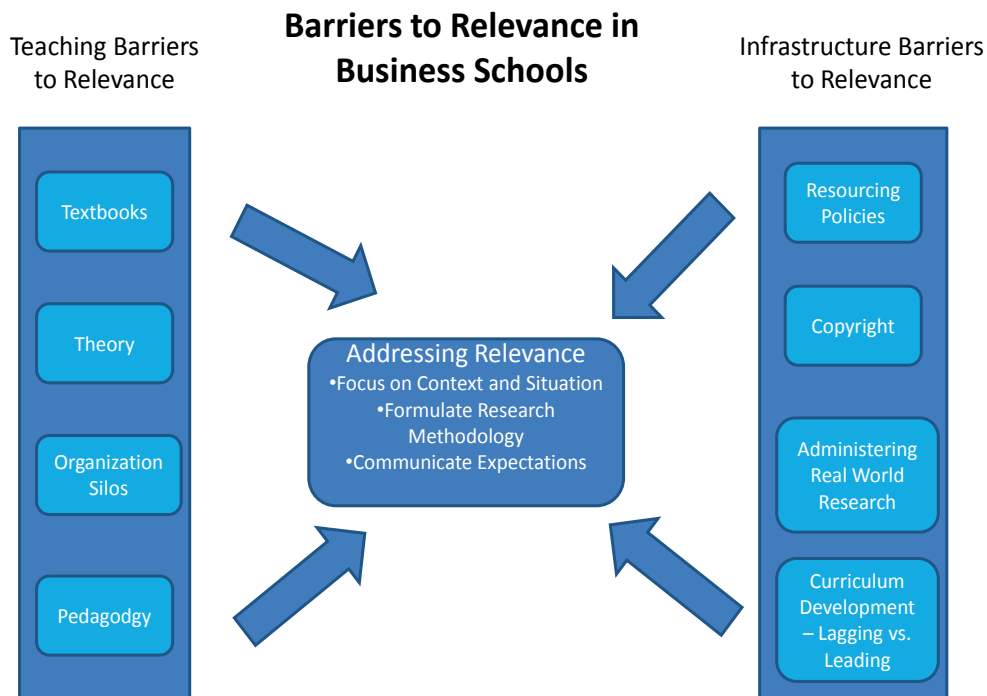
- Who is to be responsible for making contacts, connecting student consulting teams with prospective company clients, and for scoping projects?

- Who is to be responsible for managing the project and for its results? Is the faculty member being left to be personally responsible, or is the business school putting its name on the consulting project?
- What administrative and financial support is to be provided for the students and the faculty member?
- What are the work administrative arrangements for the students? For example, are the students insured against accident or injury while they are carrying out the project?
- How does the student conform to, and the business school comply with, guidelines on ethics and, specifically, free and informed consent?

Written consent and information sheets are necessary for compliance with most university guidelines. If it is necessary to obtain written consent from everyone who is spoken with on a student consulting project (since they are human subjects), how is this relevant to real-world consulting engagements? (Practitioners do not present an information sheet and ask for written consent before asking a person within an organization a question.) Compliance with university guidelines appears to be a barrier to relevance but, nevertheless, schools must put proper procedures and people in place. These guidelines also mean that schools must require that secondary research be undertaken by students before moving to gathering primary information.

In summary, we believe that there are a number of barriers to teachers enabling students to learn for real-world relevance, and to business schools enabling teachers to teach. In Exhibit 1 below we outline some key barriers and some potential solutions for addressing relevance.

EXHIBIT 1
BARRIERS TO RELEVANCE IN UNIVERSITY BUSINESS SCHOOLS



FINDING SOLUTIONS

There are a number of potential solutions to addressing the issues of relevance, enabling teachers to teach and students to learn, and these are outlined below.

Context and Situation - Theory divorced from application leads to non-relevance for most students. The best way to ensure relevance is to ensure that context and situation lead learning in the classroom – not the theory.

Formulate Teaching Methodology - A consistent and robust teaching methodology that is shared by teachers and students within a business faculty will be of much benefit in promoting relevance. Consistent with the *Association of College and Research Libraries* (2008), this approach will have at its heart logical and directed information searches with the need for students to demonstrate information literacy.

Expectation Management for Group and Individual Learning - We believe that there is a need to set expectations and ensure that students understand the different learning processes and outcomes for group versus individual learning. Treating them the same can cause issues for both fairly evaluating the work of individual students as well as for ensuring relevance.

There are also a number of tactical approaches that business instructors can undertake to address relevance. These include:

Time - We believe that students are not really in a position to judge whether the content they studied was relevant until at least a number of years after they graduate. At this time, they will better understand the application of the theories and concepts in the ‘real-world’. We would propose the business schools undertake a systematic survey on a group or individual school basis to see what graduates believe that they really learned.

What Works and What Doesn’t - Engaging students and graduates on what theories worked – i.e. contributed to their career progression, made them better individuals or opened their mind to critical thinking – is a vital way of ensuring relevance. This engagement can be done in focus groups, surveys or interviews. Using this methodology, as well as published academic research, should mean there will be enough empirical evidence on what theories have more applicability and how they should be taught. This information can be made available to business school teachers and can be used for assessing teaching effectiveness as part of accreditation.

Infrastructure Resources - The traditional model of resource allocation from an administrative standpoint is to maximize teaching efficiency by classroom size (How many students will the room hold?) as well as the number of students who need the course to graduate (Is this a core course or an elective?). Perversely, this can lead to core courses that must contain the most essential learning having the most students and the highest student/teacher ratios. We propose that a more relevant approach to resourcing would be to resource on a pedagogical process basis rather than on student numbers. For example, if the process of learning requires individual coaching and extensive research/critical thinking, then this course should be resourced different from a course which focuses more on understanding the vernacular of a subject area or a mechanistic approach to learning.

Curriculum Development - It is the responsibility of business schools to stay current and relevant, and schools can ensure that they undertake continual curriculum development to ensure this. At the very least, a curriculum development committee should be established, that is well

resourced and engaged with faculty members in the development process. Examining the curriculum only periodically, or when it is time for accreditation, is not relevant to the real-world, due to many and changing challenges and management drivers that are out there. Questions for the curriculum include: How do we teach corporate governance and responsibility after the events of 2008? How do we address corporate level strategy when the focus may have switched from growth to stability – or survival? The examples of Enron and other companies and executives, one year lauded for their strategic brilliance and then, not so long after, pilloried for their failures in integrity or, even, illegal acts demonstrate the need for continual curriculum development (Gioia 1990; 2002; Ghoshal 2003; 2005).

Change the Model - Teaching across the different management functional areas will contribute to more relevant student learning. Essentially, (even if somewhat crudely) we believe that there is a need to move from teaching business management as English Literature to teaching business management as Engineering. Students must be moved away from simply reading books, going to the library and describing and critiquing various books and author's point of view. Instead, students must be moved to critical thinking and investigative work, examining situations and processes for using subject theory content to find situational information, and interpreting the findings and deriving conclusions and recommendations.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have discussed practical issues in teaching and learning for real world relevance, and we have identified barriers to moving to relevance, and offered some solutions. For reasons described above, we can expect business school program and course designs on paper to be made more real-world relevant, especially where they must be included in schools' documentation for AACSB accreditation. In this paper, we have argued that, in this drive for real-world relevance, there are a number of practical issues that are likely to be left unrecognized and unaddressed. In particular, if students are expected to be more self-directed and expected to gather real-world information and carry out situational critical thinking, learning assignments cannot be standardized for marking and must be assessed on their own merits. More relevant teaching and learning will require more individual coaching and assessment, and this will lead to requirements for quantitative and qualitative increases in teaching effort and infrastructural support.

We conclude, however, that some fundamental changes in business school academic and administrative practices are needed if schools are to be able to move to more relevant teaching and learning in management education.

REFERENCES

AACSB International (2007). *AACSB International Eligibility Procedures and Standards for Business Accreditation, (2003-2008)*. Adopted April 25th, 2003. Revised: January 31, 2007. www.aacsb.edu/accreditation . (Accessed January 22, 2012).

AACSB Task Force on Management Education Report, (2002). *Management Education at Risk*.

Association of College and Research Libraries, (2008). Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education, www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/informationliteracycompetency.cfm (Accessed April 4th, 2011).

Alvesson, M., & Willmott, H. (1992a). On the idea of emancipation in management and organization studies. *Academy of Management Review*, 17, (3), 432-464.

- Alvesson, M., & Willmott, H. (Eds.). (1992b). *Critical management studies*. London: Sage.
- Barley, S. R., & Kunda, G. (1992). Design and devotion: Surges of rational and normative ideologies of control in managerial discourse. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 37, 363-399.
- Bennis, W.G. & O'Toole, J. (2005). How Business Schools Lost Their Way. *Harvard Business Review*, (May 2005), 96-104.
- Business Week, (October 23, 2006). The Best B Schools, 54-75.
- Business Week, (November 24, 2008a). The Best B-Schools, 41-054.
- Business Week, (October 6, 2008b), Mad as Hell on Main Street. 26-28 & \$700 Billion, No Strings Attached, 30-34.
- Canadian Business, (October 23-November 5, 2006). MBA Guide 2006, 91-124.
- Currie, G. (2002). Reflecting on a Critical Pedagogy in MBA Education. *Management Learning*, 34, (1), 27-49.
- Doria, J., Rozanski H. & Cohen, E. (2003). What Business Needs from Business Schools. *Strategy+Business*, 32, (Fall), 2-8.
- Elder, L. & Paul, R., (2005). *The Miniature Guide to the Art of Asking Essential Questions*. Dillon Beach, CA: The Foundation for Critical Thinking. (Also, see: www.criticalthinking.org)
- Fortune (1994). Reengineering the MBA. January 24, 38-47.
- Fortune (1991). The Trouble with MBAs. July 29, 67-78.
- French, R., & Grey, C. (Eds.) (1996). *Rethinking management education*. London: Sage.
- Ghoshal, S. (2003). Business schools share the blame for Enron. *Financial Times*, July, 17.
- Ghoshal, S. (2005). Bad management theories are destroying good management practices. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 4, (1), 75-91
- Gioia, D. A., & Pitre, E. (1990). Multiparadigm perspectives on theory building. *Academy of Management Review*, 15, (4), 584-602.
- Gioia, D.A., (2002). Business education's role in the crisis of corporate confidence. *Academy of Management Executive*, 16, (3), 142-144.
- Grant, R.M. (2008). Why Strategy Teaching Should be Theory Based. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 17(4), 276-281.
- Gulati, R. (2007). Tent Poles, Tribalism, and Boundary Spanning: The Rigor-Relevance Debate in Management Research. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50, (4), 775-728.
- Hall, L. (1986). *Report Card on Canadian MBA Programs*, Arthur Andersen and Company.

- Hill, T. and R. Westbrook (1997). SWOT Analysis: It's Time for a Product Recall. *Long Range Planning*, 30, (1), 46-52.
- Garvin, D.A. (2007). Teaching Executives and Teaching MBAs: Reflections on the Case Method. *The Academy of Management Learning and Education (AMLE)*, 6, (3), 643-674.
- Hayes, R.H. & Abernathy W.J. (1980). Managing Our Way to Economic Decline. *Harvard Business Review*, July-August, 67-77.
- Lorange, P. (2005). Strategy means choice: also for today's business school. *The Journal of Management Development*, 24, (9), 783-790.
- Markides, C. (2007). In Search of Ambidextrous Professors. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 50, 762-768.
- Merchant, K.A. (2008). Why interdisciplinary accounting research tends not to impact most North American academic accountants. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 19, (6), 901-908.
- Mintzberg, H. (1989). *Mintzberg on Management*, New York, New York: Free Press
- Mintzberg, H. (2004). *Managers Not MBAs: A Hard Look at the Soft Practice of Managing and Management Development*, New York, New York: Berrett Koehler.
- Parker, M. (2002). *Against Management*. Oxford: Polity.
- Paul, R. & Elder, L. (2004). *The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking Concepts and Tools, 4th Edition*, Dillon Beach, CA: The Foundation for Critical Thinking.
- Pfeffer, J. and Fong, C. T. (2002). The End of Business Schools? Less Success than Meets the Eye. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 1(1), 78-95.
- Pitcher, P. (1995). *Artists, Craftsmen and Technocrats – The Dreams, Realities and Illusions of Leadership*, Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Co. Ltd.
- Reed, D. (2002). Management education in an age of globalization: The need for critical perspectives. In C. Wankel & DeFillippi (Eds.), *Rethinking Management Education for the 21st Century*. Greenwich, Conn: Information Age Publishing
- Rousseau, D. M. (2006). Presidential Address: Is There Such a Thing As Evidence-Based Management? *Academy of Management Review*, 31, (2), 256-269.
- Selen, W. (2001). Learning in the new business school setting: a collaborative model. *The Learning Organization: An International Journal*, 8, (3), 106-113.
- Saul, J.R. (1993). *Voltaire's Bastards – The Dictatorship of Reason in the West*. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Sims, R. & Felton, E.L. (2006). Designing and Delivering Business Ethics Teaching and Learning, *Journal of Business Ethics*, 63, (3), 297-312.

Skipton, M.D. & Gupta, R.K. (2006). Real-World Relevance is Educating Players in Managing the Business, Not Organizational Management Spectators. *Proceedings of the 2006 Annual Conference of the Administrative Sciences Association of Canada*, 27(10) (Management Education), 46-55.

Skipton, M.D. & Gupta, R.K. (2005). Knowledge Applicability versus Application: A Framework for Bringing Real-World Relevance to Management Education Programs. *Proceedings of the 2005 Annual Conference of the Administrative Sciences Association of Canada*, 26(10) (Management Education).

Skipton, M.D. & Cooper, T. (2008). Educating Players Instead of Teaching Spectators: Three Courses for Critical Thinking and Relevance in Undergraduate Business Programming. *Proceedings of the 2008 Annual Conference of the Administrative Sciences Association of Canada*, 29(10) (Management Education), 120-132.

Skipton, M.D. & Furey, M. (2008). Introduction to Business in Society: Course Design for a More Relevant First Course in a Business Program. *Proceedings of the 2008 Annual Conference of the Atlantic Schools of Business*.

Starkey, K. & Tempest, S. (2005). The future of the business school: Knowledge challenges and opportunities, *Human Relations*, 58(1), 61-82.

Summers, D., Boje, D., Dennehy, R., & Rosile, G. (1997). Deconstructing the organizational behavior text. *Journal of Management Education*, 21, (3), 343-360.

Wehrich, H. (1982). The Tows Matrix - a Tool for Situational Analysis. *Long Range Planning*, 15(2), 54-66.