

## Foreword

Management education is a booming business. More and more consultants are moving into this area, forcing business schools to defend their traditional territory. American schools are allying themselves with institutions in other parts of the world and setting up subsidiaries, joint ventures and strategic alliances to leverage their know-how. On the business side, the number of Corporate Universities - establishments dedicated to management development - is growing rapidly, even in Europe. In the “battle to win talent”, companies want to show that they provide their top executives with the best chances of success.

However, the picture is not all rosy. These days every expense has to prove its value added, and management education is no exception. But as this analysis shows, a more in-depth evaluation than the “happy-sheet” survey handed in at the end of a programme is difficult to compile. First one needs to ask the question, “Who is the evaluation for, e.g., the accounts department, HR, the participants or their superiors?” Another tricky question is, “Are you measuring HR indicators or programme learning goals?” It is not at all clear that learning goals, even for customised programmes, are tied to companies’ “normal” HR evaluation process (often in the form of a balanced scorecard) and the related incentive schemes (the reason for this would require a thesis on its own).

Furthermore, as this analysis has revealed, there are at least 12 different concepts of “how” to evaluate. But is it really worth the effort? Can’t we assume that grown managers can take care of their own education, take what they need and alert their HR people if their time has been wasted? And last but not least, how can the evaluation be worded in such a way that it is short and straightforward enough for busy managers to be bothered to answer, but still allows one to gather useful, relevant information?

But these are just the sorts of challenges that a business school relishes. One has to understand that measuring the benefits of management education is much more of a multi-dimensional exercise, and that the results are only the beginning of a meaningful dialogue between the stakeholders involved - HR, sponsors, accountants, participants, etc. - leading to a better alignment of development goals and delivery. This calls for a “balanced scorecard approach”, as described in this excellent contribution, and a process driver, who makes sure that the information thus acquired is acted upon. But all the difficulties explain why there is huge support for a better evaluation of management education in general but an obvious reluctance to tackle these difficulties head on and improve the evaluation system through

more experimentation and testing of new tools. This thesis demonstrates how this can be done in the framework of one of the most global, and hence complex, companies.

Has this research revealed any surprises? At a first glance, there are surprisingly few learning differences between the “tailor-made”, company-specific programmes and the open general management programmes. Two explanations are possible: first, business schools do not really “tailor” programmes, but just repackage them using “off-the-shelf” modules. There are clearly differences between business schools in this respect, often depending on their business model and size, but I doubt that this is the main reason. More plausible for me is the second interpretation, which is that managers selectively pick “nuggets” from whatever programme they are on, and “twist” the knowledge to fit their needs. After all, the basic process of management development remains the same, i.e., that programmes offer a platform (and time-out) to reflect and to conceptualise a rich, but often fragmented and intuitive, knowledge base. Equipped with a better understanding, based on frameworks and accepted experience about what works and what does not, participants emerge with their newly acquired knowledge, ready to face any challenge.

But this is as fundamental - and generic - as the notion that companies have more to earn than they spend. We need to know more about the specifics, which is why this thesis is an extremely useful basis for evaluation for every Corporate University or HR department.

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