

Business Education in the Modern Context

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Nowadays, there is no need to prove the importance of good education for people who want to build a career or run a business. The labor market is in urgent need of professionals who are able to take charge of performance and output. Are there any ways other than business school to improve staff proficiency and competence in a short time? For me, the answer is negative.

Firstly, a business school provides a unique opportunity to enhance personal expertise through communication with fellow students from other companies and with experienced tutors. Secondly, we have to admit that the present state of affairs is not going to change now. We will never go back to the past, when low quality management was neutralized by the lack of competition. Instability and uncertainty — even if we want to consider them features of the crisis period only — will remain standard and become even more widespread. So, waiting to get through this period, economizing on education, and hence on your own career, is out of question. You have to act here and now, even more so since any crisis is a great time for determined, purposeful and efficient people to seize extra opportunities.

Today you can expect your education to equip you with a certain assurance in the adequacy of your knowledge and skills regarding business and labor market requirements. The modern student does not want to study unless the benefits of the process are obvious. Neither employers nor employees are satisfied with the goals formulated by higher education institutions within the 300-year-old academic paradigm. The classic framework of the five-year “education in case” is gradually giving way to another one — the model of continuous professional learning.

To put it more precisely, I am not speaking about business education in general, but about cases when a business school is able to reach the level of goal-setting, which is different from the classic knowledge model and aimed at vital competences. And that, in turn, requires educational institutions to make a thorough and conscientious selection of ways and means of learning. Of course, learners should have an active wish to develop the competences that are

really useful in a business environment. It is an open secret that you can meet people among professoriates and students who are formal about learning objectives. The professors prefer ornate rhetoric while lecturing, while the students “consume” learning, not taking the trouble to do serious individual work. This is the differentiation pattern within the educational space: Some people are able to change, but others are not.

Modern business education has become personal and practice-orientated. The modern educational paradigm places students themselves at the center of the learning process, as the active subject of goal-setting: Students themselves define the curriculum logic and account for the outputs of the learning process. This means that the learning process should be directly connected to learners’ business performance and how they consider their work context or problems. For example, the case-based approach is the most popular one at business schools now. But however successful a case can be, it is nothing like situations that come up in real life. Learners will find it more important to deal with their own real-life problems and to build up their own development program. This will facilitate developing universal skills for working in a constantly changing environment, where mechanical copying of strange solutions is unlikely to succeed.

At the same time you have to distinguish between the processes of purposeful personal development and personal problem solving, although this borderline is rather diffused. Otherwise you could suggest that life itself is the ultimate teacher. Practice-orientated learning supposes targeted personal reflection and strategic goal awareness, taking into consideration the unity of social, business and educational factors. Moreover, the success of an educational institution rests on its ability to manage the context of the learning experience. Based on this ability, learners can receive benefits from the learning content, textbooks or courses.

Many employers and employees take professional skill training to be the ultimate learning goal. There is, without doubt, a kernel of good sense in this. But at the end of the day, only a thinking individual is able to make mature decisions, gaining knowledge from the future, not from the past. For instance, all football players can run fast and kick the ball, that is, they all have the necessary professional skills. But at the same time, some players win and some lose. A successful player is able to evaluate the real situation within the context of the whole field, make the right decisions, and as a result influence the game’s outcome. Coordinated team cooperation is another special issue. Business is like sport, only the rules are more complicated. The ability to see the only true way through the confusion, the capability to work in a team, intuition and the ability to act above-standard are all signs of high-class performance in business, too.

There is no need to distinguish between senior management and the rest of the staff on necessity of learning. It is absolutely evident that learning in an organization is a united process, aimed at achieving an extra competitive advantage, a concerted effort to achieve a leading position. It can often happen that line managers strive to get a business education, but their managers see no need for studying. This perception gap negatively influences the organization’s performance indicators. Today, the issue of executive qualification is as vital as it has ever been, and the cost of making uninformed decisions is too high.

Not every employer is immediately able to realize the value of an employee with a good

educational background, but they can see the difference by assessing workers' performance outcomes, their ability to benefit from both failures and achievements. One of the major challenges of modern business education is teaching people to learn from their own lives and manage their own development. By and large, this is a clear manifestation of professionalism, yet still scarce in the Russian labor market.

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