

## Educating Ourselves

On the role of professional development in business Schools

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# The trigger for institutional change

**B**usiness schools have been one of the success stories of higher education over the past 50 years, as Howard Thomas has noted, Singapore Management University, 2017. However, with hindsight, yesterday's business game was relatively easy to play.

What about business schools? How are they doing? How should the professional development of faculty and talents be managed to enable the necessary renewal of institutions that tend to resist change anyway? And, this in a situation where business schools are bound to be forerunners of change within higher education institutions: as Alec Cameron noted in 2017's *Times Higher Education* "... to understand how universities will evolve in the next decade ... look where business schools are today".

Business schools are associations of individuals who come together to create impact and give the world generations of socially responsible citizens. The business schools' leadership role is to encourage its academic community to develop personally and professionally in order to be able to make contributions to the development of society and the economy, both locally and globally.

Professional development enables changes to be supported and managed with a purpose. It is sensible to develop the strong points of each individual, focusing on those that are aligned with long-term institutional objectives – a process, that is beneficial to both individual and institution.

## The need for a systematic approach to professional development

Partaking in various institutional initiatives, sometimes driven by external pressures, helps to foster professional development of academic staff.

The roles different types of academic staff play within a contemporary accredited business school are becoming more defined, criteria of success are being set in a more objective (and challenging) manner, and a distinction is made between predominantly teaching-oriented and research-oriented faculty, with various administrative roles on top of teaching and research that require additional competences.

We need a more systematic approach to professional development of top management teams in our schools. Being aware that "the shoemaker's son always goes barefoot" we at the Faculty of Economics in Ljubljana (FELU), Slovenia, and the Corvinus Business School in Budapest (CBS), Hungary, need to stay on top of current issues.

These include generational differences between younger and elder faculty, equal opportunity and gender equality, deans' roles as multifunctional persons – managers and academics, the extreme demands of managing academic peers as *primus inter pares*. And, of course, management practice that develops rapidly.



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### On the role of professional development in business Schools

Attending EFMD leadership seminars proved to be valuable in this respect, especially as they combine knowledge with the inter-institutional network benefits. Members of our management teams traditionally participate in the EFMD leadership academies; in the case of FELU the new knowledge combined with peer-to-peer interaction in the Executive Academy was instrumental in achieving a satisfactory position in the *Financial Times* ranking.

After attending the Executive Academy, participants are expected to develop and implement capstone projects. At CBS, for example, one of these capstone projects focused on internationalisation, specifically how to attract more international students to a particular programme.

Using the extensive feedback from the capstone project supervisor, significant changes were implemented in communications that enhanced the visibility of the school in the international arena.

Results from attending these academies were clear; coming back, colleagues were “recharged”, empowered and enthusiastic, they learned how to balance teaching, research and management, and their work-life balance improved.

#### Taking the road of institutional change

In pushing ideas in order to build coalitions and create a critical mass of academic staff needed to implement changes, quality improvement and standardisation initiatives have proven to be an important driving force.

Our experience in Budapest and Ljubljana shows that changes related to expectations and goals trigger professional development initiatives by faculty members. These predominantly emerge from faculty members themselves.

Professional development workshops at academic conferences and events organised by accreditation bodies are a valuable resource not only for academic staff directly involved with accreditations but also for others participating in these events. Administrative staff also has to be a part of professional development initiatives.

For example, at CBS, administrative staff in managerial positions take part in training and workshops addressing organisational change and development. Faculty members are thus

able to develop their strengths according to their needs and desires.

#### Succession planning and talent management as two integrated processes

Succession planning involves identification of talented individuals, their development and proper placement. In terms of identifying talents, it means identifying faculty members or professionals talented in terms of teaching, research or administrative performance but also in potentially taking on managerial, organisational and leadership roles. A comprehensive assessment of not only individuals' performance but also competencies, in particular managerial or leadership ones, is thus needed.

In our business schools, the challenge of succession planning is augmented by the fact that deans and vice-deans are not appointed but elected by the academic community. Therefore, the aim of professional development is to advance competencies and confidence to pursue candidacy and to enable candidates for management positions to craft and communicate their vision of the schools' development.

Because previous experiences in administrative positions play an important role in assessing the credibility of candidates, at FELU, for example, we provide a range of possibilities for young faculty to engage in administrative roles. Recently, an approach of combining experienced seniors with junior faculty on various administrative bodies has worked very well. Also, senior faculty members take on co-ordinating roles for key projects in order to ensure transfer of knowledge and develop junior faculty as team leaders.

At CBS, young faculty members are regularly invited to take part or to lead some well-defined management projects. They are mandated to organise tailor-made corporate programmes, international conferences or to manage research units at the school. Their performance is evaluated by the senior management members of the executive team.





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### **The importance of pro-active leadership and succession planning**

In our efforts to accomplish our visions as leading national institutions, the external and internal governance is designed to ensure a smooth transition of schools' management teams. For example, the FELU dean election incorporates a transition period of four months, during which the incoming dean “shadows” the dean-in-office to get the necessary insight into the governance of the school.

Deans are also exposed to most recent business school leadership practice. Benefits from interinstitutional network at the annual EFMD deans conference are of crucial importance for a new dean, and also timing of the conference a few months after taking over the leadership of the school is favourable.

For example, in Ljubljana the management team changed in 2017. The dean was re-elected while vice-deans have changed. The change was intentional to assure knowledge transfer of the governance of the school and a smooth transition to the 2019-2021 management team. In this context, in the current 2017-19 term, former vice-deans are leading important strategic projects.

### **EFMD and professional development**

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In business schools, institutional change is only possible with leadership of top management who are able to follow trends in the global and local environments. School's executive team members themselves need to engage in different forms of professional development. Ultimately, schools are people and people change all the time. The main responsibility of the management teams is to responsibly drive institutions forward by stimulating creativity and enabling sustainable development solutions.



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