

Where is management education going?

Management education leaders ask themselves this question every day. **Dan LeClair** cuts through the complexity to offer some insights and guidance

"Describe the future of management education in 1,200 words or less."

Is this an exam question in some Clayton Christensen-esq seminar on disruptive innovation? Maybe.

What we do know is that it is a daily assignment for many leaders in our fast-changing industry. We are all trying to make sense of where management education is going, for the benefit of the organisations we lead and for the good of the world in which we live.

This article offers some insights and recommendations for management education leaders, including business school deans and directors, and the leaders of a wide range of organisations that make up a larger ecosystem—policy makers, accrediting bodies, ranking organisations, assessment companies and more.

We will need to simplify and sort through many complicating factors in order to accomplish this objective. So let's start with a few basic observations about management itself.

Three fundamental building blocks

"Management is pervasive"

Referencing Peter Drucker, Santiago Iniguez, president of IE University in Spain, wrote those words in his book *The Learning Curve*. The point is that management is not confined to the c-suite of multinationals or even just to business for that matter. It happens in all organisations, and organisations come in many different forms and sizes from start-ups to state-owned enterprises, franchises to family businesses and churches to internet giants.

There are, of course, differences across industries and sectors that must be accounted for. Similarly, managers represent different business functions (such as marketing, finance, operations), which require depth of understanding and application.

Much of management, however, transcends industries and functions as well as borders and generations. The tasks of "strategising", organising, planning, creating and getting things done with and through other people are not reserved for an elite corps. Nobody needs a licence to practise management.



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Management is hard to do

Of course the basic concepts of business and management are not incomprehensible. Most managers will attest, however, that *doing* management is significantly harder than understanding it. That is partly because of the complex, ever-changing environment and its inherent uncertainty.

But mostly it is because it involves getting things done through people—individuals who carry their own perspectives, judgments and aspirations. So-called people skills are needed not only to achieve team goals but also to foster learning, creativity and innovation in organisations.

Experts say that management is getting more challenging. Flatter organisations offer less formal authority. Rapidly changing technologies mean that experience does not guarantee competence. Rising expectations for social and environmental performance have brought in a wider range of stakeholders and variables to manage. All the while, boundaries in the competitive environment have been blurring, with new and unexpected disruptions from firms in seemingly unrelated industries becoming the norm.

Management matters for business and society

Management matters to organisational performance. According to research by academics Nicholas Bloom, John Van Reenen and others, manufacturing plants that adopted better, more structured management practices, for example, achieved stronger economic performances on a broad range of measures related to productivity, profitability, growth and innovation. The relationship is robust across industries and regions.

Better management practices are correlated not only with more efficient utilisation of resources but also supportive human resources practices—suggesting that economic progress does not have to be at the expense of inclusion. Indeed, there is a multiplier effect as better managers invest in developing their colleagues and processes to enable and guide them.



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In general, research has begun to connect the economic and social interests of business in new and remarkable ways. For example, it is estimated that commercial opportunities associated with Sustainable Development Goals will total \$12 trillion and that these gains will largely flow to early movers, first adopters and companies that create the “standards to beat”.

Three predictions about the future of management education

What do these building blocks tell us about where management education is going?

First and most obviously, enabled by advances in information technology, they suggest the *continuing democratisation of management education*. If management is pervasive and difficult to do and matters for organisational performance, then we cannot avoid concluding that management education will continue evolving to serve a broader range of learners.

This is especially true for “content”—the theories, concepts and techniques associated with management. It will be more accessible across socio-economic backgrounds, age demographics and political borders. As a consequence, economic power will continue its

migration from the purveyors of management content to its consumers.

But stopping there, which too many people do, would leave us with a gross oversimplification.

Our second prediction is that *management education will become more experiential*. While technology is enabling the democratisation of management education content, it is also upping the ante to deliver what is truly value added. This is especially valid for essential yet difficult-to-master management skills such as leadership, critical thinking, communication, problem formulation, empathy, learning agility and the like. These are skills that require constant practice, reflection and feedback.

In our experiential future, the value of education will depend less on time in the classroom and more on our ability to convert actions into insights. From experiences will come not only personal and professional transformations but also social capital, the kind that brings together different perspectives and is vital for creativity and innovation.

It is in the space between work and education—between working and learning—that we will increase value. That is where we will develop business leaders in the future. And that is where many business schools will thrive.

Success in the changing world of management education will not be guaranteed. Some schools will not adapt or move quickly enough. Just like other businesses, some will not employ the right talent—the only thing harder than practising management is teaching it. Some will not reinvent their programmes for a world in which management education is more fragmented and personalised, with learners following their own pathways and consuming education from a larger number and variety of providers, in smaller chunks attached to credentials that “stack” together in a multitude of ways.

Our third prediction is both less obvious and less certain. It is that *management education will become the driving force for positive change in business and society*. Because it will be more accessible, it will reach and impact more

potential leaders. Because it is more experiential, it will transform them in more meaningful ways. Because management matters to business performance and social welfare in multiplicative ways, its aggregate impact will be significantly amplified.

Working together, even a relatively small number of business schools and businesses can provide truly transformative leadership for society, profoundly impacting the future of business as well as management education.

Three recommendations for management education leaders

What insights and recommendations can be drawn from these broad predictions about where management education is going? Continuing our pattern, we offer three recommendations for business education leaders.

First, *embrace diversity in all its forms.*

Management learners of the future will represent a wider range of backgrounds and experiences. If they are expected to transform business we must work harder to be inclusive when providing relevant and meaningful experiences as well as access to general content.

It will be especially important to embrace learners across the full range of workplace generations. We are just beginning to build the infrastructure for lifelong learning, which holds great strategic potential for a variety of management education organisations.

Diversity also applies to organisations. Fresh ideas and new opportunities will be generated by engaging different types of organisations in our networks.

Opening up to truly innovative providers will accelerate innovation in our industry. Doing so will be difficult, as it means appreciating organisations for their potential impact and what they bring to transforming an industry rather than recognising them for excellence under current cultures and traditions, attitudes that are deeply embedded in academic circles.

Second, *build and leverage platforms that connect people, organisations and ideas.*

Connecting talent to new or better jobs will continue to be a critical success factor for business schools.

But the future will require more depth and credibility in demonstrating competencies, meaning that business schools will have to work harder to assure and communicate that specific learning objectives have been met. And they must attest to these outcomes with micro-credentials and digital portfolios so students can credibly signal their skills to prospective employers.

Similarly, schools must increasingly participate on a variety of platforms that are already rewiring the way labour markets work.

More and better platforms are needed across our industry. We need more platforms that connect scholars and students to business problems for experiential learning. We need platforms that bring together multiple disciplines or stakeholders to address societal challenges. We need better platforms connecting student and faculty-generated business ideas to funding.

Third, *provide leadership for the management education industry as well as your organisation.*

Ours will continue to be a competitive industry in which each provider has only a tiny slice of the total. Yet there are lots of moving parts and no single organisation can adapt or change dramatically without the others.

For schools, a single-minded focus on competing for students, faculty, donors, rankings and the like, will hinder or slow system-wide change. So at the same time that we must compete and lead change in our organisations, we must find ways to lead the industry and work together under a shared vision and purpose in order to accelerate adaptations for the good of society. Business school networks can play a special role in enabling this kind of leadership—if they are willing to accept the responsibility.

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About the Author

Dan LeClair is the CEO of the Global Business School Network, which exists to improve access to quality, locally relevant management and entrepreneurship education for the developing world