

Leading Ideas
by Henry Mintzberg and
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Reality Programming for MBAs

Practically speaking, it's time to rethink core concepts of management education.

The MBA, which was introduced almost a century ago, has become more B than A. Contemporary business education focuses on the functions of business more than the practice of managing. Although claiming to develop general managers, in reality, business schools train staff specialists.

This is not surprising. Education, from grade school on up, carves the world neatly into disciplines — mathematics, literature, history, physics, economics, etc. Each discipline has its own perspective — its own way of seeing the world, its own approach to defining and solving problems. Even in graduate school, education tends to focus on either a discipline (e.g., an MA in economics) or a collection of fields (e.g., an MBA based in finance, marketing, and operations). Curricula for so-called executive MBA programs, or educational programs for working managers, are organized in much the same fashion. Even many intensive advanced-management programs for mid-career executives, which last several

weeks, replicate the structure of full-time MBA programs.

Yet managing is not mastering a collection of discrete disciplines. It concerns leadership and integrating skills. In a very real sense, management is about life itself. When managers face problems, they face life in all its complexity. Above all else, management is a practice, where art, science, and craft meet. To be sure, managers need specialized knowledge. But more important, they need wisdom — the ability to weave together and make use of different kinds of knowledge.

Many large corporations have created their own corporate “universities,” which may bring management development closer to practice. But they do so at a price — the loss of deep insight that comes from management education in the academic setting, and the breadth that comes from comparing your experiences with those of participants from other companies.

Integrating Two Worlds

It is time to rethink core concepts of management education, including the creation of degree programs

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designed for practicing managers. In essence, we believe we should seek the benefits of marrying management development with management education. With this in mind, we created a most unusual partnership of business schools and business organizations from around the world. Now in its sixth year, the International Masters Program in Practicing Management (IMPM) admits only practicing managers sponsored by their companies.

The assumptions behind the IMPM include:

- Managers cannot be created in a classroom, but practicing managers can be further developed through classroom education.
- Managers should be sponsored by their organizations, and they should stay in their jobs while they do the program so that classroom activity can be linked to their experience on the job.
- Team experiences are a critical part of the process; managers should come to the program prepared to work in groups.
- Development of a well-rounded manager means moving beyond the analytical to emphasize both the reflective and the active aspects of managing.

Participating business schools include: the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore, in India; INSEAD, in Fontainebleau, France; the Lancaster University Management School, in Northern England; and the McGill University Faculty of Management, in Montréal, Canada. In Japan, collaborating faculty come from Hitotsubashi University, Kobe University, and the Japan Advanced Institute of Science and Technology.

Companies involved since the IMPM's beginning six years ago, as well as those that joined later, also span North America, Europe, and Asia. Matsushita and Fujitsu represent Japan; LG is from Korea. In India, the Bangalore program has attracted senior managers from a variety of small companies. The European companies (from the U.K., France, Switzerland, and Germany) include Lufthansa, Electricité de France/Gaz de France, BT Group, AstraZeneca, and Marconi, as well as the Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Alcan, the Royal Bank of Canada Financial Group, and Motorola have represented North America.

The ultimate test of the IMPM's success is the accomplish-

ments of its graduates. In this regard, evidence of the IMPM's impact is reflected in the support of the companies that have participated. Although companies have not been asked to commit beyond a single year of the program, most of the original ones have returned for all six years. We believe the IMPM constitutes a radical new approach to management education that could be widely adopted, particularly for part-time executive MBA programs, also known as EMBAs.

The Five Mind-sets

It is important to get past the framework that dominates management education today — the functions of finance, human resources, marketing, and even strategy, taught as something apart from managing. A few business programs have tried to create a new structure around such topical themes as globalization and supply chain management. But current topics come and go; moreover, they tend to be narrow. Reform of management education needs to go deeper; it has to allow for critical insight into the underlying causes of business issues. The *objective* world outside must merge with the *perceived* world inside.

The nature of managerial work — not the functions worked on — should provide the foundation of management education. For starters, everything that effective managers do is sandwiched between *reflection* and *action*. In other words, managers work where reflective thinking meets practical action. This interaction is clearly visible on three levels. A first level concerns people and their interpersonal relationships, where the orientation often has to be collaborative. A second is that of the organization, where we find the greatest attention to analysis. The third is context, encompassing the world around the organization. Although managers may need to understand global issues, they themselves need to become more worldly.

In designing the IMPM to reflect these ideas, we created five two-week modules, each focusing on one of the five mind-sets — not exclusively, but essentially. Together they address the practice of managing in a holistic way. The program begins in Lancaster with *Managing Self*, the reflective mind-set, and ends at INSEAD, 16 months later, with *Managing Change*, the action mind-set. In between are the modules *Managing Organizations*, the analytic mind-set (in Montréal); *Managing Context*, the worldly mind-set (in Bangalore); and *Man-*

aging Relationships, the collaborative mind-set (in Japan).

Learning from Experience

Covering the five different mind-sets is one thing; understanding their essence, and bringing them to life in a classroom, is quite another. In approaching each module, we wanted to bring to life in the classroom the experience of managing change and collaboration, not just talk about it. We created an integrated framework for instruction around these mind-sets so that participants would return to their companies with a deeper understanding of themselves and their work.

- **Managing Self** is grounded in the belief that some insights and capabilities can come only through self-knowledge. Managers need to step back from daily pressures to focus on themselves and their world — to get a better feel for what it takes (and what it costs them) to be a manager. The classroom for *Managing Self* starts outdoors, with activities that allow individuals to get to know each other. Discussions may probe many areas — managerial and personal styles, ethics and spirituality, the meaning of work. When different cultures meet in a relaxed, safe atmosphere, the learning can be remarkable.

- **Managing Organizations** begins with workshops that contrast

scientific and artistic approaches to management. Then we consider the functions of marketing, accounting, finance, operations, and information technology. This is as close as the IMPM gets to traditional MBA subject matter. Our concern is for participants to develop a deeper appreciation of management functions. We do this by allowing them to talk to one another in an open forum about anything related to, say, marketing or operations, rather than being taught by a lecturer.

- **Managing Context**, which is held in India, does not seek to impose a global perspective, but to have people appreciate their differences. This module is designed on the assumption that being exposed to other people's worlds brings insight into one's own world. They spend their two weeks exploring the context of organizations from many perspectives — financial markets, consumer behavior, stakeholder relationships, and networking skills, as well as culture in general and, in particular, in developing countries.

- **Managing Relationships** explores various dimensions of collaboration: among individuals in teams, among divisions in organizations, and among organizations in alliances. The group considers alternative models of human behavior as well as the role of trust and group cooperation in companies. To get beyond American-style managing (which is often labeled as “global”), the collaborative mind-set module includes discussion about the Japanese style of management.

- **Managing Change** focuses on four themes: corporate change (more macro, top down), organic change (more micro, bottom up), societal change, and personal change. Again, the program is

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designed for experiential learning — about organization leadership and personal agendas for change. IMPM participants are given the opportunity to apply what they have learned by visiting and studying companies in the program to observe different change processes and deal with real challenges.

There are three popular pedagogies in management education: lectures and “are there any questions?”; case-study discussions; and action learning (e.g., projects, field-work). The first serves only as a beginning. The second certainly brings experience to the classroom, but it’s second-hand experience, not the participants’ experience. The third, action learning, is constructive as long as the action is real and there is reflection commensurate with the action.

We encourage a fourth approach: *experienced reflection*. The faculty introduces concepts, and the managers bring their experience; learning, and thoughtful reflection, occur where the two meet. The classroom space, which is a collection of round tables, encourages this group reflection. The place of the faculty is to facilitate, not instruct.

We have also experimented successfully with managerial exchanges. One popular IMPM activity pairs participants from different regions and sends each person to his or her partner’s company. It is “not just a visit,” says one participant, “but a mirror that lets you see yourself.” Working in a common classroom of people from around the world is one kind of experience; leaving your banking office in Toronto to enter the high-tech world of Osaka is quite another.

As these new ideas in management education have taken root,

they have become a template for others. McGill, one of the IMPM’s founding business schools, is offering a program for the volunteer sector in Canada using a variation of the IMPM model. Current participants include senior managers from organizations such as Amnesty International and the YMCA. A health-care version of the IMPM program, also under development at McGill, will be offered to senior managers across the sector from around the world. A three-and-a-half-day program called Analysis to Action, modeled after the Managing Organizations module, has run through six cycles for the Royal Bank of Canada Financial Group.

The Lancaster University Management School, another IMPM school, has used the five mind-sets to create an MBA program for the high-potential managers of Bass, the leisure and brewing company that owns the Holiday Inn hotel chain. Lancaster has also sponsored a “Strategic Leaders” program customized for the top management of BAE Systems. The success of the managerial exchanges has also prompted the establishment of lead2lead.net, which is applying the techniques from the IMPM to both individual exchanges for top managers and post-merger integration of multinational firms.

Building on its original model, the IMPM is embarking on new initiatives; the Advanced Leadership Program (ALP), for example, is for senior management teams, rather than individuals. Teams are asked to bring a key issue with which their company is grappling, which they discuss with four to five teams from other companies. This gives the sponsoring companies the benefit of analysis and advice from external

sources and education for their executives at the same time. ALP is divided into three modules that take place over six months in England, India, and Canada.

From Learners to Teachers

Organizations generally send their people to management development programs with the expectation of getting back better managers. This does not go far enough. Management education that truly melds management development with management education must change not just individuals, but the sponsoring organizations themselves by virtue of what takes place in the program. The concerted effort (on both the faculty and the company side) to transfer the learning from the participants to their companies strongly distinguishes the IMPM from traditional executive development programs.

An even more powerful, though more subtle, benefit is how the learners from the IMPM program become teachers when they return to their place of work. Since all managers have to be teachers, this is perhaps the logical and ultimate extension of management education. +