

Chapter 35

How Business School Research Values Shape the Student Experience

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines how the values of UK business school academics interact with the values of the students they teach. The chapter proposes that the dominance of research as the basis for academic progression, particularly in the top business schools, contributes to an environment where academics are challenged to conform to norms of ethical behaviour. These, and other environmental pressures such as the ratings and rankings merry-go-round, and major corporate failures such as Enron and Lehman Brothers, shape the academic value system and impact on the way that staff design and deliver their teaching. Conversely business school students also bring their values containing dysfunctional aspects, such as the increasing troubles associated with plagiarism. In particular the chapter draws on the case of the MBA, a business school's flagship programme to examine how the value systems of these two groups, academics and students, interact. The essence of this chapter is to investigate this interaction by integrating theory, secondary data and the author's reflections. The particular focus is on how staff research priorities shape and interact with the student experience in business schools.

INTRODUCTION

Business schools, in common with business, are under pressure on ethics. The financial crisis which caused the recent global recession added to a number of high profile cases which have shown business management to be wanting, e.g. Enron. Some commentators have taken business schools to task by laying partial blame for the credit

crunch at the door of business schools. They join the critics who claim that schools do not teach the “right” things and therefore do not produce managers with the “right” values (Mintzberg, 2004; Thomas, 2007). Business schools have responded by emphasising even more the teaching of business ethics and by striving further to inculcate ethical attitudes and behaviour in their students. However, various factors attenuate such

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efforts to develop business ethics including the pre-existing values of staff and students - which are the focus of this chapter. In essence the choice made in this chapter is to concentrate on aspects germane to business-school ethics rather than focus directly on business ethics. In so doing the status-seeking behaviours of staff and students are recognised as key driving forces that shape values and attitudes of both groups; with the potential to subvert integrity within business schools.

In particular the perennial academic issue of balancing the twin missions of teaching and research is highlighted; in essence these two missions can be seen as mapping respectively to the key interests of students and staff. Despite this issue's longevity, the upsurge in such as government-instigated measurement systems and the publication of rankings for universities and constituent departments has accentuated the need for universities and individual schools to achieve both missions. Business schools are not immune from these pressures; indeed business schools may be more susceptible to the ratings and rankings "merry-go-round" than other parts of academia. As Becher and Trowler (2010 p. 23) indicate different parts of academia have different cultures, i.e. "taken-for-granted values, attitudes and ways of behaving".

What seems clear is that the balance in previously mixed-mission organisations has tipped toward research as the dominant factor (Harmon, 2006) flowing from this pursuit of status. Staff value systems are distorted by this prioritisation of research and rub up against student value systems which are also deformed in their own way. For example, students nowadays are held to increasingly display an instrumental view of learning, a characteristic that some would argue is more prevalent in business students. The increasing prevalence of plagiarism or bad academic practice fuelled by the growth in the internet illustrates this trend. However, what is also evident is the growing importance of status in student views; a

growth that no doubt is linked to the increasing influence of celebrities on popular culture.

Naturally, the value systems of these two groups, academics and students, interact. The methodological approach in this chapter is to investigate this interaction by integrating theory, secondary data and the author's reflections. Underpinning the approach is a theoretical stance informed by that of Bourdieu (1990); an approach that reflects "his interest in struggles and competition over status" (Jenkins, 2007 p. 129). Other academics have also drawn attention to how an academic's work is distorted by the pursuit of status (e.g. Harmon, 2006; Rhode, 2006). The chapter focuses on how staff values, particularly those related to research, shape and interact with student values and experience in business schools. Some parallels can be drawn with Bourdieu in his work on academics (*Homo Academicus* - Bourdieu, 1990) and on students (*The inheritors* - Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979).

First the concept of a business school is elaborated and then the general factors that shape the values of such institutions are outlined. A more focused look is then undertaken of what shapes the values of individual academics in business schools and what this set of values might be. A similar approach is then applied to business school students. Finally the interaction of these two groups is examined and a final conclusion made.

WHAT IS A BUSINESS SCHOOL?

This chapter focuses on UK business and management university-level education and, in particular, on business schools; although the term business school is used broadly here to encompass similar entities such as those schools that style themselves "management" schools. In the UK a business school can be defined as "a university-level institution that confers degrees in business administration" (Wikipedia, 2011); however a

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