

Chapter 67

Teaching Methods and Syllabus Design in Business Strategy Courses

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ABSTRACT

The chapter focuses on a problem that business schools all over the world face and which is connected with the necessity to include concepts and instruments of strategic management valuable for the managers into the syllabi of the courses. It is necessary to define the requirements and expectations of the managers for the syllabus development and methods of studying. The purpose of the study is to determine the existing conformity of strategic management course syllabus and the Russian managers' perceptions of sources of competitive advantage. During the empirical study, a survey of the students of the EMBA program has been conducted. The results of the analysis indicate that managers link the sources of competitive advantage with better position of the company in the external environment that leads to greater interest in learning strategic tools which are appropriate for its detecting. The findings raise serious challenges for strategic management teaching and put into question the usefulness of proactive development of competences in strategic management education.

INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to overestimate the role and place of business education in contemporary society. By promoting the development of management expertise, modification of behavioral patterns of current and future business leaders, it should ideally foster both improved competitiveness of individual companies and the stable growth of the national economy (Baden & Higgs, 2015; Mabey et al., 2015; Anderson et al., 2018; Jung & Shin, 2018). The business education systems as a whole, as well as its key players (the business schools) have been severely criticized in last decades. This is particularly reflected in the active discussions in the leading global academic management journals regarding the current situation and the need for significant changes.

Business schools faced the criticism by various stakeholders even at earlier development stages of business education. The directions of this criticism were changing over time. So, if in the 1950s, the American business education system, undoubtedly the world's most advanced one, was primarily criticized for the lack of a serious scientific base; then closer to the end of the 20th century, the other aspects of business school were criticized significantly. The fragmentation of educational courses and scientific researches related to the rise in the level of tasks specialization and positions in the economy and the development of a greater number of specialized courses with their clearly insufficient coordination level was observed. The excessive emphasis on teaching methods for solving specific problems to the detriment of developing the capability for identifying them was also criticized. The focus on solutions and actions supporting short-term asset income, weak consideration in the course content for the political, legal, economic, technological and sociocultural specifics of different countries, and more were also challenged. The focus in the business school studies more on theory and concept development than on solving practical management problems was noted repeatedly (see, e.g.: (Mintzberg, 2004; Pfeffer, Fong, 2002; Gurau, 2015; Harrington, Short, & Hynes, 2015). Some authors went even further in their criticism: S. Ghoshal believes that many of the worst recent examples of management practice (the Enron affair, etc.) are rooted in ideas developed by business school representatives during the past 30 years (Ghoshal, 2005).

The conclusion that the current situation is paradoxical appears logical in this light. On the one hand, the business schools are asked to use the educational programs and skills improvement in management and conduction of scientific research to promote the spread in the business environment of the concepts and tools capable of raising business competitiveness. On the other hand, the impact of the business schools on real management practice is weakening, while private universities, training and consulting companies, and online educational courses are competing with them more in this sphere. Based on the analysis of the best business rating books (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002), due to the scenario of *Business Week* magazine and the national business bestsellers list, it was concluded that business schools are not the primary source of the publications directly affecting the development of management thinking and practice. The authors cite the famous work (Rigby, 2001), containing management ideas and tools applied by business and consulting representatives largely correspond to the needs of practitioners, and are used more often and deviate less often¹ compared to those developed in the business schools.

Such criticism and the resulting conclusions of the need for serious changes in business school operations (for example, the promotion of management knowledge co-creation with business representatives) increased an interest in evaluating the demand in practice of different management concepts and tools and its reflection in the academic course syllabus and teaching technologies (Porter & McKibbin,

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