

Creativity and Innovation as Subjects in Management Curricula: A Rationale for Inclusion, with Examples from Schools

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Abstract

If the mission and curricula of schools of business are to be congruent with the actual needs of society at large and if such schools are to be able to provide graduates with the knowledge and skills sought by business organizations, then relevant courses and other learning opportunities should be offered by business schools on the topics of creative thinking and the facilitation of innovation. The present study offers a rationale for the expansion of the coverage of creativity and innovation as academic topics in business schools. It also offers, under four categories, actual current examples of such coverage: (1) stand-alone courses; (2) specialized faculty appointments (3) the inclusion of creativity/innovation course content within otherwise “standard” business courses; and (4) extra-curricular opportunities. The study concludes with a potential fifth category, an as-yet-unrealized opportunity.

Introduction

It is rare to find an expressed opinion of a political leader that will probably be accepted by virtually all other politicians, as well as by all business leaders, but here is one such opinion: “The future of our economy relies on the imagination of entrepreneurs”, as stated by President Obama in his 2009 Inaugural Address. Business magazines call creativity/innovation the “new currency of business” or “the “competitive edge”, etc. It is doubtful that any seasoned business leader would contest the assertion that creativity, the driver of innovation, is one of the most vital abilities for employees and for business leaders. Several major business magazines publish cover issues annually that focus on the most innovative companies, and they also frequently feature articles about the world’s most creative organizations and/or imaginative leaders (e.g., *Fortune*, *Business Week*, *Inc.*, etc.).

Over twenty years ago, Peter Drucker emphasized that “. . . the time has now come to do for entrepreneurship and innovation what we first did for management in general some thirty years ago: to develop the principles, the practice and the discipline”.¹ Side by side with traditional business subjects and such timely topics as global thinking, ethics and information technology, we should consider acknowledging innovation and creativity (the driver of innovation) as seminal topics in management education.

But there are virtually no business professors with a doctorate in creativity. In fact, it is rare that such a degree can even be obtained. “Creativity” is not a traditional or established

academic discipline, nor is “Innovation”, as such. Unless a school’s faculty are highly trained in the field of creativity and skilled in mentoring imagination and in teaching creativity, it is unlikely that business students will receive guidance and information to assist them in applying creativity to solve business problems and to enhance corporate profit by producing innovation in products or services for customers, as well as originating innovative processes within the organization. In their hiring practices, business schools should consider identifying and appointing more faculty members who have marched to the beat of exceptionally creative/innovative drummers.

There are at least four practices by which business schools can enhance the study of creativity and innovation, and all of these have actually been implemented, though in isolated instances. There is also a fifth practice on the horizon. With regard to vocabulary, for the purpose of this study, creativity is defined as “The stimulation of imagination towards producing innovation” and innovation as “Applications of creativity towards the development, the production and the realization of unique products, or services or in-company processes”.

I. Stand-Alone Courses in Creativity/Innovation

One solution to this challenge is to deliver, within extant business schools, entire courses that are entirely devoted to assist students in the development and application of personal creativity and in the acquisition of the knowledge and skills needed to produce innovations within business organizations. Such courses do exist.

A . Drucker School of Management at Claremont Graduate University

A distinguished psychologist , an expert in the field of cognition and a distinguished author (e.g., *Flow* and *Creativity*), Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi was invited to the Drucker School at Claremont to develop and to teach “Creativity and Innovation”, an MBA course. He remains at Claremont as Professor of Psychology and Management.²

B. Harvard Business School

Teresa M. Amabile, a social psychologist who has conducted research in team creativity and organization innovation, teaches MBA elective courses at Harvard, including “Managing for Creativity” and “Field Study Seminar in Managing for Creativity”.³

C. Graziadio School at Pepperdine University

The present author co-developed and has taught for over a decade a graduate-level four-unit course entitled “Creativity and Innovation for Leadership”. The course has now become a required course in a Master of Science in Management and Leadership degree program at the Graziadio School of Business and Management at Pepperdine University and is also an elective course in the “Leadership and Managing Organizational Change” emphasis track in the Fully-Employed MBA program at the same school. The subject has also been taught as a two-unit course in an undergraduate Bachelor of Science in Management degree program. Several heuristics are developed in the course, including: ask naïve questions; consider the opposite; link the previously unlinked; if at first you don’t succeed, surrender; and postpone the voice of judgment. Students are asked to solve puzzles that require supra-rational thinking processes and to present reports on creative leaders or innovative organizations. They also are required to write a “Self-Description Project” in which they analyze their own personal creativity and also to write a “My Company’s Innovation” report as well.

D. Stanford University

The Graduate School of Business at Stanford University has offered a course in “Personal Creativity in Business”, which is “designed to open participants to the creativity within themselves so that each participant’s business life can be a ‘work of art’”. This course at Stanford has had a number of creative entrepreneurs appear to tell how they founded and have operated their ventures. The course is somewhat adventurous in that it includes such optional non-standard practices (for typical business schools) as drawing mandalas, practicing yoga or Aikido and experimenting with Tarot Cards and the I Ching.⁴

II. Distinctive Professorial Appointments

By establishing such posts, business schools can lend visibility, prominence and perhaps a sort of “academic legitimacy” to the field. Alongside faculty appointments in Finance, Accounting and Economics, schools might consider appointing a “Professor of Applied Imagination” as well as a “Professor of Organizational Innovation”.

A. Manchester Business School at the University of Manchester

Tudor Rikards is the Professor of Creativity and Organizational Change at Manchester. Dr. Rikards is a distinguished author in the field of linking applied creativity to corporate cultures.⁵

B. McMaster University

Min Basadur is the Professor of Innovation at the DeGroote School of Business at McMaster. Dr. Basadur brings an applied background to the field, having consulted for such companies as Proctor & Gamble, Goodrich and Frito-Lay.⁶

III. Creativity/Innovation in “Standard” or “Traditional” MBA Courses

Creativity and innovation can become the source for substantive content and course activities, both at the graduate and undergraduate levels, within virtually all standard business school academic disciplines, including Strategy, Accounting, Management, Organizational Behavior, Marketing, and Entrepreneurship. Business schools might consider including this in faculty performance reviews, giving credit to colleagues who include creativity/innovation in their courses, on a par with the inclusion of other “universal” business-related topics, such as global awareness, business ethics and applications of information technology.

A. Guest Speakers

In a course in Behavior in Organizations, the founder and CEO of The Phelps Group, an integrated marketing communications agency, appeared as a guest resource at the Graziadio School at Pepperdine, instructing the class on how he organized his company around “self-directing, client-centered teams”. He described various innovative in-company process that he has trade-marked, including “The Wall”™ in which employees post their “initial creative thinking” on an actual wall in the company premises so that other employees may offer feedback.⁷

B. Business Simulations

For a second-year management accounting course, a simulation was designed to give students an opportunity, as well as a stimulus, to produce creative solutions. The assessment

criteria allowed for the inclusion of “creative responses”. Additionally, students self-rated their own personal creativity.⁸

C. Courses in Entrepreneurship

As part of an Entrepreneurship major for a Bachelor of Commerce degree at the University of Tasmania, Creativity and Innovation skills are included among the personal development objectives, and a one-unit Entrepreneurship and Creativity was developed that includes the evaluation and implementation for creative ideas, with the acknowledgement that the course would not attempt to teach creativity, in a traditional sense, but rather to help students to develop whatever inherent creativity they brought to the course.⁹

IV. Extra-Curricular Activities

A. Contests

Purdue University hosts an annual “National Rube Goldberg Machine Contest”, for which creativity is a principal criterion. Contestants invent complicated machines to perform simple tasks, as modeled by a noted cartoonist, Rube Goldberg. The first-place prize winner at the 11th annual competition involved fifty-four mechanical, electrical and fluid steps to tee up a golf ball.

B. Designated Conferences

At a November 16-20, 2009 event presented by its Center for Entrepreneurship, Carnegie Mellon featured a panel discussion on “Innovation in an Academic Setting”. The director of the Center announced that “Between 10 and 15 businesses are launched out of Carnegie Mellon each year, nearly half started entirely by students”.¹⁰

C. Student Internships

Some MBA programs feature student internships in which business students work in business positions for a stated period of time. Assigning students to companies noted for creativity and/or innovation can be a vital developmental feature for students.

D. Institutes

Within the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto, the Martin Prosperity Institute think-tank explores the role of sub-national factors in global economic prosperity. In its integrated perspective, it looks beyond economic measures per se to include the significance of the development of creative potential in individuals. Linking this institute feature with the subject of Section II, above, “Distinctive Professorial Appointments”, the Director of this institute teaches at Rotman and holds the title of Professor of Business and Creativity.¹¹

V. Potential: Create a Business School Noted for Creativity/Innovation

The results of word-association tests with academically-savvy colleagues can often be quite predictable. If asked which business school comes to mind when “International Business” or “Global” are presented, “Thunderbird” is a likely response. Conversely, if the name of the school “Thunderbird” is uttered, respondents will usually respond with “Global” or “International business”. If asked which business school immediately comes to mind as associated with “Finance”, many will say, “Wharton”. If “Case study,” is presented, Harvard, Ivy or Darden will be among the likely responses. Ironically, on the other hand, if the terms,

“Innovation” or “Creativity” are presented, and an immediate response with the name of a business school is called for, silence and a blank stare will probably ensue, even though these topics are so vital and essential for progress in business. Perhaps a foundation or a billionaire will create and endow a business school primarily noted for the study of Creativity and Innovation or support and rename an extant school that’s willing to re-orient itself accordingly and emphasize the four entities discussed earlier in this paper to produce alumni noted for the expertise and effectiveness they developed in their business school major: “The Management of Creativity and Innovation in Organizations”.

Footnotes

¹ Drucker, Peter F., *Innovation and Entrepreneurship*, Harper & Row, 1985, p. 17.

² <http://www.cgu.edu/pages/4751.asp>

³ <http://drfd.hbs.edu/fit/public/facultyInfo.do?facInfo=bio&facEmId=tamabile>

⁴ Syllabus, Personal Creativity in Business, Course Number B.341, Graduate School of Business, Stanford University

⁵ <http://www.manchester.ac.uk/research/mbs/Tudor.rickards/>

⁶ <http://www.basadur.com/company/min.htm>

⁷ Phelps, Joe, *Pyramids Are Tombs*, 2002, IMC Publishing, p. 132

⁸ Wynder, Monte, Facilitating Creativity in Management Accounting: A Computerized Business Simulation, *Accounting Education*, 13 (2004), p. 231

⁹ Jones, Colin and Jack English, A Contemporary Approach to Entrepreneurship Education, *Education + Training*, 46 (2004), Pages 416-423

¹⁰ <http://thetartan.org/2009/11/23/news/entrepreneur>

¹¹ <http://martinprosperity.org/about-the-institute>, <http://newsdurhamregion.com/140253>