

Rethinking the MBA: Business Education at a Crossroads,
Srikanth M Datar, David A Garvin and Patrick G Cullen,
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Reviewed by

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The business education is at a crossroads. The scheme of studies, pedagogy, application of knowledge acquired to problem solving and the enrollment numbers are on decline. The student engagement is declining. The faculty does not show the desired motivation and inclination to add to the existing literature on business education. The number of institutions offering courses is increasing. The book under reference deals precisely with this contradiction by presenting a new approach to business education through 'Rethinking the MBA'. The book dissects the MBA curriculum and finds it not in tune with the current needs of the users and details the factors for bringing about 'revolutionary changes' in the curriculum. The authors refer to the Saloner Committee Report which recommended a curriculum overhaul with several new features. A prominent feature suggested for inclusion was a set of 'management perspectives' dealing with incorporation of cutting-edge practices in industry in the contents of the taught courses. The other courses suggested relate to critical analytical thinking, the global context of management, managing groups and teams and strategic leadership. Synthesis seminar, deep and tailored professional and personal development courses were suggested to replace the outmoded courses.

The 'Two Cultures' problem of university based business schools and specialized business institutes has been analyzed in-depth by the authors. Based on a global perspective, authors observe that both the models have worked successfully in different settings. However, a combination of both has given better results all over the world. The universities setting up institutes for promoting business education have derived benefits of autonomy as well as control. This has infused an element of liberal business education which holds superiority over narrow business education perspective. The authors highlight another dimension of the 'Two Cultures' problem i.e. conflict between teaching and research. Those who teach take a peripheral interest in research and *vice-versa*. In the opinions of the authors, business schools that have become great are schools where a golden mean has been struck between teaching and research.

The authors argue for the need of rebalancing the business management courses. Their findings point out excessive stress on the 'knowing component' in business education. They suggest the need for rebalancing. This could come from mixing in right proportions the 'doing component' and 'being component'. The doing component should build up on the skills, capabilities, and techniques that lie at the heart of the practice of management.

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The being component should create a room for the values, attitudes, and beliefs that form managers' world views and professional identities. The business education should provide for opportunities to address unmet needs of knowing and understanding the limits of markets and models and developing thinking skills: critical thinking, integrative thinking. On the doing score, it should pave the way for creative and innovative thinking, problem finding and framing. It is common knowledge that managers are characterized by lack of understanding of organizational realities. On 'being' side, the business education should promote greater attention to personal development, role and responsibility of business in society and understanding how to motivate and connect with the full range of people in an organization. Without 'doing' skills, 'knowing' is of little value, but 'doing' skills will be ineffective and direction-less without the self-awareness and reflection on values and beliefs that come from developing 'being'. The research by authors concludes that thinking critically and communicating clearly should form the essence of business education. This requires developing and articulating logical, coherent, and persuasive arguments, marshalling supporting evidence and distinguishing fact from opinion.

Gaining a global perspective has become an integral part of business education. This could be taught through identifying, analyzing, and practicing how best to manage when faced with economic, institutional, and cultural differences across countries, understanding how theories and frameworks should be adapted in a global context, understanding the management styles of different regions and developing deeper cultural awareness.

The book is based on the research carried out in business schools in developed part of the world and does not therefore capture in full the problems of business education in the developing countries. It is also largely based on secondary data. The interaction with captains of industry is a missing element.

However, all told, the book makes an interesting addition to the existing literature on business education. The Harvard Business School is a trend setter in management education. Dr Srikant M Datar is the current Dean of the Harvard Business School. The authors have undertaken a painstaking job of studying 31 top European MBA Programmes and 17 Master Degree Programmes of leading US Business Schools. The conclusions and the recommendations of the present study are of vital import to the business schools all over the world.