

Business schools in Jesuit education

FOUR REFLECTIONS

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One fundamental question facing the Jesuit universities of each period is the following: How can Jesuit education today integrate religious and human values into an effective service in and for the world?

There is a solid basis for arguing that the academic disciplines of business administration have a decisive part to play in contemporary societies.

PROLOGUE: THE JESUIT EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The schools founded by Ignatius of Loyola in the 16th century serve a clear purpose: to train leaders to carry out in their personal and professional lives a mission of service to others.

Ignatius wrote to a companion: “The Society hopes, through its ministry of education, to pour into the social order a sufficient number of capable leaders to effectively impel it towards good” (George Ganss, *The Jesuit Educational Tradition and St. Louis University*, p. 21). Independently of any historical, economic, cultural or geographical difference, the Jesuit higher education of today must seek its distinctive nature in these roots.

At present, the business department or business school of a Jesuit institute or university faces a dramatic challenge.

One in four students at Jesuit institutions specialises in business administration. An even greater number will be employed in enterprises. Our task is to provide these business science students with a profoundly humanising learning experience, the necessary skills for an outstanding professional performance, and above all a commitment to exercise power at the service of others.

Only then can we expect our graduates to give impetus to social order with competence, compassion, open-mindedness and a deep understanding and decision-making capacity.

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1. THE CENTRALITY OF BUSINESS AND SERVICE INSTITUTIONS

In the modern world, enterprises and other organisations are notably expected to help to meet a wide range of human needs by providing the goods and services on which our welfare depends.

Today a connection can be found between the emphasis Jesuit education traditionally places on service to humankind and the role of business institutions. Jesuit education is a decisive instrument in the development of leaders of the economic and social organisations that make up societies.

Administration of resources

In market economies, enterprise produces most of the vital goods and services that not only meet basic needs but also supply many of the advanced artefacts of modern life. In a world of shortage, business leaders share the administration of economic resources.

Regardless of the economic system (whether capitalist or socialist), all societies benefit from efficient and effective resource management. This administrative efficacy has a direct effect on the overall quality of life, and therefore influences the quality of life of a society.

Human services

Sectors such as social services or healthcare also put an increasing focus on efficiency. Hence the rise in management of human services and health systems. As services represent an ever larger part of the economies of advanced societies, the administration of health, educational and social services becomes a new and important centre of attention for business schools.

Business schools are, in fact, schools of management, not just schools of business administration. Students who join institutions related to the arts or health sciences, or non-profit entities, need a basic understanding of economic order, complex organisations, financial strategies and human resources management.

Nowadays, “business” schools are the repository of knowledge on administrative skills that are important for all sectors, including non-profit organisations. In this way, while the rest of the university enriches the business school, the latter can provide a service for students by preparing them for leadership in social institutions other than enterprise.

A particular challenge for Jesuit business schools is to provide their understanding and knowledge to those students on other programmes on campus without artificial barriers, enabling students from all fields to benefit from contemporary knowledge on administration sciences.

Cultural grants

In addition to preparing individuals to participate in administrative duties, a lively economy also creates a “surplus” to support education, arts and other cultural activities, either directly through individual and corporate grants or indirectly through taxes. In this way, the efficiency of enterprise bears a close relationship with other social initiatives. Business administrators often also provide non-profit organisations with a key competency by rendering service in boards of directors and in consultancy and pro bono roles.

A moral challenge

To sum up, societies that provide goods and services efficiently and effectively can create a social order that benefits and raises the quality of life of each citizen.

It is also true that without leadership ability, which is sensitive to justice and service, an unfair social order (e.g., exploitation of consumers, ruthless manipulation of prices, inefficiency, waste and labour exploitation) can destroy the social value of the business sector and alienate the workers.

The challenge, then, is of a moral nature. Enterprise can be good or bad. However, as a social institution it cannot be ignored or indeed treated as just an “economic powerhouse” that does not choose values.

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2. SERVICE THROUGH EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

Man’s lot is to work. In an agrarian society, the farmer worked the land or reaped the rewards of the sea. By doing so, men and women could see the relationship that existed between their efforts and the provision of welfare to their immediate family and the creation of a surplus for others.

In modern society, the surplus is created mostly by complex organisations and through increasingly specialised roles. However, labour must preserve its connotation of service.

A graduate from a Jesuit institution must understand the dignity of labour and the fact that modern methods and technology can still imply service to humanity. Instead of offering a glass of water, the student must understand that building a dam or a water tank, or manufacturing a pump, is another way to “give drink to the thirsty.”

The business curriculum at a Jesuit institution should accentuate students’ sensitivity to the relationship between commercial activity and service. It should also guarantee that the company is humane in its dealings with employees and customers.

Complex organisation and alienation

A graduate from a Jesuit school must also be an agent of change. Future leaders must understand the complicated process of change in a large system, in order to transform those systems towards more effective service for people.

When students are prepared to cope with the complex process of organisational change they can facilitate reorientation and reform through sophisticated strategies that are capable of achieving success. If they are not prepared, they will be disappointed by naive initiatives and ultimately doomed to fail, and to swell the ranks of the alienated.

In order to participate effectively in the configuration of strategic organisational options, the future leader must possess the analytical and professional skills in financial management, marketing and similar disciplines that provide access to key decision making.

Students who have received Jesuit training must have both the professional wherewithal and the long-term vision needed to keep up the energy to head complex organisational initiatives aimed at attaining more noble goals for long periods of time. Furthermore, when necessary, students must understand how to manage in order to “start up” new companies and value an enterprising attitude as a form of innovation.

This leadership capacity requires an intellectual grasp of the complex organisation and of economic interrelations, together with high-quality professional skills. Above all, it requires education in personal values that enable the student to contribute a demanding capacity for leadership and service at each stage of his or her career.

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3. THE CURRICULUM OF THE JESUIT BUSINESS SCHOOL

The curriculum of the Jesuit business school is compatible with a strong tradition in liberal arts that has enriched Jesuit education. Indeed, the curricular standards for the business schools of the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities and the Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business are based and place emphasis on striking a balance between arts and sciences.

Executive education takes it for granted that it is necessary to have a foundation in humanities and social sciences in order to understand individual, group and institutional behaviour in disciplines such as management, marketing and economics. The Jesuit tradition goes beyond a utilitarian conception of human behaviour. Through philosophical and religious studies, students acquire knowledge about the meaning of humanity and each individual’s relationship with the world around him or her.

Impact on society

Jesuit business education must help to guarantee that a close examination is made of the impact of business institutions on each person in a society. “It should be concerned about creating complexly organised social systems that increase sincere mutual and

community interaction and dialogue between all levels with the aim of ensuring the dignity of the individual within the organisation and constructive dialogue between the organisation and its society.” (*The Context of Our Ministries*, Working Papers, Jesuit Conference, 1981, p. 17).

Capacity for judgement

Composition, rhetoric and literature give business studies students a basis on which to obtain the capacity for critical judgement and present themselves clearly. History provides insight into other periods and their relationship with the present.

In all these related studies, students in the field of business are taught to play a role as reflexive and critical members of their entrepreneurial organisation, as well as members of society, and to act as stakeholders in the world’s cultures.

A solid grounding in natural sciences is also required, as a prelude to examining the technological essence of organisations and the impact of technology on societies. In a technologically advanced age, scientific and mathematical knowledge are a prerequisite for effective action.

However, “it is not mere competence, but also vision that will be required if the immense progress made in science and technology is to facilitate and not debase our humanity” (ibid., pp. 58-64).

Informed choice

In the essence of the Jesuit educational experience, students at business schools should find in their studies of religion and ethics the foundations both to be able to make informed decisions and for their aspirations to serve. This prepares them to undertake their careers as business leaders who are “reflexive in action” (i.e., personnel with capacity for active reflection and cautious action) and seek to raise their own activities and those of their organisations above the “same old ideas” or business for individual glorification.

By building on a thoughtfully designed exposure to issues related to fundamental values, at later stages of their educational experience students are trained to reflect on explicit and implicit choices in more specialised areas of business administration, such as how to facilitate organisation structures, decision-making styles and performance criteria that are compatible with orientation to the values obtained in religion and ethics studies.

The long tradition of rigour and excellence linked to religious studies and the humanities, arts and sciences in Jesuit education enriches the context in which strategic choice is examined within economic organisations.

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4. THE JESUIT SCHOOL OF THE FUTURE

Enterprise is a dominant institution that interacts with our own societies and those of everyone, having an impact on them. It is significant that business institutions are the main employers of graduates from Jesuit schools. In this way, it forms part of the mission of the Jesuit universities to influence these future leaders. Without well-designed contributions from Jesuit business schools, an important opportunity to impart values is lost.

The impact of enterprise on national, regional and community affairs provides graduates from Jesuit schools with an excellent opportunity for leadership and service.

Directors of Jesuit business schools face some major challenges:

- Business education is criticised for producing selfish, arrogant, self-serving graduates.
- The business sector is increasingly aware of the interdependence between the public and private sectors.
- The weaknesses of both market economic systems and centrally controlled economic systems are becoming much more visible.
- Correction mechanisms are either excessively cumbersome or lacking in clarity.
- Participants in complex organisations are increasingly alienated and see less and less connection between their day-to-day efforts and the fundamental quests of the human spirit.

With these problems facing society, the following question can be raised: “What makes Jesuit business schools different from other business schools, and what characteristics could help Jesuit business schools to find solutions to these problems?”

Firstly, Jesuit schools can fashion a curriculum that 1) builds on an essential curriculum of quality, 2) achieves a balance between global intellectual perspectives and an analytical perspective specialising in administrative sciences, and 3) maintains at all times sensitivity to ethics and the values of corporate conduct that form part of business decision making.

The spirit of enquiry at Jesuit institutions can provide guidance for discussions and the development of questions and problems in the sphere of social justice, the integration of the pursuit of profit with the goal of service and opposition to the spread of dehumanising values.

Secondly, business education in the Jesuit tradition can maintain an objective viewpoint that confronts the negative aspects of business practice and policies where they arise. At the same time, it can inspire students to become drivers of the development of transformations within these decisive institutions.

A special challenge in this respect is to examine how to provide students and alumni with the opportunity of an ethical and values-based education. This is a particularly important problem, as most business leaders enter entrepreneurial training at

postgraduate level, having previously obtained other degrees, especially in technical specialities.

This initiative will require a new approach for an adult student population who need different forms of personal ethical education that are traditionally associated with university studies. Jesuit universities need to launch a pilot model of ethical education for these mature students. They are the future decisive leaders who will make the strategic decisions that will shape our society.

Seeing postgraduate business education as a “cash generator” rather than a decisive opportunity would be a disastrous failure to fulfil obligations. Furthermore, the ongoing need for management development throughout one’s career affords an opportunity to continue the dialogue with alumni at each stage along their professional path by means of executive programmes.

Lastly, given that many important perspectives on enterprise (which would include, among others, ethics and social justice) can only arise out of the tradition of Jesuit education, Jesuit schools should open their doors as a place of dialogue with faculty of public educational institutions, inviting them to share their reflections on these matters.

“... Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are
Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s.”

EPILOGUE

We cannot be complacent about the wealth of the Jesuit tradition. Much remains to be done, and Jesuit business schools must advance in order to be even more effective in their unique contribution to education. We must articulate places and tactics to change in the future.

Given the strategic nature of our mission to train business leaders to serve society and the limitations of the new task of the Jesuits in institutes and universities, Jesuit business schools should constantly:

- Examine the quality of the students
- Maintain the excellence of the teaching
- Strive to endow themselves with erudite professors so as to enable Jesuit faculty to participate in a fundamental way to the dialogue surrounding business education
- Take into account the special yet distinct challenges of both postgraduate and graduate training, executive programmes and programmes for alumni.

There are other areas in which progress can be made. We must seek out better ways to make the most of the liberal arts curriculum as an integrated and direct support for business studies. We must find new methods for challenging contradictory value systems without limiting freedom of research.

We must also improve our capacity to help select appropriate values for the future. We must find means to reduce conflicts of objectives in educational systems and conflicts in

students' personal goals. And lastly, Jesuit business schools must investigate and clarify the pursuit of profit in relation to social justice and the concept of service to others.

All these concerns suggest that business schools should be seen as an important entity within the Jesuits' educational mission. The maintenance of educational resources for this mission must also be a fundamental commitment of the Jesuit network.

Creating an independent or non-traditional stereotype of business training undermines the capacity of Jesuit education to have a positive impact on the institutions in which the vast majority of our graduates, be they in business studies or in other disciplines, will spend their working life.

This is a most noble opportunity.

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