

**Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Learning, Volume 27, 2000**  
**TRAINER, MENTOR, EDUCATOR: WHAT ROLE FOR THE COLLEGE BUSINESS**  
**INSTRUCTOR IN THE NEXT CENTURY?**

S. D. Malik, New Paradigms Consulting Group, Pittsford, NY 14534  
Ken Morse, University of Waikato, Hamilton, NEW ZEALAND

**ABSTRACT<sup>1</sup>**

“A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops.”<sup>2</sup> While business concepts have traditionally been passed onto the next generation by training, educational institutions have long disavowed inclusion of this type of training in their definition of education. As noted by Morse and Malik (1997), at the same time that the concept of lifelong education has gained a place within the context of professional programs such as business schools, most popular instructional paradigms have focused on training students in the application of business concepts. With this focus, business schools continue in their narrow educational role. While this has sparked a huge debate among liberal arts colleagues, business school compatriots have not re-visited this issue in quite a while; preferring, instead, to sidestep the debate as they attempt to develop more efficient means of instruction.

This paper raises a fundamental question: What is our role within a holistic educational paradigm in the next century? Is it more appropriate for us to remain as trainers of the businessmen/women of tomorrow and let our liberal arts colleagues handle the other aspects of “education”? Or, should we increase our role to that of mentors by re-establishing the focus on developing more personal relationships between student and teacher, both in and out of the classroom? Does the in-

creased complexity of our ever-changing business environment actually call for us to go a step further and assume the role of educator, in the true sense of the word, where we seek to shape eternity through our influence on our students, their lives and their thinking?

**INTRODUCTION**

Business education has undergone a variety of changes over time; these changes have fundamentally altered the way that business skills are taught to and acquired by the student. The primary impact appears to be taking place at the undergraduate level where the primary institutional goal is to turn out “workers”, but there are distinct changes in the business content curricula for master’s education. Most reasons for change in educational frameworks have been ascribed to environmental changes. As one of the main pillars of the rapidly evolving business community, business education is currently faced with pressures for yet more transformation. This paper discusses some of the primary changes in educational approaches to teaching business skills over time, then identifies the environmental factors which are generating a re-evaluation of the current educational process. Finally, the paper examines various options academic business institutions might consider in trying to plan educational strategies for the new century.

**A SHORT HISTORY**

From earliest documentation, business operations have traditionally been regarded as skills that were passed from one trade member to another. A good example of this was Charles Dickens’ 1843 description of Ebenezer Scrooge’s training under Mr. Fezziwig. As is evident in this text,

---

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual EDINEB conference, June 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Adams as quoted in Mitch Albom’s (1998) Tuesdays with Morrie: An Old Man, A Young Man and Life’s Greatest Lesson, pg. 79. NY: Doubleday Press.

## **Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Learning, Volume 27, 2000**

teaching a business trade typically took the form of an apprenticeship. A young man/woman would become apprenticed to a journeyman/woman or master of a trade or skill for a set period of time. During that period, the apprentice would learn the skills of the trade through close observation, intense coaching and repetitive practice. Once the apprentice satisfied the master's requirements, the apprentice assumed the mantle of journeyman and was considered to be an expert in the skill s/he had just been taught. The journeyman status also allowed the student to take on apprentices of his/her own, thereby spreading the skills to carefully selected newcomers. In this educational capacity, the journeyman served as a trainer and mentor to the apprentice. Teaching emphasis was on the acquisition and perfection of the skill or trade being taught. Mentoring was geared toward establishing the new journeyman in a career of their own.

The idea of educating students in fundamentals of business skills was introduced to the academic world through institutions that focused on teaching technical skills. These technical or vocational schools trained students about the content and the process of developing technical skills. The educational aspect of these programs was primarily centered on the mastery of specific skill domains, and students who successfully completed requirements of these programs were thought to be qualified for a position in that trade. European and Asian educational systems still maintain these technical institutions, and students may choose the university system for a typical liberal arts education a technical institution to be trained for a skilled profession. In fact, these educational systems maintain a distinction between tertiary educational institutions like universities and tertiary training organizations such as polytechnics. Technical institutions do still exist in the United States' educational environment but have frequently, been replaced by community colleges that provide social service training as well as skills training.

In 1908, Harvard University became one of the first Universities in the United States to authorize

the establishment of a School of Business Administration. Other universities and colleges soon followed suit. It was at this point that the role of a business teacher started to shift from that of a journeyman to that of an academic educator. At the turn of the century, there were a number of breakthrough research articles that lent validity to the academic incorporation of business education. Fredrick Taylor's (1911) observations and innovations led to the Scientific Management movement as the focus of business practice and education. Another academic breakthrough came through the studies of Mayo (1933) and Roethlisberger and Dickson (1939) at the General Electric Hawthorne plant, which concluded that human relations were as essential a part of business operations as the "nuts and bolts" skills are. With these studies, business education started to develop a firm footing in the academic pastures of theory building. Theoretical arguments by researchers such as Maslow (1943), McGregor (1960) and others laid a solid foundation for the argument that the importance of business education was in the construction and elaboration of the underlying theoretical understanding of business processes rather than in the development and refinement of basic business skills. The traditional role of trainer and mentor became less essential to the business educator with this increased focus on the intellectual tenets of business operations.

### **WINDS OF CHANGE**

During the early 1900s and through the 1960s, economic conditions in the United States were good and the future looked rosy. With the rapid increases in productivity being experienced in the factories, those who wanted work were almost guaranteed a job with or without a high school diploma. In addition, as the war in Vietnam escalated, a significant percentage of able-bodied workers were conscripted into military service. During this period, due to a variety of alternative opportunities, higher education was reserved for those who were interested in more intellectual or professional education. The United States experienced major economic setbacks in the late 1970s.

## Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Learning, Volume 27, 2000

There was high inflation, high unemployment and productivity levels dropped as international competition began to heat up. The Arab oil producing countries imposed a crushing oil embargo in the late 1970s that further crippled the economy. Companies, fighting for their survival, began seeking drastic means of cost savings. One of the primary ways that American manufacturers cut their production costs was to move assembly line production overseas where they could employ a less expensive labor force. This meant that American workers no longer had the opportunity to make a lifetime career for themselves in low-skilled jobs. In fact, occupations requiring at least an associate's degree are expected to grow faster during 1996 to 2006 than those requiring less education or training (Silvestri, 1997). Furthermore, as production and manufacturing technology became more sophisticated, a high school education became more desirable, even for those entering assembly line work.

The mainstay of those displaced blue-collar workers and those who are entering the workforce with low skill levels is in the service industry. Silvestri (1997) ranks this as the third fastest growing occupational group for the next decade. In fact, he states that professional specialty and service occupations will generate nearly half of the total job growth from 1996 to 2006. While the job market in the service industry has expanded rapidly, the majority of these jobholders earn minimum wages and have had a difficult time supporting a family on service-sector based income.

The 1980s and 1990s have been defined by technology. The United States' recession of the 1980s was lifted on the shoulders of a new generation of "techies" who put their intellectual prowess toward the rapid genesis of technological innovations. This technological emphasis, coupled with the fact that most low skilled jobs had departed for overseas shores, meant that the jobs for the American workforce required high level skills and, therefore, higher education. For example, Silvestri (1997), an economist in the Office of Employment Projects of the Federal Bureau of

Labor Statistics, projects that the fastest growing occupations for the 1996-2006 time frame are in the professional specialty group. The second fastest growth rate is expected in the technicians and related support occupations. Of the thirty fastest growing occupations listed in the 1989-99 Occupational Outlook Handbook, put out by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 18 categories require postsecondary vocational training or higher levels of education.

Recent governmental surveys have revealed that there is a significant relationship between educational attainment and earnings. For example, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported, in its 1998 Occupational Outlook Quarterly report, that those workers with professional degrees earn a "diploma premium" of 208% over those with a high school degree. A Bachelor's degree will give a worker a 55% premium over a high school diploma. Studies by Pryor and Schaffer (1997) and Frazis and Stewart (1996) have also found support for the economic returns associated with increasing educational attainment.

The pressures, which have erupted from these environmental changes, have forced an increasing number of people to seek higher educational certification. As a consequence, community colleges, four-year colleges and universities have seen a sharp increase in their enrollments. A Bureau of Labor Statistics survey, described in the 1997 Current Population Survey, revealed that 67% of 1997 American high school graduates were enrolled in colleges for the forthcoming academic year. According to the Bureau, this is a 5-percentage point increase over the previous two years. This is a considerable jump considering that the enrollment rate had remained steady from 1992 until 1995 at 62%. Of those enrolled, the Bureau reported that two-thirds were planning to attend a 4-year college while the remaining had signed up for 2-year programs. Interestingly, more women graduates (70%) were enrolled in college than men graduates (63.5%).

## Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Learning, Volume 27, 2000

### IMPACT ON EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Given the fact that an increasing percentage of people are finding it necessary to complete a higher education program in order to find a profitable career, there has been a change in educational institutions, as well. Many of these alterations have occurred so incrementally, that most educators cannot consciously identify the source of these but do acknowledge that there have been shifts in what their students' expect from their higher educational programs.

The most obvious direction of this shift has been from an expectation of mind expanding, horizon developing, general education in the Liberal Arts tradition to employment preparation, job related skills development (albeit "higher order skills" such as management and marketing rather than physical skills like auto repair or bookkeeping) in keeping with the growing demands for increased career preparation by both students and business employers. We would argue that this phenomenon has been most evident in the professional, especially business, programs across the higher education spectrum.

As was discussed at the beginning of this paper, the teaching of business skills has moved from that of on-the-job process training to that of development of an intellectual understanding of business content. This shift in orientation toward business education, as was also mentioned earlier, meant that the role of the business teacher changed from that of a trainer/mentor to that of an educator. The main reason for this transformation was the academic pressure to "intellectualize" business education. As long as students were seeking higher education for intellectual growth, these changes in the business instructor's role were consistent with the needs of the student body and, the educator who was successful at developing scholars at the graduate level could be equally effective at the undergraduate level since the assumption was that they, too, were seeking scholarship from the educational institutions.

One of the first environmental forces driving the subsequent changes in business education expectations was due to the changing demands of the business needs of the employment community. With the rapid increase in technological adaptations of business processes and the sweeping globalization of the international economy, the business community needed new employees who could quickly transition into this high-paced environment with the necessary skills. It was this need that created the biggest chasm between the type of business taught in academia and the needs of the business employers.

The initial driving force of change created the second and, perhaps most potent, conflict between the traditional academic orientation and the new directions being pushed for business education. As an increasing number of people are finding it necessary to pursue higher education for the primary purpose of securing a financially stable career, the intellectualization of business education has come into direct conflict with students' goals of seeking high level specialized job-related training and skills through their higher education pursuits. Students, particularly at the undergraduate level, seeing the economic benefits associated with higher education attainment, are seeking, at the very least, a certification to enter the workforce, e.g., a college diploma. Or, at the most, they are seeking training on specialized skills that will give them a competitive advantage in the marketplace. The intellectual component of business education, and any general education, is considered to be irrelevant to the current American business undergraduate.

This change in educational expectations has created a clash with the traditional methods of teaching business within an academic environment. Students are pushing business educators to realign their roles from those principally emphasizing education (questioning/critical thinking development) to those that serve a training function (practical use skills development). Furthermore, an increasing number of students are demanding that faculty serve either as mentors or help the student establish a mentor relationship with a

businessperson in his/her chosen career discipline. This student expectation of mentoring and interaction with realistic, business community related programs comes from the perception that the academic world is not the “real” world and, therefore, educators must provide opportunities for experiences within this arena.

Many educators and business schools have proactively responded to these demanded changes. Within the business teaching profession, there has been a shift from a content-based curriculum to an increasing incorporation of process-oriented teaching methods, which seek to incorporate active learning and participation into the classroom. The expanding focus on process-oriented education has been affirmed by accreditation organizations such as the AACSB, which has curriculum standards that require elements of process-based learning within an accredited business program. Evidence of this shift may also be found in the proliferation of process-learning techniques in a variety of disciplines (see Morse and Malik, 1997 for review). . The increasing demand for “workplace relevance” has led to the need to “entertain” with case studies, simulations, group “think” sessions, etc. Colleges and universities, particularly at the undergraduate level and for many market-centered graduate programs, are instituting wide-ranging real world experiences such as internships, small business development assistance (like the one housed at SUNY at Geneseo) and business community research (like the one semester business sponsored research assignment requirement the University of Waikato imposes for degree completion). These types of programs not only serve the students’ demands for “real world” experience but also open up avenues for the institutions to solicit private funding for their programs.

Before the winds of change push the profession too far back on this road of reversal of our professional roles, it behooves us, the business educators, to examine what this reversal means and whether or not it is truly the future direction that we want for our profession.

## **SOME DEFINITIONS**

Prior to examining where the profession is headed in terms of weighting its roles, it is important that these roles be clearly defined. For this paper, we will focus on three of the principle roles business educators have performed in the context of passing on knowledge about business to students: educator, trainer and mentor.

Wexley and Latham (1981) make a clear-cut distinction between education and training, although they do acknowledge that there is considerable overlap between the two processes. Specifically, education involves the teaching of facts in order to stimulate the acquisition of knowledge, assimilation of information and cognitive development (Walters and Marks, 1981). Bloom (1987) takes a much broader perspective of education, arguing that the role of the educator, especially those involved in higher education, is to preserve the freedom of the mind by using the content that is taught as the starting point for examining alternative perspectives of thought. The function of an educator, therefore, is to encourage the mind to explore beyond the accepted boundaries. In business education, this involves the development of critical thinking processes that can move the individual beyond the accepted content of the discipline. From an educational framework, there are no right or wrong answers, only better or worse ones.

Training, on the other hand, is the teaching of skills (Wexley and Latham, 1981). Based on this definition, the trainer is concerned with process-based learning because s/he emphasizes the learning of skills that can be applied in a job or some type of work situation. According to this definition, training is a much more narrow method of education because its goal is so specific as is the focus of the material being taught. Training also usually includes high levels of physical involvement (Walters and Marks, 1981). Due to the way most training programs are designed, there are often right or wrong ways to accomplish a task. For example, students are taught that there is one generally accepted way to

## **Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Learning, Volume 27, 2000**

post sales figures to an Income Statement and they are penalized for not following this approach. In a training situation, there is little room to explore which ways are better or worse for doing a task or performing a skill.

A role that is distinct from, but related to, that of educator and trainer is the role of mentor. Mentors are people who provide newcomers to a profession or career with career-enhancing guidance, support and opportunities (Kram, 1985). Mentorship activities can include sponsorship, coaching, facilitating exposure and visibility and offering challenging work (Kram, 1983). Kram and Isabella (1985) contend that these activities are provided in order to help the newcomer establish an organizational role and learn the ropes while having a senior person as an advisor and friend. Based upon these definitions, mentoring has a lot of components of educating and training but the learning is directed toward getting established in a job or a career. Students, realizing that higher education is needed for a professional career, often do not understand what that education prepares them to do. The fact is that, since the content of their business education provides them with knowledge about so many different disciplines, they have more career options than ever before. Therefore, they turn to their business educators for ideas and help in identifying and choosing as well as developing in a particular career.

Given this understanding of the three fundamental roles of a business educator, the next question that we, as members of the profession, have to answer is how should we prioritize them? Based on the explicit needs of the American student of business, the current student body would prefer that the majority of their learning be in a training mode with the residual emphasis on mentoring. The educational function is irrelevant to the American student of today. Anecdotal evidence from Australia strongly indicates that a similar change in student perceptions and requirements is driving a nearly identical change in that part of the world. However, based on scholarly discussions at international conferences, the European,

South African and Australian academic systems have dispelled some of the issues facing American academics because of the differentiation between technical training and university education that is inherent in structure of the educational systems. Still, these scholars acknowledge that the economic pressures are and will continue to exert a change in the roles of the undergraduate instructor and, to some degree, for graduate-level instructors, too. What are those changes and is the prioritization that the American system is facing what we, the business instructors, desire?

### **INTO THE NEXT MILLENIUM**

Bloom (1987) makes an eloquent argument that higher education must serve a role that is independent of the demands of society. Specifically, he argues that if institutions of higher education conform to the norms of the social regime of the moment, their basic mission, to preserve the freedom of the mind, will become obscured by the need to constantly adapt to changing social demands. This argument would suggest that business instructors maintain a role of educators as their top priority and continue to focus on the intellectual components of a business education. In addition, if we adopt Bloom's (1987) conception of the role of higher education, business programs need to develop a curriculum that pushes the student to question the existing paradigm in an effort to move beyond those boundaries. In terms of business content, the student needs to be presented with circumstances which require the student to ask "Why not some other way?" or "If this is the only known way, what are other possibilities so far unexplored?" A broad-based business education should also develop an understanding and appreciation of the business world within its larger social context so that the role business has in this context is never assumed but is always being re-evaluated.

It is important to recognize that institutions of higher learning exist in a competitive market that exposes them to the demands of their clientele. In order to survive in a competitive state, institutions must adapt to some of these demands to at-

## Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Learning, Volume 27, 2000

tract enough constituents to justify their continued existence. As discussed earlier, most business schools have taken conscious, proactive steps to accommodate the changes in their environment. As many examples at this and other ABSEL conferences have shown, some business schools have embraced the process-based teaching method on an institute-wide basis. Still others are adopting large components of the process as a part of their curriculum. The question becomes how far to make these changes? The answer may lie in teaching techniques such as experiential learning and problem solving. Recent adaptations of these types of methods attempt to blend and balance the educational and training aspects. This equalization of the content and process teaching components appears to retain the educational agenda supported by Bloom (1987) while fulfilling the student body's demand for skill-specific training.

However, and it is a major mitigating concern, there is a danger that the educational component may get lost if the focus of the experiential learning activity becomes too process-oriented. For this reason, business educators must highlight and reinforce the intellectual phases of these teaching methods. These methods must remain a part of the entire learning process. However, in order to fulfill our professional role within institutes of higher learning, the educational component must remain the primary focus of the profession. Only in this way can we educators create future businessmen/women with the intellectual framework necessary to push the current boundaries of business processes.

### REFERENCES

- Bloom, Allan (1987) *The closing of the American mind*. (NY: Simon and Schuster).
- Bureau of Labor Statistics (1998) Earnings of college graduates, 1996. *Occupational Outlook Quarterly*. Fall.
- (1998) College enrollment and work activity of 1997 high school graduates. *1997 Current Population Survey*, BLS supplement. (Washington: U.S. Census Bureau).
- Frazis, Harley & Jay Stewart (1996) Tracking the returns to education in the Nineties. *BLS Working Papers*. (Washington: U.S. Department of Labor: Bureau of Labor Statistics).
- Kram, Kathy (1985) *Mentoring at work: Developmental relationships in organizational life*. (Glenview, Ill: Scott- Foresman).
- Kram, Kathy (1983) Phases of the mentor relationship. *The Academy of Management Journal*, v. 26, p. 608-625.
- Kram, Kathy & Lynn Isabella (1985) Mentoring alternatives: The role of peer relationships in career development. *The Academy of Management Journal*. v. 28, p. 110-132.
- Morse, Kenneth & Dolly Malik (1997) Problem based learning, experiential learning and life-long learning: Who's on first? Paper presented at the *4th EDINEB Conference*. Edinburgh, Scotland, Sept.1-3.
- Maslow, Abraham (1943) A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*. p. 370-393.
- Mayo, Elton (1933) *The human problems of industrial civilization*. (NY: Macmillan).
- McGregor, Douglas (1960) *The human side of enterprise*. (NY: McGraw-Hill).
- Pryor, Frederic & David Schaffer (1997) Wages and the university educated: a paradox resolved. *Monthly Labor Review*. p. 3-18.
- Roethlisberger, Fritz & William Dickson (1939). *Management and the worker*. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press).
- Silvestri, George (1997) Occupational employment projections to 2006. *Monthly Labor Review*. p. 58-82.
- Taylor, Fredrick (1911) *Principles of scientific management*. (NY: Harper).
- Walters, Gordon & Stephan Marks (1981) *Experiential learning and change*. (NY: John Wiley & Sons).
- Wexley, Kenneth & Gary Latham (1981) *Developing and training human resources in organizations*. (Glenview, Ill: Scott- Foresman).