



REGENT BUSINESS SCHOOL
Brown Bag Seminar Series 2014

Issues in Critical Management Studies

Seminar Topic 9: The Critical Relevance of Soft Skills in the MBA Programme

Date: Friday, 10th October 2014
Venue: Regent Business School – 8th Floor Boardroom
Time: 09h00 – 11h00
Presenters: TEDx Talks – Video Presentations
Moderator: Nadeem Cassim



"He's right, when you look at it that way, it's not so bad!"

In this presentation Various Presenters will speak on the Critical Relevance of Soft Skills in the MBA Programme:

Unlike the majority of graduate-level courses, MBAs focus on general business principles and aim to build upon the foundation of the student's professional experience rather than his or her academic background. However, despite this requirement for practical experience, the value of an MBA has been questioned in some quarters for being overly academic and consequently divorced from reality. David Garvin, Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School and author of *Rethinking the MBA* discovered that a lack of practical understanding was one of the main weaknesses of graduates identified by industry while researching his book.

Critique of MBAs for many years has been that they know a lot, but they just don't know how to put it into practice. They are a little weak when it comes to understanding how to get things done," posits Garvin. He believes that in order to the value of an MBA to be retained, curricula must be based around the cultivation of three essential areas: "Knowing/knowledge, doing or skills and being/a sense of identity." He foresees a greater balance between theory and practice in the future, although achieving this comes with its own challenges.

Alongside these developments, the understanding management skills have changed, with soft skills becoming increasingly valued in MBA jobs over the past 50 years. We see this reflected at business schools. Many business schools have been encouraging students to

learn the art of meditation as a means of managing stress. However, despite the growing focus on and awareness of the need for soft skills, business schools have faced and continue to face hurdles in their implementation. Indeed, it remains the case that employers are somewhat unsatisfied with the soft skills possessed by MBA graduates.

The demands of MBA jobs mean that business schools must continue to improve and build upon the soft skills training they offer. Top employers such as BASF Global and Deloitte have trained professionals and sophisticated strategies to identify soft skills in candidates. For business schools, it's not just a question of how to incorporate soft skills into curricula, but in what the future value of an MBA will be.

In this regard, Hult Business School has recently been nominated for a major award in MBA Curriculum Innovation. Hult's MBA program, recreated as a result of interviews with nearly 100 C-suite executives and managers from global Fortune 500 companies on what skills and competencies make MBA graduates most successful in the business world. The research-anchored, ground-up redesign combines traditional MBA "hard skills" with a dynamic and relevant "soft skills" focus that is fully integrated throughout the year.

Hult's new curriculum features several program innovations:

- A managerial "soft skills" element that runs across the curriculum.
- A corporate training methodology that allows for a significant amount of practice.
- Peer feedback and coaching to help students acquire new skills.
- Simulations that allow student teams to explore managing in increasingly difficult business situations.
- A live, yearlong business challenge exercise that requires students to wrestle with unstructured problems.

The TEDx Talks Videos exemplify some of the major deliberations revolving around the need for soft skills. We will allow time for questions, discussion and debate after the video presentations.

1. In the first Video presentation, titled the *Heckman Equation*, Nobel laureate economist James Heckman shows how quality investments in early childhood development improve social, economic and health outcomes.
2. In this video, Jeff Butterfield, talks about the importance of teaching soft skills to learners in the hope that they could be adequately prepared for the workplace.
3. Virat is a young, versatile and dynamic corporate trainer and motivational speaker from Mumbai with over 8 years of corporate work experience. After finishing engineering in Electronics from Mumbai, Virat jetted to New York for his Masters in Management, at the prestigious Syracuse University. While at Syracuse, Virat was among the top 10% students who got full scholarship. He won a research scholarship from Kodak. In this talk he speaks about the softest skill and how one can develop oneself.
4. This presentation was created as a motivational video containing many inspiring and famous quotes.