Chapter 19

Gap Between Theory and Practice in Management Education:
Teaching Entrepreneurship Through Practice

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ABSTRACT

The gap between skills that students learn in the schools and the ones required by the market is still huge. Business school should create effective programs. Teaching methods which allow students to explore business issues and to learn and study from their experiences are very important if we want to increase student confidence. One of the central elements is the experience gained by practicing real cases and by addressing successfully the situation at hand. Business educators must play the role of facilitators who provide a proper environment to students to get the real experience, to reflect on it and apply in coming future. The right business curricula and pedagogy to provide it successfully are key elements to an effective business education.

INTRODUCTION

During last two decades in Eastern and Central Europe, businesses have learned tough lessons through practices of hiring newly graduated people. As of today, in many cases presenting a university diploma is not an indisputable proof of possessing the required skills. The gap between skills the newly graduated employees learn in the schools and the skills required in the market is huge. This phenomenon destroyed the trust of the market towards the educational system and has forced the businesses to become the last line of defense, develop their own evaluation system and replace the filters that should have been in place through the academic education.

The general perception is that students received the diploma without absorbing the mathematical, analytic and logic skills needed. They are supposed to absorb those skills during the educational cycle. Businesses reported in Albania that the results of the tests evaluating young job applicants show lack of knowledge and skills. In one case, subjects of the tests were recently graduated young Albanians, who studied in the country. After the interview, the candidates were asked to undertake the test without preparation. The candidates had the right to decline. The test contained 40 questions and empirical data the company gathered shows that none of the candidates was able to answer all questions. The highest score in 4 years' experience of hiring young employees was 24, while 80% of the students' score from 15-18 points out of 40. Regardless of these results, the candidates had high demands regarding position and remuneration.

The measurements of those skills help the business to numerically evaluate skills and determine the technical potential of the candidates at the point of graduation. The low results in those tests are not the main problem. Based on observations recently graduated students miss other important skills such as entrepreneurial mentality and spirit, leadership, innovation, fast adaptability, decision making and managing project cycle. Those skills are not even properly taught in Albanian universities.

In the region the gap between skills that students learn in the schools and the ones required by the market is still huge. The trust of the market towards the educational system is destroyed and real efforts need to take place. Students are not capable professionally and do not have enough knowledge and skills to respond to markets' needs. There are several reasons behind this situation. Based on observations most of the responsibility stands with the government policies, university management and the academic faculty in that order.

- It is obvious that in their efforts, governments have not adopted the necessary policies to orient universities toward entrepreneurship. Governments have not offered incentives to universities to direct their work and efforts toward research, patents and cooperation with businesses. Moreover, by awarding unlimited university licensees, a phenomenon well known in Albania, the government lowered the standards of entering into the universities.
- The universities (many in numbers) were getting into financial difficulties, sometimes in the collapse, as the result they lowered the standards of admission to accept students. During last decades in Albania there were unprecedented cases where some universities have awarded degrees in exchange of money. This happened not only to Albanian citizens but to foreigners too.
- There are no studies undertaken in the country regarding business needs as necessary empirical evidence to foresee the future of the economy. The universities have graduated students in the field of studies with limited demand in the market, like lawyers and psychologists, while few students have been graduated in necessary fields as programming, engineering, information and technology. In this struggle, cohorts of future jobless were offered to the country: young people with no career perspective. Meanwhile, no real reform has taken place in these years to tackle university curricula, pedagogy and staff, towards nurturing future generation of entrepreneurs and managers.
- The academic faculty is full of people with almost no practical experience in business. In this aspect one part of the academic faculty, in the management schools is inherited from the old faculty, trained during the communism time. This category of educators, while tried hard to adapt with the new reality did not fully abandon the old methods based mostly on theoretical education. Another part of the academic faculty derives from the Albanian graduates in foreign countries, who return in Albania after their studies. Having spent 5-8 years out of the country, those graduates loose the

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