



## Putting some soul into management

Malini Sen | Jul 31, 2010, 04.16AM IST

The global financial crisis and the ensuing economic recession have led business schools to reflect on their future course. While the debate on whether management can be considered a 'profession' continues, efforts are being made to change the stereotype of an MBA graduate from a bottom-line fixated person to someone who cares for society.

With values being the latest rage in management education, students are signing up for a voluntary ethical oath similar to the Hippocratic Oath taken by medics; while schools are rethinking the curriculum to integrate values to encourage responsible leadership.

Freshly-minted graduates at the [Harvard Business School](#) (HBS) started taking an MBA Oath from last year, pledging to play a positive role in society once they graduate.

Though initiated by students of the [Thunderbird School of Global Management](#) in 2004-05, the MBA Oath has gained in popularity in recent years. Angel Cabrera, Thunderbird's president, says: "Our oath establishes a commitment to combat corruption. I have no doubt that if we were successful at creating a consensus around a set of principles across business schools around the world, decisions would have been quite different right now."

[Cabrera](#) has worked with Nitin Nohria, dean of HBS, in the creation of the World Economic Forum's Young Global Leaders Global Business Oath and the establishment of The Oath Project foundation. According to the YGL Global Business Oath, it aims to transform the globally dominant value system by proposing a code of conduct - a modern day 'Hippocratic Oath of Business' - that spells out a commitment to 'doing no harm' throughout the practice of management.

CEMS, a global alliance in management education, comprising business schools and corporations, is introducing the oath from this year. "The concept is to crystallise the

kind of values that CEMS and CEMS students hope will be carried forward into their working life as responsible and ethical managers," says Kevin Titman, CEMS' communications manager. Canadian universities, too, have started taking the MBA Oath from late last year.

Critics believe that signing an oath is not enough, a concerted effort is required to achieve a cultural shift. According to [Henry Mintzberg](#), author of *Managers Not MBAs* and a long-time critic of standard MBA programmes, management is a practice rooted in context, not a profession based on pronouncements.

Learning from the lessons of the economic recession, several business schools are going back to the drawing board to redesign the curriculum to face the challenges of the 21st century. The new model rests on three pillars - sustainable business, responsible leadership and interdisciplinary curriculum.

Billed as one of the most radical shake-ups of an MBA programme, Haas School of Business, University of [California, Berkeley](#), has revamped its MBA curriculum for 2010. Rich Lyons dean of Haas, says, "The world of business is at a turning point, and the discussion is, fundamentally, about society having the right human capital." Paul Danos, dean, Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth, which launched the first graduate school of management with a two-year MBA in 1900, adds: "We want our students to lead with head and heart. Our focus is on perspective, understanding and empathy."

Away from the traditional home of management education - the US - a new model is also emerging in [Canada](#), Europe and Asia. Canada's Richard [Ivey](#) School of Business has added a module, which will have courses on Cross Enterprise Leadership and Global Business Environment. "The objective is to help prepare students for the leadership challenges in their careers," says Fraser Johnson, faculty director, Ivey's MBA programme. Incidentally, Ivey graduates take a pledge to act ethically and with integrity; they are then presented with an Ivey Ring, which has a unique serial number and is not for sale.

"It is time leaders looked beyond their companies to see the impact their business is having on the environment," says Lars-Hendrik Raller, president, European School of Management and Technology (ESMT), Berlin. "We follow an interdisciplinary approach that integrates management with technology and sustainability," he adds. The school has constituted the ESMT Responsible Leadership Award to honour an inspiring business figure, committed to the principle of sustainability. The first award was given this year to NR [Narayana Murthy](#), co-founder and chief mentor of Infosys.

Echoing similar views, Arun Pereira, clinical associate professor of management education, Indian School of Business (ISB), Hyderabad, observes, "One of the key challenges for business schools today is to address the broadened expectations of business leadership. It requires schools to make substantive and focused efforts that will impact the learning experience. The ISB approach uses three perspectives: academic, corporate and Indian philosophy."

Dale [Griffin](#), associate dean, Sauder School of Business, University of British Columbia, observes that ethics can be taught; morality cannot. At Sauder, students are inspired through courses ,programmes and out-of-school experiences that broaden their perspectives and understanding of how business can be a force for good in the world.

Students in business schools in [Asia](#) do not sign up for a formal oath on ethics, but Gillian Ye, interim dean, Nanyang Business School, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, feels teaching of ethics is best done in a contextual basis using cases and examples of both international and Asian ethical/moral dilemmas.

Business schools are also partnering with liberal arts colleges to make the curriculum more holistic. Commenting on the partnership between IE Business School in [Madrid](#) and [Brown University](#) in Rhode Island, David Bach, dean of programmes, IE Business

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School, says, "Most business schools work with other business schools. Brown and IE are instead bringing a non-business perspective on critical questions affecting senior managers, into management education."

[Nancy Adler](#), professor, Desautels Faculty of Management, McGill University, Canada, and an artist herself, says soon the Master of Fine Arts will become a much sought-after business degree because "designing innovative options requires more than the traditional analytical skills taught during the past half century. Rather, it requires skills that creative artists have used for years." As they re-invent the MBA for the 21st century, business schools are going beyond the 'dehydrated' language of management.

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