

## The art of being a good manager

Schools are taking a creative approach to their courses to foster leaders as comfortable with the finer points of art and design as with a balance sheet.

By Matt Symonds

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Jazz class:  
Leaders can learn from Miles Davis



For more than 100 years, business schools have been successfully teaching the hard "left-brain" aspects of management and leadership, but, in an increasingly complex and rapidly changing world, is it enough? Or is

Professor Nancy Adler, of McGill University's Desautels Faculty of Management in Montreal, right to say that running a business nowadays calls for "levels of inspiration and creativity that are more the domain of artists than of most managers"?

While many traditional employers of MBAs in the banking and consulting sectors still focus on analytical and decision-making skills, a new wave of recruiters is looking for a more creative approach. For example, LVMH, which owns brands such as Moët &

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Chandon and Louis Vuitton, believes this is essential in candidates for its fast-track leadership programme. "We need people who combine an entrepreneurial mindset and an international vision with pragmatic and creative thinking," says Antoine Tirard, the company's recruitment and

development director. "That combination of skills is crucial to pursue innovative initiatives while respecting the DNA of our prestigious brands, and thus achieve success in our environment."

So what are schools doing to develop creative MBAs? Warwick Business School puts students on its full-time MBA programme through the Capital Centre, a joint venture

between the university's English department and the Royal Shakespeare Company. It uses theatre workshop techniques to teach students verbal and non-verbal communication skills. The aim is not to turn MBAs into actors, but to hone soft skills such as teamwork, sociability, and self-management. Dr Nicholas Monk of the centre admits students can find the experience something of a culture shock. "This is so different from what they are used to, we always have some participants who think we're just messing about," he says. "But then we have others like the student who told me this was exactly why he came to business school in the first place – to look at things in a different way. On average, 10 per cent hate it and another 10 per cent feel ambivalent about it. But the majority really benefit."

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**Antoine Tirard**

Other schools have taken this use of theatre to even greater lengths. Modules and courses where students examine or even act out the works of Shakespeare have become increasingly popular in recent years. MIT Sloan, Cranfield and Oxford-Saïd are only a small selection of those that believe taking on the role of Henry V or Julius Caesar for a few hours can give useful insights to modern leaders nearly 400 years after Shakespeare's death.

Elsewhere, others are being guided in creative directions by looking at the design industry. "We ask students to think of themselves as designers," says Professor Ken Starkey of Nottingham University Business School. "It's a good way of getting them to develop innovative models, rather than acting like cyborgs faithfully applying theoretical models. We even use jazz as a metaphor for this activity and compare managers' work to great jazz innovators such as Miles Davis."

Another believer in the view that the skills of a designer might be as useful to MBAs as those of an accountant or analyst is Esade Business School in Barcelona, which has set up a partnership with the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California. The first programme, Beyond Pretty, blends psychology, sociology and anthropology to help participants tackle business problems. Academic theories are put to the test in so-called "living laboratories" – bars and cafes.

In the US, the home of the MBA, some schools are offering joint programmes that run orthodox business training in parallel with more artistic studies. At New York University, for example, students on the combined MBA and Master of Fine Arts programme split their time between the Stern School of Business and the Maurice Kanbar Institute of Film and Television, while the University of Southern California teaches the business of entertainment at its school of cinematic arts.

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At the other end of the state in San Francisco the California College of Arts has launched an MBA for graphic designers. "Consultancies are crying out for people who can bridge the

gap between design innovation and business," says the programme's head, Nathan Shedroff.

In Scandinavia, Copenhagen Business School has developed its creative MBAs not through partnerships, case studies or joint programmes, but by addressing the makeup of its faculty. To provide the widest possible perspective, the school has moved away from a focus on professors with conventional business backgrounds and has sought out individuals from the arts and from fields as diverse as philosophy, anthropology and history.

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HEC Paris**

However, one of the Europe's most high-profile schools, HEC Paris, has suggested that producing a new generation of "renaissance MBAs", as comfortable with the finer points of art and design as with a balance sheet, may require a radical rethink of who should be undertaking an MBA in the first place. "We need greater diversity of participants," says the associate dean, Valérie Gauthier, "and that doesn't just mean diversity based on country, culture or ethnicity but on attitude and approach. We need at least some part of our intake to come not just from the usual sources of banking, consultancy and industry, but from areas such as political science, the creative arts and philosophy, to allow a whole class to frame business decisions in a wider context. Bringing these sort of people together with students who have more traditional commercial backgrounds will allow both sides to learn from each other for the benefit of all."

Source:

<http://www.independent.co.uk/student/postgraduate/mbas-guide/the-art-of-being-a-good-manager-1938358.html>

