

Advancing Technologies in Business Education

By [Sergei Schennikov](#)

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Sergei Schennikov

Rector, Professor, International Institute for Management LINK,
Honorary Doctor of the Open University, U.K.

Modern managers are increasingly linking their career development and efficiency enhancement to involvement in business school studies. Some make their decisions quickly; others doubt that MBA programs will really allow them to improve their skills and qualifications. I suppose that both types would like to know how and with what means these educational establishments achieve their goals.

The most common reason that drives managers to enroll is a desire to acquire new knowledge and to enlarge their managerial scope and views. This reason has become a really pressing need as it is required by the market economy. Today, personal managerial efficiency is determined by one's ability to operate in situations of uncertainty, risk and rapidly changing contexts.

The traditional idea of knowledge is limited to the possession of certain verified information, which in theory should help a person in solving any problems at his or her workplace. When a business school graduate says "I know this," usually he or she merely means "I know how someone managed this." As a rule, the meaning of his claim "I know this" is not equal to "I can manage this" or "I can do this," at best it could mean "I have heard of it" or "I have read about it." Such a state of affairs could be explained by the fact that Russian business education has inherited ancestral features of the classical university model, according to which certain people speak and the rest listen. Unfortunately, most of our business schools have restricted their educational model to a set of lectures. Any modern approaches and technologies, at best, are used in the form of "tuning" obsolete educational models.

Knowledge acquires useful properties only when it is applied in practice, while this practice should have a subject and a purpose. Whether the same information becomes knowledge depends on different people and different contexts; it may be useless or even harmful. For example, if an expert has shared his or her experience, it might be good. But if a listener

uses the recipe proposed by the expert without regard for his or her own context, the result could be utterly different from what was expected.

The highly advertised case-based form of training does not change the situation either. You can solve many cases in the classroom, but life will keep offering new, unique circumstances. The methodology of the university educational model, which our business schools continue to offer unopposed, was analyzed and criticized by Henry Mintzberg in his book "Managers Not MBAs" back in 2004.

The process of learning should turn knowledge into abilities and abilities into skills or competences. This is the source from where the requirements for personal and practical orientation, or focus on specific tasks, appear. Having discussed the development of competence and the ability to act, we will now proceed to a new educational paradigm in which there are fundamentally different objectives and specific requirements for students, teaching methods, support systems and teacher training methodology.

I should mention one important point — when it comes to competencies, you need to understand the standards they represent. The professional managerial community has described the competency requirements for the modern manager or businessman with the help of the National Occupational Standards (NOS) for management and leadership.

All students on MBA programs are busy people. Everyone has a huge amount of specific tasks and professional problems. And if you make these tasks and objectives a principal resource of the educational process, then the listener will develop real skills, precisely those he or she currently needs.

The business school must achieve its declared objectives with minimal resources: for less money, in less time and with minimal effort. How can you achieve this? With the help of advancing technologies. Some business schools declare that they are engaged in market research and include the results of these studies in the learning process. A noble and important goal. But you should understand that there is an excess of such content within the market, and it is very difficult for a business school to compete with relevant professional research organizations. The key problem is the lack of advanced learning technologies.

Selecting a business school, you need to be aware how the offered knowledge is associated with standards and competencies and to what extent the school applies the tools of the practice-oriented approach. To do this, you should just ask the representatives of the relevant educational institution a number of questions. Firstly, it is important to know the opinions of those who have studied there already. Next, you should refer to the business school's rating at the very last moment because this is merely a rough assessment of the material status of the school and gives only an approximate idea about the real quality of the program. Also, I would advise you to pay attention to the business school international accreditations such as AMBA, EFMD, AACSB, as they are issued by organizations that are commonly recognized and are genuinely interested in the development of business education.

The modern educational environment includes three components: production, social and proper education. If you deduct the first two components, the training outcome will be questionable. What skills can you develop if for two years you did little more than sit and listen? These could be quick note-taking skills, precise reproduction of what was heard

and adjusting to the mood of the lecturer or tutor. Can I call that a managerial competence? The answer is an emphatic no. Once you have understood the context in which the educational process takes place, you can easily guess what would be the result of your stay at any business school.

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