

Business schools have lost a staggering amount of credibility in the business community.

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Business schools strive to connect academic research to real-world practice. But [Terence Tse](#) and [Mark Esposito](#) find many institutions are failing to overcome academic silos in order to prepare students for the changing demands of the business world. Standardisation of curricula for accreditation limits the adaptability needed to teach the skillsets employers need and in many cases ivory tower expertise is not sufficient and carries minimal practical applications.



Through recent surveys, CEOs have revealed the [top skills they are looking for](#) in business school graduates. They named key proficiencies such as problem solving, the ability to connect different aspects of business and think in a holistic way, and the courage to deal with uncertainty and ambiguity.



Yet, many business schools have failed to develop curricula that satisfy the needs of employers who require a workforce that can evolve alongside a continuously changing world. There are many reasons behind this academic-real-life disconnect. One major factor is that schools continue to teach subjects in silos – as if there is no connection or overlap between them in the real world. The outcome of this is that business education has become more akin to a factory line than the transversal learning opportunity it should be.



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So why do schools continue to treat disciplines as separate entities that fail to impart the skills students really need? We believe there are three main reasons:

1) Schools want and need to be accredited. While students care little about accreditation, they care a lot about rankings. Conveniently, only accredited schools are allowed to participate in the rankings. Accreditation is not

necessarily a bad thing: it institutionalizes fundamental guidelines to promote quality education. But it goes too far when it leads to “standardisation”, which demands that *all* schools follow the same well-worn, mainstream curricular path. This would be fine if accreditors embraced a business school model that provides the skillsets employers need. But they don't. The unavoidable consequence of standardisation is that it kills new possibilities for innovative ways of teaching, and keeps core business subjects neatly and unrealistically compartmentalised.

2) Teaching staff tends to have no real business experience. We can all agree that it is a good thing for experts to share their knowledge through teaching. However, their “expertise” is often built up through years of research in an ivory tower setting – not by teaching to seasoned executives or connecting with real businesses. The outcome is that this so-called expertise doesn't jive with what is actually going on in the world.

It is incredibly surprising how many faculty members have no work or management experience outside the confines of their academic institutions. Part of the reason for this is that they *choose* not to gain industry exposure in favour of pursuing an academic career. It is counter-intuitive, if not downright ridiculous, that seasoned managers in executive MBA programs, for example, are often taught by people who have zero experience making the types of challenging decisions their own students grapple with regularly.

There are two industries where this practice would be downright appalling: desktop doctors are not allowed to perform surgery without years of training; and people do not hire theory-driven lawyers without experience to act on their behalf.

As a solution, many schools have hired experienced managers to teach. It's a great idea on paper, but we have observed all too often that these engagements end up as one-offs. There are two reasons for this. First, the majority of experienced managers rely heavily on PowerPoint presentations as a teaching aid, which quickly slays students' interest in a topic. Second, they often lack the necessary flair to engage a classroom of students, who are not their usual audience of clients or employees. They often misunderstand that there is a huge difference between a one-hour client meeting and a three-hour course.

Some professors engage in consulting work in their respective fields to keep themselves afresh and stay current. But most simply don't. This means that many instructors end up concentrating on a narrow set of subject fundamentals that bear little relevance to the reality of the business world. Many of you know this as academic research.

Academic research often brings little to the classroom. Research is very important to business schools. It matters for institutions because published articles in academic journals count for accreditation *and* business school rankings. Research is also paramount in faculty members' eyes because it's what their promotions, tenures and salaries revolve around.

In order to climb the career ladder, professors prioritise academic papers over consulting work. The problem with academic journals – as opposed to “practitioners” journals – is that they are usually irrelevant to what managers and executives *actually* do. Otherwise, there would be no such distinction! There's no requirement for research to be influenced by real-life business. Many academics are therefore more concerned with theoretical concepts, which carry minimal practical applications. Meanwhile, the promotion system, based on the number of academic journal articles a professor produces, gives no incentive to teach current business trends.

Business schools, especially second-tier ones, have lost a staggering amount of credibility in the business community. With no innovation in sight to stanch this loss of validity, they stand to haemorrhage much more. If schools continue to teach business subjects in silos, they will further widen the gap between what students learn and what they really need to succeed. If this continues, we can be assured that students, schools, employers, and society as a whole will be worse off. But then, as business school professors, we can simply offload this thorny issue onto practitioners to solve, while we go write another journal article that only a few will ever read.

Note: This article gives the views of the authors, and not the position of the Impact of Social Science blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please review our [Comments Policy](#) if you have any concerns on posting a comment below.

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