

Managing Today

WANTED: FOCUS ON RELEVANCE

IF IT IS IMPORTANT to manage things well, it is essential to get people who have learned to manage well. That begs the question: What is good management education? We may debate the answer till we are blue in the face, but an academic palaver has scant value for a nation in crisis. Very simply, good management education is one that produces managers who are good for the organizations in this country.

The first sensible step then is to ask the organizations what kind of managers are good for them.

The world of academe can be a comfortable and tempting one. One is tempted to tinker with minor aspects of the syllabus, make peripheral changes in the teaching material, and believe that sound education is achieved. That belief is false, of course, but in management it is disastrous. The business of management education is to turn out good managers, people who serve the country's organizations well. So, the first move has to be to find out what the organizations think is important in their managers.

This is harder than it sounds. The typical practice is to invite a few chief executives or their recruiters to come and tell us what they think. That is precisely what they do. They give us, on such occasions, their quick judgments and visceral reactions. Those are not without value, especially if they are the only alternatives to the quick judgments and visceral reactions of the academics. But evidently those do not really represent the collective wisdom of the organizations. To unravel that would require a longer, more systematic process of exploring the views of carefully selected line and staff managers, backed by whatever quantitative and qualitative data may be available.

We could, for example, let it be known that we are interested in the experiences of corporations that have been consistently recruiting management graduates and monitoring their fast-track performance. What their demonstrated strengths and foibles have been in the perception of their organizations will be a very valuable clue to what needs to be done.

The second step is to go beyond these simple answers and

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research to find out what kind of managers produces results and is needed.

To develop a framework of management education requires a much more detailed analysis of successful management than even that systematic process can yield. It calls for a research effort that sets up conscious parameters: What are the more important types of organizations we will consider? What are the critical dimensions of what we choose to call managerial success? What is the practical time dimension to measure such success? What varied social or economic conditions will the study have to be sensitive to?

These are admittedly large questions, to which we have to find simple and pragmatic and yet conceptually sound answers. In effect, we have to come up with two interconnected frameworks: one that gives us a clear picture of the ability to produce results in a managerial situation that is likely to be important in the country today, and another that tells us what enables or triggers that ability in the academic world. What we have right now are unsubstantiated conjectures and untested emphasis on personally preferred methods and skills. We have no notion of what spells success in the Philippine milieu. The need for some basic writing, speaking, and thinking skills is perhaps evident; beyond that, what the management graduate must master to contribute to his organization is hazardous guesswork.

The third and final step is to set up devices so that our education stays in touch with both the perceptions of organizations and the realities of our managerial world. In one vital respect, educational institutions are no different from much-maligned governmental and business organizations: once they create something, they are disinclined to depart from it. Competent academicians are perhaps better equipped for creativity, but so are they better equipped to defend the obsolete with specious ingenuity. Management education programs, once developed, tend to exhibit a tenacious longevity far in excess of their useful life. Hence the paramount need to establish a mechanism that will periodically examine such programs, check their contribution to the world outside, and ruthlessly prune what has become an anachronism.