“In search of relevance in management education: three perspectives”

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In search of relevance in management education: three perspectives

Abstract

The study examines the recent discussions of critical academic management educators (e.g., Starkey and Madan, 2001; Mintzberg, 2004; Starkey and Tempest, 2005; Bennis and O'Toole, 2005; Khurana, 2007; Starkey and Tiratsoo, 2007; Moldoveanu and Martin, 2008; Lorange, 2008; Kieser and Leiner, 2009; Vaara and Fay, 2011), business students and corporate managers on the managerial relevance of management education. The purpose is to evaluate the following questions: (1) what are the concerns of the critical researchers in management education?; (2) what are the concerns of business students in management education?; (3) how concerns above are related to the stories of career paths and managerial development of the chosen managers? The article presents three samples of the academic literature criticizing the traditional management education. The empirical data includes online discussions of business students from Helsinki School of Economics (HSE) and open interviews of corporate managers. In the comparative analysis it is combined the researchers' concerns with those of the business students and corporate managers. In the end of the article attention is drawn to some potential avenues and suggestions for developing academic management education.

Keywords: management education, managerial relevance, student satisfaction.
JEL Classification: M10, I20.

Introduction

Management teachers and researchers seem to be increasingly dissatisfied with the way managers are commonly educated in business schools (Starkey and Madan, 2001; Elliot, 2003; Starkey and Tempest, 2005; Khurana, 2007). There is increasingly more academic research on business schools and management education itself, since business schools have become more dominant as an institution in western countries. Simultaneously, the relevance of management education from the perspective of management practice is increasingly questioned (cf., Pfeffer and Fong, 2002; Mintzberg, 2004; Markides 2007; Kieser and Leiner 2009). This article aims to stimulate a debate that would analyze the gap between management practice and education.

One of the seminal writings on management education is Henry Mintzberg's (2004) critical book: "Managers not MBAs – a hard look at the soft practice of managing and management development". Mintzberg argues that both management and management education are deeply troubled, but neither can be changed without changing the other. In line with Mintzberg, Warren G. Bennis and James O'Toole (2005) present their worries on management education in their HBR-article: "How business schools lost their way". They argue that business schools are too focused on "scientific" research and hire professors with limited real-world experience, and that they educate students who are ill equipped to wrangle with complex, unquantifiable issues.

In addition to these universally well-known authors, there is a less-known critical debate on management education within the so-called critical management research. Particularly over the last decade, this line of research has increasingly criticized orthodox management education and business practice from a critical theory perspective (see Alvesson and Deetz, 1996; Alvesson and Willmott, 1992; Pfeffer and Fong, 2002; Starkey and Tempest, 2005). A commonly argued view in the critical studies is that the nature of orthodox management education has played a key role in creating and supporting systems that have rendered their real development of business values and practices.

The present article is an examination of the discussions of chosen critical management educators and critical business students of a certain business school. In addition to these perspectives, we reflect on the discussions above with the conceptions of the interviewed managers about the experiences of their own managerial development. The focus of the study is on the discussions about managerial relevance in academic business education. Our research questions are as follows:

- what are the researchers' concerns in management education?
- what are the students' concerns in management education?
- how are the concerns above related to the stories of career paths and managerial development of the chosen managers?

The questions above are very fundamental for management education and research. Therefore, we can only highlight some aspects of these complicated issues. We present the three essential parts of critical approaches to traditional management education are reviewed. We begin with one sample of critical management studies and continue presenting two recent "worries of management gurus".

Second, we describe the methodological choices of this study: textual analysis and netnography. Textual

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analysis refers to a close reading, deconstruction and interpretation of the text. Netnography is, in turn, ethnography adapted to the study of online communities and discussions. Netnographical data builds up online discussions of students from Helsinki School of Economics (HSE).

We have also collected empirical material from individual managers through open interviews. In the analysis we will compare the concerns of researchers, students and managers. Finally, we will suggest some potential avenues of developing management education.

1. Management education and research under critical evaluation

1.1. Starkey and Madan on management education and research. One of the most influential publications regarding the relevance of management education and research was the special issue of *the British Journal of Management* in December 2001. The leading article by Ken Starkey and Paula Madan was titled "Bridging the Relevance Gab: Aligning Stakeholders in the Future of Management Research". This article was then commented on by several well-known authors like Andrew M. Pettigrew and Karl E. Weick.

Starkey and Madan (2001) define the relevance gap as a consequence of contradiction between thoughts of researchers and practising managers of management research. When management researchers primarily emphasize the development of ideas affecting managerial thinking, the practitioners underline the straightforward integration of management research with practice.

Starkey and Madan present that there are essential changes in the current business world compared to the past. According to them, nowadays knowledge is the key element to competitive advantage and hence there is a growing need for knowledge development at the individual, company and policy levels. They consider these needs as the starting point for changes at the interface between universities and business. Still, they emphasize that the changes are expected to be demanding to implement because universities and companies are highly different institutions.

Starkey and Madan illustrate the fundamental background of the relevance gap by using Michael Gibbons' (Gibbons et al., 1994) dichotomy of knowledge modes. Academic research usually follows hard sciences' so-called Mode 1 knowledge which is typically discipline based, theoretic, peer reviewed and published in scientific journals. Mode 2 knowledge, in turn, is more transdisciplinary and concerned with how knowledge works in practice in the context of application.

In order to bring these institutions closer to each other, Starkey and Madan suggest that new forms of partnerships and research training could develop forms of knowledge, helping managers to become "better reflective practitioners". However, they emphasize that managers and firms in the business sector need to reconsider their role in the knowledge development process.

In fact, Starkey and Madan present several primary areas for bridging the gap between academia and practice. First, they see the need for restructuring academic institutions to improve knowledge exchange and dissemination. This includes sponsoring scholars, creating formal positions for academia, developing alliances with media and other stakeholders and using intermediaries for small businesses. The creation of problem/topic ongoing research forums and networks is crucial. Business schools need to reshape their departments to counter the inertia of functional structures and to create solid links to industry practises. Departments might need to be reshuffled while ongoing research forums and networks need to be established on a school-wide basis in order to galvanize knowledge-sharing, learning and change among academics and practitioners.

The new system of incentives is needed in order to enhance the Mode 2 knowledge production. A way to align incentives with research relevance could be achieved by providing funding and tying promotions and career tracks to impact the relevance of research and teaching, and by organizing and rewarding projects where researchers and users are co-producers. Similarly, the creation of new measures of academic impact is needed. This means a credible measure of relevance to provide a counterweight pressure to use purely academic criteria to evaluate academic performance.

1.2. Mintzberg on management education and research. Mintzberg's critique (2004) on management education is severe. He argues that the conventional management education trains wrong people in wrong ways causing unwanted consequences. He asserts that conventional management education overemphasizes the science of management, while ignoring its art and denigrating its craft, leaving a distorted impression of its practice. According to Mintzberg, we must understand the nature of managerial work before we can develop proper management education. He emphasizes that management is a practice that has to blend a good deal of experience with a certain amount of insight and some science-based analysis.

"Leadership and management are life itself, not some body of technique abstracted from doing and being. Education cannot pour experience into a vessel of native intelligence, not even into a vessel of leadership potential. But it can help shape a vessel already brimming with the experiences of leadership and life. Put differently, trying to teach management to someone who has never managed is like trying to teach psychology to someone, who has never met another human being. Organizations are complex phenomena. Managing them is a difficult, nuanced business, requiring all shorts of tacit understanding that can only be gained in context. Trying to teach it to people who have never practiced is worse than a waste of time – it demeans management" (Mintzberg, 2004, pp. 9-10).

According to Mintzberg, management education not only fails to develop managers, but gives students a false impression of managing. First, business schools are coalitions of functional interests formed by disciplines. Business schools do not teach material that cuts across the specialized functions, but they do so within particular functions.

"Management is not marketing plus finance plus accounting and so forth. It is about these things, but it is not these things. Pour each of these functions, of a different colour, into that empty vessel called MBA student, stir lightly, and you end up with a set of specialized stripes, not of blended managers" (Mintzberg, 2004, p. 33).

Second, today's management education reduces managing to decision-making, decision-making to analysis, and analysis to different techniques. However, in the practice of management, soft skills are mostly needed. Managing is after all, working with people, doing deals and processing vague information. Although business schools have been trying to teach soft skills for years, they have never properly internalized them.

According to Mintzberg, it is important to differentiate, conceptually, management education from management training and management development. In management training people are educated outside the practice. In management development, organizations further develop their managers by mentoring, coaching and rotating. Between these two forms is management training, typically offered by independent trainers, consultants and various institutions. Training often includes materials from business schools and their own practical repertoires of techniques and skills.

Mintzberg has several suggestions to reorganize business schools concerning faculty, course loads, functions and disciplines. Mintzberg criticizes typical business school systems, where only publication in scientific journals qualifies people to be a teacher. According to him, being a good researcher does not make people good teachers and business schools should start assessing faculty members on their teaching and researching independently. Consequently, workloads between teaching, reseach and admistirative work should be assigned accodingly. Business schools shoud also hire consultants or "executives-in-residence" with academic inclinations and excellent teaching skills, since they are able to contribute to the business schools.

Teachers in the business schools are also chosen by the specialization in their discipline – not in business or in management. Typically, people interested in broader issues have no place. Business schools had current organizational structures decades ago. Ironically, businesses are working to break down these functional or disciplinary silos while business schools keep reinforcing them. Business schools should favor people who have strengths across functions as well as people from the fundamental disciplines (e.g., business history, sociology), so long as they have genuine enthusiasm for addressing issues of concern to business and management.

1.3. Bennis and O'Toole on management education and research. Bennis and O'Toole (2005) argue that management education faces intense criticism for failing to impart useful skills, failing to prepare leaders, and failing to install norms of ethical behavior. They believe that a less-than-relevant MBA curriculum is the effect, not the cause, of what ails the modern management education.

"During the past several decades, many leading business schools have quietly adopted an inappropriate – and ultimately self-defeating – model of academic excellence. Instead of measuring themselves in terms of the competence of their graduates, or by how well their faculties understand important drivers of business performance, they measure themselves almost solely by the rigor of their scientific research. They have adopted a model of science that uses abstract financial and economic analysis, statistical multiple regressions, and laboratory psychology. Some of the research produced is excellent, but because so little of it is grounded in actual business practices, the focus of graduate business education has become increasingly circumscribed and less relevant to practitioners" (Bennis and O'Toole, 2005, pp. 96-98).

According to Bennis and O'Toole, the main reason underlying the problems is the aspiration of business schools to have the same standards of academic

excellence as hard disciplines embrace. In sciences like physics and economics, top faculty members have few responsibilities other than attending to their discipline. They are not required to train practitioners or to demonstrate practical use of their work. However, Bennis and O'Toole argue that business schools should follow schools of law or medicine, where most members of the teaching faculty are also practicing lawyers or doctors.

Bennis and O'Toole argue that business schools have chosen the "scientific model" intentionally, because it makes things easier. Although scientific research techniques require considerable skills in statistics or experimental design, they call little insight to complex social and human factors and minimal time in the field to discover the actual problems faced by managers. According to these authors, the problem is not that business schools have embraced scientific rigor as such but that they have forsaken other forms of knowledge.

In order to regain relevance, Bennis and O'Toole argue that business schools must accept that business management is not a scientific discipline but a profession, and understand what a professional education requires. Professions have at least four key elements: an accepted body of knowledge, a system certifying that individuals have mastered that body of knowledge before they are allowed to practice, a commitment to the public good, and an enforceable code of ethics.

The authors believe that business schools should look to professional schools in medicine, dentistry and law for guidance. For instance, law is a broad-based activity drawing upon many of the same disciplines relevant to business. Law schools, however, have not succumbed to envy physics and the scientism it spawns. Instead, they tend to reward excellence in teaching and pragmatic writing. Furthermore, law schools recognize that a well-written book or well-documented article published in a serious, practitioner-oriented review, is as valuable as a quantitative article published in a journal read only by cutting-edge researchers.

2. Methodological choices

Our methodological choices are guided by the broad objective of the study: to deepen our understanding of the recent discussions about the relevance gap between management education and management practice. As mentioned, we examined the recent discussions of critical academic management educator and have reflected their arguments with empirical material from business students and experienced managers.

The study, presented in this article, is based on textual analysis (cf. Parker, 1988; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Jokinen and Juhila, 1991). On a general level, textual analysis aims to identify sets of arguments about reality. Texts are typically knowledge formations that are based on a limited number of interlinked basic assumptions and a set of consistent metaphorical elements.

Overall, textual analysis refers to the in-depth reading, deconstruction and interpretation of the texts. The analysis is focused on defining specific interpretative repertoires. Inconsistencies between the basic arguments and assumptions lead to the identification of specific discourses. The main purpose of textual analysis is to identify shared cultural conventions and language practices at the macro level (cf., Eriksson and Lehtimäki, 1999).

The texts, used as an empirical material, are the online discussions of business students from HSE and the interviews of corporate managers. Thus, we concentrate on the contents of discussions and interviews, which reflect phenomena or processes occurring in informants' inner realities. The aim is to study what classifications and, on the other hand, what distinctions the material contains.

3. Empirical material

The online discussions of business students from HSE form a platform for understanding students' concerns about management education. HSE is the largest and leading business school in Finland and was established by the business community in 1904, receiving university standing in 1911. Nowadays, the university has about 4000 students and over 400 researchers, teachers and service personnel.

Students, studying for a full M.Sc. or B.Sc. degree, are automatically members of the student union of HSE. The function of the student union is to connect its members and enhance their social connections. The union offers an online discussion forum for its members containing eight discussion areas of different topics and areas containing a myriad of discussions. At the time of the study there were over 6300 registered users and almost 25000 messages in the forum.

The most relevant discussion for this study is under the title "The quality level of the HSE is inexcusably low" which was active in the forum since November 2002. The discussion had two intensive time periods: (1) from November 2002 until February 2003 with 22 messages; and (2) from August 2005 until November 2005 with 31 messages. Altogether there were 27 different pen-names participating in the

discussion. In the same discussion forum there were also other discussions about similar issues:

- "the useless vs. useful majors" (March-July 2005, 32 messages);
- "the most useful course of the school" (November-December 2005, 15 messages);
- "where are we?" (February 2006, 10 messages);
- "the quality level of teaching" (April 2006, 18 messages).

Most of the participants were current students of HSE, but there were also managers (typically former students) as well as students from other disciplines, especially from Helsinki University of Technology.

These online discussions are studied from a netnographic perspective. Netnography is a fairly new qualitative research method that adapts the ethnographic research techniques of anthropology. In netnographic research the aim is to study cultures and communities emerging through computer-mediated communications (Kozinets, 1998; 2002).

In its simplest form netnographic research consists of field work (observation, interviews, etc.), description of the material, and analysis. Compared to traditional ethnography, netnography is faster, simpler, and less expensive. Compared to focus groups and interviews, it is more naturalistic and unobtrusive (Kozinets, 1998; 2002).

Netnography is used in different fields of research; especially in consumer, cultural and psychological research. There is a remarkable number of influential publications studied by netnography in several fields of social sciences (e.g., Cohn and Vaccaro, 2006; Giesler and Pohlmann, 2003; Yangin and Fangin, 2004; Brown, Kozinets and Sherry, 2003).

We believe that netnography as a method, and the students' online discussions as empirical material are a very interesting combination when studying students' concerns in education. In addition to its fastness, simplicity, cheapness, naturalness and unobtrusiveness, the netnographical approach in the online discussion forum analysis is advantageous, because the anonymity of the participants is maintained, and therefore the messages can be trusted to reflect fairly authentic and undistorted thoughts.

In online discussions we really "read" the students' own voice in expressing views on specific courses or the whole curriculum. At the same, time individual and fresh ideas are stimulated and evaluated by the fellow students and by the managers already working in business.

Our empirical material includes also six open interviews. Our informants are corporate managers, who were chosen based on their long lasting experience in the top-level management, either as CEO or vice president of significant Finnish corporations. The managers are in their fifties or sixties. Five out of six have master's degree in economics or in technology; one of them has professional education. However, all of our informants have taken part in many kinds of business training and management development programs during their career.

The managers were asked to describe their careers paths and were advised to focus on their personal development events or periods. The informants reported how they have improved as managers in these specific situations. Typically, the interviews lasted around two hours. Alltogether the texts form about 100 transcripted pages.

3.1. Textual analysis of students' online discussions. After reading, rereading and using open coding we became familiar with the data. It appeared that the collected material would serve well in answering the following questions: (1) what is managerial competence?; (2) what are the students' concerns in management education?; (3) what kind of dichotomies can be identified in the discussion topics?; (4) what kinds of issues are considered important when studying business?

The areas of competence named by students can be categorized as follows: (1) practical skills such as cost accounting; (2) a holistic view of making business; or (3) soft skills (Table 1).

Table 1. Students' views about competences needed in business

Practical skills	Holistic view of making business	Soft skills
Accounting routines Cost accounting Jurisprudence Languages Market research Mathematics Programing	Ability to combine different existing skills Holistic view of areas in business Interdisciplinary Internalization of concepts	Communication skills Team work Understanding business strategies

Our conclusion is that the students seem not to be completely able to understand the nature of managerial work and the necessary competences in real-world business. The students seem mainly to emphasize practical skills, such as accounting routines or hard disciplines like statistics. Especially, those who are already in business positions, call for more soft skills, like interaction with other people.

The students' concerns regarding management education can be classified into five different topics (Table 2). The students are worried about: (1) the varying quality, role and different practice-orientation in the basic courses; (2) the lack of skilled teachers; (3) many course implementation deficiencies, such as

bad teaching methods; (4) course content-related concerns, such as narrow-scoped courses, useless and/or easy courses or over detailed courses at the cost of getting a wider view. Surprisingly only one comment argued that some students are not really motivated to learn business management, i.e., there are students that are in the "wrong" field.

Table 2. Students' concerns in management education

Basic courses	Some basic courses can be passed only by hanging around; the work load between courses varies considerably; it is stupid to lower the quality of a certain top course in order to have the same level for all of them; basic courses should create the basis for advanced courses; there should be enough basic courses to establish the basis; the courses should be practice-oriented; the courses should be better intertwined/linked/connected to each other.
Teaching resources	Not enough teachers committed to teaching; good teachers are not appreciated; the teacher/student-ratio is not equivalent between majors; if only there were many skilled and pedagogically talented teachers who are interested in the students and committed to their discipline.
Implementation of courses	Students' course feedback is not collected of the whole period, but only course by course; if there were at least one really very good course; the courses are not necessarily ultra demanding enough, with the consequence that unskilled students participating in the course prevent the courses from achieving an international level of quality; students can print the right answers of accounting exercises; teaching of logical thinking would be essential; the essential thing is not the work load, but the quality of teaching; courses should be grounded on the practice; "soft" courses should be taught in a "hard" way; even the learning of mathematics would improve very much, if things were connected to practice at least to some extent.
Contents of courses	It is not possible to get a holistic view because there are too many things to learn in a course; there are courses that don't benefit anybody, and there is nothing to learn; the things to be learned should be taught in a wider context; interdisciplinarity would benefit the students; courses, where concepts and rules are defined would be needed.
Students	There are too many students not really motivation to learn business management.

In terms of students' concerns our conclusions are that: (1) the students pay a lot of attention to the perceived problems in basic courses; (2) the students' concerns are very much teaching-related and not related to learning or the learning environments at HSE; (3) the students do not seem to be worried about the overall learning orientations of the student community.

Table 3. The dichotomies identified in online discussions

Major, discipline or course related attributes	Appreciated/not appreciated discipline/course Compulsory/optional course Course including/not including new knowledge Demanding/easy course Dynamic/static discipline Hard/soft discipline Human centered/not human centered course Interdisciplinary/narrow scoped course Interesting/dull course Loading/easy course Practice-oriented/theory-oriented course Responsive/non-responsive to needs in practice Right answers giving/not right answers giving-course Room for creativity/no room for creativity-type-course Students only hanging/not hanging around-course Useful/useless major Visionary/non-visionary course
Students' comprehension	Learning of concrete skills/theoretical skills Meaning/reproductive orientation to a course Only passing a course/learning in a course Science making oriented/practice oriented student Students with/without a proper motivation to a course Superficial smartness/real understanding of strategy
Teaching style	Teaching with/without examples in practice Visiting lecturers/only teacher's lectures

The identified dichotomies are presented in Table 3. Among the listed course-related dichotomies we can identify many expressions related to the attribute *demanding* (appreciated, demanding, loading, not-hanging-around course). Correspondingly, we can identify several synonyms related to the attribute *relevant* (useful, practice-oriented, responsive to needs in practice, courses including new knowledge). Therefore, we propose that the most essential course characteristics from the students' point

of view would be *demanding/easy* and *relevant/irrelevant course*.

Issues that are considered to be important when studying business management:

1. "Googling".
2. Own motivation and interest in the discipline in order to learn and to become an expert.
3. Selection of the major: to be able to outline the processes of a company; to gain experience during summers by training/working in companies; to have a learning orientation; to learn accounting routines; to learn concepts and details; to learn the kind of competence one likes oneself; to learn theory; to study hard disciplines and to pass demanding courses; to understand other persons' competence.

The impression, described above, is that the student's own motivation combined with hard work would result in success in business life. It is interesting to note that what we cannot see when looking at the students' expressions is: communication skills, the importance of context, situational sensitiveness, and how to learn how to be a manager or a leader (and not an expert).

3.2. Textual analysis of managers' interviews. After deconstructing and interpretating, as well as using open coding, we became familiar with the transcriptions of management interviews. It appeared that the collected material would serve well in answering the following questions: (1) what is managerial competence?; (2) what are the managers' experiences of management education?; (3) what are the managers' experiences of their own managerial development?

Based on the interviews, managerial competence (cf., Alajoutsijärvi, 1999; Alajoutsijärvi and Salminen, 2005) can be divided into three areas:

- concept knowledge: a good grasp of concepts and terminology of business;
- context knowledge: a knowledge and understanding of a specific business context;
- communication skills: an ability to understand and influence other people.

In the Table 5 there is a summary of the managers' views about the competences needed in business. In the interviews, competences connected to communications skills were mentioned dozens times more than conceptual competences typically emphasized in the business education. The context knowledge was in turn considered obvious or matter-of-course.

Table 5. Managers' views about competences needed in business

Concept knowledge	Basic concepts of psychology Concepts of strategic management Context independent business "laws" General terminology of business
Context knowledge	Relevant details Substance know-how Understanding of customers' specific needs and operations modes Understanding of technical issues
Communication skills	"Sticking" one's neck out Appreciation of external experts Communication in the different levels of business relationships Confidential relationships Firm style of management teams Inspiring and encouraging colleges and subordinates Interaction capabilities Keeping "open doors" Listening customers Preventing too independent clans Prevention of isolated managers, projects, business units and even firms Skills of foreign languages Social relationships outside one's own stakeholders Understanding and communicating values Understanding of cultural differences Visionary building and communication

All the informants agree that managers must know a wide portfolio of business concepts which help to capture the central phenomena in business. The most important concepts in our empirical material are related to strategic management and basic terminology.

The context knowledge is typically something managers must know in order to properly manage firm. In that sense, context knowledge functions as the background, setting, circumstance or condition of specific management situations (cf., Alajoutsijärvi and Eriksson, 1998). In terms of management processes, it is possible to define context as the structure of the properties that are systematically relevant to the manager. Typical contexts are market areas, industries, networks and business relationships of the focal company, its operating units, its technology, and its relevant personnel.

Based on the interviews, we can agree with Normann's (2001) argument that the most fundamental process of management is that of interpreting continuously evolving contexts, formulating notions of an organization's strategy and emerging new contextual logic into a set of dominating ideas, which are both descriptive and normative, and then translating these dominating ideas into various realms of action.

Table 5. Topics that the managers' consider to be important when studying business management

Useless topics in studies	Useful topics
Industrial engineering Microeconomics, statistics Too much emphasis on basic or elementary courses: book keeping, budgeting, etc.	Basic terminology International business Investment/financial calculations Macroeconomics as useful general knowledge Strategic planning, long-run marketing planning

The interviewed managers have studied at the university 20-30 years ago. Therefore, their comments concern the typical business or technology studies in the 1970s and in early 1980s. Naturally, they did not have many fresh or vivid memories of their university studies, but they can interestingly reflect on education within their long career (Table 6). In that sense, their reports are spontaneous and authentic. As a summary, we note that the informants did not see the content of their university studies, generally speaking, very useful. However, the degrees have been crucial for their careers. The most beneficial courses included general management, such as strategic management, marketing analysis and investment planning.

When reflecting on their own personal development as managers, the informants described critical incidents of their careers and the turning points of the firms at that time as seen in Table 7. Typical critical incidents of the careers are changing the manager position and/or the firm, and/or the industry, and/or the country. Typical turning points of the firms mentioned by the managers are caused by economic fluctuations, acquisitions and mergers, change of strategy or business idea, or management style.

Table 6. Critical incidents of the managers' careers and turning points of the firms

Incidents of the career	Turning points of the firm or industry
Changing the manager position (e.g., from office level or store level to corporate level, or from domestic trade to foreign trade) Changing the firm within the industry Changing the industry (e.g. from consulting firm to industrial firm or from banking to furniture industry) Changing the country (e.g., from Finland to the U.S.)	Acquisitions and mergers of firms Change of management styles and/or business concepts Crises of the firm and/or the industry Economic fluctuations of the industry and/or the economy Growth and/or internationalization of the firm

Conclusions

The strong critique of management education by Starkey and Madan (2001), Mintzberg (2004) and Bennis and O'Toole (2005) concentrates on the overemphasis of the scientific model in curriculum and wrong staff incites the wrong track for business school development. According to these authors, the gap between real-life managerial practices and academic education is not closing but increasing. Consequently, it seems that business schools are losing their relevance.

Based on our empirical material, also students seem to worry about the relevance of their studies, but their concerns are very much different from those of the researchers cited here. We believe that the main reason for this is that business students seem to have remarkably different understandings of the nature of managerial work than the researchers.

It is very interesting to note that the management students of the highly appreciated business school have only a vague clue of the real characteristics of their future profession, its challenges, and the competences needed. It is also interesting that the teacher in the students' expressions is presented in a very dichotomous way: she/he either pays attention to practice or not, and if the teacher is able to give examples of the practice or she/he has invited visiting lecturers for a course, that is enough for the students.

Our empirical materials answer in very different ways to the question: what is managerial competence? The first distinction concerns the main classifications. The most eye-catching classification of the managerial competences in students' online discussions includes three categories: practical skills, holistic view of making business and soft skills. The students mentioned many times more attributes refereeing to practical skills, e.g., accounting routines, language skills, mathematics and programing than so-called soft skills.

Based on our managers' interviews, the competences are divided into three categories: concept knowledge, context knowledge and communication skills. Contrary to students' view, the communication skills are strongly emphasized in the texts. It is very interesting to note that the fundamental category "context knowledge" does not emerge at all in the students' views.

The critical literature on the contents delivered within management education emphasizes a continuous search of relevance. We believe that in addition to teaching content, we need to align critical content with new pedagogical processes. A fundamental prerequisite for such pedagogical processes is the reconceptualization of the position of management education in relation to management practice, much in a way which provides an analytical focus on management and organizational practices beyond business schools.

We could, for instance, rethink our conventional understanding of management education, where management education is linked to management

practice. One teaching method that effectively integrates concept know-how, context know-how and communication skills, is problem-based learning (PBL) (Alajoutsijärvi and Salminen, 2005). It originated in medical schools and has been used for a long time (Aspy, 1993). Within this pedagogy students construct knowledge about the principles and concepts in question, following a curriculum that stimulates learning through independent research, critical and evaluative judgements, and reasoned choices. Using PBL as the teaching method helps students to adopt a meaningful orientation for the discipline and subject that they study. It has also been shown that students' orientation is related to study success (Tynjala et al., 2005).

The assumption that management education is functional to management is predicated on a model of professional training, in which there exists a body of knowledge which is understood to be central to effective practice (French and Grey, 1996, p. 3, Elliot, 2003). While this may be true of medical or legal training, for example, the same cannot be said of management, which is not truly codified in the way that the medical or legal professions are. As Mintzberg (2004) emphasizes, you do not need specific qualifications to become a manager, indeed the majority of managers do not have any, and this is reflected in the diversity of content and methods that constitute management education programs.

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