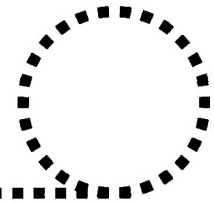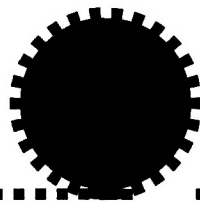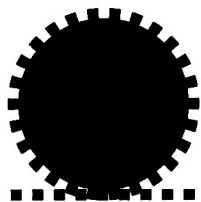# Comparing Management Curricula With Management Practice

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We endorse, acknowledge, and recognize the outstanding work that many hundreds of management professors have done and continue to do in advancing the knowledge of business. Over the years, many academicians have maintained an excellent dialogue with the business community through consulting, writing, workshops, continuing education, and teaching. However, after many decades of research, the divide remains deep between the training rendered to management students and the needs of practicing managers. This disconnect is hurting business students, business schools, business firms, and American society. The present research presumes that a closer alignment of management curricula with managers' needs will benefit all stakeholders, including business school students seeking full-time employment.

This paper examines the gap between theory (academic practice) and business practice, particularly looking at management curricula compared with business managers' needs. The purpose of this research was threefold: First, to identify specific management licenses and certifications cited in corporate job descriptions as required for entry-level business jobs. Management students today need proficiency in at least one license and certification area to compete for entry-level management jobs; Second, to assess the level of disconnect or gap between management curricula focus and managers' needs; Finally, to provide recommendations for schools of business to meet the needs of students and the business community concurrently.

Literature Review

Dickinson, Herbst, and O'Shaughnessy (1983) stated that "Communication between business academics and the business community appears to be minimal, and perhaps even threatening to both parties; academics have little interest in practitioners and their ideas." Since Gordon and Howell's (1959) Ford and Carnegie Foundation reports, business schools have been widely criticized for being too academic.

In the 1990s, Mintzberg (1996) and others outspokenly criticized business school curricula (Mintzberg and Gosling, 2002; Mintzberg and Lompel, 2001). Although sometimes used to describe academics in general, the term "ivory tower" came to symbolize the failure of business schools to provide what the business world needs. Bennis and O'Toole (2005) said "Business programs face intense criticism for failing to impart useful skills, failing to prepare leaders, and even failing to lead graduates to good corporate jobs." More recently, Reibstein, Day, and Wind (2009) discuss how and why "business academia has lost its way."

Pfeffer and Long (2002) concluded "There is little evidence that mastery of the knowledge acquired in business schools enhances people's careers; even attaining an MBA has little effect on graduates' salaries or career attainment." Bennis and O'Toole (2005) proclaimed that "Instead of measuring themselves in terms of the competence of their graduates, or how well their faculties understand important drivers of business performance, business schools measure themselves almost solely by the rigor of their scientific research, which is largely not grounded in actual business practice." The time has come to realign business school curricula with corporate needs.

One indication of the ivory tower phenomenon is the publication by some business journals of articles deemed by practitioners to be irrelevant. The dean of New York University's graduate school of business, Richard West, used the terms "fuzzy, irrelevant, and pretentious" to

describe business school research (Gaddis, 2000). Critics contend that many articles in top tier business journals are difficult to understand and out-of-touch with business reality. Some journal articles are seemingly written by academics for academics and offer no assistance for the practice of business. Bailey and Ford (1996) summarize this problem, saying: "Business schools appeal to one another as scholarly communities through a plethora of academic journals that are utterly divorced from the challenges of everyday management." In his 1993 presidential address to the Academy of Management, Don Hambrick criticized the lack of impact of the work of its members on the business community because of the "incestuous, closed loop" nature of academic research and writing (Hambrick, 1994).

Bennis and O'Toole (2005) noted that: "A renowned CEO doubtless speaks for many when he labels academic publishing a "vast wasteland" from the point of view of business practitioners. In fact, relevance is often systematically expunged from many business journals. "These authors point out that young, untenured business faculty at many large universities are urged to avoid work with practitioners; concentrate your research on narrow, scientific subjects." Young business faculty that publish practitioner-articles to the exclusion of theoretical articles run the risk of being denied tenure at many universities. Consequently, many such faculty and most business PhD students know considerably more about academic publishing and conjoint analysis than problems of the workplace.

Discontent between the business community and academia has become even more pronounced in 2008–2010 as businesses struggle to survive in the economic recession. Although business schools and business education have been commercial successes, there are substantial questions about the relevance of their educational product and doubts about their effects on both the careers of their graduates and management practice (Pfeffer and Fong, 2002). One needs only to contrast business schools with other professional schools, such as medicine, engineering, nursing, and law, to see the disassociation between curricula and industry practice. Seth Godin (2000), who attended Stanford's Graduate School of Business, studied this issue and said: "The core curriculum taught at business schools is irrelevant, and the utility of a business school degree is not based on learning." In contrast, law professors are expected to be

first-rate scholars and articles published in law reviews are often cited in trials. Similarly, medical school professors publish advanced biological research, and most such faculty are also practicing doctors.

Another indication of the gap between academia and management practice is evidenced by the relationship of business schools' curricula to the licenses and certifications specified as needed in corporate job descriptions. Pfeffer and Fong (2002) note that "A large body of evidence suggests that the curriculum taught in business schools has only a small relationship to what is important for succeeding in business." Job descriptions are posted by companies to advertise job openings. They reveal specific licenses, certifications, and skills that companies desire persons to have before applying for various jobs and also the qualifications or proficiencies graduating business students should have to possess to perform various jobs well.

Ideally, business schools provide students the necessary training to compete favorably for jobs. Mintzberg and Gosling (2002) however, reported that "Contemporary business education focuses on the functions of business more than the practice of managing." Leavitt (1989) said "Business schools have been designed without practice fields."

Method

This paper is not a scientific research piece based on statistical analyses. Rather, it consists of an analysis of corporate job descriptions, business student resumes, business course syllabi, and business textbooks. The authors first examined 100 job descriptions across many industries and identified 28 management-related licenses and certifications cited in those documents as needed or desired. The licenses and certifications fell in three management areas: production and operations management, human resources management, and strategic management. Other skills were also identified, such as communications skills and good team work, but this research focused on more tangible credentials cited as necessary for job applicants to possess.

After compiling the list of licenses and certifications, the authors used three means to assess the degree of congruence between management curricula and practicing managers' needs. First, 100 resumes from senior BBA students were reviewed to determine the extent that licenses and certifications were included. These resumes

represented a convenience sample from one four-year, AACSB-accredited, BBA- and MBA-granting public university in the southeast USA. Second, the authors reviewed 30 course syllabi to assess the extent to which management courses provided the training requested by corporations in posted job descriptions. These syllabi came from five universities located in the Southeast, all AACSB accredited. Finally, the authors examined 20 current (2010) management textbooks to assess coverage of management license and certification content areas.

Although this research focused on the management major within schools of business, the results and implications are potentially applicable across the business majors, including accounting, finance, marketing, and management information systems. The literature review gave no indication that the situation would vary extensively across the business majors.

Results

Results of this research suggest a substantial difference between what is being taught compared with what is needed by companies today. Recent job descriptions indicate that business students nearing graduation need more than communication skills, computer skills, interpersonal skills, and listening skills. To compete effectively for jobs, business students need to be proficient and ideally licensed or certified in something — some specific business areas within their major.

The 28 management-related licenses, certifications, and skills identified in this research are described in Appendix A. Being proficient or licensed or certified in one or more of these areas could give a management student nearing graduation a vastly improved chance of being selected for a job interview.

The resume content analysis revealed that the vast majority of business students have no proficiency in any license or certification areas cited in job descriptions. Ninety-five percent of the resumes did not mention any management license or certification credential listed in Appendix A. Almost without exception, students are not trained in any specific area needed to obtain entry-level jobs.

Virtually no licenses or certifications in Appendix A were mentioned in management course syllabi. Examination of course syllabi followed by 30 conversations with management professors confirmed that management courses being taught are not aimed at licensing or certi-

fying students in anything. Professors generally said that knowledge of theory would enable students to study "on their own outside of class" to obtain desired licenses or certifications. In some skill areas, such as ISO 14000, HRIS, SPSS, EPR, and ACCESS described in Appendix A, no specific license or certification is available, but such skills are nonetheless required in various corporate job descriptions. ISO 14000, for example, presumes some background in skill areas like statistics and operations that most business curricula do include. Students who know management theories well, such as Maslow's Theory, Herzberg's Theory, Path-Goal Theory, and Fiedler's Theory, most definitely will need further "study on their own" to become sufficiently proficient to include Appendix A skills on their resumes.

Regarding the content analysis of management textbooks, our findings were that the textbooks largely do not attempt to provide coverage of the license and certification areas identified in Appendix A. None of the textbooks we examined provided sufficient coverage for students to include "proficiency" on their resume.

Discussion

There is both good news and bad news in the research findings. The bad news is that the gap between business management curricula and business managers' needs appears to be as wide today as two decades ago. This finding was supported by 1) comparing senior BBA resumes to entry-level management job description licenses and certifications, 2) comparing management course syllabi to job description licenses and certifications, and 3) comparing management textbook coverage of business topics to job description licenses and certifications.

Substantial good news is also associated with this research. First, any management student today who takes the initiative "on their own" to acquire specific business licenses and certifications and skills may have a distinct competitive advantage over students who rely solely on their academic training. There is more good news. Schools of business could make changes to close the gap between academic focus and business community needs in their geographic service area. Making changes sooner rather than later could provide competitive advantages for the institution over rival colleges and universities.

To the extent our findings for the management discipline are similar to other business majors, we present 14 changes that schools of business could implement to better serve their students and local businesses. It should be noted that some schools already do an excellent job in some areas.

1. Business schools could revise their mission to become more practitioner-oriented. Changes in overall philosophy and mission are needed. The shift from theory to practice, needed more for some schools than others, should be discussed among all business faculty and administrators to achieve consensus regarding a strategic plan. This is not an either or proposition. There simply needs to be more balance between theory and practice with intrinsic and extrinsic faculty rewards for "practice" being commensurate with rewards for "theory."

2. Schools of business could revise their curricula to provide more training on specific skills needed for graduates to get jobs. Course descriptions in college catalogues need changing, some more than others, to incorporate a new emphasis on practical business licenses, certifications, and skills. Business schools need not become solely trade schools as they largely were in the first half of this century, but the current void in teaching critical business skills versus corporate job description needs is problematic.

3. Schools of business could develop specific tracks within majors to tailor courses of study to the business community's needs. The suggested management tracks in this article are production/operations management, human resource management, and strategic management, as noted in Appendix A. Many business schools already provide "specific tracks" within majors, and that is good because it helps students sell themselves as being proficient in something concrete. Within the marketing major for example, tracks could be sales, advertising, and marketing research. Within finance, tracks could be banking, investments, and corporate finance.

4. Business faculty could revise specific courses to provide training whereby students who finish various courses are prepared to take a particular license or certification exam. The suggestion is not necessarily to provide more or different courses but rather to alter the coverage in existing courses to the extent possible. Within newly designed courses, seminars, workshops, guest speakers, and class exercises could be aimed

more at bridging the gap between academics and business community needs. Leonard (1992) and Beatty, Larny, Peacock, and Saladin (1996) said that "Academics must be willing to share the responsibility of crafting the content of courses with executives, and executives must do more than tell a few war stories, give the current state of recruiting, and run out the door."

5. A positive change that schools of business could make would be to design and offer new courses that specifically train students in license and certification areas deemed most critically needed in their geographic service area. For example, there could be short courses on HRIS, SPSS, or ACCESS that are described in Appendix A.

6. Schools of business could offer more internship opportunities within their curriculum to provide students with actual work experience in particular business license and certification areas. Internships could enable students to gain actual experience in corporate skills areas, such as those for management in Appendix A.

7. Schools of business could offer smaller classes, even in the face of state budget cuts. The trend toward voluminous classes precludes the type of clinical instruction that one sees in architecture, medical, or other professional schools. Large classes by definition make some practitioner-oriented pedagogy difficult, such as group work, experiential exercises, student oral presentations, visits to area businesses, and simply answering students' questions.

8. Despite financial constraints, schools of business need to hire more faculty who have business experience and credentials. In AACSB terms, hire more professionally qualified (PQ) faculty. Some schools already have a nice balance of PQ with AQ (academically qualified) faculty. Pfeffer and Fong (2002) noted "The shortage of faculty means more business schools are hiring from social science departments, such as psychology, sociology, and even education." For many years now, social scientists have derived power from the scarcity of faculty with a doctorate in business. At some schools today, social scientists have significant or dominant influence over school of business policies, norms, research, and curricula.

9. Business school accrediting organizations such as AACSB-International and similar associations need to support and advocate the kinds of changes being proposed in this article. A

growing number of short courses offered by consulting firms and corporations fill this void. Likewise, more and more nonaccredited online institutions and smaller colleges offer exactly what licenses, certifications, and skills corporations need rather than what the Academy desires. Such innovative institutions could pose a threat to the prosperity of traditional schools as the world increasingly seeks both knowledge and training from business graduates.

10. Schools of business could alter their tenure and promotion guidelines to encourage and reward practitioner-based research and consulting from faculty. At too many universities, what goes on in the classroom as well as consulting is not nearly as important to tenure and promotion as how many articles the faculty person has published in top journals.

11. Schools of business must seek a balance between theoretical research using student subjects, laboratory investigations, and mathematical models and practical or applied business research using data and subjects from actual businesses. Journal editors and paper reviewers need to insist on virtually all articles providing a substantive discussion related to "implications for practitioners." Bartunek (2007) reported that 34% of recent articles in *Academy of Management Journal* did not mention implications for practice. Ghoshal, Arnzen, and Brownfield (1992) and Beatty, Larny, Peacock, and Saladin (1996) noted that the linkage between research and teaching assumes that research "will lead to knowledge useful to business and that such knowledge will flow back into companies through business school graduates and continuing education programs."

12. Business textbook authors need to embrace business licenses, certifications, and skills such as those in Appendix A for management and also incorporate content aimed at giving students some proficiency in these areas. There is a niche (if not large) market consisting of school of business faculty who desire right now to provide more practical content for their students. Many faculty would greatly appreciate having the opportunity to adopt a textbook aimed at providing practical proficiencies to students. Truly adopting a practitioner theme could provide a distinct competitive advantage to numerous textbooks.

13. Schools of business could establish 1) an executive-in-residency program or 2) a faculty-

in-residence program whereby corporate executives and business faculty respectively spend a semester working inside the other's domain. Some schools already do this. Beatty, Larny, Peacock, and Saladin (1996) discussed this exchange concept at length, yet too few schools have incorporated this idea, likely for financial reasons. Certainly, there are business faculty and business executives today who would be interested in participating in a well-designed residency program.

Lastly, to close the gap between academic focus and business community needs, some schools of business need to embrace the trade school model to bring practice back into balance with theory. Over the last 50 years, business schools in general have rejected the so-called trade school model in order to gain respectability and approval on their campuses by conforming to the norms and behaviors of arts and science departments. Business schools, however, need to align themselves more closely with their professional school counterparts to meet the needs of their students and corporations. If medical, dentistry, law, architecture, nursing, pharmacy, education, and other professional schools on campus can focus on real world practice, then so can business schools.

Conclusion

There are many other changes that schools of business could make to meet the needs of students and businesses. Providing training for management majors on some of the license and certification areas identified in Appendix A would be a great start to solving this problem. Management departments should lead the way in this transition. This paper provides a basis for management faculty and administrators to discuss needed reforms in school policies and curricula.

If schools of business will make some of the philosophical and curricula changes proposed here, it would be a good thing for all stakeholders, especially students, who desperately need proficiency in some area to compete for jobs. Whenever concepts are being discussed in business classes, there is a basic assumption of practical utility. Without this assumption, why cover the concept in the classroom? In management curricula, Appendix A provides specific business content areas largely being neglected in textbooks and classrooms.

Regarding limitations of this research, larger sample sizes are needed in terms of schools,

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resumes, textbooks, and syllabi. Additional content analyses of more job descriptions are needed to develop analogous lists of license, certification, and other skills for the other business majors. Generalizing the findings across business disciplines is questionable because accounting curricula, for example, generally offer a more license-based approach. But even within accounting, specific skills such as Quick-Books is not widely taught in accounting curricula, but is widely used among accounting firms.

Dickinson, Herbst, and O'Shaughnessy (1983) noted that "Professors routinely suggest that corporations should be responsible to society, but few prestigious academics have suggested that business schools should be more responsive to their environments." To the extent needed, we encourage business schools to initiate the 14 reforms suggested here to be more responsive to their environments. We envision a future in which academics and practitioners regularly enter into each others' world without needing to cast aside their own.

We are confident that the gap between academics and management practice can eventually be bridged. In the meantime, however, management students "on their own" should consider becoming licensed or certified in areas identified in corporate job descriptions of interest. Most graduating business students come to their first jobs long on theory and short on know-how. Students are, in fact, the bridge between academics and practitioners. We encourage management faculty to align management curricula with managers needs, thus providing leadership for all business faculty to more broadly align business curricula with business needs.

Dr. Fred David, professor of Management, is the author of three widely used strategic-management texts that have been translated and published in six foreign languages. He has also published in more than 100 journals. Dr. Forest David provides strategic planning assistance to businesses and students through his two Web sites: www.checkmateplan.com and www.strategyclub.com. He has taught management at three universities and published a number of management books and articles.

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ing marketing journals. *Journal of Marketing, 73*, 122–132.

APPENDIX A
Job Description-Derived Management Licenses, Certifications, and Skills

Production/Operations Management

Certified Supply Chain Professional (CSCP) — APICS offers two certification programs (CPIM and CSCP). The CSCP course covers supply chain management fundamentals, building competitive operations, planning and logistics, managing customer and supplier relationships, and using information technology

Certified in Production and Inventory Management (CPIM) — Recipient must pass five exams: basics of supply chain management, master planning of resources, detailed scheduling and planning, execution and control of operations, and strategic management of resources.

Quality Engineer Certification (QEC) — focuses on product and service quality evaluation and control; requires eight years work experience and passing an exam.

Certified Six Sigma Black Belt (CSSBB) ISO9001/2000 — a production/operation system designed to improve the quality of process outputs by identifying and removing the causes–of defects (errors) and variability in manufacturing and business processes. It uses a set of quality management methods, including statistical methods, and creates a special infrastructure of people within the organization (Black Belts, Green Belts, etc.) who are experts in these methods.

Lean Manufacturing — A production practice centered around creating *more value with less work* it uses empirical methods to decide what matters, rather than uncritically accepting pre-existing ideas.

Kanban — a concept related to lean and just-in-time production; a means through which just-in-time (JIT) production is achieved; a signaling system to trigger action.

ISO 9001 — a set of standards for quality management systems. These standards can help a company understand its processes for delivering products or services to customers.

ISO 14000 — a set of standards for environmental sustainability.

Business Process Management (BPM) Certificate — Recipient is a specialist in the field of business processes and change management.

Human Resource Management

Human Resource Information System (HRIS) — An online system to track employees, including data entry, payroll, management, accounting, attendance, and disciplinary actions.

Chartered Human Resources Analyst Certification (CHRAC) — Recipient gains access to job boards, career news and advice, and networking information.

Associate in Management (AIM) — A professional designation program designed to enhance the candidates decision-making and management abilities.

Certified Compensation Professional (CCP) — a credential attesting to expertise and excellence in all areas of compensation.

Work-Life Certified Professional (WLCP) — Designed to meet the growing need to develop strategies and implement effective work-life programs. The WLCP designation includes four exams.

Certified Benefits Professional (CBP) — Recently moved from nine exams to seven. Accounting and ginance (T2) and quantitative methods (T3) are no longer part of the new requirements for the CBP, but the content of these courses has been integrated directly into the courses and exams where they have the greatest relevance.

Professional Human Resources (PHR) — Certification recognizes human resource professionals who have met a stated level of training and work experience.

Certified Human Resource Professional (CHRP) — a human resource certification awarded by the HR Certification Institute

Global Professional in Human Resource (GPHR) — a human resource industry certification awarded by the HR Certification Institute

Senior Professional in Human Resource (SPHR) — a human resource certification awarded by the HR Certification Institute.

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) — In 2009, SPSS renamed its software predictive analytics software (PASW). It is a statistical analysis computer program widely used by market researchers and human resource managers.

Strategic Management

Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) — Software capable of integrating multiple business applications, including manufacturing, order entry, accounts receivable and payable, general ledger, purchasing, warehousing, transportation and human resources.

Cognos — One of the world's largest makers of business intelligence software, enabling users to extract corporate data, analyze it, and then assemble reports. Includes Cognos Visualize, Cognos Impromtu, Cognos PowerPlay, and Cognos Query.

Business Objects XI — Business intelligence (BI) software that provides management, planning, reporting, query and analysis, and enterprise information information

Project Management Professional (PMP) — A certification to help promote, teach, and apply project management skills.

PeopleSoft, Hyperion Essbase — An integrated business software package that includes human resource management systems (HRMS), customer relationship management (CRM), manufacturing, financials, and enterprise performance management.

Project Kickstart Pro 5 — a project management software.

Microsoft Project (MSP) — A software program designed to assist project managers in developing plans, assigning resources to tasks, tracking progress, managing budgets, and analyzing workloads. The application creates critical path schedules.

Access (previously known as **Microsoft Access**) — A database management system.

(continued from page 34)

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Comparing Management Curricula With Management Practice   48

One of the most enduring debates is over the gap between academic management theory and management in practice. Is there a gap? How big is it? Why does it persist? How can it be eliminated? After verifying the existence of this gap, the authors 1) identify specific licenses and certifications job applicants often need for entry-level positions but which they lack despite their management degrees; 2) assess the size of the gap between management curricula and managers' actual needs; and 3) make 14 recommendations for business schools that should help them meet the needs of their students and the business community. The research is based on an analysis of corporate job descriptions, business course syllabi, and business textbooks.

Fred R. David and Forest R. David