

# Embedded Values and Induced Spirituality in Management Education:

The Case of Two Successful Business  
Schools in Barcelona

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**Below, Simon L. Dolan, Yochanan Altman, Ben Capell and Mario Raich examine two successful business schools in Barcelona, and argue that successful business schools combine enshrined founding values with external facilitators that the Barcelona Ecosystem produces.**

*"The world stands on the threshold of global change. Ecological, political, economic and other crises are intensifying. Wars are waged, resources wasted senselessly, and the planet is being polluted. Society is experiencing a crisis of goals and values... Human civilization essentially faces this choice: slide into the abyss of global degradation, or realize a new model of development, a model capable of changing human consciousness and giving new meaning to life."*

Open Letter to the UN Secretary-General signed by GF2045 president Dmitry Itskov and 22 of the world's leading scientists, technologists, entrepreneurs, spiritual leaders, futurists and philosophers who gathered at Lincoln Center in New York, June 15-16, 2013

*"Biological evolution has been summed up in the phrase of 'survival of the fittest,' but with overpopulation and overconsumption of resources, the future belongs to 'survival of the wisest'; ..... there can be no social or world transformation unless there is your own inner transformation."*

Deepak Chopra Co-author, *Brotherhood: Dharma, Destiny, and The American Dream*, New Harvest, May 2013

### The growing need for spiritual empowerment in general and in management education in particular

A range of professionals, from cultural geographers to branding experts, currently engage in configuring what, as well as why and how, a city becomes known and gets crowned as a "world city" or "global city". Sassia Sasken, a leading sociologist of globalisation, writes "Global cities around the world are the terrain where a multiplicity of globalisation processes assume concrete, localised forms... a strategic site for a whole range of new types of operations - political, economic, cultural, subjective".<sup>1</sup> Branding agencies attempt to map world cities through a host of objective and subjective numericals to account for the sum total that makes a situ world class. These include assets: weather, transport, economic activity, cultural activity, history, landmarks; and buzz: food and shopping experience, media recognition, affordability and subjective perception. The "usual suspects" include New York, London, Paris and Tokyo, and rather unexpectedly, Barcelona, ranked third in Europe<sup>2</sup> and sixth overall in the world.<sup>3</sup> Barcelona stands out, since compared to its competitors it is relatively small (in landmass and population) and is not a capital city (a point the Catalan separatists may take issue with, though).



In parallel, we address in this paper the following issue: what makes a business school a "world business school", or, what are the ingredients of making a world-class business school? We posed this question to our colleagues, business and management academics from all over the world.<sup>4</sup> We asked: what are the reasons that inhibit a business school to perform at its best, say in the flagship MBA program. The replies we got revolved around three core elements: Fear of change, that fundamental and entirely understandable universal malaise which affects us all; lack of drive or success in the application of sustainable values, and last but not least, the mother (and more often, father) of all ills - poor management. Poor management is inherently linked to fear of change. If you cannot trust your leadership that they know what they are doing, what reason will you have in accepting change? But we draw your attention to the second element: the inability or unwillingness to incorporate sustainable values in the management of an institution and in its products and services. That, we argue, is the key that unlocks and holds the future of management education in the 21st century.

In a series of recent books and papers Raich & Dolan (2008),<sup>5</sup> Eisler, Dolan and Raich (2013)<sup>6</sup> and Raich, Eisler and Dolan (2014)<sup>7</sup> maintain that spiritual empowerment of business leaders holds the key to the future of society/humanity. The word "spiritual" may be derived from and connected to religious movements and practices but need not be so. Dorr (2004)<sup>8</sup> distinguishes between spirituality "as a religious tradition" and spirituality "as a set of personal attitudes and commitments". In this line, spirituality may also be, and is for us, the awakening of "consciousness" that all humans have been gifted with. Here we



talk about the consciousness to recognise the “truth” about ourselves, about relationships that we have with the people around us, as well as relationships with non-humans (animals, plants) and nature in general. Such awareness is empowering because it is the beginning of taking care of our own “self” as well as understanding the world in a better way. But normally this consciousness needs to be “awakened” amongst managers (and managers to be) and that is not a self-evident task. By and large, until now, business schools have been established and run without giving due regard to the very valuable aspect of “spirituality”. The paradigm that dominates management education and business leaders today leads to a quasi-exclusive focus on “materialistic” needs (money, status, power, domination),<sup>9</sup> while paying little or no attention to the needs of the “soul”. As a result, our minds are conditioned (by the current economic and educational system, traditional parenting, as well as religious preaching) to think in a way that instead of getting us in touch with “ourselves”, the system does a good job of taking us further away from our “self”.

We argue, herein, that this has got to be changed. The task is not easy, hence empowering managers spiritually requires content and methodology. Obviously, and ideally, the process must begin at an early age. Kids and young adults need to be exposed to issues such as the meaning of life and the core values connected with them. Young people should be encouraged to reflect, debate and explore what is important to making a good life for themselves and others – an approach to education and life that has already been advocated in antiquity by Aristotle and materialised in the 20th century, among others, by Rudolf Steiner and his school system<sup>10</sup> and recently by Dolan and colleagues attempt to teaching children values using games.<sup>11,12</sup>

Here we answer the questions we posed by elaborating on the way two distinct business schools in Barcelona operate, and show how the values of their founders were embedded throughout the years with the wider Barcelona arts, sports and innovation ecosystem, to develop and maintain a form of spirituality that may explain their sustainable success.

## Barcelona Leading Business Schools: A matter of empowered spirituality

Barcelona is the second city in Europe and fifth worldwide in the number of Master of Business Administration (MBA) students. No doubt that quality of life, safety, climate, culture and infrastructure are some of the factors that attract international graduates. However, that attraction is made stronger by the reputation of its business schools, ranked systematically among the best in the world. What are they teaching in these business schools that is distinct from others? Actually, examining the content of programs, you will find marginal differences from other business school curricula. The methodology of teaching is also not much different. What is different, are their values and messages delivered explicitly or implicitly to the students attending these schools.

**Case 1: ESADE:** ESADE, ranked amongst the top global business schools aims to educate future generation of managers for: (a) the comprehensive training of professionally competent and socially responsible people (b) knowledge creation relevant to the improvement of organisations and society, and (c) contribution to the social debate regarding the building of free, prosperous and just societies. ESADE developed its mission based on the Jesuit Christian tradition of belief as well as educational tradition, within a framework of intercultural dialogue.<sup>13</sup>

Its vision is to be a globally recognised academic institution that inspires and

**Educational institutions have the resources, the power and the opportunity to effect a positive change in society.**

prepares individuals and organisations to develop innovative and socially responsible leadership to build a better future.

**Case 2: IESE:** IESE, ranked amongst the top global business schools, is committed to the development of leaders who aspire to have a deep, positive and lasting impact on people, firms and society; to inspiring leaders to work with a spirit of service and integrity, basing their actions on the highest standards of professionalism and accountability; and to educating leaders to whom we can confidently entrust the future of business and society. IESE is an initiative of Opus Dei, a Personal Prelature of the Roman Catholic Church, which is both orthodox and conservative.<sup>14</sup>

The argument throughout this paper is that both business schools were founded by religious orders that incorporated some universal values in their mission and vision. To materialise these spiritual values certain environmental conditions were necessary, i.e. a need to operate within an ecosystem that breeds innovation and creativity and enveloped in a climate of spirituality.

## Many MBA programs are rethinking management education and curricula to engender a more holistic approach to teaching management.

### The Conceptual Model

Figure 1 represents the proposed systemic framework for the paper. It is argued that three components, working in tandem, can explain in part the phenomenon of success of the two business schools. The three elements interact simultaneously and across time to produce standards of excellence in the business schools studied.

The first component is the **Eco system**. It is argued that the Eco-System of Barcelona is breeding a mixture of creativity and innovation. One can see and sense it everywhere: in the vibrant economy (leaders in creative technologies such as BIO-TEC and

pharmaceutical), in the arts (Picasso, Dali, Miro), in the built architecture and urban landscape (Gaudi), the Catalan cuisine (El Bulli, El Cellier) in the sports (Barca football club). The second component is the foundational culture of these two business schools infused by the **values of the founders**. And third: last but not least, the two schools, albeit with different strategic foci, are reputed to be well managed, enshrining a culture of empowerment amongst their staff.

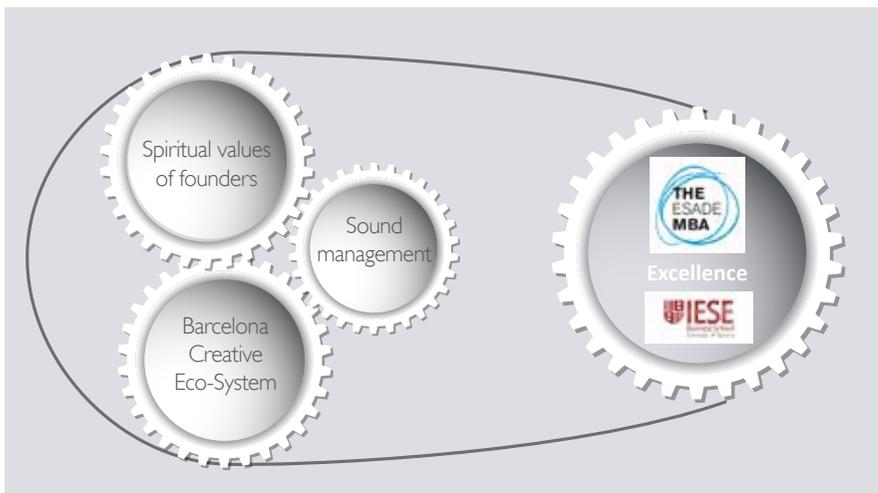
### Freedom for Management Education

Educational institutions have the resources, the power and the opportunity to effect a positive change in society. Regrettably, they are merely akin to a factory that mass produces graduates year in, year out, brainwashed with management tools and a spirit of pragmatism that has little to do, either with one's "self", or timeless universal values. If the schools and colleges were to fully exploit their potential and power, we can affect many positive changes that by their very nature are contagious and capable of setting a chain reaction of many more positive changes in the society (Raich & Dolan, 2008<sup>5</sup>; Raich, Eisler & Dolan, 2014<sup>7</sup>).

Evidently, people may say that what we are proposing is utopian. That may be so, but it is not impossible to achieve. We have seen how the great leaders of some freedom movements - Gandhi in India, Mandela in south Africa, King jr. in the USA, among others - deployed educational systems to mobilise their people (and in particular, the youth), inspired by universal values and the traditions of their respective societies, to engineer major social and political changes. Perhaps a new movement within the field of management education along similar lines, is what is called for - a freedom movement indeed - the only difference being that its focus should be managers and trainee managers who have to be freed from the enemies within - contempt,

### Figure 1

Barcelona creative Eco-system, spiritual values of the founders, and sound management as facilitators of excellence of ESADE & IESE MBA programs



The wheel of excellence powered by the combined interaction of the three base wheels

cynicism, greed and aggressiveness – qualities that are promoted by the philistine management education system that “educates” them this way, and imprint indoctrinated beliefs that remain unquestioned.

The good news is that a new paradigm for business management and business education is emerging. This new paradigm has at its core basic human values that ultimately enhance organisational performance. The cases presented here (ESADE, IESE) highlight that acting from a base of induced spirituality can become an instigator for and driver of excellence.

## Conclusion

Management's performance is confined by the normative perspectives it brings to organisational life. While many MBA programs are rethinking management education and curricula to engender a more holistic approach to teaching management, it seems that in Barcelona the two leading business schools have been doing that for quite some time. Founded on the basis of religious traditions, espousing universal values, they managed to transform these into entrepreneurial and creative management practices, reinforced by the unique Barcelona eco-system that helps sustain this type of induced spirituality. The latter takes place both directly and indirectly via multiplicative networks and interactions with sectors such as the arts and sports. It is argued that the determinants to explain the success of these business schools lies in the configuration of their founding values, people, programs, management and the Barcelona overall eco-system that breeds creativity and innovation, enveloped in a spirituality that feeds on and in turn infuses each and all of these aspects. 

Note: All four authors are associated directly or indirectly with the Future of Work Chair at ESADE Business School. The authors are also involved in the planning of the Spirituality and Creativity in Management World Congress to be held in Barcelona in April 2015 ([www.esade.edu/scmwc](http://www.esade.edu/scmwc))

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