

IEDC Faculty: Learning from the best



A School with a View

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EXCELLENCE AND RELEVANCE SHOULD BE TWO PRIMARY GOALS OF EACH MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTION!

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IEDC-Bled School of Management presents an interesting discussion between Professor Derek Abell, President of the CEEMAN IQA Accreditation Committee, and CEEMAN Accreditation Director Dr. Alenka Braček Lalić, on CEEMAN's new IQA Accreditation Framework who are both heavily engaged with IEDC-Bled School of Management. Professor Derek Abell has been Vice Chairman of the Supervisory Board of IEDC-Bled School of Management for 25 years and Dr. Alenka Braček Lalić serves as Co-Director of Executive MBA study program at IEDC-Bled School of Management.

The discussion is focused on purposes and benefits of international accreditations in the field of management education and what will management development look like in the future.



Alenka Braček Lalić: Derek, in your view what purpose does accreditation serve, and why are institutions so eager to have an international accreditation?

Derek Abell: Accreditation serves different parties in different ways. For would-be participants, it should provide reassurance that the institution that they are applying to provides a quality educational experience. For currently enrolled students it provides reassurance that they are on the right track with their education. This should mean that they are being well prepared for the professional challenges that they will face after they graduate. For employers and firms sponsoring managers to executive programs, it should mean that the output of the school will provide what they need in terms of people who can make a contribution and a real difference to their business. For the institution itself, an international accreditation is a way to considerably strengthen its brand in a marketing sense. And let us not forget educational authorities and the government. Many such authorities impose regulations on management development institutions without a sound understanding of what is really required, for example, emphasizing scientific research and publications instead of excellent and relevant education for students. International accreditation can act as a counterweight to such erroneous thinking. And let us not forget that accreditation procedures have two very fundamental purposes: to set standards and determine whether this or that institution measures up, and to set out strategies and pathways for improvement when an institution is on the way, but still falling short on one dimension or another.

ABL: As you outlined the benefits of accreditation to various parties, why did you repeatedly use the phrase “should provide” rather than “does provide”?

DA: Simply because I feel that in many cases accreditations themselves are not measuring up! They often put emphasis on the wrong things or, equally bad, fail to measure things that should have importance. So-called “international quality standards” are often standards that apply more to institutions in the developed Western economies, and are far from being universally applicable. And I am not even sure that they always respond to today’s accreditation needs of Western schools either, since there is quite a lot of muddled thinking about what quality really is and how it should be measured.

ABL: Derek, could you explain what a high-quality management education should comprise?

DA: That’s quite a question, Alenka! Former US President Richard Nixon would have answered “Good question; next question!” It is not easy to answer this question briefly because quality is in some important ways a moving target. While there are certainly some universals that change little or slowly with time, and are as essential today as they were several decades ago, there are new standards to be met as the world changes and management development needs change along with it. And as you correctly pointed out at CEEMAN’s board meeting in Vienna on 18 March 2016, quality standards must also be related to the challenges which participants will face in their own backyard as well as what they need to be at the leading edge

internationally. Let me nevertheless offer a few of my own thoughts on this central topic of the meaning of quality. Let me start by saying what I think quality management institutions are not: They are not those who put academic theory-based research ahead of relevant education for students. But neither are they those who hire mainly part-time executives to teach their programs in the belief that practice experience is all that it takes to provide effective student learning. Great teaching is always supported by thought leadership into both practice and theory. In other words, great teachers are constantly searching in their minds and in their writing for new conceptual insights to illuminate the complexities of practice and in doing so they contribute to academic thinking in parallel. Leibnitz was close to hitting the nail on the head when he said “*theoria cum praxi*”. In the field of management, he might well have reversed this famous saying and argued instead for *praxis cum theoria*.

There is a great deal of misunderstanding in the minds of many deans and their faculties about this interpretation of research and of its power to support great teaching as well as executive practice. Research into practice is fraught with difficulty and usually much harder to do well than research which starts from the theoretical end. “Inductive” research, as it is called, starts with the observation of practice in all its complexity and tries to make sense of it through the development of new ways to look at the problems of the executive. Of course there is room for both theory-based deductive research and practice based research in business, but management is far from being a science, and we hardly develop concepts fast enough to

keep up with the changing challenges, yet alone parameterize these to the point of fool-proof statistical testing.

As you know, in revising the approach of the CEEMAN IQA, we have become even more vigilant than before in looking for quality teaching and learning, and even more convinced that it needs to be supported by good practice research. This is research that can be done only by faculty who can easily cross the wide bridge between the halls of academia and the President's office. I will not go here into the details of what a quality management education should look like but a few things do stand out: It should cover certain universal international standards such as functional, cross functional, and general management and leadership learning, but also be relevant to the specific environments and to the more local challenges which students will later confront. This is a leit-motif of the new IQA approach. It should deal with the hard analytical skills needed but equally with the softer skills needed to navigate through the thickets of an organization, and to lead change. Personal self-awareness is one important part of this. And it should deal with issues beyond the business bottom line the broader social and societal responsibilities of the executive and with ethics. Finally, all internationally accredited institutions must have innovation as a central pillar of their teaching but also of their own institutional and educational development.

ABL: We are always confronted with the question of what differentiates CEEMAN's accreditation from other international accreditations in the field of management education. Derek, could you explain the distinctive features of the new CEEMAN IQA compared

to other international accreditations, such as AACSB's, EQUIS's, or AMBA's?

DA: First, the dual requirement to meet universal international standards on the one hand and to be relevant to customers in their own specific environment on the other. Second, to demonstrate a good balance between theory and practice in both teaching and research. Third, to insist that it is the quality education of students and executive participants that is of the highest priority. Research must be there to make this possible and to support this primordial objective. With these three distinctive features, we feel that the CEEMAN IQA should be the number-one choice for a school operating in any emerging or recently emerged market. This includes not only institutions that have their home base in such markets but also those schools that are based in the developed world but have pretensions to contribute to the development of executives in the new markets of the rapidly developing world. These often have very different management development requirements than those that they are used to.

ABL: A final question: What will management development look like in the future? What should it look like? Can international accreditation systems play some role in shaping what will be needed?

DA: John Kotter once famously said: "Many companies are over-managed and under-led". This is even more true today as change seems to speed up and changing organizations to anticipate the future has to go hand in glove with getting results in the present. And we are increasingly realizing that both have to be accomplished with a vigilant eye for

ethical behavior and broader societal responsibility. Management education's role has to mirror, and even better anticipate, these new demands. Can international accreditation play a role in shaping these new directions? It has to! Because there are mighty forces at work pushing in other directions. I have already mentioned the cancer that is spreading through our profession that honors overly academic research at the expense of efforts to understand and teach what the future executive will have to deal with in practice. But there are other forces pushing for a Western approach to doing business worldwide. This is equally doomed since both West and East will meet new unfamiliar challenges as the world unfolds in the future. Who will lead the way to unraveling these new challenges remains for me a very open question, and I see no reason why CEEMAN cannot take a global lead in many of these things. There is a pitiful gap between what is apparently being taught about responsible and ethical leadership and what is sadly going on in the real world. Something is terribly amiss here and one thing I am personally committed to is to ensure that accredited schools get much closer to real practice and look out for the real impact of what they teach. If this at least could be accomplished, we would make a real mark on the world as a result of our efforts.

