

A Social Contract with Business as the Basis for a Postmodern MBA in a World of Inclusive Globalisation

By Jopie Coetzee. Boca Raton, FL: Dissertation.COM

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The last two decades have been filled with robust criticism of MBA education. These critiques have ranged from Henry Mintzberg's condemnation of the MBA as a 1908 degree with a 1950s strategy to the late Sumantra Ghoshal's fundamental assertion that the theories academics teach in business schools lie at the root of what is wrong with management education (Mintzberg, 2004; Ghoshal, 2005). The scope and depth of the criticism leaves little room for yet another book condemning MBA education. To its credit and my surprise, *A Social Contract with Business as the Basis for a Postmodern MBA in a World of Inclusive Globalisation*, moves beyond the critique discourse to propose a transformative MBA degree underpinned by a new social contract between society and business.

The premise of the book is that recommendations for changing the MBA have been primarily inward looking or incremental reactionary reforms. This conclusion is reached through a rather thorough synthesis of the current academic discourse critiquing the MBA in Chapter 2 of the book. Coetzee collapses the voluminous discourse into three basic themes: general critiques of the shortcomings of the MBA, questions about the relevance and application of business education to real practice, and prescriptions for improving the strategic and operational positioning of B-schools. He argues the discourse asking compelling questions about the future of management education is less prevalent and these questions have not been adequately answered in the design of MBA programs. He cites, for example, Drucker's (1987) question, "What is the role of management and business in society?" and Ghoshal's (2005) question, "Why have business schools failed themselves and

society? “ The reason given for this void is the discontinuity between internal B-school discourse and the global discourse on a post-World War II world order emanating from other sectors of society.

In Chapters 3 and 4, the author meticulously explains the critical metasyntesis approach employed which is a wedding of critical management research and a relatively new approach known as metasyntesis. Using this approach, he examines the discourse of 88 global icons from G3 and BRICS countries. The rationale for this choice was to ensure representation from the developed world and the emerging world. The 88 icons were made up of 48 global leaders from business, politics and society and 40 Nobel Laureates from 1998-2007 in the categories of peace, literature, economics and science. I recognised many of the names of those on the list but also wondered about those missing. An impressive amount of material gleaned from speeches, annual reports, and articles containing the views of these icons was analysed. A Socratic questioning approach is used to interrogate the discourse starting with the question, “What is the future vision for society?” and ending with, “What kind of MBA does the desired future business leader need?”

What we learn from the views of these icons is perhaps the most interesting aspect of the book. In a rather creative fashion, Coetzee provides the answers through a stylized dialogue between a global leader and a Nobel Laureate drawing from the themes found in the discourse of the 88 icons. The global leader envisions a noble society that finds greatness in its humanity premised upon the values of fairness, harmony, non-discrimination, security, prosperity, democracy, God fearing, and the courage to stand-up for democratic rights. The Nobel Laureate while in basic agreement believes humankind will not find its greatness in humanity without having the courage to be the “first drop” and to “fight the intruder” as well as having a well functioning, modern, robust and globally connected society. One would perhaps have expected the sample of Nobel Laureates to possess the more utopian view of

future society and the global leaders to have a more pragmatic view of the future. A more pragmatic view arises from the global leader in response to the question about what kind of business is needed for the future society. Here the global leader's view is what might be expected—a business that is world class, delivers results, globally connected, contributes to global challenges, manages sustainable growth, and transparent. In contrast, the Nobel Laureates believes a business that can translate visions of social upliftment into sustained actions is a prerequisite for a humane society.

The kind of leader needed for this type of business is pretty consistent with the dominant discourse of the last few years. Global leaders envision a leader who is visionary and entrepreneurial with a global mindset, courage and conviction. Nobel Laureates call for a business leader who is a global steward whose choices advance the welfare of humankind rather than profit. Global leaders insist MBA programs should produce leaders who can do four things: (1) make a difference to the world; (2) shape any industry in any country; (3) have local and global competence; and (4) be resourceful. Much of what we read is old hat here in that the specifics include very familiar elements like global mindset and leadership and management skills. A surprising competence on their list, however, is MBA graduates who have a love of literature and art. Interestingly, a few scholars like Nancy Adler have been using art as a means of teaching leadership (Adler, 2010). And, we can find other MBA leadership courses that use literature as a teaching tool. But this requirement seems to be specifying something broader than using literature and art as a teaching tool. The Nobel Laureate is not interested in the specifics of an MBA education. Instead, the desire is for graduates who respect knowledge, can reason critically and philosophically, and are committed to the world's need for peace, democracy, social and economic justice.

The author interprets the views of the 88 icons as a call for a future society based on a world order of inclusive globalisation (WOIG). WOIG would be shaped by two powerful

global forces: the creation of human security through the eradication of conflict, environmental degradation, injustice and disease, and the creation of a global middle class through a second wave of globalisation. A WOIG society requires world-class businesses that are financially robust across business cycles, with global stewardship as the dominant business logic. This type of business according to Coetzee requires a leader with the ability to “envision the WOIG, and to lead in an entrepreneurial and path-breaking manner while exerting leadership qualities associated with the Golden Rule of Humanity. “ In this new social contract, business leaders have a global responsibility towards society, politics and the planet. In Chapter 7, the author proposes a rather detailed discussion of what he calls a new archaeology for a postmodern MBA. It has four knowledge clusters: global mindset, critical reasoning, crafting wealth, building wealth and managing wealth. While typical functional content is present, there are elements within each cluster that are very different from the norm. For example, sociology, developmental economics, and economic history are part of the global mindset cluster and Western, Eastern and Southern philosophies are part of critical reasoning cluster. Topics like creativity and innovation that are often electives in most MBA programs are envisioned as part of crafting wealth.

The book is based on the author’s doctoral dissertation which at times required wading through a significant amount of methodological detail. Yet, such detail provides credibility to the conclusions reached and the insights provided. Some may feel the author is too harsh in his criticism of the academic debates about MBA education that have proliferated over the past several years. This is not a new observation. Daniel (1998) characterised mainline MBA discourse during the twentieth century as an endless cycle of the same arguments. The contribution of *A Social Contract with Business as the Basis for a Postmodern MBA in a World of Inclusive Globalisation* is its efforts to synthesize Western, Southern, and Eastern knowledge values and aspirations to offer a transformative redefinition

of MBA education. Its prescriptions resonate with the budding references to other philosophical imports into management studies like the Aristotelian concept of phronesis. Thus, while there may be various opinions about what is proposed and its novelty, there is no doubt the book should stimulate new reflections and thoughts about basic philosophical questions critical to preparing current and future generations of business leaders. The book should be of keen interest to those charged with the task of redesigning MBA education as well as those of us who teach MBAs.

References

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