5.0. THE TRANSLUCENT MBA BALL OF WAX IN A NUTSHELL

The overall impression given by the 65 recruiters was one of they knew what they wanted from the business schools and its offsprings. All recruiters demonstrated a similar ease and familiarity with the terms and concepts which are uniquely indigenous to the MBA program. One area of noticeable difficulty for an overwhelming majority of the recruiters was observed in the degree of emphasis that could be placed on twelve (12) individual core courses by business schools.

The findings also indicate that a range of standards and guide lines is necessary and even desirable for most organizations. Not one program or school could meet all the demands emanating from the market-place.

It is also important to realize - after more than 10-15 years that the Dutch Trinity of B-Schools [i.e. Erasmus-Rotterdam, Nijenrode and TSM] is to this day [1999] still struggling to find the proper fit between their MBA programs and the needs of the market-place. One explanation for this misalignment may be the shift in focus from a predominantly Dutch [i.e. with an admission preference at Rotterdam & TSM for university graduates over HBO graduates] student body in the 80s to a more international group of diversified applicants in the 90s. Another explanation could be the changes which have taken place at the helm of the S.S. Ship MBA. Still another explanation could be how captains [i.e. dean and faculty] go about navigating i.e. in somewhat unfamiliar and turbulent waters - while attempting to reach/grant the [same] International MBA degree in General Management.

Researcher’s Note To The Reader(s):

Under the banner of 1992-96 the researcher will present immediately after his segmented conclusions the new standards and practices as applied by the Columbia, Indiana and Wharton B-Schools in the early to mid-90s. The objective of the exercise is to [partially] confirm or reject the Summary and Conclusions [below] because the American-Trio did apply similar methods of fact gathering with similar clientele.

The source of information came from their respective annual school brochures between 1992-96 - which are distributed [upon request] to all potential applicants, worldwide.
In Chapter Two, this Study formulated its four (4) basic research objectives which will be articulated forthwith as research questions. What is about to unfold is an attempt to answer those four (4) basic questions. The format for presentation purposes will be "Q & A" [Question & Answer].

Question One: What standards and guidelines in selection criteria and assessment procedures of Dutch applicants [who are applying to a full-time B-School in the Netherlands and who have limited work experience] is appropriate?

Answer(s): Admission criteria to graduate business schools in the Netherlands should be adjusted to reflect the economic, social and educational system [i.e. pre-MBA studies] of Dutch society. Proficiency in the Dutch language, both oral and written, in combination with one or two foreign modern European languages is a minimum. A personality test to determine the applicant's resilience to stress, creativity and flexibility should be considered as a criterion by some.

Furthermore, the ranking of standard admission criteria by 65 recruiters indicated a strong articulated preference for applying, first of all:

1. Subjective criteria, including: in-depth interviews, work experience, extra-curricular activities and clear cut career goals

   over . . .

2. Objective criteria, including tests and grades.

Letters of Recommendation were ranked the least important of all criteria by recruiters.

Question Two: What preparatory knowledge and skills are warranted when preparing Dutch students for the MBA study?

Answer(s):

Recruiters expect MBA applicants to possess a minimum of a bachelor's degree or equivalent. Mathematics, statistics and liberal art subjects [e.g. economics, Dutch communication skills, PC skills and sociology] should be part of the admission criteria. The Dutch pre-university high school program, i.e. VWO math [A or B] is the desirable niveau for the MBA core courses.

1992-96 > The American-Trio would appear to be introducing and implementing a number of new and different admission criteria since talking to their clientele [i.e.
between 1988 versus 1995]. Their new admission criteria and/or procedures for processing applicants, confirms [partially] the Study's findings, mainly: (1) personal interviews of applicants, (2) a clear preference for applicants with work experience, (3) testing for creativity, and (4) a demonstration of one's written communication skills.

The American-Trio would appear to still accentuate and prefer higher GMAT scores [600 or more] and grades [3.5 GPA], while intentionally seeking out a more heterogeneous body of national and international students. The American-Trio does not see any need, apparently, to expand the admission criteria to include: fluency in a foreign language(s) and corresponding culture(s). Student options for non-credit lab-courses in a foreign language(s) are available in the 90s.

The similarities in admission criteria would appear to be greater and progressively narrowing in 1995 versus those applied in 1988 between the American-Trio and the Study. Differences are noticeable when it came to how the criteria [i.e. objective versus subjective] are emphasized by the admission committee or officer but the number of criteria and type are becoming quite similar in the mid to late 90s.

A degree of conformity is being expressed on both sides of the Atlantic - when it comes to preparing [cognitively] groups of diversified students for the MBA experience. The American-Trio has noticeably taken more time and effort to prepare their students [via a more extensive and time consuming program] than in the past.

Both the American-Trio and Study are emphasizing a broader knowledge base in sundry subjects - related to management and business. The exact nomenclature and range of courses and its possible level can be culturally linked to the school's faculty and curriculum objectives.

Question Three: What qualifications, expertise and experience should the Dutch teaching staff possess prior to entering the MBA classroom?

Answer(s) : The qualifying criteria for faculty members to teach in a graduate business school is once again quite clear and undisputed. Recruiters prefer faculty members to possess:

1. A Ph.D. or terminating degree qualification
2. Training in adult student teaching methods
3. Classroom teaching experience and
4. Years of Work experience - prior to appointment
5. Maintain a working relationship with industry
However, some recruiters are still willing to accept faculty members with a doctorandus [drs.] degree and limited work experience, so long as they possess the other criteria of excellence.

1992-96 > American business schools believe a subject poorly taught is poorly learned.

The American-Trio has chosen to recruit more foreign students and employ more foreign scholars [with a terminating degree] as in our Study. Both are preparing and grooming domestic scholars for the international arena of knowledge and application via: international research projects, faculty-exchange teaching programs and trips abroad.

Implementing radical changes in the curriculum e.g. a global perspective, leadership skills and training - across functional disciplines - can be impeded by faculty capability, adaptability and experience.

Being able to teach in one or two modern European languages is rather unique to the Study’s findings. However, the American-Trio is inclined to solicit more foreign scholars and/or executives-in-residence who are able to communicate effectively in English.

Question Four: What are the more endearing and enduring standards or activities engaged in by students which are provided, supervised or directed by B-Schools in the Netherlands?

Answer(s) :

+ Essential but peripheral ingredients make-up the MBA experience and differentiate the mediocre schools from the more prominent one’s. Recruiters perceive a quality curriculum to contain the following standards and guidelines:

1. A more pragmatic or management relevant emphasis in the classroom sessions.

2. Graduate business schools should take the responsibilities to teach the non-cognitive skills. However, the existing faculty members aren’t able to teach effectively these so-called "soft skills" in a classroom. The placement of students and faculty members on the shop-floor of organizations for extended periods of application and training is warranted. By the same token, the placement of senior manager(s) as permanent faculty members in the B-School may help bridge the gap between the cognitive and non-cognitive skills better.

+ The business school should strive for a program that encourages breadth [i.e. generalist] of view in its curriculum.
and avoids narrow specialization during the core.

+ The mismatch between curriculum and job-entry skills for a young MBA graduate warrants adjustment. The curriculum emphasis should be better coordinated with the job-entry level and the appropriate skills linked to the position.

+ Business schools should incorporate "liberal art" subjects [e.g. philosophy, social sciences or languages] into the curriculum.

+ The core-phase curriculum in additional to teaching the fundamentals of management and business, should also help socialize [i.e. to adapt or make conform to the common values of the school's culture] the candidate. All students should be exposed to the process without any course waivers or exemptions.

+ A functional area of specialization during the post-core curriculum should be mandatory.

+ Exploratory course work or electives taken outside the business school should be made possible and also, count towards the degree requirements. The degree candidate should have the freedom of choice to accept or reject this option.

+ School policy should allow students to plan and self-design their programs beyond the required core courses.

+ A global interdisciplinary perspective should be incorporated into the core courses and not limited to a single course(s) or elective.

+ The core curriculum should emphasize the course: Human Resource Management - in the 90s

+ The teaching-learning environment should foster a "competitive and cooperative" culture but other possibilities exist and should be seriously considered.

+ Student-exchange programs with other top business schools within Europe should be emphasized for both lectures and internships.

+ A final assessment of the MBA candidate is necessary via an Oral Comprehensive Examination [OCE]. The examination should be administered in the student's mother language and two foreign languages of his or her choice. The objective(s) of the OCE are primarily intended to evaluate the student's general demeanor, attitude, poise and rhetoric skills.

+ Some members of the corporate community in the Netherlands are willing and able to actively participate in the grooming and training of MBA candidates. The exact parameters haven't been fixed but the feedback, for example, can include: classroom facilities with usage of teaching aids on corporate
premises, adjunct-faculty members from senior management, funding of scholarships for high potential students and faculty-research exchange program.

1992-96 > What follows in narration form are the major [curriculum] similarities and differences between this endeavour and the American-Trio as manifested by their respective research:

(1) Academic Rigor, Abstraction and Theory Vs. Management and Business Relevant:

More and more of the top U.S. B-Schools are emphasizing a more pragmatic and management relevant approach in their curricula. One of the remaining diehards at the top [University of Chicago], has since relinquished its preference for abstraction and converted to a more managerial and business relevant focus in the early 90s. The Study's findings overwhelmingly concur with this focus and emphasis but a segment of the Dutch market hasn't completely excluded Chicago-U's philosophy. A small but yet significant number of organizations [29%] prefer classroom experiences to nurture rigor and abstract thinkers. The real world of commerce and trade is seen as the appropriate time and place to introduce relevancy and not the classroom.

(2) Non-cognitive Managerial Skills

The faculty members of the American-Trio are assigned [to varying degrees], more responsibility for the general development and grooming of assigned students. The Study for all intense purposes concur with those developments in North America but existing faculty members are expected to encounter some problems when teaching such skills.

(3) Curriculum and Cognitive Skills

Both the American-Trio and the Study will continue to prepare their students [during the core] with a broad or generalistic perspective to business and management.

However, the Study would like to see the introduction of "liberal art" subjects into the core curriculum; the American-Trio, on the other hand, prefer to let the individual student plan and design his or her own study during the MBA experience [i.e. can include: liberal art subjects or other diversified options from other universities, schools or faculties.

(4) Curriculum Structure
A high degree of unanimity was reached when it came to exposing all students to the core courses or so-called "foundation-fundamentals and socialization" phase of MBA - on both sides of the Atlantic. To miss the MBA core would mean to miss the essence of the MBA experience. Exemptions or waivers should be avoided.

Furthermore, during the second-year of the MBA program, students [from the Study and American-Trío] must be allowed to determine an area of functional specialization. The option to pick courses outside the school or faculty must be made possible. A prescribed curriculum isn't appreciated nor accepted in North America or in the Netherlands.

(5) A Global Perspective

Most top B-Schools are moving quickly to revise their curriculums in the 90s. Subjects dealing with information systems, business ethics, leadership and global issues are dominating the corporate world of education and training. How the B-Schools revise their curriculums will vary. The American-Trío combine optional: student-exchange programs [i.e. resident studies at top foreign B-Schools and/or internships] - with brief [one to two week] visitations abroad. The Study prefers instead to assimilate [intravenously] the so-called "global perspective," as an innate part of the Dutch standard and not as a transplant. The Study's focus is clearly on Europe while the American-Trío divide their interests between Europe, Pacific Rim and South America.

(6) The Core Emphasis

The Study emphasized the course: Human Resource Management. The American-Trío concurred with the subject [Human Resource Management] but added to the list in the 90s: Management Information and Business Ethics.

(7) Employer Involvement-Commitment To MBA

Specific examples of financial commitment or other forms of involvement from U.S. organizations towards the American-Trío isn't immediately available nor itemized in their brochures of the 90s. The American-Trío and their degree granting universities do benefit from a large endowment - ranging from one to two billion dollars, a piece in the 90s.

On-Site visitations and/or direct contact in the late 80s and early 90s by the researcher with Columbia, Indiana, and Wharton - would strongly indicate a good working relationship and appreciation exists with some organizations. Some chairs of learning are financed by corporate entities, e.g. Ernst & Young Professor of Accounting and Finance and Chase Manhattan Bank Foundation
Professor of Financial Institutions,

The Study experienced [to vary degrees] a general willingness by some organizations to explore new avenues of involvement and commitment. Setting aside the Dutch tradition of involvement and long-time commitment for tutorial-internships [nationally and internationally], corporate Holland will consider: (1) funding student scholarships, (2) funding faculty-research exchange programs, (3) supplement the faculty staff with part-time adjunct instructors, (4) fund a chair, if in alignment with the donor's objectives, and (5) offer classroom space and facilities to Dutch B-Schools.

Learning from and how the better organizations actually do it [i.e. manage successfully] is a good place to start and learn.

5.1. RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

1. Most of the top American business schools promote an admission policy which accentuates the objective or quantifiable criteria. A term commonly used to describe or capture the essence of their admission policies is: only the best and the brightest may apply.

Contrary to their colleagues in North America, some European business schools would appear to be less pre-occupied with the objective criteria but prefer to screen applicants, who are considered to be: the best and most appropriate. The difference in emphasis between B-Schools from North America and Europe can be explained, partially, by the known significance and quality-levels of an university degree versus a degree earned from an U.S. college or university, HBO, polytechnical college, or "fachhochschule". The European business community regards most university graduates on the continent as being good abstract thinkers with "potential," versus a knowledgeable but more practically orientated college graduate from a HBO.

Dutch university sponsored MBA programs have changed their admission criteria, substantially, in the last 10 years. It would appear as the number of Dutch students decrease and the number of foreign students increase - obstacles to admission have been minimized. Fluctuation in policies may be warranted, periodically but the magnitude and frequency of the changes, over the years suggest a lack of leadership and an articulated long-term vision.

2. If Dutch B-Schools want to become world players and compete effectively in the global educational arena, then, they'll have to match the standards and quality of their faculty with those of Insead or IMD, for example. The Dutch B-Schools have increased the number of faculty members with a terminating degree and continue to tap the human resources of corporate Holland for adjunct-faculty or visiting professionals [from
abroad] but that is merely a point of departure. It must be said that no one has objected to the rigor or theoretical competence and conceptual modeling of the teaching staff in the classroom. What needs more attention or grooming, in the future as MBA applicants get older is a faculty who are:

+ Knowledgeable across functional disciplines;
+ Knows more about how business does business;
+ Is credible and can communication, excite, motivate, challenge and teach a group of diversified adult students;
+ And, is customer [i.e. student] orientated.

3. The curriculum has been defined as all the activities engaged in by students which are provided, supervised or directed by the school. There is however considerable disagreement among B-Schools as to what experiences should be provided in and outside the classroom. The general guidelines or framework for supporting the curriculum structure can vary from 9 to 21 months and still earn the same degree. The timeframe for future Dutch MBA programs will have to be increased from 13-18 months to a minimum of 20 to 22 months.

Most top schools have developed over the years their own unique niche in the market-place which employer organizations and applicants have grown to accept and value. This Study's research would suggest a clear preference for some experiences being orchestrated or emphasized [e.g. school culture, socialization of candidates] over others for the Dutch market. However, the findings would also suggest the needs emanating from the market-place are so broad and diversified that no one school or curriculum can be expected to successfully meet the challenge. The market needs and can harbor a number of very high quality B-Schools.

Irregardless of the school's unique niche or curriculum, the Study may conclude that certain practices or policies should be applied by Dutch graduate business schools. The rational is to be found in the educational system of the country. The Dutch have deviated, somewhat from the original Humboldt Model which called for a: broad high school [the abitur] curriculum connected to a lengthy [average 6 years] university study which should be academic, scholarly and narrow in scope. Instead the Dutch educational system calls for a narrowing of high school [VWO] curriculum in the upper-three years and further specialization during an - unofficial - 6 year study in academia.

It is within this context that most employers in the country understandably prefer a broad and diversified MBA curriculum during a two-year study versus a one-year program. However, some elitist schools, like: IMI, IMDE and Nijenrode have prescribed experiences during a one-year period or less. Dutch employers endorse an experience which expands the core courses into areas of specialization [i.e. line or staff] via the student's freedom of choice. Options created by the faculty for selecting electives shouldn't be confined to the B-School.
Adult students should be allowed to pursue their own interests and needs inside and outside the school and - if need be - the university.

Other factors can influence the MBA experience which are somewhat unique and interdependent to the local society. They are worth mentioning - for those individuals who are less familiar with the Dutch educational system and society. They include:

1. A social adversity to ranking of students or schools. Instead, the emphasis is clearly placed on high standards, academic rigor, student maturity and self-discipline at a relatively young age. Harvard's graduate business school may have its "survival of the fittest" philosophy for young MBA Turks at 26, but the Dutch VWO-university experience(s) is slightly more demanding of its survivors at a much younger age.

2. A society, which emphasizes and rewards - usually - those individuals which have met high standards, irregardless of one's grades or years of struggle. Pupil/student failure isn't penalized, at least socially nor academically, if, certain standards have been met.

3. A society which has an adversity towards ostentatious behaviour.

4. A university system which doesn't encourage nor stimulate [structurally] a social nor intellectual interaction between faculty members and students.

5. A political and university system which hasn't been properly synchronized with the modern practices of employer organizations. Some employers would have an adversity to hiring a twenty-two year old university graduate in the '90s, for a commercial position unless substantiated by extra-curricular activities or some demonstration of commercial talent. The job-market is still dominated by the buyers which may explain, partially, why university students require more than 4-years to complete their study and groom themselves for the job-market and perhaps, eventually, for a MBA B-School.

6. Subsequently, employer organizations are accustomed to a hiring practice and policy which clearly can differentiate between college [HBO] graduates versus university [WO] graduates.

7. The MBA program has a "value added" element to the job-market in the Netherlands. It has acted as an equalizer, theoretically, between Dutch HBO-college graduates [with a MBA degree] and university graduates, when applying for a so-called "academic position," in industry or governmental departments.

The Dutch MBA standard and guideline as portrayed in this Study may answer some of the challenges confronting would-be
applicants and employers. It is merely a starting point of departure. The general acceptance of an MBA degree by students, employees and employers in the Netherlands is still questionable. Unlike their colleagues in North America, Dutch recruiters aren't willing nor able to grant the horrendous salaries nor benefits. The Dutch employer prefers to pay MBA's for demonstrative skills and tangible results.

5.2. POST-SCRIPT

However, other changes may be forthcoming from graduate business schools which are more common and amenable to Dutch clientele: students and employers.

In 1992 the Dutch market responded quite favourably to the University of Nijenrode's abridged [full-time] but Intensive Doctoraal Program [IDP] in Bedrijfskunde [Business Administration]. Interestingly enough, the annual enrolment at Nijenrode's IDP was an immediate success with around 100 students. Nijenrode's MBA [i.e. launched in 1982] program has yet to reach such numbers after almost 15 years of global student recruitment.

In 1997 two other schools are planning to follow Nijenrode's lead: The Open [Dutch] University and the Haagse Hogeschool. Both institutions will offer a new part-time drs. [doctorandus] in business administration. This could mark the start of another Dutch educational frenzy and craze, i.e. 15 years after MBA privatized segments of Dutch education.

Privatization will continue irregardless of the name of the study or degree but some acknowledged standard and guideline will be necessary and warranted in order to protect the customer.