

CROSS-SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

INTRODUCTION:

To address complex social problems, business and business schools are looking to diverse partnerships for solutions. As a result, unlikely connections are developing on multiple fronts – cross-discipline, cross-sector and cross-institution.

A recent article from Ashridge Business School, “Leadership Qualities & Management Competencies for Corporate Responsibility,” considers the unique advantages of partnership in the business space. Professors Patricia Hind and Andrew Wilson and European Academy of Business in Society President Gilbert Lenssen note that companies addressing corporate social responsibility (CSR) issues seek creative and far-reaching alliances: “In developing relevant programmes, many companies are entering into partnerships with external experts on social and environmental issues by working with NGOs and pressure groups [...] The external perspective of a potentially critical third party is seen as an important ‘reality check’ and avoids an inward looking, self-referential perspective.”¹ Thus, partnerships serve not only to leverage expertise in diverse fields and disciplines, but also to develop thoughtful agendas that give voice to relevant players who have a legitimate stake in the issues.

Despite their advantages, partnerships are often logistically challenging, requiring diverse parties to align agendas and mindsets. There is a growing dialogue in the business school community regarding the distinct skills and attitudes needed to align with nontraditional actors. Numerous schools are introducing coursework to develop successful collaborators. Rotman School of Management’s Integrative Thinking curriculum, which advocates merging divergent “models” for perceiving the world, is a leading example.² Cultivating a holistic and intellectually flexible approach in future business leaders is critical to building the partnerships necessary for ameliorating the multi-sector social dilemmas facing today’s world.

This *Closer Look* considers ways management programs are cultivating perspectives that favor working with unlikely groups. It also considers tangible ways in which business schools themselves are partnering with external actors to achieve social and environmental goals in local and global communities.

LESSONS FROM THE TEACHING INNOVATION PROGRAM

This edition is part of a special fall 2007 *Closer Look* series of three articles prompted by the experiences of schools who participated in the first round of the Aspen Institute Center for Business Education’s Teaching Innovation Program (TIP). TIP is a forum intended for the exchange of ideas and the testing of new models of MBA curriculum that better integrate social and environmental thinking into core management education. Eleven schools worldwide and a select number of corporations, including GE and 3M, participated in TIP’s first round, conducted from 2004-2006. The descriptions of courses and activities in this series are drawn directly from the TIP participants, and complemented by newly-collected 2007 data from *Beyond Grey Pinstripes*, a biennial survey and alternate ranking of MBA programs conducted by the Aspen Institute Center for Business Education. The second round of TIP was launched with a planning meeting in Bangalore, India in October 2007.³

¹ Wilson, Andrew, et al. “Leadership Qualities & Management Competencies for Corporate Responsibility.” (July 2006). Ashridge. 21 July 2007.

[http://www.acbas.org/Website/IC_nsf/wFARATT/Leadership%20Qualities%20and%20Management%20Competencies%20for%20Corporate%20Responsibility/\\$file/LeadershipQualitiesAndManagementCompetenciesForCorporateResponsibility.pdf](http://www.acbas.org/Website/IC_nsf/wFARATT/Leadership%20Qualities%20and%20Management%20Competencies%20for%20Corporate%20Responsibility/$file/LeadershipQualitiesAndManagementCompetenciesForCorporateResponsibility.pdf)

² *Rotman Integrative Thinking*. (2007). Desautels Centre for Integrative Thinking. 21 July 2007.

<http://www.rotman.utoronto.ca/integrativethinking/definition.htm>

³ The two other *Closer Look* articles in the TIP series featured the topics Action Learning (Sept. 2007) and (cont’d on p. 2)

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THE BOTTOM LINE:

- One result of management schools increasingly favoring partnership in curriculum and practice has been the unprecedented rise of joint-degree programs. Often resonating with MBA students interested in leadership roles in nontraditional careers – such as non-profit organizations and institutions – emerging dual degree programs include public policy, medicine, health care and even forestry.⁴ As business students gain multi-sector expertise they become familiar with the language and norms of diverse industries, enabling them to communicate more effectively with future partners.
- A particularly fruitful collaborative model for business schools and corporations on CSR issues has been the strategic research partnership, in which business school research takes on real-world problems faced by corporations. In this mutually beneficial arrangement, business schools have access to real-time CSR research initiatives, while companies benefit from cost-effective troubleshooting of some of their most complex issues.⁵ TIP participant Alex Cirillo, Director of Community Affairs for 3M, reinforces this notion of fostering meaningful connections between the academic and corporate worlds. He cites curriculum development that solicits and incorporates corporate insights as one approach to cross-sector collaboration.⁶
- While there are business school courses emerging to build capacity for partnering across sectors, some of the most compelling partnership examples are happening in real-time, outside of the classroom. Ranging from cosponsored conferences to corporate-funded centers to multi-sector research initiatives, partnerships amongst diverse sectors, educational institutions and business school disciplines are introducing innovative approaches to collective problem solving.

FACULTY POINT OF VIEW:

The Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University is currently involved in an innovative partnership initiative that has recruited players from business, non-profit and academia to develop products that tackle global health epidemics such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and polio. Initiated by Northwestern's Schools of Engineering and Business in 2004, the **Global Health Initiative (GHI)** has had a unique impact on Kellogg's business school experience, and presents a compelling example of cross-sector partnership.

The Kellogg School's **Daniel Diermeier**, IBM Distinguished Professor of Regulation & Competitive Practice and Director of the Ford Motor Company Center for Global Citizenship, is one of the co-founders of GHI; he shares here some of the project's intents and contributions:

On the impetus for a collaborative problem solving approach to the Kellogg Global Health

Initiative: "The impetus for GHI was to merge the unique assets of industry, non-profit donors and academia to develop products that address health issues facing underserved communities around the world – 'a new model for product innovation in the health care field, if you will.' Commercial health care

The Role of the Business School in Society (Oct. 2007). The eleven global schools that participated in the 2004-2006 Teaching Innovation Program are: Ashridge Business School; Case Western University, Weatherhead School of Management; Cornell University, The Johnson School; McGill University, Desautels Faculty of Management; Northwestern University, Kellogg School of Management; S.P. Jain Institute of Management and Research; Tecnológico de Monterrey, EGADE; University of Michigan, Stephen M. Ross School of Business; University of Navarra, IESE Business School; University of Stellenbosch Business School; and University of Toronto, Joseph L. Rotman School of Management. To learn more about the TIP program visit: www.aspenCBE.org.

⁴ Bodgas, Meredith. "MBAs Who Double Up." 11 January 2006. *BusinessWeek*. 5 Sept 2007. <http://www.businessweek.com/bschools/content/jan2006/bs20060111_2790.htm>

⁵ McElhane, Kellie A. "Corporate Social Responsibility and Strategic Partnerships: Academia and Business Can Be A Powerful Team to Advance the Agenda." 2003. Caseplace.org. 21 July 2007. <http://www.caseplace.org/references/references_show.htm?doc_id=365727>

⁶ Alex Cirillo's response to the Teaching Innovation Program follow-up survey, fall 2006.

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organizations donate proprietary intellectual property (IP) that improves treatment of diseases like malaria, TB and HIV/AIDS, but that is not considered financially viable for the asset owners to develop internally. It is the responsibility of the academic partners within GHI to provide scientific talent and managerial expertise, mainly in the form of doctoral students and MBA candidates, to develop that IP and take the products to market. The research and development is funded within the non-profit community, eager to bring business discipline and innovation to global health problems.”

On GHI’s impact on Kellogg students: “In addition to valuable insight into the product innovation process, GHI provides an excellent learning opportunity for Kellogg students. It gives students the experience of working in a medical device environment from cradle to grave. They do everything from initial market research to working with the science/engineering team to dealing with the myriad of implementation problems, all in a protected environment and on projects that have the potential to do a lot of good in this world.

“This HIV test product development effort has had a prolific impact on student life as evidenced by the 200 Kellogg students have participated in the effort since its inception in 2004. Most recently, seven students from Kellogg’s Class of 2007 put their new degrees to work in Africa this summer, conducting market research at over 40 HIV testing centers in over 9 countries. The fact that these recent graduates chose to largely self-fund this market research trip prior to starting their full time jobs in September perhaps best demonstrates the passion and commitment that Kellogg seeks to instill in its graduates.”

NOTABLE ACTIVITIES:

- **Cornell University, The Johnson School**
*Base of the Pyramid Learning Lab*⁷

“The Base of the Pyramid Learning Lab (BoPLL) program is membership-based consortium of multinationals, non-profits, multi-lateral organizations, entrepreneurs and academics. The consortium works together to develop and implement initiatives among firms, communities and individuals that create value and alleviate poverty. The BoPLL encourages learning and the creation of new knowledge related to the exploration of new business opportunities for low-income communities that mutually benefit both the companies and communities involved [...] Since its establishment in 2000, the BoPLL has evolved from a single consortium to a global network in seven countries – including Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Spain, the Netherlands, South Africa and India – and continues to expand into Asia. Students spend much of their time gaining valuable first-hand experience in field projects that require them to address real problems currently being faced by companies who expect to receive practical, operational solutions.”

- **University of Stellenbosch Business School**
Centre for Development Policy and Partnership

“The Centre is a multidisciplinary research, development and service division of the University of Stellenbosch Business School, aiming to develop high-level development strategy and policy research in support of Pan African organisations such as NEPAD. It is part of an African and international network of development research institutions. The focus areas are: a) Cross-cutting African development issues such as the monitoring of and research on the Millennium Development Goals, unlocking of intellectual capital of Africa and the development of a human development strategy; b) Strategies against poverty in African countries (the so called Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers); c) Partnerships between government, private sector, NPOs and civil society; d) Regional integration; e) The advancement of partnerships between the corporate sector and small and micro enterprises at the

The TIP University Partners for the BoPLL project reflect its global and collaborative nature: IESE Business School (Spain), Ross School of Business, University of Michigan (U.S.), Stellenbosch University (South Africa), Tec Monterrey EGADE (Mexico). Many of these connections were cultivated over the course of the two-year TIP experience, during which institutions considered ways to more effectively leverage their respective strengths and expertise among faculty members.

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lowest end of the income spectrum (Bottom of the Pyramid approach); f) Local economic development in both the first and second economies; g) Advancement of foreign investment.”

■ University of Toronto, Joseph L. Rotman School of Management

Marcel Desautels Centre for Integrative Thinking

“The Centre for Integrative Thinking focuses on the development of a curriculum that allows students to take in larger vistas of the organizational landscape. Its activities will lead us to a more precise articulation of the cognitive and emotional proclivities entailed by integrative thinking. Many key advances in the social and natural sciences have come from 'outside' of the fields that celebrated them. Yet, this 'outside' aspect often feels menacing. Part of the Centre's mission is to reduce this perception of menace by creating structured dialogue between academics from different disciplines.”⁸

ONGOING QUESTIONS:

- As the academic and corporate worlds increasingly engage one another meaningfully, what capacity can be created within each sector to support these cross-sector partnerships?
- What unique leadership characteristics are required of partnership, and how might management education foster these in their students, given the growing inclination for partnership in the business world?

RESOURCES:

BeyondGreyPinstripes.org – World’s largest MBA database, including detailed records on thousands of courses and information on extracurriculars, university centers, and more, for 128 schools on six continents.

CasePlace.org – A free and practical on-line resource for up-to-date case studies, syllabi, and innovative teaching materials on business and sustainability. Created for the educators who will shape our next generation of business leaders!

A Closer Look is a monthly series of briefing papers on topical issues in MBA education, based on the research and programs of the Aspen Institute. The [Aspen Institute Business and Society Program](http://AspenInstituteBusinessandSocietyProgram.org) works with senior corporate executives and MBA educators to prepare business leaders who will effectively manage the financial, social, and environmental impacts of the private sector.

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⁸ *Beyond Grey Pinstripes* Survey, 2005