

Roundtable report:
**The role of business
schools in building more
inclusive societies**

Sponsors



carringtoncrisp

Graduate
Management
Admission
Council®



The role of business schools in building more inclusive societies

October/November 2020

Leadership Team

- André de Almeida, Fundação Dom Cabral
- Karoline Mortensen, University of Miami Herbert Business School
- Arnold Smit, University of Stellenbosch Business School (USB)

Participants

- Hamid Akbari, Carroll University School of Business
- Francis Andrea Cruz Gonzalez, Universidad de los Andes School of Management
- Daniel DeHollander, American University Kogod School of Business
- Nima Farshchi, University of Maryland
- Andrew Gaudes, Goodman School of Business, Brock University
- Mavy Gutierrez, Universidad de los Andes School of Management
- Lukas Hefner, WU Vienna University of Economics and Business
- Saleha Khumawala, Bauer College of Business, University of Houston
- Sheila Killian, Kemmy Business School, University of Limerick
- Susan LeBlanc, Goodman School of Business, Brock University
- Paula Lourenco, The Lisbon MBA Católica|Nova
- Hatem Masri, University of Bahrain
- John North, Globally Responsible Leadership Initiative
- Landry Signe, Thunderbird School of Global Management
- Aditya Singh, Athena School of Management
- Youssoupha Simeon DIOUF, Institut Supérieur de Management of Dakar (Groupe ISM)
- Amy Tomaino, Goodman School of Business, Brock University
- Carolina Velásquez, Universidad de La Sabana

Introduction

What role do business schools have in improving the terms of participation in society, particularly for people who are most disadvantaged? The factors contributing to unequal participation in economic, social, political and cultural life are complex and multidimensional, and are present to some degree in nearly all countries. Age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, religion, migration status, socioeconomic status, place of residence, and sexual orientation and gender identity have all been grounds for social exclusion somewhere over time. And there is growing concern that progress towards more inclusive societies has been slowed or, worse, undone in recent years. In 2020, the

COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionately larger impact on some communities than others. Meanwhile, racial and ethnic injustices are again coming to the forefront, leading to social unrest in various communities around the globe.

Twenty-one leaders from 18 institutions across 11 countries and five continents came together to consider “The Role of Business Schools in Building More Inclusive Societies.” Led by André de Almeida (Fundação Dom Cabral), Karoline Mortensen (University Of Miami Herbert Business School), and Arnold

Smit (University of Stellenbosch Business School), the group met virtually for a total of three hours across two days in October, 2020. This report summarizes their discussions and serves as a vehicle to share insights and opportunities that emerged. It is not intended as a comprehensive research study or meant to be authoritative.

Participants in the roundtable uniformly believe business schools can and should play a larger role in building more inclusive societies. Many schools have made doing so a priority, and have introduced a variety of initiatives. That should not be surprising to anyone who knows that members of the Global Business School Network (GBSN) already share a view that management education plays an essential role in fostering economic and social development; and have a predisposition to action.

“ *business schools can and should play a larger role in building more inclusive societies.* ”



Business school initiatives to build more inclusive societies

The importance of context was a central theme in the roundtable discussions. Although social exclusion is a global challenge, it is experienced differently depending on the setting. The efforts of business schools to build more inclusive societies cover a wide range and include entrepreneurship development programs for targeted groups,

behavioral research to reduce bias, scholarship programs, organizational changes, collaboration with different societal actors and more.

For many initiatives, context revolves around a sense of place. The Stimulating Urban Renewal through Entrepreneurship (SURE™) Program by the C. T. Bauer College of Business at the University of Houston

empowers entrepreneurs in the predominantly African

American Third Ward of Houston. Since its inception in 2012, SURE has launched or expanded more than 500 businesses. Similarly, the Institut Supérieur de Management of Dakar (Groupe ISM) works closely with local governments to create community engagement and social entrepreneurship opportunities for students in a country where private sector jobs can be hard to find. FDC in Brazil also has been focusing on social entrepreneurship locally through the PRA>FRENTE initiative which relies on a technological platform to promote the technical and human development of Brazilians who find themselves in extremely vulnerable situations.

Contextualization takes other forms besides place, and shapes the development of inclusivity initiatives. For example, the University of Bahrain has been focused on financial literacy, leveraging its strength in Islamic Finance. The school, along with several others, has also been focused on the special challenges associated with female participation in their

country's economy. In another example, the inclusivity pursuits at the Kemmy School, at the University of Limerick, have been inspired by the school's founder, a socialist, trade unionist, and stonemason. For example, the school has a strong research unit looking at precarious work and the university operates as a safe zone for asylum seekers.

Participants are rightfully proud to share these examples and others during the roundtable discussions, for they can inspire similar initiatives in other parts of the world. The spirit of the group in describing their work was less about differentiating themselves and more about solidarity.

“ Although social exclusion is a global challenge, it is experienced differently depending on the setting. ”

“ The spirit of the group in describing their work was less about differentiating themselves and more about solidarity. ”

These examples also call attention to the enormity of the challenge. Contextualization is a natural response to a global challenge—organizations address what is near and

what they know best. However, participants in the roundtable worry that isolated efforts are not enough to have a significant impact on complex, deeply-rooted systems. Change is required across many dimensions and levels throughout society.

Uncertainty about impact sometimes can reduce motivation and action. But for the

roundtable participants, it was a catalyst for deeper reflection and discussion. The remainder of this report outlines three major challenges in business school efforts to build more inclusive societies.

The purpose of a business school – reduce exclusion, build capacity for change, look beyond business to wider society

When asked about efforts to foster inclusion, schools typically point to new initiatives. Seldom do they take the time to reconsider what they already do. Roundtable leader, André de Almeida from Fundação Dom Cabral (FDC), raised this question, prompting several participants to point to existing practices that contribute to or perpetuate exclusion. For example, the dominant curricula focus on efficiency for decision making, has left other factors such as social justice and human rights largely off the table. For education programs, the admissions, pricing and discounting strategies often benefit some groups over others. The point is that business schools are themselves part of a chain that creates exclusion and social injustices.

“ participants in the roundtable worry that isolated efforts are not enough to have a significant impact on complex, deeply-rooted systems. ”



That discussion led to larger questions about the purpose of business schools, including their role in society beyond business. Is the purpose to produce graduates for the current system, or to make students capable of changing it? To what extent is business education meant to



“ business schools must stop thinking their responsibility is primarily to business and instead think of themselves as schools for society and therefore also as engines for inclusivity. ”

be normative and values-driven? According to roundtable leader, Arnold Smit from the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa, to make true progress, business schools must stop thinking their responsibility is primarily to business and instead think of themselves as schools for society and therefore also as engines for inclusivity. For roundtable participant, Hamid Akbari, the opportunity is to build a school on an entirely new foundation. He is the founding business dean at

Carroll University based in Milwaukee, which was a flash point in 2020 protests about racial injustice in the United States. For Hamid the question was “What would I do if I had the chance to start a new school?”

The point was illustrated further by leaders from the Goodman School of Business at Brock University, who recognized that students could not see themselves in the staff, faculty, and other leaders in the school. They argued that efforts to build more inclusive societies must start at home, in your own organization. According to Goodman’s dean, Andrew Gaudes, “We want people to look at the school and see themselves in it—in the leadership, students, awardees of distinguished leadership awards, and more. We want to promote a climate that is a natural representation. Anyone can go to the business school/see themselves there.”

“ efforts to build more inclusive societies must start at home, in your own organization. ”

External and internal approaches should work together. Actions inside the Miami Herbert Business School, including a faculty gender compensation review, a sustainability strategy including “LEED Certification,” and the creation of a diversity and inclusion committee, are designed to complement community efforts like hosting conferences in sustainability, diversity and inclusion, creating a new volunteer corps to support community NGO’s and small businesses and to ensure alignment with the mission to develop principled leaders that transform global business and society.

Facilitating collaboration and collective action across sectors, disciplines, and industry

The second major challenge is to facilitate more collaborative or collective actions. There was definitely an effort among schools in the roundtable to reach out and partner with other organizations for inclusivity initiatives. Cross-sectoral collaboration can be especially important for inclusivity. For example, in the Universidad de La Sabana, ISM, and the University of Houston, schools work closely with local governments. FDC has an initiative which trains NGO's towards improving their managerial capabilities.

Strong business connections are essential. The philosophy at the Center for Social Value Creation at the Smith School at University of Maryland, is that business and social impact are united as one. One can make money and do good. Businesses partner with faculty on courses and in supporting community organizations. Many programs involve extracurricular activities and experiences based on purpose, impact, and learning. In another example, at the Kogod School of Business at American University the career services function works hard to ensure that there is strong alignment between the inclusion strategies of the school and recruitment practices of companies.

The newly created Athena School of Management relies heavily on collaboration with other business schools, as partners globally for exchanges/immersions, as well as international projects on the environment and economy. Participants spoke generally about the need for organizations like GBSN to convene and connect schools with a shared interest in social inclusion. The current roundtable initiative should be continued or replicated, according to participants.

What's also needed is leadership at the larger systemic level, across borders and sectors. Existing efforts by individual schools are necessarily contextual – they are local and organizational. By focusing on the local community, the schools can and do make a difference. But how do we connect these initiatives in a way that amplifies their impact? How do we lead in the corridors of business and policy and not just teach students and engage in research? It means taking a stand collectively, to change business and society and not just prepare people for work in the existing conditions.

“ There was definitely an effort among schools in the roundtable to reach out and partner with other organizations for inclusivity initiatives. ”

Measuring what matters not what's convenient

Participants in the roundtable lament that the way we measure social progress is still limited and is itself a big factor limiting inclusion. They urge business schools to provide intellectual leadership in developing more useful measures of social inclusion. The Kemmy School at the University of Limerick, for example, plans to build their strength in social accounting.

Roundtable participants also have serious concerns about the metrics that are used to assess business schools. While global accrediting bodies and some rankings have expectations for positive societal impact, there are concerns that what is actually measured is still inconsistent with the impact they want to achieve. For example, rankings that use starting salaries as a factor can

limit a school's motivation to tilt the emphasis of programs towards underserved populations. As long as that is the case, business school efforts to build more inclusive societies will continue to be a more of side activity than a major thrust.

Finally, business schools need to measure the impact of their work on inclusion, increasingly to justify their relevance. One reason is funding. Increasingly, governments and the communities want to see their support make a difference in creating opportunities locally.

“ the way we measure social progress is still limited and is itself a big factor limiting inclusion. ”

“ While global accrediting bodies and some rankings have expectations for positive societal impact, there are concerns that what is actually measured is still inconsistent with the impact they want to achieve. ”

Next steps – learn, inspire, lead

The work of the roundtable is not finished. There is an ongoing need to discover and share what business schools already do to build inclusive societies in their respective contexts? There is a strong desire to learn from experiences about the challenges they face and think together about how these can be overcome? There is an opportunity to inspire action and courage, and to lead to impact in practice.



5 principles that emerged from the reflection on inclusivity initiatives – *by Arnold Smit*

1

Diversity and inclusion seem to be more than something that expresses a school's identity. It is also about solidarity with the society where you are from.

2

There is something about partnering in all of the stories. Partnering of faculty and students with actors from different societal sectors, becomes a strategic vehicle for building inclusive societies.

3

Projects are focal points, and ideal for bringing stakeholders together on a playground for experiential learning.

4

It is important for a school to have programs/curricula to promote inclusivity, but it becomes authentic when the programs/curricula become expressions of the ethos of a school.

5

In all of the stories there is a sense of humility and vulnerability. Such a predisposition enables a school to learn from and with others. Business schools tend to come from a position of power: we teach and show. With a predisposition of humility we may be better able to learn from others and about ourselves.



1010 Vermont Ave., NW Ste. 201
Washington DC 20005
Telephone: +1.202.628.9040
Email: info@gbsn.org
www.gbsn.org



34 Ladbrooke Square
London W11 3NB, United Kingdom
Telephone: +44 (0) 20 7229 7373
Email: info@carringtoncrisp.com
Website: www.carringtoncrisp.com



PO Box 2969
Reston, VA 20195, United States
Telephone: +1-703-668-9600
Email: customercare@gmac.com
www.gmac.com