

Reimagining the MBA

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December 1

Issue Focus: Leadership

The sense of excitement surrounding the Global Immersion “reveal” event on the evening of October 6 was palpable. As all 900-plus first-year MBA students streamed into the “hive” classrooms in Batten Hall and made their way to preassigned tables, they found on each a small cardboard box adorned with a big red question mark. Its contents, they soon discovered, provided the answer to a key question: where would they travel for their Global Immersion project?

Each box contained a jigsaw puzzle with a map of the selected destination. Once students had assembled their puzzle, they also learned the name of the Global Partner—one of 140 organizations—to which they had been assigned and the specific new product- or service-development project that would be their focus for the next 12 weeks.

As these students are experiencing firsthand, it’s one thing to hypothesize about product development in an emerging market. It’s quite another to actually do it. That’s their challenge as they disperse to a dozen cities in 10 countries during the January Term. It’s all part of an ambitious undertaking in the MBA curriculum centered around a new yearlong required course called FIELD (Field Immersion Experiences for Leadership Development).

The Global Immersion is one of FIELD’s three modules that will provide students small-group learning experiences that are by design immersive, experiential, and field-based. FIELD complements the School’s case method of participant-centered learning, and creates a rigorous new platform for students to develop skills around hands-on learning, teamwork, and self-awareness.

It’s a bold endeavor rooted in HBS’s long history of educational innovation, says HBS Dean Nitin Nohria. The vision, he explained in September to a standing room-only crowd of reunion attendees in Burden Hall, is based on the belief that tomorrow’s leaders must be able to translate knowledge into action and, at the same time, be aware of their own character and values. In short, the School’s vision for 21st-century leadership requires a commitment to three dimensions of learning: *knowing*, *doing*, and *being* (see sidebar next page).

Innovation as a Sign of the Times

Educating leaders has been at the core of HBS since its founding in 1908. It's in the DNA of the School, says Rakesh Khurana, the Marvin Bower Professor of Leadership Development and author of a highly acclaimed history of American business education, *From Higher Aims to Hired Hands* (2007). Indeed, the School's first stated mission was to educate leaders who "make a decent profit—decently." By the early 1990s, the mission was articulated as "educating leaders who make a difference in the world." What it means to educate leaders has evolved over the decades to reflect changes in the social, cultural, and intellectual conditions of the times, Khurana explains.

Over the past 30 years, historic shifts have taken place in the business arena that set the stage for the curriculum innovations playing out today at HBS and other business schools. Companies have become more global, technology-driven, and entrepreneurial. And they are less hierarchical, with flatter management structures. Service and knowledge industries have overtaken traditional manufacturing businesses as the engines of growth in the West, while China and other developing nations have emerged as manufacturing export powerhouses. The pace and scope of these changes have challenged business schools to devise new ways to teach the skills necessary to succeed and lead in 21st-century organizations.

"We're at the end of an era," says Professor David Garvin, who, with HBS professor Srikant Datar and researcher Patrick Cullen, wrote the definitive critique of contemporary MBA education, *Rethinking the MBA* (2010). "For the past 50 years, business schools have emphasized analytics, models, and statistics. These continue to be essential. Yet in the 21st century, MBAs need much more—to have a global mind-set, an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of business, and the limitations of models and markets. And they need leadership skills informed by self-awareness and self-reflection.

"To remain relevant," continues Garvin, the C. Roland Christensen Professor of Business Administration, "business schools will have to rethink many of their most cherished assumptions."

At HBS, that rethinking kicked into high gear during the School's 100th anniversary celebration in 2008. Garvin and Datar organized two colloquia that year on the future of the MBA, the second of which attracted more than half the HBS faculty. What emerged was an awareness that HBS could do more in three areas: leadership development, globalization, and experiential learning. Afterward, Dean Jay Light formed faculty committees to identify ways HBS might uniquely address these areas. Work on curriculum reform continued with support from Dean Nohria after he took office in July 2010. That collective effort came to fruition in January 2011, when the faculty voted overwhelmingly to support the creation of the FIELD course.

MBA Program Innovation: FIELD Launches

The pedagogical underpinning of FIELD is what gives it an innovative edge. The yearlong course, layered on top of the core Required Curriculum of 10 courses, is divided into three content areas, or modules, of roughly equal length: leadership intelligence, global intelligence, and integration intelligence. “From the start, our aspiration has been for FIELD to have the same kind of pedagogical discipline as our case method courses,” says Youngme Moon, senior associate dean and chair of the MBA Program, and the Donald K. David Professor of Business Administration. She worked with the 10-member faculty team—led by Professor Frances Frei, chair of the Required Curriculum—that designed and developed all the teaching materials for the course.

The leadership intelligence module, FIELD 1, is defined by small-group exercises that help students make the transition from being outstanding individual performers to performing as leaders responsible for something greater than themselves. To that end, students engage in small-group exercises that build communication, listening, and emotional-sensitivity skills. “By the end of FIELD 1, students should have a real awareness of their strengths, their weaknesses, and areas that need improvement,” says Moon.

FIELD 2 focuses on global awareness, specifically the ability to identify what is distinctive about markets that differ from the students’ home environments, and how to manage in such unfamiliar terrain. The centerpiece of FIELD 2 is an exercise that challenges cross-section groups of six students to develop a product or service concept for a real company, a Global Partner, located in an emerging market. HBS has arranged for 140 organizations in 10 countries to serve as sounding boards for the students’ projects. (Students who can’t travel will work with a Boston-based partner.)

Students first engage in a series of classroom exercises designed to enhance their understanding of product-development opportunities and processes in emerging markets. Then they work remotely with their Global Partner to begin developing a product or service idea. During a weeklong January Term immersion experience, January 8–14, students travel abroad to solicit input on the ground, refine, and finally present their completed proposal to their partner organization.

Moon draws on a medical school analogy to describe the immersion experience. “For decades medical schools have understood the benefits of sending their students into real hospitals where they can practice what they have learned in the classroom,” she explains. “Since we don’t have such facilities at our disposal, we have to build a global network of partners that are willing to become, in essence, teaching hospitals for us. Our objective, then, is to build a global teaching infrastructure.”

FIELD 3, the integration module, provides students an opportunity to combine the

knowledge, skills, and tools they have learned from all their coursework to develop and bring to market a microbusiness. “Students must execute on what they have learned in first-year Marketing, Finance, Leadership and Corporate Accountability, Strategy, The Entrepreneurial Manager, and other required courses in a fully integrated fashion,” says Moon. A financial market simulation will allow students to act as investors valuing businesses developed by other teams. At the end of the module, FIELD 3 will have put students through an iterative business-development cycle on an accelerated basis.

The FIELD faculty team worked closely with the heads of the other 10 required first-year courses to find points of synergy. Specific FIELD assignments have been designed to build on cases taught the previous day in, say, TOM or Finance 1. “FIELD can be considered successful only if it intensifies student engagement with the other required courses and thus enhances the impact of those courses in a tangible way,” says Moon.

To provide space for some 900 students to engage simultaneously in small-group exercises, and to allow a faculty member to move freely among the teams, FIELD needed a new kind of classroom. The School last winter launched a full-tilt renovation of the former WGBH building at 125 Western Avenue (recently named Batten Hall, see page 9), completing the work in time for fall classes. The top two floors house 10 unique classroom spaces dubbed “hives,” and the first floor is home to the new Harvard Innovation Lab. (see page 42) Unlike Aldrich Hall’s amphitheater-style classrooms with fixed seating, the oval-shaped hives feature movable tables and chairs that permit a section of some 90 students to break into multiple small groups or reassemble as a whole. Moon calls the hives a breakthrough in how to foster a different kind of teaching and learning.

While the FIELD course has garnered most of the attention, curriculum innovation didn’t stop there. For second-year students, last January the faculty also approved a change in the calendar to a quarter system that encourages creation of field-based courses that complement case-based courses. Already, faculty members have developed a dozen such courses for the Spring Term, including Creating High-Impact Ventures, Managing Innovation, and Social Impact Investing.

Building on Tradition

For the school that pioneered the two-year MBA Program and developed the case method of participant-centered teaching, FIELD represents a continuation of HBS’s commitment to educational innovation.

“We are in no way diminishing the importance or our reliance on the case method,” says Garvin, a champion of the FIELD course. “It remains essential. I see FIELD as an enhancement and an expansion of the case method and a ringing endorsement of our traditional approach. You need the case discussion in order to understand core concepts

and frameworks, business and organizational contexts, and the decision-maker's point of view. At the same time, you also need to think about ways of adapting the case method to make it more skill-based and reflective." (see sidebar, page 40) That's the mission of FIELD.

For his part, Dean Nohria views FIELD as a bridge between tradition and innovation. "As we make these curriculum changes, don't think that we are abandoning tradition," he cautions. "We are more committed than ever to the case method as the soul of our school. But we are as committed to innovation as we are to tradition. You don't produce traditions unless you innovate."

The case method itself was once an innovation, Nohria continues. The first case wasn't written until 12 years after the School was founded in 1908. Today, HBS distributes about 10 million cases a year all over the world. In time, the field method innovations of today will become the traditions of tomorrow, says Nohria.

Ultimately, the curriculum innovations set in motion this year aim to educate 21st-century leaders who possess competence (knowledge and skills) and character (self-knowledge), Nohria explains. That's a tall order for what he acknowledges is an educational experiment. But if the School gets it right, Nohria says, "we will have created a new field method that complements the case method, and together they will create the next stage of what management education looks like."

FIELD Global Immersion Projects



During the January Term, all first-year MBA students will take part in Global Immersion projects around the globe involving 140 partner organizations. The goal is to help students better understand the global context of business.

The map shows the cities and the number of Global Partners—multinationals, local firms,

and nonprofits—facilitating a total of 152 different product- or service-innovation exercises for small teams of students.

Leadership Courses at HBS

All first-year students are required to take two leadership courses plus the FIELD leadership intelligence module. Second-year students may choose among eight leadership electives.

Required Curriculum (First Year)

Leadership and Organizational Behavior (LEAD)

This course focuses on how managers become effective leaders by addressing the human side of enterprise.

Leadership and Corporate Accountability (LCA)

Through cases about difficult managerial decisions, this course examines the legal, ethical, and economic responsibilities of corporate leaders. It also shows how personal values can play a critical role in effective leadership.

FIELD 1. The first module of the yearlong FIELD course aims to build students' self-awareness via small-group exercises.

Elective Curriculum (Second Year)

- Authentic Leadership Development
- Leading Professional Service Firms
- Leading Teams
- Leading and Governing High Performing Nonprofit Organizations Managing Human Capital
- Power and Influence
- The Moral Leader
- The Board of Directors and Corporate Governance