

12-15-2021

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### Recommended Citation

Ang, Rodolfo P. (2021) "From Inspiration to Actualization: Designing an MBA that Can Deliver the Goods," *Journal of Management for Global Sustainability*. Vol. 9: Iss. 2, Article 3.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.13185/2244-6893.1140>

Available at: <https://archium.ateneo.edu/jmgs/vol9/iss2/3>

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# FROM INSPIRATION TO ACTUALIZATION: DESIGNING AN MBA THAT CAN DELIVER THE GOODS

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*This invited essay continues the conversation on the International Association of Jesuit Universities' (IAJU) white paper entitled "An Inspirational Paradigm for Jesuit Business Education." Mr. Rodolfo P. Ang, one of the members of the Task Force that developed the white paper, talks about his experience of leading the Ateneo de Manila University Graduate School of Business toward the actualization of the paradigm.*

## KEYWORDS

inspirational paradigm, MBA, curriculum assessment, curriculum mapping, desired terminal competencies

## INTRODUCTION

On March 8, 2019, Fr. Michael Garanzini, then Secretary for Higher Education of the Society of Jesus, sent out an urgent letter to a small group of Jesuit business school deans, inviting us to an informal Zoom meeting to discuss how we could:

- “More systematically examine our present paradigm and... create a new paradigm for Jesuit business education” and
- “Begin a process of reflection that takes seriously the call of the Holy Father for educators to rethink what we teach and how we form business leaders of the future: conscientious, capable, caring and collaborative.”

At that first meeting, held in April 2019, a Task Force was created to spearhead what at that time was envisioned as a two-year effort to develop a new paradigm of education that would:

- Create a new generation of business leaders “with an awareness and sensitivity to the urgent issues facing our planet and our economic systems,” cognizant that “the human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together,” and that “the analysis of environmental problems cannot be separated from the analysis of human, family, work-related and urban contexts, nor from how individuals relate to themselves, to others, and to the environment” (Francis, 2015) and
- Develop new frameworks and methodologies that can drive the next century of business education.

In December, 2019, the Task Force released the white paper “An Inspirational Paradigm for Jesuit Business Education” (Task Force, 2020; Garanzini, 2020), which presented a vision of the kind of business school graduates the world needs today, and the sort of business education that will form them. This white paper has since then been broadly disseminated among the business schools in our Jesuit institutions worldwide and has been the subject of a succession of conferences organized either jointly or separately by the International Association of Jesuit Business Schools (IAJBS) and the Colleagues in Jesuit Business Education. The response has been overwhelmingly positive and there has been significant buy-in to the main principles embodied in this document among educators across our worldwide Jesuit network.

The real challenge for Jesuit business educators comes next and will take much longer than the originally-envisioned two-year time frame. How can we move the needle so that the principles articulated in this white paper get translated from a set of ideals into actual felt and experienced reality inside our classrooms?

## **ADDRESSING OUR STUDENTS' HUNGERS**

The heart of this paradigm is encapsulated in the belief that business school graduates cannot just be equipped with the skills they need to succeed professionally and materially in today's economy; they need to be inspired to be champions for

integral human development and inflamed with the passion to create a better world for tomorrow.

For Jesuit business education to provide such an inspiration, it must stir, cultivate, and help our students to address what the document describes as “hungers” (Task Force, 2020: 4–5; Garanzini, 2020: 25–27):

- **A Hunger for Integrated Knowledge:** Students have unlimited information at their fingertips but are looking for a framework or a worldview that can help them to see how the varied pieces fit together for a more holistic view and greater depth of understanding.
- **A Hunger for a Moral Compass:** Students long for help to develop an ethical foundation and a method for moral discernment that can lead to greater moral courage.
- **A Hunger for Community:** As our students grow in their commitment to use their gifts and talents for the benefit of others, they feel the need to be part of a larger movement that actively works to create more good in the world.
- **A Hunger for a Global Paradigm:** Having seen the limitations and the dangers of ethnocentrism and even nationalism, our students recognize that they are part of and have a responsibility to the global community.
- **A Hunger for an Adult Spirituality:** In the face of polarizing debates, they long for a spirituality that gives meaning to their lives with ample room for both faith and reason.
- **A Hunger for Dignified Work and Meaningful Impact:** Work is not just about earning a living. It is also “part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development and personal fulfillment” (Francis as cited in Garanzini, 2020: 27). Students have a desire to find meaning in their work and to feel that they are contributing to positive change in the world around them.

## PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES

Despite the highly encouraging support expressed for the white paper by business school faculties at Jesuit universities all over the world, we will not be able to move beyond general statements of concurrence and support for this paradigm if we do not then develop an action plan or a road map that will help us turn vision into reality.

Transforming the Inspirational Paradigm into a set of actionable program learning outcomes is one important step in that road map.

In April 2020, I asked a team of Ateneo de Manila University faculty to reflect on the Inspirational Paradigm white paper and one of their outputs was a set of program learning outcomes (M. A. Cuyegkeng, personal communication; Cuyegkeng, Aramburu Goya, & de Guzman, 2021) that they felt would logically proceed from the Inspirational Paradigm. I present a shortened version of this output here, not as a definitive formulation of such outcomes, but as one possible model, and a starting point for deeper reflection and discussion:

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The curriculum should enable our students to:

- Demonstrate their moral compass based on a strong ethical foundation, a mature spirituality, and moral discernment, including respect for person and creation, ethical management of resources, and responsible innovation
- Engage stakeholders toward positive change, common good, and meaningful partnerships
- Demonstrate inclusiveness that respects every human person and creation, recognizing the intrinsic value of every person and every creature
- Develop a personal sense of mission as a business leader, which sustains and empowers, gives meaning to one's life, and gives ample room for faith and reason

- Engage in meaningful work that contributes to “human development and personal fulfillment”
  - Develop habits for lifelong learning
- 

## THE CHALLENGE

The existing framework of our traditional MBA and undergraduate business programs, organized around the traditional functional areas, has so far failed to deliver the sort of transformational change in our students that we have long dreamt of and envisioned as educators in Jesuit business schools.

An incremental approach, where we tweak this traditional curriculum by adding a few new courses, or by making minor changes in the syllabi of our existing courses, is unlikely to generate markedly different output.

We could ask every teacher to incorporate as much of this new paradigm as possible into his or her classes, but it would be inappropriate, even impossible, for every class to do so. At any rate, what we need is to ensure that the totality of our curriculum delivers the goods and not that every class delivers the totality of our desired learning outcomes.

The challenge, then, would be to design a “curriculum of the future” that can deliver the above-listed learning outcomes, in addition to (certainly not in place of) the learning outcomes already in place in our business programs. This will have implications not just on how we deliver our programs, but also on how we organize our schools.

The IAJU/IAJBS Steering Committee for this Inspirational Paradigm initiative has created a Task Force, headed by Dr. Kevin Stevens, former Dean of the Quinlan School of Business, Loyola University Chicago, that is charged to design this prototype new curriculum: a “Next Generation MBA,” as it were, that could provide our community of business educators with ideas on how we can shape/reshape our curricula to achieve the goals of this Inspirational Paradigm.

No one seriously expects that any of our schools will be able to take any prototype curriculum and apply it *in toto*. Our contexts are too different, our needs too diverse, our regulatory environments too disparate for that. But, it is hoped that a prototype can provide ideas (and dare we hope, even inspiration) for business deans around the world to see how their own curricula can be revised and reshaped to hew closer to this new ideal.

When I was dean of our business school, I would always survey the offerings of other schools around the world whenever I was revising our curriculum or developing a new program to see what I could learn from what others have done and had success with. So, too, this proposed “Next Generation MBA” can be a model that deans can look at and consider, take apart, and evaluate. Some parts will resonate and others will not; some aspects of it will seem desirable, doable, and actionable; others will seem inappropriate or irrelevant for particular environments and contexts.

We will not present here the (as yet uncompleted) work of Dr. Stevens’ committee, of which I am a member. Instead, we present here some of the work we have done at the Ateneo de Manila University, in the hope that it can provide insights into how educators at other business schools might also be able to address the important questions raised by the Inspirational Paradigm.

## **THE ATENEO GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS: TAKING A LOOK AT WHERE WE WERE**

In 2017, when I was still its Dean (and before the IAJU Inspirational Paradigm project even began), the Ateneo Graduate School of Business (AGSB) embarked on a curriculum review process as part of our regular continuous improvement program.

### **Our Goals**

One of our first steps was to update our formulations of the “Desired Terminal Competencies of our Business School Graduate” and the “Profile of the Ideal Jesuit Business School Graduate.” Our output from that exercise, modified a little for this paper with the Inspirational Paradigm in mind, is presented in Table 1 and Table 2.

As I reflected on our 2017 output in light of the Inspirational Paradigm, I found it remarkable how little tweaking was actually needed in order to update it in a way

Able to think and act critically and strategically
Able to lead self and others effectively
Able to creatively and effectively solve complex problems
Able to act in a manner that is consistent with the highest ethical standards
Able to effectively communicate and negotiate
Able to collaborate and work well with others
Able to think and act as a global citizen, championing strategies and organizational practices that are environmentally sustainable and regenerative

Table 1: Desired Terminal Competencies of Our Business School Graduate

Demonstrates a strong moral compass
Able to engage stakeholders towards positive change
Demonstrates an attitude of inclusiveness
Has a personal sense of mission as a business leader which gives ample room for faith and reason
Engages in meaningful work that contributes to human development
Adopts behaviors and a lifestyle that is consistent with respect and care for creation
Has developed habits for lifelong learning

Table 2: Profile of the Ideal Jesuit Business School Graduate

that was mindful of this paradigm. Our devotion to the same set of Ignatian values would seem to be the best explanation for how these two products, undertaken by different sets of people at different points in time, under totally different contexts, could be so much alike.

### Our Self Assessment

Having defined our goals in terms of desired terminal competencies and a profile of our ideal graduate, we undertook a curriculum mapping exercise to see if our program, as currently designed and delivered, could reasonably be expected to systematically deliver the targeted competencies and mold our students into “ideal” graduates.

We summarize our findings in Table 3.<sup>1</sup> We organized our assessment according to the four distinct academic departments of AGSB and the functional areas covered under each one:

- Finance, Accounting and Economics
- Operations Management and Information Technology
- Marketing and Strategic Management
- Human Resources Management, Leadership, and Ethics

	Finance, Accounting & Economics	Quantitative Methods & I.T.	Marketing & Strategic Management	HR, Leadership & Ethics
Able to think and act critically and strategically				
Able to lead self and others effectively				
Able to creatively and effectively solve complex problems				
Able to act in a manner that is consistent with the highest ethical standards				
Able to effectively communicate and negotiate				
Able to collaborate and work well with others				
Able to think and act as a global citizen, championing strategies and organizational practices that are environmentally sustainable and regenerative				

Table 3: Mapping Our Ability Deliver Our Desired Terminal Competencies

<sup>1</sup> We share this summary in order to illustrate our point. As with any summary, we have generalized our findings and it, of course, excludes many of the nuances of our detailed curriculum review, and overlooks a lot of the excellent work of individual faculty.

The shaded cells indicate the competencies that we are confident that we are able to develop in our students, and the departments with strong (and explicit) contributions to such development.

Sadly (but perhaps predictably, for a somewhat traditional business school), our program scored highly in critical and strategic thinking, which is reflective of a program with a strong focus on business methods, tools, and techniques. Because of our Jesuit DNA, we scored highly on leadership and ethics as well: not only do we have leadership and ethics core courses, but these themes suffuse our organizational culture and are strongly manifested in our co-curricular and extra-curricular programs.

None of our courses had an explicit focus on creativity or innovation, and there was no deliberate or systematic effort to include the themes of global citizenship, inclusiveness, sustainability, or integral ecology in our curriculum.

As seen in Table 4, we also mapped our curriculum against our profile of an ideal graduate, with similarly eye-opening results.

	Finance, Accounting & Economics	Quantitative Methods & I.T.	Marketing & Strategic Management	HR, Leadership & Ethics
Demonstrates a strong moral compass				
Able to engage stakeholders towards positive change				
Demonstrates an attitude of inclusiveness				
Has a personal sense of mission as a business leader which gives ample room for faith and reason				
Engages in meaningful work that contributes to human development				
Adopts behaviors and a lifestyle that is consistent with respect and care for creation				
Has developed habits for lifelong learning				

Table 4: Mapping Our Ability to Produce Graduates with the Desired Profile

The bulk of our courses made a primary contribution to a single characteristic in our profile—“has developed habits for lifelong learning,” which was most directly correlated to the terminal competency on critical and strategic thinking. The heavy lifting on almost all of the other characteristics identified in our profile was left to a single department (more specifically, to our two business core courses, Leadership and Ethics.)

Again, the characteristics most directly related to sustainability and inclusive development are not explicitly covered by our current curriculum.

### **Our Insights**

When we mapped desired program learning outcomes against the functional area courses that the traditional MBA is organized around, we saw that there was no direct correspondence between these courses and these outcomes. We saw the same results when we undertook this same exercise using our profile of the ideal business school graduate. Given this situation, how could we then expect our current curriculum to deliver the goods?

We need to seriously rethink the way we organize our courses (and while we are at it, the way we organize our schools), so that we can more directly address the program learning outcomes we say we want to achieve and more confidently ensure that we deliver them.

If the biggest challenges of our day center around the need for ethical decision making, innovation, global sustainability, and inclusive development, then why are they not the central, organizing themes of our curricula? Should we not structure our programs so that the Inspirational Paradigm is at its core, rather than plugged into it in bits and pieces in whichever places it might be deemed convenient?

## **ONE POSSIBLE DESIGN FOR AN MBA PROGRAM OF THE FUTURE**

### **Starting Point**

As a starting point for this conversation, we propose the following premises:

- Our goal is to design what can eventually become a mainstream business degree, and not a niche or specialized program, like

a “Sustainability Management” or a “Discerning Leadership” program. Niche programs are easier to design because there are fewer restrictions and regulatory/accreditation issues, but we will not be able to achieve impact with such a program. If our goal is to transform the way business is run, then we need to achieve scale. In the Ateneo de Manila University, we have approximately 1,500 students enrolled in our MBA program at any given time and no more than 20 students in our MS in Sustainability Management. The difference in scale and, thus, potential impact is staggering when seen in this light.

- We will not consider accreditation (and other) requirements in our program design. This will allow us to create a “dream program” that we can aspire to, even if it is not (yet) feasible to implement in its entirety. Every school (every Dean) can decide which aspects of this new program design they would like to (or are allowed to) adopt and/or adapt for their use.

### **Putting our Curriculum on Its Head**

If our traditional programs, organized around the typical business functional areas, cannot deliver the desired program learning outcomes, what could be a new basis that we can use for organizing our MBA of the future?

The AGSB team identified four thematic “strands” that could serve as the framework for a new business program:

- Leadership
- Data Science
- Innovation and Business Design
- Sustainability

Taken together with a prerequisite set of functional-area courses that would cover the traditional business tools and techniques (Accounting, Finance, Marketing, and the like), courses organized around these four strands would more directly correspond with (and more surely deliver) the terminal competencies we identified earlier.

Strands	Terminal Competencies
Functional area courses	Able to proficiently use the foundational tools and techniques of business
Leadership Strand	Able to lead self and others effectively Able to act in a manner that is consistent with the highest ethical standards Able to effectively communicate and negotiate Able to collaborate and work well with others
Data Science (Data Driven Decision Making) Strand	Able to think and act strategically
Innovation and Business Design Strand	Able to creatively and effectively solve complex problems
Sustainability Strand	Able to think and act as a global citizen, championing strategies and organizational practices that are environmentally sustainable and regenerative

Table 5: Mapping Our Proposed Strands Against Our Desired Terminal Competencies

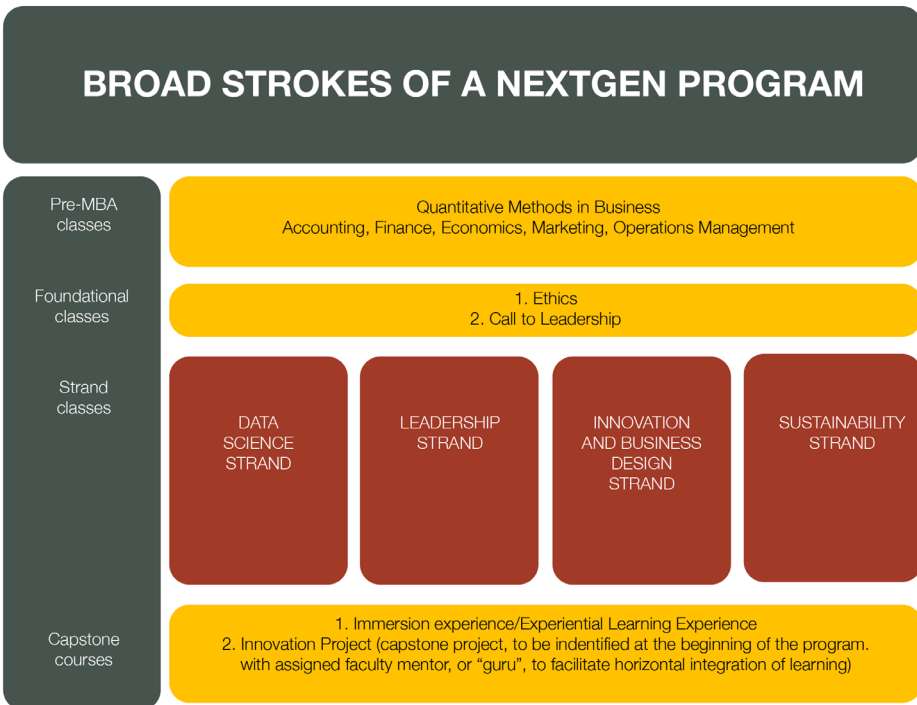


Figure 1: Broad Strokes of a NextGen Business Program

A “Next Generation Business Program” that is more consistent with the Inspirational Paradigm could, thus, be built on the four strands proposed in Table 5. One possible formulation of such a program could be described Figure 1.

Some key characteristics of this program, designed by a team of AGSB faculty, include:

- Students with a business undergraduate degree would not need to re-take courses they have already previously taken at the undergraduate level. This NextGen MBA program would build on the skills they already have, rather than require them to once again take up tools and concepts already previously learned.
- The traditional business functional area courses, possibly offered on an abbreviated and modular basis, would be required only for students who do not have a business undergraduate degree or who, for whatever reason, would like to review and refresh their knowledge of these functional area tools and techniques.
- Each of the four strands would be made up of three or four courses. The Data Science strand, for instance, could include courses like Mathematical Foundations of Data Science, Introduction to Data Science, and Data Driven Decision-Making.
- An immersion/experiential learning experience would be required for all students enrolled in the program.
- An Innovation Project would be the capstone requirement for the program. The goals of such a project would be to require actual application of concepts and tools covered in the strands, to facilitate horizontal integration of learning, and to provide an opportunity for and experience in creating “breakthrough” approaches to complex problems.

Will the above-proposed program “deliver the goods” better than our existing programs? Will it meet accreditation requirements, and will it appeal to prospective students?

The honest answer to these questions would be that we do not know. What we do know is that our existing programs are not working as well as we would like them to, and we need to try out new models for business education if we wish to find one that actually works.

### **PEDAGOGY + CONTENT = LEARNING OUTCOMES**

An effective curriculum is as much about pedagogy as it is about course content, and we would like at this point to spend a little time on the question of pedagogy.

In order to provoke and to respond to the hungers described at the beginning of this paper, Jesuit educators will have to transform not just what we teach but also the ways we teach them.

#### **The Need for Experiential Learning**

Transformative education needs to be not just cognitive, but especially also affective. Student learning outcomes are enhanced by immersive experiences and live cases. Co-curricular and extra-curricular experiential learning opportunities must be embedded in our programs.

In August 2018, I took 10 student leaders of the AGSB for a one-week Sustainability and Leadership Development Camp run by Fr. Peter Walpole, S.J., at *Balay Laudato Si'* (Laudato Si' House) in Bendum, Bukidnon Province, in the hinterlands of southern Philippines. It was a non-credit learning experience that proved to be life-changing for these 10 young men and women, who learned first-hand about the realities of life at the margins as they dialogued with smallholder farmers and indigenous peoples, and reflected on how business impacts on the environment and the lives of the people who depend on the land for subsistence.

Now imagine the impact of having 10,000 business students from all over the world having similar eye-opening and life-changing experiences every year. Would we be able to change the way business (and the world) is run, then?

#### **The Need to Provide Multicultural Experiences**

Our Jesuit business network is an invaluable resource that we all-too-infrequently take advantage of. Imagine having not just 10 Filipino students at Fr. Walpole's retreat

in Bendum. Imagine having 40 students of different nationalities from different Jesuit universities all over the world at the same camp, sharing their thoughts and perspectives on development and global sustainability, and listening and learning from one another as well as their lecturers and the members of the local community. How much richer and more transformational would such an experience be?

Now imagine having Jesuit institutions all over the world providing multi-cultural immersive experiences for business students from all over the world, each one focusing on an area most aligned with their expertise and most appropriate to their geography. What if 40 students from all over the world were to spend one week at Sanata Dharma University in Yogyakarta, Indonesia for an immersion experience? Or at the Centre for Research and Action for Peace (CERAP) at Côte d'Ivoire? Or at the Central American University in El Salvador? Or in an urban poor community in Milwaukee under the supervision of Marquette University?

### **The Need to Tap the Opportunities Provided by Technology**

While overseas immersion experiences undertaken with multi-cultural/multi-national groups of students would likely be truly transformative for those who are privileged to participate in them, these are also likely to be expensive and, in many cases, impossible for many students to undertake, especially those who are enrolled in part-time MBA programs.

The current COVID-19 pandemic has forced our educational community to transition to online learning at a pace faster than we might otherwise have seen. As we grow more comfortable with the use of online/digital learning platforms, our eyes are now opened to the unparalleled opportunity to very cost-effectively tap our global network and provide multicultural experiences and a more global perspective to our students without them even having to leave their homes.

How best to understand the importance of preserving the biodiversity of the Amazon basin than to hear about it from ecologists in Brazil? How best to understand the amount of personal integrity and courage required to call out unethical behavior than to hear Tyler Schultz share first-hand what was going through his mind when he decided that he needed to expose the fraudulent behavior at health-tech giant Theranos, Inc.? How best to understand new models for inclusive business than by speaking to social entrepreneurs in India or some of the experts at the Global Social Benefit Incubator at Santa Clara University in California?

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Even if we eventually agreed on the “final” shape of a putative Next Generation MBA, that would really just be the start of a long process rather than its end.

Many other questions would have to be discussed and eventually answered if we are to effectively re-engineer business education:

- What changes do we need to make in the way we run our schools and programs? What are the implications for the way our schools are organized?
- What are the implications on our admissions criteria and our student application process?
- What are the implications on the way we conduct our assessment of learning (cognitive versus affect)?
- What implications does this have on our faculty and on what they teach?
- What implications will this have for faculty recruitment, faculty re-tooling and development, and faculty performance assessment? Should our faculty’s role as “formators” not be given the same importance as their role as researchers and scholars?
- What types of research should be encouraged/prioritized?

As always, we end with questions rather than answers. There is no one definitive solution to the challenge posed by the Inspirational Paradigm to deliver a truly transformative business education and by so doing, contribute to positive change in society and the world around us.

This piece is intended to start, perhaps to provoke, a conversation rather than to end it. What is clear is that we are only at the beginning of a long process; one that will take more than two years, but may be one of the most consequential that we will undertake in our academic careers.

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