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agreement that this cell contains a great deal of ambivalence, 85% of the sample still agree with the proposition. Almost exactly the same percentage (82.1) agreed with a related proposition, that the market value of such degree programs will increase in the near future.

This response is no doubt somewhat provincial and self-serving, but the frequency of agreement is still impressive. Furthermore, many practitioners do not possess graduate degrees. In our sample, 46 percent held graduate degrees while 54 percent held bachelor's degrees or less. Thus, the belief that additional formal training will be important in the future likely indicates a real perceived need and is perhaps not merely an attempt to lend superficial importance to the discipline. 

What graduate degree is most appropriate?

The second area of inquiry asked the participants to compare the appropriateness of a generalized M.B.A. to an M.B.A. with some degree of functional specialization, to a narrower but deeper M.A. or M.S. degree in the field. Table 2 gives the comparative statistics.

Table 2 indicates that a specialized M.A. or M.S. is only slightly preferred over a general M.B.A. and that an M.B.A. with a degree of specialization is overwhelmingly preferred over an M.A. The preferred model seems to be the M.B.A. background embellished with enough specific course work to provide a technical base for the fledgling personnel or labor administrator. An explanation for this preference was provided by the many respondents who indicated in the "comments" section that staff administrators with graduate training are often moved from staff to line and from line to staff, thus making a case for the flexibility inherent in a more specialized M.B.A., but not in a narrower M.A. or M.S. program. Another frequent comment was that personnel staffers need to "understand and appreciate" line problems and the problems of other staff functions, again bolstering the case for the broad M.B.A. background, but allowing for the development of usable, functional expertise by expanding the hours of M.B.A. elective specialization. Based on practitioner feedback, we believe the M.B.A. with expanded elective specialization is the most appropriate format for advanced study in personnel and labor.

It is apparent that personnel and labor practitioners have a preference for a middle-of-the-road approach to graduate education in the field, capturing the broad-based foundation of the general M.B.A. curriculum with the addition of enough electives and options to provide at least a beginning for the development of specialized technical expertise and skills. Specialized M.A. or M.S. programs are certainly not thought to be preferred or even essential for the future. Academic program planners should not rush to develop very specialized M.A. or M.S. personnel programs unless local or regional conditions so demand or unless resources are abundant. A more widely differentiated M.B.A. offering a personnel or labor specialization or major would be more economical and more widely demanded and accepted by employing firms. The reason for this preference seems to center on the issues of flexibility and transferability for managers trained at the graduate level.

During the 1980's and 1990's additional growth and development in personnel and labor degree programs will no doubt continue. In light of the findings reported herein, the design of such programs should be moderated, capturing the essence of the general M.B.A. degree but allowing for increased functional specialization. The multiplication of M.A. and M.S. programs is not as strongly supported by practicing managers as faculties and academic administrators appear to have assumed.

Management Development for M.B.A. Students

By Ken DeYoung

One doesn't have to be around business long to realize that having an M.B.A. degree is no guarantee of success in a management position.

There is no question but that the development of knowledge and skills involved in earning an M.B.A. enables the individual to understand and solve many technical and business problems with greater effectiveness and efficiency than would have been the case otherwise. Many management situations call for precisely the kind of knowledge and skills which are developed so well in most M.B.A. programs.

However, many problems which the manager faces and deals with in the course of a working day are not of the type usually considered in a business school. Many are personnel problems, which most people with an M.B.A. are no better prepared to deal with than anyone else. Many are problems having to do with using one's personal resources most effectively and trusting others to accomplish objectives not easily obtained through the application of one's own energies. Some problems faced by managers in real life settings have to do with handling stress, self-doubt, and personal anxieties and apprehensions. Still other problems have to do with the personal concerns of subordinates, peers, and supervisors.

Most personal management failures do not seem to arise out of technical incompetence. Most people who fail at management do so because they cannot effectively handle some of the personal, social and/or organizational situations which arise and must be dealt with.

There is, therefore, an obvious need for some educational experiences within the M.B.A. program which can help students develop some knowledge, skills and insights which will enable them to handle these noncognitive, nontechnical situations more effectively.

In the M.B.A. program of the F. E. Seidman College of Business and Administration, we have tried to address these issues within the regular academic framework and curriculum.

From the beginning of its existence, Seidman College has been committed to the belief that one goal of the M.B.A. program is to increase the success of its graduates in the organizations in which they are employed. This principle implies that the education and training programs in
the curriculum should be focused on practical, noncognitive, nontechnical matters as well as on traditional academic subject-matter areas.

This belief has guided the development of the college in a number of ways. In the selection of faculty, purely research- or theory-oriented academicians were avoided. Instead, we believe that the ideal faculty member is a person who, in addition to excellent academic credentials, has a practical orientation, experience in working directly in or with business organizations, and a commitment to sharing with students the practical realities of organizational life. In developing the curriculum, we designed a number of courses which were heavily if not exclusively devoted to assisting the students in gaining noncognitive skills and insights. Within the framework of most of the courses, emphasis was placed on practical realities in real life situations and events. Speakers, convocations, internships, and other special programs have consistently been aimed at the practical as well as the cognitive and technical areas of concern.

Finally, probably no business school has been more aggressive and persistent in developing positive relationships with business and organizational leaders in the immediate geographical area than has Seidman College. The leaders of the businesses and organizations in this region served by the college have been very heavily involved in almost all stages of developing, monitoring, carrying out, and evaluating the M.B.A. program. Although many of these individual leaders obtained their graduate educations in prestigious schools throughout the United States, they have come to view Seidman as the regional school, providing quality education and training for their younger and/or middle-level managers. They have come to be able to count on Seidman to respond to their advice and counsel with respect to what incoming and upcoming managers need in the way of education and training.

As part of the overall commitment to work with students in noncognitive areas, Dean De Vries sought me out early on to assist in developing and offering, within the academic framework, courses which would help M.B.A. students become more aware of themselves, do a more effective job of planning and managing their careers, and understanding and handling many of the people-related problems with which they will inevitably have to deal as they participate in the management process.

Dean De Vries and I spent many hours discussing and outlining our philosophies and our ideas about the kinds of experiences and activities which the M.B.A. students could participate in which would be of most help to them in their professional lives.

As a result of these discussions and those with the Seidman College faculty, two experiential courses were developed. By having students participate in activities (some individual, some small group, some larger group activities) and by discussing and reflecting on the events and principles involved under the guidance of experienced instructor-facilitators, we hoped that the M.B.A. students would make better vocational decisions and be better able to handle themselves and the situations in which they found themselves.

It should be said that it was not expected that all students who enrolled in either or both of these two elective courses would choose management for a career. It was assumed that some were asking themselves questions about their suitability for management. It was assumed that some were asking questions about what management really requires in a person and of a person.

Self-Assessment and Development for Managers And Administrators

One of the courses was designed to be taken by students fairly early in their M.B.A. program. This course, entitled "Self-Assessment and Development for Managers and Administrators," is graded on a pass/fail basis (that is, students successfully completing the course receive credit but no grade, and students who do not complete the work in a satisfactory manner receive no credit).

The size of the class is limited to 12, and there are two instructor-facilitators. Each instructor-facilitator focuses on and works more closely with one designated half of the class, even though most of the activities involve the entire class. Students are assured that any observations or interpretations made by the instructor-facilitators are confidential, and are not available to either other members of the faculty or the administration of the Seidman Business College.

Five kinds of activities are required of students:

1. Each student must write a six- to twelve-page autobiography, stressing not only the facts of his or her background and development but also the major events and forces which shaped the individual's personality (at least as seen by the individual).

2. Each student undergoes some formal psychological testing. These tests are aimed at basic personality factors, at basic values and priorities important in a work setting, and at problem-solving capabilities under some pressure.

3. Each student is interviewed individually by the instructor-facilitator. This interview focuses on matters not covered in the autobiography and provides an opportunity for the student and instructor-facilitator to talk about anything of concern to the student.

4. Each student participates in a variety of performance-type or role playing activities under the observation of the instructor-facilitators. These activities include such things as interviewing a candidate for employment, doing a performance review with a subordinate who has some performance problems, and letting an employee go when there is clearly no other option. There are also group activities, such as serving as a board of city commissioners which have to make a difficult and emotionally loaded decision, acting as a group of vice presidents who must create a company philosophy, and acting as a group of discontented subordinates trying to deal with a poorly functioning boss.

5. Students are required to read a number of articles and case studies to be discussed in class. These items relate mainly to management issues and psychological factors affecting management effectiveness, such as growth and development, defensiveness, openness to feedback and criticism, and value conflicts.

This course originally focused on self-insight and self-assessment. It soon expanded to also focus on self-development, inasmuch as some of the activities provided opportunities to improve students' ability to understand and deal with the very situations which had been previously used for self-insight purposes only. When Grand Valley converted to the semester system in the summer of 1980, this course became a three-hour course. It has been, and continues to be, offered on a year-round basis.

In addition to having their attention focused on their own personalities, their own behavior, and the relationship between the two, students have the opportunity to observe themselves and other students dealing with typical management situations involving interactions with other people. Most of the performance activities are videotaped so that students have the opportunity to view their performances more objectively and to observe and discuss the different approaches taken by different members of the class.

At the end of the semester, each student prepares a "peer assessment" of the other students. Students are asked to rate the other students numerically on a "management aptitude" scale, to provide narrative
comments on how each other student came across, and to make whatever comments and suggestions for personal or professional growth that seem indicated. These short essays are turned in to the instructor-facilitators and read to the individual students, without revealing the author, in a final interview with the instructor-facilitator. Thus, each student receives direct (though anonymous) feedback from each other classmate.

This class has turned out to be an intensely personal and, we think, meaningful experience for students. There is little doubt that they take the feedback from both fellow students and instructor-facilitators seriously. The feedbacks are direct, candid, and constructive. There is typically a great deal of confirmation of what the student already feels about himself or herself. However, there is typically also some information, some insights or some conclusions which the student did not expect, may or may not like, or may not immediately accept.

Judging from the confidential evaluations completed by students after the course is over, they generally regard it as a positive experience. Indeed, in many cases students say that it has been the most meaningful personal experience in their educational history. Some students, however, evaluate the class negatively, perhaps because they refuse to accept some of the feedback as accurate or because they found they were not able to excel in this course as they customarily did in regular academic work.

Management Effectiveness Seminar

The other class, called “Seminar in Effective Management,” is taken by students later in their M.B.A. programs. This course is designed to give students personal exposure to senior-level managers and executives of varied personality types from an assortment of industries and organizations. Again, class size is limited to 12 and it is primarily an experiential learning activity, although both readings and papers are required.

Basically, the class makes visits to area organizations. A senior executive acts as host, generally spending the first part of the evening talking about the nature of the organization, its history and business. Then the class takes a tour of the physical facilities with the executive and returns to the board room to discuss on a much more personal basis the executive’s own history, his or her own management philosophy, his or her own view of the problems of managing a career and carrying out other roles, such as husband or wife, father or mother, citizen in the community, and at the same time maintaining some sense of self and some control over one’s life.

The organizations visited range from small to large, and are both public and private. They include manufacturing organizations, hospitals, CPA firms, social agencies, educational institutions, and restaurants.

The part of the evening in which students and executives discuss what it is really like to be a manager in an industry or organization such as the one being visited usually produces a very high level of candor. Students ask meaningful questions and the managers respond in personal ways. Doubts are verbalized, regrets are expressed, rewards are identified, and conflicts about values and ethics are discussed.

From time to time during the semester and at the end of the semester, the students and the instructor meet to discuss their experiences and some of their implications. Students are being exposed to such a mass of impressions and insights that they need even more time than is available to sort through these experiences and what they mean.

Throughout the semester, students are required to submit a written weekly report on an article of fairly immediate relevance to the issues of concern in the class. As a final project, students are required to submit a personal statement, a sort of “bare paper” on themselves as managers based at least in part on the insights gained during the semester.

While this class may not have the personal impact that a student evaluations written after the class is over indicate an almost unanimous appreciation for the value and meaningfulness of the experiences. There is no question that these experiences open the students’ eyes to many things they had not thought of before and provide considerable information which they can use as they struggle to look ahead and make wise decisions about themselves and their careers.

These two courses are certainly not designed to replace the more traditional cognitive and academic courses. Students still need to develop their knowledge and skills in financial analysis, budgeting, marketing, management theory, organizational development, etc. Rather, these courses are designed to supplement the academic experience and to involve the students in very different kinds of learning experiences. They are designed to let the students assess their capabilities and their interest in being a part of a set of activities not usually experienced in schools of business.

One can imagine the excellent student’s distress to find himself or herself extremely uncomfortable or ineffective in courses such as these, but it is better for that student to face his or her discomfort while preparing for a career than after having been appointed to a management position. The pain and the agonizing reappraisal the individual may grow through during the classroom experience may be much more valuable than if it were to occur much later in an individual’s professional life. (This says nothing about the agony and distress of the future subordinates who might be shabbily dealt with by the fledgling manager who has had no experience or exposure to this type of management activity.)

We believe that nature did not intend every person to be a manager. Many people need to discover that their natural aptitudes and developed abilities are not in the area of management, or at least not in the area of managing people.

To assist them in recognizing those sometimes painful facts and in developing appropriate strategies for pursuing professional success is certainly a legitimate endeavor on the part of a college of business.

To assist gifted individuals, those people whose personality and talents seem to predict considerable success in managing people and responsibilities, in recognizing their talents and aptitudes and in developing the confidence and the desire to use these talents in productive ways is also very much a legitimate endeavor for a school of business.

For those in between, those who have some talents and aptitudes but also some problems and limitations, the college of business can help them assess and accept their particular assortment of attributes and limitations, and encourage them to develop and apply themselves in the most appropriate ways.

We believe that the impact and influence of these courses will extend through many years of the student’s life. Indeed, we almost expect that it might take a number of years before some students are willing and able to accept some facts about themselves which are uncovered in these two courses. Nevertheless, we believe that the effort is worthwhile and that the students benefit in both short-term and long-term ways.

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