

MANAGEMENT EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO IMPROVING CAPABILITIES AND PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCES

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ABSTRACT

A frequent debate involving learning in MBA programs deals with the difficulties of articulating the syllabus with corporative practices. However, another relevant aspect is the fact that those who take these programs are considered as extras when, in fact, they are the main characters. In spite of teaching methods and corporate interests, the student-manager's performance is what actually counts. The student is responsible for the connections which can result in competence development. The objective of this study is to analyze the results of a research on the development of competences in MBA programs from the student's point of view.

Keywords: Management Education, Competences, Learning

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INTRODUCTION

One of the specific fields of study in management education is that which addresses the development of capabilities and competences in MBA programs. In this particular area, the most important debate has focused on the limitations of MBA programs. As in the case of any bipolar debate, the voices arising from the corporate field accuse the teaching methods and strategies of lacking a practical view regarding the real market problems; on the other hand, according to the MBA programs, the companies and their managers fail to establish methodologies and environments adapted to the knowledge developed by students in those programs (Mintzberg, 2004).

This debate has evolved in recent years; both sides acted upon their own difficulties, and the positive outcomes of this learning process are beginning to be recognized by both sides. Certainly, the teaching methods and strategies employed in MBA programs incorporated new standards of education better tailored to the student-manager. Likewise, companies started to focus on providing an environment more favorable to the practical use of the MBA student's knowledge. However, some difficulties related to different points of view are still present in the studies on the subject. One of the most serious difficulties, in our opinion, is the manner the participants of these programs are described in many studies. In fact, most of the time, these actors are considered to be extras in a movie, when, in fact, they are the main characters. The student is responsible for the connections, which are put into practice as the articulation between management education and corporate practice.

The objective of the present study is to investigate how the development of capabilities and competences in MBA programs occurs from the student's point of view, who is considered to be the main character in this process. Based on the ideas presented above, we put forward the following question: which aspects of management education are transformed by the students into capabilities that can be integrated as competences in practice?

CURRENT THEORIES ON MANAGEMENT EDUCATION

Management education is a frequent topic in the literature dealing with the perspective of corporate performance due to the interest in investigating its relationship with some important aspects of competitive advantage, such as competences, leadership, differentiation, etc. As the processes of learning are considered to be one of the strategic basis for the effectiveness of the company (Sanchez and Heene, 2004), management education programs stand out due to their contributions to the development of competences, especially those associated with the environment of uncertainty and rapid changes of the current socioeconomic scene.

The debate on possible contributions of management education has focused on identifying the limitations of MBA programs regarding the development of management capabilities and competences. However, this investigation does not exceed the limit of both contexts: (a) companies, as the environment where business practices are linked to the world of business, and (b) management education programs, as the educational process aimed at providing positive contribution to professional practice in the companies.

The questions related to the impact of MBA programs refer to the practice in the corporate context, the environment where the student plays the role of manager. However, students often reveal their perceptions about the difficulties of using the knowledge they acquired during their educational journey in corporate practice. If the impact of MBA programs is evaluated by the use of the syllabus in the workplace and, in turn, the company invests in the education of its managers as a way to get better results, how can we explain the existence of difficulties for the use of capabilities and competences in this environment?

The concept of learning through practice is included in this debate because it emphasizes the role of experience as an opportunity to explore in a creative manner the ideas and insights obtained by the professionals enrolled in MBA programs. The perception of boundaries set in their daily routines is the recognition that corporate practice and the business environment delimit a certain range of possible actions and, consequently, limit possible innovation or transformation. This interpretation of *boundaries to action* will require the student to mobilize reflective and analytical capabilities for the integration of the knowledge acquired together with the capabilities or competences adjusted to their reality. Under these conditions, the questioning of the corporate reality and reflective analysis are effective contributions of the educational process of MBA programs (Mintzberg and Gosling, 2003).

However, the development of individual competences is just one of the aspects investigated in the area whose debates have led to a set of reflections that analyzes effective ways to articulate the activities in management education extending the educational experience to the workplace. In this context, the importance of linking the vision of MBA programs to corporate strategy is considered a critical factor to increase the practical relevance of the syllabus of management education (Mintzberg, 2004, Raelin, 2009). The limits imposed in everyday practice by corporate reality are, therefore, important information to support the recommendation of more useful and successful designs in management education programs. In this sense, the elaboration of general or tailor-made models, considering full-time or part-time participation, are defined according to the authors' beliefs regarding their relevance to the strategic objectives of the company (Mintzberg and Gosling, 2003; Pfeffer and Fong, 2003; Latham et al, 2004).

We observed that the considerations of limitations in the companies, while leading the debate toward broader goals than just the development of students' individual capabilities and competences, open the way for the investigation of the limitations within MBA programs aiming at a more realistic connection to the companies' corporate vision.

The main question which arises within this context is related to the adequacy of programs regarding the speed of changes in the business environment, where the effectiveness of corporate performance is linked to new, increasingly complex, and superior competition and cooperation methods. In general, the debate in this area has been directed along two lines of research. The first analyzes the role of the manager with the purpose of investigating the management competences and the obstacles to their development in MBA programs. The second, which includes a significant portion of the publications in the area, is related to a set of analyses on methodological limitations and pedagogical strategies employed in management education programs.

In the field of strategic management, Sanchez and Heene (2004) investigated the management process in the face of emerging challenges. The authors argue that the

evaluation of corporate competences is critical so that the company can respond quickly to the context and be successful. Rather than building a set of features adaptable to new arrangements, the manager and the company must rethink their production methods and knowledge application. The complexity of the manager's role is related to the promotion of flexibility by continuously developing alternative actions based on competences. The manager must carry out a strategic analysis of the competences of the company, evaluating which ones should be developed and which ones should be built as new competences.

If the complexity of the manager's role takes him/her to an outstanding leadership position; it challenges the manager to continually rethink his/her practices. Considering that aspects of strategic value for corporate competitiveness are exactly the ones which are difficult to replicate, they are also less susceptible to direct transmission (Pfeffer and Fong, 2003). Thus, the authors emphasize the importance of the syllabus for the MBA programs and discuss their relevance to the corporate strategy in practice.

One of the limitations mentioned in the literature considers that there is a poor relationship between the management competences developed in MBA programs and the difficulties faced in practice. Thus, the authors identify difficulties to adapt the contents to the complexity of the challenges faced by managers. Conger (2004) argues that the leadership capability required in a globalized business environment leads managers to the dilemma of being flexible and, at the same time, comply with the company's vision. This scenario, although being attractive due to the opportunity of creating new practices, leads to issues that are difficult to be articulated by the manager when he/she has to deal with different interests and a growing number of external partnerships and relationships.

Latham et al (2004), question the lack of clarity in the educational process of MBA programs to show the students what effectiveness of results mean. This obstruction is characterized by the lack of an integrated vision connecting management education to corporate strategy. The authors argue that in order to add value to the student, the knowledge acquired in MBA programs must be perceived as relevant regarding the several different facets of the business tested in practice, promoting integration with the company's core competences. It is worth mentioning that the authors support the adaptation of management education programs designed for corporate needs, considering this a more useful strategic option as opposed to generic MBA programs.

Within the scope of the discussions about management competences, the prevalent focus of research on the development of leadership capability describes the manager as having an idealized profile, being responsible for the business success and failure (Ruas, 2003). On the other hand, studies in strategic management require a set of capabilities that must be integrated into complex management competences in order to meet the demands of competitiveness. In parallel to the debate about the design and relevance of the contents of management education designed for practical use, a set of recommendations are designed to improve pedagogical options in MBA programs.

The questioning of the methodological options of MBA programs emerges as a set of proposals for pedagogical revision to improve the educational process. In this sense, several studies have offered suggestions such as: (a) stimulation of discussions based on the combination of reading activities and a set of alternative methodologies and activities (Hicks, 1996); (b) connection between the teacher's performance and the students' reflection using tools originated from the concept of learning organization (Mazen et al,

2000), (c) use of pedagogical approaches using analytical schemes to make the classroom interactions meaningful and to shape them (Franks and Jewitts, 2001).

However, these multiple suggestions do not mean that there is a prevalence of pedagogical strategies more closely connected to the corporate practice and its nuances, as mentioned by Raelin (2009). In his investigation of methodological approaches employed in management education over the past forty years, the author found a prevalence of standardized educational practices using a traditional pedagogical approach. Raelin (2009) severely criticizes the methodological choice implemented by MBA programs because they assume that there is an underlying theory of students' passivity when they conduct their learning in a methodical manner, considering the teacher as the only source of knowledge. His proposal for changes in these educational practices advocates the use of a reflexive methodology based on active learning strategies, exposing students to less controlled but more realistic experiences in comparison with simulations or case studies.

The review of the literature on current theories of managerial education reveals another important factor that deserves to be examined more deeply: the student's role in the MBA educational process. The process of analysis has been widely discussed to explain the value of experiential learning, emphasizing the student-manager's analytical capacity as a capability that makes sense of uncertainties using the articulation of ideas and experiences (Raelin and Coghlan, 2006; Roglio and Light, 2009). However, two aspects stand out in the proposals of these authors.

The first aspect is related to the fact that there are no debates on the role of the student-manager in relation to their learning process. The debate over the role of reflection in the students' learning, is directed either at the best formats and/or pedagogy, or approaches the discussion of the process of cognition involving mental models, shared experiences and different ways of thinking. Although continuous learning is based on the reference of the student-manager's experience with the application of reflective thought, the theories do not explain how certain ideas or parts of contents are integrated into this process, creating specific capabilities or competences.

We consider that the dynamics of the development of capabilities and competences rest on connections which the student-manager can produce. The student-manager combines and recombines his/her experiences in multiple ways, both in companies and in MBA programs, producing significant knowledge for his/her practice. Some questions which are still missing from the theoretical field of the area emerge as important points in this context, such as: how does the student-manager acquire and make sense of the contents of MBA programs? How does a learning experience become meaningful in the sense of connecting the student's experiences with his experience as a manager?

The second aspect relates to how literature treats the issue of connecting the educational proposal of MBA programs to the practice in companies. Since these are different contexts, the binding factor between both is an important element for analysis so that there is an effective contribution to the MBA program. The necessary link between management education and companies is described as a movement to be produced by the MBA programs by means of appropriate learning technologies, methodologies and strategies (Mintzberg and Gosling, 2003; Raelin, 2009). However, how is it possible to articulate methodologies, teaching theories, and techniques with performance without examining what students consider relevant and practical? The student is responsible for the connections which bring

the company and management education together in a concrete way because he/she is immersed in both practices and actively responds to the elements that constitute their daily practices.

The emphasis of the role of the MBA programs to connect them to corporate reality ends up assigning a condition of passivity to the student-manager, not only in pedagogical terms, as stressed by Raelin (2009), but within the set of his investigations on the topic. Thus, there is a lack of studies which consider the student-manager as an active protagonist, whose active role is essential for the development of capabilities and competences.

CURRENT THEORIES ON CAPABILITIES AND COMPETENCES

Capabilities and competences are concepts widely used to explain how to create and developed future resources in highly dynamic markets. However, both terms can have different interpretations in literature and need to be defined to support the discussion we intend to develop.

The concept of capability has emerged from the first investigations of the philosophers Francis Bacon and Rene Descartes on human aptitude for making mistakes and for the truth. Capability, in its origin, resembles the notion of aptitude, since it is defined as a capacity which provides the power to accomplish certain things. Since the studies of John Locke (1690), the concept of capability has been related to the topics of knowledge and information in philosophy (Japiassú and Marcondes, 2000). In the area of management, capability was used to explain how learning processes produce competitive advantages through the creation and application of knowledge in companies (Merbach-Müller, 2005). Three different concepts can be related to the notion of capability: (a) as a stock of knowledge, skills, and attitudes; (b) as dynamic capabilities; and (c) as potentially available resources in a given context.

The literature on this topic usually considers capability as a synonym for a set of skills, knowledge, and attitudes. It is the idea of a repertoire of strategic resources of the company which can be combined in a flexible manner. Ruas et al (2006) argue that the problem with this concept is the underlying perspective of describing a certain group of more predictable characteristics. When it is understood as repertoire, the notion of capabilities helps to discriminate more functional profiles for selection or performance assessment processes, but it does not allow for the investigation of how the learning processes and knowledge production work to transform intangible resources into competences.

The concept of dynamic capabilities was coined by Teece et al (1997) to explain how the intangible assets of the companies can build responsive capacities considering the dynamic economic environments. Ferdinand et al (2005) emphasize the importance of this concept for articulating the learning process with an unpredictability scenario. However, the authors question its impact on the investigations on competence development in the long term, since such capabilities are developed only in response to more immediate demands.

The third approach involves the idea of potential, which is the basis for a set of possible actions by means of combinations. Ruas (2005) argues that the basis of competences in their multiple forms is the integration of capabilities which can be mobilized anytime in unexpected daily situations. The author uses the notion of event (Zarifian, 2001) to denote

incidents that are part of the normal life of the company, but that, at the same time, are a result of continuous learning. The event, then, characterizes the nature of the situation where capabilities and competences are developed through the experience of coping with daily problems. Within this context, actions are mobilized as competences to cope with the need for additional change or innovation (Becker et al, 2008).

Assuming that the notion of capabilities presented by Ruas (2005) allows for the distinction between capabilities and competences, linking them to the process of continuous learning in dynamic environments, we will discuss the concept of competences used in our analysis.

The concept of competence emerged in literature within the context of productive restructuring, which intensified new ways of understanding and organizing work due to the increasing instability and low predictability in the economy and, at the same time, the need to improve performance levels (McClelland, 1973; Boyatzis, 1982; Parry, 1988). Generally speaking, the notion of competences denotes an action which combines capabilities and tangible resources within a specific context. An action is deemed competent when its outcome is recognized as effective (Boterf, 1995). Thus, the set of mobilized capabilities are integrated into competence when the effectiveness of the action shows the socially legitimated results as appropriate to that context and the specific situation (Zarifian, 2001).

However, the term competence is characterized as a heterogeneous concept, whose theoretical debate suggests analysis according to several different perspectives, as it has been demonstrated by Ruas et al (2006), who argue that investigations are conducted at different levels of analysis, so as: the company's competitiveness; the strategic concept of competence in work practices; the personal competences; the management or professional competences.

On the specific topic of professional competence, Sandberg and Pinnington (2009) analyzed the daily activity of lawyers at an international corporate law firm to investigate how aspects of work practice are different from and integrated into specific competences. The authors suggest that the diversity of theories relating competence to action-oriented capabilities contributes to the investigation of two topics: the relational nature of competence and the importance of achieving a corpus of scientific and tacit knowledge. However, the authors argue that such contributions do not elucidate how specific professional competences are integrated into practice.

Thus, Sandberg and Pinnington (2009) argue that professional competences are not primarily constituted by knowledge or skills; instead, they are developed by how the professional sees his/her work and defines certain attributes as capabilities, arranging them into specific competences. The authors assume that competence is socially developed because the way the professional engages in action in a particular manner defines his/her *ways of practising*. Competence, thus, is defined as something that we are and do in relation to others and with useful tools for our performance. According to this point of view, the educational process of professionals is incremental as they develop through the transformation of the *ways of practising*. Such change occurs through the integration of capabilities into different and gradually more complex patterns of professional competences. Ruas (2003) points out an important element in this discussion: an capability developed in a previous experience will not always be enough to deal with similar or more complex situations. Thus, in a set of *ways of practising* already recognized as effective actions, some capabilities and competences will emerge when learning opportunities are

seized by the actor engaged in professional action, allowing him/her to reconfigure his/her *ways of interpreting practice*.

Also on the topic of the relationship between capabilities and learning, Antonacopolou and Chiva (2007) state that one must consider: (a) the student-manager's effort to be recognized as a professional within the corporate culture where he/she works; and (b) the tensions between individual and corporate priorities which affect the motivation to learn. The authors emphasize that the learning context shapes the learning opportunities. Based on this point of view, MBA programs will be contexts for the development of competences by creating learning opportunities with the purpose of enhancing the students' capabilities, helping to improve their performance in the professional practice.

However, Ruas (2010) points out that not many students in Brazilians' MBA programs identified insights associating a practical experience in their workplace with the contents studied in the program. At least at first sight, this result shows that the relationship between the working context and the context of MBA programs, still needs to be effectively developed among students. Moreover, Ruas et al (2008) argue that, in spite of the difficulties in the field of management education and the corporate context to deal with the articulation between theory and practice, it is also necessary to make students responsible for this condition, stimulating them to be protagonists of the process. In this sense, Roglio and Light (2009) argue that the learning process in MBA programs should incorporate the principles of adult education, since the student-manager is characterized as an experienced professional with opportunities to use his/her knowledge in practice. Thus, the authors describe the student-manager as being responsible for acquiring knowledge in a creative manner.

Based on the discussion presented, we argue that the mobilization of capabilities to be integrated into specific competences occurs through the exploitation of learning opportunities in MBA programs. These opportunities need to actively engage the student-manager in the process of developing competences in practice. Thus, we believe that the learning process provides the basis for the combination, expansion, and renewal of capabilities when the student can exploit increasingly complex *ways of interpreting* and, as a consequence, *ways of practising*.

METHOD

After setting the objective of investigating which aspects associated with the MBA program helps develop capabilities and competences, we assumed that the student-manager is the protagonist of this process by establishing linkages between mobilization of capabilities and development of competences. This articulation was defined, based on the student-manager's point of view, as a process of practical learning (Ruas, 2003).

We conducted a qualitative exploratory study with 160 students enrolled in 6 different MBA programs in Brazil. These programs were among the top 10 management education programs in the country between 2004 and 2007. In order to identify aspects of management education explored in the development of capabilities and competences during the MBA program, we use the following selection criteria: (a) institutions located in different cities with different programs and methods; (b) part-time programs where students

alternated educational activities and management practice; (c) giving priority to questionnaires completed by students who were working as managers during the program.

Data collection was carried out by one of the authors of this study. The data collection activity was called Seminar of Management Competences and Learning. The primary source of data was the Seminar, where phases and tools were developed with the purpose of collecting the participants' description and interpretation of their learning process and development of specific capabilities and competences during the MBA program.

In each one of the programs included in this study, the sessions in this Seminar were carried out for a period of between 12 and 16 hours on two consecutive days. Each group of participants included between 20 and 28 students. The Seminar was organized in order to systematize the collection according to the phases, where logic led the participants to identify relevant capabilities and competences for their practices which were developed during management education in the MBA program.

During the first part of the Seminar, two articles dealing with management learning and development of competences were discussed. These articles had been sent to participants in advance for prior reading. The presentation of the concepts of capability, competences and learning and the later thorough discussion were activities employed to build a conceptual framework shared among the students with the purpose of being used in the following activities. This strategy was important to ensure the validity of data obtained by means of students' description and resulting interpretations.

In the next stage, the groups were given a standardized instrument, mixing qualitative and objective questions, which were to be completed by each student. The order of the questions was designed to allow the description of contents and experiences identified as aspects of the management education in the MBA program associated with the development of capabilities and/or competences. The questions asked for: (1) identification of courses which were part of that MBA program; (2) selection of the 10 main subjects and experiences in the program, considering their importance regarding the professional capabilities and/or competences which students hoped to develop in the program (it was necessary to identify the competences stimulated by each subject selected); (3) selection of the 4 most significant subjects and/or experiences resulting from the identification of capabilities and/or competences that each one of these subjects and/or experiences would have motivated.

Once the individual activity was completed, students were divided into small groups of 5 to 6 participants in order to share their answers and perceptions to achieve a collective vision. They were not required to reach a single answer. Small groups performed their work independently for each question of the instrument. After identifying the courses according to the collective point of view, small groups began to describe the 10 main subjects and experiences in each program. Only when the results of one question were discussed by all participants, did they began to seek a final answer for the next question, always connecting them to important management competences based on the texts previously discussed. After completing this work, each small group presented its conclusions to the other groups. The final stage of the study was to return to the large group with the aim of obtaining, by means of dialogue, a description of the subjects considered to be the most relevant by the participants of that MBA program.

Based on the results reported in the questionnaires, the researcher who conducted the seminar introduced questions like: "why is subject X more important than subject Y?" or "which subjects were relevant to your management activity?" The questions were selected with the objective of solving the researchers' interpretational doubts, providing assistance so the participants could develop their descriptions and offer concrete examples of activities or interpretations.

The method of organizing a seminar involved the investigation of interpretations and descriptions on the aspects of management education and their association with the development of capabilities and competences of MBA students. This approach based on a communication technique provided support to validate the researchers' interpretations in relation to the empirical data collected. The use of follow-up questions by the researcher during the Seminar was important to ensure the validity of the information on management experience of MBA students, guaranteeing their ability to assess what they considered to be relevant for their practice.

RESULTS

To investigate aspects of management education in MBA programs according to the student-manager's point of view demonstrated empirical evidence about their contributions to the development of capabilities and competences. For analysis purposes, the results were grouped into three types of contributions and then the aspects of management education identified by the students-managers were discussed.

1. Contributions to explore new ways of interpreting the world

The change in the interpretation of the corporate world and aspects of personal and professional life was described as one of the most important contributions. Students-managers felt that transforming their *ways of interpreting* the world is the most evident aspect of integration between the knowledge learned and flexible strategic capabilities. These capabilities are characterized as easily put to use, combined and integrated into different competences when the student-manager needs to deal effectively with unpredictable situations.

This result suggests an important impact in terms of the students' training to handle more complex situations, as shown by Ruas et al (2005) and Sandberg and Pinnington (2009). The way managers identify and describe a situation is directly linked to what they are. Their interpretation of the usefulness of the available resources or about the people they have a professional relationship with will characterize their *way of practising*. Thus, the way of looking at things is an important element to be considered when investigating the impact of management education programs. Since the MBA program is a continuous learning environment which allows students-managers to explore news *way of interpretation*, it creates opportunities for their involvement in situations where they have to face their particular way of seeing the world. This aspect of management education provides managers with the opportunity to review their practice, to reposition themselves, and to rearrange capabilities so that they can develop new competences.

2. Contributions to enacting capabilities

The development of capabilities was the most valued contribution according to the students-managers in terms of management education. The description of the capabilities

developed makes it possible to analyze the learning process and the way students-managers understand the acquisition of knowledge and the integration of experiences into their daily practice.

2.1 Analytical and associative capability

The analytical and associative capability was considered by students as the most important capability developed during the MBA program, and it accounted for 75% of the answers in the questionnaire applied during the Seminar. The analytical and associative capability was seen by the students-managers as a cognitive dimension that allows us to reflect upon strategic aspects. One example was the association between the analytical and associative capability and the change in the *ways of interpreting* situations related to business internationalization, which had an influence on the association of scenarios and information based on different contexts. “After taking the MBA program, I’ve never read a newspaper the same way I used to do” is the synthesis of an idea often mentioned by the students in the Seminar.

This result is in line with the literature that emphasizes the importance of reflective thinking for professional action, such as the following works by Mintzberg and Gosling (2003), Latham et al (2004), Raelin and Coghlan (2006) and Roglio and Light (2009). On the other hand, these results demonstrate that the association of ideas and analytical thinking is described by the students-managers as effective contributions widely achieved during management education in MBA programs. Combined with the change in the *ways of interpreting* the world, the analytical and associative capability emerges as a basis for reflection, but it also provides opportunity for creativity by means of investigation and availability for new ways of thinking and relating contents, ideas, and experiences. When integrated, these two contributions pointed out by the students-managers are the most striking aspects of management education focused on the development of competences.

2.2. Capability to reflect upon and evaluate your practice at the very moment of action

Some of the contents and experiences of MBA programs encourage reflection and stimulate self-learning based on work experience. Raising awareness on this topic developed, in a significant number of students, the idea that this is an essential aspect of their personal and professional growth. According to the students-managers, reflecting upon the daily practice of their activities leads to changes in their own interpretation of the ways of acting.

From another perspective, some students showed the capability to learn from their own mistakes and discoveries as a learning experience in the educational environment. Being able to explore ideas and produce new knowledge, according to the students-managers, enables the creative expansion of thinking by engaging in daily educational situations, which is feasible in the corporate environment where there should not be mistakes. Thus, the possibility of mobilizing the reflective capability in their daily practice shows that the students-managers can actively engage in taking appropriate content from their management education to their activity in the companies. By highlighting the practice of this capability in their educational practice based on the opportunity of making mistakes and discoveries, some students-managers evidenced practical learning, in addition to highlighting how much they value the process of continuous learning and the experience of developing capabilities and competences (Ruas, 2005). These data seem to corroborate the

idea of Antonacopolou and Chiva (2007) and Sandberg and Pinnington (2009) that the particular way in which the student-manager interprets leads his/her involvement in practical action.

2.3. Capability to tolerate differences

Another aspect highlighted by the students was the development of their capability to tolerate differences. The fact of having to relate to different sorts of people in research activities, seminars, or group projects forced them to constantly negotiate because their way of being and thinking was not always compatible with their colleagues' point of view. Some aspects of the pedagogical methodology were mentioned as important elements for providing the opportunity of learning how to be tolerant by means of the impact of activities on the students-managers. In addition to the pedagogical technique, students highlighted confrontation in situations where they were impelled to rethink their opinion regarding the conflict with differences. The relationship with colleagues is valued by students-managers, since colleagues are considered to be experts. This kind of situation enabled the development of tolerance capabilities as an effective contribution of the MBA program.

3. Contributions to enacting relational competences

According to the descriptions provided by the students-managers, the only and most important contribution of MBA programs in terms of competences was the acquisition and consolidation of interactive processes by mobilizing the tolerance capability and relational factors, such as negotiating and networking. The integration of these capabilities into a specific competence suggests that learning opportunities characterize events in the sense used by Ruas (2003). Since competence is related to an action seen as being effective in a specific situation (Boterf, 1995), the context of the MBA program and the events created during the program are important components for the characterization of the competence developed. On the other hand, the results suggest that the aspects of management education related to knowledge are more intensively integrated into capabilities than into competences.

4. Aspects of management education associated with the development of capabilities and competencies

The analysis of the results reveals, according to the students-managers' point of view, the practices' aspects of management education that can be more involved in the development of capabilities and competences: (1) opportunities of learning by means of continuous experience; (2) changes in the *ways of interpreting* the world; (3) acquisition and exploitation by means of mobilization of analytical and associative capabilities taking advantage of mistakes and discoveries, tolerance, and networking.

The development of capabilities was related to two aspects in the students-managers' descriptions: (a) their active engagement in activities; (b) the learning opportunities provided. And the development of competences was connected to: (a) events generated from daily activities of the MBA program; (b) acknowledgement of the effectiveness of the actions taken.

FINAL COMMENTS

Our results show that the main contribution of the present study is related to the observation that MBA programs tend to have a more effective impact on the development of capabilities than competences. The evidence of the impact of continuous learning on the development of capabilities and competences demonstrates that even when they do not integrate specific competences at a given moment, the capabilities are the most dynamic and potential foundation of competences. Thus, the specificity of competences seems to be based on the flexibility and resiliency capabilities.

Our study showed that the development of relational competence was more compatible with the design of MBA programs. Perhaps the 'strength' of MBA programs is exactly in their differences if compared to companies because in the MBA programs the students can try different roles, react to different situations, and observe their own development by integrating contents into flexible capabilities that can be combined, recombined in multiple ways and speeds. Thus, it is essential to include the student-manager's perspective in the analysis of what is relevant for the improvement of designs or techniques; in addition to seeing the student-manager as a main character in the dynamics of learning.

It is also worth mentioning the finding related to practical learning by means of exploitation of aspects of management education experienced by the student-manager as events attached to his/her engagement in the acquisition of such knowledge. This evidence is enough to deny the passivity attributed to the student-manager, since it demonstrates his/her role as a link between the company and the MBA program. This should be considered during the design of pedagogical strategies aim at increasing the effectiveness of management education.

The empirical evidence we found highlight the aspects of management education that are interpreted by the protagonists of this process to improving their capabilities and competences. The effectiveness of the MBA program is associated with its impacts on the way in which the student-manager interprets the world, to the exploitation of contents and experiences during the program, to the events and continuous learning opportunities that mobilize capabilities during the educational practice, to the social legitimation of an action as relevant in this context. These aspects are important elements that can contribute to assessing the impact of MBA programs on the development of specific capabilities and competences, as well as to the discussion of pedagogical methodologies and strategies that best align with these goals.

Our study about the contributions of MBA programs based on data provided by the students-managers demonstrates the importance of considering the protagonist of the process in the search for empirical evidence about the process of improving capabilities and competences. Conducting further studies in the area is a relevant factor for the discussions about management education and development of competences. Although the focus of the present study was the identification and description of management education aspects, our data provide information about the nature of the process that may be addressed in future studies. In this sense, we highlight the *ways of interpreting* and the learning opportunities as events created in the MBA context. Such topics are suggestions for researches to be conducted in the area.

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