

Introduction: The Challenges Posed by the COVID-19 Crisis for the Management Education Sector

The expectations of business school and management faculty students go well beyond obtaining a degree and are defined around four essential elements:

- Acquiring theoretical and technical knowledge in the field of management and leadership
- Learning a manner of approaching problems and a mindset
- Developing a professional network with fellow program members (given that business school graduates are destined for a career in the field) and potentially entering the social circles of leaders once the degree is earned
- Social recognition of intellectual potential associated with an aptitude for accomplishment in action

Analyzing these four elements in conjunction with some of the consequences of COVID-19 makes it possible to appreciate the importance of the impact of this crisis on management education institutions.

For example, it seems obvious that its first effect is to have enormously accelerated virtual education, which affects both teaching methods and selection processes in educational management institutions.

In this new context, it is conceivable that management education institutions will succeed in meeting the requirements of the first of the previously listed elements – that is, the acquisition of knowledge – at the cost of immense work. A great deal of creativity will be required in order to adequately address the second and third of these, i.e. to inculcate a way of approaching problems and to develop networking, in the context of widespread virtual education.

The fourth element, the recognition of potential, is undoubtedly the one for which the new context in which business schools find themselves poses the most serious challenges. Indeed, although a business school degree is often seen by companies as a guarantee of the potential of graduates, this positive postulate is largely based on their having successfully passed the selection process for admission to a business school. To illustrate how companies perceive the importance of the selection process in elite management education institutions, Henri Tézenas du Montcel (1985) compared it to high-jump events for athletes. Successfully passing a difficult selection process is like an athlete successfully clearing a 2-meter-high bar. If they have succeeded in doing so once in their life, we can reasonably assume that these individuals, if well supervised and well looked after, will continue to be able to jump over a 1.8-meter-high bar very regularly for a long time to come.

Tézenas du Montcel (1985) went on to postulate that, on the other hand, in general, success during studies proper at a business school or a faculty of management is comparable to being able to systematically jump over a 1.5-meter-high bar. Using this metaphor, Tézenas du Montcel showed the fundamental role of selection in the process of social validation of the potential of business school graduates. Thus, COVID-19, which strongly affects the selection process of these institutions, poses a major challenge for the consistency of the management education system.

In addition, by quickly diverting the teaching of management education institutions toward distance education, COVID-19 not only poses a major challenge in terms of educational and curriculum reorganization, but it also obliges the collective of business schools to rethink the competition from those among them that had already moved to entirely distance education, insofar as these had represented controlled competition. This crisis appeared at a time when new challenges were manifesting themselves in business schools, foremost among which was the emergence of wholly new projects that followed completely rethought logic. Large companies were embarking on management education for audiences that extended well beyond their own employees (e.g., AI Business School, developed by Microsoft, and EY Business Academy, developed by Ernst and Young). Some ambitious projects were free (e.g., the University of the People, which allows students to obtain degrees in business administration entirely online), whereas

others (e.g., JOLT) presented original business plans that were different from those of business schools or particularly innovative teaching methods (e.g., Quantic, a mobile, flexible executive MBA).

Management Education, COVID-19, and Extreme Situations

This chapter offers an analysis of the response of management education institutions to the conjunction of these profound changes by viewing the situation of such schools caused by the coronavirus epidemic as an extreme situation (Bettelheim, 1943). Obviously, managers, teachers, and administrative staff in business schools are used to facing an array of challenges that range from the most operational (e.g., facing a lack of classrooms at a time during the week when the entire campus is full of students) to the most complex (those with short- and medium-term educational and financial consequences; e.g., managing the establishment's recruitment and admissions campaign), and even societal and long-term challenges (e.g., how to answer the question that periodically arises about the social function of business schools and their relations with businesses).

All of these issues are multifaceted and important, but they arise periodically and normally in the life and management of a school. Contrarily, however, Bettelheim characterizes extreme situations by their complete exceptionality and their highly destabilizing character, and moreover, he underscores the fact that facing them successfully implies very strong adaptability (Bettelheim, 1943, p. 419). When management education institutions were first affected by the coronavirus crisis in February, March, and April of 2020, it looked like an extreme situation. During this period, a strong feeling of concern for the health and even the lives of students, teachers, and administrative staff existed, which attested to the exceptional nature of the situation for institutions that generally do not have to consider this kind of eventuality. In addition, these institutions had to very quickly face up to strongly destabilizing factors (e.g., new obstacles to the recruitment of international students, increased difficulty in developing international programs, and the need to rethink the selection process). But especially, in their response to the crisis, they found themselves faced with the need "to adapt themselves entirely and with the greatest speed" (Bettelheim, 1943, p. 419). The methods and requirements of this adaptation are the subject of this study.

One possible objection to an “extreme-situation approach” to analyzing an organizational situation is that Bettelheim (1943) formalized his theory to analyze the behavior of prisoners in concentration camps when he himself was returning from the one at Dachau. When we use this approach to analyze organizations, do we not take the risk of falling into anthropomorphism? No. Bettelheim, anxious to clarify the scope of his work, himself indicated that this approach was relevant for individuals, groups, organizations, and the masses (Bettelheim, 1943, p. 419).

Bettelheim’s definition of the priorities essential in the case of extreme situations reinforces the relevance of this approach to the analysis of the way in which management education institutions have faced COVID-19 and its consequences. These priorities are twofold for Bettelheim: on the one hand, to preserve one’s integrity and, on the other hand, to continue to accomplish one’s mission.

He further specifies that the examination of how these two priorities are articulated provides an excellent tool for analysis, including the analysis of organizations.

These priorities correspond to the way in which the management education sector reacted to the outbreak of COVID-19; the two priorities that characterized the start of the crisis consisted, on the one hand, of preserving the integrity of schools by protecting the health of students, teachers, and administrative staff – very often by closing establishments at least for a specified amount of time – and, on the other hand, in accomplishing their missions by seeking the means to teach despite the impossibility of teaching face to face.

How Management Education Institutions Can Adapt to Extreme Situations

The centrality of the notion of adaptation in the context of an extreme situation has been underlined earlier. Faced with the mounting coronavirus epidemic, management schools largely distinguished themselves by reacting quickly and seeking to adapt.

The determining factors of the management education sector’s rapidity in taking into account the challenges posed by COVID-19 are easily spotted. The international has taken such a prominent position in the life and management of schools, whose activities and recruitment reach all corners of the world, that they are in a position to appreciate

the importance of problems even if they take place in an environment far from the historical headquarters of an establishment. Thus, even though the countries in which their teaching activities were located were not yet affected by COVID-19, schools had to think about issues such as whether to go ahead with student study trips. (From the beginning of March, the question of whether it was necessary to go ahead with study trips to China was raised in an acute manner, given the importance of this country for international seminars and learning expeditions for students as well as for executives in training.) Similarly, the difficulty that could exist in welcoming international students for the following year quickly became apparent, especially given that for some schools, the number of such students greatly exceeds half of the student body. Among these international students, students from Asia constitute a major portion. Schools were also quickly alerted to the importance of the challenge (Graduate Management Admissions Council [GMAC], 2020; Lister, 2020; McKie, 2020).

But above all, beyond the questions raised by the international, management schools also had to very quickly determine whether to continue activity on their campuses. The EFMD Global Focus review provided many interesting examples of how management schools have not only been able to use their international experience to anticipate and take stock of the COVID-19 problem but also often made the decision to close their campuses for several days before the public authorities imposed such conditions (Saviotti, 2020). This ability to position themselves as a source of information, coupled with their strong institutional image, has even, in many cases and many regions of the world, led them to advise and inspire public authorities on the decisions to be made and actions to be taken.

In addition, although the health situation in different countries led to the closure of many campuses, the speed with which teaching resumed via distance learning demonstrated impressive responsiveness. To take just one example among many, when the lockdown was put in place, thanks to the prior work of the university's rectorate, the management faculty of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev moved from a pedagogical style in which face-to-face education was overwhelmingly dominant to 100 percent virtual teaching, with only one day of interruption. In general, the management education sector has asserted itself through its ability to adapt in a crisis situation.

Management education institutions, like other faculties, have had to adapt their teaching practices.

This was not a careful or planned renovation but simply a response to the challenge created by the epidemic. The diversity of responses provided by the various faculties around the world to the challenge posed by the different stages of the pandemic has been accompanied in many cases by an impressive capacity for action and, above all, by a remarkable will to implement strategies. After realizing that the COVID-19 crisis would also affect the next school year (2020–21), some business schools decided to combine the two learning methods – face to face and virtual – as part of a hybrid education program. For example, lectures are given online in large auditoriums, and face-to-face meetings are held in small groups. This is the case, for example, with the Cambridge Judge Business School and the London Business School. At Cambridge, it is even required to physically go to school as soon as the situation allows. Each response to the crisis leads to further adaptation efforts. Thus, some students felt, already in the summer of 2020, that because of the virus, they could not commit to going to campus, which increased the rate of postponement of the start of studies. In addition, it was also decided to adapt the physical environment of the school in order to comply with the directives relating to the fight against the virus; thus, measures such as one-way elevators and stairs, physical distancing signs and procedures, and new self-service rules for the cafeteria, among many others, were put into place. Being very concerned about the fight against the spread of the virus, the health of staff and students, and the sustainability of learning, other schools (such as HEC Paris and EDHEC) asked everyone coming to campus to take periodic COVID-19 tests or routinely have their temperature measured on arrival (Nugent, 2020). To enable all students to have a good start to the school year, the opening of the school year was postponed in some schools by 14 days in order to allow the isolation period requested of students to be completed. Finally, some postponed the start of the school year so as to give themselves the best chance of delivering the program face to face and to allow students from different countries around the world to arrive. For example, Alliance Manchester Business School delayed the start of its school year from September to December (Nugent, 2021).

Many schools also created arrangements for students to arrive on campus in maximum safety within the framework of hybrid programs.

For example, WHU in Düsseldorf put in place a meticulous health and safety plan to ensure safe and harmonious education. Plexiglas walls were installed in classrooms, one-way systems were put in place, and the campus was extensively equipped with disinfectant dispensers. Access to the school premises is electronically controlled. Each student is registered via their electronic card when they come onto campus. Students receive detailed instructions prior to arrival and are encouraged to download and use the official coronavirus app, which the federal government promotes. No parties are allowed, and strict rules also apply to extracurricular and social activities. At the Bologna Business School, the pavilion was divided into eight classrooms to accommodate 370 students in a space that can typically accommodate 10,000. Every hour, an air-recirculation system brings fresh, clean air into the pavilion (BusinessBecause, 2020).

The Frankfurt School of Finance and Management invested in coronavirus tracers. Small devices are given to each student and each staff or faculty member (Nugent, 2020). Each device has a unique tracking ID linked to its owner, and using Bluetooth technology, it records the details of every device that is within 2 meters of it. This information is then kept in a system for 14 days, making it easy to spot potential infections if a student, staff member, or faculty member tests positive for COVID-19.

Types of Reactions to Extreme Situations

The very notion of an extreme situation seems to intuitively lead to behavior based on the assumption that it is not destined to last. However, in such a situation, it is quite possible to adopt an attitude that takes into account that an extreme situation can be prolonged, as it is the situation in its essence that is extreme in the difficulties that it generates, the contradictions it entails, the tensions it gives rise to. However, this does not say anything about its ability to last over time. For example, the state of extreme poverty experienced by 11 percent of the world's population puts these individuals in an extreme and unfortunately lasting situation.

To better understand the present situation for management education institutions, it is useful to compare it to loss. Loss is the extreme situation *par excellence* because it arises suddenly and puts the individual or organization in a difficult situation that must be faced. Three

attitudes that religious literature has echoed (Grossman, 2016) since ancient times and can be described under various terms emerge when facing a situation of loss: coping, mourning, and resilience.

The attitude of coping involves coming to terms with the new, unpleasant situation, even when it is an extreme one – trying to do what it takes to “live with” the situation while still supposing that it will disappear. It is thus, above all, a matter of being in the best possible situation “afterward,” when things return to normal, because the central assumption of coping is that the extreme situation is not destined to last.

The work of mourning, however, consists first of all in accepting the *fait accompli*, admitting that what was will not return, and that therefore, we must make it so that we can live *in* the new situation, which is the new reality.

Resilience occurs after having carried out and then moved beyond the stage of mourning, and it therefore implies having accepted that the present reality will persist. It also consists of trying to create the conditions to influence this situation by making it better and therefore more acceptable, creating new opportunities.

This section describes how, faced with the challenge of COVID-19 and the extreme situation that it created for the management education sector, schools reacted with attitudes, decisions, and actions relating to these three behaviors – coping, mourning, and resilience.

Obviously, sorting the behavior of business schools in response to COVID-19 into three categories is part of an approach that seeks after Max Weber’s ideal types. Weber himself clarified that these are not found as such in the social reality; rather, it is a question of indicating the main features that help to think about the subject being studied. Thus, none of the ways in which business schools and management faculties have dealt with COVID-19 are linked totally and uniquely with a single attitude of coping, mourning, or resilience. Instead, they mix together elements belonging to each of these categories. However, the description of these three ideal types makes it possible to lay a foundation for the analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on management education institutions.

Coping

The consequences of the coronavirus epidemic for business schools and management faculties were felt almost cataclysmically in March 2020.

The difficulties seemed to accumulate. Many Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) and Graduate Record Examination (GRE) test centers had closed in many parts of the world as of February and March, which made it practically impossible to obtain these important test scores for applications. International travel became problematic or even impossible, which posed a serious obstacle for organizing international seminars, learning expeditions, student exchanges, and so forth, as well as for the recruitment of international students. And very soon afterward, in the specific case of the United States, visa problems for foreign students added to the surrounding difficulties. Thus, the months of March and April showed themselves to be not just difficult in and of themselves with the closure of campuses, one after the other, but also the bearers of difficulties for the future.

The adaptability of the management education sector, when faced with these difficulties, has been remarkable. Most high-level schools extended their final rounds of admissions or added additional ones. They lowered, and in some cases even did away with, their requirements in terms of GMAT and GRE test scores. The effect on the number of applications for the following year was significant (Byrne, 2020c; GMAC, 2020) – and all the more so because it was coupled with another unexpected factor: the COVID-19 epidemic, by causing the volume of business and economic growth to decline, reduced the promotion possibilities for young managers, as well as the number of interesting jobs in the labor market.

The labor-market situation, coupled with the easing of admission conditions for business schools, has led to a sharp increase in the number of applications in master's programs (Byrne, 2020a; Moules and Jack, 2020), which has even greater significance because in the previous 3 years, business schools, and in particular MBAs, had been faced with a regular decline in the number of applications.

This increase in the number of candidates was marked on all continents; it has been particularly spectacular in the United States, where despite visa restrictions, some schools have seen an increase of more than 50 percent in the number of applications for their MBAs (Ethier, 2020c).

These elements indicate that management education institutions have, in many respects, remarkably adapted to the new constraints created by the coronavirus epidemic and have succeeded, for example (also taking advantage of socially favorable circumstances), in

increasing the number of applicants and turning around the somber situation that had been looming in which they would have suffered a decrease in the number of applications for the fourth consecutive year.

This observation must, however, be supplemented by an examination of the way in which management education institutions have reacted to this increase in applications. In the preamble of the analysis of how the increase in applications was managed, it is useful to underscore that with a few exceptions, which we will examine, the reactions of management education institutions have been remarkably similar on the six continents. In general, these institutions have not resisted the temptation to maintain an equivalent number of enrolled students as the previous year or even to increase the number of admitted students.

However, we must distinguish the case of management faculties belonging to universities, in particular public ones, from the case of business schools, where a significant portion of the budget comes from very high tuition fees. As regards management faculties, faced with an influx of candidates, they have tended to fill their classes as much as possible, taking into account the limit that their supervisory authority almost always sets for them.

Some business schools have gone much further in the same direction by increasing the number of successful applicants and, in many cases, recruiting classes of new students for the 2020–21 academic year that were significantly larger than the previous year.

Internationally, it appears that many business schools have followed the same pattern in the admissions sequence of MBA students and, more generally, in business schools. As schools around the world became aware of the negative potential of the COVID-19 epidemic in March–April 2020, they were led to try to adapt their admission requirements, both in terms of deadlines and dates to present applications and, often, in terms of the content requirements of the applications themselves, be it by waiving or postponing test results or even academic requirements.

From the month of May, they became aware of the fact that, far from declining, the number of candidates was increasing. Therefore, in many cases, the cohorts starting at the end of August/September/October 2020 and in January 2021 are larger than in previous years. The reasons that led educational management institutions to accept more students than in previous years stem from the particular context

of the COVID-19 epidemic, which has forced them to switch to distance education. Peter Johnson, assistant dean of the full-time MBA program and admissions at the Haas School in Berkeley, in an interview given to the Poets & Quants website, sums up perfectly the logic followed by many institutions: “In a normal year, if we were fully in-person, we wouldn’t be able to have a class this large” (Ethier, 2020b, para. 3).

Schools have therefore often freed themselves from referring to the physical and educational limits that they would have had to follow if they had not switched to distance learning. Peter Johnson’s statement implicitly means that schools have given up on the idea that they could go back to face-to-face learning if the situation improves on the coronavirus front in the months to come.

This observation necessitates two comments. First of all, it implies that a major shift in the teaching at business schools has taken place, even if this is not clearly stated and is not necessarily something schools have become explicitly aware of; schools are putting themselves in a situation of no return, at least in the short term, with regard to face-to-face education. This transition to virtual education will have enormous implications in terms of pedagogy, relationships with students, the use of premises, and school policies for investment in equipment, among other areas.

Second, the sphere of management education is faced with a major contradiction. Indeed, it seems that there is a consensus that distance education needs to make huge strides to be as good as face-to-face education. Thus, the numerous articles and declarations emphasizing the merits of hybrid education and calling for its rapid generalization constitute just as many positions according to which purely virtual education is not a panacea. However, to the extent that hybrid education includes a not-insignificant share of face-to-face teaching, the large number of students in this year’s classes would require huge investments and major decisions to be made in order for it to be possible. Thus, schools seem to have put themselves in a system of paradoxical injunctions where their actions are out of step with their real situations and their stated objectives. They spread the message that it would be desirable to return to at least a small amount of face-to-face education, all the while incurring situations where this option is no longer possible.

This type of behavior raises another question, especially for the more reputable schools. Indeed, by putting themselves in a position to take

the risk of suffering degradation of teaching, schools expose themselves to having their contributions questioned, in particular, in relation to lessons offered for a lower cost at more recent and less prestigious institutions that, from their conception, had turned to the virtual. It seems that schools are counting on the fact that their names, their reputations, and their branding will continue to support the demand for their degrees. Although this reasoning is undoubtedly correct in the short term, the sustainability of this type of behavior in the long term is problematic. The many ambitious new projects mentioned in the introduction, which are at the same time marginal compared to traditional academic education and totally supported by teaching on the internet, expect to be able to create different but effective branding that will put classic business schools in a difficult position.

In addition, the need to maintain an excellent educational level, pedagogically speaking, is therefore emerging in a precise and urgent manner for schools. Technological solutions have been sought in the context of the various lockdowns to try to avoid prohibiting the normal reception of students on campuses, doing “the same thing, but via Zoom” and risking offering students a degraded MBA experience. As a result, schools have tried to find online techniques to fill this gap. For example, the MIP Politecnico di Milano in Italy adopted FLEXA, an e-learning platform developed in partnership with Microsoft. FLEXA’s machine-learning technology enables the creation of a personal online study program for each student based on data from online sources, which enables students to pursue effective learning. Another example is Prendo Simulations, which creates business simulations for schools like INSEAD, Wharton, and Kellogg. These simulations are specially developed for home students during quarantine (Novellis, 2020).

Although distance learning has undergone a huge acceleration as a result of the COVID-19 epidemic, school management is focusing on the acquisition of equipment, leaving educational innovation to the initiative of teachers in the field, who are now facing significant pressure. The need for pedagogical change is felt enormously in almost all institutions because they feel that distance teaching cannot be reduced to simply doing the same thing as face-to-face teaching, only mediated by a camera.

Thus, this need for change and the adjustment of pedagogy puts significant pressure on teachers, who are on the front lines when it

comes to the adaptation of institutions to the constraints induced by COVID-19.

After two decades during which the centrality of questions of internationalization, accreditation, and so forth led to a focus on the deans of business schools, COVID-19 represents a return of the figure of the professor as a central element in the lives of business schools.

This also has consequences for the central approaches and concepts in the world of management education; where focusing on the figure of the dean had led us to focus on strategy, its concepts, and its rationality, the return of the professor's visible centrality could, as a result of the modes of adaptation the professor bears, well cause a renewed interest in practical wisdom, iterative adjustments, and the importance given to experience.

The Work of Mourning

In the description of coping, we considered the case of institutions that believed the crisis caused by COVID-19 was not sustainable and that we had to live with it, to cope with it, for as long as it lasted, as best as possible, by not refraining from seeking the effects of opportunity.

Faced with a difficult situation or with a loss, the attitude of submitting to the work of mourning is seen as an alternative to coping. The work of mourning consists of admitting that the loss that has occurred, that the disastrous change that has taken place is irreversible, which determines both behavior and subsequent actions. Similarly, to face up to the coronavirus crisis, some management education establishments have reacted in a way that is close to the work of mourning by integrating the idea that the consequences of this crisis were destined to last into their decisions as well as their activities.

Therefore, in opposition to the behaviors induced by coping, which consist of seeking short-term benefits even at the cost of long-term risks, it is here a question of admitting and taking into account the lasting nature of the effects of COVID-19 on management education institutions, even if doing so entails short-term costs and constraints.

An excellent example of this attitude is represented by the decision of certain schools, such as INSEAD and the Harvard University School of Business, to decrease the number of students recruited in the fall of 2020. INSEAD decided to decrease the number of accepted students by more than a third, although the school had a record number of

applicants. Likewise, Harvard recruited the smallest incoming class in decades, with 732 students, compared to 938 the previous year (Byrne, 2020b).

The management of both INSEAD and Harvard thus considered the fact that in order to develop hybrid education, it was necessary to account for the fact that any face-to-face education would occupy more space on their premises, which made it necessary to reduce the number of students. Maintaining the same number of students as in previous years was tantamount to choosing entirely distance education.

One of the reasons for the relatively small number of students studying in the fall 2020 cohort is that Harvard Business School has given all admitted students the option to defer their enrollment for 1 or 2 years without any penalty while not compensating for these postponements by admitting a greater number of wait-listed candidates. In making this choice, the Harvard Business School recognized that face-to-face studies better corresponded to the very high Harvard standard and that this was a right for accepted students. The leaders of the institution were faced with a particular challenge that consisted of preserving classroom teaching, which was necessary for the institution's famous "case-study method." However, COVID-19 restrictions prevented students from completely filling classrooms.

As well, Harvard Business School accepted that in order to maintain the constituent elements of its identity (the case-study method, the quality of teaching, etc.), it was necessary to mourn financial income.

It should also be noted that Harvard has also already indicated that if the world health situation returned to normal, it would recruit a record number of students at the start of the 2021 and 2022 school years. This is specific to a work of mourning that consists, above all, of recognizing and accepting a loss but that, at the same time, leads to the postulate that at some point, the situation will find a new normal. Finally, although it is easy to imagine that Harvard wants to return to its usual number of students when the health situation returns to normal, a sudden and sharp increase in its number of students would be a major challenge. It would seem that it will be achieved by capitalizing on the lessons learned from the COVID-19 epidemic and by maintaining a small amount of hybrid teaching.

Many other examples have emerged in which management education institutions recognized that the coronavirus crisis had led to

situations it was necessary to face, even if responding to them was difficult and had a short-term cost, because the situations were going to persist in the long term, and schools had to be prepared to deal with them as best as possible.

Networking is an important asset of attending a business school. However, student separation from campus has greatly hampered networking possibilities, which are first realized face to face. We are seeing many efforts on the part of schools to make some of these activities happen online. At the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Sloan School of Management, virtual student networking includes quiz nights, hackathons, and a coding boot camp (Bartleby, 2020). Activities at the Haas School in Berkeley, California, also include distance yoga and mindfulness classes. At INSEAD, students meet in virtual meeting rooms for more in-depth discussions, with groups chosen at random to ensure interaction with a larger group of classmates (Bartleby, 2020).

The investment in time, energy, and money that management education institutions devote to this development is indicative of the awareness that networking activities will be carried out after the coronavirus crisis in a different way from the way they were carried out before.

The primordial importance of approaches that stem from what we have called “mourning” in the sphere of management education as it faces up to COVID-19 is largely because the effects of the epidemic have caused a sharp increase in uncertainty. Indeed, many analysts have pointed out that the epidemic has led to a global economic and financial crisis that has had a strong impact on unemployment rates and that will durably affect small businesses in particular because they are often no longer able to function (Skok and Owen, 2020). This general situation is causing a drastic increase in uncertainty, which blurs representations of what economies will look like when this crisis is behind us (Altig et al., 2020).

However, uncertainty should logically have an enormous effect on programs and curricula, insofar as it accelerates the obsolescence of teaching: the more quickly and significantly the future is different from the past and the present, the more the knowledge acquired is blamed. To illustrate this, Jaime Weinman (2020) recounts that in the novel *A Semester in the Life of a Garbage Bag* by Canadian author Gordon Korman, the protagonist writes a political science report on the governmental structure of an obscure monarchy whose ruler is

overthrown and executed on the day the report is due. All the hero can do is add “until yesterday” to the title.

Likewise, the COVID-19 crisis seems to have largely indicted (not to mention made obsolete) strong trends in the global economy and the social evolution that is taking place – trends that had been seen as basic concepts of business school education. However, they must absolutely avoid providing teaching that would be relevant until yesterday. Two examples, among many others, illustrate this phenomenon:

- The until-recently-ultra-dominant idea of an increasingly interconnected world economy seems to have been largely demolished. The concept of the open economy of the Western world began to be questioned in 2016 with the announced desire of US president-elect Donald Trump to weaken globalized market policies, as well as to strengthen border restrictions. The British “Brexit” was also a signal of this tendency for countries to move toward economic independence (McMahon and Hartigan, 2018). There is no doubt, however, that the sudden appearance of COVID-19 has given a boost to this notion of market fragmentation in parallel with that of the return of national sovereignty in the economic field. This change should have consequences in the teaching provided in business schools and should lead to changes in perspective.
- The global coronavirus pandemic has exposed and worsened social disparities in human societies and pushed millions of people into poverty (Ashford et al., 2020). COVID-19 has given renewed acuity to these themes. Further addressing the problems of socioeconomic inequality in business school classrooms and courses is now seen as an urgent need.

To be able to take into account such cardinal changes, it is necessary that business schools do the work of mourning the previous situation, which is over. Nothing can be more disabling than to stick to approaches supposing that when the effects of the coronavirus are no longer felt, we will return to the previous situation – this approach prevents us from putting ourselves in a situation to respond effectively to new challenges.

This is particularly glaring if we take the case of foreign students at American universities: while their numbers had been steadily increasing, in 2020, they decreased. Studying with international students from all over the world and working with them on assignments is an

experience that will not be familiar to the students of American business schools this year. It is particularly noteworthy that the percentage of international students who study at American business schools will be significantly lower as long as the virus remains around because these students will not pay the high tuition fees that such establishments charge for an educational experience that consists only of e-learning. The paradox is that the spread of distance education has turned many students away from foreign universities and made them prefer local universities (Moules, 2020). But above all, contrary to what seems to be the fundamental hypothesis of the great American universities, nothing says that these students will return once the COVID-19 crisis is over.

Likewise, although it is commonly underlined how COVID-19 has had a strong impact on the ways of teaching in management education institutions and how quick and, in many respects, how successful the transition to distance learning has been, it is nonetheless clear that this development has not been accompanied by changes of the same magnitude in the curricula.

Likewise, teaching methods have often remained practically the same, and it is commonly reported that no review of technical aspects such as the length of sessions or the ideal number of students in each class has been performed, and students feel the lack of human connection with their faculty, school staff, and their peers (Liguori and Winkler, 2020). All these elements constitute enormous methodological challenges to overcome.

It would be excessive to draw conclusions that are too extreme and claim that pedagogy has not been affected by changes wrought by the coronavirus. Institutions have profoundly rethought their methods. The example of the South Korean Sungyunkwan University is particularly interesting: starting from the belief that fatigue is a major challenge of e-learning in many business schools, the decision was made not to record classes to increase student attention and involvement. The principle behind this decision is that watching the video is insufficient and that active watching is necessary not only to fully understand the course but also to ensure its quality (GBSN Emerge, 2020). To encourage active learning, some other schools recommend dividing the lesson into short segments of about 15 minutes, with a short activity between them; obviously, the length of teaching time slots in educational institutions is a contingency factor for organizations.

On another level, Weinman reports that when COVID-19 hit, McGill University's Bensadoun School of Retail Management was opening a 2,300-square-foot retail innovation lab to study the retail business experience; the lab was redesigned to take into account that the coronavirus has ushered us into the age of physical distancing, allowing students and faculty to simulate "how customers can make their shopping journeys without interacting with anyone or touching a single item in the store" (Weinman, 2020, para. 5).

In addition, noting how much of a general influence the coronavirus crisis has had on the curricula of business schools should not lead us to neglect the cases where, to the contrary, special courses were created to deal with questions raised by the COVID-19 crisis, considering that schools cannot afford to stick to old curricula and not react or update themselves to take into account the effects of the crisis. For example, the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania launched a course called "Epidemics, Natural Disasters, and Geopolitics: Managing Global Business and Financial Uncertainty." The London Business School will soon be organizing a course titled "The Economics of a Pandemic."

This underlines even more how much mourning is necessary to lead people to understand that management education will not return to the status quo ante of the situation before the pandemic. It is understandable that until such work is done, management education institutions and their teachers will be reluctant to really change their curricula and psychoeducational practices to meet a need that they feel is temporary.

Resilience

The two attitudes mentioned previously to represent the reaction of business schools to the extreme situation into which the COVID-19 epidemic has plunged them are based on radically different assumptions. Coping is based on the fundamental assumption that this extreme situation and the crisis that caused it are not going to last – that it is just a matter of waiting to return to the previous situation. On the other hand, the work of mourning consists of taking note of the fact that the consequences of the crisis are lasting and that a return to the status quo ante is not possible. This approach – for which examples were given in the previous section – consists of defining one's decisions, one's actions, and one's attitudes by being faithful to one's identity and one's objectives and by acknowledging the new situation.

The reaction of business schools to the extreme situation generated by the COVID-19 crisis has led to a third type of response that is also based on the recognition of the lasting nature of the consequences of the crisis. But this response is not satisfied with merely taking note of such durability and determining its attitude to best preserve the objectives and identity of the institution. Rather, it strives to act on the context in which the crisis has put schools in order to improve it. This type of reaction can be grouped together under the generic term of *organizational resilience*, which initially involves an accomplished grieving process.

An example of this is provided by the Stanford Rebuild initiative of the Stanford Graduate School of Business (GSB), for which the Startup Garage at Stanford GSB has been a key resource in an 8-week innovation sprint to design or scale up post-coronavirus-crisis economic stimulus plans. In this context, the school is entirely playing its role because this initiative is, first and foremost, a large-scale brainstorming session focused on large-scale problems and guided by eminent specialists from the business and academic worlds. The 8-week program began on June 22, 2020, and ended with a high-profile event in September (Ethier, 2020a). Stanford Rebuild is not limited to Stanford students; it is an event open to students, entrepreneurs, innovators, and business leaders from around the world. The school calls it a “focused investigation of ideas and solutions to accelerate the path to a better post-COVID future” (Ethier, 2020a, para. 6). Stanford’s voluntarism is reflected in how, to give the project maximum impact, Stanford trains the participants by allowing them access to Stanford Embark, “an interactive entrepreneurial toolkit designed to help people explore if they can turn their idea into a viable business” (Ethier, 2020a, para. 6).

The intention of the project is manifested in the enunciation of the four sectors to which it relates: Reimagine Organizations, Reinforce Healthcare Systems, Revitalize the Workplace, and Redesign Human Wellbeing. Even more precisely, this intention is expressed by the type of challenges faced by the participants, which include not only challenges directly related to COVID-19, such as the implementation of scalable, socially responsible tests and contact tracing, but also major societal issues like rethinking childcare and preschool education; the impact of social distancing on mental health; and support for small businesses to recover and, in many cases, reinvent themselves. Finally,

it is important to underline that for the projects considered most remarkable, the university has helped entrepreneurs find financing.

The Stanford example is one among dozens of others in which management education institutions are not content to merely take the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis as given but instead are embarking on processes intended to contribute to the reconstruction of post-crisis society. This example has in common with the examples of the grieving process provided earlier that it highlights instances in which the institutions of management education, far from making sacrifices to opportunistic processes to confront the crisis, remain faithful to their identities and their objectives.

The Stanford Rebuild project is presented as an initiative in which the management education institution mobilizes its teachers and students in an extra-academic framework. Certain other institutions have integrated an approach aimed at reacting to the consequences of COVID-19 as part of their curriculum. Many voices from both faculties and business school students call for engaging management and business administration students in actions related to their role as students and future managers in such a crisis. For example, Nyenrode Business University has realized how important it is to involve students in this resilience process and has launched programs in which students help small businesses and families with financial advice, all as part of their study program.

Likewise, an interesting example is the MBA Response project (Garner, 2020; MBA Response, n.d.). Harvard University has recognized that many struggling organizations, from those directly battling the pandemic to those devastated by the economic fallout, could benefit from MBA skills – marketing, finance, strategy, and so forth – to help face the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The MBA program started a project that brings together businesses that need help and students who want to volunteer and help. The initiative spread to Georgetown University and became an inter-business school initiative called the MBA Response (Garner, 2020; MBA Response, n.d.).

Some business school projects facing the COVID-19 pandemic are trying to cope with global instability to launch progressive projects. For example, within the London Business School is the Wheeler Institute for Business and Development, which started a whole new business in India during the pandemic (Keller and Kwag, 2020). Rural areas of India were most at risk from the COVID-19 situation, not only

from the health risks it entails (which also affect the rest of the world) but also because of the disease's impact on development and investment in new opportunities for the underdeveloped society of this country. The Wheeler Institute has established culturally sensitive and professionally empowering "labs" for female entrepreneurs. Knowing that this population was the most likely to be most affected by the pandemic, investing precious resources in times of global crisis is a message of solidarity and courage aiming at systemic progress.

Conclusion

The debates on the vocation of business schools traditionally oscillate between their responsibilities toward their students, which consist of educating them in management, and those toward companies in terms of training qualified personnel. They induce numerous developments for the way in which these two responsibilities complement and oppose each other and for the obligations toward each other that all of these stakeholders share.

The analysis of the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis for management education institutions via the notion of the extreme situation leads to the highlighting of another aspect of the *raison d'être* of these institutions. The coronavirus epidemic, like any crisis, is not limited to, on the one hand, "dealing with it" and attempting to operate in the manner closest to what was in effect before the crisis (even if it means disregarding it), nor, on the other hand, taking note of the fact that many aspects of the crisis are irreversible and trying to adopt behaviors that take into account the new situation in order to try to carry out one's mission.

This chapter has underscored how the notion of the extreme situation makes it possible to characterize the two attitudes described previously as relating to coping for the first and mourning for the second. But it has also highlighted a third alternative, resilience, which is characterized by acting proactively on the environment in which we operate. This analysis of the extreme situation through these three modalities reminds us of an element whose relevance is not limited to crisis situations: if management education institutions have a mission to educate students and meet the human resources needs of companies, then they are also a social place whose *raison d'être* is also to train elites for the society in which we operate and to influence the state of

society as a whole. The leadership of management education institutions is enriched by also taking this third dimension into account. In addition, it thus contributes to the social legitimacy of business schools.

In its analysis of the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis on the management education sector, this chapter went through the notion of the extreme situation, borrowed from Bruno Bettelheim. Bettelheim (1943) argued that because extreme situations imply the need for adaptation, they act as accelerators and therefore revealers of the ongoing and desirable development pursued by an individual, a community, or a society.

The description and analysis of the responses of business schools to the crisis brought about by the pandemic have shown that alongside the two traditionally recognized missions of business schools and management faculties (training students in management and business administration and meeting the need for trained managers in companies), a third responsibility that had already emerged is now essential.

Indeed, the types of responses that can be given to an extreme situation (coping, mourning, and resilience), which have all been implemented by management education institutions, have demonstrated the increasing importance of a third mission of the management education sector, according to which business schools take note of the irreversibility of the consequences of the pandemic but use all their potential to contribute as social actors¹ to a reconstruction of the social environment and therefore to a way out of the crisis. We have seen that management education institutions, by letting companies in difficulty benefit from their knowledge, organizing forums in which skills are aggregated, training their students and participants in their executive education activities, and being immediately operational in confronting the crisis by adapting their teaching and so forth, work toward resilience for society in general and for the various communities. Obviously, this role of structuring society, or even, to paraphrase Berger and Luckmann (1966), of social construction of reality, had already

¹ See, in the present volume, Eric Cornuel's Chapter 13, "Going beyond 'Always Look on the Bright Side of Life' in Management Education Crisis Strategy."

emerged well before the coronavirus crisis. But this crisis, by demonstrating that the recognition and exercise of this social responsibility have a primordial role in the “post-COVID-19” world, also indicates an important direction of development for business schools, “in peacetime” as well as now.

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