

# **OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS IN TRAINING MANAGERS – A NARRATIVE OF THE BRAZILIAN EXPERIENCE WITH PROFESSIONAL MASTER´S PROGRAMS<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Abstract:**

This text is a narrative of the institutionalization process of the Professional Masters (MP), which began in the 90s. It also analyses the experience of the Business School at the Federal University of Bahia (EAUFBA). These themes are contextualized in the recent history of Brazilian post-graduation, discussing peculiarities and paradoxes of a hybrid area driven by diverse rationales: academic, corporate, governmental and social. The lessons learned from the experiences of the EAUFBA can be summarized by opportunity and risk factors, all of which are included within the same institutional post-graduation system, strongly centralized and regulated by CAPES with direct participation from the academic community. The Professional Masters Program has been a target of controversy within the scientific community, accepted and rejected by important institutions, and by academic leaderships, but ultimately, it is responsible for mediating the academic world with the working world, reducing bi-polar tensions and providing opportunities for society.

**Key Words:** Brazilian Professional Masters Programs; Federal University of Bahia; opportunities; risks;

## **1. OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS OF THE APPROACH**

This text is a narrative of the institutionalization process of the Professional Masters (MP), which began in the 90s, and an analysis of the experience at the Business School at the Federal University of Bahia (EAUFBA).<sup>2</sup>

A recent and controversial phenomenon in Brazilian post-graduate studies, the Professional Masters Program (MP) has opened up a space among the modalities represented by the Doctorate Programs, Academic Masters Programs and Specialization Courses. This text reflects on the MP as an innovative process. Tension and dilemmas have marked the path of this teaching model.

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<sup>2</sup> The Professional Masters was a collective creation of the NPGA – Nucleus of Post-Graduation in Administration in the School of Administration of UFBA. Among other people who collaborated with the project, I call attention to the Pedagogue Fátima Oliveira, current Pedagogical Assistant to the course.

The opportunities are due to the institutions' efforts in recreating post-graduation courses, investing in: new curricular designs and learning strategies; faculty with academic qualification and managerial experience; excellent in-class and distance education; conciliation of work and studies; and articulations effectuated between theories and practices.

The MP is not an excluding course. It ambitiously tries to conciliate the paradox of the academic and professional axes of post graduation courses in Administration. The path of professionalizing teaching has been ambiguous not only in Brazilian schools. The crisis of management schools and the reactions to international MBAs coming from within well-known institutions abroad is a consequence of the adoption of new models and the internationalization of courses.

The theme is contextualized in the recent history of Brazilian post-graduation, discussing peculiarities and paradoxes of a hybrid area driven by diverse rationales: academic, corporate, governmental and social.

In Brazil, the Masters Program deemed "Professional" is not exclusive to the area of Administration. Today there are professional masters programs in obvious areas such as Engineering and Dentistry, but also in Sociology and Theology. The most surprising initiative is that of Professional Masters in Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics. In other words, above all, the Professional Masters is characterized by innovation and reconstruction of the traditional teaching model.

In the late 90s, four Brazilian institutions submitted Professional Masters projects to CAPES (a foundation connected to the Ministry of Education) and put them into practice:

- Two Federal Universities – the Federal University of Bahia – UFBA, and the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul – UFRGS;
- Two Business Schools at the Getulio Vargas Foundation: Business Administration School of São Paulo – EAESP, and the Brazilian School of Public and Business Administration - EBAPE.

The lessons learned from the experiences of the UFBA Business School (EAUFBA) can be summarized by opportunity and risk factors. Some of these elements are relatively linked to others: all are absorbed into the same institutional post-graduation system, strongly centralized and regulated by the CAPES with direct participation from the academic community.

## **2. A DUAL MODEL OF POST-GRADUATION: TWO OPPOSING FORCES?**

In Brazil, the post-graduation system has been bipolar, with dilemmas and tensions among academic values and pressures of the working world. It is no coincidence that the Professional Masters Program is a target of controversy in the scientific community, accepted and rejected by important institutions, and by academic leaderships.

It is important to remember that it had already been included in the initial regulation of the Brazilian post-graduation program. Report No. 977/65, registered by the Federal Board of Education, proposed the creation of courses with professional orientation. Therefore, since its implantation, post-graduation courses have sought to train professors and researchers for teaching in the same post-graduation courses.

The 60s and 70s were times for investment in training of personnel, especially abroad, and in supporting implantation of the Masters Courses and the beginning of Doctorate Courses (Fischer, 2001). Within this perspective, even in a phase in which efforts have been concentrated on increasing our skills in graduating people with Masters degrees, the reference and general goal of the post-graduation development policy was to expand the consolidation of academic Doctorate Courses.

It was hoped that the professionals trained for teaching and researching would have a multiplying role. In other words, the Brazilian post-graduate programs imitated the international programs that graduated professors suitable for academia. The first academic specialization courses began in Brazil in the 60s, and in the 70s the first Masters courses were created. The 80s were a time for expansion.

The CAPES (2001) evaluation system was the regulating element of the following configuration. The Post-Graduate Evaluation System was conceived to measure the performance of courses using parameters, criteria, and indicators. The skills acquired by CAPES in the evaluation of the Brazilian post-graduation program were set within the reality of the courses for academic training.

The 90s were times of progressive differentiation, or rather, Specialization Courses expanded widely, and were labeled as “MBAs” to supply a market that demanded knowledge and qualification. Thus the Professional Masters Program (MP) emerged, with controversial format and denomination, as the most recent expansion of educational services.

In 1993, 50 of the most representative international institutions, such as Boconni, Harvard, Wharton, INSEAD and others, met in Paris to discuss the MBA crisis, to propose new teaching models, and to conquer new South American, African and Asian territories (Mintzberg and Gosling, 2003).

In 1995, CAPES created an interdisciplinary task group to reflect on the post-graduation model and to regulate the creation of Professional Masters Programs. The area of Business Administration was represented in this group and in those that followed from 1998 to 2002. From the first resolution, the Professional Masters Program was conceptualized as a course that was qualitatively different, and not as a variant of the Academic Masters Program.

In Brazil, the Academic and Professional aspects are summarized as follows (CAPES, 2001):

**Academic** – has the purpose of training researchers. It is consolidated in the offer of a doctorate program. In this aspect, the masters program has the role of a preliminary course, given the stage of development in the area of knowledge in the country, or in a determined geographical region.

**Professional** – has the objective of training qualified professionals for performing duties beyond the realm of academic research, by offering courses geared to the application of up-to-date knowledge and modern methods. The masters program, in this case, is a terminal course for obtaining the intended skills set.

In October 1995, Order No. 47 was developed in discussions with the Advisory Board, regarding the need for Brazilian post-graduate programs to diversify in order to fulfill

society's demands. It determines the implantation by CAPES of the appropriate procedures for professional masters courses. In December, 1998, Order No. 80 established processes and procedures for recommendation, follow-up and assessment of Professional Masters Courses.

In September 1999, the Technical Scientific Board of CAPES approved standards for the evaluation of the Professional Masters proposal. In November 2001, the Resolution of the Advisory Board approved the basic ideas on adjusting an Evaluation System to the needs of post-graduate development.

From here onwards, annual growth in the number of proposals for Professional Masters Programs approved by CAPES grew: 4 in 1997; 6 in 1998; 24 in 1999; 22 in 2000, 25 in 2001 and 106 in 2002.

In 2002, CAPES again returned to the theme, forming an interdisciplinary committee to revise the previous resolutions and to propose a policy that defines the nature of the Professional Masters Programs and establishes compatible evaluation criterion. These courses should have the following characteristics (CAPES, 2002):

- Clear and direct association between curricular structure and professional experiences, to the current requirements identified within society. This involves the development of formal mechanisms to identify needs and opportunities; and to guarantee appropriate responses to the inevitable modifications in requirements.
- Construction of the course based on real-world problems and common interests between the academic sector and the involved institutions: corporations, governmental and social organizations.
- Implantation of the course supported by efficient exchanges with society, in terms of contributing to the development of its products and services on the one hand, and on the other, better qualification of students.

Thus, in Brazil, the Professional Masters Programs are regulated by a set of rules regarding research, scientific and technical production and faculty. The MP courses that have already become institutionalized uphold these requirements and their titles are recognized. However, the market imposed its logic and many specialization courses are offered today, with varying forms of labeling MBAs and with heterogeneous levels of quality. Today there is often confusion between good and bad products, and among the courses that award valid certificates and those that are neither high quality, nor even legal. Therefore, the post-graduate program in administration in Brazil has two axes: the Academic with masters and doctoral programs that are similar to academic courses from other areas assessed by CAPES, and the Professional, with Professional Masters Programs (MPs) and Specialization Courses (MBAs).

Currently, the diversity of the post-graduation programs (academic doctoral and masters vs. professional masters and specialization), as well as the locus (in school or in company, traditional or distance), have created an excellent dynamic, in which the schools interact intensely with society, provoking changes in research and teaching methods.

However, if the MBA specialization courses expanded uncontrollably in the 90s, coinciding with a higher rate of growth in undergraduate courses (almost two thousand in the beginning of 2003), the same did not occur with the Professional Masters Programs.

Reviewing the numbers comparatively with other areas in Brazil, at the end of 2002, of the 106 Professional Masters Programs, 81 were operating and 25 had been deactivated. The majority of Professional Masters Programs concentrate on interdisciplinary areas (15 courses), followed by Administration and Tourism with 13, Dentistry with 12 and Economy with 9, in addition to other areas, with from 1 to 3 courses.

The Brazilian public institutions were not as aggressive with Professional Masters (MP) courses as they were with the specializations (known as MBAs in Brazil) and undergrads. Without a doubt, this is due, firstly, to the regulation of the CAPES evaluation, which operates as an inhibiting mechanism for low quality courses. Secondly, the desire for academic recognition and the evaluation criterion concerning the social dimensions of teaching and research have reduced the offer of professional courses. Thirdly, high quality private courses with high market impact consider their courses as “professional” but dispense with labels, thus giving them an advantage over public university MP programs that must use the “professional” label. This situation happens mainly in private institutions, with new courses that haven’t been contaminated by the past.

The concerns from the academic community about the MP include the following:

- The MP could be oriented by quality standards inferior to those of the Academic Masters;
- An increase in the offer of MPs could reduce the offer of Academic Masters;
- MP titles could be accepted for entrance to a teaching career.

International criticism of the MBAs, strongly supported in functional areas, comes from all fronts: from orthodox to radical critics, from traditional schools to the most recent (Clegg, Colado and Clarke, 2000; Mintzberg and Gosling, 2003; Aktouf, 1998; Lynn Jr., 1997; Rodrigues, 1999; Fischer, 2001). International post-graduate courses in Business Administration have changed over the last years and, even though they continue to be centered on functional areas, they consider managerial training and leadership development as fundamental. Teaching how to think, business ethics, emphasis on career planning, communication and relationships are themes incorporated into MBA projects. The courses are redesigned, incorporating interactive and modern teaching methods.

And in Brazil? Despite some confusion by the indistinct use of the term “MBA” for all kinds of courses, the Professional Masters (MP) has become a reality. Although still poorly understood and absorbed by the academic community, the course is designed as a middle ground between academic courses and MBAs. It is more of an opportunity than the MBA courses since it qualifies the student to teach at a Master’s level. But what can we learn from the recent Brazilian experience?

### **3. LESSONS FROM EXPERIENCE – OPPORTUNITY AND RISK FACTORS**

What do managers from Gerdau, Ford, Petrobras, Odebrecht Organizations, State Ministers, Directors from the Caixa Econômica Federal and managers of NGOs such as Projeto TAMAR and the Newton Rique Foundation of the Iguatemi Shopping Center all have in common? What distinguishes them from recently graduated students, consultants and many former executives?

In the classroom of the Professional Masters (MP), everyone is seeking better qualification as managers. They want a course with excellent content, without operational faults, that conciliates the return to academia with the stress of an executive career: weekly trips, joint ventures, privatizations, power conflicts, competition and family life. Expectations are high and most enter the course with a considerable repertory of professional and other experiences. In addition, they participate in courses and events nationally and internationally, read business magazines and consume “airport” literature in the area of Business Administration.

But this intense lifestyle is not enough for them. On returning to academia, they are deciding to do the MP in order to keep their jobs, or to change their jobs, and sometimes, even their lives.

What are the risks and opportunities of this project? In order to answer this question, this paper analyses the institutional context of the Professional Masters in Administration (MPA) at UFBA and identifies the opportunity and risk factors of this experience.

### **3.1 The Institutional Context of MPA at UFBA**

The constitution of the MPA project at the UFBA Business School began in 1996. At that time, its post-graduate program (NPGA) had already become consolidated, having been assessed four times with high marks from CAPES. It included a Doctorate program, an Academic Masters, a Specialization Program (CPA), three lines of research, one magazine, significant student and faculty production, and adequate installations and infrastructure. The creation of the MPA at UFBA was an institutional decision towards innovation. However, that decision was accompanied by general institutional fear and reactions, mainly about the issues of charging students at a public university.

With the MPA, the NPGA began to discuss a teaching model that would be differentiated from the conventional, in which new pedagogical factors were considered from the conception of the curricular design, which also happened in the three other experiences initiated at this time by other Brazilian business schools.

The MPA at UFBA, as with the other courses, has tangible dimensions, such as: curricular design, teaching strategies, faculty and infrastructure conditions. On the intangible side, the institutional name and prestige, the expectation of significant learning and changes in life and career.

### **3.2 Opportunities**

One of the principal opportunities of the Professional Masters (MP) is the direct relationship that it establishes with the working world, and more specifically, with the growing and volatile demands of the managerial environment. The MP doesn't focus on training professionals for a narrowly defined job or work situation. Instead, it provides the student with a wide range of skills, allowing mobility in unforeseeable situations (REY, 2002). Meeting this challenge means creating conditions and opportunities for the development of skills, which allow the students to mobilize their theoretical and practical knowledge in professional situations that are increasingly interdisciplinary, complex and heterogeneous.

The MPA students at UFBA include professional executives, at diverse career levels and with different organizational experiences. The education of this type of student involves the skills set – understood as the capacity to mobilize and use resources, defined in terms of knowledge, abilities and attitudes, to face specific work situations or conditions (ZARRAFIAN, 1999) – related to the need to learn how to learn, to think and act with differentiation, to deal with complex and uncertain situations and to make decisions quickly (RUAS, 2003).

In this context, *transversal skills* earn distinction. These are the result of interdisciplinary learning and are transferable - that is, adaptable to different situations (REY, 2002). The learning situations and experiences gained in the MPA at UFBA, according to students from the course, have provided them with development and application of the following skills (RUAS, 2003):

- Analytical ability for research and investigation;
- Ability to analyze organizational culture;
- Ability to understand fundamental concepts and relationships for comprehension of the business world;
- Ability to analyze the influence of the external environment on organizations;
- Ability to comprehend the notion of “network”;
- Ability to deal positively with complex and adverse situations;
- Abilities to use instruments for organizational analysis;
- Abilities to use instruments for research and production of scientific knowledge;
- Critical perspective;
- Deal with differences;
- Ability to work in teams;
- Strategic vision as an attitude and a way of thinking;
- Ability to share individual experiences and to act in groups;
- To value interpersonal relationships;
- Skills in finding information that is of interest to the organization.

Another opportunity of the MPA at UFBA is the diversity of the student body: selecting managers from the largest and best companies in the region; leaders from the public sector and managers from social organizations. Dealing with these different logics is difficult in the beginning but becomes one of the most attractive features of the course.

An example of this opportunity was recently registered by RUAS (2003, p.61) in the Management Skills Integration Seminars of the MPA at UFBA: the co-participation in class work and seminars throughout a large part of the school year, among managers originating from three different segments (private, public and social) transformed the reciprocal suspicions and initial prejudices into an opening process of comprehension of unknown universes. According to their own statements, the managers of the public sector thought that the private sector operated only according to profits and results; whereas the private sector thought the public sector managers were a group of corporativists that were only concerned about issues of their own interest. And finally, neither of the two groups knew anything about social organizations.

Other opportunities include:

- The use of the institutional name and image. The EAUFBA has been active for 50 years and was one of the pioneers in Business Administration, together with UFRGS, EAESP and EBAPE;
- The adoption of flexibility, innovation, and consistency principles in curricular design;
- In the proposals of a management profile oriented towards multi-qualification, which would allow the participant to migrate between management fields and segments (private, public and social);
- In the orientation of concrete management problems and an intervention project of organizations as a final course requirement;
- In a recognized and qualified teaching faculty and in the constitution of national and international partnerships for professor exchanges.
- In systematic evaluation and results by CAPES and two international evaluators. The results of the first MPA classes surpassed the country's rates for master's courses.
- In the projected image from business magazines, MP national rankings, newspapers and national and international forums.

### **3.3 Risk factors**

Despite the fact that there is a qualified and multidisciplinary faculty (the large majority with doctorates in a wide range of social science areas), the greatest challenge in teaching practice for the professor in the Professional Masters is to work with teaching content, while including the professional backgrounds of the students. These experiences, compared with theory, are converted into themes that generate debates and reflections mediated by the professor, using various teaching strategies (RUAS, 2003).

To guarantee the interdisciplinarity and reflection on management practices is not a small-risk factor, considering that the Brazilian university professor generally has gaps in his teaching training, as a result of an education that has favored development of intellectual and research skills, in detriment to the core activity of universities: teaching (REGO, 2001). This challenge is greater for the professor of the professional masters, due to the fine line between the world of education and the world of organizations. Therefore, in addition to profound theoretical-conceptual knowledge of the discipline, the professors in the Professional Masters must have knowledge and experience from the business world in order to be able to mediate theory and practice while teaching.

A pedagogic survey carried out in 2003 with professors and students of the Professional Masters in Administration (MPA) at UFBA indicates that in teaching practice, most professors are concerned with the analysis and interpretation of content and the development of a critical spirit in students. There are only individual efforts to work with constructive dimensions in this practice, incorporating context analysis based on professional and socio-cultural experiences of the students (D'ÁVILA; OLIVEIRA e ANDRADE, 2003).

Some other risk factors:

- Permanence as an innovative course in a time of transformations. To be a “continuous metamorphosis” is a condition of survival, with the dilemma of managing turbulence;
- Legitimacy, to remain within the productivity indices, while maintaining consistency;
- Sustainability, maintaining an adequate relationship between captation and use of financial resources;
- Visibility, to sustain the image constructed and to expand it in times of exacerbated competition;
- Continuous invention of teaching models by deconstruction and reconstruction.

The dilemmas associated with these factors are routine, middle and long-term problems. Management is a craft, paying attention to details, subtleties, and nuances; even in courses with a higher number of students. But if this experience is dated from the late 90's, what does the future hold?

#### **4. TRAINING MANAGERS FOR A VOLATILE FUTURE – DILEMMAS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN INSTITUTIONAL ARENAS**

In today's hybrid and multicultural organizations (and Academia is one of these) the training of managers is a task that is always open.

A Professional Masters (MP) is more attractive than an “MBA” specialization diploma. It provides a title that permits teaching, the prestige of the institution that grants it, the allure of an innovative curricular design, the faculty, and the student body.

The MPA is a course that is close to society and designed based on external demands and requirements, thus establishing a clear managerial profile. These courses have new curricular designs of an increased interdisciplinary nature and are more creative than the traditional disciplinary logic. Flexible formats and use of more participative methodology are encouraged.

An important issue is the theory/practice relationship. It is impractical to imagine that MP students with considerable experience in management would be seeking practice. Their expectations are to create a learning space in which this experience would be reflected by the theories.

This is especially true in the Brazilian case, where the student body is more mature than in other countries and the available background is an important teaching resource. The demands from society for training come not only from companies, governments or social organizations, but also from multicultural institutions.

Currently in Brazilian public universities, there are high tensions among coexisting teaching models in the same institutional arenas. The future is volatile and the professional masters program is constantly changing, a fascinating area for creation. Like a lost link, it is responsible for mediating the academic world with the working world, reducing bi-polar tensions and maintaining its opportunities.

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