

THIS IS NOT (QUITE) AN MBA!

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Abstract

In the 1990s, MBA – Master in Business Administration – programs won a solid reputation and expanded beyond U.S. frontiers. More recently, however, the model began to suffer strong criticism, both from the perspective of its effectiveness in training managers, and from that of the content of the programs. In this paper, we use this criticism as background to discuss the development of MBA programs in Brazil. A phenomenon of the 1990s, connected to the country's economic liberalization, this development led to three different program categories: about ten elite programs, which were renamed MPAs (Professional Master in Business Administration); about fifty executive MBAs; and an expressive, hard to estimate number of long run executive programs, that have freely adopted the MBA brand. Our investigation focuses on the first group. Although classified by local business magazines, students and firms as MBAs, Brazilian MPAs have features that set them apart from the American model. In addition, by attempting to align with its regional social and economic context, each program followed its own route. We believe that the experience this article describes, although had in an emerging country, may raise reflections that go beyond the local context and can make a contribution to the current debate over management education.

Key-words

MBA, business schools, management education

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“My painting is visible images which conceal nothing; they evoke mystery and, indeed, when one sees one of my pictures, one asks oneself this simple question 'What does that mean'? It does not mean anything, because mystery means nothing either, it is unknowable.”

René Magritte, Belgian painter

INTRODUCTION

“*Ceci n’est pas une pipe*” (“This is not a pipe”): René Magritte obviously means to provoke by the title of his famous painting. The image one sees is clearly a pipe. The title subjects the beholder to dissonance. What does the famous Belgian painter mean? The answer is at once simple and flabbergasting: the painting is not a pipe, but the image of a pipe. With this work, Magritte exposes our blindness in face of reality and condemns our tendency to follow prevalent reading codes and only perceive appearances.

This is approximately the *mis-en-scene* one encounters on observing the phenomenon of Brazilian MBAs – Master in Business Administration. Emerging in the early 1990s, on the wake of the vertiginous growth of local business administration programs, Brazilian MBA programs were, from the outset, an interesting experiment. A fortuitous observer might perceive the phenomenon

as just another instance of importation or transplantation of ideas coming from the developed world to an emerging country. Behind this facade, however, manifold patterns and models arose, different from the original American cast and different one from another.

In this article, we present and discuss the phenomenon of Brazilian MBA programs. The subject of our study is the MPAs (Professional Master in Business Administration), a small group of programs offered by renowned Brazilian institutions. Despite being generically classified by the local business media, students and firms as MBAs, these programs spot peculiar features that set them apart from the American model. In addition, by attempting to align with the regional social and economic context, each program followed its own route. We believe that the experience this article describes, although had in an emerging country, may raise reflections that go beyond the local context and can make a contribution to the current debate over management education.

Our field work involved document analysis and in-depth interviews with 10 coordinators and key-persons involved in six Brazilian MPA programs, developed by five different institutions in four different states. Interviews were carried out between March and August 2002.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows: the next section seeks to go over the main points of the international debate on MBA programs, thus providing a background to introduce the phenomenon in focus; the following section summaries the recent evolution of business administration courses in Brazil and draws an outline of Brazilian MPA programs; the next section discusses the MPAs' paradoxes and speculate about the factors that conditioned their development; and the final section relates the MPA development with the importation of managerial expertise, and presents suggestions for future research.

THE REDEMPTION DISCOURSE AND THE CRITICAL DISCOURSE

Origins of business education

The earliest business administration course appeared in early 1881, with the creation of the Wharton School. MBAs were introduced in American business schools in 1908 and their popularization acted as a catalyst for the expansion of management education. In the 1950s, the United States already turned out 50 thousand bachelors, 4 thousand MBAs and 100 PhDs in business administration per year (Castro, 1981). In the 1960s and 1970s, PhD programs expanded and MBA programs were consolidated. At the same time, business schools became export products and knew their first “golden age”.

In Europe, the dissemination of business schools came as a result of the Marshall Plan and of the expansion of American multinationals (Warde, 2000). In the early 1990s, the American model had already spread across the continent: Cambridge and Oxford, stalwarts of classical education, opened business schools, while many French universities and *grandes écoles* created their own MBA programs.

Meanwhile, periodicals such as *BusinessWeek* and the *Financial Times* came up with rankings of leading schools, which led to the creation of evaluation criteria and to intense competition among schools. These rankings had a deep impact on the management of business schools. Like companies striving for market leadership, many institutions hired deans with experience in improving results and implemented changes, and carefully monitored every topic in the ranking

list To Gioia and Corley (2002), the rankings are producing a transformation of business schools from substance to image, a phenomenon that must be carefully understood and deserves proactive engagement from the academicians.

Although the debate about the MBA model is nothing new, criticism gained fresh momentum in the 1990s. One can say that the debate is polarized between two positions: the redemption discourse and the critical discourse.

The Redemption Discourse in the Business Media

The redemption discourse can be seen in the business media in the United States, Europe, and also in Brazil: MBA programs are often depicted as a remedy for professional troubles and a safe route to a successful career (*e.g.* Jacomino, 2001; 2000; 1999; Gomes, 1997; Sganzerla, 1995). In the Brazilian media, the redemption discourse first considered American and European MBAs. In two typical articles published at business magazine *Exame*, the most important of the country, the journalists point out:

“Three years ago, the Chemical Engineer Danny Siekiersk, 28 years old, started what could be seem as a risky endeavor: he left his job at Brazilian subsidiary of Procter & Gamble to back to school ... his objective was to get an MBA in a foreign country, a kind of passport for the future, often present in the dreams of young professionals like himself ... After getting his degree, he got four job offers, one of them in a foreign country!” (Sganzerla, 1995: 108)

“Few dreams are more present in the managers’ imaginary than that of an MBA degree. The Master in Business Administration is a promise for fast track careers, high salaries and, the dream of dreams, the possibility to become the CEO of an important company.” (Gomes, 1997: 112)

If one takes the add pages of *Você S.A.*, another popular Brazilian business magazine, for instance, one can find several examples of the projected image of the MBAs. The adverts frequently appeal to the courses’ impact on one’s career and professional life. Here are some examples (*Você S.A.*, 2001; 2000):

- Make a difference in the world of business: Executives for the 21st century – FAAP
- FGV-Management: Always close to those who wants to exceed – FGV
- A future made of results – PUC-SP
- The doorway to a new professional world – INPG
- The globalized business world in your hands – FEA-USP

In international business magazines, the approach is similar. Here are some examples, collected at British magazine *The Economist* (2002a; 2002b), which has a large advertisement section dedicated to management education:

- “You will be transformed” – Chicago GSB

- “You have the potential: Lift your career beyond expectations” – INSEAD
- “How far will you go?” – ISMA Centre / The University of Reading
- “Developing tomorrow’s leaders” – Cranfield University
- “The World in your class” – Rotterdam School of Management
- “Global approach: See with your eyes what very few have the privilege of seeing” – IESE

On the other hand, the critical discourse, which coalesced in the 1990s, can be divided into two main groups: first, the critical trend led by Henry Mintzberg and his collaborators, which challenge the effectiveness of MBA programs meant to prepare managers; second, the criticism of the contents and pedagogy of the programs, as expressed by researchers involved with the stream of *Critical Management Studies* (CMS).

The Critical Discourse: Criticism of Effectiveness

Henry Mintzberg is certainly one of the most consistent (and persistent) voices to criticize the MBA programs in their capacity to develop managers. This professor and researcher is also concerned with the impact MBA graduates can have on firms. He argues that management schools insist in promoting a disastrous approach: many MBA graduates will skip from one firm to another without ever truly realizing how things work, acting as if they were still in a learning environment. Mintzberg argues that managers can no longer continue to be trained by means of

fragmentary case studies and disconnected theories. His central point: MBA programs do not train managers, they only make one believe they do it. They teach managerial rhetoric and cause students to believe they are able to control situations and solve complex problems overnight (see Mintzberg & Gosling, 2002; Mintzberg & Lampel, 2001).

A survey made by Mintzberg and Lampel (2001) proves the failure of some MBA graduates that took management positions at important American companies. By examining the *Ewing List* (Ewing, 1990), which names the 19 most notorious Harvard graduates, the researchers found that 10 of these failed: they either drove their companies to bankruptcy or were fired for unsatisfactory performance.

Complementary, Warner (2000) argues that business schools fail to meet the needs of firms because they adopt a generalist discourse but focus on functional areas of expertise, without giving proper attention to the cross-disciplinary character of today's business environment. use

Mintzberg himself developed a model to serve as an alternative to MBA programs, named "International Executives Development Program" (see Mintzberg and Gosling, 2002). This model is based on using students' professional experience, stimulating international practice, and applying a distinctive pedagogy, which includes special design for the classrooms and high interaction among students. His motto is "learning occurs where concepts meet experiences through reflection".

The Critical Discourse: Criticism in the CMS domain

The increased criticism of MBA programs in the 1990s also relates to the emergence of Critical Management Studies – CMS (see Alvesson & Deetz, 1996; Alvesson & Willmott, 1993; 1992). Authors affiliate to this stream point out the following problems concerning management education (Antonacopoulou, 1999; Welsh and Lewis, 1999; Gold, Holman & Thorpe, 1999; Reynolds, 1997; Boje, 1996; Dehler, Grey & French, 1996; Grey, Knights & Willmott, 1996; Robert, 1996):

- management education is undergoing a “commoditization” process, one that privileges “‘mass-production’ instead of individualization”, “commerce instead of education”, and “image instead of substance”;
- most business schools are embedded and promote the “management culture”, a set of values and assumptions that overemphasizes financial success and short term results;
- business schools present strong tendency to “instrumentalism”, with the use of ready-made prescriptions that lead students to learn how to reproduce techniques, instead of performing adequate diagnoses;
- traditional management concepts and visions taught in business schools are increasingly inappropriate because of excessive reduction of the complexity of management to simplistic models;
- most business schools use a poor repertoire of learning methods – focus is on teaching instead of being on learning; and

- students are being regarded as mere spectators, or clients, of the teaching process – there is almost no encouragement to autonomy and self-development.

These authors also discuss how management education might be renovated, addressing matters such as contents, learning methods, the connection between theory and practice, and, mainly, the development of students' ability for critical visioning and analytical reasoning.

As regards MBAs, criticism of “commoditization” is foremost among CMS authors. Inspired by Ritzer (1993), Parker & Jary (1995) point to a progressive “macdonaldization” of British universities, with the appearance of an elite that specializes in standardizing higher-education. Analyzing the case of Malaysia, Sturdy & Gabriel (2000) conclude that management education is becoming a commercial asset and that Western schools are increasingly engaged in competition for lucrative opportunities and foreign students (“consumers”) in emerging markets. In this context, MBA programs are as a standardized commodity with a high symbolic value, as they theoretically imply status, prestige and power.

For Sturdy & Gabriel, knowledge has undergone a standardization process that began in the 1950s: books, videos and teaching packages appeared and were soon offered for export. When the field of management is compared to other areas of knowledge (such as Philosophy or History), it becomes clear that the former was very quick take on consumer good traits. This process seems to be associated with students' tendency towards instrumentalism and short term accomplishments, with the pecuniary interests of professors, and with the education market itself. In this context, MBA programs arise as standardized management education packages, with relatively high price-

tags, and offering consumers the promise of improving their professional life and their income perspectives.

In the early 2000s, the focus of criticism drifted to the questionable ethics of MBA graduates, many of whom were involved in the financial scandals that came to light in the second half of 2001 and early 2002. In a recent article for the American magazine *BusinessWeek*, Schneider (2002) comments on a survey made by the Aspen Institute with almost 2000 MBA students graduating in 2001 from 13 leading U.S. business schools. Representatives of these institutions stated that they attempt to teach that the environment and long-term interests must be taken into consideration. But only 5% of the students that participated in the survey mentioned the environment as a priority for a firm. On the other hand, only 7% of males and 14% of females claimed to take the ethical standards of a company into consideration when evaluating a job offer. The results indicate that the attitudes and values of the people who attend MBA programs do change, but not necessarily for the better. This discussion echoed in the American academy, bringing a number of discussions and panels (see Adler, 2002; Gioia, 2002b).

MBA_s PROGRAMS MADE IN BRAZIL

Origins and Current Situation

In Brazil, as in other countries, the development of business administration as a teaching and research field can be related with the industrialization process. The turning point was in the

1940s, when the economy was no longer essentially agrarian and the expansion of the industrial and services sectors began (Martins, 1989).

The first undergraduate course totally focused on business administration was created in 1954 at Fundação Getúlio Vargas (FGV): the Escola de Administração de Empresas de São Paulo (EAESP). A group formed by Michigan State University faculty members took part in the design of the academic programs. As part of the project, Brazilian professors received training in the U.S. After FGV-EAESP, other business schools were created in Rio Grande do Sul (EA-UFRGS), Rio de Janeiro (FGV-EBAPE and PUC-RJ) and Bahia (EA-UFBA).

In the 1960s, FGV created its graduate courses in the fields of public administration and business administration and started to regularly offer master's courses. This enabled the institution to train professors for other business schools.

In the 1990s, management education underwent considerable expansion and diversification. In the year 2000, there were in Brazil, according to the Ministry of Education, 969 undergraduate programs, 28 master's programs, and 10 doctorate programs. In August 2002, the number of undergraduate programs had grown to astonishing 2687! The number of graduate programs, by their turn, grew at more modest rates.

Concerning practice-oriented graduate programs, between the second half of the 1990s and the early 2000s, three types of programs were consolidated:

- first, about ten elite programs, which were named MPA (Professional Master in Business Administration), offered by major public universities and traditional autonomous schools;

- second, close to fifty executive MBAs. These are *lato sensu* graduate programs with a minimum 360-hour duration, generally offered in two modes: (1) general management programs; and (2) special purpose programs, dedicated alternatively to human resources, marketing, finances, information technology and other specializations;
- third, an expressive, hard to estimate number of executive education programs – including in-company and corporate university programs – with varied durations and that use the MBA brand name with great liberty.

MPAs: the Brazilian MBAs?

The MPAs were officially authorized by the Brazilian Ministry of Education in 1998 and accredited in 2001. The only exception is FGV-EAESP's program, which was created 5 years before the other programs. Exhibit 1 offers information on the six programs analyzed in our field research. It is worth noting that, in 2002, four more programs were created. These were not considered in the present survey.

Insert Exhibit 1 about here

In general, MPAs spot many differences from their American and European counterparts. Based on the data from Exhibit 1, the following information must be emphasized:

- As regards the general characteristics of the courses and its relation to students' profile, we point out that MPAs are part-time programs: therefore students attend them at night and/or on Fridays and Saturdays, without giving up their jobs. Most students come from medium- and large-sized companies. The extreme cases are FGV-EAESP, 90% of whose students come from medium and large companies, and EA-UFRGS, 45% of whose students come from small companies, where they act as entrepreneurs or consultants.
- Still regarding students' profile, their average age is greater than that found in international MBA programs: Brazilians, except for FGV-EAESP students, seem to seek out MPAs at a later point in life than their foreign colleagues. Consistently, they also hold relatively higher hierarchic positions. The ratio of women attendants, despite being low as compared to outside references, must be considered in the local context, where female presence in executive positions is low, though increasing.
- As for tuition, MPAs are a low-cost alternative as compared to foreign MBAs. Of course, one needs to consider the purchase parity power, which makes MPAs comparatively expensive regarding other local alternatives. In addition, we emphasize that these are part-time courses, and are often paid (partially or fully) by the students' employers. This is common practice in Brazil, particularly for large multinational companies. We must however observe that the practice of paying full tuition, which was common a few years ago, is decreasing.

- As for classes and methods, the small size of classes draws attention. This is justified, in part, by teaching requirements and, in part, by the level of dedication the courses demand, which limits the number of interested candidates.
- As for faculty members' profile, there is the remarkable fact that, although almost all professors are PhD holders, most of them perform extra-academia activities, be it as executives at public and private companies, be it as consultants. We must point out that being full time professors is relatively uncommon in Brazil. Therefore, most professors bring their practical experience to the classroom.

In addition to the characteristics mentioned above, three other aspects are noteworthy: the fact that MPAs function as a renewal project for the institutions that promote them; a specific demand of the students relate to new career alternatives; and the quest for new approaches in pedagogy. Let's examine each of these aspects.

First, we noticed that institutions regard the programs as important showcases, as they enable closer ties with the corporate community. Three factors, mentioned above, relate to this condition: one is that the MPAs are part-time programs – therefore, students function as links between their firms and the schools; other is that many firms pay (partially or fully) the tuition, which also represent a possible connection between them and the schools; the last one is that most institutions became increasingly dependent on tuition and funding from the private sector since the early 1990s, when the government start experimenting budgetary restrictions. This led to significant investment in facilities and teaching resources. Consequently, MPA programs also stand for renewal projects for the institutions providing them.

Second, Brazilian students probably seek out MPA programs for the same reasons as their foreign peers look for MBA programs: professional improvement and career advancement. But all of the program coordinators we interviewed mentioned a significant number of professionals that regard the MPA programs as an opportunity to build either a new or a parallel career as professors or entrepreneurs. We can hypothesize that this may reflect the changes in the labor market, characterized by large restructuring and downsizing processes in the 1990s and the poor performance of the Brazilian economy in the same period. But one of the interviewees expressed a different reason: to him, many students are simply disgusted, annoyed with corporate life and want something new, something able to open their minds for different perspectives. Also according to some interviewees, their programs are responding to these demands by creating courses on entrepreneurship and special classes on teaching methods.

Third, it is worth mentioning the search for a new pedagogical approach. At both EA-UFBA and EA-UFRGS, for instance, there is a guideline to reduce lectures to a minimum and to implement new learning methods. Among other initiatives, the program coordinators mentioned: high flexibility in the design of courses, seeking to adapt to each class' profile; a management and creativity lab, that uses theatre techniques; stimulus to exchange experiences between the public sector, the private sector and the third sector; and the promotion of a “multi-functional, cross-disciplinary” perspective, crossing the borders of traditional areas of knowledge. According to one program coordinator, for the students the most important impact of the program occurs in their thinking process: the prescriptive view is overcome by the diagnosis and analysis approach.

Different Paths

Besides their differences from their American and European counterparts, MPA programs are also different among themselves, having developed identities aligned with the history and culture of their respective host-institutions.

FGV-EAESP enjoys a strong tradition as a business school, is located in Brazil's leading economic and financial center, and has always had close ties with international institutions. It has also pioneered the implementation of the new model. FGV-EAESP's MPA is marked by great student expectations related with career advance and by a spirit of peer competitiveness remindful of the culture of some American MBAs. In addition, its students come massively from the cadres of large multinational and local corporations. These factors appear to be crucial for the definition of the format and conduction of the program, which is, arguably, the closest to the original American model. PUC-RJ and IBMEC-RJ's programs, albeit being created recently, followed approximately the same path.

At FGV-EBAPE, the program was implemented as part of a shift in the institution, which focused exclusively on public administration and wished to become more private sector-oriented. At EA-UFBA, the previous relationship with local not-for-profit organizations seems to have influenced the design of the program. At both EA-UFBA and EA-UFRGS, the implementation of the program related also to the context of financial and budgetary crises at Federal public universities.

The prevalent reasoning at Brazilian public universities, the history of the institutions involved, and the teaching vision of those responsible for implementation all had a strong influence on the

characteristics of the programs, leading to experimentation and innovation. Although they have drawn closer to the business community, these programs were strongly influenced by a more critical vision of management and of the role that firms play in society (similar, in many instances, to that of CMS authors, mentioned in the previous section).

DISCUSSION

MBA: to be or not to be?

As we mentioned before, in Brazil the term MBA is used without constraint: the acronym can be applied to designate executive *stricto sensu* graduate programs, executive *lato sensu* graduate programs, and also assorted specialization programs, including long-duration in-company courses.

In our research, we observed that the program coordinators consciously rejected the general label MBA to designate the MPAs. This rejection, however, is not free from contradictions. Indeed, in the course of interviews, and despite prior rejections, the term MBA at times arose spontaneously in the discourse of interviewees to designate their MPA programs. Although the term is insistently denied, they accept reference to the programs as MBAs at the ranking published annually by the magazine *Você S.A.*, the leading local reference for executive programs. In fact, even after almost a decade, the term MPA is still restricted to academic circles, since the business media, students and firms often refer to these programs as MBAs.

One may relate the use of the acronym MBA to a marketing requirement: for many potential clients it (still) seems to be a valuable and consolidated brand. On the other hand, its rejection and the adoption of the acronym MPA has to do with the wish to differentiate these programs from the dozens of alternatives offered in the management education market. One might forward the hypothesis that, given the inability to state “those are not MBAs” (in reference to other competing models), MPAs’ coordinators started to claim: “our program is not an MBAs”.

Brazilian MPAs are in truth a hybrid model: they do not completely embrace the tradition of American MBAs, but neither are they adaptations of the more academic oriented master’s programs that preceded (and also influenced) them.

As such a hybrid, the model (or models, in view of the fact that each institution took its own route) is afflicted by several tensions and ambiguities, some of which are hard to overcome. Among these, we noticed: the presence of professors and coordinators that align themselves with the critical discourse *versus* the instrumental expectations of students; the dedication requirements posed by the programs *versus* students’ constraints, since the courses are part-time; and the business practice-oriented content *versus* some students’ demand for professorial education.

On the other hand, Brazilian MPAs have some traits in common with the “International Masters Program in Practicing Management” (Mintzberg and Gosling, 2002): the cross-disciplinary approach found in some of the addressed programs; students’ profile regarding professional experience; the fact that students maintain their professional engagements for the duration of the program; the international experience provided by exchange programs with foreign institutions;

and the small classes, enabling greater interaction among students and between students and professors.

In addition, the awareness of the local context revealed by the interviewees suggests a tendency to resist importing foreign models, one of the main factors indicated by Chanlat (1996) and commented upon by Sturdy and Gabriel (2000) to generate changes in business education.

Factors that Contributed for the Development of the MPA Programs

At this point of the paper, after portraying the MPAs, it is worth discussing the “input factors” and the “conditioning factors” that contribute for the development of these programs and their actual characteristics. We define input factors as the primal components of the programs and conditioning factors as those components that restrain or stimulate certain traits in the programs.

The **first input factor** relates to the process through which the MPAs were created and to the influence of foreign models. Before developing their programs, Brazilian business schools carefully studied American and European MBAs. Top ten programs were commonly used as references and provided insights for the Brazilian future counterparts. We estimate that this first input factor influenced all aspects of the programs: the overall design, structure, contents and pedagogy.

The **second input factor** relates to the existing organizational and individual resources and competences. The creation of MPA programs usually succeeded the creation of undergraduate

and master's programs. One may therefore hypothesize that these resources and competences conditioned the design given to MPA programs in terms of workload, syllabus, contents, and pedagogy. There is, consequently, a reproducibility or inertia component at the creation of the MPA programs. This second input factor may be also responsible for the following traits in the programs: attention to reflection, recognition of the importance of critical thinking, strong focus on theory and theorizing, and, on the other hand, a certain complacency with out-of-date contents and teaching methods.

The **first conditioning factor** relates to the influence of local context, at both national and regional level. The programs we analyzed certainly reflect their social and economical environment, which differ enormously among regions in Brazil. This first conditioning factor may be responsible for different orientations, in terms of content, in the programs: orientation to small and medium size companies' reality in some programs (EA-UFRGS), orientation to not-for-profit organizations' reality in certain programs (EA-UFBA), and orientation to large size, industrial and service firms' reality in other programs (IBMEC-RJ and FGV-EAESP). As a result, the programs have acquired different outlines in terms of contents and structure, drifting away one from another.

The **second conditioning factor** relates to the adoption of imported references – handbooks, papers and theoretical models. In general, we noticed a massive use of foreign references at the analyzed programs, including, in some cases, guru-authored books and self-help books, which we came to classify as “pop-management literature”. We must observe that the tradition of using foreign books, as well as the limited availability of high quality domestic materials for graduate programs, acts as a vector in favor of the continued status of administration as an “imported

field”. On the other hand, among the programs we noticed differences: while some programs were more influenced by the sociological perspective, and adopt to some extent French philosophers’ books and CMS’ texts, others chose to spouse massively American handbooks, the same used in foreign MBAs. This second conditioning factor certainly influenced the content of the programs. We can also relate these choices to the general approach of the programs (more critical versus more instrumental).

The **third conditioning factor** has to do with students being unavailable for exclusive dedication, as it is common in the U.S. This obviously reduces focus and commitment to studies, but on the other side favors interaction between management practice and theory, decisively changing the course dynamics, and opening new routes for reflection. On the other hand, one might also infer that this factor raises the pressure for instrumentalism, since many students will instinctively look for solutions for their work immediate problems. This third conditioning factor also impacts the programs in terms of work-load and pedagogy.

The **forth conditioning factor** relates to the presence of internal and external competition to the MPA programs. Internal competition is represented by other courses offered by the same institution and with the same target-audience. With a few exceptions, the business schools we included in our field research offer, besides the MPA programs, executive MBA programs and other diverse executive programs. External competition is represented by other business schools, both local and foreign, that also target the same audience. Indeed, foreign business schools are increasingly present in Brazil, as they form join-ventures with local partners. This context causes MPA programs to develop “competitive strategies”, attempting to develop strong brands and to offer “attractive”, differentiated solutions to potential candidates. To quote one interviewee, there

is a “seduction” component to the relationship between the course and its attendance. This “seduction” component may be also a conditioning vector for content choices and pedagogic alternatives. For instance, among students some professors are treated as celebrities, less for their teaching skills and their knowledge of the subjects being taught, and more for their ability to retain attention and to entertain the pupils.

The **fifth conditioning factor** relates to direct demand from students to interfere in the design of the programs. At formal and informal evaluation processes, as well as in their direct interaction with professors and coordinators, Brazilian students usually convey their needs and expectations. Even when these are not highly elaborate, they have an influence on the programs. In this sense, the pressure for “novelties” and “practical solutions” can steer the course towards up-to-date contents, which is positive, or to an exceedingly instrumental and low-consistency path, which is harmful. Like the “seduction” component mentioned previously, this demand can also be a conditioning vector for content and pedagogy choices.

The **sixth conditioning factor** relates to demands from firms. This influence doesn’t appear to be directly exerted, but at the analyzed programs there is a clear intent to train professionals that meet the needs of the market and of companies. In this sense, coordinators’ and professors’ interpretation of these needs can also influence both content and pedagogic design. We may also hypothesize that this sixth conditioning factor also leads to raise the pressure for instrumentalism.

Exhibit 2 presents the eight factors, organized into three categories: impact on the program general strategy, impact on contents, and impact on pedagogy. One should observe that some conditioning factors have impact in more than one category. Another point in view is that some

factors add contradictory forces to the development of the programs. As we mentioned before, these programs are absolutely not free of tensions and contradictions.

Insert Exhibit 2 about here

As a result of both input factors and conditioning factors, Brazilian MPAs may resemble in certain aspects to American MBAs, but differences are conspicuous. In fact, the American model had an undeniable influence on Brazilian programs, but local conditions and coloring were added.

CONCLUSION

Managerial Anthropofagy

The development of Brazilian MPAs may be also be analyzed as a phenomenon of importation of managerial knowledge and expertise, and its adoption in an emerging country. Based upon field surveys conducted in Brazil, Wood and Caldas (2002) identified three reactions to the adoption of imported managerial expertise: unreasoned adoption, ceremonial behavior, and managerial anthropophagy, (this last named after an old Native South-American ritual, in which warriors devoured the defeated to retain their courage and energy). According to the authors, three major factors conditioned the reactions: (1) substantive pressure, the existence of opportunities and problems for which imported managerial expertise is a possible solution; (2) political and/or institutional pressure, which reflects the interests of power groups and coalitions, and also

comprise the external forces found in an organization's environment; and (3) the level of critical reasoning, defined as the skill to carry out an objective analysis of the managerial expertise considered for adoption.

The first reaction – unreasoned adoption – occurs under the presence of high level of institutional and/or political factors, coupled with a low level of critical reasoning. In this case, organizations tend to embrace the imported managerial expertise, even when it doesn't fit its needs. The result is frequently frustrating.

The second reaction – ceremonial behavior – consists of adopting managerial expertise only in a temporary or partial manner, frequently to mitigate adoption pressures, without actually producing substantial change. This reaction occurs in the presence of elevated institutional and/or political pressures to adopt legitimated foreign managerial practices, but when no substantive need would justify it. In this case, the level of critical reasoning is commonly high.

The third reaction – managerial anthropophagy – occurs under the presence of high level of substantive factors, coupled with high level of critical reasoning. In such circumstances, the organization assesses and adapts the new managerial expertise to its own reality.

This third reaction seems to be the case with the MPA programs. Brazilian business schools neither pretend to adopt a foreign managerial model in which it doesn't see answers for its challenges, nor does it simply rejects it. What took place was a re-reading of the model, taking into account local reality, and aiming to comply with local context and goals. MPAs are thus an example of a "reasonable strategy": the development and implementation of small-sized

programs that attempt to meet the market's demands by articulating the basis of existing resources and accumulated experience.

Future research

This paper dealt with the phenomenon of management education in Brazil. By electing the MPAs as subject for analysis, we excluded an expressive number of programs that serve thousands of executives in the country. This might certainly be appointed as a weakness of the study, especially if we aimed to produce a broad picture of the phenomenon. However, we consider that the research strategy was appropriate, since we found that the MPA programs truly reflect valuable paths of experimentation, and the contradictions that emerged from these paths.

We consider this article to be an introductory piece, to be complemented by studies to enhance its breadth and depth. A first possibility is to investigate Executive MBAs and other programs that adopt the MBA brand, including in-company courses. A second possibility would be an in-depth study of the impact these courses have on their attendants in Brazil. Such an investigation might involve both objective aspects – wages, career advances, etc. – and qualitative ones – increased competencies, improved analytical and critical abilities, and values changes. A third possibility might be an in-depth evaluation of the tensions and contradictions found at the MPA programs: an analysis model could be built from the tensions identified in the course of such research.

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NOTES

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(2) The authors wish to thank all of the interviewees, which assisted the researchers and talked openly about their ideas concerning management education.

Exhibit 1 – Characteristics of the MPA Programs

Program		IBMEC-RJ	FGV-EAESP	FGV-EBAPE	PUC-RJ	EA-UFBA	EA-UFRGS
Created in		2000	1993	1999	2001	1999	1998
Students origin	Large firms	30%	60%	40%	40%	60%	30%
	Medium firms	40%	30%	30%	30%	10%	25%
	Small firms and others	30%	10%	30%	30%	30% (includes NGOs, private foundations, and the Government)	45%
Tuition	Total (US\$)	10000	16000	6500	10000	7000	11000
	Paid by	38% employer 40% employer / student 20% student 2% grants	20% employer 40% employer / student 40% student	50% employer 30% employer / student 20% student	60% employer 20% employer / student 20% student	10% employer 70% employer / student 10% student 10% grants	5% employer 15% employer / student 80% student
Classes and methods	Attendants per class	30	50	25 to 30	30	35 to 40	25 to 30
	General course structure	6 required disciplines plus 3 elective disciplines	22 required disciplines plus 6 elective disciplines; foreign double degree option	10 required disciplines plus 2 elective disciplines	18 required disciplines plus 3 elective disciplines	10 required disciplines plus 2 elective disciplines	15 required disciplines plus one required international seminar
	Lectures	45%	60%	70%	50%	60%	65%
	Case studies	35%	20%	20%	20%	20%	20%
	Group-based dynamics	20%	20%	10%	30%	20%	15%
Faculty profile	PhD or equivalent degree holders	95%	100%	100%	100%	90%	100%
	Professors with business activities	100%	100%	100%	50%	70%	100%
Attendant Profile	Average age	36 years	28-32 years	40 years	35 years	35-45 years	35-40 years
	Women	17 %	14-17 %	15-20 %	30 %	30 %	10-12 %
	Top-management	20%	20%	40%	30%	10%	45%
	Middle management	40%	40%	40%	40%	70%	30%
	Other	40% (non-managers, consultants, auditors, entrepreneurs)	40% (non-managers, entrepreneurs)	20% (non-managers, professors, entrepreneurs)	30% (non-managers, entrepreneurs)	20% (non-managers, entrepreneurs, recent retirees)	25% (non-managers entrepreneurs, consultants)

Exhibit 2 – Factors that Impacted the Development of the MPA Programs

Factor	Impact in the general structure and strategy of the program	Impact in the content of the program	Impact in the pedagogy of the program
<p>Input factor #1 Benchmarking with foreign MBA programs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Overall design: target-audience, general pedagogic objectives, general structure of the programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Focus on a generalist approach ○ Use of the traditional division of knowledge based on areas of expertise: finances, human resources, marketing etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Use of the case method
<p>Input factor #2 Use of existing resources and competences</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reproducibility or inertia in relation to previous programs offered in the same institution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strong focus on theory and theorizing ○ Complacency with out-of-date contents ○ Recognition of the importance of critical thinking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strong focus on theory and theorizing ○ Complacency with out-of-date teaching methods ○ Attention to reflection ○ Recognition of the importance of critical thinking
<p>Conditioning factor # 1 Local context – national and regional</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Contents and structure oriented to firm’s reality and profile in the different regions ○ Differentiation among programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Contents and structure oriented to firm’s reality in the different regions 	
<p>Conditioning factor # 2 Adoption of imported references</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Continued status of business administration as an “imported field” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Adoption of “pop-management” books stimulating instrumentalism ○ Adoption of French philosophers’ books and CMS’ texts stimulating critical thinking 	
<p>Conditioning factor # 3 Students being unavailable for full-time dedication</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Stimulus for instrumentalism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Stimulus for reflection over management experience ○ Stimulus for interaction between management practice and management theory ○ Constraints for work-load ○ Limited focus on academic activities
<p>Conditioning factor # 4 Presence of internal and external competition</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Attempt to develop brand and niche strategies ○ Attempt to align with supposed market expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Stimulus to “seduce” students with appealing contents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Stimulus to “seduce” students with appealing pedagogy (celebrity-professors)
<p>Conditioning factor # 5 Demands from students</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Pressure for “novelties” and “practical solutions” leading to either up-to-dateness or fad-orientation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Stimulus for professors to act as entertainers
<p>Conditioning factor # 6 Indirect demands from firms</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Pressure for “novelties” and “practical solutions” leading to either up-to-dateness or fad-orientation ○ Stimulus for instrumentalism 	