

The Moral Responsibilities of Business Schools –In Pursuit of Excellence and Social Justice

An Introductory Article for the special editions of Social Justice and Its Significance in Organizations

Lead Guest Editor

Cam Caldwell, No Affiliation, St. George, UT, USA

Guest Editor

Dima Rachid Jamali, Dean of the School of Business at the University of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates

Received: June 11, 2023

Accepted: July 3, 2023

Online Published: July 7, 2023

doi:10.5430/bmr.v12n2p1

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/bmr.v12n2p1>

In recent years, many business schools have struggled -- particularly as Generation Z (Gen Z) and Millennial students have questioned the practical value of a four-year business degree (Salhotra, 2022) and have expressed dissatisfaction with a work world that increasingly treats employees like commodities (Maloni, Hiatt & Campbell, 2019). Coupled with the pressures of inflation (June, 2022) and the paucity of funds available from both governmental sources and private donations (Zusman, 2005), the typical secondary school has attempted to make do financially by increasingly relying on part-time adjunct and untenured faculty to whom they offer fewer benefits and lower salaries (Colby, 2023). This approach to cutting costs has predictably lowered the quality of education (Bettinger & Long, 2010) despite the fact that business schools have long been criticized about the relevance of their courses and the low quality of business graduates (Mintzberg, 2004).

The purpose of this special edition is to address selected social justice issues facing society that also affect business schools. These papers have substantial importance for society in the 21st century. Each of these papers addresses factors associated with the moral responsibilities of business education in a world where business schools are under tremendous pressure to improve their quality – despite the fact that their resources are often limited. We begin the paper by briefly addressing the general issue of moral responsibility and its specific application to schools of business. We define moral responsibility, identify duties owed to several business school stakeholders, and offer six recommendations for business school administrators, accrediting bodies, and faculty. We then briefly introduce the articles contained in this special edition and explain their contribution to social justice issues.

Understanding Moral Responsibility

A moral responsibility is a duty or obligation that is implicit within the roles of an individual, an organization, or a position (Talbert, 2022). The expectations of a moral responsibility are such that the responsible person or persons willingly stand behind the functions, purposes, values, and objectives associated with those roles and acknowledges that there exists a mutually understood social or psychological contract with obligations due to affected stakeholders. The multitude of stakeholders that may be affected by an individual or organization can make moral responsibilities vitally important, depending upon the extent and scope of the obligations involved.

For schools of business, the obligations due to stakeholders are extensive because there are many implicit responsibilities and duties with a broad array of stakeholders. The direct responsibility of business schools is to their students and to the faculty members who instruct them. The reasonable expectation is that business schools will provide faculty members who are qualified to teach cutting-edge concepts that will prepare their students to apply best practices within the context of their future careers.

Hiring well-qualified faculty members and supporting them with fair compensation and adequate resources are obligations of business school and university administrators – yet the major increase in hiring part-time and non-tenured business faculty raises questions about the ability of business schools to maintain a high quality of business education. Future employers of those students are indirect stakeholders of business programs and they have the reasonable expectation that the students that they hire will be well prepared, committed to applying correct principles, and interpersonally effective in a work context.

Given the context of the 21st Century business school program, the challenges facing the university administrators, deans, department heads, and faculty are severe (Cornuel, 2007). Asking part-time faculty who are grossly underpaid to teach high quality courses and to provide students with specific and timely feedback is the chosen response of many business schools – including some schools who are allegedly AACSB-accredited business programs. The reality of the product delivered by underqualified and overworked part-time faculty is predictably lower than students require, or that future employers need (Bennis & O’Toole, 2005).

Given that, according to the American Federation of Teachers (2022), fewer than 75% of secondary school faculty are not currently eligible for tenure, the commitment and incentives required to deliver a top-quality business curriculum and to conduct research to stay current is likely to be lacking for contingent faculty (Brownback & Sadoff, 2020). The proper onboarding of faculty, providing training in improving teaching, and offering research support are frequently not provided for full-time tenured faculty at many colleges and university – much less for contingent faculty.

Accordingly, we offer six suggestions for college and university business schools to strengthen their ability to deliver quality education to their students and to honor their moral responsibilities to students, faculty, and future employers.

1. **Conduct an immediate formal assessment of current business school offerings and faculty effectiveness.** This assessment should involve feedback from present and past business program students, local employers who have hired business graduates, leading community business leaders, and current part-time and full-time faculty who are considered outstanding scholars and teachers. The information from this assessment should be incorporated to identify opportunities for business school program improvement.
2. **Replace clerical and administrative staff with qualified business faculty who can perform these tasks in addition to teaching in their fields.** At many schools, administrative staff perform tasks that business faculty could easily take on that would enable those business schools to hire more full-time personnel who could also teach courses in their areas of expertise.
3. **Encourage business faculty to play a greater role in partnering with local business employers.** Provide incentives for faculty who create consulting projects, internships, and collaborative research which involves students working with and for local businesses. Such opportunities provide students with real world experiences that prepare them for future career success, and increase the likelihood for students and faculty to conduct practical research that also benefits local businesses.
4. **Reconsider the cost/benefits of hiring part-time, contingent, and untenured business faculty.** Assess the quality of teaching, its current relevance, and the quality of performance of students who take classes taught by adjunct and untenured faculty and involve present and past students, employers, and outstanding scholars and teachers in that review.
5. **Upgrade the quality of mentoring, research partnering, and onboarding of all new faculty, especially adjunct and untenured faculty.** Communicating the standards expected of these faculty will both assist them in raising the bar of their performance and identify those individuals who can be offered full-time tenured faculty positions.
6. **Expand the commitment of business schools to upgrade the overall quality of their curriculum.** Involve top scholars and teachers, past students, corporate leaders, and subject matter experts in reviewing the current curriculum, researching best practices at world class schools, and identifying opportunities to improve course and program learning outcomes – particularly in the areas of research and business writing. Include the creation of new academic degrees that will enhance the quality of business school offerings, including creating advanced degrees that will involve students and faculty in applied research.

Each of these six recommendations can help business schools to honor their social responsibility, improve the quality of their business curriculum, and increase stakeholder satisfaction with the ability of the school’s business program to fulfill its mission and purpose.

Summary of Articles

In this special edition about social justice, we offer the reader the following articles. Each article is briefly summarized.

“New Faculty Onboarding – An Opportunity for Connection and Commitment”

The onboarding process in most organizations is poorly done and sends the wrong message to new employees. Rather than affirming an organization’s values and helping employees to be successful, most organizations under

deliver in socializing and orienting their new employees. In the case of business schools, especially for new faculty, the transition process tends to be especially poor – with full-time and part-time faculty often brought into the organization at the last minute and rarely given access to a university’s teaching platform.

In this paper, the authors identify the critical importance of helping new faculty and include ten specific recommendations for schools of business to improve their onboarding process. Improving new faculty onboarding can be an important step in communicating to new faculty their role in honoring the moral responsibilities of schools of business.

“Diversity, Bias, and Integrity – Leadership Implications”

Social justice involves leaders creating systems and processes that enable organizations to treat people with diverse backgrounds in a fair and equitable manner. This paper, co-authored with the City of Huntsville, Alabama’s VP of Diversity, identifies the importance of leaders thoughtfully and consistently assessing their own conscious and unconscious biases in the treatment of others. Leaders must not only act with integrity in creating fair and impartial organizational policies that ensure fair treatment but must constantly encourage their colleagues to monitor their own beliefs, biases, and actions in how they treat others. This paper identifies the implications associated with creating organization cultures that honor the rights of others and the need for leaders to constantly reflect on their conscious and unconscious biases.

“Why HBCUs must Create World Class Doctor of Business Administration Programs”

Marybeth Gasman, the world’s leading expert about minority-serving academic institutions, has co-authored this article that identifies why Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) must raise their standards by creating Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) programs. The paper offers a detailed description of nine current problems facing HBCUs in providing business education programs that meet the needs of the many students which attend their institutions.

The paper also identifies positive advantages of DBA programs that HBCUs can not only incorporate to upgrade the opportunities available to their students but that can provide positive benefits for all the business program offerings at an HBCU business school. This paper also identifies the financial advantages of offering a world class DBA program, not only for the students who obtain the degree, but for the business schools that offer the program.

“Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion – Insights from a Justice Perspective”

This paper, co-authored by Kenny Anderson, Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for the City of Huntsville, Alabama, addresses the practical realities of creating an organization culture that promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion. Treating individuals fairly includes involving them as full partners in the pursuit of organizational objectives – making them active participants rather than simply members of that organization.

The paper also addresses the characteristics of twelve perspectives of justice – with four perspectives associated with procedural, distributive, and interactional justice. Enumerating each of the differences of those respective nuances of justice and their relationship to diversity, equity, and inclusion, the paper offers powerful insights about the nature of social justice and its practical implications for people and organizations.

We encourage those scholars and practitioners to read these papers to reflect on the importance of these social justice issues. For business school administrators and faculties, we encourage them to adopt the recommendations contained herein and to examine how they can honor their moral responsibilities in improving the effectiveness of business school programs.

References

- Bennis, W. G., & O’Toole, J. (2005). How business schools have lost their way. *Harvard business review*, 83(5), 96-104.
- Bettinger, E. P., & Long, B. T. (2010). Does cheaper mean better? The impact of using adjunct instructors on student outcomes. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 92(3), 598-613. https://doi.org/10.1162/REST_a_00014
- Colby, G. (2023). *Data Snapshot: Tenure and Contingency in US Higher Education*. American Association of University Professors, March 2023. Retrieved July 5, 2023, from <https://www.aaup.org/sites/default/files/AAUP%20Data%20Snapshot.pdf>
- Cornuel, E. (2007). Challenges facing business schools in the future. *Journal of Management development*, 26(1), 87-92. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02621710710720130>

- June, A. W. (2022). *Here's How Rising Inflation is Affecting Higher Ed*. The Chronicle of Higher Education, June 14, 2022. Retrieved July 5, 2023, from <https://www.chronicle.com/article/heres-how-rising-inflation-is-affecting-higher-ed>
- Maloni, M., Hiatt, M. S., & Campbell, S. (2019). Understanding the work values of Gen Z business students. *The International Journal of Management Education*, 17(3), 100320. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijme.2019.100320>
- Mintzberg, H. (2004). *Managers Not MBAs: A Hard Look at the Soft Practice of Managing and Management Development*. Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Salhotra, P. (2022). A growing number of Americans are questioning the value of going to college. *National Public Radio*.
- Spitalniak. (2022). AFT: Pandemic Worsened Adjunct Faculty's Struggles with Low Wages, Job Insecurity. HigherEd Dive, March 2022. Retrieved July 5, 2023, from <https://www.highereddive.com/news/aft-pandemic-worsened-adjunct-facultys-struggles-with-low-wages-job-inse/619637/>
- Talbert, M. (2022). Attributionist Theories of Moral Responsibility. In D. K. Nelkin & D. Pereboom (Eds., pp. 53-70), *The Oxford Handbook of Moral Responsibility*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190679309.013.7>
- Zusman A., (2005). Challenges Facing Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century. In P. G. Altbach, R. O. Berdahl, & P. J. Gumpert, (Eds., 2nd ed., pp. 115-160), *American Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century: Social, Political, and Economic Challenges*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).