

Business Leaders on Catholic Business Education: A Response

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Outline of Comments

Introduction

I would like first to acknowledge the fine work of Mike Naughton and Pat Murphy in organizing another enlightening and inspiring conference. Thanks also to Agnieszka Winkler and Richard Green not only for their thoughtful comments on the topic of business education at Catholic universities but for the examples they set as strong, successful and compassionate Catholic leaders in business.

Focus on "Connecting the Dots"

The principal theme I want to respond to is the challenge to business educators issued by Agnieszka Winkler to "connect the dots." Agnieszka tells this story:

I spoke recently with a really terrific business school professor, someone very respected in his field. I asked him how he was working into the business school curriculum, the University mission of competence, conscience and compassion. His response was that competence was clearly demonstrated, and conscience was doing pretty well with the ethical component of the business curriculum, but he could not find any way to introduce compassion into a business curriculum. As a business person, this stunned me. (Winkler, page 7)

Surely, if we are to be true to the Catholic mission and values of our institutions, there must be a place for not only conscience but compassion in the business education we provide to our students. So how do we as educators connect the dots and "help our students connect business to habits of the mind and the heart." (Winkler, page 7)

Three Ways Catholic Business Education Can Connect the Dots

1. Ask the BIG Questions

One way for business educators at Catholic colleges to connect the dots is to ask the big questions. Business education in general, not just in Catholic institutions, seems to have gotten off track, or, perhaps in some ways, has never been on the right track. In his open letter to the deans and the faculties of American business schools, Ian Mitroff (2004) states:

“To be perfectly clear, I am arguing that the philosophical foundations of business are in need of fundamental and serious revision. We have founded modern day management on a series of outmoded and highly dubious assumptions.”

Another recent critique of business education (Bennis and O’Toole, 2005) suggests that business schools have lost their way by focusing too narrowly on scientific research with limited practical applications. Business is a complex, messy human activity and cannot be reduced to a scientific equation or a regression analysis. In fact, oversimplifying assumptions about business may bolster the scientific approach but when it comes to business practice, “statistical and methodological wizardry can blind rather than illuminate” (Bennis and O’Toole, 2005).

To break out of this mold, business schools need to challenge the “philosophical foundations of business” by asking the big questions that Catholic business schools are uniquely positioned to ask.

Examples:

- **What is the purpose of business?**
 - “But to turn shareholders' needs into a purpose is to be guilty of a logical confusion, to mistake a necessary condition for a sufficient one... The purpose of a business is not to make a profit, full stop. It is to make a profit so that the business can do something more or better.” (Charles Handy, 2002)
 - “Every major (business) success seems to have started with an idea or a passion. Microsoft— a computer on every desk; Walkman—making music ubiquitous. Nike-- enabling athletics for everyone. These companies and the people involved made fortunes, not because money drove them, but because the idea, the passion, the love of what they did drove them. And the passion was a positive one—to make things better. In my own professional life, the company was very successful from a financial perspective, respected by its peers and appreciated by the employees. But when we worked, we focused on the challenge of introducing exciting new products and technologies that would change people’s lives, and change industries. The reward was money, but the focus was always the work.” (Winkler, 2008, 5)

I use the Johnson & Johnson case involving the Tylenol poisonings in 1982 as one way to engage students in a discussion of the purpose of business. After reviewing the tragic facts of the

case, seven deaths from ingestion of cyanide-laced Tylenol, students are challenged to think about how they would have managed the crisis and what that means about the purpose of business. I challenge students to consider how J&J responded to the crisis, asking “At the initial meeting of the J&J response team, what do you think the team did first?” Students are often surprised to learn that the meeting began not with a review of facts or a definition of the problem, a situation analysis or a legal briefing. It started with a reading of the J&J corporate credo and the credo states very clearly that the company’s first responsibility is not to stockholders but to customers:

“We believe our first responsibility is to the doctors, nurses and patients, to mothers and fathers and all others who use our products and services.... We are responsible to our employees... Our final responsibility is to our stockholders... When we operate according to these principles, the stockholders should realize a fair return.” (J&J Corporate Credo)

Students at Catholic business schools need to understand that business is not first about profits or maximizing anything. Yes, profit and returns to shareholders are important, but they are a necessary not a sufficient condition for successful business. Catholic social teaching, particularly with its emphasis on the common good and respect for human dignity, is a rich resource for a discussion of the purpose of business. I have also used Charles Handy’s article “What’s A Business For?” (Harvard Business Review, 2002) as background reading for a discussion of the fundamental purpose of business.

- **What makes a leader?**

Another big and necessary question to engage for business students in Catholic institutions is “What makes a great business leader?” Kouzes & Posner (2007) have studied leadership for decades, surveying over 75,000 business people from around the world by asking, “What do you look for and admire in a leader?” Their results suggest that over time and across continents, only four attributes consistently receive ratings of 50% or higher – leaders are honest (88%), forward-looking or visionary (71%), inspiring (65%) and competent (66%). This research provides fertile ground for a discussion of the needs and aspirations of the human person in an organizational context. Here again, the discussion can be informed by Catholic Social Teaching and its emphasis on the principles of solidarity, participation and association. Likewise, students can be introduced to seminal works in the fields of management (e.g., Peter Drucker, Daniel Goleman) and philosophy to think more deeply about people in organizations.

Many Catholic colleges were founded by or are affiliated with great leaders. Shouldn’t students be familiar with their stories, values and talents? Chris Lowney (2005) has documented the leadership principles and practices of Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits). His book describes leadership practices of an organization that has survived for more than 450 years under the vision and imprint of its founder, Ignatius. The Jesuits have founded 28 colleges in the United States and dozens more around the world. Business educators at Catholic universities have the opportunity and perhaps the obligation to design curricula that reflect the values of the Catholic character and/or religious order of the mission of the larger university.

Focusing on the leadership style and traits of leaders such as Ignatius is one way to connect the dots between business practice and university mission.

- **Other examples of big questions/issues to address include:**

- Business metrics – What to measure and how to measure business performance?
- CEO Compensation
- Global operations and economic justice
- Can business be a vocation?
- Each functional area has its own big questions

2. Business Education at Catholic Institutions – Is it systemic and curricular?

This conference is proof once again that good practices abound in mission-driven business education. Whenever I attend a meeting such as this I am inspired and encouraged by all of the good work being done by my faculty colleagues across the country and the world. As a native of Philadelphia, it makes me want to run up the Art Museum steps! But then my enthusiasm is tempered by a nagging question – what percentage of our students actually experience these courses and programs that we present and discuss? I get the uneasy feeling that much of what we do, as powerful as it may be, is experienced by only a fraction of our students. Some of the programs (e.g., community service projects, student retreats) can be transformative but they are outside the curriculum and experienced only by students who opt in. They tend to be administered quite successfully by Campus Ministry staff but mission cannot be relegated to Campus Ministry and must not be experienced only in extracurricular programs.

Mission-driven business education needs to be intentional, systemic, serial, curricular and extracurricular. My own research on this topic suggests that we have plenty of room for improvement (Porth, McCall, DiAngelo, 2008). Business education at Catholic universities and colleges tends not to be distinctive in reflecting the religious character of the larger institution.

To understand the current state of business education at Catholic institutions, we surveyed and audited the websites of 110 Catholic colleges and universities in the United States. We found that 77% had a separate mission statement for their business school or business unit. As shown in Table 1, of those that had mission statements, more than half of the missions included an explicit reference to ethics education, almost half mentioned religious identity in the mission and almost a quarter cited both ethics and religious identity.

Table 1 – Mission Statement Analysis

Mission statements included...	Ethics	Religious Identity	Both
	56%	46%	23%

Having a mission statement and living the mission are quite different as we know from Arthur Andersen, Enron and others. To assess the nature of the commitment to ethics education and religious identity, we requested the business unit's learning goals based on the assumption that what gets measured is a good indication of what really matters. Table 2 shows the results, indicating that over 80% of respondents to our survey measured student outcomes with respect to ethics education but only 6% assessed learning with respect to religious identity. Furthermore, when we asked what specific ethical theories and outcomes students were expected to learn, responses were, with a few exceptions, indistinguishable from what one would expect from an ethics assessment at a secular or state university. Answers ranged from a simple stakeholder analysis to more substantive reference to utilitarian theory, deontology, virtue theory, and rights. Only a small minority referred to concepts or theories that had a distinctly Catholic content.

Table 2 – Outcomes Assessment

	Learning Goals	Ethics	Religious Identity
Survey results (n=40)	33 of 40 (82.5%)	27 of 33 (81.8%)	2 of 33 (6.1%)

In general, it does not appear that business education at Catholic colleges and universities is distinctive. The good news is Catholic institutions include an emphasis on business ethics education. But this does not make us distinct. Any decent business education needs to emphasize ethics. Indeed, this is a requirement of AACSB. Catholic institutions need to go beyond this minimum requirement to deliver ethics education that is both more substantive and more informed by central ideals of the Catholic tradition.

3. It's a Big Parade: Catholic mission is multifaceted, and needs to be inclusive

I agree wholeheartedly with Agnieszka Winkler's challenge to us as business educators at Catholic colleges:

“From a purely practical point of view, formation of the business person based on Catholic values would be a tremendous differentiator. It may actually propel Catholic schools into leadership, certainly thought leadership, but also scholarly and reputational leadership... get in front of the parade before someone else does. Catholic Universities are particularly well suited to the concept of formation of the business person. The impediments to doing this are less cultural and societal today, and more structural within academia. It would be good to have the courage to remove them. The rewards could be fantastic” (Winkler, 2008, page 9).

But if we are to accept this challenge and lead the march, we need to invite everyone to the parade. Catholic mission is multifaceted, and needs to be inclusive. It is not a carefully prescribed blueprint for conformity. Rather, it is a set of principles and values based on reason and an understanding of the human person and the common good that derive from Catholic social teaching. In can also be a spirit or philosophy traceable to the founders of our institutions, such as the method of discernment or the practice of the spiritual exercises of Ignatius Loyola.

Faculty are a portfolio with diverse backgrounds, talents and strengths. These strengths and talents need to be respected and nurtured not forced into a box for the sake of conformity. Not all business faculty should be expected to incorporate Catholic social teaching in their courses nor is that necessary. The unit of analysis should be on the business program rather than each individual course so that we can safely say that our students receive an intentional and serial exposure to Catholic thought as part of their business degree and overall academic experience.

Andre Delbecq (2003) reminds us that as business educators in Catholic institutions we live in a pluralistic world. Our faculty colleagues, students and the executives we work with come from diverse religious backgrounds. A profound respect for all faith traditions and for nonbelievers alike should be a hallmark of our work. Andre helps his executive students connect the dots between their faith and their work. Students are challenging to learn more and think more deeply about their own faith and to grow in appreciation for the religious values and traditions of their classmates. Similarly, Bob Spitzer, S.J. (2008) has thought deeply about the philosophical underpinnings of a faith-based business education and he speaks eloquently and with experience about ways to help move students and executives move from a personal identity fixated on ego comparisons and narcissism to a personal identity that seeks to contribute, to make a positive difference in something or someone beyond the self. Delbecq and Spitzer lead an inclusive parade and the results are transformative.

John Haughey, S.J. provides workshops at Jesuit universities to help faculty make the connection between what they do and the mission of the university. These “mission from below” workshops use an inductive approach, asking faculty to consider the good that they seek in their teaching and research. After articulating the good, Haughey challenges faculty to connect the dots, to see the linkages between the good of their teaching and research and the mission of the university. The key is that the mission is not imposed or, as Haughey states, “helicoptered” on the faculty.

Instead faculty are affirmed for the good they already pursue but are challenged to be more explicit about how that good relates to mission. In so doing, faculty learn more about the institution's mission and the mission parade grows larger and more enthusiastic.

Conclusion

It is my hope that when business educators at Catholic universities are asked how we “work into the business school curriculum, the University mission of competence, conscience and compassion” (Winkler, 2008), we won't draw a blank on compassion. Yes, we need to deliver on technical competence and functional expertise. And, yes, we need to educate students for ethical reasoning and decision-making. But these are minimum standards for any quality business education. They do not make us distinct. We need to help our students connect the dots between university mission and business practice. We need to focus on what makes us distinctive – ethics and conscience informed by our religious traditions and founders, compassionate business leadership, and mission-driven business schools that teach minds and hearts.

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