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(1925-)

Warren Bennis is a recognized authority, lecturer, and writer on organizational development, leadership and change. Born in New York City, he is currently University Professor and Distinguished Professor of Business Administration at the University of Southern California. He is also the chairman of the board of directors at the Harvard University Kennedy School of Government's Center for Public Leadership. He has been an adviser to four presidents of the United States and he is the founder of the University of Southern California's Leadership Institute.

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James O'Toole is Research Professor in the Center for Effective Organizations at the University of Southern California. He is also the Mortimer J. Adler Senior Fellow of the Aspen Institute. O'Toole's research and writings are in the areas of leadership, individual growth and development in the workplace, corporate culture, and philosophy. He has addressed hundreds of major corporations and professional organizations and is the author of fourteen acclaimed books.

QUESTIONS: Do you agree with Bennis/O'Toole assessment of business education? Has UST chartered a different course or do their criticisms fit our business school as well? What is it about Opus College of Business that makes these criticisms inadequate or applicable to our situation? Do you agree with their claim that business is a profession and that integration is a key factor to educating business professionals? If not, what is business? If so, what are the implications of such a claim for the Opus College of Business?

HOW BUSINESS SCHOOLS LOST THEIR WAY

WARREN G. BENNIS & JAMES O'TOOLE¹

Business Schools are on the wrong track. For many years, MBA programs enjoyed rising respectability in academia and growing prestige in the business world. Their admissions were ever more selective the pay packages of graduates ever more dazzling. Today, however, MBA programs face intense criticism for failing to impart useful skills, failing to prepare leaders, failing to instill norms of ethical behavior—and even failing to lead graduates to good corporate jobs. These criticisms come not just from students, employers, and the media but also from deans of some of America's most prestigious business schools, including Dipak Jain at Northwestern University's top-ranked Kellogg School of Management. One outspoken critic, McGill University professor Henry Mintzberg, says that the main culprit is a less-than-relevant MBA curriculum. If the number of reform efforts under way is any indication, many deans seem to agree with this charge. But genuine reform of the MBA curriculum remains elusive. We believe that is because the curriculum is the effect, not the cause, of what ails the modern business school.

The actual cause of today's crisis in management education is far broader in scope and can be traced to a dramatic shift in the culture of business schools. During the past several decades, many leading B schools have quietly adopted an inappropriate—and ultimately self defeating—model of academic excellence. Instead of measuring themselves in terms of the competence of their graduates, or by how well their faculties understand important drivers of business performance, they measure themselves almost solely by the rigor of their scientific research. They have adopted a model of science that uses abstract financial and economic analysis, statistical multiple regressions, and laboratory psychology. Some of the research produced is excellent, but because so little of it is grounded in actual business practices, the focus of graduate business education has become increasingly circumscribed and less and less relevant to practitioners.

This *scientific model*, as we call it, is predicated on the faulty assumption that business is an academic discipline like chemistry or geology. In fact, business is a profession, akin to medicine and the law, and business schools are professional schools—or should be. Like other professions, business calls upon the work of many academic disciplines. For medicine, those disciplines include biology, chemistry, and psychology; for business, they include mathematics, economics, psychology, philosophy, and sociology. The distinction between a profession and an academic discipline is crucial. In our view, no curricular reforms will work until the scientific model is replaced by a more appropriate model rooted in the special requirements of a profession.

Before asking how business education should change, we need to examine its evolution. Most business schools claim a dual mission: to educate practitioners and to create knowledge through research. Historically, business schools have emphasized the former at the expense of the latter. In fact, for the first half of the twentieth century, B schools were more akin to trade schools; most

¹ Warren G. Bennis and James O'Toole, "How Business Schools Lost Their Way," *Harvard Business Review* (May 2005): 96-104. Used with permission.