

CLADEA
Guide to
Responsible
Business
Education in
Latin America

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Consolidation of students as changemakers through PRME

The case of social entrepreneurship at the University of Monterrey

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The University of Monterrey (UEM) has been characterized by its efforts to improve the conditions of the community where it operates, especially those in conditions of poverty and exclusion, through service and social action. The consequence of this approach was its designation as “Changemaker Campus” by Ashoka and its addition to the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) of the United Nations. Part of its effort to fulfill its mission to be a generator of change-agents and a promoter of responsibility for the education of management from an ethical and responsible perspective, is the inclusion of social entrepreneurship courses across the whole undergraduate business school. As part of these courses, two specific activities are aimed at raising awareness and generating social and economic value for companies and society in Monterrey and its metropolitan area. The first activity is the research and diagnosis of local social entrepreneurship initiatives, with the intention of recognizing the characteristics of social entrepreneurs and the impacts they generate, and to propose recommendations to improve the management of these initiatives. The second is to propose a new social enterprise or design an improvement plan for an existing local social enterprise aimed at generating social and economic value to society. These proposals are oriented toward addressing the social problems of the city. The result of these activities has been the implementation

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by social entrepreneurs of the recommendations proposed by the students and the creation of a pool of social enterprise projects that can be developed later.

Keywords: PRME, social entrepreneurship, changemaker, research-action method

Introduction

The University of Monterrey (UDEM) was founded in 1969 by five religious congregations, driven by an association of Catholic citizens and entrepreneurs from the city of Monterrey, which is located in northwestern Mexico (UDEM, 2015). UDEM is in the Metropolitan Area of Monterrey, which presents a paradox. On the one hand, this area has the second highest GDP per capita of the country, and offers better living conditions than are available to most of the Mexican population; and on the other hand, the area contains homes and neighborhoods with poverty conditions similar to those observed in the poorest regions of the country (Portales, 2014). An example of this situation is the fact that over 50 percent of the population suffers from some form of social deprivation, and about 20 percent are in poverty (CONEVAL, 2014).

Since its foundation, one of the most important characteristics of UDEM has been its orientation toward the improvement of the living conditions of the community where it operates, through service and social action. This aspect is at the heart of one of its foundational principles: “Man is perfected in the service of man” (UDEM, 2014). The consequence of this humanistic orientation has been the creation of institutional projects that aim to respond to the conditions of vulnerability and poverty in the surrounding communities. Among the lines of action of these projects is high-school education for low-income youths, entrepreneurship projects in “bottom of the pyramid”, microcredits to women in vulnerable situations, and human development workshops for low-income women, among others.

The result of this work was the designation of UDEM as a “Changemaker Campus” by Ashoka-U, a distinction that indicates the interest and effort shown by the University regarding both the improvement of living conditions in vulnerable communities and the consolidation of their students as change-agents. UDEM also joined the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) of United Nations in its Business School. In terms of efforts to fulfill its mission to be a generator of change-agents and a promoter of responsibility for the education of management from an ethical and responsible perspective, the university has included ethics, corporate social responsibility, sustainability, and social entrepreneurship courses in pre-graduate programs.

Challenges

Being considered as a Changemaker Campus and the addition to the PRME UN brought with it the challenge of generating schemes that strengthen the students' changemaker profiles at the same time as complying with the principles of the PRME.

Regarding the generation of changemakers, the identified challenges were presented in four lines. The first is the need to create mechanisms that encourage students to become aware of the conditions of inequality and poverty in the country, specifically in the communities surrounding the university. The second is to identify how social enterprises and purpose-oriented business models (such as Bottom of the Pyramid [BOP] and inclusive business, among others), addressed poverty and the lack of fulfillment of social rights at national and international levels. The third is the involvement of students in some of the initiatives that are currently being carried out by social entrepreneurs or companies, with the intention of identifying how these can be a mechanism for creating social and economic value. The fourth was related to the adoption of a theoretical framework linked to social entrepreneurship and its implications.

At the level of compliance with PRME, the challenge comes from a dual perspective. The first focused on the identification of concepts and knowledge that students should have; to address this issue the strategy focused on purpose, values and dialog principles. The second focused on the development of teaching strategies that will facilitate the apprehension of these learnings, for which the principles of method, research, and partnership were used as a basis.

Taking into account these challenges, the social entrepreneurship course incorporated a teaching strategy that sought to include the principles proposed by the United Nations and to strengthen the changemaker profile of students.

What we did

In addition to the activities developed traditionally inside the classroom, the course on social entrepreneurship included two more activities. The first one took into consideration the principles of method and research proposed by PRME. The students use the action-research technique for the diagnosis of social entrepreneurship initiatives or inclusive business taking place in the city. Through the application of this technique, students recognized the characteristics of social entrepreneurs and the impacts they made on society, and generated recommendations aimed at improving their management.

In the development of diagnostic and research reports, the students used concepts they learned about in class to explain the initiatives, which involved concepts and proposed recommendations. In order to achieve this, research professors

created an agreement and partnerships with social enterprises and/or transnational corporations, who served as spaces for the development of projects and who also received the recommendations of students, reinforcing the principles of dialog and partnership proposed by PRME.

The second activity carried out within the framework of this class was the generation of proposals for social enterprise or inclusive business aimed at generating social and economic value to society. These proposals had three key features: first, they should be based on the identification of some socioeconomic problem or necessity present within the city, which must be clearly diagnosed, defined and delimited regarding the scope of the proposal. Second, they must be purpose-oriented to deliver a social, economic, and/or environmental value to society through the creation of social enterprises based on social innovation business models. Third, they should consider the Sustainable Development Goals and should be aligned with the principles of the UN's Global Compact.

Through these two activities, the social entrepreneurship course was able to respond to the challenges posed by integrating PRME principles and strengthening agents of change through a learning methodology.

What happened

The implementation of these activities brought significant consequences that can be observed at three different levels: students, organizations or companies, and university.

Regarding students, the effects are seen in two ways. The first has to do with academic training, where a student understands more clearly the connection between concepts seen in class and the way they are applied or carried out by companies. The second affects the level of their commitment to addressing specific social, economic and environmental issues. One example is the fact that some students become a volunteer or do their social service within these companies, or decide to start their social entrepreneurship using the concepts learned during the course.

At the enterprise level, the effect is seen in the fact that some of the recommendations proposed by the students were implemented. Furthermore, the work done by students helped to identify the opportunities that business models have, the conditions in which they operate, and the perceptions that beneficiaries have about their impact. However, it is noteworthy that the depth of analysis was not very high if used as a basis for identifying potential areas of opportunity and the strengths of the business models.

The contributions to the university are twofold. The first occurs in the generation of a pool of social enterprise projects that students could develop during their bachelor's degree, with the support of professors from another course. For example, the next course in the program should be "business planning", so students can

use the concepts and knowledge they have regarding business plans to develop and eventually implement their proposal for a social enterprise or a purpose-oriented business model. From this perspective, the strategies developed in social entrepreneurship could be viewed as a plan that transcends the temporality of the course. The second relates to the ties that the university has with businesses and social entrepreneurs in the locality. This link allows other research projects to follow, contributing to the generation of new and updated knowledge that can be brought into the classroom, and creating a circle of knowledge and practice.

The experience with the students has been good for businesses; for this reason, they have begun to integrate with other courses in the business school and not only the social entrepreneurship course, with the idea of strengthening their business models.

What is next

The experience with the social entrepreneurship course shows how it can cater to the principles proposed by PRME while aiming for students to become changemakers, a mission that is in the specifications of UDEM for Changemaker Campuses. The experience also shows the effect that action-research can have on the students' learning processes and the strengthening of social enterprises or business models. It also shows how ties between academia and practice can be strengthened based on win-win criteria and working on a specific project. However, it also leaves important challenges for the college in the short term and the medium term.

In the short term, challenges can be displayed in two lines. The first is to identify the best way in which students can follow the projects created in the social entrepreneurship course during subsequent semesters. This challenge requires that the most viable and sustainable projects are identified, and that institutional mechanisms are generated to enable the follow-up and to ensure their successful implementation.

For the medium term, the challenge lies in the need to link projects designed in the social entrepreneurship course with entrepreneurs, companies, investors, impact funds, and others, so that they can be carried out. Another challenge is related to the generation of an extracurricular program for students with high changemaker profiles, who want to develop or are currently developing social innovation projects. To increase the efficiency of the program and to guarantee the success of the projects, there should be tutoring and mentoring from social entrepreneurs who have already gone through that process, such as training on issues related to the project the students wish to carry out.

The initiative undertaken through the social entrepreneurship course can be understood as the first step toward compliance with the Principles for Responsible Management Education and the consolidation of changemaker students by UDEM.

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