

**CLADEA**  
**Guide** to  
Responsible  
*Business*  
**Education** in  
Latin America

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© 2016 Greenleaf Publishing Limited

Published by Greenleaf Publishing Limited  
Salts Mill  
Victoria Road  
Saltaire  
BD18 3LA  
UK  
[www.greenleaf-publishing.com](http://www.greenleaf-publishing.com)

Cover by Sadie Gornall-Jones.

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data:

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN-13: 978-1-78353-335-0 [hardback]  
ISBN-13: 978-1-78353-322-0 [PDF ebook]

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# 7

## **Pedagogical transformations in business schools: experiential and service-based learning for enhancing PRME engagement**

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Several successful international case studies have been documented that look at the transformative potential of incorporating pedagogical strategies that enrich curricular content with experiential learning, the development of critical and conscious thought, and the introduction of globally focused leadership, in program administration, teaching and research. This work presents an overview of certain perspectives and transformations, highlighting international alignment and the development of an ethical conscience within the pedagogical innovations implemented by business schools. This study takes an in-depth look at specific cases in the areas of operations management and corporate social responsibility.

**Keywords:** experiential learning; internationalization; corporate social responsibility

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## Introduction/background

Faced with new realities, and as market interactions and dynamics increase, it has been found that business school internationalization requires a series of activities that contribute to improved teaching quality and student experiences; including assigning organizational and budgetary resources that will help bring an international perspective to their strategic decisions (Bennett & Kane, 2009). Within this framework, Bird (2014) acknowledges that the cognitive, attitudinal and behavioral requirements demanded of people working in global contexts need to develop transformational potentials through experiential learning, given that traditional pedagogical approaches are insufficient.

Kolb (1984, p. 41) defines experiential learning as “the process through which knowledge is created by a transformation of experience,” and adds “knowledge is the result of a combination of obtaining and transforming experience.” Kolb also states that experiential learning includes four stages: concrete experience, reflexive observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation.

Since 2012, the Business School at Universidad EAFIT in Colombia took on the task of expanding its international focus while aligning its substantive functions with the commitments it acquired through the PRME (*Principles for Responsible Management Education*), Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), and the responsibilities assumed by the University with the United Nations’ Global Compact. The Operations Management area of the Department of Organization and Management decided to increase its international focus while incorporating experiential learning-based teaching strategies. To do so, it designed a project called *Living the Factory*. Simultaneously, the Ethics and Social Responsibility area of the same academic department redesigned its curriculum, incorporating a strong international approach both within the practical components of the functional areas of corporate social responsibility (CSR), and in ethics that aim to promote universal values. Experiential learning was also introduced by requiring volunteer work for everyone taking the subject.

## Challenge

An ever-growing body of documented evidence supports the role universities have played in the social, cultural and economic development of different societies (Arbo & Benneworth 2007, Benneworth & Conway 2009; Gonzalez-Perez; Mac Labrainn, & McIlrath, Lorraine, 2007), and on a local and regional level, institutions of higher education have frequently been strategic actors for building connections between different participants (Arbo & Benneworth 2007). By influencing most socioeconomic activities, they have also helped shape and transform the way busi-

ness decisions are made, and how businesses develop their identities while dealing with the challenges posed by social and global dynamics (Morsing & Rovira, 2011).

The challenge of including an international approach and pedagogical innovations in the academic areas of operations management and corporate social responsibility (CSR) at Universidad EAFIT was: how can we incorporate these elements while still contributing to a transformation that will form socially responsible business managers at the business school?

## What we did

In order to hasten the integration of this international approach and seeking to form responsible business managers, equipped to deal successfully with the challenges imposed by demanding and changing international markets, the institution designed two specific programs: *Living the Factory and Ethical Scenarios*.

*Living the Factory* is a study tour designed to incorporate experiential learning elements and promote practical experiences within the world of real organizations in actual international environments, as well as complement classroom content, so future operations managers can understand and develop competencies to help them deal successfully with their future work environments. The first *Living the Factory* event (2014) was held in the United States; a second version (2015) traveled to Europe; and upcoming versions will travel to Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa and Oceania. The project is made up of four cycles that repeat annually: (i) design; (ii) preparation; (iii) execution; and (iv) feedback (Escalante & Uribe, 2014).

The second program, *Ethical Scenarios*, is a component introduced into the Ethics and Corporate Responsibility course for undergraduate Business Administration and MBA students. It consists of fictional micro case studies presented to students as they work on the formation of universal values. Students are divided into small groups of 4-5 people that analyse these case studies in depth.

## What happened

Experiential learning principles as well as the design and implementation of *Living the Factory* have contributed to its participants' professional, personal and academic enrichment. The program has complemented classroom learning objectives and helped develop market-required international competencies. Favorable results have been obtained from feedback sessions aimed at reevaluating processes, sharing individual learning at professional, conceptual and personal levels and making sure that learning processes (active experimentation, exposure to concrete experi-

ences; reflexive observation; abstract conceptualization) actually took place. The experience has become a reference point for Universidad EAFIT and other local business schools.

On the other hand, after sharing the case studies, an ethnographic study carried out over a semester in the Operations Management and Social Responsibility areas of the Universidad EAFIT Organization and Management Department involving, apart from an international approach, the use of pedagogical innovations in the *Ethical Scenarios* program, has allowed implementing a public presentation of values for discussing different scenarios that require ethical decision-making. These discussions are not only useful for helping students to become sensitized to potential scenarios, but are also a tool for performing an axiological analysis of each group, serving to guide teachers regarding the values they should promote or focus on.

With a view to sharing some of the topics discussed, the following are summaries of some of the case studies analyzed:

### **Case study: The widow**

Mrs. Judith's husband has just died. She has no children or pension, and is desperately seeking to sell her home in a housing complex for US\$30,000 to pay her debts and move to a care facility where she found a place. She is doing this through a real estate broker. You know her property is worth much more. Your parents have always wanted to live in that housing complex. You have other guaranteed customers that could offer between US\$80,000 and US\$100,000. What do you do?

### **Case study: The scholarship**

Sofia is your student and the single mother of two children. She works to support her home and pay her tuition. Due to her work, Sofia misses class frequently, and her coursework isn't up to standard. Sofia's grade for 70% of the subject is 2.5/5.0. Student services calls and tells you that Sofia needs a final grade of 3.5/5.0 to be eligible for a scholarship to cover the cost of her tuition. What do you do?

Case studies that simulate real world situations and test the ethical decision-making positions of students have also been used in Operations Management courses. In current competitive environments, organizations deploy a series of actions and strategies with the intent to obtain favorable market positions. However, some of these practices give rise to discussions regarding the ethical standards of corporations. Conscious of this situation, the assignments contain case studies that simulate scenarios including the following:



## Case study: Uncertainty regarding outsourcing

Faced with increasing competition in the sector, the company you work for has decided to outsource a significant part of its production processes. After visiting the installations of the contracted company, you realize that the people employed there are victims of exploitation and work under subhuman conditions. When you return to your country the company's CEO asks for a report on everything related to the subcontractor's policies and production standards. Would you share the situation you found even knowing that the company's production returns and financial profitability have grown substantially?

## Case study: The harmful product

The company you work for launched a product a few months ago that has become a runaway sales success in third world countries. After several studies performed on different samples, you discover the product can cause side effects in consumers. The R&D manager seems to be appraised of the situation but has done nothing about it. What decision would you make?

## What's next?

This work described two pedagogical mechanisms designed and implemented by the Universidad EAFIT Business School in Colombia, and used to enrich curricular content by using two forms of experiential learning: study tours and ethical scenario simulations. Common to both cases are internationalization and sustainability perspectives, insofar as they include processes for accompanying an open-minded view of the world, both physically and in dimensions that lead to an axiological alignment with universal values. The next step is to replicate the benefits of experiential learning in high impact areas for the University, such as those linked to Marketing, Finances and Project Management. There is also a need to establish a cross-cutting *Ethical Scenarios* component in all management assignments, such that they can share, disseminate and discuss situations and positions related to business environments.

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