

Business schools teach how to deal with different cultures



The dean, Fiona Devine, visited the country with the objective of strengthening the partnership with FGV in research and exchange of students

Nowadays, cultural intelligence is the most important skill for corporate leaders. Therefore, the issue might be addressed in the curriculum of business schools, next to subjects such as corporate governance, big data and the influence of the social and political environment in management. This is the opinion of Fiona Devine, Manchester Business School dean, the largest institution of its kind in United Kingdom. In Fiona's opinion, one of the institution's priority is to guarantee that the students are capable of understanding and relating with other cultures.

The desire to turn Manchester more international brought Fiona to Brazil this month. She came to discuss the partnership expansion with Fundação Getulio Vargas (FGV), with which they offer a global MBA program with lectures in class and on-line. Fiona came with a delegation of around twelve academics from Manchester University, and included in the agenda research collaboration opportunities with Brazilian academics. "It is extremely important that our relationship goes beyond the classroom and embraces research."

Subjects such as marketing, competitiveness and innovation are some of the topics that might be addressed in the future, as well as the increase in exchange of students from FGV graduation and post-graduation courses. "The student exchange is highly positive, as it allows the creation of international networks that may help these professionals advance in their career after they graduate."

In September, Manchester Business School will adopt the surname of its biggest donor, David Alliance, and will be called Alliance Manchester Business School. Nowadays, the institution gathers over 130 nationalities and five thousand students. The MBA groups are composed mostly of foreigner students - 23% from Latin America. "We value diversity in class because business schools must prepare professionals to be global citizens that will be able to work in different scenarios ", says Fiona.

For the dean, this exposure to the set of differences helps to understand patterns, legal practices and expectations from other cultures. "In order to have competitive advantage today, one must have collaboration and information sharing skills. The ability to communicate – either with colleagues or competitors – is critical to make companies more productive ", says the dean.

However, cultural aspects are just a fraction of the wild knowledge developed by business schools today. Fiona took charge of Manchester Business School one year and a half ago, after a long academic career in Political Science and Sociology – essential areas to understand the context in which businesses operate, in her opinion. "There is a social and political environment besides economic scenario in which the companies operate ", she says. The combination of these is ideal to understand what moves society, companies and individuals. According to her, this approach flourishes in the interdisciplinary nature of business schools.

"A sociologist might be interested by the dimension of work and employment, lack of talent or if people will receive the adequate education to keep track of the technology evolution. Political science, on the other hand, brings a context that is essential to understand government structure and regulation of the economy", she points out.

The curriculum of business schools must include, more and more, the transformation the world is seeing. Financial crisis, for example, brought the need to bring new subjects such as corporate governance and social responsibility. "These are issues that people are interested about, which makes us think about how we teach these matters to students in all levels ", she says.

She believes that for the next years the curriculums will embrace technology, with the use of big data in the development of strategies and operational activities, as well as data security practices. It will also be required to analyze more deeply the innovation that arises in recession times – as well as the lessons that can be learnt and implemented in any economic scenario. And least, but not last, the dean mentions the revision of processes and inclusion of sustainability concerns in all business aspects.

When discussing these trends, Fiona says she is interested in the contribution of emerging markets. "It is easy to listen to what United Kingdom has to say about the world, but sometimes it is a lot more interesting to observe the discussions that are happening directly between countries like China and Brazil", she says.