

Derek Abell's Vision for a Shake-up in Management Education

What do you do next if you are the founding president of ESMT European School of Management and Technology and Professor Emeritus, have been the Dean of IMEDE (now IMD), on the faculty of Harvard Business School and MIT and a founding board member of CEEMAN, the leading management education accrediting association in Central and Eastern Europe?

If you are Derek Abell, author of the CEEMAN ***Manifesto: Changing the Course of Management Development: Combining Excellence with Relevance***, the next step is simple: “nothing short of triggering change on a global scale.”

Abell, together with CEEMAN President Danica Purg, believes that management education, except for a few professors and schools, is on the wrong track. With their fellow CEEMAN board members who are co-signers of the ***Manifesto***, Abell is setting about righting that wrong with the ambitious vision laid out in the ***Manifesto***: to rebalance management education across the globe by combining “excellence with relevance.”

Imbalance is the root of what is wrong with management education today, according to Abell. He is “chagrined” to see the continuing shift in management education from this center ground to a one-sided embrace of:

- Research at the expense of teaching
- Quantitative research at the expense of qualitative inductive investigation
- Methodological precision at the expense of pertinent substance
- Specialization over holistic thinking and integration
- Theory over practice, and
- Orientation toward academic peers with little contact, attention or interest in business.

Compounding this shift is the belief that management is an exact science that can be quantified, as opposed to understanding that apart from certain specialties like flow operations and logistics, management’s inherent nature is “inexact, judgmental and values driven,” says Abell.

Against these troubling trends and the needs of dynamic economies to respond to their own markets, Abell felt compelled to step up. He was quickly joined in his ***Manifesto*** rallying cry by fellow board members of CEEMAN, led by President Danica Purg. These thought leaders are speaking for many Deans and Directors of management education programs worldwide who are dissatisfied with the status quo and believe that change can and will start with them – and fellow CEEMAN members. They will launch the ***Manifesto movement*** on 20 September at the 26th CEEMAN Annual Conference in Prague.

The **Manifesto** defines relevance in both management teaching and research in three ways:

- Relevance to management practice and to the executives at all levels who are charged with management and leadership responsibility,
- Relevance to the specific and different needs of managers in their local market environments, who must also have an eye toward both local challenges and the latest global thinking and best practices, and
- Being up-to-date on issues and anticipating trends, while understanding that yesterday's problems do not predict tomorrow's.

“The more change is delayed, the more irrelevant we are likely to become,” challenges Abell, and thus the Manifesto movement will be driven by broad dissemination and implementation strategies with CEEMAN leading the way. CEEMAN will actively promote the **Manifesto movement** to leaders and influencers of top management schools globally, and to governments, global and local companies, and at other accrediting bodies, seeking their endorsements and buy-in. **The thrust is to “restore the balance” between:**

- Quantitative research and teaching,
- Qualitative inductive reasoning and quantification,
- Methodological precision and pertinent substance
- Specialization and integration,
- Theory and practice, and
- The role of business as the most important consideration, and the most important customer.

CEEMAN accreditation criteria are already for some time closely aligned with Manifesto principles, and these new standards will penetrate markets of dynamic economies as CEEMAN members are newly accredited. Abell is teaching a 3-day workshop for Deans and Directors, “Leading the Way in Management Development” that engages them as change agents by stress-testing and adapting their strategies and plans for a more balanced approach to teaching and relevant research.

All CEEMAN's offerings will integrate Manifesto principles into their leadership development. But change requires a long game, consistent effort, and measuring impact and results. Who best to define those? Keep an eye on Abell, he will be leading the way.