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A Human Centered Approach in Executive Education at ESAN Graduate School of Business in Peru

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Introduction

This chapter illustrates the experience of introducing a human centered approach to executive education (EE) programs at ESAN Graduate School of Business in Peru. ESAN's teaching-learning model is used to explain how the diversity of learners' backgrounds aligned with a multidisciplinary faculty and different teaching strategies can collaborate and develop learning communities that stimulate participants' engagement and develop social skills that are valuable assets in the companies where they work. Teaching methods aligned to the human centered paradigm have strengthened ESAN's teamwork performance with teacher's guidance and effective use of technological resources. One of the main courses in EE is described to show why and how course contents promote practical application of learning topics in synch with participants' awareness and responsible contribution as member of a team and the central element in EE programs subject to quality standards in the 21st century.

ESAN Graduate School of Business was the first institution that offered EE in Peru. After 50 years in the market, ESAN has reached top positions in several rankings among the best EE programs from business schools. The 2012 América Economía EE ranking[1] places ESAN in third place, after Dom Cabral Foundation (Brazil) and IESE (Spain). However, ESAN gets higher scores in *client-company* dimension (measures amount of small, medium, and large companies that hire EE services), *client loyalty* dimension (7 years of relationship between clients and the school), and *balance* dimension (distribution of client-companies with high percentage of large firms as clients). This dimension is especially valuable for ESAN given the complex environment of large companies and its relative value as business partners (Almeida, 2012).

An interesting dimension is EE *faculty quality*, which is ranked based on the faculty with the highest proportion of PhD degrees from the most prestigious business schools in the world. Although ESAN's pool professors with PhD degrees reaches 25 percent, there is a teaching requirement to have at least a master's degree from a prestigious university and teaching priority is given to doctoral candidates. Faculty quality also measures experience in the workplace, in companies, and as consultants. ESAN scores high in this dimension because professors have an average of 26 years of work experience (Almeida, 2012).

ESAN's EE success is supported by a growing demand among executives, managers, and directors to participate in these programs despite a national economic crisis. ESAN compensates participants' time and monetary investments offering the business experience of quality professors to facilitate learning and acquisition of knowledge that expedites practical applications necessary to increase productivity in their workplace.

Executives recognize the need to invest in training during difficult economic times to prepare for emerging challenges in highly competitive markets. So, despite the global financial crisis in 2009, Peru saw increased demand for EE programs. This trend has continued and increased in 2010 in the functional and sectorial specializations offered by ESAN (Bravo, 2010).

While business schools and universities have been able to diversify their curricular content and increase the number of specialized programs, all confront the challenge to adapt to a diverse group of students with different needs and backgrounds. ESAN students, for example, come from different regions in Peru and from other countries. To serve all participants schools must leave behind traditional pedagogical procedures, which are still used in many Peruvian and Latin American institutions, and need to build up a diverse multidisciplinary faculty.

ESAN maintains EE competitiveness based on the quality of faculty and participants' engagement in learning with teachings on the human centered paradigm[2] to help students achieve academic and career goals. Some practical teaching strategies include reading analysis, case method, teamwork exercises and debates, and field research. Class methods are enriched by diversity among participants from different disciplines, fields, and sectors. Professors aware of such diversity can stimulate creativity, decision making, collaborative work, and problem solving in learning environments.

ESAN understands the expectations of organizations regarding people's value for business and the best business results depend on people's preparation and respect for the opinions of others and the need to strengthen technical training, but above all, to develop a set of social skills and competencies that impact workplaces and society.

ESAN accomplishes the above objectives offering EE programs based on team building, collaborative learning, and the creation of learning communities and networks, where participants undertake a leading role in

their learning process to get ready to deal with the company stakeholders in an ethical and socially responsible way that shows a comprehensive understanding of the humanistic approach.

ESAN's EE programs highlight the need to strengthen the human centered paradigm in the curricular design, teaching strategies, teacher's quality, and learning engagement as a necessary condition to achieve effective learning.

ESAN's EE programs

ESAN's Direction of Institutional Programs (Dirección de Programas Institucionales, DPI) designs and delivers customized EE programs to train executives, managers, and business leaders to be competitive and contribute to society. Programs are designed for the public and business sector, and associations, considering their particular characteristics, scope of activities, and the management challenges viewed from national and international factors that impact performance.

ESAN's expectation is that executives from different fields who participate in EE programs can learn to deal successfully with continuous challenges that arise in their firms, making ethical and responsible decisions not only based on economic profit but also considering the quality of life of the people who work in the organization and the level of satisfaction of all the internal and external stakeholders. This required DPI to design a curricular structure that promotes a true humanistic management and is deployed through teaching strategies that support development of a range of social skills, attitudes, and work ethics.

One way to strengthen human centered education is to promote synergy between firms and academia. To meet this goal, professors who teach EE programs are business managers or firm consultants in different industries and have experience in research and teaching as a necessary condition to understand and assess the business environment and relate objectively integrating and transmitting knowledge among both environments. EE participants relate better with faculty who have passed through different stages and experiences in their work life and gained ability to apply technical and theoretical knowledge to solve practical business problems and challenges. Furthermore, education is enriched with multidisciplinary backgrounds of faculty and learners, with specialization in business, social sciences, humanities, communications, and engineering, among many others.

Due to a growing demand for EE nationwide ESAN has developed programs focused on personal development to promote a humanistic approach in organizations. This is based on the argument that people who collaborate effectively can increase productivity in organizations and are able to design more interesting proposals to improve the competitiveness of the places where they work and contribute to foster national development. Consequently, ESAN's EE curriculum includes courses that develop interpersonal

skills and personal attributes that enable learners to deal effectively with periods of change and crisis in organizations.

ESAN has incorporated a methodology to promote *continuous learning* to closely meet needs of program participants within a wide range of age. Recent program graduates are managers and business executives with over 20 years of experience. Focusing teaching on continuous learning enhances new knowledge and skills to be applied throughout life, not only in the workplace but also in everyday life. Thus, critical thinking, analytical and synthesizing skills, and deductive reasoning are essential in all situations as much as developing social skills and ethics that facilitate integration of individual work teams with companies' missions (Gil and Padilla, 2009).

EE programs offered by DPI are shorter than a master's degree program and can be easily adjusted to the participant's schedule to balance time spent at work, school, and with family. Programs include a wide variety of topics to meet specific needs of diverse organizations. Clients who contract ESAN as a training provider meet with DPI program coordinators to discuss specific institutional interests and participants' learning objectives. DPI organizes certifications, seminars, courses, conferences, workshops, and a variety of programs to meet diverse clients' needs and expectations. The following programs have been originally designed by ESAN and remained for years in the market: *Programs for Advanced Business Management* (in Spanish – Programas Avanzados de Dirección de Empresas, PADE) and *High Specialization Programs* (in Spanish – Programas de Alta Especialización, PAE), both of which are detailed below.

PADE

Programs for Advanced Business Management or PADE offers specialized programs for public management and associations in management, finance, marketing, operations and logistics, and information technology. Programs last 11 months and a central characteristic is renovation of curricular content in accordance with demands in the business environment and management trends in Latin America and the world.

The emphasis of PADE is to train participants who are able to immediately apply acquired learning, which DPI faculty assess based on effective teamwork and ability to develop an integral vision to evaluate outcomes of organization processes identifying areas of improvement necessary to secure new business projects. PADE's admission process promotes selection of executives with different careers and work experiences in every program.

PAE

High Specialization Programs or PAE offers shorter programs than PADE held on weekends. Activities focus on specific topics in different fields aiming

to help executives develop conceptual, methodological, and technological skills. PAE activities have the highest demand in Peruvian provinces where ESAN operates. PAE's business administration is the program with the highest demand focused on the development of personal and social skills applied to management, communications, teamwork, planning, and organizing an impact performance project as a business presentation. A goal of PAE is to improve leadership responsibilities to become effective agents of change in organizations.

ESAN's EE alignment with the human centered approach

Participants in ESAN's EE programs are informed that teaching faculty will act as mediators to facilitate learning, help learners acquire knowledge, gain experience, and drill social skills needed to become active learners. ESAN faculty does not deliver traditional theoretical lectures, where learners' participation is passive and contribution is minimal. Instead, as facilitators, professors build on previous knowledge and experiences to expand participant's learning.

ESAN's EE meets specific aims of humanistic approach promoting participants to assume a major role in learning using assignments that engage them cognitively and emotionally. It also facilitates participants' learning in collaborative decisions, respecting opinions of others, and how to contribute with other team members with a positive attitude, active listening, and empathy. The basic pillars of the teaching-learning process of ESAN's EE programs of a true humanistic approach can be summarized as *team building for collaborative learning* and the *creation of learning communities*.

Team building

Teamwork is a core activity in all EE programs at ESAN. Team building methods vary and teams can be built spontaneously or randomly. Professors also organize teams to achieve specific objectives selecting participants based on professional background, work experience, and industry, and to form heterogeneous groups in age, gender, nationality, or birthplace.

Learning teams include five participants, considered an ideal number to optimize learning (Gonzáles and Díaz, 2005). Each EE program includes a maximum of eight teams, based on collected evidence that a larger number of teams delays class activities and leads to repeated information. Each EE participant receives a list with the names of classmates, and a corporate ESAN e-mail is assigned to each participant to expedite academic coordination of course information, materials, and activities.

In the introductory session faculty conduct an assessment of participants' expectations about training and what they expect to learn from people in their team and the program, a practice that makes participants aware from

the beginning about the importance of interpersonal and social skills that are essential for human development.

The professors clearly establish the rules of participation on the learning groups so that every member can contribute ideas and receive and give respect for the ideas of other participants. Faculty need to guarantee that all the members in the learning teams understand tasks and activities and know how to present the information effectively using conceptual maps, diagrams, or brief presentations (Bernaza and Lee, 2005).

Developing teamwork skills

Participant teams focus on rapid application of theoretical class contents. Teams are advised to facilitate active engagement and promote participatory leadership, where different participants lead tasks based in their areas of expertise. Positive leadership is effective, except when a participant is unconcerned with collective learning and mainly worries about time or deadlines, because these behaviors have academic and grading consequences.

Complex exercises that can be addressed from different angles benefit from the contribution of all the team members (Gonzáles and Díaz, 2005). ESAN's EE programs promote interaction and exchange between participants to facilitate adjustment and improvement through flexible thinking and multidisciplinary contributions. Team exercises may include analysis of a short video of a current topic, role playing, decision making, problem solving, new organization techniques, business processes' assessments, and business negotiation strategies. Team debates seek to expose conflictive situations that arise from divergent points of view. This is particularly important in Peru, given the numerous political ideologies and economic situations that polarize citizens' opinions and professionals' too.

An industry that involves different stakeholders and a diversity of factors (such as environmental, public health, economic) is mining in Peru, where social conflicts, labor rights, environmental issues, and health problems of workers and communities become conflicting issues. To deal with these potential conflict issues in ESAN's practical sessions company performance, government policies, and the legitimacy of stakeholders' claims are discussed. ESAN follows the same line with other situations of national interest, focusing on companies' performance where ethical negotiation is a core skill every business person needs to learn. The purpose of the debate, as a teaching strategy, is that participants can confront work ethics, social responsibility, and values in corporate behavior, question and discuss opposite points of view, learn to hold arguments, identify their talents and areas of improvement, and above all, respect the ideas of others as a necessary condition to reach agreements and consensus through negotiation.

Faculty-directed team activities induce participants to assess their learning process while they are solving cases so they are aware of the models, concepts, and connections reached in class to integrate them and improve

their work over time. It is valuable when this mindset is transferred to working life because it implies making conscious decisions about learning from experience (Monte and Jones, 2002).

Collaborative learning

Collaborative learning is reached in team discussion of a problem which, due to its nature, does not have a unique solution. The analysis of different points of view by participants to reach consensus on the best possible solution is key in this type of learning. The professor's role is to open the discussion, question participants, and promote a discussion based on previous knowledge and experiences of the participants to support the arguments (Gonzáles and Díaz, 2005). The goal of this type of learning is to help participants be aware of different sources of knowledge, analyze opinions from different strands of thinking, and understand changes in management practices over time in order to reinforce management skills.

Collaborative learning helps participants assess their level of knowledge in comparison with team members and within the class, and with the knowledge community, represented by the professor (Gonzáles and Díaz, 2005, p. 31). It is a key in ethical reflection regarding aspects of participants' working lives and behavior of the organization where they work. In discussions of ethical nature it is far more complex to reach consensus, so ethical issues that affect the growth of Peru are discussed, including lack of formal structure in national companies, disrespect for labor rights, and unclear policies of social responsibility. Discussion of ethical dilemmas is part of the class dynamics at ESAN to help executives improve values and ethics in their organizations.

ESAN promotes the following collaborative learning goals focused on human development: the development of the participant's responsibility regarding their learning team; effective communication and active listening, acceptance of peers' criticisms and differences as benefits not as constraints; and strengthening self-confidence and awareness of own talents, strengths, and limitations (Bernaza and Lee, 2005). Mutual support helps participants acquire new knowledge with greater strength than in isolation and can be easily transferred to organizations to deal with organization challenges and stakeholders' relationships where respect and ethics in decision making should prevail. This leads to the attainment of collective goals and positive interdependence (Bernaza and Lee, 2005).

Learning communities

A learning community integrates everyone who influences a learning process, directly or indirectly. Therefore, this is a collective and social activity that occurs in the classroom, but also in moments of relaxation and in virtual environments. A learning community allows learners to interact with

a diversity of people from different cultures, languages, and beliefs, and it works as a portrait of society (Diez-Palomar and Flecha, 2010).

Family is an important part of ESAN's learning communities. So ESAN invites the families of PADE's participants to the opening activities to inform them about the demands and responsibilities to provide support and reassurance during the program. Involvement is such that in the closing ceremony a representative of the participants' family gives a speech about their experience in supporting ESAN's EE experience.

Learning communities are expedited with use of technology. Virtual networks allow sharing large volumes of information and online interactions at any time using emails, chats, Skype, and other social networks. ESAN promotes these types of connections because executives, managers, and directors have demanding work schedules, travel frequently, and have limited time to meet outside classroom sessions. Virtual networks as non-formal learning processes are possible among team members who work on assignments at their own pace and, simultaneously, develop social skills and a sense of belonging in a learning community.

According to Sloep and Berlanga (2011), university learning networks should incorporate a profile service, navigation functions, and help desk. From a human centered approach, profile creation is an important activity in EE because learners can participate in the community, make contacts, share resources, and contribute with their knowledge and experience.

ESAN has a virtual online platform for learning networks. This environment enables participants to import, download, and edit documents online, and participate in forums and chat sessions with their teams, professors, and academic assistants. Professors use the platform to post course syllabus and suggested readings, give advice to students, keep track of class attendance, post bulletin boards, post examination scores, and post evolution of participants' performance. Participants can submit assignments, control of schedules, deadlines for assignments, examinations, online quizzes, as well as doubts and suggestions.

Human centered teaching strategies in ESAN's EE programs

ESAN uses the following teaching strategies to align its human centered approach:

Reading analysis

Reading of material in preparation for class discussions is essential in EE programs and it is also used as a learning assessment method. The type of reading material includes book chapters, working papers, scientific articles, company statements, news from different contexts, and authors' backgrounds. Professors administer written tests to assess students' learning but more likely participants must provide integrative constructs based

on assigned literature to show level of understanding and issues linked to personal development skills, such as communication effectiveness, responsibility, commitment, and autonomy, among others.

Case method

The case method is used in all EE programs at ESAN since the institution was founded. Different types of cases are used and solutions are standardized by experts' consensus. The teams discuss arguments and evaluate different alternatives that may lead to solutions (Gonzáles and Díaz, 2005). ESAN commonly uses cases with alternatives and not a unique approach to solve the problem or conflict to stimulate collaboration. This is a multilevel learning strategy that fits the human centered paradigm with the goal to develop social skills, such as active listening, effective communication, and teamwork. Learners can solve the case using different resources to make decisions and experience active learning by testing and comparing different approaches to problem solving (De Miguel, 2005).

The class instructor is responsible to present the case and introduce the participants to the discussion topic. Participants read the case individually and later teams share an overview of the problem and its context, and the teacher dispels doubts and clarifies concepts throughout the process. To move forward to detailed analysis the teams discuss possible alternatives to solve the case and then write the conclusions. The process involves arguments on analysis, organization of team member responsibilities, and reflection on the decision-making process. When teams present solutions, the instructor asks questions and offers constructive criticism, identifying potential conflict and avoiding any negative judgment about the participants' points of view as part of the learning process.

Instructors have to maintain clear organization during the case analysis process, keep track of teams' interventions, and avoid judging before the best solution is reached, keeping constantly in mind the educational purpose and the concepts and skills participants need to develop, identifying strengths and areas of improvement in discussions, and ensuring that strategies are respected to help participants reach conclusions that improve interpersonal relationships.

Field research

ESAN's EE programs assign teams to work in field research related to course content. The most common practice is analysis of the company operations, from the mission and vision to human management and financial results. This exercise involves interviewing, designing surveys, checking documents, and other activities that develop a foundation to make an effective proposal for business improvement.

Another practice is to prepare a business plan. To study a field is important because it involves teams in market research, negotiations with providers,

communications with potential clients and associates, and creation and evaluation of new business strategies.

Field research develops skills linked with the human centered paradigm because it facilitates team members to reach agreement regarding methods of doing business guided by ethical and social responsible ways, respecting human dignity and growth.

Human centered approach in curricular content and pedagogical practice

Curricular design emphasizes that, aside from Human Resource Management courses, other courses offered by ESAN must develop objectives and contents based on a humanist view of organizations. This is the case of Management and Organization, a core course in ESAN's EE. The course syllabus includes pedagogical and technical goals and these goals relate to the human centered approach:

- Developing participants' skills linking management with stakeholders' satisfaction under the view of modern management
- Provide participants with practical knowledge of modern management approaches to create and keep an environment where individuals, working together, can achieve, with efficacy and efficiency, shared goals

The first topic in the course syllabus is Current Challenges in Management focused in the analysis of social, economic, political, technological, ecological, and geographical factors that affect companies. The course starts with a socialization workshop where participants and faculty introduce themselves and communicate their expectations about course outcome and expected goals to be achieved. The professor invites a psychologist to facilitate group dynamics that allow learners to get to know each other better.

Participants have to prepare two or three readings that are included in the syllabus. The reading material is delivered before classes start and is also posted on ESAN's virtual website.

Learning assessment in the course includes reading assignments where the professor asks questions about central ideas to stimulate further inquiry, creativity, and self-reflection, in addition to the author's arguments (Mento and Jones, 2002).

The professor activates the learning process presenting class topics using diverse teaching strategies, materials, and multimedia. The professor summarizes class conclusions of collaborative analysis to provide closure that allows learners to assess their learning (Mento and Jones, 2002).

In practice sessions teams work together on issues related to the humanistic management approach and several activities are used to practice interpersonal skills in real situations, case studies, and exercises. The professor, as facilitator, ensures that team members are learning. Learners must present

a written assignment and hold a discussion including solutions to demonstrate participatory learning (Mento and Jones, 2002) and development of other skills, such as the ability to solve spontaneous questions from other team members and the capacity to capture the attention of classmates.

In this course, teams have to present a final project, called "integrated assignment", which involves analysis of all management processes of a company and is developed by integrating the following classes: organizational culture, corporate strategy, organizational configurations, human management, and organizational control. Each team has to study an operating business (which can be in their own companies, the companies participants work for, or a company seeking professional advice) to research, conduct interviews with managers in all areas of the company, analyze organizational culture, review financial results related to corporate strategy to demonstrate how participants process data, design a balanced scorecard, or make recommendations to improve the company strategy. The submission of the integrated assignment is mandatory in PADE program to get a diploma, and the assignment must be defended as an academic thesis.

Learning engagement and professors' quality assessment

Learning engagement is structured to the participants' goals (Bernaza and Lee, 2005). Executives attend ESAN's EE programs not only to comply with mandates of their companies but because they have interest to improve employability. If participants pay for the program they are highly motivated to recover their investment getting good results and positive feedback, including a promotion, and improvement in the workplaces.

To achieve learners' commitment in management subjects ESAN faculty *brings the environment into the classroom* (Finn, 2010), creating different environmental situations that affect national and international companies, so participants can easily associate course contents with the reality in organizations where they work.

To promote the learners' engagement, the following instructional approaches are deployed: *problem-based learning* and *project-based learning*.

In *problem-based learning*, the approach is through the search for solution to a problem where there is no predetermined solution. This requires critical thinking, reflection, and collaboration. This type of learning implies that students are responsible for their involvement and learning. Professors serve as facilitators of learning rather than information transmitters (Finn, 2010, p. 3).

Project-based learning is aimed to develop a range of skills, including ability to plan work activities, communication, and negotiation regarding tasks the participants have to complete (Finn, 2010). Presenting a final product as a result of this type of learning secures that effective engagement is reached.

Finally, to promote learning engagement a supportive environment is necessary. So ESAN provides administrative support, program coordinators, and academic assistants, who guide participants in the use of resources and technology available at ESAN.

To attain collaborative learning and learning engagement, professors use different strategies, including assignments and integrative questioning that involves all team members. If one participant is unable to provide an answer the professors may reduce the grade of all the team members, showing lack of knowledge on the assignment and/or learning commitment (Pease, 2011).

Class facilitators can also use observation records of teamwork dynamics as an indicator of team members' commitment. Observations include how the participants discuss and plan to do the job, the level of involvement in discussions, if there is balanced participation to do the work, how team members argue when conflicts arise to solve problems assertively, the working environment, and if work is equally divided.

Participants are allowed to assess performance of teammates with *co-assessment* using criteria proposed by the instructor to obtain the final grade, showing honesty and objectivity in all organizational processes. Some criteria may be: respect for group rules and different points of view, ability to contribute ideas and solutions, punctuality in attendance to group meetings, and delivery of tasks for which the participant is responsible (Pease, 2011).

Another alternative is to use a self-assessment. To prevent participants from assigning higher scores than they deserve, professors use the same evaluation criteria to compare self-assessment. If results vary significantly professors ask the participant to explain differences in perceptions with the goal to clarify differences, reflect over attitudes, and learning commitment. At the end of this meeting an agreement must be reached between the instructor and the participant to give an objective grade.

The criteria for faculty *quality assessment* are that all faculty members who teach in ESAN's EE programs must have research and teaching experience in academia in addition to professional practice, which is imperative to help participants solve real problems in organizations.

Participants in ESAN's programs systematically assess instructors' performance when courses are completed. This assessment consists of a survey with a rating scale to assess instructors' performance including perceived knowledge of course subjects and teaching skills and attitudes. Professors' evaluations are anonymous to ensure students' honesty. Professors get overall results via email. Academic coordinators analyze results and meet with professors to provide appropriate feedback and recommend strategies to improve their work.

Professors are asked to be self-critical of their work and use some criteria to assess teaching effectiveness of cases and exercises in class, especially when they design the material. This means recognizing if the material stimulates students' interest and ability to relate prior knowledge with concepts

covered in class. In addition practical activities should lead to insights and new ideas to stimulate problem-solving capacity using creativity (Mento and Jones, 2002).

Conclusions

ESAN's EE proves to be effective based on a diversity of curricular content, teaching strategies, and a multidisciplinary faculty body able to help a pool of diverse program participants. Program design includes current matters of national and international interest, environmental and stakeholders' issues, and how to manage with ethical and social responsibility aligned to a human centered approach.

Practical applications of curricular contents of ESAN's EE programs are highly valued by directors and managers, and executives from corporations of all sizes in all industries in the economy and program participants come from businesses, entities in the public sector, and associations. EE programs emphasize a practical orientation to develop shared goals where participants can experience real empowerment working together to succeed.

ESAN deploys principles of collaborative learning, creation of learning communities and networks in teaching methods, and strategies aligned with the human centered paradigm. Course material, case discussions, and field research show the importance of heterogeneous teams, strengthen interpersonal or social skills with active listening, effective communications, participatory leadership, personal and social responsibility, empathy, business negotiation, and respecting individual differences and diverse points of view.

Notes

1. America Economia special issue in Executive Education in Spanish November 6, 2012. Available at: http://www.iae.edu.ar/iaehoy/Documents/06_11_2012_RKEducacionEjecutiva_AmericaEconomia.pdf.
2. The human centered EE is a paradigm in education that refers the fullest development of the capacities of each individual and the respect and humanistic regard for all members of humankind.

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