

Are We Really Having An Impact? A Comprehensive Approach to Assessing Improvements in Critical Thinking in an MBA Program

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Abstract

While executives and faculty recognize the importance of critical thinking skills for business graduates, according to Datar, Garvin and Cullen (2010) it is often debated whether students come into MBA programs with these skills, and if not, whether such skills can be effectively taught. This paper describes our experience in measuring the improvement of critical thinking skills in the MBA program at a well known Business School in Central America. Recognizing the intricate nature of the learning process using the case method, we proceeded to apply three different approaches to gauge its impact on student problem-solving ability: the application of standardized tests in critical thinking skills to incoming students and, later on, to those same students just before completing the program; a pre- post- comparison of written case analyses; and the use of the capstone “Management Consulting Practice” experience as a course-embedded assessment instrument to evaluate critical thinking skills in a real-world context. From this experience we concluded two things: first, the MBA program does have an impact, not only improving students’ critical thinking skills, but also leveling the playing field in this area with respect to their U.S. counterparts. Second, assessing improvement in critical thinking skills is a complex task calling for a multi-measures approach. In particular if the intent is to develop corrective measures. When such an approach is applied, the quality of information for improvement is enhanced and a more complex informing network emerges, including faculty from diverse functional areas who do not normally interact.

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