

# TALKING POINTS

## Business Schools on an Innovation Mission

### Talking Points For Use With the Business Community

Innovation is now viewed as our best hope to directly address the world's social challenges, and to fuel the engine of economic prosperity. While there is widespread recognition of the crucial role of innovation, the concept still remains deceptively complex and often misunderstood. The *Business Schools on an Innovation Mission* report explores this complexity, and provides insights into the role of business schools throughout this process.

With the release of this report, AACSB International has launched an effort to encourage business schools to elevate the concept of innovation as a central component of their mission, and to consider how they can foster more innovation in society.

This document is designed to help business school leaders better communicate the core concepts of the report to leaders within the business community. It describes key points, summarizes a framework for understanding the role of managers in innovation, lists what business schools should do, and what the business leaders should do to support them in their efforts.

### The Intersection of Innovation and Business Schools—Salient Points

To fully appreciate the role of business schools in supporting innovation in society, we must understand and think differently about the relationship between innovation and business schools:

- Innovation is not just about profit and competitiveness, it is essential for global prosperity and sustainability. *Business schools play a vital societal function by supporting innovation in the communities they serve.*
- Innovation is applicable to organizations of any type, profit-seeking, not-for-profit, and governmental. *The real purposes of business schools extends well beyond serving profit-seeking firms and salary-minded individuals.*
- Innovation and entrepreneurship are not equivalent, but are deeply and inextricably linked. *Business schools' support for innovation involves more than training entrepreneurs and fostering new business creation.*
- Innovation involves both technological and managerial aspects working together in balance. *Business schools operate at the intersection of many disciplines and perspectives, not just traditional business school subjects.*
- Innovation systems and needs vary widely across communities. *Business schools define their innovation activities to both fit and shape the innovation systems of the communities they serve. Different schools focus on different needs and the diversity of business schools magnifies their ability to positively impact society.*

## The Role of Managers in Innovation

Management talent is an essential component to innovation, and to the innovation process because managers:

- Are key leaders and decision makers in the innovation ecosystem (*managers as leaders and decision makers*).
- Possess specific knowledge which is essential to the implementation of breakthrough ideas (*managers as knowledge assets*).
- Build the capacity for organizations to innovate (*managers as organizational architects*).
- Invent new business models and tools necessary for success (*managers as inventors*).
- Facilitate and engage in boundary-spanning networks that increase innovation potential (*managers as bridges*).

## The Role of Business Schools in Fostering Innovation

Every business school should support innovation, but each should find its own distinct way of doing so. The following items are suggestions on what business schools can do to foster more innovation in society:

- Blend innovation with other themes, such as sustainability, vertical markets (e.g. health care, education), leadership, and ethics. Schools should not be afraid to combine themes to create new and valuable niches.
- Do even ordinary things differently. For example, one way to support innovation is to break down functional silos and disciplinary barriers in learning and research.
- Focus on developing skills to support innovation, not just on knowledge transfer. Think deeply about how best to develop these skills.
- Give special consideration to non-degree executive education. These programs allow for more current, research-driven content consistent with innovation to influence management practice quickly.
- Convene the key players in relevant innovation systems. They produce network benefits that boost creativity and facilitate the diffusion of innovation.
- Leverage alumni networks to drive innovation. Alumni organizations can provide the networks and trust to make innovation more likely.
- Bear in mind that research does not have to be revolutionary to have an impact on innovation. Innovation also benefits from the testing, codification, and synthesis of what works and what does not work.
- Explore partnerships with other academic units to develop outreach activities that most directly impact the innovation capacity of relevant communities.

## What Can Business Leaders Do?

As catalysts for innovation, business schools are firmly grounded in both academic and practice communities. Business schools could not impact innovation without significant engagement and support from the business, non-profit, government organizations in the communities they serve.

There is much that the business and governmental community can do to help business schools become stronger drivers for innovation:

- Expect more from business schools. *Recognize that business schools do more than produce the graduates your organization hires.*
- Advocate for the innovation role of business schools. *Help the public and policy makers to understand that managerial talent is just as important for innovation as scientists and engineers.*
- Get involved with business schools and take advantage of their diversity. *Advise schools about management development needs, make information and employees available to support vital research, and actively contribute to business school networks.*
- Promote integrative and interdisciplinary strategies. *Bring together schools of business with other professional schools, such as engineering, medicine, and public policy, to increase innovation potential in your organization and in the schools.*

## About AACSB International

The following provides a brief description of AACSB International:

AACSB International (The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business), founded in 1916, is a membership association of almost 1,200 educational institutions, businesses and other organizations in 74 countries and territories. AACSB's mission is to advance quality management education worldwide through accreditation and thought leadership. AACSB accreditation is the mark of quality distinction most widely sought after by business schools—less than 5% worldwide have earned the achievement. As the leading membership and accrediting body for institutions offering undergraduate, master's and doctorate degrees in business and accounting, the association also conducts a wide array of conferences and seminar programs at locations throughout the world. AACSB's global headquarters is located in Tampa, Florida, USA, and its Asia headquarters is located in Singapore. For more information, please visit [www.aacsb.edu](http://www.aacsb.edu).