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RECLAIMING QUALITY IN GRADUATE MANAGEMENT EDUCATION

Robert S. Rubin
DePaul University

Frederick P. Morgeson
Michigan State University

Key Topics Covered in This Chapter

- Overview of existing quality systems and their impact on business school stakeholders
- Description of research that offers a new comprehensive model of graduate management education program quality
- Discussion of the central advantages of adopting a new quality rating system as an alternative to current quality measures
- Recommendations for using the quality model to improve program quality within and across business schools

Despite substantial criticism since the turn of the century and the economic downturn that started in 2008, graduate management programs continue to thrive. They represent the central, most profitable, and most visible offerings in a business school's portfolio of programs. Indeed, as of 2009, master's degrees in business accounted for approximately 26 percent of the total master's degrees conferred, second only to degrees in education

(U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Given this success, business schools now offer a broad range of degree "products," including specialized MBA degrees, joint degrees, and highly specific master's programs (Dierdorff & Rubin, 2009). As programs have proliferated and student choices have expanded, both institutions and consumers have shown an increased desire to evaluate and differentiate graduate management programs in terms of their overall educational or academic quality (Basken, 2012; Dierdorff & Rubin, 2009). This business school trend follows a broader movement in higher education in which institutional stakeholders (such as students, recruiters, and government) increasingly demand evidence of educational achievement and program quality (Basken, 2012; Cabrera, Colbeck, & Terenzini, 2001). That is, stakeholders peering into the ivory tower appear less willing to rely on an institution's vague promises of academic quality or proxy measures of success, such as graduation rates.

For example, in a controversial 2006 report commissioned by U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings, the Commission on the Future of Higher Education asserted that "there is inadequate transparency and accountability for measuring institutional performance, which is more and more necessary to maintaining public trust in higher education" (U.S. Department of Education, 2006, p. 13). In response, recent reports have reaffirmed a movement toward one of the commission's key recommendations, namely, to create a national college database that would track student learning and outcomes and allow for institution-by-institution comparisons (National Research Council, 2012). As educational costs continue to soar, stakeholders (including the government) are placing more pressure on institutions to prove that they fulfill their central educational missions.

This movement toward increased accountability for quality appears to be particularly important for external stakeholders, such as students and employers, who are the primary consumers of data about business schools' academic quality. As these business school outsiders make enrollment or recruitment decisions, they draw, logically enough, upon existing signals of educational quality—indicators that are often imperfect or incomplete (Spence, 1973). Thus, students, recruiters, and others seek out information they believe will provide the most credible signals about quality to inform their education-related decisions. Indeed, years of institutional research by GMAC have consistently found that program quality and reputation are among the most important, if not *the* most important, factors driving application decisions (GMAC, 2012b). Similarly, employers routinely cite student quality as the most important factor behind deciding to actively recruit from a given institution (GMAC, 2012a). Not surprisingly, then, demand for credible program quality data remains high (Rubin, Dierdorff, & Morgeson, 2011).

For numerous reasons, however, determining the credibility of information about program quality is complicated. As decades of educational research have demonstrated, consensus remains elusive. Studies assessing graduate program quality are routinely met with criticism and "have been a matter of controversy since the first one was published in 1925" (DiBiasio, Girves, & Poland, 1982, p. 99). Indeed, regardless of the approach, most studies of academic quality have serious limitations (Tan, 1992). For example, one approach has been to use "objective" indicators, such as faculty research productivity, financial resources, library holdings, and student selectivity, as measures of quality. This approach has been criticized for its inability to capture interrelationships among the quality indicators (that is, the indicators' relative importance).

Another approach falls under the general rubric of reputational studies, which focus heavily on judgments of alumni and external raters (such as employers, deans, and so on). This approach suffers from biases related to the inherent problems involved in asking alumni to rate their own schools and external raters to judge programs with which they are wholly unfamiliar (Lawrence & Green, 1980).

Still another, the "quantitative correlate" approach, seeks to understand quality by examining factors that relate to quality; it often uses reputation as the starting point, thereby infusing the aforementioned biases. For example, researchers might study the top twenty-five schools and try to understand factors they have in common.

The concept of quality is multidimensional and often oversimplified. A comprehensive understanding of quality requires, at a minimum, a full examination of both educational processes and outcomes (UNICEF, 2000). For example, the notion of academic quality represents elements of both merit and worth, whereby level of attainment and utility of such attainment are to be considered simultaneously (Kuh, 1981).

Even existing quality frameworks rarely distinguish between relative and absolute approaches to evaluation (UNESCO, 2005). Thus, although some approaches capture quality against a standard (such as accreditation), other approaches measure quality by comparing institutions (for example, through media rankings) without regard to a particular level of achievement. Overall, a fair reading of the academic quality literature might conclude that ". . . in the absence of a theory of quality, it has been difficult to select the best-suited variables or combinations of variables for measuring quality" (Tan, 1992, p. 206).

Not surprisingly, then, the existing literature consists of a disparate collection of studies that lacks comprehensive or integrative frameworks. Curiously, even though they are often at odds, both the academic literature and existing quality systems, such as media rankings, have been largely concerned with how to *measure* quality rather than clearly defining the meaning or nature of quality. Yet, fundamental to any valid measurement system is a full explanation of the concepts being evaluated.

In this chapter, we advance the conversation about quality by suggesting that current systems are imperfect measures of graduate school quality. In using the term *quality* we simply mean the extent to which a product or service manages to fulfill the

purposes it was designed for (Certo & Certo, 2009). We first offer a brief review of the two most-consumed signals of quality: accreditation and media rankings. From an understanding of their limitations, we then develop a more comprehensive and robust conceptualization of graduate management education quality. This conceptualization, which depicts management education quality as highly multidimensional, leads to a recommendation for developing a rating system as the only legitimate way to index graduate management quality. Before we get to that recommendation, however, we first set the stage, because current quality systems have become part of the fabric of business schools' existence.

Current Conceptualizations of Program Quality

Although the most resourceful stakeholders may find some useful information in the academic literature or by scouring individual program websites, it appears that most people are looking for heuristics they can use to more easily signal quality and compare one institution to another. Here we discuss two that are widely used.

Accreditation

Two prominent accreditation bodies are AACSB International (the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business) or EQUIS (the European Quality Improvement System). By obtaining accreditation from AACSB, for example, institutions attempt to send a clear message that their programs uphold the highest level of educational quality against an absolute set of standards and values. Accordingly, the preamble of the AACSB accreditation guidelines notes unequivocally that "accreditation focuses on the quality of education. Standards set demanding but realistic thresholds, challenge educators to pursue continuous improvement, and guide improvement in education programs"

(AACSB, 2010, p. 3). Given accreditation's commitment to quality and stated intentions, it is not surprising that accreditation is one of a few areas prospective students cite as being important to their enrollment decisions (GMAC, 2008). Further, AACSB accreditation is usually an additional endorsement beyond a university-wide accreditation (by, for example, the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools). As a result, institutions holding this additional seal of approval ought to stand out as being of higher quality than those who haven't received it.

Nevertheless, since 1996, the number of institutions attaining AACSB accreditation has grown by more than 75 percent to 570 as of 2009 (Francisco, Noland, & Sinclair, 2008) and to more than 640 schools as of late 2012. One reason for this growth is the reliance on the "mission-driven" philosophy that encourages "diverse paths to achieving high quality in management education" (AACSB, 2010, p. 4). By affording programs this diversity, AACSB allows for substantial variation in requirements and student experiences across MBA programs. Practically speaking, this means that curriculum decisions regarding required coursework are not predetermined by the accrediting body but rather seen as part of a broader "business model" for accomplishing a school's primary stated mission.

In this sense, AACSB does not certify that the MBA, for example, carries a highly particular set of requirements but rather that the manner in which business schools pursue their variations on the degree is accomplished within certain quality parameters. As a measure of quality, then, AACSB accreditation verifies a baseline standard beyond which it's likely that substantial variation in program quality exists among accredited institutions. Despite such a seal of approval, however, few stakeholders are willing to treat all of the roughly 640 AACSB-accredited business schools as equivalent in terms of overall program quality. As such, because accreditation represents quality in an absolute and not relative sense, it rarely provides

enough information to enable individuals to differentiate among business schools.

Media Rankings

Perhaps the most accessible signal of educational quality is communicated not by institutional oversight bodies but by media rankings (for example, *Bloomberg Businessweek*). Unlike accreditation, media rankings provide signals about *relative* levels of quality, with higher rankings intended to represent higher levels of quality compared with lower rankings. Since the 1990s a critical examination has taken place in the literature about the value of media rankings as indicators of educational quality (Elsbach & Kramer, 1996; Morgeson & Nahrgang, 2008; Safon, 2007; Trank & Rynes, 2003; Zemsky, 2008). Regardless of one's opinion of rankings, two conclusions are not in dispute:

1. *Rankings matter.* Rankings are clearly very important to a wide range of business school stakeholders. Ranked schools (and their students) enjoy significant advantages, including increased recruitment and placement activities, enhanced alumni donations, and increases in applicant quality (Argenti, 2000; Corley & Gioia, 2000; Gioia & Corley, 2002). Such advantages are so highly sought that sustaining their positions (or attempting to break into rankings) is thought to "dominate business schools' thought and action" (Gioia & Corley, 2002, p. 108) and focus schools on initiatives to "look good" rather than "be good" (Policano, 2005).

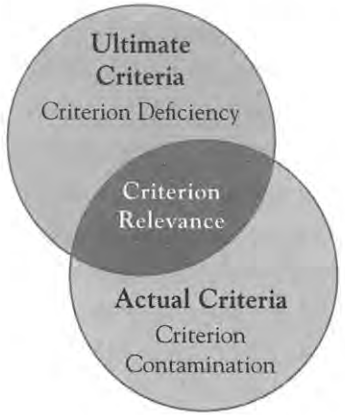
2. *Rankings are here to stay.* Despite a flurry of criticism, business school stakeholders continue to look to rankings to differentiate program quality; as a result, there are at least four major ranking publications (DeNisi, 2008). One of the purported advantages of media rankings reflects the conventional wisdom that business schools cannot be trusted to provide credible or objective information about quality; they

require an independent or objective third party. Less known to the general public, however, are the numerous studies suggesting that rankings are anything but objective indicators. Instead, they represent a relatively narrow focus on institutional reputation rather than a broad assessment of academic quality, even in the most liberal sense (Morgeson & Nahrgang, 2008). Thus, although it is clear that not all business school administrators embrace media rankings (Policano, 2005; Zemsky, 2008), rankings have created a system in which "playing the rankings game" is seen as a requirement (Corley & Gioia, 2000). Given the public's thirst for such information and business schools' continuing participation, media rankings are unlikely to go away anytime soon.

What If We Focus on Quality Instead?

There is an undeniable sense that across all areas of higher education, building a comprehensive understanding of academic quality has been difficult, unproductive, and largely dictated by external bodies that can maintain an "air of objectivity." One central reason for this failure to comprehensively define and measure quality is the sheer complexity of such an undertaking. Indeed, at the heart of this challenge is an issue endemic to all existing quality measurement systems, namely, that they suffer from the so-called "criterion problem" (Thorndike, 1949).[1] The criterion problem refers specifically to the inherent "difficulties involved in the process of conceptualizing and measuring" concepts or performance indicators that are clearly multidimensional in nature (Austin & Villanova, 1992, p. 836). For example, anyone who has ever had his or her job performance evaluated by a manager or supervisor knows how common it is for one's boss to overemphasize certain performance factors while ignoring or underemphasizing others. Thus, the real challenge in accurately capturing a multidimensional concept such as quality is

Figure 8.1 The Criterion Problem



Source: Thorndike, 1949.

that it is an "ultimate criterion," representing an abstraction that can only be approximated because it represents everything that ultimately defines quality.

Because the ultimate criterion is entirely conceptual, one must develop actual criteria to approximate the ultimate criterion. For example, nearly all educational institutions rely heavily on grades, which represent an approximation of individual learning. Ideally, one hopes the actual criteria overlap significantly with the ultimate criterion (resulting in "criterion relevance"). But often criteria are deficient or contaminated (see Figure 8.1; Thorndike, 1949). *Criterion deficiency* refers to a failure to include important criteria that are present in the ultimate criterion; an example of criterion deficiency is rankings that omit measures of student learning. *Criterion contamination* occurs when criteria are included but are largely unrelated to the ultimate criterion, such as the extent to which a school is located in an urban or rural area. Both deficiency and contamination are problematic because together they distort a full understanding of the ultimate criterion (Brogden & Taylor, 1950). Simply put, "if we are measuring the wrong thing, it will not help us to measure it better" (Wherry,

1957, p. 5). It is in this spirit that we set about to systematically define what constitutes MBA program quality, assess the content of that quality model, and refine it.

More specifically, given the high stakes involved in MBA programs (that is, university profit centers, return on investment expectations of students, primary recruiting for employers, and so forth), we argue that it is time for academics to move from simply criticizing existing systems to creating meaningful alternatives. One meaningful and viable alternative to existing quality representations would be to develop a *rating system* of MBA program quality. We are certainly not the first to suggest that moving to ratings would broadly improve the measurement and objective reality of program quality. For example, Morgeson and Nahrgang (2008) noted that adopting a rating system would "make the differences explicit to consumers. . . . Schools that are not significantly different in terms of ratings can then be treated as functionally equivalent in terms of quality" (p. 39). Similarly, in a report from an AACSB task force on issues in graduate management education, the committee's first of four recommendations is to "label MBA rankings accurately" and "convert from rankings to ratings" (AACSB, 2005, p. 10); the report notes that "deans have always believed that rankings measures do not accurately reflect quality of business education" (AACSB, 2005, p. 7). Further, robust rating systems are rather common in education (in, for example, Carnegie classifications) and throughout industry (as in, for example, Standard & Poor's credit-worthiness ratings and *Consumer Reports*' ratings of product quality). This suggests that stakeholders are not averse to rating systems and would likely embrace such an approach.

Although there is ubiquitous agreement among academics that ratings are superior to rankings, far less agreement exists about what criteria such ratings might use. Put simply, creating any meaningful new system first requires a complete understanding of the essential criteria that constitute academic quality in MBA programs. To date, no one has undertaken such an expansive view of MBA program quality, and it remains unspecified in the literature.

Our research offers a comprehensive consideration of MBA quality that can serve as the foundation for such a system. We chose to focus on MBA program quality because of the substantial work that has examined MBA programs already and because they are typically the most prominent business school programs. Given the focus of most graduate management education programs in schools of business, however, the resulting model is likely to be highly generalizable across programs.

Building and Validating a Quality Content Model

Following the best practices in criterion development efforts that the social sciences commonly use, we conducted the research across three broad phases. We summarize our research method in Exhibit 8.1. (For more details, see Rubin, Dierdorff, and Morgeson, 2011). The results of the first phase of research produced an initial content model that includes twenty-four dimensions organized into nine broader meta-dimensions. The number of

Exhibit 8.1 Research Method to Develop and Validate the Program Quality Model

Phase 1: Develop Preliminary Program Quality Model (PQM)

We extensively reviewed the academic literature pertaining to issues of educational quality spanning multiple disciplinary areas, including general business, management, marketing, higher education, and so forth. We extracted from identified sources any definitions, aspects, and/or facets that were described as indicative of educational quality in general. After excluding sources that did not explicitly discuss criteria related to quality in education, we identified a total of 48 usable and unique sources, resulting in a total of 314 quality criteria. These criteria served as the initial input for a PQM.

Phase 2: Conduct a Content Analysis

We conducted a content analysis of the 314 quality criteria via a Q-sort technique by two of the principal investigators, which yielded tentative criteria clusters that were subsequently titled. That is, all of the quality criteria were printed on note cards and then subsequently sorted (grouped) into conceptually similar clusters by two principal researchers* The aim of this Q-sort was to iteratively produce a more parsimonious description of collected quality criteria. Following the Q-sort, tentative "titles" for each of the criteria clusters were generated. An independent review of the Q-sort results by the third principal investigator was then conducted. Here, potential misclassifications were identified and discussed among the three investigators and subsequently reclassified. Clusters were further sorted into meta-categories to enhance interpretability and organization of the preliminary program quality model. Finally, we identified and convened a panel of sixteen subject matter experts (SMEs) in total for focus groups and subsequent surveying (Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007, p. 54). The major goals of SME review were to gain general background information about what constitutes quality in graduate management education, learn how the SME panel discussed the notion of quality (that is, the context of the discussion), and obtain reactions and/or revisions to the initial PQM.

Phase 3: Collect Supplemental Content Validity Evidence and Reactions

Survey methodology was used to gather quantitative data in this phase. SME panel participants from Phase 2 were the focal respondents. Conventional procedures for collecting content-related validity were followed (Lawshe, 1975) whereby SMEs rated how "essential" each of the twenty-four dimensions of the PQM were. Specifically, SMEs were asked, "Please indicate how

*Along with the chapter authors, Erich Dierdorff of DePaul University also served as a principle project researcher.

essential each of the following factors are in creating a high-quality MBA program." Ratings were made using a three-point scale of "unnecessary," "somewhat essential," and "essential." All dimensions were presented with definitions and examples to facilitate interpretation.

In addition, seventy policy-makers from AACSB-accredited business schools were surveyed to judge the importance of each PQM dimension to MBA program quality, the degree to which each was currently emphasized at their institution, the relative utility of each in maximizing quality, and general reactions toward ranking and rating systems for assessing quality.

dimensions belonging to each of the meta-dimensions range from zero (requires no further explication at the dimension level) to five (contains multiple dimensions). Exhibit 8.2 provides the names of each meta-dimension, corresponding dimensions, definitions, and examples. We refer to this resulting content model as the Program Quality Model or PQM.

Subject matter experts (SMEs) were asked to rate the "essentiality" of each of the twenty-four dimensions of the PQM. Table 8.1 shows the percentage endorsements across the rating categories for each PQM dimension. Each of the twenty-four dimensions received no less than 86.7 percent endorsement of "somewhat essential" or "essential." For half of the dimensions, 100 percent of the SMEs indicated "somewhat essential" or "essential." These results suggest that the PQM is comprehensive in scope and contains little redundancy in capturing the essence of MBA program quality.

We next sought to collect reactions to the PQM from the SMEs and seventy policy-makers (that is, MBA program directors, associate deans, and deans) across several topical areas related to the PQM, as well as obtaining other general reactions

Exhibit 8.2 MBA Quality Dimension, Definitions, and Examples

Metadimension and Definition	*Dimensions*		*Definition (Features)*
1. **Curriculum:** The overall quality of the courses of study provided by the program/institution	1.1	Content	Degree of relevance of the learning content presented in the courses of study that constitute the curriculum (for example, relevance to managerial work, practicality, mix of program's courses)
	1.2	Delivery	Specific manner in which the learning content is presented to students (for example, experiential learning, online or distance learning)
	1.3	Program structure	Specific manner with which the courses of study within the curriculum are arranged to constitute the program as a whole (for example, program length, sequence of required courses)
2. **Faculty:** The overall quality of teaching personnel within the program/institution	2.1	Qualifications	The educational and professional backgrounds of faculty that impinge on their ability to effectively impart practical and relevant knowledge to students (for example, educational background of faculty)
	2.2	Research	Degree to which faculty are involved in activities that make intellectual contributions to the knowledge base of the field (for example, research productivity, quality, impact on practice)
	2.3	Teaching	Extent to which faculty provide high-quality learning experiences for students that facilitate the acquisition and retention of relevant knowledge and skills (for example, preparation, facilitation)
	2.4	Overall quality	Overall perceptions of faculty performance (for example, faculty/student perceptions)
3. **Placement:** The overall quality of career-related programmatic opportunities for students	3.1	Alumni network	Breadth of alumni resources available to students (for example, networking opportunities)
	3.2	Career services	Extent to which services or mechanisms are made available to students regarding career guidance, placement, and development (for example, resume building, recruitment coordination)
	3.3	Corporate and community relations	Extent to which the program/institution has and actively develops relationships with organizations in its community (for example, community outreach activities, local business relationships)
4. **Reputation:** The extent to which the program/institution is recognized by external stakeholders as being of high quality or merit		None	
5. **Student learning and outcomes:** The extent to which students acquire relevant knowledge and skills and attain associated career outcomes	5.1	Personal competency development	Training effectiveness of specific competencies required for students to effectively function in their resulting careers (for example, alignment of competency development in target careers)

(*Continued*)

Metadimension and Definition		*Dimensions*	*Definition (Features)*
	5.2	Student career consequences	Impact of program/institution membership (including development experiences and earned credentials) on nonmonetary career outcomes (for example, career options, job mobility)
	5.3	Student economic outcomes	Impact of program/institution membership (including development experiences and earned credentials) on monetary outcomes (for example, starting salaries, salary increases)
	5.4	Learning outcome assessment	Extent to which the program/institution achieves its educational objectives (for example, degree completion rates, learning goal achievement)
6. Institutional resources: The overall quality of resources available to the program/ institution and its constituents	6.1	Facilities	Presence of physical and technological infrastructure that facilitates program/institution functioning (for example, library resources, level of classroom technology)
	6.2	Financial resources	Amount of monetary funds available to the program/ institution for maintaining and enhancing functioning (for example, endowments, donations)
	6.3	Investment in faculty	Extent to which resources are available and devoted to faculty for facilitating and enhancing faculty activities (for example, research funding, support for development)
	6.4	Tuition and fees	Monetary contributions made by students to the program/ institution
	6.5	Student support services	Extent to which resources are available and devoted to facilitating and enhancing student activities (for example, academic support, student services office)
7. Program/Institution climate: The overall educational context, consisting of prevailing values, attitudes, and norms within the program/ institution	7.1	Diversity	Extent to which diversity is valued by the program/ institution, in addition to the extent that this value is reflected in program/institution personnel and the student population (for example, demographic heterogeneity, international faculty)
	7.2	Educational environment	Extent to which program/institution characteristics facilitate student educational development and reflect a value for learning/education (for example, faculty involvement, student interaction)
8. Program student composition: The overall makeup and corresponding quality of the student population with respect to academic achievement and professional experiences		None	
9. Strategic focus: The overall quality of the articulated mission of the program/ institution and corresponding strategic planning and positioning with respect to achieving the mission		None	

Table 8.1 Essentiality Ratings of PQM Dimensions by Subject Matter Experts

Dimensions	*Unnecessary*	*Somewhat Essential*	*Essential*
Curriculum			
Curriculum content	0.0%	13.3%	86.7%
Curriculum delivery	13.3%	26.7%	60.0%
Program structure	0.0%	53.3%	46.7%
Faculty			
Faculty qualifications	0.0%	40.0%	60.0%
Faculty research	13.3%	60.0%	26.7%
Faculty teaching	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Overall faculty quality	0.0%	26.7%	73.3%
Placement			
Alumni network	0.0%	73.3%	26.7%
Career service	0.0%	20.0%	80.0%
Corporate and community relations	6.7%	60.0%	33.3%
Reputation	6.7%	53.3%	40.0%
Student Learning and Outcomes			
Student personal competency Development	0.0%	53.3%	46.7%
Student career consequences	6.7%	53.3%	40.0%
Student economic outcomes	6.7%	86.7%	6.7%
Student learning outcome assessment	13.3%	33.3%	53.3%
Institutional Resources			
Program/Institution facilities	0.0%	73.3%	26.7%
Program/Institution financial resources	0.0%	66.7%	33.3%
Program/Institution investment in Faculty	6.7%	40.0%	53.3%
Program/Institution tuition and fees	0.0%	73.3%	26.7%
Program/Institution student support Services	6.7%	46.7%	46.7%

Table 8.1 (*Continued*)

Dimensions	*Unnecessary*	*Somewhat Essential*	*Essential*
Program/Institution Climate			
Diversity	6.7%	73.3%	20.0%
Educational environment	0.0%	33.3%	66.7%
Program Student Composition	6.7%	60.0%	33.3%
Strategic Focus	13.3%	26.7%	60.0%

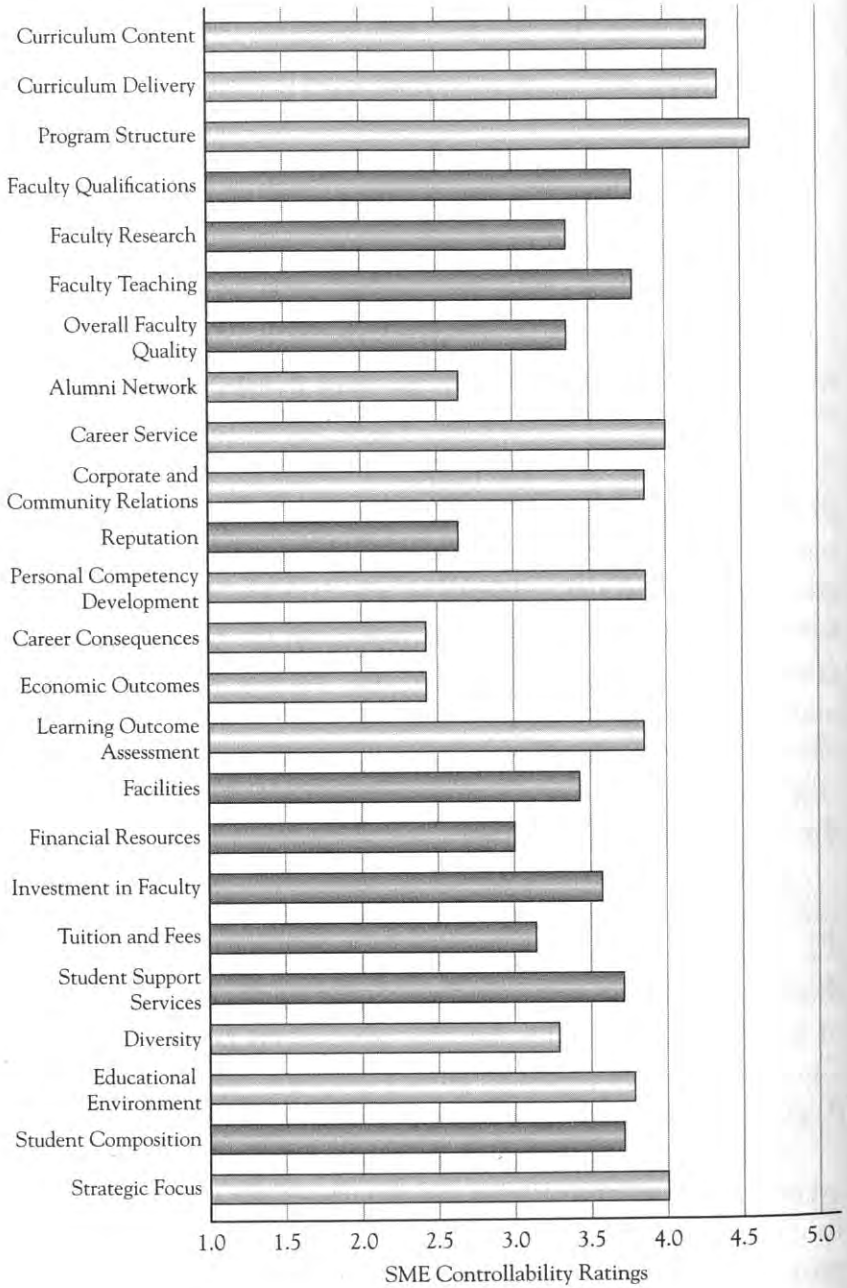
Note: A total of sixteen SMEs completed the ratings. Interrater reliability was in the acceptable range (intraclass correlation [ICC] = .69 across all dimensions).

to issues of assessing MBA program quality (such as media rankings). For each of the twenty-four PQM dimensions, SMEs were asked to "indicate the degree to which each of the following factors is readily changeable or malleable for most MBA programs. In other words, to what extent are the following factors under the control of most MBA programs?" The mean controllability rating across all twenty-four dimensions was 3.54 (SD = .588), suggesting at a broad level that business schools can affect the dimensions of the PQM.

However, closer inspection showed there was considerable variation in controllability ratings across the dimensions. Figure 8.2 shows the mean ratings of controllability for each PQM dimension. As the figure shows, among the most malleable aspects of MBA program quality are the dimensions falling under the Curriculum metadimension; among the least malleable were the Reputation and Career/Economic Outcomes metadimension.

At a more general level, both SMEs and policy-makers were asked to evaluate the relative importance of the metadimensions to overall MBA program quality by placing the dimensions in rank order in terms of their impact on improving overall quality. Table 8.2 shows the percentage of SMEs and policy-makers who ranked each metadimension in the top four positions (that is, with ranks of 1, 2, 3, or 4). The metadimension of curriculum

Figure 8.2 SME Controllability Ratings of Quality Dimensions



Note: For purposes of clarity, the dimensions are grouped by the nine metadimensions of the PQM. Responses are based upon a 5-point scale in which 1 = not at all controllable, 3 = somewhat controllable, and 5 = completely controllable.

Table 8.2 Percentage Endorsing Metadimension as Important to MBA Program Quality

Metadimension	*Subject Matter Experts*	*Policy-Makers*	*Average*
Curriculum	93%	75%	84%
Faculty	85%	79%	82%
Student learning and outcomes	79%	74%	77%
Placement	57%	53%	55%
Strategic focus	43%	37%	40%
Student composition	21%	34%	27%
Reputation	14%	29%	22%
Institutional resources	14%	19%	17%

received the greatest number of top rankings (that is, ranks of 1); reputation and institutional resources did not receive any top rankings.

Finally, policy-makers responded to survey items that asked about media rankings as well as general reactions to assessing MBA program quality. Table 8.3 provides these items and associated findings. As shown, policy-makers held generally unfavorable views of media rankings' accuracy and meaningfulness (items 4–6). Yet, at the same time, policy-makers responded that there is institutional pressure to use and attend to such media rankings (items 1–3). Policy-makers had positive reactions to using a rating system to depict MBA program quality and thought it was important for business school stakeholders to have program-level information from a procedurally transparent system (items 7–10).

Implications for Assessing Quality

Although substantial evidence derides the reliance on reputation-based indices of quality, scholarship has been slow to offer meaningful alternatives. We think the PQM described here provides

Table 8.3 Policy-Maker Reactions and Attitudes Toward Quality Assessment

Question	M	*SD*	% *Top 2*
1. At my school we pay close attention to MBA program media rankings.	3.99	1.04	72.9%
2. My dean frequently discusses his or her concerns about "the competition" (that is, other MBA programs).	3.54	1.05	54.3%
3. Moving up, breaking into, or maintaining our position in a major media ranking is a top priority to my dean.	3.74	1.07	68.6%
4. Program quality differs greatly between schools that are ranked and schools that are not ranked.	2.94	1.04	34.3%
5. Media rankings provide a good measure of the overall quality of an MBA program.	2.23	0.91	8.6%
6. Media rankings are a valid tool to quickly delineate "the best from the rest."	2.41	0.99	15.7%
7. I believe a rating system would add value beyond a ranking system.	3.86	1.05	70.0%
8. Business school stakeholders deserve to know specific information about what a program is doing or not doing.	4.29	0.57	92.9%
9. It would be useful to business school stakeholders to be able to compare one school to another on a set of standardized criteria.	4.20	0.87	85.7%
10. It is important that a rating system is transparent in its data collection procedures.	4.69	0.50	95.7%

Note: Items rated on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 5 = strongly agree). "% Top 2" represents percentage of responses in the "agree" and "strongly agree" categories.

a necessary first step in offering meaningful alternatives in at least three ways:

1. MBA program quality is multidimensional in nature, and criterion development efforts must seek to identify criteria that are fully representative or cover the full breadth of the quality content domain.

2. To capture the complex multidimensionality of quality, one must examine the phenomenon from multiple perspectives. This necessarily involves input from multiple stakeholders.
3. As with all criteria development efforts, the resulting content model is not likely to be perfectly comprehensive. Thus, the primary goal in criterion development must not be to declare "game over" with respect to understanding quality but to make progress toward improving the accuracy with which we make such approximations.

Comparisons to Current Quality Systems

What stands out most from the derivation of our PQM is that it reflects the considerable multidimensionality undoubtedly present in MBA academic quality. Some dimensions of the model are reflected in other existing systems, such as accreditation standards, because these systems were used as initial input in our criterion development efforts. Yet, our model provides unique elements not represented by existing systems and helps to overcome problems associated with criterion deficiency.

For example, compared to the dimensions contained in our model, the *Bloomberg Businessweek* and *Financial Times* full-time MBA rankings both appear to be deficient in how well they represent MBA quality. They capture roughly 38 percent and 42 percent, respectively, of the PQM dimensions (that is, approximately nine to ten of twenty-four dimensions). Similarly, *U.S. News & World Report* rankings capture only four of the twenty-four quality dimensions. The striking implication is that although these outlets clearly assess some aspects of quality, none of them sufficiently covers the dimensions we uncovered when examining the broad array of quality sources. This highlights one of the key problems with media rankings. Although they purport to comprehensively assess quality, they clearly do not function as advertised because they under-represent or omit entire categories of key quality factors.

At the same time, if stakeholders want to know about a few dimensions, such as student economic outcomes (that is, starting salaries), rankings appear to provide this information sufficiently, albeit for only a very small number of institutions. However, it is one thing to include this information in rankings and omit other critical factors; it is another to give such outcomes disproportional weight. As Gladwell (2011) notes, media rankings do not provide comprehensive views of educational quality but rather make definitive decisions for consumers regarding which educational values or ideals should or should not be important to them when considering a particular institution.

For example, when media rankings assign close to 50 percent of the ranking score to economic outcomes (as in the *Financial Times*) and give virtually no consideration to student learning, the rankings communicate and prioritize a clear set of values regarding what (in their views) should be the ultimate purpose of graduate management education. Because rankings "enshrine very particular ideologies" (Gladwell, 2011, p. 74), stakeholders who hope to use media rankings as credible and definitive signals of MBA program quality should be clear about what the rankings represent to avoid overinterpreting the nature and meaning of such information.

Our results add to substantial and growing concerns about the veracity and usefulness of media rankings in stakeholder decision making. Given the great deficiency in quality content coupled with empirical evidence of the rankings' insufficiency, one might logically surmise that media outlets would be eager to improve their products' accuracy. As Policano (2007) describes, however, the media outlets may have motives beyond the primary task of determining MBA program quality:

> When you recognize the misperceptions that rankings can cause, you would imagine that the media would want to correct this deficiency. But they don't. And why they don't became apparent to me during a conversation that I had with the editor of one of the rankings publications. Basically, I suggested rating, not ranking, schools. Of course, there would be less change from one year to the next and thus less perceived news associated with any newly released rating and, thus, less public interest. But ratings would provide a more accurate portrayal of the relative quality of programs. The editor responded emphatically they would never adopt any change that would decrease circulation. An interesting response—profits above accuracy. It certainly doesn't seem that, in the rankings game, prospective students are winners. (p. 46)

In contrast to media rankings, accreditation standards from EQUIS and AACSB appear to be substantially more complete in their coverage of the quality dimensions. For example, the AACSB standards cover roughly twelve dimensions, and EQUIS approximately seventeen. Of course, the point of accreditation is to deal primarily with the inputs and process of educational interventions, whereas our model includes inputs, throughputs, and outputs of quality. Although we did not specify relationships among our metadimensions, a high-level examination of the metadimensions reveals this classic open systems framework (Katz & Kahn, 1978). That is, the metadimensions of strategic focus, program student composition, and institutional resources likely represent the major sources of input quality. Curriculum, faculty, program/institution climate, personal competency development and learning, and some aspects of placement (such as career services and community relationships) represent the primary sources of throughput or process quality. Reputation, economic outcomes, and alumni network represent the key sources of output quality. Thus, our quality model could reasonably be used as a diagnostic lens for examining these important program design elements (inputs-throughputs-outputs) to prescribe interventions to improve quality in any given area (see Figure 8.3; Recommendation 1 later in the chapter).

Not All Quality Dimensions Are Equal

Beyond recommending overall improvements in sufficiency over existing quality sources, our SMEs strongly suggested that

Figure 8.3 PQM Represented as an Open Systems Model

although all twenty-four dimensions are important to quality, they are not all equally important. These experts placed the highest importance on quality dimensions such as faculty teaching, curriculum content, and student learning, and the least importance on student economic outcomes, program/institution facilities, and alumni network. One might rightly argue that experts whose life's work is devoted to such concerns would be biased. However, the subject matter experts' views of quality were strongly corroborated by our sample of MBA program directors, whose successful performance is often determined by far less idealistic pursuits. Such pursuits include the number of "butts in seats," placements, and student economic outcomes (areas to which policy-makers did in fact assign more weight than did academic SMEs). Demonstrating the primary importance of teaching and learning, however, one subject matter expert remarked, "Education is largely about the teachers. Does anyone argue that your child's third grade teacher is not the most important element in his or her third grade education? Other things matter, of course, but if you want a great MBA, you need a great faculty that engages students."

The focus on teaching and learning is perhaps not surprising when one considers these are areas in which business schools have considerable control. Yet, an analysis of the dimensions most heavily weighted in media rankings, for instance, shows

substantial importance given to the very dimensions that our experts suggest are out of business schools' direct control, namely, alumni networks, reputation, student economic and career outcomes. The implication, of course, is that if quality involves things that cannot be changed, there is simply no use in pursuing activities to attempt to improve them. As one subject matter expert explained, this is a reality of living in a rankings-dominated world:

> "The quality of the program should focus on what we can do, which is facilitating learning. If the students are gaining knowledge and skill, then we are doing our job. All else supports that goal, and flows from it. Of course, that sets aside the reality that some firms hire on reputation, which means that student economic outcomes (placement) are influenced by things outside the control of current leaders and teachers. I think the best we can do is acknowledge this is true, but then focus on what b-schools *can do* to ensure learning."

To reiterate, the PQM presented here does include quality outcomes. But, as the expert view presented exemplifies, quality outcomes are less meaningful when critical educational process components are ignored.

Why Is It So Hard to Adopt a Program Quality Content Model?

Focusing stakeholders on all dimensions of quality beyond reputation and student economic outcomes is not without difficulties. In fact, our data show just how hard this can be. For example, policy-makers rated the quality dimensions of curriculum content, faculty teaching, and overall faculty quality as highly important. However, when asked how much emphasis these areas receive in their respective programs, policy-makers rated each substantially lower. One reason for this misalignment might be the continual

shadow of media rankings, which emphasize outcomes over process. For example, although our policy-maker sample strongly rejected the notion that media rankings provide "good measures" of overall quality, 73 percent reported that their institutions pay close attention to the rankings (see Table 8.2). Despite the convincing evidence that breaking into the rankings is an extremely rare occurrence for never-before-ranked institutions (Morgeson & Nahrgang, 2008), schools that believe they are on the cusp are likely to ignore many of the aspects of quality uncovered in our model in favor of focusing on the criteria the rankings weight most heavily. In doing so, these institutions divert critical resources from the central mission of business schools—to inculcate knowledge and skills about the science and practice of management (Khurana, 2007; Mintzberg, 2004; Rubin & Dierdorff, 2009). Paradoxically, one major benefit to schools that are unranked in major media-ranking publications (and whose prospects are low for breaking in) is that they may feel freer to focus on the full breadth of quality dimensions. As Policano (2005) described it, before the major rankings emerged in the late 1980s

> business school deans could actually focus on improving quality in their schools' educational offerings. Discussions about strategic marketing were confined mostly to the marketing curriculum. PR firms were hired by business, not business schools. Many business schools had sufficient facilities, but few buildings had marble floors, soaring atriums, or plush carpeting. Public university tuition was affordable for most students, and even the top MBA programs were accessible to students with high potential but low GMAT scores. (p. 26)

The point is that even the most well-intentioned and mission-focused business schools have been subjected to what Khurana (2007) calls "the tyranny of rankings." This must contribute in some form to the schools' inability to align what they know to

be important in terms of quality with their actual program practices. In this way, chasing media rankings pushes business schools away from their core mission—to educate. Although business schools clearly differ in their view of their primary pursuits (Palmer & Short, 2008), we doubt that *any* business school would say that its central mission is to help students make more money.

The result then is an absurd reinforcing cycle: Ranked schools promote aspects of quality from the very limited criteria media rankings capture, and lower-ranked institutions seek to emulate these "leading business schools" who "lead" due to activities that make up a very small slice of the overall quality pie. Even when academic researchers seek to understand quality, they, too, tend to limit their examination to these leading institutions and reinforce the perceived validity of the rankings (for example, Datar, Garvin, & Cullen, 2010; Navarro, 2008).

Thus, despite their associated dysfunction, rankings single-handedly own the quality space and remain resilient in the face of such critiques. This resiliency is due, in part, to that "air of objectivity" that a third party can provide. For instance, media publication editors often callously dismiss even evidence-based criticisms from the Academy of Management as being baseless and motivated by self-interest (see Lavelle, 2008).[2] Portraying the academy as out of touch and hiding behind the ivory tower with respect to quality is at the heart of the media rankings' original intentions. Historically, the rankings were meant to respond to what many believed was the complacency and self-satisfaction that business school administration and faculty developed in the 1980s (see Porter & McKibbon, 1989). Khurana (2007) agrees that one benefit of media rankings is that they have played a "salutary role by focusing [business schools] on their external environment" (p. 342). Therefore, media rankings have in fact achieved their original intent of creating a market in which students and corporations can have data on which to base their application or employment decisions.

In principle, we strongly believe in the usefulness and legitimacy of independent ranking systems. Such systems avoid the appearance of bias and often have mechanisms to buffer potential conflicts of interest. At the same time, we reject systems that refuse to change in the face of substantial, credible evidence regarding their veracity. Regardless of their humble beginnings and despite overwhelming evidence suggesting rankings' inherent problems, media-ranking organizations appear to have absolutely no interest in devoting resources to improved systems (DeAngelo, DeAngelo, & Zimmerman, 2005). Ironically, the very organizations that derided business schools for their apathy and that claim responsibility for upholding a system that encourages business schools to "do better" are themselves unwilling to engage in serious continuous improvement.

Yet, the successes of media rankings are informative in at least one way. They highlight stakeholders' ongoing desire for information about program quality. Indeed, more than any other factor, an institution's quality and reputation are rated by MBA applicants as the most important criteria when selecting schools (GMAC, 2010). Thus, in media-ranking organizations' attempt to deflect legitimate criticism and forestall meaningful change, the real losers are not the business schools that did not make the top twenty but the innumerable stakeholders who make consequential life decisions on the results of a deeply flawed system.

Toward a Better Quality System

As we have said, the time is now for business schools, policymakers, and academics alike to stop critiquing and start creating a new way forward. In doing so, we must start by acknowledging that the advent of business school rankings and their continued popularity are due in part to a long historical lack of transparency and a business-as-usual approach to graduate management education. Further, we must acknowledge stakeholders' continuing

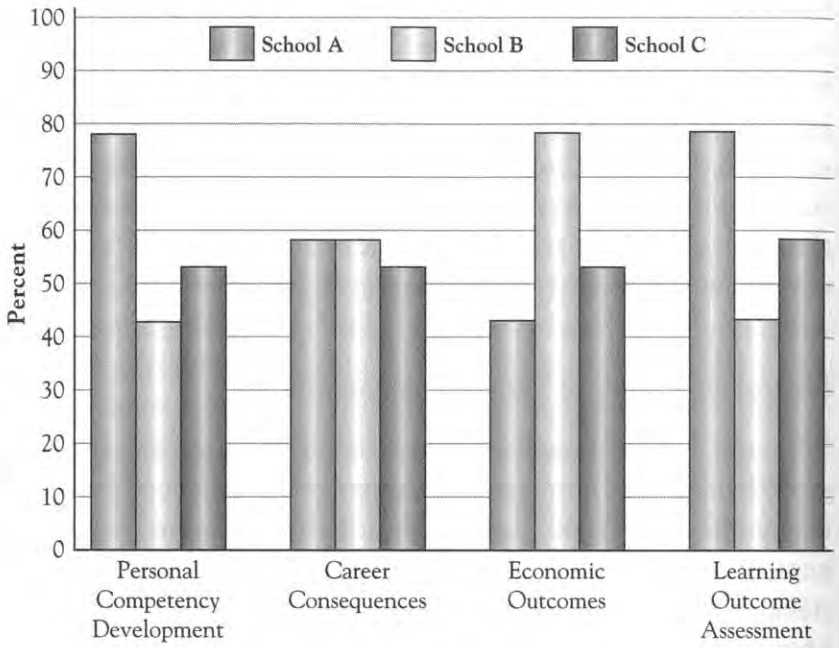
desire for information that can help signal quality and provide useful demarcations of various program elements. With this in mind, the next stage of assessing MBA program quality should involve developing a rating system based upon the PQM described here and toward the creation of a comprehensive program quality index. Such a system would offer several unique advantages over media rankings, including (a) clearer depiction of multidimensionality; (b) specific representation of differences and similarities; (c) enhanced transparency, and (d) increased focus on education. Next, we briefly discuss each advantage.

Clearer Depiction of Multidimensionality

First and foremost with respect to content, our model appropriately depicts the clear multidimensionality present in the abstraction known as "quality." Put simply, the key advantage of a rating system is that it would depict program *quality profiles* that stakeholders could use to evaluate the full breadth of quality. Moreover, schools that are not substantially different in these ratings could be treated as functionally equivalent in quality.

At the same time, depicting quality profiles could also allow individuals to weight each quality dimension according to their own unique needs or perspectives. End users could query a rating system to address their particular needs, such as when recruiters are interested in programs with high-quality international internships or applicants want programs that emphasize the development of team skills. For instance, in Figure 8.4 we show how a rating system could provide unique information within and among institutions. In this simplified example, a prospective student truly interested in student learning might select School A given the institution's strength in this area; a student more concerned with economic outcomes might select School B. In both cases, the inherent trade-offs involved in choosing one institution over another would be readily apparent and allow users to weight and prioritize their own quality imperatives.

Figure 8.4 Example of a Quality Dimension Profile Comparison on the Metadimension of Student Outcomes



Specific Representation of Differences and Similarities

One misconception about rating systems is that they group too many schools together and therefore do not show meaningful differences. We think this concern represents a half-truth. Because rating systems have the potential to treat large groupings of institutions as functionally equivalent, they almost always do so in the recognition that any differences presented should be valid and not manufactured.

In comparison, rankings suffer from methodological concerns that obscure meaningful performance differences (Murphy & Cleveland, 1995). These concerns include the inability to communicate the magnitude of the differences among schools, arbitrary weighting of different criteria (Policano, 2007), reliance on

limited, convenient, and potentially biased data sources, and a highly subjective sampling (Morgeson & Nahrgang, 2008). For example, ranked institutions are often separated by less than one point on total criteria scores (Morgeson & Nahrgang, 2008). In a rating system, school data would more clearly highlight the differences across quality criteria while taking certain baseline information into account. Rating systems allow for both broad classifications of programs that meet certain minimal requirements (such as accreditation) and specific classifications on criteria that show how those programs go *beyond* such requirements (such as clear evidence of student learning). In other words, ratings are by nature compensatory, meaning that the quality dimensions programs choose to emphasize would be more clearly depicted.

Enhanced Transparency

Because rating systems are not limited to an arbitrary "best set" of institutions, stakeholders would be able to see how widely MBA programs vary. This promotes a transparency that is not present today in discussions of quality. No longer would debates be structured around whether a school ranked thirty-first is really worse than the school ranked twenty-seventh; rather, the ratings would allow information to surface regarding differences and similarities.

A rating system would promote transparency further by showing changes over time on quality dimensions that institutions are trying to improve. In contrast, when a school moves up in a ranking, it is often difficult to determine exactly how and why the school "improved." As mentioned earlier, as of this writing, AACSB accredits programs at more than 640 schools of business. On the surface, of course, media rankings make it appear as if all of these institutions had been studied to arrive at the "top" one hundred, fifty, or thirty business schools. As Morgeson and Nahrgang (2008) found, in the three decades *Business Week*

has ranked institutions, only thirty-five unique institutions have ever appeared on the top-thirty list. Under a rating system, all institutions that want to be included and rated could be if they so chose, thereby giving stakeholders a real sense of how their local programs would compare to other more nationally or internationally focused institutions.

Finally, transparency is enhanced by rating systems in which data are sourced for multiple stakeholders and through multiple methods. Because ratings would need to capture a wide range of quality information, they would not be limited to self-reported surveys from recruiters and students; rather, they would involve a broader set of institutions, faculty, and policy-makers. Such data collection efforts would necessitate open access to information and allow any individual or institution to use the data to study how the rating system could be continually improved.

Increased Focus on Education

A rating system would likely help reduce the dysfunctional behavior involved when institutions chase or manipulate the most heavily weighted criteria in rankings. Indeed, anecdotes abound regarding all-too-common efforts to game reports of student GMAT scores, internship placements, prior work experience, and so forth. Underscoring the magnitude of the dysfunction that rankings encourage by placing so much weight on so few criteria, Emory University recently acknowledged a decade-long misrepresentation of high school SAT and ACT scores reported to the *U.S. News* rankings (Supiano, 2012), and a similar admission of misreporting of GMAT scores was made by Tulane University administrators (Morse, 2013).

Because ratings are not limited to a small number of narrow criteria, institutions may be more empowered to pursue their strengths and educational missions knowing that their efforts and improvements would be clearer in a rating system. Under media rankings, institutions that place a strong emphasis on, for

instance, teaching are not "rewarded" or given credit compared to institutions that pursue a high degree of research output. Thus, rating systems would encourage schools to pursue improvements in many domains that are currently undervalued or ignored by institutions that are heavily involved in playing the rankings game.

Acting Today to Improve Quality Tomorrow

By now, the reader may be frustrated with this chapter's somewhat idealistic tone, perhaps including a lack of attention to the on-the-ground realities of most business schools. After all, even though most policy-makers can agree that media rankings are deficient, to date no reasonable alternative exists. Further, although a rating system may sound good in theory, the barriers to putting one in place may seem too daunting, particularly from the perspective of individual schools caught squarely in the rankings game.

We suggest that changing the current state may not be as difficult as it appears. The responsibility most definitely starts with institutional leaders who can act now to change their fates in the near term and at the local level. Toward this end, we next offer a few critical recommendations to advance the quality agenda in graduate management education. That said, we fully acknowledge that any action that takes away from the substantial status quo–preserving forces and moves toward improved assessment and management of quality is likely to inflict a bit of pain.

Recommendation 1: Use the PQM as an Assessment and Management Tool

It is often said that all politics are local. Similarly, we would contend that regardless of the national or international trends, participation in rankings, or institutional resources, nothing should stand in the way of a business school adopting a broader

perspective on educational quality in its own institution. Start with the mission statement and ask stakeholders salient quality-related questions from the PQM. For example, under curriculum, key questions might include,

- "Is our curriculum aligned with what is required for future managers to be successful?"
- "Do we deliver curriculum in a way that engages and promotes optimal learning?"
- "Have we structured the program in a way that encourages or maximizes opportunities to learn?"

Take time to operationalize metrics in each of the model's categories for one's own institution, not relative to others. Here again, asking self-study questions such as "What do we mean when we say, 'quality teaching' and how will we measure it?" or "What is meant by a '"strong alumni network"' and how do we most appropriately measure it?" is likely to lead to the development of unique quality indicators.

Using the model as a guide, an institution can use metrics to create an internal dashboard or performance scorecard to actively track improvements alongside other more traditional key indicators such as revenue, enrollments, and so forth (which of course fall under "institutional resources" in the PQM). As noted, one critical component to making the content model come alive as an assessment and management tool is to get as many people involved as possible who can shape the meaning and nature of the metrics identified and collected. As Figure 8.3 and our data suggest, institutions may benefit from focusing their efforts more closely on important educational throughputs, all of which can be prioritized at the local level. Reach out to and include all major business school stakeholders, including faculty, students, alumni, employers, administrators, community members, and local government.

Recommendation 2: Build Learning Communities or Communities of Practice

In their study regarding the stability of *Bloomberg Businessweek* rankings, Morgeson and Nahrgang (2008) demonstrate that the average correlation between the *Businessweek* lists from ranking year to year is .82. Compare this with an average correlation of .30 for the rankings of NCAA basketball teams from the Associated Press polls tracked over the same time period as the *Bloomberg Businessweek* rankings. The striking implication is that ". . . when a ranking system is based on observable, head-to-head performance, they will exhibit considerable variability over time" because ". . . there is an agreed upon performance criteria . . . that produces clear winners and losers" (Morgeson & Nahrgang, 2008, p. 38). Despite this evidence, much of the success of media ranking has relied on logic that suggests business schools are engaged in heated "head-to-head" competition, much like corporate giants Pepsi and Coke or Costco and Sam's Club, fighting for every percentage of market share they can grab. Ironically, this notion has been propagated by substantial literature produced by the AACSB and others that essentially argues that business schools need to make unique "value propositions" to their primary customers, namely, students (Khurana, 2007). This type of thinking effectively ignores the simple fact that all higher education institutions essentially share the same primary mission: education. Similarly, all business schools share the common purpose of educating managers for future managerial and professional roles in organizations (Rubin & Dierdorff, 2011).

Given that business schools are not really competitors in the true sense of the word and that they share a strong common purpose, we encourage schools to adopt a stance of cooperation rather than competition with respect to quality. One way to promote such cooperation is to create "communities of practice" "that are naturally aligned around critical common characteristics about their programs, such as student composition (for

example, part-time MBAs), funding sources (private versus public), and so forth.[3] Although such groups currently exist for purposes of sharing information (for example, AACSB affinity groups), we imagine more robust partnerships being created. Such groups could pool resources, operationalize the most critical quality content criteria from the PQM, and agree to a set of guidelines for sharing information and using such information to improve quality. For example, DePaul University is directing the formation of a new center dedicated to furthering knowledge about quality in part-time graduate management education with the goal of sharing extensive information on different quality dimensions on a yearly basis (http://www.parttimeexcellence.org). Given that no program is perfect with respect to quality, deans may find that such cooperative efforts will help them to further their strengths while improving upon quality challenges that do not equal the standards of others in their communities of practice.

Recommendation 3: Participate in the Construction of a Rating System

Beyond using the PQM at the local level to assess, track, and improve quality in graduate management programs, we strongly encourage all interested institutions to begin conversations with well-suited third parties who could begin to shape and develop a national and international rating system. Pursuing a viable rating system requires additional work on at least two major fronts. First, future research is required to further validate the PQM by understanding the interrelationships among the dimensions. This requires data representing each dimension that would allow researchers to understand the amount of unique variance in overall quality each dimension contributes. Further, work remains to establish a more parsimonious set of metrics as well as isolate metrics that are most representative of the quality dimension to which they pertain. This work also requires the

explication of data sources and determination of what sources (for example, student reports, standardized measures, and so forth) best capture the meaning and nature of a given dimension. Undoubtedly, multiple perspectives and sources would contribute to the most robust measurement system.

To be certain, concerns over data are a substantial challenge to the development of a rating system, so much so that it represents a key barrier to creating a new system. Yet, we were curious regarding just how difficult it might be to generate metrics that could reasonably capture the essence of PQM using more objective and direct measures. We put together a small research team to generate an initial listing of dimension-level metrics and then rate each metric generated on its (a) *objectivity* (outcome based versus judgmental), (b) *level of practicality* (high, medium, low), and (c) *degree of discriminability* (high, medium, low), or the extent to which variance between schools is likely. A total of 420 nonredundant dimension-level metrics were generated, with an average of 17.5 sample metrics for each dimension (see Table 8.4). Overall, approximately 62 percent of the generated metrics were deemed objective in nature, 49 percent as highly practical to measure and collect, and 42 percent as providing high variance across different MBA programs ("high discriminability"). Based on this evidence, we believe that with a serious effort and institutional buy-in, developing a set of metrics to populate a quality ratings system is feasible.

Second, beyond additional metric generation and validation efforts, additional work is required with respect to implementation. This effort involves developing a data collection protocol along with extensive buy-in from schools, stakeholders, and other interested parties (for example, AACSB or GMAC). As successful rating systems like Standard & Poor's credit ratings demonstrate, the utility of a rating system depends greatly on the cooperation of myriad institutions and stakeholders. Ideally, such a system would involve the leadership of an existing or newly formed nonprofit that would seek only to provide high-quality

Table 8.4 Descriptive Statistics for Sample Metrics by PQM Dimension

Metadimension	*Dimension*	f	*Objective*	*Practicality*			*Discriminability*		
				High	*Medium*	*Low*	*High*	*Medium*	*Low*
Curriculum	Curriculum content	17	24%	30%	35%	35%	24%	52%	24%
	Curriculum delivery	15	47%	53%	40%	7%	20%	67%	13%
	Program structure	13	77%	77%	23%	0%	31%	46%	23%
Faculty	Faculty qualifications	29	58%	17%	73%	10%	34%	66%	0%
	Faculty research	21	95%	5%	95%	0%	71%	29%	0%
	Faculty teaching	11	18%	64%	36%	0%	27%	55%	18%
	Overall faculty quality	16	44%	44%	38%	18%	44%	50%	6%
Placement	Alumni network	22	68%	27%	55%	18%	23%	68%	9%
	Career service	21	67%	57%	33%	10%	33%	62%	5%
	Corporate and community relations	23	78%	43%	57%	0%	52%	39%	9%
Reputation	Reputation	14	50%	57%	36%	7%	4%	29%	29%
Student learning and outcomes	Student personal competency development	5	20%	20%	60%	20%	0%	100%	0%
	Student career consequences	18	61%	0%	67%	33%	39%	61%	0%
	Student economic outcomes	11	100%	9%	73%	18%	64%	36%	0%
	Student learning outcome assessment	16	62%	38%	44%	18%	12%	63%	25%
Institutional resources	Program/Institution facilities	27	74%	74%	26%	0%	67%	33%	0%
	Program/Institution financial resources	24	83%	88%	12%	0%	46%	46%	8%
	Program/Institution investment in faculty	21	86%	80%	10%	10%	38%	57%	5%
	Program/Institution tuition and fees	14	93%	93%	7%	0%	50%	36%	14%
	Program/Institution student support services	15	80%	80%	20%	0%	47%	47%	6%
Program/ Institution climate	Diversity climate	18	61%	72%	28%	0%	78%	17%	5%
	Educational environment	17	70%	47%	41%	12%	23%	65%	12%
Program student composition	Program student composition	19	58%	69%	26%	5%	37%	53%	10%
Strategic focus	Strategic focus	13	8%	8%	84%	8%	54%	23%	23%

information to stakeholders and not become beset with potential conflicts of interest spurred by profit motives associated with selling magazines or driving Internet traffic.

Recommendation 4: Stop Playing the Victim—Reclaim Quality

Finally, we want to challenge business school leaders, particularly business school deans and their peers in highly ranked institutions, to recognize the power they have to perpetuate the current state as well as the power to create a new way forward. Rather than lament that the rankings have taken control of quality assessment and concede that the "rankings game" must be played; simply stop playing. This can be done in a number of ways.

First, use collective power to insist that if *Bloomberg Businessweek* and others want to continue with rankings that they must demonstrate efforts to overcome their rankings' greatest flaws. At the most basic level this most certainly includes actions to broaden the criteria set, efforts to collect data from multiple sources, expansion of institutional participants to all who wished to be considered, and increasing the transparency to consumers regarding the nature of rankings, namely, the obscuring of meaningful differences among institutions.

Second, if media-ranking organizations show no interest in improving, then deans can make the collective decision to no longer supply data and to prohibit their students from responding to surveys while they are enrolled. Yet, this must be a collective effort. As we have seen in the recent past, even when high-profile institutions like Wharton and Harvard decided not to provide *Bloomberg Businessweek* with data regarding starting salaries, *Bloomberg Businessweek* continued to rank them despite the absence of direct data (DeAngelo & others, 2005). The message of this action was clear: a list without Wharton or Harvard in the top twenty was not likely to be seen as a credible list. However, as Zimmerman (2001) noted more than a decade ago, a strong

and unanimous effort could effectively shut down the major rankings: "If just a few university presidents at our most prestigious business schools (based on BW rankings) convened and stopped their deans from disclosing to BW the names of their graduating MBA students, then the BW survey would lose much of its credibility. Once a few universities joined forces, more would follow" (p. 21).

Even with such actions, media rankings are not likely to simply exit the stage. In that regard, prominent deans and senior business school leaders can play an educational role, helping the broader media and business community understand the limitations rankings have as measures of academic quality or, for that matter, as a proxy for their students' capabilities. A single "open letter" with the signatures of the institutions current highly ranked by *Bloomberg Businessweek* and published in the *Wall Street Journal* or other mainstream outlet would send a strong signal that it is time for a change. We are not naïve, of course. We recognize that when a dean at a prestigious institution discredits a media ranking, there is a fear that it would be interpreted as a statement about the inferiority of the institution. Yet, we think this is generally a false fear. As Morgeson and Nahrgang (2008) showed, none of the initial set of ranked institutions from *Bloomberg Businessweek*'s first ranking in 1988 has ever fallen out of the ranking. It is safe to say that these schools are likely to enjoy the positive halo of such rankings for decades to come.

Final Thoughts on Reclaiming Control

The time has clearly come for the academic community to move beyond mere criticisms of media rankings as indicators of MBA program quality. We sought to begin this movement by more systematically developing the criterion space surrounding program quality. It is clear from our findings that developing and refining a quality content model is indeed feasible.

Moreover, there is clear consensus from multiple academic stakeholders (scholars and policy-makers) that the identified dimensions adequately represent quality in graduate management education and that media rankings fall substantially short. We firmly believe it is no longer viable to stand on the sidelines while inadequate systems dictate conversations about what values are most important to the quality of graduate management education.

Instead, it is time to take accountability seriously and apply the philosophy of rigorous and evidence-based decision making that we so often espouse in our schools of business. Put simply, we can—and we should—reclaim control of quality in graduate management education, restore it to its rightful place, and regain the positive outlook of our collective futures.

Summing Up

- Business school stakeholders deserve relevant, useful information about program quality and how programs differ in this regard.
- It is important to recognize the complexity and multidimensionality that exist in program quality and the serious deficiency in current systems such as media rankings.
- Business schools can use the Program Quality Model (PQM) as a basis for diagnosing their programs' level of quality.
- Business schools can improve quality in their own programs if they prioritize efforts by collecting data and tracking model dimensions deemed most critical to program quality. These dimensions include faculty teaching, curriculum content, and student learning.
- School leaders should participate in the creation of an alternative rating system based upon broad

operationalization of the PQM. A viable alternative to rankings that can create a comprehensive quality index is within reach.

- It is possible for business schools to use personal and institutional power to engage others in a process of rethinking, retooling, and reclaiming the measurement of quality in graduate management education.

Notes

1. Although the term *criterion* has been used in multiple ways, here *criterion* refers to a "basis for a judgment or qualitative comparison" (English & English, 1958).
2. In response to Morgeson and Narhgang's (2008) study of *Bloomberg Businessweek* ranking stability, a *Businessweek* editor published an article remarking, "Somehow these critiques of our rankings never come from schools at the top of the list" (Lavelle, 2008). Of course, critics have long resided among ranked schools. For instance, Khurana (2007), a Harvard professor, documents a host of systemic problems originating from *Businessweek*'s "top" schools.
3. By "communities of practice," we mean "social systems of shared resources by which groups organize and coordinate their activities, mutual relationships, and interpretations of the world" (Wenger, 1998, p. 13). For a practical explication, see Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder, (2002).

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