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Who Will You Be as a Management Educator?: Lessons from Greek Mythology

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Upon completion of their studies, most doctoral students plan to pursue a career in academia, with most students wanting to be professors of business. Yet, in the same way that the field of operations management is quite broad so is the role of being a management professor. While the formal Merriam-Webster definition of professor is “one that professes, avows, or declares” (*Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 1993), this definition does little to clarify what it is that management professors declare or how they go about crafting their declarations. As doctoral students, and eventually as assistant professors, each of us is left to determine how we want to answer the questions of: What is it that management professors teach? How do we teach? And, How do we relate to our students to best facilitate their learning about business and management?

The challenge of determining how you will define your role as a management professor is further complicated by the lack of formal training doctoral students receive pertaining to this topic. Doctoral students spend most of their time honing their research skills and developing discipline-specific knowledge (Bennis & O’Toole, 2005). Furthermore, doctoral students learn quickly that to succeed as management professors, they must emphasize their identities as researchers and de-emphasize their identities as educators. These are messages that we received as we pursued our own doctorates, and as we interview candidates for assistant professor positions we find that these messages continue. In

reviewing past articles for this column of *Decision Line*, it was obvious that most articles were geared towards doctoral students’ success as researchers with less emphasis on assisting doctoral students with their development as management educators.

Taking time to develop one’s role as a management educator is particularly important today given the vast financial and ethical business crises that are occurring and the attacks that business schools have received for their role in these problems. These criticisms are not new as for the past decades business schools have been critiqued for their failure to develop business leaders who have strong analytic and interpersonal skills and are ethical, global citizens (Bennis & Toole, 2005; Mitroff, 2004). While there are many reasons for business failures, some fault may be placed on how we as professors teach students and enact our roles as educators (Bennis & O’Toole, 2005). Management professors need to be engaged with questions related to the goals of management education, what these goals mean for how we craft our roles as professors, and how we relate to students and try to educate the next generation of leaders and global citizens. Furthermore, management professors need to evaluate the diverse pedagogical choices we are making and the implications these choices have for student learning and management education reform (Billimoria, 2000).

With these concerns in mind, the authors set out to investigate how professors frame their role as management

educators and the implications this has for what they teach and how they teach. Specifically, in the weeks following September 11, 2001, we interviewed 36 professors across four business schools in the northeastern United States. The four schools included traditional research universities and those that were more balanced on research and teaching. The professors who participated in our study taught everything from operations to marketing to organizational behavior. In this inductive, qualitative research study, we found that professors defined their role as management educators in three distinct ways. Drawing upon Greek mythology, we explain how these three roles are embodied in the archetypes of Athena, Prometheus, and Asclepius. These archetypes differ with respect to (a) what management professors believe students need to know to succeed in business; (b) the type of learning on which professors are focused; and (c) how professors relate to students to facilitate learning. As we present this typology below, we explore how these archetypes can be used to help doctoral students, and management professors, become more reflective and thoughtful about their role as educators.

The Archetypes of the Role of Management Educator

Before presenting the three Greek archetypes, it is important to note that these archetypal images are inherently linked. An individual does not enact a particular archetypal image at all times; rather, an individual may invoke different archetypes in different situations. For clarity to the reader, we present each archetype in isolation. As we do so, we provide a brief description of the Greek archetype and describe each archetypal frame in relation to the subthemes of management education philosophy, teaching goals, professors' function, and relationship with students (see Table 1).

Athena: The Role of Knowledge

According to Greek mythology, Athena is the goddess of wisdom, intellect, and reason (Columbia Encyclopedia, 2001). Athena is known for providing wise

counsel that enables both humans and gods to make good decisions (Otto, 1954; Stroud, 1996). The myth of her birth suggests she is born from the mind, not from the heart.

Professors who subscribe to the Athenian archetype (which was 34% of our sample) define their educator role as one of facilitating students' cognitive learning. Athenian professors believe the goal of the management educator is to teach students the discipline-specific concepts that will make them better decision makers and thus business leaders. Operations professors should focus on teaching the principles of operations; finance professors should focus on teaching the analytic tools of finance, and so forth. Wisdom, knowledge, and learning pertains solely to each management professor's discipline. As such, Athenian professors are reluctant to teach anything other than their discipline even after a world crisis such as 9/11. The following quotes illustrate the frame of the Athenian professor:

I don't think it's inappropriate (discussing September 11th) if it's within their subject matter. If it's a math professor, I would say it's almost like me, as a marketing professor, there's nothing in my subject area that gives me a right to impose myself. Here I am a professor in a subject area Marketing—I'm a professor. There are things I should be professing and getting the student to understand about the topic.

We're not in an ethics course, or philosophy course, or political science course. If I were one of the instructors in that area, I would, in fact, bring it up. But, on this thing (9/11), you and I are equals. I have no more experience. My views are no more clear or my emotions less or more deep than your emotions on this. Basically, I said, "right or wrong, I choose not to address it in class, because this is not what class is on, nor is it my area of expertise."

Athenian professors' ideology places them in a traditional hierarchical relationship with their students, with the professor as expert and the student as novice. In this relationship, Athenian professors define their role as imparting knowledge to their students. Because of their aware-

ness of the power they have over their students, Athenian professors are often careful to only use this power in areas where they have a defined, intellectual expertise. Furthermore, these professors often argue that since students' learning goals are centered on the acquisition of tangible skills, formulas, and data that would support their business careers, it is important to remain focused on one's role as discipline experts. As one professor explained to us:

Our MBA students are so... as a rule... most of them are still so pragmatic, so focused on outcomes that I think it would not be a useful way for them to spend their time with me [discussing 9/11]... nor is it directly relevant to what they had signed up for... [I]t didn't feel appropriate.

The Athenian archetype, like all of the archetypes, does have unique challenges that may prevent professors from fully achieving their goals of imparting wisdom. Within this archetype, the professor focuses on being a rational academic advisor, and thus, may minimize expression of emotion and human vulnerabilities. This role can be hard to enact when one is confronted with a highly emotional situation like that of 9/11.

Prometheus: The Role of Enlightenment

The primary role of Prometheus in Greek mythology is as the benefactor of humankind. According to Greek myths, when Zeus mistreated man, Prometheus stole fire from the gods and gave it to the humans. In the process of giving humans fire, Prometheus also gave humans the gifts of thinking, cognition, and hope (Columbia Encyclopedia, 2001).

While Prometheus, like Athena, is described as a teacher and mentor, it is important to note that in accordance with Greek mythology these two archetypes result in very different teaching philosophies. Athena is focused on teaching knowledge while Prometheus is focused on teaching courage, teamwork, and self-improvement. Furthermore, Athena's relationship to her students is one of dependence in which the student continues to rely on Athena for the wisdom

she imparts. In contrast, Prometheus' relationship is one of empowerment in which students take responsibility for their learning and their future. As such, these two archetypes represent fundamentally different philosophies about what management students need to learn and how to best facilitate this learning.

Within the Promethean archetype, professors hold broad definitions of the learning goals of management education (56% of the professors in our study ascribed to this role frame). These professors focus on educating students as whole people and on nurturing students' personal growth and development. While some Promethean professors arrive at this broad definition of learning through their desire to facilitate personal development, other Promethean professors are drawn to this frame through their desire to educate managers who are ethical, thoughtful global citizens. For the Promethean professor, learning is centered on social, emotional learn-

ing. The following quotes illustrate this perspective:

Is this education simply technical training or is it somehow a platform for real life as a citizen in this world? And if so, what is it that we do here that helps you—that is at least part of how you want to address serious challenges of this magnitude.

Our role as educators is to help them learn. So if I would rank the things that need to be learned right now, pretty close to the top of my list is how to navigate the world that seems to be unfolding. The other thing we need is to teach things that are relevant. The only way in which we wouldn't be responsible for teaching this [9/11] is either if we don't have responsibility for their learning, or we teach things that aren't relevant and not connected to the real world.

In establishing their relationships with students, Promethean professors tend to relate to students in a personal, egalitarian manner. In the classroom,

Promethean professors frequently rely on a facilitating style. Rather than being the expert who dictates ideas, Promethean professors focus on creating the context for students to discover their own learning. Just as Prometheus worked to empower humans to control their destiny, Promethean professors see themselves as empowering students to control their own learning. Beyond facilitating, Promethean professors also empower students by acting as role models as they depict desired behaviors in their classrooms. Just as leaders must "walk the walk and talk the talk," Promethean professors teach students by modeling behaviors they want to nurture in their students. One Promethean professor articulated this view quite clearly as she stated,

Just as I expect them as managers and leaders and team members to pay attention to their colleague's emotional reactions to life and how that then bears on the job they do and how they work, we have to do the same.

	Athena: The role of wisdom	Prometheus: The role of enlightenment	Asclepius: The role of healing
Philosophy underlying management education	To be successful in business students need to learn the models and theories of the disciplines.	To be successful in business students need to develop broadly as whole people. They need strong interpersonal combined with an ethical, global mind-set.	Students can not engage in other learning if they are not emotionally centered. To be successful in business students need to be able to navigate emotions in the workplace.
Learning goals	Cognitive development of the language, concepts, models of a particular discipline. Educate students on the theoretical concepts that are outlined in a course syllabus.	Facilitate students' interpersonal and leadership development. Facilitate students' development of ethical reasoning and global citizenship.	Help students become emotionally centered. Develop students' awareness of the relationship between emotions and management.
Professor's functional stance	A discipline expert	A facilitator, coach, and role model	Monitor of emotional health
Relationship with students	Hierarchical relationship of expert to novice	Egalitarian relationship of co-learner or guide	Hierarchical relationship of parent to child
Challenges	Narrow definition of student learning that may hinder students' development of interpersonal competencies and ethical basis.	Teaching approach may violate students' expectations of the professor and the course and may be inconsistent with their educational goals.	Faculty may not have the training, background to respond to these issues. Students may not be interested in obtaining help.

Table 1. How we frame our role as educators.

Within the Promethean archetype, the primary challenge an educator faces emanates from the potential misalignment between how professors execute their role and students' expectations of these roles. Students who are pursuing a business education are often described as concrete, causal thinkers who are focused on learning the concepts, knowledge, and tools that will enhance their business acumen. Many students are not expecting to focus on their personal development, and as a result, are unwilling to engage in this type of learning. The following professor talked about this challenge as she tried to lead students in an introspective, learning exercise:

I think helping people develop for this age group, though, is a delicate matter and it has to be done in ways that are not obtrusive—actually maybe in ways where you sense a readiness, an openness, to what you might propose. Otherwise, they don't get it, and you are wasting their time. And risking, actually, I think, a hardening of their attitudes towards some of these things.

In enacting the Promethean archetype, a professor may only be able to facilitate student learning when students are ready and willing to engage in a self-reflective, self-managed process.

Asclepius: The Role of Emotion

Asclepius began his life in Greek mythology as a Greek hero who later became the Greek god of medicine and healing. His physician staff, which is still the symbol of the medical profession, is what distinguishes him in the art of healing (Pantheon.org, 2002). While most people associate Asclepius with physical healing, according to Greek mythology he is also associated with emotional and spiritual healing.

As educators, professors encounter students at all ages and stages of life. Because of this diversity, many students also may be working through varied personal and emotional issues. Students may be coping with major world crises such as 9/11, violent or tragic university events, or family and career challenges. As a professor you will have important choices to make regarding the extent to

which you respond to students' emotional needs. While most professors are not likely to solely frame their role as that of an emotional healer, many do believe an important facet of their role is to provide students with emotional and psychological support. In our data which followed 9/11, we found 56% of professors invoked this archetype.

Within the Asclepian archetype, professors often start from the premise that learning can only occur when students enter the learning process from a safe, emotionally secure place. Emotional healing is not seen as a final learning goal; rather, it is an interim step that is necessary before other types of learning could occur. Emotional learning is a means to an end. The following quotes illustrate how Asclepian professors teach through emotion:

My experience is when students are upset or something they come to see me. Actually, I talk to them about the way they feel. That's just kind of the way I am because I think let's get it out. I'd rather just engage them and get out their feelings and then kind of go from there.

Our goal as educators is to help them through all kinds of things. To me, this is as much a part of something that we need to help them with as any subject that we teach. I do sort of take the role obligation very seriously. I see it in a more boundary-less kind of way.

To support students emotionally, Asclepian professors frequently try to build a classroom culture that demonstrates their willingness and availability to support students emotionally. As the following professor articulated:

I think that our role is to create an environment in our classroom and create a relationship with our students where they would feel comfortable coming. It's passive to the extent that I'm not calling my students up and asking them to come in to talk about this [9/11], but I actively try and foster a relationship and a culture in the classroom that would let them know that it was okay.

Within the Asclepian archetype, professors often frame their relationships with students as that of a parent to a child. This is particularly true for pro-

fessors who are teaching undergraduate students or are at a residential campus. Asclepian professors often assume these students need more emotional parental support from faculty and administrators, since these students are removed from their family and personal support systems. Although relating to students as parent to child does create a hierarchical relationship, similar to that of the Athenian frame, this hierarchy is based upon age and personal maturity, not cognitive knowledge. The professor is providing the emotional guidance and wisdom that one would expect to obtain from someone who is older and has more life experience.

The challenge with enacting the Asclepian role stems from the controversy that is associated with this role. Of the three roles, professors voiced the most concern over whether it was appropriate to emotionally support students given that most professors did not have a mental health background. In explaining why he believed emotional healing was outside their professional role, the following professor explained:

Because I think that these are skills. And some people have more experience with these kinds of skills than others. And I don't think that, unless we are going to run all the professors through—how do we deal with it, how are we sensitive to it, and how do we respond to students who may be in pain in some way—unless we're given the teaching and the training to do that, I don't think it should be part of what we do.

Professors who are more confident enacting the Asclepian archetype often have prior training or experience in responding to mental health issues (i.e., as a social worker) or in teaching classes on emotionally "hot" topics (i.e., social issues, diversity). This suggests that the other challenge for the Asclepian archetype is that there may be a limited number of professors who are able and willing to enact it.

How Our Role Framing Affects Management Students' Learning

These archetypes of how we define our roles as management educators begin to

provide insight into why management professors teach as they do. While some researchers have described management professors' choices around teaching as ill-defined or even idiosyncratic (Billimoria, 2000), our study indicates that management professors' choices are anything but indiscriminate. How management educators choose to teach and work with students, in short, how we enact our role, is guided by how we frame our role. Based on our findings we suggest there are three distinct interpretive frames professors hold regarding their roles as educators. Depending on the frames one holds, we approach our role differently with regards to (1) what we define as the purpose of management education, (2) the learning goals we establish for our courses, (3) the functional stance we use as a professor, and (4) how we relate to our students. Table 1 provides a summary of how each of these role dimensions differ based on one's archetypal frame.

Interpretive frames are important not just because they highlight the differences in beliefs of professors but also because they guide professors' actions and behaviors. The aforementioned interpretive frames guide professors to make a series of connected decisions regarding what to include in a course, the methods and technologies they engage, and how they choose to relate to students. Through these actions, professors create a course curriculum that directs students toward specific learning outcomes.

For example, professors who ascribe to the Athenian frame are focused on teaching discipline content. As such, these professors will be more likely to lecture about course concepts, and they will be more likely to use testing methods that evaluate students' learning of discipline concepts. Athenian professors are thereby likely to direct their students toward the learning of critical and conceptual discipline knowledge. The Promethean professor who believes more in personal development is likely to create a syllabus that provides students with more opportunity for experimentation and reflection. The Promethean professor can be expected to use more exercises, feedback sessions, and role plays to support student learning. Through these

choices, the Promethean professor guides students toward learning outcomes that relate to interpersonal development and ethical and global thinking. Finally, the Asclepian professor who is focused on emotion and the connection between emotions and the workplace is likely to design a course that surfaces emotion and engages emotion to support learning. Be it through journal activities, extensive in-class writing, or T-group style group processing, this professor engages students' emotions. As such, the Promethean professor directs students toward building their emotional competence and awareness.

While each frame is likely to facilitate certain learning outcomes, each also limits other types of learning outcomes. For example, an accounting professor who employs an Athenian archetype is not likely to discuss the ethical issues associated with accounting. By ignoring ethics, the professor is modeling behavior that suggests that as managers, students do not need to consider these issues. With the increased focus on educating management students who are more human and ethical in their business practice, a unilateral focus on discipline knowledge does not allow for the design of a curriculum that supports a more expanded definition of learning outcomes (Mitroff, 2004; Bennis & O'Toole, 2005). At the same time, we would argue that a unilateral focus from the Promethean professor on interpersonal skills and ethical development does not support the learning of the core theories and frameworks that are central to each management discipline. Hence, no single role can facilitate the range of learning outcomes that business schools need to support.

What does all this mean for doctoral students, doctoral advisors, and doctoral education? We argue first and foremost, doctoral education needs to place more emphasis on teaching doctoral candidates how to teach and more importantly how to think about enacting their role as educators. In the few programs where doctoral candidates do discuss teaching, the focus of these discussions is primarily on the mechanics of teaching. Doctoral candidates are taught how to manage classroom discussion, create assign-

ments, designing a lecture, and grade effectively. Rarely are doctoral students encouraged to think about what is their frame for how they teach.

If we are to move beyond some of the current challenges of how and what we teach in business schools, we must begin by teaching our doctoral students differently. Doctoral candidates need to have opportunity to engage in discussion about how one begins to craft one's role as a management educator and what are the strengths and weaknesses of different models of educators. Through discussions and reflection, doctoral candidates can begin to think broadly about their role and how their crafting of their role contributes to what business school students learn. Just as doctoral students learn to craft their role as researchers so too must we help these students begin to craft their role as educators.

Endnotes

1. More information on the full study and methodology can be found in the two research articles published from this study in the *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 2007, 6(4):439-457 and *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 2002, 1(1): 38-54.

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