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SCHOOL PROFILE

Building bridges

By David Furlonger

The Management College of Southern Africa (Mancosa) hasn't always enjoyed an easy relationship with other business schools. Principal Yusuf Karodia has sometimes been outspoken about the perceived disparity between university-based schools and private ones like his own.

He has accused university-based schools of being overpriced, exclusive, and not doing enough to meet the management needs of the broad SA population. The FM has also been in his sights. He withdrew Mancosa from the FM MBA rankings a few years ago, claiming we rated the school too low (rankings are done independently, based on responses from schools, employers and graduates, with no FM input).



Hoosen Rasool and Yusuf Karodia Global players required

That was in the past. Today, Karodia says Mancosa's relationship with other schools is "very good". It is a fully accredited MBA provider and an active member of the SA Business Schools Association (Sabsa). It plans to offer doctoral programmes soon. Karodia himself has mellowed, he says.

Well, almost. When I ask about Mancosa's relationship with Regent Business School - its offices are opposite Mancosa's Durban headquarters and its founder, Naren Bhana, has joined Mancosa - Karodia asks what I've heard and if I am suggesting something improper. With calming words from Mancosa MD Hoosen Rasool, I assure him I'm not. For the record, he says the only link is that Regent "can use our resources" but that there are no shared faculty.

There's no doubt though that Mancosa has found a ready market in the (relatively) low-cost MBA field. It's possible to complete the two-year supported distance programme for a fraction over R40 000. That's less than a quarter of the most expensive SA-based MBA and considerably less than the cheapest university-based qualification.

Top schools argue that you get what you pay for and that they provide more facilities, classroom teaching and active experience. The most expensive programmes are usually full-time.

Rasool says: "SA has a huge management skills deficit but big schools are too expensive. They have created the perception that you have to be rich to have an MBA. We believe the modern MBA model should not be the exclusive Harvard model but one for the people." The challenge, he says, is to provide affordable and accessible information. "We could be very expensive if we wanted, but what would that do for development?"

Rasool suggests that the content of the traditional MBA needs revising, particularly in SA. "Is the curriculum relevant to the 21st century or is it rooted in the 1950s?" He believes there has already been a shift from management theory to practical management teaching. "The emphasis should be to provide skills for immediate use in the workplace."

Core MBA content internationally remains based on US and European tradition but Rasool wants to see more African relevance in SA programmes. He wants more case studies from African business. "Students need a good understanding of Africa but must also learn skills they can apply in the rest of the world."

Mancosa offers programmes in many African countries. Rasool says they are "contextualised" to each market. He claims Mancosa is SA's most active business school in Africa: "No-one has an African footprint like ours." It is a claim with which some schools take issue.

Rasool wants the school to take its skills further afield. "We see huge opportunities in developing markets. We are trying to foster academic relations with countries like Russia, Kazakhstan, Mongolia... places off the beaten track." All SA business schools should be increasing their international exposure.

Karodia says: "Education is a global market and we need a globally competitive education industry. Leading nations export education. It enables countries to expose the rest of the world to their cultures and traditions. Look at Australia. One of its biggest export earners is education.

"We have good institutions here that can do the same. We mustn't underestimate ourselves. If you are not a global player today, you are doomed to extinction."

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