**“From Pipelines to Platforms”: Examining the Benefits and Limitations of Management Education Platforms for Institutionalized Shift**

**Abstract:**

Platform technologies have increasingly challenged institutions to move beyond narrowly defined products and services toward an ecosystem of user interactions that have the capacity to disrupt entire marketplaces. Facilitated through the co-production of a product or service, popular examples of platform technologies include Uber, Wikipedia, and Facebook, and, in the educational markets, Coursera and Skillshare. Yet, beyond providing greater accessibility and forms of institutionalized shift, how else can platform technologies be leveraged to increase positive (rather than negative) impact? What implications do they hold on management education and its overarching objectives, from delivery of quality teaching to achievement of student outcomes? In this 60 minute roundtable session, we provide an overview of how four comparative education platform technologies have re-conceptualized management education. Leveraging the Porters Five Forces Model in active dialogue with session participants, we discuss what implications platform technologies may hold (positive or negative) in management education, and illuminate/critique some of the strategies espoused by platform experts. We end by discussing implications on institutional and curriculum design targeted to business faculty and administrators.

Keywords: *Platform Technologies, Institutionalized Shift, Strategies for Management Educator in Age of Ecosystems*

**Introduction**

The introduction of platform technologies has both imminent and potentially transformative market implications. In their seminal book, *Platform Revolution*, Parker, Van Alystne, and Choudary (2016) describe the holistic shift from “pipelines” to “platforms” - explaining how traditional organizations and markets can no longer compete solely on the basis of controlling a specific value chain of products and services (i.e., the pipeline of controlled resources and institutional myths and ceremony). Rather, organizations must contend with platforms, which are defined as an ecosystem of interactions that are controlled by end-users who can simultaneously co-participate in the creation and evolution of a product or service. A notable example of platform disruption can be found in AirBnb, a hospitality platform that became more valuable than both Hilton and Hyatt Hotels by creating an ecosystem for users to find and rent accommodations.

In this ecosystem, “amazing amounts of value can be exchanged” through a viral effect of interactions (Parker, Van Alystne, and Choudary, 2016: p. 3), leading to multi-dimensional, often rapidly evolving outcomes. As Parker et al. (2016) describe, the success of platform technologies has disrupted how entire organizations and industries historically compete on supply economies of scale, resource controllability, which are often safe-guarded through institutional logics needed to maintain legitimacy and control.

Yet, part of managing the opportunities and challenges with platform technologies involves understanding how such technologies can aid individual users - 1) define their own value from the ecosystem itself, and 2) to what extent participants can help curate their own value by matching and allowing frictionless entry into an existing market system.

In the context of management education, this problem centers upon understanding how individuals can develop and curate their own value toward individual improvement, and not just as means to conform to existing institutional and organizational practices that may questions resource and traditional norms around institutional control. This problem is especially relevant within the context of higher education, where colleges and universities face increasing pressure to better prepare learners for success in the 21st century that may not follow a traditional learning and controlled model of “linearity”. Yet little work has addressed this challenge as pedagogical and practitioner challenge in management education.

At the same time, examples of successful platforms have burgeoned; they include Uber, AirbnB, Amazon, YouTube, and Wikipedia that have led to wide-spread market disruption in various industries (i.e., transportation, housing, retail, journalism. media content, and book/information production). In the context of education, the impact of platform technologies are now just emerging – beginning with MOOCs and the growing popularity of platforms such as Coursera, which engage independent instructors from various notable institutions (e.g., Wharton, Johns Hopkins, Stanford, and the University of Michigan) to help students tailor and deliver course content in a series of exchanges. While Coursera has been notable for its potentially disruptive nature, Sean Gallagher of Northeastern University’s Center for the Future of Higher Education and Talent Strategy indicates that more education technologies are beginning to position themselves as “enabler” companies in support of traditional education – and not just to provide remote access to courses.

Specifically, while still nascent, these exchanges have the potential of becoming encapsulated into independent course offerings and have the longer-term potential of being folded into independent degree certificates or micro-credentials (i.e., badges), potentially disrupting the traditional concept of a degree from a one given institution or even how guidance is provided by specific accreditation boards. At the same time, by offering a lower cost alternative to education while a student debt crisis drags on, they may challenge the very fee structures that sustain universities.

By bringing more flexible and affordable learning alternatives into the mainstream, it is clear that platforms are capable of expanding education access. Beyond access, a variety of emerging platforms are positioning themselves to improve education quality and outcomes. As seen in Table 1 below, platforms now exist to improve employability, equip students with tools for greater success, and improve the quality of teaching. While the potential implications of these platforms are transformative, their impact has yet to cause a widespread shift in the operating norms and procedures within traditional education.

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| **Potential Impacts of Education Platform Technologies** |
| ***Platform*** | ***Primary Value to Learner*** | ***Primary Impact*** |
| Coursera, EdX, Udemy | Flexible low cost courses & degrees | Increasing education access |
| GA, Skillshare, Lynda | Skills development | Improving employability |
| InsideTrack, StudyBlue | Performance tools for learners | Improving student success |
| TED-Ed | Tools to improve teaching | Improving education quality |

Yet, how can such platform technologies be mobilized beyond just institutionalized shift (for which they have been both lauded and criticized in the immediate and longer-term), but also as means to develop individual impact and benefit? What are their limitations? In this session, we tackle these questions as both macro- and micro-level issue by having session participants confront both the benefits and challenges of platform technologies in the context of management education with the following learning objectives in mind:

**Learning Objectives**

1). To provide an overview and greater understanding of the role of platforms and how they must contend with various forces in the education marketplace; for this area, participants will consider the role of resource controllability, institutional controllability as well as the competitive forces that may influence or force re-evaluation how we define education programming

2). From point one, to engage in discussion regarding the implications that these technologies may hold on the quality and delivery of teaching and learning in management education and specifically among affected stakeholders (students, faculty, and their institutions)

3). To illuminate and critique some of the strategies espoused by platform gurus, practitioners, and theorists – specifically leveraging the work on Sangeet Choudary and others, with a first-hand perspective of how the CEO of platform technology has contended with this issue

**Targeted Audience and Session Format**

This session thus approaches both the benefit and drawbacks of platform technologies as one of educational policy and strategic programmatic consideration that will integrate, examine, and critique this shift through various theoretical lenses.

To contextualize its contribution, this session first examines how the concept of pipelines in management education have often operated from a resource-based view of the organization. Leveraging Wernerfelt’s (1984) and Barney’s (1986a; 1986 b) concept of the Resource-Based View of the firm, we look at how resource contingencies have defined how forms of expertise and access to them have built and controlled the pipeline of value creations in business education markets.

 Second, this session then turns to institutional theory (i.e., the notion that institutions survive on the basis of myths that they project into the market to maintain their legitimacy from Meyer and Rowan’s (1977) work. As part of this discussion, participants will be asked to argue that this perspective is being questioned with platform technologies posing broader implications on how administrators, institutions, and accreditation authorities will manage for legitimacy, the relevance of their product through traditionally existing institutional norms such as school rankings, and the need to introduce or contend.

Finally, participants will then integrate what are the benefits and drawbacks of platforms as ecosystems – and more viscerally how educators can select, vary, and retain strategies to deal with this shift both administratively and in day-to-day actions with the students and colleagues, but also where alternative areas of individual and social impact need to be derived. This portion of our session ends by understanding what might be the day-to-day curriculum and programmatic implications as well as what faculty’s views of education for themselves and delivery might need to be transformed.

**To achieve these contributions and learning objectives, this 60 minute general roundtable session will be divided into three parts (i.e., Parts A, B, and C) and is geared toward business faculty and administrators.**

**DESCRIPTION AND FORMAT OF SESSION EXERCISES**

* **Part A: Introduction to the Concept of Platforms** (15 - 20 Minutes)- Part A will include an overview of the concepts of pipelines to platforms including examples from industry and how they are changing RBV, institutional effects, as well as demand an ecosystem model. As part of this segment, we will show an abridged version of Sangeet Choudary’s TED Talk on this topic or we will provide a brief explanation; we will then show some existing platforms in the context of education outlining how they have created institutional shift.
* **Part B: Application of Porter’s Five Forces Model and Critique of This Shift- Both Positive and Negative** (20 -25 Minutes) – This second part of the session will engage participants in an activity that will build on the introduction to platform technologies and examples. We will divide participants into pairs or, if attendance is particularly large, into small groups of 3-5 people. We will have participants consider three key stakeholders in light of platform technologies in the context of management education (i.e., business school students, faculty, and administrators). As part of discussion, we will have participants consider the following questions in light of the Porter Five Forces Model.
	+ 1) What different forms of rivalry will be posed with educational platforms both in the immediate and long term?
	+ 2) Who or what kinds of threats or opportunities both might exist? Here I will probe participants to consider both obvious and less obvious examples.
	+ 3) From the buy side, how might platforms shift the educational paradigm of student as being the receiver toward the consumer of knowledge? Who else might be on the buy side especially as institutional norms are transformed or changed by platforms?
	+ 4) From the supply side, specifically educators and their institutions, how might platforms change the paradigm of how educational products are delivered as well as their compensation structure? Here we will have participants try to think of at least two models and how these models may alter resource bases differently, potentially change institutional norms as well as impacts, and what issues remain when transitioning management education to an “ecosystem”?

In addition to being given these questions as part of a handout, participants will also receive a copy of the Porter Five Forces Model as pictured below. This will help participants maintain their focus on how platform technologies are shifting the marketplace.

Porter Five Forces Model:



* **Part C: Debrief and Wrap-Up** (15 -20 Minutes) – With the time remaining, we will have participants share out some examples and answers to session questions from Part B. As part of wrapping up this session, we will provide a handout (i.e., a white-paper) on how faculty can integrate existing education platforms or platform-inspired strategies into their teaching practices that will build in part from Parker et al.’s (2016) book. We will also have CEO in this space provide perspective on how to contend with the effects of platforms and their implications on individual and social impact.

**Application to Conference Theme and Unique Contribution to MOBTS**

As the focal point of this year’s conference is how business educators can become positive agents of change, ultimately, the session should enable business faculty and administrators to better understand their role in strengthening the state of management education in the age of the platform.

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This is the first time this proposal will be presented at MOBTS or at any conference.

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