

## Changing MBA Identities: Using Critical Reflection inside and out in Finding a New Narrative

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**Abstract :** Storytelling is an established means of leadership and management development and is also considered a form of leadership of self and others in its own right. This study focuses on the utility of storytelling in the development of management narratives in an MBA programme; sources include programme participants as well as international recruiters, whose voices are often only heard in terms of economic contribution and globalisation. For many MBA candidates, the return to study requires the development of a new identity which complements their professional identity; each candidate has their own journey and expectations, the use of story can enable candidates to explore their aspirations and assumptions and give voice to previously unspoken ideas. For international recruitment, the story of market development and change must be captured if MBAs are to remain fit for purpose. If used effectively, story acts as a form of critical reflection that can inform the learning journeys of individuals, emerging identities as well as the ongoing design and development of programmes. The landscape of management education is shifting; the MBA begins to attract a different kind of candidate, some are younger than before, others are seeking validation for their existing work practices, yet more are entrepreneurial and wish to capitalise on an institutional experience to further their career. There is a shift in context, creating uncertainty and ambiguity for programme managers and recruiters, thus requiring institutions to create a new MBA narrative. This study utilises Lego SeriousPlay as the means to engaging programme participants and international agents in telling the story of their MBA. We asked MBA participants to tell the story of their leadership and management aspirations and compare these to stories of their development journeys, allowing for critical reflection of their respective development gaps. We asked international recruiters, who act as university agents and promote courses in the student's country of origin, to explore their mental models of MBA candidates and their learning agenda. The purpose of this process was to explore the agent's perception of the MBA programme and to articulate the student journey from a recruitment perspective. The paper's unique contribution is in combining these stories in order to explore the assumptions that determine programme design. Data drawn from reflective statements together with images of Lego 'builds' created the opportunity for reflection between the mental models of these groups. Findings will inform the design of the MBA journey and experience; we review the extent to which the changing identities of learners are congruent with programme design. Data from international recruiters also determines the extent to which marketing and recruitment strategies identify with would be candidates.

**Keywords :** critical reflection, programme management, recruitment, storytelling

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