

Ramon O'Callaghan and **José Varejão**
outline the positive effects of a BSIS study

The impact of BSIS

Unlike most universities, Portugal's University of Porto has delegated its mission to educate future business leaders to two schools: the School of Economics and Management (FEP) and the Porto Business School (PBS).

FEP is a regular school of the University of Porto. PBS was set up as a separate legal entity – an association of the university and 36 organisations, including some of the largest companies in Portugal.

While FEP offers undergraduate, MSc and PhD programmes, PBS targets working professionals and corporations through its MBAs, executive education and customised in-company programmes.

Though FEP and PBS are autonomous schools, as we think about impact in its multiple dimensions, it becomes clear that the two schools are not, *de facto*, independent. The full extent of their educational impact cannot be identified separately.

With non-overlapping programme portfolios and target groups but partially overlapping resources (part of FEP faculty also teach PBS programmes); and alumni networks; financial, educational and business development impacts; as well as the impact on the regional ecosystem the two schools are deeply intertwined.

For us, thinking in terms of impact was tantamount to thinking about how the strategies of the two schools were linked and how they should be aligned for maximising impact.

“”

Though FEP and PBS are autonomous schools, as we think about impact in its multiple dimensions, it becomes clear that the two schools are not, de facto, independent. The full extent of their educational impact cannot be identified separately

The Porto BSIS study

In 2017 both schools participated in an EFMD Business School Impact System (BSIS) study that assesses schools' impact on several dimensions from financial and educational to business development, intellectual impact within its local ecosystem, and societal and image impact.

Completed in September 2017, the BSIS report concluded that FEP and PBS had a combined financial impact of €85 million and highlighted some “remarkable features” of the schools:

- an unparalleled reputation in bachelors degrees in Portugal
- a solid position in executive education, with good international exposure
- a quality partnership with companies in the region
- active alumni associations with graduates proud of their schools
- quality of students
- full-time faculty producing high-quality intellectual contributions
- exemplary faculty pedagogical success in executive education and MBAs
- highly motivated administrative officers

36

PBS was set up as a separate legal entity – an association of the university and 36 organisations, including some of the largest companies in Portugal

€85m

Completed in September 2017, the BSIS report concluded that FEP and PBS had a combined financial impact of €85 million

The 'impact' of the BSIS process on our schools

The most remarkable effect of the BSIS process is that it led us to rethink the notion of impact itself, what impact really is and what it meant for our schools and our stakeholders. In both schools, impact was predominantly considered for its effects on students' lives and careers.

Although financial impact, intellectual impact and impact on the regional ecosystem have always been perceived as important, the truth is that the focus was on the educational impact with the other dimensions being given a relatively low status.

PBS, for example, independently of the BSIS process, was engaged in a rebranding effort. The previous positioning emphasised the school's impact on students. "We change lives", the slogan used to say.

While this was certainly true (many MBA alumni indicated that the school had indeed changed their lives), it was too restrictive a view. PBS was clearly also having an impact on organisations, given that a third of its turnover came from customised programmes for corporate clients.

Thus, at that point, we could have modified the slogan into something like "changing lives and transforming organisations", but the BSIS process made us realise that the sphere of impact went beyond organisations and that the school was making a difference at a societal level in many other ways.

So, there was no point in trying to be explicit about the "target" and circumscribe the impact to a given domain. PBS's slogan today ("make change happen") is an invitation to take the lead and a call to action, to make a difference. And it is applicable at all levels: individual, organisational and societal.

Beyond the question of rebranding, BSIS has helped both schools reach a better understanding of how the respective impact domains are structured and who the key stakeholders are.

This reflection has had a positive effect in developing an overall comprehensive view of the total portfolio of management education at the University of Porto, including undergraduate, pre-experience, post-experience, specialised postgraduate and non-degree executive education programmes, irrespectively of the schools where specific programmes are offered.

Moving forward, we believe that the external communication of this comprehensive view of

the full portfolio of programmes and activities can lead to significant synergies in terms of communication, brand equity and overall reputation.

Another consequence of the BSIS process has been the collaborative spirit that it created. For the first time, the two schools, which had generally worked independently, were talking to external stakeholders with a single face and single goal – to educate future business leaders and, thus, improve the management capabilities of Portuguese businesses and society, especially in the north of the country.

For the external stakeholders, the process, and most particularly, the interview with the team leaders, was a rare opportunity to think jointly about the two schools and their stakes in them.

Internally, the BSIS process has already made change happen: for the first time, faculty and staff of the two schools (and university staff) were working together and not just at the operational level, as they typically used to do. In the process, they came to take stock of the current state of co-operation (or lack of it) and to assess the domains where co-operation made sense and should be developed further. This is already enhancing efficiency and creating synergies in key areas of the two schools' activities.

Regarding intellectual contribution and its external communication, BSIS has led both schools to proactively disseminate the managerial relevance of research output to the business community by means of research reports, newsletters, trade publications and to organise topical seminars and discussion events.

Although career progression is monitored for MBA alumni, the schools do not have sufficient data for other alumni. BSIS has encouraged both schools to systematically collect data about alumni of all programmes in order to measure career progression as well as the extent to which their learning experience at our schools has helped them in their professional advancement.

More broadly, the idea of developing an "Impact Information System" is now being considered. Such a system will centralise data on alumni, career services, corporate relations, publications, media presence and so on.

In addition to these specific initiatives, a more subtle consequence of BSIS has been the gradual development of an "impact culture". Increasingly,





“

A more subtle consequence of BSIS has been the gradual development of an “impact culture”. Increasingly, management, staff and faculty are recognising the importance of measuring impact and, thus, becoming aware of their own contribution and of the collective impact of the schools’ activities



management, staff and faculty are recognising the importance of measuring impact and thus becoming aware of their own contribution and of the collective impact of the schools’ activities. This is key for designing impact-oriented programmes.

The BSIS process has been of great value to the University of Porto, and more specifically to its two management schools. It has offered the opportunity to assess the impact that we produce on the local community and beyond, and to reassess the expectations of our main stakeholders regarding our activities.

For both schools, BSIS has been a powerful instrument not only to raise internal and external awareness about impact but also to influence the management agendas, both at operational and strategic levels, while developing an impact-oriented culture in the schools.

Subsequent to the BSIS process, the schools now envisage further collaboration, better alignment and joint projects for greater societal impact. While the schools will continue to operate in different and non-overlapping domains, there is a growing consensus that many synergies can be obtained through closer relationships and joint strategies, which in turn will lead to greater impact and recognition.

gf

About the Authors

Ramon O'Callaghan is Dean, Porto Business School, University of Porto.

José Varejão, is Director, School of Economics and Management, University of Porto.