



Cass Business School

Cass Business School is one of Europe's leading providers of business and management education, consultancy and research. Its reputation attracts students and faculty from around the world. It aims to 'educate managers for the 21st century'.

SAMI's role: equipping MBAs to think about the future

As part of that guiding principle, Cass asked Gill Ringland of SAMI Consulting to develop and deliver a new course offering tools and techniques for thinking about the future. It was to be an MBA elective and consist of five sessions of three hours each.

In order to meet the Business School's brief, SAMI decided to focus on practical work based on creating and using scenarios for management in 2025. In this way, the participants, who were from North America, Europe, Africa and Asia, would be given an invaluable lesson in the use of tools to anticipate how management may change over the next decades and how MBA courses should respond accordingly. The aim was not to develop them as futurists but to develop them as managers who know how to get the best from futurists.

The process: scanning the horizon and creating scenarios

The first task for the class was 'horizon scanning': what are the forces which will affect management in 2025 and thus the MBA course content? It was clear that the world in 2025 could be very different from today in ways which could be anticipated. Equally, it was also clear that the lessons of the last few years were that there could well be a series of unexpected events which changed the shape of the world.

This led to the focus on four scenarios, built on two axes: organisations can or cannot cope, and change is predictable or unpredictable. The names of the scenarios were chosen to communicate their essence.

The outcome: creating a road map for future MBAs

Business as Usual is also often called "The Official Future", as it reflects the unspoken assumption that life will continue with minor changes, all of which are for the better. Management responsibilities and challenges in this scenario include:

- Global complex networks need new styles of management.
- Managers will increasingly find that IT systems are used to do many of their traditional tasks, leading to a revolution in how managers spend their time.
- Social networks and virtual worlds will be part of the fabric: these increase peer-to-peer interaction and make hierarchies behave differently.

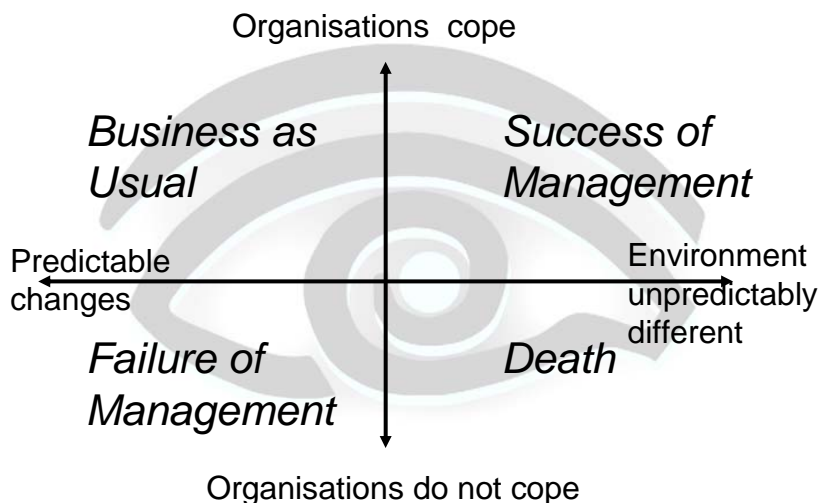


The implications for the MBA include:

- The need to become truly global.
- Since some MBA subjects cover aspects of management now mostly covered by IT systems, these could be enhanced for specialists who need to be able to modify the systems but taken out of the standard MBA.
- Soft skills will become the prime differentiator, more in tune with the new world of contracting, peer task force and projects – skills currently neglected in MBA courses.

The class thought that few managers had started to think about the challenges of even the predictable future.

Management in 2025



SAMI Consulting
St Andrews Management Institute

Future proofing

www.samiconsulting.co.uk

In the **Failure of Management** scenario, MBAs are joining organizations that do not find it easy to change. Ways in which MBAs should be prepared include:

- Students should be taught to recognize external challenges to help the organization respond to them.
- This demands an external focus along with the capability of researching topics - something not currently expected from MBAs.



Success of Management describes a world in which management successfully deals with unpredictable change. Two specific courses of study for MBAs would be critical:

- Geopolitics would be focused on understanding the potential flashpoints in the world which could affect the global economy so students would be sensitized to news of which otherwise they might not see the importance.
- Risk management would be much wider than the current focus on financial risk, and allow students to use historical and scientific research to compare risks and anticipate how they might change in the future.

The **Death** scenario is one in which many of today's major corporates fail because of lack of capability to adapt to the challenges to their business model from the changing world order, and to plan for "the unexpected".

- The MBA course would need to sensitize students to the possibility of disruptive change and to anticipate ways of dealing with it.

The class discussed potential sources of disruptive change. Some, for instance pandemics, proved to be likely to occur but unlikely to be massively disruptive; an analysis resulting from considering the track of the Black Death and the 1919 flu pandemic. Extreme weather events provided the stimulus for discussions about relocations of headquarters – how could this best be done?

The conclusions reached by the class were more far-reaching than expected. Perhaps the most thought-provoking one was: does the MBA represent a 20th century view of the world?