Academic Rankings: What they do to the Image and Reputation of Business Schools

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Utopian Ranking System

- Maximise some utility function e.g. value added activity of business schools

- Can be globally encompassing, at national level or stakeholder specific e.g.
  - students: maximise life income/career surety
  - organisations: maximise supply of high-level manpower
  - owners: maximise self-funding ability
  - stakeholders in sustainability: exposure to sustainability, governance and environmental issues
  - media: maximise readership/profits

- All stakeholders require
  - accurate definitions of quality
  - statistical validity
  - robustness
Utopian Ranking System

cont....

• Effect of the complexity of the product
• Debate about constrained optimisation
Examples of Objectives

• Financial Times
  – career progress
  – international focus
  – idea generating capability

• Which MBA?
  – new career opportunity
  – personal development
  – increase in salary
  – potential to network
Value of Rankings

Favourable rankings

• assist in discovery process
• bolster the global dimension of business schools
• drive continuous improvement initiatives
• create comfort with permanent external scrutiny
• support brand building and drive positive perceptions about MBA programme
• drive student applications
Possible Shortcomings of Rankings

• Drive short-term maximising behaviour
• Changing weights causes instability
• Changing objectives causes instability
• Statistical methodology frequently flawed
• Profusion of rankings exacerbates uncertainty amongst stakeholders
• Significant cost of data collection
• Expensive game if school should pursue variables driving rankings (“the cold war”)
• Criteria may not reflect truly critical variables and hence applicants may be misdirected
Non-Utopian Conclusions

• Accreditations and rankings
• Ratings and rankings
• Expert opinion
• Multiple objectives/weight reductions
• Public domain objectives
• Eduniversal methodology
  – mixed model in terms of measurement
  – mixed model in terms of ranking/ratings
  – mixed model in terms of regional constraints