

# **Business education with an innovative approach: the case of the MBA at Universidad Nacional de Rafaela**

**Authors:** María Della Torre, Marcelo Costamagna, Andrea Minetti, Delfina Berra and Rodrigo Carmona

## **i. Introduction**

The Master in Business Administration (MBA) from Universidad Nacional de Rafaela (UNRaf) has positioned itself as an innovative program in the field of executive education, standing out for its global focus on technology and adaptation to the challenges of modern organizations. In a context where business education requires integrating digital skills, strategic thinking, and sustainability, this training comes to respond to the needs of professionals and companies in Rafaela (an industrial city with a productive fabric based on SMEs) and the region.

This work aims to analyze the development of the UNRaf MBA, examining its curricular design and its impact on the development of leaders. Unlike other programs, the emphasis on technological innovation makes it a relevant case study for understanding how business schools can evolve in dynamic environments.

The document is organized into four sections: first of all, the program is contextualized within the global trends of business education; second, its target population, structure, and activities are described; third, the challenges faced and its future projection are discussed; finally, the results obtained are presented.

## **ii. General context in which the UNRaf MBA experience is framed**

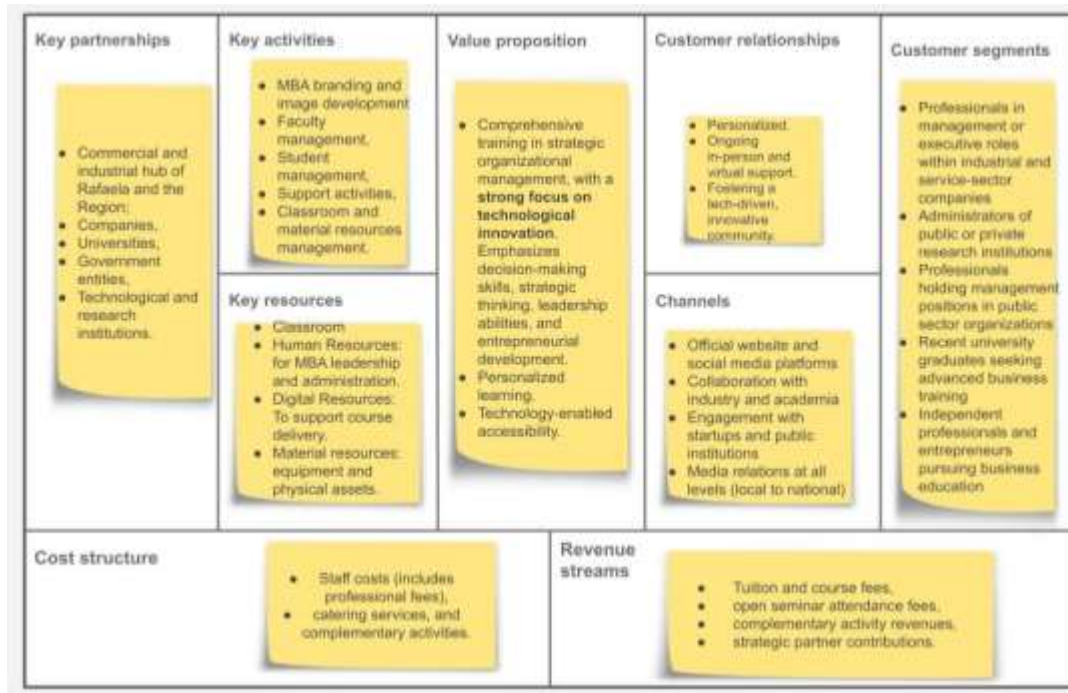
The UNRaf MBA has become an innovative postgraduate since 2019. Its conception has the added value that all subjects and the vast majority of its topics are cross-cuttingly influenced

by the concept of technological innovation. It starts from the importance of considering in today's world of organizations, whether private companies, SMEs, state organizations, or academic institutions, the key role played by technology and innovation as a determining aspect of the management model by the people who direct, lead groups, or develop projects. In this way, technological innovation, the training of professionals in management and direction, and their adaptation to the current challenges of organizations appear as its main assets.

It is also pertinent to formally introduce to some aspects that account for the transformations and new requirements that appear for business and administration schools. The emergence of business schools dates back to the 18th century, but it was not until the 19th century, after the industrial revolution, that a professionalized business administration began to be required to take advantage of the new possibilities offered by mass production and to master the complexities of the "modern corporation". In response to these growing needs, numerous business schools were created in Europe and the United States, and began to teach subjects such as finance, sales, and general management to increasingly wide audiences. Over time, these institutions added topics such as human resource management, strategy, innovation, corporate social responsibility, along with many other, reflecting the importance of generating knowledge about management, business administration, and the need to deepen and professionalize it in increasingly challenging and international competitive environments (Gruber, 2022; Bagley et al. 2020; Chia & Holt, 2008).

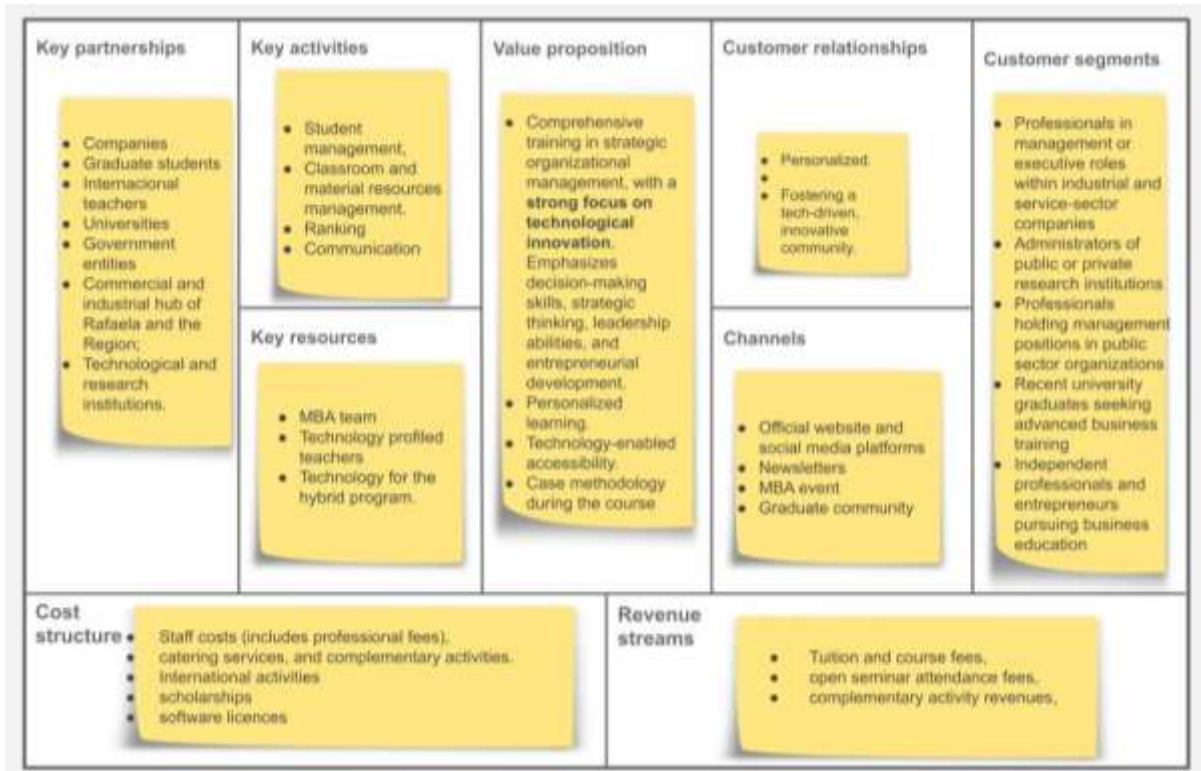
In this framework, business schools have demonstrated their ability to adapt their offerings to the changing needs of people and companies, as well as the society in which they operate. This leads to the importance that they can strategically plan ahead and can become areas of value creation and be dynamic platforms of knowledge both internally and externally.

These issues are reflected in the Business Model Canvas developed in 2019 from the postgraduate program, which reflects the main strategic elements.



Source: own elaboration

The strong technological changes enable new ways of teaching and learning, digital channels, the development of new content and titles that require alternative and innovative solutions. An aspect that clearly emerges is the importance of artificial intelligence and sustainability as two of the most significant dimensions of the modern world. Faced with this, business schools must generate new types of responses to increasingly changing and contingent contexts, which will require the inventiveness of their main references in order to respond to new demands and challenges (Baldegger, 2022; Dyllick, 2015 and Hawawini, 2005). Considering these aspects, a new business model canvas for 2025 has been proposed by the MBA UNRaf team, which reflects these perspectives.



Source: own elaboration

### iii. Population and objectives

The 2019 canvas oriented the proposal to a specific public, and with the evolution of the postgraduate program, there were some changes in 2025. The new challenges include younger students and, also, graduates from the institution. Something to highlight is the increasing diversity of profiles and the origin from other localities outside of Rafaela.

The general objectives of the postgraduate program aim to: i) Train necessary skills for the administration and management of organizations; ii) Develop the culture of technological innovation as the basis of value creation; iii) Provide concrete concepts and tools to direct organizations towards technological learning in a highly changing environment.

### iv. Main challenges

Throughout its development, the program has faced various challenges such as the retention and graduation of students. In order to overcome them, the study plan incorporates three workshops that accompany students in the development of the MBA thesis. This results in better monitoring and graduation conversion.

The pandemic brought with it the demand for hybridization modalities and even broadened the competition towards other MBA programs and/or proposals. In this sense, a distance learning version was submitted for accreditation, and the technology was improved in order to offer a quality hybrid system.

The new business model canvas takes these definitions as a basis to structure the value proposition of the program and the integral management of the business model.

On the other hand, it is possible to make a prospective analysis based on artificial intelligence regarding a future scenario of transformation. Indeed, by 2050, the landscape of Master in Business Administration programs in Argentina will change radically, driven by a profound transformation in education, the labor market, and technology. This future, characterized by adaptation and innovation, will change the way these training proposals are structured and offered at different levels.

## **v. Results**

The UNRaf MBA is positioned as a different proposal and has achieved a position in the MBAs América Economía Ranking. Furthermore, it is the only program in the province of Santa Fe to be ranked. This international recognition evaluates the best MBA programs in Latin America in key areas such as academic quality, return on investment, and international projection. What's more, its graduation rate stands at 46%, a number that is not usual in postgraduate programs in general and, particularly, in Argentina. These achievements reaffirm the quality

of this proposal, which has already established itself as a benchmark for professional training of excellence.

## References

- Baldegger, R. “Introduction to The Future of Business Schools”, in Baldegger, R. J., El Tarabishy, A., Audretsch, D. B., Kariv, D., Passerini, K., & Tan, W. L. (Eds.). (2022). *The Future of Business Schools: Purpose, Action, and Impact*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Bagley, C.E., Sulkowski, A.J., Nelson, J.S., Waddock, S., & Shrivastava, P. (2020). A path to developing more insightful business school graduates: A systems-based, experimental approach to integrating law, strategy, and sustainability. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 19(4), 541–68. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2018.0036>.
- Chia, R., & Holt, R. (2008). The nature of knowledge in business schools. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 7(4), 471–86.
- Dyllick, T. (2015). Responsible management education for a sustainable world: The challenges for business schools. *Journal of Management Development*, 34(1), 16–33.
- Gruber, M. (2022) “Foreword”, in Baldegger, R. J., El Tarabishy, A., Audretsch, D. B., Kariv, D., Passerini, K., & Tan, W. L. (Eds.). (2022). *The Future of Business Schools: Purpose, Action, and Impact*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Hawawini, G. (2005). The future of business schools. *Journal of Management Development*, 24(1), 770–83.