

GUEST EDITORIAL

BUSINESS EDUCATION IN LITHUANIA

Vytautas Pranulis

*Department of Marketing
Faculty of Economics
Vilnius University
Saulėtekio g. 9 (Building I, Room 515)
LT-2000 Vilnius
Lithuania
Tel.: (+370) 5 2366 148
E-mail: vytautas.pranulis@ef.vu.lt*

Vytautas Pranulis is Professor, habil. dr., Head of Department of Marketing at Faculty of Economics, Vilnius University, Lithuania, since 1990. He has received his MA in 1969, PhD degree in Social Science in 1977. In 1989 he defended the thesis of doctor habilitatus at Moscow State Institute of Economics, Russia. In 1989-1991 he was Dean of Commerce Faculty of Vilnius University. He is Editor-in-Chief at the International Journal of Scholarly Papers “*Transformations in Business & Economics*” (www.transformations.khf.vu.lt), Lithuania, and Deputy-Editor-in-Chief at the Lithuanian Journal of Research Papers *Ekonomika* (Economics), which is published by Vilnius University, Lithuania, since 1960. He delivered various courses and seminars in Lithuania, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Great Britain, Holland, Italy, and USA. He is the author of 120 scientific publications and 5 books on marketing, marketing research and currently he is co-editing a compilation on *Selling* for Lithuanian top managers (see **BOOKS REVIEWS** in this volume). Fields of scientific interest include: marketing basics, marketing research, international marketing research.

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ABSTRACT. *Business is one of the eminently popular fields of studies in Lithuania. Improving and adaptation of business education system is one important source of economic growth and upgrading quality of life in the country. A major focus of research paper is the environmental context, content and phases of development of business education system in Lithuania. The analysis is based on the published sources of secondary information and on the observational primary information. The pre-historical, methodological, organizational dimensions are examined. The study shows that the process and speed of transition are related not only to institutional and structural changes but to the number of well-educated managers and policy makers in society as well. The development of business studies in Lithuania is closest to conformity of this process in the developed democratic countries.*

KEYWORDS business education, studies, environment, Lithuania, transformation

Introduction

Problem context. Business education system in Lithuania is in the process of sweeping transformations. There is obvious progress in business practice and business education system as well since the Declaration of Independence of Lithuania in 1990. The increase of GDP by 8.3 percent in 2003 put Lithuania into the first position among the state-candidates accession of the EU. The concomitant development of business education and growth of national economy leads to assumption of causality. In this situation assessment and improvement of business education is an important precondition for further economic growth. We can perceive some valid reasons of such sharp economic growth, which is associated with the tendencies of the qualitative and quantitative fluctuations in human resources. At present the following tendencies can be named:

- 1) qualitative and quantitative changes of business education system;
- 2) increased quantity and quality of educated and skilful managers in business practice;
- 3) increase share of intellectual component in business activities;
- 4) a considerate shift of business efforts from the brutal fighting for the privatization of stat-owned property and illegal business activities to the businesses, based on the understanding and meeting the customer's real needs.

The above-mentioned tendencies, which are taking place in Lithuania, have the same reoccurrence probability in other post-soviet countries. But their positive influence upon the economy and society development in individual transition countries is different. We assume that ethnical peculiarities, visions and strategies are other important factors that effect social and economic development. However, this paper focuses on business education system in particular.

Problem formulation. At present, business education system in Lithuania is characterized in general context of the problem of the upgrading of university and professional studies and the integration of this system into an integral education system of the EU countries (Melnikas, 2002). However, business theorizing in the past several years leads to the thought that business is a science and that spending on business studies is an investment that pays returns (Zyman, 1999). Consequently, business education system is a powerful tool of adaptation to the extremely fast changes in the market environment. Educated, initiative and motivated individuals epitomise progress these days as well as for several coming decades of twenty-first century (Kotler, 1999).

Studies by Lithuanian scientists and academicians are focused more on the problems of business teaching and research of business problems and less on the development and creation of a contemporary business education system. There were just few publications and scientific events on this issue. The Faculty of Economics of Vilnius University (Lithuania) has organised a Conference (2000) devoted to the problems of economic science and studies. Some aspects of business education were examined in several earlier publications by myself (Pranulis, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2002).

Theoretical considerations of Juslin and Paldanius (2002) expressed at the 4th International conference on *Marketing Theories and Methods* in Vilnius (Lithuania) goes to the initial source of business education. They consider that in business pedagogy the most important thing is to understand how the student is involved in creative work and how the tutor can support the process of creating students' competences. This scientific thinking may be strange to a business practitioner. However, it can be realised into practice only after we have envisaged the framework of the contemporary business education system. In this paper, I

will present chronological events and facts on the development of Lithuanian business education system in the last fourteen years; and based on my findings, I will add my insight on where business education system in Lithuania is heading on in the context of economic growth. I will do this, as P. Kotler (1999) worded, by “looking back into the future.”

The goal of this paper is to analyze environmental context, content, and phases of development of the business education system in Lithuania and present some theoretical considerations and practical conclusions on this issue.

1. The Environmental Context

The Lithuanian national movement for independence and democracy stirred and consolidated society, which resulted in ideological self-determination and liberalization from the hateful regime with reestablishment of the independent state of the republic of Lithuania in 1990. Consequently, this means that the arrival into the new millennium is marked by three changes in Lithuania: *first*, the experiment of creating a totalitarian state has petered out; *second*, Lithuania has successfully overcome the requirements for accession into the European Union, and the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) (which is accepted as the basics for comparison quality of business studies in Lithuanian universities); and *third*, the country has sprung into an international environment marked by the advancement of science and technology, social and economic collaboration, as well as international integration of unseen magnitudes.

1.1 Prehistory of the Problem

The Baltic countries since 1944 till 1989 were under compulsion of creating the centrally planned economy system. As the consequence, it resulted in the formation of specific social culture and certain ideological, political, institutional environment. The soviet-prototype social culture, which was introduced in 1945, was based on education system that was adapted for these purposes. It would be incorrect to say that people of the Baltic States withstand that influence and legacy. The mentality and morality of that time came to the light through efforts and activities of the active part of society.

The liberalization of society of the post-soviet countries has resulted in growth initiatives and activity in the following sequence:

First, political activities and struggle for independence. (Universal enthusiasm + Sacrificing).

Second, political activities for the power and position in the structure of independent state (Naive dilettantism + Political and pseudo-patriotic speculations + Self-preservation + Ambitions + Selfishness).

Third, struggle for the ownership of state property (Aggressiveness + Selfishness + Business ideas).

Fourth, efforts and activities to generate quick money and to accumulate property in the obscure business environment (Business ideas + Initiatives + Aggressiveness + Performance).

Fifth, efforts for starting business and its performance in the environment of growing and competing market (Business ideas + Performance + Demand of earnings and making profit + Industry + Risk + Seeking of business knowledge – business education).

During the struggle for Independence, the business education system in Lithuania just started developing into the new quality and shape. However, it will take a certain period of time, until the habits and culture will be blocked out and erased from the mentality people, who were educated in the soviet period.

The ideology of studies on centrally planned economy was based on the methodological approach from common theoretical conclusion to real practice. It was different from the methodology and solving of social and economic problems in the market economy, where the approach from real practice to scientific conclusions (for the improvement of practice) dominated.

The first approach is limited to the breaking of the existing social and economic system, while the second one researches the improvement of the existing practice.

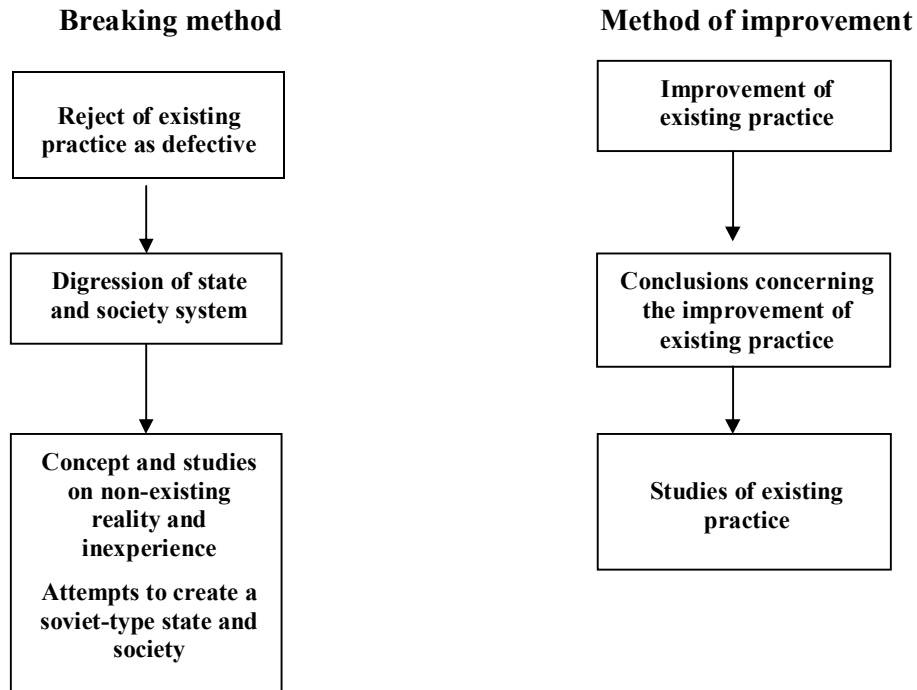


Figure 1. Method Selection

Main distinguished features of an education system, based on the breaking method (Figure 1), were:

- 1) rejection of existing practice,
- 2) digression of existing state and society system,
- 3) education system, based on the concept of non-existing reality and lack of competence.

At present, the specific issues, concerning business education in Lithuania, include two main issues. *Firstly*, the mentality transformation process of Lithuanian business education policy-makers, institutional managers, professors and teachers can be acknowledged as effective and fast enough. *Secondly*, the restructuring of Lithuanian business education system is in accordance with the contemporary business development requirements.

1.2 ECTS

The integration into the European Union requires harmonizing differences in business education system. In order to provide common procedures to guarantee academic recognition of studies abroad, the ECTS was developed by the Commission of the European Communities. It provides a way of measuring and comparing learning achievements, and transferring them from one institution to another. This is achieved through the use of a

common ECTS credit and a common ECTS grading scale. ECTS also improves access to information of curricula at foreign universities.

ECTS makes use of three important documents: *the information package* (on the courses available either at the department or faculty level), *the learning agreement* (between the home institution, a host institution, and a student), and *the transcript of academic records* (to show the student's learning achievements prior to and after the period of study abroad).

ECTS is a credit system based on student's workload. Student's workload includes lectures, seminars, lab tutorials and independent study. The system counts the entire student's input needed to prepare for an examination. The basic allocation is 60 ECTS academic credits per year of studies, i.e. 30 credits per semester. The institution is responsible for allocation the credits for the different courses according to the student's workload necessary for any particular course. The practical training and optional courses that form an integral part of the curricula also receive academic credits. Practical training and optional courses that do not form an integral part of the curricula do not receive academic credits. Non-credit courses may also appear on the transcript of academic records.

Credits are awarded to the students only when the course has been completed and all required course work and examinations have been successfully taken.

Examination and assessment results are usually expressed in grades. The ECTS grading scale has been developed to make the process of credit transfer between home and host institution transparent (*Table 1*).

Table 1. ECTS Grading System and Expected Students' Performance

ECTS grade		Percentage of students
A	Excellent	10%
B	Very good	25%
C	Good	30%
D	Satisfactory	25%
E	Sufficient	10%
F/FX	Fail	

The grading scale used by Vilnius University (Lithuania) is based on a 10-point scale of 1 (very poor) to 10 (excellent). In addition to this ten-point system, the pass/fail system is used, 5 and higher being a passing grade and 4 and lower – a failing grade.

Table 2 shows the indicative correlation of the Vilnius University (Lithuania) grading scale to the ECTS grading scale.

Table 2. ECTS Grading System and Students' Knowledge Coverage and its Evaluation at Vilnius University, Lithuania

Pass/fail	Definition	National Grade	Knowledge percentage	ECTS Grade
Pass	Excellent	10	≥92%	A
	Very good	9	82-91%	B
	Good	8	74-81%	C
	Highly satisfactory	7	66-73%	C
	Satisfactory	6	58-65%	D
	Sufficient	5	50-57%	E
Fail	Insufficient	4	40-49%	F/FX
	Highly insufficient	3	30-39%	
	Poor	2	20-29%	
	Very poor	1	≤19%	

The correlation of the business studies grading scale at Vilnius University to the ECTS scale affords to compare the quality of students' performance in the classroom in one or another subject area.

1.3 International Environment

The new environmental context created the demand for a new concept in institutionalization of social, scientific and economic life. In 1990s, courses, related to business studies, emerged as a painful and complicated problem for the universities, academic and business society. The declaration of the Independence and orientation toward a market economy and democracy had all of a sudden created a new kind of motivation and demand for business studies and university courses, such as marketing, business management and the like. However, there were no teachers and professionals with knowledge and experience in business. Under the centrally planned economic system there was no need for teaching and studies of such courses. The local economic environment provided no experience in market economics. This meant that teachers and professors were under extreme pressure to become adaptable and resourceful very quickly, to learn fast themselves as well as to professionally prepare new courses, related to market economics.

2. Stages in Development of Business Studies

The past 13 years of market economy in Lithuania were marked by three stages in the development of business studies.

2.1 Stage I

Year 1990-1995 was the beginning of adapting market economy and business studies in practice. The centrally planned economy remains the heritage of the social culture that should be replaced by the growing culture of the newly established ideological, social and economic environment and foremost by the new educational system. For a certain time, the national specifics of business studies and practice were also dependent on the influence of the '*Homo Sovieticus*' mentality.

The shortage of teachers and professors, who could have been prepared to deliver business-related courses at this stage, was the main problem. There were no business and marketing studies at the soviet universities and no market environment in the soviet system. This meant that, since 1990, teachers and professors of Lithuanian universities and schools of higher education have been forced to begin learning and teaching business and marketing courses simultaneously. The lack of textbooks and lecturing experience, how actually a market environment functions, further complicated the problem.

Nevertheless, the first efforts of institutional restructuring began immediately. In 1990, the Marketing Department was already established at two Lithuanian universities, namely Vilnius University and Kaunas University of Technology.

2.2. Stage II

Year 1995-2000. It was the period, when first graduates from Lithuanian universities and colleges, armed with questionable knowledge in marketing and business studies as well as poor orientation in market economy and business experience, tried to put their education into practice. The situation of business studies at this stage was reflected in the conversation between a Marketing professor and his students, which took place at Vilnius University in

1993. Reacting to the content of a marketing lecture, an undergraduate business student noted: “Professor, although what you are talking about seems really interesting, attractive and perhaps, somewhere, practical, it all seems to me like a history of fiction. Our business practice is quite different from marketing-based business reality.” However, in 1995 and later, clear tendencies of shrinking possibilities of making money from the collapse of the former soviet structure could be identified; it was also noticeable that real businesses were emerging, based on the studies of consumer needs; influx of business investments was witnessed as well as profits were achieved by satisfying consumer needs.

In this stage, the demand and interest in business studies grew dramatically. Many Lithuanian universities and schools of higher education launched business studies programs. For instance, the Faculty of Economics and Management at Kaunas University of Technology offered marketing studies on both – bachelor and master program – levels. Business, especially marketing, studies have been improved by the growth of the market economy in size and quality in Lithuania.

2.3 Stage III

Year 2000 and beyond. The quantity and quality of educated business managers and marketing specialists has been increasing. The professional quality and concept of the terms ‘*business*’ and ‘*marketing*’ is nearly the same as in the advanced countries with market economy. However, high-competence business management and marketing professionals in Lithuania, as the transitional economy country, are still in great demand. Main causes of current situation could be insufficient comprehension of marketing skills on the decision-making level and the existing structure of educational schemes.

Nevertheless, the number of educated, enthusiastic young managers in business practice has increased, and the environmental context has essentially been changed. There are more than 60 various business study programs, offered by universities and colleges in Lithuania. The majority of senior and middle-aged business academics have enriched their market practice experience, essentially improved their professional knowledge and skills in delivering business-related courses. At the same time, there are approximately 10 young people earning their doctoral degree in business sciences every year and part of them join universities and colleges for full-time teaching.

There is a very high demand for business studies in Lithuania and there are several private schools of higher education, offering bachelor and master level study programs in management and business administration.

Private schools are a relatively new phenomenon, which changes the competitive situation in the academic labour market. Private schools are more flexible in seeking more gifted and better prepared teachers and professors and attracting wealthy students, who can pay relatively high fees for their studies. All private schools supply business study programs for certain fees, when state universities and schools of higher education provide business education, basically relying on extremely poor financing schemes of the Government. It makes very difficult to attract gifted and well-educated young scientists for pedagogical vacancies in the state universities and colleges, as salaries are very low.

3. Business Education System of Lithuania at Present

Presently, two types of schools of higher education – colleges and universities – are main providers of business education in Lithuania. Successful Business graduates from these schools acquire the status of higher education. Nevertheless, only universities certify the

academic education diploma in three levels – bachelor (undergraduate), master (graduate), and doctoral (postgraduate).

Study programs in Business colleges normally have a status of higher education; however, graduates are not certified with the bachelor or master diploma. College educational programs are more oriented towards practical education – management of a particular business position or function. It is worth noticing that the demand of well-prepared business specialists is growing in accordance with high performance of Lithuanian economy (the growth of GDP as mentioned before was 8.3 percent in 2003); therefore, the employment possibilities for business college graduates are rather high.

According to the Lithuanian law, a college has a possibility of awarding their graduates with bachelor diplomas, only in the case, when 50% of lecturers have a PhD degree. As for today, colleges have very few teachers holding PhD degree; therefore, it is doubtful, whether in the next ten years these schools will be able to certify their bachelor programs. Some Lithuanian colleges are attracting professors from universities to teach part-time, desperately trying to fulfil the 50% requirement of teaching staff, holding a PhD degree.

Lithuanian universities apply three-level study programs: bachelor, master and doctoral. The difference in the strategic approach taken by universities and colleges is that business studies at universities are oriented towards business management, e.g. establishing a new business, generating and developing new ideas, as well as applying strategic business development and implementation.

Preparation process of study programs for bachelor and master levels is a complex of several stages, therefore, the paperwork and accreditation from different Lithuanian institutions takes approximately from 6 months to one year. Let us follow through the main stages of preparation and accreditation process of a study program.

First, three to five teachers of one or several departments of a university form an initiative/ working group, which is preparing the project of a bachelor or a master study program. After the prepared project is approved in all institutions, this group automatically becomes a program coordinator.

Second, the project group discusses the study program together with the different departments, which will be actually involved in implementing the program, i.e. delivering target courses. Recently, social partners from business institutions, associations, and public management institutions became involved in discussing and revising these projects.

Third, after target university departments and social partners have positively evaluated the project, it will be forwarded to the Academic Commission of the Faculty for further evaluation and approval.

Fourth, in the case of a positive outcome, the Academic Commission of the Faculty will recommend the project for the Faculty Board.

Fifth, if the Faculty Board evaluates the project positively, they will further suggest to University's Academic Commission to assess the project.

Sixth, after a positive evaluation of the project, University's Academic Commission will propose to the University Senate to accredit the program.

Seventh, the University Senate will consider the project, and after positive evaluation it will issue a Resolution of Authorization.

Eighth, the authorized program project will be submitted for the final accreditation to the SKVC¹ Centre at the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania.

This accreditation gives the University the right to announce the student admission to the newly accredited study program. Recently, a study program's implementation and monitoring was solely a responsibility of a particular department, which was obligated to

¹ SKVC (Studijų kokybės vertinimo centras) – The Centre for Study Quality Assessment.

organise and control the study program's execution. However, such a practice is under a strong criticism, because of the ineffective programme management, which occurs as a result of weak co-ordination among different departments that are involved in delivering different courses. Problems also occur in the fields of (a) inefficient distribution of workload among teaching staff, (b) quantity and quality of delivered courses and their evaluation, and (c) financing issues. Therefore, at present, the issue on organising, implementing and financing of an entire study program is under discussion, whether it should be transferred under the Program Committee's control.

The accreditation system of multi-level study programs has certain advantages, as it obliges initiators and evaluators of a new study program to analyse it from various perspectives by presenting valuable comments and final assessments. This system also pertains to certain disadvantages, namely:

- *firstly*, the scale of bureaucratic mechanism of accrediting a new study program is enormous, where the time-lag for its discussions and evaluation processes is beyond comprehension, which, consequently, requires huge amount of work and efforts to overcome a lengthy chain of debating and legitimating a new study programme;
- *secondly*, the principle of autonomy of universities is violated as universities appear to have no legal right to independently make decisions upon issues of introducing or renewing study programs;
- *thirdly*, extended bureaucratic procedures impede flexible, fast and timely reaction of universities towards dynamic changes in social, economic, scientific and technological environment.

Doctoral (PhD) degree is the third stage of university studies. The Government of the Republic of Lithuania has approved the list of specific scientific classification for doctoral studies. Universities, which could accommodate their departments and research centres with active and productive scientists of particular scientific branches, e.g. Economics, Business Management, etc., are authorized to organize doctoral studies and to form defence committees of doctoral degree. It is recommended to include scientists from other Lithuanian universities, as well as scientific institutions into defence committees of doctoral degree. In the case, when there is a shortage of scientists of one particular scientific branch (e.g. Business Management), representing home university, then a joint defence committee of doctoral degree could be formed from at least two Lithuanian universities.

Doctoral study programs and procedures of granting a doctoral degree in Lithuania have been changed since the Restoration of Independence (1991). Previously, a defence council of doctoral dissertation was formed from 20 to 25 different scientists. Before 1990, doctoral dissertations were required to be written in Russian and defended in Moscow or in other cities of the Soviet Union. During the first years of Independence, Lithuanian universities initiated PhD studies and defence committees by themselves. Such a committee was comprised of five field scientists. One has to admit that there were many difficulties and problems with doctoral study programs and research in business management, as well as in their acknowledgment. There was a significant shortage of experienced and qualified scientists in business management research. Therefore, new quality growth and transformation symptoms were predicted.

Nevertheless, the introduced doctoral study system and procedures of doctoral dissertation defence had justified themselves in due time. Even though it did not perform on the highest global scientific level, it still allowed enough flexibility approaching the general international science standards. Furthermore, it was not physically possible to directly transfer the experience of preparing PhD students from Western countries to Lithuania. Because, this experience was build up through many years of research and practice of modelling different doctoral programs.

Today, Lithuania already has dozens of business management scientists holding a doctor degree. General impression is that the quality of the research and final versions of doctoral theses are being upgraded and enhanced each year. Yet, one should admit that scientific research in business management area, performed in Lithuania, are poorly coordinated and measured in comparison with the research carried out in other countries. There is still deprived scientific collaboration and communication with international academic society. At this stage, all efforts are focussed on removing these limitations and obstacles. The requirements for dissertation defence committees are tightening. According to the new regulations of the Ministry of Education and Science of Lithuania, such committees can be formed only at the universities, which have sufficient number of scientists who announced the required number of scientific publications in refereed (reviewed) international and national scientific periodicals. However, the disputes on what kind of scientific publications in national, foreign, or international periodicals should be accepted as a suitable background for awarding a doctoral degree, are currently in full height. Evidently, the new requirements are positively influencing the activity, productivity and general performance of Lithuanian scientists and doctoral study programs.

Conclusions

1. The transformation of business studies in Lithuania has passed through the first two phases - the abandonment of the ideological and institutional soviet cultural environment, and entered the third phase, related to the competitive market and the environment of democratic culture.
2. Transformations of business studies in Lithuania are still not completely free from the legacy of the soviet culture and mentality. The process and speed of transition are related not only to institutional and structural changes but to a number of well-educated managers and policy makers in society as well.
3. The third phase of development of business studies in Lithuania is closest to conformity of this process in the developed democratic countries.
4. Two factors of internal environment shape the Lithuanian system of business studies and science: *first*, generation that is adapted to the new growing market and democratic systems, and, *second*, retiring generation, which is nostalgic of the old social-economic and study system that was so habitual. This change will require an entire generation to change over, e.g. 25 to 30 years.

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VERSLO MOKYMAS LIETUVOJE

Vytautas Pranulis

SANTRAUKA

Verslo mokymas yra svarbi krašto ekonominio augimo prielaida. Lietuva, išsiveržusi iš totalitarinės valstybės gniaužtų bei įveikusi svarbiausius pereinamojo laikotarpio etapus, 2003 metais Centrinės ir Rytų Europos šalių tarpe pagal BVP augimą bei pasirengimą narystei ES užėmė pirmaujančias pozicijas. Remiantis pavyzdžiais, antrine informacija bei asmeninio stebėjimo pirmine informacija apie vertybių kaitą, straipsnyje išskirti penki verslo sampratos, motyvacijos bei požiūrio į verslo studijas raidos etapai. Be to, pateiktos faktinių reiškinių požymių grupės, leidusios išskirti tris verslo studijų kokybinės bei kiekybinės plėtros Lietuvoje stadijas. Tyrimas parodė, kad verslininkų, verslo vadovų ir specialistų vertybinės orientacijos keičiasi profesionalumo bei kvalifikacijos ugdymo bei jungimosi į tarptautines rinkas ir stojimo į Europos Sąjungą kryptimi.

Straipsnyje pateikti tyrimo rezultatai metodologiniu požiūriu grindžiami trimis teorinėmis-ideologinėmis nuostatomis: pirma, privačia nuosavybe ir iniciatyva grindžiamo verslo teisėtumo principu; antra, privačia nuosavybe ir iniciatyva grindžiamų ūkininkavimo sistemų prievartinio griovimo ir naikinimo atsisakymo principu; trečia, pripažinimu to, kad vien patraukliomis idėjomis ir abstrakčiomis, su praktine patirtimi nesusietomis teorijomis grindžiama verslo plėtra nėra patikimas ir perspektyvus tikslo siekimo kelias.

REIKŠMINIAI ŽODŽIAI: verslo mokymas, studijos, aplinka, Lietuva, transformacijos.