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Management education at crossroads

MANAGEMENT EDUCATION continues to attract youngsters in our country, like a magic wand. No wonder this year too, there were thousands of students trying for admission to the leading B Schools in the country. In June, campuses of business schools across the country came abuzz with activity as a new batch of students arrived, with their own aspirations, goals and dreams. Unfortunately, only some of these dreams will be fulfilled. There will be more disgruntled students than satisfied ones at the end of the programme.

This sad state of affairs is explained by a combination of factors. These include the selection process, the faculty, the curriculum, the courseware and the pedagogic methods used.

In our country, students who join a B School are typically young and without any work experience. Most of them are really not sure why they are there. Contrary to the general perception that MBA students are smart, confident, assertive and clear about what they want to achieve in life, most of them are simply relieved and happy at having successfully completed the admissions process. The enthusiasm of students disappears even before the journey has begun. Moreover, in the absence of any work experience, they find it difficult to relate the concepts taught in the class to real life business situations.

Many of our B Schools are unable to attract good faculty. Most of the faculty members do not have industry experience. When they explain concepts in the class, they lack conviction, as they are unable to give relevant live examples. As the *Economist* (May 22-28, 2004) recently reported, it is easier to train a practitioner in classroom teaching or handling a case rather than make pure academics appreciate management concepts. Unfortunately, in India, the best people do not get into academics. They want to work in the corporate sector. This trend will continue as long as the salary differentials remain high.

Then there are the problems with the courseware. Textbooks and much of the reading material used in our B Schools are mostly American in origin. There is little quality writing by Indian professors.

The way of handling subjects in the classroom leaves a lot to be desired. Different aspects of management are taught separately, not in an integrated way. There is little attempt to introduce the social, economic and ethnic realities of India while handling the subjects in the class.

The case method is ideal for teaching many management subjects as it brings a practical, cross-functional perspective into the classroom. Unfortunately, Indian B Schools continue to rely on the traditional lecture mode of instruction. Most B Schools do not have trained faculty for handling cases, leave alone writing cases. At a recent case writing workshop we attended in Delhi, organised by CII, UNDP and AICTE, this came out very strongly.

When MBAs arrive at the work place, they find that the training they have received is totally out of line with what the employer wants. They realise that it is more important to do the little things the boss asks them to do rather than try to be creative. This is especially frustrating for MBAs from our leading B Schools, where the faculty may be good but the training given is esoteric rather than practical. Moreover, in the absence of proper career

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counselling, it is common to see MBAs getting into the wrong jobs.

Placement mania

If these concerns are not enough, B Schools are increasingly unable to impart the right values to their students. And what is education if it cannot impart values? The placement mania makes MBA students regard jobs and salaries as the be-all and end-all of things. This attitude is inculcated into very bright, young and impressionable students right from the time they enter the B School. In fact, most B Schools give wide publicity to their placement track record during the admission process. Instead of imbibing a spirit of idealism and developing a strong desire to change the world for the better, students leave their B School after graduation, totally obsessed with making money and progressing in their career.

Today many B Schools find themselves under attack. Their curriculum, faculty and pedagogic methods are all attracting sharp criticism. Some critics even argue that the only role that our best B Schools play is screening out good students through a stringent admissions process. There is even a suggestion by some cynics that the IIMs should restrict themselves to conducting the Common Admission Test (CAT) and leave it to the industry to give the selected students the appropriate training!

But despite these looming clouds on the horizon, B Schools continue to be in a state of denial. Many management professors strongly believe that it is their training which makes the students great. But the reality is that companies visit B Schools for recruitment, primarily because of their admissions process. Some employers are already looking beyond B Schools and casting their nets wider among departments of commerce and economics in the better universities. Some of these universities have fairly stringent admission processes, even better than those of our B-rung and C-rung B Schools.

It is time that B Schools faced these challenges squarely. Otherwise, they face a bleak future in the long run.

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