



THINKSTOCK

THE ROLE OF B-SCHOOLS IN CREATING DIPLOMACY

Business leaders may not be looking for number-crunching prowess in a new manager; the ability to take the team along might be the clincher

BY KIRTI SHARMA

The new world of
B-SCHOOLS



"The art of teaching is clarity and the art of learning is to listen"
— Vanda Scaravelli

Education norms have since time immemorial reflected the needs of the society, or, we can say, the abiding power structures at the basis of the human society. Going back in time, we can see that post 1990s era was rather taken with management education. Back then, questions over the value of a free market system, capitalism etc had abated, just as doubts over the fallibility of systems like socialism as well as communism had been confirmed. Managers emerged as a special breed, and management education became the latest must-have, if one wanted to make it to high-profile boardrooms where big money changed hands, not to mention, power and influence.

Globalisation followed and management education shot to the pinnacle of popularity. Given the limited resources, the rise in consumerism — which meant economising production to the limit possible, and making products available to as large a section of people as possible and the burgeoning rise of the middle class the world over, it became imperative to create, and seek out efficient managers. Managers who would 'manage' resources — material, physical, social, emotional, psychological, institutional, you name it! This trend went global, making its presence felt at India's doorstep too.

India has about 3,541 AICTE-approved institutions awarding MBA degree and 308 institutions awarding PGDM. These numbers say a lot. In the last decade, the phenomenon of globalisation has taken an even bigger leap such as large-scale information sharing, prominently through the internet — which, as a communication platform, has already forced major changes in the organisational structures of large businesses — making them flatter hierarchically, more focused on innovation and corporate social responsibility than ever before.

No wonder then that management education also has had to take these changes into account. With

greater information sharing across societies, it has become more and more difficult for organisations to keep and guard secrets, while open markets threaten monopolies. This ushered a wave of expectations of social, environmental accountability for corporations, which gave way to outrage across the globe during 2008-10 due to subprime crises in the US, the fall of major international banks, followed by a recession. Movements like Occupy Wall Street accompanied some deep soul-searching on the part of economists, thinkers, and even the common man — that in this world, business is the by-word for progress and salaries, bank accounts, the only yardstick for success, performance, and achievement.

Latest thinking in management education is breaking new grounds in this aspect: we are asking questions today in the B-school classrooms that had been left for the liberal arts to ponder — is this consumer-driven progress the ultimate goal of higher education? Are ever-increasing executive salaries the only way to encourage and motivate a mass of intelligent and young people? Can business be 'taught' and 'learnt' without actual involvement with various social and governance platforms? If it is so, how best to equip this new breed of management educators so as to give students a value-based education at such a high level? Can success in business be defined only by glittering balance sheets, and whether this success can be achieved by more innovative, community-based, and ethically responsive measures?

*If you light a lamp for somebody,
it will also brighten your own path* — Zen saying

The biggest challenge is, unfortunately, that we educate our students for the future by looking at the trends of the present time while, the future is radically unknown in today's unpredictable, volatile world. Therefore, what current business leaders are looking for in a manager is not as much number-crunching ability as the ability to analyse current

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trends and deal with them creatively in high-pressure situations; not as much skill for statistical analysis as for smooth communication skills, more leadership and definitely a more multi-faceted personality. All these factors can not be the product of classroom experience and textbook teaching only.

In all leading B-schools, this paradigm shift is already in motion. Their curricula integrate all these aspects of learning that not only encourage a student to think vertically but apply his/her knowledge laterally. With this change in paradigms, there is a basal shift in approach towards learning: business ethics is not just an attractive elective, but an attempt is made to sensitise students towards the larger goal of helping the world community grow through value-based decision-making. Here, communication is not just about conveying ideas effectively, it is about transforming the business environment towards greater accountability and sharing. Here again, innovation and creativity are skills to be cultivated, aiming to seek solutions to variegated problems that we face collectively and individually.

Most important of all, though, is that with an increased thrust on entrepreneurship, diminished power of monopolies, and a sort of shake-up in priorities following the economic downturn, an increasing portion of youngsters and aspiring managers recognise career as an opportunity to actualise themselves — their interests, their talents, their skills and strengths, and not simply a job that pays well. It has also turned back the focus on the 'value' of education, per se. The economic downturn, and consequently a slow market for jobs has sent students looking for a resetting of their priorities career-wise, and for enhancing their resumes with advanced learning. B schools have received an impetus to further refine the programmes they offer.

Most top-rung B-schools look at the business aspect of management education, but those are not playing an important role in even public policy-making, strategic decision-making, international relations, defence, social responsibility, to name a few. This is through imparting specialised management education to people in such kind of services. As a re-

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sult, it is imperative for such institutions to encourage specialised research and development among their faculty members.

Most recognised B-schools across the world, not just in India, are dealing with a serious shortfall of the PhD-level faculty. Funding is the biggest challenge in this area. Governments and institu-



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his/her knowledge for the betterment of society. Our ancient universities such as Nalanda and Taxila ensured that students' curriculum was tailored according to their unique abilities and ambitions, and above all, the needs of the state. Foremost among the latter was the cultivation of a responsible and enlightened citizenry. The learning imparted here was internationally relevant too, for history provides enough evidence of student exchange, both in and out of these institutions.

We shape clay into a pot, but it is the emptiness inside that holds whatever we want — Lao Tzu

Applying the same principle now, the business school today is capable of a paradigm shift in contemporary diplomatic relations as well. Management Development Institute (MDI), Gurgaon, for instance, has started the first International Summer University in India. Here, students become the ambassadors of the countries and the cultures they hail from, providing an invaluable platform for cultural and knowledge-based diplomacy. The world we face today doesn't allow us the luxury of ignoring the age-old Indian saying, *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* (the whole world is a family).

And finally, it is incumbent on our country's B-

schools to present themselves as the one-stop destination for the all-round development of their students, as individuals as well as citizens, and business executives later. This cannot be achieved without celebrating the institution's standing as a community in and by itself. Every place of learning has to become a hallmark of academic excellence in its own capacities. Faculty members have to support, nourish, and educate their students, as the latter must learn to interact proactively with them. It is about approaching cultural/sports festivals, examinations, and placement meets with an equal flair. It is about emphasising academic symposia over trade fairs and job fairs. It is about incubating not just talent, but even the student's belief in his/her own abilities.

Our increasing struggles have awakened the global community to question the hitherto prevalent systems of monopolistic imperial capitalism. Management to an untrained mind is the ability to start a dialogue with the stakeholders and more importantly, the end users of the product or service—the community at large. As management educators, we shoulder the responsibility to bequeath our students with these fresh paradigms. IM

Don't pray for lighter burden, but for stronger backs.

— Zen saying

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