



INDIA'S BEST B-SCHOOLS

MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

CUSTOM MADE

Companies are
opting for customised
management training
programmes for
employees.

by SONAL KHETARPAL



Open MDPs have the cookie-cutter content to suit the masses, but in a customised programme, a group can explore organisation-specific issues

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VERY YEAR, as many as 30 employees from Pidilite Industries (maker of the ubiquitous Fevicol range) spend a total of 20 days on the campus of S.P. Jain Institute of Management and Research (SPJIMR), spread across a span of five months. Known as Capstone, it is one of the many management development programmes, or MDPs, run by the company where high-potential middle managers are trained on leadership, change management, self-development and fundamentals of other business functions to prepare them for bigger roles. The faculty of the Mumbai-based B-school (it ranks fourth in the *Business Today* list) conducts the course along with Pidilite's leadership team, including its CFO, CMO and CHRO, who teach company-specific values and processes to their future leaders.

"In the current business environment wrought with fast technological changes, companies want tailor-made programmes to build a deeper understanding of the concepts and skills related to their specific businesses. It is the time of niche learning; broad overview of concepts does not work anymore," says Rahul Sinha, President, HR, at Pidilite. According to him, 95 per cent of the company's retraining is carried out through customised MDPs.

If digging deep into rapidly evolving industry segments is a non-negotiable requirement, trimming the huge cost of staff training is the practical ramification of a sluggish economy. After all, expenses could easily run into crores of rupees if company executives are asked to pursue full-time general management courses. Understandably, data from the Top 50 Indian B-schools (as per *Business Today's*

rankings) shows that the number of total MDPs has gone down considerably, from an average of 47 per institution in the academic year of 2017/2018 to 40 in 2018/19. The revenue generated from these programmes has dipped accordingly, from an average of ₹3.55 crore per B-school to ₹2.44 crore. In contrast, a closer look at the data from individual B-schools validates the rising demand for customised programmes. The reason: Companies are looking for targeted courses which bring real-life dimension to theoretical underpinnings.

Manoj Thomas, Associate Dean (Corporate Programs) at XLRI, Jamshedpur (third in our list), echoes the trend. "The demand for MDPs is the same as before, but its nature has changed. Companies are now demanding customised programmes which will suit their specific concerns." In fact, this trend has started picking up during the last five years, he adds. At XLRI, 75 per cent of the 800 MDPs conducted during this period have been customised while the rest is generic and open to all.

As business processes get disrupted and new models emerge, companies leverage MDPs to train their employees on new job skills, says Madhu Srivastava, Group HR Head at Vedanta Resources, the London-headquartered mining and metals behemoth. She also shares how Vedanta took a strategic call two years ago for its oil and gas business and outsourced its operations to global majors for cost-effectiveness. This created an immediate requirement for an entirely new skill set (partnership management, contract management, vendor negotiation and more) over and above one's technical expertise.

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The company, therefore, zeroed in on most suitable MDPs for the upskilling exercise across the organisation.

According to Rajiv Burman, Founder of Gurgaon-based HR consultancy GrowthSource, open MDPs offer cookie-cutter content to suit the masses. They work well for smaller firms which do not have the bandwidth to get an entire curriculum retooled or an adequate number of people required for a full-fledged batch. For a large company, customised MDPs work well as the employees undergoing the course speak the same language and share the same understanding of the business. They can even discuss confidential problems and seek solutions which would not have been possible under open MDPs. Incidentally, companies usually prefer to send their mid-level and senior managers for these programmes.

The essence lies in customisation, though, be it the curriculum or the delivery mechanism. At times, B-schools may have to create a course from scratch; otherwise, they would modify existing programmes to suit a company's requirements. According to Steven Burton, Executive Director, Centre for Executive Education, at the Indian School of Business, Hyderabad, certain categories receive maximum queries even though the ISB has an

SPJIMR **80%**

of its 101 MDPs in the academic year 2018-19 were customised

XLRI **75%**

of its 142 MDPs in the academic year 2018-19 were customised

MDI Gurugram **82%**

of its 208 MDPs in academic year 2018-19 were customised

Source: Institutions

extensive portfolio of MDPs. Top categories include business model innovation, digital transformation, 21st century leadership (addressing the millennial, VUCA and transformation issues) and strategies for innovation and change management. Often, the faculty members are required to teach, but the firm's leadership team also takes part in training their people. Also, MDPs can be five-day courses spanning a week or 10-day programmes spanning 10 months.

Vanita Bhoola, Head of MDPs at SPJIMR, says that in-company programmes require considerable legwork and commitment from

the institution as the faculty has to understand the business and speak to business heads across functions and hierarchies to figure out the core issues before designing custom content. Also, designing a module can take anywhere between four weeks and eight months. "Developing a custom MDP means figuring out the issues the business is facing, submitting a diagnostic report and churning out a possible solution," says Bhoola. Interestingly, 80 per cent of the MDPs at the institution are custom-made.

Kapil Kanwal, Dean of Continuing Education, Consulting, Alumni and Placements at Gurgaon-based Management Development Institute (MDI, sixth in our list), makes an interesting point when he says companies coming to the MDI have not changed over the years. "There might be a slowdown in the auto sector, but we still have those companies coming to us." Around 82 per cent of the MDPs developed here had been customised. In 2018, MDI conducted 171 custom MDPs for 4,642 participants.

Although training costs get trimmed during a recession, Burman of GrowthSource thinks it would not affect executive development. Companies still want to show that they care for their best performers and want to invest in them, and MDPs are one of those ways. Still, there are chances that employees would forget their newfound knowledge within a few weeks and go back to the old ways. But when the company takes the initiative and ask them to implement those lessons in their work, it makes a difference, he adds. Another mistake that most companies make is to train their top management and expect the knowledge to permeate through the entire organisation. But that does not work. When employees across hierarchies learn through the programmes suited to their respective levels, they start speaking the same language and it shows in their work, says Burman. **BT**



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Rahul Sinha

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