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## Raising the bar in B-schools

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*For management education, and also higher education in general, to result in a meaningful experience for the student, the faculty and the industry, all three have to contribute, with a radical change in approach.*

It is estimated that the national gross enrolment ratio (GER) in higher education in India is around 19 per cent of which around 5 per cent is in technical education. According to one estimate, at least 25 million students every year are eligible for higher education (after school). Are there enough higher education institutes to absorb these 25 million students?

There are several reports which indicate that many of the students are unemployable. The figure varies from 75 per cent to 80 per cent. In the case of B-schools, there is a general perception that there is a mismatch between the industry requirements and the skill set available with the students.

Discussions with experts in the field indicate that the industry requires students who have both soft skills and hard skills.

The challenge for institutions is to provide quality education, and this is dependent primarily on three main stakeholders — students, faculty and the industry. Industry professionals rarely take interest in providing quality education, except through guest lectures or as visiting faculty. The only personnel from the industry who are readily available as guest lecturers or as visiting faculty are those who are retired and those who would now like to “contribute to the society.” The experience of such personnel is also limited to their own ex-organisation. This implies that ensuring quality education mainly depends on the faculty (as giver) and on the students (as receivers).

The objective of students is to get a certificate, while for the faculty it is to get a good feedback. Students believe that the institution is a place for merely getting a certificate. In many cases, they believe that the certificate is a passport to employment and is obtained as soon as the fee is paid. They would prefer to spend their time in the cafeteria or elsewhere discussing social topics and so on, rather than listening to the lectures. They believe that all information that is required is available on the Internet, and can be easily digested by reading casually before the exams. Students also believe what they hear from the industry personnel — the syllabus is outdated and what is actually required is not taught by the institutions — forgetting that what the industry preaches is the application of the fundamentals. Without the fundamental knowledge, application is not possible.

According to experts, it is a Herculean task to get the students to listen to a guest lecture. Students need to be coaxed, or, sometimes, even given incentives in the form of additional marks, to make them attend to the guest lectures. In many cases, students come to the class academically unprepared, be it for the regular session or for a case discussion.

Thus, students pretend to learn by attending the institution, not the classroom or the library or the computer lab. In spite of this attitude, students demand a good placement in terms of companies and attractive packages.

Yet, at times, students lack basic knowledge. In one of the B-schools, students did not know the basic definition of marketing or the role of a finance manager in an organization. Dressing casually and being late for an interview is the norm of the day. In one such institute, for an interview at 2 p.m., students were deliberately told to come by 12 p.m. so that at least by 2 p.m. the students would be available for the interview. Additionally, students feel that the organization should be next to their residence. From day one, students feel that they are “vice-president material” and that the role of the institute is to provide them with a job, irrespective of their performance in the interview.

The only solution is to counsel the students. Specifically, a student must be made to answer the following questions:

- What does he want to achieve in the next 5 to 10 years?
- How does he want to achieve the above?
- Why does he want to achieve the above?
- What does he see as his strengths and weakness?

The student must be counselled so that he understands his limitations. He should analyse his strengths and weaknesses and set realistic goals for himself.

Discussions with students also reveal that faculty are also to blame for this situation. Many a time it has been found that the faculty is inadequately prepared for the lecture, and, in order to cover this inadequacy, is quite liberal in the evaluation of the student. (This can be seen from the fact that many students label faculty as a “liberal” faculty or a “strict” faculty and so on.)

The net result is an all-round dissatisfaction in the faculty, students as well as the industry. This dissatisfaction can perhaps be reduced by controlling the input side of the institution, which is, by reducing the intake of students, limiting the number of higher education institutions and by continuously monitoring the academic progress of the student. Helping students develop holistically, ensuring development of soft skills through involvement in social projects would help. Also, the industry could take an active part in the educational system by participating in it, rather than crying foul of it.

Institutions need to develop strategies to ensure that the students understand their role. For this, they must take care of the following areas:

- Implement a time-bound vision and mission statement. The vision and mission statement of most of the B-schools remains on paper most of the time.

- Sustainable management: In quite a few B-schools, the director is replaced every year or after two years. In such cases, it is difficult to have a sustainable strategy.
- Infrastructure: Most of the infrastructure is barely sufficient and meets the requirements of the statutory bodies.
- Faculty shortage is the order of the day. Today, commitment from the faculty towards the students and the B-school is sadly absent. Considerable steps are required in this area, especially to build a long-lasting trust between the institute and the faculty.
- Innovative programs: There is a need for starting innovative interdepartmental programs — ones which are demanded by the industry. The prime focus of these programs should be to provide the industry with ready-to-use students from day one.
- International and national conferences and workshops: This is another area through which there could be several interactions with the corporate world.
- Guest lectures: This is another important area where the quality of students can be improved substantially by bringing faculty from the industry.
- National and international industrial visits: These visits help students to understand the processes used in various industries as well as the culture of different countries.
- Student and faculty research: In some B-schools, faculty are given time-off to carry out research. The D.Y. Patil University School of Management, for example, encourages faculty to publish research papers, present papers at various conferences by giving them time offs, and/or reimbursing the travel cost as well as the registration fee.
- Innovative pedagogy teaching: Use of ICT technologies, group projects case study discussions, live projects role modelling, group discussions, and so on, help students realize their potential.
- Holistic development: Such activities include Institutional Social Responsibility (ISR) projects such as blood donation camps, HIV awareness camps, and eye donation camps, adopting a village and training the villagers to market their products, and so on.
- Alumni association: Past students are a great help.
- Proper revenue generation and optimal utilization of resources: Currently, the fee structure is regulated by various bodies. This means that consequently, B-schools would have to optimally use the available resources. Many B-school managements look at a School as an industrial venture, and, consequently, would require a minimum of 25 per cent to 30 per cent return on investment. This is in sharp contrast to the government's policy of no profit, no loss outlook.
- Reorientation of B-school to student-centric school: This means ensuring that the student is at the center of all activities of the School or any institution of higher learning.
- Use of Learning Management System (LMS): Through LMS, a student can refer to the presentations at any place wherever the Internet is available. Also, assignments, discussions and so on can be easily uploaded, thus making the whole exercise of learning interesting
- Live projects: Students are expected to work in an organization for two days in a week. This helps them in understanding the culture of the organization, the expectations of the industry, and also their own strengths.
- Participation in student committee, placement committee, industry institute cell, academic committee, and so on: In one of the B-schools, all the activities of the school are organised like that of a corporate world. Several committees are formed and in each of these committees, students are encouraged to participate.

### **Conclusion**

The expectations of students from an institution of higher learning are extremely high. When these expectations are not met, students exhibit a bored attitude.

There is a need to change the attitude of students, and for this, institutions must be more student-centric. There is need to bring back a sense of pride in learning — not rote learning, but an application-oriented one.

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