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Management Education in India: A Marketing Gimmick or a Quality Product

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Abstract—As the countries in the world are getting connected faster and deeper, and in more complex ways, there is increasingly felt need of more qualified, talented, knowledgeable, visionary, committed people at management echelons. If this is true, there is no denying fact that management education has become the order of the day.

As India is putting its best foot forward on the path of growth, efforts to launch and establish India as a noticeable identity on the global map have increased manifold. The country is taking steps to bring reforms in various/different sectors/areas/fields. These reforms include sectors like insurance, telecom, banking, agriculture, health, IT, energy, etc. In this direction, important development is taking place in the field of education. There is increasing realisation that providing education to masses is the only remedy to break the shackles of ignorance. Statistical figures and records of numerous research agencies, government departments reflect and evidence that in India lot still needs to be done. There are huge gaps in dreams and achievements so far. Elementary education, secondary education, higher education all require a strong push to take the country forward. Keeping in line with this need, success in managing organisations, and putting and maintaining these organisations on the growth path is a gigantic task. As success in the corporate sector gets associated with its management, therefore, providing management education to our younger generation gained momentum. BUT....Do we KNOW???

Management education in India is becoming more a Marketing Gimmick than a quality product!!!!

False projections, false promises, exaggerations by word of mouth to lure prospective students in the competitive world by many providers of management education leave aspirants confused and in a state of doubt..It is becoming increasingly difficult to find the right match for materializing the expectations and dreams of future managers.

This paper is an attempt to throw light on realities of business of education and the possibilities of fulfilling the dreams of young generation of India highlighting the ways to fill the present gaps in this field.

I. INTRODUCTION

B-schools providing management education have grown in numbers in the recent past. These

institutions are categorized as premier, niche, or tier-I, tier-II, tier-III etc.

Many promises are being made by these B-schools in their advertisements in print media, electronic media. These promises are varied and are many. B-schools make attractive offers like providing free laptop to every student, assurance of 100% placement at the end of the programme or PPOs before the end of the programme, offering easy and low interest student loans to needy ones, scholarships ranging from 10% to 100%, concessions in tuition fee to students from financially weak background. Besides, they project a rosy picture of their institution having state-of-the-art infrastructure, wi-fi enabled campus, spacious world class lecture rooms, rich exposure to latest concepts, real-life projects, ultra modern auditorium, conference room, well-equipped library with online journals.

List goes on...

Where is the quality?? Quality that must be delivered!!

Quality in teaching, updated curriculum with focus on relevance in the connected world, learning environment and preparedness of graduating students to face the intricacies of the job world. Numerous fingers are pointed towards the delivery quality in management education.

Have they actually prepared their graduates to face the uncertainties of the corporate world?

Have they imparted right values in their students to prevent scams or not mastermind/indulge in such activities??

Moreover, the institutions that are in the business of imparting management education, what about their own management?

How frequently they have updated, upgraded, revised, adapted themselves with changed situations, changed expectations, changed environment, changed business conditions??

How visionary their own managements proved to be in last two decades?

How effectively they are able to stay ahead of the times??

To quote message of a reputed B-school director "Management Education is essentially different from the traditional education that is imparted in general degree colleges or even in specialized disciplines, like engineering and medicine. The high diversity and fluidity of knowledge, skills and experience in the real business world poses greater challenge to the B-Schools in designing, delivering and sustaining their programs in a dynamic and rapidly changing scenario. It, therefore, becomes highly necessary for the institutes to create permeable interfaces for constant osmosis of knowledge and information with the industry and shape its offerings in tandem with the contemporary management practices, problems and issues."

With these perspectives in the background, let's outline the objectives to be achieved through this study.

II. OBJECTIVES

The present paper attempts to:

- 1) Outline the recent trends in the field of management education.
- 2) List the expectations of recruiters, students, society and government and other stakeholders.
- 3) Explore the contrast between reality and projections in marketing ME, if any.
- 4) Decipher the probable factors behind such contrast.
- 5) Finding the role of various stakeholders in minimizing the contrast, especially government and owners/management.
- 6) Assure to deliver the quality product to the society in terms of knowledgeable, confident graduates.

Objective 1: Outline the recent trends in the field of management education

We need to deeply investigate, study and summarize trends in the field of management education. Claims are made in many news forums since 2000 about the mushrooming growth of Management Institutes (IIF, Chairman, Dr J.D. Agrawal mentioned it way back in 2002) and recently in many research studies (Merit Trac, MBA Universe.com, FICCI, IIR Annual Report, AICTE Statistics, etc.). From 117 institutes 25 years ago enrolling few thousand students to 3500+ institutes with an enrolment of over 5 lakh students now. The reason behind this vehement growth in the number of management institutes is government's liberal approach towards private players. It has opened this sector for private players and encouraged them to impart management education both at undergraduate and post-graduate levels. Courses run by these institutions are varied e.g. BBA, BBM, BBI, PGDBM, PG Diploma in Sales and Marketing, public relations, advertising etc. Also specialized courses in ethics, insurance, healthcare, small business, retail, rural management, hospitality, social entrepreneurship

are launched. Data shows that the number of courses provided by such management institutes sum up to 700+ courses.

Management education earlier, was the prerogative of IIMs and some niche universities only (e.g. Faculty of Management Studies, Delhi used to run evening/part-time course for working executives). Subsequently, distance education programs were also added by many institutes. There was little or no need of marketing these niche courses MBA/PGDBM run by limited few but Centres of Excellence churning out knowledgeable, well-exposed and confident products, viz. Management Graduates.

As economy opened up to integrate with the changing world order, more such institutes were set up. With the growth of the economy and success of big corporations, the demand for management graduates inflated at a spiralling rate. As a consequence, suppliers/providers of management education came in a big way to fill the gap offering more and more courses keeping with the changing times. But the story could not go far away. As initial expenditure in setting up these institutes went up, pressure to enroll a good number of students also build up to recover the costs incurred. Simultaneously, somewhere in other parts of the country, players with ample financial resources kept on investing money in bringing up fancy buildings, air-conditioned class rooms, world-class furniture, canteen with the face of a premier restaurant having a lavish menu, most comfortable hostel facility. Some players went into a war of outshining in terms of advertising and marketing their institutes. Attractive and creative advertising in print media encouraged rivalry among management institutes. More and more funds started diverting to investment in marketing and advertising. Many even hired premium professional ad-agencies for the purpose of selling their institutes, their facilities, the courses offered, citing benefits and advantages of graduating from their institutes. The content of advertisement changed from providing relevant information to story-telling about the institute. Ads as Pop ups on social media were also put in to create an impression of being the most contemporary in the line and also to cut down on marketing costs.

Institutes with not so easy funds, not so sufficient funds couldn't match others in the fray. Enrolment in institutes located in far off remote areas was so negligible that they started facing the difficulty to recover even their running costs. Many institutes didn't have a single student. This situation forced such institutes to resort to marketing gimmicks like drawing a false picture of themselves with an intention to lure students. Putting up big boardings on highways, sign boards on roads leading to their premises, banners at markets and public places as a first step to induce aspirants in rural or local areas to enrol. Concessions and discounts in course fee

were offered for referring the institutes to others. As students faced difficulty in reaching institute, the MLs hired vans and buses to pick and drop students from their respective convenient points. Hiring a qualified faculty at these MLs at low salary levels was another hindrance. MLs either hired low calibre faculty or made false promises to hire a faculty (such instances were not uncommon with even, now well known, engineering institutes situated in good localities, where for the whole academic session students remain without faculty for more than one subject). For instance, even today, if one takes a tour of hundred odd colleges in states adjoining capital, one can conveniently experience that situation is more grim.

In well located, well designed Management Institutes/B-schools, the number of students started dwindling after some time. Reasons were manifold.

Objective 2: List the expectations of recruiters, students, society and government and other stakeholders

Recruiting companies started going for the series of screening tests to shortlist, choose and appoint well-groomed management trainees. They started hunting from campus to campus in their search for the best ones.

Aspirants started looking for international courses, international universities, exposure to foreign culture, global issues, participation in live-projects in industry...regularly updated curriculum which prove highly useful not only domestically but also a flexibility for add-on short-term courses to handle international assignments. As economies in the world are moving from agriculture to manufacturing, from manufacturing to service, from service to integration...and so on, need for specialised courses increased. In addition to core subjects like finance, human resource, accounting, law, economics, new additions to courses like information management, tourism management, construction management, rural management, hospitality management, insurance, energy management, environment management, ethics, intellectual property, crisis management, management of frauds and scams, banking etc came in.

Ambitious students preferred IIMs and IITs and niche institutes over private ones. Main attraction was the Institute as a Brand in itself and good placement prospects, with a prospect of becoming friends with tomorrow's who's who, who will be presently their batchmates/friends there. Parents and society in general looked for handsome offers and good employment contracts.

Objective 3: Explore the contrast between reality and projections in marketing ME

With the increase in the number of institutions, the rivalry between B-schools increased. Some B-schools were well-connected to corporates and funding agencies for financial resources on time and in sufficient quantity. Others were not. As a result, these struggling B-schools resorted to different marketing tools. Earning a good rank in B-school surveys by paying for the place in the rank. Making fancy presentations at conferences, seminars, distributing attractive brochures in undergraduate colleges free of cost, holding competitions to attract young crowd with impressive cash prizes, or gifts in kind and offering discounts in fee for on-the-spot enrolments. Additional discounts offered for a bringing/enrolling a friend on the same day or within a week. Spreading/publicizing brands that absorbed their past students by word of mouth. These B-schools also highlight well placed alumni, highly learned core faculty, and well experienced visiting faculty, their research publications in journals of national and international repute.

Projections are made for providing a hostel with all amenities; canteen; medical facility; sports ground for polo, lawn tennis, squash; sports room for billiards, chess, table tennis. Maintaining a decent student-faculty ratio to give personal attention to each and every student (even Shiamak Dawar classes don't fulfil that promise). Opportunity for industry interface, rural visits, corporate visits, providing opportunity to work with NGOs with a hands-on experience opportunity. Launching an attractive and eye-catching website of the institute with a unique logo, great motto, unique mission, vision, values and philosophy of the school.

Objective 4: Decipher the probable factors behind such contrast

As is widely known that unmanageable growth in number of management institutes resulted in many consequences detrimental to the success of these Institutions. First, the role of teaching faculty diverted from academic contribution to financial contribution (i.e. revenue generation). Also, quality of teaching suffered and became a casualty. Second, students took MBA degree as a golden passport to lucrative jobs without proper focus on learning and experience they lacked the will to acquire meaningful knowledge, gain understanding and clarity of concepts taught in the classroom and lacked ability to apply it in the real world. Hence, declared unemployable by the industry experts (recruiters/job providers). Recruiters resisted to visit such B-schools or offer placements. Even if they did, the salary offered went low. This trend continued for many years at many B-schools and is still continuing.

"If the reputation of the awarded degree is slipping, so is the graduate's livelihood".

-Peter F. Drucker

Thus over projected estimates led to the growth of MIs country-wide, which eventually led to conversion of an academic institution into a business model (aiming to generate high revenues), finally a shift in focus from profits to profitability. Quality of teaching suffered, academic output suffered, student placement suffered, brand image diluted, enrolment went down, leading to closure of many B-schools, more than 500 in last 4-5 years. And many more are on the verge of closure, having meagre/no enrolment, no staff, academic or otherwise.

B-schools are evaluated on parameters like brand value, input value, value addition and ambience. Brand value comes from tie-ups with foreign universities, campus placements, average salary offered this year or last year, highest salary offered, brand of the recruiter itself, and profile of corporate recruiters. Input value includes quality of the entrance test administered, number of students with work experience seeking admission, enrolment of foreign students, and students from big cities within the country. Value addition to a management institute comes from industry visits, international linkages, profile and strengths of faculty, especially research in starting new courses, both long-term and short duration, and through visit by industry experts. Fourth parameter, learning ambience includes attributes like infrastructure, IT, Library and industry-student interaction.

Thus, probable factors behind the contrast/mismatch in expectations and projections include the management of the B-school itself, seriousness of the intention of B-school to provide good education, availability of ample funds, hiring well-experienced faculty, offering salary commensurating the work burden/contribution of faculty, support of local authorities, and dedication of the institute towards its social responsibility. In tier II and tier III b-schools entrance exams were conducted as an eye wash and practically every applicant who appeared for the test got through! Inside classrooms students lack will to grasp and learn the subject, in the internal assessment faculty members felt the pressure of deliberately assigning higher scores or ignoring complete absence of student with influential background (they were near-dear ones of financiers of the institute or politically influential people). In main examinations, questions to be asked happened to be already shared in classrooms. Students scored liberally and they never felt the brunt of their agitated parents. Resultantly both the parties, B-schools and students enjoyed the mutual benefit.

Objective 5: Finding the role of various stakeholders in minimizing the contrast, especially government, owners/management and students

Management institutes have to shoulder the responsibility of being ethical in their efforts, in

their strategies, in their policies, in their actions. Falsification of facts, over projections may prove beneficial in the short term, but survival in the long run is definitely at stake. Management Institutes need to have clarity in their mission statements and leave no stone unturned to make it a reality. MIs shall include context-specific cases, exercises and experience sharing in course curriculum, shall include papers on economic history to enlarge/broaden thinking; on capitalism to abreast them with a global picture; on business ethics to make them understand its relevance in times of scandals, greed and moral lapses; on leadership in good times and in tough times to clarify that same concepts cannot be applied at all times. Institutes need to first focus on addressing local opportunities in jobs, then domestic and finally address international demand of qualified management graduates.

Students' expectation which are too high and too unrealistic, therefore, need to be scaled down. Students shall develop an attitude to learn intricacies of the subject, expose themselves to job realities to be handled in future, and develop adaptability skills. Students also need to refine their

- basic knowledge in core areas
- analytical thinking
- application of concepts to their jobs
- regional-focus
- cultural understanding
- industry relevant awareness

Eliminate burden on faculty to contribute to revenue kitty as they are not entrepreneurs. Make the most of their academic excellence because that is their core strength. Extend autonomy in their effort to improve student learning and provide adequate and timely support for research and professional development. B-schools need to employ and implement tough standards of learning and testing student knowledge. They should not be liberal in assigning scores for want of building brand image. They need to encourage faculty-industry interaction.

Objective 6: Assure to deliver the quality product to the society in terms of knowledgeable, confident graduates

Management institutes/B-schools should strive to be a highly dynamic education sector. Seal the gaps in learning and expectations. Premier and niches institutes shall move away from tool-box courses (by teaching too technical SPSS or SAS). Move away from teaching WHAT'S and HOW'S teaching WHY'S. Employ innovative teaching and learning methodology to stay ahead of times. Blended learning, networking, face-to-face interactions, MOOCs or massive open online learning courses may be the future of institutes. Social networking will definitely add benefits. Ethics have to be preached by themselves before teaching ethics to its students. Create an environment to learn,

strictly follow the guidelines and rules of assessing students on a continuous basis if the society expects responsible and mature citizens and future managers.

To summarise, we shall strive to make

“Management Institutes Shall Become ‘Temples of Learning’ . Not Status Symbols”.

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