

News monitored for: ISB

Business India

A question of scale

The biggest challenge is providing good quality education on a large scale

What would you say are the key problems facing management education in India today?

The biggest challenge is to provide good quality education on a very large scale. Right now we have very few really good institutions and then we have a large number of what I would call poor quality education institutions. So scale and quality are the top challenges. Related to this is shortage of good faculty. Also, in India we have really not been doing too much of research relevant to our markets. There is no rigour in our research. It is this rigour that automatically enhances the quality of teaching. And of course, for all these things to happen we need money.



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So what is the way out of some of these issues? Regarding quality for instance, do we need more regulation with regard to the large number of so-called B-schools who are churning out students not fit for industry?

Ironically, these poor quality institutions are the ones which are regulated. Most of them are AICTE approved. Obviously the regulations have not met their objectives. So more of it is not going to help. Frankly, we need to see who owns these institutions. In many instances, it is people with strong political interests who probably have a vested interest in not changing the regulations.

Regarding quality, one possible solution is accreditation. For instance, at ISB we have gone in for global accreditation. Everyone may not be able to opt for this but there could be some form of peer review/accreditation. The HRD minister has some good ideas but unfortunately all those bills have got stuck in the Parliament. While we seem to know conceptually what needs to be done, we are not able to move forward.

How can the issue of shortage of quality faculty be resolved?

One, unless we can offer good careers and decent compensation levels we can't attract enough of good quality faculty. Two, a large number of students who passed out in the first 10-15 years of the IITs and IIMs are retiring now. We need to see if we can retool and retrain these people as academics. These are people who are keen to contribute and are not really looking for lots of money. AICTE needs to recognise this and not set standards in isolation.

There are also other possibilities. For instance, we can look at sharing the faculty pool across institutions in a region. Increasingly, newer e-learning models are also coming up which will increase the reach of the faculty manifold. So perhaps there could be different models and fee structures for, say, in-class live experience,

an online experience, or canned courses which are available on the net after a particular course is over.

Is any of this happening at present?

Yes. It is beginning to happen, but is at a very early stage. At ISB, from this year we are offering at least two courses in our PGP (post graduate programme) which will be online. I expect that in the next five to 10 years online teaching could be the single biggest disruptive factor.

On a different note, the industry feels that IIM-A alumni – and, more recently, ISB alumni – 'think too much of themselves' and find it difficult to fit in with non-MBAs and even MBAs from 'lesser' schools. Have you got this feedback and how are you handling this issue?

No. We have not got this feedback from the industry. The feedback we have is that our students are very balanced. We have all the top recruiters coming back year after year and recruiting more... [What probably happens is that] when you go to a top quality school, one of the things you also end up learning is self-confidence. You have been taught by the best faculty and interact with peers who are high quality so naturally you have the confidence of your own views and are vocal about it. Being assertive is not a bad thing.

By and large, is management education in India too narrowly focused on an individual's career development without adequate emphasis on broader social issues? Is there need for greater balance between these aspects?

Yes. I do think it is. But I also think it is changing. We are sensitising our students to broader social issues like ethics and social and societal aspects of enterprise. But there are challenges. Take ethics. Everyone knows what ethics is. And in any case, this should not be taught when people are 25-27 years old. It should be inculcated at home and be a part of primary and secondary education. We also need role models in society. But having said that, we at B-schools, cannot duck our responsibility to teach ethics. The thing is that in a classroom everyone knows the correct answers. The challenge for us is how do we recreate greed, time pressures, political pressures, etc. which people buckle under. One of the things we have started doing is inviting eminent people and asking them to share what happens in their industries and then have a robust debate. But we all certainly have a very long way to go.

As told to MEENU SEKHAR