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Crash courses on placement preparation are neither enough nor sustainable — learning is a process

Students, parents and academicians are in a dilemma today as jobs, which earlier seemed sensible and secure, have now become unreliable and increasingly irrelevant. ‘Bulk placements’ have shrunk and are seeing significant hiring drops. their hiring significantly. In 2016 and 2017, there was a reported 15 to 35 % decrease in placements of technology, engineering. and management graduates.

Multifold roles

The reasons for this shift are manifold, but two stand out. The first is the unprecedented speed with which technology has entered people’s lives and businesses, in the last decade. With data sciences, artificial intelligence, machine learning and e-commerce, human intervention for standard operational work is reducing. It doesn’t, however, mean that there are not enough jobs. What it means is that organisations now need people who can think, ideate, and problem-solve beyond what machines can do.

The second is the response of education institutions to the rapid change in the business world. One reason that today’s students are beginning to get concerned about their future is because most

education institutions have not been able to stay updated and develop essential skills of their students. In this situation, what is the role of education institutions in preparing students for the real world?

It is important to understand that placing students in that first job is not preparing them to succeed later — the role of the placement cells is to shape students that companies desire. Getting a job is important, but being able to get the right opportunities is necessary too. ASSOCHAM reported recently that only seven percent of Indian management graduates, outside of the top 20 institutions, are employable, and the numbers are similar or worse for technology and engineering graduates.

This happens because we see placements as a task, not a process. Let us compare this process to that of product development. To mitigate the risk of an unsuccessful product, we brainstorm, evaluate the market, analyse consumer needs, prototype and test before finally launching it. Thus, if we can do this for developing products, here we are developing careers of young people. We must visualise the final product, the student, and work backwards to provide room for application and practice.

Not a one-size fit

With the IT boom in the past decade, students from mechanical, chemical, electrical or any other specialisation found themselves in IT services jobs. The narrative was simple — take it or leave it. Now, this was after spending several lakhs on their education. Thus, we have a nation of unemployable and unhappy youth.

Different students have different strengths and interests. They are interested in jobs, further studies, fellowships, scholarships, entrepreneurship and so on. It is important that institutions work to identify and map these interests and strengths progressively and look for areas where they can work with passion. The career services teams in many cutting-edge institutions are, therefore, working with students to explore and customise entrepreneurship or higher education opportunities.

Crash courses on placement preparation, in the last year or semester, is neither enough nor sustainable. Learning is a process, and building the ‘product’ begins from when they are inducted. Building on skills should be strategically divided across their programme and provide them the opportunity to apply the learning.

Institutions must be aware that the experiences provided from knowledge resources available is limited, and the exposure can be broadened by greater interface with the real-world of work experience through guest sessions, longer internships, live projects, mentors, and more. It not only inspires them but also exposes them to see outside the safe bubble of their campus.

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<https://www.thehindu.com/education/mapping-the-course-of-a-career/article24601155.ece>