

Being socially conscious at Indian B-Schools

LEARNING CURVE B-school students are given exposure to the real world to make them aware of the innate potential of businesses to make a positive impact on society

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NEW DELHI: Earlier this year, some 300 students from a B-school near New Delhi travelled to Mewat in Haryana to learn about rural life and the problems villagers confront in everything—from gaining an education to getting an electricity connection.

It was not a fun trip, but part of their course curriculum at the Birla Institute of Management and Technology (BIMTECH) in Greater Noida, which is teaching students about doing “responsible business.”

“As a B-school we must try to inculcate a sense of social awareness among budding managers,” said Vineeta Dutta Roy, an associate professor at BIMTECH. “Learning about profit or balance sheet is fine, but what about responsible business practices? Here we come in through a structured course called responsible business comprising issues like sustainability, governance, society and ethics.”

Conscious capitalism will become a way of business life in the future, said Roy, adding that the B-school is trying to inculcate the concept in its students. According to an Harvard Business Review essay, conscious capitalism is a way of thinking about business that reflects where we are in the human journey, the state of the world today, and the innate potential of business to make a positive impact on the world.

“While it is okay to be competitive, it is equally important to have people who are more self-aware, and can empathize with others... students should have a clear idea of how they are perceived by the world around them, and not just how they perceive the world,” said S.K. Munjal, chairman of Hero Enter-



■ B-schools are trying to inculcate the concept of conscious capitalism

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prises. Conscious capitalism or social awareness is not just about ethics, it is also becoming a business requirement, says Runa Sarkar, professor at the Indian Institute of Management Calcutta (IIMC). The attempt is to broad-base the understanding of students.

The introduction of corporate social responsibility rules in April 2014, mandating companies with a net worth of Rs500 crore or revenue of Rs1,000 crore or net profit of Rs5 crore to spend 2% of their average profit in the last three years on social development has contributed to a greater awareness of the need for B-school students to gain an understanding of society that goes beyond business textbooks.

If a company is allocating money to CSR activities, it would like its employees to understand what the subject is about, said Sarkar. The bottom of the pyra-

mid also offers a potentially lucrative market for businesses.

At IIMC, some students even consult non-profit organizations to learn how they can reach out to society, for example to solve problems that people in the villages confront.

Other top B-schools including S. P. Jain Institute of Management and Research in Mumbai, Great Lakes Institute of Management in Chennai, Indian School of Business in Hyderabad and the IIMs in Lucknow, Indore, Bengaluru and Rohtak teach social immersion courses and organize tours for students to gain exposure to the real world.

At IIM Indore, as part of the institute's social initiative, both students and faculty reach out to dozens of villages. The aim is to make women financially literate and teach underprivileged students. “From teaching the elderly to underprivileged, from

working for women's empowerment to having a shelter for stray dogs on the campus, we at IIM Indore do a variety of socially-relevant projects to make students socially conscious,” said an IIM Indore spokesperson.

And industries are welcoming such initiatives.

“It is necessary to incorporate courses on community citizenship that educate students on their social responsibility towards the upliftment of the society,” said Harshil Mehta, chief executive officer Dewan Housing Finance Corp. Ltd, a listed housing finance company. “Today, as the world evolves, companies are increasingly looking at multi-faceted individuals who are not only subject matter experts but are also wanting to explore other functional abilities that could enable the organization to grow beyond its boundaries.”