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In the same league?

Indian management education needs to market itself better so that it is in the thick of it rather than merely on the outside

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As an alumnus of IIM-Bangalore and someone who is a visiting faculty at a few IIMs, I have always been intrigued by this question. How do Indian management schools compare with those globally? Are they in the same league? Here are a few thoughts for your consideration.

Yes IIM and ISB are good but...

The problem in India is the proliferation of management institutes of all sizes, shapes and hues, many of whom have dubious credentials even if they are housed acres and acres of real estate! So, I think for purposes of this discussion, we must stay with just the top IIMs and ISB when we speak of comparison with the top-flight management schools. So the important point that we need to keep reminding ourselves before we get carried away is the fact that we have less than a handful of top-flight management institutes in the country and that's a sobering thought. So the challenge for educators is how to make the other institutions comparable with the global ones.

One of the biggest differences in favour of global schools is the diversity and experience of the students. It is not uncommon for students to interact with people from over a dozen countries, with many of them having

commendable work experience. This improves class participation enormously and promotes cross-cultural discussion. A student from India is interacting with students from Germany and Japan which gives him a completely different perspective of the consumer in these diverse markets. The scope for learning from one's peers is truly enhanced and consequently the quality of education. It is truly global in that sense. There is a sameness to the profile of the students, say in IIM, with a high percentage of freshers. While that certainly makes sense from a placement perspective, it certainly doesn't make for high quality class participation. To a certain extent ISB is moving in the direction of global students, but the IIMs still have some distance to cover in this respect, assuming however that this is an important objective.

Over the years, there has been a lingering doubt about the management faculty in India not spending enough time on original research. The research papers presented by them are generally a lot fewer than their international counterparts and there have been questions raised on about the quality of the papers themselves. This is a serious lacuna in the management education ecosystem of India and while the IIMs, particularly IIM Bangalore (because I am more familiar with it), are addressing it on a war footing, the perception largely justified, is that barring ISB to a limited extent,

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the problem persists. This gap has to be bridged. It is certainly a fact that management teachers in India can get away with limited efforts in the research space. This has to be addressed on a war-footing if India is to make large strides in closing the gap with the western world.

The very nature of management education makes it obligatory for students to keep interacting with industry. While all institutes attempt this, I feel from my own personal experience that many of my friends who have spent decades in industry are giving back to the students by way of being guest and

visiting faculty. Sadly, whatever we may bring to the table, our breed is never equal to the academic because we do not have PhDs. There is a distinct class differentiation. The students however get substantial value from their seniors from in industry who are spending more time in academics today. They bring a lot to the table, having worked on industry problems and are still in touch with live business problems. Management schools have to find a way of to harness this talent which is floating on the periphery and integrate it with the mainstream for the benefit of the students who will be the richer for this.

We live in exciting times, with the internet breaking all barriers and bringing the world closer together despite the efforts of a

few. The challenge is to grow with the times so that we can catch up with the western world which seems to have a head start in this important field. Yet, the offers enormous possibilities given its diversity and the size of its market. Indian management education needs to market itself better so that, it is in the thick of it rather than being merely on the outside. We have demonstrated that we can beat the curve in certain categories like mobile phones. Now's the time to extend the scope of this achievement to management education as well. Let's hope that the journey is not too long.

The author is the CEO of brand-comm and visiting faculty at leading management schools.



Higher education embracing change

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At the same time, there are infrastructural, socio-economic, linguistic and physical barriers to access to education. Quality of education varies significantly from place to place due to differences in quality of the infrastructure, teacher and the processes.

Information technology has created new opportunities for education and e-learning can be a useful tool for enhancing the quality of teaching and

learning. Using the new age information and communications technologies one can also design multimedia-based simulations of complex processes for learning in domains like the biological and medical sciences, engineering, agriculture. This is a huge gain as such educational practices are not easily or cheaply accessible in real time.

Over the last two decades, many higher education institutions have adopted a wide range of e-Learning tools into their educational delivery and support

processes. However, such institutions in developing countries are lagging behind in terms of benefiting from the immense opportunities that information and communication technologies have brought to their counterparts in developed countries. Universities in these countries face many challenges such as increasing demand and declining investments, demoralising conditions of service, resistance to change by faculty and students, and limited access to technology. Access to Internet in developing countries including India

is not as widespread as in the developed countries.

The faculty, library, IT, and instructional design departments need to collaborate in developing sustainable and seamless infrastructure and also in designing e-learning modules that are exciting for the learners. Very few institutions have been able to systemically attain such a coherent strategic approach so far.

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