

Indian Management Education on the Global Map: Resurrecting it from its Nadir!

The GMAC 2017 application trends for Management programmes worldwide with 965 respondents show as an increasing trend in the applications of the 2017 admission cycle. MBA programs continue to be the most sought-after curriculum among the bouquet that is offered by management institutions worldwide. Others are Executive, Masters, Part Time etc. For India, the survey shows that 85% of the two year full time programmes here reported application growth which is more than the percentages in the East/South East Asia and the USA at 77% & 32 % respectively.

Out of this macro trend, the survey shows growing trend of international applications pipeline worldwide. International application pipelines were largest for programmes in Canada, Europe and US. International applicants represent 57% of US application volumes, 70% in Canada, 89% in Europe, 20% in East and SE Asia. However for India international applications is abysmally low i.e. less than 1% of application volume. India fairs equally bad in the regional break up and has less than 1% application destination wise of the total international applications for all 956 institutions. Programmes in East/South East Asia is much ahead at 9% and US is leap bound ahead at 51%.

On the contrary, India and China represent the largest volumes of international applicants to programs worldwide indicating interests of students outside their own country. This reflects a very sad state of affairs for Indian management education as far its quality and standards are concerned which stand nowhere in the international arena in spite of IIMs(A,B,C), ISB, select University MBA programmes and a set of well-meaning autonomous PGDM institutes in the country.

It is worthwhile to look into the reasons for this sad state of affairs even after six-seven decades of history of management education in the country.

To begin with, the sentiments of students and the aspirants are most important to understand. Reaction of one of the Indian students spoken with from premier B-schools, more than explains what they think of Indian programmes. “Do you really expect the programme design and curriculum we are followingand the kind of pressure we are putting on students to

perform, will do any sort of good to Indian society?—India is producing nothing but workbots for MNCs... World is on Android 8.1 and we are still working on symbian Java phones”, young India is quite vociferous, the moment one touches Indian education.

A typical Management programme offered in India is of Two years duration spread across trimester/semester comprising of 35 plus courses, between compulsory (20-25) and electives (10-12) with overall minimum teaching load of 1100 odd hours plus internships(globally this figure is 700-800). The core courses are found to be more or less standard across programmes. Electives though offered in bouquet and revised corresponding to the needs, the number of choices and flexibility to register for them are quite limited. Curriculum and teaching pedagogy lack innovation and practical learning except for counted exceptions.

The shocking reality is that such a programme, a more or less standardized one is offered across students who get admitted from diverse backgrounds of age, work experience (0-5plus years), educational background(Engineering, Social sciences, Physical or Life sciences, Commerce, CAs, Doctors and others) with diverse purposes, interests and aptitude.

Awareness and initiatives on new pedagogical tools for innovative and experiential learning and industry need/skill based courses are late starters and is far lagging behind from world standards. Accreditations both national and international with an emphasis on Assurance of Learning though emphasized of late, their impact on results will take a longer time. Reason being, the basic philosophy and approach behind the design and delivery of programmes in India have run out of context of the present times and thereby have no attraction for students outside or in India who deserve and one who can afford.

Talking globally, a look at the programme design, curriculum and pedagogical tools of the few institutions from FT 50 list across the US, Canada, Europe, SE Asia, Australia reveal certain startling differences from India. All across regions, programme philosophy emphasize on “innovative portfolio of MBA programs which help students finding the ideal balance among professional, educational and personal goals”(Kellogg, US). Unlike India, MBA students in these countries typically have work experience nothing less than 3 years. For fresh students bouquet has Masters and for higher work experienced, Executive programmes are offered.

The most important differentiator is personalized curriculum. It is to the extent that MIT Sloan offers choice to students to “self-manage” their curriculum or from different track and certificate options to match their interests and career goals. It offers the joint degree program Leaders for Global Operations, which combines coursework in management and engineering (Engg. School) with an internship at an MIT partner company. INSEAD (Europe) has the one year accelerated full-time MBA programme for those who can not afford to stay away from job for long.

In contrast to what was explained earlier, broadly, 10 odd compulsory subjects are offered while a plethora of elective choices from various disciplines, up to 200 even(Wharton US) is

on the platter. The NUS MBA imparts and encourages industry-specific expertise and runs courses on healthcare, real estate, digital business, analytics and operations besides functional expertise. Schools like AGSM Australia, offer popular courses such as “Building Business in China” or “Building Business in India” on entrepreneurship that take learning out of the classroom and prepare students for real global ventures.

The programmes emphasize on creating essentials of a successful business in their curriculum. Few of the best practices are listed here which get included in various schools. Creating collaboration and innovation learning (Stanford, MIT); connecting classroom learning to real organizations; language learning; identifying areas for leadership development efforts; gaining new insights into global business by engaging around the world; international exchange to broaden experience academically, professionally and culturally (e.g. 3 integrated campuses of INSEAD, Europe, Asia, Middle East); business project to source a real-world business issue and learn commercial acumen; intensive week of experiential leadership learning and others. Evidently enough, pedagogy trends here include team projects and experiential learning besides lectures and cases.

Unlike India these programs have globally renowned faculty that combine industry experience and active research with impressive teaching abilities. Critical differentiator if one looks at vacant positions and the profile of faculty in India.

Unlike India where B schools have been christened as placement agencies in the minds of students and their parents, abroad focus is on enabling students to get a job rather than placing them. Career Development Office in these schools sponsor many programs designed to help students set and achieve career goals. They provide networking opportunities and powerful connections with international recruiters and corporations.

It's really sad and a concern to see India not more than a spec in the eyes of students globally. India in history is known as a seat of learning India, however, in present cant contain students migrating overseas in such huge numbers. It is shameful as not only its leads to brain drain but it's a big dent on building a competitive human resource pool for the country.

Only a handful Indian B schools have introduced the desired transformation that too very late on being compelled by the competitive realities of the world and also due to recent mandates and accreditation requirements. Mandates are for meeting benchmarks in curriculum design, pedagogy, faculty quality and their competence in teaching and research, overall institution building, internationalization etc.

Recent initiatives of the govt. for creating a competitive environment and a pushing the vision of global excellence is not just sufficient. Institutions like IIMs and others will have to adopt an early transformative approach which can only be possible if meritocracy,

accountability and dynamism are ensured in the system and the leadership. It's a good sign that few corporates have come up with institutions with good intention and approach, however, it is the Institutes of national importance (IIMs, IITs) and others established ones who have to gear up to the needs. Institution building of eminence is a time taking process and a short cut and populist approach so far followed by the govt., devoid of the futuristic realities would take the institutions to shambles.