

B-SCHOOLS: ROADMAP FOR EXCELLENCE

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I. INTRODUCTION

With the commencement of the era of liberalization, privatization and globalization (LPG), the country witnessed a mushroom growth in the number of higher and technical education institutions, including B-Schools offering different specialization-specific technical education courses/programs both the at under-graduate and post-graduate levels. It was then rationally expected by the State and the statutory apex bodies sanctioning establishment of new higher and technical education institutions and increase in intake that this quantum growth across the country would bound to complement and supplement governmental efforts in bringing higher and technical education within the easy reach of prospective students. However since inception; plugged with various major infrastructural related problems, poor intellectual capital, inadequate institute-industry interface, poor placements, sluggish governance and many other deficiencies including financial crunch; a large chunk of such institutions could not meet the genuine expectations of students, the primary stakeholders and the society, and sarcastically failed in delivering their intended services to them both in terms of quality and quantity and that too in time. Moreover, sloppy and tardy monitoring system of the State further added to the plight of millions of unemployable graduates, who were by now churned out by these institutions. Though said to be a knowledge society, this scenario is however, still prevalent for one reason or the other. Since finally market being the driving force, over the years literally many such ill-managed institutions found their survival difficult and were thus compelled to submit their closure requests with the competent authorities.

II. B-SCHOOL: THE THREE PILLARS

Against this backdrop, it is evident that any academic institution, offering service to its stakeholders has to be primarily student-centric with sharp focus on excellence in all endeavors. The academic institutions have three major pillars of their workings, namely, academic, finance, and governance; whose domains have to be clearly identified and action plans be worked out and executed with precision. Academics broadly includes preparation and execution of academic calendar, lesson plans, ICT for digitization of study material/delivery of teaching material, concurrent tracking of quality delivery of lesson plans, standing operating procedures (SOPs) for conducting summer internships, research dissertation projects, experts talks, field visits, examinations; undertaking sponsored research and consultancy projects, MDPs, FDPs, SDPs etc. Under finance; preparing Plan and Non-Plan budgets under various heads, estimating income from various sources along with the time frame and expenditure under different heads keeping in view the inflation, ensuring regular cash inflow,

working out rate of return, and applications of stringent financial measure in every operations of the Institute, creating 'buffer' to meet future development needs and 'emergency fund' to meet unforeseen expenditures. Under governance; timely conduct of all the scheduled programs/activities/examinations and declaration of results, timely meetings of various committees/ refund of security etc; and submission of the compliance reports to statutory bodies/state/court etc has to be ensured.

Offering industry-specific degree programs, MDPs, consultancy, sponsored research etc. and skill training for students to help industries in their various operations will add feathers to the workings of the Institute. Mobilizing resources from various funding bodies and organize seminars/programs etc on subjects of topical interest will be a great learning experience for students and as well as the faculty. Publications in national/international quality research journals and bringing out its own journal will be a platform as well as a boon to the Institute.

Education, being a service industry in the highly competitive market scenario, has to always ensure adequate returns from investment to its primary stakeholders. Inadequate infrastructure, poor quality of faculty, inadequate institute-industry interface and lack of regular capability building programs collectively result into poor academic performance, and poor quality output having personality-deficient syndrome, which is not much suitable for gainful placements. The cumulative effect result into poor perception of the Institute among its stakeholders and the commensurate response. However, this vicious circle is not difficult to break through honest introspection, critical SWOT analysis, and meticulous planning and execution with excellence on all the three major fronts (academic, financial and governance) in any B-School.

Placement is the outcome of the academic rigorousness, strong interface with industry at various levels, and sound grooming of students inculcating the right mix of knowledge and attitude/skills needed by industry. Industry-specific need analysis and developing and executing interventions strategies accordingly are a must. Proactive involvement of alumni, faculty, management and the students in placement endeavors throughout the year is the need of the hour.

Unfortunately regularity, punctuality, general discipline among students is the first causality in many professional institutions. However, these minor problems can be well addressed and managed through mentorship programs, active involvement of parents, observance of academic calendar, students' engagement activities (co-curricular and extra-curricular), vocational guidance programs, sustaining/promoting their interests in academics through seminars, workshops, industrial visits/study tours/experts lectures on subjects of topical interest, creating an urge in them to excel in their chosen domain and find out various platforms/hangouts for unfolding their creativity and innovations.

Following points are of paramount importance for taking any B-School to its peak in all spheres of its activities:

III. COURSE CURRICULUM

In tune with the ever changing and challenging local, national and international market demands, drawing lessons from its own rich and varied experience, and in consultation with concerned stakeholders; B-Schools must enjoy complete autonomy to introduce new programs, design and periodically revise course contents/curriculum, and get specify its degrees u/s 22 (3) of the UGC Act 1956. After careful feasibility considerations, new programs may also be evolved and launched around emerging knowledge domains and the

focus areas identified by the State. Thereafter resource mobilization and their deployment commensurating with the set objectives through backward integration will certainly be a much demanding task.

State of the art infrastructure – classrooms, library, computer centre, language lab, hostel, sports facilities, campus upkeep including eco-system and hangouts etc. and their proper utilization especially by primary stakeholders i.e. students and the faculty is a must for ensuring effective teaching-learning in all institutions. Since technology is fast changing, its regular updation/replacement is also utmost necessary.

IV. TEACHING LEARNING PROCESS

Teaching-learning pedagogy is one of the most important ingredients of any education system. It is not about ‘what to teach’ but is all about ‘how to teach’. This entire process has two major components – first enhancing collective competence of faculty through various means and second pro-active involvement of students in learning process, which needs to be closely mentored through SOPs. Student-centric learning enabled conducive campus environment is certainly a boon. Rigorous observance of academic calendar, mentor-mentee system, concurrent, periodic and objective feedback followed by appropriate corrective interventions/measures, use of latest ICT, presentations, case studies, industry analysis exercises, industry interface through internships, international internships, guest lectures, students’ involvement in research and placement activities, visits (domestic/international), co-curricular (seminars, workshops, conferences etc. on subjects of topical interests) and extra-curricular activities, nature walk, adventure sports, yoga etc. greatly facilitate and positively impact teaching-learning processes. Students’ engagement, recognitions/awards/appreciations etc. and encouraging creativities and innovations further boost this process. Regular interface of Alumni with students and faculty will open Pandora Box of exiting learning and gainful employment opportunities even in the hitherto unexplored domains.

Experiential learning is a method of educating learners through first-hand experience. Skills, knowledge, and experience are acquired outside the traditional academic classroom setting, and this may include internships, studies abroad, field trips, field research, and service-learning projects. Experiential learning supplements and complements classroom teachings and connects learner to the real life situations. In fact a majority of learning in professional programs must be experiential learning, which operates in a continuous cycle including concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation.

V. RESEARCH & INNOVATIONS

Creating sound HR Policy, a Non-Plan Head and making adequate budgetary allocations for ‘Research and Innovation’ activities; and undertaking and producing quality research by faculty, independently and/or in collaboration, is one of the major contributing factors in branding an institution among its contemporaries-locally, nationally and globally. Collective competence of faculty, optimum utilization of research grants and facilities, and regular publication of the same in referred national/international journals help institution to establish its credentials for securing recognitions/merits/accreditations etc. With the help of industry, promoting entrepreneurship and innovations through skill development/up-gradation/refinement and getting patents and tie ups for commercial productions should be the time-bound agenda for institutions.

Collaborative research, and close interface with industry will help in bridging gaps between the academia and industry and work with synergy. This interface will open many opportunities to students to seek employment in different industries. Initiatives taken to build their competencies at par with the industry requirements will further facilitate their search for suitable employment.

Vocational career counseling of students by subject experts, prior to and after their joining higher education stream, will present them the larger picture of many new vistas of gainful paid and/or self-employment opportunities, which will help them to choose and pursue the most appealing career among the options available. Offering cafeteria approach to education and dovetailing education and vocational streams for easy mutual transferability will increase their job readiness. Industry-specific gap analysis based well planned and executed Personality Development Programs (PDPs) will empower students with necessary knowledge, skills and attitude matching industry expectations from management intern graduates.

VI. COLLABORATIONS

Rightly said ‘most of the break-through works are the product of global collaborative ventures’. This holds more true in case of education as education, research and innovations observe no physical boundaries in the knowledge-based economy of the global village. Need-based local, national and international collaborations with like-minded industries/institutions/organizations–government/semi-government/private etc. mutually enhance capabilities of each partner institution to work more efficiently and effectively. Education, being a tradable commodity, is more open to such experimentations, which has yielded rich dividends in the past. Tie-ups/joint ventures/dual degrees arrangements etc. in teaching, curriculum development, international industry internships, training, research, publications, exchange of faculty and students etc. will help institutions to play crucial role on international platforms by providing their students many rewarding opportunities of learning, and employment and personality development. Collective competency is certainly bound to be more rewarding in a resource crunch scenario.

VII. TEAM BUILDING AND COMPOSITION OF TEAM

Target-specific competency-based team composition developed gradually and nurtured with patience and perseverance over a period of time under a strong, adhesive, transparent and trust-worthy team leadership will help any team to cross even the seven seas. Team building efforts’, having in-built rewards and punishments, is in fact a very tedious and long drawn process and calls for an extremely methodological SWOT analysis of all the probable team members against the specific requirements of the team mandate. Accommodating and balancing/ironing out of the conflicting interests of the team members within the ambit of the larger good of the team should be the quality of the team leader. For the sake of the larger good, short term personal gains need to be sacrificed by each member of the team. Recognizing and giving credit to team members publically for their individual and collective efforts, but shouldering responsibility on him/her only for any shortcoming/failure is the moral responsibility of the team leader. An honest introspection will help in setting the house in order.

Participative approach of management (with in-built checks and balances) involving all stakeholders in smooth conduct of various operations of the Institute is the need of the hour. This will help immensely in generating

mutual trust, respect and confidence in teams, wherein decisions are taken in 'team spirit with collective wisdom' for the larger good of the Institution.

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