

An Examination of Collaboration with Foreign Institutions in Management Studies

Privatisation of management education in the 90s has brought into existence more than 1150 institutions approved by the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE). As the committee appointed by the Government of India in the year 2000 to recommend on 'Policy/Perspectives of Management Education' highlighted in their report, almost 85-90% of the existing newly created institutions offer low quality of programmes. The Committee in its report submitted in April 2001, has made many suggestions to upgrade the quality of education in such institutions. From all available accounts, the report has been tucked away in the files of the concerned authority and would perhaps be confined to history until the next committee, in due course, may wish to refer to it along with other reports on the subject. Here I am commenting on the developing trend for what is described as collaboration with institutions abroad. It is this collaboration that I believe needs closer examination. The nature of collaboration with foreign institutions has many forms. The most common features of the collaboration arrangements are the following:

- The Indian Institute of Management at Ahmedabad and Kolkata had signed, respectively, a collaboration agreement with Harvard Business School and Sloan School of Management at MIT. Under this arrangement, faculty members from collaborating institutions stayed for long periods—from one to three years or more—and worked together with the local faculty to develop courses, projects etc. Both the collaborating partners developed close relationships and learnt a great deal from each other.

- A second type of collaboration in the late 90s is activity based. Under this type of arrangement, the institutions collaborate in research, exchange of faculty for brief periods and maintain regular contact in areas of their interest. In more recent years, some institutions provide a part course in India and the remaining part in a foreign university. The Indian curriculum is assessed by the foreign university before it is finalised. This arrangement has also become popular for practicing executives. The fee includes travel abroad.
- In a third type of collaboration which are becoming more common during the late 90s, the Indian institution undertakes to teach the courses designed by the foreign institutions for their own programme at home. All details of the courses, teaching material, examinations etc. are controlled by the foreign institution. The grades and the degree are also bestowed by them. In the strictest sense, the Indian institution simply is an outlet for teaching material for the foreign institution. In return, the fees for the programme are shared by the two institutions on an agreed basis. The collaboration arrangement is a commercial contract rather than one that requires exchange of academic matters. In rare cases the Indian institution is allowed to make marginal changes in the programme such as replacing labour laws from the foreign to the Indian, or injecting some Indian examples to elaborate sections of the programme from the one's provided in the package. Because the courses are set, evaluated and supervised by the foreign institution the student is allowed to pursue his programme and complete the study in foreign institution if he chooses to do so. Ordinarily he finishes the course in India and gets a 'foreign degree'. These programmes do not appear to need the approval of AICTE in India. The Committee mentioned above had recommended that such courses should be accredited in India before the institutions offer them to local students. I believe so far no action in this respect has been taken by the concerned authority.

Most of us in management education are interested in exchange of knowledge and dialogue with academics round the world. A formal arrangement, as in collaboration arrangements in the first two types, is most useful. These collaboration arrangements help each institution to broaden their perspectives.

The third kind of collaboration is designed primarily to increase financial resources of the two collaborating institutions, without adding academic value to either the institutions or the members of the faculty. The Indian institution at best serves as a 'teaching center' or a 'teaching shop'. In one discussion

on the subject, one person raised the point, “So what? Students get a foreign degree at less cost than they would if they took up the full course in a foreign university and the Indian institution is able to earn more money when they ride on the back of a foreign name because in India foreign names still have higher acceptance” This is the point made by many institutional managements and deserves serious examination. The key question is – does a student get better education from this programme than they do in a ‘good’ programme in India where he has to incur lower costs ? This is the question I have tried to examine here.

The Nature of Business Education

The Committee for Policy / Perspective on Management Education referred to earlier had examined this question. The committee consisted of 18 members drawn from varied backgrounds in business, education, consulting, professional bodies and government departments. All the members had achieved a high reputation in their own area of work and had taken keen interest in management education. The committee had recommended that management is a professional programme of study like medicine, architecture, law and the like. The teaching methodology should include application of knowledge besides subject knowledge. In medicine a great deal of subject knowledge is derived from biological, physical and related sciences. Likewise in the teaching of management, a great deal of subject knowledge is derived from social, biological sciences, quantitative areas, engineering and technology. As in medicine, the subject knowledge has to be applied to manage organisational and social situations. The students should be involved in practical problem solving situations, and in decision making. Subject knowledge is important as it helps in understanding, diagnosing and anticipating business and organisational situations, and in carrying out managerial tasks in a systematic manner.

Acquiring knowledge and using it in day to day life are two different processes. A medical doctor is not an ideal patient. Nor is a child psychologist a model parent. The educational system and the educational technology has to bridge this gap. Education for professional programme cannot be confined to classroom contacts or lectures alone. Teachers in turn have to encourage systematic use of relevant knowledge to problems and issues and in decision making. These objectives can be achieved only by developing an environment of learning, and a kind of mutually acceptable relationship between the teacher, students and among the students themselves. Teaching of management is different from teaching a subject in social or physical sciences, i.e. teaching of a discipline. A course outline or a set of readings

despatched by an unknown body in a distant land for classroom study may provide subject knowledge at best, but not its use for managerial tasks.

One other consideration in a professional programmes concerns application of knowledge. All organisational and business situations involve human beings and, therefore, it is necessary on the part of a manager to understand human behaviour. The manager should be able to predict and anticipate human situations well. The reactions to people, interpretation of behaviour, social and personal aspirations of individuals and groups etc. which influence work level relationships are developed and embedded in the individual's mind from his experiences in the family, the social institutions and the society. The expectations of employees from management are vastly different of Indians in India, than, for example, Americans in United States. In India, need for affiliation is stronger than need for autonomy. This is the reverse in USA. In any organisation harmony in relationships, desire to cooperate, the acceptance of responsibility for results, etc. are obtained through different processes and management practices than they do in most countries in the west. Almost in all aspects of organisational activity human response to a particular activity or a situation is important. The understanding of human processes in teaching of management has to be culture-specific. Teaching a subject dealing with people without the social context will mark a separation in the student's mind between what is taught and what is practiced. The courses taught as per the course outline despatched from a foreign institution may provide information and it may enter some part of a students memory but it is unlikely that it would influence his managerial action. Ideas may be conveyed to students but they remain in the form of abstract notions. When ideas are not used or operationalised, they soon go out of a person's memory. As a manager his actions would be guided by what he observes around him, not the education that he has received. The teaching material should focus on the images, sentiments and orientation familiar to a student. If abstractions are not understood in the context of reality as experienced by the individual, the ideas are unlikely to be internalised. This situation would be different if the individual is studying in a foreign university. In that situation he would be able to relate ideas to observable behaviour. When a programme of study developed in an alien environment is taught in a totally different culture-context, the process of internalisation of these ideas is likely to be different. We borrow notions of the west but continue to behave as 'Indians', where Indian-ness is imbibed in the process of growing up in the family, the institutions and the society. In such a situation emotional involvement for individuals at work doesn't develop. Without emotional content, most Indians are unlikely to be able to invest effort in their jobs. Work is carried out in a mechanical way and one does what he is obliged to do.

Global Context

It is suggested by some that management programmes should prepare students for global operations. It is true and I believe this has to be an essential feature of the educational programmes.

In this context some teachers suggest that culture-specificity loses its meaning if the focus is on global management. Global context means that the manager should understand cross-cultural differences and consider each situation in its own context. The education should provide how the prospective manager understands his own context and, using this framework, attempts to anticipate and understand human responses of Americans in America and Koreans in Korea, and so on. We can understand others better if we can first understand ourselves. Culture is not created; it develops. It is embedded in the minds of people. The educational programmes in management would have to re-orient their courses and the course material keeping inter-cultural context in view, apart from developing subject knowledge in many areas of management. Some people suggest further that India has no experience of global business and therefore programmes from abroad are needed. However, learning requires either determination with a focus on a personal goal or some kind of emotional investment in which learning must take place. We have to develop global perspectives and derive help in specific areas from people with expertise, i.e. subject knowledge. At present we are not investing enough energy in this direction partly because we are instead seeking 'collaboration'. Let me add here that collaboration is useful but the purpose of such arrangements should be 'exchange' and not 'dependence'. Basically the global perspective has three concerns:

- (a) Change in the way a student perceives a problem
- (b) How sensitive is he to cross-cultural issues
- (c) How flexible is he to accept new ideas. The programmes have to emphasise the many aspects of technology, developments in sciences and pace of changes that would characterise the society of tomorrow. Having said this, the educational programmes would have to continue their emphasis on the processes of decision-making, analysing, implementing and predicting events and situations. The content or the context of a decision may change, not the process. Indian educational institutions have very little material on cross cultural issues, and many other related areas. This material would have to be developed.

A majority of 'collaboration arrangements' assign the teaching of a subject, rather than development of a manager. While such collaborations

capitalise on the name of a foreign institution, it fails to provide the kind of education needed in India. Exchange of knowledge is necessary for advancement of knowledge itself. Collaboration is needed to establish exchange of ideas, working on advancement of knowledge, better understanding of managerial processes and systems. India should not isolate itself from the processes that advance knowledge. At the same time commercial arrangements of the kind mentioned here which burden students with additional costs without knowledge creation, is hardly profitable to them individually or the knowledge society. By such collaborations, Indian institutions may gain some commercial advantage; however, the loser and in most cases is the student. He pays higher fees for a programme which makes little contribution to knowledge creation.

What is said about the low learning value of educational 'study-centres' of foreign universities does not apply to studying in good universities abroad. Being in foreign land and associating with local people and students from other countries enables people to understand the concepts which are based on the experiences of that country. This understanding is often easier to transfer to the home environment. But understanding of foreign culture and society is better understood and appreciated by living in it than from accounts in books. In my own case living in Nigeria for more than four years helped me to understand the people and culture of that country. Living in a foreign environment is a rich experience.