

Reappraising Management Education

Until the early 90s the four IIMs and a few university departments were the only institutions engaged in management education at the postgraduate level. Between 1950-1990 (30 years) we had 118 institutions for full time postgraduate level courses in management. After 1990 rapid growth of such institutions has brought the figure to around 1200. Whenever educational institutions develop rapidly over a very short period of time, the quality of education suffers unless systematic and detailed planning is done for the purpose. The adverse impact on quality under similar conditions has been noticed in other fields of study as well such as medical and engineering. In my interviews with business organisations, teachers, parents and institutions to obtain data for my book 'Reappraising Management Education, Perspectives for the Future', an overwhelming feeling among them is that the quality of education has deteriorated substantially and the cost has increased beyond the reach of most working families. Considering the increasing demand for management graduates, most people feel that there is need to increase the number of institutions, but they will hardly serve the purpose unless the quality of education is improved substantially and brought up to maintain international standards. Some educational institutions are trying individually to improve their programme inputs, and need help in several aspects of the programme. The experience of upgrading educational programmes elsewhere suggests that simultaneous improvement would be needed in several areas: methodology of teaching, the preparation of relevant teaching material, plans for faculty development, financing and infrastructure support systems, including administrative aspects of programme development.

Management is neither a subject nor an academic discipline. It is a professional programme. The study should help a student to become an effective manager. An effective manager should be able to develop a capacity

to take good decisions. And a good decision is one which solves the problem at hand and ensures that it neither recurs, nor creates problems elsewhere. The decision making would require a series of steps such as – what additional data, if any, is required; sorting out what is relevant and what is not; testing the reliability of the data; determining causal relationships and patterns in the situation; analysis and diagnosis; search for action alternatives and final choice of the alternative, etc. The decision maker has to determine an appropriate strategy for action and test whether the strategy works or not.

The manager has to develop confidence in taking decisions because his choice of the alternative involves judgement and a capacity to predict the outcome of the decision. Some elements in this exercise are based on an instinctive feeling which may at times be difficult to fully articulate. The effectiveness of the decision will depend upon his having considered the impact of the decision on the organisation as a whole, and while involving others in the process he must ensure that they broadly agree with the choice of the decision. Hence, the managerial role makes varied demands on the incumbent. He will benefit by using the tools of data analysis, using relevant research findings and concepts and theories based on these findings to diagnose the situation, and understanding of the overall business situation. He would have to acquire skills to develop cooperative relationships with others, and sustain them. He must also become aware of his own values about self, society, work, people, business, etc. to know how they influence his own behaviours and the decision process. Hence educational inputs for managerial job will have to consist of knowledge about business, research findings in relevant areas of concern, developing business, social and relational skills, and personal attitudes. The teaching material and methodology to develop these characteristics among students are central to the effectiveness of the educational process. An example may make this consideration clearer.

A sales manager, for example, has to consider a variety of circumstances before he closes a sale. He has to assess the customer's need and assess his requirement with the capacity and schedules in the production departments including component supplier. He must examine the cost of production for the particular size of the order and how well he can meet the service requirements of the customer, and how well can be sustain the various linkages that may have to be developed in executing and servicing the order. He would have to seek cooperation of the concerned departments in meeting his commitment and train his own staff to monitor and upgrade the contact made at the time of the sale. He must ensure timely billing and receipt of payments. Several of these activities are not controlled by him in the

organisation, but his efficiency depends upon the cooperation of many other people with whom he must establish what are known as work flow relationships. The job requires understanding of the business, ability to analyse and diagnose the situation in the customer's organisation and the various coordinating units in his own company. He must take a series of decisions that are involved in making a specific sale.

In a large number of institutions in India subjects are taught as if they constitute the core of learning, without adequate emphasis on application of knowledge. In recent years leading management schools abroad have developed student-centered teaching methodologies where a student has to become an integral part of the learning process.

In India considerable attention was given to teaching methodology and teacher development in the 1960s and early 1970s. The Institutes of Management, ASCI in Hyderabad and university departments in Delhi and Chandigarh and some others had developed cases, business games, role play, in-basket exercises, etc. Efforts slackened considerably in the 1980s and the 1990s. No serious effort was made after mid-70s to either prepare new teaching material or develop faculty. The Ph D level programmes neither gave the numbers or the quality to maintain the programmes offered by institutions in India, leave aside expansion of such programmes. There is critical shortage of both teaching materials and teachers.

The frame of reference of teaching institutions in the USA has been 'what the business needs'. Links between the educational institutions and industry are close and continuous. Each benefits by this association. The involvement of industry in management education in India has been peripheral. Some companies visit institutions for recruitment and few managers take occasional lectures, or attend odd student presentations. Likewise, a few faculty members have involvement as consultants, or teach in in-company courses on invitation. A few have research contacts. The contact between students and business organisations is confined to summer jobs that students are required to do, or odd assignments. At the same time most institutions have little research output. Hence the tendency in most cases is to teach from textbooks. The teaching is generally at abstract level with some illustrations brought into the presentation. This practice varies from one faculty member to another. There are notable exceptions among teachers in this respect, specially in organisational behaviour and marketing. But these are exceptions.

There are rare instances when an institution has evolved a particular philosophy of education, and a methodology that would be sympathetic to

that philosophy. Most institutions have on an average 3-7 full time faculty and the bulk of courses are taught by visiting teachers who come for their scheduled sessions, lecture and leave. In most cases contract is given to teach a course. It is unlikely that one teacher would sit with other teachers to reflect on the educational process. Even the institutions which have more full time faculty, devote little time to develop educational approach of the institution as a whole, and implications of this for the programme. The practicing managers are often too busy in their own job and do not have enough time to reflect adequately on the course.

The pattern indicated above applies to a large number of institutions that have been set up in recent years, with notable exceptions. The pattern, however, covers a bulk of the institutions currently engaged in education for management. Basically then, the improvement in the quality of education would require the institutions to seriously reflect on characteristics of their product i.e. what they expect their students to be able to do on completing their education. They have to be concerned with knowledge of the subject and his role as a manager. The student is unlikely to use knowledge to handle his job unless he can internalise the knowledge. It should become a part of his automatic reaction or unconscious response to dealing with day-to-day work. And the process of internalisation requires that the student experiences success in using knowledge and is able to feel that he can understand and resolve issues better by using knowledge than he would any other way. When this experience is reinforced in a variety of situations, the knowledge is internalised. Hence the teaching methodology, and the material, as much as the social environment of the educational institution must provide such experience.

Our study reported in the book mentioned earlier, indicates, as do USA reports, that management courses are generally weak in the task of integrating knowledge, and in generating vision, besides problem solving abilities. The courses in business policy are designed to achieve integration in so far as they deal with enterprise as a whole. In most cases they serve this purpose inadequately. Some institutions in the UK and USA have replaced these courses or supplemented them by more live problem solving experiences built into the course work. Many institutions also encourage the faculty to design individual courses in a way that they bring out interdependence between business functions. All these exercises make special demands on faculty and team-work in designing the programme and in teaching courses.

In USA and Europe, teaching institutions have established close links with business organisations. The problem solving assignments in

organisations enable students to learn theory and practice interwoven in the educational programme. This kind of association with industry is useful both for the educational institution and the business organisation. In most cases the contact of students in India is confined to summer placement in between the first and the second year for 6–8 weeks, and odd assignments in some courses. The teachers also have limited contact either as researchers or consultants. Some IIMs had encouraged case writing in early years, and this work brought faculty members close to the work place. Such requirements do not now exist and, in most cases the contact is confined to teaching in company based training programmes.

From the early 60s many attempts have been made to increase work-level contact between the industry and the teaching institutions. But success in this respect has been limited. The two organisations continue to move in their separate orbits. In more recent years one other tendency is noticed. Some successful business organisations have set up business schools by initial donation to them. Most of these institutions meet their expenses from student fees. In a large number of cases the donors or the entrepreneurs either manage the institution or have continuing personal involvement. In most cases these institutions manage with a very small number of full time faculty and contract out the teaching of individual courses to part time outsiders. The situation offers little scope to take up research, experimentation in teaching, development of new teaching material or even development of faculty. They teach standard courses, but are able to do little to develop skills and attitudes relevant for managerial role.

Systematic and planned approach to improve the quality of management education is important. The most important steps are the following:

- Developing an understanding of the outcome of the educational process, i.e. education for what?
- Serious efforts to develop teaching material and teaching methodology in institutions.
- Research that would bring the teachers and students closer to the industry.

How should these efforts be made and who should initiate them? It is apparent that the effort would require cooperation of the policy making authority, industry and educational institutions. In the early 1960s, France had decided to enhance the quality of management education in that country. They set up a foundation consisting of the employer's organisation, government and select universities. This Foundation provided funds for faculty development, upgradation of courses, research and everything else

that was needed to build programmes of international standard. In about 30 years they have developed programmes that are rated among the best anywhere in the world. They strengthened the existing programmes in the universities.

The approach in India has been different. The government funded institutions and university departments claim inadequacy of funds. The institutions supported by private business or entrepreneurs engage a very small number of full time faculty and rely on 'contract' teaching. They are expected to 'teach courses' as against providing education. There is no discernable interest in experimentation in teaching or methodologies that would enhance utilisation of knowledge. The employer's associations such as FICCI or CII have not been intimately involved in education. It is understood that FICCI has some collaboration with UK to conduct research, though no output is available in print as yet. Reports show that CII has decided to spend considerable funds on setting up four 'educational centres to prepare managers for the future'. The newspaper reports suggest that each of these centres will engage 3-4 full time faculty and invite people from abroad to conduct short courses. From available reports it appears doubtful that these efforts would contribute in any significant way to the improvement of management education.

In our context the government, the All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE), the Association of Management Schools (AIMS) and the teaching institutions would have to create a group to set out a comprehensive programme for institutional development. I believe that the country has the experience and the talent to undertake such an exercise provided the concerned agencies were to believe that such efforts are needed.