

What does a B-School Expect from a wannabe MBA

By Prof. Dr. C.S. Adhikari

“First of all, learn by doing. Then learn by observing. Finally, learn to learn. Learn from unusual sources. Reflect on why you are doing what you are doing. Experiment with yourself. Read a lot. Read the serious stuff”. (Subroto Bagchi’s interview with MBAUniverse.com)

Management and technology have emerged as the key drivers of growth in terms of cutting down costs and increasing efficiency. Look at the contribution of service sector to the national income which is about 54% and essentially services are provided and managed by people. Obviously unleashing peoples’ skills and talent and leveraging the same towards higher productivity are of paramount importance and in this regard investing in education in general and technology and management education in particular is absolutely essential. Management education in recent times has grown at an unprecedented rate if the number of business - school and the enrollment therein is any indicator. Thanks to the buoyant economy, majority of the pass outs from these B - Schools are being absorbed by the industry notwithstanding their employability. There are as many as 1800 Business Schools in India today and each year 150 - 200 B - Schools are being added. In this kind of a situation, the moot point before all the stakeholders: AICTE, students, B - Schools, parents and industry is to see whether we allow this growth of B - schools to the market forces to happen and in this process of competition, over a period of time let the better ones survive and the rest die their natural death. Economically thinking this might sound rational and logical however from the equity point of view, it has an intrinsic element of exploitation of all those who suffer in this process in general and the students who remain unemployed in particular.

At present, it seems it is the former which is happening. Thousands of students are getting their MBA/MMS/ PGDM degrees and diplomas every year and a sizeable number of students are either underemployed or unemployed. Therefore the biggest challenge before a wannabe MBA is to find out a B-School which can convert him employable at the end of the program and get him good placement. There are various ways and means by which one can find out right kind of B-school to pursue MBA. The first and foremost is ranking of B-school by various agencies. In this regard, one can see the ranking of first 100 B-schools and see whether a B-school is ranked among top 100 consistently by majority of credible B-school ranking agencies over a period of last 5-10 years. If yes, go to that B-school. These top B-schools, by and large, take students having through out first class career and very high CAT/XAT percentile. In other words, students having thorough out first class career coupled with high CAT/XAT percentile and passing out from top 100 B-schools generally do not have placement problem. The placement becomes a serious problem for students who have average educational background and pass out from B-schools in the lower rung of the ladder. It gets further worsened if such B-schools are located in relatively less known cities and towns with negligible presence of industries/businesses and corporate offices. In such B-schools, PGDM is nothing but an extension of B.Com program. There is no value addition to the existing body of knowledge of the students. Lecture method is the predominant method of teaching; address by top executives is a rarity; industry visits are seldom held and developing aptitude for research, analytics and self learning are exceptions rather than common practices. Generally summer projects, group discussions and group presentations and some efforts on communications are the only value additions students get in such kind of colleges and unfortunately such colleges are in majority.

Thanks to the educational loan facilities, students with good academic profile combined with high percentile in aptitude test and good communications skills tend to seek admission is

good B-schools and thereby assure their placement. However, there is a large chunk of students who have excellent educational background but weak in spoken and written communications. These students by virtue of their poor performance in GD/PI fail to click with top 100 – 200 B-schools

Admission of PGDM students: A case of Institute for Technology & Management (ITM) Navi Mumbai

ITM established in 1991, at present runs four programs namely PGDM, PGDM (IB), PGDM (HR), and PGDM (IB) and admits students through CAT/XAT exams, over the years. ITM has earned good reputation from the academic and industry and Business Today June 19, 2005 ranked ITM among the top Wannabe MBA's 10 institutes. ITM while selecting the students keeps the employability of a student on the top of its selection criteria. According to McKinsey report only 25% of total engineers, 15% of total finance and accounting professionals and 10% of general graduates from colleges and universities are employable. There will be a shortfall of 3.1 million employable people by 2010 leading to a severe problem if the issue is not looked at the grass root level.

While employability of a student to a great extent can be ensured during the course of two years PGDM program, certain key employability factors at the time of admission are considered at ITM. These are: academic achievements, communication skills, and group skills, capacity for hard work, commitment, practicality, IT skills, logical reasoning and attitude to learn. Therefore an aspirant should possess and demonstrate these qualities at the time of seeking admission in ITM. Generally a student is selected for PGDM program on the basis of very high Cat/Xat percentile, throughout first class career and high performance in GD and PI. One may think that GD and PI are ritualistic and within a limited time it is difficult to really determine the employability factors of a candidate. However, it is not so if one knows how to conduct GD/PI. Most of the times, GD is left to the students and vary often it results into fish market. How to avoid this kind a situation not to happen? Firstly there should be 2 – 3 members to conduct the GD and the facilitators should give some guidelines to the students about how to proceed and about the parameters they will be evaluated upon. The facilitators should ensure that each participant should get an opportunity to speak and by intermittently intervening and randomly asking some students to subscribe, to add and to oppose the print of view of x, y or z. This exercise helps determine the student's extent of attention paid to the ongoing discussions, presence of mind, quick thinking, logical reasoning etc. During PI also the panel must know their role and responsibilities to elicit the best out of the candidate. It is possible when there are elaborate guidelines as how to conduct GD and PI. Many a times, panel members ask same set of questions related to general knowledge, subject knowledge, career goals, overall personality etc. on a set platform and in the process student can easily anticipate and prepare himself or herself for the PI. Obviously the PI panel has to be innovative in its approach and examine the in depth employability characteristics of a student.

Delivery of the program

We at ITM think that selection of students through a rigorous GD/PI based on some employability characteristics as discussed above is like getting a good quality raw material. Converting the raw material (student) into a reliable product (fit for placement) using marketing analogy is of paramount importance to an institution for its growth and sustenance. Three core areas on which PGDM program of ITM is based on are knowledge, skills and attitude. Obviously this requires an innovative program and innovative delivery with a judicious mix of curricular, extra-curricular and co-curricular activities where the student is given ample scope to harness his knowledge, skills and talent and become a co-producer of knowledge along with the faculty members. The student should have his own

point of view. He should be in a position to analyse a situation and take a call on the same. This is possible only when a teacher gives a student to challenge his wisdom or point of view. Here I would like to give a reference of the interview MBAUniverse.com had with Mr. Subroto Bagchi co-founder of MindTree. He says “At broader level, our education system is very archaic. It is too fiercely competitive, and has a rejection-centric approach. It doesn’t ask students to question things, but merely cram things up. The education system should be rooted in the future, so that when future arrives, the society is ready. I think most young MBAs lack a point-of-view on important issues. They are unable to synthesize various aspects, and come up with their own point of view. This is dangerous. You can not run a knowledge economy on basis of what McKinsey says or what Forrester says. What about what *you* have to say?”

How can you acquire knowledge by reading from various sources say books, journals, business news papers, internet and various other publications? This is an area where majority of students are found deficient and to a great extent it depends upon program structure as well as course structure and how does a course faculty make students read and learn and more importantly think. Extensive reading and drawing out useful reading and subsequent practice of your reading into the production of assignment, project reports, case discussion, debates, book reviews, paper writing for conferences, presentations, managing various functions of student committees etc. enhance the communication skills, reading skills, and practical skills, group skills, IT skills, problem solving skills, logical thinking, managerial and time management skills and above all independent thinking of a student.

Having attained knowledge and skills, the third important component of a student is attitude. This is an area where not much, attention is paid in B-schools today. One may argue 'attitude' cannot be changed within a short span of time the student spends with a B-school. This is very defensive argument and there are ways and means through which you can change the attitude of a student but it requires a lot of faculty and management time to be invested on the student. ITM engages Ma foi to identify various personality tests of its students, faculty and staff. It also uses various psychosomatic tests to identify weak competencies of a student with a view to help student through mentoring. Identification of slow learners, tutorials by faculty and seniors, 18 students led committees, personal growth, laboratories, Life style management and development of responsible corporate citizen as credit courses, special Addresses by eminent personalities from India and abroad, workshops on personality development and appointment of a professional counselor are some of the measures taken by ITM.