

MBA Curriculum: What Should It Be?

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(For Management Gurus and MBA Aspirants)

Management education /MBA curriculum in our country is largely linked to functional subjects like accounting, finance, marketing, human resources, personnel, operations, organization behaviour, MIS, business policy and so on. These subjects are discipline-oriented. They impart knowledge; do not necessarily imbibe comprehensive holistic perspectives or operational skills—the perspectives so essential for an effective manager.

As most of the MBA students join generally from Arts, Sciences, Commerce and Engineering streams, they are familiar only with disciplinary teaching. For most of them MBA education comes as an extension of earlier degrees.

Similarly, the business school faculty also find themselves comfortable in teaching these as subjects. Interestingly they do realize that integration of management functions is the key to managerial effectiveness but in practice they find it hard to demonstrate this in a classroom situation. Sometimes management cases are used for teaching

and they manage to borrow cases from different sources and use them, but to many, it remains an intellectual exercise.

The curriculum of B-Schools must focus on the needs of business and corporate world at all levels. If one looks critically at the concerns of business leaders, they are basically about quality, cost, technology, logistics, customer satisfaction, and service. Some are also concerned about business strategy, acquisitions and mergers, alliance and joint ventures, core competence and disinvestment.

Restructuring/Downsizing, manpower planning, salary administration, human behavioural and human resource development are also emerging as the most desired key areas. If the management education has to be relevant, it is high time that it restructure its curriculum to meet these demands. Business world and leaders expect business schools to produce managers and not MBAs, who can immediately slip into a slot to perform and prove their paper degree. They want graduates with perspectives, skills and attitude to manage an enterprise or hospital or any organization.

It is unavoidable and therefore management education must give priority over other things, to develop managerial skills, not only to human relations but also to skills in the area of lateral thinking, collecting and compiling information, negotiations, making decisions, diagnosing problems, finding alternatives, and finally balancing of IQ and EQ. There is a lot of know-how but these need to be pooled, designed and delivered.

Interestingly, MBAs are like skilled surgeons who not only have intensive grounding in anatomy and physiology but sharpened skills in cutting, stitching and healing successfully.

Management faculty are expected to be specialists in transmitting knowledge, therefore they have to be skillful in disseminating skills which require alternative pedagogy. It goes without any doubt that Management Gurus must imbibe and be fully equipped with expected skills.

To reinforce, I believe that Business School curriculum should be developed with regard to management issues and problems and, not like marketing, finance or HR disciplines as it is today. We all know that managerial problems cannot be segregated under different subjects. A marketing problem may have linkage with finance, manpower, cost, quality etc. Likewise, manufacturing issues may be related to materials, logistics, sourcing finance, etc. Therefore, business management institutes must identify major problems confronting the contemporary management issues and design courses around them. They should look for complete change in their mindset on MBA curriculum.

The MBA curriculum should focus on pedagogy, descriptive theory and



intuitive thinking. While it is relatively easy to identify issues and themes around which management curriculum should be designed, it is a real challenge to evolve a pedagogy suited to the course.

In business education, it is not what you teach that is important but how you teach them. The success of MBA relies on teaching pedagogy and descriptive insight and intuitive thinking.

Descriptive insight informs students about how their world works. Descriptive theory is the most powerful perspective in the hands of successful practising managers. It throws light on the basic functioning of an organisation, how it takes decisions, identifies strategies, processes information, how its managers work and so on. Theories are important but in managerial parlance, no one theory can give always solution. It can only help generate alternate ways to view the world. The ultimate choice will always rest on intuitive thinking of the manager responsible for performance.

How to Change

It is suggested that there is a need for radical shift in the paradigm of management education in India, knowingly well that the task is not easy. Those of us involved in management education, are deeply entrenched.

To design a curriculum around problems and issues, inputs and outputs necessitate change in the faculty mindset, lateral thinking and innovative academic entrepreneurship.

Business Schools must look at the following mindset.

We know that management education has been perfected in the western world and hence we must teach students western management principles. We prescribe them western textbooks without scrutinizing the underlying values they espouse. Most teachers of management have succumbed to this mindset. They follow western education and, pass on to students the generalisations which have worked in the industrialised countries of the West. Unfortunately, such a teaching has little relevance to the objectives, needs and the problems encountered by managers of Indian enterprises.

The second mindset revolves around the fast growing market for MBAs. Whatever business schools produce, its graduates get into the better segment of the job market. If there is a ready market for their MBAs why should the school review its curriculum and take trouble to change curriculum of



management education? Likewise, the unusually large number of students seeking MBA admission has also created complacency in business schools, a mindset that there is no need for change. It is often said that students join business schools for obtaining the degree which is a passport for good job; they do not seek admission for acquiring education or skills. On the top of these, the willingness of the student to pay high fees has seemingly frozen the mindset of the Indian Business Schools. We need to realize that establishing Business Schools is becoming an attractive business. Unless we take preventive action, we will be in for a rude shock.

In order to meet the challenge we have articulated, Indian Business Schools, big or small, old or new, must adopt strategies that enable them to produce responsible and competent managers to effectively run enterprises in the fast changing economy.

Firstly, a business school must forge partnership with industry. The managerial community must be the primary partners in developing the MBA programme, its management technology, curriculum and teaching material. The Business Schools' faculty must work on action research closely with managers, not only in a business firm but also in public agencies or voluntary organizations.

Secondly, as we have argued, MBA students must bring with them valuable work experience. MBA education should be offered to those who have at least 3-5 years of work experience. During the two years of MBA programme, no student can possibly accumulate all the knowledge and information, and acquire all the abilities

and skills, values required for effective professional manager. Meaningful work experience will help an MBA student to raise right questions, examine learning critically and make right choices what to learn and what not to learn. Business Schools at the best can help students to acquire skills for continued learning.

Thirdly, Business School teachers need to think themselves not so much as the source of wisdom and knowledge but as the managers of learning process. The curriculum suggested earlier necessitates that the faculty help students to grow as competent responsible managers, endowed with skills of managerial surgeon. Skills are best attained when students actively participate in the process of learning and they are primarily responsible for its success. Excellence comes through rigorous and repeated exercise in thinking, feeling, deciding and acting managerially. Business Schools must pursue these three strategic policies.

As we close, I must underline that the future of management education in India is nearly interwoven with the challenges of Indian economy, sustained growth, enhanced competitiveness, building synergy and creating visionary organizations. To meet these challenges, Business Schools must produce managers who are performers, not analysts. This will require admitting students with work experience, designing problem-centered curriculum and skill-driven pedagogy. Above all, change in the mindset where Business Schools thrive on partnership with industry and business faculty excel in managing learning process and learning organisation. Should this happen, Business Schools will produce Managers not just MBAs.