

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Transformatory approach to imparting business education: Business Process Management

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ABSTRACT

The globalization process is significantly affecting the economic and commercial life of all nations. Changing social, cultural, economic conditions combined with intensification of global competition have given management education an increasingly central role in the success of individual's career and corporations. The purpose of this paper is to engage all concerned in a serious discussion with a view to analyse the management education (pedagogy) in India as a prelude to better participation and viability in the global economy. Today there is a lack in the focus on holistic education for the students aspiring to pursue MBA. Hence the student is not able to encash upon the gainful opportunities in the job market nor is he prepared to start his own venture. The core competencies of a business school offering management education lies in its unique and innovative teaching pedagogy to enable meaningful learning and development of skill sets that would enable students to either perform in the organisations or start their own business venture. This paper analyses the present system of management education with reference to the private management education schools in India, which is more oriented to rote memory, its focus on each individual function of business as a watertight compartment which lacks systems approach. This paper presents how teaching pedagogy has to be developed to make management education process more meaningful and holistic from the perspective of all the stakeholders at large. In this context this paper also will discuss problem based learning approach in business education and business process management. The data for this study is based on discussions with students and academicians of business schools and secondary sources.

Keywords: Management education, business process management, Problem based learning, business schools.

INTRODUCTION

The total number seats in B-schools has increased by four fold in the last seven years— from 94,704 seats in 2006-07 to 385,008 in 2012-13, according to the All India Council for Technical Education, the apex technical education regulator. B-schools appear to be losing their sheen. Apart from the top 20 business schools like the Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), merely 10% of graduates from business schools manage to get hired by corporate India, but campus recruitments have gone down by 40% in the same period. The bad news continues with the study estimating that 180 schools had shut down in 2012 and another 160 schools offering MBAs were expected to close this year. "Only 10% of graduates from Indian business schools excluding those from the top 20 schools get a job straight after completing their course, compared with 54% in 2008," the study states..These statistics may sound a bit pessimistic, but we need to learn a lesson from the experiences which has led us to this stage and be proactive in taking corrective measures which is the need of the hour.

Over the last decade, management education has been challenged by the increasingly competitive environment brought about by globalization and internationalization of business. Multitude of economic

changes globally has posed great challenges to organisations all over the world. Corporates especially in India have come to view management education as being commercialised with mushrooming of management schools that has led to a situation where the business schools had no choice in screening the entrants to this professional program leading to a compromise on quality of outputs. These institutions turn out large number of management graduates who are ill equipped to face the challenges of real world business leading to many management schools being merely reduced to delivering theoretical content, testing the rote memory and evaluating the students based on their ability to recall the content. . Business schools were chastised for being too theoretical and out of touch with business realities, for producing narrow-minded technicians who lack interpersonal and communication skills, and for concentrating on esoteric research which has little if anything to do with the business world; not developing the leadership, decision making, risk bearing ability to challenge the conventional thoughts which corporate leaders expect today from these recruits. In short, there is a wide gap between the level of skills and competency which corporate expect and the skills imparted by these

business schools. Hence, there is an urgent need for modern business schools to transform themselves and operate as centres of excellence in learning and impart knowledge and skill for life

METHODOLOGY:

Review of literature, discussions with teachers of management education, and authors experience of teaching management education were the basic inputs for this paper.

Business Process Management:

Even though business processes have been the subject of formal study from multiple perspectives for a long time, since the start of industrial age, processes still are not well understood, left unmanaged and poorly executed. With business schools teaching primarily function specific and narrow skills, learning and understanding “process view” and “integration” is left to the individual student. It posits the significance of BPM and highlights its ability to provide the missing link to business education. Employers and professional associations complain of graduates’ inadequate process management capabilities and insufficient process focus and observe that they are not sufficiently prepared to work in a customer and process centric, IT-enabled, integrated world of work. Increased competition, regulatory demands, customer power, changing workforce, information overload and relentless technology push have all made rediscovering, understanding and transforming business processes an imperative need for organizations and rejuvenated the interest in business processes. For that reason, education in business schools that takes a cross-disciplinary approach to teaching and learning business processes is also becoming an imperative.

These functionally specialized schools/disciplines were designed to meet the needs of large, highly bureaucratized organizations that were also organized around functional areas. Several twentieth century management initiatives, including just-in-time (JIT), total quality management (TQM) and business process reengineering (BPR) have process and process management as their underlying theme. As a result of implementing such initiatives, many organizations have shifted their focus towards business processes that are cross-functional and customer focused, and shifted the management development emphasis away from functional specialization and towards the integration of different functional departments (Malekzadeh, 1998; McCormack and Johnson, 2001; Welke, 2005). Although some of the leading organizations have begun to adopt process centric organizational structures, most business schools still use this specialized function-based model. Even though business schools are good at developing specialist technical professionals in accounting, operations, human resources, finance or information systems, they are criticized for their inability to produce well-rounded business graduates and, in particular, those who understand business process orientation and cross-functional integration

(Tippins, 2004; Kavanagh and Drennan, 2008; BCG, 2001).

We are faced with a challenge of aligning curriculum and teaching models to the changing business environment, business education has been subjected to several rounds of reviews all over the world in the past 30 years. Many of these reviews have highlighted the importance and lack of cross-functional integration and business process orientation in the business curricula (Porter and McKibbin, 1988; Karpin, 1995; Michaelsen, 1999; Cecez-Kecmanovic et al., 2002; BCG, 2001; Ethie, 2003; Trites, 2004) in addition to others such as soft skills and ethics. While practitioners and business organizations are making their organizations process centric (Davenport et al., 2004), teaching and research in business schools is still typically discipline focused and narrow (AACSB, 2008). Though introduction of the cross-functional integration and process-centric thinking into the curriculum are recognized as essential to prepare business graduates for the future, reforming the business curriculum is not easy. The challenges of allocating and prioritizing shrinking resources among various disciplines, perennial contest to protect discipline turf, reluctance to change the carefully built strategic focus on certain competencies and discipline strengths, inadequate commitment by faculty to pedagogical issues, perceived overemphasis on research output, and the general resistance to break the discipline based silos, are making the reform process complex and difficult (Navarro, 2008; Walker and Black, 2000; Mintzberg, 2004).

The focus on customers and business processes (one external and one internal aspect of business), has never been higher. With the increasing recognition of business processes as critical corporate assets, developing “process orientation” and “process view” to its employees has become an imperative for modern business organizations (Kohlbacher, 2008). Many of the world’s leading business organizations such as CISCO, Texas, Dell and Amazon have embraced “process-centered thinking” or “process view” and changed their organizational structures, strategies, and models and trained their employees (Davenport, 2005). To put in Michael Hammer’s words, “process is the Clark Kent of business ideas: seemingly mild and unassuming but actually amazingly powerful”: Process is the way in which the abstract goal of putting customers first gets turned on its practical consequences. Without process, companies decay into a spiral of chaos and internal conflict (Hammer, 2003).

Generalists not specialists :

When I teach organisational behaviour, my challenge lies in making the students realise that their attitudes and behaviour have impact on all cross functional areas such as marketing, finance, Human resources and production. We need to make the management graduates understand that business is a process as a whole and involves an end to end approach and not look at business as individual functions on a piecemeal basis. Business schools are too focussed on

specialisations and each teacher is driven by giving the best of the knowledge on the functional area. The problem is the student is unable to see the integration between these functions as a process. Each faculty must teach their functional area say for example organisational behaviour but the focus must be on linking this area to other areas like highlighting the importance of understanding team work in production, being ethical in handling financial resources, being innovative to drive changes on customer service, being a good learner by sharing with others thus creating a culture of learning organisation. Though in India this model of specialisation on functional areas has helped business schools to develop good specialists, their ability to produce well-rounded business graduates with relevant understanding and skills in process management is limited. With industry bodies and professional associations demanding process understanding and process-centric thinking as key graduate requirements in this information age, business schools are increasingly revisiting their curriculum

We need to take a thread from business schools from abroad those schools, though have not been directly addressing the issue of "process orientation," they are responding to their critics through regular curriculum reviews and by introducing courses on ethics, entrepreneurship and leadership. Other top business schools have taken a more radical approach. Yale, for example, replaced the teaching of traditional functional courses such as marketing, strategy, accounting, operations, etc. with courses that address different themes – customers, employees, competitors, innovation, the investor, and business and society.

Recently there has been great interest in the potential of problem-based learning (PBL) for management education. Problems are what business students will ultimately grapple with in their professional lives, and thus a problem-based approach presents a hopeful marriage between student needs and pedagogy. PBL offers the potential for real-life experience so often called for by the stakeholders of higher education. Indeed, traditional approaches to business education curriculum have been increasingly criticized for having little relationship with what is important for succeeding in business (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002).

CONCLUSION:

Business schools have no choice but to cope with the demands of a fast-changing business environment and produce future managers with the ability to critically evaluate situations from cross-functional perspectives with a focus on process and customers, rather than on hierarchy and functions. In spite of such heightened importance and attention, and being subjected to formal study since 1900s, business processes in many organizations are still unmanaged and executed inconsistently and poorly. Too much emphasis on business functions and on their performance at the expense of the end-to-end process performance is affecting organization's ability to sense and respond to

rapidly change market conditions and needs The teaching methods should focus more deeply on leadership, team work, communication skills, and on how to prepare students to play a critical result oriented role in terms of changing an organization for the better.

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