

Nurturing B-School Excellence in India: The Way Forward

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ABSTRACT

This article is based on an interview with Dr Alok Saklani, an accomplished academician having over 40 years of rich experience of leading the departments of management studies in a central university and a private university as Dean besides steering a standalone B-school of repute as Director. Currently, he is associated with Swamy Rama Himalayan University pro bono. He has been deeply interested in improvising educational outcomes, quality assurance, and academia-industry interface. Dr Saklani's views on nurturing B-school excellence provides a holistic perspective on augmenting effectiveness of the institutions of higher learning towards meeting and exceeding the expectations of all the stakeholders viz. students, faculty and staff, recruiters, among others. In this interview-based article, Dr Saklani has also shared his views on National Education Policy 2020 vis-à-vis tryst of Indian B-schools for excellence. Interview for this article was conducted over multiple sittings by Dr Srirang Kumar Jha, Associate Professor and Head, Multidisciplinary Studies, Apeejay School of Management, New Delhi.



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HOW DO YOU VISUALIZE AN IDEAL B-SCHOOL?

An institution that allows learners to get an insight into the environment that business/non-business organizations work in, where they get opportunities to acquire exposure to any area(s) that interests them, where they can develop their professional and personal potential, a place where they can eventually explore experiment their ideas, under watchful eyes of faculty members, which may lead to a life-long engagement, is, in my view, an Ideal B-School.

Such B-schools have potential to emerge as great institutions in public perception, thereby encouraging good faculty and students to join the same. Higher benchmarks in program delivery and research publications along with better campus placement opportunities may ensure institutional excellence in the long run.

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF AN IDEAL B-SCHOOL?

An ideal B-school may have the following distinctive features:

- Faculty members are engaged in creation & sharing of theoretical as well as applied knowledge by way of research, relevant for society and industry.
- Faculty members are involved in students' overall development process with mentoring, inspiring talks, providing constructive feedback, and creating opportunities for learning both inside and outside the class.
- Students are encouraged to indulge in meaningful interactions, exchange of ideas, and creation as well as, sharing of knowledge.
- Where students are allowed to play with ideas as also implement them in centers to help incubate.
- Both faculty and students are involved in questioning the established paradigms and promoting fresh ideas, applying newer pedagogical practices.
- Curriculum is reviewed regularly to maintain relevance/applicability with the external world accommodating new areas of studies.
- There is flexibility for learners to leave a term and rejoin after some experimentation in industry or, even a startup of their own.

HOW CAN THE B-SCHOOL LEADERS CREATE AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT AIMED AT EXCELLENCE?

As a first step, the B-school leaders need to build a culture of trust based on fairness and equity, transparency (set processes, sharing of information, involving all stakeholders) and participative decision-making. Further, they also need to foster camaraderie among the faculty as well as staff members which in turn can augment interdisciplinary collaborations.

Some of the other measures may include faculty development opportunities/training programs on/off campus, time for social and intellectual interactions, lesser administrative responsibilities, opportunities for meaningful interactions, exchange of ideas, sharing of knowledge and creation knowledge through seminars, conferences, workshops, corporate lectures, industry visits, field research opportunities, collaborative research projects, etc. Free time to discuss, deliberate, and explore is crucial in any good B-School.

HOW CAN THE B-SCHOOLS CREATE AN ENABLING INFRASTRUCTURE?

First and foremost, the B-schools need to ensure comfortable work-stations for the faculty members. Nature of job is such that they need a little bit of privacy and comfort at work to prepare for teaching and engage in research. Moreover, the libraries can become more proactive in terms of facilitating research by offering digital resources in a big way. Of course, seminar halls and state of the art auditoriums add tremendous value as part of enabling infrastructure. There should be adequate space on the B-school campuses to set up an incubation centre, carry out research projects hold multiple academic events as well as club activities on any single day.

HOW CAN THE B-SCHOOLS DEVELOP ENABLING HR SYSTEM?

We need to work on performance management system, rewards, and recognition in order to develop an enabling HR system for any B-school. B-schools leaders need to ensure role clarity, performance standards, well-articulated performance expectations/deliverables, effective feedback mechanism and mentoring while designing and implementing performance management system.

It is important to keep the faculty motivated. Hence the reward and recognition programs must include both intrinsic and extrinsic elements. Intrinsic elements of motivation may include urging the faculty to share his/her research findings, and enabling them to fulfil their aspirations in teaching, research and areas of interest/hobbies. Extrinsic elements of motivation may include supportive team-leaders/supervisors who are involved in *facilitating* rather than controlling/managing/monitoring, public appreciation/recognition, incentives, promotions.

Quality of routine HR services like leave processes, increments, annual appraisal etc. are equally important and the B-school leaders must take personal interest in improvising the same.

HOW TO PROMOTE ACCOUNTABILITY AMONG FACULTY MEMBERS?

Role of faculty is crucial for developing an ideal B-school. Accountability of the faculty may be fostered by following measures:

- Sense of purpose and direction
 - ✓ Where we want to go?
 - ✓ What we want to achieve?
 - ✓ How do we achieve what we want to achieve?
 - ✓ Who will be owners of various aspects of strategic plan?
(Explained/communicated in numbers/labels both for organization and faculty through vision-mission workshops organized every year)
- Supervisors/Team Leaders to function as facilitators and mentors and see how they can add value to the job being done by their team-members.
- Supervisors/Team Leaders to take accountability of ensuring all support for smooth functioning of the team-members.
- Self-Reporting by faculty members on pre-determined deliverables/performance standards.
- Reports to be shared with all faculty members.
- Introduction of 360° Appraisal.

HOW CAN THE B-SCHOOLS LEVERAGE OPPORTUNITIES PRESENTED BY NEW EDUCATION POLICY 2020?

There are several platforms that B-Schools can use to transform their delivery.

Foremost, they need not remain as standalone institutions, rather they can add flavors of both the creative and performing arts besides the sciences that may encourage students to learn new, structured ways of viewing and planning towards an end objective. At this point, it would be pertinent to mention that an incubation centre, which the NEP has spoken about, could go a long way in converting their ideas into business opportunities.

Secondly, research can be inbuilt into the learning for those who have an interest in participating in creation and uncovering knowledge. Here, the National Research Foundation could help a B-School create an in-campus platform for writing research projects and pursuing meaningful research, therein.

Next, the academic bank of credits could prove to be a useful window to help students from other institutions to extend their exposure in a new campus. Institutions own students can also take a break, especially those without much prior industry experience, to intern for a year or two in a sector of their choice and rejoin after some practical exposure has been added to their learning.

Finally, senior faculty from the NAM set up under the NEP, could be invited to spend a few semesters at the institute to engage with the learners on the campus and enrich them with knowledge/experience in their area of expertise.

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