

12 Nov, 2014 11:21 IST

The Big Question: Liberal Arts Or Management?

Experts weigh in on the importance of management and humanities education in Shaping leadership qualities



Ashish Nanda, Director, Indian Institute Of Management, Ahmedabad (Photograph by BW archive)

Humanities and management are not competitive; they are actually complementary. A Humanities degree and management education are not mutually competitive; in fact, in some ways they are complementary. If we are able to strengthen undergraduate education in streams such as humanities and commerce, we will have a more diverse pool of students enrolling in management schools. A rigorous undergraduate education puts one in a position to be a good management student, irrespective of the stream in which the undergraduate degree was earned.

Ashish Nanda, Director, Indian Institute Of Management, Ahmedabad

"A strong UG education in arts and commerce will lead to a diverse pool of students in B-schools"

Liberal Arts Is One Way To Augment Skills

The issue is not about liberal arts or science or technology; it's about certain defined skills in a particular area and that students be given the option to pick and choose. At present, good management colleges are oversubscribed by almost 50 to 100 times. Liberal arts is one way to enhance employability and upgrade skills, but not the only way. Introducing occupational standards and a skills framework in colleges is the answer.

Pramod Bhasin, founder and vice-chairman, Genpact

"At present, good management colleges are oversubscribed by almost 50 to 100 times"



Management Education Cannot Be Trumped By Humanities

Humanities education will not take precedence over an MBA. While it is heartening that more students are opting to study a wider variety of subjects, management education is still considered a superstructure. I would like the study of humanities or any other discipline to be the foundation on which the edifice of management education is built. One cannot replace the other.

Bala V. Balachandran, founder and dean, Great Lakes Institute of Management, Chennai "An MBA is considered the superstructure; humanities or any other discipline is the base"



'Blue-chip' B-schools Are Not Always Sought After

People want a degree. If they cannot get admission to Delhi University, and if their parents can afford to pay, they go abroad. There is a lack of capacity in India, especially in the arts stream. Private universities offering humanities education are trying to carve out a niche for multi-sector, collaborative schemes. From my interaction with some employers, I learnt that they were not willing to pursue and recruit students from certain 'blue-chip' management and technical institutes as they believe the students spend so much time and energy on getting into such institutes that they burn out sooner.

Dilip Chenoy, Managing Director and CEO, National Skill Development Corporation
Some employers believe students from top B-schools tend to burn out faster



There's a need to redesign the MBA curriculum in the country

We need a blend of humanities and business education; one without the other is incomplete. This is particularly relevant when it comes to post-graduate degrees or diploma programmes for engineers. What we need is a redesign of the existing MBA curriculum in the first year where core subjects in behavioural, quantitative and economic sciences should be augmented by subjects from humanities. This can be achieved in a six-term MBA or diploma programme.

Jagdish Sheth, Charles H. Kellstadt, professor of marketing at Emory University

"In the first year of MBA, core subjects in quantitative & economic sciences should be augmented by humanities subjects"

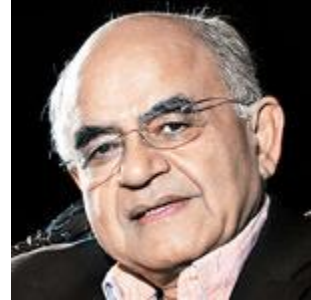


MBA Enables You To Make A Living, A Liberal Education Lets You Build A Life

Liberal arts education makes a person more empathetic and gives him a perspective on life. All these are important qualities for a business leader; they are more than just the problem-solving techniques one learns at a management school. There is a difference between making a life and making a living. MBA, law, medical education and engineering help one make a living, but liberal education lets you build a life. When I was running P&G, we recruited candidates from St Stephen's College and St Xavier's and not only from the IITs and IIMs. Management colleges should devote a quarter of their curriculum to liberal arts. In the US, people don't pursue a professional course until they have completed undergraduation, usually in the arts or humanities.

Gurcharan Das, Author and Former CEO, P&G India

"Management colleges should devote one-fourth of their curriculum to liberal arts"



An MBA Is More Than Technical Know-how, It Completes A Person's Education

A degree in Humanities must be combined with management education. A postgraduate management education is not only about numbers, quantitative or technical competence; it's also about leadership, innovation, entrepreneurial ability and energy. We have to teach all these to students to enable them to look for new business opportunities. A holistic education is more helpful than mere technical and quantitative competence.

Saibal Chattopadhyay, Director, Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta

"Humanities must be combined with management education for holistic learning"



For Good Citizenship, We Need Education In Social Sciences

We need education in citizenship for democracy to function in India. Universities focusing on humanities and social sciences contribute towards development of citizenship. The best way to cultivate citizenship is through broad-based education in the humanities and social sciences. Management courses will not take a back seat if humanities and social sciences start gaining currency. Universities are good and bad — the bad ones will be driven out of the market. We don't need bad universities offering management and technology education.

Andre Beteille, Sociologist, Writer and Chancellor, Ashoka University

"Management courses will not take a back seat if humanities education starts gaining currency"



(This story was published in BW | Businessworld Issue Dated 01-12-2014)

- See more at: <http://www.businessworld.in/news/b-school/surveys/the-big-question-liberal-arts-or-management/1616618/page-1.html#sthash.4m7zuxfn.dpuf>