

# Embrace disruption



PHOTO: DALIP KOPAR

In an ideal education system, everyone need not be a "book smart" person but can be "street smart"

**BALA V  
BALACHANDRAN**



**T**he world is becoming an increasingly difficult entity to predict. Business, Economy, politics and society are a part of the same ecosystem, certainly, but the rules of engagement have changed and what held good once upon a time is no longer good enough. The future of the VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) world is completely different and its challenges, unprecedented. Disruptive technologies and the internet are driving these changes and it takes not only a well-informed manager to understand the implications, but a smart one to be able to realise the potential of such disruptions.

Educators therefore, have a duty to offer knowledge not only for the basic understanding and appreciation of the discipline but also for enhancing skillsets and expertise that will help the students face up to the challenges of the coming years. In this context, the higher education segment has a crucial role to play.

My article is specific to the management education milieu. Here is a summary of some of the things that are wrong with management education in India and some suggested remedies:

■ **Lack of qualified faculty:** While the regulatory authorities impose specific mandatory requirements for appointing qualified faculty members and principals, the word 'quality' is a tricky one. There is a huge variance in the quality of the qualifications that a person in India can acquire. You cannot equate a Ph.D. obtained from the say the IITs with one obtained from a fly-by-night school. However, both candidates can certainly be appointed professors since they do have the requisite Ph.D. qualification. One way to handle is to use the philosophy of "publish or perish" which will ensure that there is an emphasis on research output even after the Ph.D. has been obtained. One might argue that there are unverified and dubious "online" journals in which one could publish and once again quality will be suspect. Institutes need to insist on research and paper publications only in rated and peer reviewed journals. This will ensure quality and therefore equality in the overall standards of qualification.

**We need to focus on experiential learning besides class room teaching. Integrated and energised teaching should be encouraged by institutes of higher education**

■ **The low financial packages in the education sector vis-à-vis the Industry:** The pay and perks that many faculty get in India are not commensurate with rest of the world or even the rest of Asia. Faculty members have to become a "teaching machine" or take on "forced consulting" to generate the income needed to sustain a comfortable lifestyle and send their children to good schools. Thus, the effectiveness of their overall academic performance suffers. The package should be on par with the opportunity cost of having worked in the corporate domain. Ensuring decent package and providing incentives for scholarly work and effective performance are essential.

■ **NO discipline:** The unfortunate reality that I see in today's society is the general disregard for discipline and ethical values. Let's be clear that without either, there is no success or achievement whether personal or professional. Teachers and parents especially in the K to 12 age group have to do their bit in moulding the youth with these fundamental strengths. Collegiate and higher education should certainly reinforce these qualities

and this is the only way to create super-performers who are also responsible corporate citizens.

■ **Merit should prevail:** Reservation should not take precedence over merit. If the government ensures access to basic, good and free education to all right from kindergarten the quota systems won't be necessary in higher education. The merit system has to supersede and include standardised tests as well as an overall assessment of the achievements, quality and potential of the student leaving no room for subjective interpretation. No student is "unfit" but there may be "misfits". Everyone need not be a "book smart" person but can be "streetsmart".

■ **Experiential learning:** We need to focus on experiential learning besides class room teaching. Integrated and energised teaching should be encouraged. Also, a questioning attitude among students must be encouraged and exams need to test that. The evaluation system currently encourages the students to master the 'art of cheating' as opposed to the 'science of teaching'.

■ **Faculty members:** Every class should have two faculty — one from industry stressing the

business relevance and an academic who can bring "academic elegance" — the fundamental concepts and discipline of the subject. This way the shortage of academics can be filled to an extent with industry experts in an environment where the art of Leadership blends with the science of management. This is another way to ensure that the teachers are brought up to speed and they continue to learn.

In sum, several mandatory changes are required in the way that management education is delivered in India. More so since the avenues for gaining said knowledge are going to multiply in the coming years. The faculty members are neither challenged intellectually nor are they financially motivated to engage in research. Evaluation methods are compromised and experiential learning is close to zero. If this continues, there will be a large number of textbook managers who won't have the resourcefulness to excel in business and society. It is time to embrace the change.

*The author is J.L. Kellogg's distinguished Professor of Accounting & Information Management, Northwestern University, USA; Founder, Dean & Chairman, Great Lakes Institute of Management, India; Founder & Chancellor, Great Lakes International University, Sri City, India*