

ENHANCING QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT EDUCATION - A STAKEHOLDER'S APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

Quality is desirable, in a marketing world where customer is the king it is essential and without delivering amongst quality failure is inevitable. We all know quality when we experience it, but describing and explaining it is a more difficult task. Quality is what makes the difference between things being excellent or run-of-the-mill. Increasingly, quality makes the difference between success and failure. The best organizations, whether public or private, understand quality and know its secret. Seeking the source of quality is an important quest. Education is also recognizing the need to pursue it, and to deliver it to pupils and students. Acknowledging the claims of stakeholders is a new quality development initiative of management education Institutions, whereby they have begun to recognise their obligation to meet the needs of a range of stakeholders such as students, employers, professional associations, the government, the academic community, and wider society, without which there is no survival.

In recent years, higher education in the field of management has witnessed an increasing demand in India. A large number of students are pursuing education after graduation and management education is a popular choice because of its interdisciplinary nature, with admission to the courses open to all categories of graduates. Many new institutions have exclusively been set up, in particular by the private sector in large numbers, to offer postgraduate courses in management. Besides, many existing institutes have started offering these courses considering the huge demand. This development, while satisfying the market demand for management education, has also raised a serious debate among management experts, students, academicians and corporate groups, on the quality of education being maintained. Further, the quality of graduates coming from these institutes is also being carefully assessed about their employability by the corporate and business sector and capability to satisfy their divergent needs. This paper examines the critical issue of the quality of management education at postgraduate level.

Data gathered from convenience sampling of a sample size of 98 respondent stakeholders that included students of first year of MBA program in a reputed business schools and their parents through a structured interview

comprising of open ended and close ended questions was analysed. The results have been presented systematically and discussions as well as implications for management educators have been drawn. Finally a seven point framework for quality development and enhancement has been suggested that could provide useful directions to institutions aiming to enhance the quality of management education in an organized and efficient manner.

Keywords: Quality, Management Education, MBA Program, Business Schools

INTRODUCTION

Quality is both, a philosophy and a methodology, a philosophy as it becomes a way of thinking, a driving force to act and a methodology as it needs a systematic approach to manage it, a process to achieve it and a continuous introspection to enhance it.

A lot of hype has been made about quality and a sudden discussion is centered around this whole word with various agencies evaluating management institutes on quality parameters, criteria being developed to serve as guiding steps to achieve quality, but in all this why should at all a management institute be concerned about quality if survival is not a competition. A wave of business education started in 90's in India and the boom continued for a decade and a half and now we see a drop with many business schools closing down, at a point of time a management degree meant a guaranteed job and it is not so today.

Customers want the best always and in a perfectly competitive market, they have the widest choices to make use of and morally it is impossible to accept anything less than the best in education for the child as unlike many western countries, it is the parents who pay for the higher education of their children in majority or rather close to all cases. As a service provider it becomes a marketing obligation to provide the best for the price charged, rather better to delight the customer and as moral responsibility of nurturing the future of the country it lays tremendous responsibility on the provider to ensure the teaching and all aspects that influence teaching are of the highest standard. Then there is competition that becomes an important force in driving the quality paradigm. Education providers are on their toes to ensure that they offer something more than their competitions to ensure full enrolments. Focusing on the needs of the customer is the heart of any quality initiative and as institutions are becoming more and more accountable to stakeholders, it is becoming imperative to understand what these stakeholders want, what is evolving in the market, and what shall not just satisfy the customer, the student community but delight them and in the process of getting education at the institution they shall become skilled, learned and employable or entrepreneurial. This paper looks at a stakeholder approach to enhancing quality of management education and presents a step by step guideline and framework to achieve the same. The term stakeholder's include primarily the students who would get education, their parents as they are an important contributor to the provision of education and the industry or the market who will be providers of jobs to the students.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The word quality comes from the Latin *qualis* meaning *what kind of*. The quality of something can be said to be a part of its nature. The construct of Quality came into existence as early as industrialisation started as mass production necessitated the need of some parameter to judge what is appropriate in terms of quality to be acceptable for buyer. The idea of quality was initiated by W Edward Deming(Deming 1982, 1984) in 1930s working on waste reduction in industrial processes and he gave the 14 points on quality which are more applicable to manufacturing but with his teacher and mentor Walter A Shewhart framed the PLAN - DO CHECK- ACT model of quality. This can be translated into management education very objectively to plan the curriculum that serves to get the student develop conceptual clarity of the subject while making sure that what the industry demands of this learning is enabled in the delivery process. Then the faculty needs to DO in-depth study of the subject itself so that relevant cases are incorporated, the methodology of teaching is defined, learning outcomes are developed that will serve as a measurement rod on the CHECK phase when objective tests, qualitative traditional question answer papers, introspective and reasoning based exercises or cases are done and the learning is established. ACT is an ongoing process while delivering education as the teacher and student continue to act, one teaches, the other learns, and it is the responsibility of the teacher to continuously evolve to learn first his/ himself and to transmit this to the student later.

Shewhart developed the Shewhart Cycle of Learning and Improvement cycle, combining both creative management thinking with statistical analysis. This cycle contains four continuous steps: Plan, Do, Study and Act. These steps (commonly referred to as the PDSA cycle), Shewhart believed this would ultimately lead to total quality improvement. The cycle draws its structure from the notion that constant evaluation of management practices -- as well as the willingness of management to adopt and disregard unsupported ideas --is keys to the evolution of a successful enterprise. The study phase is similar to what Deming called the Check phase in that while delivering education the process of study which involves developing the learning abilities of the student must continuously evaluate their learning development and act accordingly to meet the objective goals planned.

Joseph M. Juran(1988, 1989) made many contributions to the field of quality management in his 70+ active working years. His book, the Quality Control Handbook, is a classic reference for quality engineers. He revolutionized the Japanese philosophy on quality management and in no small way worked to help shape their economy into the industrial leader it is today. Dr. Juran was the first to incorporate the human aspect of quality management which is referred to as Total Quality Management.

The following table outlines the major points of Dr. Juran's quality management ideas:

Table 1. Quality Triology

Quality Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify who are the customers.• Determine the needs of those customers.• Translate those needs into our language.• Develop a product that can respond to those needs.• Optimise the product features so as to meet our needs and customer needs.
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Quality Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a process which is able to produce the product. • Optimise the process.
Quality Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prove that the process can produce the product under operating conditions with minimal inspection. • Transfer the process to Operations.

Organizations that follow the TQM path regard quality as being defined by their customers. They are the final arbitrators of quality and without them the institution will not exist. The institution that champions TQM as its philosophy has to use all means at its disposal to explore their stakeholders' needs.

Quality can be defined as that which satisfies and exceeds customers' needs and wants. This is sometimes called *quality in perception*. Quality can be said to be in the eyes of the beholder. This is a very important and powerful definition, and one that any institution ignores at its peril. It is the consumers who make the judgments on quality. Tom Peters in a discussion of the pivotal role of the consumer in quality (1982, 1986, 1987, 1992) argues that the *perceived* quality of a business's product or service is the most important single factor affecting its performance. He argues that quality as defined by the customer is more important than price in determining the demand for a majority of goods and services.

Philip Crosby's (1979, 1984) ideas are very useful for quality in education. Crosby's name is associated with two very appealing and powerful ideas. The first is that *quality is free*. This very powerful idea is premised on the idea that savings from quality improvement programmes pay for themselves. The second idea most associated with him is the notion that errors, failures, waste and delay—all the 'un quality things'—can be totally eliminated if the organization has the will. This is his controversial notion of *zero defects*. Both ideas are very appealing in education. The idea that quality improvement can pay for itself and can lead to an elimination of failure, especially if this could mean pupil and student failure, is one that few institutions can ignore. Crosby, like all the other 'gurus' is at great pains to emphasize that the route to zero defects is a difficult although achievable one. As he has written, 'Quality is free. It's not a gift, but it is free. What costs money are all the un quality things—all the actions that involve not doing jobs right the first time'.

SERVQUAL, the famous, most widely used and largely acceptable service quality model across industries by Parasuraman et.al (1984) and its subsequent refinements in 1985, 1989 describe quality as a difference between the perception and the expectation. What does the customer expect and what is he actually receiving. Now this again bring us to the basic point of understanding the stakeholder's expectation in that replacing the customer with the stakeholder as in the case of management education in India besides the customer, the student, the parents who pay up for the program are a decision factor and in that sense they become technical stakeholders besides being moral stakeholders with the Indian culture where parents are deeply involved in the child's education decisions.

A lot of work further has been done on investigating quality in various sectors and in the management education sector also using the underlying model of SERVQUAL stating that only perceptions, SERVPERF must be known and to get the rating of being as higher on the scale should be taken as delivering good quality. Cronin and Taylor (1992)

With this as the basis of quality constructs of management education this paper tries to look at what do stakeholders, parents and students want from management education they enrol into at the postgraduate level and based on structured interviews and the analysis of the responses presents a framework for total quality management for institutions engaged in imparting management education that shall provide fruitful results to their effort of delivering quality.

METHODOLOGY

The work in this paper is descriptive in nature with data collected from current students enrolled in the MBA program and their parents through a structured interview containing both open ended and close ended questions. These students were in the first year of the two year full time MBA program of a reputed B school which is ISO 9001 certified and is rated in the A category by the NAAC, the National accreditation and assessment council. 150 students and their parents were targeted for the study and 98 responded positively to agree to participate in this dialogue giving a response rate of 65.33%. a convenience sampling was used for the study.

RESULTS

Table 2. Gender of Respondents

GENDER	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
MALE	59	60.2
FEMALE	40	40.8

The respondents were largely male representing 60% of the sample while 40% were females. This is largely due to the enrolment on numbers as the overall enrolment also shows the same ratio.

Table 3. Educational Background of Respondents

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND (GRADUATION)	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
ARTS	20	20.4
COMMERCE	24	24.4
BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION	28	28.5
SCIENCE	12	12.2
B. Tech	4	0.04
PSYCHOLOGY	10	10.2

53% of the students enrolled in the MBA program are from commerce or business administration (BBA) stream, the least number coming from engineering stream.

Table 4. Work Experience of Students

WORK EXP.	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
With work experience	9	0.09
Without work experience	89	90.8

This is a striking revelation and dissimilar to what we see in terms of enrolment of students into MBA program in western countries. The large majority of students is the MBA program are without any work experience and the program has been chosen as a mode of study to generate employability and the hope that it would give a better job than choosing any other stream of study.

Table 5. Family Background of Respondents

FAMILY BACKGROUND	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Business family	42	42.9
Service class family	56	57.1

The gap between the percentages of students coming from business class versus service class is small but none the less the majority of students coming into the MBA program are from service class as they seek to get a job after the completion of the program. The students from the business class are equally keen to pursue the course as it gives them a better image as a businessman to be qualified than being a mere graduate and it will also enable them to manage the business better and seek new opportunities to enhance the scope of the current business operations they are into.

Table 6. Career Goal of Students

CAREER GOAL	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Do a job	55	56.1
Join family business	30	30.6
Start own business	13	13.2

Majority of students enrolled into a MBA program want to do jobs and a small number is keen to be their own boss and start on their own. This lays a lot of pressure on the teaching as until skill development has been the outcome of the program that can be transformed into employability skills to meet the industry demands; the student expectations cannot be met.

Table 7. Factors Students Consider While Making Choice Of Business School

FACTORS	RANK
Brand Name / Ranking in published surveys	1
Salary packages gathered by students in latest placement, companies that visited the campus	2
Quality of faculty (No. of senior experienced faculty)	3
Infrastructure (class rooms, library, computer labs, quality of furniture, provision of laptops, wi - fi facility)	4
Affordability of Fees	5
Location	6
Innovative Curriculum- Foreign language, specializations offered	7
Industry Interface / Seminars	8
Summer internships	9

Table 7. Factors Students Consider While Making Choice Of Business School

FACTORS	RANK
International exchange programs	10
Projects, teaching methodology, assessment parameters	11
Focus on Development of Communication skills, personality and grooming	12
Training on Entrepreneurial skills development, self employment initiatives, incubation centres for entrepreneurship	13

Brand Name / Ranking has been Ranked 1 by the students as it seems to them an indicator of an overall quality of the college including its teaching, placements, and infrastructure as well as acceptance by the corporate. The published surveys are considered an important and reliable source of information as they have been conducted by an independent authority and seem to be authentic from the student point of view. The placement figures, highest salary package received by the students is the next highest priority as the students are enrolling into the program to get a good job. The kind of companies that visited the campus is an important factor in the decision choice of the students while choosing a business school.

The students expect a high quality of faculty in terms of experience and qualification. Besides teaching them concepts in class in an interesting, interactive and industry relevant manner, students also expect faculty to mentor them, guide them on various personal and professional issues including deciding choice of majors and chalking out career paths. The students expect the faculty to have good subject knowledge and market awareness in the subject they teach and expect them to give real life examples and current happenings in the field of business.

The infrastructure in terms of classrooms, computer labs, library, provision of laptops, wi fi facility in the campus, location of the premises of the B school are high on the agenda while choosing a B school. This is quite reasonable in terms of the market dynamics and what is on offer from the other players in the market. These also aid in the development of skills and the teaching and learning process of subjects.

What all teachers directors and owners of business schools spend time effort and energy on - the curriculum, teaching methodology, innovation in curriculum, industry interface, summer internships etc. is low on the consideration set of students while they make their choice. This does not translate that it is not important to them but this is already taken into account by them when they have considered the B School rankings as all the published surveys take this into consideration as one of the most important factors while they give a rank to the institute. So since this has been taken care of by the survey rankings, the students focus on this is not high while making choices.

The students want to develop their soft skills like Communication, Leadership, Negotiation etc. to grow further in their career but they expect these skill development initiatives to be incorporated into the mainstream curriculum and the teaching methodology, assessment parameters should enable this development. The international exchange programs, projects

and assessment criteria are not attractive to the students while making choice of B schools as at that time their first and foremost consideration is to see whether the institute will get them a good job and has a good infrastructure. This dimension attracts interest while they are on the verge of completing their first year of studies as they then want to explore international exposure options also. With job markets becoming over competitive, students are additionally looking for entrepreneurship training, support and guidance not only for self employment but also to generate jobs, though this is last on their agenda

DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATION FOR MANAGEMENT EDUCATORS

Education is about learning. If quality has to be enhanced it is necessary to address the relevance of this quality in terms of the needs of the learners, the students and incorporate the quality enhancement involving them in an interactive manner so that the enriched quality does not seem a burden but an enjoyable experience to them. Learners learn best in a style suited to their needs and inclinations. An educational institution that takes the total quality route must take seriously the issue of learning styles and needs to have strategies for individualization and differentiation in learning. The learner is the primary customer, and unless learning styles meet individual needs it will not be possible for that institution to claim that it has achieved total quality.

Quality enhancement is hard work. It takes time to develop a quality culture. By themselves hard work and time are two of the most formidable blocking mechanisms to quality improvement. Cultures are essentially conservative and status quo is the norm. Staff are most comfortable with what they know and understand. However, to stand still while competitors are improving is a recipe for failure. If TQM is to work it must have the long-term devotion of the senior staff of the institution. They must back it and drive it.

The following is suggested as a framework to enhance quality of management education

Simple Structure - Structures need to be appropriate and facilitate the quality development process. As much possible, hierarchy needs to be eliminated, and flatter structures with strong inter departmental relationships must exist. The more appropriate organizational forms are simple, lean, and are built around strong teamwork. The development and strengthening of teamwork is essential for quality.

Leadership - The educational leader must establish a vision and communicate it to the staff, students and other stakeholders. The running of the organisation must display the set vision. Management by walking around and management by objectives must be practised by the leader and there must be provision for autonomy, experimentation and support for innovative ideas. The leader must ensure that organizational structures have been clearly defined responsibilities allocated and maximum delegation compatible with accountability established. Any barriers, whether they be organizational or cultural are removed and effective teams are built. There must be appropriate mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating success.

Empowerment Of Teachers - In a quality driven organisation there must be involvement of teachers and all staff in problem-solving activities and the use of basic scientific methods and the principles of statistical quality and process control. The teachers must be motivated to think about things and how projects could be handled rather than telling them how they will happen. The staff must analyse which systems and procedures are preventing them from

delivering quality to their customers—students, parents, co-workers. There must develop a desire for meaningful improvement and professional growth by moving responsibility and control for professional development directly to the teachers and technical workers. A systematic and continued communication among everyone involved must be initiated and skills in conflict resolution, problem solving and negotiations while displaying greater tolerance for and appreciation of co-workers must be developed.

Teamwork - Teams have the advantage of involving the maximum number of people in the total quality process. It is futile to think of quality enhancement without effective teams. The synergy required to make quality improvements comes from people working in harmony. Quality improvement is hard work, and this is best approached with the support of others. The teams have a number of important functions that include being: accountable for the quality of learning; responsible for making quality improvements in their area of responsibility; a vehicle for monitoring, evaluating and improving quality; a conduit of information to management on the changes necessary to improve provision. Quality improvement often takes place by a series of teams working on small incremental projects, each of which is designed to solve a problem, improve an existing process or design a new one.

Quality Circles - In his *What Is Total Quality Control?* Ishikawa (1985) charts the development of the quality movement in Japan from its origins in the early 1950s through the growth of the quality circle movement. He describes quality circles as small groups based upon mutual trust, which voluntarily perform quality control activities within the workplace, and which use quality control methods and techniques. Quality circles specifically suited to the needs of the organisation can be established that can guide the development and assurance of quality both internally and externally.

Knowledge Management - The term knowledge management is applied to everything from the application of new technology to the much broader endeavours of trying to harness the intellectual capital of an organization. knowledge management as being about learning to know further and deeper what we know. However, organizations need to be clear that knowledge is more than information. More and better information does not mean that we are any more knowledgeable. In fact often the opposite can be the case. Information by itself can often lead to confusion and overload. A key to successful knowledge management is to exploit all forms of knowledge, both formal and informal. This can be achieved by developing an open knowledge-sharing culture and developing processes linked to appropriate technologies that facilitate the sharing and exploitation of all available information.

Benchmarking -Benchmarking can be defined as a systematic process for measuring and comparing the performance of one organization against those of others. The goal of benchmarking is to learn the lessons of others and to use them to make improvements in one's own organization. In education there are various simple means of benchmarking which can be carried out as staff development exercises. Teachers can simply visit other institutions in their area and see how things are done. They can discover best practice and ensure that their matches it, and then seek to improve on it. The importance of benchmarking is that it saves reinvention.

CONCLUSIONS

The process of strategic planning in education has to be on the similar lines as is normally followed in industry and commerce. The tools employed for establishing mission, goals and analysing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats translate well. The tools themselves are simple and easy to apply. Their power results from the focus they give to the corporate thinking process. They force a questioning of why the institution exists, for whom it exists, and whether it is pursuing the right goals.

The quality enhancement initiatives must look at critical factors like a) Quality of Faculty recruited b) Quality of Infrastructure provided C) Quality of Library and brainstorming discussion groups and seminars led by top Professional Management Gurus d) Last but not the least is the placement provided by the Institutes based on industry needs .

Any institution engaged in the quality enhancement process must conduct an in-depth SWOT - strength, weakness, opportunity and threat analysis of itself and develop a strategic plan to address the issues identified. Objective clarity strengthens the strategic planning and action deployment process. The entire quality exercise must be carried forward with the cost function in mind so that the returns on the cost involved in developing quality are far lower than the returns that heap as an outcome. Continuous monitoring and evaluation are needed to keep the cycle of quality going for competitive advantage.

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