
ACTIVITY BASED LEARNING AND SKILLS IMPROVEMENT

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ABSTRACT: Innovativeness through the creation of new companies and business areas are seen as key factors to achieve economic goal for firm, the industry, the region and the national level. A restricting factor is the availability of competent individuals to manage projects in a efficient way and under limited factors we have to create new opportunities, employment and sustained economic growth. So professional educational institutions can address this need by enhancing the motivation and competence of their graduates to become key persons in innovative and entrepreneurial activity. Professional education has traditionally focused on teaching individuals, but many initiatives are increasingly becoming more action-oriented, emphasizing learning by doing. This article presents views that how activity based learning in professional education provide the exposure to professionals problematical business scenario with skills improvement. Authors highlight Various issues, Challenges and importance of activity based learning in professional education. Article shows that how activity based learning education focuses less on teaching to individuals in a classroom setting and more on decision making activities through learning-by-doing.

KEYWORDS: Activity Based Learning; Skills Improvement; Exposure; Problem-Solving; Economic Development

1. INTRODUCTION

Professional educational institutions are contributing with substantial way in the growth and development of country through specialised and subject-specific programmes, which focuses on creating and enhancement of intellectual, managerial and technical knowledge. Furthermore it generates the skills for the development of entrepreneurs and enhanced the competitive environment for business. As the business environment becoming more global, competitive and complex, industry requires professionals which are capable & competent to contribute in business development through creative & innovative manner. Besides this professional educational institutions are expected to play a dynamic role in business community and society. Therefore to build up the industrial ready professionals has become more challenging task for professional educational institutions. To face the above challenges, authors argue that education must transfer from classroom to industrial and corporate arena as per specialities and with the interaction of all size businesses & sectors, community groups, and government agencies for economic growth and development. So activity based learning is examined as instructing the required skills & competencies in students and providing them practical exposure of realities that how to manage a business in the changing scenario of business world.

Meeting the need of business world by Creating the skills in Professionals:

The knowledge economy requires a new set of skills which is different from the skills required by the traditional manufacturing and service dominated economy. Today Jobs require an increasing amount of education, training, as well as twenty-first century skills such as creativity, problem-solving, entrepreneurship and leadership. Educational institutions do not exclusively exist to prepare graduates for the role of a subject specialist or a technical expert, but also require a graduate, who can bring new ideas to the business world, who is flexible and has an enthusiasm for on-going professional learning (Hynes and Richardson, 2007; Starkey and Tempest, 2008). Many of traditional management theories and models do not meet the complexities and challenges of 21st century's knowledge based economy. Similar findings were improved in the "The flexible professional in the knowledge society report" (Allen and

Velden, 2008), which classified the critical skills for graduates into five areas include: professional expertise, functional flexibility, innovation & knowledge management, mobilisation of human resources and international orientation. Professional educational institutions have also experienced enlarged demand of capable human capital from the business community & government for their services in supporting attempts to institutionalise innovation processes and enhance the competitiveness (Huggins et al., 2008). Furthermore there is a need for educators to engage themselves and learn about the required knowledge & skills by business world, economy and industry and transfer the skills such as creativity, problem solving, self-management, team building & working together, communication, and enterprising skills into students. Students must have Innovative skills and creativity for generating and evaluating ideas for solutions, generic management practices, information processing skills, critical thinking, communication, team working and decision making to create greater efficiency & higher levels of productivity with dealing in uncertainty and managing customer & external relationships. Furthermore, authors argue that “the practice” or “the work” context of the learning should not be restricted to paid employment within an organization, but be inspired in the educational institution through active collaboration and involvement of industry. Management problems require that students must have the ability to leverage both their experience (know-how) and new knowledge (know-what), thereby centralising the relationship between experience and theory. Practice-based programmes are ideally placed to operationalize this relationship.

2. ACTIVITY BASED LEARNING – BRIDGING THEORY AND PRACTICE

Activity based learning contains the investigation and solving of real business world task/problems that are experienced in practice and goes beyond the problem solving to acquiring new knowledge & facts and developing critical analytical problem-solving and implementation skills which result in new sustained learning. This can be achieved through the use of complex projects or assignments that have a workplace setting. “Experiential” learning is not just “fieldwork” or “praxis” (the connecting of learning to real life situations) in a structured classroom situation, it also extends to a deeper cognitive learning in which learning is perceived as experiential, reflective and reflexive (Kelly, 1997; Hytti and O’Gorman, 2004). Thus, active forms of learning encourage students to think and work more creatively to develop problem-solving strategies for confronting unknown or unfamiliar situations and may encounter in the workplace (Huggins et al., 2008). Experiential learning that is focussed on individual knowledge is in danger of neglecting the importance of social processes in making that “knowing” real in a complex environment. Therefore, teamwork activities which build relationships between students and educators and foster a positive co-learning environment where students maximise their own and their peer’s learning should be incorporated as a central aspect of practice-based learning programmes. Two sets of factors intrinsic (features of the group itself) and extrinsic (factors outside the group) require consideration in team formation as they impact on the effectiveness of the team performance (Wickham, 2004; Ancona and Bresman, 2007). Intrinsic factors relate to the composition of the group in terms of age, gender, experience, personality and attitude, whereas extrinsic factors relate to the environmental forces, resources and time constraints the team has to perform within. As teamwork is concerned, it personally increase confidence; making assignments more enjoyable and increasing the relevance of work interaction for learning and for work place (Stein, 2006) and engagement of students in teamwork and experiential learning move them from a passive mode of learning, to one where they take ownership and responsibility for their own learning and assume roles of problem solvers, decision makers, negotiators, conflict managers and communicators, which are common roles and responsibilities of employees within work force.

3. ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

A primary goal of activity based learning in professional education must be to promote awareness of opportunity in business world. However various surveys have been conducted on employability and their results show a critical picture of employable skills that the gap between market needs and skills of graduates is enormous. A Report by The Merit Trac- MBA Universe.com (2012) which based on the evaluation of Management students from over hundred Institutions, grounded on international standards

describes that only 21 per cent management students are employable. As per Higher Education in India: Vision 2030, a survey was conducted and produced by an international consultants Ernst and Young for the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) gives daring results of professionals that 75 per cent of IT graduates, 55 per cent of health care, 55 per cent of manufacturing and 50 per cent of Banking and Insurance graduates are deemed unemployable. A report by the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (2013) showing that only 10 per cent students of management, which exclude the students of top 20 management institutions, acquire a job straight after finishing their programme and most of them getting ten to fifteen thousand rupees per month for work. The main reason is the growing number of institutions are not matched by quality in professional education. Productivity of human capital and growth of their incomes is adversely affected by the low levels of professional education, skills and health. Professional educational institutions should develop the various programme objectives (POs) as per the needs of market with the involvement of various stakeholders those are associated with education system and evaluations of POs should be done in result oriented manner. The present government has created the road map of developing India through various initiatives which includes Make in India, Start-up India, Digital India and most important is skill India, because without employable skills which are demanding by industries and our economy, can't achieve the target of sustainable development. Furthermore government should focus beyond the skill development and thrust on education to bridging the gap between skills of graduates and market needs.

Education system in India needs to focus not only on providing quality in professional education for high productivity but also try to make the Students understand about career enhancement opportunity and possibilities as an entrepreneur or business personalities. The most important issue is instructor preparedness and students attitudes regarding this learning. Teachers must be entrepreneurial thinkers and should try to involve students in problem solving and decision making process. If programme and course objectives are properly designed and delivered, students can learn as much as in traditional on-campus courses, but if students do not perceive the technology as useful, they will not be receptive to activity based learning methods. Courses should reflect the fundamental aspect of entrepreneurship and effective decision. There are also some issues like currently business environmental factors changing more faster than expectations, so it is very challenging to take decision in a given situation and time. The competency of teachers to develop the necessary skills, to adopt a positive attitude, and to develop the needed pedagogy and entrepreneurial thinkers are other important issues affecting the creation of activity based learning in professional communities. To create a virtual classroom, one must plan for the following tasks: advising, curriculum development, content development, articulation, learning delivery, hardware choice and assessment. The courses must encourage students to seek different ways of looking at a problem, rather than insisting that students find the one right answer.

4. IMPORTANCE OF ACTIVITY BASED LEARNING IN PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

In activity based learning, students learn through experience and practical exposures. Students often write their own business plans, create products or services, and showcase their ideas to their classmates. Activity -based learning offers individuals, small businesses and community groups a service to identify and solve their business problems. Preparation of feasibility studies in various areas of management, business plans, marketing plans and market research reports represent typical assignments. Above mentioned activities provide an important mechanism for introducing students to the ordinary management problems and the heterogeneity of business decision making and operations, where students obtain an enhanced comprehension of the role and skills required by a entrepreneur or manager, by a consultant and by a project manager. Students with practical hands-on experience of engaging with a small or medium enterprise in a managerial consulting capacity. It serves to develop students' analytical, communication & presentation, report Writing skills, decision making skills, project management skills, negotiation and conflict management. Fundamentally, the students develop resourcefulness and an innovative capacity on what, how and where to apply the theory of their subject discipline into a relevant context. In an educational setting students should meet and internalise a realistic business concept from the outset & business arenas. Further, teachers should be operationally involved in real business contexts, to make the teaching-learning process more interesting, motivating, satisfactory and more awareness

towards business, management and marketing. Now a days professional institutions have realized that the conventional programmes are too theoretical and lack practical knowledge and exposure. Therefore, while efforts are being made to enhance theoretical principles in learning, the focus of teaching has been shifted to more practical skills. For the success of activity based learning, industrial participation must be there in the formulation of Programme Objective, industrial training & intergrated programmes, business simulation, case studies, projects work, industrial trip, entrepreneurial development programmes/cell. The institutions and corporates could collaborate through jointly participation in the development and upgradation of technology, solve the business problms together, consultancy work. Such efforts will lead the skill development and business decision making rationality of students.

5. CONCLUSION

For the improvement in professional education, we must try that students from all socioeconomic backgrounds and skill levels should be admitted in professional courses. To fill a new role as active contributors to regional economic growth and development, educational institutes are asked to promote professionals in general, and commercialisation of knowledge and research in particular. A natural role for B-schools to play in this respect is to provide education of entrepreneurs. The traditional approach to entrepreneurship education has been indirect, aiming to educate individuals that subsequently are supposed to start new ventures. By broadening the perspective and actually including the formation of new ventures as a part of the education, a better match with these conceptions can be achieved. In addition, new venture creation should be the mission of professional institutions to contribute in economic development. To succeed, it seems necessary to include a broader range of activities than those conducted in a classroom setting, and to employ substantial resources compared to most of other study programmes. Most initiatives can be characterised as action-based or learning-by-doing. Professional educational institutions must take initiatives for the generation of new businesses is either a direct goal or an important part of the entrepreneurship education for economy growth . The participants are, however, likely to be recruited among people initially motivated to become entrepreneurs, so a high start-up rate could be expected independent of the education programme.

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