



# Win-Win Collaboration between Industry and Management Institutes

By R. Rajagopalan

**E**ducation for professions like architecture, medicine and management requires significant amount of coaching rather than mere teaching. Coaching implies student-specific inputs, practice and feedback on performance. Thus, classroom-based simulations - role plays, case discussions, games etc., are undoubtedly important tools. But nothing instructs as well as the real world.

Medical education uses clinical practice as an important component of learning - by letting students try their hands under expert supervision and mentoring. For MBAs, the 'summer project' or its equivalent, is the only 'clinical practice'. But often, such projects are on 'dead' issues - more like cadavers for dissection, rather than patients needing cure. And there are no teacher-doctors to supervise.

The situation is reverse when organisations send their managers out to management institutes for management development programmes (MDPs). The sessions in such programmes are generally disconnected from their organisational experience. The faculty appear to have grand ideas with no appreciation of a manager's plight in trying to put them into practice.

Is it possible to create an equivalent of a 'teaching hospital' in management education? Should we try for a 'teaching company' or a 'practising institute'? There are several possibilities for creating collaborative organisations to facilitate real learning:

1. Companies can encourage some of their managers to form 'coaching pairs' with academic counterparts from a management institute. Such a team can offer a course, say on market/ equity research. The same team can train working executives in that organisation. Students of the course can work on projects of relevance to the firm.

2. Big companies can launch their own in-company executive MBA/ diploma programmes, in collaboration with a management institute. Classes can be held one day a week with participants working on projects with access to internal data.

TAPMI is currently running two such programmes for its client organisations.

3. Companies can use summer projects for MBA students as entry points to involve management institutes to conduct sponsored research, say on employee or customer satisfaction. They can also be starting points for the development of case studies for use in academics and in-company MDPs.

4. Companies or industry associations can commission management institutes to prepare annual position papers on their industry/ markets. This will encourage the faculty of management institutes to be in continuous touch with industry developments. Such studies can add substance to courses in subjects like strategic management, where it is hard to get industry papers. For example, TAPMI has two courses called Business Awareness and Business Analysis, which are ideal for working on such industry papers.

5. Companies can host the faculty of management institutes for sabbaticals of a few months to a year. Research work and case development in areas of mutual benefit can be conducted during such

sabbaticals. One of my faculty colleagues developed two cases on brand building during one such sabbatical.

6. Companies can permit their employees to attend specific courses that management institutes offer their regular students. At a minimal cost to the company, it can improve its knowledge base and contribute to the diversity in the classroom. We are trying this experiment through the Essae-TAPMI Academy in Bangalore.

I am sure that if we put our minds, and more importantly our hearts together, we can generate many more potential ideas. We at TAPMI, have taken courage to radically restructure our MBA programme, based on such interactions with industry. We are hoping that the industry will come forward to collaborate with us in this effort. In our next column in this series, we will describe our restructured programme in detail.

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