Industry-School Interface: Following Professional Education Model to Impart Pragmatic Business Edification

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Abstract

This intercourse aims to identify means by which the business education system can be aided to effectively meet the needs of the business-operating environment. Despite of the popularity of business and management education critics have been talking about business education to be less relevant to business needs. This study focuses on exploring the modes of exchange of knowledge between business schools and industry to facilitate practical learning. It mainly aims to get a holistic view of the extent to which an industry and school collaboration based system can ensure pragmatism in business education along with promises, issues and challenges such industry school interface can offer. The data collection for this hypothesized model will be collected from business executives, business school management and alumni. This intercourse will offer new insight into the business education system. The study results will be valuable towards bringing improvements to the existing business education system.

Keywords: Business Education, Management, School - Industry Interface, Pragmatism, Industry

1. Introduction

If the course of the last hundred years is observed, the business has seemed to transform the whole world. Business is considered as a lashing force in reshaping society and as a medium of enhancing economic growth and new opportunity (Lorenzi, 2004). Successful management of business has stimulated the creation of new jobs and roles, the wealth generation, the technological advancements and exploring more and more opportunities for an ever more diverse population (Friga, Bettis and Sullivan 2003). Because of increased competition and changing technological needs corporations are placing more and more emphasis on looking up the right resource (Rao and Bowonde, 2004). Management education on the other hand produces human resource capable of working as leaders and competent for creating successful corporations which are vital for these profound and universal accomplishments (Pfeffer, 1999).

Hughes (2006) expresses that a student joins management schools with an intention to acquire knowledge and skills so that his life may be enhanced and enriched and he may be able to make a meaningful contribution to his organization and society. On the other hand, companies also have their goals and purposes which they want to be successfully realize, in order to become useful assets to societies, and reaping greater returns (Ray's, 1993). This is why and how management education has a significant and incalculable value to individuals, organizations, and society, therefore a close interaction and dexterity among the trio is imperative for the benefit of all the stakeholders.

Despite the overlapped needs of industry and management schools, it has been remained solely the responsibility of management school to prepare a business graduate (Leavitt, 1986; Porter and McKibben, 1988; Bailey and Ford, 1996; Mintzberg, 1996; Starkey and Madan, 2001; Pfeffer and Fong, 2002; Bennis and O'Toole, 2005; Van and Johnson, 2006; Shapiro et al. 2007). Business schools and industry so far and since long are been operating in separate and different domains (Mintzberg and Gosling, 2002; Ackoff, 2002; Pfeffer and Fong, 2002; Doria, Rozanski and Cohen, 2003). The management paradigms are constantly changing, and as a response to such increasing complexity of the business environment, there is a need necessitated that these two entities for the betterment of their future must work closer and together.

2. THE INTERACTION BETWEEN BUSINESS SCHOOL AND INDUSTRY

School-Industry interface means a collaborative and interactive system between management education institutions

and the industry for the achieving various mutually interdependent goals and objectives (Starkey and Madan, 2001). In traditional business schools set up the level of interaction between the industry and academia even after a huge critic followership has been very informal. The guest lectures, case studies, and internships are the only way where schools, graduates and industry interact with each other Aggarwal (2004). Even in case of industry based projects and cases it requires only basic level knowledge and information is shared to the graduates and sometimes opposed to factual position (Bisoux, 2003). The experience and role of the faculty of business schools also has become controversial; today it is very easy to find a faculty member of management schools who has never seen or worked in a real business, other than as a customer (Dayal, 2004). The management schools do not try to bring the practice of real time management in class rooms to create a relationship between academic and practical knowledge and the integration of these two aspects of business is left to the student's apprehension and his employers who have to retrain graduates about what management practice is all about and how much it is different from academic course Rizvi (2003). Hence a very open and loose coordination is seen between management schools and industry.

Significance of management education is not unknown to Industry leaders; the significance of quality management and business education, and the fact that education provided in these institutions has a thorough effect on the business success, has always been acknowledged. Mention that despite their awareness about this interdependency, the current organizational structures and functional processes of business schools provide inadequate and restricted opportunities for developing a worthwhile collaboration between industry and management schools (Starkey and Madan, 2001).

3. NEED OF INDUSTRY SCHOOL INTERFACE

Various researchers have given feedback about school – industry linkages and its importance (Trank and Rynes, 2003; Porter, Rehder, and Muller, 1997:O'Reilly, 1994; Wholihan, 1990; Mintzberg, 1996; Leavitt, 1989; and Ackoff, 2002); Law and medicine are professions, having an organized body of knowledge to impart relevant skills (Nanassy, Malsbary & Tonne, 1977). By whatever means of school-industry interaction, e.g. starting small businesses, industry apprenticeship and internships, practical research etc. type projects should be included in study management and business school faculties in facts should revive the ways in which the involvement of industry can be sought (Bisoux, 2003). The successful business schools will be those who will form strong and lasting collaborations with the industry (Friga, Bettis and Sullivan, 2003).

The management schools edification should be the theoretical component of a work/study program, rather than a highly theoretical and academic exercises giving basic industry knowledge (Bennis and 'Toole, 2005). No system design will work until and unless this distinction is done and this academic based system is redesigned fulfilling the intrinsic requirements of corporate professional world (Hinings and Greenwood, 2002). The situation forces business schools to rethink more prudently about what organizations are hiring, and what exactly they are looking for; this is where the role of corporate world in the management and business school education process becomes imperative.

3.1 Following the Professional Education System

In point of fact learning about management and business practices is about learning a profession, same as in case of law or medicines (Gioia and Corley, 2003). Management and business institutions are also professional institutions and they should also develop their system separate than any other academic field of knowledge and defiantly like any other professional field of knowledge (Mintzberg, 1996; Pfeffer and Fong, 2002). Like any other professions, business education also shares knowledge of other academic disciplines. As for medical education, these disciplines include psychology, biology and chemistry, similarly for business education these may be sociology, mathematics, philosophy, economics and psychology. However business education is not about academic courses only, other than these, there has to be some professional course work for the students (Pfeffer and Fong, 2002).

Therefore based on the suggestions of literature the researcher has worked on a possible mode of industry – school collaboration based Interface called Pragmatic Business Edification (PBE). The underline principles behind the PBE interface are following;

- Imparting graduate with the knowledge which is relevant to the dynamic needs of the industry and that will make graduate students successful in industry
- Adapting to the changing needs and demands of the industry by using school-industry interface

Based on the recommendations of literature that management schools need to extend their thinking about the business education with enhanced standards of admission and performance, with more experienced, and better informed and more scholarly faculties that are able to carry out more significant and relevant research. PBE interface suggests a formal partnership between Industry and business schools. As suggested by Mintzber (1999); Pfeffer and Fong (2002), the interface considers the partnership as a platform where both industry and business education institutes achieve their interests by interacting, and collaborating on a mutual, fundamental objective.

3.2 The PBE System Design

The pragmatic Business edification (PBE) interface suggests a nontraditional way of managing and running a business school. Main functions and roles of the business schools remain the same i.e.

1.   To induct students from the market

2.   Put them in education process

3.   Market refined product (graduates) into the industry

However new roles, functions and procedures are added at each of the three levels in order to enhance the productivity and effectiveness of business schools in imparting relevant and required set of knowledge.

This system design calls for partners to work on the basis of collaboration. As mentioned by (Beer, 2001; Mintzberg and Gosling, 2002; Mintzberg, 2004; Bennis and O'Toole, 2005; Ghoshal, 2005). The Industry which was considered to be target market or customer in the existing business system, is no more viewed as this; rather the phenomena behind this collaboration is that if we know that the schools' product (graduates) is to be used by industry, then why not it should be as required by industry, and even more specifically why not ask industry to help schools to make it as required by them. The redesigning of organizational design at all the three levels will be as follows.

Traditionally Business schools induct students all alone and on the basis of schools internal policies (Lorenzi, 2004; Leavitt, 1986; Porter and McKibben, 1998). Whereas the induction process under new system design will be according to the requirements of the Industry. The companies from all the industries about which a school is preparing it graduates should be in collaboration with the school, therefore the feedback from them will decide that quantity of induction. This functional area of the PBE Interface requires serious attention and concern; while it is about the edification process and partnership with the industry. The education process includes; curriculum, faculty, Infrastructure and culture.

3.3 Scope 0f Partnership

This may also not be ignored that industry basically has its own particular businesses, where they have their full attention and devotion, and if industry acts as a partner, still the role of organizing and managing this collaboration will remain with Business schools; as its business schools' business (Rousseau, 2007).

Therefore the main responsibility of coordinating and administrating students' business education should remain with the business school. Industry may be asked to lend a hand as required. Much of this partnership is required when students are offered specializations; this is the time when student should fully be exposed to the industry with the help of industry school partnerships.

Professions like business are practice based and are inclined towards their customers and clients (Pfeffer and Fong, 2002). However PBE Interface dose not propose that management schools should become a gated profession requiring credentialing and licensing and permissions from industry. Nonetheless, as endorsed by Mintzberg (2004) it is believed as a way forward towards recognizing that management and business education is about learning professional skills and experience, thus it is a need to realize the importance of both imagination and experience, therefore are the concern of business education. Since PBE interface considers industry and Schools as partners so both the partners will specifically have to perform some functions and roles.

Business school as a partner of industry-schools collaboration based PBE interface will have to form a strong interface for partnership. the main focus of this interface should be; to be a full-fledged research and development Unit and the unit will be in full collaboration of the industry (Arain and Tipu, 2007). Based on its research, the Unit will give feedback to the business school that which major is in demand by the industry and which is obsolete. And how much gradated roughly will be adjusted by the industry on yearly or semiannual basis. Based on such facts and

figures each major will be assigned a merit. The aggregate demand of all the majors will help the business school to decide its intake amount. Following controlled method of induction the problem of market saturation for business graduates will somehow be solved where only the calculated number of students will be given business degrees (Jenkins & Reizenstein, 1984; Engwall & Zamagni, 1998; Arain and Tipu, 2007; Cubberly, 1978; Pfeffer & Fong, 2005).

This interface will also be responsible for keeping official coordination with the one or more organizations depending upon the number of majors offered. It will be mediatory for a business school who offers e.g. Marketing majors that it should officially be attached with the Marketing department of one or more business organizations. It will also be the responsibility of the school using the interface to coordinate with the attached business organization and design courses according to their needs. These courses should also be reviewed periodically. Similarly the school using this interface should also seek help from the attached industry's department in getting the course instructor as visiting faculty. This is how the students will learn business skills from practicing managers.

The PBE doesn't recommend school to be working under the umbrella of some industry rather a school has to use some industry in order to embed pragmatism in to the education system. But such partnerships can only be successful if all the partners know their part and are willing to fulfill their responsibility. For example, management schools may offer students looking into consulting or investment banking career; a customized course of study that specifically prepares them for these fields, not just by offering general courses and electives, but by introducing a discrete and specialized set of courses, training and experiences.

Industry is that partner of this PBE interface who has never been held responsible for the poor performance of business graduates. This partner of the proposed collaboration is also important to search for new, innovative, wider, and more operative ways of bartering and sharing ideas and apprehensions.

For enabling school-industry interface, of all the things, industry support is the most pivotal and challenging; however, unluckily, most business professionals who act as employers for the business school product, have been sending mixed and unclear signals (Mintzberg, 1996; Mintzberg & Gosling, 2002; Lampel, 2001), and Leavitt, 1989). Industry has been liberal enough in providing financial support to management and business institutions, by offering them huge amount of money, as financing or sponsoring them; this financial support is understood as a vote of confidence and acceptance and acknowledgement of their product (Bruce and Edgington, 2003). Until and unless business leaders don't ask educational institutions for professing to facilitate them and unless industry leaders clearly state their expectations and requirements; it is far difficult for management schools to come out of this problem.

Industry should collaborate with one or more Business schools for research and development. The notable fact is that the industry may or not be asked for financial assistance, the utmost need is to facilitate business graduates to learn the business skills practically and as a return an industry may be facilitated by the school in the form of research and development. The contribution of industry in collaboration would be worthwhile in gaining a better understanding of management education research (Nonaka, 1994; Amabile et al, 2001). Imparting knowledge by the practitioners is another area where this collaboration spreads. The practicing managers of the industry in the form of visiting faculty, is the requirement of the business schools (Mintzber, 2004; Pfeffer and Fong, 2002). The students studying specialized courses cannot be best taught anybody other than the instructor having hands on experience of the respective field. Similarly designing the courses according to the requirement of the industry will be another concern of this interface, and hence the other role of industry in the collaboration based interface. The overall framework for Pragmatic business edification is explained in figure 1.

4. Research Methodology

The study was descriptive in nature. Focus group method was used for data collection in the 2nd Phase. The Focus Group study was used for a multiple reasons. The aim was to get stakeholders' feedback and suggestions on the PBE Model so practically, it was not viable to use any other method for evaluating the proposed model. Two focus groups were conducted (having two sessions / day each). The focus group study included twenty eight (28) professionals from education and other industries of Pakistan, exploring the potential benefits and possible hindrances in implementing proposed model. The members were carefully selected from Business school management, alumni of business schools and the corporate executives, to ensure that representatives from management schools and industry both are in place to focus on the proposed model. Questionnaire was got filled from each participant at the end of

each session to record their responses.

5. Results

Participants of all two focus groups sections had in depth discussions over the proposed interface and believe it to be useful contribution for the business communities; and accepting this type of partnership, means that management schools should re-examine their missions and should choose an appropriate industry intervention for the specific need expressed for a specific target market, with the objective of these graduates to become a fruitful and useful part of the industry. Henry Mintzberg (2007); Bennis, O'Toole and James (2005) have also considered business education to be professionals and recommended to follow professional education interface to impart knowledge.

As suggestions to business schools for implementing PBE Interface, management schools should consign themselves for adjusting with ever changing curricula as according to the changing demands of the industry, finally all business programs should particularly allow students to concentrate on an what business wants from them. Moreover Participants also suggested that the PBE Interface is generic in nature and can be applied to the business needs with ease as an appropriate interface to base their curriculum regarding managerial training. The PBE Interface has introduced certain areas which were not taken care of in any traditional system of business education. Bisoux (2003) also expresses that the existing management education system focuses on mostly giving awareness and basic knowledge of the industry, and has the specific objective of educating students on the various aspects of a business mostly from a theoretical perspective, however proposed PBE interface deals more with the preparation of aspiring business graduates who are well trained and well groomed according to the explicit requirement of today's dynamic business environment; moreover the PBE Interface triggers the need of industry academia corporation and believes that both the entities should work on equal basis acting as stakeholders for preparing the graduates. Alsop (2002); Pope (2002) also believe that his would benefit the society on a wider perspective; a business graduate who is criticized today as jack of all trades would certainly end up being master of any specific field. As discussed by Bennis, Warren G, O'Toole and James (2005) the industry can bank upon the products of business schools as most of their training needs will be fulfilled by the schools in the forms of jointly designed courses, similarly the quality of business education can be ensured as this collaborative system will make sure the survival of the fittest, as the collaborations and industry itself will define the quality hence the low standards will no more be the profitable ventures thus will be vanished away.

However the focus group participants also pointed out few challenges PBE Interface or any such industry-school collaboration based interface will face while implementing. The challenges discussed are mostly related to Pakistani environment as the participants were from Pakistani business markets. The various discussed challenges are as follows; The PBE interface calls for a system design change at management schools, and acceptance of a change is a long term process. Moreover the bureaucratic structure at the administration level will find it difficult to adapt such leveraged role of industry. Furthermore the management education at present is governed by Higher education system (HEC) and as any such interface calls for a change at system level which may take a longer period of time in getting recognition at HEC and government level, therefore any such interface should start its way from individual schools, towns, cities and then make its way through at mass level. Moreover the success of collaboration based interfaces like PBE depends a lot on the perception of the partners about the success of any such ventures, industry has never been held responsible for any such role in the History, acceptance and performance of any such roles is doubtful till it is practically executed.

6. Directions for future research

This dissertation has indicated various areas which need improvement when it comes to delivering practical exposure to business graduates. The study also explored and identified areas in which future research work could be conducted. Further research should also be conducted to cater for specific content relevance when an implementation program is developed. The assessment of implementation problems of the PBE Interface like collaboration based system could be investigated with a longitudinal study that may reexamine the potential benefits and possible challenges of industry-school collaboration based projects. Moreover the challenges discussed were mostly related to Pakistani environment as the participants were from Pakistani business markets. The results could be different if participants have experiences and observations of different business environments.

Based on the nature of the topic of the dissertation, research design was highly theoretical, where the participants of focus groups and respondents of questionnaire were asked for their opinions about possible benefits and problems of the industry-academia based PBE interface, and therefore results may change if any such collaborative interface is practically implemented.

Moreover the school-Industry collaboration which this course of dissertation talked about is a less researched area particularly with reference of modes in which the both entities should interact. Although there had been a lot of debate over the need of such collaboration, we find very few of the suggestion about what should be the strategy and direction, using which industry-academia interaction could be improved for the betterment of the education system. PBE Interface was proposed realizing the same dilemma, however still new areas and modes of collaboration need to be explored in detail, so that the little nitty-gritties, and essential ingredients for the effective working of this partnership can be identified.

Wrapping up the whole discussion it is lucid about management education that there are exciting opportunities and new ventures waiting in future, however there are also standing some serious challenges in the way for management education. This study offers an interface where the industry can be involved to cope with the changing environment. Nevertheless there are several other issues of major concern regarding designing the curriculum, fulfilling and meeting the needs of highly agile, dynamic and challenging real business environment.

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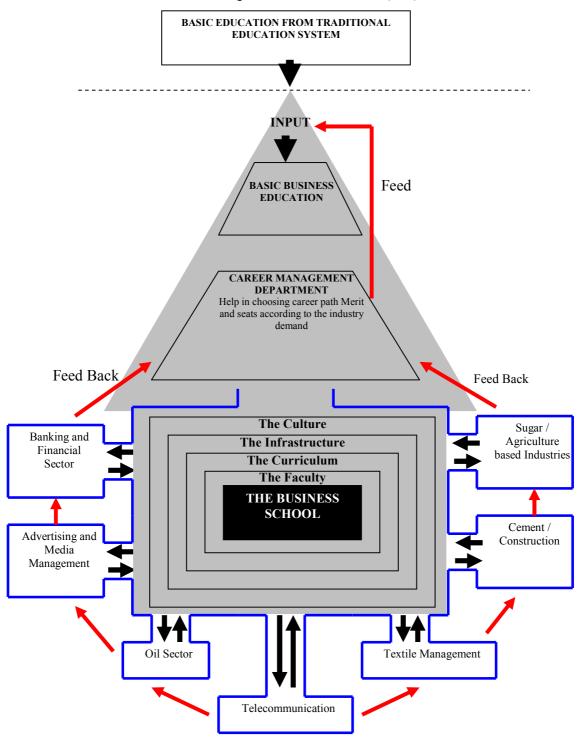Wholihan, John T. (1990). Business Dean Turnover: Causes and Consequences. Selections.

FIGURE 1: Pragmatic Business Edification (PBE) Model