

Guest Editorial

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Preparing IT Students for Success

It is well known that the majority of the students graduating with degrees that propel them to careers in IT and related services, end up working in an international environment. Yet, very little is done during their education programmes to prepare them for such a career, with all the emphasis being on “technical competence”.

In a situation where all the Engineering Colleges have identical syllabi, the key differentiation for the colleges ends up being the “cut-off” score at which they stop admission. Perhaps, initiatives that enhance the true “employability” of these graduates would be a better differentiation. One key factor that can make a difference is to prepare them for the real work environment.

The key challenges faced by young graduates in an international environment are communication, business culture variances and business etiquette. Each of these is elaborated below:

Communication: From early childhood onwards, all of us (parents, teachers, examiners, etc.) attempt to understand what the child/student is trying to communicate, instead of forcing him/her to communicate properly. Consequently, very intelligent Indians end up being quite poor communicators as compared to less accomplished people from the West. It is not just a language issue, though that is indeed a one of the factors.

Colleges must invest time to make their students better communicators who speak and write clearly. Teaching a foreign language to the level of business competency would be a bonus.

Business Culture: Each country has a different business culture. In the absence of any formal training, it takes a long time for an IT professional to understand these differences, often through costly blunders as some countries are less forgiving than others.

Every hour spent on sensitizing their students to these differences, will pay handsome returns for both the colleges and students.

Business Etiquette: A number of businesses run courses on this subject for their students. While it is never too late to learn this, it is much easier when one is young and eager to learn. Simple things like screening videos on the subject will make a huge difference.

The above may sound rather unimportant things for an educational institution to focus on. In reality, businesses spend a lot of time and money in preparing their new entrants in these areas, often with mixed success, which constrains their ability to recruit large numbers and grow rapidly.

Madhukar Dev

From Chairman's Desk



There was a spate of Independence Day Issues around 15th August this year. Outlook-Business carried several articles by opinion-makers on the theme *India – Making of a Superpower*. I summarize three of them as being relevant and significant to our readers.

R.A.Mashelkar deals with the “Art of being World Class”. He proposes that Excellence and Innovation are the cornerstones on which to build elite research-led universities; teaching without research is sterile. The developed nations have recognized this, and built research-led universities such as Harvard, MIT, Cambridge, Oxford, Stanford and Princeton.

He lists five factors that help create world-class universities:

- An absolutely uncompromising pursuit of Excellence, both in teaching and research.
- Continuous thrust on not only working at the frontiers of research, but creating new frontiers.
- An uncompromising attitude towards selection of the best faculty and students – going for the very best, that too globally.
- An undying commitment to institutional autonomy, without any political interference, whatever.
- Full understanding of the route to “Lakshmi” through “Saraswati” – not only understanding the wealth-creation potential of knowledge, but also creating an “ecosystem” in which this can happen effectively.

He believes that in future, the private sector will have to pay a crucial role in higher education; it is in their vested interest. He proposes that the entry of foreign universities of great repute should be viewed with an open mind.

He contends that we need to put explicit demand on science. Unless the demand is created, there will not be any worthwhile scientific research; this demand will have to be created by both industry and society. He emphasises that in this competitive environment, our industry will have to realize that the “I” in Industry must stand for “Innovation”, and not for “Imitation” or “Inhibition”.

C.K.Prahlad speaks about his vision for : India at 75 (2022). He believes that “India has the framework within which to change the game” and has the potential to have 30 Indian companies in the Fortune 500 list (none today), can contribute 10% share of world trade (1.5% today), and have the largest pool of trained manpower.

He points out that if you are a global company, corporate governance must follow global standards, no less. Globalization forces new standards of: transparency, governance, choice of leadership, choice of investment strategy, and technology approaches. “If you want to differentiate, then trying to be more like the GM or Ford makes no sense”. You have to change the game.

Pratap Bhanu Mehta, President, Centre for Policy Research, contends that India’s education needs are so huge that any source of investments, FDI included, is welcome; but without reform of higher education as it exists now, it is pointless. The reality is that the quality of Indian universities is dismal, with very little innovation in pedagogic practice, and very little research contributions.

The net result is a serious skills shortage in the country, holding back virtually every sector of industry and economy. There are very few institutions which can be described as world-class; even these do so not on account of the excellence of their teaching and research, but because of the selection mechanisms they employ for their students.

Most of our educational institutions don’t have autonomy – over basic decisions like: what to teach, whom to teach, who will teach, how much to charge, and what salaries to pay. Much of the de-facto privatisation in higher education has been promoted not by education entrepreneurs, but by groups with strong political connections.

One of the key questions relating to FDI is whether the foreign players that come to India would be subject to the same regulations as Indian institutions. If they are, they will either not come, or very poor quality institutions will come, since the exercise of autonomy is central to an institution’s ability to achieving excellence and brand value. The draft Foreign Universities Bill deals with these issues, and may clear the confusion that exists now.

He makes the important point that good private systems work only in the context of a good public system. In the absence of good public institutions, private institutions simply exploit the excess demand, instead of raising their quality.

Prof. R. Natarajan

**BITES – CII Workshop
On
Global Enterprise Product Support Forum (GEPS)**

**Venue: Dayanand Sagar College of Engineering
Date: 31st May 2008
Sponsor: CII
Host: Dayanand Sagar College of Engineering**

CII has setup a specialized Global Enterprise Product Support Forum (GEPS) which aims to unify efforts around skill building, talent identification and other areas that help drive the product support industry to the next level. The objective is to position India as a Global Leader in Technology Services and Support by 2012.

Today's Global enterprises use a mix of technologies to keep their business running and are required to optimize their technology investments. Given the complex scenario and the diverse interplay of technologies that are in use, enterprise product support can be very challenging. Enterprise Support is very broad in its scope and covers applications solutions, development tools, systems software related problems, hardware, communications and networking related issues.

India has a workforce of almost 10,000 employees working in enterprise product support and accounts for approximately 3% of the global workforce. The total Enterprise product support services export revenue for India stood at US\$ 1.4 billion in 2007. There is a significant growth momentum and IDC forecasts that the enterprise product support industry in India will grow to accommodate 15% of the global enterprise product support workforce by 2012. The overall revenue from India in the enterprise product support services export will also grow to US\$ 10.7 billion in 2012.

Enterprise product support centres in India are a virtual extension of the support organizations around the world for the ISVs. Bangalore, Delhi Mumbai, Pune, Hyderabad and Chennai are the established centres for providing enterprise product support. There are three levels at which enterprise product support is provided including development support, deployment support and operational support.

An Enterprise Product Support Professional is responsible for providing quality support with a high degree of customer satisfaction while also providing responsive and reliable technical solutions and information to the customers.

The attributes of an enterprise product support personnel should include:

- In-depth technical knowledge
- Analytical skills
- Good communication skills
- Service attitude and strong customer handling skills

The work profile for enterprise product support is highly technical and is designed to handle complex issues having significant business impact on the client's business. The training provided in enterprise product support is significantly high-end and complex and deals with learning on technologies and platform around the products supported.

Accessing and hiring quality talent is becoming increasingly challenging in the Indian IT Industry. While talent exists in large numbers the key task for support organizations lies in understanding the availability of talent pool, shifting through this dynamic talent pool and choosing the candidates that best fit with the job role and organization. As a career option, enterprise product support services provide the high level of skill enhancement and a wide choice for individuals aspiring for a career in support.

Enterprise product support promises excellent career growth options, growth towards onsite support, growth for experienced professionals to senior level in a technical or managerial role, exit options to consulting, product/project management, product marketing, product development and training etc.

In order to enhance the awareness and showcase the incredible potential and career opportunities available in Enterprise level, CII-GEPS and BITES organized an awareness seminar in Bangalore on 31st May 2008 for the students and placement officers of BITES member colleges.

Vikram Tiwathia, Chief Information Officer, CII gave the welcome address, Dr A. L. Rao, COO, Wipro Limited was the Guest of Honor and Dr R. Natarajan , Chairman – BITES delivered the Keynote Address.

Rajeev Shroff, CII – EPS - Spokesperson and Shekar Ganapathy, CII-GEPS Lead – Academia briefed about the Potential and career opportunities available in Enterprise Product Support.

What is new in the world of Information Technology?

HP, Intel Corporation and Yahoo! Inc. announced the creation of a global, multi-data center, open source test bed for the advancement of cloud computing research and education. The goal of the initiative is to promote open collaboration among industry, academia and governments by removing the financial and logistical barriers to research in data-intensive, Internet-scale computing.

The HP, Intel and Yahoo! Cloud Computing Test Bed will provide a globally distributed, Internet-scale testing environment designed to encourage research on the software, data center management and hardware issues associated with cloud computing at a larger scale than ever before. The initiative will also support research of cloud applications and services.

HP, Intel and Yahoo! have partnered with the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA), the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) in Germany to form the research initiative. The partnership with Illinois also includes the National Science Foundation.

The test bed will initially consist of six “centers of excellence” at IDA facilities, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the Steinbuch Centre for Computing of the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, HP Labs, Intel Research and Yahoo!. Each location will host a cloud computing infrastructure, largely based on HP hardware and Intel processors, and will have 1,000 to 4,000 processor cores capable of supporting the data-intensive research associated with cloud computing. The test bed locations are expected to be fully operational and made accessible to researchers worldwide through a selection process later this year.

Source: www.hp.com/hpinfo/newsroom/press/2008/080729xa.html