



## QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION – PRIMACY OF INSTITUTIONAL BUILDING A CASE STUDY OF A MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

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### **ABSTRACT**

Higher education aims at developing human capital of a high caliber. The embedded systems and processes for such high quality human capital can't be over emphasized. The quality could be measured in several ways such as realizing intended outputs and long term benefits to the society. The processes meant for quality, its measurement and their impacts are essentially a function of the purpose, structures and systems for higher education.

Given the scope of such understanding, it is proposed to present a case study of a management institute. The purpose of the case study is to:

- a. provide a descriptive account of quality and its related matters over a period of time;
- b. delineate important steps at different points of time;
- c. continuously assess quality standards and make provision for assurance;
- d. evolve systems for continuous maintenance and upgradation;
- e. align with the larger processes of the institute including faculty involvement and participation and finally;
- f. generalize some of the important lessons of such quality assurance.

The case study brings in detail measures including continuous improvements and innovations as much as involvement of stake holders particularly students and faculty. It also draws upon the experience, institute's growth and reputation as indicators and its acceptance by significant stake holders. The quality and its assessment on a continuous basis and measures to improve it will be discussed during the presentation. The autonomy and freedom of the institute have been highlighted in the quality assurance.

### **INTRODUCTION**

This is a case study of a management institute in India – a description of its growth and reputation. While narrating its growth, the study underlines the value of its flagship program and its relevant aspects. It highlights chronologically some of the major milestones. The case study speaks to the importance of the evolution of ideas, the decision-making processes and the implementation. The emphasis on rigor and relevance to the significant clients and their sustainability over these years has also been presented. The study describes the processes, the systems developed and the people responsible for sustainability and institutionalization over the years. The systems developed have infused institutional values including quality and innovative thinking.

## **The case study is presented in two parts:**

- I. Flash back – a case study on the Institute and the program:
- II. Continuation of processes on the foundation laid earlier

### **Part One**

#### **Flashback (1992 – 95)**

This is an account of TAPMI's experience in raising the quality of management education through its two-year Post Graduate Program in Management. The quality has come through various processes at the Institute. In the last three years the Institute has evolved a culture in which the processes have been strengthened and quality has been the ultimate goal.. Everyone has expressed the importance of quality. Quality has been central to all decisions in the various stages of its implementation. A clear understanding of what is required of the program was reached and everyone sequentially worked on it: faculty, seeking support from others, raising quality of facilities and infrastructure, providing better facilities to the students, improving upon admission procedures and enabling faculty to do their best.

#### **A Score Card**

The score card in brief is visible. The number of applicants seeking admissions has increased five fold. The placement record has been substantially improved and is probably one of the best both for the number of jobs and for the quality of placement. From a small faculty of 6-7, there are now twenty highly qualified members with substantial experience in academics, industry or business. About 70% of the faculty holds Doctoral qualifications or their equivalent.

The quality of infrastructure is one of the best in the country. The computer centre, the library, and the classrooms are designed aesthetically to meet the needs of students and faculty.

#### **Decide What Is Needed and Be Clear about the Objectives**

About three years back serious thought was given to the objectives and outlook of the Institute. It was felt that the Institute should become one of best in the country and must be seen and known as such. It must have an image of a good management institute offering high quality programs. To achieve this objective the concentration was on the two-year post-graduate program which has been the major activity.

Whatever is being taught or carried out as part of the program was to be done intensively, rigorously and systematically. This particular stance gave adequate mileage and provided leads to think about other areas for improvement so that continuous improvement became the norm..

#### **Learn from a Pioneer**

A plan had been drawn to restructure and redesign the program. It was also decided that it was more advantageous initially to follow a pioneer in management education in India. IIMA was chosen. All of its positive aspects such as regular schedules, continuous evaluation system, adequate preparation for classes including teaching material preparation in advance, feedback

system, norms of discipline, attendance, working days and packing the program with intensive curriculum have been included.

## **Strengthening Faculty Resources**

Simultaneously the faculty resources needed to be strengthened at least in some of the major functional areas and additional faculty members were recruited for each of these areas. The process of recruiting was facilitated through contacts and friends in the academic institutions and later on with advertisement in newspapers. In a span of three years time, 12 highly qualified faculty members were added. This has added to the capacity to strengthen the program and other plans.

## **Involvement of Faculty**

One of the major changes was giving responsibilities to each one of the faculty in the conduct of the program and other non academic matters. Responsibilities are shared by each of the faculty members – with each taking responsibility for co-ordination of an activity such as program, placement, MDPs, research etc.

The faculty reviews the program closely from time to time and makes improvements or changes as necessary. The PGP Committee is the major policy making and implementation body for the program. The committee assists the program coordinator and provides the needed support in carrying out program objectives. It is another indication that not only objectives of the program are clearer to faculty but also the output expected of them.

## **Faculty Development**

Faculty development is consciously planned as a corollary to the plans, directions and identity of the Institute. This is a major step in bringing out the best in the faculty members and in encouraging them to excel in their work.

The processes and tasks necessary for the implementation of change are examined in detail. Faculty members have taken responsibilities for specific tasks and resources. A process has been initiated to have frequent reviews of tasks and feedback on activities and consultations. The faculty is capable of handling both professional and administrative tasks on their own. Each one of the faculty members has a large share of responsibilities in the Institute.

Continuous efforts are made to strengthen faculty competences by updating of skills, teaching abilities, writing, publishing and enabling them to participate in various conferences and forums.

## **Curriculum Development**

The curriculum meets with the standards of best institutes in India. While the process and pedagogy needs some strengthening, the curriculum has firmly articulated the needs and issues in keeping with the current changes and future scenarios. The rigor and discipline through which it is imparted is firmed up and the norms for the conduct of the program have been thoroughly streamlined.

The curriculum takes into consideration the changing market needs as reflected through feedback from alumni and students as well as other sources. The Institute has the benefit of networking with other national and international institutions. The support of institutions, participation in conferences and forums both in India and abroad by the faculty have strengthened the ability of the Institute to respond to the ongoing changes in the country and elsewhere.

A major constituent of the program is students' induction. Elaborate plans and activities are part of this activity. It starts with the address by the Director.

A small group of students is allotted to each faculty member. Students are told in advance what they are expected to do as part of the program and how they should conduct themselves in order to get greater mileage from the program. They are also told to seek faculty help even in personal matters.

The students, thus, have sufficient understanding of the Institute and its activities. They realize that the program is quite rigorous and regular preparation for the classes is necessary. As the schedules are quite tight, the students have to put in consistently hard work.

The students, through the Student Handbook, are aware of the information about the program, norms of discipline, rules and regulations, hostel facilities, co-curricular activities, etc. The active faculty advising and support system helps students cope with the pressures of the program.

All the activities are facilitated by a simple functional and flexible system. The Library and the Computer Centre are open an average of 14 hours a day for six days in a week. These two important major facilities are seen to be highly responsive to the needs of students. The expanded facilities of library with about 300 useful journals, current literature on management, current data bases and the latest software add greatly to the facilities. Thus, large investments have been made both in the computer systems and on the library.

## **Autonomy of the Institute**

The institutional make-up and processes cannot be appreciated fully unless its autonomy is understood. The autonomy has been largely facilitated by the regular conduct of the Governing Council meetings and its functioning. Once the policies are laid down and accepted, implementation of such policy is left to the discretion of the Director.

## **Board of Management Studies**

The Board has been constituted with academicians and practitioners of repute who meet once in a year. This forum is a think tank to provide a window on the ongoing changes in the country and elsewhere. It advises on the relevance of courses and programs.

## **Style of Management**

The style of management at the Institute is largely entrepreneurial and participative. Wherever opportunities are available, they have been sought continuously for the benefit of the

Institute: industry support, alliances and networking arrangements, participation in academic and professional forums including exchange programs abroad.

As the activities are faculty oriented, staff members working with them have enough opportunities to participate in each of the Institute's activities. Hence, they feel responsible to do their jobs well. Many of them share work without being even asked. They do enjoy and support the standards of quality at the Institute.

There is also a good deal of informality at the Institute. Staff feel comfortable in meeting with the Director and seeking his support or help as well as offering suggestions to him. A sense of understanding and appreciation of the work and responsibility prevails throughout the Institute.

## **Culture of the Institute**

Each one of the members of the Institute feels good by doing something on their own rather than being told to do This has added a different flavor to the Institute's activities.

A system of personnel policies has been purposefully cultivated to be fair, informal and respectful of each other for one's worth. The Institute can also claim little formal hierarchy and much less officious behavior. Activities by and large are carried out smoothly through collective efforts. Issues are discussed and then resolved.

## **Part II**

### **Developing a Flagship Program**

A flagship program designed with greater clarity of focus, design, conceptual backup and delivery was attempted.

It was decided that the program would be offered on such important considerations and the best possible faculty offered it. It was also decided that admission to the program would be streamlined and a large pool of students would apply for it through a test which is known for its quality and national coverage. Simultaneously, the program office was organized to provide necessary support to faculty and students. Placement services were planned in advance and responsibilities assumed by the faculty. Many of these initiatives proved to be very useful at a later date. Continuous improvements were in place to make these actions sustainable. It was equally important that the program was delivered by well qualified and experienced faculty and the efforts directed to recruit such faculty.

While some of these foundations were laid, others such as standards, rigor, discipline, schedules and continuous evaluation of students were also taken up. A requirement of 100% attendance, out of classroom preparation such as pre-reads of teaching materials and cases, library work, computer labs were decided suggested and implemented. Such schedules with adequate scope for out of class activities and time for reflection made students realize the importance of education that is offered on a systematic and regular basis with learning as the basic objective. Each faculty member was oriented towards such a process and the program office chaired by one of the members of faculty.

## **A Framework for the Program**

- Identifying programs and activities that will provide a sustaining competitive advantage for the future.
- Involving faculty and other members of the staff in almost all the critical activities of the institute to create shared understanding.
- Working on the medium and long range plans simultaneously for raising human and physical resources.
- Induction of high-quality faculty with an appropriate mix of industry experience and academic excellence.
- Proactively seeking help and support from other reputed institutions.
- Building competence and capacity of the institute for academic and applied research, consulting and practice.

## **Redesign of the Program**

On the basis of the above considerations, the program was redesigned and restructured from semester to a term system with clear responsibilities for the faculty and students. The redesign aimed at greater scope for learning, provision of regular preparation and continuous evaluation, diversity of learning inputs, frequency of assessment of performance feedback, and advice and guidance to students through self-study, group work, etc.

Its entire implementation was carried out by students and faculty. The very first batch of students in 1993-95 was shown to have been benefited in respect of learning, discipline, faculty support and guidance. A good deal of fine-tuning in the schedules, delivery of courses, regularity, time for self study and preparation (including pre-reads, cases) for the classes had taken place. The approach has helped the institute move forward and initiate many other changes and innovations later. The placement record was exemplified by the batch all round performance. Highly qualified and experienced faculty members were recruited from some of the premier institutes and a number of visiting faculty contributed to the program and its success during this period.

## **Admission of Students**

It had been the endeavor since the beginning to select students from all over the country through an admission process which is not only transparent but highly professional. The first step in this regard was the decision to use CAT of IIM for admitting students since 1995. This in and of itself had the advantage of a large pool of students that facilitated better choice. Besides, an elaborate and systematic process of selection was instituted by then. It included not only group discussions, but extempore, summary of writing on group discussion, two sets of extended personal interviews one with a panel of faculty and other with a panel headed by the Director.

## **Continuous Improvements**

Continuous improvements in the curriculum, learning processes for students, addition of new courses, and changes including practice/experiential learning were made with a yearly review of the program by the entire faculty. The feedback from students on courses and by the industry representatives as well helped significantly.

## **Recruitment of Faculty**

Highly qualified faculty members (PhDs) were recruited with ample opportunities and freedom to excel in their respective disciplines. Liberal support was extended to attend conferences both nationally and internationally and also facilitation of internal workshops and seminars. Faculty members were encouraged to collaborate in the preparation of working papers, case writing, presentation of papers in seminars, conferences. In general, faculty development was emphasized. Annual faculty workshops for renewals, updating and innovations were offered. The faculty advisory/coaching system resulted in student-friendly relations and purposeful activities.

The Institute directly encouraged and supported non PhD faculty to secure doctorates and at least six of them received doctoral degrees. The Institute also signed an MOU with a university in the vicinity. Three doctorates are in the pipeline and one has already completed. Cross- functional and inter-disciplinary group work among the faculty was encouraged as much as student-faculty collaborative research. At least 50 papers and cases have been prepared as Compendiums over a period of three years. With some effort, these will be worth publishing in peer-reviewed journals and also as a book.

While some of the basic ideas of an institution and the program had been thought through, it was the faculty members in general who have taken the responsibility of implementing the nitty-gritty of the program. The first set of changes was found to be critical for the Institute to drive itself towards many others later and establish some kind of identity for itself.

## **Internal Processes**

During this period, a number of internal processes have been developed through active participation and involvement of faculty. To begin with each of the area/discipline has been organized into a working group of faculty to facilitate individual faculty needs for teaching and research responsibilities, administration, executive education and other functions. The functioning of these groups resulted in better understanding and sharing among faculty over a period of time and these groups produced positive results. They could also realize the value of sharing, accommodation and working together for their own benefit and also of their colleagues.

## **Shared Responsibilities by Faculty**

Progressively, faculty had taken more and more responsibility for admissions, placement, program management, research and publications and extra- and co-curricular activities for students. Matters pertaining to students' development, their involvement in general, their welfare and growth were largely taken responsibility by the faculty.

The general culture was that the staff members (non-teaching) had given willing and whole- hearted support in all matters pertaining to the Institute. Over the years, they had grown and the Institute had provided direct support for their welfare, growth, better emoluments and facilities. More importantly, they were treated equally and on a less formal basis (even friendly). Thus, faculty as a group exhibited qualities of fairness, friendly and informal relations, and participation in all important events and activities.

A number of processes evolved for a dynamic and forward looking environment, facilitated by the Director and supported by the Governing Council (constitutional) body. Priorities both academic and non-academic were largely set by the faculty with guidance from the Director. Decisions on investments and expenditures and revenue generation flowed from such priorities: infrastructure and facilities such as one of the best libraries for management education in the country.

### **Some of the Important Milestones**

- Redesign of the program – 1993
- Reorganization of work and responsibilities 1993
- Admission through CAT 1995
- Equivalence of the program to MBA by AIU – 1996
- An output based internship: MIP - 1997
- Weekend Post Graduate Program for Executives at Bangalore - 1997
- NGO internships - 1998
- Case Development Since 1999 from internship experience of students with the guidance of faculty. (about 600 cases have been registered with ECCH)
- Faculty Working Groups – 2000
- Outbound Program and executive education – 2000
- Accreditation of the Program by NAAC (with five stars) and NBA with “A” grade – 2001
- Process of Developing *VISION* – 2005 - 2003
- Initiation of AACSB Accreditation (in progress) – 2003
- Thematic Curriculum – redesign - 2004
- Faculty Student collaboration research – 2005
- Centre for Executive Education - 2005

### **Results and Outputs**

With many initiatives and also innovations, the Institute has become top quality and top ranking. It has attracted the best of faculty and students and has an excellent record for placing students in jobs after graduation. Industry has duly recognized it for collaboration and partnerships through Chair Professorships, Campus Connect, and Corporate Colleges with some well known names: Infosys, WIPRO, HP, ORACLE.

### **Rewards**

The entrepreneurial and innovation orientation in most of the activities of TAPMI has been well rewarded. The following are some of awards received from AIMS:

- Best Young Teacher Award – 1998
- Best Innovation for Management Teaching (MIP) – 1999
- Best Teacher Award – 2000
- Best Research Paper Award – 2000
- Best Case Writing and Presentation Award – 2001

There are many other awards received by our students in the last five years. The Best Management Student award has been given consecutively for two years.

## **Institutional Credentials**

Some of the institutional credentials:

- 15<sup>th</sup> rank by 1997 itself;
- was one of the few to obtain NBA (AICTE) accreditation in 2001 with A grade for five years and also NAAC with 5 stars;
- one of the few recognized by AICTE for faculty Development programs since 1997;
- consistently made surpluses and the pooled amount is over Rs.10 crores plus investments of about Rs.10 crores in hostels, IT infrastructure, Library and the institute itself. Even though the facilities were leased by the institute;
- recruited reasonably good faculty and has been able to maintain quality with 80% of them having PhDs (though there has been some turn over);
- first institute to go for AACSB International accreditation and it is in the process of completing the work and should be able to obtain its accreditation towards the end of 2009;
- innovations in its curricular matters, pedagogy and creating an academic environment and a place for learning for faculty and students. (Some examples may be cited: Output oriented intern ship (MIP), a major revision of curriculum with themes, faculty students collaboration for research, NGO intern ships, TCCL);
- some awards: Best Teacher-twice, Best Young Teacher, Best innovation in Pedagogy, Best Case writing over the last 7-8 years from Association of Indian Management Schools (AIMS);
- awards received by our students consistently over the last 5-6 years in competition with best of premier institutes in the country;
- number of candidates seeking admissions has gone by about 100 times since 1992. (Since 1995, TAPMI was one of the few members of CAT of IIMs);
- the financial turnover has been increased by 100 times since 1992;
- was one of the few institutes to obtain ICICI Chair Professorship;
- received Rs.10 lakhs as an endowment for a Chair Professorship from Syndicate Bank in 2000;
- along with two institutes in Germany and USA, designed an unique Global MBA Program (online and onsite format with cohort as a major focus);
- has partnership with Asian Institute of Management for Case Research;
- has an arrangement with University of Oakland, USA for faculty exchange facility;
- is one of the members of consortium of two other institutes (NMIMS and XIME( for conducting PhD program in management since 2006;
- has an agreement for conducting PhD program with MAHE (Manipal University). The first PhD has been awarded.

## **Continuous Growth**

The Institute has grown by building on its own strength. A Consortium PhD Program, a Global MBA Program along with institutes in Germany & US and a Faculty Exchange Program with Oakland University, Detroit (USA) were some of the important developments. Partnership with Asian Institute of Management for Case Development in the Philippines was another.

Much has happened without any external financial support and thus, the Institute was truly a self financing one. It must be noted that with a limited base of finances and without a campus of its own, the Institute has grown to be one of the most reputed ones in the country.

The Institute's growth is a function of investments made in raising the quality of the program and on faculty development with a decent academic infrastructure. The continuous improvements added dynamism to the institute and its activities. The process of institution building lends itself to sustaining the quality and professional outlook. All of this together have made the Institute what it is today.

## **A Residential Campus**

A large residential, modern and green campus is about to be completed soon. It was financed by a soft loan of about 47 crores from a commercial bank and also with internal accruals of Rs.10 crores.

## **Current Phase of the Institute**

Consolidation, expansion, new programs, internationalization of curriculum, programs, international accreditation (AACSB) is going to be the top priorities of the Institute. Executive education, faculty development, research and publications will get added importance.

## **What Can Be Learned**

- There is a clear participative culture of developing an institute for building capabilities and enhancing its capacity, generating internal resources as much as seeking outside support.
- Offer contextually relevant programs based upon not only the existing knowledge but also on experimenting with new sets of concepts and practices.
- Evolve methodologies that support a high degree of inter-dependence within and outside.
- View changes as strategic thrust in the institutional make-up.
- Seek diversity in the composition of faculty and students and value it in offering them quality education, its excellence, innovative programs etc.
- Maintain a balance of internal structure and systems with the external world and influencing processes both within and outside.
- Innovate and create a culture of innovation across the institution with a clear understanding that a management institute needs to innovate on pedagogy, curriculum, courses, methods of internal working and alliances on a regular basis.
- Orchestrate and weave a coherent system which requires an institutional framework or to say an architecture.
- Support a dynamic and evolving institution and offer the best possible education, research and other managerial services to the best of clients and the stake holders.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the descriptive account of this Institute underlines a high degree of emphasis on institution building, its belief in developing a fairly respectable program in spite of constraints and an ability to build its capacity for resource enhancement and substantial improvement in the infrastructure and facilities. The Institute continuously harped upon ideas,

innovations and initiatives and thus enabled its expanded activities. The institutional makeup - its informal and participative culture - enabled such initiatives and utilized many of the ideas for implementation. These included integration of teaching and research, new courses, flexibility in offering electives, the ability to outsource and continuously search for improvements in all aspects of institutional life. The search behavior added to the capacity of the Institute to look for better and new ways of conducting the program. Value was added by bringing in concepts like replication of reality of the corporate world in the class-room and the institute and by behaviors such as greater participation of students, larger interaction among students and faculty, learning opportunities, user-friendly ambience, discipline and regularity and a social system that has a community/family orientation.

Appendix: 1

### **Broad Ideas**

These are some of the broad ideas that have been found useful during the course of building the institute:

- Developing larger horizons in the program;
- Providing an arm for understanding local enterprises businesses/organizations;
- Application of concepts/theory to real problems as much as possible;
- Integration of disciplines;
- Voluntariness in understanding social dimensions and approaches;
- creative fora of students and their active participation;
- a larger space for students operations (non-class room basis);
- students' strength for writing research papers, case studies and teaching materials;
- Alumni participation of selection of fresh students;
- employers participation in students selection process;
- appropriate incentives and rewards for faculty to publish papers and books;
- integration of teaching and research;
- Practitioners perspective in preparing teaching materials and cases;
- Continuous thrust on new dimensions and new areas to the program;
- Identifying thrust areas through faculty participation;
- Adding value to the program through inputs which have potential demand;
- Self-learning systems through students self-evaluation and faculty self evaluation;
- Strategic alliances and networking in key areas like executive education, entrepreneurship, NGO management;
- Plan of projects for improvement of education through active participation of students and faculty;
- Building resources (additional) through students support (survey of MIP and brand building exercise);
- Building community of interest to the institute (parents, alumni and students);
- Scouting for opportunities
- A seminar course on bio-graphies and auto-biographies of business leaders and company histories and profiles.

### Summary of Process

- ◆ Faculty shared responsibilities,
- ◆ Implementing standards that are set collectively,
- ◆ Continuous improvements in such standards,
- ◆ thrust on intellectual pursuits,
- ◆ Large opportunities for faculty learning and growth,
- ◆ Thrust on continuous investments in institutional priorities such as knowledge centres;
- ◆ Evolving processes for sharing, interacting and collaboration between students and faculty,
- ◆ Multifaceted growth of students through both classroom and non classroom activities,
- ◆ Continuous growth of co-curricular and extra curricular activities and their quality,
- ◆ Standard Annual events like Episode, Brandscan, Atharva, Sankalp and Tattva etc,
- ◆ Creative pursuits by students through both curricular and co-curricular activities;
- ◆ Students' involvement in the community with the guidance of faculty.
- ◆ Creation of academic outputs such as cases, research papers jointly by students and faculty.

- ◆ Wholesome MBA education
- ◆ A thematic approach
- ◆ Emphasis on learning and reflective orientation than merely teaching
- ◆ Greater emphasis on practical and experiential learning with outputs
- ◆ Focus on context/situation, application and orientation
- ◆ Higher level of interactions among faculty and with the students
- ◆ A clear learning output in every theme for students and faculty,
- ◆ Self assessment of students

Abbreviations used in the Case Study:

*IIMA – Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad*

*CAT – Common Admission Test*

*AIU – Association of Indian Universities*

*MIP – Management in Practice*

*ECCH – European Case Clearing House*

*NAAC – National Assessment and Accreditation Council*

*NBA – National Board of Accreditation*

*AACSB - Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business*

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