Purpose and efforts to bridge the skills gap

The Management Graduates today are deemed by industry as not being ‘ job ready’ and lacking the skills required successfully applying disciplinary knowledge and adding value to our globalised, knowledge economy. In this examination of postgraduate management education, the limited empirical evidence and research literature in comparison to that for postgraduate programs, particularly the MBA, is overwhelming.

In a bid to satisfy industry demands, the most common response among business schools are the development of employability skills and enhanced involvement of industry professionals in curricula content and design, both subject to potential failings and criticism. This review of business school efforts to bridge the skills gap also examines the role, function and impact of management education, a research area significantly overlooked in recent years. The present research has discussed the viewpoint on the Management Graduates skills gap and the assignment of responsibility for its resolution.

Few research questions which have been raised are, Is management education for enhancing higher-order intellectual and moral skills, such as criticism and inquiry, or to facilitate the development of ‘ job ready’ Management Graduates through industry-relevant education and research? This exploration of functional role leads us to reflect on the impact of management education on industry and society at large and their reciprocal influence on management education.

The current research paper looks in to deep the various other issues responsible for the deep gap between the demand and supply of skills.

Management Education in 21st Century – Purpose & Efforts to Bridge the skills Gap

Vipin Agrawal

Assistant Dean – Research

Integrated Academy of Management and Technology, Ghaziabad, India

Dr. Vidhi Agrawal

Assistant Professor

Ajay Kumar Garg Institute of Management, Ghaziabad, India

Introduction: Business and industry need highly educated and skilled employees. Employers are looking for graduates who have skills in three major areas: strong academic and thinking skills; strong technical skills in the field in which they work; and employability skills such as the ability to work in teams and communicate effectively. Numerous challenges in the twenty-first century will confront corporations worldwide. On a macro- level, these challenges will include globalization (Church, 2000; Friga, Bettis, & Sullivan, 2003; Weisman, 2000), increasing competition, limited resources, deregulation, enormous scientific and social change (Barrett & Beeson, 2002), rapid advances in technology (Greater Expectations, 2002), and growing diversity among the workforce, customers, and others (Allen, Bordas, Hickman, Matusak, Sorenson, & Whitmire, 1998; Business-Higher Education Forum, 1997; Weisman, 2000). At the organizational level, corporations will evolve into smaller, more flexible corporate structures characterized by a reduction in hierarchical management layers, decentralized functions (Rabuzzi, 2001), and a focus on high performance,

autonomous teams to address issues of quality and customer satisfaction (Business-Higher Education Forum).

Industry analysts report that for success in the workplace, employees need to possess entry-level employability skills. These essential skills are often viewed as a company’s most important raw material. Perry (2003) states “ as the information age turns the nature and type of work we do on its head,” our traditional views of work, professions, and specialist skills are continually challenged and reshaped. Employers have stated that they prize worker flexibility and people who can “ think outside the square” in finding new and better ways of completing job tasks. Employers will seek people who can think, conduct research, and adapt to change. To succeed in this complex environment, organizations will require individuals who possess a wide and complementary array of knowledge, skills, and attributes that allow them to confront successfully the complex issues facing firms on a global scale (Weisman, 2000).

The next generation of MBA graduates will require specific skills to confront challenges to their organizations that include: a) strategic and integrative thinking, particularly with regard to global competition and the application of technology (Allen et al, 1998; Weisman, 2000); b) analytical capability to sort through large amounts of information to focus on the most relevant aspects (Graduate Management Admission Council [GMAC], 2005); c) a capacity for quantitative reasoning (Greater Expectations, 2002); d) the ability to influence and persuade highly diverse groups of employees, customers, strategic partners, investors, and other stakeholders (Friga et al, 2003; Greater Expectations); e) the ability to lead in an environment that spans

global cultures (Barrett & Beeson, 2002); f) decision-making in an environment of ambiguity and complexity (Mumford et al, 2000; Weisman, 2000); g) creative problem solving (Barrett & Beeson; Martin & Butler, 2000); h) adaptability to change (GMAC, 2006); and i) a high degree of self-knowledge and social judgment (Mumford et al, 2000; Nesteruk, 1999).

Research literature suggests, however, that there has been ongoing concern within the business community since the late 1980s that higher education does not adequately prepare graduates in these skills (Fugate & Jefferson, 2001; Lundstrom, White, & Schuster, 1999; Pearce, 1999; Porter & McKibbin, 1989). Many corporations urge academia to place a greater focus on a real world orientation of how business operates (Chew & McInnis-Bowers, 1996; Hersh, 1997) by emphasizing these skills in their curricula to a greater degree.

Chonko and Roberts (1996) specifically report on dissatisfaction among corporate leaders over the lack of business graduates' communication and interpersonal skills, intolerance for ambiguity and diversity, inability to think critically and to recognize common themes, and the students' adherence to a single, narrow perspective of the world. The authors continue that corporate leaders perceive business curricula as falling behind in global strategies, and sacrifice qualitative thinking for a tools orientation. The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business [AACSB] (2003) responded to these concerns by revising its guidelines for business curricula on several occasions between 1990 and 2000 (Fugate & Jefferson, 2001). The AACSB revisions, written by a committee of representatives from industry, labor, academia, and government, warned that a large percentage

of post-secondary business degree programs were not keeping pace with rapidly changing demands in the marketplace. The AACSB reports stressed the need to include in curriculum revisions a greater emphasis on ethical and global issues, demographic diversity, and awareness of macro-economic considerations.

However, there are encouraging indications that the pessimism over a perceived lack of relevance in MBA programs may be unfounded. For example, several premier universities, including the Stanford University, University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School, Columbia University, and the University of California, Berkeley, have begun experimenting with innovative approaches to MBA education to respond to industry’s concern. One such approach involves a required core curriculum that builds a basic framework in quantitative, analytical, strategic, and problem-solving skills drawn from scientific disciplines across the university, such as economics, mathematics, social sciences, and other areas.

Moreover, there are indications that industry and academia increasingly are working together to identify critical issues facing MBA programs (Austin, 2002; Business-Higher Education Forum, 1997; Friga, Bettis, & Sullivan, 2003) and to develop and implement curriculum changes that offer MBA students greater real world experience through internships, case studies, simulations, and other experiential learning approaches (Cudd & King, 1995; Mintzberg & Gosling, 2002; Rabuzzi, 2001).

Curriculum Issues: Changing demands are requiring educators to use innovative teaching techniques to integrate employability standards into the

curriculum. Education curricula must provide specific and appropriate preparation for students who choose enter the workforce immediately. By using innovative teaching methods, students are provided an opportunity to apply essential skills to real-world situations in both classroom and work-based learning activities. Industry partners should be included in the curriculum design phase to enable planners to better understand and incorporate real-world procedures and systems in instructional strategies.