



Management Education: An Approach towards Nurturing Students' Employability Skills – A Study on Tripura Students

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ABSTRACT

In this highly competitive and dynamic world, Management graduates need to have requisite skills and knowledge to adapt to the expectations and requirements of the industry. The paper will address an important facet of the Management Education that looks at the development of the employability skills in the students in accordance to the expectation of the employers. Students passing out from schools have many expectations while entering to the Management institutes. Management Education should aim at fulfilling students' expectations while developing the skills and knowledge required meeting the industry expectation. Keeping in view the scenario of Tripura the paper will attempt to find the role that the Management Education can play in inculcating the employability skills among the students of the state. It will attempt to find the lacking of the students of Tripura in respect to employability skills through a questionnaire survey and will try to come up with a contemporary approach that can be effective in nurturing the students of Tripura. This approach of Management Education suggested in the paper will make the students of Tripura efficient with skills and knowledge required to sustain in this rapid changing competitive work environment.

Key Words: Employability, Industry expectation, Management Education, Skills, Work environment

INTRODUCTION

Over sixty years ago, Charles Gragg, one of the originators of case teaching at the Harvard Business School, stated: "Education in the professions should prepare students for action." But to maintain a relationship between the academy and employment is a difficult task as it can erase the academic freedom, as it can become a process to train graduates for job than improving students' intellect and knowledge. However, it is undisputed that Management Education should be responsive to the Market demand. This approach of Management Education no way downgrades the academic value as it focuses on learning with ample training. In a rapidly changing world, graduates need to be lifelong learners. In this situation the role of Management Education is should be to enhancing students' knowledge, skills, attitudes and abilities and at the same time empowering them as lifelong critical, reflective learners. The 'employability' of graduates should not be seen as the primary focus of Management Education as employability is a subset of, and fundamentally contingent on, transformative lifelong learning. At an organizational level, employers have been, for some time, proclaiming the need for highly educated and skilled people if their businesses are to be successful in a rapidly evolving, global economy. Furthermore, most organizations in which graduates are employed have undergone significant change in the last decade and expect internal organizational structure and strategic objectives to continue to change. These changes will be prompted by the continuing information revolution, by a growing awareness of the need to be responsive to customers, clients and other stakeholders, and by the need to adopt an international perspective. All of this has impacted on the graduate in four ways: the need for clear understanding of the job, the need to be more flexible, the ability to work in teams and a clear career progression goal. This has lead to innovation and changes in approach among business schools. Therefore to cope with the changing scenario Management Education should develop a contemporary approach which will be enough in itself to make graduates well equipped for facing the stern realities of the competitive market. To think of such contemporary approach, knowing the inadequacy among the students who are entering into the Management Education is of foremost importance and focusing on the market reality to make these students fully equipped with proper employability skills, knowledge and life long learning ability is also need to be considered.

EMPLOYABILITY & PRESENT DAY INDUSTRY EXPECTATIONS

In a general sense, 'employability' relates to a person's ability to gain employment. Today technical skills are labeled 'discipline specific skills' or 'hard skills', and other 'soft skills' as 'employability skills'. In regard to this notion it is expected that management graduates would develop a range of personal

and intellectual attributes beyond those traditionally made explicit in programmes of study in higher education institutions. Employers want interactive and personal attributes which will enable to fit themselves with the dynamic work culture. The core interactive attributes are communication, teamwork and interpersonal skills. These are necessary to communicate, formally and informally, with a wide range of people both internal and external to the organization; work effectively in teams, often more than one team at once, and to be able to re-adjust roles from one project situation to another in a changing work situation. Personal attributes are attitudes and abilities including intellect, knowledge, willingness and ability to learn and continue learning, ability to find things out, willingness to take risks and show initiative, flexibility and adaptability to respond, self-motivation, self-confidence, self-management and self-promotion. These personal attributes are important to allow graduates to fit into the work culture, do the job, develop ideas, take initiative and responsibility and ultimately help organizations deal with change. Furthermore, 'problem solving' which has become 'creative problem-solving' and risk taking has become a key attribute for any management graduate. More recently, these have been further extended to include personal attributes, such as: loyalty; commitment; honesty and integrity; enthusiasm; reliability; personal presentation; commonsense; positive self-esteem; motivation; sense of humor; balanced attitude to work and home life; ability to deal with pressure.

STUDENTS' EXPECTATIONS FROM THE MANAGEMENT EDUCATION- PERSPECTIVE OF TRIPURA STUDENTS

The attention within Management Education to enhance students' employability potentially serves a number of important purposes. First, it responds to students' motivations for entering higher education. A survey on 1035 school students of Tripura through direct interview method shows that 650 students are willing and interested to go for Management Education after the completion of their higher secondary. The most important personal reasons cited for going for Management Education by these students is, alongside 'to study a subject that really suits me' are three vocationally-oriented reasons: 'to have a professional career', 'to improve job prospects', 'to gain entrance to a well-paid career'. Building a professional career is an important aspect of higher education in the present day scenario. To meet the students expectations in building their professional career Government and Private Institutions are spending large sum in the development of the higher education. An important part of the rationale for the large sums which the Government invests in higher education is the contribution which it makes to the development of the country's human capital. The more employable students are, the greater the economic yield is likely to be from this investment. Tripura students are also a part of these large phenomena. They can not be separated and isolated from the whole business. So the expectations that have been found out are not only the expectations of a class but are an over all view of the present day students' expectations from Management Education. Students' expectations to have a professional career are an out come of the post globalization, where every individual likes to have a professionally managed career. But professionally managed career does not come without proper skills and knowledge. So the students of Tripura have shown keen interest in improving their job prospects. To meet with the students expectations Management Education continuously should thrive for proper grooming of a student to a direction which can make them employable in this competitive market. The third expectation of the Tripura Students to gain entrance to a well-paid career is also a common trend of the modern day life, where luxurious life style is a symbol of some one's success. These expectations of Tripura students are quite aligned with the present day scenario and in this era of globalization higher education programs that seek to prepare management professionals should assert to a more ambitious set of goals to meet the students' expectations.

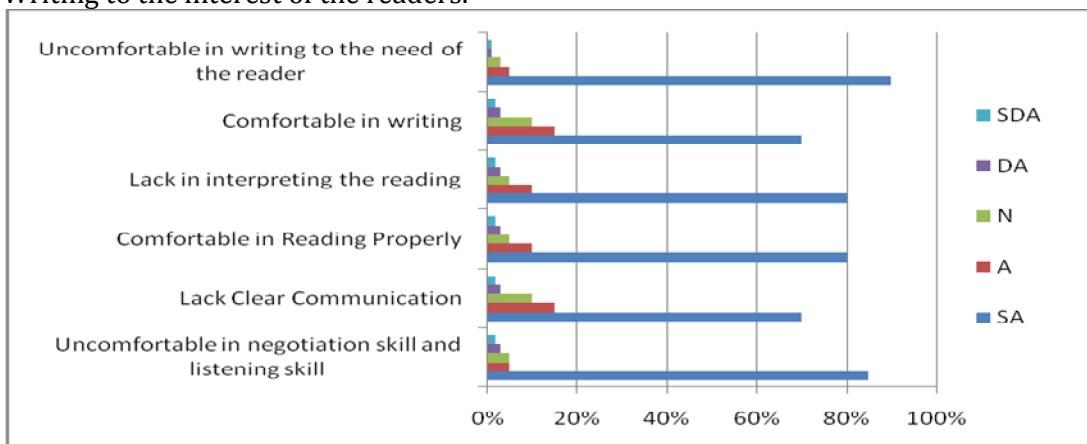
AN INNER VIEW TO THE EXISTING AND NONEXISTENT EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS OF TRIPURA STUDENTS

Incorporating with employers' expectation and students' expectations can be a challenge for Management Education. To cope with this, Management Education need to identify the lacking of skills and knowledge in the students and required to nurture those skills to meet the expectations of both - the students and the industry. From the perspective of the Tripura students it is needed to be identified the lacking of skills and knowledge among the students who are entering into the realms of Management Education. To do so a questionnaire survey has been made among 650 students who have completed the secondary education from various schools of Tripura and are interested to pursue

Management Education. The questionnaire has been developed keeping in mind the expectations of the employers and the requirement of the present day industries. It is also necessary to identify the key generic employability skills that are required for an individual along with the job-specific or relevant technical skills as these additions are seen as essential by the employers. The questionnaire study has focused on these several employability skills which are considered so important in this present day scenario.

Communication Skill: Good and effective Communication skill contributes to the productive and harmonious relations between employees and customers. Therefore modern day employees should have good communication skill which will contribute to the growth of the organization. But it is often found that students passing out from schools lack good and effective communication skills. Effective communication skill depends on various important aspects of communication which generally the students ignore or are unaware of. Tripura school students can be evaluated on this basis which can give us a good idea about their employability skills. Five basic attributes of communication skill have been taken into consideration for this study which are of the most importance to judge one's communication skill.

- Listening and understanding a speech.
- Speaking clearly and directly.
- Negotiation and clarity in response.
- Interpreting any writing independently.
- Writing to the interest of the readers.

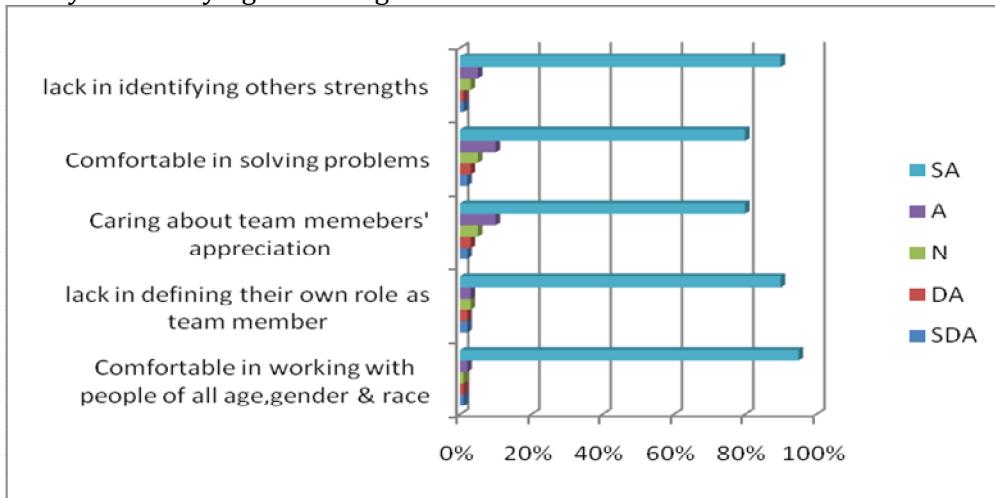


While assessing the communication skills of Tripura students' from these five parameters it has been observed that out of 650 respondents 85% of the students are lacking negotiation skill and proper listening skill. Moreover 70% of the total respondents are not comfortable in communicating clearly and directly. Though the students are found comfortable in reading a document but when they are asked about interpreting a writing individually they have shared their problems in doing so. The students are found comfortable in writing but they lack the ability of fulfilling the interest of the readers in their writing as they are not sure of how to do this. This clearly shows that the students of Tripura who are aspiring to enter Management Education have real problem in communication and this can be a huge barrier in bringing up the employability skills in these students.

Team Work Skill: Team work skill contributes to productive working relationships and outcomes. In today's work culture it is almost impossible for an individual to work alone. For this reason organizations today give immense importance on team work. Starting from policy making to implementation of policies and even in problem solving activities organizations today hardly depend on individual efforts. Therefore team work is of primary focus of any organization. Any employee who wants to make his professional career successful should have the team-manship spirit and the ability to work in a team. Therefore to develop the team work skill is an important issue of the Management Education. Keeping this in focus it has been tried to find out the team work skill among Tripura students aspiring to become management graduate. Team work skill can be judged from one's ability to work with every body in any situation at any level. So five basic characteristic of team work has been taken into consideration while judging the 650 respondents' team work skill.

- Working with people of different ages, gender and race.
- Defining self role as a team member.

- Comfortable in solving problems with other.
- Giving value to team members' appreciation.
- Capability of identifying the strengths of team members.



The students of Tripura have been found comfortable in working with people regardless of their age, gender and race. But the students are not sure of defining one's role in a team. Over 90% respondents are unaware of how to define one's role in a team. This clearly shows that the students lack practical knowledge of team work. The students are comfortable about their team members' appreciation and they are also comfortable in working with others in solving problems. This points out to the fact that students possess the willingness of a team work. While identifying the strengths of others in a team the students are again found to be lacking practical knowledge as they are not sure of how to do this. In this regard it is found that more than 90% students are not aware of how to identify the strengths of others present with him in a same group. So it is clear that though students are willing to participate in team work but lacks practical knowledge or idea of participation which is a negative aspect of their employability skill and it is needed to be addressed while grooming them for future job market.

Problem Solving Skill: Problem-solving skill contributes to productive outcome for an organization. It has been observed that an employee having good problem solving skill is always an asset for an organization. Solving problems in and outside the organization requires great deal of efficiency and maturity along with good knowledge and analytical skill. The students of Tripura as an aspirant of good professional career need to have this problem solving skill which will not only contribute in entering into the professional world but also will help them to sustain there. Problem solving ability depends on the factors like:

- Having ability of creative and innovative solutions to problems.
- Giving practical solutions to problems.
- Ability of independently identifying problems and solving them.
- Problem solving ability in team.
- Applying range of strategies in solving problems.

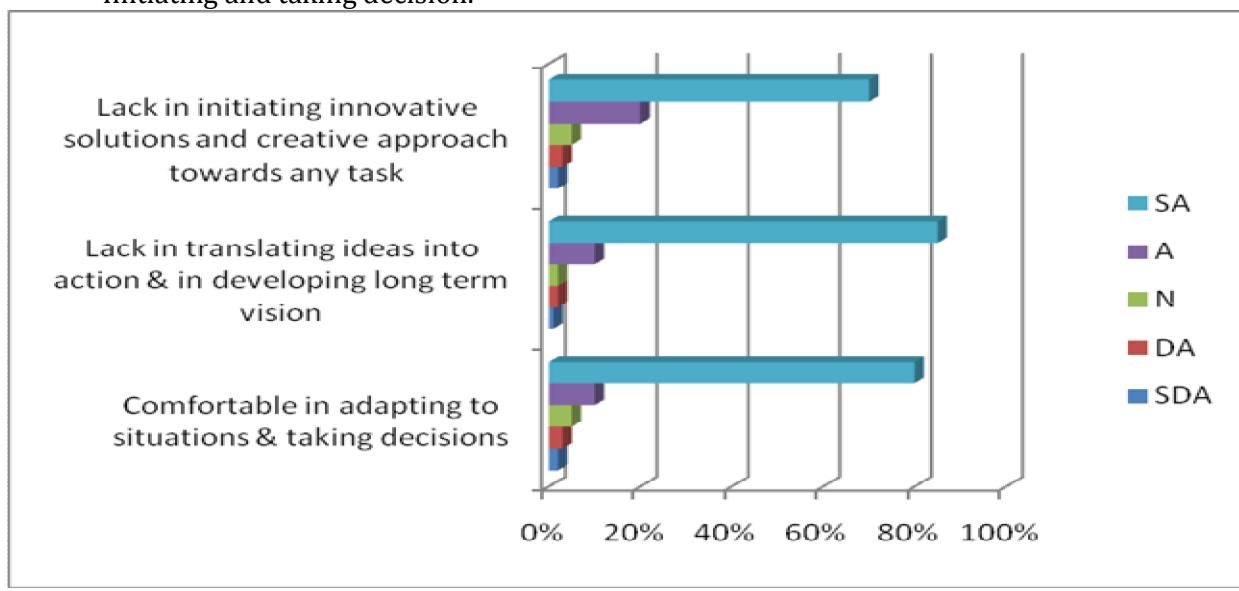
Having creative and innovative solutions to problems is an important component of problem solving skill. While surveying the 650 students of Tripura it has been found that students are not sure of their ability in respect to innovative and creative solutions to problems. More than 85% of the students are saying that are not comfortable in solving problems innovatively and creatively. Developing practical solutions to problems is a critical issue for the students. As students rarely get opportunity to solve problems in real life situations it is very difficult for them to think of developing practical solutions to problems. This is again been reflected in the responses of the students as more than 95% of the students have expressed their discomfort in developing practical solutions to problems. Identifying and solving problems independently is again a big task for the students due to their lack of practical knowledge. So the same is reflected in their responses as more than 85% of students have said that they are not comfortable in this area. Solving problems in team requires willingness and experience. Students though have intention lacks in experience which is quite evident in their earlier responses and it has been again substantiated by their response towards this. When students were asked to response to the question on Applying range of strategies in solving problems they were found to understand nothing of the problem as they have no knowledge base to do so. More than 95% of the

students expressed their discomfort to this question. This clearly indicates that the students' knowledge base and practical experience needs to be developed.



Initiative and Enterprise Skill: Initiative and enterprise skills contribute to innovative outcomes which generates opportunities for an organization to flourish against the all odds of competitive market. Taking initiative and enterprise shows the employees ability to contribute to the goal of the organization. Challenging situations demands such work power and employee having this can make a mark in the growth of his professional career. Initiative and enterprise skill comprises of various components like:

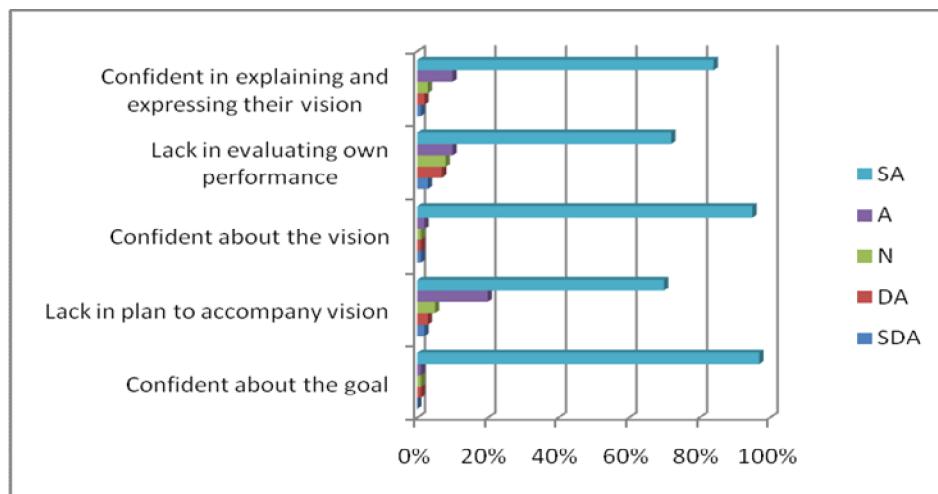
- Adapting to new situations.
- Developing creative and long-term vision.
- Having creative approach towards any task.
- Translating ideas into action
- Initiating innovative solutions.
- Initiating and taking decision.



The students of Tripura have been found moderate in initiative and enterprise skill. While above 80% of the respondents have shown their comfort in adapting to new situations and in initiating and taking decisions more than 85% of the respondents have expressed their discomfort or lacking in translating ideas into action and in developing creative and long-term vision. Students are found lacking in initiating innovative solutions and creative approach towards any task. In this regard more than 70% of the students have shown their discomfort. This indicates that students in Tripura are not groomed in a way where they are facilitated enough with such opportunities which can help them to acquire such skill.

Self Management Skill: Self-management skill contributes to employee satisfaction and growth. Managing self is always a big issue for any professional to achieve success and desired growth. It is an accepted fact that a person may have diverse qualities, skills and enormous knowledge but without having the self management skill he/she cannot make progress in the career. Moreover in the professional world where there is so much competition and challenge, self management is extremely required for smooth progress. Self management skill comprises of varieties of components and it is a wide range of study. But to judge the students of Tripura five basic components of self management skill have been tried to find out.

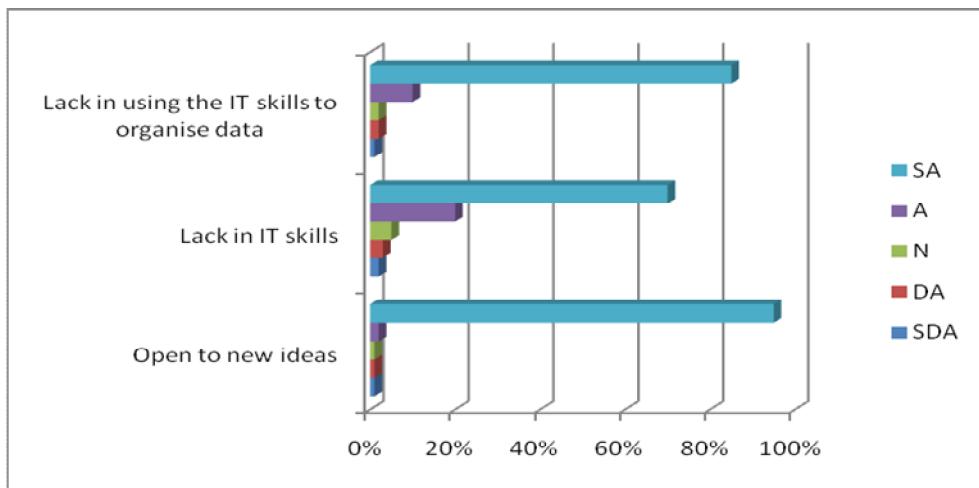
- Ability to develop a clear personal vision and goal.
- Developing a proactive plan to accompany the vision.
- Having knowledge and confidence in own ideas and vision.
- Evaluating and monitoring own performance.
- Explaining and expressing own ideas and vision.



Ability of developing clear vision and goal is not an easy task as it requires lot of understanding of the self and the out side world. From the 650 respondents most of them are found lacking in this ability. Though 97% of the respondents are found clear of their personal vision and goal they are found to be lacking confidence in developing a proactive plan to accompany their personal vision and goal. More than 70% of the respondents have said that they have no idea how to develop a proactive plan to make their vision successful. This shows that the students have intention to become successful but they have fewer clues towards achieving this success. Students are found confident about their own vision as they have made up their mind about their goal. Hence more than 95% of the respondents are found to be confident in their own vision. Evaluating own performance contributes to the growth of an individual. This is an activity which is the base of any success. Self evaluation is also important to decide upon personal growth. Students of Tripura region are not much confident in evaluating their own performance as 72% of the respondents have expressed their incapability in evaluating their own performance. Another important aspect of self management is the ability to express one's own ideas and vision. Students are found to be lacking in this area as 84% of the respondents have said that they are not comfortable in explaining and expressing their own ideas and visions. This particular part of the study points out to the fact that students are not retrospective and they do not have the skill to manage them which can prove to be a vital aspect of their failure or success in the professional world.

Learning Skill: Learning skill contributes to ongoing improvement of company operations and outcomes; and expansion in employee and company operations and outcomes. At the same time it also contributes to effective execution of tasks. Therefore an employee today should have adequate learning skill which does not only imply one's ability of learning effectively but give emphasize on one's ability of learning as a continuous learner. To find out the learning skill of the students of Tripura who have a desire to study Management courses four parameters have been identified.

- Enthusiasm for learning new things.
- Open to new ideas and techniques.
- Knowledge of basic IT Skills.
- Knowing the use of IT to organize data.



Students or employees, who ever it may be, in today's world continuous learning is a very important aspect of survival. Person lacking the ability of continuous learning will definitely lack in employability skills. One important component of continuous learning is the willingness and interest for learning new things. The students of Tripura are found quite active in this particular aspect. All most 99% of the respondents have expressed their eagerness in learning new things. The study also shows that the students are not rigid and they are open to new ideas. More than 95% of the students are found to be ready to accept new ideas and techniques. As per the knowledge of modern techniques are concerned the students are found to be lacking various important things. Among 650 respondents almost 70% of the respondents have said that they lack basic IT knowledge and almost 85% of the respondents said that they do not know how to use IT to organize data. It indicates that the students are interested in continuous learning but they lack certain skills to fulfill their intention.

A CONTEMPORARY APPROACH OF MANAGEMENT EDUCATION TO DEVELOP EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS OF TRIPURA STUDENTS

Problem-based learning as an approach to teaching, learning and curriculum innovation can prove to be very effective in building up Tripura students Employability skills. Real-life problems provide the starting point for learning in a radically transformed instructional environment that is referred to as problem-based learning, or PBL. The "students" prospective and current managers jointly decide how to deal with these problems. In the process of grappling with these real-world challenges, students acquire the knowledge and skills needed by managers who lead by facilitating collaboration and building consensus rather than by relying on formal authority. To begin our discussion of problem-based learning, let us step inside three classrooms and listen to the instructors introduce the topic of employee selection.

Example of Problem-Based Learning: Near the end of the class session, the instructor announces, "The materials in front of you describe your next project on the topic of employee selection. You will have five class sessions of two hours each to complete this project. You will need to organize yourselves into teams of four to six members per team. Each team should identify a team leader who will coordinate project activities with the instructor. In this project, your team is constituted as a selection committee for an entry-level supervisory position at ABC Company. ABC Co. has experienced a number of problems in recent months culminating in the resignation of a senior Manager. Please see the project details for further information".

In this project, the instructor will design a selection process for this position, and then implement it with three final candidates. Instructor will have to decide which candidate to recommend for the position. The instructor will act as an observer and a resource to the team and will decide how he is going to complete his committee's assignment and to accomplish the learning objectives.

From the example, we can see that problem-based learning (PBL) is an instructional strategy that has the following characteristics:

1. The starting point for learning is a problem (that is, a stimulus for which an individual lacks a ready response).
2. The problem is one that students are apt to face as future professionals.

3. The knowledge that students are expected to acquire during their professional training is organized around problems rather than the disciplines.
4. Students, individually and collectively, assumes a major responsibility for their own instruction and learning.
5. Most learning occurs in the context of small groups rather than lectures.

There are two major versions of problem-based learning: problem-stimulated learning and student-centered learning. These two species of problem-based learning are defined primarily by the major goals of the curriculum and the extent to which the instructor or the student determines the learning objectives, the resources (e.g., references and relevant experts), and the modes of evaluation for each focal problem within the curriculum.

Problem-based learning strives to create the essential preconditions for successfully using motivational strategies. The instructor creates a supportive learning environment by encouraging students to take risks, by praising students for their risk-taking attempts, and by treating mistakes and "failures" as learning opportunities. The instructor assigns tasks at the appropriate level of difficulty. This precondition is achieved by choosing projects that are neither too easy nor too difficult for the student and by gradually increasing the complexity of each project. The instructor chooses each PBL project with meaningful learning objectives in mind. Finally, the instructor uses a variety of strategies to stimulate student motivation. To maintain students' expectations of success, the PBL instructor underscores how the curriculum has been designed to promote success. Projects have been chosen and sequenced in such a way that students will acquire the basic skills they will need to succeed in this instructional environment. Moreover, each project contains a knowledge base and a set of guiding questions that may prove helpful to students as they attempt to deal with the focal problem. Finally, students are encouraged to draw on other resources to assist them in thinking through and solving the problem. Each successful completion of a PBL project strengthens the expectation that effort leads to success. To underscore the value of learning activities in a PBL curriculum, instructors may use extrinsic or intrinsic motivation strategies. An extrinsic motivation strategy links task performance to consequences that student's value. These may take one of several forms: rewards for good performance, instrumental value in achieving future success, and rewards achieved through competition with others. Intrinsic motivation strategies are based on the assumption that students will expend effort on tasks and activities they find inherently enjoyable and interesting. Each PBL project contains six elements that most students find enjoyable or intrinsically rewarding.

1. Provides opportunities for active response.
2. Includes higher-level objectives and divergent questions.
3. Includes simulations.
4. Provides immediate feedback.
5. Provides an opportunity to create workplace-like products.
6. Provides an opportunity to interact with peers.

A Design for Using PBL in Preparing Managers – a way to develop Employability Skills of Tripura Students:

Major Components

Designing a management education program based on PBL requires one to consider five interrelated issues:

1. The realities of the workplace,
2. The goals,
3. The content,
4. The process by which the content is taught and learned,
5. Student evaluation.

By attending to these five issues simultaneously, the program designer increases the likelihood that students will be able to transfer their newly acquired knowledge and skills to the work context.

Realities of the Workplace - Crafting an educational program rooted in the principles of PBL involves making several assumptions about realities of the workplace. As discussed in Chapter One, the world of work is changing rapidly. There is an increasingly accepted belief that organizations must be responsive to their stakeholders. Managers are expected to collaborate with a widening group of people (e.g., staff, boards, customers, suppliers etc.) who may span the globe. They need expertise in solving problems and in creating a work environment that effectively and humanely responds to the

needs of increasingly diverse cultural groups. Moreover, the problems and the knowledge base relevant to these needs and problems are continually changing as well.

Goals - In light of these workplace realities, the following educational goals seem appropriate for prospective managers:

1. Familiarize prospective managers with the problems they are likely to face in the future. Such problems should be those with high impact; they affect a large number of individuals for a relatively long period.
2. Acquaint students with knowledge that is relevant to these high-impact problems. Such knowledge likely comes from a variety of disciplines, rather than from a single one.
3. Foster skills in applying this knowledge. Since PBL assumes that knowing and doing are equally important, students should be provided with opportunities to use their knowledge and to test its utility in dealing with real problems. In the process of applying the knowledge, students discover gaps in their understanding and in their ability to use the knowledge.
4. Develop problem-solving skills. Since the character of future problems is somewhat unpredictable, attention must be paid to promoting skills in finding, framing, analyzing, and solving problems.
5. Develop skills in implementing solutions. Consistent with the emphasis on doing as well as on knowing, students need opportunities to craft and implement proposed solutions. Simply analyzing a problem and discussing what one should do to solve it is insufficient.
6. Develop leadership skills that facilitate collaboration. Critical to collaboration are skills in planning and organizing projects, running meetings, achieving consensus, resolving conflict, making decisions, and listening to others.
7. Develop self-directed learning skills. With an exploding knowledge base and ever-changing problems in the workplace, managers also need to acquire self-directed learning skills. These include identifying gaps in their own knowledge, locating relevant resources, and evaluating the suitability and appropriateness of resources for the issues confronting them.

Content - Domain specific knowledge in a PBL curriculum is organized around high-impact problems of professional practice. PBL adherents follow this maxim: first the problem, then the content. Problems are used as the stimulus for leaning new content instead of the context for applying previously learned material. A major criterion guides the selection of domain relevant content. The content should be functional in fostering understanding of the problem, possible causes for the problem, constraints that must be taken into account when considering solutions, and/or possible solutions. Problem-relevant knowledge comes from variety of sources: selected management disciplines, the relevant expertise and craft knowledge of practitioners, the policies and practices of the organizations, and from experiences of the students themselves. Although the instructor may suggest pertinent reading material, students exploit an array of sources that may assist them in understanding and dealing with the focal problem a practice that is consistent with the type of on-the-job learning that PBL seeks to develop.

Instructional Process -In a PBL curriculum, students assume greater responsibility for their learning. The process by which they learn mirrors realities of the workplace and curricular goals. Accordingly, the process affords students repeated opportunities to practice and refine the skills needed to lead today's organizations skills in promoting collaboration, cooperative problem-solving, and implementation of change. Unlike traditional M.B.A programs, the basic unit of classroom instruction in PBL is a project. Embedded in each project is a high-impact problem, a set of learning objectives, and a collection of reading materials that illuminate different facets of the problem.. During a class session, the instructor takes on a variety of different roles. Although the instructor may occasionally offer direct input through mini-lectures, the predominant role can be characterized as "an unobtrusive guide on the side." If the instructor senses that the team is heading in the wrong direction, he/she may or may not choose to intervene. Missteps or mistakes represent occasions for learning and often provide valuable insight into the problem, the problem-solving process, the solution, the implementation, the group's functioning, or the student's own sense of self.

Evaluation- Student evaluation, like the goals, content, and instructional process, reflects the realities of the workplace. As part of each PBL project, students are expected to perform tasks and to create products that approximate what they would do while solving a similar problem on the job. Student performance during a project provides a basis for formative evaluation. Accordingly, students receive feedback from peers, the instructor, and practitioners about their performance, as well as on the products they create. When providing feedback to students, we underscore what they have done

especially well and raise questions for them to ponder. Given the nature of PBL projects, students may receive feedback on their performance relative to any of the eight goals described earlier. As a way of encouraging students to consolidate what they have learned and to think about transferring newly acquired knowledge to their future roles, some PBL projects require the student to prepare a reflective essay. This essay details what the student learned and how he or she could use the insights, knowledge, and skills in the future.

CONCLUSION

As it has been argued here, PBL represents a radical departure from the traditional way of preparing managers. This approach can play an instrumental role in developing managers who can make meaningful contributions to organizations as they grapple with a changing environment. Managers are being asked to move away from command-and-control models of leadership to "transformational" styles. Problem-based learning holds promise for preparing leaders who have the capacities to facilitate, collaborate, make decisions, and implement solutions to significant organizational problems. Management graduates also develop personal and team-learning skills that will support further professional learning throughout their careers. The lacking among Tripura students that has come out during the questionnaire study can easily be fulfilled if such learning process been adopted properly. The required employability skills among Tripura students can be developed by adopting this PBL model as a contemporary approach of Management Education in alignment with the industry expectation and students' expectation.

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