**Value Chain for Quality Education**

**Ishrat Husain**

*Address to the 4th International Conference on Business Management (4th ICoBM) at 26-27th February, 2014 Sukkur IBA*

Congratulations for organizing this international conference. So my thanks to the organizers for taking this this very important initiative. I also would like to place on record appreciation for Nisar Siddiqui and the faculty and students of Sukkur IBA who have really done a marvelous job in turning around this institution by their dedication and hard work. . IBA Sukkur  being located in a backward area of the province of Sindh has its own disadvantages. That you have maintained high standards of education and produce quality graduates from this institution is a remarkable feat which very few organizations institutions can achieve . I think all of you deserve our collective thanks and everyone who is interested in the development of education in Pakistan can only admire your efforts.

Academic institutions are not really known for their buildings and infrastructure or even the quality of their faculty but for the contribution they make in the generation dissemination and application of knowledge. In Pakistan unfortunately we have been emphasizing on producing meal tickets called degrees rather than imbibing the instincts to assimilate the knowledge and apply that knowledge to the real world problems faced by us. Seeing this assembly of students I have decided that I would address you on a subject of great importance ie. the value chain of quality education of management .We have always heard that for management education to have successful outcomes it must emphasize on high quality, relevance and rigour. These are abstract terms that need to be further dissected. . . There are so many business school producing MBAs and BBAs and all kind of degrees who profess and preach the same concepts of quality, relevance and rigour. .But my basic hypothesis is what distinguishes one institution from the other is the strength of the whole value chain just not one or two components . Unless all these components are glued together you really cannot have quality education. So what are these components?

First and the foremost the starting point is the admission process . This should be open , transparent and merit based . If we cannot withstand the culture of nepotism or bribes in admitting students we are laying very weak and unstable foundation. There are institutions where you can buy degrees without going through the classes, studying much and cheating at the examinations. This is an anathema for quality education. Unless the entry is based on merit and merit alone you're not going to the get the first foot in the door as far as quality education is concerned .In addition to merit , we should be able to ensure that the students being admitted have the right attitude and the capability to bear the workload for the next four years. In other words the person is serious minded not only for getting grades but is able to acquire the competencies being imparted in the school. It is also an obligation to ascertain whether the student has the aptitude for management education or not or that his father is forcing him to do MBA to get a better job. That is an absolutely wrong approach of admitting someone to a business school. If he is under pressure or under direction from somebody else but his heart isn’t there I don't think he should ever apply what to speak admission , .Attitude, aptitude and merit should be the recipe for admission but I want to add an important point that both Sukkur IBA and Karachi IBA are following . There is much hidden talent among the poor families in the backward districts. These poor families do not even aspire for applying for admission for these talented children at schools like IBA as they assume these are beyond their financial reach and are highly expensive. As they cannot afford it we must reach out to them and bring this talent from their homes in a proactive manner, to give them the tools, mentoring and coaching to make up their deficiencies, to groom them and if they are successful at the admission tests then they should be given free education, lodging and boarding. This is our responsibility that we should try to identify these nuggets of gold that are hidden somewhere . We cannot remain completely oblivious to this as the ones who usually apply to our schools come from well to do families.

The second component of quality value chain is that when we admit bright and talented students we should give them the proper faculty . If we do not have excellent faculty and only those who cannot find job somewhere else become teachers we would be doing a great deal of injustice to those bright and talented students. We must have full time faculty members recruited on the basis of qualifications, knowledge and expertise . They should not use the academia as the last resort for finding jobs. Because we are training the future generations and they can only be trained by the best faculty members who will be their role models . Not only they should be qualified they should also have an interest in grooming the students and should be responsive to the curiosity and inquisitiveness of the students. They should not shut up or shout down the students who are asking questions. They should not feel affronted that their students are challenging them in their class because learning is two way process . It is not simply that because you're a teacher you're superior to the students . Even after the class the teachers must devote some time for the weaker students in their class in order to bring them up to the average speed and standards of the class. One of the attributes I would like to see is the faculty members in Business schools acquiring industry experience. It is not necessary to have worked there but they must be engaged in consultancy or research or in case studies so they have practical knowledge of how the businesses are actually run and operated. That makes them a much better teacher than simply assigning chapters from the book which anybody can do .They would be able to demonstrate the application of concepts and theory in actual practice.

The third component is the curriculum of a business school which has to be both broad as well as deep. I will suggest we must give our students a wide choice for their specialization and with new knowledge being generated so rapidly we cannot have a curriculum that was designed 10 years ago. It will become obsolete as the practices must have changed even within a short span of 5 years. I don't think the class of 2008 at IBA ever had any lecture or ever had an idea of what digital marketing was about but today Digital Marketing is one of the most important tool which the students of current class have to acquire. So the curriculum renewal and revision in response to what is happening in the industry is extremely important .At at the same time the Business students should be given a broad understanding of history, philosophy, logic, ethics, political science because the decisions they are going to make are not going to be purely technical decisions but they are the decisions which are being made in the context of social, economic and political conditions . In absence of this broad exposure and understanding our students will remain technicians and never be able to become leaders. We live in a globalized world and I expect that knowledge of one of the foreign languages such as French ,Arabic ,Chinese will improve your employability not only in Pakistan but also in the international market where there are many job opportunities which cannot be accessed because of the lack of mastery of the foreign language skills

The fourth element is the pedagogical tools. Just giving the monologues and lectures by the teacher is something which is common today . But there are many other effective ways of learning such as case studies , assignments , report writing , experiential learning, observation visits to the plants and factories, simulation games, role playing, problem solving etc. What the teacher should do is not just assign a text book and say chapter 1 to 4 are going to be covered for the midterm and chapters 5 to 10 in the final exams. We have to make learning more interactive ,dynamic ,hands-on and practically oriented. So there is a need to have a more diverse array and tools for pedagogy.

The fifth element is that when the students come to the business school they should not just be exposed to simply classroom or the academics . What the employers are looking for is a well balanced personality. Let me tell you that having a CGPA of a 4.0 opens the doors for you but if you cannot communicate your ideas, if you cannot make a presentation to even your own colleagues, if you are so full of yourself that you think that everything else is a dumb or fool and you have all wisdom then you will not be able to lead the team. The employer will soon find out that you are not very useful to his organization. Therefore emphasis on interpersonal skills, team building skills ,communication skills, emotional quotient is extremely important .The schools must also provide you opportunities for fuller participation in extracurricular and co-curricular activities where you interact not only with the outsiders but also your colleagues . You learn the techniques of planning ,managing, financing and delivering activities , giving you hands-on experience on how things are actually done .This experience is going to become very important in your professional career. One of the things we have found extremely useful is working on a real world problem in a company and developing options to solve that problem . We call that experiential learning project(ELP). For example, Continental Biscuit need not pay millions of rupees to a consultant because the students doing ELP project will be able to provide that service . This is a win-win situation as you will actually learn the application of your knowledge while the company would have found a solution to the problem they were faced with.. You also have to be engaged in internships not only in the business internship but also in community service. You are fortunate there are only 7 percent of you getting higher education while the rest 93 percent of your age group have never seen the face of a college or University. You have to realize this responsibility to help them. If you come from a village go back to your village during the holidays or summertime and work with the people of your age group, try to share your knowledge . You can teach in a school or take part in polio or immunization campaigns in your communities or villages or teach farmers the right dose of fertilizer application to their crops. . This makes you a good citizen and a human being besides being a professional.

The sixth component is that no business school can afford to remain a teaching institution and the faculty has to engage in on research and case studies on continuous basis. There are two advantages of research and case studies, one the classroom teaching becomes enriched with the knowledge generated from all those case studies. The teacher is not just reciting the text book published in the United States, Canada or UK but telling them what is actually happening in our own environs. How is the organizational behavior different in emerging economies compared to what the US text book tells us , what is happening differently as far as the motivational skills in Human Resources management are concerned, why is that the marketing campaigns and practices by even MNCs are so customized. This kind of discourse and discussion enlightens the students who become very much engaged as they can relate better to this rather than reading the hackneyed chapters from their books. This also is a good opportunity for the teachers to contribute to the society. Most Pakistani companies compared to the multinational are working below their efficiency frontier. People who are management specialists teaching at business schools can help these companies move from within the efficiency frontiers to the efficiency frontier. This will earn them profits which will ultimately benefit the country.

The eighth factor I would like to emphasize is the good quality of physical infrastructure and ICT facilities .. Sukkur IBA would not have achieved this much had there been no quality infrastructure and ICT facilities. These are what I call the enabling environment, in which you can work with ease. If the teachers don't have a place to sit or even a laptop to work on or the multimedia is unavailable , this will not only affect the teachers but the students will also suffer along. Quality education is very much dependent upon the quality of physical infrastructure and the ICT and;

Finally no business school would ever be able to make a name unless its graduates are placed in good positions, enjoy decent salaries and have a satisfactory career progression. Therefore liaison with the employers, bringing them to the campuses, having job fairs and career seminars are part of the school’s basic responsibilities. Exposing the companies to all the changes taking place in your business school continually will bring you good placements. Eventually the admissions will also be dependent on the success we have in placing our students. If within six months we are able to place 90 percent of the class, the parents will appreciate and spread the word of mouth that other kids should study at your school because a student’s chances of getting a good job after a decent education on a good salary will become high. This is how the circle of the quality value chain is completed. Placement is the feedback loop to the admissions and then any other company when it gets integrated.

Thank you very much.