

## **WHY IS IT THE RIGHT TIME TO LOOSEN THE GRIP OF MANAGERIALISM?:**

### **A COMMENTARY**

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As a faculty member teaching in a management program, I relate very closely with the content in the article ‘Have we come in the grip of Managerialism?’ A proponent of the term managerialism the former editor of Harvard Business Review, Magretta (2012), expressed that, “We all learn to think like managers, even if that’s not what we’re called.” The central idea of managerialism is that all the organizations, irrespective of their core business, can be managed according to existing management theories, and interestingly, this perspective, has firmly ingrained its way into the business schools around the world. Most MBA programs create generalists, who’re trained in similar skills having exposed to the same literature through a similar pedagogy and examples, mainly if not exclusively derived from the American context. Datar et al. (2010) for instance, presented a comprehensive research on the state of MBA education in the United States on the assumption that most of the programs were germane and required to be rethought. Notably, although the context of their research was primarily American MBA Institutions, but the findings could be useful under a variety of settings. For example, management education in India has completed over six decades of its existence this year (i.e. 2020) as part of the formal higher education system which may not be a long enough span for evolutionary results, but is suitably appropriate to evaluate and consolidate the offerings of our programs by analyzing if and how managerialism has been useful or not useful for management graduates, the industry and the society at large. In other words, management education in India has reached ‘a stage’, (which the author refers to) from where the institutions must take a call on how to move ahead alongwith a thought on its direction.

Further, the author in his views on management education and managerialism raises a number of relevant questions. To begin with, the ‘functional perspective’ of business schools for instance, has been iterated under the following quote: *“As things progressed, much of the work in Management Studies got involved in adopting a functionalist perspective with the aim of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of managers and their organizations, by identifying the rational techniques and ways of behaving that promoted these goals”*

In business schools, the curriculum is divided into different specializations. This may be problematic because most of the solutions for business problems exist at the intersection of different functions. Teaching business problems in silos could be detrimental for the students. Podolny (2009) pointed out in his article that the disciplinary silos, generally popularized by business schools, often tend to leave the students unaware and confused about real-life challenges that they might face in their jobs. By and large, teachers in management education often tend to convert from one discipline to another, which in turn, may not follow an organic process. In fact, many of them seem to continue teaching their own disciplines, often without placing problems within a proper business context. To meet this challenge, there is a need for more faculty development programs that focus on teaching methodologies. In the absence of such facilitation, one learns through experimentation. However traditional and archaic it may sound, teaching per se, is an art that one effectively masters with experience. Every year, a teacher evolves; at the outset, the journey of a teacher per se is the same, whereby s/he follows textbooks, prepares slides and delivers lectures. Over a period of time, while many may be caught in this routine rut, but ideally one should look to evolve, by bringing about in one's teaching environment the interactions with different people, placed within a context to share the real-life situations and challenges. In other words, the teachers must look at bringing in more practical relevance to theoretical teachings. The students must be made to think independently, whereby s/he is able to connect together to different disciplines and aspects of life.

This concept has been highlighted by the author in the following lines from the article: *“Think about management practices such as business process re-engineering, 360-degree feedback, performance measurement and talent management, all of which are heavily researched, taught in business schools and commonly used in organizations today. Yet despite this, the relationship between management theory and practice is seen to be problematic - usually by academics, which believe that managers are not implementing the theories they've so carefully constructed!”*

As a matter of fact, the paradigm of industry-academia gap and conflict has been discussed by many authors in the past. Bennis and O'Toole (2005) for instance, discussed how business schools tend to lose their way by treating the subject of management like physical sciences. Branden burger (2019) made an intriguing introduction to his article by writing that students of strategy in business schools, often tend to get frustrated, because there seems to be a

difference between what they are taught vis a vis what they would like to learn. While, they tend to be trained well in analytical tools and frameworks, in reality, what matters is game changing strategies that essentially emerge from creativity and innovativeness. Thus, probably there's a need to tweak our approach to teaching management; we, possibly need to introduce the students to being more creative and innovative. This could be done through workshops, live projects, experience sharing sessions etc. Additionally, the element of humor for instance, has mostly been disassociated with the world of education in our country; it is time to incorporate such elements in the delivery of higher education. Amos Tversky amongst others was famous for teaching with humour.

The author makes a very relevant point by stating: *“Challenge, today, is to prepare students for increasingly complex organizations. Much has changed from industry 2.0 to industry 4.0, necessitating students to develop deeper understanding of the continuous changes that are taking place and their fallouts. Among others, the ability to think critically, decide wisely, communicate clearly, and implement effectively have become the orders of the day.”*

A one size fits all approach can work if the conditions change marginally and organizations do not expect breakthroughs. But if expectations from students include creative outcomes continuously; their individual strengths and weaknesses will have to be taken into account. While one may follow a detailed and a well-planned process, the other may aim at creativity through chaos. As the article says that, managerialism has gradually spread its roots, it may well be a struggle to challenge the deepened roots, the rigid and insecure mindsets and an established system at large. Efforts towards a scenario in which both students and organizations are able to identify 'their way' to excel or as the author quotes Prof Sumantra Ghoshal's words in the article 'the smell of the place', whether it is chaos or clarity, must be the way forward.

## References

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