Tipping Point Leadership in B-Schools: Exploring Opportunities While Managing Change

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Abstract

Business schools often face challenges on several fronts. Student enrolments are often unpredictable. Due to low pay scales offered, not many are interested in entering the teaching profession. Even among those who have a flair for teaching and a passion for developing the competencies of students, their interest wanes over a period of time due to the absence of a performance-driven culture. Absence of motivation is due to the fact that in most academic institutions, high performers are rarely recognized. To add to this, teachers and students may get involved in bureaucratic issues that only dissipate their energy further. If promoters are only interested in developing education as a business, it compounds the problems further. This stalemate can only be improved by a radical change in the mindset and developing the leadership abilities of those who are at the helm of the affairs in educational institutions. Discipline is essential in an academic institution, but it cannot come in the way of academic progress. This paper highlights the need and relevance of applying the concepts of Tipping Point Leadership in bringing about a turnaround in management education in India. The paper also questions the Americanization of management education in India wherein student feedback is used as the sole means of gauging performance of a faculty member. This being more of an exploratory research, the paper highlights opportunities for future research and recommends the use of Tipping point leadership in instigating a culture of quality in management institutions.

Keywords: Blue Ocean Strategy, Business Schools, Edupreneurs, Leadership, Management Education, Tipping Point Leadership, Total Quality Management

1. Introduction

Effective Leadership is critical for sustainability of business. But it is also important for academic institutions to ensure their long-term survival. Let us first understand the genesis of the tipping point leadership theory.

In February 1994, William Bratton was appointed police commissioner of New York. The odds were stacked against him. New York was full of turf wars and crimes. Social scientists had given up hope. But then Bratton brought about a turn-around in the police department's efficiency in less than two years. Bratton was an old hand at managing and successfully steering such turnarounds.

Two management researchers namely W. Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne (both from INSEAD blue ocean strategy institute) tried to analyse the triggers of high performance and how a decrepit organization can be brought back to life. This gave rise to the concept of Tipping Point leadership. Tipping point is the inflexion point where a major change occurs.

2. Common Problems Faced by Organizations

- Prevalence of status quo
- Limitations of Resources

- Demotivated staff
- Vested interests working against organizational interests

These problems result in reduced productivity in organizations, improper utilization of resources and reduced profitability. Bratton's example led the researchers to arrive at a concept called tipping point leadership. Essentially, tipping point is about successful management of change. Once the beliefs and energies of a critical mass of people are unleashed, then one can expect a change for the better. How does it happen?

3. Tipping Point Leadership- Can this be replicated?

First, it is about leadership. Second, it is about focusing on resources that matter and then mobilizing the commitment of the organization's key players. These players have the charisma to silence the carping critics who always focus on what can go wrong.

Often leaders dread the huge hurdles that come their way. But in the end it is all about the courage and conviction with which the leader can overcome these hurdles. The authors assert that Bratton's success is not a matter of his personality alone- it is also about the methods followed by him consistently. Thus Tipping point leadership can be replicated.

Tipping Point Leadership (TPL) is about overcoming four main hurdles

1. Resource Hurdle- Focus on areas that need attention and seek support where needed.
2. Motivational Hurdle- Define the challenge and show people how they can shine.
3. Cognitive Hurdle- Let managers face problems head-on and find out new ways to communicate.
4. Political Hurdle- Identify, silence and isolate the armchair critics.

Often need for change is communicated to the team along with the rationale that invariably focuses on numbers. But Bratton believed that managers should witness reality. Here is a gist of some of the actions that he took as part of TPL:

1. Bratton insisted that all police officials travel via the subway so that they get a feel of the crimes that happen. The police officials started experiencing the problems that were faced by the common man on a daily basis.
2. Once the regulatory authority in Massachusetts decided to order smaller squad cars to cut corners. Bratton made the general manager travel in the smaller squad car to make him experience the discomfort. But he did that in a diplomatic fashion. Bratton did not fight the decision. But found an intelligent way to solve the problem.
3. He brought the policing staff to the community so that the latter's grievances could be heard and resolved.
4. Bratton appointed an expert communication advisor. He relied less on traditional forms of communication like memos and bulletins. Video messages by Bratton were flashed to the police staff and the advisor ensured that the media projected the strong messages of Bratton.
5. Reallocation and resources of staff was done based on real time statistics of crime rates.
6. Rather than hire more policing staff, Bratton identified strategic zones where crime rate was highest and he deployed plainclothesmen in these zones. The criminals got the message.
7. Arrest processing time was reduced from 16 hours to 1 hour by converting old buses as arrest processing centers.
8. In those days when no one knew what big data was, Bratton believed in data-driven policing. He successfully built a crime database.
9. Bratton chose to motivate a few set of people who could bring in a dramatic transformation in the way resources were managed and who could act as precursors for change.
10. Perform or Perish. The performance reviews were held with the top police brass and not just Bratton. As accountability increased, people became more way of performing well. There was no question of blame game.

"Youth and skill will win out every time over age and treachery." This was what Bratton firmly believed in. A victim of political machinations within the organization, Bratton understood that it was important to learn about the plotting and politics. He was able to identify a senior leader in the top team who could be trusted and could act as the sponsor of the change.

Bratton's alliance with the mayor's office and the city's leading media institution successfully isolated the courts

when they were up in arms against zero-tolerance policing. This case reflects the challenges associated with management of change and the rewards that can be reaped by addressing those challenges.

4. Objective of the Study

This is an exploratory research that aims to understand the conceptual relevance of the tipping point leadership theory and its effective application in business schools. The research questions can be delineated as:

- Can the tipping point leadership theory be applied in business schools?
- What are the challenges in implementing tipping point leadership in a business school?
- What are the challenges in a business school that can effectively be addressed by the principles of tipping point leadership?

5. Literature Review

In the last few years, the world has been witnessing to economic recessions occurring with alarming alacrity. The adverse impact of the recession is that it has eroded business confidence and led to contraction of investments. Renee Mauborgne of INSEAD business school says that during times of economic recession, it is important for businesses to embrace innovation rather that compete in a contracting market where the demand has attenuated. Firms have to focus on customers and create a new market space. This is the essence of Blue Ocean strategy.

A brilliant strategy that is not executed well is an exercise in futility. To embrace the blue ocean strategy, firms' leaders have to overcome four key hurdles to minimize organizational risk and make execution happen. These hurdles are- the cognitive hurdle, the resources hurdle, the motivational hurdle and the political hurdle.

Key to overcoming these hurdles is what is called Tipping Point Leadership. The theory of tipping points, which has its roots in Epidemiology, is well known; it hinges on the insight that in any organization, once the beliefs and energies of a critical mass of people are engaged, conversion to a new idea will spread like an epidemic, bringing about fundamental change very quickly.

Tipping point leadership builds on the reality that in every organization there are people, acts, and activities that exercise a disproportionate influence on performance.

To overcome the hurdles, leaders must embrace change and take bold steps, deploy resources where they are really needed, energize the high performers who are committed to organizational cause and have the presence of mind to silence the most vocal naysayers who cannot think anything beyond negativity. Tipping point leadership thus helps leaders build strategy execution into strategy making.

Cognitive hurdle recognition will necessitate the buy-in of employees who have to become agents of change. People must be aware of the need for a strategic shift. Tipping point leaders let people come face to face with harsh reality. This makes them understand that turnaround is inevitable and achievable.

A basic principle of tipping point leadership is the understanding that the key to creating a change fast, at low cost, is concentration, not diffusion. Leaders must refrain from allocating resources based on assumptions. Rather the leaders should focus on hotspots- activities that have the highest performance but are resource starved. It will be interesting to explore those activities that have scant performance act but are consuming significant resources.

In matters of successful strategy execution, leadership plays a defining role. Leadership is central in initiating the change for the enterprise's benefit (Vora, 2013). Leadership is critical to addressing the crisis of governance in environmental matters (Case et al., 2015). Transformation of safety culture in an organisation needs application of tipping point leadership concepts and proper allocation of resources (Heese, 2015; Ashphaq et al., 2015). As task difficulty increases, a leader's limited resource capacity may become overwhelmed by the experience of high levels of negative emotions. Transformational leadership is constructive while abusive supervision is destructive (Collins et al., 2015). Thus, the concept of tipping point leadership plays a role in improving governance, environmental performance and instigating a cultural change in the organisation.

Adequate incentives for superior performance are a must. Knowledge is increasingly seen as the organization's most important asset. The knowledge-based view dictates that by understanding the importance of knowledge as a competitive advantage, and leveraging it, organizations can compete in a differentiated and sustainably advantageous way. Despite having a big impact on both the academic and managerial world, organizations seem to struggle when actually faced with the practical implications of integrating knowledge in the firms. Deficient

incentive systems are the reason why many firms [including academic institutions] struggle with knowledge integration across firms (Chung et al., 2014). A good incentive scheme will enhance the quality of teaching talent. Schools need even higher quality teachers in the future than in the past (Steward, 2010).

Business excellence can be achieved through sustainable change management. Sustainable change is characterized by three pillars- enlightened leadership to provide change direction, great project management to manage technical aspects of change and excellent talent management for implementing the change (Vora, 2013). Thus, an academic institution needs to embrace change management to sustain in the long run.

Blue Ocean Strategy aims at breaking the trade-off between value and cost. Alignment of the value, profit and people propositions of a strategy in support of pursuing both differentiation and low cost is important (Mi, 2015). The three conceptual building blocks of Blue Ocean strategy are- value innovation, tipping point leadership and fair process. Blue Ocean strategy requires organizations to develop and align the three strategy propositions- value proposition, profit proposition and people proposition.

The right strategy is to place equal emphasis on creating breakthroughs in buyer value and controlling costs. A crisis is typically accompanied by resources crunch and low morale. To overcome the crisis, a leader not only needs vision and determination, but also strong execution capabilities. Blue Ocean Strategy provides a roadmap for strategic transformation. Tipping point leadership is one of the tools to achieve success in blue ocean strategy.

Based on the above, one can say that it is high time educational institutions look at use of the principles of blue ocean strategy to bring about a turnaround in the quality of the educational services provided by them.

5.1 Principles of Uncommon leadership

In their book on uncommon leadership, Higson and Sturgess (2014) lay out the tenets of uncommon leadership. It is important to address the elephant in the room. Holistic view of leadership is important. Leaders have to become more conscious of their requirements.

Leaders have to create and use a compelling vision to make sense of the business and distil meaning. They have to exert influence to shape the organisation in line with the vision. They have to model appropriate behavior and skills in setting the standards.

Leaders need to build strong networks and effective relationships with internal and external customers. They need to foster collective leadership. Climate is where leaders need to focus. Climate impacts performance. Culture is big and cannot be changed quickly. Climate is driven by what leaders do. Research has shown that customers can sense climate within two seconds of interacting with a team member. Charles Handy, a management thinker, says that thought leaders find the sense before it becomes common sense.

The 5S principle of uncommon leadership

1. Seeing-Finding the sense before it becomes common sense
2. Shaping- making good sense into common sense
3. Showing- Doing the common things uncommonly well
4. Serving- Having the common touch
5. Sharing- Making uncommon leadership more common

Tipping point leadership is one way to find the uncommon sense.

5.2 Who are the Customers in a B-School?

With the globalisation of the higher education industry, service quality in the higher education services is seen as a vital factor in determining a university's competitive advantage (Chong et al., 2015).

Many educational institutions have reconceptualized their relationships with students to conform with principles of total quality management. One facet of this orientation is to portray students as customers. But there is a difference between commercial transactions and education. Treating education as a commercial transaction will lead to defining customers too narrowly and confusing short-term satisfaction with long term learning. (Schwartzmann, 1995).

The debate whether students are customers is polarized. Critics feel that treating students as customers will degrade educational standards and damage the educator/student relationships. From the positive aspect, student interests can form the basic premise. However, "the customer is always right" philosophy does not apply in this context. Higher education, it has been argued that, is not just another service industry. Academic discipline is influential in determining the attitudes towards the notion of

the student as a customer (Eagle et al., 2007; Lomas, 2007; Dao et al., 2015).

Analysis of the factors that influence student decisions in joining Vietnamese institutions revealed that facilities and services, price, offline information, opinions, online information, advertising (Dao et al., 2015).

Many management institutions are under the fallacy that students can evaluate the performance of a faculty member so that a decision can be taken whether to retain the faculty or not. Performance feedback by students is certainly important and essential because it helps the teacher to understand his/her strengths and overcome the weaknesses. Teaching is an evolutionary process. No one can become the best teacher on the first day. Like other professions, teachers also learn from their mistakes and strive to improve their performance. The performance evaluation of a teaching faculty has to be assessed on a cumulative basis considering the skills, competence, soft skills, knowledge, creativity, responsiveness, research interests of the teacher. Student evaluation of the teacher is only a part of this process of performance assessment. It cannot act as the sole determinant of a teacher's performance.

In b-schools, a teacher who is knowledgeable, competent, a hard task-master and strict is bound to get lower rating from the students. Students have their own way of getting back at a teacher who has admonished him. A faculty member who plays to the gallery and makes life easy for the students gets a higher rating even though he may not possess sound knowledge. So, how do you truly assess performance? Also, a student may not pay attention in the class, not study for the examinations and may end up failing the examinations. Can we hold the faculty member responsible for the same?

In some institutions, students' personal comments about teachers are strongly discouraged. This is a good move. Feedback of students about the faculty members must be more technical in its orientation- for example- did the teachers cover the syllabus, were the concepts explained well, were the doubts clarified, whether the assessment system was appropriate etc.

Many academic institutions treat the students as their customers. In private B-schools where students pay anywhere between Rs.15 lakhs to Rs.20 lakhs for a 2-year MBA program, this is the norm. In some institutions, teachers are fired for the smallest mistake and this only results in increased attrition of faculty members. The real customers of a b-school are the companies that visit the campus during placement season. However, most b-schools adopt a subservient approach towards their students as the latter have paid exorbitant fees to get enrolment in the b-school. Application of tipping point leadership is important to address the resource hurdles, political hurdles and cognition hurdles that come in the way of successful fulfillment of a two-year MBA program.

The quality of teaching faculty in b-schools also needs improvement. Unfortunately, some sections of the faculty members treat the teaching profession as a part time vocation. So they tend to focus their attention on other matters in their spare time and show little inclination towards research. To avoid such instances, a performance driven culture is a must in B-schools. Teachers should keep themselves updated, write research papers and contribute to the intellectual efforts of the institution. Collaborative efforts of faculty members in management research must be strongly encouraged.

6. Student Feedback in Business Schools

Hindu mythology is replete with examples of how a guru was respected by his disciples. It has become a practice to elicit student feedback about a teacher's performance in the class. While there is nothing wrong with this practice per se, in most cases the feedback is used to intimidate b-school teachers. There have been cases where student feedback has been used to suspend teachers from their jobs or reduce the emoluments that the institution owes them.

Heads of institutions often are untrained in giving feedback and so they end up demoralizing sincere and committed teachers. Maintaining discipline is an essential requirement in a business school and if students who are disciplined give selective feedback about a teacher then this does not augur well in the long run. The main idea behind eliciting feedback is to ensure whether a b-school teacher has done justice to the job. But in institutions where students are collected rather than selected, students invariably become customers. It is not uncommon to see comments like – "Dress properly", "Do not give unnecessary explanation in class" – such comments when they are not filtered are in very poor taste.

It is incredible that institutions solicit feedback about teachers who have spent a number of years in the organisation – every semester. Most students use the feedback as an opportunity to get even with their teachers. Tipping

point leadership can be an effective tool to manage such glitches. The head of the institution must be a strategic leader who must make it clear to students that they should not indulge in abusive language in the feedback. Interestingly, when the heads of departments or deans give the feedback to faculty members, they do not reveal the true picture and instead only focus on the negative aspects in the feedback. It is common knowledge that while assessing the performance of an employee, the appraiser must begin the discussion on a positive note. Transparency is important in the process of communicating the feedback and this is one area that business schools must work on.

Job security of a business school teacher is invariably hinged to the number of admissions in a b-school as well as student feedback. This is definitely not a good sign. This is where tipping point leadership can make a huge difference.

7. Conclusion

Tipping point leadership is about management of change. The theory is very relevant today. Second-rung B-schools face a challenge in terms of maintaining the quality standards in management education and ensuring good placements for students. Dilution in the quality standards in the selection process of students has a repercussion in placements. However, too stringent standards may leave the institution with vacant seats which can affect the sustainability of the institution in the long run. The solution is to focus on imparting quality education to students who enroll in a business school so that they are not the same when they entered the b-school.

A B-school is in the process of producing future managers for the corporate world. There needs to be greater interaction between academia and industry and this has to be an ongoing basis. Inviting professionals from the corporate sector to speak to students is essential to build bridges between industry and academia. SRM (Student Relationship Management) is essential for management institutions as alumni of the institution can help in generating a buzz about the b-school based on their own personal experience. Involvement of industry in framing the syllabus in management courses is very important. All these efforts will need a drastic change in the way the edupreneurs think about management education and the way

heads of institutions can question the status quo. This is why the concept of tipping point leadership is even more relevant today than ever before.

Tipping point leadership can ensure sustainability of business schools. It can energise the faculty members to put in their best foot forward to raise the bar when it comes to imparting quality education to students who have enrolled in the MBA course with lots of expectations. Faculty members need motivation both at a monetary level and from an intellectual perspective. Encouraging faculty members to do research will build the reputation of a management institution as a center of excellence. When faculty members share their research findings with students, it raises both the intelligence and the intellectual quotient of students. Well-trained students whose competence has increased by leaps and bounds after entering the b-school will prove to be great assets for the institution.

In the corporate world, a satisfied workforce will lead to a productive workforce and this will lead to better customer service. This will eventually breed customer loyalty. In academic institutions, faculty members who are encouraged and motivated will prove to be more productive. A "perform-or-perish" culture can work in management institutions only if there is sufficient incentive for performance enhancement. A same rewarding scale across the board for all faculty members will not do much to energise the high performers.

Taking a cue from the tipping point leadership concept, high performers need motivation and special attention and they can be used to inspire the average performers in b-schools. Every faculty member can be encouraged to make a presentation to the edupreneur highlighting his/her achievements to strengthen the culture of performance in a B-school.

From the perspectives of students, not all students are equally motivated to pursue a MBA course for professional excellence.

Those teaching in b-schools often face the challenge of less-than-interested students sucking out the energy of the faculty members and diverting their attention in disciplining them- much to the disadvantage of students who are enthusiastic and interested. This is a contemporary problem and the only way of solving this issue is to group students based on their performance. The classroom delivery of a teacher is a result of synergistic effect of efforts of the teacher and the interest level of students.

The intention here is not to discriminate between students but to ensure that interested students do not lose their drive due to the adverse influence of others. Grouping of low performers in a class can be a challenge for the institution but it can mean a specific strategy for such students in terms of pedagogical adjustments. Going forward, students who show massive improvement can be transferred to the classes of high performers. This is again an application of the principle of tipping point leadership.

Grouping of students can be done based on their oral and written communication skills before the first semester classes commence. Faculty members can take turns to teach these classes.

Avant-garde infrastructure, adequate disciplinary standards, focus on providing quality education, proper selection procedures for both faculty members and students and motivation of faculty members are all essential measures that will ensure sustainability of the B-school. These measures will greatly enhance the brand value of the management institutions. No publicity can offer a better return on investment for a B-school than word-of-mouth publicity.

The B-schools may also adopt a strategic approach in insisting on enrolling students who are committed to the cause of doing a MBA and achieving professional excellence. The b-schools can conduct entrance level examinations. Offering seats to all students just because seats are available will dent the brand equity of the b-school in the long run. Tipping point leadership and its off-shoot the blue ocean strategy can prove to be effective in improving the brand equity of the management institution. To reiterate, good students will attract good placements, and this will attract good students in the subsequent years.

8. Summary

It is possible to apply the tenets of blue ocean strategy and tipping point leadership in business schools. The main challenge in bringing about a change is resistance to it. Educational institutions must understand the reasons for this resistance. Administrative heads, directors and deans will need support of the promoter in institutionalization of change. Faculty members and students must realize the importance of this change and how it can help sustainability of the institution. Faculty members need to be motivated and energized to steer this change. They have to be sufficiently incentivized to push the envelope when it comes to performance.

A faculty member's job in a b-school must extend beyond teaching and research. Inculcation of right life skills and values among the student community is essential. Faculty members should interact regularly with industry and should be allowed to take up consultancy assignments and build bridges with industry. Every faculty member should play a role in successful placement of b-school graduates.

Use of tipping point leadership principles in B-schools will enhance the quality of teaching and make faculty members more accountable. This change can happen only if the promoters show interest. This approach can address the challenge of poor employability of MBA graduates and contribute to their intellectual growth. The outcomes will be favorable- a motivated and productive teaching workforce, students who are self-motivated and energized and the market which benefits due to the better quality of management graduates being churned out. This in turn will improve admissions to the educational institution through brand building and positive word of mouth publicity.

9. Limitations of Research and Future Directions

This research is essentially a conceptual study and will need empirical study to support it. Future research can focus on application of the tipping point leadership concept in B-schools by interviewing the promoters, heads of departments, deans and directors of business schools. It will help to conduct a survey among students of business schools to understand their expectations from a MBA course. These expectations can then be linked to the need for application of tipping point leadership in B-schools. Going forward, the survey can be conducted pan-India to test the generalizability of the findings. It will also be a good idea to include the government-funded Indian Institutes of Management in the survey. Another area for future research can be in understanding the relation between the Tipping Point Leadership concept and Total Quality Management (TQM) in B-schools.

10. Notes

In this paper, the term b-school indicates business school.

The terms B-school and management institution mean the same though both the terms have been used in the paper.

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