Organizing On-Campus International Conference for Institutional Branding: A Review

Dr. Subhasis Sen

Associate Professor

Symbiosis Centre for Management & Human Resource Development (SCMHRD)

Symbiosis International University (SIU), Pune, India

ABSTRACT

Management Education needs innovation and implementation of best practices in India. Several institutions have closed down owing to lack of student admission, placement opportunities and unable to withstand competition from premier institutes. Students have become demanding in terms of ROI and looking for actionable knowledge. The study has attempted to address an innovative method for engaging the student and staff of the institutes while learning the marketing skills. Hosting of International Conference during the 2-year Business Management Programme can lead to institutional branding, student engagement, sharing of knowledge with global exposure and finally,enhancing job opportunities for the students by connecting with corporate world. The need for affinity marketing, improving human skills, profit-making for a noble cause and introducing a new way of evaluating the actionable knowledge delivered by the motivated students in the form of international conference has been suggested for inclusion in the post-graduate management education programme.

Keywords: human skills, affinity marketing, noble cause, intellectual capital, incentive

Introduction

There has been a serious decline in the quality of education for business schools across India. Several institutes have to close down owing to lack of admission. Many others are running with fewer intakes of student mainly because of reducing demand among aspirants for management education and placement records not as per expectations of the students. In the midst of such volatility in management education business, the core committee of the institutes/universities offering business education must take measures to improve the falling standards of the course curriculum and meeting the manpower requirements for the industry. The general psychology of business school graduates is to compare their institution with other competitors offering business education in the market in terms of ROI. Today's student community has become exposed to digital information which makes them impatient towards gaining effective knowledge at the same time they are intelligent to differentiate the value of learning.The need of the hour for the business schools is to explore, experiment and define innovative ways for engaging the future managers toearn while they learn during their 2-year management programme as offered by the management educational institutes in India. The author here, has visited several prestigious business schools and universities in India and USA and published research papers while participating in the International Conferences organized by the Business Schools like Xavier Institute of

Management Bhubaneswar, Indian Institute of Management Bangalore, NITIE Mumbai, IMT Nagpur, Rosen College of Hospitality (Orlando, USA), ICFAI Business SchoolHyderabad in collaboration with established management associations like AIMS, International Journal of Arts and Sciences (USA), Operation Research Society of India, Global Institute of Flexible Systems Management. The said study has attempted to address the significance of organizing international conferences by inviting delegates, research scholars, academicians, and corporate people worldwide and share their ideas about emerging trends globally. An overview of business plan for coordinating an international conference has been discussed while grooming the management students for the fiercely competitive job market. The institutional branding can be done through networking of the corporate participants and understanding the company manpower requirements. It gives an opportunity to the students, research scholars and academicians to exhibit their intellectual contribution towards society as a whole. The study has recommended an innovative method for engaging the post-graduate management students who are eager to earn their pocket money and learn the tricks of marketing while attending the classroom sessions in their business schools.

Literature Review

Academic research in the domain of management has found little relevance to practice. The academic researchers seem to be unaware about the language, problems, and concerns of the business world whereas practitioners or consultants look for 'actionable knowledge' in the world of academe. Performance of academic faculty is generally assessed through the feedback of students, which essentially focusses on teaching. Business schools need to develop specialized tracks and train a group of faculty members for teaching. In this way another batch of faculty members for research and the third group for academic administration, as one cannot be expert in all the three aspects. Academic faculty should be assessed and nurtured for one of these three specialized tracks depending on their competence and area of interest. Indigenous research needs to be rewarded through appropriate reward and recognition structures. Incentives can be seed money for faculty members desirous to

undertake context specific research, funds to host conferences on indigenous themes, providing and supporting travel to conferences of organizational and industry relevance. The study highlights an overview of the rigour and relevance required to bridge academic research with business organizations and practitioners. Research scholars should reach out to the practitioners and collaborate with the corporate world to take up problem solving research. (Panda & Gupta, 2014).

The branding of B-Schools has been a vital concern for the business education leaders as it communicates about the quality of their offerings, faculties, students, placements, financial resources and so on. The purpose of the study has been to understand the expectations of major stakeholders i.e. students, recruiters, and faculty members of B-Schools operating at three different levels – premier, national and regional. The findings show that robust placement opportunities are the most important expectation of students across different levels of B-School students. Recruiters look for the right attitude and students' ability to adapt to the organization culture as compared to knowledge or skills. (Tigga, Pathak & Kumar; 2014).

Ethics in teaching of higher education cover content and pedagogical competency, fair assessment, respect to stakeholders, professional conduct, student development, reasonable pay, perks and leaves, avoidance of dual relationships, counselling to students and parents and involvement in community development. In an era of rapid transformation of university education, besides teaching, teachers are expected to do research, carry out consultancy assignments, interact with organizations for training and placement of students, develop communities surrounding the college, show extra-role behavior and run the educational institution. Though teaching profession looks simple, it is a complex web of activities with defined deliverables. (Suar, 2014).

Student engagement is a strong proxy of learning for students. Student engagement is the involvement and participation of students in academic and campus activities. Student engagement research is influenced by research on employee engagement. An educational institution

has to create the opportunities for academic and developmental experience of students. Likewise, students have to show commitment to these opportunities. An engaged student connects with institution, faculty and various learning and development focused experiences. He is prepared, motivated, passionate and curious about institutional activities. He participates in reading and discussion, working on projects and preparing for tests and examinations. Furthermore, he collaborates with other students to learn from their views and experiences. He develops a sense of belongingness and takes pride in being an active member of the institution. (Singh & Srivastava, 2014).

Education is regarded as a key enabler of empowerment in any nation. Education helps to develop a person individually, socially and economically. This transformation of the individual drives the social growth engine. One such critical aspect of education is generating employable human power. The research study has revealed **Human skills** are significantly preferred in making hiring decisions across various types of businesses to the extent of 42%. Communication skills with 26% weightage, has stood as the 2nd most preferred attribute for engineering graduates to be employable. Professional skills at 18% has been ranked as 3rd. Lastly, Technical skills has stood 4th in importance at 14% approval. The above data has been collected from three major business sectors – IT/ITeS, Engineering Services and Manufacturing. (Kulkarni & Chachadi, 2014).

Collaboration can be used by a brand to enter new sectors outside of the brand's core competency. The Nike + iPod Sport Kit is a product developed by both Apple and Nike to fulfill the role of a personal trainer. It is a wireless sensor and receiver that fits in a Nike+ shoe to connect to an iPod touch to track the runner's performance. Runners can also connect and compete around the world through the community on the NikePlus website. In some cases, partnerships have emerged as an extension, or substitute of sponsorship, where a company can choose to support a charity rather than a sporting event e.g. Coca-Cola partnership with the charity, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). Any partnership should make sense to the audience and successfully contribute to a need in society that can only be

addressed through the joint knowledge and sharing. Thus, **Affinity Marketing** seeks to develop a positive or influential relationship among customers by associations with other companies. (Davis, 2009).

When a brand makes promises, implied or explicit, these set expectations of the customer. If the company fails to deliver on those promises, it would lead to failure of meeting expected customer experience. There are only two ways that a business can expand. They are by increasing the turnover with the existing customers and increasing the number of customers while retaining the existing ones. In the beginning it is easier to expand the level of business with customers who already know and trust you. The key to success is to deliver on your promises for customer retention rather than looking forward to acquire new customers. Conferences, exhibitions and other events often invite guest speakers to share their success stories with the audience. Some of these pay speakers, others expect speakers to contribute for free, and many expect those who can benefit commercially from speaking at the conference to pay for opportunity. These kinds of interactions can leverage the client case studies of the organization. (Rayner, 2013).

Objectives of Organizing International Conference

The objectives of carrying out an International Conference can be manifold. But here, it has been considered as a part and parcel of the course curriculum beneficial for the students. The following objectives should be kept in mind while organizing an On-Campus International Conference in a Business School:

1. It would create a platform for the Academicians, Corporate Executives, Research Scholars and Students for sharing their experiences and knowledge.
2. It would initiate the development of Research and Development Centre with the motive of revenue generation for the Institution.
3. It should encourage the student-staff participation to contribute towards intellectual capital of the society through a systematic incentive scheme. Contribution of the students towards coordination of the conference should

be evaluated and added to their final marksheets.

Significance of Hosting International Conference

The idea behind International Conference is to attract student community towards actionable knowledge leading to fulfill their placement expectations. It would be a consortium where ideas, experiences, research and knowledge of corporate gurus, consultants, academicians, researchers and students can be exchanged and questioned. Best of the presenters can be rewarded and selected for journal publication. It can be a brand-building activity for the management institute where there can be opportunities for collaboration with publishers, non-government organizations and industry experts. Students' contribution can be evaluated and added to their final marksheets. Indian Institutions who have been vigorously promoting international conferences for bridging the industry-academia gap are IIMs, IITs, NITIE Mumbai, IISWBM Kolkata, ISB Hyderabad, IMT Nagpur, Symbiosis Pune, ICFAI Hyderabad, MDI Gurgaon, Amity Noida, XLRI Jamshedpur, XIM Bhubaneswar and so on. The student engagement in on-campus activities would create a sense of belongingness about their institute, interest for study and an element of earning while they are coordinating the event.

Workforce behind Conference

Conference Chairperson should be the head of the institute or a senior person with years of experience in branding and research. **Advisory Board** should comprise of industry experts and senior faculty members with international exposure. **Conference Coordinator** should be a faculty preferably from business communication and marketing. Conference coordinator's role should be to guide the students for arranging the international conference. **Research and Development Team** should be responsible for exploring emerging areas of study and designing the theme of the conference while breaking it into different sub-themes. The schedule of the conference should be prepared by them. **Marketing Team** has to be concerned about the revenue generation and communication with the delegates of the conference. **Operations Team** needs to take care about the logistics, hospitality of

the guests and arranging a short city tour in the evening with the foreign delegates participating in the conference. **Review Team** should play a vital role which would comprise professors from renowned universities and business schools to review the abstracts and manuscripts sent for the conference proceedings.

Technical Requirements

We are in the era of social media and digital marketing. So it is important to design an effective webpage dedicated towards Research and Development which would highlight publications by faculty members and students, events like international conference, emerging trends in industry and academic achievements of the students. Priority should be given to establish a research and development centre for conference co-ordination, meetings and presentations by the students and faculty members. A globally accessible bank account for collecting registration fees for the conference from the participants should be kept in mind. Email Accounts dedicated towards conference should be regularly checked by the Review Committee. The conference coordinator should be addressing to all the queries of the delegates wanting to participate. The Institute should collaborate with a reputed publisher for promotion and publicity of the research papers published in conference proceeding. In addition, strategic tie-ups with esteemed retail book stores like Crossword, Oxford, and Starmark can boost up the registration and sale of conference proceedings.

Launching Duration and Student Contribution

A 2-Day Conference with 9am to 5pm timing during Winter Season (November-February) should be ideal for foreign travellers coming to India. The student engagement should be for one year prior to the conference date. Every student should be evaluated based on a Management Information Systems Report prepared during the first and second semester which would clearly mention the activities to attract participants in the international conference, emerging themes for conference and registration target for each student.

Conclusions

The outcome of such an event should be to build a strong institutional brand, student engagement and

incorporating innovation in management course curriculum. The following points can be derived out of the study:

➢ Earn while you Learn for management students and faculty members is an innovative practice in business institution.

➢ Conferences would open gateway for interaction with corporate professionals and foreign delegates.

➢ A Research and Development Team should be identifying problems faced by business organizations, provide consultancy to business firms and predicting the emerging business trends.

➢ There is a scope for publication for students having flair of writing articles and adding value to their professional career.

➢ Lastly, Conference can be treated as a profit-making venture for a noble cause.

References

1. *Davis (2009)*, Branding Techniques, The Fundamentals of Branding, AVA Publishing Switzerland, pp 94-115.

2. *Jayakumar & Sulthan (2014)*, Modelling: Employee Perception on Training and Development, SCMS Journal of Indian Management, SCMS Cochin School of Business, 11 (2), April-June 2014, pp 57-70.

3. *Kulkarni & Chachadi (2014)*, Skills for Employability: Employers' Perspective, SCMS Journal of Indian Management, SCMS Cochin School of Business, 11 (3), July-September 2014, pp 64-70.

4. *Padmanaban & Shakeel-Ul-Rehman (2013)*, Comparative Analysis of Employee Training Practices for Sustainability in Telecom Industry, SONA Global Management Review, Salem (TN), 8 (1), November 2013, pp 29-35.

5. *Panda & Gupta (2014)*, Making Academic Research More Relevant: A Few Suggestions, IIMB Management Review, IIM Bangalore, 26 (3), September 2014, pp 156-169.

6. *Rayner (2013)*, Expansion, How to Sell to Retail, Kogan Page Ltd. UK and USA, pp 191-203.

7. *Sharmila & Gopalakrishnan (2014)*, An Implementation of Talent Management on SMEs, 8M, Jagannath International Management School, New Delhi, 19 (2), April-June 2014, pp 57-59.

8. *Singh & Srivastava (2014)*, Development and Validation of Student Engagement Scale in the Indian Context, Global Business Review, IMI New Delhi, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 15 (3), September 2014, pp 505-515.

9. *Suar (2014)*, Ethics in Teaching, Journal of Human Values, IIM Calcutta, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 20 (2), October 2014, pp 117-127.

10. *Tigga, Pathak & Kumar (2014)*, Branding of B-Schools by Undertaking the Expectations of their Three Major Stakeholders, Indian Journal of Marketing, New Delhi, 44 (10), October 2014, pp 7-23.