

The New Normal In The Education Sector In 2021

From the institutional perspective as well, campus and classroom interaction is important to holistically nurture global business leaders



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As I write this, there is news that the Indian government is about to give its first approvals for vaccines for the coronavirus. Media reports suggest that it will be several months before India is covered by the vaccine. Till then, there will be flux and uncertainty in Indian education. A "New Normal" may emerge only thereafter.

I believe that as far as management education is concerned this new normal will be reflected in a sharper segmentation of the market and programmes more specifically designed and targeted to these market segments. This will reinforce a trend that

started before Covid-19.

Young students with no or limited work experience and slightly older students who want to go back to college for the last time will continue to seek a classroom learning experience leading to a formal degree. Friendships and networks, peer learning, the whole "college experience", are valuable to these students.

From the institutional perspective as well, campus and classroom interaction is important. One element of IIM Bangalore's mission is to "nurture innovative global business leaders, entrepreneurs, policy-makers and social change agents through holistic and transformative education" - it's difficult to see how we could do this holistically through the online mode alone.

Business schools may integrate some elements that worked online to supplement classroom learning. Students have told us that they found the recordings of classes useful to fill in things they missed in the class; breakout sessions helped shape intense discussion; and some of the online simulations were useful for learning.

Some curricular changes may also be necessary - for example, recruiters and our students are telling us that digital skills and managing in a digital context ("digital transformation") have, in the course of the pandemic, become essential for all job-seeking MBA students. Digital technology and its implications need to rapidly become a part of the core curriculum across functional areas if they are not already.

Our students have told us that online learning in some subjects that are theoretical or have definite solutions and answers such as quantitative methods, accounting and finance has been effective. At the same time, they felt that online learning in subjects involving judgement and human volition like strategy and organisational behaviour is incomplete. An interesting feedback from students was that in some cases they missed a much-needed critical perspective as some faculty seemed to hesitate to voice critical opinions on deviant corporate behaviour in a recorded, online session.

These young students may sign up for additional skills or specialised qualifications through the plethora of online courses that are now available. MOOCs will play an important role in this context. Self-sponsored continuing education or "lifelong learning" as it is now called will become more commonplace and will be largely online. Learners will have a variety of providers - higher education institutions, MOOCs platforms, edtech companies, other "for-profit" providers and partnerships between different entities - to choose from. Providers will seek to overcome low completion rates and doubts about certification through the current trend of modularity, stackability and grant of degrees (as a signal of more rigorous certification). These online degree programmes will need to pay greater attention to

how topics and courses are sequenced to give learners a more meaningful experience.

Organisation-sponsored executive education or training is likely to split into two. Skill and basic competence-based training will move online to a mix of partners as in the case of self-sponsored learners. High-end training, particularly on the softer aspects like negotiation or strategy execution, will continue to be in campus-like serene surroundings.

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