

IIM BANGALORE

STEP OUT AND SEE



By Sourav Mukherji

Outdoor activities add to the institutional culture

THE KEY RESPONSIBILITIES OF AN ACADEMIC institution like IIM Bangalore are knowledge creation and knowledge dissemination, which broadly translate into three important activities—research, teaching, and problem-solving through consulting and other professional services. While these activities are interrelated, their primary stakeholders are often very different. Research is relevant mostly for scholars, teaching is focused on students and professionals, and problem-solving is driven by the needs of society. IIM Bangalore has pursued all three of these simultaneously, which is quite a difficult balance. It is the maintenance of this fine balance throughout most of its existence during the last 50 years that has been key in making it the institution that it is today. While the external world might look at IIM Bangalore primarily as a business school, we have always defined ourselves as a management institution responsible and accountable to multiple stakeholders of society. This has also led the institution to make well-thought-out investments that were often ahead of its time, such as the Centre for Public Policy, the NS Raghavan Centre for Entrepreneurial Learning, Centre for Teaching and Learning, and IIMBx, which today is the country's leading digital platform for creating and disseminating digital educational content. Today, IIM Bangalore is in a unique position of being able to offer its students a panoply of academic and educational content, ranging from those important for running various kinds of businesses to entrepreneurship to public policy, in a variety of forms leveraging technology, such as in-person, online and in a hybrid mode. We are one of the few academic institutions in the country with state-of-the-art facilities for creating digital courses.

Apart from being able to offer a wide variety of educational programmes, this multi-stakeholder approach has got gradually embedded in the culture and value system of the institute which makes us constantly strive to be inclusive, to embrace diversity, even while maintaining high standards of performance in all our undertakings. And that value system has also become the philosophical foundation of education that we impart to our students—to be inclusive, to be sensitive to the needs and aspirations of multiple stakeholders of the society, and to set high standards



of performance in whatever one does.

The world of business and management is perpetually in a state of flux, and it is impossible to make any predictions about the future. Even as I write, we are at the crossroads of three enormous forces—geopolitical tensions, technological advancements, and climate crisis. While we do not know how each of these will unravel, we are certain that how they unravel will have a profound impact on the world. How does one prepare for such uncertainty? Being adaptable, resilient, and even anti-fragile are often the prescriptions. It is our understanding that to build those capabilities, one needs to combine strong fundamentals with an ability to experiment and take risks. This is a combination of knowledge, skills,

and values, which IIM Bangalore has embedded in its education. A significant part of our curriculum towards the beginning of any programme is spent on developing strong fundamentals, while the latter part provides a variety of challenging contexts where such fundamentals can be applied to solve problems, be it for business, government, or society. Realising that education does not happen only within a classroom, we create a variety of interventions outside the class, where students hone their skills and discover values that they cherish and would love to live by. Our courses take students on difficult mountain treks, multi-day bike rides of endurance, and deep inside slums, not as tourists but as sensitive citizens who would use such opportunities to broaden their



Campus life
at IIM Bangalore

understanding of the world and the complex nature of its challenges.

There is however a negative consequence of being adaptable and being a risk taker, which is falling for every passing fad. To be discerning, and to distinguish between signal and noise, one needs to develop a critical mind. The case-based pedagogy, which is popular in most management institutions, aims to develop such a skill. While this is not new, it becomes more important in the context of uncertainty. Case-based teaching, sometimes erroneously construed as telling stories in class, is actually about educating students on how to make choices under uncertainty, ambiguity, and trade-offs. We also use case teaching to promote skills and values among students such as being engaged in a constructive debate and being able to listen to others and appreciate viewpoints that may be diametrically opposite to yours.

THEREFORE, IT TAKES enormous effort to convert a popular story into a teaching case that serves the true purpose of education. IIM Bangalore has been making significant investments during the past decade in developing its Centre for Teaching and Learning as a centre of excellence for case writing and case teaching. Today, apart from developing institutional capabilities, the centre also offers teaching and learning workshops for academics and doctoral students from other management institutions. Case writing also has the additional benefit of engaging faculty members of IIM Bangalore with multiple stakeholders of the society and the variety of challenges that they face—be it a business undergoing digital transformation, the government implementing a large infrastructure project, or a not-for-profit analysing whether it can achieve financial viability by adopting an inclusive business model.

Maintaining high performance standards and adapting to a changing world over a sustained period is impossible without a powerful governing structure. IIMB's governance is driven by the triad of alignment to purpose, providing autonomy with accountability, and recognising sincere efforts, even if they result in failures. While the Board has always been very supportive of institutional initiatives, trusting that the director and the faculty body would keep the best interest of the institution in their intentions and actions, most directors have also provided complete autonomy to faculty members to experiment and chart their own paths of excellence. We cherish the fact that IIM Bangalore has remained a faculty-governed institution, which has enabled it to leverage the diversity of talent among its faculty members and staff. Building an academic institution and educating generations of managers

and leaders is an extraordinary responsibility. Therefore, it is not merely a job for us, but a way of fulfilling our life's purpose. The governance of the institute at every level has remained inspirational to keep us committed to this larger purpose.

During the past 50 years, IIM Bangalore has established itself as a leading management institute. It has earned the respect of its global peers because of the steady improvement in international rankings. IIM Bangalore's alumni have established themselves as leaders, entrepreneurs, academicians, and policymakers in India and abroad. IIM Bangalore's faculty members have distinguished



The library at IIM Bangalore

themselves as thought leaders, consultants, scholars, and institute builders. All of these have contributed to creating a brand that represents trust and commitment to excellence. But we cannot sit on our laurels because there are greater challenges ahead. To continue to generate and disseminate knowledge that is insightful and relevant, and to play an important part in the progress of India, we will need to dig deeper, be bold in taking risks, and stay firm on our values and fundamentals as an educational institution. Our plan to establish a School of Multidisciplinary Studies to address the demand-supply gap in high-quality graduate education in India is a step in that direction. It is definitely the biggest entrepreneurial venture that IIM Bangalore has ever undertaken, and it is not going to be easy for us to bring this new venture up to the standards that we have set so far. But we will do our best to create a rich academic legacy with the hope that 50 years hence when people write about IIM Bangalore's 100-year journey, they will acknowledge how IIM Bangalore reached greater heights by building on the good work that was done during its first 50 years. ■

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