As a society facing problem of under-management, and even mismanagement, of our enterprises, Nepal presents a strong case for substantial management development. This is indeed a precondition for her social and economic transformation, much the same way as, or even more strongly than, the other South Asian neighbors. Ours is not so much a problem of under-development as of under-management, the later directly causing and contributing to the former. Management has largely failed development by not enabling it to deliver expected results efficiently and by slowing down its pace. As a result, Nepal’s development remains less capacitated and hence less competitive in the global economy, even by the South Asian standards.

Management development ought to be a major strategic response to the needs and initiatives of Nepal’s development aspirations to which management education has a critical role to perform. The basic role of management education is that of developing critical managerial capability for effective performance of human enterprises and for the efficient delivery of results while promoting professional culture of organizational practices. In essence, management education is about making it possible for a society and its enterprises to have more (results) with less (resources), thereby adding value to the organized human actions and furthering economic and social prosperity of the society. There is, however, little evidence that it is happening in the context of Nepali economy and society. Problem is not so much of scale but of substance of management education.

Underperformance of management education is in no way a national or regional issue alone; there are critical questions about the value addition role of management education particularly that of MBA programs on a global scale as well. As acknowledged in a recent extensive research by Datar et al (2010), graduate management education has come under “growing scrutiny” and its “public criticism” has “sharply escalated”. As a matter of fact, dissatisfaction with the ability of management education to provide with relevant training and skills for students surfaced much earlier (e.g. Hambrick, 1994; Jorgensen, 1992; Linder and Smith, 1992; Porter and McKibbon, 1988; Spender, 1995). There have been increasing “calls for reform” in the way management education is designed and delivered (Datar et al, 2010). The magnitude of underperformance is, however, more critical in both scope and implications in this part of the world. The urgency of improvement needs is more pronounced in Nepal.
More Quantity less Quality

Management education in Nepal represents a growth pattern of higher education in South Asia, typically characterized by rapid expansion in terms of both demand and supply without corresponding quality enhancement to make it globally competitive. Fast growth in higher education is largely due to increasingly younger population base of our societies with more demand for higher education as well as wide extension of market-based socio-economic activities resulting in huge appreciation in the perceived value of higher education degrees, particularly from the employment point of view. This inevitably led to rapid expansion in supply as well. The growth has been more in number and less in quality. And this is more so in case of management education in Nepal.

With the very modest and limited beginning in the form of commerce education a little over five decades back that produced accounting and business supervisory personnel of limited professional capability, management education in Nepal saw a sluggish growth for about 30 years. Both design and delivery of management education during this period were grossly inadequate, almost irrelevant, to prepare graduates for managerial and leadership roles for managing business, succeeding only in producing poorly trained graduates with clerical mindset.

Coming to early 1990’s, there was almost sudden change in both the pace and the form of management education with high acceleration in demand and supply and some reorientation in its structure and focus towards general and functional management competencies. This was spurred largely by the economic liberalization policies Nepal pursued on a limited scale around that time which created huge demand for professional managerial resources to run the economy and business in a more competitive environment, and also opened up new scope for managerial talents in the fast growing non-governmental/ development sector.

No accurate data is available but a general estimate suggests huge expansion of management education market in the recent time. There are currently about 40 graduate management education providers offering MBA, EMBA and other specialized graduate programs in management and many scores of undergraduate management colleges running bachelor level management programs. Collectively, they churn out thousands of graduate degree holders every year, most of them having been inadequately prepared for managerial or entrepreneurial career. Despite ‘employability’ problem of management graduates, the ‘charm’ of management education continues to grow unabated, creating more opportunities in the management education market.

The response to the emerging opportunities for scaling up management education has been, however, more commercial than professional and academic as much in purpose as in process. Hence, despite the spiraled growth in the last two decades, management education has not improved the quality standards much. This is the irony of the growth of management education in Nepal, taking a “quantitative leap” with “qualitative lapse”. This must be corrected. And correction requires an understanding of the problems facing management education and of the ways to address them for its better performance.

From Problems to Performance

Management education in Nepal was initiated and has survived in the tradition of “general social science education” in the university system that focuses more on “theoretical knowledge impartation” and “production of degree holders” without any clear linkage with defined professions and professional markets. Even today, there is no
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A macro policy framework or planned approach to guide it either at the government level or industry level. This has resulted in a situation where universities and other institutions of higher learning are “micro-managing” management education in the sense of designing and delivering programs without coordination, a broad central focus of the purpose, linkage with market, and general quality standards of inputs, processes and outputs.

Production of graduates has superseded as the basic purpose rather than their performance to meet the managerial, entrepreneurial and leadership needs of the market. There is no proper fit between the supply and demand of management graduates in number as well as performance capability as required in the market largely due to this “macro policy cavity”. Another reason for this mismatch is very “limited engagement” of management education providers with the market, with a kind of apathy on both sides. Participation of the private sector in management education has been merely in the role of “consumer” of its graduates not that of “investors” in informing, guiding and facilitating its design and delivery. Wherever there has been investment of fund in setting up private management colleges from the business, the “business” part of business education has taken precedence, with “education” taking a back seat.

Much of the problem of management education, however, lies within the university system. There is only a limited conceptualization among the providers of management education of its fundamental purpose and nature in the context of emerging socio-economic character of the society. As a result, contextualization of management education to the national needs of managerial resources in light of the growing regionalization and globalization of the economy and the society has not received much attention.

Lack of contextualization of management education has been reflected in curricular structure of management education which is often a poor copy of what the western management schools do. “Contextual innovation” is largely missing in curricula as does the broad “educational purposes”. A typical curriculum is obsessively focused on “knowing” component of management profession with only limited emphasis on the “doing” competency (analytical, creative and problem solving skills) for the most part. In the west, there is an increasing emphasis on the “being” (professional values, attitudes, soft skills of being a professional manager) part of management education, which is almost entirely missing from curricula in most universities.

The “design defect” in management education does not limit to the issue of educational focus; it is manifested also in the pedagogic approach designed for delivering education. Delivering strategies built into the curricula are typically traditional, more didactic in approach than analytic, experiential and self-discovery based. Actual delivery by faculty is more in the nature of verbal engagement and text bookish information with limited practical exposures and experiences, simulated exercises, team-based real-life or real-like projects and problem analyses being employed to generate “transferable and meaningful learning” at the end of the program.

Design and delivery problem of management education has much to do with the faculty who are less prepared and even less motivated to teach management as an analytical and problem solving discipline and practice. Research background and skills of most faculties are only marginal due to inadequate research training and education prior to and during their facultyship. Industry experience (either as a management practitioner or consulting provider) is even less. Periodic faculty development programs for upgrading and enriching quality of
faculty across various academic roles (e.g. teaching, research, consulting, and management training) does not exist in the country, and many management schools do not avail of the opportunities available elsewhere either on the ground of affordability or, more practically, due to very narrow faculty base they operate with. Most private management schools do have very slender faculty strength, more than two thirds of whom are part-timers doing moonlighting with little understanding of and commitment to management education and performing their role only as a “subject informant” and not a faculty.

Meager intellectual and instructional resources available are scattered across various institutions with little coordination and cooperation among them within the country. Perhaps this is natural in view of the highly competitive spirit with which management education is being delivered. A coordinated approach for sharing, mobilizing and utilizing resources could be a strategic approach to address the problem of “resource deficit” but it has neither been planned nor practiced.

Much of the problem of quality in Nepal can thus be pinned down to institutional management of universities/ schools offering management education. Management schools themselves have not been able to operate as role models of high quality institutional entities of professional management systems and practices, offering best practice example and experience for graduating students and the business community to observe, participate in and learn from. Institutional capacity enhancement for designing and delivering high quality management education through significant upscaling of academic and institutional management strengths should be a priority issue.

There is an urgent need in Nepal for working on these problems and raise the performance of management education by building and enhancing quality. For this to happen, the identified problems and needs must be addressed. This is probably true even at the regional level, though country specific variations do exist in terms of intensity and priority. Some reform agenda for institutional development of management education for high quality and globally competitive management education, based on the issues noted above, are in order.

- Macro-policy formulation with the participation of the state and the industry as a framework for development and operation of management schools.
- Close collaboration with business, industry, development and state sectors in terms of deciding agenda and approach of management education in the national context in view of its globalized scope.
- Institutional capacity development in terms of clear ideology of management education, value proposition of management schools, academic and institutional management strategies, market and business linkage, resource generation, and professional systems development.
- Restructuring of curricula blending reassessed and contextualized knowing component of management, elevated doing component with emphasis on analytical, entrepreneurial, leadership and other soft managerial skills, and professional and social values, attitudes and beliefs of managers as practitioners of a respectable profession (the being component).
- Pedagogic reorientation of the delivery of education with more focus on analytical, problem solving, experiential, and real-life or real-like approaches.
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- Upgrading of research, consulting and management training capacity and activities and their integration with management education.

- Faculty development through rigorous recruitment and selection as well as continuous education and experience processes coupled with strenuous performance management practices to evaluate their productive and innovative contributions.

- Resource pooling and sharing through collaborative frameworks and actions between and among universities within the country and on the regional level.

Kathmandu University School of Management, as the premier business school in the country, is both aware of and active in implementing some of these reforms in last couple of years. One example is the restructured MBA program and BBA (Hons) and BBA (Emphasis) programs that incorporate some of the innovative elements, including contextualization of knowledge and competency, blending of three main focuses of management education in terms of the targeted outcomes, and more emphasis on experiential and analytical pedagogies. Initiation of research degree programs (e.g. MPhil and PhD) for faculty development is yet another example. But this is not enough. Addressing the major issues restraining the quality enhancement will require much more initiative. It is in this context that the School sees the tremendous value of accreditation.

Accreditation of management schools will enable them to work on some of the more important issues of quality of management education and to upgrade it. In this context, the SAQS process will be a productive learning and developing opportunity for quality improvement in management education in South Asia. This is necessary for improving performance of management education and through it the performance of the economy and the society of the Region.

Management education in South Asia is at a crossroads, requiring major redirection with focus on quality enhancement. It requires working collaboratively within the region, and for this the framework of AMDISA and the instrument of SAQS have tremendous potential. It is the responsibility of all of us to actualize it.

References


