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THE MOOCs REVOLUTION

B-Schools Must Prepare for Online Onslaught



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Recent developments in higher education have prompted some experts to opine that the field is ripe for cataclysmic changes. The expected changes are tied to Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), and they can have a far-reaching effect on institutions of higher learning, including business schools. For Indian business schools, these developments herald likely threats as well as unique opportunities to enhance the quality of Indian management education.

THE MOOC FACTOR

Open online courses are not new; however, the recent version of MOOCs is a force to reckon with because it is offered by the best universities in the world, free of charge. For example, these include EDx initiated by Harvard and MIT, and Coursera (started by a couple of Stanford professors) which offers courses taught by award-winning faculty from University of Pennsylvania, University of Michigan, Princeton University, and Stanford University.

These MOOCs are not simply recorded lectures; rather, they offer instructor interaction with students, student-to-student communication, virtual laboratories, and e-text books. Further, like traditional courses, they require student regis-

tration, have a defined start and end date (typically spread over many weeks), require the completion of assignments, have grading systems, and provide a certificate of completion.

IMPACT ON BUSINESS SCHOOLS

Currently, there are only a few "business" courses offered in MOOC programmes such as Edx and Coursera. However, as new courses become available to anybody, anywhere in the world, there will be direct and indirect effects for business schools in India and the rest of the world.

IMPACT ON COURSE QUALITY

For the top-ranked business schools, these free MOOCs taught by master teachers will set new standards of quality, be it course content or delivery. MBA students will have access to these free MOOCs and they will become the basis of comparison to the courses they are enrolled in. Student expectations will likely rise and faculty will be

forced to respond to these new benchmarks of excellence. This will lead to improvements in the quality and currency of course content, as well as teaching efficacy.

IMPACT ON CURRICULUM

Business schools that lack sufficient faculty (which is an ongoing problem in India) to offer a wide variety of courses may

consider allowing students to complete a course or two from a pre-determined set of MOOCs, and these courses would count to the student's degree. In fact, initial data from Coursera indicate that the reason most students enroll in MOOCs is because their universities do not offer the courses in question.

IMPACT ON MDPS

Management development programmes (MDPs) are short (2-3 days) courses that executives use to update their skills, and are often very profitable for business schools. Tomorrow's MOOCs could include shorter versions that will compete head to head with MDPs. Given that these MOOCs are free, available in the comfort of the executive's home, and provide the ability to interact with a world-renowned expert, business schools may need to rethink their MDP model.

They will need to provide new value-added features (probably, focusing on features outside course content and delivery) so that high priced MDPs can compete successfully with the free MOOC option.

Overall, the arrival of MOOC programmes from globally top-ranked schools can be a catalyst that produces broad positive changes in Indian management education, including higher quality in course content, course currency, course delivery, and possibly an expanded selection of courses.

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