



Time to reform AICTE

AICTE is not in sync with B-schools and is impeding rapid growth

Last year was a period of sombre reckoning for B-schools as they had to face a tough regulator – All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE). It was ironic that AICTE, which was the root cause for the mushrooming of bad quality schools in the late 'eighties and the 'nineties, now has to do the cleaning up act. The AICTE affected a bulk of schools that were operating without any approval for several years. The schools were given an ultimatum to comply with the AICTE Act or close down.

Even though the AICTE action against such schools had started a year earlier the warnings gave place to hard action this year. After warning the schools several times the AICTE published a blacklist of around 200 schools in its website and sent their details to respective state governments to take legal action, including the arrest of the directors and closing down of the schools. Though no state government actually took any legal action against such schools, the message was clear that unauthorised schools cannot continue.

R.A. Yadav vice chairman of All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE) who has now become famous for wielding the big stick in his pursuit of quality in technical education, is unabashed about the strong arm tactics the agency has been employing to make the B-schools comply with the law. "It is not so much that rules of compliance are being flouted, its just that the quality of the B-schools which is abysmal," joins in his colleague Narayana Rao, member secretary of the council.

While no one would question the necessity to take action against any business school that does not comply with any state legislation, B-school bosses feel any such action should be seen in the context of circumstances. "What we don't need at this time is any action that will reduce the number of graduates when we need all hands that can come abroad", comments Dr Manohar of Karvy. Also there is the question of whether the schools in question are of quality and capable of delivering results. Defiant B-school bosses like Arindam Chaudhry of Indian Institute of Planning and Management (IIPM) Delhi argue that "When we produce students suitable for industry and are able to bring the best international faculty to teach and also give good exposure to our students, how can anyone say that we are producing bad quality".

His argument is that if the institutes outside the law could grow in number and size, then the provisions of

the law itself need to be reviewed in the changed context. Another B-school leader who preferred to remain outside the AICTE fold and grew phenomenally in a short period of time, is Balasubramaniam, chairman of Balaji Society, Pune. He says "No one wants to go against the law of the land but the institutions implementing the rules should be sensitive to the needs of the society." Balaji society accounting for nearly 1,400 B-school students is one of the top institutions outside the system to voluntarily accept the need to comply with AICTE rules. It hope AICTE would do justice to its growth aspirations and past track record of achievements and has since visited by the AICTE inspection team for approvals.

AICTE should be market savvy

However, AICTE has been incapable of following the spirit of law and could only implement it in its letter is evident by the poor quality and cosmetic acts of compliance of rule of law by a bulk of the AICTE regulated institutions. "AICTE recognition is no guarantee for quality as it is totally dependent on the leadership of the institution and their commitment to the students", explains M. S. Pillai, founder director of Sadhana Centre of Management and Leadership (SCMLD). The rules of AICTE requiring the B-schools to own land and buildings and also having sums exceeding Rs1 crore in bank deposits is guaranteed to ensure that no professional would be able to set up a business school, the B-school community laments.

It also believes that to be effective AICTE should be far more market savvy and sensitive to industry needs. For most institutions complying with the AICTE norms is a time consuming and pointless task. "Take the annual compliance report for instance, we have been filing the report for the last 12 years and every year we have to produce the land documents, titles of ownership, appointment orders of every faculty with us etc.", points out a B-school director.

He is not alone. "We are forced to file nearly a quarter tempo load of documents in triplicate knowing fully well there is no manpower in AICTE to even open the first page of any document," joins in another. Besides this AICTE just notifies any change in compliance procedure giving little or no time for the schools to react. "Take the mandatory disclosure form for instance, the revised format of this was available just three days before the last date of filing on the AICTE website," comments another director. If we need the law of the land to be respected, then the law needs to be pragmatic and should take care of the change in the market place, feels the community.

♦ THOTHATHRI RAMAN