



beyond marks assessing for a fit

By Raghavendra K.

Expectations from b-school grads are not just in terms of academic, technical and behavioural skills, but, new dimension assessments on non-cognitive skills are also in vogue! A robust competency based assessment is Infosys BPO's way of selecting talent from b-schools.

The business education market in India is more than Rs.30 billion and has grown at rates as high as 12% CAGR. There are close to 1,600 business schools producing over 100,000 management graduates every year to meet the growing demand for management education in India. Opportunities in management education in India are immense. B-School education today is being looked at as one of the most lucrative option and a stepping stone into a challenging world of management and entrepreneurship. Given the criticality of the roles and the career path that these management graduates are being hired for, it becomes imperative to create an absolutely robust assessment framework for two reasons, viz. ensure accurate role fit and therefore return on the investment made in this talent pool; and envision and provide a long term career option to candidates to drive superior performance.

These candidates are tested on both technical and behavioral competencies. In today's world, we are seeing an increased focus on domain/specialist know-how intelligence rather than just academic orientation/performance. The conventional technical education in fields such as engineering and medical does not empower a candidate with a macro view of the economy and the corporate world. Business Education has many facets to it which includes the academic curriculum, the methodology, learning techniques and environment, new and innovative methods of imparting education, facilitation of the learning process, faculty, assessments etc. Many business schools are focusing on ensuring that the students are "industry ready" by the time they reach the interview stage. There are multiple innovative methods that include corporate tie ups, seminars, projects, internships etc.

Having said that, what is it that an organization expects out of business school graduates? We often hear about how pursuing an MBA lands you up in a lucrative job opportunity. However, the capabilities of the individual being hired for such jobs needs to commensurate the worth of the job itself.

The expectation out of a business graduate is not just in terms of bringing expertise in terms of knowledge on the table, but also, a way of functioning that will help accelerate his personal and professional growth in turn affecting the growth of the business he is into. B-school grads are expected to be passionate and ambitious with a go getter attitude. Change management is the

requirement of the hour and these graduates need to be equipped with all that it takes to tackle any kind of change that may come their way. Creativity and result orientation are two other areas that they need to be good at. They will often face situations where they are expected to think out of the box and predict and produce results. In the current scenario where work is delivered from multiple locations across the world, they also need to be adaptive and flexible.

Business schools: adding value

The number of management institutions imparting management education is only increasing day by day. Many of these institutes in India have attained international repute. The top 10 premier b-schools including IIMs, XLRI, ISB, and FMS are institutes that are imparting education over a world class curriculum. We have also seen many Tier 2 and Tier 3 rung institutes that have come up in the past few decades. Some of the lower rung institutes have also developed capabilities in delivering high standard education. These institutes were started with the objective of providing the required facilities to the aspirants that would ultimately feed managerial capabilities into the talent pipeline and also encourage entrepreneurship at some level. Some of the ways in which these institutes are trying to enhance the competencies of the students include -

- International tie ups: Many of these institutes have tie ups with international schools/other bodies for exchange programs etc that help a student gain

international exposure at some level.

- **Internship programs:** Most business schools run a structured internship program that helps engage students in diverse projects across functions within Infosys BPO with an objective of giving them real time exposure.
- **Corporate tie ups:** There are guest lecturers conducted by industry experts for subjects of relevance/choice. This again helps the student in getting a better grounding of the subject area.
- **Case studies and presentations:** Case studies have become a norm in most of these institutes and presentations which a student would not have experienced at a graduate level helps in building confidence and communication skills.
- **Co-curricular activities:** Could include activities such as sports, seminars, conferences and other co curricular activities.

Assessing a b-school candidate

Different companies employ different methods and tools of assessments at a business school. There are some usual methods that we often hear of which primarily the aim is creating a balance of the competencies being assessed and the scales to be managed. Some of these typical methods include group discussions, case study presentations and personal interviews.

Typically a fresh B-schooler is hired for a role which will grow into one with managerial dimensions over a period of a few years. Therefore, assessing capabilities in terms of decision making, innovation, team handling abilities and of course communication and interpersonal skills are critical at this stage. More than the methods or tools of assessments, it is important to identify what needs to be evaluated.

The evaluation can take place at two levels viz. technical competencies and behavioral competencies just like any other assessment. While the technical

competencies in case of a B-school grad would focus on assessment of the academic learning and the various managerial concepts/techniques learnt, the behavioral would focus on the softer side of assessing analytical ability, communication, team handling, interpersonal skills, customer orientation etc.

Educationists, organizations, economists and psychologists are increasingly interested in the role that non-cognitive skills play in adult socioeconomic attainments (e.g., educational attainment and outcomes, labor market outcomes). Non-cognitive skills include, for example, emotional intelligence and personality. Because of the difficulty in obtaining measures of these skills, models of adult attainments have until recently tended to downplay or ignore the role of non-cognitive skills. Many issues remain unresolved, including questions about the reciprocal relations among non-cognitive skills and socioeconomic outcomes, the meaning and interpretation of "non-cognitive skills", and the appropriate use of these various measures across different samples and sub-populations.

Predicting how well a person will do on a given task typically has involved testing a person's ability and skills and maybe a few personality traits. But now, for the first time, psychologists from the University of Minnesota, whose study in the current issue of the American Psychological Association's (APA) Journal of Experimental Psychology - Applied, found that if they combined measures of ability, personality, interest and motivation, they would get a more accurate picture of which persons learn well under stress. This could prove to be a helpful measuring tool for selecting appropriate job applicants in numerous high-pressured career fields.

The approach that most companies today follow revolves around assessment of cognitive and non cognitive skills. While there is high focus on building ones cognitive ability through academics, often, at times educational institutes or B-schools who claim to do an overall development fail to achieve depth in building non-cognitive ability. While organizations do give credit to academics, what really matters in the long run is how do you apply your marks on the job, and most often the success on the job has little or no relation to your rank in the B-school.

The selected students perform roles across various functions that include marketing, sales, human resource, finance etc. All these roles are highly demanding and need a high degree of capability both in terms of the knowledge and expertise in these areas and also the ability of the individual to adapt and function in an environment. Any business school hiring process therefore needs to be formulated in such a way that these finer details of an individual's personality are assessed as well. Competency based interviewing and other assessment techniques are instrumental in developing a robust assessment methodology.

Our approach

At Infosys BPO, the business school hiring process can be segmented into three phases - branding & communication; interviewing & selection; and



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competency development programs post joining.

Like many other organizations across the globe, Infosys BPO also believes in nurturing talent from business schools to place them into roles that will help them groom into effective managers in the future. We carry out extensive exercise both in terms of internal and external benchmarking to ascertain the roles and the career path for these hires. The set of institutes to be visited is also decided based on market data of rankings and looking at the performance and attrition data of the past hires internally. Post this, we try and ensure that all this information is disseminated to the target audience through a series of pre-placement talks. We have also invested a lot of effort in educating these students about the BPO industry as a career option which came up as a requirement in our analysis over a period of years.

Post the branding and communication stage, the critical stage of assessing the target pool for job fitment follows. Infosys BPO follows the 'Role + Competency' structure which provides a unifying solution to address structure requirements of different Infosys businesses and BEFs, and also allows for mobility of people within the businesses and ease change management effort within the organizations. A robust "Competency Based Assessment" process is critical to ensure that this model is executed in principle and practice and same is executed at various selection stages including external and internal hiring/movement.

Assessment is the process of collecting evidence and making judgments on whether competency has been achieved. The purpose of assessment is to confirm that an individual can perform on standards expected in the workplace, as expressed in the relevant endorsed competency standards. Each of these assessments is aligned to the competency framework through different assessments tools that help us assess competencies effectively at every level. At Infosys BPO, we have established a competency framework which encompasses behavioral and technical (professional) competencies. The candidates are evaluated against the various competencies that are applicable to the roles that they are being considered for. The methods that we use include group discussion, personal interviews, case analysis etc.

The assessment process at Infosys BPO does not end at the interview stage. Post joining, we conduct a 20 days long induction program during which the participants are made to go through an organization induction and also many other projects. Based on their performance in these projects and also their aptitude and interest, we identify suitable units, streams and roles for them. This process ensures long term alignment of these employees.

The expectations out of business school graduates is more than just delivering the role, it's about being able to drive results, being able to work in harmony and being able to plan and implement large scale projects. The assessment at the selection stage therefore becomes instrumental in getting suitable talent into the organization that will help shape up the future of the business/s within the organization. 