Chapter 22

Online Business Education in India:
A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Several scholars have described the advantages of online education. The Indian market for business management education is also increasingly accepting this mode of delivery. This case presents the history and policy environment leading to the origin, design, and delivery of a one-year online management education program by a leading business school in India. The technological and marketing support received from a partner organization is presented. The structure of this program, along with the unique challenges faced in operationalizing such a program with limited resources is highlighted. The interplay between program administrators, business school, faculty members, program participants, and service provider is discussed. The authors illustrate various enablers and impediments faced, and provide some key points of learning.

INTRODUCTION

As suggested by Webster and Hackley back in 1997, the online medium for instruction and training appears to be here to stay 14 years later. Technological advances have enabled full-time students as well as working executives the world over to use online media to receive basic education and advanced training in subjects of their choice (Mueller, 2003; Wicklund & Gee, 2004). Virtual classrooms today include a repertoire of facilities such as video-conferencing, recorded lecture repositories, and text messaging exchanges among participants and faculty. Together they facilitate
peer-based learning through synchronous as well as asynchronous discussions among participants (Lam, 2004). India too is currently witnessing a strong move to online education, especially in the domain of business education and training. In the next section, we briefly describe this Indian context for online learning.

BUSINESS EDUCATION IN INDIA

The demand for higher education has recently witnessed a boom in India (Pal, 2009). India and China are predicted to generate more than half of the demand for international higher education till 2025 (Bohm, Davis, Meares, & Pearce, 2002). A similar increase in demand is also predicted for formal business education as illustrated by nearly 10 times growth in the number of business schools offering Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree, or its equivalent, between 1988 and 2002 (Khurana, 2002). Besides the growing demand for an MBA from students, organizations are also providing impetus to demand for executive training. In order to build and further develop their human capital, organizations in India have considerably enhanced their training budgets in the recent past (Yadapadithaya, 2001). Apart from short-term training, many organizations also provide full or partial financial support to their employees to pursue higher education. There is also an increasing trend of individuals funding their own business management education to make better use of available opportunities in their work spheres, enabled by a widespread use of existing technologies.

Technology-enabled higher education in some form has been in existence in India for more than two decades. In the 1980’s, educational media research centres (EMRCs) located in various universities across the country prepared several short video lectures on a variety of topics. These video lectures were routinely telecast over the national television network in non-primetime hours to supplement the higher education system of universities. With the rapid improvement in information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure, people got used to interacting online and it facilitated the supply of online education. Top business schools in India took note of this opportunity, and some of them started offering online educational programs for working executives in 2000. However, these business schools did not have the required technological infrastructure, and they used the services offered by other organizations to offer such programs. Besides offering technological infrastructure such as virtual classrooms, these partners also provided marketing support to the business schools.

This mode of higher education is now poised to grow even further. The Government of India, through the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), has recently launched an ambitious program called “National Mission on Education through Information and Communication Technology” (2009) with the aim of enhancing the knowledge and skills of working adults. The government has plans to spend close to one billion US dollars in five years (from 2007 to 2012) to achieve its mission.

Considering this impetus and interest, it is an appropriate time to present a case study of an online program so that policy makers and others interested in using online media for offering higher education can understand some of the nuances involved in such an effort. This particular online program was recently offered by a top ranking business school in India. To ensure confidentiality, we label this business school as Renowned School of Business (RSB).

Online Executive Education at RSB

Admission in the MBA program of RSB is through one of the toughest entrance examinations in the world. Less than 1% of the applicants are success-
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