The Chasm Between Theory And Practice

MEERA SETH

There is something about dealing with people you know and with people you don't know. In the case of the former, you judge them and put them into neatly labelled boxes. But when you deal with people you don't know, each one surprises you with qualities that you didn't even know existed. As each one takes your breath away, you realize what truly stellar people we have as a country, be they students, managers or teachers.

And yet, in the same breath, we have to admit there are amongst us as many who are not as complete human beings as may be a manager. So I may have the dexterity amid spreadsheets and strategy to deal with fascinating intelligence-related product development/movement/consumption, but quite incapable in unstructured situations with alarmingly low discrimination between value-less and value-based conduct. Or, I may be a star while dealing with inanimate machines and numbers, but at a complete loss among other people. Worse, I may not even be aware of this shortcoming. And despite this serious anomaly, many such persons are left loose to manage people, children, organisations and countries.

Case after case, research has thrown the spotlight on this very anomaly, while gently emphasizing the chasm that is growing between practice and theory.

Veteran managers and officers in organisations shake their heads at some behaviours and ask, 'How can an MBA behave like this?' Thereby unwittingly implying that if you have been to B-school, certainly the expectation from you is different. However, B-schools are categorically not in the business of information, imparting business management skills, which assumes that its incumbents some day will be finished for emotional intelligence.

So one segment looks at B-schools as finishing schools where you learn your graces and manners; the other looks at students as brief visitors who have stopped by for specific knowledge, not general wisdom, the latter being a job that should rightly begin as the cradle rocks.

While neither is wrong, both also happen to be customers of each other—the student is present and the B-school in the future—at the student turns manager, and hence, must be served. Thus, we felt it was time for a reality check on what we teach in B-schools what we practice in the workplace. Of course, B-schools are only a part of the whole system of education in India. Other parts are schools and colleges. But the overall issue is deeper. It goes beyond technical skills to the issue of imparting wisdom at a mainstay of all education. Such wisdom we see remains incomplete as the vision of each of the stakeholders—parents, care givers, teachers, professors and organisations (which hire the human beings moulded by each of the stakeholders), remains unachieved or suboptimised.

With India poised to becoming a global economic giant, it is not mere academic skills but an overall mindset that needs care and attention. And that includes the emphasis on emotional intelligence as the superset of all learning.

Towards this end, the cases of 2005 were discussed anew by a tripartite team of students, managers and professors. I have thus met with the views of over 45 persons on what or where the need gap is.
The undercurrent of frustration that comes through from the young managers (many of whom are now first-time parents and severely taken aback by the world into which they have brought their child) and students (who, shockingly, are void of any faith in the system) and teachers (who, like only those who can hope that all will be well) underscore one thing: education in India lacks soul. It is, at best, imparting knowledge, at worst teaching skills; but nowhere, does it make students wise. If anything, a student after education is worse than he was before it.

This is, indeed, a very grim picture made worse by a political scenario which is uninspiring, a social scenario that is disgusting and an ethical scenario that is non-existent.

I wondered if it was appropriate to start a new year and a new special compilation on such a note. But then we need change now as never before and it's time we stopped kidding ourselves about how brilliant we are. This is no time for good news but serious introspection. Are we, honest to God, proud of the state of our country? Is economic brilliance an indicator of our real intelligence and wisdom?

A wise European music teacher told me, “As a young boy I used to love India for its values and elegance. An Indian kept certain aspects of his life quiet and private. He was the epitome of grace. Today that elegance is gone. Your movies are today made by rich businessmen, not film makers; your politics is run by business-minded people, not government and administrators; this is what happens when money vests in the hands of a few and not many. It is they who become the opinion leaders of a country’s values.”

So, that is what separates theory from practice — values.

Rekha Gulati in the discussion on *Brand Charlatan* says text books give you theory whereas practice boils down to common sense. What is this common sense? Parshu Narayanan says it is what you are wired like inside. Where lies the genesis of this thinking? Can nurture overwhelm nature, then?

In the nature of students abides a lot more than the theory they are taught — attitude, compassion, adventure, curiosity. We need alertness and sensitivity to recognise these; admission processes need to be alert to these traits if we must have a new generation of business and social leaders.

And what are the students saying? Satyabhama Sai and Kanik Varna argue (as do Smita and Udit) that students with work experience assimilate B-school teaching better than those without work experience; that field work teaches more than classroom lectures; that real-life situations need to be simulated to complete the learning process. Do students find theory and practice divorced? Maybe that’s what led to the phrase, “walk the talk”. In modern times.

Professors are saying it would be nice if students came with work experience, that admission processes are trying to be alert to latent skills and talents in students, that by common across all managers in the discussion, i.e., teaching pedagogy must include real-life situations, and ethics must become a compulsory subject.

Balancing each segment on its shoulders is the teaching fraternity, torn between the student and the practitioner. Truly, we have a rich, deep, respectable teaching ethos at B-schools, but as Laxman Mohanty asks, “Is two years enough to impart specialised knowledge? Should students go out into the world after their first year, work a few years and then come back to specialise?” The closest where this happens is in the education of chartered accountants.

Time and again these three segments emphasise the need for emotional intelligence and its complete absence in our upbringing. Clearly young parents (grappling and struggling with life) still evolving are unlikely to be able to impart Emotional Intelligence to their children. That is why we have the joint family which, the west derived the same through a strong relationship with the church and religion.

Unfortunately for us in India today, we neither have the joint family system nor any relationship with religion. Our temples are either just historic monuments or po-

**Education in India lacks soul. It is at best imparting knowledge, at worst teaching skills, but nowhere does it make you wise.**

In the time a student comes to them, he is already a finished product emotionally so there’s not much that can be done, that B-schools and organisations must collaborate if the learning process must translate into knowledge generation. In short, professors — like good teachers — have no complaints with the students they have. They like them as they are. If there is something they want changed, it is the number of hours in a day.

Managers are saying B-school teaching needs to incorporate a lot more into it and adapt after it’s pedagogy. Now this can be annoying, coming from practising managers, yet it must be borne in mind that these young men and women are speaking from the other side, having traversed the road of studentship.

In fact, there’s not much else that managers are saying and what they have said is litigious anecdotes. In other words, we have no one to audit or screen our values.

Coming back to the five discussions, if they represent the modern, thinking, feeling India, then this is what they want:

- Discard the attitude that emotions must be hidden — for the rational is shaped by the emotions too.
- Make social/civic work a part of B-school curriculum and workplace curriculum and evaluation planning.
- We don’t want to be robots, but sensitive, sensitive humans and we want sensitive, caring alumni, alumni’s authority figures and parents to look up to.

Those of us who are parents today cannot help but not undo what we have done so far. But we can change tomorrow’s parents and thence to their attitude to parenting, so that we herald this ethos in a wholesome future. For that we need to contain our aggressive stance on education as capitalism means of gaining skills and abilities to enough managers and leaders, so said Arpit A.
The Birth Of A Manager

When is a manager born? After B-school at 25? Or at five, in school? Who else is responsible for building the management pool?

ARPIITA looked in horror at her 11-year-old daughter, Tula, just as the phone rang. Freezing her glare on her daughter, Arpita, a lecturer in the local college, took the call. It was her husband calling from the suburban factory. "Arpita, I am going to be terribly late. Some IR problem here. Need to hold hands and reason. You guys do wait up for me."

Her plate of problems brimming over, Arpita resumed her glare at Tula. Young, Angels, the school where Tula was a fifth-grader, encouraged private enterprise among its students. Tula was a "special columnist" for the middle school’s newspaper. As most kids her age, she dragged her feet and the due date she did not have her column on global warming ready. With great agility and complacency, she "googled" her search and found six odd articles. Already late for bed, she gave them a quick glance and found they had the key words she was supposed to cover. She then cut-pasted them onto her Word file and submitted it.

This evening, when Arpita read the article, she was amazed by the contents. On probing, Tula said nonchalantly that she had done a cut-paste from the Net. Not yet alarmed, Arpita said: "Fair enough, but then you must mention your source below." To which Tula said: "I searched them, didn't I?"

Arpita agreed, but said: "Someone else did the research, wrote the article and put it there, Tula. Of course, he will never know that you have used it for your school paper. But doesn't it strike you as not a very nice thing to do, taking credit for someone else's work?"

Tula looked at her mother surprised: "But ma, everybody in my class does this. Our teacher never told us not to do that! And besides, ma, this article on this site is not even signed. So, who does it belong to?"

This was when Arpita’s jaw had dropped. Quickly correcting her surprised look, she said: "When I was in college and did research from books, we were taught to quote the reference in parenthesis right next to our text; or do a bibliography where we cross
Tula ground her heets. "Ma, you know all this; my classmates don't. It's do stuff which they don't, I will look stupid in class and they will all make fun of me. Let me do as my teacher says, not as you say. How many people can I obey?"

Arpita felt the return of the old anxiety. What am I doing, putting my child in the hands of people who are insensitive to ethics? Is this how I want her to grow up?

It was past midnight when John Chacko, her husband, returned. He explained how the HR head at the factory had pointlessly got excited over a minor issue. "One of the staff girls had taken home 100 sheets of printing paper from the office," he said. "Virkar got to know and he wanted her chargesheet, if you please." Taking in John's nonchalance, Arpita asked: "Is it OK for employees to take stuff from work?" John shrugged. "Look, these things happen. There are worse things that happen in other companies."

"John, it's about attitude, isn't it?" said Arpita. "You have had managers skimping conveyances bills despite having taken a lift from a friend... where does all this begin? Rather, when did all this begin? At 30? Or at six or seven years of age?"

John looked at Arpita and knew a storm was building up. "Oh, no," he said, "something worse than HR has hit us. See, tell me!" Arpita asked. "It's Tula. She is not learning ethical behaviour along with her school duties. At one level, the load of work is very high and when she cannot cope or when she does not want to cope, she is happy compromising! Her attitude is: 'The work has to be done somehow, isn't it? John, the school seems to be emphasizing performance and not process! They have already taught her it is important to attain success, no matter the cost. But sadly, they have not taught her how to stay with the process and how to enjoy the process.'"

John smiled wryly. This was so much like his workplace. "Probably that's where they learn how to get the actuallly wrong, Arpita, and then they carry it into the workplace too," he said. Arpita scowled and applied: "And then you demand that they work on how to be right-brained. And do you know, I have heard a lot of people complain that, we, college professors, are incapable of exacting good work from students. A lot of the students, the marking system is very lenient, they work hard, but in the end, the work is not coherent. The only person they admire is the parent!"

The issue over the article was just the tiniest of the iceberg. "The rot begins elsewhere, John," Arpita said. "Tula is just not getting the attention she deserves in a class of 35 children. Worse, the teacher is giving seat-work to the kids, you know, work sheets designed to keep children in their seats. In them cases, they keep busy and out of your hair."

"Kids her age can be so difficult," said John. "With one, we are going insane; now imagine 35 Tulas in a 15' x 15' room!"

This is exactly what bothers me," said Arpita. "What are our schools doing? I just got an email from my sister, Rachna, and she writes: Pratyush is having lots of trouble at school, and I'm clueless as to how to help him. I yell and shout and hug and encourage, but it still all seems to no avail. Then he goes off to bed and I pray for some way that I can see out of this fog! The bullying has stopped, but he has lost all motivation to work. He doesn't hand in his work on time, is distracted in class and gets argumentative."

"Now, this is the same child who helped me design my website, put up all the software, and all this!" said John. "Imagine, he was coding the entire thing!"

"And Pratyush, too, is a victim of seatwork! It's a drill and kill practice. It drills children; and kills creativity and imagination. It neither builds the drive nor the desire for knowledge-seeking. In short, it does not make them wise. No doubt, I would like Tula to develop critical skills, but equally, I do not want her to simply regurgitate what she reads."

John said: "Look, we should not interfere with the school's methods. Every year, they produce a 103 per cent success rate, which is a CSBE! Surely, they know what to deliver and how to deliver. As for learning by rote, didn't we learn just like that? And face it, Arpita, the people who will employ her tomorrow are ultimately people who will look at marks, grades and technical skills. Unfortunately, but even the best companies despite paying lip to well-rounded personalities do take a quiet peek at scores and grades. It's finally about IQ, wise?"

Arpita was now quite agitated. First, it was Rachna's email, now it was John's justification. She said: "I think that reasoning is exactly what sustains obsolete teaching practices and does not renew methods with an eye on the future. At her age, we did not have a window to the rest of the world. We had neither television nor Internet. Today, the young world is bursting with information at the speed of thought. But nothing has changed apart from teachers getting more impatient and schools wanting to devote less time to individual development... Schools are working more like assembly line production belts..."

"At a fundamental level, I am concerned about Tula not having an ethical viewpoint on anything, i.e., she has no ability to think laterally. Her teachers have quickly gotten onto the Internet method of research, which is a waste of time, but a corollary respect for published work...I would go along with that. I could have told Tula what she was doing was tantamount to stealing, but it would have been very harsh and even unfair on her. The people who ask her to research and 'buy' off the Net are the ones who should have taught her that, isn't it? Plus, in the new globalised world, in this open trading of world news, children have to be taught to voice an informed point of view. Global issues, be it war or peace, genetically modified foods or conservation of forests... these are the things... Tula has to form a viewpoint on. The trouble is, we adults refuse to think or realise that, ultimately, we will be handing over the world to the young and they need to be developing educated opinions. The companies and corporations we are going to be run by these managers we build at school..."

John agreed and didn't agree. "I agree, but right now, teach her to obey her teachers. In our society, we place a lot of emphasis..."
CASE STUDY

Arpita said: “Obedience has its place and context, John! In Indian society, obedience is one way, by which we ensure that the community is served well — older people are respected and the cycle of looking after each other continues. But there is a way of teaching children to think for themselves and also be responsible towards the community. Whereas, our schooling system consciously bypasses ethical issues. Whatever happened to moral science? I think kids in schools are confused between the terms ‘listen’ and ‘obey’. As a result, they are not learning to absorb different points of view and consider each before accepting or discarding it. I want Tula to learn to listen and accept or reject — but all the while keeping the window of learning open.”

“And how would that work?” asked John, reminiscing about the similar events that played out in the workplace where he had to be boss and friend and guide in turn. He said: “As a parent, I am torn. At times I need to be a friend to my child, but at other times I need to be a parent, a guardian or even a teacher.” Arpita smiled and said: “There you are! I think the key is learning to figure out what to wear when it’s the same thing in teaching and learning. Kids need to learn when they should obey and when to strike out on their own.

“That is how you awaken creativity. That is what I want for my child, to be creative and to find learning fun. Right now, school is boring, trivialised by unit tests that measure recall or ability to speculate. It does not test assimilation or understanding! The whole appraisal system only evaluates what you did in today’s exam. It is short-term and does not measure your whole personality or your capability.”

Last week, I was at the school and since they have a week until the unit tests begin, I asked the math teacher if she was planning to revise the lessons before the exams. She said she would do it a day before the exams, so that the points would stay fresh in their minds. This is what I mean!

“On take history. The value of grooming kids in our schooling system consciously bypasses ethical issues?

**Whatever happened to Moral Science?**

I think kids in schools are confused between the terms ‘listen’ and ‘obey’.
it is still the problem of the school and the teacher. I am a fee-paying parent and I want to see my child get the education she deserves. She is critical to the country — is the country getting what I am paying for? Can she become a valuable resource?

As for discipline, Tula is very good with helping out around the house, but now even that is disappearing because we are tense all the time about getting her to work on her school tasks. So, the question is not about discipline in the house, but bringing the discipline of the school into the house. The work load is huge and causing work for the parents as well. Often, we are left to decipher what the teacher wants — it seems that the teachers are not clear with their expectations either. Often the brief is very nebulous.

For example, last year, she was asked to do a biography on an eminent person. I think, at age 10, it would be nice to be specific, a historical figure, sportsperson, someone you admire, or someone who has achieved a lot through self effort. There were some children who did their work on biographies of rock stars. Rock stars? What type of learning is taking place there, and is it brought together and integrated in the class? When I asked Tula, she said we were asked to do anything we wanted to do. While that is nice, I think it is also important for the teacher to highlight and connect what is relevant from the child’s standpoint: to the larger goals of learning. What exactly is the purpose of asking a child to do a biography of a rock star?

**Teacher:** They are learning to do research. And way their interest in studying and writing and so on is also maintained. In any case, they are always talking about rock stars.

**Arpita:** To my mind, that is a good reason to expose them to other biographies instead. And what about doing group work? You fathers who are present here, your organisations insist on team work, team playing, participation... wouldn’t that be necessary if you were taught, at a school level, the merits of team play? Where do kids in school learn to do things together and cooperate? That is a skill that is increasingly in demand in the world, and I find that the more we are moving towards competitiveness, the more we are becoming incapable of living together in a community. This involves emotional intelligence (EI). What are you doing about working on that?

**Principal** (growing impatient): Ms Chacko, we barely have time to complete the syllabus, let alone teach EI. In any case, isn’t EI supposed to be built at the family level? Schools can be amitious, and I know many talk about kids of kinds of intelligence. But finally, a school is there for academic growth and IQ! I think that from this school, the students go on to do very well. You see, we cannot really touch on these issues because it will take time away from exam portions. There is enormous pressure on teachers and students to do well in exams, and that drives the syllabus and the teaching in the class.

**Arpita:** That is all very well, but perhaps you can explain why teachers often end up punishing children by saying they will not teach when the kids are being naughty.

**Principal:** Well, you said it yourself: it is to teach kids that they will lose a lot unless they are disciplined and obedient. With zero, I am alarmed, pardon me? If my child is taught in your house, would I say, ‘I will not feed you’? My job, as a parent, consists of managing behaviour in children from time to time. Still, I must deliver as a parent. I cannot seek to correct by abdicating my parental duty. Neither is correction had by doing so, be it parent or teacher. Please, these students are being built for the future management of the country and its businesses. It is a huge responsibility, not a check list. There are situations, which are experienced only in a school environment. And it demands specific emotional attention from teachers and caregivers. A teacher who exhibits EI in managing crises teaches students to evolve emotionally to manage crises.

The teacher’s refusal to teach is not delivering the message she intended, apart from being ridiculous. It sounds a lot like the strikes at my husband’s factory! And I don’t think we are talking of students indulging in vandalism or being violent or anything like that. We are talking about students being distracted, and that is something school teachers should be able to take care of with the skills they are taught at school. Distraction is a function of the mind, and takes place among adults and children alike. At 40, they send you to expensive workshops at the cost of shareholder money to teach team playing, focus and de-stressing. Shareholders like you and me! So, in effect, what we gain in the swing we lose in the round about. Today, you load the students with work that is alien to their skill base. They do get stressed, but they do not know that it is stress; its manifestation is seen in distraction, destructive behaviour, denial, neglect and even depression!

**Tula’s teacher:** There is very little time. We are battling against time to teach the kids, and it is very difficult to teach everything that is required for the exams in the short amount of time allotted for each topic. I think we have spent a lot of time on this. We will look into this and get back to you.

At this stage, a hugely annoyed Arpita stood up and told the principal: “You know what? We are turning our country into one that respects neither its young nor its old. We respect only our productive, revenue earning 20-35 year olds. The rest are a burden and not worth spending time or resources on. That is why we don’t care how we treat our children and our old. That is why nobody wants to review where our teaching system is flawed, or accept that it is flawed, for that matter.

“We can live and die like that, no problem. But we have no business to pass on that same disease to our children.”
Do The Right Thing?  
Or, Do The Thing Right?

SUBIR GOKARN

Every morning, when I drop my daughter off at school, my feeling that the educational system is fighting a losing battle is reinforced. Illiteracy of children entering the institution to be taught not only the distinction between multiplication and division and present continuous and past imperfect but, most importantly, right and wrong, good and bad. They leave behind a milieu of parents and other escort barking, swearing, cursing, bulling, giving the wrong way — in short, behaving in ways completely contradictory to what they are being taught. There are days, particularly those on which I have had time to look at the morning headlines, when I feel the battle has already been hopeless lost.

But then there are days on which the paper delivery is a little late and I am able to look at the situation with a little more detachment. Regardless of the contradictions that they have to deal with every day, not just outside their schools but in virtually every situation they are in, children seem to have an innate sense of the distinctions that matter. Whatever the combination of positive influences they are subject to, it seems strong enough to counteract the daily exposure to violations. Social order is perhaps not as threatened as my more pessimistic moments make it seem.

Three critical questions

The question whether values are assimilated and adhered to by people because of their early education or despite it is a complex one. I think it is relatively easy to answer when the situation calls for extreme choices to be made. In such circumstances, most people would be guided by their innate 'moral compass', something that transcends specific educational exposures or life experiences. However, when we deal with situations in which the choices are not so stark, in which several alternative actions are consistent with
one or another conflicting interest, are equally justifiable in terms of this moral compass, the answers are far more elusive. We might like to believe that, just as there is a unique solution to an optimisation problem, there is a 'best' way to behave in any situation. But, as comforting as this belief is, it is totally removed from reality.

This complexity is demonstrated in so many ways in the cases that have been included in this publication. In each case, there is a clear sense on the part of one or more individuals about the inappropriateness of the behaviour of somebody else — a superior, a peer, a subordinate. This inappropriateness is sometimes perceived because of damage to personal interests, but, more often, the protagonists see it in terms of harm caused to a larger, even abstract, entity: be it the organisation itself or the company's customers. However, in every case, for the detached observer, which the readers presumably will be, it is equally clear that the behaviour that is the source of the resentment, the disappointment, perhaps even a feeling of betrayal — is not even close to being unreasonable or illogical, let alone immoral or criminal. It simply puts priority on a different set of interests than the protagonists do.

This line of argument raises several questions. First, does the sense of discomfort typically articulated by the protagonists reflect limitations in their own moral compasses? Have they simply not developed the ability to look at situations through the eyes of others and recognise that, in the vast majority of situations, business or personal, there are many 'right' actions and outcomes? Second, assuming that the answer to the first is 'yes', where does this weakness emerge and how does it develop? Are some or all of the phases in the educational process failing in their responsibility? Third, if this is indeed the case, is there a feasible solution?

Opportunities and constraints in school

Perhaps the daily dose of contradictions does do some damage, after all. The moral compass works well, as was said before, in situations where the choices are extreme. But, move towards the middle of the spectrum; what is the essential message from watching adults going through their early morning routines outside countless schools across the country? That aggressive promotion of self-interest does usually get the desired results, that such behaviour is okay because your friend's parents, not to mention your own, do it, that not doing it makes life much more inconvenient.

Being very much a mainstream economist, I am partial to explanations of human behaviour based on 'rational' pursuit of self-interest. However, the discipline itself recognises that individual rationality and collective interests are not always aligned: in fact, they are often in conflict. Functional societies will inevitably find ways of reconciling the two, both formally (regulation) and informally (values and ethics). In all the cases that follow — with the possible exception of the one dealing with disclosure to customers — even then, the matter is hardly black and white — the situations do not reach the domain of formal regulation. The participants necessarily have to fall back on their personal systems of values and ethics, their moral compasses, to guide their actions and reactions.

In my school curriculum, there was a subject called Moral Science. Science connotes unambiguousness, determinism, only one right answer to every question. Every situation that was presented in that course was dealt with in precisely this way. There were no shades, no nuances, no room for the possibility that multiple interests need to be balanced in any real life situation. I see no such course based in today's school curricula, but, glancing through textbooks and other material, I have no doubt that the determination persists. Every situation has a unique optimum. The depiction of gender roles is a good example. With supreme assurance, the textbook lays out specific roles that each parent is supposed to play, the way they are expected to look and act. For an increasing number of children, cutting across socio-economic categories, the reality differs significantly from the standardised textbook model in this and many other situations.

Yet, it persists, perhaps because there needs to be a model to teach with, and, while there are many alternatives to it in the real world, none of them has emerged as a clear successor. The underlying premise is that children do not have the intellectual capacity to appreciate nuances and ambiguities. My own experience does not support this, but I am obviously not an expert in this domain. Let's assume for a moment that the premise is valid. Children need to be taught through simplistic, black-or-white scenarios. Without this, they will not become functional adults. If this is indeed the case, then designers of school curricula presumably don't have much room for manoeuvre. Black-or-white, all-or-nothing scenarios as teaching models are unavoidable.

But then, some kind of transition process, in which the assurance of unique solutions gives way to an appreciation and understanding of ambiguity — that there are multiple interests, all legitimate, in play and therefore, alternative outcomes.
legitimate as far as the moral compass is concerned, must be considered. When and how is this going to happen?

The issue of the boundaries on school education and the issue of the transition process are both central to the cyber-discussion, whose transcript is published in this volume. Educators, academics, corporate executives and a psychologist have contributed a mixture of insights and perspectives on them. Reading through the transcript preparatory to writing this, some areas of virtual unanimity as well as some with wide divergence struck me.

Virtually all the participants in the discussion lamented the overwhelmingly utilitarian role that early education had come to play in a child's life. Contemporary school curricula were seen to promote goal orientation - test marks, exam performance and all the 'objective' indicators of intellectual capability - over the joys of learning and any appreciation for the wider social contexts in which we live and work. Examples of exceptions, which prove the point, were cited, mainly in the context of schools that had developed alternative teaching paradigms, which emphasised explo-

indeed in the ways schools work and, therefore, any viable solution must begin from there?

Here, I will go back to the opening paragraphs of this article and categorically state that I am not so sure. First, I am not so sure that schools can, even if they wanted to, fully neutralise the adverse impact of the world around them on the moral compasses of their students. Second, I am not so sure that the majority of children cannot use the totality of their childhood experiences to develop pretty sound moral compasses.

In short, while agreeing with the proposition that the school curriculum could do with considerable improvement, I certainly think, as I argued above, that the deterministic approach that is used to teach children about the world around them should give way to one in which there is explicit recognition and legitimisation of multiple stakeholders and their often conflicting interests. But, even after all this, I am not entirely convinced that any feasible programme of change will make a lot of difference to the development of the moral compass. This is something, which I believe is the result of the overall experience of growing up in a social context, with both its positive and negative influences.

The trouble with transition

This gets us back, then, to the issue of transitions. Even if we go as far as we can in changing the schooling paradigm, if we do accept that it has limits, an intermediate stage that prepares young adults for the inevitable assimilation into the real world, warts and all, seems inevitable. Most children will come out of school operating within the range of socially acceptable bounds. However, this range is quite likely to be somewhat wider than the business world can accommodate, so there is clearly some need for 'homogenisation'.

Where does this happen? At the undergraduate level? I was struck, almost not entirely surprised, by the vehemence in the cyber-discussion that this stage in the educational process was, if anything, even more degraded than school. When a group, which includes the principal of one of the country's best-known colleges expresses several concerns about the college experience, we have to sit up and take notice. But, again, I think we need to ensure that we are diagnosing the problem correctly if we are to propose meaningful solutions. One theme that runs through the discussion is that 'under-prepared' schoolchildren will make for less desirable college students. Add to that the burden of university administration resource constraints and we do have a significant problem on hand.

However, coming back to the argument made above, that it may be a bit unrealistic to see schools as the primary source of the problem and, therefore, the pivot of any solution, it is easy to see that the same linkage between social environment and school experience that applies to schools is equally relevant to the college and university stage. More so, perhaps, because the comprehensive support
system that a child has, with whatever positive influences it may exert, tends to weaken in the college phase. If a person hasn't developed a functioning moral compass by the time he leaves school, he is unlikely to do so later. If he has, the college experience has the potential to refine and mature it, although the discussion group seems to be sceptical about even this capability.

What about business schools? Representatives of this segment on the group appear to feel that, by the time young adults enter this environment, it is perhaps late to re-lay the foundation. B-schools, particularly those which are not affiliated to a university, have a lot of flexibility to design courses and, clearly, as is pointed out in the discussion, some of them have used it to develop courses go beyond utilitarian (that word again) skills and challenge students to explore the ambiguities inherent in real life situations. But these can very easily degenerate into mere diversions from the more useful technical courses that most students put such premium on and their impact on the majority of participants may well be fleeting.

The importance of the employer
That leaves the employer, the last link in the educational chain, who surely has the most justifiable reason for saying that, by then, it is too late. But, as a relatively recent entrant into the corporate world, I am struck by the amount of effort and resource that go into the kind of human resource development activity that directly relates to the issues being addressed in this publication. Leadership, teamwork, mentoring, personality development and a host of other labels appear frequently on the training agenda of organisations and, typically, these cover several management levels. Obviously, the homogenisation that I referred to earlier — the narrowing of the range of functional moral compasses — is something that companies feel the need to do internally.

This could be because they feel that the process, which should have been taken care of before the person came into the job market, didn't quite live up to its commitment. In which case, we are back into the realm of 'system failure' and the costs that it impose on companies to train and re-train people to keep on delivering up to expectations. We should be concerned about the implications of this for the efficiency of resource allocation. However, with the caveat that I have been in this environment for a relatively short time and that too with only one organisation, I somehow don't think that this is the right interpretation.

The reality, it seems to me, is that even if schools, colleges and B-schools were to live up to our most idealistic expectations, companies would still be running pretty much the same training and development programmes they are doing today. This is mainly because they have come to realize that moral compasses, once formed, are unlikely to endure without continuous nurturing and reinforcement. Personal value systems are as vulnerable to degradation or obsolescence as personal skill sets. The best-trained engineer or economist from the most prestigious institution in the world will become a liability to the organisation that employs him if he does not engage in continuous learning. Why should we believe that value systems are any different?

On this basis platform, companies have two advantages over the educational phase of a person's life when it comes to strengthening and convening individual moral compasses. One, they can bring to the process, with far greater effect, formal instruments of reinforcement, viz. regulation, Reward and punishment systems, which we have designed and administered to help transform virtues into necessities. Two, they have a far longer, in fact, open-ended horizon for each of the individuals they hire. Educational programmes are by definition and design, time-bound. This inevitably influence the way in which people relate to them. Yes, people change jobs, but rarely does anybody join an organisation with a definite commitment to exit at the end of a pre-determined period of time. When people do allow for the possibility of long-term commitment they are far more inclined to align their behaviour with the collective interests of the organisation.

Concluding thoughts
The last question I had raised many paragraphs ago was about solutions. The implications of the arguments made in the preceding paragraphs for 'solutions' are simple. Yes, each phase of the educ