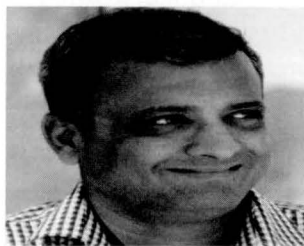


Career in Management Education: In Conversation with Dr. Vishal Gupta, The University of Alabama, USA

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VISHAL GUPTA¹



K C MISHRA²

Profile of Vishal Gupta

Dr. Vishal Gupta is Associate Professor at The University of Alabama. Previously he has served on the faculty at University of Mississippi, State University of New York at Binghamton and University of Nebraska at Omaha. He has also been a visiting faculty at Bahrain Institute of Banking and Finance, Indian Institute of Management at Kashipur, and Indian Institute of Management at Shillong. He is a frequent speaker at leading business schools and academic conferences around the world. He has published over 50 research articles in prestigious journals such as Academy of Management Review, Strategic Management Journal, Journal of Applied Psychology and Journal of Business Venturing, among others. Over the years, his research has been recognized with several awards, including the most recent Southwest Academy of Management Best Conference Paper in 2017. He serves on the Editorial Boards of several leading journals, such as Journal of Business Venturing, Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice, and Group and Organization Management, among others.

Dr. Gupta received his PhD (in Business Administration) from University of Missouri and completed his undergraduate degree (in Mechanical Engineering) from Punjab Technical University. His non-academic work experience includes entrepreneurial ventures in machine tools, automotive ancillaries, and vocational education. His hobbies include reading (non-fiction works) and travelling (50 countries by the age of 50). He lives in Tuscaloosa (AL, USA) with his wife, spending considerable time every year in his home country of India. During his stays in India, he has conducted numerous faculty development programs (FDPs) focused on strengthening the research and teaching capabilities of college professors, including at Delhi University, Indian Institute of Management, and Ansal University, to name a few.

Excerpts of the interview

K C Mishra (KCM): What motivations and/or life experiences led you to the field of teaching in HEIs?

Vishal Gupta (VG): I started thinking about HEI teaching as a career option when I took graduate classes at Penn State University. I took two business classes during this time- both in supply

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chain management- and the professors teaching those classes seemed quite engaging and passionate. Their teaching style got me thinking about how to get trained to become a professor myself.

KCM: What has been some of your biggest influences, intellectually and professionally?

VG: Several people have been influential in my life. From my undergraduate Professors KP Singh and GS Bath I learned to emphasize integrity, hard work, and honesty in life. My graduate professor Daniel Turban was instrumental in helping me learn about how to undertake research and have a productive research career. On the family side I got my love of reading from my mother. My father taught me the ropes of business and my cousin Arvind Gupta inspired me to study when I had little interest in school as a teenager.

KCM: In addition to teaching you have consulting practice. What is the relationship between your professional and academic practices? Why do you do that and how are your students benefitted out of the same?

VG: I think professors should remain involved in both the academic world and the real world of business. I have tried to do so, although it is a tough balance to maintain. Being engaged in the real world of business help acquire experiences that one can discuss in class while teaching. Verbalizing one's experiences and discussing them in class deepens our reflection about them, which can help in making better decisions at work. So, I think it helps to straddle the worlds of business and academia.

KCM: How do you differentiate the higher education system between India and other advanced countries? Please spell out both sides of the coin and suggest the measures to improve upon in Indian context.

VG: All systems have their pluses and minuses, and this is also true of the Indian and American systems of higher education. I think the best thing about the Indian education system is the exams, both to get in (entrance exam) and to pass the course (end-of-semester or annual exams). I was also fortunate that as a college student in India, I became very close to some of my Professors (KP Singh and GS Bath as mentioned above) although I later came to realize that such close student-professor relationships are not the norm in Indian colleges. The biggest disadvantage of the Indian higher education system, I think, is that no stakeholder emphasizes learning as the desirable goal, with everyone too focused on placements. This willingness to think of the college as a Placement Agency is a problem in India that I have not yet seen in advanced countries. Further, neither the students nor the parents or the professors are open to experimenting with new pedagogical techniques. While there is inadequate attention to teacher training and development in Indian higher education (which needs to be addressed), parents and students also need to be open to alternative pedagogical techniques that take them out of their comfort zone.

KCM: You had education in India but leading your career abroad, why? If each one of us do like this then what about our nation? It's known the best of the best brains are abroad.

VG: I do not think it is correct to say that "best of the best brains are abroad". Shri APJ Kalam never studied or worked abroad, yet he led India into the nuclear age with his leadership and technical acumen. Some people who live abroad may be 'best of the best brains' (e.g., Raghuram Rajan), but not everyone is of the same calibre. I believe that the decision to go abroad has nothing to do with one's love for the nation. One makes the decision of where to live and work based on where the rewards will be best for his or her human capital investment. There is no dearth of people who want to, and actually are, contributing to the

nation from the outside. Of course, there are also people who live in the country and serve the nation from within. There are also many who live abroad for a few years of their working life and move back for personal reasons.

KCM: Please let's know about MBA Program; the crux of it and what have to be done to offer the genuine MBA Program at our Institutional level so that the MBAs become true budding Managers.

VG: I think India has become factory for MBAs. We are producing MBAs without the necessary emphasis on quality and real-world exposure. If we want to improve the quality of MBAs at an existing institution, we have to become selective at admission, more rigorous during the course (with willingness to fail those who do not perform up to the mark) and train the professoriate to teach in ways that emphasize both theory and practice. No MBA should be able to graduate without practical training and there should be a thesis requirement at the end that should meet high quality standards.

KCM: You say Management teaching and research should go hand in hand, suggest the way out

VG: There is no easy way out: management research and teaching should go hand in hand. Professors should invest time and effort in doing research, as well as in improving themselves as teachers. The model here is Chanakya, an Indian Professor who was good at teaching and also did research that was written in books people talk about to this day.

KCM: Rather than B-Schools it should be called as Management Schools; what have you to say?

VG: Makes no difference! Whether it is called a B-School or a Management-School, it is one and the same thing. The emphasis should be on teaching business fundamentals, regardless of what you call it. In fact, calling them management schools may actually undermine the goal of business schools by making it seem that other disciplines such as finance and marketing are less important.

KCM: A Management School should nurture MBAs to develop the best qualities in a student; please spell out some of the best qualities that should be nurtured

VG: It seems to me that the ability to engage in logical thinking, financial analysis, communication skills (both verbal and written), and exposure to business practices from around the world are the essential skills for MBA graduates.

KCM: Management teaching should be based upon practical research by the faculty members. Give your comment and how can students be involved in such research activities?

VG: Faculty members should be free to do whatever research they want and can get published in good quality journals. Students should be encouraged to work with interested faculty members on their research projects by having an incentive system in place (for both professors and students). This incentive system can involve both cash- or non-cash awards that encourage the right behaviours with regard to research.

KCM: India Inc does not come forward to extend Corporate Connect taking the plea of paucity of time though they very well point out the gaps between Industry and the Institute. How can an Institute leverage out of this.

VG: The Corporate-Academia interface is difficult to bridge throughout the world. We should look at Business Schools that have been able to bridge this gap successfully, and then

implement those practices at our institutions. Such efforts will require some investments to host industry visitors (e.g., boarding, food, transportation) and b-schools should set aside dedicated budget each year for this purpose. In India, the problem is many in the Corporate Sector are not sure how to add value in such forums, so experienced professors may want to work with them to train them.

KCM: What have you to say about benchmarking of the Management Schools?

VG: Every school should identify peer institutions and aspiring institutions as part of their strategic plan, and then do regular benchmarking to assess how they compare to them.

KCM: We are an affiliate Institute of the University and have to follow the University curricula and all other guidelines. Please suggest how we move with our global counterparts to upscale our position/ benchmark ourselves.

VG: Being affiliate institute is not a handicap, but should be a source of strength. There is plenty of room to improve even within the constraints imposed by the affiliating University. I think for a B-School with limited resources, benchmarking should start with domestic institutions like themselves and then move to global institutions located outside the country.

KCM: How should be the future outlook of Management Schools in India?

VG: This is a difficult question to answer. Business Schools are popular around the world, and there are plenty of students who are willing to enrol for the promise of a better future. So, I have no doubt that b-school will exist for the foreseeable future, but whether there is much value add outside the top-tier, is an open question. My concern is that b-schools in India are seen as glorified placement agencies, and I do not see much emphasis yet on trying to change this perspective.

KCM: Please collate with Higher Education and Social Transformation in Indian Societal context

VG: The original purpose of college (or HEIs) was to produce an informed citizenry. This is a noble goal and one that closely ties the pursuit of higher education with social transformation. However, to truly achieve transformative social change through higher education, all colleges should direct part of their resources to engage their faculty and students with the community. Colleges need to make money to survive and grow, but they should not be profit centres to produce cash flow for non-academic activities (which is currently the case for many private colleges in India). Instead, all money generated by educational institutions should be directed towards meaningful academic activities that have the potential to bring positive change in the community. In effect, colleges should be pillars of the community and drivers of social benefit at the local and national levels.