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## CHANGING NEEDS AND THE ACADEMIC DISCONNECT WITH SOCIETY

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### ABSTRACT

*A Washington Post article showed clearly the growing disconnect between the higher education focus and the needs of society. About 61 per cent of India's educators feel (as reported in a study of IBM in collaboration with Economic Intelligence Unit) that the higher education system is unable to respond to the changing societal needs. New technologies, ever-changing skill requirements and outdated curricula are challenging India's higher education system in its efforts to equip graduates with job-ready skills. Between 2010 and 2030, India's working Population is expected to expand from 750 million to almost one billion. Without adequate education and training, such population growth, poses increased risk of the emergence of a growing class of the underemployed or unemployed who are unable to achieve the Indian middle class dream of "higher education" the study noted. The study suggested that developing more practical, applied, experience-based education, embracing technologies that improve educational access, experience and outcomes, and building deeper relationships with ecosystem partners which will be instrumental in transforming the educational system. This research paper will attempt to bring out the disconnection between higher education and expectations from society.*

## KEY WORDS

*Academic disconnect, higher education in India, embracing Technologies for futuristic needs, societal expectations.*

## INTRODUCTION

Many graduate students report that they have chosen a research career precisely because they want to contribute to the real world: to offer their knowledge and expertise in order to make a difference. And many report that if academia do not value their efforts or worse discourages it, they will follow a different route, either toward schools that reward such behavior or leave academia for think tanks, NGOs, the government or other organizations that value practical relevance and impact. The frustration is such that some no longer tell their advisors that they are involved in any form of public engagement, writing blogs or editorials, working with local communities or organizing training for their peers on public engagement. Will academia eventually reject these emergent scholars out, or will they remain and change academia? Many senior academics hope for the latter, fearing a worrying trend toward a reduction in the level of diversity and quality in the next generation of faculty.



**Figure 1: There's growing pressure for academics to get outside their comfort zones and to share their research with the broader public (Ref: [www.shutterstock.com](http://www.shutterstock.com))**

India's higher education system is unable to respond to society's changing needs as only 40 per cent executives believe that new employees recruited in local labor markets have requisite skills, says an IBM study. According to the study by the IBM Institute for Business Value (IBV) in cooperation with Economist Intelligence Unit, addressing the looming talent shortage will be instrumental in preparing India for the competitive global economy. The IBM study took insights from a survey of academics, corporate-recruiters, and emerging education leaders in India. In addition, the study analyzed results of recent surveys of startup entrepreneurs, venture capitalists and corporate executives.

This is a cause for concern. In our increasingly technological world, issues like nanotechnology, stem cell research, nuclear power, climate change, vaccines and autism, genetically modified organisms, gun control, health care and endocrine disruption require thoughtful and informed debate. But instead, these and other issues have often been caught up in the so-called culture wars. There are numerous factors that explain this current state of affairs, but one is the extent to which the scientific community has been unable or unwilling to explain the state



**Figure 2: IBM study – A wakeup call for Indian students.**

and gravity of scientific findings. The academics will need to evolve to keep up with the major changes going on around us. At stake is how we will maintain our relevance in society.

## **OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY**

As the business environment is evolving so also the educational requirements of society, because higher education determines the technological developments contributing to the evolutionary process. Societal needs are always changing due to trends in consumption due to economic and social factors, and the effect of evolving technology on the needs of society. Most of the scientific developments have contributed to make life more comfortable in the planet for humans starting from industrial revolution. Humans have always found means to improve their living by such changes and adapted to new methods and ways. The development of digital devices has contributed to make communications faster and in many ways improved the quality of our lives. Consider for example our grocery stores, fruits and vegetable vendor and any other house hold service, which is just a phone call away, as they say. But such a proliferation of devices of convenience has also made humans a bit lazy and led to disconnection between reality and imagination. As the higher education becomes dearer and the relevance of such costly education is lost, particularly in the present environment where much of the information gathered through education is only a click away. That is why many of our youngsters are getting a bit anxious about the high cost and spending involved in obtaining higher degrees in Universities. The present research is aimed at finding the causes of turbulence among the students of higher education and the changing needs and aspirations of society, of which the younger generation seeking higher education is an integral part. With these thoughts in mind following Objectives have been identified for the current research paper:

1. Environmental impact on academics and education.
2. How the needs of society are changing.
3. The impact of such environmental changes on academics.
4. How the academics are coping with such requirements
5. A review of requirements and fulfillment through higher education.
6. Conclusions and suggestions.

While considering the topic for research, there were serious doubts about availability of adequate information through published sources. This was soon expelled with the identification of

adequate published information through previous research in connected areas. Such information was available through web pages as well as print and published media. The challenges were in identification of information sources, compilation of data from available resources, tabulating and arranging information for arriving at suitable conclusions. This was possible as adequate data sources were identified and evaluated for relevance with respect to the objectives identified. This has been compiled and arranged so as to arrive at the Conclusions. Some suggestions have been added for future research to compliment the current efforts.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Needless to say, many excellent scientists are poor communicators who lack the skills or inclination to play the role of education to the public. Further, they are not trained nor are they given proper incentives to do it. And for that reason, many academics do not see it as their role to be “an enabler of direct public participation in decision-making through formats such as deliberative meetings, and do not believe there are personal benefits for investing in these activities.” As a result, there is focus inward to own research communities and remain disconnected from important public and political debate going on around them. This manifests itself in a professed lack of appreciation of the academy, particularly within state legislatures that have begun to cut funding to higher education. The problem is not made any easier by the reality that the public, according to surveys by the California Academy of Sciences, the National Science Foundation and others, is not well versed in science and appears unreceptive to attempts by scientists to correct it.

In the face of constant change, students will need to have different skills all the time. Education is the foundation on which a country is built. It is through education that we help our children to reach their full potential, both as productive members of the economy and as responsible, principled citizens. But how can we build an education system that best develops the adults of tomorrow? It's not easy to build schools that will cater to the needs of the fast-changing world of the 21st century. Consider the major changes in our society over the past 30 years and how they have affected the way we teach today. The world of 2044 will be very different again from that of 2014. Helping students to develop a framework in which they think about future challenges is

critical. Enabling students to participate in events such as the Montessori Model United Nations program, the world's only education program of its kind for children between 9 and 15 years will help them develop new perspectives and useful skills.

Over the past 30 years, there have been remarkable changes in how people work. The time when people stayed for 25 years in one job is long gone in developed societies. Therefore, schools now need to prepare students for a life in which they may have more than 10 jobs before they turn 50. Employers now look for employees who have not only mastered core subjects, but who are flexible, deal with change maturely and can learn new skills quickly. The economy itself is changing. The knowledge economy and the service economy are expanding rapidly all over the world. In Abu Dhabi, the long-term transition towards a sustainable, high-value knowledge economy will see the non-oil economy grow at an average of more than eight per cent per annum. Communication, collaboration and creativity are the skills required in the knowledge-based industries of the future.



Figure3: Globalization has made people think differently

Globalization requires everyone to think differently. The world is smaller place than it was 50 years ago. Our children will need to be “globally competent” to understand other cultures and be comfortable with cultural complexities. The world of information has also changed dramatically. The amount of information in the world is doubling every two years. So the way we manage this

will have to evolve. The students of the future will need to learn how to discern, aggregate and synthesize information in ways we cannot yet imagine. In the face of such tremendous change, our students will need to have different skills. Hence, education will no longer just be about “knowing”, but will require us to focus on the development of soft skills, communication, creative thinking and flexibility. But education could easily get lost in its quest to train children for the jobs of tomorrow. Our role as educators must focus on more than just “professional” development. Educators must create learning environments that provide young minds with a comprehensive, well-rounded education, covering culture, language, value development, creating and retaining a connection to our heritage.

It is easy to think that you can improve education just by getting the right curriculum, right testing system and right management scheme, and that somehow these will create great schools. But education is not an assembly line. The most powerful element in education is the teacher. Children do not learn on an assembly line – they learn through human contact. Teachers have an important task to play. They shape future generations. They must be knowledgeable and creative, but they must also empathize and communicate on a daily basis with those students they have a responsibility for inspiring. For educators, recruiting and retaining the best staff assumes a far greater importance than ever before.

While the above is true to the best of our knowledge and belief, the present trends in digitalization appear to be destructive with respect to the above observations. *The world is fast*. The three biggest forces on the planet—globalization, Mother Nature, and Moore’s Law (the exponential growth of computing power and, so, of digitalization)—are all surging so fast at the same time that the most critical challenge for the planet now is knowing how to plan for them.

Thomas Friedman discussed this idea during a surprise appearance at a recent World Bank course, *Strategic Choices for Education Reform in Arab Countries: Education for Competitiveness*, held in Kuwait at the International Monetary Fund’s (IMF’s) Middle East Center for Economics and Finance. Friedman is a big picture thinker, the bestselling author of *The World is Flat* (a book on globalization), and a Pulitzer prize-winning contributor to the New York Times.

The *Education for Competitiveness Initiative (EAC)*, the latest collaborative venture between the World Bank and the Islamic Development Bank, conceptualizes education within three domains:

- (i) Building foundations for learning and skills acquisition through improved quality of inputs, innovative approaches and improved governance – *Education for lifelong learning*; Life-long learning is essential and begins by building a solid foundation so that children are ready to learn throughout life as student and adults. Education that interests students, which leads them to learn how to learn and to become independent active thinkers, allows them to become the agents of their own future. Now more than ever, there is a need to learn and relearn throughout life—it is not a luxury but a necessity
- (ii) Strengthening school to work transition through more relevant skills and preparing students for the labor market – *Education for employability*; and Education for employment, seeks to ease the school to work transition. It not only recognizes the role education and training can play in fostering cognitive and socio-emotional skills, as well as the job-related skills graduates need to succeed in the labor market, but also the lack of information they face about the labor market
- (iii) Developing 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and values that promote creativity, innovation for competitiveness as well as wider social awareness and engagement in Education for transformation. Government ministries and others involved in education to go about their work in truly new and innovative ways. Finally, education systems must address the other pillar, Education through transformation. Education systems currently do little to promote 21st century skills, which are critical for success in today’s interconnected world. 21<sup>st</sup> century skills refer to a set of knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and ethics that are believed to be critically important to success in today’s world. The objective of this intervention is to support and strengthen the delivery of educational services that produce graduates with these important skills.

Social media is perhaps one of the most disruptive forces in society today, and academia is not immune to its impact. Society now has instant access to more news, stories and information, including scientific information, from more sources and in more varied formats than ever before.

For universities to remain relevant, we must learn to engage in the new realities of the information age.

Today many young people have a different set of aspirations and goals than their senior advisors. Against this backdrop, there are glimmers of hope as more people rethink the audience for academic research. For example, many faculty members in Universities are engaging with the public regardless of the lack of formal rewards or training. Academic Appointments and Promotions Committee in Mayo clinic in the USA announced it will include social media and digital activities in its criteria for academic advancement; the American Sociological Association published a white paper on how to evaluate public communication in tenure and promotion; and some schools, like the Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan, have added a fourth category to the standard three – research, teaching and service – in its annual review process that captures impact on the world of practice.

Beyond training, Academic Research and scientific institutions are beginning to study the “rules of engagement” more deeply for example: The AAAS, Leshner Center for Public Engagement with Science & Technology, the National Academies of Sciences’ “The Science of Science Communication” Colloquia and the University of Michigan’s “Academic Engagement in Public and Political Discourse” for engagement of faculty in conference and seminars. Similarly, donors are stepping forward with funding: such as the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation’s “Public Understanding of Science, Technology & Economics” or Alan Alda’s support of the Center for Communicating Science at Stony brook University that bears his name. Many student unions, activists and associations are taking up the cause of education, training and research to be oriented and focused to social needs of community at large.

Not to be left out, many students are taking charge of their own training in this area. For example, the Researchers Expanding Lay-Audience Teaching and Engagement Program (RELATE) was started at the University of Michigan in 2013 by a group of graduate students to help “early career researchers develop stronger communication skills and actively facilitating a dialogue between researchers and different public communities.” To help this process move even faster, new kinds of outlets are making it easier for academics to bring their

voice directly to the public, such as *The Conversation*, the *Monkey Cage* and hundreds more in journals, trade associations and professional societies. Indeed, it would seem that academia is changing, albeit slowly. The conversation is being engaged by faculty, deans, presidents, journal editors, journal reviewers, donors and students. But in the end, the question is whether the aggregation of these many conversations will reach the critical mass necessary to shift the entire institution of the academy.

The United States is in the midst of one of the great transformations of Western civilization. Like many other managers, the chief executive of General Motors feels the quakes. What is happening is that the old ideas and assumptions, which once made great institutions legitimate, authoritative, and confident, are fast eroding. It is hard for managers, especially those in large corporations, to operate in an environment in which the old ideas no longer seem to work. If these new ideas were well defined, it would be difficult enough for managers—and for all of us—to cope with them; but since they are still plastic, unfamiliar, and disruptive, we are baffled—and perhaps afraid. Overall, there is a declining confidence in the political leadership to face the challenges of future needs.

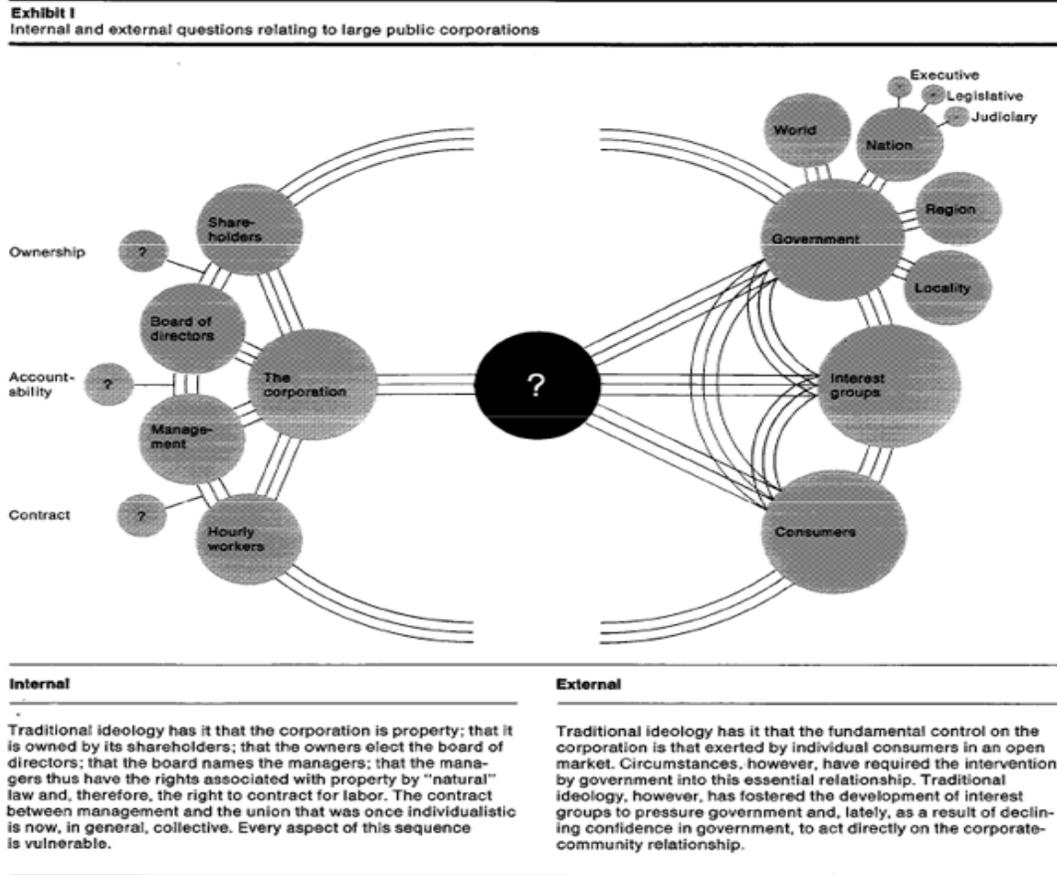
In essence, mankind must weave together a new system of definitions for the ancient values—survival, justice, creativity, self-respect, and the like. All communities everywhere have treasured these values; they are timeless and essentially noncontroversial. It is the definitions of such values that vary from time to time and place to place. If we consider the past 6,000 years of human history, we are struck by the extent to which this atomistic, individualistic ideology constitutes a fundamental aberration from the historically typical communitarian norm. It stands as a radical experiment that achieved its most extreme manifestation in America in the nineteenth century. Since that time it has been steadily deteriorating in the face of various challenges—wars, depressions, new economic and political systems, the concentration and growth of populations, and institutional as well as environmental degeneration. Institutions that depended on the traditional ideas for their legitimacy—notably the large corporations—have thus become unmoored.

The community as conceived today is indeed more than the sum of the individuals in it. It has special and urgent needs, and the survival and the self-respect of the individuals in it depend on the recognition of those needs. Individual fulfillment for most depends on a place in a community, an identity with a whole, a participation in an organic social process. Both corporations and unions have played leading roles in the creation of the circumstances which eroded the old idea of individualism and created the new. Finally, and perhaps most fundamentally, the old idea of scientific specialization has given way to a new consciousness of the interrelatedness of all things. Spaceship earth, the limits of growth, the fragility of our life-supporting biosphere have dramatized the ecological and philosophical truth that everything is related to everything else. Harmony between the works of man and the demands of nature is no longer the romantic plea of conservationists. It is an absolute rule of survival, and thus it is of profound ideological significance.

And educational institutions gave them little help in understanding or coping with it. Academic bureaucracies, based on the old idea of specialization, constitute a series of long dark tunnels called disciplines. The best man in each field is at the end of his tunnel, digging an ever-narrowing trench of new knowledge. "If you are diligent you may find him," the student is told, "and if you are persistent you may get him to raise his head and mumble." Whatever the ultimate value of academic research may be, the student has come to wonder whether this kind of education is what he needs to understand the world—whether, in fact, what is truly important is not what ties the tunnels together and how they are related to one another. If he tries to find out, there are only a few mavericks to hold his hand. It is no wonder that increasing numbers of college seniors have no conception of where they are going to fit. It is also no wonder that increasing numbers of students are dropping out to seek their own integration through direct experience in the world.

Once the manager has opened his mind fully, he can consider two sets of problems which the changing ideology raises for the large corporation. The first has to do with the internal organization of the corporation and concerns matters of ownership, accountability, and contract. The second has to do with the relationship between the corporation and the communities which it

affects: the neighborhood, the city, the state, the nation, and the world. This is a valuable exercise, not so much because the manager can always influence the answers directly, but because it helps the manager set out the possibilities for himself. (Exhibit I diagrams the context of these questions.)



**Figure 4: Internal and external questions relating to large public corporations**

Ideological analysis and contemplation also will allow managers to consider how what is best and dearest in the old ideology may be preserved. One ideology obviously builds on another. The glories of the old—the rights of the individual, his dignity, the beautiful efficiency of competition in many areas, the incentives of enterprise and invention—are all in jeopardy. The best of them can be preserved only if we consciously design them into what is coming.

## **FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION**

The Quality and contributions to a society can be determined by the nature of the education systems and the contribution and difference that the education has made on its members. Today most of the industrial organizations are aware that their continued existence depends on their relevance to society. Educational Institutions are no different to these criteria of evaluation in society. The relevance of education will be determined by the contribution of the students and products coming out of the system as they go to work in various institutions created by society for their convenience and comfortable living. This will include industrial organizations and other institutions where the new generation of youngsters goes to work. Unless their education has ingrained in them a social responsibility to be a net contributor to society their education has failed.

Societal needs always change from generation to generation. These are triggered by the new needs identified by them and ways of fulfilling them. Transportation is a good example; as the society and families have got dispersed due to industrial development and occupational changes due to that we find that most people need to travel some distance to their work place. This need has been satisfied by new generation of fast cars and suburban electric trains. Along with this the new schools have opened and relocated to places near to human settlements and colonies. While this development is welcome and has been complimented by development of concurrent transport systems and educational institutions, the moot question is what is being taught in institutions of knowledge is relevant to modern society and their requirements.

There has been tremendous growth in number of educational institutions and the types of degrees and diplomas awarded by them. But are these degrees and qualifications are sufficient and useful in making a positive contribution to furthering knowledge; but has the use of such knowledge for practical purpose of improving quality of life and getting gainful employment in society improved. A critical review and focus on our systems of education and evaluation of their utility for employment generation is the purpose of this research paper. Many new institutions of technical education and higher knowledge have been opened in India and other developing countries and many of them with foreign university collaboration. But it has been generally

found that these youngsters with fancy degrees from acclaimed institutions are not able to make a social contribution.

Throughout the body of this research paper and review of Literature, various suggestions have been proposed for overhauling our educational systems. Our educational system starting from primary schools must really focus on developing the citizens and youngsters of tomorrow. While this has been professed through various discourses of politicians and education administrators very little has been done to update our children to international standards through imparting current and competitive information for their choice. The development of thought processes, skills and efficiency to tackle the unknown are lacking in our inputs through such institutions of knowledge.

India has a rich history and tradition of Gurukulams and great teachers. Where are such inspirational teachers now? A Guru is one who imparts practical knowledge and the skills and training to apply them appropriately free of cost. Today the parents though paying hefty Fees for schooling and higher education of their wards find that they do not acquire the skills needed for self learning and application on learned knowledge for solving many problems that afflict society today. So, it needs a comprehensive review of our systems of learning and education which will be practical and useful for the generations to come. The purpose of education is to create a pool of men and women who can take up the societal challenges in a changing and ever challenging world.

## **SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATION**

In this paper, it has not been possible to develop a full, or even a comprehensive, picture of globalization as it will affect education policy and planning. Although constrained in terms of scope, the author has none-the-less realized that the demand for post-secondary and higher education, especially for profession-oriented courses/programs, is increasing in most countries, particularly in Asian countries. The reasons for this are the high demand for opportunities to enter higher education and the need for improvements in professional development. Frameworks for quality assurance, accountability and accreditation will all, in turn, become platforms for future opportunities and development in education in the global world. In the light of these

developments, if the new demands and opportunities are to be faced there has to be a change of culture. Research into these issues could influence thinking on how education might be re-structured to light the future. ‘Thamasoma jyotiirmaya’ – i.e. From darkness to Light – that is the purpose of education to take one to real knowledge from ignorance.

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