**What One Should and Should Not Expect From a MBA Program**

An *MBA* is not to be seen as a mere tool / route to get a lucrative dignified employment with an MNC or a popular brand or a decorative feather on the cap to impress the significant others. An MBA, to my mind, at best prepares you for a disciplined rational approach to analysing and comprehending situations in your career and life in general. This approach, if used diligently and responsibly, will help you to evaluate a larger basket of opportunities and choose the one that best fits your skill set, life / career goals, market opportunities, personality traits, your passion and what you believe will give you happiness and meaning in life. It helps you to see things in perspective and for the really driven ones, to dare to venture into unchartered territories. So do not carry a myopic view as to why you are opting to do an MBA. You should have a larger objective than bagging that coveted job quickly or enhance your value in the market.

All successful MBAs need not necessarily land in a lucrative job in a national brand or an MNC. Many who get carried away initially by brand names and peer trends discovered later that that was not their place. There are many entrepreneurially driven MBAs who choose a path that satisfies their inner desires, have succeeded and become Icons and path breakers in their chosen field. So keep your sights high. So don’t settle for something suboptimum just because something is the fashion of the season, but away from what is passionate to you and below your true capabilities.

We tend to underestimate our real capability until we are pushed to the limits. Push yourself and you will realise your true capability. Dare to choose your own path and you will discover the new you!

More than a conduit to land a respectable job, an MBA helps acquire life skills whose value pervades beyond the call of a job situation. MBAs tend to be more confident and see life in a different light. This is because of the diversity of exposure one gets through the course work in an MBA program as well as the variety of interactions during the program.

Traversing an MBA program many times endorses your own closely secretly views that you would have held close to you, for fear of ridicule, disapproval or out of sync with the fashion of the day, and thus reinforces your independence thought process and self-confidence. It gives you an opportunity to see your diverse experience in life through the glass of variety of disciplines (finance, economics, behavioural science …..).

In simple terms, *Management* is just common sense applied logically and rationally, as seen through a structured filter of multiple disciplines, taught in a MBA program. A disciplined approach brings in consistency and predictability, enhances confidence and acceptance levels leading to results. It helps take a rational view than a temporal emotionally charged knee jerk reaction. One would be able to see the *woods* in addition to the *trees* that make up the woods. This approach brings maturity in understanding and decisions in complex situations.

MBA students should guard against overzealous inferences drawn from individual discipline oriented approach by respective faculty. One has to recognise inherent conflict across several management objectives and the goal is to arrive at an optimum decision that best balances conflicting objectives of individual disciplines in management. Faculty members who could be experts in their narrow discipline but without *management* exposure may tend to send out a message that their disciplines’ objectives shall override everything else. This is typical of real life organisational dynamics where you have to guard territory. But at higher levels in management (above individual disciplines / functional areas) these are moderated to consider needs of and impact on other related areas.

Quality MBA programs should induce participants to be incisive in their analysis and understanding, questioning on possibilities (eg. negative interest rates) and implications, holistic evaluation on consequential fallouts of decisions, contrarian thoughts, new possibilities and experimentation; not mechanistic skill acquisition for its unadulterated deployment. A mechanistic approach will only help in transactional management (maintenance) and not transformational and creative. What is significant is, to develop a questioning mind, searching for answers, introspection, debate, evolving new paradigms and standards. This is possible only if one is constantly in sync with environmental developments (an open system approach) and being able to predict emergence of new models and interconnections. Product of quality MBA programs should expect to nourish their entrepreneurial competence fed by unhindered exercise of their mind. Ability to see the *invisible* would be one of the most valued contributions from a quality MBA program. One need to develop the skill to reconcile contradictions. Be open and humble to accept your limitations or even ignorance even after a MBA! It is equally important to stretch your imagination beyond the classroom theories and nurture a questioning mind such as (contradictions below):

* We always talk of positive interest rates (I haven’t heard much on negative interest rates!). Cash in hand today is more valuable than a receivable due to tomorrow! This is also the logic driving discounted cash flow analysis for investment appraisals. Do these premises hold good for ever? Are negative interest rates real and possible? <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-08-20/only-in-argentina-where-minus-3-bond-yields-are-all-the-rage>
* How does an elected government steal your wealth legitimately? What is the real meaning and implication of deficit financing? What is devaluation in its true sense? Are you really better off by stacking cash today for use tomorrow?
* Why world over there is craze for dollar? Are rich countries saviour of the poor as made out to be? What is the real price we pay for aid? Do we need it? Should we take it? At what cost? Who pays and how? <http://www.brettonwoodsproject.org/2005/08/art-320747/>; <http://www.teamlaw.org/BWAgreements.pdf>; ….
* What does correlation coefficient mean? A positive correlation coefficient simply means two sets of numbers are moving together in one direction and a negative value means they are moving in opposite direction, the % of correlation (value of the fraction that is less than 1) simply indicating the strength of this relationship. It does not in any way mean any *causal relationship* between the two variables which will have to be established through a logical argument based on the intrinsic functional nature of the two variables. Unfortunately such incisive and searching discussions rarely take place in classrooms
* A brand is simply what comes to the top of the mind of the stakeholder (trustworthy, expensive, reliable, quality, image booster, cheap,… ) when we name a company, product and so on, that will drive an action w.r.t the product / service offerings of the company. It is not the one that makes too much noise through high decibel obtrusive visuals. The approach for brand promotion itself could be a reason for its negative image. More noise doesn’t mean higher brand value
* We are disappointed when we lose a deal we are pursuing to our competitor. Is competitor your enemy? Never, in fact it is competition that drives innovation and excellence in quality, innovation, efficiency and even market value. We should thank our competitors for making us what we are and moving up the scale
* One traditional definition of Management is *Planning, Organising, monitoring and Controlling*. Does it still hold? Execution being the most crucial to many businesses, why is it that it doesn’t find mention in the definition of *Management*.
* Do we need to monitor employees’ physical movements (their coming and going from office)? Not necessarily, we need not control inputs, but only outputs. Monitoring outputs are considered more civilized and progressive, give more freedom to the employee, enhances their morale, is better measurable and objective, motivate the team.
* There are multiple functions / elements in management, many of them in conflict. Employee satisfaction through higher wages causes dissatisfaction to shareholders by lower profitability; Customer delight by improved quality is management’s curse by lowered profits; Marketing teams’ aggressive commitment is a curse for production team with lower time to deliver; Marketing teams’ competitive price is finance man’s nightmare of lower returns…. It is necessary to recognise negative collateral consequences of any managerial decision and plan for mitigating undesirable consequences or arrive at a balanced consensual view. To balance out these positives and negatives Balanced Score Card (BSC) is used while evaluating performance. BSC recognises intrinsic conflict and has evolved a mechanism to provide for intrinsic conflicts. An organisation is a living organism (Living systems theory) and hence has complexity inherent and managers need to approach it with a holistically. Do not be guided by a blinkered approach
* Trend analysis from past data can never capture brewing disruptive shifts. Inferences from data analysis need to be seen in the light of contextual developments, drawing meaning from what may qualify as illogical based on past premises. One has to also read the written and unwritten writings on the wall, to draw realistic meaning from otherwise mere quantitative data analysis. Decisions should not be a mere mechanical extension of quantitative analysis’ results thrown up by the computer. Despite all distractions, one should adopt a logical approach beyond what is dictated by numbers
* We are confronted with increasing invasion of routine logical managerial processes by automation, using technology. This has reduced direct human intervention in handling routine managerial processes. The role of managers would be one of trouble shooting, predicting failures, innovation of new practices, methods and rules changing paradigms. Real value from innovation is what is expected of management and not mechanistic maintenance that can be relegated to process handlers.
* MBAs are not meant to be robots but those who conceive, develop, deploy and exploit robotic capabilities to achieve goals.

You will discover and educate others more as you go along in your career!!