

IT Project – the missing link in IT education in India

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After a continuous surge for 20 years in IT business, India and the IT industry in particular have realized that we must get into higher levels of business in the value chain. Unless we do this, we cannot build a competitive edge over other competing countries. Neither can we maintain the current competitive edge that we have already built. Everyone has understood that the bottom line of entry-level talent must be honed with better skill set. But, how is this mammoth effort to be set into initiated and realized?

In a series of articles, the author proposes to bring out various problems and solutions that she found effective to the readers. She has 23 years of experience – 4 years as teacher, 10 years in Defence R&D and 9 years in IT industry in MNC and Indian private companies as well. Now, she is an entrepreneur heading a 25-employee company, MeritScholar IT solutions pvt ltd., which is building IT solutions for its clients. The following is the first article that brings out the context of the BIG problem that we are all facing.

The current generation of students passing out of professional colleges is all borne during late 80s. If we take a careful look at what kind of schooling they have all undergone, we notice that it is a generation that got caught up in the conflict of local language vs English medium based education system. The parents were unable to decide which way to go by as there was no clear direction in the job market during that time. IT sector just started to boom then. This kind of talent dearth was not heard of nor even talked about during those days. In fact, the more progressive parents of late eighties generation believed that if one were to prosper one has to go to the US. The others were left to their indecisiveness due to lack of English-medium schools, higher fees in existing ones, lack of media's voice and Indian IT companies' struggle to establish their supremacy.

Then, came a sudden spurt of growth in early 90s due to late Prime Minister Sri P.V. Narasimha Rao's blessed vision and Dr. Manmohan Singh's liberalization of economy. IT companies cashed in the opportunity presented by the Government and ended up bagging unprecedented business in International IT market. Along side, NASSCOM systematically projected IT sector needs

every year, and AP not only opened up professional education to private sector but also created excellent IT infrastructure due to its ex-Chief Minister's meritorious vision. Naturally, when so much happens so fast, some gifted sectors can do well and the not-so-gifted sectors fare badly. The IT sector needed the best talent of the country. It thus absorbed the productive talent of those times that knew programming from all industry domains. Due to availability of funds and dedicated service to the US corporate it performed exceedingly well and ended up creating several job opportunities today. Probably, for the very same reason the education sector suffered due to lack of knowledgeable instructors. However, professional engineering colleges of early 90s could recover from the slump, spotted the trend and put in quick measures to produce immediately absorbable industry-grade talent, but the latecomers on the horizon became the worst sufferers. They neither have good faculty nor have talented students. They are forced to run their education business under constrained conditions due to sponsorship of ambitious parents. So many youth needed to be educated professionally!

The IT corporate have realized that the so-called cream also needs to be trained for 2-3 months before they become billable. As a result, everyone started taking a more critical look than ever at our age-old education system.

Now, we can see very clearly how this talent gulf has got created due to various circumstances – lot of business due to senior level IT talent, lot of resultant job opportunities, diluted professional college education that does not inculcate any core scientific values, lakhs of youth in productive age, enormous support of child education by parents, awareness of one and all due to media boom. In technical parlance this is a very NICE-TO-HAVE problem. This is when INNOVATION must hit the market.

Unfortunately, due to various uncontrollable reasons, majority of the youth do not see a direct relation between education and job, theory and practice, what is told in the class and what happens outside, a spoken word and an action, a code written for practice and a project work, a problem and a solution, a copied work and an original work, a reviewed work and an unreviewed work, an individual work and a team work; put in other words, a normal work and a GREAT WORK.

Their value system for work is NOT AT ALL set. Can we leave this problem unattended? Absolutely not. If we do so, we will be the worst sufferers. Hence, I propose to set it with good project work. This could very well prove to be the missing link in our IT education. It has the power to create wonders.

Youth have the capacity to absorb any complexity if it is well packaged. This is the time for an innovator to realize his dreams. Give the youth those things that open their vistas. Feed them with the best of technical values. Let them understand the power of truthful implementation. Let them comprehend the relation between theoretical and practical worlds. Let them digest the agonies of delivering an IT project. Let them register how important a customer is. Let them evaluate the value of time. Let them test the value of getting their work tested. Let them enjoy the benefits of teamwork. Let them learn to withstand tough reviews by superiors. Let them know how important it is to find a good solution and not just a quick fix to a problem. Let them get rugged in long hours of intriguing work on computers – fighting with that untraced bug, unknown technology, ununderstood tool, uncomprehended error. Let them get bitten by a tester's caustic bug. Let us watch if he gets up and gets over it. If he completes the cycle we see the emergence of our new DREAM DEVELOPER. Only when we take him through the trials and tribulations of IT projects does he emerge with better understanding of time, quality, teamwork and all those qualities that we cherish and wish they have them.

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