

An Empirical Study on Re-Engineering Management Education For The VUCA Environment By Understanding Needs And Learning Stages Of Students

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ABSTRACT

Recently, with the bursting of both the economic as well as ethics bubbles, the credibility of management education has taken a beating. The rapid growth and proliferation of business schools have led to the emergence of some schools having dubious quality – and Management education has come under scrutiny. Outside of the US, India now trains the largest number of MBAs with about 240000 degrees annually.

Indian business schools have sought to replicate the US-based organizational, pedagogical, curricula, industry interface, and academic research models, but are struggling to introduce several adaptations because of the differences in the work culture system. Every aspect of management education today is aimed at making the student corporate ready but in this endeavor sometimes business schools forget to understand whether the student is “education ready”.

This paradox can be resolved by focusing on two aspects:

- a. The needs of students when they enter a business or management school.
- b. The stages in the learning curve of a student during his stay at the school.

This paper aims to diagnose both these aspects through empirical research for the purpose of re-engineering management education for the VUCA environment. The first part of this research paper aims at identifying the contextual framework and the dynamics, issues, and challenges of management education in India.

The second part of this paper will dwell on an empirical survey of B-School graduates and will develop a hierarchy of 6 needs of students namely need for certainty, diversity, significance, networking, contribution, and growth, and link them with 4 stages in the learning curve which are Unconscious Incompetence, Conscious Incompetence, Conscious Competence, and Unconscious competence

Keywords: (Business education; pedagogical; organizational; quality; contextual; industry interface; academic research model)

INTRODUCTION

Business education has its origins in the late 19th century in India. Currently, 840000 plus undergraduate degrees, and 2,35,000 plus graduate degrees in business are awarded in India every year by more than 6730 accredited colleges and universities. Estimates by the school website. Key players in university-based executive education span elite universities, as well as many regional and mid-sized universities and business schools around the world. Similar trends are seen worldwide - business education has spread rapidly in Europe, Asia, and Latin America. Many of these schools are at least partially based on the US model.

The growth of business education has gone together with numerous innovations in pedagogical models, course content and curricula, the role of research, and the relationship with government and industry. Until the 1980s, U.S. business schools thrived on a hyper-competitive culture, with mostly Type A personality students with finance and engineering backgrounds. However, many of these people were not prepared to compete in a global world.

In response, business schools diversified their student bodies in terms of both discipline and demographic backgrounds and pushed for more team-oriented programs backed by preparation in the foundations of international business, information technology, and entrepreneurship. To meet the resource demands of this push, business schools adopted a flexible organizational model, encompassing all segments of education: undergraduate or graduate, full-time or part-time, degree or non-degree, and bricks or clicks.

Recently, with the bursting of clicks as well as ethics bubbles, the credibility of corporate America has taken a beating and so has that of business education. The rapid growth and proliferation of business schools have led to the emergence of some schools having dubious quality – and business education has come under scrutiny. Even well-run business schools are

not exempt from this scrutiny. As organizations look for more areas of efficiency, the high salaries paid to graduates from elite schools have led both academics and practitioners to re-evaluate the benefits of business education.

Pfeffer & Fong (2022) in their controversial paper "The End of Business Schools? Less Success Than Meets the Eye," contended that the graduates with business education are no more successful than the leaders without the degree, for the success is a function of what a person can do. Does it then make sense for the potential students to bear the cost of an MBA education that often tops \$175,000, including tuition and lost salaries? Similar issues were raised in a recent paper from the consulting company Booz, Allen, and Hamilton that derided "cookie-cutter" MBA programs that were producing look-alike MBA's and not meeting businesses' needs (Doria, Rozanski, and Cohen, 2013)

Every aspect of management education today is aimed at making a student 'Corporate Ready.' But in this endeavor, sometimes, business schools forget to understand if the student is "Education Ready". There is a mushrooming of business schools all over the country and each of them tries to outperform the other by either making the syllabus complex or making the curriculum so difficult that the students rarely understand what or why they are going through such a tough churn.

The attempt, in this paper, is to look at the other side of the fence and discover if this grind of management education is serving its purpose, from a student's standpoint. It is also an attempt to find out if, at the end of the course, a student is confident about meeting the future corporate challenges.

Today, there exists a paradox in business and management education. The paradox is "Whether the course curriculum should focus on the Students or the Corporate World?"

While focusing on the students dilutes the curriculum, focusing on the corporate world makes the course untenable.

This paradox can be resolved by focusing on two aspects:

- a. The needs of students when they enter a business or management school.
- b. The stages in the learning curve of a student during his stay at the school.

Hamilton derided "cookie-cutter" MBA programs that were producing look-alike MBA's and not meeting businesses' needs (Doria, Rozanski, and Cohen, 2013)

OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

- a. To analyze if the grind of management education is serving its purpose, from the students' perspective.
- b. To discover the true benefits a student acquires when he leaves the B-School.
- c. To understand the need for students to take up management education.
- d. To focus on the stages of a learning curve when a student is undergoing a management degree.
- e. To formulate a model which connects the need of students with the stages in the learning curve.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- a. **Research Design:** Descriptive in nature.
- b. **Data Collection:** Primary Data: Questionnaire
Secondary Data: Various research articles and News Articles
- c. **Sample Size:** 413 students from the Business Schools and Management Colleges, through the random sampling method.
- d. **Tools and Techniques:**
 - The percentage analysis method
 - Testing of Differences between Proportions for large sample test at a 5% level of significance: to understand whether the students prefer a certain need the formula for large sample test of proportion which is

$$Z = \frac{\hat{p} - p_0}{\sqrt{\frac{p_0 q_0}{n}}}$$

- P is % of students preferring a certain need, P0 & Q0 are assumed to be point 5 each with the assumption that there is no specific preference for a particular need.
- Bar diagrams and Pie charts for better pictorial understanding.

DATA ANALYSIS:

UNDERSTANDING STUDENT NEEDS

It is often found that hundreds of students are fed with a management curriculum that the academic fraternity thinks fits, but the expectations of the students are seldom considered while business schools strive to provide meaningful education.

An empirical survey was conducted, interviewing four hundred and thirteen management students from various business schools and management colleges spread over Bangalore. It discovered the following six needs of such students while they pursue management education:

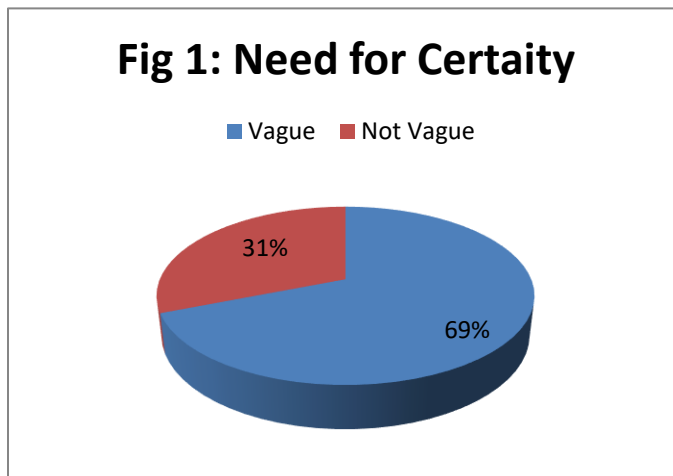
1. Need for certainty:

Students expect clarity on what they will be taught and what they are expected to do during their stay in the B-school. The students sometimes are made to take up tasks for which there is no clarity of purpose and communication of such purpose is found to be lacking amongst the imparters of education.

Out of the 413 students who were surveyed, 285 students thought the entire course curriculum was vague and there was an abstract element to several topics which they thought could be understood only by cramming. These students also found it difficult to understand the practical purpose of studying the subject in its present form.

The attempt of the teachers must be to provide a pragmatic view of the subject, teach and explain the practical feasibility of the subject and its applicability to the business environment.

This will lend some tangibility not only to the pedagogy but also to the grasp a student will have over the subject.



H0: There is no significant difference between the proportion of students who think that the curriculum is vague and not vague.

Using the large sample test for proportion mentioned in the tools and technique.

The test value is $Z = 7.72$ which is higher than the table value of 1.96. Therefore, there is a significant difference between students who consider the syllabus to be vague and not vague.

2. Need for diversity and variety:

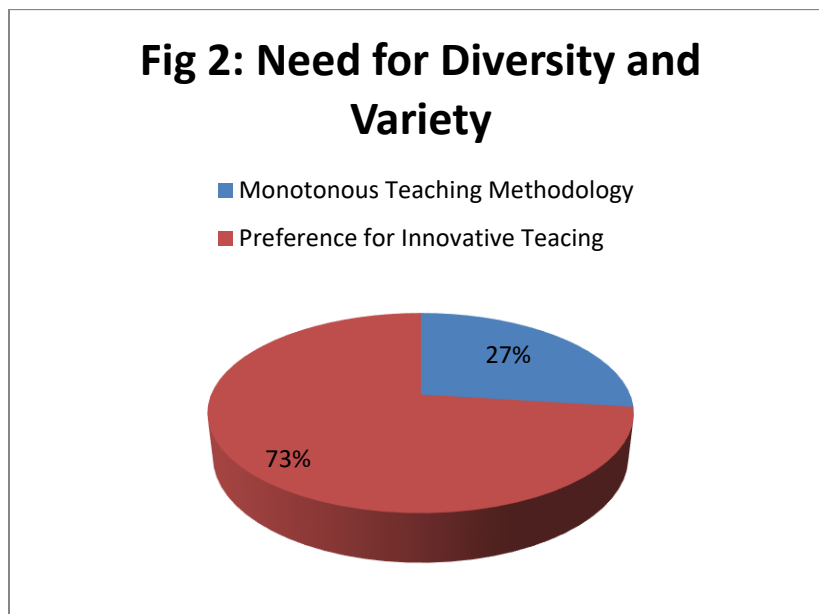
There is a tendency among students to get mentally worn out with the same old techniques of lectures and case studies.

The students, in the survey, felt a strong need for variety both in management pedagogy as well as the curriculum.

301 students wanted a departure from the chalk and talk system of teaching to more innovative methods of imparting education.

Methods such as business games, quizzes, innovative summarizations by students, role plays, and simulations must not only be made a part of the teaching methodology but also must be made mandatory.

A sincere effort must be made to include these pedagogic techniques as an integral part of the syllabus, and it must not depend on the personal effort of the teacher.



H₀: There is no significant difference between the students who prefer innovative teaching and students who prefer traditional methods of teaching.

Using the large sample test for proportion mentioned in the tools and technique.

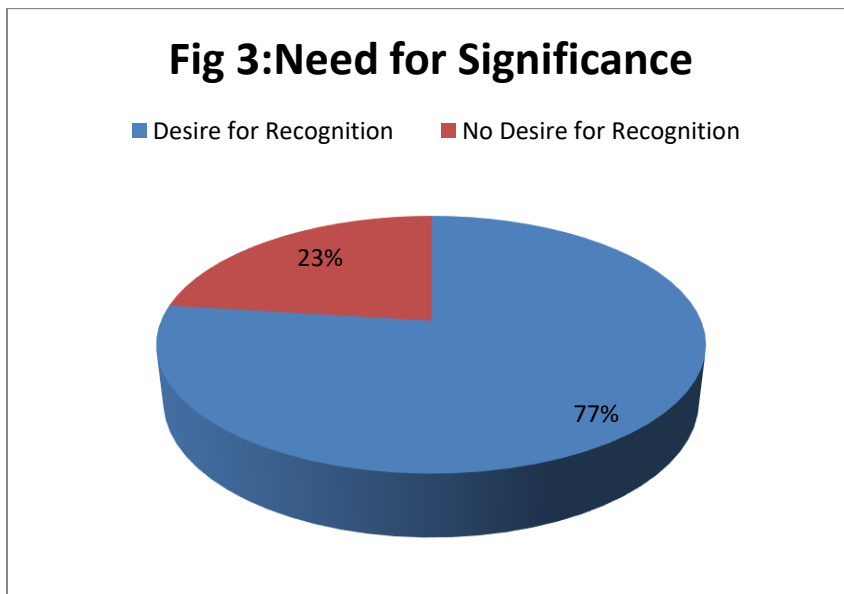
The test value is $Z = 11.004$ which is higher than the table value of 1.96. Therefore, there is a significant difference between students who prefer innovative teaching and students who prefer traditional methods of teaching.

3. Need for significance:

The students said that the times when they participated in events and activities and were recognized for the same, they felt extremely happy. The duty of the faculty is to move from a sage on the stage to a guide by the side.

318 students expressed their deep-felt desire to feel recognized and when asked when they felt really satisfied with their performance in the class, they answered that they felt happy when their assignment was accepted with good grades or when their presence was appreciated by the faculty.

A strong and powerful message from the survey was that critical pedagogy must be replaced with a supportive pedagogy where students are notified of their mistakes, but encouragement and empowerment must follow such criticism.



H0: There is no significant difference between students who prefer innovative teaching and students who prefer traditional methods of teaching.

Using the large sample test for proportion mentioned in the tools and technique.

The test value is $Z = 19.89$ which is higher than the table value of 1.96. Therefore, there is a significant difference between students who desire recognition and those who do not desire recognition.

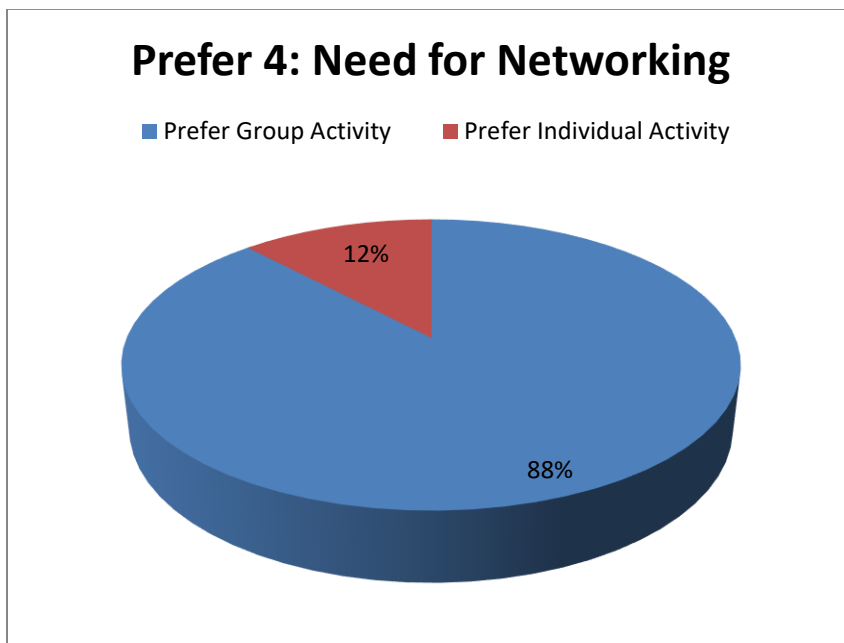
4. Need for networking:

An important need for students is to network and build bonds so that they can perform their tasks in a congenial atmosphere.

The academic fraternity should encourage group activities and create informal groups for work to be performed. Out of the 413 surveyed students, 362 students said that they preferred group activities to individual activities as they could learn from each other in a team.

This is also true in a corporate environment where most tasks are performed in a team.

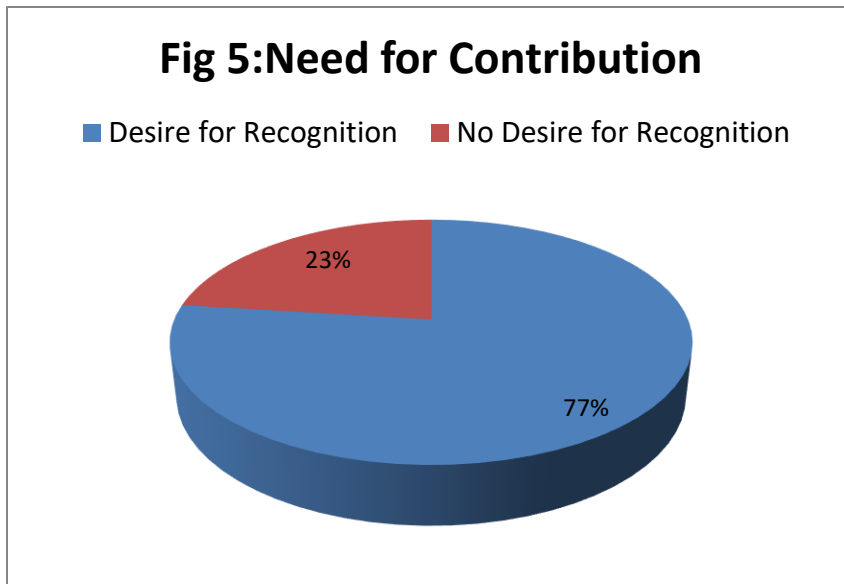
The seeds of teamwork and a feeling of camaraderie must be at this stage, to reap results in the future.



H₀: There is no significant difference between students who prefer innovative teaching and students who prefer group activity and those who prefer individual activity.

Using the large sample test for proportion mentioned in the tools and technique.

The test value is $Z=15.65$ which is higher than the table value of 1.96. Therefore, there is a significant difference between students who prefer group activity and those who prefer individual activity.



5. Need for contribution:

Another strong need was the urge to contribute to all activities within the educational institution and to feel that the students have made a significant difference to the college or institution at large.

If there is one need that holds a key to the previous four needs, it is this need to contribute that eventually brings certainty to his stay, variety to his curriculum, and a chance to feel significant and network with his peers.

This need can be brought into focus by organizing events like seminars, symposiums, and inter-college fests, and involving the students in all activities where they feel a sense of accomplishment in having contributed to the college and the society at large.

H₀: There is no significant difference between students who prefer active participation in college events and those who don't prefer active participation in college events.

Using the large sample test for proportion mentioned in the tools and technique.

The test value is $Z=7.72$ which is higher than the table value of 1.96. Therefore, there is a significant difference between students who prefer active participation in college events and those who don't prefer active participation in college events.

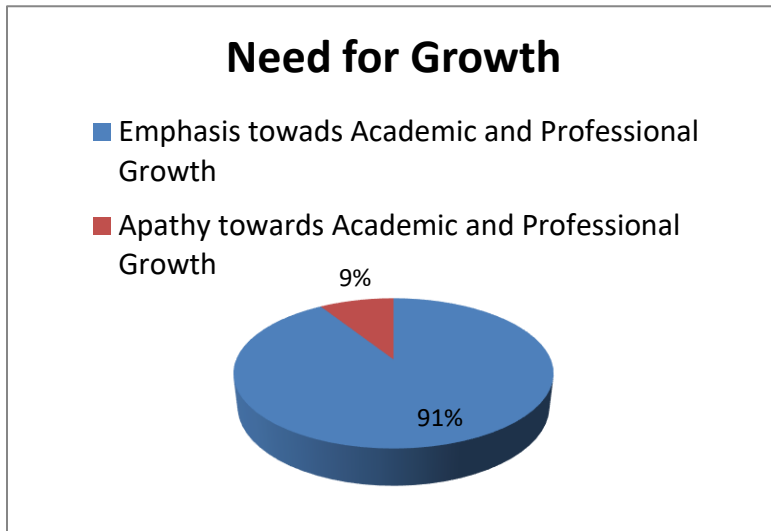
6. Need for growth:

The greatest need identified was the need to grow both academically and personally after his stay in the B-school. Academic growth is perceived to be the expansion of knowledge and personal growth as the growth in emotional and rational stability.

375 of the students expressed that they would consider their stay in the business school to be fruitful if they would gain professionally in terms of knowledge and personally if they could ride the tough waves of the corporate world.

Every aspect of the pedagogy must underline this fact. The teachers and all the providers of management education must ask the question “If the activities assigned would result in some growth to the overall personality of the student?”

If not, the activities held so forth must be modified or changed to meet this critical need.



H₀: There is no significant difference between students who emphasize academic and personal growth and those who have apathy toward academic and personal growth.

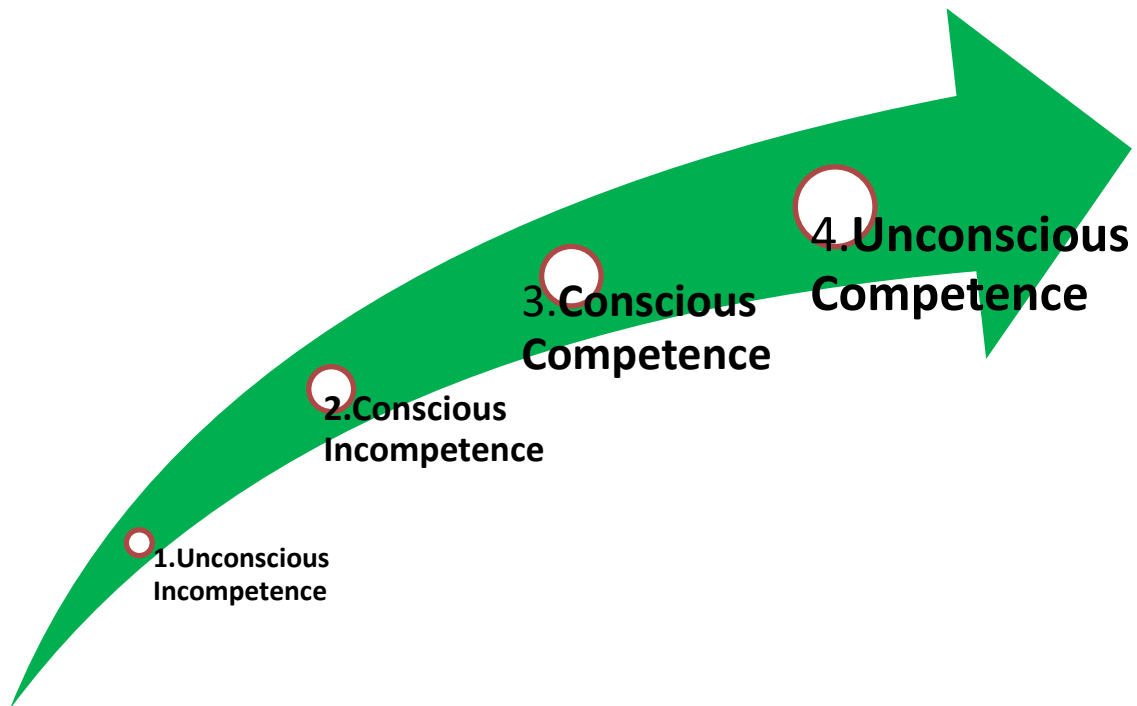
Using the large sample test for proportion mentioned in the tools and technique

The test value is $Z=15.78$ which is higher than the table value of 1.96. Therefore, there is a significant difference between students who emphasize academic and personal growth and those who have apathy toward academic and personal growth.

Bar graph showing the results of the survey



STAGES IN THE LEARNING CURVE OF THE STUDENTS



Besides these needs, there is also a necessity to understand the different stages through which a student passes, so as to impart a more effective management education. These stages were

carefully identified after an in-depth interview with the above-mentioned sample of students who were in different phases of their management course.

The stages were:

1. Unconscious incompetence:

The stage where the student is unaware of what lies ahead of him and is not yet competent to take on any corporate role.

In this stage, the need for certainty must be emphasized, so that he gets an outline of the syllabus and knows what he is in for.

2. Conscious incompetence:

The stage when it slowly dawns on the student the fact that he knows very little of the management and business world. In this stage, there must be a sincere effort to bring in variety and diversity along with the group activities so that the student does not lose confidence.

This stage calls for underlining the need for variety and networking.

3. Conscious competence:

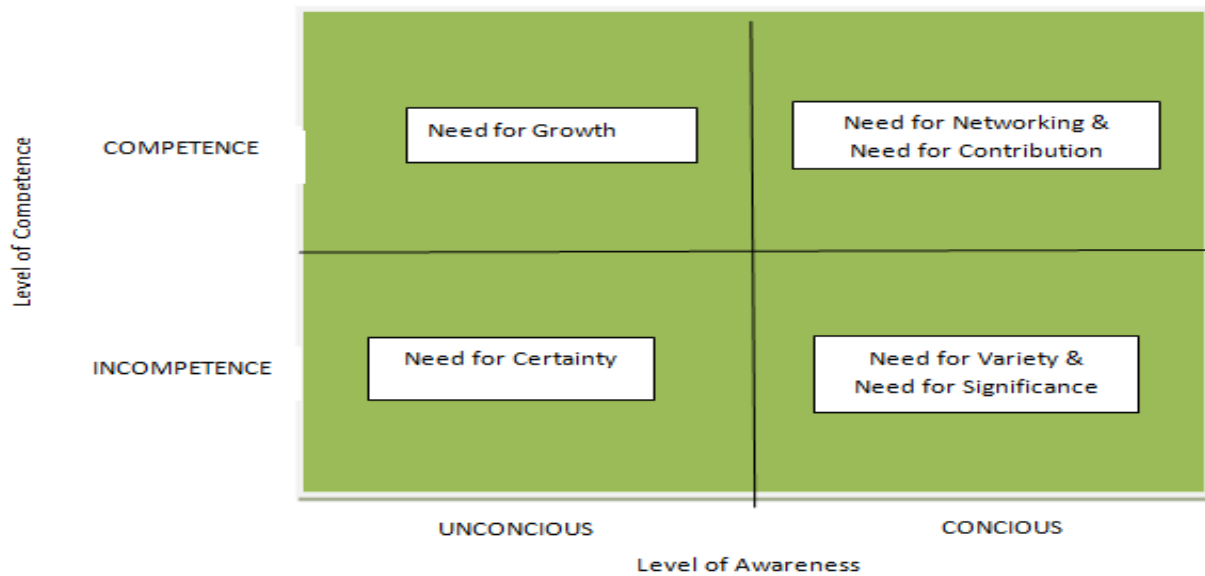
It is the stage when the student has undergone internships and is confident of his ability to take up greater responsibilities in the corporate world. This stage calls for a reinforcement of the faith the faculty has on the student and direct the same towards making him feel better, this stage calls for the need for significance and the need for contribution.

4. Unconscious competence:

Where the qualities of a manager become secondary in nature and the student is all set to take on the challenges of entrepreneurship or corporate positions. Here the pedagogy must focus on the need for growth and make the student realize the need to outgrow from the student mode and transcend to the leadership and entrepreneurial mode.

SUGGESTIONS

Fig8: CVSNCG-Learning Stages Model



CVSNCG-Learning Stages Model

Stages in the Learning Curve	Students' Needs
1. Unconscious incompetence	Need for Certainty
2. Conscious incompetence	Need for Variety & Need for Significance
3. Conscious competence	Need for Networking & Need for Contribution

4. Unconscious competence	Need for Growth
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CONCLUSION:

Today's B-schools must focus more on making students education-ready, rather than corporate-ready and this is possible when the B-schools understands the need and learning curve stages, which can go a long way in improving management pedagogy and re-engineering management education.

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