* INNOVATIVE INSTITUTIONS - A CHALLENGE

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1.0 INNOVATION :

Innovation is a deliberate and systematic attempt to replace an old practice with a better one in relation to certain desired objectives.

After independence, India saw many education commissions and their scholarly reports aimed at improving the standard of education. Many recommendations were tried and implemented at National and State levels. Reforms were introduced from preprimary to post graduate University level. The most recent of these reforms have been started with formulation of National Policy on Education (NEP) in 1986. Many innovative recommendations from the NEP, like autonomy to colleges have not been implemented to the required extent, for a number of reasons.

In a big country like India, major educational reforms have come from power coercive strategies initiated by the Central and State governments, especially when it meant redistribution of resources and development of suitable infrastructures to manage the change. There are instances where institutions, departments or individual teachers have taken initiative and tried to replace the present practices by something new and better.

2.0 PRESENT SITUATION :

The market oriented economy has forced every organisation to look at its own activities more objectively with a view to remain "competitive in the market". Quality of product has become a watchword in agricultural, industrial and service sectors. Every organisation is now forced to think globally, assess its strengths and weaknesses, look to the future scenario, take stock of its resources and various processes at its command, and to rechart its goals and strategies to continue to exist in the market with dignity and pride.

Institutions from higher technical education have started facing a keen competition because of their large number and a time has come for every institute to look inwards and prepare for an uncertain future as is being done by the organisations. Producing tangible marketable goods and services.

Engineering educational institutes are like industries. They produce an engineer or a technician out of a raw student and this product has to be of the right quality having abilities to

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absorb and adapt to the ever changing technology. Institutions can no more sit idle in their ivory towers passively looking at the swift changing environment and contentedly say that our job is to teach, conduct examinations and award degrees or diplomas to the successful candidates. Industry has now become highly selective, trying to select the best of the available talent and at the same time select only such passouts who have specific abilities currently needed by the industry. If institutions fail to understand the changing job specifications and do not change curriculae, improve training methods, reform evaluation procedures, their passouts will be either jobless or will not have ability to hold on to the job for appreciable time. Age old curriculae taught through inflexible, drab, unexciting methods will never produce the type of vibrant dynamic self-reliant and adaptable engineer needed by the market whether in wage-earning or self-employment sector.

3.0 EITHER CHANGE OR PERISH :

Educational institutes, hereafter, will therefore have to change to adjust to the uncertainties of the fluid environment. Supply of engineering graduates and diploma technicians is more than the conventional job opportunities. Unbalance in supply and demand of technically qualified passouts is enough to send alarm signals to every conscientious manager, teacher educator and make him aware of the need to change. The environmental forces are changing so rapidly that it demands accelerated changes in the working of educational institutions. Change itself provides opportunities and this is one of the most valuable incentive to go for innovative changes.

Need for change must be felt, accepted by all the partners in an institute and if this could culminate into a sort of commitment to go for a change, it is likely that the change will be managed effectively provided management gives its due support and members of faculty operate as a team. Change of any sort imposed from outside never works, at the most it leads to a superficial cosmetic change. A conscious decision to change from within the organisation, perhaps with the help of external counsel or assistance is most likely to succeed.

4.0 MANAGING A CHANGE :

If a group of teachers is involved in any change process, have recognised the need for change and are committed to the job, have high quality consciousness and a sense of urgency, chances of its successful implementation are high. Every group has certain strengths and some weaknesses. Awareness of strengths give confidence to go about the change process. While recognition of weaknesses creates an element of dissatisfaction and also acts as an incentive to change.

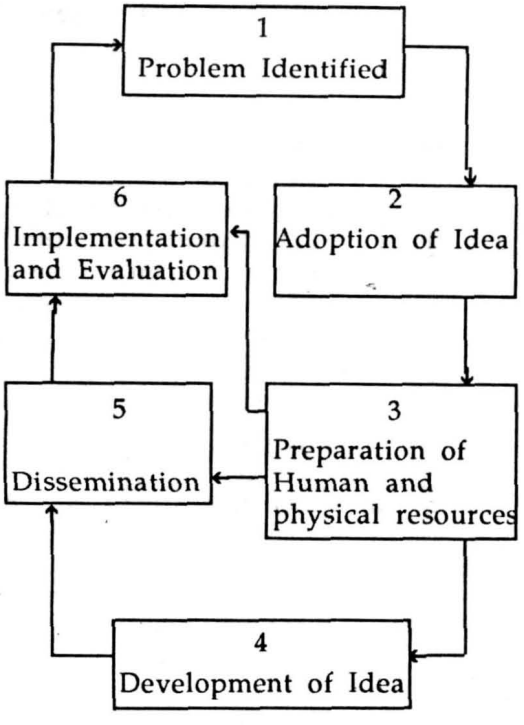
Any organisation going for a conscious change or wanting to make a deliberate attempt to shift its position from the present to a perceived better situation in the future, will have to develop a climate of effective continued learning to the extent that it should become "a learning organisation". Organisations who are not stale and who continuously try to learn new things, are vibrant with change-proneness. Learning is actually a process of change

in behaviour and therefore organisations who continuously change for the better are learning organisations.

5.0 PROCESS OF INNOVATION :

Variety of innovations ranging from large scale educational reforms to small changes in classroom teaching methods, make it difficult to suggest definite sequential stages through which innovation activities progress. Five main features, however, are stated below -

a) Problem Identification
b) Adoption of an idea
c) Development of an idea
d) Dissemination
e) Implementation and Evaluation



Very few institutions are practicing a systematic problem identification process. Adoption of an innovative idea or a product or a process may happen in a classroom or laboratory or workshop or drawing hall, where a group of faculty members agree to an innovative proposal. This essentially is a negotiation phase where individuals interact, think together, understand the proposed innovation, mobilise resources, etc.

In the development phase, interaction with professional groups, researchers take place and through trial-error methods, pilot tryouts, evaluation of results etc. the innovation developes into a stage where it can give the intended better solution to the problem.

Innovative practices successfully used by one may not be implemented successfully by others and therefore, all innovations do not spread to other parts of the education system. This does not mean that the innovation is a doubtful success. Experience gained and learning that takes place in the actual implementation of an innovation many times results in redefinition of the problem and the cycle of new ideas, their development etc. continues.

Faculty and the institute as a whole learns more through innovative activities and this is the most important gain coming out of innovative activities. Institutes remain alive to the situation, enthusiasm and freshness of faculty and supporting staff is transparently clear when one sees an innovative institution.

6.0 BARRIERS TO INNOVATION

(a) Psychological :

People tend to remain happy with activities that are known and where there is a certain security. People do not like to engage into activities with unknown consequences. Dependency

on authority figures and a mindset where a person is habituated to wait for orders from his superiors are the main barriers to innovation because even if freedom is provided to such persons, they feel insecure to take initiative and feel a risk in making their own decisions however small.

(b) Values :

Apart from psychological barriers, there are barriers because of attitudes and value systems of users of innovation. In most cases value conflicts are not clearly understood but are only vaguely felt.

(c) Power :

Significant and large scale innovations usually mean redistribution of resources and changes in authority structure in the system. Major reform like World Bank Assisted Project on strengthening of Polytechnic Education system has seen changes in relationship between various Principals and the Officials in State Project Implementation Unit, between polytechnics and industries, between regional centres of excellence and other associate polytechnics, etc. Most individuals and groups tend to hold on to their power because they feel threat to their privileges and advantages. If innovative activities are being conducted in an institute by different teacher groups, it is possible that due to differential resource allocations and other support mechanisms, influential teacher groups try to dominate other groups and at times stall innovative processes of other groups.

(d) Practical Barriers :

Eventhough uncertainties and ambiguities are a part of our daily life, authorities demand evaluation of quality of innovation and expect clear-cut answers to complex educational problems. This many times goes against the introduction of innovation.

Energy of most of the organisations goes into the maintenance of existing operations and very little energy is left for innovative activities. Barriers of practical nature arise because institutional management has not created conditions suitable for survival of the innovative activities.

Roles and role relationships in an institution change with the installation of an innovation. Interpersonal conflicts can surface out. Skills in problem diagnosis, planning, communication, evaluation, creativity etc. are essential in change effort and therefore a new set of rewards is necessary if innovative project is not to breakdown because of personnel problems.

Many change efforts are isolated piecemeal efforts. Few receive backing and linkages with external resources. lack of support and a systematic use of external resources causes a breakdown in an innovative activity. Infact, innovative behaviour is many times punished by extra load of work, uncertainties about outcome and scepticism among colleagues. It is seen that innovations die down because of lack of systematic management support for change.

7.0 WHAT CAN COLLEGES DO ?

(a) Management :

The most important of all the strategies for promoting innovation is the proclamation of clearly speltout management policy of promoting crea-

tive ideas for enhancing quality of educational processes. If the management stays apathetic or lukewrm towards innovative ideas, the faculty gets a loud and clear message that institute is interested only in lip sympathy and no sustained encouragement and support will be forthcoming for faculty initiatives.

Institutes should publish their mission statements, objectives and standards of quality work expected from faculty, staff and students. The managements must develop intensive dialogue with faculty and staff to generate a ten year perspective plan of development of institutes.

(b) Train teachers and students in creativity, problem solving, interpersonal relations, team building, etc.

(c) Develop association with external agencies of repute and industries for sharing ideas, and sharing of physical and human resources for mutual benefit.

(d) While administering an institute, foster an approach of Human Resource Development. A good deal of freedom is necessary to chart out one's own progress and establish the institution as a centre of excellence. Institutes should therefore pursue for getting an autonomous status.

(e) Constitute reward structure

(f) Publish information about innovative efforts of faculty in the form of case studies, reports, papers. There is a great need for a state level forum to disseminate information about innovative activities from various institutions.

8.0 CONCLUSION

To provide quality education to our students, innovations in curriculum, teaching learning processes, evaluation is very much essential. This is possible if institutes are given freedom through autonomy - both academic and financial. In the present context, only autonomous institutes have a chance to become centres of excellence. In Maharashtra, there are many good institutions backed up by sound academic management structure. They also have good faculty suitably qualified. It will not therefore be out of place to suggest to these institutes to go for autonomous status. It is unfortunate that there are not many takers for institute autonomy - an innovative recommendation of NEP 1986.

If we want institutes to work with dynamism, and remain fresh with innovative activities, we need Principals and Heads of Departments with intrapreneurial qualities. Intrapreneurs have vision - they look for new ways to do things, they are full of new ideas; and secondly they are action-oriented-they want to move on things, take risks, get things done.

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