Chapter 4
Design Thinking in Redesigning Business School Admission Process

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ABSTRACT

Admissions are critical for any business school (B-school). A good school aims at a diverse participant mix who reflect a broad range of industries, functions, countries, and backgrounds to enrich the learning experience. Therefore, admissions or the intake process becomes crucial and decides the fate of both the school and students. This chapter maps the journey of the design thinking tools applied in redesigning of the admission process and its impact in context to a leading Indian B-school. This study has broader implications for B-schools in general as the model will help them understand the need of applying design-thinking techniques in redesigning new age admission strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Admissions are critical for any Business School (B-School). A good school aims at a diverse participant mix who reflect a broad range of industries, functions, countries, and backgrounds to enrich the learning experience. With higher education entering into an era of transition, the long-standing models of higher education that prefer tradition and stability will be supplemented, if not displaced, by new models that embrace organizational innovation, responsivity, and adaptation. Design thinking offers important pathways for shaping these important new models (Gilbert, Crow, & Anderson, 2018).

According to Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU), "General education sits at the intersection of an array of demands facing higher education—demands for more intentionally scaffolded, integrated, and engaged approaches to teaching and learning; more campus-community

partnerships; more mentoring and advising; more multimodal learning experiences; and, above all, more meaningful assessment of student learning across these efforts." (Eger, 2017)

Design thinking is a methodology that provides a solution-based approach to solving problems while keeping the human needs at the core. Design thinking stands fundamentally to successful strategy development and organizational change (Pal, 2016). The dynamic concept of 'design thinking' fully caters to the user-oriented, prototype-centred process of innovation ideally suited for product, service and business design (Pal, 2016). The design thinking stages include observation to learn about the left out needs in relation to the context and constraints of a typical situation, discovering the opportunity and the capacity of innovation, forming brilliant ideas, testing and improving (Pal, 2016).

Indian B-Schools, especially the privately managed ones, are independent or stand-alone and operate as complete business units that provide business education to students to place them in jobs. Campus placements are the end objective, and companies visit B-Schools to recruit employees. Business Education is considered a professional degree that helps take the career of students to the next level. One of the higher ranked or top-tiered B-School would also help them start with above average pay packages as compared to open market job positions. So, the stakes of both the school and student are high. If the student does not get placed, the B-School gets a hit in terms of rankings and reputation. And if they do not choose the right students, the students do not get placed. Therefore, admissions or the intake process becomes crucial and decides the fate of both the school and students. This study maps the journey of the design thinking tools applied in redesigning of the admission process and its impact in context to a leading Indian B School. The School worked on revamping its admission process by applying design-thinking techniques, and the outcome was visible in not only quantity but also the quality of students and with enhanced brand visibility. The exhaustive journey following the design thinking process led to the robust admission process, which in turn led to higher conversions that is more quality students joining the program. This model has broader implications for B-Schools in general. This study will be relevant for them to understand the need of applying design-thinking techniques in redesigning new age admission strategies.

ADMISSION PROCESS IN INDIAN BUSINESS SCHOOLS

The intake or the admission process for the two years Masters in Business Administration (MBA) program in India in all the top-tier colleges is a four-step process ("MBA Admission Process", 2018):

Step 1: Register and Apply for MBA Entrance Exam

The first step requires candidates to register and apply for the relevant MBA entrance exam like

- Common Admission Test (CAT) administered by the Indian Institute of Management and /or
- Xavier Aptitude test conducted by XLRI on behalf of Xavier Association of Management Institute and/or
- Indian Institute of Foreign Trade entrance and/or Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) by Graduate Management Admission Council and/or
- Management Aptitude Test (MAT) by All India Management Association and/or NMAT by GMAC for admission to Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies and/or

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