

The Bloc Interview. ‘IIM-C Case Centre’s mandate is to develop indigenous cases

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Prof Dharma Raju Bathini on the importance of case method and why Indian cases are needed

[BY MITHUN DASGUPTA](#)

Prof Dharma Raju Bathini | Photo Credit: Special Arrangement



With India becoming one of the fastest-growing major economies, business schools using the case-based teaching methods are facing increasing demands for Indian cases, says Dharma Raju Bathini, faculty coordinator of IIM Calcutta Case Research Centre (IIM-CCRC). In an interview with *businessline*, Bathini says IIM-CCRC has an important mandate to develop indigenous cases. The Centre now has a “good number of cases” based on Indian context for teaching students who will be future managers.

Excerpts:

Why do you think case-based teaching method is important?

In case studies, we are talking about real business problems where a senior manager or a manager, typically called a protagonist, faces a particular challenge. There are several options before the person, who is trying to take a decision. Here, the attempt is to put the students, usually of the age group of 24-25, in those business situations, and help them make those decisions in a structured manner using certain theoretical and analytical frameworks that are in management literature. They come up with their own solutions which are discussed in the classes. Through the discussions, teachers try to communicate certain concepts, and in the process students learn not only about the skills that are required in management but also about taking decisions, communicating the decisions and defending those decisions.

Harvard Business School (HBS) has been a pioneer in case study-based management education. If you look at the history of Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), most of these institutions began with collaborations with foreign universities. IIM Calcutta had a partnership with Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) when it began, and IIM-Ahmedabad was in partnership with Harvard Business School (HBS). Since HBS used case methods, automatically it became popular at IIM-A. At that point in time MIT did not use cases much. So, IIM-C is a little late in following the case method. But that is why we set up a Case Research Centre (CRC) to make sure that IIM-C also does well in using cases for teaching.

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What kind of changes took place in teaching cases at B-schools in the post Covid era?

During Covid era, all institutes in India as well as abroad were forced to move into the online mode. This is not a big challenge for a lecture-based kind of teaching. But it is much more challenging for a case-based method, because in this there is active participation and discussion between the faculty and the students. Now, how do you replicate all of these in an online world? That was a challenge that most of us faced during the Covid era. But that also means the kind of cases that we were using should also be amenable for this change.

Second change that has happened is due to the rise of technologies like ChatGPT. It has changed the learning process because students can simply use ChatGPT or Google Bard or any of its generative AI equivalents. They can upload the cases that a faculty member gives on to ChatGPT and ask for solutions.

Another challenge with case teaching comes from using cases from Harvard Business School, IVEY in Canada and The Case Centre in the UK — who are largely the primary distributors of cases. But if you look at the students we are training, most of them would operate in the Indian context. So, there is a clear gap. There is a clear demand for cases set within Indian organisations, with Indian nuances.

In the past four or five years, our economy compared to the rest of the world is growing. India is becoming a more prominent player. So, then naturally the demand for Indian cases will increase. That need is not just in India, that need could also be felt in the US because students across the world would be interested in knowing what is happening in India.

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You feel that there is a need to adapt instructional methods in light of changes brought forth by the rise of AI applications like ChatGPT...

Instead of spending time on knowledge aspects that can be Googled, the students may be given certain questions and let them look at ChatGPT, let them come up with those solutions. What ChatGPT can do is basically it can give you that knowledge. But there are other skills that you need to develop. So, the teachers can actually leverage ChatGPT in some sense to improve the experience in the classroom. When knowledge is available at fingertips, then our role as faculty is to leverage that and enhance certain other skills of students like critical thinking, communication skills, empathy etc, which are not merely knowledge.

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How is IIMCCRC working towards the goal of writing indigenous cases?

An important mandate to the CRC is to develop cases from India. Every year we conduct workshops where we train faculty, students, PhD students largely, or those who are interested in writing cases, and even some corporate people in writing cases. In these workshops we teach them how to write an abstract and a good case. IIM-CCRC also provides grants to faculty to develop cases. We have a good number of cases now.

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