



Academia should select students based on attitude, learning, interest 'Industry-Academia Conclave'

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To build the workforce of future, practical solutions are dependent on the effective integration and collaboration of industry and academia. It has become all the more critical to provide a compatible environment to nurture future entrepreneurs. To decode and find solutions to these challenges, TimesJobs.com in association with Apeejay Stya University hosted an 'Industry-Academia Conclave' with industry leaders, academicians and HR experts in New Delhi.

The eminent panel included Prashant Bhatnagar, director-hiring & staffing, SapientNitro; Nimish Gupta, global-learning & development head, Tech Mahindra; Amitabh Akhauri, sr vice president-HR, Jindal Stainless Limited; Yuvaraj Srivastava, SVP-HR, MakeMyTrip; Anil Gaur, vice president, HR, Jubilant Life Sciences; Deepika Pillai, human resource director, Xavient Information Systems; Naveen Narayanan, global head-talent management, HCL Technologies and Aditya Berlia, co-founder and pro chancellor, Apeejay Stya University.

The biggest disconnect between the industry and academia is the employability quotient of the students. One of the biggest hindrances in bridging the skills gap is that industry tie-ups are mostly limited to premier institutions highlighted Akhauri of Jindal Stainless limited.

In Bhatnagar of SapientNitro's view, there has been a change in certain pockets/institutions. Most companies still have to struggle to get the right talent. To get the piece right, academic institutes have to come to terms with the global change and focus on what they impart and how they impart.

If students are not employable, how is the industry managing their talent pipeline? To this end, Narayanan answered that companies have found their way to fill the talent gap, may be through expensive ways. Companies will survive and grow. "I believe we went the wrong way while fighting, debating and tweaking the curriculum. The main challenge is that students lack learnability skills and application of knowledge at the right time in the real world."

New learning models

According to Gupta of TechMahindra, the academia perspective has to change. "In fact, we should adopt new international methods such as the German model where students are allowed to work first and then go back to college to get the degree."

Adding to this, Pillai of Xavient stated that the teaching pattern has a lot to do with the student's getting the right knowledge and exposure. "It has to be a combination of industry experts and teachers to bring the best of both worlds to the students."

Another major problem is that most academic institutions have many courses running simultaneously.

Academia needs to focus and prioritise, explained Gaur of Jubilant Life Sciences. "Skills such as learning agility and passion should be considered while taking students."

Srivastava of MakeMyTrip said it is critical for students to spend the last eight months in the institute for a final cut out for the industry instead of doing internships.

Industry will anyways train students as per their specific requirements.

The academia perspective

Representing the academia on the panel Berlia of Apeejay Stya University mentioned that the foremost task for the industry is to connect/reach out to parents, since, they decide which course their child will take, may be out of peer pressure or for other reasons. "The industry word has more credibility. If an industry leader says, we will be hiring so many people in a particular technology/domain there is no way that parents will not encourage children to take up that particular course."

The panel highlighted that the relationship between the industry and the academia has to be mutual and on-going. To enhance the employability quotient, students should be admitted to college basis their attitude, learning agility and interest level, not just their academic performance. Skills such as entrepreneurship and innovation are not driven by a student's academic performance or a professional degree.

Together, the industry and academia have to take more responsibility to lay a strong foundation for students in their formative years. By helping students make the right course choices and mentoring them for a smooth transition from the classroom to the boardroom. The exciting discussion opened many threads for both the industry and academia to work together to create an employable future workforce.