Is your business school fit for the world of AI?

The impact of technology, already hugely significant, is about to become even more intense. **Prabhu Guptara** asks if business schools are ready

In January 2018, I started a research project to understand how business schools are responding to the new world of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and to assess whether our graduates are really being prepared for the world that current "supertechnologies" are bringing into being.

I abandoned the research project due to a lack of response from the leading business schools I approached, who all claimed to be too busy with other priorities.

Yet as I sit down to write this article, Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg are the three richest men in the world. Each of them made his fortune via technology. None of them studied at business school.

Two points arise from the above that are relevant for us in business schools:

1. Technology is today's single-greatest wealth creator

2. Business schools ignore tech at their peril

"But we are not ignoring tech!" was the response when I raised such matters with business school faculty, deans and directors.

On being pressed, the worst and most common answer that has emerged so far is that the school has an IT department whose job is to ensure the school's internet system is working properly.

The best answer has been that there is a member of the faculty who works with the IT department to ensure that the school has the best IT system in the world of business schools.

However, there seemed to be some puzzlement at my research and my questions, as IT is after all a convenience, a servant. Why the fuss?

Well, consider: are we not confronted with the sorts of opportunities and challenges represented by the business model of Facebook and other social media? What about the even greater opportunities and challenges represented by Blockchain, Cryptocurrencies, Machine Learning, Cloud Computing, Big Data, the Internet of Everything, Wireless Mesh Networks, CRISPER/Cas tools, Engineered Atoms, SuperMaterials, Molecular Engineering, Machine-Human interaction and Near-Human (soon to become Super-Human) Robots?

As each of these displays aspects of "artifice" as well as of "intelligence" and as these are increasingly converging into ecosystems, I lump all these together into my definition of Artificial Intelligence.

At least, I do so for the purpose of discussing these developments with business schools. Here are the questions I have asked, which you can use to assess the situation of your own school:
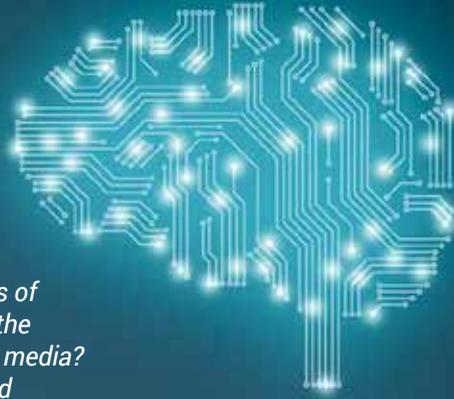
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A. Governance

A1: Does your school's Governing Board commission and ensure systematic scouting of digital trends for their implications on governance?

A2: Does that process enable identification and consideration of relevant SWOTs for your school?

A3: Does all that make for appropriately speedy adaptation of your school's positioning, competitive advantage, USP and business model?

A4: How does your business school assess whether its approach to IT is aligned to the school's objectives?

B. Faculty

B1: Do the recruitment criteria for all your new faculty explicitly include digital competence in appropriately fine-grained detail?

B2: Are the abilities of the faculty member(s) responsible for your school's IT (and the IT staff) regularly evaluated objectively by an outside party for competence and not just for data management but also in other critical areas (cloud, mobile, security)?

C. Research

C1: Is AI well integrated into your school's approach to research in all fields?

D. Curricula

D1: Do you commission external audits into whether digital trends are sufficiently integrated into the overall curriculum as well as into individual courses, both in terms of content and in terms of pedagogy?

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Beyond ensuring that we as citizens do not surrender our privacy and are treated fairly as customers, in a global business world do we not all need to strive for an appropriate global AI governance regime to be put in place?

Broader questions

The Facebook – Cambridge Analytica data scandal triggered anguished public discussion on ethical standards for social media companies, for political consulting organisations and for politicians. The UK Information Commissioner's Office recently announced its intention to fine Facebook £500,000 because it "contravened the law by failing to safeguard people's information", a view backed by the UK's Governmental Select Committee, which proposes major new steps towards greater consumer protection, clearer enunciation of the right to privacy and increased curbs on misinformation and propaganda.

We might conclude that while the executives of Facebook demonstrated contextual intelligence, extended networks of relationships, possessed technology-related abilities of a high order, and deployed an extraordinary willingness to seize each and every business opportunity they could see or create, they lacked the sort of moral compass which most human beings would accept and respect as valid.

What has all that to do with your business school? Well, in his book *The Mosaic Principle*, Nick Lovegrove develops six dimensions business schools need to implement in their students' educational journey, the first of which is "morality, compass, ethics, gyroscope".

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The others are:
- intellectual thread, metanarrative, meaning, purpose
- transferrable skills, abilities
- contextual intelligence, situational intelligence, emotional intelligence
- extended networks of relationships
- a prepared mind

Though Lovegrove published the book in 2016, the world has already changed since then, as we have been through another generation of technology. Another dimension, therefore, needs to be added to Lovegrove's framework. Let me put it this way: if Zuckerberg were to decide to cash in his work in technology and come to study at your school, I wonder whether he would emerge any better fitted to address the enormous ethical, social and political issues that are being created by AI.

Beyond ensuring that we as citizens do not surrender our privacy and are treated fairly as customers, in a global business world do we not all need to strive for an appropriate global AI governance regime to be put in place? If you agree, would your business school deny graduation to a Zuckerberg if he or she was unwilling to internalise that striving? How would you know? In any case, is your business school willing to take a public position on such questions? There lies the rub of whether your business school, as a business school, has a conscience.

It is that which will determine whether your business school is fit for a world of AI – just as it is whether AI has appropriate conscience-like features built into it which will determine whether AI is fit for the world.

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About the Author

Prabhu Guptara is Distinguished Professor of Global Business, Management and Public Policy at William Carey University, India. He has two books scheduled for publication this year, Make the Best of Your Life ("Letters to Indian Youth"*, Forward Press, New Delhi, published on 23 August) and* Where Did We Go Wrong?: Reflections on 200 Years of Modern Education in India, 1813-2013 *(details to be announced shortly).*