Editorial

Gurumurthy Kalyanaram

In this issue of the Journal, we present five research manuscripts and one illustrative case-analysis. While the research manuscripts are eclectic and varied in topics and methodologies, they are high on relevance and rigor. That is why they find a place in this Journal. We are thankful to the authors for sharing their manuscripts, and we are confident that academics and scholars will find the research insightful and interesting.

As the editor, I am presenting below an essay that Dr. Rajan Saxena and I wrote about three years back for a Conference Proceedings at Nirma University of Science and Technology on metrics of quality higher education. We produce that essay here, because we think that this is timely and highly relevant in today's debate on quality of higher education in India.

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State of Higher Education in India

Annual enrollment in higher education has been growing at over 6 percent since mid-1980s when measured cumulatively. However, in the last decade the growth has been even more aggressive – the annual enrollment for most of the years has been over 10 percent. The demographic shift to a younger population has increased the demand for higher education. It is estimated over 60 percent of India’s population is less than 30 years old. The estimated median ages for United States, United Kingdom, Russia and China are 36.7, 40.2, 38.4 and 34.1 respectively. But for India the estimated median age is 25.3, a dramatically lower number. The lower median age suggests higher potential work-force productivity for India, but such higher productivity will not materialize without education and skills development. Here, our responsibilities and challenges are monumental but so are our potential rewards.

Accordingly, we have to design policies and programs to create high-quality education which is not exclusive of protests, and demonstrated their effectiveness and universality. Rabindranath Tagore explored new forms of teaching and learning. All these exemplars advise us that our learners should be endowed with values and critical thinking.

Transformative discoveries in science and technology have come from compelling curiosity. For example, Newton did thought experiments and postulated the laws of motion, the gravitational theory and the differential calculus. Einstein’s theory of relativity is more an outcome of his deep reflection, than work in large labs. Mahatma Gandhi experimented new forms of protests, and demonstrated their effectiveness and universality. Rabindranath Tagore explored new forms of teaching and learning. All these exemplars advise us that our learners should be endowed with values and critical thinking.

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Institutional Excellence Beyond Traditional Metrics of Quality

Higher education is a driver of economic development, prosperity, social justice and empowerment. So, as stewards of higher learning and education we have an obligation and responsibility to enhance these outcomes. This not only requires an understanding of science and technology, commerce and business but also cultivation of values and critical inquiry.

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or elitist but democratized. Thus, high-quality education should be relatively easily accessible and available. As demonstrated by researchers (Frei, 2006) in other areas, excellence and efficiency or accessibility can be complementary, and they do not have to adversely impact each other.

In this context, liberalization and privatization in higher education have propelled the growth of educational institutions. For example, in the decade 1999-2009, the number of private educational institutions has grown from about 200 to 730 in pharmacy, about 660 to about 1600 in engineering, about 680 to about 2,500 in business and management, and about 780 to about 1,000 in computer applications. The expansion in the number of medical colleges was modest, from about 174 to about 223, probably because of greater regulatory control.

**Definition of Customers in Higher Education**

In a model proposed by Saxena (2012), he defines the various customers who are integral part of higher education in India. The customers are: learners (students), teachers (faculty), program designers and leaders, systems implementers, process developers and administrators, academic and governance leaders, and micro- and macro-environment players such as alumni, industry, government and society. Saxena describes the role and activities of these customers. US National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) also defines customers in the context of education as students/learners and other important stakeholder who participate in the education process. Accordingly, henceforth, when we use the word customer we refer to the learner and the other relevant stakeholders as defined by Saxena.

**Existing Model of Quality: Exogenous Customers (Learners and Other Stakeholders) As Receivers of Service**

Improvements of service and satisfaction of learners through pragmatic improvisations such as new programs, joint programs and interdisciplinary programs are increasingly becoming commonplace. Or even take improvements in various processes such those in student admissions, assessment of learning, placement, and faculty recruitment, training and development – and these too have been adopted by most educational institutions. Accordingly, quality as we have traditionally defined and operationalized is becoming commoditized.

Our approach to quality thus far has been characterized by defining the learner and other stakeholders as largely passive receivers of service, and value-addition as exogenous i.e., something identified and implemented by an administrator or a leader.

This model has achieved as much as it is likely to achieve. We have now reached an asymptotic level in this approach. So, we need innovation and thinking beyond traditional definition of quality.

**Excellence Beyond Quality: Endogenous Customers (Learners and Other Stakeholders) As Sources of Value-Creation**

To excel beyond the traditional metrics of quality, all the customers (learners and other stakeholders) of a university have to become the sources of innovation and excellence. In this model of active engagement, customers are drivers of value and purpose. Von Hippel (2002) has empirically shown that users are the most successful drivers of innovation across many

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**Source:** Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry Higher Education Summit, 2009
service and manufacturing sectors. Amplifying Von Hippel, other researchers have made similar findings. Sawhney (2006) describes twelve ways for a firm to innovate, and one of the celebrated approaches to innovation is customer care and experience. Urban (2005) argues for customer advocacy and trust-based engagement. Treacy and Wiersema (1997), while discussing the modes to market leadership, identify customer care and experience as one of the distinct modes to achieve such leadership. In the context of manufacturing and service sectors Kalyanaram (2011) has outlined a model where the customer is endogenous.

Customer driven innovation had moved from a “nice to have” category to a “strategic asset” to develop and sustain excellence. Universities are now developing operating models to use customer engagement as a true differentiator. This development of a new “dimension” of **customer-driven value-creation and innovations** is fundamental to constant renewal and excellence.

**Model of Customer (Learners and Other Stakeholders) Driven Value-Creation, And Customer-Contact / Experiential Points**

In this model of customer engagement, the customer i.e. the learner and other stakeholders are endogenous to the university. They are integral part of the learning and organization of such learning. To increase innovation from the learners and other stakeholders, we want to increase the number of opportunities of service and contact. Therefore, customer service is a function of parameters that go beyond direct experience from the degree program offerings and class-room teaching.

Value-creation should be fostered from all customers, and at each of the customer-contact/touch points, though the primary customer remains the learner and his/her experiences with the university. For example, the learner can be a source of value creation at each one his/her touch/experiential point such as admissions, class-room learning, graduation and alumni interaction. Or take the example of another customer – employer. The employer interfaces in placement, curricular inputs and design, and financial giving activities. The employer can be an important value-creator at each one of these touch points. Or take the example of an accreditor or a regulator of an educational program. The accreditor’s/ regulator’s touch points are many: review of educational programs, faculty credentials, resources, learning enhancers and impeders. In each of one of these touch points, there is opportunity for the accreditor / regulator to be a value creator.

Therefore, a university which is focused on excellence should design platforms to add value at each customer touch/interface point to maximize continuous and sustained value-addition. Accordingly, it is important to make every customer touch point rich and meaningful. Customer experience can be maximized by offering the best information to customers, and developing an ability to understand the customer needs at each one of the touch points. The goal is to build a bond and trust with the customers in all the processes and transactions.

Because a university has varied customers / stakeholders (learner being the primary customer), the variance in opportunities for value is great. Usually, greater variance leads to improved output.

To facilitate this model, we should:

1. Increase the customer experience/touch points
intently for each one of diverse customers such as learners, teachers, employers, accreditors, regulators, employers, and others.

2. Provide opportunities to create value at each touch point by modularizing and enriching the touch points and eliminating obvious roadblocks such as excessively risk-averse regulations.

To understand the various customer-contact points and opportunities for enrichment of value-creation and innovation, it is instructive to review the model proposed by Saxena (2012). While Saxena model does not specifically explicate the experiential/touch points of each one of the customer, the model nevertheless provides a useful roadmap to identify the various customers and their touch points. Saxena model provides a framework to accomplish excellence beyond the traditional metrics of quality. To develop the framework more fully, it is useful to apply the Malcolm Baldrige Performance Excellence Program Model.

Malcolm Baldrige Performance Excellence Program Model

The purpose and scope of Malcolm Baldrige Excellence Program Model for Education is to “provide a systems perspective for understanding performance management. They reflect validated, leading-edge management practices against which an organization can measure itself. With their acceptance nationally and internationally as the model for performance excellence, the Criteria represent a common language for sharing best practices among organizations. The Criteria are also the basis for the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award process.” (National Institute of Standards and Technology, US).

The model as proposed by US National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) is shown below.
One of the important criteria/elements is capturing the Voice of the Customer which is integral part of Customer Focus. Capturing the voice of the customer is described as the institution’s “processes for listening to your students and stakeholders…The aim is to capture meaningful information in order to exceed your students' and stakeholders’ expectations.” Through the voice of the customer(s), we should capture value addition and innovation creation. Such value addition will impact the leadership and strategic planning thus fundamentally re-calibrating processes and expectations. In the last two decades, research has developed excellent approaches to capture the voice of the customer(s), convert the voice into specific design and application metrics and then finally implement them (Griffin and Hauser 1993, Keil 2010).

The other six elements / criteria of analysis and decision are Leadership, Strategic Planning, Knowledge Management, Workforce, Operations and Results². Each of these elements deals with a portfolio of customers/users, and different touch/experiential points. If designed productively, these myriad touch points will be continuous and diverse sources of excellence.

Concluding Remarks
We must recognize that there is no one model for a university’s excellence. In fact, there should not be one model. Excellence is multi-faceted. Diversity is strength. There will always be tensions and dichotomies, and there should be. Such creative tension is source of strength and innovation. Debates about depth v. breadth, or between the search for applied knowledge and the devotion to knowledge pursued for its own sake, or between private and public universities, or between egalitarianism and exclusiveness will continue, and should continue.

But independent of these conflicting but considered opinions, excellence is not argued. What is excellence may be argued, but not the imperative of excellence.

We have provided a thought and practice-oriented frame work to operationlize excellence beyond the traditional metrics of quality. Our framework is flexible, and can be customized. In fact, the Malcolm Baldrige Model is designed to be user-friendly, and respond to diverse situations and institutions. We encourage our readers to amplify and enrich our frame-works so that collaboratively we may arrive at an accepted model which can be both a conceptual and practical roadmap for excellence in our higher learning institutions. The need of the hour is to develop such indigenous model for our country.

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Dr. Gurumurthy Kalyanaram: Editor, and Visiting Professor and former Dean, Research, NMIMS University.

Dr. Gurumurthy Kalyanaram is a distinguished professor, a management consultant and a corporate advisor. Currently, he is an advisor to and professor at International University of Japan. He advises the University on academic and accreditation matters. Dr. Kalyanaram is also a professor at City University of New York, and a visiting professor at NMIMS University and Tata Institute of Social Sciences. He has served as University Dean for Research, Dean for Business, Director of the Master’s Programs, Director of Research and as the Senior Faculty Liaison for External Development.

Dr. Kalyanaram has been a visiting scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, a fellow at the Center for Russian and East European Studies, and the Inaugural Endowed Professor in Kazakhstan. Dr. Kalyanaram’s areas of expertise are marketing, innovation and management science, and international business and strategy. His research and teaching have been eclectic and inter-disciplinary.

Dr. Kalyanaram is also a management consultant. He has consulted with several universities globally, and major corporations. Dr. Kalyanaram got his Ph.D. from Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He can be reached at nmimssbm.journal@gmail.com (for Journal related issues) or kalyan@alum.mit.edu (only for specific research communication).

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