Chapter 27

Mindtree's Experience in Global Learning Center

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Mindtree is a *learning organization*. It is not just concerned with what we learn from usual sources, but more from unusual sources. Growth for Mindtree Minds (we do not call ourselves “employees”) means “learning.” How we see the world and respond to it is an indication of the way we learn (pedagogy). The idea of setting up a physical campus in the digital age did go through its fair share of debate. A brick-and-mortar campus helps codify the organizational culture. People must experience culture in the real as well as the digital world; both add to memorability. Hence, it was imperative to create an immersive learning experience for Mindtree Minds. This article highlights some of our experiences from this creative journey.

Issues and Challenges

An alarmingly large number of engineers joining the information technology (IT) industry do not come with the required skills to work in customer projects. Often their *weakness in fundamentals* is severe. This is pronounced in understanding systems; solving problems; the ability to articulate; and, most importantly, relating to real-world problems, which a standard University Engineering curriculum should attempt to cover. There are many possible and debatable reasons. Among these is that industry hires engineers from various disciplines when there is a demand and trains them in-house. Thousands of colleges mushroomed in the last decade as a response to this demand. What the colleges produce is not questioned as long as every student gets a job placement, which they have. The first job is expected to provide opportunities to close immediate learning deficits and deploy engineers to work at the earliest

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opportunity. In a way, the skills required in the industry are known and dealt with by the industry itself. Collaboration between industry and academia is practically nonexistent. Peer and parental pressures to always succeed and never fail during the 16 years of proctored examinations have almost deprived students of the excitement of learning. The quality of courseware, faculty, and the exposure deserved by students, coming from diverse economic and social backgrounds is not addressed adequately by anyone. Amid this debate, the fact remains that our workforce is not ready as individuals, professionals, and global citizens as they step into the IT industry.¹

Proposed Solution

Mindtree's Approach

Solving the key issues highlighted above requires a very different approach toward learning and adoption of a long-term view. With the resolve to make a difference to businesses and societies, Mindtree designed its 20 acre residential Global Learning Centre to groom college graduates hired globally. Its mission, aptly directed toward the IT industry's youngest professionals, is to "Revive *Curiosity*, Ignite *Courage* and Foster *Responsibility* to become an expert and a global citizen." In three words—Curiosity, Courage, and Responsibility—are found the guiding principle behind everything that is seen, felt, and done at the *Global Learning Centre*. Curiosity is inherent in us as we discover ourselves through the work we do. While Curiosity can be a driver, it requires Courage to challenge existing belief systems and present a new point of view. Above all, a sense of collective Responsibility awakens us to a purpose beyond our own selves and unites us a global citizen.

Physical, Digital, Intellectual, and Emotional Infrastructure

A residential learning facility for the future requires the right balance among physical, digital, emotional, and intellectual infrastructure. This, combined with the right pedagogy, can create an environment for future professionals. The curriculum should focus beyond technical and soft skills on health, business, society, and sustainability, which we believe are critical missing components in grooming our next generation.² We made our own bricks, we did not send our wet waste outside the campus, we grew vegetables, we replenished the groundwater, and we generated our own energy to the extent possible. All of these became an integral part of campus life and curriculum.

¹Based on *Grooming talent for the next decade: Mindtree's Approach* (brochure).
<https://www.mindtree.com/about/resources/grooming-talent-next-decade-mindtrees-approach>.

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Source: Mindtree Limited

Figure 27.1 Four layers of infrastructure

The “Four Layers of Infrastructure” as represented in Figure 27.1 integrate the design with the outcome tightly. While physical infrastructure provides the base, it has limited capability and capacity. Digital infrastructure, when meaningfully embedded into a physical space, can extend the space to infinity. Intellectual infrastructures provide many learning environments that are closely tied with the digital–physical capabilities. Such learning environments are incomplete without an emotional infrastructure that creates memorability. When engineers graduate from our Global Learning Centre, apart from the holistic learning acquired, they carry with them an indelible emotional footprint. This footprint is created through the collective experience of living and working together, learning by self, in groups, and from experts; creating meaningful software for external communities; design thinking using campus systems and processes; working with ground staff in campus maintenance; respecting professionals from diverse disciplines—turning into a professional and global citizen. We call them “engineers of tomorrow.”

Pedagogy, the Way One Learns

To design an environment, where one competes with one’s own abilities, where fear of failure is converted to determination, and where diversity conflict becomes a new learning opportunity, we had to dismantle four traditional pillars of learning.

- (i) Replace traditional confined classrooms with all types of physical space as learning spaces that can be used for many forms of interaction.

- (ii) Replace teachers and faculty with technical leaders from Mindtree who can work as colleagues and guides to solve problems together.
- (iii) Replace proctored assessments with continuous demonstrations, every day through learning conversations.
- (iv) Adopt real-world problems and content around the world as the curriculum.

While these form the basic guiding principles to design the intellectual infrastructure, there is a continuous effort toward evolving new ways to learn. We call them experiments that will never be completed. Our Global Learning Centre will thus remain “Always Beta”—a software that is almost ready but not complete. The learning environment is unstructured within a structure with plenty of intellectual freedom for learners and experts to exercise. With no scores, marks, or grades to objectively tag a human mind to a level of competence, there is scope for learners to push their own capabilities further. There is no false competition, nor the pressure to score; instead, there is a creative pressure to explore and stretch capabilities by solving real-world problems. A capability is subset of a skill acquired that you can either demonstrate, explain, discuss, and debate, or you simply cannot do all of that.

Examples of Good Practices

As campus hires (we call them Campus Minds) begin their professional journey with their first 90 days at the Global Learning Centre, their brain expansion happens through a program called “Orchard.” They arrive with “Me” as their sphere of influence and leave the campus after 90 days with a worldview that progressively adds layers of exposure that a professional would need to get started with life. This is called their “Me to World Journey,” wherein the meaning of work, client, industry, society, and our planet is brought into their lives through a diverse set of engagements. Figure 27.2 maps out what we regard as being good practices in this regard.

Campus Minds come into industry at different levels of competence. Some are weak in programming languages, some in logic, and some in confidence. The goal is to find ways to rapidly skill engineers in basic programming and problem-solving. The design team at the Global Learning Centre focuses on many learning experiments such that no two batches go through the same program, improving the process of learning with observations, feedback, and debate. The experiments are mostly around designing self-realization opportunities with lots of counseling. The objective is to trigger curiosity and build self-confidence to ask questions.

Source: Mindtree Limited

Figure 27.2 Mindmap of good practices

Application of These Good Practices

Real-World Problems

We asked ourselves, why cannot learning be on real-world problems, even if it is about basic concepts? Let the curriculum be real problems and real systems. In addition to basic capability development, the engineers should work on real projects manifest on the campus, which could be on security, sustainability, hospitality, or automation. Most importantly, it must be a creative pursuit that triggers curiosity: learning by doing. Working on these real-world problems further helps learners apply what they have learned as concepts. It exposes them to the structure, processes, and systems of an engineering environment.

G8 Living and Learning

Groups with socioeconomic diversity, when made to live, learn, and work together for a period of time, can break mental barriers and bridge deficits that otherwise cannot be imparted through lectures. A diverse set of individuals from distinct cultural backgrounds come together to form a culturally heterogeneous group of approximately

eight people (referred by the Harvard Business School as a Group of 8, i.e., G8). A common purpose challenges them to work in teams, helping them improve their communication and collaboration skills. A spectrum of nontechnical tracks ranging from storytelling, business feasibility, professionalism, and social interaction was brought together to create a learning environment.

Industry Connect

Understanding business is as important as knowing technology. A glimpse of what is in store at the delivery center makes a big difference on day one at work. Increased IT industry exposure, direct conversation with internal business heads and top management is a two-pronged approach to help Campus Minds connect with many stakeholders and understand what is the meaning of *work*, who our *clients* are, what is the nature of *business*, and how we impact our clients and *societies*.

Learning Platforms

To remain relevant, it is important for us to immerse ourselves in the world of disruptive technologies and ways of doing business as new channels of communication take birth. Mindtree has built a web-based learning platform (Yorbit) and on-the-go mobile (Shotclass) platforms for learners to support self-paced and self-led learning. It has dramatically changed the way engineers on the ground are self-skilling, upskilling, and cross-skilling. Every new batch of Campus Minds brings with them newer ways of learning.

Electives

What happens when interesting people are invited to spend time with Campus Minds on topics that the respective expert is passionate about? Will Campus Minds love to give a weekend to be with such interesting people or will they choose not to? In addition to courseware, we introduced electives, conducted by interesting leaders and practitioners. Topics ranged from cooking and photography to personal branding. We saw most of the Campus Minds opting for one such additional course. They are free to walk away at any point, which is a real test for the experts and hence learning for them as well. We see true engagement when passion is the reason to meet.

Implications for the Future

Being “Always Beta” is an *adaptive design*. The path to the future is designed in the action today. Just as living organisms have evolved *trying*, the Global Learning Centre applies the same rule. We must sense change every day and adapt incrementally. With time some of the practices discussed above will age and die, and new ideas will take their place. New mindsets will rule with artificial intelligence, art, ethics, social conscience, and rights of robots as the next generation areas of expertise, to name a few. New ways of working will be discovered, and new customers will arrive with a completely different set of skill expectations. Machines and humans will share work seamlessly as well as jokes. In the long run, the measure of success will be to see how many graduates eventually become a respected business, technology, and social leaders. How many will carry on the mission of “Curiosity, Courage, and Responsibility” to become global leaders?

Conclusion

In the field of engineering, as is the case with many other occupations, there is often a skills gap with regard to employees having the necessary repertoire of skills to perform efficiently and productively in the workforce. This draws on the idea that all individuals need to possess and display ‘multiple intelligences’ if they are to be successful in their work endeavors.

This short article explains and evaluates how, to help overcome deficiencies in this area, *Mindtree* has successfully designed and executed a program, through its Global Learning Centre, to generate learning experiences and an infrastructure which addresses and seeks to achieve an optimum balance between physical, digital, emotional, and intellectual aspect of teaching and learning. The Mindtree initiative demonstrates that it is important for educators and learners to immerse themselves in the world of disruptive technologies and various ways of doing business as new channels of communication evolve and develop.

Mindtree has dramatically changed the way engineers on the ground are self-skilling, up skilling, and cross-skilling.

Link to the presentation material: <https://events.development.asia/materials/20160920/mindtree-s-experience-global-learning-centre>.

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