

APPLIED LEARNING IS THE WAY AHEAD



HOTEL MANAGEMENT INSTITUTES NEED TO PREPARE STUDENTS FOR A WORLD WHERE PEOPLE WILL EXPECT SUSTAINABLE FOOD PRACTICES FROM THE INDUSTRY

BY: **AMIT KAPUR**

IF THE goal of teaching is not to just educate but to inculcate learning, then the relevant question is what leads to most effective life-long learning?

A number of factors are at work here -- for instance, the profile of incoming students, qualified faculty, the framework for quality assurance, industry engagement, opportunities for applied learning, and so on, each of which deserves deeper deliberation. A few of these, which I have discussed below, are at the cusp of transition as we keep up with the evolving education landscape.

Despite the popularity of the buzz phrase 'applied learning', its implementation in actionable terms remains elusive. The reason for this is simple. If applied learning is an afterthought, rather than a part of the teaching institution's ethos, then the institution can only pay lip service to this concept as it struggles to define and implement it.

The correct approach therefore is to prioritise applied

learning components of the curriculum over traditional requirements. As an example, and in the context of culinary education, we at Vedatya actually flipped the traditional space planning process when we were building our campus. Rather than prioritising the traditional infrastructure requirement (classroom, indoor labs, and so on), we focused first on areas of applied learning during the master planning phase.

The approach has resulted in on-campus facilities such as the farm that gives students a first-hand understanding of the 'farm-to-fork' concept, an independent herb garden, a fish farm within the rainwater harvesting pond, multiple fruit trees, and a dairy. A lack of understanding of these different components of the natural eco-system and their effect on the F&B supply chain has been identified by global culinary education leaders as a critical gap in the curriculum of hospitality management institutes. We have attempted to bridge this gap.

A knowledge of sustainable practices should also be an essential component of culinary education. Our depleting natural resources demand a much more effective system of utilising them



sustainably and this growing global concern must be reflected in the curriculum of the hospitality management institutes.

Only when students are aware of such practices will they be able to incorporate them in their professional lives. The practice of sustainability is a key component of applied learning at Vedatya. Our farming practice, as a result, is completely organic. Additionally, we use drip irrigation, which saves more than 90 per cent of the water we would have used had we employed traditional irrigation methods. We generate our own compost by recycling organic waste and we are in the process of installing greenhouses made with bamboo sticks instead of a steel structure.

An important component of applied learning is the industry internship. It is now time to question the utility of having this just once during a hospitality student's academic tenure. Should the internship not be an annual feature of the curriculum of hotel management institutes?

The continuous learning pedagogy can easily become a ground reality when we start thinking differently. One step in this direction is the student-operated food truck on the Vedatya campus, where students also hone their revenue management skills by analysing data from the Point of Sale (POS) system.

They are also required to execute a culinary event as a part of their course with the goal of earning a 40 per cent gross operating profit, thus developing entrepreneurial skills in an academic environment. All our on-campus events, including a services focused conference attended by more than 300 people, are led by our students. Continuous learning therefore is not only the need of the hour, but it can in fact be implemented in

any progressive culinary curriculum.

What's next on the frontier of culinary education? Applied research certainly is one field to continue to explore. By research, I don't mean referencing the work of other authors or even conducting secondary research. The focus should now shift to primary research. What about a study, supported by grants from the industry or the government, on the impact of in-house aquaponics or vertical farming on the F&B budgets of hotels? Questions such as these need to be addressed intensively.

A deeper engagement between the industry and academia is now more a necessity than a luxury. We at Vedatya, for instance, run a jointly certified revenue management programme with the InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG). This successful model could be replicated in culinary education so that forward-thinking chefs partner with like-minded institutions to foster a symbiotic relationship. One expression of this relationship could be a joint certification programme similar to one that we have with the IHG. Another could be a Chef-in-Residence programme.

I am sure there are many other credible ideas swirling in the minds of the practitioners of culinary education practitioners. The key is to start implementing these ideas because we, the educators, need to practice what we preach.

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