

Shaping inclusive leaders: How B-schools are integrating DEI into education and practice

B-schools are ensuring DEI becomes a central pillar in both their teaching and research and are forging partnerships with organisations that prioritise diversity and inclusion

Business schools are increasingly at the forefront of addressing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) concerns, recognising their critical importance in shaping tomorrow's leaders. Just as businesses worldwide focus on creating more inclusive environments, business schools have evolved - updating their curricula, implementing innovative strategies, and ensuring that their graduates are well-equipped to lead with sensitivity regarding DEI issues.

Integrating DEI into the curriculum

While traditional functional subjects such as finance, marketing, and leadership continue, these subjects are increasingly being infused with DEI-related content. For example, core courses in organisational behaviour and strategy now include very specific lessons on inclusive leadership, biases in decision-making, and how diversity can potentially enhance organisational performance.

Further, business schools now also offer specialised courses dedicated to diversity management, social responsibility, and sustainable and ethical leadership. These courses often cover topics such as understanding the impact of unconscious biases, building inclusive teams, and addressing potential inequality within corporate structures. A quick look at schools across the world will indicate courses such as "inclusive leadership," "social innovation," and "corporate social responsibility," all of which emphasise how business decisions can affect a range of stakeholders, including underrepresented or marginalised people.

Strategies for DEI beyond curriculum

To truly embed DEI principles into their culture, business schools are adopting a range of innovative strategies that go beyond curriculum changes. First, schools are looking at hiring and nurturing diverse faculty. Diversity among faculty not only provides different perspectives on the curriculum but also serves as an important role-model for students. These faculty can bring their lived experience toward contributing to a more comprehensive learning environment. I also believe that as business schools are also focusing on diverse leadership teams, they are shaping the strategic direction of the school, ensuring that DEI becomes a central pillar in both their teaching and research. Second, business schools are forging partnerships with organisations that prioritise diversity and inclusion.

That is, they are increasingly working with companies, non-profit organisations, and social enterprises to provide students with opportunities to learn, imbibe, and apply their DEI

learning in real-world settings. For example, students can collaborate on projects with organisations that are committed to improving workplace diversity or designing strategies for social impact. These partnerships can help students bridge the gap between theory and practice, providing them with tangible experiences that can demonstrate the real-world relevance of DEI issues. I have also seen examples of programmes that encourage students to engage directly with underrepresented communities (for example, action research, pro-bono work) wherein students can understand on-the-ground social and economic challenges.

Real-world applications of DEI learning

Business schools do not stop at teaching about DEI. Schools, the world over, are increasingly encouraging their students to actively apply what they've learned in real-world scenarios. For example, one can see student-run social enterprises or internships or action projects with diversity-conscious firms. All these activities help students turn their knowledge into actionable leadership. Student-led initiatives have also assumed the form of activities such as "diversity day" or "assistive technology conferences" or conclaves and virtual meets wherein open conversations, workshops, and networking opportunities between students, faculty, and industry leaders can serve as practical learning platforms related to diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

Overall, I believe that as our business world continues to evolve, business schools are uniquely positioned to ensure that our next generation of leaders is equipped with the skills, empathy, and mindset to lead diverse, equitable, and inclusive organisations.

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