



DEVELOPING COMPETITIVE MINDSET: PERCEPTION OF ACADEMIA

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge based economy recognizes human capital as the intellectual capital and knowledge as a critical tool for enhancing competitiveness of a country. With an annual average GDP growth has been 6% to 7% since the start of the 21st century, India has made impressive progress in economic growth.

The Global Competitiveness Report, 2019 of World Economic Forum (WEF) suggests the role of competitiveness to sustain future growth and income. The report demonstrates a strong correlation between competitiveness and per capita income and that without improving competitiveness; less competitive Economies may find it difficult to sustain even their present levels of income. Improving the fundamentals of competitiveness improves resilience to shocks. Available literature also suggests that if India becomes globally more competitive, it can raise its per capita export substantially and could create over 30 million well-paying jobs.

Though factors like policy environment and infrastructure strengthening are important in providing a competitive edge to the nation, a competitive mindset is equally important. A question which eludes a convincing answer since long is that despite being a nation of capable people, why does India lag behind in global competitiveness?

There is an apparent need to skill nation's workforce with attributes that lead to a competitive mindset and this study is aimed at understanding the perception of academia about such attributes. Suggestions have also been made as how to amalgamate the imparting of such attributes with formal programmes at the level of higher education.

Keywords: Competitive mindset, knowledge-based economy, academia, survey, attributes, curriculum design.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Knowledge based economy has come to acquire a prominent place in the economic development of a nation. It is the economy where human capital is recognized as the intellectual capital and knowledge as a critical tool for enhancing competitiveness of a country. Education is most important vertical of the build-up towards a knowledge-based economy. The curriculum and the skill inputs have therefore to be aligned at every level of education, especially higher education, to build the intellectual capabilities with a focus at building competitiveness of the human resources.

India has made impressive progress in economic growth. Since the start of the 21st century, annual average GDP growth has been 6% to 7%, (Kanungo et al, 2018), and was the world's fastest growing economy, surpassing China from 2014 to 2018. (World Economic Outlook, October 2018; British Broadcasting Corporation, 2019).

The Global Competitiveness Report, 2019 of World Economic Forum (WEF) suggests that countries must invest in broader measures of competitiveness to sustain future growth and income. The report demonstrates a strong correlation between competitiveness and per capita income and that without improving competitiveness; less competitive Economies may find it difficult to sustain even their present levels of income. Improving the fundamentals of competitiveness improves resilience to shocks. Acquiring economic resilience through competitiveness build up has become more relevant than ever in today's volatile context, with the world facing a wide range of vulnerabilities like pandemics, climate change and geopolitical tensions.

It would be interesting to see as to how India compares in global competitiveness with other countries specially BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) economies? Having slipped 10 places in annual global competitiveness index to rank 68th in 2018, India is among the worst-performing BRICS nations in annual Global Competitiveness Index (World Economic Forum-WEF). India had the lowest per capita export - a mere \$241 a year among these comparable economies (International Trade Center, Geneva, Switzerland). Available literature also suggests that if India becomes globally more competitive, it can raise its per capita export substantially and could create over 30 million well-paying jobs.

Change in competitive mindset is imperative in face of the Fourth Industrial Revolution also. Factors like policy environment, infrastructure strengthening etc. are important in providing a competitive edge, but a competitive mindset is equally important. Big question which eludes a convincing answer since long is that despite being a nation of capable people, why does India lag behind in global competitiveness?

There is an apparent need to skill nation's workforce with attributes that lead to a competitive mindset and this study is aimed at understanding the perception of academia about such attributes.

2. RESEARCH STUDY

In order to understand what attributes make up a competitiveness mindset and how do Indians perform on these, a survey was conducted with teachers and students as the respondents. IIT,

Gandhinagar has earlier conducted a study to identify the systemic issues that affect competitive mindset and India’s standing on these issues. That study was conducted with professionals as the respondents. We have repeated the survey with academia, including students and teachers, since we believe that they are the future drivers and stakeholders of economic growth. We wanted to learn from them as to what is causing otherwise capable Indians to cede their demographic edge.

We reached out to 650 students and 130 teachers with a structured questionnaire in 4 institutions. Two of these are located in the National Capital Region with respondents (350 students and 83 teachers) primarily from urban elite families; and other two at Kala Amb, a small town on the border of the states of Himachal Pradesh and Haryana, with respondents (260 students and 47 teachers) primarily from rural poor families. The samples were drawn in a completely randomized manner and included faculties of Law, Engineering, Architecture, Journalism and Mass Communication, Management and Pharmacy.

Having drawn the samples, detailed interaction in a typical class room setting was held to explain the objective of the study, the concept of competitive mindset and the systemic issues they were required to respond to. Subsequently, they were segregated into smaller groups so as to rule out the possibility of bias through mutual discussions or consultations. Four hours were given to respond to the questionnaire.

3. FINDINGS

The study determined a score on India’s standing for each of the 24 behavioral and cultural attitudes/attributes (these attributes have earlier been identified by IIT Gandhinagar) that affect competitiveness mindset and ranked them in order of preference accorded by the respondents.

3.1. Data

Table below provides the perception of respondents about ranking of these 24 attributes and India’s standing on them (S- Students; T – Teachers; O – Overall) :

Table 1 Perception of Respondents

S. No	Attributes	Ranking Importance			India's Standing		
		S	T	O	S	T	O
1	Hard work	88.15	88.21	88.16	43.26	42.11	43.07
2	Taking initiative	87.21	86.19	87.04	20.19	19.73	20.11
3	Problem solving skills	87.01	87.21	87.04	36.52	36.04	36.44
4	Innovativeness	86.82	91.98	87.68	29.12	22.73	28.06
5	Creative thinking	86.58	87.23	86.69	24.82	22.19	24.38
6	Perseverance	86.34	86.82	86.42	22.19	18.54	21.58
7	Conscientiousness	85.71	89.15	86.28	19.03	14.56	18.29
8	Freedom of self-expression	85.14	70.26	82.66	28.52	30.12	28.79
9	Education	84.92	83.02	84.60	34.18	35.17	34.35
10	Independent thinking skills	84.13	82.73	83.90	29.38	24.45	28.56
11	Superior Technical knowledge	83.64	81.91	83.35	28.54	30.58	28.88
12	Research capability	82.14	82.97	82.28	32.83	29.12	32.21
13	Team Player	82.06	81.02	81.89	29.12	27.73	28.89
14	Empowering & building confidence amongst youth	81.84	80.01	81.54	18.59	23.16	19.35
15	Transparency	80.75	80.12	80.65	18.14	18.67	18.23
16	Obedience	80.12	88.01	81.44	44.12	40.03	43.44

17	Respect for Law	79.42	80.78	79.65	20.26	17.73	19.84
18	Level of trust among peer	78.81	76.45	78.42	20.26	19.98	20.21
19	Sense of responsibility	78.13	83.85	79.08	20.31	19.72	20.21
20	A global out look	76.27	74.84	76.03	22.26	22.03	22.22
21	Attention to details	75.1	84.47	76.66	23.55	21.12	23.15
22	Level of trust amongst admin. levels	62.17	70.13	63.50	16.26	17.03	16.39
23	Proficiency in English	58.92	56.54	58.52	34.18	31.26	33.69
24	Proficiency in native language	48.19	49.83	48.46	44.13	43.42	44.01

3.2. Analysis

The survey shows a remarkable consistency in the responses by two categories of respondents surveyed viz., students and teachers. Independent of ranking within themselves, top seven attributes, viz., Hard work, Taking initiative, Problem solving skills, Innovativeness, Creative thinking, Perseverance and Conscientiousness are same with both the groups. All these seven qualities were also observed to be deficient amongst Indians in the perception of respondents. None of these attributes scored over 43.07 %. As such, these can be considered as target attributes for developing the Competitiveness Mindset of the youth and to build global competitiveness of the country.

Even though, the survey shows a remarkable consistency in the responses by two categories of respondents surveyed viz., students and teachers, following differences in their perception are significant:

1. Obedience found a higher ranking at number 8 for the teachers as against 20th for the students.
2. Attention to details found a higher ranking at number 9 for the teachers as against 21 for the students.
3. Sense of responsibility found a higher ranking at number 10 for the teachers as against 19 for the students.
4. Freedom of expression found a higher ranking at number 8 for students as against 21 for teachers.

The survey also asked the respondents to indicate their degree of agreement with following culture/context statements relevant to the competitive mindset. These statements have also been borrowed from the survey conducted by IIT Gandhinagar. This part of the survey was optional and only 79 percent teachers (102) and 58 percent students (377) responded.

- Indians don't speak up, just follow orders.
- Indian society and culture encourage younger minds to realize their potential.
- Indian society suffers from the "Tragedy of Commons". (That is where one does all one can do for the good of oneself - their family, home, job even if it is at the detriment of the "common good").
- Indians don't encourage individual opinions or questioning.
- India's organization philosophy is based on too many checks and balances.
- Indian climate is a limiting factor.
- Attitude of acceptance of mediocrity (chalta hai) in India has a negative effect on its competitiveness.
- The traditional Indian diet has an adverse effect on competitiveness.
- Indians encourage entrepreneurship.

- Indians value individual skills.
- Level of trust has a correlation with productivity.
- There is prejudice against manual labor (work that might get your hands dirty).
- India's caste system is a barrier to competitiveness.
- Indians play to play and not always to win.

Again a consistency was seen in the response by the two categories of the respondents. Following 4 statements received the highest score (out of a possible maximum of 100), meaning thereby that the respondents agreed with the statement the most.

Table 2 First Category

1.	India's organization philosophy is based on too many checks and balances.	78
2.	There is prejudice against manual labor	73
3.	India's caste system is a barrier to competitiveness.	64
4.	Indians don't encourage individual opinions or questioning.	61

The positive statements didn't score that high.

Table 3 Second Category

1.	Indians encourage entrepreneurship	32
2.	Indians value individual skills.	43

4. RECCOMENDATIONS

The findings highlight the requirement of designing the curriculums with a focus on building such skills that help to build the global competitiveness of the nation viz., Hard work, Taking initiative, Problem solving skills, Creative thinking, Perseverance and Conscientiousness; and learn ways to start practicing innovative thinking. Available scientific evidence suggests that these attributes can be cultivated within an individual. The findings of the study are a message to the Universities to amalgamate the imparting of these attributes in the curriculum. Authors propose at least one 4 credit compulsory course for UG technical programmes and PG level Management programs. The course can also be offered as an optional with modules on different attributes as also as add on programmes. These can also become an integral part of the Management Programs and at Training institutes.

Instructional designers will be required to work with the subject matter experts, planners and industry experts to obtain the desired information before designing the content. There needs to be clear objectives and their careful connect to the content. It may be advisable also to have clarity on how to inculcate these attributes in students i.e. delivery methods. It would be important to work with students at every level. Capstone projects and group learning exercises can prove effective to acquire, practice and internalize these attributes. It would be interesting to consider leading this course through and with the active participation of a community of students, bound together by common interest of developing these non-cognitive skills.

Multiple techniques such as interactive instruction, student-centered learning, self-discovery, etc. can help students understand and get sensitized to conscientiousness; discussions, discovery and analysis, together with individual and group exercises have been found to be useful for learning Perseverance; simulating roadblocks and strategizing to overcome these can lead to initiative taking; offering challenging situations and doing exercises to stretch their brains and come up with innovative ideas and solutions as individuals and in groups develop innovation capabilities; and exercises aimed at identifying the problem and to find multiple alternative solutions to address these methodically leads to problem solving skills.

Case studies and analyzing real life issues may prove useful for developing other competitiveness attributes. Competitiveness Mindset Institute, USA offers such courses through highly interactive, participatory, collaborative classroom work based practice-oriented courses, and not lectures.

We hope that this report will be useful to academic planners in deciding the course of action to address systemic issues identified in the study to build the global competitiveness of the nation and eventually make some changes for the better.

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