



India Needs Problem Solvers, Not Just Specialists

A generation trained to move between tech, business, policy, design, and human behaviour will build the enterprises, institutions, and solutions that shape the country.

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INDIA HAS BUILT its global reputation on specialists. Our engineers run the back ends and capability centres of the world's largest companies; our management graduates understand scale and execution; our designers shape products used by hundreds of millions. Individually, this talent holds its own anywhere.

Yet I have seen, in industry and in higher education alike, talented people solve their part of a problem brilliantly and often still struggle to solve the whole. Put an engineer, a manager, and a designer in a room with a challenge that needs all three, and the system strains. They often speak different professional languages, optimise for different outcomes, and pass the problem from one silo to the next instead of solving it together. The fault is not with them; it is with the way the system has trained them.

For decades, our education has rewarded depth in one field and undervalued range. A student picks a stream at 16, commits to a discipline at 18, and spends four or five years fluent in one subject and not fully familiar with the rest. That worked when industries had clear boundaries and a career meant one job done well for 30 years. It fails now, when the problems that

matter no longer fit inside a single department, discipline, or degree.

Consider what it takes to build a competitive electric-vehicle industry: engineers who understand vehicle dynamics, software specialists who build battery-management systems, materials scientists working on cell chemistry, supply-chain professionals securing critical minerals, and policymakers shaping incentives and charging infrastructure. No single capability is enough. The real test is the room where all of them sit together and make a decision that holds across technology, cost, customers, infrastructure, and policy. That room is

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where the opportunity will be won or lost—and we are still not adequately preparing enough young people to function confidently in it.

Climate action is another example: a renewable-energy project must navigate land, grid integration, community concerns, financing, and regulation at once. The challenge is not finding specialists; it is finding people who can connect what they know into something that works.

For business, the gap can be costly: products being built without a real understanding of users, technology getting investments no one truly owns, and delays in decision making. In all such situations it is also critical to understand and handle the human angle. As a result, we often get managers who can optimise a function but struggle to navigate an enterprise.

This is not an argument against specialisation. Depth remains indispensable; a country of connectors without experts would be no more useful than a country of experts who cannot connect. But the binding constraint is changing. India's shortage was once deep skill in narrow fields. Increasingly, it is people who can combine depth with range—who know enough of another discipline to ask the right question, respect the



answer, and turn it into action.

Artificial intelligence has made this urgent, rewriting jobs as fast as it creates them. A marketing leader must now grasp how algorithms shape behaviour; a manufacturing leader must weigh data, sustainability, supply chains, and geopolitical risk in a single decision. The World Economic Forum's 'Future of Jobs Report 2025' estimates that 39% of workers' core skills will change by 2030—down from 44% two years earlier, because firms began investing seriously in reskilling. Disruption is real, but adaptability can be built.

Universities must, therefore, rethink how they prepare the young for the future. Most are still organised around subjects as separate worlds—a computer-science student may graduate without encountering ethics,

a commerce student without technology, a liberal-arts student without ever growing comfortable with data. Private universities carry a particular responsibility. We were not created to replicate older structures on newer campuses; we have the freedom, and the obligation, to frame education around the world students will enter.

Four changes are essential, in my view.

First, cross-disciplinary work must become central to the undergraduate experience, not an occasional elective. Every student should complete at least one serious project with peers from other disciplines before graduating—not a token group assignment, but a genuine problem that cannot be solved without combining technology, business, design, data, and human understanding.

Second, universities must teach through problems as well as subjects. Students should learn finance, engineering, economics, or computer science in depth—but they must also be put in front of real problems, such as building a clean-mobility solution or developing an affordable healthcare intervention, where no single subject holds the full answer.

Third, faculty incentives must evolve. Academic excellence will always require disciplinary depth, but institutions must also recognise the faculty who collaborate across departments, build applied programmes, and help students connect knowledge to consequence.

Fourth, employers must send a stronger signal. Corporate India says it wants adaptable, collaborative, problem-solving graduates. Its recruitment, evaluation and promotion systems must start rewarding those qualities visibly. Universities will move far faster when employers show that interdisciplinary capability is not flattering language in a prospectus but a real route to responsibility and leadership.

India will continue to need outstanding engineers, economists, designers, scientists, managers, and policymakers. But it will also need something more: people who can bring these worlds together without losing the rigour of any one of them. A generation trained only to think inside one box will struggle with challenges that were never inside a box to begin with. A generation trained to move intelligently between technology, business, policy, design, and human behaviour will not merely find jobs—it will build the enterprises, institutions, and solutions that shape the country.

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(Views are personal.)