

BY KAUSHIK MUKHERJEE ('00 EEE)

MYTH-BUSTING THE INDIAN MBA ROULETTE

12 misconceptions about the selection process you would rather avoid

The Indian MBA

graduate has never had it this good. However, today, with over a thousand b-schools in the country, we run the risk of selling the Indian MBA dream with the promise of money.

This is exactly where we need to separate the wheat from the chaff. There are amongst the hundreds, a precious few institutes that have carved a niche for themselves in the world's management fraternity. Here, we take a look at 12 such misconceptions, any aspirants should steer clear of. After all, in a game of roulette – you ought to do better than trust someone else's hunch.

01. The brain reigns supreme

In the months that lead up to the aptitude tests, we come across a motley crew of aspiring candidates. From the lazy to the struggler to the gifted few who seem unnaturally brilliant at making a mockery of the different sections of the test, they are all a part of the same race. Over the years of schooling and graduation, it has been embossed in our minds that some students are more intelligent than the others and

more often than not, it is the same select few who walk away with the cake. Indeed, we hear cases of candidates managing sky-high scores with only a month's effort, if not lesser. The mistake we make is that we view such people as perhaps the only ones who are assured of a



safe berth in the second round of selections. It is then, the time to flip the coin. These tests are great levelers. Where some might possess superior intelligence, it is our duty to fish out the best in us and pit them against another's. What is it? Superior determination? Perseverance? Dedication? Finding one's strengths and drawing up a plan based on it explodes myths like these. For all we know, our intelligent

competitor might not have the endurance to last more than a month.

02. 1:100 is too high an odd

With numbers, the bigger they get, the more they allure us.

When we read about a 153000 candidates appearing for an entrance test, we struggle with the odds. A simple division would scale down the ratio to 1:100. And this is exactly when panic begins to set in. Now, let's look at this figure a little closely. Firstly, out of the entire lot, at least 30% of the applicants take the test to apply for Tier-II and Tier-III b-schools. Another 20% take the test without any serious effort put into it whatsoever. This is when the figures start favouring us. How passionately do we really want this to work out? If we want it bad enough, we

will not have to bother about finding 99 others who might not be as motivated as us, to secure our seat. All we need to do is keep our end of the bargain – believe in our capabilities, without getting intimidated by daunting ratios. Think about it – the minute we count ourselves out, the person next to us has one less – 98 others to surpass.

03. There's never enough time

The other day I heard of a second-year student who had started on his preparation for these entrance tests. Now, here's an interesting thought. A student is willing to sacrifice over two of the best years of his life – his college days, to study for a test he plans to take after two-and-half years. This – is exactly what fear of failure does to aspirants. In fact, he is not the only one – quite a few 'coaching institutes' start their batches for a particular year even before the tests for the same year gets over. The solution then, is unique to the individual. We have to plan our preparatory schedule according to our profile. It would depend on the number of hours we might be able to put in everyday, our commitments and our work/study schedule. This is when we understanding the benefits of 'back-planning'. From the date of the test, we move back in time – all the while accounting for the practice tests, the analyses, the classes, the time spent in self-study. We have enough time. Once we accommodate our preparations in scheme of things, we come up with a time span. We arrive at a date. That is the date when we start running – and we don't stop till we've crossed the finishing line.

04. Classroom coaching is mandatory

Let's face it, coaching institutes don't work magic. They facilitate miracles, but it is us who have to be prepared to perform them when it matters most. It does depend on the individual and his ability to assess his need for a mentor. For some spirited individuals, correspondence material and practice home-tests prove to do the trick. But if we realize that

we perform best when there is someone to put us through the grind, then classes like these might just help in bringing out the best in you. This is when we bring up the topic of 'active learning'. Most of us are used to the damaging process of being spoon-fed each and every detail of a course. Well, that might have worked in school and in college, as well. In this case, it is up to us to take the initiative and engage the faculty in gleaning the most out of the curriculum. Class participation, discussions, doubt-clearing sessions – there will come a time when we will get more than every penny's worth and best of all, that will be the last of our concerns. Know yourself, and if you invest in this – for the sake of time, effort, dreams and money – go the whole hog.

05. Oh, for a 99

One very elusive figure for every aspirant is 99 – ninety nine percentile. To put it in layman's terms, this is when you break into the top 1% of all the students who appear for the test. For most candidates, this would translate to a confirmed seat in the second round of selections. Often, the mistake we make is that we benchmark ourselves on standards set by others. In spite of knowing that a perfect score is quite possible, we strive hard to achieve the average score at which a candidate secured an interview call. This is dangerous as it might end up shortchanging us of our potential. We perform, when the need of the hour is to outperform. A safer option would be to benchmark ourselves against deserving others till the time we break the barrier. Once that is done, we strive to surpass ourselves with each effort. This way, we give complacency the boot and at the

same time gain some semblance of consistency.

06. A simulation test is after all a mock-test

Amongst the many pit-falls of the commercialization of the coaching process, none could be possible more hazardous than the "simulation tests-wars". In their bid to attract maximum number of students by delivering more value for money, some institutes go to the lengths of conducting back-to-back tests for every week of the three months that lead up to the test. Although at first glance, the return-of-investment seems lucrative, there's more to what meets the eye. An average test is attempted for a period of two hours. Surprisingly, more important than how much we score, is the amount of time we spend analyzing our performance. This could stretch over days – where the solved and unsolved questions are revisited. It is a process which is drawn out over time and ingrains in our system some of the finer qualities of effective question selection, time management, solution approaches, etc. No, there cannot be a short-cut to this. Taking back-to-back tests, give very little time for analysis. Also, it builds a feeling where one is tempted to try scoring well in the test to come, instead of learning from the pitfalls of the present one. Practice tests – both, the home and the national ones – play an invaluable role in honing one's test-taking skills. Spare no effort – in fact, you might consider resetting your watch to 1100hrs every time you start attempting one.

07. To get ahead of the pack, stay away from it

Some of us have a habit of preparing in isolation. For most it's a compulsive habit, while for some it's decisive. One of the biggest misconceptions that we all come across in some phase of our study life, is that it works to our advantage if we keep away from the group, when it comes to matters of sharing information of knowledge. Knowledge restricted, is knowledge gained? Actually not, in fact it's just the reverse. That is the beauty of the manner in which the tests are structured. The oddball who decides to dispense with helping others, also stands a high risk of not getting help when he needs it most himself. In a test where you are rated against your peer, where the percentile matters more than the percentage – a cloak-and-dagger approach to studying would ring the death knell of any aspirant. If it's a melee, you have to be in it – in the thick of things to know your own strengths – apart from discovering the many weaknesses of others, of course.

08. Underrating yourself keeps the pressure off

Stars performers always attract attention – from well-wishers and others, alike. Times like these, expectations sky-rocket, complacency sets in, the pressure of performing increases – in short, it might not be an easy situation to handle. True, especially if all this is happening well-before when it actually should be. To counteravail this, most of us take a diametrically opposite approach. We discredit every success of ours as a stroke

of luck, and weigh heavily on every little setback. In short – we underrate ourselves.

Although this might seem like a pragmatic thing to do – of course, everybody loves an underdog – we need to be very careful in walking that thin line of modesty. Unchecked, it might breed dissatisfaction and infuse a latent sense of hopelessness in our minds. The next time someone asks you about your preparations or your performance, try this – instead of painting a sorry picture, tell them that you did your best and you have your fingers crossed for the results. Sometimes, being candid works wonders on both you and your party. You gain in confidence and the nosy parkers cease their taunts.

09. Sacrifices are imperative

This stems from the old maxim that in order to gain something, one must sacrifice another thing. While this might be true in cases, they are definitely not mandatory. But yes, if that is what it takes to make things work – it could be for the better. A sacrifice, however trivial it might be, stays in the mind for a while to come. Especially if we choose to forego something that is very close to our heart in order to accommodate our study routine, we tend to work doubly hard to make sure that the sacrifice was well worth it. In cases like these, it adds a dash of responsibility and character to our cause. It makes us sure that no matter what the compulsions, a course once planned is what we will stick to even if it requires the re-shuffling of a few priorities. Of course, at the very end of it all, in the event of things not working out in our favour – we would not want to have this one incident to blame.

10. Disadvantage – the fresh graduate

Quite a bunch of the applicants, predominantly those who apply as fresh university graduates fear the fact that they might be at a disadvantage when it comes to the selection rounds that follow the written test. Simply put, this would be a disadvantage only if we'd want it to be one. For starters, there are enough a more things going our way. Unlike most of the working applicants, we would be in the habit of studying and ought to have our core graduating courses and projects right on the top of our minds. It is then up to us to allocate time from our final semester and do justice to the preparation plans. Secondly, it is important to know that although business schools do recruit fresh graduates in large numbers, it is important to distinguish yourself from the person right next to you. To make a start – read up about things outside your university curriculum – current affairs, the Indian economy, the Chinese manufacturing model, etc. Bottomline, the well-informed, mature freshman with a fair idea of the happenings of the world around him - Bingo!

11. Disadvantage – the working professional

The biggest challenge that working applicants face, is that of time-management. Based on your profile in the company, you might be in India... abroad, working twelve hours a day... or even longer. It's a slipstream you have to avoid at all costs – and if you are determined enough, it won't seem as Herculean as it sounds. The trick is to prioritize the tasks and

EDUCATION & ACADEMICS

making sure that no matter which slots you juggle and reshuffle, the top spot remains untouched. Re-schedule work hours, take a day off to catch up, start early so as to accommodate unforeseen office night-outs – but fight tooth and nail to stay on course. Once the initial hurdle is through, your work experience promises to be a show-winner at almost all of your interviews. Undertaking initiatives in the workplace, assuming responsibilities within the team and having a crystal-clear idea of how your individual contribution fits in to the bigger picture – additives that will make sure you blaze through the final rounds.

12. The easier section must be done first

Rigid answers like this surprise me no end. True, it might hold good for one who wants to make sure he is off to a secure start. Another candidate might simply

not feel comfortable with the idea of leaving a difficult section till the end. This is where beginning early displays its merits. The home-tests offer numerous opportunities to experiment with different time-splits, order of sections and strategies. A time comes when we boot a high score and with new-found confidence in the winning combination, we teeter on the edge of aborting the trial-and-error process. This could simply be the first nail in our coffin, if we're not careful enough to try all the permutations and combinations possible. Over a period of time, we zero in on a particular strategy and then try it out in the national-level tests.

Well, there is no denying the fact that some of the world's top consulting firms and investments banks troop to the premier Indian business schools to pick the crème-de-la-crème of the graduating batch. With a predicted shift of the balance of global economy towards the

Asia-Pacific region, and an emergent India with a key role to play in it – pursuing your management course in this country would have obvious merits in the long run. Factor in the high return-on-investment and globally accepted teaching methods and you have a powerful case for the Indian MBA. What you might have to forego is the high networking value, the rich global perspective and all that comes with the much-talked about 'foreign b-school' tag. But given the way in which the Indian premier b-schools have come up over the years and are finally making efforts in expanding their reach beyond the national boundary, there is a good chance that things might just be on an upward spiral. If you are one to jump in to where all the action is, well – congratulations! You now know 12 ways not to derail your MBA entrance preparations.



BITS Pilani, Hyderabad Bhoomi Pooja snaps!

Date: Ugadi Day (Thursday), 30th March, 2006
Venue: Campus Site, Jawahar Nagar, Shamirpet
Mandal, RR District, Hyderabad