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Educational institutions should promote entrepreneurship among students: Kris Gopalakrishnan

Stanley Pinto, TNN | Sep 3, 2013, 07.32 PM IST

MANGALORE: Is there a spirit of entrepreneurship among the youth passing out of the hallowed portals of an institution? Or is the spark of entrepreneurship doused even before it is kindled?

Recently, Kris Gopalakrishnan, executive vice-chairman, Infosys, urged educational institutions to promote entrepreneurship among students. But are the colleges really equipped?

Industry expert Naren Koduvattat, chairman of the board and managing director of i-Point, says it is a definite no. There is no ecosystem in place to give the message that there will be encouragement and support from either the government or the industry as of now."

Naren says it is a proven thing that at least 10% of the young generation is serious-minded about being entrepreneurs. It is only this crowd that goes forward when government/ industry support system is in place and rids them of fears of failure," he notes.

So what are the necessary ingredients? Naren, who had a distinguished career with PSI Data Systems and Infosys Technologies playing various roles from software engineer to vice-president, says: "First of all we have to create an aspiration so that people aspire to become entrepreneurs. You just cannot turn the plate all of a sudden. Students have been brought up to clear the examinations as of now through a curriculum which has no place for entrepreneurship. But they have to realize that the spirit of entrepreneurship is running in the larger world and within the country.

"To create that aspiration, government should facilitate a 'startup village'. Since government cannot work in isolation, it has to work together with the industry. Industry has to supply mentors as it knows what a good idea is unlike a youth. Industry has to create a good incubation programme which has two parts - venture capital which is critical, and giving them business.

When government says it creates something to facilitate young entrepreneurship, then it catches the imagination of youth in their final years and start asking questions. Things will go forward like this," he says but points out another critical issue - faculty who don't understand the power of research, innovation and entrepreneurship.

Research is the backbone of entrepreneurship. An entrepreneur has to do research about validity of an idea, the reach and power of an idea. And then comes the innovation to take the existing idea to something better or something brand new. Entrepreneurship involves converting this idea into a business model, which also involves marketing and branding," says Naren.

But things look bright. Naren says trends are happening in the coastal city like Manipal Institute of Technology where there is an innovation centre and Nitte and others looking at increased industry interaction and alliance.

What experts say

"We have an innovation centre since 2007 specifically for this purpose. We have competitions where lot of students participate and come up with innovative ideas. We provide office space for start ups at the centre for 36 months to incubate an idea depending upon their plan and requirement. We also offer seed money in deserving cases and help launch their company. There are 12 companies in the centre working on start-ups. We want entrepreneurship integrated into curriculum gradually and but we have support system in place for that. Germany University, Chemnitz, has a Centre of excellence at the centre which works on printed electronics.

--Srikanth Rao | MIT joint director

"We have started an innovation centre at the college as per the direction of the human resources ministry. We encourage students to come up with ideas and help them develop them at the centre. Apart from this we invite young entrepreneurs to give them a feel of how to become an entrepreneur and develop entrepreneurship. But as my experience goes it is not easy to become an entrepreneur. I had to shut down my unit in Bangalore in 1995 because of government policies. But nevertheless, we encourage students to ideate.

--Joseph Gonsalves | principal, St Joseph Engineering College

"We have an incubation centre which is a part of our vibrant Entrepreneurship Development Cell (EDC). We have many schemes for students, especially at NMAMIT at Nitte. We have very close interaction with industry. Many students have become success stories and Rohit Bhat, CEO of Robosoft Technologies, is one of them. Presently, there are two student groups that have started incubating an idea. There is also another proposal by Master of Computer Application students, which is under our active consideration.

--Vishal Hegde |trustee, Nitte Education Trust

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