Introduction

Management education is more than a hundred years old in the world. In India it took wing in the late 1950s and the first IIMs at Ahmedabad and Calcutta were established under mentorship with the Harvard Business School and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In our country, admissions to IIMs, especially to Ahmedabad, Bangalore and Calcutta is the most difficult in the world. They probably have the highest applications to admission ratio in the world. Today, there are almost 3,000 b-schools in the country, out of which about 2,500 are approved by AICTE and remaining conducts unapproved programmes. All these Institutes produce about 200,000 management graduates per year.

It is common knowledge that quality standards of education differ significantly among Indian b-schools. If one looked beyond the IIMs and a few other institutes mentioned above, there is strong need for quality improvement in the more than 2,000 b-schools before they can come up to a reasonably acceptable level. One of the ways in which the quality of non-IIMs b-schools could improve would be by using a well-structured mentoring programme. Such a programme would include multiple layers, namely, a programme for mentoring the Faculty Mentors and then, programmes within the Institute for mentoring the students for improving their employability.

To address the first layer, it may be useful to use a ‘multi-level diffusion model’ of mentoring in Indian b-schools. Each mature IIM should mentor the next level of 5 b-schools in their region. Non-IIM b-schools can send their faculty to the IIMs for a period of 2-10 weeks. The faculty will attend classes, may take some classes along with IIM faculty, interact with them and understand their practices and imbibe their teaching methodology and pedagogy. Similarly, the IIMs can send one or two faculty members to the interested / attached institute for a period of 2-10 weeks; the IIM faculty may teach a course or part of a course and interact and mentor local faculty in teaching methodology, case method, pedagogy, writing of research papers etc. In turn this non-IIM institute will mentor 5 institutes of next level and so on.

For the next layer of ‘multi-tier model’ mentoring within the Institute, the programme would include buddy mentoring by senior students, by faculty mentors and by Industry
mentors as well. There is indeed a lot of scope in terms of designing and implementing such a programme in non-IIM Indian b-schools.

According to the 2010 edition of the BW–Synovate b-school survey of India’s best b-schools, there are ten institutes from the country that were among the top ones on the basis of several parameters. The survey relates to only those institutes that participated in the survey. The methodology used for the survey this year included two new parameters, namely, industry interaction and pedagogical system since these were considered important in terms of a fulfilling management education experience. This goes on to suggest that mentoring by Faculty at b-Schools and by Guest Faculty from the industry – both play a significant role in shaping the experience of a student.

The mushrooming of business schools has led to challenges of finding Mentors for management students. Too many institutes have come up in a very short span of time. According to Arvind Singhal, Chairman of Technopak, “In 2000, these were 600 colleges offering 70,000 MBA seats, but by the end of 2009 that number increased to 1,400 colleges offering 120,000 seats.” Considering one institute needs about 35-50 full-time faculty, 1,400 institute would need around 70,000 Faculty. But only around 40 percent of this is available and the rest is being managed by visiting faculty from the industry.

As a result it is felt that mentoring at a b-school needs to be undertaken as a joint venture between the institute faculty and the guest faculty from the industry.

The concept under study has not been much verified in the b-schools. Therefore, specific literature regarding the application of the concept to B-schools is not available. An attempt is being made to understand the use of the concept in a few select b-schools in India. The justification for undertaking the research can be understood further by going through the following research driven conclusions

“To inform mentoring policy and practice, we need more direct studies of mentoring and its effect on the teacher. We need to know more about how mentors work with mentees in
productive ways, what structures and resources enable that work and how mentoring fits in the wider framework of professional development and accountability” (Feiman-Nemser, 1996, p.3).

Supporting Feiman-Nemser’s (1996) advocacy for more studies of mentoring, Ingersoll and Kralik (2004) stress the importance and validity of studies that collect similar outcome data from both participants and non-participants in a mentoring programme emphasising the need for such a study to establish whether participants perform differently from non-participants.

McGuire and Reger (2003) offer more general conclusions about research to date, stating, “Mentoring influences an academic’s level of professional activity and productivity” and “Most of our understanding about mentoring comes from research that focuses on a particular kind of relationship – one involving an older, experienced person and a younger, less-experienced person” (p.55). These statements appear narrow and unsubstantiated, supporting Ingersoll and Kralik’s (2004) view that many research studies on mentoring lack methodological rigour. Ingersoll and Kralik also offer an interesting observation that has not been considered by the other literature, when they state that there is little research investigating the negative effects of mentoring. For example, there can be an inherent danger of relying on mentors to pass on their teaching practices regardless of whether they are effective or not.