Academic ambitions that span continents

The new dean of Insead sees a need to go beyond business when educating future global leaders, writes Della Bradshaw

International mobility, always popular with business students, is becoming increasingly attractive with demons as well. Academic heavyweight Dipak Jain has become the latest to prove that management education is a global business by leaving the US to take over from Frank Brown as boss of Insead.

Since moving from the Kellogg school at Northwestern University, he has devised ambitious plans for Insead, the self-styled “business school of the world”, where he became dean in February. In particular, he intends to ensure the school lives up to its slogan. At the heart of his strategy are plans to make Insead the same powerful force in the US and Latin America that it is in Europe and Asia, a basic requirement if Insead is to be a true global force.

The plan is to make the Americas the school’s fourth pillar, alongside the three centres in France, Singapore and Abu Dhabi, says Prof Jain. As former dean of Kellogg, and a founding faculty member there, Prof Jain knows more about the US business schools market, and the difficulties involved in breaking into that market, than most. He is still considering his options for American business schools, but does not rule out a fourth campus – former Kellogg dean Gabriel Heyman was unable to realise his ambitions for a campus in the US.

In the shorter term Prof Jain is considering how to develop the existing partnerships, with the Wharton School in the US, which Insead has held an alliance with for 10 years, and with Fudan’s EMBA program in Shanghai, the executive short course specialist.

But he has other immediate priorities. “Down the road, we have to decide what kind of presence we want: a partnership, a campus. But first we have to unify the three existing campuses,” he says.

“I have undergone a change in perspective. When I came to Kellogg, I thought of opportunities. Now I have to think about challenges. In the US, in terms of placement, I was looking at how to get you a job. Now I have to think of how to attract students from the region, which is a cultural challenge, but Prof Jain has a plan to consolidate all three campuses as regional hubs. "In France, we are not a French school, in Singapore, we are not a Singaporean school." The school in France is already a powerhouse in Europe and the Singapore campus, now 10 years old, will be able to reach out to China and India, as well as other Asian countries.

But it is the newly opened Abu Dhabi campus, inaugurated in June 2010, that will need most attention. The plan is for the campus to serve Africa as well as the Middle East, which Prof Jain acknowledges will take time. "We are building the Abu Dhabi initiative from here. This year, the plan is just to explore. We want to spend a year to study what we can do." Prof Jain recognises that recent unrest in the Middle East has introduced uncertainty into the region, which has so far attracted top notch European business schools – including London Business School, HEBS and Manchester Business School – but few from the US. "I am sure it is only a matter of time before we see US schools. When things go very well, they will come," he says.

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Prof Jain is confident the campus will do well. "Countries with resources are beginning to attract people and one of the places where there is resource is China. It is not a democracy. But it has growth." While many US and European schools set up programmes in China to teach local students, Insead’s multi-campus approach is different, says Prof Jain: "It is not just about attracting students from the region but to attract students worldwide who want to work in the region. Indeed the two largest nationality groups on the Fontainebleau and Singapore campuses are from the US and India. When you go for a new campus, it is not just to attract students from the region, but to create job opportunities."

Insead is already the only business school that has substantial multiple permanent faculty, making it bigger than any business school in the world, as measured by number of permanent faculty. "One Insead will be a logistical and international campuses, each with their own permanent faculty. The Singapore campus, for example, has 11 permanent faculty, making it bigger than the Tuck school at Dartmouth College (9), while the Abu Dhabi campus has five resident faculty.

But the heart of Insead remains in Fontainebleau, and that too will get a marketing facelift. To begin with, Prof Jain does not refer to Fontainebleau as all but last to the Paris campuses. "Everything we do should help us to sharpen our brand.

As a top-notch marketing professor, the value of location branding is something he learnt as dean at Kellogg. In Evanston, Illinois, "the campus is fine, just Evanston is fine. But Chicago is Chicago." And Paris is Paris. The Paris brand will prove particularly attractive to Americans, he believes. "We can put some programme in Paris that will attract people from all over the world. How do you give the European business? You leverage Paris." Insead is in the process of developing an alliance with the Sorbonne University in Paris. "You have the power of two world-class friends," as Prof Jain puts it.

As well as location, the alliance will bring the advantage of access to facilities. As a standalone school, Insead has no access to the wider academic resources of a university, at a time when science, economics and management are seen as an essential part of the business world. In particular, Insead is hoping to work with the Sorbonne on a masters level law degree.

For Prof Jain, the need to "go beyond business" is central to his philosophy when it comes to educating the next generation of global leaders. "It is essential if the mantra "business school for the world" is to move beyond hyperbole."

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