



## Mandarin on the menu at Indian B-schools

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**New Delhi:** It makes eminent sense: if you are going to be a master of the universe, it would help to know the language (or languages) spoken by most of its inhabitants.

Several Indian business schools are offering students the option of learning Mandarin, and at least one of them has made it mandatory for its students to learn the language.

Even mathematically, that should give these students an advantage: assuming that a student at an Indian B-school knows Hindi, English and Mandarin, he or she will be able to communicate with at least half the world's population.

Bala V. Balachandran, founder of the Great Lakes Institute of Management in Chennai, said that knowledge of Hindi, English and Mandarin are a great advantage for any young manager. "You have to learn the language of the country, which is leading or going to lead the global economy," said Balachandran, whose school has made it mandatory for all students to learn Mandarin.

China's economic surge over the past decade has also prompted several schools to offer a course in Mandarin. The Chinese economy is the second largest in the world (after the US).

"Looking at the emerging world order, it's important that a business manager understands the language of a country that has a huge say in the global economy," said a spokesperson for the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Shillong, which offers a course in Mandarin.

Trade between India and China is growing at 40% a year and was \$60 billion (around Rs2.87 trillion today) last year, Mint reported last week, citing Industrial and Commercial Bank of China president Yang Kaisheng.

"China is emerging as a huge economy and bigger things in trade and business are set to happen between India and China. By imparting Mandarin to our students, we are expanding the horizon," added the IIM Shillong spokesperson.

Other schools and institutions offering a course in Mandarin include Mumbai's

Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies and Centum Learning Ltd, an associate of Bharti Airtel Ltd that offers postgraduate programmes in management. IIM Kozhikode planned to start offering a course in Mandarin this year, couldn't for a variety of reasons, and could "have something from next year", according to the B-school's chairman of international exchanges and strategy, M.K. Nandakumar.

Knowledge of Mandarin could also help students land better jobs. IIM Shillong's spokesperson said that while the school didn't try to leverage the Mandarin course during the last placement season, it may consider doing so.

"It may not have an immediate effect, but (it) will benefit (students) in due course," said Easwar Krishna Iyer, director of admissions at Great Lakes.

Interestingly, the Union government-controlled Central Board of Secondary Education expressed its intention to start a language course in Mandarin last year, though nothing has come of it.

## Municipal policies should facilitate recycling of waste

The capital is now faced with the daunting task of finding 100 sq. km of landfill space to meet its needs until 2050. This land is not available either in Delhi or in the neighbouring states

The municipal corporation is the largest local body in Delhi with the responsibility of providing basic amenities. It also deals with solid waste management (SWM) through the traditional practice of collecting garbage at the household level, followed by dumping in bins and dhalaos (waste dump in a residential area), from where the waste is transported to landfills. Curiously, such a system does not provide for either minimization or recycling of the waste. In 2000, the Union ministry for environment and forests issued rules that introduced segregation into this chain so as to extract recyclables and reduce the total amount of waste to be disposed of. The impetus came from the fact that, since 1975, 20 sanitary landfills have been created, of which only three are currently operational, and these too are close to exhaustion. The capital is now faced with the daunting task of finding 100 sq. km of landfill space to meet its needs until 2050. This land is not available either in Delhi or in the neighbouring states.

In addition, there are no provisions for the informal sector, which constitutes the core of the recycling process. In 1996, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) had 337 dhalaos and 1,428 dustbins, which were the sites where segregation and collection of recyclables took place. Now, under a new "green" policy, even these sites are being dismantled. There are no official policies for minimization, particularly for packaging waste. In fact, the real potential lies in the fact that over 50% of the waste generated in India is organic—which can be composted—and 30% is recyclable.

Officially, Indian waste is supposed to consist of 11% metal, rubber, textiles etc.; 5% paper and paper products, and 1% plastics by weight. But actual collection at kabadi shops (which trade in cast-offs) in Delhi indicates that paper and paper products are fast overtaking metals, while plas-

tics are now almost one-third of paper.

With the increase in sources such as hospitals, nursing homes, laboratories, offices, electronic devices and industrial units, there is also an increase in hazardous waste in the city.

Since the local municipal authorities are unable to deliver the services, their tasks are being fulfilled by a more than 100,000 waste pickers who, if paid the minimum wage, would cost the city a minimum of Rs. 1 crore every day. To make this workforce a part of the formal structure of waste management, it is necessary to conceive an alternative system of waste management.

Such a system has been proposed by the waste pickers themselves, who have asked for space at each dhalao for six to 10 waste pickers engaged in door-to-door collection and segregation at source.

The organic waste could then be processed by them in local compost pits and sold in local markets for use in parks and gardens. The recyclables could be transported by small kabadi associations on cycles or rickshaws to big kabadisand recycling units. That only leaves 20% of the waste for eventual disposal at landfills.

Such a system is manifestly logical, eminently doable, and can result in significant reductions in land and energy costs and in pollution and emissions of greenhouse gases. All it entails is recognizing the social and economic value of the work of waste pickers and providing them with identity, space and credit.

However, this legality is exactly what frightens the babus of the corporation and they would much prefer the privatization of waste management so that the higher profits can be equitably distributed among the conglomerate of decision makers, technocrats and corporate firms. Believe it or not, this is precisely what "corruption" is all about!

Source: Hazards Centre in New Delhi.

## Services provided for a difference

Information technology solutions for non-governmental organizations are delivered at a fraction of the market cost—mainly by getting a large group of volunteers to contribute and complete projects

**Chennai:** Four engineering students from VIT University at Katpadi, near Vellore, and one from Lady Shri Ram College, Delhi, started ngoFuel last year, more with an eye on getting meaningful work experience than making money.

Nine months later, they are willing to decline job offers from professional firms to ensure that the start-up, which provides information technology (IT) solutions for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) at a fraction of the market cost, survives.

"We provide IT, Web, media and related services to NGOs across the country," says



Apurv Agrawal, founder and chief executive of ngoFuel.

At least 30 NGOs have registered with ngoFuel since it was founded in September. The company has completed projects for three of them, is working on projects with 11 and signing deals with another five.

These projects are related to designing and setting up websites, with content writing and graphic designing bundled together.

While Agrawal is the Web designer, Saswata Shankar De and Aditi Agarwal are the content writers, and P. Shreyas and Siddhartha M. are photographers and graphic designers.

In addition, De is the chief operations officer, Aditi Agarwal and Siddhartha are directors, and Shreyas is the managing director of the firm.

"We had to take such designations and form a board amongst ourselves to sound professional, thereby dispelling any trust or credibility issues that senior professionals may have with us," Shreyas says, a little sheepishly.

### Crowd sourcing

But the designations have functional

value as well. While these five founders interact with NGOs, get their requirements and finalize deals, much of the actual work is done through what they call "crowd sourcing"—or getting a large group of volunteers to contribute and complete projects.

"We have 250 volunteers registered with us, of which 15 are actively involved in projects now," says Siddhartha. "These volunteers are mostly students spread across colleges and universities. Only three of them are from VIT."

"Students these days," adds De, "require a social service certification to complete a degree, or they like to have one by themselves to add value to their resume while applying for jobs or higher studies. Volunteering for us gives them that certification, and also the experience of having worked on a real life project, as opposed to a college laboratory project."

ngoFuel is in the process of being registered as a trust, after which it will be able to hand out certificates for voluntary work.

Designed by: Rangresha

### Quick Facts

- **Company Name**  
ngoFuel: Because it empowers NGOs online
- **Founders:** Apurv Agrawal, Saswata Shankar De, Aditi Agarwal, P. Shreyas, Siddhartha M.
- **Industry:** Online media
- **Product company or services or both:** Services
- **Founded:** September
- **Number of founders and employees:** Five founders, 250 registered volunteers of which 15 are active at present, 25 interns
- **Later Investors:** None
- **City:** Chennai
- **Investment to date:** None. The company provides Web services through cloud sourcing, so there is no investment involved
- **The next closest milestone they plan to accomplish:** To sign up 75 NGO clients by the end of this year, and 200 by next year

Getting volunteers for work allows the company to offer Web services to NGOs at around 10% of the market cost. "For the first three months, we were providing Web designing services for free. Then we realized that any service given for free will not have any value," says Shreyas. "So, we found out about market rates in the Web designing industry and started offering our work at 10% of that rate."

The company has also started offering internships to students. Ritika Gupta, one of its 25 interns, is in marketing—and has just marketed the internship programme to an applicant from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT)-Madras.

"He had applied through an internship connect portal of IIT-Madras, where ngoFuel is registered. He was shortlisted on the basis of his resume and statement of purpose," Gupta says. "When I interviewed him, he was excited about the work, but wary that it was an unpaid internship. I think I've managed to convince him that real experience outweighs a paid internship with no work. That he can do this internship sitting where he is, in front of a computer, helps."

### STUDENT AMBASSADORS

Students like Gupta will be the company's

"ambassadors" in college once the founding four graduate next year. "We definitely want to keep the company going and be involved with it full time even after we graduate. If monetary considerations require us to take up other jobs, we'll be at least involved with ngoFuel part time," says Apurv Agrawal.

With the succession plan in place, the founders are figuring out ways to make the company's revenue large enough to sustain it as their full-time business.

ngoFuel now makes Rs. 5,000 per month as revenue and Rs. 3,000 as profit. "Since we are not keen on charging more from NGOs, the idea is to increase volumes," De says. "We target projects with about 75 NGOs by the end of this year. In due course, if we can sign up about 200 NGOs per year, we'll be self-sustainable."

Another option the company is exploring is circular funding, where it offers its services to companies at 70% of market rates, and uses the revenue to fund the NGO part of its business.

"There are 3.3 million registered NGOs in India, of which only 2% have a Web presence," says Apurv Agrawal. "Even if we assume that only about a million NGOs do any serious work,

the market open to us is vast."

ngoFuel has tied up with some other companies that it may turn to when the assignment in hand is larger or more complicated than it can handle. "For instance, a Chennai-based company once wanted us to appoint someone in their premises to maintain their website. Since we don't have full-time employees like that, we directed them to Hosticia, a Web hosting company that we have a tie-up with to host the websites that we design," Apurv Agrawal says. "Morvo Corp., a Web designing company, is another tie-up we have that we haven't had a chance to put to use yet."

### SOCIAL WORK

The four have started viewing ngoFuel as more than just a Web services company catering to NGOs. "We really wish to see ngoFuel as the organization that brings youth closer to social work," De says. "That's why we have started other initiatives like awareness photography and a fortnightly NGO journal."

It has also started working on its first photography project for letsgraduate, a microfunding platform for needy students developed by Letmeknow.in, a start-up founded by Sarabjeet

Singh. Apurv Agrawal is also a board member in letsgraduate, Singh being his mentor.

"The photographs, to be uploaded on the client's website, will visually convey the need for funding for education, without actually featuring students who need such funding. It's a subtle awareness initiative," Shreyas says.

letsgraduate is also a start-up headed by Oishik Bagchi, a law student in Bangalore. "We student start-ups meet at networking sessions and often find that our businesses can serve and boost each other," he says.

The group has landed a photography contract for a campaign called Drug Free Punjab from the Armaan Foundation, bundled with Web designing. It has also designed the website for a Bhutanese NGO named Baawe, working on women's educational and financial empowerment.

"When our seniors join corporate jobs," says Shreyas, "they often quit in the first few months because however good the pay is, they get restless about the fact that their work is mundane and will not count for much experience. In other words, the learning is low. We, on the other hand, learn a lot, are exposed to a lot. We'd really like to see ourselves stick to this mode of work and life."