

## B-school with a heart

Debashis Chatterjee is a man with a vision. When he talks, everyone — from a bunch of students in their twenties to school principals in their 40s or 50s — listens.

“If you have to win a war, first learn to lose a battle,” is Chatterjee’s motivational mantra for 46 leaders of schools located in different corners of the country.

In fact, it is the director of IIM Kozhikode himself, who injects a dash of humour and energy by smartly bringing up references of interesting personalities such as Kapil Dev or the Mahabharata’s Arjun in an otherwise technical discussion revolving around the effective teaching pedagogies to be followed in classrooms.

The school leaders have gathered for a workshop — one of the many held at the 100-acre IIM campus nestled between the beautiful hills of Kozhikode.

What makes this institute different is its approach to management education. While every other B-school is bent on producing money churners, IIM-K has an inclination for social responsibilities. “We want to produce business managers who not only manage business entities, but do that while following certain values. They should think about business and society at the same time. They should aim to establish institutions which can withstand multiple cycles of economic growth or turbulence. We teach them to contribute to the making of great institutions, and not just make money,” says Chatterjee.

Isn’t business all about making money? “That is because we are told this way. It’s like saying (Karl) Marx was right. Yes, the Russians used to think it,” he adds.

Chatterjee’s socially-oriented vision has started influencing his students too. Dhiraj Tiwari, a final year student of the PG programme, believes that social participation is the next big thing for future managers. He has no doubts about what Chatterjee propagates because that is what the economy also demands.

Referring to a recent news report that new bank branches were to be opened up in the Indian hinterland, Tiwari says, “We must understand the needs of the society. It is mandatory for all management students.”

Another student, Rahul Bhaskar, is working on an organic farming project in Wayanad. “This is a two-year project and we are trying to assess the hurdles farmers face owing to bureaucratic red-tape. Every student is mandated to work on one such group project which aims to help a section or group in the surrounding area,” says Bhaskar.

Besides the project, the institute also has a special course in ‘social transformation in India’ in the first year, which touches upon topics such as gender, caste and politics viewed through the prism of the business world.

Diversity in classroom is another striking feature of IIM-K. In its 2010-12 batch, there are 30 per cent girls in the PG programme. There is an author, a theatre artiste and a singer also in the batch.

Chatterjee aspires to build a unique institution of sorts. “We don’t believe in what IIM Ahmedabad does. First we find out what they are doing. Then we come back and do exactly the opposite,” he adds.

In one of his endeavours to be different, he is currently reaching out to Chinese companies and academia.

IIM-K is looking eastwards while the other B-schools emulate the West for expansion.

The institute has also hired teaching faculty from a Chinese university and the director has recently visited China to enter into partnerships with the varsities and companies there.