

Enhancing Business-Community Relations

Wipro Case Study



**by Aparna Mahajan¹
with Kate Ives²**

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Wipro Limited: “Applying Thought in Schools”

Research Project Background

This case study is one of ten that were chosen as part of the ‘Enhancing Business-Community Relations’ project in India implemented in collaboration with The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI). These cases document examples of engagement between businesses and communities and can be used as learning tools for the promotion of responsible business practice and sustainable development.

The Enhancing Business-Community Relations project is a joint international initiative between United Nations Volunteers (UNV) and the New Academy of Business. Implemented in seven developing countries, the purpose of the initiative was to collect and document information on business-community practices as perceived by all stakeholders, build partnerships with them and promote corporate social responsibility practices. It is also intended to enhance international understanding of business-community relations through information sharing and networking with other countries especially those participating in the project - Brazil, Ghana, India, Nigeria, Philippines, South Africa and Lebanon.

The findings and recommendations reflected in the case study are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of UNV, TERI or the New Academy of Business. It is important to note that these cases were written as examples of business-community initiatives. They do not constitute a comprehensive assessment of the company’s social responsibility.

1. Introduction

Wipro is a leading Indian IT services provider, whose programme, “Applying Thought in Schools” is aimed at ensuring children leave school equipped with skills which are demanded by today’s employers; the emphasis rests clearly on creative thinking and problem-solving. To achieve this, teachers are invited to attend subsidised workshops where they have the chance to learn new techniques and concepts. Moreover, to ensure application in the classroom, these workshops are backed up with regular in-school sessions.

2. Company Profile³

Wipro is a leading provider of IT solutions, with a profitable presence in other niche markets such as consumer products and lighting. It services the needs of a diverse base of India's largest corporate houses and multi-nationals, as well as being dominant throughout Asia-Pacific and Middle East. It is listed on the National Stock Exchange, and has been the recipient of numerous awards for performance and innovation.

The company has also undertaken a joint venture with GE Medical. With over two decades of experience, 1900 employees and 275 business partners serving over 40,000 customers, Wipro has stamped its presence on the Indian market and leads the Indian IT industry.

3. Project History and Development⁴

“Applying Thought in schools” was launched in 2002 with the intention of enhancing the creativity and problem solving skills of school children. The driving force behind this initiative is Wipro’s belief that there is a need to reduce the gap between what is currently provided by existing teaching techniques, and what is required by today’s organisations.

The mission of this initiative is to “transform the education system to achieve world-class Quality of Learning”, with two broad aims: a) to enhance learning and thinking abilities, and b) to have an impact on a large number of people. A summary of the programme philosophy is given below;

- Learning is not a simple matter of information transmission – learning is an active process in which people construct new understandings through exploration, experimentation, discussion and reflection.
- The most important purpose of school is to help students understand the major disciplinary ways of thinking – scientifically, historically, artistically, ethically and mathematically.
- Every child is intelligent in a multiple way – the real purpose of education is to help young people learn how to create the lives they truly want to create, that is, expand possibilities for them.

The modern workplace needs people who are rich in skills such as creative thinking, problem solving, self-motivation, with a strong work ethic and the ability to work in teams. The programme identified a series of problematic areas within the Indian education system: depth of knowledge, practical orientation, poor social skills, and students studying to pass exams rather than to learn and understand different concepts. These deficiencies were blamed on the absence of synergy between the different participants in the education system.

The rationale for the project descends from the idea of a “knowledge economy,” in which the nations with the best thinkers and learners will prosper. People who think and learn are the real output of a successful, high-quality education system. Despite Wipro’s background however, the programme is not restricted to IT. Instead, it is concerned with how creative thinking and commitment can make a difference to everyday life.

Acknowledging the profound importance of teachers, the programme’s focus is on teacher empowerment and re-skilling, enabling them to effectively put into action innovative teaching and assessment methods. It is a long term programme, with training spread over 6 months, interspersed with classroom based support, and follow-up training to ensure actual practice inside the classrooms. Schools are charged for participation in the training program – though the cost is heavily subsidised. Wipro is also seeking to create partnerships in Bachelor of Education colleges as well.

Effective measurement of change in thinking and learning abilities is a challenge to the project. The Wipro strategy is to not only work at the school level, but to promote change at the national level in order to make this change sustainable. Working with partners and opinion leaders helps in the identification of schools that could participate in the project. Such collaboration also improves the chances of the project impacting national policy.

The programme is based on some fundamental “building blocks.” These are practical aims or objectives that shape implementation and are detailed below;

- To transform the teacher into a “reflective practitioner” who is herself a “thinker and learner”

- To encourage school leaders see their role as leading this transformation
- To help parents change their view of the true purpose of education as a result of the importance of the “knowledge economy”
- To help education administrators change the curriculum from being “content heavy” to “ability enhancing”
- To help education administrators change the school-leaving examination system from being entirely focused on testing “memorisation skill” to also testing abilities such as creative and critical thinking, problem solving, learning to learn and so on

3.1. Implementation

The training programme is implemented through a local NGO called Jagruti. It involves 18 full days of training for each teacher, spread over a 6 month period. Subsequent to this teachers receive training modules from expert trainers, 12 days of classroom-based support and group-based activities. The training is conducted in a manner of styles to ensure it is interactive and effective.

3.2. Progress made

The project has made considerable progress in the last eighteen months. For example,

- Over 200 teachers have participated in the workshops, with school-based support to follow
- Wipro is securing support from many partners all over the country, with aims to launch further teacher-training programmes in new locations
- Workshops with parents are due to start in mid-October
- A ‘Forum for Quality in Education’ has been set up by Wipro to encourage opinion leaders to discuss advocacy

Evidence collected by Wipro details examples of problems which were resolved through the programme. Using a variety of teaching methods such as brainstorming and project work, for example, has contributed to student engagement in the classroom as well as the improvement of teachers’ skills. Time-management has also improved amongst teachers, which has meant that administrative work is handled more efficiently and that disruptions do not reduce the effectiveness of lessons. Techniques, such as “circle time,” have been introduced to maximise student participation and contribution to their lessons. Indeed, classroom teaching has also been made more stimulating through the use of teaching aids. The range of skills taught and tested has been enhanced through the emphasis on concepts such as *summarise*, *explain*, *organise*, and *design*. By adopting these new approaches, the traditional “spoon-feeding” approach can be replaced by fact-finding. Teachers have also been given the opportunity to work on concepts which they found difficult to explain, in order to make them more accessible and understandable by pupils.

3.3. Wipro’s approach for learning

The methods used for the training include short lectures (10 minute capsules), small group discussions, collaborative learning within a group and school based support. The following describes some of the problems faced by teachers/students and how these were addressed through Wipro programme:

- **There exists one dominant teaching style - chalk and talk** – Wipro introduced them to group work, brainstorming, case studies, projects and work sheets.
- **Time management is a problem for teachers** – They were taught concept of introduction, how to prevent hijacking of class from interruptions and managing administrative work. Teachers felt that their way of teaching changed from a haphazard use of techniques to a more systematic and definite pattern.
- **In a class of 40-50 students, only a few students tend to speak in class** – The Wipro programme used the concepts like “circle time”, in which each child got a chance to speak about a certain topic. Listening skills, sharing ideas and providing opportunities for each one to speak were some positive factors. Another concept of “Wait Time” was introduced by Wipro, which gave the whole class thinking time of one minute to reflect upon a question posed by the teacher. This challenged the usual mode of response in which the cleverest children respond quickly to questions and so prevent others a chance to come to their own conclusions.
- **Classroom teaching was not interesting** – The company program made use of teaching aids like newspaper clippings, models, chart papers. One student feedback was – “my teacher asked one by one the whole class what doubts we had.” One teacher observed that it really helped students to think constructively, even the students who hadn’t opened their mouths ever, are now coming out with brilliant ideas.
- **Teachers test only the knowledge or memorizing skills of children** – The Wipro program gave tests to assess all 5 levels of critical thinking skills by using action verbs. Concepts like summarising, explaining, solving, illustrating, deducing, organising, hypothesising, designing etc. were introduced and explored between teachers and students.
- **Teachers are not sensitive to the feelings of students** – For this, the training provides sessions on better communication skills, for example offering alternatives to sarcasm as a way to reprimand a child.
- **The usual method of teaching is ‘spoon-feeding’ and student does not indulge in any fact finding** – the methodologies under Wipro program ensured that students were engaged in active learning. The teacher became more of a facilitator to the process of learning and students actively did research and found out information rather than depending on the teacher.
- **Some topics are difficult to explain** – Wipro program gives a 5-day session on subject enrichment, which helps them to devise alternative methods to explain difficult concepts. Some of the feedback which emerged from students was that they liked alternative teaching methods like PowerPoint presentations by teachers, group activities, use of models in the class, role plays, etc. Subjects like factorization, biology, geography were made interesting through such methods and had a quick learning effect on the students

4. Key outcomes and lessons learned

“Applying Thought in schools” is an example of how a business can involve itself in knowledge development and the enhancement of skills, which are important to both students and teachers. The development of any nation rests on the quality of its human resources, which form the cornerstone of a progressive and knowledgeable society. Quality education and training to encourage creativity

and innovation is vital to achieving this aim. It is interesting to note that Wipro applies the same methodology of applying thought to its own in-house training programme.

The commitment of a leading national IT company to addressing the growing challenges in education is commendable. Wipro is helping to enhance the experiences of both school children and their teachers, while involving other parties in the wider aim of developing a more critically thinking and creative society.

The future prospects for the project in terms of sustainability are excellent, as is evident from its successful implementation at various sites, the planned expansion into other areas, and the prospects for networking and involving other sectors of India’s economy.

The association of an IT company with educational institutions can lead to mutually beneficial outcomes, as well as reaping wider benefits to business and society. Industry requires specific skills of qualified manpower and this could be possible only when the educational institutions provide the matching candidates to fulfil industry requirements. The matching of supply and demand for these skills can be aided by closer relationships between industry and educators. This is particularly important in the context of India, which has high levels of unemployed people lacking the skills desired by employers.

Wipro’s educational project does not guarantee them any direct benefits in return. This suggests that the company sees the benefits in the long rather than short-term – rather than as clients today, as potential employees tomorrow. Further, that there is considerable value in developing and harnessing the abilities of children, in a life-long learning process, to benefit society as a whole. The fact that the training is not free for schools suggests that the training is in demand. Schools need to add value into their lessons, and thus enhance the skills and capabilities of their students. The programme therefore works as a partnership, serving the objectives of all stakeholders – the company, schools, teachers, students, parents and society at large.

A company with broad vision can work effectively at a grassroots level. Direct involvement in educational schemes such as “Applying Thought in schools” can be an effective mechanism for successfully bringing about positive change and shaping the thinking of society.

Endnotes

¹ The views expressed in this case study are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the New Academy of Business, UNV or TERI.

² Kate Ives is an associate of the New Academy of Business who has assisted in the preparation of this case study.

³ See also www.wipro.com for more information

⁴ Inputs from Mr. Vijay Gupta, Vice President, Wipro Ltd., Bangalore