India has Much to Teach
Leading schools from around the world come to India to learn.

A fascinating mélange of practice and concept from which we can all learn. Thus, unlike the view that derives from the pundits’s prediction that US business schools should come to India to teach the country how to practice good business, leading schools from around the world should humbly and inquisitively come to India to see what we can learn, what we can teach and how we can connect the best ideas from everywhere into the local context to business people around the world. The school that engages with India to watch this creative process in action will have a huge advantage over that which looks at India from afar and contemplates how business works in contrast to the one we know well.

Three aspects of India seem especially relevant as a platform for innovative business models. The combination of scale, price point and logistical challenge all require Indian firms to conceive of approaches that

There are fascinating and creative solutions to business problems being created in India because of India’s unique context

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, many pundits argued that the world was going to converge on a single model of political economy, business practice and business education. In its simplest terms, the world would become Anglo-American. A couple of decades later, it is clear the pundits were wrong and we are lucky they were.

Instead of a monolithically consistent world, we have evolved a wonderfully diverse world with different institutional structures, different business models, different ideas: a world that India can teach us, and a world that we can learn from and help accelerate some fascinating things. India has much to teach, not just much to learn.

Consider, for example, the evolving use of the cell phone as a commercial device in Indian villages, the adoption of time shared computing as a business model, the invention of the Nano, the utilisation of local energy generation models, profitable small-scale finance and customised service delivery models in dense cities. All of these entail a creative answer to the unique context that is India and involve the development of dramatically different and very effective business models. From social entrepreneurship to finance, consulting to manufacturing, logistics to energy, there are fascinating and creative solutions to business problems being created in India because of India’s unique context that can provide ideas and insights from business would never be considered in other countries, that once discovered can be adapted with a clear advantage. As an analogy, many of the greatest innovations in US business practice over the last 20 years came from Walmart’s effort to provide affordable products and services to the largest portion of the US population that could not afford the typical offerings at other stores. For example, how does one provide affordable artisan bread to someone who has only $65 per month for food. Someone reading this example in India would laugh at what seems a trivially easy problem given the questions of scale, price point and logistics in India. We are seeing thousands of similar innovations in India to those few that made Walmart so successful.

Thus, it is with great humility and curiosity that we come to India to not only teach, but also to learn.