Role of Academia in Fostering Innovation India

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Format of this discussion

- Some of my thoughts and conclusions – feel free to agree/disagree/comment
- Many questions – let’s brainstorm
- No specific paper – just a collection of articles
Basic idea

- Observation: (At least some) Innovation in US starts at universities. (MIT, Stanford)
- Observation: Academia as incubators to new ideas.
- Question: Why doesn’t this happen in India? (or does it??)
- Who is to be blamed? Industry? Academia? Society?
- What can we change?

Roadmap

- Pockets of innovation
  - Industry/Companies
  - Rural/social innovations
  - Anything else?
- Academia’s role in these innovations presently
- Can it be improved?
Industry-Academia interaction

- Focus on using existing tools developed in the West
- Consulting as “quick-fix” way to get advice/ideas from academia
- R&D needs more interaction, more efforts and investment.
- This view mostly from the point of view of the software industry, but may be widely application (Right?)

Don’t Indian companies innovate at all??

- Should we blame companies for not innovating at all? No entrepreneurial spirit?
- No, companies innovate. But it is different from the innovations in US
- Innovate on low cost model, how to adapt technology to work cheaply in India etc. (E.g., Infosys, TCS)
- “Bread-and-butter” innovations
- Such innovations not “cutting edge” research and hence not interesting enough for academia?
Another example of conflict of interests?

- The current nature of interaction: help manufacture skilled labor.
- TCS, Wipro and other companies have some programs where they train students in using existing tools.
- Insufficient training in using tools hampering innovation?
- Lack of exposure to industry is why no Indian university produces a “Google”?

Part 2: Rural/social innovations

- Low-cost equipment in villages, micro-finance etc. are innovations.
- But academia does not have a role.
- No great social sciences/economics/management research being done?
- Academia cutoff from real-life issues?
Should academia do anything different?

- Research in social sciences needed? (E.g., ways to scale up rural innovations)
- Research adapted to Indian settings? (E.g., low-cost models etc.)
- Should the nature of research in India change? Is it following the western world too much?
- Focus on innovative ideas for education, health care and agriculture?

Should industry do anything different?

- Will the above measures work?
- Are these applicable to all companies/sectors or just a few high-end companies?
Discussion?

- Can we think of examples where academia in India came up with innovations? Can we learn any lessons? (WiLL phones?)
- More examples from the manufacturing fields
- Any other comments? Thoughts?