

# Design your thinking

An entrepreneurial mindset creates a huge impact, says Nandini Piramal

■ MADHUMITHA SRINIVASAN

The Piramal Group recently organised 'The Tangram Challenge', an initiative that aims at providing B-school students with a platform to understand the concept of design thinking, and implement its learnings by providing innovative solutions. As part of the competition, students are presented with real-life problem statements in a social setting, identified and curated by Piramal Foundation, the philanthropic arm of the Piramal Group.

A key aspect of this challenge involves participants visiting the identified rural areas to delve deeper into the problems faced by communities at the grassroots level, to build and test prototypes of the solutions presented. Through this, they are made aware of issues that are critical roadblocks towards unlocking India's economic potential.

"Through Tangram, we aim to nurture design thinking as a mindset amongst participants, as they work closely with local communities to build a better future. By the end of the competition, participants discover their own potential and build sustainable, meaningful solutions," explains Nandini Piramal, the executive director of Piramal Enterprises Limited.

This edition of The Tangram Challenge saw participation from 40 B-schools across India, and received over 1,800 team applications comprising 7,000+ students, where participants underwent three challenging rounds of evaluation. The top 14 shortlisted teams then presented their insights and innovative solutions to a multidisciplinary jury panel that comprised Swati Piramal, Group Vice-Chairperson, as well as other CEOs and business leaders at the Group.

Nandini Piramal, who also heads the Human Resources and Information Technology functions, and is passionately involved with the Foundation, speaks to *Education Plus* about



**Platform for innovation:** Students taking part in the Tangram challenge.

the importance of design thinking.

Why is design thinking relevant in an academic and corporate environment?

Today's volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world necessitates individuals and organisations to create innovative, scalable and sustainable solutions with a hands-on approach to address global and local challenges. To meet this requirement, 'design thinking' is increasingly being adopted across academic and corporate institutions, providing individuals with a 360° perspective on the current need, its technological feasibility in a social setting, and its economic viability.

The crux of design thinking is in developing empathy and focusing on the end users and communities. As to its relevance in corporate life, we all are in it to serve our customers. Design thinking facilitates this shift from focus on solutions to focus on the customer.

What are the skills that have become increasingly necessary and relevant to the changing corporate sector?

Today, the dynamic workplace ecosystem, while extremely competitive, is undergoing a transformation. To be a



Nandini Piramal

step ahead of the curve, individuals need to be agile, innovative, entrepreneurial in spirit, and well-versed with the latest industry trends. We foster innovation and trusteeship and nurture a strong value-based culture that enables our employees to navigate through challenges and market headwinds. We believe that employees with an entrepreneurial mindset, aligned to the values of their organisation, ultimately create a huge impact.

How can such competitions help students?

Competitions such as Tangram provide students with the opportunity to better understand complex problems and

challenges faced by the underserved and underserved communities across India while making them more empathetic towards them. Through such competitions, they develop the ability and interest to contribute to the social sector by developing innovative solutions or prototypes that address the concerns faced by marginalised sections of society. These serve as a platform to develop future-ready skill-sets such as design thinking and lateral thinking that are critical for developing holistic solutions to complex problems. In fact, several participants have written to us on how the whole experience has grounded them and encouraged them to step out of their comfort zone.

What is your take on skills versus educational qualifications?

Both are equally important. Increasingly, academic institutions are offering courses focused on building skill-sets such as critical thinking, problem-solving, negotiation, reasoning, technology literacy, creativity, communication, and so on, that are conducive to successful workplaces. These new-age skill-sets complement educational qualifications to enable a well-rounded professional.