Creation of a Computer Centre for Training@

Creating a centre for computer training at a low a cost as few lakhs of rupees was a great surprise to all concerned from head office to college. No one expected that as the cost of creation of computer centre in those days used to be few several million of rupees, when cost of civil work itself used to be over Rs. 5 million.

Background of the Case

It was in the year 1984. Use of computers was limited to very large business organisations and leading academic institutions only. Typically they had Main Frame computers while use of mini computers had also started. The Indian Bank Association had entered into agreement with various staff unions in banks for introducing computers in the banks. The Head Office had sent a letter to the Principal of the bank's apex staff college asking him to develop and suggest the action plan that the college proposes for computer training of the officers and others, to be able to use computers when the bank introduced the same. The Principal asked Mr. Vaishampayan to draft a reply to the letter as no one else in the college had any idea of computers. The Principal had asked Mr. Vaishampayan to prepare the reply as the latter had worked in a large engineering company before joining the bank's staff college, where he had developed computer programmes (software) for the commercial department and written a case study which was published in a leading management journal of the country.

Mr. Vaishampayan had been appointed in the Apex college of the Bank along with 6 others as senior faculty members with non-banking background to bring fresh ideas in the bank and work like a change agent to elevate the staff college from a college for training probationary officer to an Apex college for Executives (officers typically with 15-20 years' experience or more). He had started designing and conducting several new programmes like Organization and Methods, Management Information Systems, Managing Organisational Change which no other faculty member was doing. The Bank ranked number two among the commercial banks nationalized in 1969. There were close to 100 executives at Chief Manager/ Regional Manager level and about 300 at Senior Manager level. Mr. Vaishampayan had also started a novel two week long General Management programme for the executives for the first time in the banks. The design included a 3 hour module on Computer Appreciation, for which the previous principal had reprimanded him saying "how dare you use the word computers in the bank", which was not unexpected in those days and in view of the principal's background of legal, personnel management and industrial relations fields in which he had spent most of his life. However Mr. Vaishampayan was upset over the same as instead of appreciation he had been reprimanded.

Mr. Vaishampayan with his background of electrical and mechanical engineering, cost accounting and management was a man with varied interests, always inquisitive and curious to do things in new ways if not doing new things. One day he entered a room with the college electrician and asked why there were two long cemented platforms with machine only on one. The electrician replied that the machine is compressor for centralized air conditioning which could be expanded as the need arose in future by putting another compressor. Asked as to how much that would cost, the enlightened electrician replied that it may cost about Rs. 200,000.

Likewise one day he entered in another room in the basement curious about where the sweeper goes and what does he do, only to notice that there was a big hall of about 30* 60 feet, being used by sweeper for putting waste paper, broken furniture etc. The rental in the area, which was posh area of the town, an A Class city of India, was about Rs. 10 per sq. ft. "This huge area costing about Rs. 18000 per month, which is four times of the salary of the Principal is being used for storing garbage" Mr. Vaishampayan wondered.

The Reply

Initially Mr. Vaishampayan tried to wriggle out as he was too cut up and feeling peeved on the issue of computerization, especially because the letter had come from the personnel department which was headed by the previous principal who had reprimanded him just a year ago for use of the word "computers" in the Executive Programme. However, he agreed to draft the reply as he could not refuse because the new principal was a "nice" person who never maltreated him and supported for initiatives like research.

The Proposal

In the reply Mr. Vaishampayan developed an elaborate plan for computer training, which was partly due to vengeance and partly an outcome of what all he could think of. The proposal in brief contained the following"-

1. **Hardware Maintenance Training**: for those who were to man the various computer centres of the bank which were likely to be created at Regional/ Zonal offices as well as the Head Office. Training to be given by computer suppliers/ Maintenance agencies.
2. **Software Development Training**: For training those who would be enagegd in development of software for various applications in the bank. Training to be given by companies like TCS and Academic Institutions like IITs, IIMs etc.
3. **User Oriented Training**:
    a) For Executives / Officers in Zonal/ Regional Offices (where the computers would be installed) to help them familiarise with computer use so that they can switch over and start using computers for quality decisions at high speed. All the Executives in the Regional/ Zonal and departments at head office and two officers reporting to each one of them will be given this training.
    b) One or two officers/ staff of every branch, who send information to regional and higher offices periodically on regular/ adhoc basis. If they were not familiarized, they may commit mistakes in sending information in correct formats so that there is no mistake and data could be processed properly.

For 3(b) above, the proposal suggested half a day training module to be conducted by faculty members at the 12 Regional Training Centres of the bank, who will be given training and also necessary kit for the purpose by the Apex college.

The suggestion 3(a) above to meant that close to 1200 people had to be given three days' hands-on training to enable them have confidence of touching and using computer inn their office. One leading management institution was conducting a 3-day programme for computer appreciation charging Rs. 3000/- per participant. His meant to that to get 1000 executives/ officers trained it would cost the bank about Rs. 3.5 million. Further the institute may not conduct more than one or two programmes per year, training about 20 persons or so (sponsored training was not common those days in leading management institutes). Thus training close to

1200 people could take 7-10 years. There were no other avenues to get all the persons trained. The proposal therefore also suggested creation of 20 seater Computer Training Centre for training at the Apex college at the cost of about Rs. 6 lakhs. Two/ three faculty members of the college would be trained for the purpose. Mr. Vaishmpayan offered to start the same. One more faculty member of the college also offered to join the move.

Response of the Head Office

The head office was quite impressed with the overall plan but had reservation on two counts. One, the cost was underestimated, which in its view would not be less than Rs. 10 million, and this will throw the viability out in the winds. It therefore asked to explain. Mr. Vaishampayan also got adamant and replied to head office that the cost calculations were right. The head office asked how without including any cost of civil and electrical work the computer centre would be created. Mr. Vaishampayan replied that he was prepared to share all the details provided the head office agreed for the creation of the centre at least in principle. After few months the head office indicated its consent and deputed two officers to get details of how the centre would be created.

Mr. Vaishampayan gave all the finer points how the computer centre will be created in the library without any significant expenditure beyond the cost of computers (10 PC XTs, which had entered the Indian market). The library will be shifted to the large unused hall in the basement (which was bigger than the library, almost twice) with A.C. ducting work and addition of second compressor in the electrical room. The librarian was persuaded by administrative staff who were experiencing discomfort due to poor air conditioning.

The Clearance by Head Office

The head office people were pleasantly surprised to see the low cost solution using extra space available that existed but no use contemplated. Initially it was thought to be used as a parking area, but due to certain logistic issues it could not happen. However, since the foundation and plinth work for column structure was already done, the area was covered and the room got created.

The head office immediately cleared the proposal and the first computer centre for training in the banking industry was created. Mr. Vaishampayan was subsequently included in the head office committee for computerization of the bank. After few years, the college opened the training centre for training of officers of other banks and started generating some revenue also.

Some faculty colleagues were of the opinion that Mr. Vaishampayan has only tricked the H.O. people to his way of thinking to get the Centre created. Some felt it could be a good business opportunity. Faculty member teaching personnel management was opposed to it as it involved labour issues, although he started using the facilities for typing work first, once the system stabilized and some secretarial staff learnt the use of it.