

The Power of Check Listing@

In a leading management institute of India, an exercise of perspective planning was being undertaken to prepare a plan for the next 10 to 15 years. One day in the tea club, some young inquisitive faculty members asked the senior colleagues sitting there, to share their experience/ views on how to manage the task of giving fillip to the academic activities of the Institute. Prof. Chidambaram, one of the senior colleagues, narrated a story about how the Institute had gone about for giving 3.5 fold rise in intake of Post Graduate in Programme in Management in 4 months' time a few years back (see the cases The Fun of Case Writing A & B).

Prof. Nandkumar, another senior colleague, narrated the following experience on the request of the younger colleagues. "Preparing check list is considered an important management tool for planning and implementing growth agenda. But how powerful is this tool, is not specifically described in the literature. Sometimes in February of 1996, I was attending a Board meeting of the Institute. At one stage of the discussion, perhaps on growth of the Institute, the Chairman looked at a faculty member on the Board, and asked why could not the Institute increase the PGP batch size (that was around 125 students) to 180?"

The faculty member politely told that the question should be asked to the Director, not to him. Chairman said "the Director says that the faculty council feels that it is not possible to increase the intake in view of various constraints like class room, faculty etc. Why can't you allow at least 15-20 students to the present size"?

The faculty member said "The Director may be right in that the faculty council has decided that the institute should wait for one more year so that all the necessary infrastructure is in place in advance. But you may please check with the Director that I have not said so. Regarding adding 15-20 students, as a faculty my view is that it should not be done. We don't have appropriate class rooms even for sixty students. With 9 students in one row in the lecture hall, my voice does not reach even the seventh row. When I move with mike for eliciting participation for the case discussion, the cord of the microphone breaks as I move forward and backward to the seventh 16 row. If the students are not able to listen to me and each other, how will they follow what is being taught through the case method? Without that we will have farce of teaching, not imparting learning to the students. But you may check with the Director I have never said no to adding one full section, even if it increased my workload substantially".

"But the Director says it is not possible. The faculty council has suggested a faculty strength of about 30 faculty members to take the increased intake of 180 students", said the Chairman.

The faculty member quipped "We have developed the expertise of telling how things can't be done. If you ask this question next February, answer will be the same. We will tell you very convincingly, why the same can't be done". "So what should be done?" asked the Chairman. The faculty member replied, "The Institute should be asked to prepare a checklist of all that is to be done to increase the batch size to 180 next year. And in every Board meeting the first and main agenda should be to discuss what remains to be done. The Institute must confirm to the Board by next December that everything required has been done to increase the batch size to 180. If this is done, there is a possibility the next year we will have a batch size of 180".

The Board asked the Director to do the same, and surprise of surprise, next year the intake was 180. “I never realized that the power of preparing and using checklist as a management tool is of that order. Do you?” he asked.

The faculty members were awestruck. Can by making the check list the increase in intake can take place? If so why the Institute does not prepare it for further increase? How to prepare it? Can we prepare the check list for increasing the intake from 120 to 180 using the strategic management concepts that we teach? In what way this checklist would differ from the one mentioned in the case “Shabashi”? When could the intake be increased to 180 or more? These questions flashed in their mind.

Exhibit 1

	PGP Intake	Campus* Development	Faculty	Non-teaching Staff	PGP Fee / Student	Total MHRD Grant*		
						Non-Plan	Plan	Total
1985-86	27	NA	NA	NA	2625	NA	NA	NA
1986-88	30	NA	NA	NA	2425	NA	NA	NA
1987-88	32	NA	NA	NA	3075	NA	NA	NA
1988-89	34	165	22	84	5375	NA	NA	289
1989-90*	105	290	25	88	6075	NA	NA	503
1990-91	96	517	28	79	6375	NA	NA	725
1991-92**	90	309	25	78	10650	NA	NA	537
1992-93	104	330	23(12)	105	12450	120	409	529
1993-94	118	121	22(18)	112	12450	120	130	250
1994-95	122	67	22(18)	106	19000	132	275	407
1995-96	108	293	23(15)	129	35800	145	500	645
1996-97	118	197	26(3)	132	50050	118	0	118
1997-98***	172	NA	34(2)	135	59900	84	51	135
1998-99	158	NA	35(2)	146	70000	343	72	415
1999-00	183	NA	44(2)	140	85000	579	113	692
2000-01	183	NA	57(3)	141	95000	700	200	900
2001-02@	240	NA	64(3)	138	110000	750	400	1150

* PGP Intake increased to 2 sections ** Institute shifted to own campus
 *** PGP Intake increased to 3 sections @ PGP Intake increased to 4 sections