

The Birth of an Orphan

“After receiving the letter (see exhibit 1), I could not take meals for two days”, said Prof. Nandkumar of IMX Institute of Management. “After all the painstaking efforts to organise the first conference when there was no infrastructure, this is what you get. I had to run around and be accountable for everything, from printing of brochure, getting delegates, look after the conduction of the conference, bother about getting payments, settling bills, forming professional body, and the director only asking questions and refusing permissions. Had it not been my good friends in PM (Project manager) and CAO (Chief Administrative Officer), the Conference would not have materialised. And to cap it all, he (the Director) felt humiliated for something which to my recollection I had not done”. “Never again, I resolved in my mind”, he concluded.

The Genesis

The genesis of the Conference was the first faculty development programme. IMX was 10 years old and did not have any regular MDP infrastructure. It was operating with 18 seats class room and 20 beds, stop gap boarding/ lodging facilities in 10 small 2 bedroom houses for the purpose. Having come out of a major strike by faculty and staff against the director (in which Prof. Nandkumar refused to be dragged by either side), Prof. Prasad, the Director was all happy with going on with a PGP intake of 120 students.

Some times in August 1994, Prof. Prasad was elected as Vice-President of AIMS. In April 1995, AIMS invited proposal under AIMS- CCMS programme, which provided grants for supporting research, faculty development programmes etc. The Director asked Prof. Nandkumar to do give some proposal. The latter made a proposal for FDP on “Launching a Strategic Management Course” and the programme was conducted from January 22-27, 1996. The programme had overwhelming response with 35 participants, more than half of them being readers, professors, HOD, Chairmen of PGP etc. They had to be squeezed in facilities for 30 participants.

Somehow the participants liked the pedagogy of the programme and in the valedictory session asked for raising a low cost platform wherein they could meet (to update themselves through collegiate system of learning) at least once in the year, even at their own expense. Prof. Nandkumar, taken aback by such a request, contacted his Ph.D. guide, Prof. Ganesh Director of a leading management institute (IPXM) under MHRD, whether the latter could provide leadership to such an initiative. On his encouraging response, it was decided to forge a platform with Prof. Ganesh as Chairman and one participant of the programme Prof. Vittal as Secretary. It was also decided to meet on 27th January, 1997 in the first Conference, exactly one year from the valedictory date.

Another participant, a senior professor from BIBM, a leading management institute, offered to organise the first conference. Prof. Vittal was to form and get the body registered at a Society in Delhi. However, when Prof. Ganesh contacted the director of BIBM institute in August 1996, the latter regretted. He then explored the possibility in his institute (IPXM) also, but the infrastructure was already committed for some other events on those days. The Ganesh also explored faculty support from his institute.

The Opportunity

Prof. Prasad had also asked Prof. Nandkumar to organise a conference like annual conference of AIMS. In October 1996, when Prof. Nandkumar learnt that even the second possibility may not materialise, it occurred to him that perhaps IMX has an opportunity to host the first conference.

“Twenty years ago, in 1976 my teacher Prof. C.K. Prahalad had mentioned that for professional advancement the faculty members in each discipline must meet at least once in a year, to exchange experiences, share their work, develop friendly relationship with faculty of other institutions for joint research and literature development, groom faculty etc.”. Since the suggestion had emerged from the participants of the faculty development in January 1996, I thought perhaps the idea may take off for such a platform. When the institute of Chairman also expressed difficulties, I thought of doing it at IMX. I hoped the director will whole heartedly support it because he had asked for organising a conference. But it turned out to be nightmarish with number of arrangements to be made, solutions to be given, clarifications to be provided, denial of permissions and help, especially because as I was badly caught in my own heavy academic load of teaching, MDP, and literature development besides administrative work of board and others”, said Prof. Nandkumar

Exploring the Possibility

Prof. Nandkumar sent a letter to director on October 10, 1996 that there was a possibility of having the First Annual Conference of Strategic Management Forum at IMX (see exhibit 2), enclosing draft of letter to the Chairman of the (informal) Forum.

On October 14, Monday, a note from Director was received, asking for expected number of delegates and how the arrangements will be made as neither class rooms nor hostel would be available. He also wondered how boarding will be arranged (see exhibit 3).

“This made me think” said Prof. Nandkumar “if this way the progress of campus construction continued, even next year increase in PGP intake may take place as pointed out by him in a Board meeting”. His apprehension emanated from his association with project work as a member of campus planning and development committee till few months back. Having seen completion of a 120 seater class room in 25 days flat when the PGP batch size was increased from 30 to over 100, Prof. Nandkumar was convinced that construction could be expedited. He thought holding the Conference may help in expediting completion of some buildings in time for having increased batch size which had been held for 7 years already.

The Arrangements

On October 16, Prof. Nandkumar replied how alternative arrangements can be made if the Conference was to be organised (see exhibit 4). The Director was however, not convinced and felt that many adhoc arrangements were being proposed and since Prof. Nandkumar was very busy with his MDP, he (Prof. Nandkumar) should arrange a meeting of Director, PM and CAO as per convenience of all concerned. (see exhibit 5). Alongside the director’s note dt. 17.10.96, Prof. Nandkumar also received a note from CAO that the latter will be proceeding on leave from 18th to 27th October.

Prof. Nandkumar was very much peeved with this and replied that the administrative matter be sorted out at Director's end (see exhibit 6) and he be informed about the final decision. He also marked a copy to PM and CAO.

The replies of PM and CAO were very encouraging. Prof. Nandkumar had worked with them as member of the Board and campus construction committee and was convinced that once these two persons put their heart, the institute could hold the Conference. He forwarded their views to the Director.

Inching Forward

On 11th November Prof. Nandkumar learnt that Chairman had approved the proposal. But no formal letter had come to IMX Director. Being reminded on 14th, the Chairman sent implied consent to Prof. Nandkumar, but regretted that the faculty members will not be able to assume any responsibility (see exhibit 7). There was no confirmation from the faculty member of another institute to assume responsibility of another module. "This meant that I have to assume responsibility of organising all the three academic modules, besides other arrangements" said Prof. Nandkumar.

Prof. Nandkumar forwarded the fax to the Director, with the note that if the latter agreed to be Chairman of the Organising Committee, he will be willing to go ahead, else close the chapter (see exhibit 8). The Director sought clarification about the organising secretary and financial responsibility. Prof. Nandkumar agreed to be organising secretary, and explained that funding was to be done through registration fees.

Finally, on Friday, 22nd November, Prof. Nandkumar decided to close the chapter, drafted a Fax to be sent on 26th November, if by Monday 25th November, the Director did not decide the matter (see exhibit 9).

The Set Back

On 28th November the Prof. Rao, Secretary enquired about the arrangements being made. Prof. Nandkumar drafted a reply and forwarded for the Director's approval so that the brochure for the Conference could be released. Director agreed to it subject to certain conditions. He however had not agreed to allow the registration fee to be received by the Institute. This meant an account had to be opened in the name of Forum itself. This required that a formal body is to be created fast. However, around mid of December the Secretary expressed his inability to get the Forum registered as a society and asked Prof. Nandkumar to do the same. "My God- how to do that" wondered Prof. Nandkumar.

Formation of the Forum

Luckily Prof. Nandkumar had been Secretary to Board and Society of IMX few years back and had a copy of the Society memorandum. He modified it to form a new society. Problem was how to get signature of Chairman. The latter advised to get in touch with Executive Director of a public sector company (on which Prof. Nandkumar had done a case study) was a common friend. He agreed. The MD of another company for whom Prof. Nandkumar had done a consulting agreed to be Treasurer. Prof. Nandkumar agreed to be the Secretary of the Society. Some other faculty members of IMX and participants of the first FDP became other members to meet the requirements of the Society formation.

The Director of IMX refused to allow IMX for registered office address. He did not allow even his officer, who had necessary experience, to help in drafting and filing of the registration papers. Fortunately, Prof. Nandkumar had a house in the city, which was made registered office.

Despite apprehensions, there were no difficulties created by the registrar office and two weeks later the Forum was registered as a Society, just a week before the Conference.

The Conference

The project manager extended full support to expedite the completion of dining hall and just in time the door and windows were fitted. Thirty rooms in the students' hostel were also completed on the day previous to commencement of the Conference. The CAO also did his might to help.

The Conference was attended by over 45 delegates from various management schools. A book by an author- delegate on Strategic Management was released. The Instructor Manual of Prof. Nandkumar's Case Book (published last year) requested by participants of first FDP was also completed and released. Some Directors and Vice Chancellors also attended the conference.

On the last day, the election for new office bearers of the Forum was held. Unfortunately, no one proposed the name of IMX director for any position. "I refrained from doing it, because I did not want to organise any other event desired by the director. One experience was more than enough" said Prof. Nandkumar.

Commenting on the letter by the Director, Prof. Nandkumar said "It pained. But I was happy that now at least one PGP hostel of 60 rooms and the dining will be operational to ensure that the PGP intake is increased to 180, which was not happening for the seven years. The experience of coinciding inauguration of a major event to expedite completion of a building was a great lesson which helped me in completing the construction work that was stuck in another institute when I joined there as director", he said.

"Formation of platform for annual interaction of faculty members in my discipline, a cherish dream for 20 years was also realised", Prof. Nandkumar said.

"There was no further conference in IMX until 2001, which I organised under the aegis of the Forum. But that's another story" smiled Prof. Nandkumar.

"If it was possible to organise the Conference, why Director did not approve in the first place? Why both of them feeling hurt? Was it avoidable? Why no other conference was held for next 4 years? Will the Forum survive? Is there a Role of Orphans in the Society?". These were some questions that puzzled Dr. Nandkumar, even after retirement