



THE FUN OF CASE WRITING (B)

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The Fun of Case Writing (B)

A group of young faculty members discussed with a senior colleague as to how a leading management institute in India could increase the student intake in their flagship management program in just four months (see case Fun of Case Writing A). The faculty members were curious as to how a case writing can lead to increase in intake? They did not respond to Prof. Chidambaram's challenge of preparing the checklist for increasing intake, but mentioned many items, like class rooms, hostels, faculty offices, dining hall, library, computer centre, faculty. They could not mention some others. They however asked Prof. Chidambaram to narrate what all was done and how? He agreed to give the glimpse of what all happened from reflections of his memory. The story went as described below.

Arranging the Classrooms

There were only two classrooms one in an upcoming state government institute (SGI) from where the Institute had started its Postgraduate Programme in Management (PGP) and another one in a hired premises, in which a class room was constructed to accommodate first year students as the PGP second batch. There was acute shortage of classrooms, but no money and permission from local authorities to construct additional buildings. Prof. Chidambaram requested the Students' Council President to spare the students common room, who flatly refused saying that he had regretted even to the Director when the Director wanted it to accommodate some secretarial staff. On Prof. Chidambaram's remark that the Students' Council President should not go down in the history of the Institute as a person who strangulated its growth, he relented, but sought a solemn promise from Prof. Chidambaram that the room will not be used for any other purpose.

Special chairs (with attached writing provisions), which were 6 inch shorter on all sides than normal chairs were ordered to make the 30 seater room work as 56 seater one. The students' common room was converted into a 48 seater classroom to make a total of 106 seats in two classrooms for PGP I. The second year students continued to use SGI classroom.

The Dining Hall

To meet the requirements of dining hall the lunch hours were staggered. Thus in the dining hall instead of 60 (30+30) students, 120 students took meals. The lunch hours were extended below so that two batches could take lunch one after another.

Library

Since the first year courses did not have too many requirements of references and reading rooms and mostly used books only, by and large the second year used the Library for reading purpose.

Computer Centre

The computer centre posed a problem. The in-charge of computer centre pleaded for a new air conditioned computer hall. The PGP chairman was vehemently opposed to it. His argument was that PGP I was taught only mundane things like Wordstar, Dbase and Lotus 1-2-3 packages, which needed Personal Computer (PC) only and those could be kept in the

hostels, which were rented 3 bedroom houses with kitchen. He totally disagreed to the demand for a separate air conditioned computer centre, as PCs could well withstand 30°C temperature and normal humidity. The courses were not taught during rainy season (July-Sept) and by the time the temperature got 30°C+ in summer, the PGP I students went for summer job and second year students passed out. However, an intermediate solution was found. The project office was shifted to the land where institute's own campus was to come up. The space was converted into small computer centre in which students could practice round the clock.

The Issues of Hostel Facilities

Since students were already living in rented houses, it was not a great issue. Hectic search was made for getting some more rented premises. Luckily a new construction was available with about 35 double occupancy rooms, in which bulk of students could be accommodated. The lease for 3 years 3 bedroom house at INR 2400/- per month taken 3 years ago was renegotiated for INR 1800/- per month and each room was made double occupancy, thus reducing the hostel cost per student from INR 800/- per month to INR 300/ per month which was to be recovered from the students as per the actuals.

Problem with the Parent Ministry

Getting both plan funds (for campus construction) and non-plan fund (to meet operating expenses) from the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) was not easy. Almost every month Manager (F&A) had to go to MHRD to collect cheque(s) for running expenses. The position of plan funds was even more precarious. Winning Ministry's concurrence was also not easy as it was keen that the Institute should focus on non-corporate sector and public systems, which was equal thrust area at the time for setting up the Institute. The Director was somehow able to convince the Ministry arguing that as per a recent study, country required over 5000 qualified managers by end of next plan and all the management institutes, funded by the ministry, put together had intake of only about 4500. Even if all the university MBAs was accounted, it would not be more than 2000. "How the country is going to meet the growing shortage" she asked. Further the older institutes had reached saturation and infrastructure cost per students for additional intake would range from INR 50000- 80000 per year. Since the Institute's campus was under construction the incremental cost would come to around INR 30000/- per year only. Perhaps that made sense to the Ministry. This was as much a question of credibility and argument of the Institute to allow it to prove 3.5 fold increase, perhaps made Ministry concede the Institute's request.

Problem with Staff

The staff was getting agitated as their work load was to increase. For example instead of making course material for the 60 PGP I students they had to do it for 130. Indeed, a union leader did ask as to why the non teaching staff should take more load when there were no benefits or promotion. Prof. Chidambaram however tried to persuade him by asking whether they will get promotion otherwise? If so, he would go and request the Director not to increase intake. By working more they may get promotion. This made sense to him and the issue did not crop up later.

The Problem of Course Material

The course material in those days was given in cyclostyled form. In four years, most of the stencils for cyclostyling had outlived their life and the typing, correcting and cyclostyling 300 pages for a single course of Business Policy in a single month was not easy. Prof. Chidambaram sought permission of the Director to get the material xeroxed. It took lot of pain to Prof. Chidambaram to convince the Director that xeroxing of material would be cheaper if the cost of xeroxing room, the operator, storage, exact number of copies, speed of work etc. were all considered. Finally the Director agreed and the Institute started giving xeroxed course material at low cost which made it first institution in the country used to give xeroxed course material

Faculty Resistance

While there were many problems to be solved, the toughest challenge came in the form of faculty resistance. Many of them questioned the wisdom of increasing the intake. The admission committee had recommended only 300 odd candidates for the academic session to the PGP Chairman, who had the responsibility of giving admission offers. The number was close to what used to be for intake of 40 students admission earlier. When the Director asked for some more names, the admission committee refused to give any additional name maintaining that no candidate beyond that number will be able to cope with the demands of the programme.

The admission chairman also gave leave to admission office staff, who were to prepare admission offers. The two staff members of PGP office too proceeded on leave. The deadline for sending admission offers was 19th April and the list of recommended candidates was given on Friday, 14th. The letters were to be cyclostyled, addresses printed and the letters posted in three working days.

In the meantime the PGP Chairman asked the Director to give additional manpower or two PC-XTs, one for his use and one for his office. The Director agreed to the latter. Prof. Chidambaram had experience of using PC-XT, having set up a computer centre for training in his previous employment. He quickly perused and corrected address list of candidates recommended by the admission committee and after indexing them, developed personalized letters, printed them for required number of candidates and posted them at two addresses, one on the address given by the candidates for correspondence, and another to the home address. He also introduced a form for acceptance to be signed and returned with Demand Draft of INR 500/- (unlike INR 100 charges by leading institutions). He received 60 acceptances by Friday, 12th May. On 15th May he released another 80 regular offers and 27 offers for being kept on waiting list. The latter were informed that they could contact on phone from 28th June afternoon onwards whether they have been offered admission. If offered they would have to report for joining by 12 noon on 1st July, failing which the offers would stand withdrawn. On 1st July 105 students joined.

Two more things were done. The admission registration form was reduced from 16 pages to 6 by deleting the duplicate information. The library and the identity cards, which used to take 7 and 30 days respectively, were prepared in advance as acceptance were received, and issued on the spot at the time of registration. Likewise, as soon as the offer of acceptance was received the data was entered in the Dbase and weekly statements along with demand drafts (DDs) were given to accounts department for depositing them in the bank on weekly basis.

Earlier due to manual process, the DDs used to be deposited after 1 month or so, losing interest unnecessarily. Later even question papers etc. were taken in hand written manuscripts from faculty, typed in PGP Office and xeroxed (not cyclostyled) in presence of PGP Office staff, sets made ready and opened by faculty in the examination room.

Gradually staff started liking use of computer. Prof. Chidambaram suggested to the Director to allow incentive of INR 25/- each for using Wordstar, Dbase and Lotus 1-2-3 packages to any and every staff member who accepted to learn and use the same if faculty or administration asked them to use the packages. In a year's time all the staff members learned and switched over to computer based working, making a special post of data entry operator, redundant.

Arranging Faculty

The shortage of faculty was cited as one of the most important problem as in other institutions. There were twenty three regular faculty members and when the decision to increase the intake was taken, two of them left. Another one, who was on deputation for 3 years decided to return to the parent department, although he agreed to be available to teach 1 or 2 courses as adjunct faculty. Yet another faculty applied for long leave to join another institute. The director was getting concerned, but Prof Chitambaram as PGP Chairman held the view those who do not want the institute to grow, should be allowed to go as they won't put their heart into work. The faculty member later decided not to proceed

The problem of shortage of faculty was as much as its utilization. There were only 22 courses in first year and another 40+ in the second year. In all there were about 60 courses and for many courses adjunct faculty were invited to conduct the courses as the courses were highly specialized ones, which internal faculty was unwilling to teach. In all not more than 35 -40 courses were taught by core faculty with average load being little less than 2 courses. Areas like Marketing, Finance and Business Policy, which had more than 5 courses each, had only two faculty members. On the other hand areas like economics had 6 courses and 4 full professors. The same was the case with Production, Quantitative Methods and Information System group, having only 10 courses and 6 faculty members.

It was thus not a shortage all around. In December previous year, Prof. Chitambaram had convinced the Director and got a proposal approved in the faculty council that all the faculty members would teach at least two courses every year in the future, a new practice which was later introduced in other similar institutions. One faculty member had not taught even a single course for three years. That reduced the requirement of faculty in non- critical areas. For critical areas, adjunct faculty members were invited. In any case not all requirements were to be met in the first year itself. There were four areas in which no additional faculty was required immediately under new norms. For the Marketing and Finance areas, 4 faculty members each were required, which could be managed through adjunct faculty. Getting faculty for eight courses was not such a big deal, although it was a difficult task. The core faculty in finance and marketing agreed to take one or two additional courses each to tide over the problem.

Although with the internal faculty accepting to conduct two or more courses, the demand for external faculty reduced, it created severe problem of scheduling the classes. The problem was somewhat mitigated by another proactive measure introduced through unanimous decision of faculty council, to switch over to six day working (Mon- Sat.) for conducting

classes instead of 5 days, a practice in vogue since inception of the Institute. This streamlined class scheduling in general and first year classes is particular. For instance every course had classes either on Monday / Tuesday / Wednesday or Thursday / Friday / Saturday slots in the forenoon. Only second year classes could be held in the afternoon also if absolutely necessary. But faculty member dictated choices of time slot, some would like consecutive classes, some would like to have a gap of one period etc. It was a formidable task for PGP Chairman and took more than one month to convince all the faculty members and complete scheduling of classes. The problem was compounded in the second year due to the elective courses, in which conducting parallel classes become difficult due to students being common in many courses. The problem was further compounded with institute spread in three different locations, two of them being more than a furlong away on either side of the main building and faculty had to walk all the way in heat, rain and fog, which they resented.

The doubling of the teaching load and tripling of evaluation load without any reward, was not liked by anyone. The heaviest load came on PGP Chairman, who had to conduct 5 courses, when average faculty load was 2 courses. Of course this led to a positive effect also. With the faculty members getting busier the politics, which was on the increase due to free time available reduced drastically. The pressure of timely processing the results manually in 2 days would have become unbearable for declaring results within 15 days of the examination without use of computer. This led to use of computers getting institutionalized without anybody noticing it. The same was true with Xeroxing. The quality and manpower efficiency increased dramatically, with same number of non-teaching manpower, despite size having increased 3 fold. This also resulted in associated reduction in cost per student.

The passing out batch with 96 students had much better job placement than ever before. Pleased with over 3-fold increase in PGP intake in four months, the Ministry released a large part of plan funds for management institutes to this institute, and also enough funds in the next year. The builder expedited completion of Phase-I of campus work, which could accommodate an intake of 120 PGP students (240 students' population, so that the institute could move to its campus next year, with a population of over 200 persons.

A large number of non-teaching staff got promotions or special increment in for the outstanding performance. All in all, the move demonstrated increase of batch size was more a matter of choice and will, than the issue of constraints.

Sharing the experience of two years, with the case writer Prof. Chidambaram said, "I had thought after Apollo case writing that it would be great fun to increase the PGP intake, it really turned out to be other wise. Although it gave a sense of fulfillment, which even my family could not realize. It was a major achievement, which we ourselves did not believe. A great experience for me was hiring a private house and constructing two classrooms there in 3 months of summer and also constructing a 100+ seater class room in 25 days square. But the strain of work; attending to variety of problems, finding solutions with very few people supporting me in coping with challenge, had taken a heavy toll. Working for almost 15-16 hours a day for the whole year, damaged my metabolic system. I literally collapsed one day. The most unfortunate part was the people, especially some faculty members, who were going to be beneficiaries of growth did not spare any opportunity to create obstacles. But at the end of it, most of them especially senior ones forgave me for the strain I had caused in the system while trying to increase the intake".

- Q1. What were the challenges faced to increase intake 3.5 fold
- Q2. What were the benefits of increasing batch size?
- Q3. What can be done to add another 60 students' batch size?
- Q4. How much time it should take to do?

The Fun of Case Writing (B)
Exhibit 1

Year since inception of institute	PGP Intake Nos.	Students' Population* Nos.	Regular Full Time Faculty Nos.	Regular Non-teaching Staff Nos.
1 st	27	27	NA	NA
2 nd	30	57	NA	NA
3 rd	32	62	NA	NA
4 th	34	66	24	34
5 th	105	139	21	38
6 th	96	192	26	79
7 th	90	186	25	78
8 th	104	194	23(12)	105

* Approximately ** Institute shifted to its own campus
Figures within parentheses indicate visiting faculty

Exhibit 2

Year since inception of institute	PGP Intake Nos.	Recurring Expenses INR	Non-recurring Expenses INR	Campus Development INR	Total MHRD Grant INR	PGP Fee / student INR /Student
1 st	27	NA	NA	NA	NA	2625
2 nd	30	NA	NA	NA	NA	2425
3 rd	32	NA	NA	NA	NA	3075
4 th	34	87	37	165	289	5375
5 th	105	126	87	290	503	5375
6 th	96	137	71	517	725	5675
7 th	90	161	67	309	537	10650
8 th	104	147	102	330	529	12450
	118	181	103	121	250	12450

All the figures are approximate