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INNOVATION IN MANAGEMENT: CHALLENGES AND THE ROAD AHEAD

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The case depicts the creative and innovative practices of a management team, in an academic organization, motivated by an efficient director. With the continuing innovative performances and break-through thinking of the school members, more parents sought to get their children admitted in the school. The director of school is now confronted with a situation whether to increase the capacity by expanding the infrastructure or opening a new school. But director is apprehensive whether the current creativity and innovative practices followed at present can be sustained or will get diluted in the advent of school's expansion. He does not want to expand at the cost of creativity and innovative practices. He wants to sustain those practices post-expansion. The case has been written to teach the students about the importance of culture, climate and leadership in an organization to sustain and foster creativity and innovation.

Keywords: Innovation, School management, Leadership, Culture

ABOUT ST. STEPHEN'S

St. Stephen's Senior Secondary School was established in 1985 in Ajmer (Rajasthan) by Mr. Gilroy Martins along with his wife Dr. Deepa Martins. The school was started in two-rented houses and has now has developed a sprawling campus of its own. Mr. Martins resigned from his secure job as a lecturer in a Government College to pursue his dream of building this academic institution. His focus was to bring excellence in education, building character of students by inculcating values and discipline. Mr. Martins dedicated himself completely to the school's growth and was directly associated with every aspect of the school's functioning.

THE SCHOOL'S SYSTEM DURING MR. MARTINS

The School was following the curriculum prescribed by the Board of Secondary Education Rajasthan, the State Education Board. Mr. Martins was managing the school. He started off as the Principal and Manager, but later appointed a Principal while still managing all matters directly. In the later years he also appointed an Estate Manager and an Academic Affairs Manager. There were thus three offices reporting to him – Estate Manager, Principal and Academic Affairs Manager. Even though he delegated some responsibilities to them, they largely followed instructions instead of taking individual decisions. Mr. Martins was

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keenly involved with every minute detail from the regular morning assembly, extracurricular activities, sports, cleanliness and discipline, examination and evaluation, time-table arrangement, library, parent-teacher meeting, discipline among students, etc. With regard to day-to-day operation, his attention covered everything from safety pins to maintenance of school buses.

He designed a system which required faculty members to prepare daily lesson plans for the subjects they handled. He made it mandatory for the faculty members to submit class diaries for correction every morning and their lesson plans each week. Faculty members were also required to maintain question and answer banks as well as write homework in the students' diary. These practices ensured that the students could keep their notes up-to-date.

SCENARIO AFTER MR. MARTINS

After the sudden and unexpected demise of Mr. Martins in February 2005, a new Director took over the administration. The Director found out how, the entire system of the school was amazingly controlled by one man – Mr. Martins. He could witness that the demise of Mr. Martins had created a vacuum in the management of school. Except for the focus on academics and students' discipline, neither the Principal nor any other authorities knew how to initiate and ignite the system for movement. The new Director was able to infer that Mr. Martins had taken every decision as well the responsibility of the outcomes, himself. The Office Bearers were just holders of a designation and followers of instruction rather than decision makers. They were disciplined in following orders and now

needed to be independent in dealing with the processes and functioning of the school. There was even an apprehension that prevailed among teachers and parents that the school might be sold.

DESIGNING OF SYSTEM

After studying the system exhaustively, and initiating functioning in the same style, the Director focused on institutionalizing the systems by implementing the ISO 9001:2000 Quality Management System in 2005. Teachers were provided training in ISO 9001:2000 QMS Awareness and a few teachers were trained in Internal Audit of the ISO 9001:2000 QMS. As a result, there was clarity in responsibilities and authorities of various personnel of the school and processes related to the functioning of the school. This structure was formally put on paper and communicated. Every position in the chart was marked with clear definition of authorities and responsibilities were assigned to them. Additionally, a responsibility matrix was also created. Major decision-making power on general supervision, providing direction and exercising financial powers were assigned as authorities and responsibilities of the Director. He was supported by next layer in the management constituted by the Principal — responsible as head of the administrative duties; Academic affairs manager – responsible for assisting the Director and the Principal in the day to day academic affairs of the school; Estate manager – assigned with the responsibility for the overall maintenance of the school estate and managing peons, maids, bus drivers etc. With respect to the academic functions, a third layer of organization structure which includes Head mistress (primary school), teachers of primary sections, teachers of secondary sections, and office staffs.

Headmistress of primary school was assigned the responsibility to supervise, guide and control the work of teaching pertaining to the primary section. Committees were created to manage assembly, extracurricular activities, sports, cleanliness and discipline, examination and evaluation, time-table and arrangement and library. Teachers were delegated and assigned responsibilities to form and manage the committees and they were headed by the Principal.

DESIGNING OF SYSTEM PROCESSES

Process flows were designed to provide transparency and to ensure the smooth functioning of the system. The process clearly depicted the activities such as new admission process, students' promotion, staff recruitment process, selection of teachers for the class, formation of classes, formation of time-table and break-up of syllabus, lesson planning, addressing problems of parents, providing teachers' training, assessment of students, providing remedial classes etc. The above processes of the school were documented and a quality manual comprising quality policy, quality objectives, and quality management system's elements, system procedures, work instructions were issued on 1 September 2005. Output measures and in-process measures were also defined to give maximum clarity about meeting the standards. The school achieved ISO 9001:2000 certification from ICL Certifications in December 2005.

INNOVATION IN MANAGEMENT

Decision of Decentralization

As a next step of improvement, director focused

on human resources development by delegating important responsibilities. A team named SSALT (acronym for St. Stephen Ajmer Leadership Team) was created. The team comprised the Principal, Vice-principal, Headmistress - primary section, Academic Affairs manager, Activities Manager, Human Resources Manager, and Estate Manager. They were entrusted with responsibility of taking the school to the next level by functioning collaboratively, taking decisions based on discussions and implement innovate new ideas. The agenda was to create a smooth functioning of the system and a system than can function by itself.

SSALT'S Achievements

SSALT reworked the school's curriculum and methodology of delivery to the students. From the State Board, the school moved to affiliation with the Central Board of Secondary Education. The school was also upgraded to the Senior-Secondary level. The team focused at implementation of most of changes at the fundamental level catering to the primary classes. Every change and development was implemented in an organized way. Taking the advantage of non-prescriptive syllabus by the government for the primary school, the curriculum was designed by taking inputs from the NCERT (National Council of Education Research and Training) syllabus which prescribes experiential learning and CBSE system which prescribes project methods. The teachers focused on including the Multiple Intelligences while drawing up lesson plans, including logical reasoning and visualization as part of the learning process. The school adopted the inputs prescribed in the UN core skills. The school also uses, as guidelines, the fundamentals of education that Dr. Howard Gardner outlines in the 'Five Minds for the Future'.

The school has focused on developing synthesizing ability of the children. A three-pronged approach has been adopted. The three features are (1) Emphasis on communication, (2) Developing logical reasoning of the student, and finally (3) Inculcating value education.

INNOVATION IN ACADEMICS

Apart from regular class room activities, SSALT started focusing on developmental activities at fundamental level. Reading was given priority over writing for the students at Kindergarten and primary school level. Children were motivated to read and encouraged to develop writing skills gradually.

Teachers were encouraged to innovate in the classroom teaching methods and activity-based learning. In a geography class, students were explained the longitude and latitude lines using an orange. The structure and segments of the peeled orange were used to explain the concept. Dependency on the teacher reading aloud the text was reduced and discussion and exploration of topics was encouraged. Classroom settings were never permanent. The setting was often changed such a way that it became learner-centric rather than teacher-centric. It encouraged peer learning from the primary school level itself. Instead of the teacher writing answers on the board for the students to copy, the students were encouraged to think and write answers on their own.

In examinations, questions were no longer based on rote learning only but focused more on creativity and problem solving. Teachers were instructed not to penalize for repeated spelling mistakes. Library periods have been made into interesting sessions for students. Students were motivated to read, interpret and discuss about

their learning in the library. They were encouraged to depict their learning through drawings. Corporal punishments were completely banned and games, sports and co-curricular activities enhanced in the curriculum. Resource persons were invited to provide counseling to the Secondary classes.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THIRD PARTY TOOL

The SSALT took another bold step by introducing a third party curriculum in line with, but more evolved from the relatively basic curriculum prescribed the NCERT. The team understood that the implementation would bring in a radical change and felt the need to counsel potential mind blocks from two important entities – Parents and teachers. As the curriculum was different and more activity based, there was a need to make changes in the existing system and adapt the new curriculum without affecting any of the core values of school. They designed it in a way compatible with the infrastructure of the school. The third party curriculum was originally designed to fit a class strength of 25, but at St. Stephen's, the classroom strength was upto 45. The curriculum was thus an exploratory and experimental run for the vendor and also St. Stephen's. The school implemented the third party program very creatively to fit its existing system and available resources.

They studied teachers' apprehensions like (i) increase of workload, (ii) students getting in-disciplined in the activity-based method which was largely a part of the new curriculum, and (iii) teachers getting familiar with a non-text book oriented syllabus. Teachers were given a lot of inputs and training. They created a system that was open to innovation. Certain activities prescribed by the new curriculum could not be

followed due to limited resources; this gave them advantage of innovating new ideas. If the curriculum needs the students to be taken to the post office, one of the peons in the school dresses in a khaki uniform and visits the class as postman where he explains his duties at the post office. Homework has been converted into interactive learning. Students are asked to observe the moon and write about it, or observe an insect at their homes, and write about it. Assistant teachers have been employed to assist the teachers in the day to day work. If any student is found unable to follow the lessons, he/she would be taken for one-to-one coaching and given proper explanations so that he/she can join to the mainstream of the class.

They have been able to face and resolve parents' apprehensions like not being able to send their children for tuitions as the tuition teachers cannot handle interactive and non-text book learning method. Only teachers with special training in the curriculum were able to interpret the interactive method involved in the curriculum. It was a workbook-based (vs. textbook based) curriculum. Parents felt anxiety as there were no text books provided to the students to be carried home except for workbooks. Parents were not able to understand how to anticipate questions for the exams. Parents could not picture how a lesson has been taught and how they could teach their children in the absence of text books. As there was no homework given to the students, apprehension also crept in about the absence of stereotypic homework patterns.

SSALT'S MENTORSHIP SYSTEM

SSALT team created a Mentorship program for teachers which comprised Principal, Vice-

principal, Head mistress (Primary section) and Human Resources Manager to act as mentors. Each of the mentors was assigned twenty to twenty-five teachers. They mentored the teachers in handling the class, handling the subject innovatively, acted as personal coaches and counselors. Teachers were encouraged to walk-in freely to meet their mentors and discuss their issues and get solutions to them.

FEEDBACK SYSTEM

The team focused on building an environment with trust and reliability which allowed students to give their feedback and seek counseling or advice: from petty interpersonal quarrels and differences to more important academic concerns, students are free to come forward with their concerns. Transparency ensured the smooth handling of issues. Teachers were mentored based on the feedback and were given strategies and tips on class handling skills. Teachers were encouraged to interact with parents and receive their feedback and communicate it to the team. The team focused on constructive approach towards feedback.

CASE DISCUSSIONS

1. Discuss the role of creativity and innovation during organizational constraints?
2. Discuss the role of leadership in the organization. What kind of leadership do you think that the director of the school has been following?
3. Do you find self-empowerment in the organization? Discuss.

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