

Madras Management Association: Managing Diversity, Growth and Excellence

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If there is one thing inextricably linked with the making of an institution, it is the goal which the institution is purported to fulfill. All institutions come into being with missions - ranging from profit generation to nation building - whether or not these missions are clearly specified. Missions guide policies the organization undertakes to reach its aims and defines its character. However, organizations are open systems - influenced by flux in the external environment, nature of resources and pattern of demands of internal and external stakeholders. To survive, the organization has to adopt policies that may however, deviate from the original mission. When done in excess, this may change the organizational character significantly. It is therefore imperative for an organization to introspect from time to time whether short term survival concerns are making it myopic to long term goals.

It is at this crossroads we find the Madras Management Association (MMA), as it undertakes a retrospective journey of its 55 years of activities to 'further the cause of managerial excellence' through 'learning and experience sharing'. Starting from a modest base, it has grown to accommodate teaching, mentoring and awareness building - winning laurels and recognition from stakeholders. Winning the Best Local Management Award 2011 from the All India Management Association, after a drought of three years, the organization seeks to identify what has worked in the past and what has not, as well as to find out whether diversification has caused it to stray it from its original vision and mission.

What Does Knowledge Management Entail?

The MMA has the expressed goal of acting as a 'fountainhead' of world class management excellence in India. Essentially its vision boils down to knowledge management related to management excellence in the sub-continent. Knowledge management entails four major activities: knowledge generation, knowledge

storage and retrieval, knowledge sharing and knowledge application (Janz & Prasarnphanich, 2003). In the present context, it may be said that to emerge as a centre of management excellence, MMA should focus not only on knowledge sharing but also on generation, storage and application.

As we undertake the introspective journey with members of the MMA, we need to first stand clarified of the vision and mission of the Association. The vision statement reads 'To be the fountainhead of world class management excellence in India'. This tells us that the focus of the association is on dissemination of global best practices. Further, the geographical spread is to be stretched across the subcontinent - rather than be limited to Chennai and its surroundings. This provides a strong argument in favour of opening new chapters of the MMA in surrounding districts and emergence of MMA as primarily as a knowledge dissemination unit - through seminars, forums, educational programmes and publication.

If we analyze the mission statement of MMA, we find the following:

- Synthesize the Indian ethos with international management thought: this aspect is not prominent from the information shared in the case. Theme-based seminars, courses and consultation activities may be indicative of steps in this direction
- Be a reservoir of expertise in management: this role of the institution seems well-fulfilled, through its enormous membership base and the popularity of its various educational programmes. It appears effective in being a reliable source for spreading management knowledge and becoming a forum for meeting of management experts from India and the rest of the world.
- Inspire individuals to actualize their potential: Trainings and educational programmes may be again

regarded as steps in this direction. More focused measures would be incubation programmes for entrepreneurial projects, development of access to resources such as library and journals and scholarship programmes for theoretical and action research in the field of management.

- Nurture creativity and originality: This pertains to entrepreneurship development programmes and provision of infrastructure for original research in the diverse fields of management. But for the presence of the KSA, this focus also appears to be largely missing in the portfolio of services offered by the MMA.

The above analysis shows us a definite gap in the mission of the MMA and the activities it has undertaken extensively. If we classify the diverse range of activities undertaken by the MMA, we shall see that the vast majority of its activities are concentrated on knowledge sharing (through training programmes and certification courses) and partly in knowledge storage and retrieval (in the form of publishing magazines, building library and generating databases of reading materials). However, the contribution to knowledge generation (in the form of funding and guiding research projects) and knowledge application (through action research and consultancy) is not significant. It is this gap that also shows up when we analyze if MMA deviates from its stated mission.

Given the above analysis, one may emphasize on the need for more diversity in MMA's service portfolio. It may be said that MMA's issue is not over-diversification, but too much concentration of resources in one area to the relative ignorance of others. These needs be more focus on research and development as well as application of management practices through consultancy services and incubation programmes.

Rolling Stone or Standing Pole?

Organizations are open systems and as such are open to impact of changes in the environment. It is necessary therefore that MMA is receptive to developments in the external world and able to accommodate it in its ambit. A positive step in this direction is the incorporation of electronic media in its activities that has led to significant

cost-cutting and operational efficiency. There may be more efforts in this direction, including the launching of online courses for professionals. This may help improve and sustain the growth in its continuing education programmes.

Towards the conclusion of its retrospective journey, MMA faces the dilemma about whether to accommodate the two newly growing business sectors in the horizon - small entrepreneurs and BPO firms. It may be stated that diversifying the stakeholder base to include these two new classes would not be in contradiction to the organization's stated objectives. Instead it may be imperative for the organization to ensure its survival in the changing contexts.

The Stars and Cash Cows

With detailed data on financial performance and popularity of its various offerings and chapters, the case on MMA also provides an interesting opportunity for portfolio analysis. While in the case, it has been stated that the percentage of income from continuing education, management development and family business has fallen, financial data shows that actual income has risen from all these sectors. As opposed to this, income has fallen from forums and conventions. It may be worthwhile to investigate the trends in rise and fall of revenue generation and identify programmes that need boosting as well as those that need restructuring. For instance, costs on management forums and seminars can be further cut down by holding them in collaboration with academic institutions. This will also fulfill the institution's goal of increasing the interaction of the industry with the academia. Also to enhance the validity of its training programmes it can work for affiliations from noted management institutes of the world or the Government of India.

Conclusion

The case provides an interesting perspective into the process of realigning an institution to its original goals. It gives rise to questions as to how far the original goals remain relevant in an ever-dynamic economic and social environment. Retracing the history of MMA and weighing the strategic value of its various ventures

provides useful exercises in teaching strategic goal setting in an organization. It can also provide opportunities to analyze relative performance of the various offerings by an institution both in terms of financial gain and stakeholder value. However, the question of sustainability is difficult to explore due to the absence of data about competitors and substitutes in the environment. Within the limited perspective of MMA's own performance and the changing needs of its stakeholders, the case provides important insights in the strategic management of an institution's activities to meet its long-term goals, satisfy stakeholders and keep pace with an ever-changing environment.

References

Janz, B.D. & Prasarnphanich, P. (2003). Understanding the Antecedents of Effective Knowledge Management: The Importance of a Knowledge-Centered Culture. *Decision Science*, 34(2), 351-84.

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