

Professional Associations – Ahmedabad Management Association (AMA) –

‘A Pathbreaker Sitting Pretty!’

The Ahmedabad Management Association (AMA) was established in 1956 by the outstanding scientist and institution builder - Dr. Vikram Sarabhai. Its mission was to create awareness about the field of management at the societal level and to promote adoption of modern management concepts in industry. After joining the textile business in the year 1963, I had started teaching at the IIMA as visiting faculty. During that period Dr. PC Mehta, Director, ATIRA, became the President of AMA. He encouraged me to take active interest in AMA. Eventually that led to my taking over as President.

I had a long association with AMA, having served as its president from 1971 to 1973. In designing the activities of any association the boundaries have to be drawn keeping in mind the membership and their needs. It was an association where the members were active and involved. Various ideas for activities would be mooted. It was easy to get carried away by the success of some of the initiatives and expand into some other peripheral activities which were in the nature of formal education. For example, there was a proposal for starting a diploma/degree programme in management for fresh students. I had to draw boundaries around such proposals. My stance was that we are an association of professional managers, not an educational institution. Our programs should cater to the needs of professional managers, refreshing and upgrading their skills while providing a broader perspective on managerial jobs. Getting into formal education would require large resources, permanent academic staff and affiliation to a degree giving University. I did not consider that to be a prudent choice at that point in time.

I had other ideas. With my involvement in management education at IIMA I wanted to introduce management programmes for working executives. AMA was the perfect platform to launch this. A few of them are described below.

Apart from routine management functions like finance, marketing, HR etc there was a need to expand the outlook of the managers. Instead of thinking just in terms of business and industry focusing for example, on market share or return on investment (RoI), managers have to understand the broader science and technology trends and social forces at play to assume leadership roles. An idea occurred to me when Dr. Vikram Sarabhai, the founding President of AMA, passed away prematurely at the age of fifty in 1971. He was a visionary who integrated lessons from various disciplines and institutions for effective leadership and institution-building. That was the inspiration which led to the formation of Dr. Vikram Sarabhai Memorial Trust at AMA to serve as a vehicle for an annual lecture series in his memory inviting leading thinkers from diverse fields. Incidentally, prior to his passing away Dr. Sarabhai, in a conversation with me, had mentioned how delighted he was that the Administrative Staff College of India (ASCI) had invited him for a special lecture and paid him an honorarium of Rs. 5,000. For an industrialist and a scion of the Sarabhai family this amount was peanuts. However, he felt that this gesture was important to him as it gave a feeling of personal recognition. This was an important learning for me – that we must honour and recognize those who have achieved high levels of excellence in different fields and try to learn from their ideas and insights.

Over the years, the annual event was organized with simplicity, dignity and informality to foster and stimulate intellectual dialogue. The series hosted international scholars from science, social sciences, business, and industry, such as physicist Professor MGK Menon; economist Dr. Amartya Sen; astrophysicist Dr. Philip Morrison of MIT; architect and designer Buckminster Fuller; Lord C P Snow; virologist Professor Jonas Salk; economist and diplomat Dr. J K Galbraith; industry leader Russi Modi, among others. This flagship event became an important fixture in the Ahmedabad city calendar, enriching young minds and managers by expanding their Horizons in addressing organizational, institutional and social issues.

In the process of establishing the Trust as a vehicle for organising the Annual Lecture I learnt a few valuable lessons.

For organising the lecture series, I needed to collect funds. Along with some friends, I contributed Rs 5,000 as initial amount. We reckoned that from the 50 odd textile mills if we collect @Rs 5,000 per unit and get 30 units to donate, that would be sufficient corpus for running this annual activity. As per the normal tradition in the city of Ahmedabad for such activity to raise funds, one would approach the city's leading industrialist and philanthropist Seth Kasturbhai Lalbhai to kick-off the donation drive. Along with two millowner colleagues and former Presidents of AMA I went to see Kasturbhai. I briefed him about our plan to organise a prestigious annual lecture that would enhance the image of Ahmedabad city and commemorate Vikrambhai's legacy. I mentioned the amount of funds that we required and the broad formula for donation. At the end of that I made a request to him to contribute Rs. 35,000 based on my calculation of Rs.5,000 per unit. I had arrived at that figure knowing that he was the head of the group that owned seven textile units in the city. To my utter dismay he said he will contribute only Rs. 2,000. He then gave me a tongue lashing that we did not think properly and instead of putting in efforts to raise the money from all those connected with Vikrambhai in his business enterprises like Calico Mills and Sarabhai Chemicals we expected Kasturbhai to *largely* fund the activity. *That concluded the discussion.* We left his home crestfallen being at a loss on how to move forward.

After a few days, I chanced to meet Kasturbhai at a felicitation function in honour of Ravi Mathai at IIMA. Probably he had second thoughts on our conversation. He called me aside and said that he would like to understand the details of the funding of the activity. He wondered whether we had thought through the long-term funding of these lectures. Sensing an opportunity, I immediately responded by saying that one of these days I would come over and apprise him of the details of the funding pattern and the cost of organising lectures. After a few days I asked Ravi Mathai to accompany me and the two of us went to see him. I again explained the background, the purpose and the projected funding to him. After listening to me, he said that he will donate Rs. 20,000. This was falling short of Rs. 35,000 target that I had set for him. So I persisted in my request. At that point, Ravi Mathai who was sitting next to me pressed my hand. It was a signal to stop arguing further. When we came out, Ravi mentioned to me that we had come a long way from Rs 2,000 to Rs 20,000 and said that knowing Kasturbhai as well as he did I will never have a funding problem in

the future. If we are short, he will stand by us. It was a wonderful lesson for raising money from people who have a very high sense of accountability. After that episode I had an excellent relationship with Kasturbhai and whenever I needed some advice, I could go to him, and he would positively support me.

Another learning related to the composition of the Trust. As I mentioned earlier, when Vikrambhai passed away in 1971, we decided to establish a trust in his name that would annually host a lecture by a distinguished thinker, scientist, social scientist, or professional manager at AMA. To ensure effective management of the trust, we provided in its constitution a well-balanced board. During discussions with Ravi Mathai, he pointed out a crucial aspect that left a lasting impression.

Ravi advised me on ensuring the long-term integrity of the trust. He stressed that the majority of the trustees should be carefully selected persons of eminence who would not have a personal axe to grind. This measure was crucial to prevent potential deviations from the trust's core mission over time. Ravi's insight was illuminating even though he didn't elaborate fully. He clearly perceived that ex-officio members from an entity like AMA who were periodically elected might be influenced by factors that might come in conflict with the trust's founding principles. Their decisions could be clouded by differing perspectives and extraneous interests. In essence, Ravi foresaw that the trustees might struggle to transcend their personal ambitions, potentially diluting the essence of the trust's original vision.

In response to this foresight, we designated two seats on the board for AMA's office bearers. The remaining four trustees were to be distinguished individuals from various fields who shared a deep appreciation for Vikrambhai's work and legacy. This approach, as expected, not only lent significant credibility to the trust but also kept its focus aligned with the initial purpose and vision. Ravi's concern was founded on the idea that trustees might be swayed by a desire for personal prominence, and he rightfully emphasized the importance of upholding the trust's fundamental objectives as envisioned by its founders.

Let me recall another pathbreaking initiative. I strongly believed in expanding the idea of managerial competence beyond business and industry into sectors like civic management and NGOs. Despite pressure and temptations to venture into educational programs for young collegians to boost our reach and finances, I resisted and

maintained our focus. Instead, we chose to focus our attention on civic management. From 1992 onwards, AMA started facilitating creation of activity centres focused on specific set of activities on sustained basis and supported by an endowment. Taking advantage of this initiative, I was instrumental in establishing the Anubhai Chimanlal - AMA Centre for Management of Civic Affairs in 1995. I had endowed this Centre in memory of my father who was deeply interested in city development and efficient provision of civic services.

Under this Centre, we introduced many innovative programs in civic management which received tremendous response from the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC), urban experts and concerned citizens who were committed to improving the quality of life in our cities. For nearly a decade the Centre focused on the following five major activities:

- 1. Public Health Action Group:** Carried out ward-level projects for monitoring and improving water quality and assessment of incidence of diseases.
- 2. City Monitor:** A large research project for inter-city comparisons of urban quality of life. First round (City Monitor 1996-97) covered four cities (Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Hyderabad and Pune). Second round (City Monitor 2002) covered seven cities (Bangalore, Ahmedabad, Surat, Lucknow, Nagpur, Indore and Chandigarh).
- 3. Public Opinion Polls:** Six opinion polls were conducted in Ahmedabad city from 1996 to 2002 to assess the quality of services provided by the AMC. Sample size was 1200 respondents selected through random cluster sampling technique. Each poll had a set of tracking questions covering obligatory municipal services and a set of special theme questions around one particular service.
- 4. Ahmedabad City Guide:** Detailed city maps of 100 municipal wards published by a local publications house in collaboration with AMA.
- 5. Anubhai Chimanlal Nagarikta Puraskar:** A citation and cash award to honour exemplary civic services work done by an NGO, or a social service organisation or an individual in the city of Ahmedabad, and judged by a panel of eminent citizens.

The two rounds of City Monitor and the six Public Opinion Polls

demonstrated the applicability of management principles to non-business sectors. To fund these projects we had mobilised corporate sponsorships. The City Monitor, perhaps the first of its type of urban research project in India, was designed by Professor Prem Pangotra of IIMA. It provided a snapshot of various municipal services, and a report card benchmarking the cities against each other. The city level surveys followed a rigorous methodology for data collection and analysis. The project was funded by Infrastructure Development Finance Corporation (IDFC) and each city that participated also contributed a fixed fee to underwrite the cost of the study. This pattern of funding ensured high degree of cooperation and accountability on part of the participating cities.

The idea of conducting opinion polls on urban services provided by the AMC, was inspired by similar polls reported in US newspapers. We took the role of a neutral organiser of this activity and did not influence the results in any way. We engaged ORG-MARG, a reputed professional firm, to conduct the survey with rigour and neutrality. Findings of these opinion polls carried the weight of citizens' views, enhancing the credibility of our efforts. Later when the municipal officials questioned some of the results we could point out that this was not our opinion but as expressed by the citizens through a scientific opinion poll. That established its sanctity and validity. I think the whole idea of creating a Centre for Management of Civic Affairs within AMA has demonstrated the applicability of management discipline to non-business sectors. That has been its real value.

Significant Lessons learned:

1. An annual memorial lecture by distinguished speakers is a great tribute for a person whose life is a source of inspiration to people from all walks of life. By inviting eminent persons to deliver a lecture, we honour and recognize those who have achieved high levels of excellence in different fields. These events provide a great opportunity to learn from their ideas and insights.
2. When raising money for a worthy social cause we should remember that potential donors have a high sense of accountability – even a wealthy philanthropist needs to know the worthiness of a cause and justification for the amount of contribution sought. There are no loose purse strings.
3. A useful governance principle for an association, a registered

society or a public trust is that the governing board should comprise of persons who are committed to the core principles of the association. The board of trustees should collectively uphold these principles without any consideration based on personal preferences and interests of individual members.

4. Funding of research projects in non-business organisations is a challenging exercise. An innovative approach is to involve all key stakeholders in a co-funding arrangement including not only an apex organisation but also other organisations who agree to participate in the project as subjects of study. This ensures high degree of cooperation and accountability from the participating entities.
5. Public opinion polls require rigorous methodology, meticulous implementation and objectivity in analysing the findings. Hiring a professional agency to conduct the polling is usually a good idea. It is desirable for the sponsoring agencies to remain neutral during the entire process and share the findings with public at large without any interference. This gives credibility to the results of the opinion poll and makes the exercise meaningful for the citizens.
6. The biggest challenge in organising various activities at an organisation like the AMA is to obtain participation of discipline experts, eminent persons, visiting faculty, and government officials in relevant departments. We should appreciate that for the most part these individuals are donating their time and effort pro-bono for the greater public good. The hosts should recognise their valuable contribution and provide needed resources as well administrative support for the activity.

NID and CEPT – *‘Stars of the Ahmedabad Constellation’*

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF DESIGN (NID)

NID was founded in 1961, inspired by the landmark report by the renowned American design duo, Charles and Ray Eames. Gautam Sarabhai and Gira Sarabhai, the first office bearers of NID, played a pivotal role in shaping the institution’s early vision. Their ideas about design and the pedagogy for design education served as the foundational seeds. Over the years, their successors refined and developed these concepts, but the imprint of the early founders’ vision remains deeply embedded in NID’s ethos.

At the time, design as a discipline of learning was barely understood in India. NID’s pioneering contribution lay in creating awareness about design, developing a curriculum and pedagogy for design education, and demonstrating its wide-ranging applicability across various fields. These efforts established NID as a trailblazer in the Indian design landscape.

One of the most notable milestones in its history was the hosting of the pathbreaking UNIDO-ICSID conference in 1979. This event culminated in the ‘Ahmedabad Declaration’, a landmark in the history of design awareness in India. The declaration not only heightened the global profile of Indian design education but also provided an enduring platform for design practice in the country. It remains a testament to NID’s leadership in advancing design as a critical discipline and profession in India.

Prior to my joining NID Governing Council, a major episode had happened at NID. The founders had greatly contributed to the initial take-off of the Institute and established some very innovative ideas for its development. However, the founders held all the institutional strings in their hands, which was smothering its growth as an independent

institution. This led to a crisis when the founders were dismissed by the very Government that had given them an opportunity that was the first of its kind in the world. That crisis was the first trial-by-fire of the NID experiment. It survived that test because by then an institutional awareness had been internalized by a community of teachers and students through a long process of introspection.

The dust had barely settled down when I joined NID. My involvement spanned about 18 years as a member of its Governing Council (GC) from 1981. Although it wasn't as extensive as my engagements with IIMA, Ahmedabad University or Saptak, NID's unique educational philosophy created a lasting impression on me. The institution's approach was centered around 'learning by doing,' a pedagogical method that went beyond mere academic instruction, blending practical applications with creativity. Recognizing design as an intrinsic discipline applicable across various fields, their pedagogical approach was a more generic form compared to 'project based learning' a term which came into vogue later. Ravi Matthai captured this essence in NID's first convocation address, stating that 'learning by doing' signified 'a leap from analysis to solution, from systematic to creativity, from knowledge to inspiration, and from science to the arts.' His words encapsulated how NID encouraged students to not only acquire knowledge but also to discover their own capabilities and limitations.

At NID, students were deeply immersed in studio work, where real-world projects formed the basis of their education. Communication design and other subjects were also part of NID's curriculum. The focus was always on practical outcomes, where the process of designing and creating products was integral to their learning journey. This hands-on approach not only nurtured creativity but also introduced what we now recognize as 'design thinking'—a concept firmly rooted in NID's pedagogy long before it became a global movement. The process where human sensitivity and craft came together was deeply ingrained. NID's education philosophy reflected the design ethos of 'service, dignity and love' (symbolized by the lota). This realization struck me powerfully while watching the film 'LOTA' and hearing Laurie Baker discuss brick design in his convocation address.

One experience that deeply resonated with me was the film LOTA, inspired by Charles and Ray Eames as a follow up of The India Report, which laid the foundation for NID's establishment. The film and report examined the evolution of design in India, using the humble Lota as

a symbol of functional, timeless design. I had never thought of such everyday objects through the lens of design before. The report and the film were a revelation, showing how objects evolved over millennia to serve specific purposes with elegance and efficiency. The Eameses concluded their report by recommending the establishment of a design institute in India, one that would explore the evolving symbols of Indian life and imbue modern design with traditional values. As they wrote, 'The hope for and the reason for such an institute... is that it will hasten the production of the 'Lotus' of our time.'

Laurie Baker, in his NID convocation address in 1992, made a similar observation about the traditional Indian brick. '....Now this is all part of the design process. Over thousands of years, our ancestors found that there was a perfect size. They found out the amount of mud you could pick up in your hand, the amount that you could pat into a nice little shape, and the amount that could fire and burn right through without cracking. You could catch it; you could handle it. You could use one hand and hold it. You could have your tools in the other hand. You just can't do all this with blocks. This is an example of falling away from the simplicity, purity, and beauty of design that India is well known for.' To that I would add, brick is porous, permeable and 'perishable' and environment friendly. It disintegrates. It is created from earth and returns to earth. This reflection stayed with me, reinforcing the idea that good design is as much about preserving tradition as it is about innovation.

Beyond theoretical underpinnings, students tackled design problems through projects, blending problem analysis, ergonomics, aesthetics, technology, and innovation. This hands-on approach ignited students' imagination and fostered deeper engagement while also being innovative and creative.

Ashoke Chatterjee, a former Director of NID, reminded me of the institution's revolutionary pedagogical approach: 'NID's pedagogy of 'learning by doing' was also one of qualifying through service. No exams, no marks, no 'toppers'—yet academic assessment of great rigour, in which success was demonstrated through the quality of service to real-life clients and through apprenticeship to educators who were also practicing designers.' This system defied conventional academic structures but proved immensely effective, with recognition of NID's diploma coming first from the marketplace and the United Nations (UNIDO-ICSID-India 79), not from the Ministry of Education. He added

‘This was an Indian achievement, built on a level of institutional commitment to the design process as a value, and on a stamina for uncertainty that an experiment can demand. Today these can seem beyond belief.’

This exposure to design thinking later proved invaluable when I visited Olin College, MIT, and Stanford while searching for relevant models for engineering education at Ahmedabad University. My discussions with thinkers like Larry Leifer and Ade Mabogunje at Stanford and Rick Miller at Olin further expanded my understanding of the role of design in solving complex challenges. Visits to places like IDEO’s design studios with Ade were eye-openers.

I saw the interface bridging the gap between workplace learning and classroom education. Striking a balance between learning by doing and learning through analysis and observation was paramount – both approaches needed to be blended but were often disjointed in other institutions. Learning by doing required studios, workshops with very best workmen which the NID community celebrated. These skilled craftsmen who came from little or no formal educational qualifications taught the students how to make and making was central. This emphasis on making was also something that CEPT had adopted.

In my discussions with senior faculty a more structured approach to design consulting – ‘service’ - and project execution, covering administrative aspects like project costing, impact assessment and faculty evaluation and development emerged. The need to cultivate a culture that blended informality and creativity with program delivery discipline became clear. It was crucial to comprehend educational entrepreneurship, enabling institutes to achieve self-reliance and insulating them from external influences. I recognized the challenges faced by top management and faculty in pursuing autonomy and realized that understanding constraints and strategizing resource generation were key. This included comprehending the spectrum of resource-raising avenues for both one-time and ongoing expenses, ensuring a well-rounded approach.

Policy Engagement at NID

During that period, NID was dependent on government grants to sustain itself. It was realised that this may overshadow institutional autonomy. The challenge was to achieve financial self-reliance. Every activity would have a beneficiary. Charging cost-based fees would

ensure financial sustainability. It would also bring accountability. But this approach had to be tempered with its ethos of serving under-served sectors and providing wider access. I advocated for educational programs catering to practitioners, emphasizing real-world challenges and the integration of practical experience with academic learning. I worked with senior faculty to develop a structured approach to project execution and consulting work, focusing on administrative aspects like project costing, faculty evaluation, and program impact assessment.

One important initiative was the development of a costing model based on 'cost per faculty day.' This allowed NID to better manage consulting projects and academic programs, moving the institution towards financial autonomy and reducing its dependence on government grants. It also helped evaluate the effectiveness of programs from the perspective of beneficiaries—an approach I later applied at Ahmedabad University. This was not an earth-shaking application but often obscured by academic preoccupations.

Despite these positive developments, my association with NID came to an end in 1999 over a disagreement that touched the very core of the institution's values. A search committee was appointed to select the new Director when Vikas Satwalekar's term was coming to an end. I was a member of that Committee. We unanimously recommended M.P. Ranjan, a senior faculty member, as the first choice. However, some Board members, including the Chairman, objected on the grounds that Ranjan lacked formal qualifications. There is a background story to this. Ranjan was a student at NID. At the time of his final jury presentation, he had a difference with one of the jury members and he walked out of the session. Later NID reached out to him to join as a faculty while he was already helping his father in the family business in Chennai.

I argued that the objection was not relevant for various reasons. M P Ranjan was already a faculty member. The issue of formal qualification which would have been very relevant for a faculty member was never mentioned then. He was also asked by NID to help launch two other institutions, one in NE and the other in Jaipur. Most importantly NID had never considered formal qualifications as a threshold criterion for selection of faculty. I cited the example of Dashrath Patel, the first faculty member who was not even a Matriculate was acknowledged as one of the best in the country. Shrenikbhai and Ashoke Chatterjee the other members of the search committee echoed the same view. This objection went against NID's long-standing tradition of valuing

creativity and 'learning by doing' over formal academic credentials.

I was very upset and could not accept this position which hit at the very heart of NID's education philosophy and ethos. I decided to resign from the Board after nearly 18 years with a heavy heart. Below is the letter I wrote to the Chairman at the time:

25th October 1999

Shri Hasmukh Shah
Chairman NID Governing Council
15 Dhanushiya Society, Sama Road
Baroda-390 008

Dear Hasmukhbhai,

I have been associated with NID for about 18 years since September 1981. Over these years, I have understood its academic ethos, creative stimulus, unique pedagogy, and administrative weaknesses. I have also come to appreciate its culture and processes, questioning some and learning from others.

The discussion at the last meeting of the Governing Council has rankled in my mind a great deal. The fact that some members of the Council have chosen to accord primacy to form over substance troubles me deeply. I expressed my serious reservations on this issue. The twists and turns of various arguments surprised me.

It is necessary that the Governing Council functions harmoniously for the growth and development of NID. I am afraid that harmony cannot be realized when we hold such divergent views on what constitutes its core values and the need to protect them. In this context, I feel my interactions will only create friction and paralyze the decision-making process. A simpler alternative is to resign, and that is the purpose of this letter.

I want to thank you and the other colleagues on the Governing Council for quietly putting up with my conceptual enunciations, occasional irritating references to conventions and values, and sometimes tedious hairsplitting.

I wish NID a bright future and a stellar role in its mission of promoting design awareness and propagation.

May I make one last request? Could you kindly place this letter at the next meeting of the Governing Council so that I may be spared the hazard of being misunderstood?

With kind regards,
Yours sincerely,

Prafull Anubhai

CEPT

My involvement with CEPT (formerly the School of Architecture) spanned more than 15 years as a member of the Governing Body. During this period, I witnessed the institute navigate various phases and challenges. Here, I'll briefly outline its history and background.

Founded in the early 1960s, CEPT was the vision of architects B.V. Doshi, Bernard Kohn, and structural engineer Rasvihari Vakil (fondly known as Rasubhai). Architect B.V. Doshi led the initiative, persuading Kasturbhai Lalbhai, Chairman of the Ahmedabad Education Society (AES), to support it. Originally established as the School of Architecture, the institution later expanded to include technology and planning, becoming the Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology (CEPT). It quickly gained prominence for its informal structure and emphasis on creativity, with Doshi's influence permeating the institution. Students were encouraged to think beyond traditional architectural practices, often working on projects that pushed design boundaries alongside distinguished faculty.

The institution's infancy was conceptualised and shaped by the combined vision of its three founders, who were honoured by alumni as the founders during CEPT's 50th anniversary celebrations in 2012. Doshi served as Director of the School of Architecture from 1962 to 1972 and as Dean of CEPT from 1972 to 1977. After 1977, Doshi was appointed on the Governing Body/Board of Management without an executive role. Hasmukhbhai Patel succeeded Doshi as Director of the School of Architecture (1972-1982) and as Dean of CEPT (1977-1982). Rasubhai Vakil then took over from 1982 and led the institution until his retirement in 2012. Vakil, an outstanding structural engineer known for his gentle and collaborative leadership style, led CEPT with a stable hand. Though he held no formal position after his tenure, Doshi's influence continued through key faculty members who were his protégés.

As Vakil approached retirement, a search committee was formed to identify his successor. The committee selected Bimal Patel, a distinguished architect and a CEPT alumnus. Bimal Patel, despite his thriving architectural practice, was eager to lead his alma mater and bring his own vision to CEPT's future. Doshi had been a father figure to him, yet institutionally Bimal wanted to initiate changes to modernize CEPT and lay the foundation for its long-term development. His priorities included a more structured curriculum with greater student choice, integrated programs across disciplines, and a focus on skill-building—principles inspired by his experiences at Berkeley.

Bimal's approach aimed to bring formal processes, and professionalize its management. This shift in direction, coupled with his distinct leadership style and academic policies, created some tension. The transition was not without conflict, and, for a period, matters took an unpleasant turn. Media reports magnified these differences, creating an impression of discord. I was asked to step in to help clear misunderstandings and lower the temperature. Over the course of about a year, the two leadership styles gradually coalesced, creating an environment for Bimal to introduce more structured and professional management practices.

This experience underscored the challenges inherent in leadership transitions within institutions founded by charismatic figures. I had observed similar transitions with leaders like Vikram Sarabhai and Ravi Mathai, who deliberately distanced themselves from day-to-day operations to allow new leadership to take root. Ravi often spoke of the importance of stepping away as essential to institutional sustainability, recognizing that founders must consciously create space for succession to preserve an institution's legacy while allowing it to evolve. Often the emotional attachment made it hard to practice it.

Addressing Structural and Operational Issues

Another significant challenge at CEPT involved consulting work by faculty members, who often used institutional resources without clear accountability. This blurred the lines between personal practice and institutional responsibility. To address this, we established the CEPT Research and Development Foundation (CRDF), a separate entity dedicated to managing external projects. This division allowed CEPT to focus on its core academic mission while providing greater oversight and transparency for faculty consulting work.

This experience at CEPT underscored the importance of balancing creative freedom with institutional discipline. While CEPT's culture of innovation was essential to its success, it needed a robust administrative framework to prevent ambiguity in resource use and ensure long-term sustainability. The policy framed at IIMA and successfully implemented acted as a guide.

Lessons from NID and CEPT

Both NID and CEPT provided invaluable lessons in institution building. NID's philosophy of 'learning by doing' and its resistance to bureaucratic constraints allowed it to become a beacon of creative freedom. However, this approach necessitated financial and governance autonomy to maintain its independence—a principle I later applied at Ahmedabad University. Being a Govt institution conferred immediate legitimacy and status but also constrained its autonomy. Like in IIMA appointment of top functionaries was in the hands of Govt. unlike in CEPT. IIMA struggled to shake off that shackle; after long years it succeeded only to be constrained again.

CEPT presented a lesson in leadership transition. It also underlined the challenge of establishing a clear separation between personal consulting work and the use of institutional resources. Setting up CRDF was a crucial step in ensuring that faculty could continue consulting without compromising either the institution's academic integrity or resource accountability.

These experiences have shaped my understanding of the principles necessary for successful institution building: balancing creative freedom with financial sustainability, maintaining institutional integrity and autonomy, calibrating leadership transition and fostering a structure that allows for succession and growth. These lessons continue to inform my approach to nurturing and developing institutions across various sectors.