

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.