Case Study

Case Study on Youth Enlightenment Through the Library Movement

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I N F O

A B S T R A C T

This case study is on an organization which is engaged in spreading libraries. The reading habits have fallen down substantially due to rise in e-content. The libraries which were the source of transforming ideas earlier, are all abandoned. Can an organization survive in such a difficult conditions. Should the organization change its strategy? How should an organization try to achieve the objective, which is very difficult to achieve in the present day context. This case study describes the overall working of this social development organization and presents options for its revival. The original case study is written in 2006. The present day situation has been added in this case study and the questions remain the same.

Keywords: e- Content, Library, Social Development, Society, Sustainability

Introduction

This case study was written in 2006, but the situation is still the same. The social development organization Ajit Foundation still works with the same objectives of transforming youth through library movement. The organization has re-started "Chahal Pahal" to connect with the children. The organization continues its dialogue series. The organization has continued its monthly activities including book reviews, career counseling programs, interaction with the authors of the books etc. However, the overall popularity of books has reduced. The ultimate objectives of the foundation are still unmet. It is difficult to invite the youth to the library. The questions remain the same.

The case reads as below:

It is the scene of the annual review meeting of Ajit Foundation Bikaner (Rajasthan, India). (Ajit Foundation is a library movement, which uses libraries as source of ideas, social change, and community centres.) Twice a year, the executive body of Ajit foundation meets to discuss about the progress of the organization. It is chaired by the founder chairperson of the Foundation Prof. V.S. Vyas (an eminent economist and ex- director, IIM Ahmedabad). The meeting is also attended by the associates (the regular employees are called associates), members of advisory body and some special invitees. The agenda of the meeting is to first review the activities of the past one year and then to proceed towards discussion of future direction of the organization. The chairperson invites everyone to speak and share their ideas about the future course of action. Everyone is free to share his opinion about the future of the foundation and make suggestions. First all the ideas are written and then they are discussed in the light of mission and vision of the foundation. The chairperson moderates the discussion by encouraging everyone to speak. The honorary secretary Mr. Virendra Shrimali takes down the notes of the proceedings of the meeting. This time there have been many suggestions regarding the activities of the foundation. Some of the suggestions are as under:[1]

- The foundation should restart children's magazine Chahal Pahal
- More camps should be organized during summer vacations and winter vacations.

Jain TK
J. Adv. Res. Lib. Inform. Sci. 2023; 10(2)

20

It should step up its publication activities There were many questions raised in the meeting. These questions were as under:

Should foundation add / subtract its activities. How should it change / modify / update its present activities – what changes are required?

- How should interest of members of community centre and Mohall libraries be increased considering constant influence of TV /coaching / tuition?
- What should be the focus of the foundation in the next five years?

History and growth

Ajit Foundation is completing 12 years. During these 12 years it has undertaken varied activities. It was set up by Prof. V.S. Vyas and Laxmi Devi Vyas in the memory of their son (Mr. Ajit, who died in a car accident). From the beginning foundation received support from local social workers, eminent writers (there are many eminent writers on the board of the foundation), thinkers, friends and relatives of Prof. Vyas, and activists. The foundation pursued its mission of giving a space to the youth of Bikaner city for developing their attitude, creativity and intellectual faculties through a participative and development-oriented forum.

It started as a community library and a mobile library. A tanga (horse – cart) would move through the narrow and circular lanes of old city in Bikaner with a collection of books. Two volunteers would accompany the tanga and as they would move from one street to another, they would ask people to read and discuss about the books. The tanga would halt at every square (called chowk, which was a part of a Mohalla – a group of houses) where there is some open space in the street (the street is wider at these squares, and generally there is some public place to sit at these squares, sometimes there is a wooden platform called Pata at these squares). As the Tanga stops, a group of children would soon throng around the Tanga and collect books / magazines for reading. The volunteers would start talking to the people of the area (called mohalla) and discuss with them about general issues. As they sit on Pata, they start issuing books and magazines to the children. One of the volunteer is generally a lady, who would move to different homes in the street and talk to the women and girls and encourage them to come out and read the books which are lying on Pata. However, mobile library was discontinued a few years back and instead of this mohalla community centre (mohalla library system was introduced).

Similar practices would also be visible in the community library centre of the foundation where every afternoon (between 3 to 7 PM) children and adults would gather to read books, discuss and do some creative activity. As the time passed, the people who were alienated from libraries and books, started taking interest in books. The community centre has a hall, an underground reading hall, 13000 books, equipments (including some scientific equipments and musical instruments, computers, LCD projector, Video Camera) and three associates to facilitate the working of the community centre. The community library soon turned into a vibrant youth activity centre, which was owned, operated and managed, by the youth of the area. The membership grew manifold and soon the members organized themselves. They would meet every month and formulate action plan for the next month. There is a general hall and a reading cum discussion hall in the community library. Members would spend every day in doing something creative. All the days of the week are assigned some unique activity. For example, they would undertake some literature related activity on Monday, write on current topics on Tuesday, have painting and drawing on Thursday, sing and play instrumental music on Friday, have some games on Saturday and watch some film or do some book reading on Sunday. There would also be a monthly lecture on some topic chosen by some group by

an expert on that topic (members have organized themselves in many voluntary groups – for example – science group). of late, some of these groups are becoming dormant.[2-4]

Dialogue Series

The foundation invites some eminent person at an interval of every three months to speak with the people of the city (this is called Samvad – dialogue). The speaker is identified by the chairperson and members of advisory body. The speaker must have credibility in some sphere of activity, and must have led his life by authenticity and values. The speaker would choose some topic of relevance for common persons and would discuss the topic with the people. On that occasion, about 100 persons from different backgrounds and professions would gather in the community centre hall and participate in the dialogue. The invited speaker would also deliver some guest lecture in some local college / institution. The dialogue series has created a unique identity for the foundation in the city and people across the city eagerly wait for the dialogues.

Publications

The initial group of members (beficiaries and the associates) at foundation started an open handwritten newsletter called Chahal Pahal (which means hussle-bussle full of fun). They used to compile their creativity and put it in the form of a newsletter. This newsletter used to contain poems, stories, paintings etc. the contributors to this newsletter would be from the age range of 5 to 25. They soon started sending it to other institutions and organizations also. There was a very positive response to the newsletter as people described it as a very innovative newsletter. However, as the foundation went for registration of the

21

Jain TK
J. Adv. Res. Lib. Inform. Sci. 2023; 10(2)

name of the newsletter, it was not approved. Instead, an alternative name – Vikalp was approved. Thus Chahal Pahal converted into Vikalp. As the name changed, the contents also changed. Vikalp (it has 16 pages, annual subscription is Rs. 100), has greater contribution from learned and established writers. The initial group of members of the foundation, who had joined 12 years back, had also grown matured and they continue to contribute to the Vikalp. However, most of them have settled down in jobs or in professional / higher education and have now little time to actively participate in the daily activities of the foundation.

Foundation also encouraged people to take research studies on Bikaner, its culture and practices. Based on this foundation had come out with a publication also. Once it organized a massive campaign for voters' awareness and achieved significant increase in voter turnout in the elections. During ward elections, it collected and published complete details regarding election agenda, past back ground and future action plans of all the contests. It also published a book on development of Bikaner (Edited by Prof. V.S. Vyas), which is based on a seminar organized by the Foundation. It organized many activities for intellectual development in Bikaner city. The foundation had also come out with a software on water resource management (developed by Dr. Vikram Vyas, son of Prof. V.S. Vyas) which was demanded by NGOs from different parts of the world.[5]

Organization Culture and Values

The mission, vision, culture, and values of the foundation are guided by the visionary leadership of the chairperson Prof. V.S. Vyas and his wife Mrs. Laxmi Vyas. There is individual freedom for every associate to formulate and implement plans. Innovations and creativity are encouraged at every step. Authenticity, transparency, accountability, and proactiveness are encouraged in the organization.

A few students of MBA (these were carried out in 1998, 2004, and in 2005) arried out studies on foundation. They found high public image about foundation.

People described foundation as a centre of value creation, an innovative centre, an intellectual body and other similar terms. People appreciated programmes of the foundation and there was a high recall of the dialogue series lectures and other programmes of the foundation (including election campaign).

Mohalla Libraries

Ajit Foundation wants to replicate its community centre in other mohallas in the city. It wants to transfer its model in other mohallas also. Where-ever its mobile library used to go; it has promoted setting up of library cum community centres. These libraries (presently 12 libraries) are working similar to Ajit Foundation. These libraries are managed and maintained by the mohalla community (foundation provides

guidance). Initially foundation provides training, constant support, books, other materials and some financial support (for running expenditure). Later these community libraries are completely owned by the mohalla. Majority of these community library centres are located in areas of poor socio-economic status. The setting up of these community centre and mohalla libraries have had profound change on the life in those mohallas. While girls rarely came out of the home earlier, now they organize themselves and run many programmes. Like the community centre, there is a democratic structure in management of these libraries. Members form their groups, and plan and undertake all their activities.[6]

Impact

For the outsiders, it is a matter of surprise to find the impact of Ajit Foundation with such a small budget and such a small manpower (it has only six full time associates). The community centre and mohalla libraries are located in lower and middle socio- economic region. A large number of members of Ajit foundation have achieved success in their personal and professional life. They attribute their success to the participative development process of the Foundation. Many girls, who couldn't utter a single sentence in public meetings, today organize and coordinate social programmes at the foundation. Many members achieved distinctions in their academic and co-curricular activities. A few of them got gold medals / merit positions at state / district level. A few of them have emerged as writers, painters, dramatists, singers. They feel that foundation has provided them a space to actualize their potential and a platform for self development. Media also gives adequate attention to the activities of the foundation. There have been many national and regional telecast and articles / reports on foundation and its activities (Table 1).

Table 1.Financial Statements for the year ended March 31, 2005 (amount in Rs.)

Receipts	Amount	Payment	Amount
Opening bank balance	129593	A. Recurring expenses	
Grant received from SDTT	500000	Pay and Allowances	199789
Donation received during theyr.	193801	Traveling expenses	48162
Vikalp Advertisement	34955	Docume-ntation expenses	44507
Vikalp Membership fee	19871	Telephone Expenses	30014
Interest income	18489	Workshop / seminar	43090

Jain TK
J. Adv. Res. Lib. Inform. Sci. 2023; 10(2)

22

Life membership fee	4300	Maintenance expenses	25027
UTI Dividend	2802	Contingence Expenses	29603
Membership fee	1965	Mohalla Libraries	24648
Other income	610	Printing and Stationary	14806
-	-	Vikalp Expenditure	9865
-	-	Electricity and Water Expenses	4815
-	-	Total (A)	474326
-	-	B. Non-Recurring Expenses	
-	-	Furniture and Equipment Purchased	15520
-	-	Computer and Equipment	9700
-	-	Books and Journals	65172
-	-	Total (B)	90392
-	-	C. Investment, Bank Balance	
-	-	Investment	250000
-	-	Closing Bank Balances	91668
-	-	Total (c)	341668
Grand Total	906386	Grand Total (A+B+C)	906386

(Data Source: Annual Report of Ajit Foundation 2004-05)

Ajit Foundation
EXHIBIT : BIKANER

Figure.1 Bikaner city Map

Bikaner was established in 1488 by Prince Bika from Jodhpur. The old city is surrounded by four walls (fig 1). The new city developed towards north – east direction of the old city. The old city is divided in various mohallas (which are generally named after castes – although people from other castes also live there). There are wooden platforms (of the size of about 9 square meter). Traditionally people would gather on these platforms (called Pata) and discuss all types of matters. There would also be small mohalla community centre in mohallas – where people would discuss some serious issue. All these have been in existence for a long time. Even before 1947, there were many libraries in these mohallas. These were developed by individuals or groups of persons from mohallas. These libraries had good collection considering that time. Some of these libraries, (for example Agarchand Nahata's Library) had national reputation and attracted scholars from different parts of the country (some from out of country also). Bikaner was called Choti – Kashi (small Kashi – Kashi was a holy place in North India and it was considered to be a place were scholars thrived). Tradition of libraries and discussions created many writers and thinkers from this place (although it was located in a remote place). The education structure was still in its primitive stage and there were many marjas (traditional teachers, who used to teach at their home, they were called Marja). There were many scholars, who would read books and discuss abstract issues on Pata in vernacular language. It was due to strong

emphasis on learning and discussions that Bikaner has witnessed a very high level of communal harmony and constructive collaboration over last 5 centuries (there have been no riot in this city). The city had many Muslims who were experts in Hindu (or Jain) philosophy and many vice versa. Although, the city had one of the most progressive and benevolent rulers, yet the people participated in freedom struggle and contributed to our freedom movement. Bikaner was the fist princely state to join Independent India. However, after independence, the libraries started loosing attraction. Scholarly discussions disappeared. After the arrival of TV, most of the libraries were virtually defunct. Some of these old libraries closed and others were about to close. Although the city inherited a very strong system of values, yet it had culture, traditions and taboos (like caste) similar to any other traditional city of the time. Girls were not encouraged to come forward in social and intellectual fields. While the new city (which developed towards north-east direction of the old city) had more cosmopolitan look and had modern facilities and a few institutions, the old city and nearby areas continued to languish. The old rich culture of discussions practically disappeared and there were signs of resentment and frustration among the youth. It was in this environment that Ajit Foundation started.. The focus of Ajit Foundation has been the old city, and near

23

Jain TK
J. Adv. Res. Lib. Inform. Sci. 2023; 10(2)
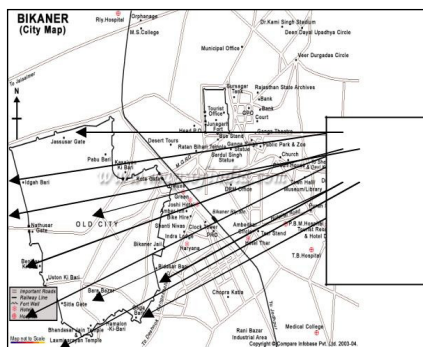
the old city (out of four walls)– where people from poor socio- economic environment lived. In fact it also faced opposition from some people initially. Now people welcome it and in fact some defunct libraries/ community centres have been revived by initiatives from the Ajit Foundation.

(Case was written on 15 -1-2006)

Discussion points for case teachers:

First reading of this case prompts us to think about alternatives like the below:

1. restarting the magazine – chahal pahal
2. promoting innovations in the organization
3. using internet and other tools for promoting students to come to the library and organize their activities
4. organizing more student related camps.

However, it is important to remember that voluntary organizations pass through different stages in their life as they grow and mature. It also depends on the direction that they are pursuing. We have to study the status of the voluntary organization and identify its direction in terms of its purpose and fundamental objectives. We also have to look at the competency in the voluntary organization for achieving those objectives and on the values and cultural context of the organization.

Voluntary organization's first stage is the stage where some social need has been identified and some beneficiaries have been identified. The organization faces some resistances in the beginning and relies primarily on the founder / a very close group. As the organization grows, it takes the direction charity based / funding based organization to self reliant organization. The path to self reliance may be different in different organization. In this transition the organization looses its original shape and adds some additional activities or remove some activities. There is an increasing emphasis on knowledge building, capturing the processes through documentation and sharing of the practices. Expansion and growth is very important for any organization – but it is more important to see that the basic purpose is achieved. If the basic purpose is fulfilled the organization may have to recoil or reduce its activities or change its purpose.

Let us look at Ajit Foundation in the continuum of the above framework. Where is Ajit Foundation in the above framework?

Chahal Pahal or youth camps are important, but they are not the main stakes of Ajit foundation. Ajit Foundation should identify its most critical success in achieving its objectives so far and try to document those success. The knowledge base so acquired will enable the foundation to enable other libraries (mohalla libraries) to replicate the success of the foundation. The foundation has partly achieved its objectives. Its future does not depend on restarting Chahal Pahal or in increasing number of student camps, but in transferring its knowledge base and expertise that it has acquired to other mohalla libraries. It should re-look at the youth processes and should increasing play a catalytic role in skill building of the youth – which have already reached a stage of development.

It would be a mistake to evaluate an organization in terms of its past activities or to see it in reference of only its past success. With the change in size, context and perceptions of people, the organization also changes and it has to change. The solution does not lie in any of the alternative listed above. Ajit Foundation should not think about diversification or expansion or restarting old activities (which have been discontinued). It should identify and document its successes and should identify the next activities for itself on the basis of combination of vacuum and potential in the context and its capability.

Following could be some of the action plan that the foundation may opt for:

1. Involving the first group of beneficiaries in sharing foundation's competency with other mohalla libraries
2. The foundation should identify the areas where there is maximum discontent among the beneficiaries and try to put its skills in changing people there so that people can have similar attitude and skills.
3. constant skill building for the beneficiaries who have already benefited from the foundation
4. publication and magazine related activities should continue, but the important point is to involve beneficiaries in these and to launch new publications / documents which can enable the foundation to become self-sustaining in some of its activities.
5. The foundation should identify the areas where technology can enable it achive its mission better
6. The magazine should be brought out in multi-languages - so that it becomes viable option and also gives adequate publicity to the activities of the foundation. It should be made such that its subscribe base increases from the present 200 (approx.) to a considerable number. It should also bring out the same magazine on internet also. It should document and publish its achievements through its own publication.

Teaching Notes

Teaching Objective

To use this case study for any of the following purposes:

1. as a case study to represent transition of a voluntary organization.
2. as a case study for business policy subject – to identify business policy.
3. as a case of social entrepreneurship and identify

Jain TK
J. Adv. Res. Lib. Inform. Sci. 2023; 10(2)

24

decision points and take decisions.

4. as a case of social marketing.

Possible scenarios during class discussions – where the instructor may intervene:

1. Participants may polarize themselves towards two dimensions - making it a charity based organization or starting commercial activities like coaching etc.

2. Participants may be unable to move forward and continue to see the old activities as the real foundation and may ask to restart the old activities - the participants may be suggested to think out of box.

Results

Despite the challenges posed by the decline in reading habits and the increasing popularity of e-content, Ajit Foundation has persevered in its mission to transform youth through the library movement. The organization's efforts to connect with children through the revival of "Chahal Pahal" and the continuation of various activities, including book reviews, career counseling programs, and interactions with authors, highlight its commitment to engaging the youth.

However, the overall popularity of books has continued to decline, making it challenging to attract the youth to the library. The annual review meeting raised several critical questions and suggestions for the organization's future course of action.[7-10]

Conclusion

The journey of Ajit Foundation, spanning over 12 years, reflects a commendable effort to sustain a library movement in the face of evolving challenges in reading habits and the increasing dominance of e-content. The organization's commitment to its mission of transforming youth through libraries remains unwavering, as evidenced by the revival of "Chahal Pahal," continued dialogue series, and various monthly activities.

However, the prevailing decline in the overall popularity of books poses a significant challenge, making it difficult to attract the youth to traditional libraries. The suggestions raised during the annual review meeting, such as restarting the children's magazine Chahal Pahal, organizing more camps, and stepping up publication activities, underscore the need for adaptive strategies to reconnect with the community.

The historical growth of Ajit Foundation, from a mobile library on a tanga to a vibrant community center, demonstrates its resilience and innovative spirit. The shift to a mohalla community center indicates a willingness to adapt to changing circumstances. Yet, the challenge remains in maintaining the momentum and enthusiasm among the members, as some voluntary groups show signs of dormancy.

The dialogue series, a unique initiative bringing eminent personalities to engage with the community, has carved a distinctive identity for the foundation. This series not only fosters intellectual discourse but also creates anticipation and eagerness among the residents of Bikaner.

In contemplating the future, the foundation faces critical questions regarding the modification and update of its present activities, attracting members amidst the constant influence of TV, coaching, and tuition, and defining its focus for the next five years. The need for strategic adjustments, technological integration, and community engagement is evident.

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