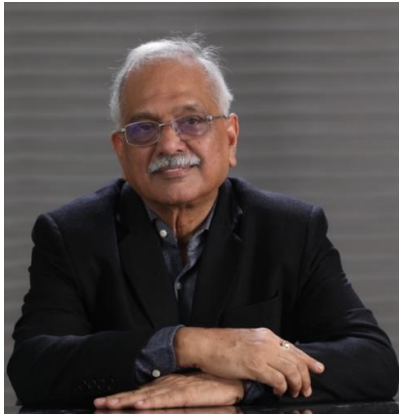


## MY SESSIONS AS CASE PROTAGONIST AT IIMA



**By Madan Mohanka (Chairman, Tega Industries Ltd; IIMA- PGP Batch of 1967)**

The Case method of teaching has been the cornerstone of IIMA's pedagogy since the 1960s. I feel humbled and privileged that over the course of the last forty years, several instructors have written and taught case studies based on different challenging situations confronted by Tega Industries, a company that I had founded after graduating from IIMA. In most of these cases I have been at the center of a complex real- life situation as the case protagonist. I feel elated when I see students in IIMA classrooms step into my shoes as CEO of Tega Industries and learn to make difficult decisions with limited information and improve their leadership skills. It also pleases me that through these cases, some of my experiences, know-how and even failings get documented and these are available for the IIMA community to learn from. It is my way of giving back something to the institution that has taught me so much in life.

Recently, Prof. Chitra Singla, Associate Professor at IIMA and Dr. Bulbul Singh- an FDP alumnus of the institute had written a case titled, 'Tega Industries: Journey of an Indian MNC'. This case was taught at the AGMP, Strategic Management (D2D) and PGP-II courses of IIMA. I was invited for a 30-minute talk as a guest speaker to these live classroom sessions. The aim was to provide insights into the decision-making processes related to my company's internationalization strategy. I am happy to share with the readers that these sessions received an excellent response from the participants. This case offered great learning value to many budding entrepreneurs

and practicing professionals at early, middle and even senior managerial levels.

I have been overwhelmed by the deluge of messages that have been pouring in since these classes were conducted. Out of the 180+ messages received, in all humility, I wish to share a few selected responses:

*Professor Rabikar Chatterjee from University of Pittsburgh and an IIMA Gold Medalist remarked, "This feedback is truly amazing! Actually, it does not surprise me at all that this case received such high praise and appreciation. The underlying story is a remarkable lesson on various dimensions that few, if any business cases capture. When you were there in person to bring all of it to life, it would have been a very special experience for all attendees."*

*"This by far was the most exciting and life changing learning experience for me. Analyzing the case and learning about the dilemma related to each situation from the entrepreneur himself was the best thing that could have happened to me as a student. The protagonist's risk-taking appetite, his dedication to his company, his passion for doing what he does has got me thinking about my own entrepreneurial dreams and how to pursue them." - PGP II student*

*"Today's discussion with Mr. Madan was truly inspiring. It will surely be one of the most cherished sessions I have had in my entire two years at IIMA." - PGP II student*

*"I have no words to express as to how motivated I feel today after listening to MM and seeing his 'Never Give Up' attitude. Having the experience of working in the corporate world and then plunging to start my own company, I could revisit the mistakes which I made in the initial years of my entrepreneurial journey."- AGMP-07 participant*

*"Sir, it was a pleasure learning from you. When you discussed your struggles, we were with you in emotion and we connected with you. This impact would last for a lifetime. When you mentioned that failing is okay, in fact good, we remembered all our managers who advised*

otherwise, Sir we were moved... What we learnt from you in those thirty minutes is something we haven't learnt in our entire careers." – AGMP-07 participant

"Today's class was a full paisa-vasool class...really enjoyed today's session and that's really what I wanted from this course." – Strategic Management (D2D) participant.

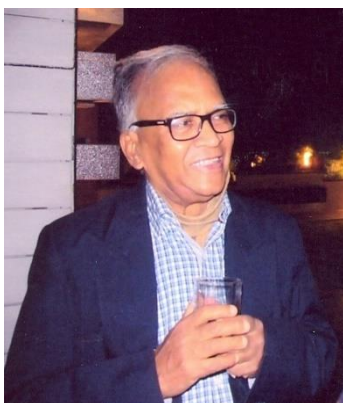
*"Case studies of people who have built organizations over 25 or 30 years need to be developed and used. Presence of protagonist in class while teaching the case can enrich learning significantly."*

I shared the above feedback with a few of my dear colleagues from the academic world.



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**Professor Jahar Saha, former Director of IIMA,** commented that this case - "dealt with all aspects of a corporate entity, namely; strategy,

structure, system, staff, skill, style and shared value."

I began to introspect on what it was about this case study, that evoked such phenomenal responses. I have penned down a few learnings which are as follows:

*"I found students tended to jump to conclusions without sufficient diagnosis of the problem. So when I stepped in the class, I made the students see the situation from my lens. Teaching-learning methodology must inculcate the need for a structured diagnosis as an approach to problem solving."*

### **Case Protagonist in the Classroom Make Discussions Livelier**

I believe case teaching is not just a science, but also an art. Instructors typically follow a particular structure and metric while conducting case discussions, but there is a need to sometimes go beyond these prescribed structures to really make teaching impactful. I believe that whenever possible, the protagonist of the case should be invited to scale up the discussion. When business leaders share their perspective, wisdom and know-how, which they have accumulated through years of practice, it makes a huge difference in students' learning.

I remember as a student at IIMA, some of our instructors really pushed us against the wall and perpetually challenged our decisions with strong counter-arguments. My favourite classes would be the ones where I would change my mind during the course of the debate. We followed the same principle in class while doing the case on 'Tega Industries: Journey of an Indian MNC'. The instructor started the discussion by taking a class poll, "Should MM close down the Chilean operations or not?" Invariably, in all the classes about 60% of the students would say "Yes, shutting down the Chilean operations would be the wise choice".

The instructor would then create a platform to debate, explore and learn concepts that the participants could apply to the case situation. I observed that the students tended to jump to

conclusions and were eager to recommend solutions without adequate diagnosis and understanding of the issue at hand. So, when I stepped into the discussions in the last 30 minutes, I made these students see the situation through my lens. I contradicted the views recommending shutting down operations and presented my logical counter-arguments on why I chose to revive the Chilean business. Then I went on to further stun the attendees by sharing with them that I was going to infuse more capital into the Chilean operations and scale up the business there! I believe, the real purpose of case discussion is served only when the participants' managerial and problem-solving skills are challenged, and their critical and creative thinking skills are prodded a bit. That is when they start delving deeper and learn more.

*“In real life business environment, problems rarely impact only one discipline to the exclusion of others. But sometimes a fresh MBA thinks in silos. Writing cases that integrate across organizational boundaries is a dire need. It is also important to write more contemporary case studies on Indian firms and sensitise students to new market realities.”*

To create even more impact, I stirred up their emotions by talking about my family's hardships, infused with instances that affected the participants' own sentiments. Many of them connected with the emotions instantly as it resonated with their own personal struggles in life. It made them debate internally, *“Now, should I respond to the case situation intellectually or emotionally?”* When their curiosity was heightened, I shared with the participants the consequences of each decision. Through structured diagnosis, I challenged the decisions of students, this made them alter their original positions, and that's how we paved the way for better engagement and learning.

#### **Develop Richer India-Specific Content**

It is important to develop rich content based on the unique experiences of Indian companies to sensitise students to the fast changing set of market realities and managerial challenges. The

idea is to give a real-life scenario to participants who will face these situations as they expand their businesses and fight international competition. A PGP participant revealed, *“The case on Tega made me understand that business strategies cannot be generalized, the playing field is just not even. Compared to challenges faced by foreign MNCs, the problems that Tega had to deal with were far more complex. Simply doing cases on large MNCs does not give you the whole picture.”* I feel that such curiosity in a learner must be sated through richer content coming from Indian firms.

*“The real business world is dynamic and demanding. It requires courage and real strength of character. Create a conscious ability in students to learn from mistakes. Bring some focus on value education.”*

#### **Develop Content that Integrates Across Organizational Boundaries**

I think, the process of excellent case teaching starts with the case writing itself. Generally, in a case, an occurrence in one functional division is written and learning objectives which are attached to the phenomenon are framed by writers. The case on *‘Tega Industries: Journey of an Indian MNC’* went beyond the prescribed metrics and presented the full scale of problems as I had confronted in reality. It had bundled together HR and OB issues, legal issues, marketing problems, accounting issues, financial constraints, operational and logistical challenges, M&A and due diligence issues. A huge crises had befallen me and this one case fully captured my concerns. Business decisions in the real world are never made in a unidimensional manner. Therefore, it is important to write content that integrates different functional areas and presents the full scale of challenges that business leaders would have faced in reality. I feel that this slight change in case writing approach will prepare students better to face complex market realities.

#### **Develop Capability of Learning from Failures and Bad Decisions**

I feel students really enjoy sessions when business leaders share their stories on how they *‘made it big’*. What students appreciate even

more is when leaders talk about their failings, setbacks, miscalculations, and how they revived their business after making mistakes. Tega's internationalization journey talked about a series of setbacks, and it took a lot of courage to execute a revival plan in Chile. Turnarounds are never easy for owners of a business to implement, but they make interesting reading for learners of a subject. Like in life, in business too, one learns more from failures than from successes.

It is very important to create a conscious ability in students to learn from mistakes. After the session, a young Bengaluru based educational consultant shared that the lecture was totally contradictory to what she had been told all her life. In fact, she was so inundated with emotions that her eyes had welled up with tears during the session. Later in the evening she posted this reflective note on her LinkedIn page, *“Since childhood we have always been taught that failure is bad and that we should not make mistakes. Instead of learning from our own mistakes, we are prodded to learn from someone else's mistakes. But today after the lecture, my faith in human resilience has become stronger, thanks to Madan Sir and his experiences. I learnt that one should never doubt oneself, work hard, build intrinsic knowledge, stay strong, make mistakes and learn from them. Every crisis brings opportunities and most importantly there might be ups and downs but we must stand tall and always keep moving forward.”* Personally, for me, it was really gratifying when students could integrate learnings from the case with their own experiences and career aspirations.

### **Transfer Core IIMA Values**

The aim of IIMA is to create strong leaders who can combat problems, who commit to transforming society and who contribute to sustainable development of the nation. To realise this goal, apart from building intellectual capacities, the institute must also transfer its core values to the participants. The values that my teachers had instilled in me at IIMA, have shaped my personality and character in a great way. It is at this very institute that I learnt to *“never give up”*, *“be passionate about what you do”*, and; *“the safety, honour, welfare of my organization comse before anything else in life”*. When I was sharing my business insights with the students, I also shared some of these

institutional values with them. I feel these are equally important for building entrepreneurial flair and chiseling leadership skills.

These are some honest reflections from my recent sessions at IIMA. I hope that my sessions will serve as a guide to the students in their personal journeys towards success, and will also help the beloved professors at this institution to touch and inspire even more lives with every class they conduct.

