

“Learnings from the Vande Bharat CEO Mr Sudhanshu Mani”



Weekly Learnings 22 / 2024

I had the honour of sharing the stage with Mr Sudhanshu Mani, the ex ICF General Manager who led the Vande Bharat team and made it a reality. These are my Learnings on the Vande Bharat product and idea/ implementation from Mr Sudhanshu.

1. The Prime Minister challenged the Railways to develop 75 new age Vande Bharat trains. Mr Sudhanshu and his team took on the challenge and delivered ahead of schedule by Feb 2019.
2. ICF delivered, 82 are in operation. initial indigenisation was about 80 pc, today it's closer to 90 pc plus.
3. ICF is a Rs 10000 crores company employing about 12000 people. For most of its existence, ICF did and repeated what they did for years. They conceptualized the design, aesthetics and quality from scratch for Vande Bharat.
4. The Railways board dithered for 5 to 6 months in approving the project since they were unsure of its viability and success. Mr Sudhanshu stuck his neck out and got approval from the Railway board. Each 18 bogey Vande Bharat costs about 98 crs to make to start with and now it's about Rs 110 crores. The Executive Class bogey has 52 seats and the Chair Car has 78 seats.
5. The propulsion system for the train is developed by Medha Servo Drives Hyderabad who is a Top 6 company globally in this area and have invested significantly in R & D.
6. The only two products which are imported for Vande Bharat are the brake discs and seats which come from Spain.
7. Mr Sudhanshu feels that each train will break even in 10 to 12 years' time with current pricing and at 4 pc maintenance costs. Current capacity utilisation is about 65 pc and Kerala is 180 pc because each leg of the journey is counted as 1. He also feels that the sweet spot for Vande Bharat is a 3-to-4-hour travel, beyond that consumers might prefer a flight. An 8-bogey train has better utilisation than a 16 bogey train.

8. He empowered the women in ICF who were being used as assistants by men by giving them full roles. They did better than men when empowered.

9. Mr Sudhanshu mentioned that he never dreamt that this would happen to him, he realised his big dream in his last stint with the Railways as GM - ICF.

10. His best line - Give trust a chance.

Mr Sudhanshu is a great Shakespeare and Ghalib fan and quotes them eloquently in his speeches. He has written a book on Vande Bharat Train no 18 !!

It was inspiring to meet him and hear his story. I humbly realised what a significant country impact he has made compared to people like me who have been MNC CEO s. Vande Bharat is the best testimony of the Make in India strategy.

Great lessons from the wonderful Vande Bharat CEO.

Attached pictures from the Ghaziabad Annual Management Conference whose theme was India@100.

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