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SUPRAKASH DAS

Director Finance & Operations
(Chief Financial Officer)

TCG CREST

STORY OF THE MONTH

**LIGHT BEYOND
THE LAMP**

The Inspiring Journey of
Child Scientist Pooja Pal

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Driving Impact Beyond the Balance Sheet

SUPRAKASH DAS

Director Finance & Operations (Chief Financial Officer),
TCG CREST

"Finance is not just about numbers. It's about driving transformation and aligning innovation with purpose."

These are not the words you generally hear from a Chief Financial Officer. But for Suprakash Das, Director of Finance & Operations and CFO at TCG CREST, this belief is not just a guiding principle but a lived reality.

Suprakash's approach has been shaped by years of learning in classrooms, across industries, and through cross-industry experience. His educational journey spans Calcutta University, a CMA qualification, an MBA from Liverpool Business School, a Doctorate in Business Administration from Paris, and executive leadership training through the Chief Financial Officer Programme at the Indian School of Business. This global and interdisciplinary foundation informs his ability to lead with precision and vision in today's complex financial landscape. His professional trajectory reflects a breadth of experience and strategic evolution. He began his career at the West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation, laying the foundation for a deep understanding of public-sector finance and

development. Over the years, he honed his financial and operational acumen across a diverse portfolio of esteemed organisations, including Berger Paints, Mackintosh Burn, and Usha Martin Technologies.

Today, he drives the financial and operational strategy for TCG Digital and TCG CREST, while serving on the boards of multiple companies within the TCG Group. His contributions have been widely recognised through accolades such as 'CFO of the Year', 'Star of the Industry', 'Exemplary Leader', 'The Sustainable Excellence Award – Certificate of Honour', 'Outstanding Dedication & Excellence in Finance', and the 'Innovation in Finance & Operations Award'. Each honour is a testament to a career of foresight, impact, and continuous excellence.

In this exclusive conversation, Suprakash shares candid insights on leadership, innovation, and the evolving role of finance, offering a grounded perspective shaped by years of navigating complex business landscapes and a forward-looking vision for driving progress in a world that demands agility and purpose.

Q TCG CREST bridges academia, industry, and government. How are you helping shape its leadership narrative?

At TCG CREST, we aspire to become one of the world's leading research institutes—a place that



truly unleashes untapped human potential. Our vision revolves around four pillars: **Knowledge Creation, Knowledge Application, Knowledge Dissemination, and Knowledge Exchange.**

Today, we operate across six verticals: **Institute for Advancing Intelligence (IAI)**; a **Centre for Quantum Engineering, Research and Education (CQuERE)**; **CHINTA** — the **Centre for High Impact Neuroscience and Translational Applications**; **CARE** — our **Cancer-related Advanced Research and Education**; **FTSI** — the **Food Technology and Science Institute**; and **RISE** — the **Research Institute for Sustainable Energy**. We have also received approval to set up a Deemed-to-be University under a distinct category.

When you operate at the convergence of science, policy, and enterprise, you stop seeing boundaries and start seeing bridges. I've learned to think in systems, speak in values, and act

with agility. Over time, this has shaped me into a translator of ambitions—and that's where true transformation begins.

Q As you coordinate between investors, scientists, and policymakers, what is the biggest challenge, and how do you address it?

"Scientists are driven by discovery, not numbers. Policymakers follow complex regulations. Bridging these worlds is the most challenging and most rewarding part of my role." Purpose is powerful, but purpose without structure can collapse under its own weight. At TCG CREST, financial strategy is not a constraint but an enabler of impact. We follow goal-based budgeting so that resources align with outcomes, not legacy commitments. Metrics like EVA, R&D ROI, and technology

readiness guide us, but they are compasses, not chains. Discipline grounds the vision; the vision disciplines humans. That's how we work at TCG CREST.

Q How do you act in times of uncertainty and make strategies that turn complexities into clarity?

I follow a simple but effective approach: deconstruct, prioritise, and co-create. I firmly believe that uncertainty is not a signal to freeze but a clue to focus. Whether navigating policy delays or funding gaps, I first reduce the issue to its first principles, then involve the right stakeholders to co-create actionable paths.

When the world stopped during COVID-19, we prioritised agility over perfection. At TCG Digital, we re-aligned cost structures and doubled down on core capabilities, achieving one of our strongest bottom-line years. Simultaneously, at TCG CREST, we built three large labs, bringing brilliant minds together to turn uncertainty into opportunity. That's the mindset I always lead with.

Q You often say that finance is a tool to inspire change. Can you share an example of how your financial decision sparked innovation?

One of our most impactful moves was redefining how we allocate research funding. Instead of purely academic outputs, we introduced incentives for translational outcomes. This shift moved us from a publication-centric model to an impact-driven culture.

We consciously asked: how many of our publications are helping society, not just adding to academic metrics? As a result, teams began collaborating across disciplines, startup ideas emerged, industry partnerships deepened and finance became a directional signal, not just a report card.

In legacy research, where knowledge often abounds but breakthroughs stall, finance must stop being the scorekeeper and become the catalyst. We adopted a VC mindset — using tools like internal seed funds, lab-to-market fellowships, and ROI-driven startup incubation.

Simply put: when finance funds not just discovery but delivery, innovation stops being an exception; it becomes the norm.

Q As India transforms into a global knowledge hub, how can CFOs evolve from gatekeepers to architects of progress?

I saw a McKinsey report recently stating that **75% of CFOs' time is now spent on non-financial priorities**. That statistic alone shows how much the role has shifted.

In today's economy, CFOs must be architects of value, not just accountants of cost. In my current and past organisations, we evaluate investments for financial viability and strategic potential. We back bold ideas, fund early-stage innovations, and help de-risk moonshot projects. *CFOs are becoming the co-founders of the future, and that's the evolution we must embrace.*

Q What was an instance that gave you the biggest learning in life?

In 2020, I faced a life-altering health crisis—brain haemorrhage, septicaemia, organ failure, and partial paralysis. It was a complete system shutdown. I often say those were the best days of my life, because they taught me not just resilience, but surrender — the humility to start again.

I always say, *"Disrupt before you get disrupted."* Doctors told me I wouldn't walk or drive again, but I pushed those limits—walking to work, driving to Kalimpong, and



even riding solo through Ladakh. *It taught me that when faced with any problem, our strongest tool is our mind.*

Q What has been one of your most emotional decisions as a finance leader, and how did it impact you on a human level?

Numbers may demand efficiency, but people demand empathy. One of my most emotional decisions came during a major restructuring. Instead of opting for layoffs, we invested in reskilling and cross-skilling.

I was amazed to see those same team members later contribute to a significant rise in delivery metrics and engagement. It revealed a new human side of the organisation. For me, human capital is the most important asset. I always remind my team that learning and development should go beyond work and enrich personal growth.

Q You've played the role of mentor, strategist, and transformer. Which has been the most challenging — and why?

I believe a mentor is naturally a strategist. We enjoy making great decisions in the boardroom. But being a transformer is more challenging.

"Transformation demands confronting systems that feel safe, habits that feel familiar, and ideas that won't work. As I often say, you will get disrupted if you don't disrupt on time."

Leading transformation is like walking a tightrope between legacy and leap. But that's also where leadership feels most alive.

Q Please share one failure that taught you something bigger than success ever could.

I believe that everyone should work for a struggling firm at least once because that's where you learn how to create value, not just preserve it. It shifts your mindset. You stop asking what we sell and start asking what we are truly solving.

Failure is the best mirror which reveals ego, exposes blind spots, and humbles assumptions. When a company struggles,



strategy alone won't save it. The mission, vision and people you hold become critical.

Q What advice do you have for emerging leaders?

Pursue excellence with ambition, but let your moral compass remain unwavering. In a world of disruption, Ethical Leadership is the one constant that builds trust, credibility and lasting impact.

Q If you could make one bold prediction or take one high-stakes bet about your industry or business for 2030, what would it be?

By 2030, the boldest breakthroughs in quantum, AI, and clean energy will not come from corporate giants. They will come from fearless, mission-led research hubs that challenge the status quo. I am placing my faith in radical science and alternative capital that backs what the market cannot yet imagine. But with such transformative potential comes profound responsibility. Unregulated tech innovation without ethical frameworks or governance could outpace our ability to steward it wisely. We need visionary science, but also brave and forward-looking models of responsibility to guide it. The future belongs to those who dare to invent it and have the wisdom to steward it. ♦