

A CASE STUDY ON UNETHICAL TEAM LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

The case study is on an organizational situation which narrates about a newly joined employee's ordeal with his team leader. The new joiner's contribution was unjustly taken away by his team leader as his credit. The employee was afraid to discuss this issue with his team leader due to his positional power in the organization. He also does not want to escalate the issue to senior project manager due to a fear of reprisal. The case study can be used to discuss in organizational behavior sessions for post graduates and undergraduates to provide insight on the leadership style, positional power, organizational ethics and procedural justice.

INTRODUCTION

Shirish was surprised to find out when his name was not mentioned in the final draft of the learning material project. He took meticulous effort to complete the draft and was expecting appreciation from the client as well as from the project manager. He was proud that he had authored and submitted his first full-fledged training material. When he received the final version, to his shock, he could find his team leader, Gautam's, name was mentioned in the author's field. He knew that this will have an impact over his performance review for the current quarters. He wanted to discuss this issue with Gautam; but was also worried whether this may lead to conflicting situation. As he had just started his career, confrontations with his team leader may negatively influence his growth. He went back to his workplace with a consolation that it is not always possible to get justice. He understood that human interventions can crisscross the systems in organizations.

ABOUT THE COMPANY

Velesa technologies was a start-up business process outsourcing firm in Bangalore, India. Its

major sources of business were publishing houses and website designing companies. It does transcribing, editing, proofing, and designing of learning and training materials. There were 70 employees working in the company and were working under nine different teams on various projects. Six team leaders were managing various project teams and reported to two project managers who were also the proprietor of the company.

ABOUT THE JOB

The project involves transcription of spoken as well as written documents into a digital document. In addition to transcription, the documents were edited and proof-read for the client's specification. Later, documents that were comprised of different modules were sent to the clients for the approval. The team member whoever was responsible for the respective work was entitled to mention her/his name as the author of the work. The entitlement helps the client to interact frequently during the final phase of the work. Additionally, entitlement helps in performance review of employees, too. Once client approves, the

modules were arranged and organized as a digital publication.

CLAIMING AUTHORSHIP

Shirish who was in Gautam's team was working on a training module for a North American client. Shirish after completing his under graduation in English and joined Velesa Info Tech. He was working in the firm for past nine months. Current project was his third one and he knew that on successful completion of sixth project, he may be allotted "work-from-home" projects. He aimed to work from home as he was planning to pursue his higher studies. He believed that he could have save time in travelling and also enjoy convenience of flexi-time while he work from home. He had also conveyed his intention to Gautam. Though, Shirish found Gautam's initial signs of resistance; but finally agreed to his idea. Gautam noticed Shirish as a competent and committed person. He had also appreciated him as fast learner in a previous performance review.

THE ISSUE

Normally, after completion, Shirish needed to get the approval of his work from Gautam. Once Gautam approves, Shirish could mention his name as author of the document and send it to client for their approval. This time Gautam's approval was delayed than normal time. When enquired, Gautam informed Shirish that he himself had forwarded the document, as document was free from any recognizable errors. On hearing this, Shirish felt puzzled about Gautam's act of forwarding the document direct to the client. Although, it was not a norm; Shirish believed that he would have done it in a right attitude.

The report which were sent to the clients, normally returns in two working days. When his report took longer than two days, Shirish contacted Gautam and verified about the status. Gautam told that he had received it and mentioned that he will mail him the document. On receipt of the mail, Shirish was shocked to notice Gautam's

name as author; while his name was mentioned as a co-author. He knew that this was not the practice. Shirish felt that all effort that was put forth have gone waste. He had worked over-time, prepared the document and passed it on the right time to Gautam; but he had taken all the credits and recognition. Shirish wanted to escalate the issue to the senior level in the company; he also shared with one of his team mate. His teammate warned him that he will not get any justice except for a few consoling words. He also added that Gautam had been working for past five years and also been treated as close ally to project managers. Shirish was also suggested that if he press the issue further, his performance review may be affected.

CASE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the kind of power that Gautam was using in this scenario?
2. What kind of leadership style Gautam should have exercised to support Shirish?
3. Can the incident be related with the ethics?

TEACHING NOTES FOR THE CASE DISCUSSION

1. What is the kind of power that Gautam was using in this scenario?

In this case scenario, Gautam was using a power tactics which was primarily originating from his formal position. It can also be called as formal power (Robbins et.al. 407, 2012). The type of formal power that he was using is also known as Coercive power. The Coercive power base (Robbins et.al. 2012) primarily rely on imposing fear of the negative consequences. The person who uses this power may exercise when she or he is having the ability to control the consequences according to his or her whims and fancies. In this case scenario, Gautam had the power to influence the future growth of Shirish in the company. He

could influence negatively the performance appraisal of the Shirish. Adding to that, he can also influence the availability of future project and can also pose a hurdle to work from home opportunity for Shirish.

Gautam's ability to influence or threat to influence the growth and performance appraisal, of Shirish, has made him powerful.

2. What kind of leadership style Gautam should have exercised to support Shirish?

Gautam should have exercised, ideally, the servant leadership (Ivancevich et.al., 2011) style. In this case scenario, Shirish was a fresher to the company who was trying hard to excel in his work. He worked with enthusiasm and sincerity. He was also trying hard to have "work from home" opportunity for pursuing his higher education. Gautam, being one of the senior in the company and team leader in his position should have been empathetic on Shirish. He should have understood the genuine need of Shirish and contributed to the best outcome of Shirish project. He should have helped Shirish without minding about his status and any return obligations. This servant leadership style involves humility, showing equal treatment to everyone, and following high moral conduct (Ivancevich, et al., 2011) which Gautam was lacking.

3. Can the incident be related with the ethics?

The case scenario can be related to the equity theory that primarily focusses on an individual's feelings of how fairly she is treated in comparison with others (Hellriegel, et al, 2009). The procedural justice (Hellriegel et, al, 2009) of the equity theory focusses on the results that people receive after they have spent effort, time, or other inputs. The procedural justice analyses the after effect of the process that was applied to make a decision. In this case scenario, Gautam had taken a decision to mention his name as an author in the place of Shirish. Gautam knew well that the training material was contributed by Shirish and he has expended his effort and time for

completing the same. By virtue of his positional power or formal power, Gautam has failed to follow the procedural justice and he has taken the credit of Shirish's effort.

In organizations, it is important to follow the procedural justice as it helps the organizations to define itself as ethical. Employees also feel highly motivated by the ethical conduct of the organizations.

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