

The Dawn of Reality



Of late, there have been several instances of fresh management school recruits being bullied by their Managers, or in some instances their senior colleagues, in the initial days at the job. These employees seek the counsel of their faculty at the B-school to discuss the matter since the classroom never taught them to deal with situations such as these.

- BY DR.POORNIMA GUPTA

Prof. Kumar is on his way home from the management institute where he taught Marketing, and he receives a call from a student from one among the previous years'.

Manit: Sir, Good evening! How are you? Mani here from the 2015 batch.

Prof Kumar: Hello Mani, I am good.

Manit: Sir, I would like to discuss something with you in person. When can I come over?

Prof Kumar: Why don't we meet over coffee tomorrow?

Next day over coffee

Prof Kumar: Ok Mani, how are things? How is your new job going? I believe you were very excited about joining it. How long has it been since you began working now? 7 months? 8?

Manit: I will complete 11 months next week, sir. It was my dream profile. I wanted to be in this role, and could not believe that I got it. But, I think I may have to leave.

Prof Kumar: Leave? Why? You have a better offer?

Manit: No, it is not that. I have not yet started to look for one. But the way things are going at the office, I do not think I can continue there for long.

Prof Kumar: Why what happened? Please see that if you leave your job too soon, it will reflect badly on your resume.

Manit: You know sir, after the completion of my MBA, I thought I would be doing something different as compared to what I used to do earlier. I felt I would have more responsibilities as a Manager. But here, I seem to be just another minion, doing tasks for other Managers. I do not get to sit in meetings, so, I get only second hand information on the decisions taken, which largely impacts my work. My manager is forever breathing down my neck looking for mistakes. It is as if it's a personal triumph if I make a mistake, and he is able to pinpoint. I am always too scared of committing an error that I cannot concentrate on my work.

I also had a fellow colleague Rajesh, from my previous company. Since, we had worked together previously, we were comfortable and so I would consult with him about my tasks. This again was taken negatively by my boss, who thought I prefer taking help from Rajesh rather than him.

He does not give me relevant information until the last moment, if at all, and then complains that my

performance is largely below than what can be expected from an "MBA". Mostly, he foists off whatever is his pending work during weekends on me, so I end up working on Saturdays and Sundays.

I do not mind doing so occasionally, but it has been recurring on almost every other weekend. Whenever, I apply for leave, he digs out some work, which is very urgent.

Sir, we really enjoyed your lectures, but I wish we could have learnt more on how to handle this situation. I am afraid that one day I will confront my boss and say things I will regret.

If I do something on my own, he says I cannot as I am not "experienced enough" to handle things on my own. If I go to him for advice, he says, "I never show initiative to do things on my own-how will I learn?"

I get so confused. I have forgotten everything that was taught to me during MBA. Now I am just on my toes trying to please him.

I have tried talking to HR about this, but they say that we cannot expect to be pampered. If work is to be done, we need to do it.

Prof Kumar: Mani, why do you think your boss is like this? Does he behave the same way with others?

Manit: Yes, it appears so. No one is happy with him, but with me in particular, he is completely micro managing.

It may be due to the fact that when I joined initially, I did not understand the urgency of one report, and therefore he had to sit with that himself to correct and complete it. After that, nothing I do seems to please him. You know you had told us about the "First impression error", I guess that has happened to me. I have no choice but to shift.

Prof Kumar: I am sorry this happened. Do you think you can do something to resolve the situation? Maybe talk to your boss?

Manit: It is of no use talking to him. Every time I try to tell him my problem, he says stop whining and do your work. You are paid to work not complain.

I am at my wits end. I am under extreme stress. My colleagues are of no help. They feel that I work extra to earn brownie points from my boss. They have started to alienate me from their discussions... as if being seen in my company will reflect poorly on them.

Prof Kumar: Okay Mani, let me think over this, and maybe I will talk to you in

a couple of days.

Manit: Thank you so much for your time Sir, and for listening to me. I am feeling much better after our conversation.

Mani worked for LMC Consulting Company, one of the leaders in the consulting business in the country. He was the topper in his batch. Though, he seemed to be laid back, he was very sharp and completed his work on time. He was a loner without too many friends, but was liked by the entire faculty.

Among the five students shortlisted, he was the only one to be selected in this company from the institute at a very attractive package. The company was known for its progressive culture and fast growth career path.

Mani always wanted to be a Business Development Manager, and when the opportunity came to him, he was



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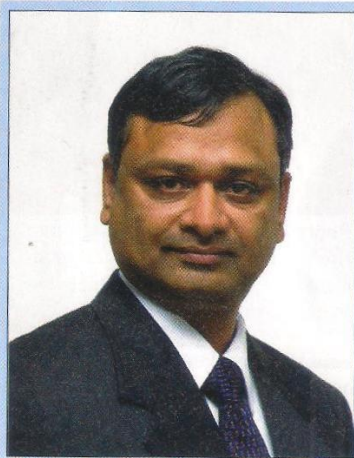
naturally very keen. He was over the moon when he was selected. He met me just after joining the organization and said, "Sir, this is a company I would be happy to retire from."

I do not know what advice to give him. This was his dream company. In only a few months' time, he has become so disillusioned. The young people are so impatient. They want immediate feedback, and get disheartened if they do not get any. They do not understand the dynamics of working with superiors or peers. I feel he is blowing it all out of proportion. **HC**

CASE STUDY

In the case study, the Professor has clearly perceived that Manit is a victim of strong office politics in his current organization. This being Mani's dream job, the Professor did not wish to disconcert him with the crucible fact that he could not do well in the organization owing to his colleagues' sly tricks and the acts by his manager. Further, he wanted Mani to understand the fragility of the situation, and, act judiciously under such pressing circumstances.

The professor also wants Mani to be tenacious so long as he is working in this organization. Not only does he want Mani to understand the root cause of his predicament, he also wants him to stay, and give one hundred percent to his work. According to him, these are the very challenges that are bound to arise even if Mani changes his job. Exercising patience with his manager and attempting to recognize his requirements will aid Mani in fulfilling the responsibilities assigned to him on time, and will help him build a strong rapport with his manager. Before Mani can figure out the ways of dealing with office politics, he should first establish an understanding as to what office politics is.



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According to the Professor, "office politics" are strategies played by people, either for their personal gains, or for a cause, they support. It may carry positive or negative connotations depending on the situation at hand. When people complain about their jobs and organizations, they never claim that the work is too hard and is taking a toll on them. Instead, they talk about the human element at work, which is invariably the toughest part of any job. When we love our jobs, it is owing to the fact that we like the work, and the people around us create a feeling that we are being appreciated and are relevant. When we hate our jobs, it is usually because we are treated badly at work. The work might be okay, but people energy is critical.

To get a handle on office politics, it is pertinent to observe as to how issues are handled in the organization. Therefore, it is essential to raise some fundamental questions to ascertain the core values in the organization, and the manner in which they are being enacted. It is also important to ascertain the process of decision making and gauging the underlying risks. A fitting answer to these questions should provide you with a good sense of the culture of your organization.

Office Politics is Real

Office politics is real, and one cannot shy away from it. Whenever and wherever, a group of people are involved in an organization, splinter groups are bound to be formed on the basis of an individual's preferences. As a consequence, several individuals will attempt to mock a person or play pranks. Office politics is a reality. What really is a fact is that smart people actually understand politics and find a way to navigate through it. The choice in front of them is either to use it for their personal gain, or for the greater good.

Stay Away from Politics

Detractors will never resort to politics if they are well aware that a person cannot be influenced. They may also be uninterested in dragging someone into it if they knew that the individual is maintaining a neutral stance. So, given all the choices, it is in fact easy to stay away from politics. It is likely that one can be caught in the cross

fire, but if they simply stick to their work and keep doing what they are supposed to do, politics will not matter to them. Sometimes, it becomes a question of waiting it out, understanding it and then being able to deal with it, instead of making claims that politics is nonexistent.

Things to be borne in mind

Do not be oblivious- In order to grow and stay in the organization, one cannot ignore office politics and therefore cannot turn a blind eye towards it or wish it away. If a person understands the situation, the players and the objective, it is possible to navigate and emerge unscathed through the situation. It is important to be aware of your surroundings, but equally important to find a way to stay isolated and remain focused on work.

Staying in or out - Staying in or out is an individual's personal choice. One can play the same game and grow in the organization, or can choose to completely stay out of office politics altogether. If people around you are made aware that you have no intention of getting involved in office politics, then there is no way that you can be dragged into it.

Being mindful and vigilant - One has to be mindful, vigilant and pay full attention to the goings on in his or her environment. There are times when even senior and competent people fall prey to malicious gossip. Office Politics are a fact of life. Wise politicking will help you get what you want in the world of work without compromising others in the process.

Key takeaways

A junior subordinate in this situation can remain focused and keep doing better work since this is the time when he/she can gain recognition at work for the efforts

If you are asked to take sides, make sure to have an open dialogue with both the parties involved and talk about the conflicting instructions/messages that are creating distractions

Again, making a choice as to what is right or wrong as per one's discretion; office politics has its own advantages and disadvantages, and one must be mindful of the situation and use it to their best advantage, while at the same time maintaining a sense of integrity at all times. **HC**

Organizations face this problem on a regular basis today. In this case study, after apparently making an informed choice about the role, Manit is now apprehensive about his future prospects and growth in the company.

On the other hand, his manager is not making it easier for Manit to settle and find his mojo. Are both missing the bigger picture in their respective run for instant gratification - Manit to find a voice and a 'face' on the strategic table after making initial mistakes, and the manager solely focussing on completion of the task and not interested in the task-holder? Are they both being more self-focused rather than focussing on what works for the organization? Such questions could be endless if we go down the path of one versus the other. Instead, let us focus on how both the entities - the B school and the company, could have leveraged their might to prepare both of them to manage such challenges. Apart from looking into grades, education, knowledge and experience but also digging in depth to appreciate that traits such as team orientation, motivation, learning / coaching and intelligence are equally important aspects that require to be looked into. Let us hence look into this issue in two parts:

(a) What can B-schools do to smoothen the journey of the fresh graduates like Manit into an organization?

(b) What can the Organizations and managers do to complement the journey?

How Can B Schools Prepare?

Willingness to learn and the capability to unlearn and relearn- There is nothing like the right solution. In the midst of a rapidly changing business environment and a fast-paced work life, it is of paramount importance to perceive the growing need to be always on your toes. Therefore, one needs to be always eager and consented to learn something new, unlearn it, and relearn something totally different when required. These are the days when one of the most valuable skills sought by companies is the passion to continuously improve their professional skills and competencies

and their application commensurate with the requirement of the team or organization.

Keen Appreciation of the Words 'Manager' and 'Strategy'- Young graduates like Manit want more responsibilities and don managerial roles, but they need to be explained in the B-School that the organizations' first expectations from them is to help them build the strategy through their radical ideas and thought provoking philosophies and concepts. Hence, there has to be a keen appreciation as to what words like "strategy" and "manager" entail, and the appreciation that opportunities for co-creation and conceptualisation would follow sooner than later. More often than not, one does not join a company and immediately start working from the top. There is nothing wrong being an independent contributor who adds value to the "strategic" agenda and to his or her "manager's" output.

Work out the ordinary- Manit wanted a 'different role', but the irony is that there is nothing like a 'different role'. Every year, an estimated 3 lakh students graduate as MBAs in India. Not everybody gets to do something different. The only thing Manit can do in his role is working out the ordinary, differently!

Hard work never kills- The best part of a B-school is the multi-functional experience one gets while studying. One would have simultaneous deadlines for multiple project submissions for different professors and subjects. In B-schools, the successful ones crack this code through smart prioritisation, collaboration with different sets of students with complementary skills, and meet super-tight deadlines with an eye on quality and of course grades. This multi-tasking attitude and the capability to deliver at the highest quality level are what organizations look forward to.

However, one cannot expect things to be served on a silver platter. There will always be some challenges, which will have to be resolved. There is no such thing as a perfect relationship with the manager; work is always demanding, and will require undivided concentration for 20 hours straight with mere coffee breaks, work might even require working on weekends like

it did for Manit, and that is okay if you are learning and adding to your skill set!

Appreciate Diversity- One can choose friends, but not the people to work with. Hence, it is vital for the employees at the workplace to appreciate diversity; and this implies, diversity of all forms including but not limited to Gender, Culture, Education and most importantly, Thought and



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Capability Diversity. Appreciation and understanding of diversity plays a very important role at any workplace. There is something to learn from everyone.

Importance of Emotional Intelligence- Employees at the workplace should know when to reveal emotions with maturity, and when to exercise restraint and control. For this, it is important to have a high EQ. Manit needs to maintain his EQ so that he can work on his relationship with his manager and the other colleagues. They might be alienating him now, but

CASE STUDY

if he gives them some time, and has regular conversations with them, they will eventually trust him, and thereby develop a good relationship with him.

How can organizations complement this experience?

Involvement- The manager here in this case study should not underestimate Manit for his lack of experience. In fact, he should realize that he does not carry any baggage, and hence would have a fresh perspective and enthusiasm towards work. This renewed outlook needs to be nurtured and retained

Feedback and Mentoring (Like Prof. Kumar) - Individual, Group, Reverse or Anonymous - mentoring is of utmost importance. The manager here could really work on this one thing. Manit would in his heart, definitely acknowledge having certain limitations and the lack of crucial elements in order to move forward. It is just that he would not want to keep his vulnerability on his sleeves all the time. In organizations, the key to having a life-long affiliation lies with the managers being meaningful contributors, confidantes and wiser individuals who can provide guidance on professional and personal progression

Responsibility and Accountability with a dash of Faith- Responsibility is a two-way street and both the parties need to work on it. If Manit is given ownership of projects and initiatives, the outcome can really be beneficial to the team or organization. The core belief of millennials is pace and energy, which if coupled with the managers' wisdom and knowledge, can really be a heady concoction that companies need to leverage in a sustained manner.

Provide Relevant Learning Opportunities- The case study does not mention anything about learning opportunities. Absence of learning opportunities would cause people like Manit out in no time! Millennials no longer feel the obligation to stick around in an organization for too long. Quantum and quality of learning opportunities embedded at the workspace, which is relevant for their horizontal and vertical growth, would topple the salary factor. Recognising

and appreciating contribution and achievement, providing growth opportunities based on performance (and not just on experience) will surely do the trick.

No Comparison- The manager here is breaking the unsaid rule! Never ever, compare two young graduates with each other. Do not expect them to perform a certain way just because they are from a certain college or have a certain degree. Do not peg these employees to some other management trainee you had reporting to you a couple of years back. Each individual is different and each individual brings something different to the table.

Understand their Life (check out your own kids) - Millennials do not strive for work-life balance anymore, but prefer work-life integration. Since this company is known for its progressive culture and fast growth career path it should also realize that for young graduates like Manit, work is not a separate element of life that needs to be 'balanced' out. They need to be provided with flexibility - working hours, work mates (let them choose their Rajesh'), work space, as long as the quality and timelines of deliverables are mutually set and abided by. Why should it matter if the work is done sitting at an office desk or at a coffee shop? **HC**