

Understanding human behaviour at workplace

Organizations are formed by individuals, with different personalities, attitudes, values, perception, motives, aspirations and abilities. No two individuals are similar. However, workplace biases and stereotypes tend to make people adopt an aggressive and defensive approach.

- by **Dr. Poornima Gupta**

Richa Arora, MD of Charora International (CI) reached her office on Tuesday, thinking about the activities she needed to complete by the end of the day. Most importantly, she had to address her merchandising team. There were four people in that team and she wanted to get them all geared up for a good export order from Germany, hopefully.

The junior-most member in the team was Shreya Bose. She was a very enthusiastic employee and had been with the company for two years. She had recently been shifted to merchandising from communications based on her performance. She started to think about what her manager Manoj Singh had said about Ms Bose

"I am very disappointed with

her. She does not know how to handle herself".

What do you mean? Ms Arora asked.

"She does not listen to even simple orders and becomes aggressive if I try to correct her. She just doesn't listen. I cannot work with her. I will not be able to deliver if I do not have the right support and she is not a right fit. She forgets important

communications causing us to lose face in front of our customers. You know how these buying house people are. They want all the I's dotted and the t's crossed," Mr Singh replied.

Charora International (CI) was a garment export company established in 2009 as a sole proprietorship by Ms Richa Arora. She had over 30 years of experience in a reputed buying house and was a graduate of National Institute of Fashion Technology. She started her own export house when some of the importers requested her to handle their accounts. The main exports were of kids' readymade garments. She created her own design samples and outsourced the manufacturing to fabricators. Their turnover had grown from 5 crore in 2011 to 20cr in 2014. The main markets they supplied to, was Australia and France. She had expanded the business over the last five years and was now looking to supply to Germany, Italy and also the USA. The export house was in talks with a Buying house for a US store for supply. Ms Arora had also participated in the German garment expo held in Bonn in 2014 and had generated several inquiries from the local stores for supply of cotton kids garments from India.

The company had a sampling department consisting of one Merchandising Manager, one Quality Control Manager, two Merchandisers, one designer, one Master tailor and five sampling tailors.

The Accounts department had a Chief Accountant, Purchase Manager and a Logistics Manager.

Production department had one Production Manager, cutting Master, four packers and finishers. They also employed the finishers on contract basis during the shipping time.

The working environment was very relaxed with everyone working as per the need of the hour. There were no policies regarding leaves, attendance in

place. During the time of shipments, especially between the months of December to March, the production and merchandising departments literally lived at the office premises, but it was during the "lean" period that everyone started minding everyone else's business.

Shalini Mathur was the QC manager and had worked with Richa in the previous organization. She had joined CI last year. She had 25 years of experience. She had never had a formal education in garment industry, but had risen from the ranks as a junior cutter to QC manager.

Mr Singh had worked with CI for last three years. He also did not have MBA but over the last 20 years, had worked with many garment exporters and knew the industry very well. He had worked with two other merchandisers before Ms Bose, who had left after they got married.

Ms Bose was a management graduate in International business and had been working with CI in their communications department for one year, when it was felt that she would be more useful as a merchandiser. She was very fluent in English and also understood a little French, which made it a good business sense to shift her to client interactions. After only about three months working as a merchandiser, she was able to handle client inquiries independently. Ms Arora started relying on her more and more and giving her the coveted showroom keys whenever Ms Arora was out of Office.

Ms Arora recalled an incident which had happened a few months back between the QC Manager and Ms Bose. There had been some issue while packing the garments for shipment to the store in France. Ms Bose had just been shifted to the merchandising department and was overseeing the final packing when the QC manager came and inspected the garments. She ripped into Ms Bose for allowing the garments to be

packed without airing them properly as some were still damp from the cleaning spray. She went on and on till the logistics manager came and said that MD was calling Ms Bose and she was able to make her escape. She was much shaken after the incident.

Ms Arora had come to know of this later when her accountant apprised her of the situation. She did not wish for such arguments to happen within her merchandising team as she knew that coordination between the managers and merchandiser would be responsible for them to execute the order successfully.

She wanted to get the team to be prepared to handle the pressure of sampling and meeting all the requisite permissions. Germany specially was very particular about the dyes used in the garment and had very unique packaging instructions. She did not want their samples to be rejected on trivial issues like the packing boxes did not have the requisite signs.



Poornima Gupta

Assistant professor, HRM - Great lakes Institute of Management

The author, Poornima Gupta is an Assistant Professor, HRM and Organizational Behaviour, Great Lakes Institute of Management, Gurgaon.

CASE STUDY ►

She called Ms Bose into her office to discuss with her first what the issues were before she addressed the whole team.

Ms Bose: Good Morning Ma'am. The sampling for the Germany order is complete. We will be able to ship the pieces in each of the sizes by tomorrow. I have done the costing for each size and have given it to the Mr. Singh for approval.

Ms Arora: Hi Shreya. I am really banking on this German order as it will open up new markets for us. Are you sure you have all the certificates in place regarding azo dyes? We cannot send the samples without those.

Ms Bose: Yes Ma'am. We received the certificates from the lab yesterday.

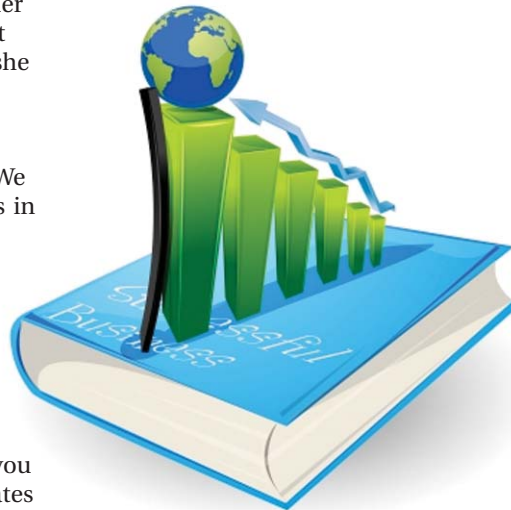
Ms Arora: Shreya, is there a problem?

Ms Bose: No ma'am. Why what happened?

Ms Arora: It's just that Manoj... (Suddenly Shreya breaks down and starts crying)

Ms Arora: Shreya, here have a glass of water. What is it?

Ms Bose: Ma'am, he is impossible! It is very difficult to



work with him. He cannot seem to have any organization skills. All his information is haphazard. He does not like to work in excel and that makes it very difficult for me to do the reports. He asks me for every small detail repeatedly. He never seems to store any info I give him. Then he blames me when he forgets to inform me of some important communication. He also gives very confusing orders. Last week I called him to tell him that I will be getting late to office as my son missed the bus and I had to go to drop him

to school, he said I do not need to inform him every time I get late. But yesterday, when I did not call him and was late by an hour because I was stuck in traffic, he started screaming at me that I should have called him.

Ms Arora: Shreya, you know I respect you a lot. I prefer to discuss things with you before the team as you are able to give me a holistic perspective. I do not need to explain in detail and still you are able to grasp what I wish to get done. Maybe it is because of your management education, but I have come to depend on you in these last three months. I sometimes forget that you are still very new in this industry. Mr Singh and Ms Mathur have been in the industry for more than 20 years and know its workings very well. Maybe they resist the invasion of technology because they are scared of using it. You will need more patience in working with them.

After Ms Bose left, Ms Arora went over her conversation and started thinking of what she should do now. She needed Ms Bose and Mr Singh to work together, but did not know how to persuade them to do so.

Analysis by V Ravi ►

Situations that Richa Arora, the MD of Charora International (CI) faces is typical of several organizations with generational and other differences among its employees across intermediate levels. From the behaviours displayed by Manoj Singh the Merchandising Manager, Shalini Mathur the QC Manager and Shreya Bose the new executive in the merchandising department, it is apparent that though the MD trusts young Shreya, the latter's boss and his peer don't. This most likely stems

from the following factors:

- a) Inadequate exchange of information and communication between levels
- b) Lack of collaboration, cooperation and coordination primarily due to stereotyping
- c) Prejudice against younger, more qualified and enterprising executives

Richa's predicament is understandable. Though she may be biased to Shreya on what she has heard she should be careful not to be prejudiced against the managers concerned considering

the export orders she has to meet with now. She should check whether this problem also pertains with others of Shreyas age if any at CI. She can consult her senior team members and analyse the problems thoroughly. She may plan to tackle the issues through promoting team working across the generations by an outbound training programme and address the issues subtly but immediately before they snowball.

Workplace biases and stereotypes tend to make people adopt an aggressive and defensive

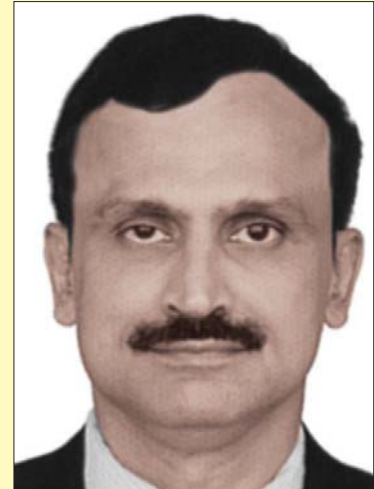
approach. Richa may address Shalini and Manoj to understand their real issues with Shreya. Though CI is a small organization with about twenty employees, it is important that she communicates to all over a meeting her expectations and seek support from her team. She may identify a set of values that she cherishes for CI and get them endorsed by the managers and teams. These have to be followed by every member so as to impact the organization through their internalisation and demonstration by all employees. Behaviours that encourage active listening, valuing different views and backgrounds, decrease ambiguity and support the sharing of expectations, valuing hard work, build fun needed to beat the work place.

If communication is improved and managers work more closely with their subordinates, they gain a better understanding of their roles within the company, the value they are providing to the company as a whole through the work they do, and how decisions that are made by the management ultimately impact them. Managers, if they work more closely with the lower-level employees, will gain a better understanding of the issues and frustrations that the lower-level employees might be facing which will help them take steps to improve any problems that might be occurring.

It is also required of women employees to leverage on their support systems to adapt to new challenges than to complain and blame people and situations they perceive are creating dissonance in their work lives if they feel harassed. They themselves are responsible for the choices and priorities they make. Women can better overcome prejudice at work by demonstrating commitment to work and ensure that it does not suffer due to personal reasons. They need to seek counselling or mentoring to avoid reactions to conflict situations. Mentoring

programs with some incentives can realise good dividends. More specifically, subordinates like Shreya should list a few actions as below:

- a) Develop self-confidence: She should believe in herself. Know that it's she who makes or breaks herself. She must understand that it is not in her control what people do to her, but it is totally in her control how she reacts.
- b) Try to empathise with people who harm: It is easier said than done, but not everybody harms due to total viciousness. She must try to understand the circumstances under which the person hurts her. Was he or she even aware of what he or she was doing to her?
- c) Develop a loving / forgiving attitude: As the old saying goes, love always triumphs hatred. Loving the person who has hurt one is the greatest revenge. It doesn't have to be a project. Managers like Manoj and Shalini should take up the following actions for self-development.
 - a) Try to solve the problem with the person. If they are really disturbed by the behaviour or lack of responsibility they can try to solve the problem with Shreya. They should communicate with her what is expected of her without being abrasive to prevent any misunderstanding later. Had they openly discussed the matter it is possible to realize that she is not that bad as perceived. If they do not find any solutions even after discussing with Shreya this could be escalated.
 - b) Realize the philosophy of life: They should always believe that no person on earth is born incompetent or bad but the circumstances in life changes a person. A person is always moulded according to the circumstances he undergoes in life. He should be given a benefit of doubt and as seniors they should help, support, coach and mentor juniors. Being prejudiced for reasons extremely personal and behaving inappropriately is



V Ravi

Vice President & Head - L&D, RPMG

In a career spanning 29 years, V Ravi currently heads the learning and development function for Reliance Project Management Group. His interests include TQM, value engineering, individual and organizational learning.

immaturity. There are so many other things one can focus on rather than disliking or ridiculing someone.

- c) Appreciate what they have: Rather than feeling bad about what they don't have, they should begin to appreciate things that people have in their current life which was denied to them at their age due to circumstances beyond their control. It could be one or more of factors like qualification, salary and opportunities.

The above behaviours may appear elementary. What is called for is for people to be tactful in their interactions and believe that diversity in terms of age, gender, community, locality etc. has to be accepted and encouraged. Generational differences and conducive environment for constructive employee interactions will improve employee morale, motivation and enable fulfilment of their aspirations.

Analysis by Santosh Rai ▶▶

This is typical case of coexistence of varied kind of individual in organization with different set of values and belief, thus achievement of goal alignment becomes highly challenging. Leadership has to handle this with utmost caution and maturity as each individual is required resource in organization with his unique set of skill and competency. In this case, if we look at the background of Employees, it is ample clear that each one has unique expertise and experience. There is good amount of gender and generation diversity and to the some extent it is hampering the mutual understanding and alignment. In this particular case there are employees like Manoj Singh and Shalini Mathur, who have grown up from ranks and have long working experience and employees like Shreya Bose who is young and

she has professional qualification. It is obvious that the behavior pattern of these two different set of employees will necessarily be different. Much more involvement of senior leadership is required in the area of counselling, coaching, mentoring and training in order to create mutual acceptability amongst team members.

Organizations are formed by individuals, with different personality, attitudes, values, perception, motives, aspirations and abilities. No two individuals are similar. In the early studies, theories of organization and management treated people as though they were the same; scientific management was based on the similarities amongst employees, not the differences. In contrast, modern theories of human behavior are based upon the differences among people and how those differences can affect the organization. Individual differences are many for example some employees are motivated to work and some are not. This can be due to several reasons involving, psychological, physical and social aspects.

Behavior can be defined as a response/s which is observed directly/indirectly for any stimulus. Direct observation is possible by studying the responses of people to a work environment. Indirect observations are decision taken by people.

Human behavior is very much unpredictable. This behaviour could be (i) caused behaviour, (ii) motivated behaviour, (iii) goal oriented behaviour. By understanding behaviour one can predict, direct, change and control behaviour of individuals or group. There are generally four basic assumptions regarding nature of people: individual differences, a whole person (completer person comes at workplace with all kind of emotions), caused behavior (motivation) and value of the

person (human dignity).

In an organizational set up, it is essential for managers or leaders to understand behaviour, as they are constantly with people, interacting with them in terms of communication (either written or oral) in terms of work (either by specifying the work and getting things done).

Understanding past behaviour is important for developing effective human skills, and it also provides a framework for predicting behaviour. It also gives an idea to managers/ leaders as to how behaviour is similar in certain circumstances and changing in changing environmental conditions.

Another skill which an effective manager or leader needs is the ability to direct, change and control behaviour.

Managers/Leaders have to understand that there are going to be individual differences among the employees, as no individual is similar to other. Each individual is unique by themselves. Then one has to understand that each individual has to be taken care of as a whole person by taking care of his needs as well as training and making him up to date in terms of work. Ultimately human beings have to be treated with respect only then only can expect effective performance.

In this case, Richa Arora should start to look at the organization design. When organization has varied set of employees, cautious organization design plays a vital role. The work allocation and job description to be designed in such a way so that conflict of interest could be minimal rather more synergy can be build up. The individual profiles to well understood in establishing reporting relationship. For eg. In manufacturing set-up there are always friction between maintenance and operation team and thus organizations started to

**Santosh Rai**

DGM - HR & IR, L&T Special Steels and Heavy Forgings

In a career spanning 17 years in Human Resources and Industrial Relations, Rai has successfully anchored various productivity improvements and manpower rationalization initiatives including job evaluations. He has also practiced innovations in talent acquisition.

merge both the function in one umbrella to build synergy. Next step is to work on systems. Many differences can be unified through systems. In this case there is incidence of late coming and this kind of issues can be easily resolved through placement of system of attendance regularization. In fact the expertise of organization, should be utilized in development of Standard operating procedures and work instructions. This helps in establishing no rooms for any excuses for team for deviation and thus many rifts can be avoided. The third aspect is defining the meaning of performance. A thoughtful question is asked as to whether my employees are familiar with the vision and mission of the company and if so are they really feel that they are part of this vision and mission. For people of different background and set of beliefs, defining organization's value is prerequisite. The performance

should not only cover the achievement of target rather it should have proper mix of achievement of goals, potential and attitude as measuring parameter. If Value adherence is given due weightage, many undesired behaviors in organizations are automatically discouraged. For e.g., If one of the core value of company is respect and dignity of people, then its noncompliance to be viewed seriously and at the same there has to be robust monitoring mechanism of such behaviours. The attempt is also made to look out for right fit instead of smart fit. While assessing the right fit, a deeper look in the candidate is required in terms of his/her cultural background, value proposition and ability to adopt. The existing inherent issue of conflicting interest can be identified through proper diagnostic with detail study. The proper identification of problem followed by the coaching,

counselling and mentoring by mature leadership on positive behaviors, team working and teambuilding act as an enabler for superior performance of organization. Training need analysis and suitable behavioral training should be the ongoing efforts and its impact must be assessed and reviewed.

To summarize, Managers or leaders spend considerable time making judgements about the fit between individuals, job tasks and from these approaches it can be derived that environment has a much greater effect than it is believed. It is established that the large areas of human behavior are modifiable. Organizational design, training and development can have a profound impact on the behavior of the members of an organization. The culture plays a key role and it's the people and leadership need to work jointly and constantly to build and sustain the right culture.

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