

HumanCapital

REALISING BUSINESS STRATEGY THROUGH PEOPLE VOL. 22 No. 2 JULY 2018 ₹100

The Psychology Of People Analytics

INTERVIEW

The Leap Onto Tomorrow

Niel Nicolaisen,
Chief Technology Officer, D.C. Tanner

CASE STUDY

Dealing With Workplace Gossip

PERSONA

The Trader of Shared Values

Anshu Gupta,
VP and Head of HR Global Operations, Ericsson





Dealing With Workplace Gossip

A study carried out by Epicor involving 2500 respondents in 14 countries revealed that employees are in fact welcoming robots into the workplace. The employees have stated that robots, apart from taking over mundane and redundant tasks, do not involve themselves in office gossip and politics, an unwanted human exercise that only brings out negativity within the organisation.

BY DR. SHAMEEM. S

“People talking behind each other's back” was something that troubled Riya, the HR Manager of a leading business process outsourcing company, as Prem, one of the key resource, approached and told her that he is going to leave the organisation. After brooding for several hours over this on her way home, she decided to have a detailed chat with Prem.

The Next Day

Venue: The Office
Time: Around 10.00 A.M.

(Phone ringing)

Riya: Hi Prem, Good Morning! Can we quickly meet for a discussion?

Prem: Hello Riya, yes sure. Where should I come?

Riya: We can meet in the cafeteria and discuss over coffee.

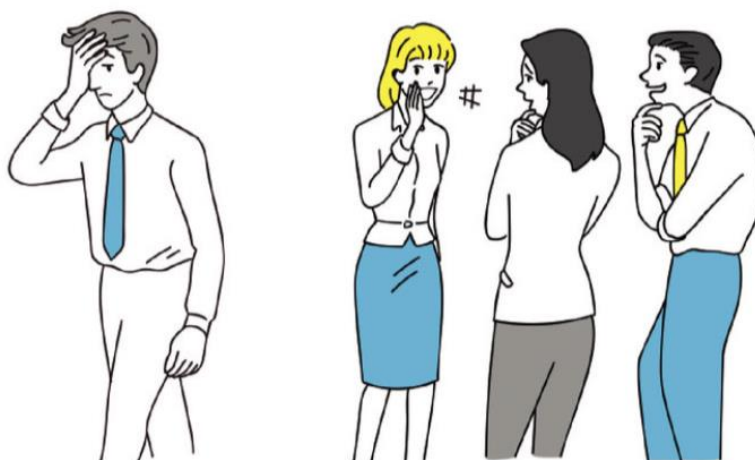
Prem: Sounds great! Will be there in fifteen minutes.

Venue: The Cafeteria
Time: Around 10.30 A.M.

Riya: How are you doing today?

Prem: All well... still can't get my thoughts out of what happened last week.

Riya: I completely understand. I was thinking about the issue yesterday, and, decided that I must speak with you in detail to understand the issue in a better way. However, I am not with you on your decision of leaving



this job because of this.

Prem: I understand your point too Riya, but I can't take this any further. My very friends are ignoring me, have ganged up against me, and, are talking behind my back. You are well aware that I am working here since the last 7 years, and, that makes it even more difficult for me to take such a decision.

Riya: Prem, we can talk this over. I suggest that you take some time off and give this a great deal lot of thought before deciding whether to quit or not. Not many employees get such a transition opportunity. The management has a lot of trust and belief in your abilities.

Prem: Above all, I need to stay calm and peaceful. I am unable to concentrate on the job as my very

colleagues are keeping away from me, and at times, I learn from others that they are not talking to me because of this opportunity.

Riya: To quit the job over such an issue is not going to help you either. You are losing a good opportunity, transition and promotion for those friends who don't even talk to you or encourage you.

Prem: Yes, I have analysed my career growth path, but when I hear that I got this only because of favouritism and not because of my talent and ability, it truly hurts me.

Riya: Why don't you talk to them? Communication is the key for all problems. Don't you think so?

Prem: Yes, I do. Let me try. I have a client call. We can discuss this again some time later.

Riya: Sure, once you are done, give me a call. We can schedule the discussion and meet again.

Riya and Prem went back to their respective workstations and resumed work. However, Riya could not get to brush herself away from thinking what Prem had encountered. She was thinking as to why employees gossip, and the prevalence of such conversations in the workplace as it affects their productivity. So, she decided to interact with Raj, Prem's friend, to understand the nature of the issue and work out a solution.

Venue: Riya's Cabin
Time: Not recorded

(Phone ringing)

Riya: Hi Raj, how are you doing?

Raj: Hi Riya, doing great, anything important?

Riya: Yes. Can you please drop by my cabin?

Raj: Sure. I will be there.

(Raj knocking the door)

Riya: Please come in, Raj.

Raj: Yes, Riya. What can I do for you?

Riya: Raj, there seems to be a problem at the workplace. I thought of speaking to some of our employees to understand their feelings better about the work environment. I need to ask you a few questions. It will be helpful for me to assess our work environment if you answer them rightly.

Raj: Ok. Please go ahead.

Riya: On a typical day, how many colleagues of yours do you speak to outside of work?

Raj: 2 to 3 officially and 5 to 6 people in general.

Riya: Can you please tell me what you talk about? Is it about weather or travel or about another colleague?

Raj: Movies, cricket, travel, and sometimes, about other colleagues as well.

Riya: How do these conversations start? Like, what leads to such talk?

Raj: Most of the time I talk about people on the basis of situations and reactions, and, we talk about it once the incident is over.

Riya: Do you initiate or is it done by the other person? What was the topic last time?

Raj: Usually, I listen to what the

others are talking. If they talk what I think, I agree to their point instead of initiating the talk.

Riya: Do you feel good after this conversation? In what way?

Raj: Yes, I relieve my stress by talking about others instead of keeping things to my heart...

Riya: Do such conversations affect yours or the others' work in any way?

Raj: The habit of talking about others is definitely not good for work. It makes us waste time discussing about others and reduces productivity. In addition, we tend to form a blind image about this person and it affects our perception about him or her.

Riya: Why do people talk about others?

Raj: As far as I think, there are two reasons for people to talk about others. One, their own insecure feelings, and the other, is their incapability to defend themselves in front of others.

Riya: Interesting...! What makes you participate in the discussion about others?

Raj: Well, basically to seek information. In addition, we can feel the belongingness to the group and overcome the feeling of isolation. For me, it is all about curiosity to know.

Riya: When do you generally talk about others? If you don't mind, can you share any recent happening?

Raj: If I learn about people talking about me directly or indirectly, then I will start talking about them as well. I share news about others to the people I trust most. I only trust 4 to 5 colleagues of mine and share things confidently. I am upset over Prem's behaviour nowadays, and, we talk about him. It is not because he bagged a transition opportunity, but because, he kept it a secret from all of us.

Riya: How do you feel when someone else talks about you or what happened to you? Do you get upset? Or, is it OK for them to talk about you?

Raj: I have heard from people that my fellow colleagues talk behind my back. I feel upset on hearing people doing this to me.

Riya: Nowadays, people are using Facebook, WhatsApp etc. to connect,


talk, discuss and share many things with each other. Do you use them?

Raj: I prefer personal conversation rather than using social media or WhatsApp. I would prefer not to use a medium where we can record conversations and play safe.

Riya: Thanks for your cooperation in answering all my questions. Do you also agree that you and your friends spoke about Prem recently? Don't you think it will upset him? He may not have kept his transition a secret, but, he could have waited to share it after confirmation. Why don't you guys break this silence?

Raj: You are right Riya. After talking to you, I have realized that if I can be upset about people talking behind my back, it is natural for Prem to get upset as well. We should not have done this to him. Let me talk to him.

Riya: Thanks Raj, See you.

Riya felt very relieved for doing something in tackling the issue. But, she was also thinking that she needs to have some office policies/ trainings that help employees to solve the issue of gossiping and engage them in more productive work. Workplace gossips are prevalent in all organisations. In fact, 70 percent of our daily conversations will be about others when they are not present. It can be good or bad. But, when it exceeds its limit, it is the responsibility of the management to ascertain why such things happen and find out ways to get rid of it as it affects the work outcomes. 

About the Author

DR. SHAMEEM S is Assistant Professor in OB/HRM at Great Lakes Institute of Management, Chennai. She has previously worked at National Oxygen Limited, Institute for Financial Management and Research (IFMR) as faculty, and as a Guest Scientist at University of Gottingen, Germany. Dr. Shameem holds a PhD in Management specializing in HRM/OB from Department of Management Studies, DoMS, IIT Chennai and an M.Sc. in Applied Psychology from Pondicherry University.