Adcorp International Services: Organizational Politics

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ABSTRACT

This case has been written from the perspective of an Adcrop International Services Company employee who holds a senior software development position. It aims to illustrate how a chain of events perceived as unfair and laden with inconsistencies, poor plans, and politics results in demotivating and growing dissatisfaction among employees with their employers. It adopts a case study method to illustrate a chain of events that has led to work demotivation and dissatisfaction. It was noted that the attempts of the employee to resolve issues and to maintain communication with concerned parties were failures due to the denial of appropriate and entitled respect. This led to feelings of self-demoralization, demotivation, insecurity, and irritation, and was often found at the receiving end of the unfair practices. This illustrates organizational failures to manage and communicate changes, leading to a culture characterized by intragroup competition, favoritism, mistrust, misuse of power, limited resource sharing, poor coordination, and non-cooperation. Amidst limited exploration of organizational politics from a case study perspective, this case surrounds an employee's situation with a very high workload because of the exit of a supporting co-employee from the organization. The teaching notes illustrated here could be handy for concerned students and Human Resource and Organizational Development personnel.

KEYWORDS

Organizational Climate, Psychological Contract, Workplace Conflict, Team Dynamics, Favoritism, Misuse of Power

Context

Kavita Singh

Kavita had a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science from a reputed engineering college in India. With her excellent merit, she has been a hockey champion, represented her college at the state level in the competition, and grabbed campus placement at Adcrop International Services, a multinational corporation and a giant in the IT industry, in her 4th year of graduation. She was posted as a Software Engineer in 2006 at its New Delhi Office, and two years later, she received the 'Champions Award' for developing an intelligent computer program for

internal time sheets. Owing to her exceptional technical expertise in software programming, she was promoted to Senior Software Engineer and transferred to the Lifeline Healthcare Foundation project in 2009.

Adcorp International Service (AIS)

Adcorp International Service (AIS) was the services division of Adcorp Inc., a prominent American hardware company. The organization was constituted in 1995, and by 2012, it had 20 offices and 75,000 employees worldwide. According to the Adcorp Revenue report, 2006, the company's services division contributed to a revenue share of 43%. In India, AIS started its operations in 2000 in Bangalore, popularly known as the 'Silicon Valley of India.' Within three years of its successful presence, it established another office in the capital of India- New Delhi.

The global and US crisis of 2008 also impacted AIS as it laid off more than 30,000 employees globally. This act garnered heavy criticism worldwide and grabbed the headlines of almost every newspaper, including AIS India.

To meet the financial challenges, the organization curbed and cut its expenses, including the overhead costs and shift allowance it gave its employees working on UK and US-based projects. The shift timings were revised without a view to managing and coordinating problems that would arise in time overlap with US and UK-based counterparts. Yet another change that employees faced was discontinuing the free door-to-door cab pick-up service. This was replaced by a paid bus service for employees from Noida, a Delhi National Capital Region (NCR) city[1]. Employees residing in other neighboring towns of Faridabad, Gurgaon, and Ghaziabad were not offered transport facilities to come to the office. All these moves contributed to growing employee dissatisfaction, and employees protested strongly against them. The attrition rate at the Delhi office rose to 40%, the highest ever since its inception. According to an in-house survey, the reasons for increased dissatisfaction varied from uncertain and unclear career growth, apathy of management, lack of communication, low organizational support, and poor work environment to lack of employee commitment and even a skewed appraisal process. The employees who remained with the organization were highly demotivated, anxious, dissatisfied, and actively sought opportunities elsewhere.

Sahil Diwan

Sahil Diwan was an Information Technology graduate from Anna University, Chennai. He graduated in 1998 and worked in the Delhi Office of AIS since its establishment in 2003. His service was much appreciated, and he was awarded the 'Employee of the Year' on three occasions. With a zeal to succeed and perform his best, he never failed to achieve targets and deadlines. In 2006, he was promoted to Senior Development Manager, wherein he outperformed himself. Though he was sometimes accused of favoritism and engaging in political activities within the organization, he negated it by saying that he had to develop and pitch for his "inner circle of team, his confidants" that he could trust and work closely with. Slowly, he gained a reputation as a highly technical manager. In 2010, he was appointed the Project Manager for an ongoing US-based project for Lifeline Healthcare Foundation (Exhibit 1), one of the organization's first clients and highest revenue contributors.

The Web Services Core Software Development team

Kavita worked as a senior software engineer for the Web Services Core Software Development team of the Lifeline Healthcare Foundation project. In one year, she acquired excellent domain knowledge of the US healthcare sector, gained expertise in her work, and possessed a working knowledge of the functioning of almost all the other teams in the project.

Besides her, the team consisted of two other team leads, Ritu Tiwari and Rohit Shankar, a software programmer. Due to the rapid changes in the company's policies, Ritu resigned and joined another IT service company. As one of the oldest and highest performing employees, my resignation perplexed many, and a few others felt very emotional and negative. Kavita was also surprised. She considered Ritu an ideal employee with the "ability to balance her work and life perfectly." Her resignation was shocking because we knew she had a

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[1]*The National Capital Region (NCR) is the name given to a metropolitan area in India. It includes the entire National Capital Territory of Delhi, including New Delhi and several urban areas surrounding it in neighboring states of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. Gurgaon is also a part of NCR.*

great future at TIS. I saw her career progression, so when she put down her papers, she left abruptly without any explanation. This was so unusual on her part."

Kavita rose to the occasion and volunteered to fill in Ritu's position. On a typical day, she attended meetings and sessions with customers based in the US, created project plans, devised implementation strategies, defined code changes for every new consumer requirement, and helped develop software. Soon, she felt overworked but continued to deliver her best within the existing time frames.

Kavita, however, noticed that Rohit took his work casually and sometimes would even pass on his work to her on the pretext of learning from her. At first, she did not pay attention, but his persistent requests exasperated her. She also felt that the clients and others at the office often took her for granted and burdened her with work.

Kavita reacted in two days: "First, by thinking that I was a dumpster where people would unload work and second, as a capable person whom people could trust with their work. I purposely chose the second one during those times and had to keep going. I evaluated the situation as challenging, indicating my capacity to work and deliver good results. This was my testing time where I could either show them what I was capable of or fizzle out."

As days passed, more and more work was allotted to her. However, to her dismay, her quarterly bonus needed to meet her expectations. Her anger knew no bounds when she learned Rohit had received a bigger bonus. She exclaimed, "I was shocked. What did it mean? Did it mean that even if I put my life out there, no one would ever notice it, let alone reward it? Also, I did not know how and why Rohit was given this unjustified amount as a bonus despite his lackadaisical nature and casual approach toward the work allotted to him. Rohit had planned a vacation." She also heard rumors of Rohit's increasingly close ties with Sahil during this time.

In addition, the revised timings from 2.30 pm-11.30 pm to 10 am-7 pm left only one hour of overlap between the work timings of employees in India and their US-based counterparts, within which much work had to be accomplished. Many raised their voices and blamed the company for not fulfilling its moral responsibility of providing safety to its female employees. Changes like these were unwelcome and were perceived as forced.

As expected, employees worked on their projects but faced significant time constraints in collaboration with US clients and counterparts to ensure the seamless execution of tasks. Since the changes were introduced abruptly, they had little time to plan a course of action for future work. The situation worsened when, after a few days, they were informed of their shift allowance being scrapped as a part of a cost-cutting measure.

Like others, these changes also affected Kavita. With the discontinuation of the free cab service to Gurgaon, she paid from her pocket to commute to and from the office. Often, it took her more than two hours to reach the office. The situation worsened during the evenings. Her revised shift typically included several meetings to understand requirements and determine how these changes affected the project. Being stressed and overworked, she finally decided to voice her concerns to Sahil and email him. Sahil responded positively to it, and a meeting was fixed.

First meeting with Sahil

Kavita met Sahil at the agreed time and was greeted warmly by him. She could not hide her dissatisfaction and spoke about it.

Kavita: "Sahil, as you know, it was my initiative to take up Ritu's role after she left. As you know, people are either leaving or being asked to leave daily. With the changed timings, I spend most of my time traveling, even during odd hours. Frankly, I think I deserved much more than what I got. Sahil, I would like to have a revision of the workload. I also need a subordinate to work with me."

"I understand Kavita. We have all seen your work, and the company is pleased with your initiative and hard work. I am sure you will have an advantage in the coming months [Winks]. Regarding your work, what about Rohit? Is he not contributing to the team? Well, I have to tell you something. I have been looking into some resumes and am in the process of interviewing some of the prospective candidates. You will hear about it as soon as something materializes. However, I am afraid to say I cannot do much about the change in shift timings and allowances, including bonus, as I do not have much say in company policies."

Kavita: "Rohit has joined only recently. He is inexperienced, and I cannot trust him when dealing with different work requirements. Regarding other teams, I think you know that the nature of work for our team is different from others. I hope to have another team member. I have to continue like this for now, at least for some time. Isn't it? "

Sahil: "I guess for some time at least. However, if you are looking for an immediate solution, why can you not finalize two days to conduct all the client meetings scheduled for the entire week? I can only arrange a shift allowance for those two days you worked your previous shift times. For the rest of the week, you can work the 10 am – 7 pm shift like others, as it will benefit you from taking a shift allowance and working at times that are comfortable for you. But yes, you must plan with the stakeholders and clients to prioritize the meetings effectively. Try this for two weeks, and we will meet again."

Kavita: "I am not sure how this would work out. In my experience, sometimes meetings are set according to some immediate need and are thus unplanned. Plus, meetings are only one aspect of work. Ok, know what, just let me see how things will be."

Later that week, Kavita decided that she would keep Monday and Thursday exclusively for meetings and work during the previous shifts on these days. However, more often, some or the other outstanding issues needed another round of meetings on subsequent days. Kavita, as lowly, grew uncomfortable with the work scenario but continued it for another month, hoping that things would sort out and that she would "get the hang of things." Kavita, that month, also noticed that on the remuneration front, she was not billed for shift allowance as Sahil promised.

Kavita has now decided to consult with other employees in other project teams as well. They aired similar observations and informed her that only the team leads of their respective teams worked in the 2:30 pm – 11:30 pm shift while others worked as per the revised timings. Their leads also held meetings 2 or 3 days a week at their convenience, after which they briefed the other team members and assigned work. Kavita pondered over her role in the team. However, like the other team leads, she was considered for shift allowance and flexible work timings. On top of it, in his previous meeting with her, Sahil suggested that she would be rewarded for her work and loyalty towards the company.

Kavita soon grew excited about becoming the team lead and convinced herself that others, including the management, perceived her as ready to take up new responsibilities. After a few weeks, to end the confusion, she formally asked for the team lead position and sought clarification on the shift allowance.

Second meeting with Sahil

Kavita entered Sahil's cabin unannounced. Engrossed in his work, he was surprised to see Kavita.

Sahil: "Surpiya, here you are! Before you say anything, let me give you good news. I just appointed Chitransh Pathak as your new team lead. He will bring your team new energy and fresh ideas, which will be a great learning process for you. Anyways, how have you been all these days?"

Kavita was shocked. She told him she needed someone to assist her and not take over as the team lead. She felt betrayed.

Kavita: "Sahil, this is *indeed* some news. I thought you were conducting interviews for subordinate roles in my team and not for the Team Lead position. You never bothered to keep me in the loop? Frankly, I expected to be promoted this time for everything I did. In your last meeting, you gave me an indication of the same. I think it's time for advancement in my career. I rightly deserve better."

Sahil (visibly irritated): "Oh! I don't know what to say. Please don't get me wrong, but I have never considered you for the role of a team lead. I am sorry if you got that impression anytime during our last meeting. And if it's any solace, having Chitransh here was not planned. By chance, I happened to meet him, and we just talked. I know he has varied experience in the software industry. He will not only guide you on the technical front but also help you manage the work efficiently and help you out when you struggle with work."

Kavita (visibly shocked): "What? This is what you understood from my last meeting. You are simply twisting my words to bring in someone else, and on top of it, you feel that I am a novice in this industry? Did you consider this when I was working overtime and did all the functions of a team lead most ably? Sahil, I am quite capable and did my best even when everyone else questioned the company. Earlier, I was given this meager amount as a bonus. Rohit, with his questionable performance, got a better bonus than me. Now it's this. Is there something that I am not being told? Is there something more to it?"

Sahil: "Kavita, you are over reacting. This is what happens when one starts overestimating herself. I know you are hurt, and maybe the salary cut has affected you badly, as it has affected all of us. It's all right to ask why you didn't receive the bonus you felt you deserved, but why are you concerned about others? Look, Kavita, I have a responsibility as the project manager, and I cannot propagate ill will among my people. As for the allowance, I got a late nod from the head office. Working with Chitransh would be a good learning experience for you, and I sincerely hope you will deliver the knowledge transfer sessions to him to the best of your abilities."

Stunned by this, Kavita felt disenfranchised, used, and cheated. Crestfallen at the turn of events, she left office early that day. At home, she shared her predicament with her mother and blamed Sahil and the company for behaving unjustly. She later contemplated a job change, but her mother advised her to rethink this drastic step in an already sluggish economy.

Chitransh joins as the new team lead.

The following Monday, when Kavita arrived at work, she almost immediately received a phone call from Sahil asking her to meet him. She went straight to his cabin and saw him seated with a man probably her age. Sahil introduced him as Chitransh, who would join from that day. Kavita was surprised but welcomed him. "That was quick," Kavita thought, "Were they planning on this much before Sahil talked about it last week? Chitransh looks my age. What experience was Sahil referring to when he promoted him?" After the initial introductions, Sahil asked Kavita to appraise Chitransh on the project and the team. By the end of the week, Kavita realized through futile job searches that finding a new job in the tough economy was indeed challenging. She decided to put her differences aside and start afresh with Chitransh.

Experiences with Chitransh

Kavita prepared a detailed plan of the induction sessions (covering a period of 15 days) that were to be conducted for Chitransh. As the healthcare industry was relatively new for him, Kavita began with the definitions and terminologies the team followed in its process flow.

Initially, Chitransh was enthusiastic and participative during these sessions, but as days passed, his interest plummeted. Instead of the induction sessions, he seemed more involved in frequent meetings with Sahil, which would last several hours. However, he was extremely wary of and punctual if the team met with Sahil. He would comply with Sahil's words in those meetings and never give any counter-opinions. Soon, Sahil started to ask Chitransh for his opinion on almost all the tasks. During project meetings, Sahil would openly express his liking towards Chitransh and praise him for his capabilities. Similarly, Chitransh also sought Sahil's opinion on all the essential matters. Soon, she realized that most of the teamwork and targets were discussed during their informal lunches and dinners, and they distanced themselves from her.

Chitransh stopped including Kavita in the meetings with clients. He also did not prepare meeting minutes (MOM)[2], which was a regular practice in the team. She discussed her concerns with Chitransh, who heard them but said nothing. Unclear instructions, expectations, and plans delivered to Kavita demotivated her. Even when she met Chitransh, he did not take it politely; instead, he was harsh. Things worsened after this, and Chitransh grew cold and unresponsive to her.

Kavita, being dependent, felt alienated from the team and thought that the burden of work had hardly been reduced. What anguished her most was that Chitransh started to promise deadlines to the clients without consulting with her. Consequently, the deadlines were rarely met, and almost always, the clients complained about it. In a code review, she was embarrassed when, during the presentation, an auditor pointed out a significant

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[2]*MOM (minutes of meeting) is the summary of a meeting. It illustrates action items and target dates.*

defect in the code. This was a result of the requirements not being made clear to her. Even though Chitransh did not defend her, he held Kavita responsible.

Finally, when Kavita could not handle it, she decided to take up the matter with Sahil in the next quarterly review meeting.

The final blow

Kavita reached the office early on the day of the quarterly review meeting. She was committed to conveying her observations to Sahil. She reached his cabin and found that Chitransh was already with him.

Kavita: "Hello Sahil! I needed to talk to you about something."

Sahil: "Yes, Kavita. We need to talk. Chitransh informed me about the fiasco during the last Code review meeting. I hope you realize we cannot lose face in front of our clients, especially when the company is going through a rough patch."

Kavita (startled): "With due respect, it *was* Chitransh's fault. I developed the code according to the data and guidelines given to me. The shocking part is that he neither spoke in my favor during the meeting nor realized his limitation now."

Sahil (Irritated): "Kavita, *please understand*. Chitransh is new to this project. If there was a doubt, you could have confirmed it with him or the clients before the review meeting. You cannot pass the blame to someone else."

Kavita: "Sahil, it was not a case of doubt. I am not blaming anyone. It would be best if you saw this without judgment. The wrong information was passed on to me. How would I know the client's expectations if I am not asked to sit during client meetings? During all these years of working here, a situation has never been like this. The work has been suffering, and I feel I am no longer part of the team. I was thinking of applying for another project through Internal Job Posting." [3]

Sahil (callously): "Kavita, I don't understand why you feel everyone is against you. You are the only one feeling left out. Rohit is pleased. I know you had problems with Chitransh as a lead from day one, but you cannot carry the baggage of the past to ruin your present. You may try to do whatever you like, but I am not in a position to give you my approval. I can only say that you can wait for some more time before Chitransh can perform the duties independently. Then, I will be more than willing to give you my recommendation for any other team, project, or even another company. Right now, please concentrate on your work. You may leave now."

Dejected and insulted, Kavita walked out of Sahil's office. Soon, this became a common topic of conversation for employees. While some openly empathized with her along with the members of other projects and recommended that she distance herself from the organization, few, in a hushed tone, criticized Sahil and Chitransh for making the environment unfair and politically charged. Yet others were pessimistic regarding their future in the company. At the same time, there was a rumor that an employee knew Chitransh's previous employers, who revealed that he had been fired due to poor performance and fabricating experience. The office gossip intensified this issue. People knew he was Sahil's 'pet' and kept a distance from him. Kavita had never been so helpless and hopeless.

When Kavita tried to talk to Sahil again, he ignored her requests and told her that she needed to follow the instructions of her lead. Kavita did not know what to do. She pondered over what went wrong. Could things be the way they were when she joined? Should she seek a transfer to another team or join another organization? On December 26, she stood on her balcony, thinking about her next step.

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[3] *Internal Job Posting or IJP is an initiative by Adcorp Inc. where in an employee can apply for different projects/ teams in case of vacancies after completing a year in the project that an employee is currently working on. However the prerequisite is approval from the current manager to proceed with the same.*

Teaching Notes

Synopsis

Kavita Singh, a Senior Software Development Analyst at Adcorp International Services (AIS), a leading International Software Services company, was doubtful about her position. After six years as a loyal and productive employee, she felt unappreciated and insecure. She was still determining how to handle her situation due to the global recession that led the company in 2010 to downsize and introduce several unexpected changes in the form of revisions in the salaries, shift timings, and commutation of its employees. In such a scenario, several key position employees have resigned abruptly. Kavita volunteered and performed the team lead role, and problems started when Kavita was denied the position despite performing diligently for several months. She felt that injustice had been done to her, and another person with questionable experience had been hired. This embittered her and left her demotivated. In a climate of rapid organizational changes, intragroup competition, favoritism, mistrust, misuse of power, limited resource sharing, poor coordination, and non-cooperation, the project's progress suffered, and Kavita became a scapegoat. Her attempts to reconcile were thwarted. Now clearly troubled, Kavita was indecisive and pondered how to handle the situation.

Teaching objectives

The case is written for the MBA and undergraduate business courses' organizational behavior courses. It can also be used for an Executive program. The following concepts can be introduced through the use of this case:

(a) Organizational climate
(b) Psychological contract
(c) Workplace politics and influence tactics
(d) Team dynamics and the role of its leader

a) Organizational climate: To understand organizational climate, we have three approaches: i) an objective set of organizational attributes, a ii) a *subjective* perception that an individual forms from the organizational characteristics (i.e., psychological climate), and a third approach that balances the above two by posit it as an outcome of interactions that individuals have with their situations. Of importance here is Kavita's perception of other individuals, events, and the shared experiences and meanings formed by employees as a result of how the organizational system and subsystem interacted and dealt with its members, groups, and issues.

The concept assumes importance in the everyday functioning of an organization, such as work satisfaction, motivation, turnover intention, employee psychological well-being, overall performance, and organizational commitment[4].

Organizational climate occupies increased importance in a crisis when changes are common and frequent[5]. A crisis has the potential to disturb and disrupt the established organizational climate.

In the present scenario, the concept can be analyzed at three levels: as an individual perception; second, as an attribute of a subsystem, and third, as a collective perception of organizational members. Students can be encouraged to examine Kavita's psychological climate, how she perceived and interpreted her environment, processes, events, and other individuals, and how they influenced her behavior. Ultimately, the students can present an effective way of managing and shaping climate at all levels by AIS.

b) Psychological contract: The psychological contract starts to develop as soon as an employee enters the organization and is revised as they grow. A psychological contract describes the employment relationship (largely unspoken and unwritten) between the employer and employee regarding terms of exchange. While the concept has two dimensions-transactional (refers to specific monetizable exchange like promotions, remuneration, bonuses, etc.) and relational (refers to nonmonetizable exchange, for instance, job security, interpersonal relations, and professional development), both exert considerable influence on future expectations, behavior, performance and overall job satisfaction of the employee.

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[4] J. Kevin Frod, Taylor K. Lauricella, Jenna A .Van Fossen and Shawn J R, "Creating Energy for Change: The Role of Changes in Perceived Leadership Support on Commitment to an Organizational Change Initiative", *The Journal of Applied Behavioural Sciences* (2020).
[5] Soumendu Biswas, "Behavioural and attitudinal outcomes of psychological contract violation." *Journal of Management Development* 35, no. 2 (2016).

The concept of perception of breach of psychological contract[6] (the perception that the organization has failed to fulfill its obligation) is essential here because restructuring presented a challenge to the employees existing employment relationship and expectations from the organization. Many contemplated leaving AIS. Kavita, too, seemed to perceive a breach of psychological contract. Violation of psychological contract in her case can be related to procedural, interactional, and distributive justice issues. She expected just treatment regarding fair distribution of rewards, fair procedures followed to determine rewards, and fairness in her interactions with her seniors. While her project manager failed to see and reward her loyalty and efforts, her opportunities for career advancement were restricted unfairly. The present case offers a chance to analyze the reasons behind the breach of contract and its effects on employees, including Kavita.

c) Workplace politics and influence tactics: Workplace politics can be considered a reality and sometimes even inevitable for management, which must balance competing needs and demands when planning and distributing resources.

This case provides an understanding of how the perception of organizational politics is vital in understanding conflict development and its resolution. In the present case, the situational factors (workplace climate characterized by uncertainty, ambiguity, limited resources, and lack of trust) and personal factors (personality characteristics, attitudes, and needs) gave rise to politics. While Chitransh actively indulged in political behavior, Sahil failed to check it as a Project manager. He could not create a healthy, fair atmosphere with just relationships between the team members. Others also observed such behaviors by not being directly part of the issue. The consequences were psychological (stress), attitudinal (job dissatisfaction), and behavioral (withdrawal and distancing oneself from the organization) for Kavita and others.

d) *Team dynamics and the role of its leader*

The team involved is a project work team where members are required to structure themselves around a common purpose, work in a complementary and interdependent manner, share resources and information, have clarity in the role and contributions of each member, and gain satisfaction from mutual working. While the team can be evaluated against these dimensions, values that make teamwork possible can also be discussed. The role of its team lead, Chitransh, and the project manager, Sahil, is of specific importance here in shaping a team climate and influencing working relationships between the team members. Examining the team can help understand dysfunctional teams and the factors that make them dysfunctional.

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Classroom Activities and Discussion Questions

1. Critically analyze the organizational climate and its effect on the employees.
2. Discuss the development and manifestation of organizational politics and misuse of power. What effect did workplace politics have on employees?
3. What are the dysfunctional characteristics of the team? Evaluate the issues of leadership in the project team.
4. As Kavita, what would you do? What lessons can you draw from this case for general managers in an organization?**Appendix**

EXHIBIT 1

Lifeline Health Care Project

Source: Prepared by the authors