
**SETH PROJECT CONSULTANTS LTD:
STRIVING FOR GROWTH**

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Management activities are often discussed and analyzed using static analysis thereby failing to accurately communicate the difficulties of operating in an environment where decisions have to address several factors simultaneously and have unexpected consequences. This case is based on the problems faced by an organization in its effort to improve its growth rates. While the situation described touches upon various areas of management in an organizational setting beset with problems and confusion, the focus is on depicting the interrelated nature of different aspects of management and with particular reference to Indian work conditions.

Introduction

Seth Project Consultants Ltd. (SPCL) provided project management consultancy and services, primarily for large construction projects. Over the years it had earned a good reputation and was well regarded. The only drawback was that its growth was steady rather than spectacular and its Promoter/Chairman was very eager to remedy that aspect.

After several consultations and meetings, the management of SPCL agreed that some external assistance might be required to meet its promoter's aspirations. To that end they appointed leading advertising and marketing consultants to project the image of SCTL to a higher level and to help them grow their business. In addition some internal changes were also implemented

(spread out over a period of a year or so). One noticeable break from the past was the appointment of the new CEO. Until then, SPCL had always been run by an Operations executive. The new CEO, however, was a Finance man, who had caught top management's attention several years ago while spearheading the installation of a new Project Management Information System. The advanced accounting features of the PMIS had later come in very handy, not only by saving the company a lot of money, but also by helping it to avoid legal and other complications during a dispute with a very powerful customer. That had cast the then GM (Finance) into the limelight and accelerated his rise and when the current CEO was elevated to MD, the once upon a time GM (Finance) became the CEO.

The last major change concerned the organization structure. Earlier, temporary pure project organizations were formed to handle each new project under a senior manager (the Project Manager (PM)). Projects were largely industrial or government. Now, the businesses of SPCL were reclassified under four heads - Industrial, Government, Commercial (non-industrial) and Residential, and a new Business Head position (termed as Grade A1) (1) was introduced to head each business group. The Business Head reported to the DCEO. The PM designation and position were still retained, but while previously PMs were mobile and freely moved across projects without reference to whether they were industrial or government, now they were

attached to a particular business and required to report to the respective Business Head.

A couple of years after the launch of the new initiatives to revitalize the organization, SPCL decided to review the progress that had been made towards the objectives specified. Accordingly, a meeting of the CEO was scheduled with the management staff.

Brief Summary of CEO's Address

CEO: "We thought we would share a few things with you. I understand that all of you are busy at this time of the year, but the new initiatives for the revitalization of SPCL has been going on for about two years now and we in the management thought we should take stock and assess how things have been. A few concerns have been brought to us so we thought we should share some information and perhaps remove the doubts and answer the rumours that have been circulating.

First, certain rumours have been brought to the attention of top management regarding the new performance appraisal system. Let me clarify that the new performance appraisal system is not for the purpose of downsizing. We are not downsizing. There is no truth to the rumours. For every role we have now come up with a set of clear guidelines – what the employees are required to do, the criteria for performance appraisal and the basis on which rewards and promotions will be made. The purpose was to bring clarity and objectivity to the process so that everyone knows the basis on which these decisions will be made. There were some doubts, some worries that the goals are too challenging and we have addressed them adequately.

For example one common question is that employees are assessed on their overall all round performance. Let us say that an employee is very good at routine performance and poor at meeting developmental goals (individual or organizational). So what happens? We do not have any simple answer. The committee will review such cases and decide. But, in general, an acceptable level of performance across all criteria will be required. Exceptional performance in one or more criteria will be considered provided that the performance in each area is at least of a minimum standard. Yes, people who are not able to meet those standards will be given some chances but if they don't improve then we will not be able to continue our association with them. Our organization is not a free bus to carry ticket less passengers. Every one has to pull their weight.

Another point of concern that we have been hearing about relates to the distribution of work across locations. Since our centre here at Madhyampur was the first location where SPCL was established and is still the Head Quarters and largest workplace of SPCL I understand that many tasks were centralized here. Now of course, the other locations where our operations are carried out are getting larger, particularly Pashchimpur, Poorvanagar and Dakshinpet. The distribution of work across locations relating to both operations and administration must become more equitable. All operations centres must contribute their fair share and a beginning has been made. On the other hand, the need is to ensure that the same standards are maintained across locations.

In a similar fashion, we are also moving towards uniform application of HR and other policies across locations, standardization of procedures across locations and for that

matter through out the organization.

You will all be aware that as the first step in our growth plan, we had established the new positions of “Business Heads” to work under the top management team comprising of the MD, myself and the DCEOs. Each of our four businesses is under the direct charge of a Business Head and to start with all of them have been located here. At the other locations we have Deputy Business Heads. Ultimately a Business Head might be located anywhere the business requires and not necessarily here. The primary objectives of the Business Head are customer, market and product development for that business. Separate organization wide teams have also been established for this purpose comprising of employees who have been specially chosen for this purpose based on their expertise and potential to contribute to SPCL.

We had spent a lot of money on the external agencies we had appointed for the marketing and positioning of SPCL but that experiment was not successful. So now we have decided to handle those ourselves. As far as other functions are concerned we will continue to focus on core areas and outsource others to more competent agencies. I can tell you that we are already seeing encouraging results in some of these initiatives.

All these changes and more are in the pipeline to make SPCL the premier project consultancy organization in the country, a sought after partner of the construction industry and the employer of first choice for the best and brightest engineering and management students of the land."

Sometime after the meeting some quiet conversations took place. (**Note:** It may be

assumed that all facts, incidents and examples, reported or referred to in the conversations, are essentially true. Arguments/opinions should be assessed on their own merit/logic.)

Cast of characters:

Lakshmi Parvati (L): Expert with overall 18 year's experience. At the time of the first conversation she was a scheduling specialist.

Vaishampayana (V): Veteran employee with 14 year's experience. At the time of the first conversation he was a design expert and the Department Head of his function.

Yajnavalkya (Y): Veteran employee with over 10 years' experience at SPCL. At the time of the first conversation he was a certified civil specifications professional and the Department Head of his function.

Conversations

A

L: Let's see, I took some notes the other day...

V: (Raising eyebrows sardonically) Took notes?

L: (Unperturbed) It is useful sometimes. One tends to forget things these days.

Y: Yes, of course, words of wisdom, sorry, golden words are never repeated.

V: Rare words from our non-resident CEO and non-resident MD.

L: (Looks up, vaguely interested) Yes, do tell me where these people are all the time? Business development?

Y: What business development? Spending large sums of money on meetings not held or otherwise unproductive.

V: Meetings? Enjoying the comforts of home you mean!

L: (Still searching) No, I mean, I thought, he was supposed to be heading up that new business?

V: Where are you these days? He gave up that long back. They have appointed new people,

created that new post called Business Head as he mentioned. He gave up his Business Head duties long back.

Y: And so now we have yet some more grossly overpaid "top managers".

L: Found it! So tell me what did you think of his statement? "Not a free bus for ticket less passengers", and that bit about pulling our own weight. Reminds me of olden day oarships with lots of poor fellows rowing?

Y: So those fellows sit and beat the drum and we row?

V: No, no. No drum beating and all that. They enjoy themselves fully without distractions. That is why they appoint others - to beat the drum and whip the slaves.

L: Right. Full of joy, the both of you are.

B

L: Now tell me I don't remember hearing about those business wide teams before?

V: Of course not! Only specially chosen employees are on those teams!

Y: And we are not special. But, I did hear some months back about some such proposal. I thought everyone knew.

L: Maybe they sent it only to you Department Heads. I definitely don't remember it. Anyway the Marketing Department and Business Development people must be rejoicing.

V: Rejoicing?

L: Well okay, I believe the exact word is schadenfreude.

Y: What? Use simple words.

L: German word, which found its way into English. It means, "joy at the misfortune of others".

V: Oh, you are talking about the advertising and marketing consultants.

Y: Tell me, he said that the experiment failed, but did anyone ask why?

V: Ask why? No, no, no, no, no. That is all dangerous. Then you may have to find

someone at fault.

L: But –

Y: No buts, it was an experiment which failed.

L: But, then how do we know that other experiments won't fail?

Y: What? You still have some doubt? Of course they will fail!

V: Yes, I was just going to say that but he said it. In all those so called "non-core areas" we have great expertise, developed over many years with much effort, but it is being lost now and our external professional agencies are doing very poor quality work, and at a very high cost also. Only when the system collapses, then everyone will realize.

C

V: We don't seem to be meeting very regularly these days?

Y: (Laughing) Coordination problems?

L: Sorry, I don't get it.

Y: Projects are accepted here at HQ. We go through and tentatively, in principle agree that it can be done and then it is circulated for approval. Last time some projects were rejected here. But then the business development team at Pashchimpur called the party for negotiations.

V: Not only that, the best part is that they have accepted (other) projects for which they do not have the capabilities!

Y: Even better, some projects are only handled here. Some months back they found out that Dakshinpet has accepted such a project and completed it without informing any one. Only at the time of accounting and billing did the whole thing come out and become known over here!

V: You don't know the whole story, Poorvanagar did the same thing, and then they used the wrong accounting code.

D

L: One part of what he said got me a bit

worried. What was that reference to overall all round performance and developmental goals? Till now I was aware of only my performance of my duties including the secretarial/administrative/clerical work, which was not originally part of my job, but got dumped on my head, when they didn't hire new staff. And then of course it became part of the performance appraisal system!

Y: No idea, he was just giving an example and possibly he was thinking that we had 360 degree feedback so he spoke about developmental goals.

V: Yes, that is most likely; he probably doesn't even know what work we do.

E

Y: (Gleefully) I foresee more problems.

L: I should have known from how happy you were that something is about to happen.

V: What is it this time?

Y: Potential future problems.

L: Could you be more specific?

Y: (In a sing song voice) The company has decided to implement teleconferencing and electronic work groups, due to unique skills at different locations.

V: So?

Y: (Continuing in sing song) This might require further changes in the Performance Appraisal System.

L: I am ... doomed.

About six months later there was much activity and it became known that a High Level Management Meeting of Top management was being conducted. Shortly thereafter a meeting of the MD was scheduled with the management staff. This led to animated discussions among the staff.

F

L: Any idea what this meeting is about?

V: Are you new to SPCL?

L: (Taken aback) No.

V: Have you ever attended any meeting where the agenda was circulated in advance?

Y: Don't you know? First the minutes are written then the meeting is convened!

L: Hey, hey, hey, okay, you don't have to be so mean. I just thought that you well-informed people knew. If you don't know, no need to get all heated up!

Y: (Laughing) You are right. We do know.

V: (Grinning) Growth problems! Marketing failures!

L: What?

Y: And above industry norm attrition rate among employees.

L: (Hopefully) No good news?

V: Look we have told you what we heard. Now, whether you think it is good or bad, it is up to you.

L: So should I go for the meeting? I have another meeting scheduled with a customer.

Y: Last week I got a terrible scolding from W. You know what he said? "It is your mistake. You think you have a choice. When your boss asks/says something even if it doesn't sound like an order, it is one and you have no choice".

L: (Sighs) OK. It's just that the last meeting was so depressing.

Y: Can you tell me one good thing about these meetings?

V: Yes, I find them terribly motivational.

Y,L: (Look at V as though he has gone mad.)

V: Ask me what I do?

L: What does it motivate you to do Basanti? (2)

V: Very funny, very funny. But, ... it does motivate me. It motivates me to get high scores on Space Invaders®. (3)

Brief Summary of MD's Address

MD: "Thank you all for being here. As you might be aware last week we had a top management meeting with all the DCEOs and Business Heads. Certain issues were discussed and we thought that some of those should also be informed to everyone here. Briefly we have several points on the agenda. In fact some of those points were mentioned by the CEO in his address a few months ago about future paths.

Specifically, since we are approaching our historically lean season, and this is the time when many of you avail of your leave entitlements, there are some points you might want to ponder over when you are free, in your spare time.

To start with there were some issues about centralization and decentralization across locations, business, projects, departments and teams. These questions have assumed greater importance in view of the changes that have been initiated by which we are implementing greater delegation of authority and responsibility to the employee on the spot to make decisions. We have implemented policies empowering employees across the company to participate effectively in the new schemes initiated in various operational areas, including business development and new product development and we expect your enthusiastic participation.

In our last meeting with the chairman, we had suggested certain goals regarding our company. I may tell you that the chairman was quite appreciative of all that we had done, but thought that we should stretch our goals. For example, revenues from new

customers, products and businesses are very small right now and he did not feel that merely setting a high growth target on such small bases was appropriate. Therefore we finally decided on some more challenging goals based on absolute values. We decided that these might be better set as percentages of our total revenue i.e. what fraction of our sales should come from these areas. Please also be aware that these are stretch targets and therefore quite demanding. We have studied some innovative companies such as 3M and decided to set out own goals accordingly. The goal is that 50% of our total revenues should be generated from these avenues – new customers/markets contributing 10%, new products from the existing businesses 20% and new businesses another 20%, thereby doubling our existing revenues from their current levels.

This is possible only if each and every one of us is involved in the effort to generate new business. In fact we have always been encouraging employees in this regard in the past as well i.e. to say employees generating new business for our company have always been recognized and rewarded. The only difference now is that everyone must be involved in this activity. If you have contacts outside, follow up and tell them what we can do for them. When you go to the sites and meet representatives of other organizations; when we are bidding and you meet the private and public agencies issuing the tenders; and in general, whenever you come across some project activity or meet people involved in project activity, tell them what we can do. And when you come back, inform the respective departments here so that they can follow up.

Coming to the matter of new business and product development: we have already

delegated these matters to the specialist departments. It is you collectively who are now assessing new requests for proposal and forwarding them for processing. You do not need to be told that all the growth planned can come about only if we have the right attitude and involvement of all personnel. All employees were instructed in detail about the new product development programmes and in fact those tasks were delegated to the departments and teams over a year ago. I would be very unhappy if anyone says that they have completed all the work assigned to his or her department or team. This simple means that you have not identified enough growth opportunities to make sure that all resources are fully engaged. The responsibility for identifying new business lies with each and every one of us: with each member of every department, project or business, and in particular the Department Heads. Nor will we accept it as a genuine reason if any department or project team identifies a lack of manpower as a reason for not being able to achieve their targets.

In fact let me make it clear, achievement of the targets set by the chairman is of paramount importance. I do not wish to offend anyone, but, it has been observed that many of our employees are very careful to take full benefit – that is to say – to fully avail of the leave that they are allowed and it perhaps time to reconsider that issue. If you have time to go on leave then you cannot say that you did not have enough time or manpower to achieve your targets.

In a related development, we have also decided to institute some new initiatives in order to bring SPCL on par with the practices

of our most renowned competitors. Henceforth we will have a new billing procedure. Instead of billing on the basis of man-hours as is currently being done, the top management was of the view that billing should be done on the basis of man-days with the minimum billing unit being half a man-day. The procedure for the billing calculation has also been revised in order ensure that the billing amount remains more or less comparable under the new norms, and to prevent abuse of the process so that clients will not start complaining that it is just a back door way to increase the billed amount.

I think that I may disclose to you that there was a heated discussion about the implementation of the new billing procedures. Everyone present from the Chairman downward to the Department Heads had strong views. Finally agreement was reached. In any case the new billing procedures would have to be adopted sooner or later. However, ultimately it was decided to introduce the new billing procedures from the current year, with the following provisos: (i) the new billing procedures would be applied to all new clients; (ii) for existing clients and existing projects, following the current billing procedures might cause confusion; and (iii) for the first year it is up to the departments concerned to decide which billing procedures they wish to follow.

Finally, after much thought, one of the new product development teams has come up with a suggestion. I would like all of you to consider this suggestion without any preconceived notions or prejudices as it has great potential to be a money-spinner, even though it might seem counter intuitive. There is great demand for certification programmes, which I can

vouch for from my personal experience; I myself have conducted a number of refresher courses for various corporate clients. Since all of us, or at least most of you, have qualified, passed and obtained various project management certifications, we may be able to become a certifying agency ourselves or failing that we can at least facilitate people who want to obtain the same – for a fee of course. Now if we consider the number of persons who might need these types of certifications, I am sure that you can estimate for yourselves that the market size is potentially hundreds or even thousands of crores. I want each and every business and department at each of our locations to develop and run at least one such certification programme in the next one year, preferably during the lean season next year."

Predictably the MD's announcements led to some furore among employees even though they were careful to discuss these matters only in private.

Conversations (Cont'd)

G

Y: What a joker. Saw the presentation he made? He can't make a decent set of slides and he claims to have run certification programmes?

L: (Hesitantly) Maybe someone else made the slides for him.

Y: That is alright. That is what W says. He says that he doesn't make slides. He even says that he has other people to do such things. But just look at the quality of his (W's) slides. If other people make the slides you should at least check before using the slides, and I remember that he (MD) said

that he had made the slides himself.

L: Fair enough. (Sighs)

Y: (sarcastically) What? Lost your enthusiasm?

L: Remember what he said? "Some points you might want to consider during your leave". You know what the translation is? "Some of you might want to start searching for a new job!"

V: That is a good input!

L: And that's not all. Did either of you get the underlying message?

Y: The stated message was enough for us!

L: This is worse than you think. All the time he was saying everything is our responsibility, meaning what? Everything is our fault! They have done whatever they could and so nothing is their fault, but everything depends on us and therefore if things turn out badly, everything will be our fault!

H

L: I had a really interesting experience just now.

Y: Calm down, calm down.

V: Yes, have a seat, calm down and then tell us.

L: Oh there's no problem in telling. Sometime back we managed to develop a new product concept. So I took it up to my Department Head – you know him – excessively careful not to cause even the smallest wave. Surprisingly enough he seemed to think it would be possible to take it forward. So I wrote it up and off it went to the PM. So more queries, more funny questions, but he too seemed to think it would pass. Then it went to the Business Head who took it to the DCEO. Now the Business Head has sent a mail, which was eventually forwarded to me that the DCEO says it should be discussed with the CEO, the MD and the other DCEOs. He even wants to know whether we have discussed this with our counterparts

at the other locations. Imagine – 'WE' are going to offer that product / service and this relates to services offered only here ok? On top of it the other locations don't have experts in this area. And now, all these other fellows will tell us what to do? They don't have to implement it so they can make any funny suggestions and we have to implement it and face the music? This is really ridiculous.

V: Oh, you think that is bad? Wait till you hear my story. Like in your case, some proposal finally found its way to the DCEO's table. So I call him up. He says that he is busy and to call next week. So I call again the following week and the week after and then the week after that! Finally, he says that he will get back to me. Now I am stuck. And at least in your case everyone knows the situation. My department thinks that I, as the Department Head, am not doing anything and I get a bad name.

Y: Yes, yes, and if you try to tell anyone all they say is that the bosses are busy people so it is up to the businesses, project people, departments and teams to follow up and get things done. But do they understand that this is all in addition to our normal schedule? I cannot leave everything and go sit outside his office. Then top management will say that I am never available in my office!

L: There are so many things we can do. But these top managers keep going on the same track. I thought that new products and services should be offered because there is a market demand/requirement, because customers recognize the value proposition and are willing to pay a good price. But, we have no discretion over pricing. Everything is decided on a company wide basis. I don't understand; if customers believe that some services are worth more then why can't we

give them what they want and charge for the full value?

V: Don't worry, it is not only you. We also had a terrible fight in the meeting about our proposal. In the past we offered some products and services, but we really didn't have much expertise in those areas. Now one of our specialists suggested that we should get out of those and instead offer the services demanded by our customers. You know whenever there is any interaction they (customers) mention that it would be nice if we offered the full set of services they use. But in the meeting the argument went round and round. People kept arguing that we had built up expertise in many products and services so they should be offered because SPCL has the capabilities.

L: Wait a minute I am a bit lost. First you said that you didn't have capabilities, now you say that SPCL has the capabilities. So which one is it?

Y: On paper we have some capabilities. But in practice the quality is very poor. Some people believe that we have the capabilities. He (indicating Y) and I don't. That is another story.

V: Ultimately, it comes to the same thing. Do we offer those service and products because we have capabilities (or think we have capabilities) to provide them or do we determine which service and products the market wants and develop the capabilities required to ensure that we can provide them?

I

L: (to Y) V seems to be in bad mood?

Y: There he is. Let us ask him directly.

Y: (to V) What happened?

V: (Fuming) Don't ask. Do you remember those new billing regulations?

Y: Sort of. Why?

V: (Looking around carefully before starting)

So, sometime back the formal document of the new billing regulations and procedures was circulated to all of us?

L: Might have seen it. Don't remember the details.

V: It had a preface mentioning that it had been decided to introduce the new billing procedures from the current year and that the new procedures would be applicable to all clients of the company. Some of the others went to get some clarifications about the new procedures and were told that for ongoing projects they could follow the previous norm. That was a big relief, since we are in the middle of many projects and we had been maintaining billing records in the old way i.e. on the hourly basis format. No doubt we could convert the records to the new format, but this would require a lot of time and effort. So we continued as we were doing.

Then at the quarterly review, the billing statement submitted by some of the specialists in my department following the hourly norm was apparently questioned by top management. Since none of us were present at that meeting, a committee of VP (Operations), VP (Systems & Admin) and VP (HR), was set up to meet and find out why the old norms were still being followed. The CEO in particular was very angry that employees apparently did not know that the policy had been amended and made some very harsh comments about the consequences for such employees. When the people were questioned by the committee, all of them said that they were aware about the new procedures, but they had understood that the new billing was optional for the first year and that they had been informed that for ongoing projects it was not merely permitted, but also preferable that the old

norms be followed rather than change procedures in the middle of the project and risk offending the clients. The committee was taken aback at the response and clarified to them that the new procedures were not optional. Then H proved that in his project, following the old norms was beneficial and also more equitable.(4) The committee was surprised but agreed that in his case, perhaps the old norms could be allowed and he (and I) believed that the matter had been closed.

Y: So much fuss over nothing?

V: (Growling) Wait. I have not finished.

L: Something more happened?

V: Yes. A few days after that, H was again directly instructed by VP (HR) that all employees had to follow the new billing norms and he was asked to rework his billing statement. I was not called to that meeting, nor was I officially informed about what happened. But now H is quite confused and also angry. However there is no way to argue or verify what happened at the meeting because there is no official (written) communication - only an oral instruction.

J

L: Tell me, that day you said you had another story

V: Who said?

L: You both did

Y: About what?

L: Our capabilities or some people's perceptions of our capabilities.

V: There is a long story. I believe it is true but I have no proof.

L: Why the suspense? Please start.

V: Okay but after that if I want a rope you should not ask why! You know that our MD earlier worked at Bizarre Banausic Research Organization (BBRO)?

L: It was called something else earlier?

V: Pre-independence it was known as the Benefic Bibliophilic Research Organization,

but when Bizarreland achieved independence it decided to give up its colonial name and renamed itself as Bizarreland Banausic Research Organization which was later amended (shortened) to its present name of Bizarre Banausic Research Organization. Anyway, when our MD was a Department Head at the BBRO, a similar problem had arisen over there. The story goes like this:

Many years ago, BBRO was a small struggling organization, and they needed to improve their viability. Its Pharmacy Department was renowned but most people were unaware that it even had other departments. They were very desperately looking for ways to improve their research output. So it was considered a great achievement when BBRO managed to convince Nexteinstein the famous physicist to join them.

When the news spread, people were surprised that Nexteinstein had agreed to join BBRO. While Physics was a long established department at BBRO it was not one of its better departments. In fact it was not known at all for its research; in reality many of the physicists were more famously (or notoriously) associated with some nearby schools where they were much in demand as tutors. Indeed, only a short while earlier there had been rumours that BBRO was planning to do away with the Physics Department entirely. Then came the shocking announcement: Nexteinstein had been hired for the Pharmacy department and the stunned employees raised all sorts of queries:

Why? Because the pharmacy department was world famous for its research and Nexteinstein was the foremost physicist in

the world was the answer.

What does physics have to do with pharmacy? BBRO had a specialized research area called Physical Pharmacy. (Besides as the high ranking officer said, "Physics, pharmacy all these , (5) areas isn't it obvious there is an esoteric similarity?")

Who decided? The recruitment committee of BBRO comprising of senior officers from various departments (but no one from either Physics or Pharmacy).

Two departments were most unhappy at the developments. The first obviously was the Physics department. When questioned by the HoD, Physics Department, about why Nexteinstein had been hired for the Pharmacy Department, the recruitment committee members laughed till the tears came out of their eyes.

"Do you expect the foremost scientist in the world to wallow in your mud hole?" scoffed one officer. "We have hired him because HE IS. Just having his name associated with BBRO gives us prominence."

The other surprisingly (or perhaps not so surprisingly) was the Pharmacy department.

"What on earth are we supposed to do with a physicist?" asked one junior scientist bolder than the others. "He probably doesn't know the difference between liver and lung much less patella and pituitary. And it not as though we are not reputed in our own right."

The officer frowned. "He is a double Nobel laureate: the only one of his kind still alive. "You" may be "reputed" but "He" is a living legend. You must learn to make use of the

resources you have got. Why should he be restricted to work in only YOUR areas of specialization? Let him do research in whatever area he likes.”

The other officer interjected, “Yes, that is correct let him do whatever he likes. Be happy if his shadow falls on you.”

“But the cost ...”, the HoD of Pharmacy started to splutter.

“Cost? Bah!” was the condescending reply, “Are you accountants? No? Concentrate on science and leave such mundane book keeping type tasks to the Industrial Studies Department,” (“Till they are shut down,” the other added sotto voice).

“Just be happy that unlike SOME departments you are not at present in any danger of being made redundant. Consider Nextein's appointment in your department as your reward!”

V: And that, my dear friends, is your answer.

L: But what has that story to do with us?

Y: Everything. When the big bosses found that some departments were lagging behind in new product development they decided to “help” us by providing us with “experts”. Let us not start about what we wanted. Just one example is enough: one time, we wanted a civil engineer with expertise in modelling. Finally we reached a compromise and agreed to accept anyone with mathematical modelling expertise. They did not recruit us a civil engineer nor did they get us an expert in modelling. Instead they transferred K, who is a mechanical engineer to us. Now, I should not comment about someone else's abilities, but K himself says that he has spent his entire life in maintenance and forgotten all his

academics! And now if you say words like 'design' or 'model' in front of him he looks at you blankly. So on paper we have expertise, but our “experts” have no knowledge about our practical engineering problems. (6)

V: And these are the people who top management has faith in. And not only that that – all the new “experts” have been directly recruited in grade B. So on the one hand top management complains about productivity and on the other hand we are dumped with useless fellows, who are paid high salaries, but who do no work.

L: Yes. That seems to be a common feature these days. Even in our department, the new recruits are all interested in new product development, but when it comes to the normal work they all complain about the workload and the quality of their work is pathetic. All absolutely lazy lumps! But after the new pay scales were altered, they were all placed in grade D or even C with the rest of us people, who have been bursting ourselves, slogging here for so many years.

K

V: It finally happened.

Y: What?

V: H lost his temper.

L: H lost his temper? But he is so calm and quiet. I cannot imagine him shouting.

V: He didn't shout. The committee called him for a meeting where the new billing procedures were being discussed. Our CEO was there and made some comment about people being unaware about the billing procedures. H very politely told him that it was possible that he (H) didn't know about the billing procedures. Then he continued that he had been here almost 15 years, doing various tasks including preparing the billing statements from his first year. He finished by saying that he was quite sure that there could

be no doubt that the CEO was more expert than him and that he (H) was quite willing to learn from him.

Y: He said that?

L: The CEO who hasn't prepared a single billing statement, at least here at SPCL, is going to teach him about billing? What did the CEO say?

V: He looked surprised. Then the DCEO told H that the guidelines had already been circulated and the CEO had other responsibilities.

Y: (unbelievably) You mean they didn't understand what he was trying to say?

V: Correct. They thought he was just being troublesome. They didn't understand that he was mocking them.

L

V: I wish that I had some back up then, like H, I too would say something to the CEO and MD.

L: About what?

V: About the certification programmes.

Y: What would you say?

V: I would say that I was not able to conduct the programme because all the hotel rooms were booked.

L: (puzzled) All the hotel rooms were booked?

V: Yes, the famous summer/monsoon vacation wonderland resort of Madhyampur is much in demand at that time of the year and tourists make bookings months in advance. What? Why do you look at me like that? SPCL does not have any accommodation facilities of its own, so the participants will have to stay in hotels.

L: Agreed, we don't have any accommodation facilities. But who comes here in the summer/monsoon? I don't understand how anyone can think that outsiders will willingly want to come here in the summer with average temperatures of 40+ degrees in the

shade, till the monsoon starts and then we get an average of 10 mm rain daily!

V: And look at our location – out of town in the heart of the industrial area. The nearest decent hotel is almost 20 km away. It was ideal for our original customers but to conduct certification programmes?

Y: You are missing the point. All these off location programmes are part business and part paid holiday. But our canteen and lunchroom are vegetarian. There is no bar anywhere nearby. There are no recreational facilities.

V: Yes, ideal conditions, enjoy industrial surroundings complete with pollution, eat grass, drink water and without any distractions participants will have to focus on the programme!

Y: If our "experts" run the programme, the programme will be the recreation!

M

Y: (Grimly) Have you ever thought that you could see the future?

L: No.

V: Just tell us what happened.

Y: I am just coming from a meeting with our Business Head. He says six months are gone and wants to know why we are lagging behind in new customer / business / product development.

L: Does he understand that we are short staffed and have not been able to even complete the work we have on hand? What happened to all those "initiatives" anyway?

V: Really! This is too bad! Top management reorganized the company into businesses and appointed Business Heads for this very purpose. Then they appointed the company wide business development and product development committees and on top of it they even appointed similar committees for each Business, Department, Location and what

not. In this process, some Department Heads are on their respective departmental committees and some are not. Why? Because apparently the choice of committee members has been dictated by the grade - only grade B and grade A level management staff were included on the committees. What happened in some departments where the number of grade A and grade B employees were less than 5? Then they have drawn members from other departments. And finally when the Business Heads and top management's "handpicked" committees fail, all of us are responsible for the failure of product development, business expansions and new business development?

L: So, now it is clear why the CEO referred to overall all round performance. We underestimate these people. See it wasn't that innocent. But how are we can we achieve those revenue goals? The MD calls them stretch; I say they are extremely difficult. In two years we haven't managed to do more than 1 or 2 % each and in one year he expects to make it ten times as much?

Y: Only difficult? That is what you think. I think they are impossible.

V: That is what. This is the power of delegation. Now it is not their problem. Like you said it is our problem.

L: Well we can't solve it. So better start getting ready for the fun next year.

Notes

1. Originally management grades (below DCEO) in SPCL ranged from Grade A (highest) to Grade G (lowest). The creation of the new Business Head required the creation of a new grade, hence A1.

2. Older readers will no doubt be able to place the reference to Sholay. (Basanti what is your name?)

3. Space Invaders® One of the first (read "really old") video games in which the player has to shoot down alien invaders.

4. Admittedly this was an example of a rather peculiar set of situations where, due to no fault of either party, on a large number of occasions the employee had not been able to put in a full day on the project, so the number of partial days worked was very high.

5. Psi, Phi (= Sci-fi?).

6. Similar to 6 above, it might be inferred that mathematics, maintenance, mechanical engineering and modelling are related in the same esoteric way, beginning with the sacred letter 'μ'. And likewise, benefic bibliophilic, bizarre and banausic are related to each other by the enigmatic symbol 'β'.