

A Perspective on the Case: "Anatomy of a Crisis"

*Dr Arvind Sudarsan

**Assistant Professor, Management Group, BITS Pilani*

The following is a perspective on the case study published in our January 2011 issue, "The Blow That Shook The Bank" and attempts to analyse the reasons and the remedies for the situation that was reported therein and to find a judicious management solution to the issue. With the use of the fable of the Panchatantra the author tries to answer if the crisis could have been avoided?

Preface

The case brings to mind a story in the Panchatantra called "The Three Fish". The gist of the story is that three fish overhear that some fishermen have discovered their pond. The first fish leaves immediately. The following day, the second fish is caught by the fishermen and manages to escape, (by his presence of mind), by pretending to be dead. The third fish is also caught and thrashes about in the net (trying to escape) and is killed by the fishermen.

According to one source (<http://panchatantra.org/tale-of-the-three-fish.html>) the names of the three fish are given as:

1. Anagatavidhata, meaning^{1,2}: one who can foresee events which have not taken place;
2. Pratyutpannamati, meaning: one who is able to handle whatever is happening at the moment; and
3. Yadbhavishya, meaning: one who doesn't care about what will happen; who does not plan for future

Based on the details provided, by and large, the characters in the case would appear to exhibit the characteristics of the third fish. Whichever paradigm one prefers³, it is clear that things have been allowed to deteriorate to their present state as described in the case.

Analysis of Issues & Characters

(This is with reference more to the last set of questions mentioned in the case)

1. Robinson: racist, obnoxious (alienated almost all employees including those in the executive cadre), stupid (not bright). Why is he tolerated at all in the bank? What action was taken to correct his behaviour in the past?
2. Murari Bose: Frustrated due to lack of advancement; leading to over reactions. (Observation: such a situation can lead individuals to become bitter; then their performance is affected and other people complain and treat them worse – it is a vicious cycle.) Why is he not being promoted? Is there a good cause? Has anyone told him? (Apparently not.) If he was a poor performer why was he promoted in the first place?
3. Mukherjee slapping Bose: Where Mukherjee chooses to stay would appear to be his business. It is his responsibility to come on time. So the question arises: does he normally

come on time, or how often is he late? Accordingly he may be dealt with. This issue must be resolved creatively. It cannot be left to go unrecognized for obvious reasons of organizational discipline and morale. No action will be perceived as an invitation for the staff to slap officers.

4. The union can go to the police if they like. The facts are that Mukherjee assaulted Bose and not the other way about. If Bose files a counter charge, it will be Mukherjee facing the music.
5. Conflict management: Apparently issues (1) and (2) were managed by "avoidance", and primarily because of this the present situation has arisen.

Possible Solutions

With reference to Mukherjee, One possible solution would be to give him a suspended punishment contingent on good behaviour (and possibly coming to work on time for the next 6 months or 1 year).

Bose's situation presents a trickier problem. While his age is not mentioned, it would appear that he cannot be very young, so some care should be taken to avoid further harm.

Ideally the organization could try and counsel Bose and help him meet his aspirations – either by finding out his strengths and giving him the appropriate work so that he might prove worthy of promotion; or by providing appropriate training opportunities so as to address any shortcoming he may have which are coming in the way of his advancement. Of course in

case it is clear that for what so ever reason Bose is not likely to achieve any further career progression that too should be made clear with a full explanation and after that it is upto him to decide whether he wants to continue or not.

The third person i.e. Robinson would appear to require both counselling and disciplining on an urgent basis. Indians tend to be extremely tolerant of the racist tendencies on the part of whites particularly, but others are not. For his own future welfare his attitude and behaviour needs to change.

In general there appears to be a lack of proactive management or anticipation of problems much less implementation of any corrective steps on the part of the organization. (Alternatively it may be that problems are recognized but there is a tendency to avoid confrontation.) Either way, some type of remedial training may be useful to foresee and avoid such problems in future.

Notes

1. For all meanings I have referred (informally) to a person knowledgeable in Sanskrit.
2. Unfortunately I am unable to remember/find the source where author renames the three fish as the Strategic Management fish; the Crisis Management fish and the Reactive Management fish.
3. Students of management may also be able to analyze the situation in terms of the "Urgent vs Important" framework of Stephen Covey.

