

Out of Sight, Out of Mind: The Case of Missed Appraisal

Azra Ishrat*

Assistant Professor, Amity University Lucknow Campus, Lucknow – 226028,
Uttar Pradesh, India; aishrat@lko.amity.edu

Abstract

Dr. Reema Sinha joined Erudite University, Bilaspur, as Lecturer in Marketing in July 1999. She was Doctorate in Consumer Behavior from Delhi University and had 10 years of experience in academics. During probation period, she worked with full dedication and enthusiasm. Surprisingly, she was promoted as Senior Lecturer in February 2000. She proceeded on maternity leave in 2003 for six months. In 2004, she waited for her increment which was due in February but the wait got endless. After 7 months of waiting, she decided to write a letter to Mr. Khan, Director HR. She wrote that her increment has been missed and he should look into it. She waited for his response but it never came. After great persual, she could meet Mr. Khan. He told her when she was on maternity leave there was revision of HR policies. Employees who had availed maternity leave were not being entitled for annual increment. Besides, he insisted that she has fast track promotion therefore, she should not expect it. Dr. Reema was surprised, as she was never informed about these two conditions. First, she will not be entitled for annual increment if she avails maternity leave. Second, she would not be given increment, if she had fast track promotion. Moreover, in the 2004, another colleague of her got increment despite availing Maternity leave. This disparity came as a rude shock to her. Upset with what has transpired between her and Director HR. Further being witness to her colleagues who had availed a year maternity leave and another who availed seven months leave getting annual increment added to her injury. She decided to write to higher authorities. The case got reopened. Director HR could not provide any substantial justification for increments that were given in rest three cases. He shifted the entire blame on Director of the institute for not initiating the appraisal process. Dr. Reema again mailed to HR Director but she never got the response.

Keywords: Appraisal, Grievance, Increment, Maternity

1. Introduction

Erudite University is a private university set up in 1980 in Chandigarh. The university offers under graduation and post graduation programme in all major streams of science and management. After completing a successful stint in academic for about 17 years the owner decided to open its sister concern university in Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh. In this way, Erudite University, Bilaspur came into existence in 1997. In the beginning, the university was offering only Management courses. However, within a short span of one year the university diversified into all possible streams be it Science, Law, Fashion, Technology, Hotel Management to name a few. Professor A Satyanaryan headed Erudite,

Bilaspur as the Director General. He along with Directors of various programme and Administrative activities like examination, academic etc. ran Erudite. Professor Satyanaryan had the autonomy to take routine decisions related to campus. However, Erudite University (Parent Organization) situated in Chandigarh took the final decisions about students as well as employees.

Chandigarh campus took all major decisions related to academic as well as administrative issues. All academic and administrative activities were conducted by Bilaspur campus. However, Chandigarh office took the final decision related to both academic as well as administration. The decision-making was highly centralized. Even for small issues, as organizing tea party for Staff of Erudite

*Author for correspondence

had to prepare budget and get it approved by Chandigarh campus. Lack of autonomy at work created discontent and dissatisfaction among the employees of Erudite

The university did not have a uniform policies and norm about to admission, recruitment, promotion, leaves. The norm and policies varied from person to person. The rules got relaxed and were made severe depending on the how well connected the person was with top management. This inconsistency was major cause of dissatisfaction among the employees.

2. Appraisal at Erudite

The appraisal at Erudite was conducted biannually and the appraisal period was July-June. In Half-yearly appraisal, the Director assessed the employees with employees having no hand in it. As such the employees had no idea regarding the criteria on which they were being assessed. Similarly, the employees had no idea as to what the director had written about them in their appraisal. The Director also never used to give feedback to the employees about their performance. Hence, the employees had no idea as to where they were in terms of performance.

The annual appraisal had a four-tier system. There was self-appraisal, followed by appraisal by the Director of the institute, Director (HR) and finally by the Director General. The employees were assessed on three broad category- interpersonal, academic and personality traits. In interpersonal they were assessed on teamwork, cooperation, organizational building etc. In academic, it was contribution in Research activities, teaching pedagogy, updation of teaching material. In third section personality traits like dependable, punctual, dedicated, honest etc. were evaluated.

Apart from this there was no linkage between performance appraisal and the reward system of the organization. Whether the employee was exceptionally good or poor performer, they got almost the same incentives. Infact the good performers felt that they were under-rewarded. Consequently, most of the employees were dissatisfied. They also felt that the entire appraisal is based on sycophancy and networking rather than on performance.

3. Procedure of Maternity Leave at Erudite

There was no norm for proceeding on maternity leave. Employees availing maternity leave had to write an

application to the Director of the institute mentioning the duration of maternity leave and tentative date of rejoining. Then the Director forwarded application to Director HR.

4. Maternity Leave Rules in Erudite were as Following

Confirmed female employees were eligible for grant of Maternity leave. Maternity leave on full pay would be admissible to female employees for a period not exceeding 30 days from the date of its commencement, on production of necessary medical certificate. Such leave however, would be admissible on not more than two occasions in the entire service, provided the number of surviving children does not exceed two.

Maternity benefit is not entitled to a female employee unless she has worked for not less that 80 (eighty) days in the immediately preceding twelve months period. During the period of such leave, the leave salary will be equal to the salary drawn immediately before proceeding on maternity leave.

5. The case

Dr. Reema Sinha joined Erudite University, Bilaspur, as Lecturer in Marketing in July 1999. She was Doctorate in Consumer Behavior from Delhi University and had 10 years of experience in academics. Before joining Erudite, she was working as ad hoc Lecturer in a reputed college of Delhi. On joining the university, Dr. Reema was surprised to find confusion and disparity in various things like allocation of paper, teaching pedagogy, and teaching load and even HR policies. To her astonishment, she found there was nothing constant. Policies and rules varied from person to person. In all this mayhem, Dr. Reema spent first six months in understanding the culture of the organization apart from doing, her regular duties. During probation period, she worked with full dedication and enthusiasm. Surprisingly, she was promoted as Senior Lecturer in February 2000.

Taken by surprise she confided in her colleague that she never expected it, as her probation period was still not over. She was curious to know the criteria of appraisal. She did not get any response. Her colleagues jokingly suggested not to get worried the criteria and basis of promotion and let this be area of concern for those who have not been promoted. Dr. Reema too felt that she was thinking too

much and must enjoy her new status. Being happy with the promotion, she conveniently forgot about her query. This sudden change in her designation led to change in her appraisal cycle. Initially it was from July-June now it was changed to February-January. After one year of her promotion, she got her annual increment, in February 2001.

On one hand she was making advancement in professional field on the other hand her personal life was also undergoing change. Dr. Reema got married in 2001. In 2003 she was expecting her first child. Before going for maternity leave, she wrote an application to Director (HR). She mentioned in the application that she would be going on maternity leave from January 2003. She also clearly stated that she intended to join back in July 2003. After getting her leave approved, she went away. The institute did not inform her about the process of rejoining neither she cared about asking them. She assumed that it would be a normal usual process. In April 2003, she got a call from the Dr. Namit Kishore, Director of the institute. He told her that she was promoted as Asst. Prof. (Performance assessment year 2002-2003). She did not get any official letter related to the promotion. However, in May 2003 she got a letter from Director (Human Resource), Mr. Khan, enquiring about the expected date of joining after maternity leave. She mailed back that her child being small and she could not arrange caretaker therefore she would extend her leave by one month. She got positive response from the university.

Everything was going fine until she returned from maternity leave. When she rejoined, she felt lost as a new pedagogy for teaching and evaluating students. Because of added responsibility at home, she found it difficult to resume her professional responsibilities with confidence. The personal and professional demands were tearing her apart. Dr. Reema shared her problem with her colleague who had also returned from maternity leave recently. The colleagues casually asked her if she had submitted fitness as well as birth certificate with an application of rejoining in HR Department. Dr. Reema was taken aback. She had met Mr. Namit Kishore when she joined back but he never said a word about it. Even HR Department did not inform her about it. Almost 20 days had passed since her rejoining but the HR Department also did not check whether the due certificates were submitted or not. She finally submitted the entire document about rejoining on 24 August 2003, although she had rejoined on 1st August 2003. There was no intimation from the HR Department about late submission of the certificates. Dr. Reema

assumed that everything is fine and got busy with the daily schedule.

The semester passed and Reema got tuned to the role and responsibility. Meanwhile, the colleagues informally informed her that when she was on leave HR Department had streamlined the appraisal. The employees were categorized into two categories for appraisal. Those whose appraisal was conducted in January was in Category A, and rest in category B, for appraisal in July. Her colleague informed her that she was in A category. However, neither the Departmental Head nor HR Department informed her about these changes.

Finally came the time of annual appraisal. Two of her colleague who joined after availing maternity leave got annual increment as well as performance incentives. She felt surprised and at the same time happy with employee-oriented HR policies. She got hopeful that she would be also getting her due increment in February.

In 2004, she waited for her increment in February but the wait got endless. After 7 months of waiting, she decided to write a letter to Mr. Khan, Director HR. She wrote that her increment has been missed and he should look into it. She waited for his response but it never came. After great perusal, she could meet Mr. Khan. He told her when she was on maternity leave there was revision of HR policies. Employees who had availed maternity leave were not being entitled for annual increment. Besides, he insisted that she has fast track promotion therefore, she should not expect it. Dr. Reema was surprised, as she was never informed about these two conditions. First, she will not be entitled for annual increment if she avails maternity leave. Second, she would not be given increment, if she had fast track promotion. Moreover, in the 2004, another colleague of her got increment despite availing Maternity leave. This disparity came as a rude shock to her.

Upset with what has transpired between her and Director HR. Further being witness to her colleagues who had availed a year maternity leave and another who availed seven months leave getting annual increment added to her injury. After reconfirming it, she wrote to authorities. These letters are given as

Exhibit I

EXHIBIT I: Letter to Director HR

Dear Sir,

I am Dr. Reema Sinha from Erudite. I had met you in context of my annual increment. According to you, I it was

not given to me as I had availed maternity leave (January 2003-July 2003). I would like to bring to your kind notice that two of my colleagues both Lecturers had availed maternity leaves had increment as well as performance incentive. One was on maternity leave from May 2002-February 2003. However she got increment as well as performance incentive in July 2003. Another colleague availed maternity leave from July 2002- July 2003, yet, she also got increment as well as performance incentive in Dec 2003. Both of them were promoted as senior lecturers while they were on maternity leave.

Sir, when I met you said that HR process has been streamlined. Therefore, now onwards people availing maternity leave will not be entitled for annual increment. Kindly explain the basis why they got increment and I was denied. In anticipation of your response. Thank You

Regards,
Dr. Reema Sinha

Dr. Reema waited for 15-day for him to reply however, there was no response from him. She wrote another mail to him

With reference to letter dated Oct 17, 2003. I would like to bring to notice that like me both the faculty members were promoted in 2003, when they were availing their maternity leave. Both rejoined the university in 2003 and in the same year, they got their increment as well as performance incentive. So why am I being denied increment on the basis on availing maternity leave?

In anticipation of response

As usual, there was no response. Frustrated and irritated she decided to mail to the Director General of the institute Mr. G. Satyanarayana stating her case.

The Director General
Erudite University
Bilaspur

Thru: Director, Erudite Business School

SUBJECT: ANNUAL INCREMENT –2003- 2004

I am Dr. Reema Sinha Assistant Professor (HR) with Erudite Business School. I would like to inform you that I have been denied my annual increment for 2003-2004., I met Director HR who informed me that I am not entitled for increment because of following reasons:

1. I have availed maternity leave for 214 days (1st Jan -31st July.2003)
2. I got fast track promotion
3. I was promoted during my maternity leave
4. HR policies have been **streamlined**

I would like to bring to your notice that my two colleagues from ZBS who joined university in 1999 with me. All three of them had availed maternity leave and rejoined the university in 2003. Duration of maternity leave of one was a **year** and another **9 months**. The **same year** they got annual increment and performance incentives in 2003. Further, both these faculty was promoted during their maternity leave. However, I was denied both increment and performance incentive because I had availed maternity leave.

Director HR told me that HR Policy has been streamlined. Those availing maternity leave were not entitled for annual increment. Therefore, my increment will be processed only in Jan 2005. He did not respond when I asked him if my increment for 2003-04 would be taken care of.

I would also like to bring to your notice that the faculty who went on maternity leave after me (**2004**), has got increment whereas I was denied on basis of streamlining the process. When I mailed to Director HR regarding this I got no response.

Sir, I have want to know as to why I am being singled out and being punished for availing the maternity leave. I request you to kindly look into the matter as this discriminatory practices are demotivating.

Thanks and regards,
Dr. Reema Sinha
Assistant Professor
Erudite Business School
Bilaspur.

The next day she got mail from Director HR asking her to give details like Name and designation, Period of their increment and year of their assessment, Duration of maternity leave of those two colleagues who had got increment

Dr. Reema mailed the details
After two days, she got another mail from Mr. Khan that her case was put up to The Director General along with details of your colleagues. The Director General has directed him to explain her in person the points raised.

Dr. Reema went to HR Department.

“I presume you have sent a letter to Director General about your increment. In it you have stated that two of your colleagues have got increment whereas you were denied,” said Mr. Khan

Dr. Reema responded affirmatively.

He flipped through the papers put in front of him and said so you joined in 1999 as lecturer, your pay was Rs.14000. In 2000, you were promoted as senior lecturer and then your pay was Rs. 21450. In 2001 you were given 4 incentives your pay became 28450.....

“No, it was 26450 and I got 3 increments instead of 4” interrupted Dr. Reema

OK I will recheck it. In 2002, you got another increment. In 2003 you went on maternity leave and the same year you were promoted as Assistant Professor. After a pause he continued, “You see its not that they were given increment and you were denied. There are many reasons ...”

Like what? Dr. Reema interrupted

See, as far as Dr. Gunjan Srivastav is concerned she had worked for 5 months... he replied

“Ok if this is the criteria then I too had worked for 6 months. And what about Dr. Neha Pandey, she was on leave for one year? How would you justify her increment and performance incentive when she was not in the campus even for one day”? Retorted Dr. Reema with irritation.

Mr. Khan was not prepared for any such thing. He kept quiet for a minute and then started fumbling “Actually I too was shocked when I saw that she has got increment and performance incentive but.....yes it is surprising but.....Dr. Gunjan Srivastav and Namita Singh (the one who went on maternity leave in 2004 for 6 months) they had worked hard”

So, have I

But still they have worked hard

How much hard work they have done?

See they had worked for 5 months

If this is the case then I have worked for 6 months, retorted Dr. Reema

But there are other factors also

Like what?

Mr. Khan did not reply

Tell me the criteria which I had not fulfilled or where I failed on the basis on which I was denied increment?

Well, you should not compare yourself with others; see what you got two successive promotions in such short

span of time. People are unhappy not because of what they did not get but what others got. Don't compare yourself. Look in such small time you got 2 promotions and annual increments. The other two did not get promoted so quickly. See, they

Dr. Reema got irritated with illogical justification given by Mr. Khan.

She told him that she was not satisfied with the explanation given by him. Mr. Khan asked her that he would get back to her with all the relevant details. At this juncture Dr. Reema left the office

Reema again waited for ten days and then decided to pursue her case and she mailed to Director. HR with a copy to Director Gen regarding the discriminatory HR practices.

Respected Sir,

I had met you on 13th Oct, 2003 in context of my missed increment. After initial discussion, you told me that you would be calling me later as you were not ready with the details. It's been over 10 days but I have not received any intimation from your office. I would like to reassert the fact Dr. Neha Pandey had availed maternity leave from July 02-July 03. She got promotion in 02 and surprisingly got increment in 03. Dr. Gunjan Srivastav went on Maternity Leave from May 02 and rejoined university in Feb 03. She too got promoted in 02 and increment in 03. Namita Singh also has increment in 2004 although she too availed maternity leave in 2004 for 6 months. As far as Dr. Neha Pandey is concerned, you admitted that you were shocked when she got increment. Your justification for Dr. Gunjan Srivastav was that she had worked for 5 months. Sir, if such is the case then I too had worked for 6 months from Aug 09-Jan 2010 (increment due in Feb 2010). Then why I was denied annual increment when in all the three cases increment was given. You insisted upon that I should not compare myself with others. But Sir, don't you do the same when appraising the performance of employees for annual increment. You also insisted that I should not compare on only one aspect, so kindly inform me the other parameters on which the appraisal is based and on which parameter you found me not up to the mark, which resulted in, me getting no increment. Lastly I have always accepted as well as respected the decisions of the university. I even accepted your decision when you told me that since the HR policies have been streamlined therefore people availing Maternity leave will not be entitled for annual increment. However I feel cheated and hurt when I find that those who have availed mater-

nity leave after me have also got increment. Sir, I have only one query as to why I am being singled out and penalized for availing the maternity leave. Thanks and regards, Dr. Reema Sinha

On insistence of Director General the case got reopened. Director HR could not provide any substantial justification for increments that were given in rest three cases. He shifted the entire blame on Director of the institute for not initiating the appraisal process. According to Mr. Khan the appraisal form were sent to the department to be given out to the faculty members. It was Director who never bothered to send the form to Dr. Reema nor did he inform HR about she being on leave. Another reason he cited was that the entire appraisal process (both half yearly as well yearly) got over on 22th Aug 2003 and that the employee had on paper rejoined on 24th Aug 2003, therefore she was not given increment. The HR department was not ready to accept that it was at fault and due to it carelessness that this had happened.

In Dr. Reema, mailed back asking how half-yearly and annual appraisal was conducted within a span of 7 months

against her appraisal period Feb 2002-Feb 2003. She stated that as per her understanding appraisal is conducted for past performance and not for future performance. Secondly, she insisted that if her half-yearly and annual increment was not initiated by HOI why didn't the HR Department checked the reason behind both half-yearly as well as annual increment being not initiated. She asserted that she had not resigned but was on Maternity leave. More importantly, she had informed the University about the duration of her Maternity Leave and tentative date of joining well in advance. She wanted to know that why she was made to suffer because of fault of Head of the institute or HR Department. She is still waiting for the reply.

6. Case Questions

1. Critically analyze the performance appraisal system of Erudite University bringing out the strengths and the flaws of the system.
2. According to you who was to be blamed for the missed appraisal. Also suggest what course of action Dr. Reema should take.