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Is an Unethical Decision for Recruitment in an Institute of National Importance Increases the Inclination of Unethical Slippery Slope?

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Abstract:

Unethical decision making in organizations is a culpable act committed by the decision making authority. This is due to the ethical blindness and narrow frame of the decision making authority for which they cannot see the future consequences. It is like Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall; Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. Throughout the history of the World there are so many Humpty and Dumpty and they had a great fall. As a result, scams like Enron to Lehman Brothers and Rose Valley to Sarada happened, yet nobody studied the relationship between the inclination of unethical slippery slope and unethical decisions making in any educational institutions. The objective of this paper is to investigate the plight of an institution of national importance in Kolkata for making unethical decisions for recruitment and we found that the authorities taking the unethical decision increases the inclination of the unethical slippery slope and they suffer from ethical blindness.

Keywords: *Employment, Ethical blindness, Institution of national importance, Slippery slope, and Unethical decision making*

1. Introduction

Unethical decision making is common in all organizations. It is done to protect the vested interests of the same group of people. The bad apples in the organizations are not able to see the nature and consequences of their decisions in future due to temporary loss of ability to see the ethical aspect of a decision. This temporary loss of ability to see the ethical spectrum of a decision is called ethical blindness. They forgot the value system prevailed in the organization, cannot recognize the gravity of the future problems and the ethical overtones, while making decisions. They neglect established procedures, use easier frame, or succumbed to peer pressure, or even use narrow frame for urgency. This gives rise to ethical blindness and the institutional context reinforces it. There may be pressure from the external and internal environment while taking decision in the organization. Government regulations, greediness of the employees, fierce competition, and the student's growing expectation are some of the factors that influence the decision making in educational institutions. This paper investigates the plight of an institution of national importance in Kolkata for making unethical decision for recruitment of Registrar and we find that the authorities taking the unethical decisions increases the inclination of the unethical slippery slope due to trap in ethical blindness.

2. Literature Review

Unethical decision making in organizations is widespread in modern times, the most notorious unethical decisions are made in Sarada and Rose Valley. Huge amount of money siphoned off by the employees of the Sarada and Rose Valley, ultimately they shut down their business, and the CEOs are facing prosecution in various courts in India. The CEOs of these organizations are not from upper-class individuals but they entered into the business world from the lower-class of our society. It is found in a study that upper-class people are more prone to unethical behaviors than the lower-class people. They are more likely to break laws, take costly goods from others, exhibits unethical decision making attitude, support unethical behavior at work place and cheat others to increase their properties (Piff et al., 2012). It is further seen that charismatic persons believe in values, ethics and law abiding. Howell & Avolio (1992) found that charismatic leaders are ethical hero in the organization. They establish new set of rules and work in an organization for a change to obtain high performance from their employees. They are less prone to commit unethical decision or to ride on the unethical slippery slope. Brown et al. (2013) explained the existence of slippery slope behavior to show how good people commit bad things. Gino & Pierce (2009) addressed the question when people act dishonestly to hurt or help others and found that inequity is the reason that prompts people to act dishonestly to hurt or help others. Obviously, manager with some vested interests will help people of the same group and hurt the people having affiliation to the counter groups. Sometimes people act dishonestly to make unethical decision for their personal gain and aggrandizement, due to the complex interplay of ethical blindness (Palazzo et al., 2012). It is also probable that unethical decision making in an organization depends on the experience, awareness and mindfulness. Ruedy & Schweitzer (2010) found that people with high mindfulness are more likely to behave ethically to uphold ethical standards; they are

less likely to be cheated by others compared to persons with low mindfulness. Welsh et al. (2014) studied on self-regulation to examine slippery slope of increasingly unethical behavior and found support for their model. Jones (1991) proposed another model for ethical decision making using a new variable, moral intensity. He argued on the basis of evidences derived from the social psychology that moral intensity influences moral decision making. Again the stressful situations have an impact on unethical decision making in a situation involving punishment and no rewards (Selart & Johansen, 2011). Scholars further found that disgust, happiness and sadness have an effect on unethical decision making (Winterich et al., 2014), besides, factors like profession, government rules and regulations, individual attributes, experiences, skills, knowledge, values and culture are dependent on ethical decision making, albeit these factors may vary in time, space and situations (Sinha & Mishra, 2011).

3. Materials and Methods

This exploratory study is based on primary and secondary data collected from an institution of national importance at Kolkata, West Bengal, India. Primary data are collected during the interview for an employment before the selection committee held in June 2011 and through discussion with the interviewees and employees of the Institute. The secondary data are collected from the newspapers, internet browsing and data collected through an application under the Right to Information Act 2005. Qualitative methods are used to analyze the data and to arrive at the results.

4. Results and Discussions

The Institute in order to recruit one Registrar published advertisement in the newspapers from time to time. The excerpt of the advertisement is given below:

The Director, B*** Institute, Kolkata invites applications from bona-fide Indian Citizens for the following post. The post carries DA & other allowances as admissible to a Central Govt. employee posted in Kolkata. PF and other retirement benefits will be regulated as per Central Government Rules.

- Registrar : One (1) post (Unreserved)
 Pay Band + Grade Pay : PB-3, Rs.15600-39100/- + GP Rs.7600/-
 Essential Qualification : Degree of a recognized University. 10 (ten) years' administrative experience in a responsible supervisory capacity with adequate experience of establishment and accounts
 Desirable Qualification : Knowledge of Govt. Rules and Regulations. Experience of working in a scientific deptt., or institution in a responsible senior position. Knowledge of work-study methods, accounting procedures, modern management techniques and e-governance system
 Age : Preferably below 45 years (Relaxation as per Government Rules)

In response to this advertisement an internal candidate having less qualification than other candidates were appointed. After his retirement at 60 years he was reemployed during 2010 in the post of OSD (*Officer-on-Special Duty, a post created temporarily for special purpose*) to look after the duties and assignments of the Registrar. He created an environment of fear in the mind of the higher authorities that he is the indispensable officer of the institute and the heaven will fall in his absence. Therefore, the authorities are compelled to reemploy him due to fear, while taking decision they cannot see the other half of the decision, ethical norms and culture of the Institute.

The Institute again published the advertisement for the same post of Registrar in 2011, the selection committee found nobody suitable, in order to continue him in the said post of OSD, it was further re-advertised in the year 2011, and a candidate with less educational qualifications and experiences was selected in January 2012. He did not possess the desirable qualifications though several candidates applied for the said post possessed higher desirable qualifications. The selected candidate had working experiences in audit but no experience of working in a scientific department or institution in a responsible senior position as advertised.

No of Candidate	Series 1	Series 2
applied for the post of Registrar	75	118
shortlisted for interview of Registrar	08	14
appeared at the interview of Registrar	03	11
in the Panel of Registrar	00	03

Table 1: Candidates shortlisted and appeared at the interview

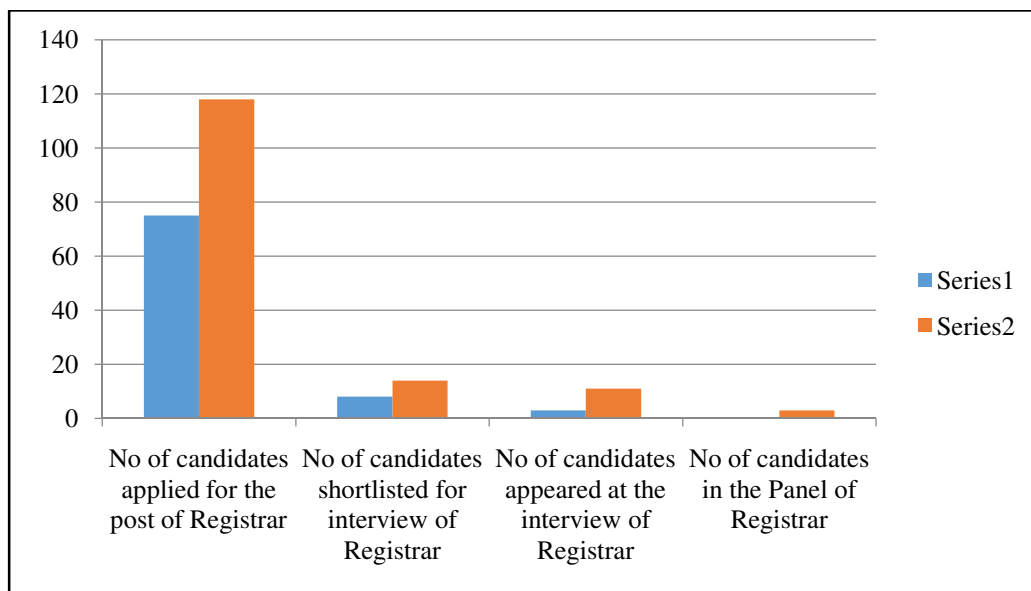


Figure 1: Candidates shortlisted and appeared at the interview

The Table 1 describes the descriptive statistics of the candidates shortlisted and appeared at the interview. Fig. 1 depicts the number of candidates shortlisted, appeared at the interview and selected. It is evident from the Fig. 1, Series 2, and the facts and circumstances that the decision making authority failed to select best candidate out of 11 (eleven) candidates appeared at the interview and they exercised imprudent judgment for selection of Registrar due to their vested interests.

From 2008 to 2012, the institute made fraudulent payment of huge amount to a legal counsel for conducting legal cases in the High Court at Calcutta. This case is similar to that of the Folk Tale - "Emperor's New Clothes"¹. The institute recruited the Registrar with a pressure from the higher authority to hush up audit observation of Principal Director of Audit, Central Government, for fraudulent payment of huge amount of fees to advocates. The Institute authority paid fees to advocates for appearance even after disposal of cases by the High Court. An application under the Right to Information Act revealed that the Institute prepared panel of candidates in order of merit, hosted it in the Institute's website, but the members of the selection committee or the interviewers did not award any marks to the interviewees during interview for evaluation². This is an unethical decision of the Institution that increases the inclination of the slippery slope. Here, the context is stronger than the reasons, the evils does not need any intention, it spread like a cancer, the Registrar of the Institute was implicated for alleged involvement in a sexual harassment case for giving undue privileges to a woman who had applied for a stenographer's job in return of sexual favors³. He was suspended for alleged commission of misconduct and disciplinary proceeding started. Subsequently, the Central Bureau of Investigation in an investigation purportedly implicated the Director of the institute for fraudulent payments to advocates⁴. Thus they committed series of evil acts against the reasons and the ethical standards⁵. Those unethical incidents happened due to the following reasons:

- i. Unclear recruitment rules: It is mentioned that Degree of a recognized University. 10 (ten) years' administrative experience in a responsible supervisory capacity with adequate experience of establishment and accounts. But in fact, the Registrar before joining the institute was in Pay Band (PB)-2 and had less supervisory experiences than the other candidates. Most of the candidates who appeared at the interview are from Pay Band (PB)-3 and even one of the candidates having experience in Grade Pay (GP)-Rs.7600, the same Grade Pay of the Registrar, was deprived. This is done due to unclear recruitment rules for undefined "experience in a responsible supervisory capacity".
- ii. Overloaded information: The institute used to obtain last five years Confidential Report and Vigilance Clearance from the employer before appointment of Registrar. In this present study it is revealed that Delhi High Court on 27th January 2009 reversed a writ petition of the selected candidate, the employer provided no objection certificate on 17th April 2012 stating that no disciplinary or vigilance case is pending or contemplated against the officer with effect from 29th June 2009 till date. This was a report of the candidate for a period of three years and just before this period a court case was pending which could have been exposed easily from the internet searching. The institute is thus acted unethically due to overloaded information.
- iii. The Director should question himself: Can I universalize the decision? It means that can I appoint any other candidates having such lower qualifications and experiences and confidential report less than five years?

¹<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KvRpN5Y23UE>, accessed on 19.05.2015

²rti.india.gov.in/cic_decisions/CIC_LS_A_2012_002557_M_100942.pdf, vide para 7 of the CIC decision, accessed on 25.05.2016

³http://www.telegraphindia.com/1141011/jsp/calcutta/story_18913123.jsp#.VVszxEZXRz4, accessed on 19.05.2015

⁴<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/Premier-scientific-research-institutes-Legal-fee-fraud-under-CBI-lens/articleshow/44795071.cms>, accessed on 19.05.2015

⁵<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7oltMEi09AU>, accessed on 23.05.2015

- iv. Context is stronger than reasons: The institute has been suffering from doing illegal activities and fraudulent payment to parties. They were under pressure for doing unethical acts, they could have reduced the complexities by enlarging frame; otherwise the actors may be trapped in a very narrow perception of reality.
- v. Fear is the key driving force for taking irrational decisions: Since long they had committed series of illegal acts due to fear. This could have been averted had they appoint a right candidate in the post of Registrar. In other words, hurting candidates have adverse effect by the nature is an unethical decision that helps to move in a slippery slope of increasing inclination.

Decision making authorities generally do the wrong things in spite of their values, ethics, and good intentions due to driving them in the wrong direction and ultimately increase the inclination of the unethical slippery slope for which they may devise the following defense strategies against ethical blindness.

- i. They may pull others into strong context as a charismatic leader. The leaders may inculcate new cultures in the organizations.
- ii. Changing the frame, flexing the frame, is the ability to apply reason in a more holistic manner and broader view for an ethical dimension at a stake. Flexible framing requires various abilities, being mindful, step out of routine and acting consciously without fear and favor.
- iii. Decrease the inclination of the slippery slopes, setting broader set of options while making decisions, deciding consciously, acting unprejudiced.
- iv. While making technical decisions or legal decisions there is every possibility of being trapped into ethical blindness. They should see the issues from the technical, political, social and economic perspectives in consultation with the experts.
- v. Stretching the morals and right behaviors that come from the constant training of character, values, beliefs and vision in life.

5. Conclusions

Ethical blindness plays a vicious role while taking decisions. It increases the inclination of the slippery slope in a series of unethical decisions of the highhanded authorities for recruitment in an institution of national importance. The highhanded authorities cannot see ethical spectrum due to their narrow frame. Thus they ended up in disciplinary proceedings and audit observation of the Principal Director of Audit.

- i. What they believe and what they do under the strong influence of the organization is to be considered in which the values and ethical standards are embedded.
- ii. The institution might reinforce organizational and situational forces that attract them towards ethical blindness. In situational context they all behave like sheep. In organizational context aggressive pressure from the corrupt and greedy persons is the force for taking defective frame.
- iii. The institute should clearly set the Rule of the Game and it must clearly spell out in the advertisement about the meaning of experience "*in a responsible supervisory capacity with adequate experience of establishment and accounts*". This induced them to take unethical decisions and to move on to the top of the ever-increasing inclination of slippery slope.

Thus, the Institute behaves unethically because they cannot see it, as they cannot see it, how can they say it? They have temporarily loosed their ethical dimensions for recruitment of Registrar in a series of unethical acts due to ethical blindness that continuously increases the inclination of the slippery slope. A small unethical decision may drag the decision making authorities to a larger complex problem in future. Ultimately the Registrar is allegedly implicated in a disciplinary case and the Director is under the scanner of Central Bureau of Investigation for fraudulent payment to advocates. The Institute may arrange training and sensitization program for the employees to understand the fact of ethical blindness and slippery slope while dealing with their official work without falling into the trap of unethical decisions. This may help to learn the intrigue meaning of why decision making authorities take unethical decisions under constraints of fear, favoritism or nepotism.

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