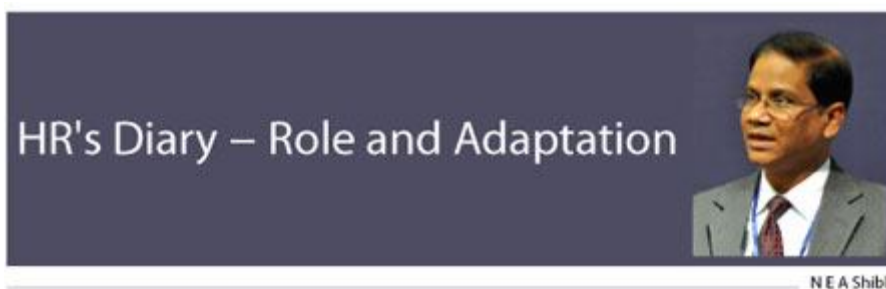




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Looking back at the whole episode of joining this multinational, Zahid feels that he never had to suffer from any disillusionment. This turning point of his career has been significant in many ways, although there had been ups and downs along the way. He recognizes that the 'on-boarding' phase had had a honeymoon effect as it walked him through various sessions of orientation program and the warm welcome. The honeymoon period seemed to be over while he was at the last leg of his orientation at the Dhaka Branch. Notably this MNC divided its total operational facilities into two branches - Dhaka and Chittagong; each was headed by a Branch Manager, flanked by department heads for Production, Personnel, Accounting, Quality Assurance, Engineering and the like.

That morning was grey, shrouded by clouds. For almost a week, intermittent rains had overshadowed sunny days. Like many others, Zahid's mood was dampened by this dismal weather. He was on the production floor observing work flows as a part of the orientation program. The droning of the machines, punctuated by loud voices of the operators, set on monotony; people were trying to communicate with each other competing with the mechanic screeches and clanks. In the midst of these, it was a relief when Zahid was informed that the HR Director would like to see him in the conference room. Zahid thought it would be one of those one-on-one sessions trying to know his progress. When he reached the conference room on the second floor, he found the HR director sitting alone with a somber expression; he could not fathom what the matter could be, while a thousand and one things came up in his mind within the second. However, when the Director started to speak, he felt reassured that nothing had gone wrong.

Nevertheless, the content of the conversation was an incredible surprise, and the matter-of-fact

way that it was delivered in added to Zahid's candid astonishment. The Director told him to forego the remainder of his orientation program and take over the responsibilities of 'Branch HR Manager' right from that moment onwards; the the-then branch HR manager, who had been on service extension, had expressed his unwillingness to continue any longer. The HR director told Zahid point blank, "Here are the keys ...I am throwing you into the sea ...either swim or drown I don't care." He left the room without any further words. The next course of action for Zahid, in his reverie, was to enter the Branch HR manager's room on the first floor, sit in his chair and stare blankly at the keys, as he momentarily lost himself in monologue: "What do you do now Zahid?"



Quite suddenly finding himself at the helm, Zahid was overwhelmed in deciding how he would do what he had to do. While he was preparing himself to take over the responsibilities of HR services manager at the corporate office, the full realization of his current position hit him. He was not sure as to where he should start, who would guide him, coupled with the fact that there was no one to explain to him his responsibilities, or to brief him on the prevailing issues in this branch that exceeded 1,000 employees. In front of him existed only the troubled ocean he was expected to sink or swim in - and sinking was not an option. He was perplexed - so far everything had been following the book to the T, and this sudden topsy-turvy situation arising from nowhere, set his world a-skelter.

The situation that followed was unsettling for any uninformed new management employee: people stormed into the room without knocking or asking for his permission; they pulled out chairs, lit cigarettes, pressed the calling bell and ordered for tea and snacks from the tea boy who had just rushed in. The whole event unfolded in front of him as though he did not exist at all. He was literally a silent spectator. Without being introduced he could guess that they all belonged to the Executive Committee of the CBA. In response to his look of obvious surprise, one of them finally said, "It seems you are the new personnel manager. The management would have never bothered to introduce us to you we know, so here we are, to get introduced." Zahid tried to say that he was new, and the decision of this posting was made on that very day, and as such the management did not have time for formalizing the whole process. Zahid felt his words had made no impact on them. The person (who Zahid later found was the General Secretary of the CBA), continued, "We don't care whether you are new or whatever; we need our issues to be resolved immediately. Management has been given enough time to resolve these issues, which as far as we are concerned need urgent attention, and we want your intervention by today. Otherwise, you will face the music come night-shift, as our opposition is creating problems there. Your predecessor only pretended to deal with this all the time, but did nothing at all."

Zahid had no insight whatsoever into these issues. He could not ask them to expand on these either as, he could sense that at this stage, it would be pouring more fuel into a raging fire. Something deep inside him insisted, "Keep rolling with it Zahid, you will be able to find out from them easily." Zahid rambled, "So what can I do to facilitate you facing this opposition's showdown in the night shift? After all, you are the CBA and issues should be settled only through you." This calmed them down, as they thought this would give them a way out. Zahid was glad that his 'un-planned' tactics had produced such instantaneous results. Zahid could immediately sense that the relationship between the CBA and his predecessor had been characterized by inherent distrust. He also assumed that his predecessor had adopted the tactic of delay and the issues (whatever those were) remained as unaddressed sores for the CBA.

Through diplomatic requests regarding their suggestions on the matter, Zahid figured out the issues one by one, which were revealed to be promotional cases at the floor-level. Zahid was careful enough not to commit to anything at this stage without knowing the background, the management stance and the reasons behind the delaying tactics of his predecessor. He could diffuse the situation successfully at that particular instance by just listening to their suggestions and demands. But he was wary of the pressure of solving burning issues without being equipped with any background information. He was convinced that one wrong move on his part would lead to a strike on the factory floor, exacerbated by the rivalry between the CBA and its opposition.

After this breathing space, Zahid rapidly started gathering information on background issues. He was surprised by the magnitude of politics (both corporate and industrial relations) involved in such matters as promotions at the floor level. He gasped for air amidst this environment saturated with such disturbing information. This jolted Zahid, and for the first time, he questioned himself - 'have I made a blunder changing my profession?'

He felt terribly alone, but did not want his sudden emotional bubble, dwindling at the wake of the industrial relations situation, to rupture his confidence or progress. This is very much a part of any HR professional's job. There was no way back and he did not have the luxury of looking back for solace from his previous career. So, Zahid boldly decided: stay calm, move forward and play with the situation and cope with all the eventualities.

Zahid had started to get all the pieces in place logically and tried to gain a holistic picture of the prevailing situation of this jigsaw puzzle. He had to gain some insights into the critical matters affecting the management of organizational behaviour and industrial psychology. He decided:

- He wanted to have a clear understanding of the people's personalities (CBA leaders and the key employees) to help him assess what to expect of them;
- Understanding his own personality would also provide a valuable insight into his own behaviour - and the relevant adjustments required;

- Gauging the perception of the management on CBA matters and the leadership would be beneficial because those are fundamental to a variety of organizational activities.

Zahid reminisced the event of the initial encounter many a time. In retrospect, several factors emerged each time, but all those led to one consolidated principle - 'Individual and Organizational Processes'. This may be considered the starting point of learning the Organizational Behaviour which is vital for any manager to be effective.

For the next couple of days, Zahid concentrated on quickly learning the dynamics of the Dhaka Branch. He developed his own 'scrap book' in which the sketches were on:

- Painting personality and drawing out various personality dimensions that were responsible for individual differences affecting organizational behaviour. He also painted the personality of his predecessor.

- He used different colours to distinguish between emotions and moods and their effects on the overall picture of the behaviour in Dhaka Branch.

- He also attempted to include social perceptions in his landscape - painting the processes by which people come to make judgments about what others are like - gauging how the workers were judging the actions of the management, how the CBA leaders were opining on the management decision, how and to what extent the management was allowing the union leaders to participate in decision-making.

- He also noted the biases making the above process imperfect - for example the perennial distrust between the management and the union.

Zahid knew that the initial encounter that he faced on the first day had been just one of the many more to come. One of his major responsibilities was to maintain a congenial industrial relations (IR) situation in the Dhaka Branch, to ensure that operations could continue uninterrupted. So, instead of getting swayed by the IR wind, he decided to fast develop his own professional approach towards IR matters. For this, there was no short-cut method but to acquire holistic knowledge on IR, otherwise 'drown without swimming' amidst the unforgiving rough waves.

He tried to find out the prevailing attitude towards work, because he believed:

- People were potential victims of prejudice and discrimination on the job; nobody was immune. That was the reason the promotional issues cropped up initially.

- The more people were satisfied with their jobs and committed to their organizations, the less the prevalence of IR issues was, giving birth to militancy by the union. He believed that there had been issues with job satisfaction at the Dhaka Branch.

- Changing attitudes was not impossible. There were specific things that he found later that the managers of Dhaka Branch did quite successfully to enhance the work-related attitudes of their employees.

The more Zahid sought to know, the more he got fascinated by the different factors and their interplay that shaped the organizational behaviour. He discovered there was no end to learning. The interpersonal relationship that prevailed at the work environment of the Dhaka Branch also drew his attention because:

- Cooperation between people could make life on the job not only more pleasant but more productive as well. Unfortunately, lack of cooperation prevailed in certain areas.
- Instead of the effects of conflict being explored as beneficial through managing properly, those turned out to be harmful if being mismanaged. The rivalry between the union leaders as well as the distrust between the management and the union leaders was quite apparent in the Dhaka Branch.

Zahid decided to work on taking several effective steps to reduce the likelihood of deviant organizational behaviour. These would yield high costs if not addressed in time.

The next couple of months found him very busy shaping his own ideas based on the above factors. The only way was quickly ascertaining the factors which affected the way the organizational behaviour should have had been managed; through this, he could get into the helm of resolving IR and all the HR issues. Zahid accepted this as challenge, and this proved to provide him with a clear direction as to the career - he decided not to suffer from any disillusionment.

(This is sequence 6: to be continued)

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