

IN THE WONDERLAND OF INDIAN MANAGERS

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Dedicated
to
my appreciative audience whose
encouragement
made this compilation possible

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LAST WORD FIRST

Most of the advice one receives is not followed. Nor does anybody expect one to do so. And yet now and then one follows a couple of wise words. This book is a result of two such wise words.

The first one was from my professor Dean Bach. He advised me, "Sharu, you talk too much. I suggest you limit your talk to what you know. This will reduce the volume considerably—and there is a chance people may listen."

While I have not followed this advice rigidly, I have kept my talks as close to my experience as possible. This has enhanced my credibility—at least I suppose so.

The second piece of advice was from my boss Ig Soisson. He was not particularly enthusiastic about my accepting lecture invitations. But when I did, he insisted that I prepare the lecture outline in advance. "If you feel it worthwhile spending some time in giving a talk," he said, "it is definitely worthwhile investing some more and putting your ideas in black and white."

Following this advice has left me with about a hundred and fifty talk outlines and most of them have found their way to articles in various periodicals in the course of time.

The person responsible for a substantial number of my talks is Prof. N.S. Ramaswamy. For some time, the two of us were known as the Laurel and Hardy of the Management World. People stopped this when they could not distinguish who was Laurel and who was Hardy as both of us grew in several dimensions.

My audiences have always been kind to me—as I usually took care to get as many friends invited to the talks as I possibly could. The response from the audiences and the readers of my articles made me think seriously about compiling the articles in a book form.

This brought up another problem. As the author, I could not decide which articles to put in and which to omit (or defer to the next book).

At his stage entered Kishor Aras—an appreciative reader who became a discriminating editor and picked up the articles for this compilation. So you now know whom to blame.

My numerous friends offered several suggestions in revising the articles and Pama did the final editing. My secretary, Homai Kerawalla did the typing. My sons and daughter contributed their bit by wondering loudly as to whether anybody would purchase my book.

SHARU RANGNEKAR

A WORD AGAIN

The disappearance of the first edition in just about five months has effectively quietened down the new generation in our house which once upon a time was so ungracefully vocal in doubting whether anybody would purchase the book at all.

Our experience during the first run of the book has not been entirely unmixd. Unknown readers sent in appreciative comments and known friends wrote favourable reviews. And then there were people who praised the cover and the printing (indicating that they have not dwelt on the book any further) and there were customers who ordered 'that Laxman's cartoon book'.

We have had some social repercussions too. At cocktail parties, we would painfully notice that a substantial section has only a brief interest in discussing the book and this often left us monopolizing the company of our hosts. The sudden fall in our cocktail party invitations these days is, we hope, safely due to the spiralling inflation. To our chagrin, many visitors have been just shying away from our residence—they seem to value things other than listening to the latest reviews and the lively statistics of the number of copies sold and in balance. Such is the lack of popular interest in the higher things of life.

Nothing succeeds like success and Pama is now engrossed in editing my next book which she is titling 'Indian Intellectual in Search of a Racket'. All I can say at this stage is that it is not an autobiography. And all that my children can contribute to this venture is to suggest that I should write a book based on Laxman's cartoons rather than the other way round.

Kishor Aras and his enthusiastic band Dixit, Churi and

Hirachand (May their tribe prosper!) have spared no efforts to push the book and it is to their credit that the first print has been pushed out so soon. All strength to them—to push out the second print too.

SHARU RANGNEKAR

A PAPERBACK WORD

I have been showered with criticism from many quarters, both from within the press and outside, regarding some abstract deficiencies in my book. As one interested in environmental peace and harmony, I have shunned these unkind souls and have been fairly successful in avoiding a major conflict by keeping myself in blissful isolation.

But one material criticism vehemently expressed and which I dare not disregard is concerning the price, though it is no consolation that the criticism came from those who borrowed the book. As one habitual borrower reported, with low-priced books the follow-up by the lender for the return of the book is very lukewarm and one can easily build a good collection. His grouse was that owing to the high price of the book he was under constant pressure to return it and eventually my book could not adorn the shelves of his library.

Since the number of book-borrowers is a large multiple of the number of purchasers, an inexpensive edition became essential to appease the borrowers in particular and to serve mankind in general. Another strong motivation was my keen desire to make some modest contribution towards arresting the inflationary trends in this country. I am sure that this paperback edition will lead to a wider circulation of the book.

SHARU RANGNEKAR

AFTER A GENERATION

Two hard-cover editions and over thirty paperback editions is perhaps a record in Indian management literature. To me the real surprise is to meet so many people who remember the book 'In the Wonderland of Indian Manager'. Some have actually read it.

Lately, I have been meeting managers who tell me that their fathers gave them the book to read — and I suddenly realise that almost a generation has passed since the book was first printed at the beginning of 1973.

There have been great changes in this generation—even in the management field. Designations have changed—there are more Presidents than M.Ds these days. Inflation has spread from prices to management designation—and recently to management salaries. Computers — a mystery a generation ago—are common and understood by all except a few at the top management levels.

So I face a question: Is this book valid even after such a catastrophic generation? Does it need to be updated?

I went through the book again only to find that my description of management foibles seems to be as relevant today as it was a generation ago. Decisions are still being avoided actively, Jagirdari system is prepotent, interviewers are playing their games with candidates, the Feudal Vizirs and the Cocktails Managers are confusing the babes in the woods and illiterate managers abound.

In short, the more management changes in India—the more it remains the same!

So I do hope that this improved edition— improved in size,

get-up (and price) will serve another generation of managers.

SHARU RANGNEKAR

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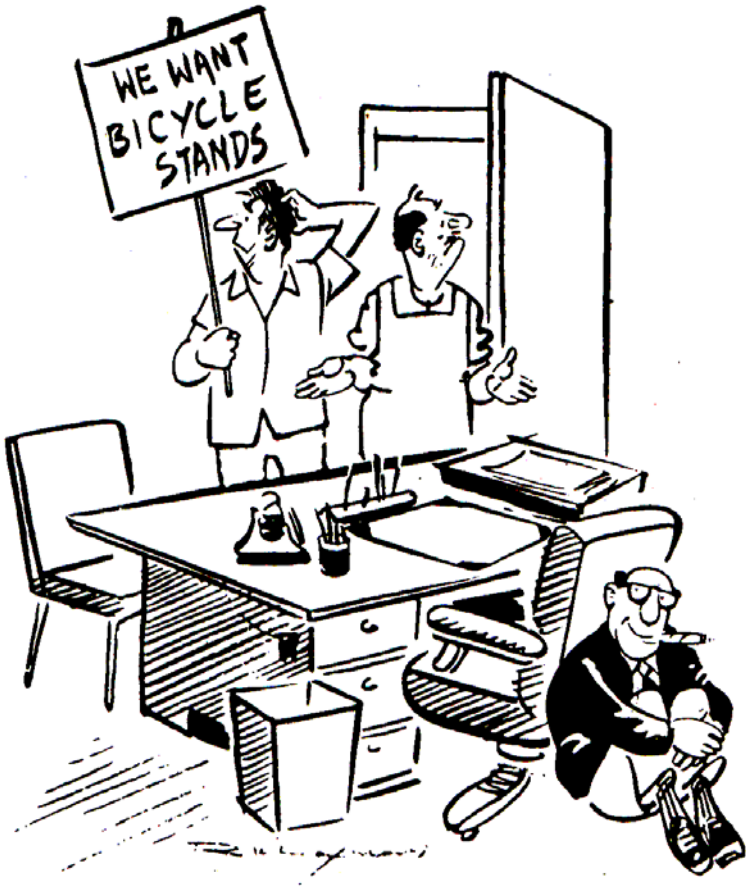
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ONE

how to avoid making decisions



WHEN missionaries started preaching Christianity in Africa, they caused some confusion with their colour scheme of a 'white' Jesus and a 'black' devil. There was a real spurt in conversions when some genius changed the colour scheme declaring Jesus 'black' and devil 'white'

A similar confusion has taken place in the field of management in India. Foreign professors or Indians imported straight from foreign universities without contamination with Indian industry are spreading the gospel: 'management is decision-making'. This caused untold hardships to the young graduates of the management institutes when they entered Indian industry and attempted decision-making.

So the time has come to reveal the Truth: "in India management is decision-avoiding". Some sceptics wonder whether the confusion caused by the two-year-full-time or three-year-part-time instruction in management institutes can be cleared with a single stroke. We should not worry about these sceptics because we know: "Truth shall prevail".

In India, it is as important to learn ways of avoiding decisions as it is to learn ways of decision-making in America. The first decision-rule of Indian Management is: If you can avoid it, don't take it.

DECISION AVOIDING VS. DECISION DELAYING

Laymen often confuse decision delaying with decision avoiding. Delaying is rather a passive and negative activity. It does not have the positive and active impact of decision avoiding. An effective manager will not be sitting back simply delaying decisions. He will be on his feet where decisions are asked for and will avoid them. He will keep initiative in his hands and will not allow 'decision-by-default'

Thus, even if the ultimate result is the same, the approach is very much different. Most of the methods available for avoiding decisions are equally effective in delaying decisions. But an efficient manager will stand out by his approach. He will not delay the decision—thus increasing his workload for tomorrow since the problem is likely to be brought up again. He will avoid the decision once and for all. The second decision-rule,

therefore, is: If you can avoid it, don't delay it.

Even where it is impossible to avoid decision and the only alternative is to delay it, the active manager is clearly distinguished from the passive one. The passive manager will delay by being too busy, going on leave, putting the problem at the bottom of the pending pile, going on tour and if all these fail falling sick. The active, decision-avoiding manager will counsel a deliberate delay, e.g.:

'Re: Cycle Stand for Workers: The industrial situation in India is in a melting pot. It is essential to allow time to stabilise the situation', the 'macro-situation' has to be clarified. so I suggest that this cycle-stand proposal be delayed indefinitely.."

PASS-THE-BUCK APPROACH

The first step to decision-avoiding is to determine whether we should avoid the decision by ourselves or "pass the buck". The third decision-rule states: **If you can get somebody else to avoid the decision, don't avoid it yourself.**

***Committee Method:** The most popular method of passing the buck is to appoint a committee to 'review the problem'

This method has been patronized very widely by government authorities but it is by no means their monopoly. Non-government sectors also have found this method extremely useful for decision-avoiding. Although in many cases, the very act of appointing committees will effectively ensure decision-avoiding, a wise manager will doubly ensure the result by taking the following measures:

1. Make the committee as large as possible:

A committee of three may suddenly get to a decision. The possibility is greatly alleviated if the membership is increased to nine. Research has revealed the mathematical rule (known as the fourth decision-rule): **The possibility of avoiding decision increases in proportion to the square of the number of members in the committee.** Committees with membership of thirty and above rarely reach any significant decision (e.g. National Integration Council).

2. **Make the committee meeting difficult:**

This can be done by appointing a sick chairman, members geographically as distant as possible, etc. In recent times, geographical distance has been a very effective deterrent to committee meetings. The airlines are helping actively through staggered strikes by pilots, air-hostesses, mechanics, etc. In the case of railways, any agitation on food, politics or language is adequate. For example the agitations to "Remove English" in the north and to "Remove Hindi" in the south were immediately effective in removing trains everywhere!

3. **Make the committee incompatible:**

At least two members of the committee should have a previous record of proved hostility or- at least a dominating attitude. Others will develop hostility as the committee work proceeds.

***Abominable No-man Method:** Many companies have an invaluable asset which rarely figures on their balance sheet. It is the "Abominable no-man". The basic characteristic of this person is his infinite capacity to say "no". Consequently, even a threat to refer the matter to A.N. compels the initiator to drop his proposal.

***Bottomless Joe Method:** In the absence of the availability of A.N., some companies resort to the "Bottomless Joe". B.J. has the exceptional quality that any matter referred to him is guaranteed to get lost. He is invaluable to his employers because he cannot or will not complete any job assigned to him and is thus very convenient for avoiding decisions.

Needless to say, A.N. and B.J. are extremely useful as members of any committee appointed to avoid decisions.

***Make it a Policy Matter:** In circumstances where committees cannot be appointed and A.N. or B.J. are not readily available, the buck can still be passed to the higher management by making the problem a policy matter, e.g.

"There has been a proposal for a cycle-stand for workers. This basically forms a part of our employee-benefit scheme and consequently cannot be considered in isolation. In due

course, the top management should consider this proposal while reviewing our wage-structure, benefit scheme, etc....”

In criminal cases, ‘insanity’ is the ultimate plea. Similarly, in management action or inaction, “policy” is the ultimate convenient label.

***Suggest a Survey:** Looking at the practices of others is a sure way of creating confusion and delay, e.g.:

“I suggest a survey be carried out in our geographical area as well as in our industry to find out location and industry practices vis-a-vis provision of vehicular parking (e.g. cycle-stand) for employees reporting on duty...”

***Appoint a Consultant:** This is rather a desperate move and should be resorted to when other remedies are not available. If a proper consultant is chosen and his terms are made ambiguous enough his report will create enough confusion and hostility so that the original problem will be lost.

DO-IT-YOURSELF DECISION-AVOIDING

Situations arise where a manager is unable to pass the buck and is compelled to avoid decisions by himself. In such cases, the manager may use any of the following approaches:

Scare the Initiator: The methods available for this purpose are:

***Tantrum Method:** This is a somewhat ancient method, but is still effective. When the initiator comes with his proposal, you should throw a tantrum, e.g.: “Cycle-stand for workers! Oh, what a proposal and what a time to bring it up! The bearing on the starting machine has broken down, the compound wall has cracked due to the last earthquake and my ulcers are bothering me again! Can you not think of anything more significant than a cycle-stand?”

***Hush-hush Method:** Alternately, you may warn the initiator that he is rushing in where “angels fear to tread”, e.g.

“Cycle-stand for workers! Sh-sh-sh, talk low. This matter is already with the top brass and there are wheels-within-wheels. If I were you, I would just keep quiet and tell anybody who talks about this problem to keep his trap

shut...”

***More-details-please Method:** If you keep on asking for more and more details, the initiator will give up his proposal sooner or later e.g.

“Regarding your proposal (cycle-stand for workers) we regret to note that full details have not been made available. Before the proposal can be considered further, we would like to have the following details in quintuplicate:

1. Dimensions of standard cycles with expected variation.
2. Average laden and unladen weight with usual variations.
3. Estimated capacity requirements by quarters in the next seven years.
4. Possible modes of construction with estimated cost (Please enclose 3 competitive quotations each)
5. All other relevant or significant details available at your end...”

***Double-talk Method:** If you have mastered the jargon of management, you can confuse the initiator, e.g.

“You are talking about cycle-stand for workers. Do you realise that is just a method of their expressing the lack of mutual trust. So we must look upon the problem as a symptom and not as a disease. What must we do to create an atmosphere of mutual trust or harmony? Not granting material benefits, but interacting with the workers to create a feeling ,of unity...”

***No-problem-exists Method:** Deny the very existence of the problem, e.g.:

“What is this about a cycle-stand? We have been running this factory for 15 years without a cycle-stand. Everybody knows that cycles can stand without a cycle-stand. Why do you want a cycle-stand? Why do you want to bring up an imaginary problem?..