

Employee Background Verification Systems: Implementation Challenges

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Introduction

The case based method of teaching has been gaining in popularity across the world - particularly in professional education such as the MBA courses. The reasons for this popularity are well-known. Cases provide a feel of the real life with their storytelling, rise and fall in action, and vivid characters - and break the monotony of simply learning theory. They give the scholar an opportunity to apply their logical reasoning, decision making ability as well as their theoretical knowledge in the relatively safe environment of the classroom - where the costs of an erroneous decision are low. Finally, cases demonstrate possible solutions to problems encountered in reality - providing learning highly useful for the professional. Let us evaluate the present case in terms of how suitable it is for meeting the above objectives.

Case Facts - Synopsis

The case essentially focuses on the dilemma faced by Samir Tiwari - the HR manager of the Financial Services business vertical of a leading software services company. Samir's reported discomfort with the involuntary attrition of employees has been further aggravated by the nature of the next two termination decisions he is expected to make. One, a senior delivery manager in Insurance, known to be a very high performer and expected to be a Vice-President soon, has been found to have produced forged high school mark sheets and certificates. Two, a new employee, a good performer by preliminary analysis, has been found to submit a forged relieving letter from the previous company.

Thus simple, the case next leads the reader on through a complex array of contextual information that justifies the name aptly - motivating one to think if really it is more understandable to be non-ethical in some situations than the other. The dismissal of the senior Manager will

definitely cause Bharat Services Limited (BSL) to lose one of its star performers, may lead to loss of valuable accounts and will reflect badly on the previous verification checks done at BSL. Interdepartmental pressures are also high for Tiwari to take a lenient stand. Finally, the Manager's stellar academic career thereafter seems to make the high school credentials redundant. On the other hand, the new employee has been a victim of high-handed and unjust behaviour of her previous employer. Even after serving a month's notice and submitting due resignation, she did not receive the relieving letter. Her dismissal may be of little consequence to the company, but removal on grounds of immoral acts may affect her career and her life adversely.

Three themes emerge clearly out of the case, which can be the topics for discussion:

1. How to resolve an ethical dilemma? This can be viewed from the practical perspectives of cost of dismissal and costs of retention in each of the cases, or from the legal-ethical angle of abiding by rules and norms.
2. Are the two cases comparable? There can be interesting discussions on whether some forgery are more justified than others or what are the grounds on which justice can take a lenient stand.
3. Are ethical barriers encouraging ethical behaviour or encouraging frauds in the company? This can emerge as a meaningful discussion if scholars take a futuristic perspective and wonder whether the policy of 'No shades of gray' has not been accompanied by adequate assistance to the present and potential employees to abide by it. This is clearly a problem in the second case, where forgery was unnecessary - given that the employee has proof of serving the notice period and has submitted a proper resignation. Interventions such as entry-level counseling and awareness building workshops may be suggested

Merits and Demerits

Let us discuss the case on the following grounds:

Content - Importance of Topic, Comprehensiveness of Issues Raised, Strength of Arguments

With ethics fast emerging as a core subject for professional training in business management, the area of this case appears highly relevant. It also brings out the phenomenon of ethical dilemma successfully. Additionally, by emphasizing the consequences of removal, the case highlights the ethicality of both the offences as well as of any decision of dismissal.

Two weaknesses may be pointed out in the narrative. One, the case chooses as its subject matter, forgery of documents, that indeed leaves little scope for finding shades of grey. It becomes more a legal question than an ethical one. However, one may argue that this is strength - in that even this apparently straightforward issue gives rise to discussions. Two, the forgery in the 2nd case appears redundant (as discussed above), weakening the narrative. More complicated cases of ethical dilemma could have been more illustrative of the topic in discussion.

Style -Readability, Lucidity, Redundancy

The case is short and engrossing - with little redundancy. Although data shares in the appendices do not directly contribute to the case solution, they may help foster discussions on the pervasiveness of unethical behaviour. Additional data about organizational structure may have helped us in understanding how much freedom Mr. Tiwari has in taking a decision and how he may be influenced by others.

Outreach- Number of Disciplines and Topics that can be Taught using this Case, no. Of Models / Theories that can be Taught

This case is suitable for teaching a variety of topics such as ethical dilemma, moral development and workplace ethics. It is also suitable for teaching, in different contexts, labour law issues in disciplinary actions and even for teaching about exit interviews. The instructor can aptly teach of Kohlberg's model of moral development (Kohlberg, 1973) or Kidder's model of Ethical Dilemma (Kidder, 1995) - using this case. While the case offers little fodder for areas other than HRM, it appears to have a commendable outreach within that area.

Based on a software firm in India, and dealing with difficulty in obtaining relieving letters, the case is likely to appeal to young professionals. It also calls for active decision making in an area that require relatively less technical expertise. Hence the case is likely to appeal to a wide and diverse audience.

Conclusion

In summary, it appears that the case in question does the job of raising questions about and illustrating the problem of and ethical dilemma efficiently. It is also suitable for the use of diverse pedagogies such as role plays, class discussions and debates.

References

- Kidder, R. M. 1995. *How Good People Make Tough Choices*. New York: William Morrow.
- Kohlberg, Lawrence 1973. The Claim to Moral Adequacy of a Highest Stage of Moral Judgment. *Journal of Philosophy*, 70 (18), 630-646.

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