

The Selection Dilemma Faced at Drona Institute of Management Studies

Vision
17(3) 247–250
© 2013 MDI
SAGE Publications
Los Angeles, London,
New Delhi, Singapore,
Washington DC
DOI: 10.1177/0972262913496807
<http://vision.sagepub.com>


Girish Balasubramanian

Abstract

This case deals with issues related to the access of higher education facilities to individuals with physical disability (visual disability in this case). The names and the characters are fictitious though the overall inspiration of the case is based on real-life events. This case has been developed as an instructional case to illustrate the model of factors affecting the treatment of individuals with disability in the organization. These factors can be broadly divided into two categories, namely, the personal factors and the environmental factors (Stone and Colella, 1996). This case also touches upon issues like due diligent efforts that need to be made to accommodate the individuals with disability, the acceptance of the individuals with disability into organization and into main stream society, and stereotyping of individuals with disability. This case can also be extended to sensitize individuals and managers to other forms of disability and to educate them about the legal provisions made both nationally and internationally. This case has been developed for academic discussion only.

Key Words

Diversity, Disability, Inclusive Education, Fundamental Right, Environmental Factors, Personal Factors

It was a sultry afternoon and Director Dr S. Radhakrishnan was intently poring over the final list of successful candidates who had made it to the most coveted management school of the country. Getting through to these hallowed portals was no cake walk. Like all the previous years the selection procedure had been stringent and the director was happy that this year too his team had been successful in selecting one of the most talented and diverse batch, be it in terms of gender, education, the place to which the students belonged, the type of industry that the students had prior work experience, and a good mix of candidates with work experience and candidates who had just completed graduation. Indeed there was cut-throat competition and the admission team also burnt the mid-night oil to get the best 350 brains in the country out of which 250 candidates were offered admission and another 100 candidates were waitlisted. However, there was one candidate, by the name of Ekalavya, who was giving the Director sleepless nights. The reason for his worry was whether to offer Ekalavya admission seat or not because he was a visually challenged candidate and never in the illustrious history of Drona Institute of Management Studies (DIMS) had a differently abled candidate sought admission. The Director Dr Radhakrishnan was afraid that mythology might repeat itself.¹

About Drona Institute of Management Studies

Drona Institute of Management Studies had made humble beginnings in the post-independent India in the holy city of Benaras in the year 1952, with a humble strength of 20 students and some help from the Russian authorities. India at that time was fighting a war on multiple fronts. Drona Institute of Management Studies was formed with the motto of creating visionary thought leaders. ‘Mentoring managers of today to become leaders of tomorrow’ was one of the vision statements of the institute. The detailed vision statement has been given in Exhibit 1. Till date the institute had lived up to the expectation of giving thought leaders to the industry. Many Arjuna²s had passed out of the hallowed portals and have helped in creating a difference in the lives of innumerable people. The alumni list boasted of the who’s who in the industry. A handful of them were also able to carve out a niche in the national politics. In the current year, Dr Radhakrishnan took over as director and chairman, overseeing the admissions. The fame of the institute had spread far and wide to such an extent that candidates from overseas also applied. The competition also had intensified. However, as a principle and strategy, the institute was very cautious in increasing

the seats. The institute had a rigorous selection procedure. An entrance test was conducted which was amongst the toughest in the country to crack. It was followed by a rigorous procedure which included group discussion, group task, extempore oration followed by three rounds of intense panel interviews. After the initial shortlist was declared the candidates had to submit a one-page statement of purpose. The extempore oration was the latest addition to the long list of selection procedure. Dr Krishnan, as he was popularly referred to, was of the opinion that the institute had to innovate continuously to remain ahead of the coaching centres that had mushroomed and trained the prospective candidates in all the areas. The faculty definitely were overworked and under tremendous pressure to get the right mix of talent and the best brains.

Academic Rigour

Students who successfully got through to the institute would often share a piece of mind with their juniors and prospective candidates that surviving the academic rigour was much tougher than the selection procedure that they had to go through. The usual load of assignments, quizzes and submissions were there but with a difference. For example, one of the professors Dr Nelson who was otherwise liked by the students was of the opinion that students would go to corporates which are full of uncertainties and hence to simulate the real-life conditions he would prepone the submission deadlines. Another professor Dr Madhu who was referred to as 'psycho' (because she had majored in Applied Psychology) used to give surprise quizzes in the most unearthly hours. All the subjects invariably had hundreds of pages of pre-read. Students would often say jovially that at DIMS time and sleep both are scarce commodities. To add to this the students also took part in a plethora of events. There were a number of committees both informal and formal in the institute. The students also had their own student council. The students of the senior batch formed the Upper House and the students of the junior batch formed the Lower House. Thus, the institute not only took pains in selecting the most talented and brainy candidates but provided an equally tough academic rigour, so that by the end of two years students would be ready to take up challenges. Dr Krishnan would often quote 'the daily grind of hard work gets a person polished'.³ He would often say that this rigour had stood the test of time. Even during the recession of 2008, candidates of DIMS managed to break the previous placement records.

The Candidate Ekalavya

Ekalavya, who belonged to a lower middle class family, was visually challenged by birth. However, he never felt

any disability. With support from his family members, he was able to live a normal life. He was refused admission to the schools where the able-bodied children of his age went on the grounds of his disability. However, an association called the Blind People Association⁴ came to his rescue. He was given all possible aid and help. He was indeed a bright student. He cleared the Secondary School Leaving Exam and the Higher Secondary School Leaving Exam with distinction. He was a merit rank holder. He wanted to be an electrical engineer. He idolized Dr E. Sreedharan.⁵ However, his disability came in his way and he was denied admission. The reason cited was that a lot of practical work would be involved and the visual impairment would be a problem. He did not lose hope. He also had a passion for literature. He graduated from St. Xavier's Benares, another Mecca as far as graduation studies are concerned, in English and Sanskrit with a first division in both the streams. He idolized Nick Vujicic.⁶ While the authorities provided him with writers for examinations, technology came to his rescue as far as preparing for the examinations and studying was concerned. All he needed was a laptop with the notes and the reading material scanned and converted into portable document format (pdf) and the default pdf reader would read out the material for him. He had also attended the Braille training at Dehradun. He wanted to do something challenging. He had heard about the level of toughness of DIMS entrance exam. Hence he found his next target, that is, to crack DIMS entrance test and also secure a seat for MBA.

Ekalavya was not only academically brilliant, but he was also a trained Bharatnatyam dancer and a trained Carnatic singer. He played the Veena. He was also the International Science Olympiad finalist and the winner of the Bournvita Spelling Bee contest. Thus, it is amply clear that with his family support he did not allow the visual impairment to be an obstacle in any way. His scores in examinations and other credentials are given in Exhibit 2.

The Selection Procedure

Ekalavya prepared with due earnest and it was no surprise that he aced the entrance exam. He also earned the coveted selection call for the next round of selection. However, he got a shock when the authorities decided to debar him from the next round of selection on the grounds of his disability. Ekalavya now wise from his previous experience had done his homework. He argued with the authorities that the application brochure mentioned nowhere that candidates with disability need not apply. The authorities pointed out that the brochure did mention that candidates who are medically fit to undergo the academic programme can apply. However, Ekalavya argued that he was medically fit for studying. The very fact he had graduated was proof

enough that he was medically fit. Moreover he further argued that the authorities were also free to examine his medical records which, of course, had no mention of any life-threatening disease or illness. Dr Krishnan was also present at the centre where his selection procedure was supposed to be held. A man of principles and finding merit in his argument, he decided in Ekalavya's favour. He was allowed to participate in the selection process and was also assured that he would be treated fairly. Moreover all the procedures were independent and thus there was very little chance of any bias. Ekalavya, to the surprise of the selection panel, outperformed in most of the tasks compared to his able-bodied counterparts.

A seasoned man that Dr Radhakrishnan was, he did not rush into making a decision. Instead he formed a two member committee consisting of Dr Sunita, the public relations officer of DIMS, and Dr Gupta, another veteran professor of DIMS, to carry out a detailed study about the necessary infrastructure that would have to be created in case Ekalavya was given an admission. He gave the committee complete freedom to conduct the assessment. The only mandate that he gave them was to ensure a comprehensive and detailed report as this study would impact many people in different ways. The decision taken based on this report would not only impact Ekalavya, but also many others and hence it was important that all relevant issues were discussed thread bare. Even as Dr Krishnan was plagued by a whole lot of questions he had a feeling in him that mythology would be re-written based on the reports of the committee.

The Committee's Assessment

The committee did a detailed assessment over a period of one month and reported as follows. The breed of students that come to DIMS are intelligent, talented and fiercely competitive. Ekalavya had sufficiently demonstrated his intelligence and talent, but as far as competitive spirit is concerned they only have the selection process data points which seem to give ambiguous indications. The second aspect was his acceptance into the student group at DIMS. The committee contended that DIMS was mentoring managers of today. They needed to be sensitive to the myriad issues. This would be a classic experiential learning for his peers as well as for Ekalavya. It would only enhance the learning for both Ekalavya and his peers. As far as infrastructure arrangements are concerned, a computer with braille key board would have to be installed at the computer centre. The vast amount of reading material that is given to the students would have to be given to him as a soft copy. Moreover proprietary speech software would have to be procured. As far as assessments of written tests are concerned, he would have to be provided with a writer; rest he

could manage. The companies also had evinced keen interest to provide placement. The recruiters were of the opinion that his disability would not be a hindrance in getting him a job. Thus, the gist of the assessment was that some changes would have to be carried out which would need substantial investment. Moreover the committee was of the opinion that Ekalavya's selection would be a unique experiment in the history of DIMS. It would also add another dimension of diversity to the batch. Admitting Ekalavya also had distinct gains in terms of brand and reputation.

The Selection Conundrum

After going through the assessment report, Dr Krishnan was all the more confused. Dr Krishnan in his academic career had never been through such a dilemma. Like most real-life problems, here too he had very limited decision-making points. He wanted to be doubly sure that he took the right decision because his one decision could impact the lives of many including the professors, the students, the staff and many others. He also kept in mind the mission of DIMS (Exhibit 1); the credentials of Ekalavya (Exhibit 2) and, of course, the leeway that had been created inadvertently in the admission brochure (Exhibit 3). He knew that this was his chance to change mythology.⁷ Based on the assessment reports he decided to offer admission to Ekalavya.

Exhibit 1.

Mission Statement of Drona Institute of Management Studies

Inspired by the divine place, Banaras Drona Institute of Management Studies offers

- To mentor the managers of today to be the leaders of tomorrow
- To disseminate knowledge to one and all without discrimination
- To provide learning to persons of extraordinary calibre
- Diversity with synergy
- Excellence, creativity and commitment

Exhibit 2.

Academic Credentials

Secondary School Leaving Certificate	90%, merit rank no. 5
Higher Secondary School Leaving Certificate (Science stream)	95.56%, merit rank no. 3
BA English Literature	70%
MA Sanskrit Literature	72.23%

Bournvita Spelling Bee Champion
International Science Olympiad finalist
NTSE scholarship holder

Extra-curricular Activities

Trained Bharatnatyam dancer
Trained Carnatic vocalist and veena player
Keen interest in theatre and acting

Exhibit 3.**Excerpts from the Application Brochure Eligibility**

A candidate must be a graduate from a recognized university or a deemed university with a minimum of 60% aggregate marks. Candidates in the final year of the bachelor's degree and awaiting the results can also apply.

PS: The academic programme requires a lot of rigour and hence the candidates are expected to be fit and sound, mentally and physically.

Notes

1. Drona was the famous teacher of the Pandavas and the Kauravas in the famous Hindu mythology the Mahabharata. Legend has it that Arjuna the third of the Pandava warrior prince was the favourite disciple of Dronacharya. However, there was a Bhil by the name Ekalavya, who was an even match for Arjuna. Seeing the master train the princes, Ekalavya also sought tutelage from Dronacharya, but he denied him the tutelage. He even made Ekalavya cut his right thumb so that he could no more be an archer.
2. Arjuna is one of the Pandavas from the great epic 'The Mahabharata'. He is one of favourite disciples of Dronacharya, the teacher of both the Kaurava and the Pandava princes.
3. <http://www.searchquotes.com> (retrieved on 15 September 2012).
4. The Blind People Association, Ahmedabad is an organization working for the betterment of visually challenged people.
5. Dr E. Sreedharan is the former chairman of Delhi Metro who is credited with finishing the project within deadline and also for huge cost savings.
6. Nicholas James Vujicic is a Serbian motivational speaker. He was born with tetra Amelia syndrome, a rare disorder characterized by absence of all the four limbs. He struggled a lot in

his life and has now come to terms with his disability and is now a motivational speaker.

7. The Mahabharata is a famous epic written by Rishi Ved Vyas. It is a story about the Pandava and the Kaurava princes and their bitter fight for the kingdom of Hastinapur. Among the many characters one is Drona, who is the teacher for the princes, both the Pandavas and Kauravas. Amongst all the princes, there was one prince, Arjuna. He was the favourite disciple of Drona. Drona wanted Arjuna to become the greatest archer. Legend goes that there was a tribal boy by the name of Ekalavya who was fascinated by archery. He sought Drona to teach him archery. Drona disagreed because Ekalavya was a tribal boy and he taught people belonging to the royal lineage. Ekalavya made a mud statue of Drona and started practicing archery and also excelled at it. Drona came to know of this in one of their chance encounters in the forest. In those times there was a tradition of Guru Dakshina (offering to the teacher) in return for what one learnt from the teacher. Drona knew that if he allowed Ekalavya to learn archery then he would definitely excel at it. Hence, he demanded the right thumb as Guru Dakshina from Ekalavya. Ekalavya who was an obedient student gladly made the offering in spite of the fact that he would not be able to excel at archery. References

References

Stone, D. L., & Colella, A. (1996). A model of factors affecting the treatment of disabled individuals in organizations. *Academy of Management Review*, 21(2), 352–401.

Girish Balasubramanian (fh11001@astra.xlri.ac.in) is Doctoral Candidate, Human Resource Management at XLRI, Xavier School of Management, Jamshedpur, Jharkhand, India. His areas of interest are diversity, industrial relations, compensation and sports & management studies.