



Inspired Encounter with Difficult Situation: The Case of Disgruntled Students

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Abstract

This case study shows how to use inspiration practices to solve challenging situations in academic institutions and any organization when the beneficiaries are Disgruntled. It is meant to address the reality of every day life situations that if faced with persistence and perseverance.

Keyword: Inspiration, Persistence, University Issues, Students Demands

Introduction

Mid-May 2022. The 10th Convocation of Shimal University is only three weeks away. Convocation here is a highly official program and a mega event.¹ It is because President of the country, who is the Chancellor of the University, attend convocation to confer degrees. Most of the preparations for the convocation are done. Students registration has been closed at least three months ago. This always however happens that some students don't register on time despite repeated notifications, and they create scenes which are difficult to handle.

¹ **Exhibit-1** shows several committees responsible for the arrangement of the convocation. It reflects the grandeur of this event.

Convocation's Extra Significance

As a graduation ceremony, convocation is an important event in students' academic life. But transcending academic significance, it becomes more a mega socio-cultural event here for the graduates. Due to many constraints and unavoidable difficulties, most of the universities here can't or don't arrange convocation by the end of each and every semester. Usually it is arranged once in two to three years and by then a large number of graduates are accumulated. Upon graduation (i.e. completion of all degree requirements) but before the conferment of degree in the convocation, the graduates receive their provisional certificates and leave university for the next stage of their life journey. However, they patiently wait for the convocation day which offers them a golden chance to meet their friends, classmates, teachers and many other known faces at a common premise after a long period of time. Wearing special clothes (convocation gown and hat); taking photographs; receiving certificates and awards; sitting, eating and gossiping together; attending cultural program; presence of relatives (e.g. spouse, parents, siblings) all these highly elevate the intellectual and emotional attachments of the students with the convocation day.

Students' Appeal

Dean of the School of Economics and Business was deeply engrossed in discussing a policy proposal with one of his colleagues. The discussion was interrupted by an office staff who informed that some students of Economics Department were waiting for long hours to meet him. Unwillingly though, he put aside the important discussion to entertain students. A group of five students entered his office and were asked to seat. He didn't know the purpose of these students. When students started presenting their case, he became annoyed because they were requesting his intervention for late registration in the forthcoming convocation. Keeping his annoyance masked, he kept on listening and concurrently thinking on how to say 'no' to them.

When he was about to decline their request, the words of Sadman, the most provocative one of this students group, made him utterly surprised. "We have been sent to you by the Office of the Controller of Exam. They have said that anything is possible if you recommend our case for late registration." He restrained himself from saying anything conclusive then and there. From them he took necessary information and noted down on a small piece of paper which he sent to the desk of MBA Program Director Dr. Akmal Khan who deals with convocation matters at School level. Students were asked to go back home and patiently wait until their matter was inquired into and the Director contact them for their subsequent action.

Inquiry into the Case

The MBA Program Director contacted the Controller of Exam Office to know the issue in detail. The result of the inquiry was both soothing and discomfoting. The Controller of Exam confirmed that no officer of her office had asked those students to



see the Dean for their case to be recommended. It was soothing in that the Controller Office had not passed over the burden of saying 'no' to the School. However, the inquiry result baffled the Dean since his students presented their case to him in a way where false reference was made. He was further shocked to know that the provocative student was very argumentative, rude, and impolite in his dealings with the officer of the Controller Office. He requested the Dr. Akmal to ask the students group to see him tomorrow and left office for home.

Though the Dean left his office, the office didn't leave him. After taking dinner, he closed his eyes to relax, but his mind plunged into deep thinking on how tomorrow he should deal with the students –the students who are guilty of misconduct and misrepresentation. In fact, he has two choices. He has positional power as the Dean of the School. He can use *classical administrative approach*. Another choice is *inspired approach*. This approach is largely unknown and hence seldom used by people in authority who invariable rely on external sources of power. As he thought deeply, he imagined how his interaction might be tomorrow.

Classical Administrative Encounter (imagined)

The next day the student came to the Dean's office to know about their requested late registration for the convocation. No sooner had they entered the office, he declared, without asking them to sit, in a stern voice: *Your request is rejected.*

Students: *Sir! You can do something for us. You know how important it is in our life.*

Dean: *Don't kill my time. Don't ask for the same thing repeatedly.*

Students: *Sir please do...*

Students couldn't complete their sentence. He was already annoyed. He got agitated now.

Dean: *Look! You people should be punished. Don't you understand what you did. You have lied with me. You have made false reference. You have misbehaved with the officer in the Exam Controller office.*

Students: *Sir please listen...* (He stopped them and retorted)

Dean: *Don't talk. I don't want to listen to you. I feel I should suggest withholding of your degree certificates. Just leave my office.*

The students left the office with faces clearly indicating dissatisfaction and anger. Their murmuring got louder as they walked further away from his office. The students departed, but he couldn't assure himself that the problem has been solved.

Glimpse of New Light

The imagined interaction was intercepted by the violent sound of a strong wind. The Dean rushed to the window to close it. As he was closing the window, his eyes fell on



the sky which thick clouds has covered. However, the wind was driving the clouds and the bright moon was getting chance to peeped through them. While his external eyes were caught by the beauty of the interplay of darkness and light, he remembered two Prophetic narrations beauty of which deeply moved him.

A Bedouin started urinating in the Masjid al-Nabawi. While the companions of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) were about to interrupt him, he prevented them. Only when the man has finished urinating, he dealt with this mistake. He treated the man very gently; he was not harsh with him at all.² In the second narration, a poor companion was found to have committed a severe mistake in the fasting month of Ramadan. As an expiation of his mistake, the Prophet offered him alternative remedial measures of freeing a slave or fasting for two consecutive months or feeding sixty poor people. The man however expressed his inability to do any of these. When a large basket of dates was made available to the Prophet, he offered him the basket and asked him to distribute among poor people in his community as a solution to his problem. Interestingly, the man declared himself to be the poorest in his community, and hence the Prophet had to eventually laugh and allow him to take the basket for his own family consumption.³

Beauty of the problem solving approach contained in these Prophetic narrations sparked light in the mind of the Dean and he felt inspired. He quickly recalled the critically positive role of inspiration for personal and professional growth and development. An elaboration of this role is that “inspiration awakens us to new possibilities by allowing us to transcend our ordinary experiences and limitations.”⁴ It raises our ability to overcome challenging situations, and motivates us to create an environment in which many people can peacefully coexist and thrive together.⁵ Moreover, he remembered that inspiration-based problem solving model creates room for individuals to use their inner ability and power to influence others without relying too much on external powers, and develop simple solutions for complex problems without using too much external resources.⁶

Now, the storm has stopped. The Dean opened the window. Clouds have disappeared. The moon is shining with its full radiance in the clear sky. He felt a sort of assurance in his heart. His hesitation over the choices of dealing with the disgruntled students is gone. He won't follow classical administrative approach to deal with them; he would rather prepare himself to pursue inspired approach. Questions were peeping in his mind. Would this inspired approach unveil opportunities for getting positive

² Sahih Muslim 285. For the English translation of this hadith text, please see **Exhibit-2**.

³ Sahih Bukhāri, 1936. For the English translation of this hadith text, please see **Exhibit-3**.

⁴ Kaufman, S. B. (2011). Why inspiration matters. *Harvard Business Review*, 8.

⁵ Buheji, M., Saif, Z., & Jahrami, H. (2014). Why Inspiration Matters? *Journal of inspiration economy*, 1(1), 11-20.

⁶ Buheji, M., & Thomas, B. (2016). *Handbook of Inspiration Economy-eBooks and textbooks from bookboon. com*.



outcomes? Would the new sun of the new (next) day bring him a new and enthralled experience?

Inspired Encounter (actualized)

With colleagues

On the next day, two of his colleagues came to his office: MBA Program Director Dr. Akmal Khan who had investigated into the case and BBA Program Director Dr. Nasir Shah.

Akmal: *The students will come within one hour. If you wish, I can keep you undisturbed. I will convey them whatever decision you have taken about them and save your time.*

Dean: *Have your seat please! Don't be hasty.* (He looked deeply in the eyes of both Akmal and Nasir)

Nasir: *What are you thinking? It seems you want to say something serious!*

Dean: *Hmm... Yes, something special indeed!*

A mix of curiosity and anxiety became evident in their faces. They thought that, apart from rejecting the request of the students, the Dean would talk about disciplinary measures against them. They asked him if their case of misrepresentation and misconduct would be reported to Proctor of the University.

Dean: *No. I have decided not to be harsh with them. Let's treat them softly.*

Akmal: *Are we then going to accept their request and recommend their case for late registration?*

Dean: *We cannot accept their request. This is true. But we will try our best to communicate the decision in a persuasive manner. Don't you want to see them the least shocked by the decision?*

Akmal: *Yes of course!*

Nasir: *This is understood, Prof.! But what about their lying and ill conduct? Are we going to ignore these issues?*

Dean: *Certainly no! We will address them, but with a positive mindset and in a counselling mode. They are our students after all. We will avoid using administrative tone and punitive intention.*

Although both directors were already comfortable with what the Dean told, he continued talking positively of his intended approach of dealing with the students. He added that no socio-economic problem should be taken as a disturbing or negative phenomenon absolutely. Inspiring problem-solving approach suggests that every problem contains within it a wealth of opportunities. If these opportunities are carefully identified and positive relatedness among the parties to the problem can be ensured,



desirable solution to the problem can be reached and possibility of generating expected outcomes can be maximized.⁷

With the disgruntled students

At this stage, Dr. Akmal looked at the corridor through the glass partitions and saw the students waiting outside. He went out and got back with students. After greetings, the Dean asked the students to take their seats and looked at them deeply having a broad smile on his face. The students were a bit nervous and hesitantly asked about their request for late registration.

Dean: I understand how important the convocation is to you. I wish I could do what you expected. I'm sure you know what I know. Depending on the number of registered graduates, all arrangements have been finalized. Convocation souvenir has already been published. It contains separate lists of all graduates and registered graduates. I don't have any way to do what you want. By declared policy of registration and by the finalized arrangements, accommodating non-registered graduates has been made impossible. I know it is painful, but we will have to accept this fact.

The students somehow nodded their heads in agreement with what the Dean said, but their faces were gloomy. They were about to stand up and leave, but he asked them to keep seated and ordered for them snacks and tea. While these were being served, the Dean drew attention of Sadman, the most provocative student:

Dean: Sadman! I believe you have some ideas about information filtering and distortion?

Sadman: Yes, sir! I think I have read about these in business communication course. I know the concepts.

Dean: Fine! We have an example. You had visited Controller of Exam Office (CEO) and then my office few days ago for late registration. I think there had been some distortion when information travelled from that office to me through you. What do you think Sadman?

Sadman: (He lowered his face and was found little uncomfortable.) Sir, I really cannot understand....!

Dean: I understand that there were conversations between you and someone in the exam controller office. They didn't really refer your case to me for my recommendation. We have checked with CEO. It's not unlikely that some points have been misunderstood and you thought that they had referred your case to me. This been an innocent mistake.

⁷ Buheji, M. (2018). *Re-Inventing Our Lives: A Handbook for Socio-Economic "Problem-Solving"*. AuthorHouse.



The Dean didn't at all utter the word lying. He didn't say that Sadman lied or made false reference. He even didn't say that the case has been 'misrepresented.' Although Sadman remain silent, other students quickly responded saying: "Yes, sir! We also think so." Plausibly, these students realized that the serious offence of making false reference has been camouflaged by the Dean's mentioning of 'innocent mistake' and 'information distortion'. They felt that he was dealing with them softly and opening for them a silent and non-hurting exit from a morally sensitive problem. They thanked him and asked for permission to leave. Again, he asked them to wait.

Dean: I'm happy that you understood the issue. In your professional carrier and communication, always try to reduce the extent of information filtering and distortion. In this way, you avoid many unwanted situations.

Students: Sir! You asked us to wait. Do you want to tell us something else?

Dean: Yes, I have another point in mind. This point more important than what we have talked about until now.

Students: (with great curiosity) What is it?

Dean: Do you like that your life journey becomes uneven and full of adversities?

Students: Certainly no.

Dean: When our unjust behavior causes injuries to others' minds, negative energies released from the injuries are invisibly accumulated over time. This accumulation obstructs our life journey and makes it unpleasant to us in inexplicable ways. If you really want to enjoy your life, give your best efforts to avoid hurting and harming others.

Pin drop silence prevailed in the office room. None talked anything for some time. Students stood up and, breaking the silence, they requested the Dean to forgive them for their shortcomings and mistakes. Having a broad smile on his face, he left his chair, approached them, and patted them consolingly on their shoulders. "Wish you all an enjoyable life journey" were his last words before their departure. As they started moving towards the nearest elevator, what kept on ringing in their minds was: Don't hurt and harm others. This was overriding their agonizing concern over not getting chance to attend the forthcoming convocation.

Outcomes Contrasted

After departure of the students, the Dean walked back to his seat. As he felt satisfied with his inspired (!) dealing with them, he recalled what he had imagined about their reactions if they were dealt with following a classical administrative approach. He perceived differences in outcomes between these two types of dealings. But, are the differences just in his mind or could these be real? He felt the urgency of finding an



answer to this question from external sources; it's because he actually followed an inspired approach; following classical administrative approach and its outcomes were his pure imagination. Having this question in mind, he turned to his two colleagues who assured him that they would discuss with these very students to gain an understanding about his perceived differences.

Two directors, Akmal and Nasir, made a plan to sit with the students at a restaurant on the coming weekend. Students were initially hesitant and reluctant to express their feelings and reactions relating to their unsuccessful appeal for registration in the convocation. The directors however were eventually successful to initiate a friendly conversation and thereby get significant information about their feelings and reactions. They summarized their conversation with the students (**Exhibit-4**) and presented to the Dean. He went through the conversation with great interest. When he reached its end, joy and excitement were clearly evident on his face. Being a participant in a 5-day *Inspiration Labs* back in 2018, he was convinced that when a problem is tackled from an 'inspirational' perspective, beyond immediate results, many significant outcomes can be achieved. Now, as his conviction in dealing with a problem using 'inspirational' approach was reinforced, he thought it worthy to jot down some of the outcomes in a comparative fashion (**see Exhibit-5**).

After writing the last word on comparative outcomes, the Dean felt highly spirited. He was about to call his two directors to share the outcomes with them for their reflections and remark. Before he approached the land-phone, an office staff entered his office with a sealed envelope on which written 'urgent'. He quickly opened it and read. An emergency meeting of all chairpersons and deans has been called to discuss a critical problem. Graduates of some departments (names mentioned), who couldn't make registration to attend the convocation, are writing on various online platforms against it and planning to stage a demonstration against it one day before the convocation day. His alarming eyes quickly glanced through the list of names of the departments. Immediately his eyes became cool as Economics Department is missing on the list. He sat on his chair, closed his eyes, and reclined. He engrossed himself in thinking: Can he capitalize on the recently generated inspirational resources (e.g. experiences and relationships) in his participation in the meeting and contributed greatly to deal with the vexing problem evolving rapidly?



**Exhibit-1 Tenth Convocation
Committees, Shimal University**

1. Central Management Committee
2. Reception Committee
3. Certification Committee
4. Publicity Committee
5. Invitation Committee
6. Printing and Publication Committee
7. Speech Preparation Committee
8. Convocation Gown Committee
9. Transportation Committee
10. Crest and Gift Committee
11. Cultural Committee
12. Hospitality Committee
13. Finance Committee
14. Disciplinary Committee

Exhibit-2 Hadith on Urinating in the Masjid

Anas b. Malik reported: While we were in the mosque with Allah's Messenger (salallāhu 'alaihi wasallam), a desert Arab came and stood up and began to urinate in the mosque. The Companions of Allah's Messenger (salallāhu 'alaihi wasallam) said: Stop, stop, but the Messenger of Allah (salallāhu 'alaihi wasallam) said: Don't interrupt him; leave him alone. They left him alone, and when he finished urinating, Allah's Messenger (salallāhu 'alaihi wasallam) called him and said to him: These mosques are not the places meant for urine and filth, but are only for the remembrance of Allah, prayer and the recitation of the Qur'an, or Allah's Messenger said something like that. He (the narrator) said that he (the Holy Prophet) then gave orders to one of the people who brought a bucket of water and poured it over. (Sahih Muslim, 285)

Exhibit-3 Hadith on Rewarding Expiation

Abu Hurayrah (radiyallāhu 'anhu) narrated that a man came to Allah's Messenger (salallāhu 'alaihi wasallam) and said: "I am destroyed O Messenger of Allah!" Allah's Messenger (salallāhu 'alaihi wasallam) asked him: "And what has destroyed you?" He responded: "I had sexual intercourse with my wife while fasting in Ramadan." The Messenger (salallāhu 'alaihi wasallam) said: "Are you able to free a slave?" He replied: "No." The Messenger (salallāhu 'alaihi wasallam) said: "Are you able to fast two months consequently?" He said: "No." The Messenger (salallāhu 'alaihi wasallam) asked: "Can you find food to feed sixty poor people?" He replied: "No." Then the man sat down.

A little while later, the Messenger (salallāhu 'alaihi wasallam) was given a large basket of dates. He turned to the man and said: "Go and give this in charity." The man said: "And is there anyone who is poorer than us? There is not a family living between the two lava plains of Madinah more in need of it than us." The Prophet (salallāhu 'alaihi wasallam) laughed till his back teeth became visible. Then he said: "Go and feed your family with it." (Sahih Bukhāri, 1936)

Exhibit-4 Summary of Students' Conversation with the Directors

Directors: Your appeal for late registration in the convocation couldn't be honored. How do you feel?

Students: We can't attend the convocation. Definitely we are sad, but we are not



dissatisfied. Rejection of our appeal is agonizing, but we aren't angry now.

Directors: Apart from your appeal for late registration, what thoughts were in your mind when you had gone to see the Dean for the second time?

Students: Frankly speaking, we were nervous. We made false reference. We were also not courteous in our dealings with the officer in Exam Controller office. So, we thought that the Dean would be very angry with us; he would treat us harshly and rebuke us sternly.

Directors: Had he really done as you had thought, what would have been your reactions?

Students: (with hesitant smile on the face) Our plan was to instantly reject allegations against us. We would deny outright that we had done anything wrong. Moreover, our plan was to organize the graduates like us and launch an online protest against the convocation on the ground that it excludes many graduates who are willing to attend it.

Directors: Approach of the Dean was opposite of what you had thought. What are your reactions and evaluations of his approach?

Students: Speaking the truth, his way of dealing surprised us, overwhelmed us. It dissolved our counteracting energies and soften us surreptitiously. He said 'no' to our appeal, but we couldn't say anything contrary to his saying. As we said, we are sad for this, but we are no longer dissatisfied and angry. He addressed our nervous points of misrepresentation and misconduct, but he did so in a counselling mode without provoking our ego. In fact, he was respectful to our sense of self-dignity throughout his interaction with us. This has impressed us highly, and removed our negative thoughts and intentions. We are no longer thinking of doing anything negative against the convocation or the university.

Directors: Do you think that you have gained something from this positive encounter?

Students: One learning is evident. How to deal with people at their nervous moments? We experienced it during the encounter. We also learned the importance of refraining from deliberate filtering and distortion of information. Above all, his advice for no harming and no hurting has touched us deeply. All these will be invaluable capital in professional and personal life journeys.

Exhibit-5 Outcomes: Classical Approach vs. Inspirational Approach

Classical Approach

Inspirational Approach

Regarding appeal for late registration

Students' appeal was rejected outright. | This is true that students' appeal resulted



| | |
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| <p>So, they would be sad, dissatisfied and angry. They would go for organized protest against the convocation which could tarnish the reputation of the university.</p> | <p>in no pleasing outcome for the students. They were sad, but not dissatisfied and angry. They didn't want to do anything against the convocation or the university.</p> |
| <p><u>Regarding misrepresentation and misconduct</u></p> | |
| <p>Being nervous and felt threatened, students would be defensive, argumentative, and even disrespectful. Relationships were damaged. They could gain nothing beneficial for the personal and professional growth and development.</p> | <p>Despite the sadness due to rejected appeal, the students remained calm. Their mind could appreciate the essence of advices regarding misrepresentation and misconduct. They understood their mistakes and got motivated to correct them. They learned valuable and long-lasting lessons for personal and professional growth and development.</p> |
| <p><u>Regarding time and impact future activities</u></p> | |
| <p>Planning for dealing under this approach may be very quick and its execution in the first attempt might involve less amount of time. But untoward consequences erupted from such dealing can be reason for wasting many hours in future. Moreover, unfriendly or hostile reactions from students could make the administrators angry and this would definitely have negative impacts on their forthcoming activities.</p> | <p>Planning for inspired encounter and its execution required a great deal of time. But it has potentially saved many future hours which could be lost due to students' revengeful activities. Moreover, the administrators achieved calmness of mind and remained positively motivated for enriched performance of their forthcoming activities.</p> |

Disclaimer: The story, all names, characters, and incidents portrayed in this case study are fictitious. No identification with actual persons (living or deceased), places, and buildings is intended or should be inferred. The characters, views, information, or opinions expressed during the case study are solely those of the individuals involved and do not necessarily represent those of any University and its employees.

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