

## **Employee Conflicts Leading Towards Hostile Work Environment: A Case of Health Center**

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### **Abstract**

The communication style of an organization plays a significant role in achieving the goal. In the healthcare industry aspects of communication among co-workers and management play a very sensitive role. Nicobar health private limited (NHPL) (imaginary) is a large organization. This case study present issues on versions of the communication gap between higher authorities and subordinate employees that lead to traumatized lifetime experience of an employee within the organization while rendering her duties. The differences between two individuals (senior and subordinate) turned into workplace harassment. Communication barriers promoted harassment at workplace, therefore this case study tries to touch these issues and it will also provide suggestions for further improvement in employee communication with reference to a safe workplace.

### **Keywords**

Communication Gap, Workplace Harassment, Workplace Conflict, Hostile Work Environment.

### **Introduction**

A female employee transferred to new clinic where she faced uncomfortable environment. It was the situation where differences between two individuals turned into hostile work environment.

This case study narrates how communication barriers sometimes promote employee harassment at workplace. It includes different instances and conflict which leads to employee's traumatized experience while performing her job. Departmental levels issues also discussed in the case which also contributed to the communication gap.

### **Overview of Case**

NHPL is one of the largest health care providers in Delhi. This organization runs different health care institutions like polyclinics, allopathic health clinics, mobile health clinics, school health clinics, primary health clinics. The organization also implements and coordinates various state and national level health programs on behalf of state Government.

Dr. Bryan (Head of the Department) received a written complaint from one newly opened clinic. Miss Daisy, a nurse who was posted there filed written complaint against a doctor related to workplace harassment. She had also complained against, her immediate seniors to delay in response on her complaint. Now Dr. Bryan had to take a decision on the issue.

Senior nurse Miss. Daisy was transferred to the newly open clinic in a remote location. She had good expertise in her field of health care services (primary). After joining in the newly opened clinic she received verbal instructions related to work from higher authorities. A few days later while working in the clinic, she observed that the clinic was running with certain malpractices practices like distribution of medicine and handling of blood samples without any technical expertise, fake entry of patients in registration data base, drinking & storing alcohol in office premises. She did not wish to become part of those activities and informed almost all malpractices to her higher senior officials.

In the aftermath of this event her immediate boss started targeting her and rest of staff were showing unsupportive attitude. She was continuously informing her seniors for help and support but her seniors didn't respond in a positive way.

She was left alone in an unsafe workplace. She tried to communicate many times but failed, later one-day she got entangled in an argument aggravated with abusive language with Doctor.

Nurse Ms. Daisy was working as a regular employee since eight years in the organization. She was usually posted in primary health care setting during her entire career. Her expertise included vaccination, ANC and PNC checkups, coordinated with different facilitation of work grassroots stakeholders, the complete area of maternal and child health in 8,000 population of a community, implementation of various national health programs at the grass

root level and coordination with grassroots worker & other stakeholders in the community for implement health care programs.

### **How it Started**

She got transferred on 29/04/2017 to join duty in a clinic at Shine Colony on temporary basis. The clinic was located at the end of the village and due to proximity of wild life sanctuary many animals used to come in village area like monkeys, pigs, snakes etc. Public transportation was available with very low frequency to commute and only a single bus was available which would leave passenger only at the main bus stop. The distance from bus stoppage to the clinic was 2.5 kilometer. She had to travel by foot approximately 20 to 25 minute to reach health centre, as no other mode of transport was available like Auto Rickshaw, or private cab. Even the phone network was not working properly due to densely forest / cantonment area. The location of this clinic was very unsafe.

She had joined her duties after two days and she was continuously in touch with Dr. Anni Vasco regarding work at the clinic. Dr. Anni Vasco instructed her.

*“Daisy you are the representative of the organization in this clinic. If any issue / illegal activity takes place in this clinic you will be contacted there. You will help Dr. Gorge Park in maintaining all records of the clinic (Registers), it is your responsibility to take care of the expensive vending machine, tablet (Touch screen personal computer), refrigerator, furniture, and other inventory. You have to look after all the activities in the clinic, take care of the same. You will take care of patients, that's why we have posted you”.*

She was doing her duties in the clinic as instructed, with full dedication, honesty and integrity. Before joining her, no official records related with amount of biomedical waste treatment given to the contractor for waste management and frequency of disposal were existed. Looking on this situation. She corrected and maintained different official register/records in the clinic as stated above. The very few details of her work were listed below in the box.

#### **Box 1**

- Bio-Medical Waste Management record Register.
- Visitor Register.
- Complain/suggestion register for patients/clients.
- Laboratory report record register.
- Ante-natal-checkup Register.
- Family planning counseling register.
- Outpatient record register.
- Adolescent Reproductive Sexual Health (ARSH) Counseling Register.
- Attendance register
- Family welfare service register.

She tried to give her the best maximum possible services related to the community health in the clinic.

### **Issues at the Workplace**

During her posting in the clinic, she observed that certain malpractices were running in the clinic. The details of these malpractices were follow:-

#### **Dispensing of Medicine Without any Technical Expertise**

She observed that both the sons of landlord were appointed as attendant in clinic and elder son of the landlord (Mr. Aavil) was dispensing the medicines without any technical expertise on behalf of pharmacist. He was posing risk of patient's life in danger and also in contravention of certain rules, pharmacy Act 1948, Section - 42 as "No person other than registered Pharmacist shall compound, prepare, mix or dispense any medicine on the prescription of medical practitioner and whosoever contravenes his position shall be punishable with imprisonment which may be extended to six months or with fine not exceeding 1000 Rupees or with both. An only registered pharmacist is designated & competent person for dispensing of medicines, checking the overdose of medicines & counseling the patients regarding drug reaction & drug food reaction".

#### **Collecting/Handling and Sampling of Blood without any Technical Expertise**

Again a major cause of concern found that younger son of the landlord was taking the blood sample, handling biomedical waste in a dangerous manner, testing blood sugar without any technical expertise. The minimum educational/technical qualification required for laboratory technician/laboratory assistant / Phlebotomist is a diploma in medical laboratory technology as per recruitment rules laid by the government. He was playing with the life of poor people as he didn't have any technical knowledge of blood borne infections, sampling technique, blood split management and injecting the needle in the human body.

#### **Fake Entry of Patients in Registration Database**

It was noticed that the doctor was doing fake entries of old patients in database for increasing his incentives as more patients will get more money. He also had made fake entries of old patients even they did not visit the clinic in OPD.

## Drinking & Storing Alcohol/Wine Bottles in Government Premises

Drinking and keeping alcohol in office premises by Dr. Gource Park (Emplaned Doctor/private practitioner) with the sons of the landlord was routine practice. They had been storing alcohol bottles in the official refrigerator, which was given to keep medicines/vaccines or injections, samples of blood. They were misusing the government resources for personal benefit. They were misbehaving with her & other female patients after consuming alcohol.

## Hostile Work Environment

Ms. Daisy raised questions regarding the same above issues then Dr. Gource was trying hard to close with her. He also offered her leniency in working hours to get some kind of personal bonding but after her refusal, he created an offensive /hostile work environment for her. He was using uncivilized verbal comments on her in duty hours throughout the day (Box.2).

### Box 2

- *Are you married?*
- *When you are getting married?*
- *Do you cook food at home? Why don't you cook food at home? Your husband will die if he came to know that, he is married to you? Husband will surely die.*
- *What is your plan for Saturday weekend? Let's go to any place for enjoyment.*
- *What had you done in between two holidays? You should go outside for hangout.*
- *What does your father do?*
- *Do live alone in PG?*
- *Don't come to the office I will give you attendance, just follow me and do whatever I said to you.*
- *Today go and enjoy the weekend if any inspection form higher government authorities were done, I will say you would have menstruation (period) problem of female, then you (Nurse Daisy) left the office...but whatever I ask you must follow.*
- *Why don't you favor me...it is too difficult.*

When she refused to accept his personal advances then he threatened her-  
“You will have to work under me -I will spoil your career”.

He was humiliating her by using offensive language and misbehavior. This was causing her mental trauma, pain, suffering and emotional as well as physical distressed.

She had even informed this matter to Dr. Madona, the concerned medical officer in charge of the clinic, on dated 9<sup>th</sup> August 2017 and also sent a video of malpractices on the very same day with the note- “The environment of this clinic is very unsafe and Dr. Gource had

*started a series of my personal life questions day by day. Madam many illegal activities are going in this clinic and Dr. Gourage is misbehaving with me. I am not feeling safe."*

Dr. Madona replied. *"Look Daisy these things in verbal has no meaning, if you have taken any photographs, then send to me. Today and tomorrow I am on leave. After two days I have a meeting with district magistrate. I will discuss this matter in the office to the higher officer. Look if you give this in writing, these things will go to very far, and I will see this matter"*.

After this Dr. Gourage Park become more violent, He shouted on her by saying: *"Yesterday I went to the head office. Office people know each and every thing about this clinic. You work with me and you must not tell these things to your higher authorities". You will come to know, I will transfer you to the worst clinic (in a threatening way)."*

### **Burst Out Moments**

With the passage of time, he had started continuously interfering with her work, one day when she was doing adolescent counseling (adolescent reproductive sexual health) with a young girl, he shouted at her as well on that adolescent girl. He asked in a loud shouting manner to leave the room. He humiliated her in front of patients. Whenever any female patient wants to communicate with her, he always shouts on patients did not allow her to do her work properly.

He always shouted on her- *" You don't do any work. This is my clinic. I will do whatever I want. This clinic is located in so remote location no one will come to for inspection "I will register complaint against you, then you will come to know"*.

Even she did her work with sincerely and honestly, no work was pending at her level.

The son of the landlord (Mr. Aavil) and Dr. Gorge Park closed door while she was sitting in the OPD room, which had made her scared many times. He consumes alcohol during office hours in the same OPD room in front of Ms. Daisy. He was continuously harassing her and threatening her that he would complain and spoil her career after her refusal of unwelcoming gestures. He requested higher authorities to change nurse and meanwhile filed fake complaints against Miss Daisy.

At the times when she humbly asked him for two days of casual leave, he replied in an offensive way- *"It's better if you do not come to this clinic."*

With the passage of time. Dr. Gourge Park used to crack jokes on her in a humiliating way with the son of a landlord on her dignity (*Oh! look at her, she traveled in sunlight by covering her face*).

Another day he became violent and shouted on her- "*Get out of my clinic. Get up and leave this chair and table*". He had snatched all registers and records of patients from her hand.

She immediately informed this matter to Dr. Anni Vasco and other superior officers posted at next level head office, on 03/09/2017 that Dr. Gourge Park was misbehaving with her in an uncivilized manner. She raised her voice against malpractices going in the clinic and become whistle-blower against Dr. Gourge Park.

With the passage of time she realized, if any accident takes place with her. She was not in position to save herself under such a situation. She finally registered official complaint to the competent authority on 05/09/2017 for self-defense in the last stage to protect her modesty at the workplace and also submitted evidence (video clip) for the same. She registered her complaint on following charges listed in box.

**Box 3**

- Consumption of alcohol at workplace.
- Shouting by superior without any reason.
- No decorum at workplace.
- Medicine dispensing without expertise.
- Blood handling without technical expertise.
- Fake data base entry of OPD.

Miss Daisy received a hearing notice on 17/09/2017 at 10:15 am by head office (Fig.3). Ms. Daisy, Dr. Gourge Park and Mr. Aavil appeared in hearing on 19/09/2017 at 11:00 am.

Hearing notice was given through proper channel without any privacy. District unit medical officer of organization email to the common Id of each and every health clinic in the organization. The name, identity, the matter was known by each and every person of the organization. The hearing committee consists of medical officer, pharmacist and a clerk and they have expertise in their respective professional domain like medicine, pharmacology, clerical work etc.

Later, she also received office memorandum with reference to a fake complaint with specific reference (Fig. 1) made by Dr. Gourge Park for seeking explanation on dated

07/09/2017 within two days. (As he was previously threatened her to spoil her career). She then submitted her reply on issued memorandum on 09/09/17(Fig.2).

### **Status Report**

The case had come to Mr. Bryan (head of the department) for decision making. Ms. Daisy had registered complaint of workplace harassment against Doctor Gource Park. But again her seniors issued memo to Ms. Daisy rather than Dr. Gource Park, trying to hide the whole matter of workplace harassment. Privacy of victim was not maintained in proper way and also disposal committee was not formed according to the norms. Committee members did not have any background of handling cases related to workplace harassment.

### **Case Problems**

- Identify the key factor in the case like a communication channel in the organization.
- Dispute management committee.
- Identification of delayed by Dr. Madona and Dr. Anny in response to the complaint.

### **Appendices**

**OFFICE OF NICOBAR HEALTH CARE PRIVATE LIMITED, SM DISTRICT**  
NEW DELHI-110107  
PHONE NO:- 26633329,26692289  
*E-mail: nhcpl@gmail.com*

F.No.1 (77)2017/NHCPL/SM/Estt/PGMS/1969 Date:01/09/2017  
**MEMORANDUM**

With reference to the complaint received from Dr. Gource Park (Empanelled Doctor, Clinic) in respect of Ms. Daisy, nurse is as follow:-

1. Ms. Daisy, Nurse never comes on time (never opened the clinic).
2. She goes from the clinic whenever she wants.
3. She misbehaves with the medical officer and patients too.
4. She doesn't cooperate in other activity (e.g. Breast cancer screening Camp which was held in the clinic, where a female Doctors or Nurses are mandated to perform).

Ms. Ms. Daisey, Nurse is directed to reply to the memorandum within two working days from the date receipt of this letter.

Ms. Daisey (Nurse)  
Through Dr. Gource Park (Empanelled Doctor, Clinic)

Digital Signature  
Dr. Chalk.G Mulla  
CMO (SM District)

**Fig. 1 Copy of a Complaint Received by Ms. Daisy)**



To Date-09/09/2017

The CMO, SM District

Nicobar health care private limited

New Delhi-110107

**Subject:-Reply of Memorandum/letter No.-1969 dated 01/09/17 received on 07/09/2017 at 01:00 pm.**

Sir

With reference to office letter no. File No.-1(77)2015/NHCP/SM/Estt/PGMS/1969 dated 01/09/2017 received on 07/09/2017 at 01:00 pm. I would like to inform you as under:-

That all these allegations are false and baseless in nature as I have already informed to the head office-wide dairy No.3014 dated 05/09/2016. (Annexure-I enclosed)This Doctor was already threatening me to spoil my career by making false allegations because he was doing illegal activities in the clinic.

This complaint was written intensely by Dr. Gource Park to spoil my career because I raised my voice against the illegal activates held in the clinic. I have already informed via mail on 05/09/2016 (Annexure-II enclosed) to higher authorities.

I have already informed to the concerned senior officer in charge, Dr. Madona on dated 9<sup>th</sup> August 2016(Annexure-III enclosed) and also send video of Illegal activities (Annexure-IV enclosed) on the very same day.

I tried to give my best maximum possible services related to the community health in the clinic, with full of dedication, integrity, and honesty.

This is for your kind consideration and necessary action.

Thanking you

Yours truly

Ms. Daisy

ANM

Health clinic

**Enclosures:-Annexure-I, II, III, IV**

**Date-09/09/2017**

**Fig. 2 Reply made by Ms. Daisy**

**INOVATIVE DISTRICT HEALTH SOCIETY, SM DISTRICT  
OFFICE OF NICOBAR HEALTH CARE PRIVATE LIMITED  
DISTRICT HEAD OFFICE**  
New Delhi-110107  
**NMN Office, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor DMPU**  
New Delhi-110107  
Ph.011-2933966(CMO Office)/011-26137265(DMPU Office)  
E-mail: nhclh@gmail.com (CMO), dmpusm@gmail.com(DPMU)

File No.1 (46)/DMPU/IHDS/S/Prevention/Prohibition/Redressal Committee/913-98 Date: 16.09.17

**OFFICE ORDER**

The undersigned has received a complaint vide PUC No.233 dt.14.09.2017, copy enclosed regarding, complaint under “Sexual Harassment of women at workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013 against Private Practitioner in clinic Shine colony, New Delhi by Ms. Daisy (Nurse) posted at health clinic, Shine colony and further detailed to the above mention clinic for officer work”.

The complainant and the respondent are directed to appear for a personal hearing in the presence of the committee for the disposal of complaints regarding sexual harassment for women employees in offices at the below mentioned address, date and time.

Venue: O/o DMPU (SM)  
2nd Floor PRV Centre Complex  
New Delhi-107  
Time: 11:00 AM  
Date: 19.09.2017

Digital signature  
**Dr. Ranny Dela**  
CMO-FNGS

File No.1 (46)/DPMU/IDHS/SD/Prevention/Prohibition/Redressal Committee/913-98 Date:16.09.17

**Copy to**

1. ADNHL-SR
2. Nodal officer, clinics, SM
3. Medical officer in charge, Clinic, Seelampur
4. Ms. Sweta Rain, Upper Division Clerk, O/o NHCPL (SM)
5. Mr. Aasiyan Raam Antony-Pharmacist –Clinic, Bahajanpur
6. Ms. Daisey
7. Mr. Gourage Park
8. Mr. Aavil
9. Guard File

Digital signature  
**Dr. Ranny Dela**  
CMO-FNGS  
Committee for Disposal of

**Fig. 3 Hearing notice of organization issue to Ms. Daisy**

## Teaching Notes

### Synopsis: A Case of Harassment at the Workplace

Miss. Daisy (28-year-old) was transferred to newly opened clinic at remote location on temporary basis and received instruction related to work from Dr. Anny Vasco. She observed that some malpractices were going on. Her immediate boss was trying hard to close with her. He also offered some leniency in working hours to develop some kind of personal bonding but on the refusal of his all offers he threatened Miss Daisy to spoil her career. He showed uncivilized behaviors many times towards single female employee in office.

She informed all issues to her seniors with evidence and got assurance that matter will be resolved soon but her seniors didn't respond in positive way. After few days in inconvenience notion she registered official complaint against him and also submitted evidence second time.

Seniors try to hide the matter in organization and issued memo (fig.1) to victim rather than culprit. She submitted her reply (fig.2) and transferred to previous health clinic. She received hearing notice and appeared in hearing. Hearing notice of workplace harassment was given in very casual way, name of victim was disclosed to each and every employee of organization. Privacy of victim was not maintained and disposal committee for hearing was not formed according to the norms of *Vishakha* guidelines.

### **Timeline of Incidents**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Incidents</b>
29/04/2017	12:30 pm	Miss Daisy transferred to newly opened clinic on temporary basis.
12/05/2017	08:00 am	She joined her duties and take charge of the clinic.
12/05/2017	12:30 pm	She received verbal instructions from Dr. Anni Vasco regarding work at the clinic.
24/06/2017	09:00 am	Observed continuous malpractices at the clinic during her entire posting and raised questions to Dr. Gorge Park related to same.
09/08/2017	10:00am	Dr. Gorge Park tried to close with her and offered some leniency in working hours, after her refusal he threatened her to spoil her career.
09/08/2017	02:00pm	She informed all issues to Dr. Madona and submitted evidence (video) on the same day regarding this matter, received assurance that matter will be solved soon.
10/08/2017	08:30 am	Dr. Gorge Park became more violent and offensive at the workplace even misbehaved in uncivilized manner.
03/09/2017	12:45pm	Informed to Dr. Anni Vasco in head office that Dr. Gorge Park is misbehaving with her in bad manners for refusing his offers.
05/9/2017	10:00am	Victim registered official complaint to the competent authority for self-protection in the last stage to protect her modesty at the workplace and also submitted evidence (the second time, Video) for same.
05/09/2017	05:58 pm	She received information that her transfer had been canceled and also instructed to join her duty in previous health clinic.
06/09/2017	12:15pm	Inspection of the clinic was done by Dr. Madona.
06/09/2017	04:00 pm	Head office called Dr. Gorge Park after inspection and suspended him till further inquiry.
07/09/2017	01:00 pm	Miss. Daisy received memorandum/notice with reference to fake complaint made by Dr. Gorge Park for an explanation of baseless allegations with direction she had to submit her reply within two days.
09/09/2017	09:30 pm	Miss Daisy submitted a reply on of above-said Memorandum /office notice.
17/09/2017	10:15 am	Miss Daisy, Mr. Aavil, landlord, and Dr. Gorge Park received hearing notice from head office.
19/09/2017	11:00am	Miss Daisy, Mr. Aavil, landlord, Dr. Gorge Park appeared in hearing on at 11:00 am

### **Educational Objectives**

- To understand gender sensitivity and safety at the workplace.
- To develop an understanding of women harassment at workplace and its implication to the organization e.g. interpersonal conflict and its impact on team dynamics, performance barrier in organization, team issues.

- To find out a remedial solution for prevention of workplace harassment especially in a large organization with multiple hierarchies.

### **Discussion Outline in Case**

- Decision making in a gender sensitive case.
- Discussion on availability of the simplest mechanism to address the conflict in the organization.
- An understanding complication of the issue in legal aspects as per the law of the country.
- Cultural and social sensitivity towards the victim and workplace culture.
- Development of communication mechanism in organization.

### **Tips for Resolving the Case Problem**

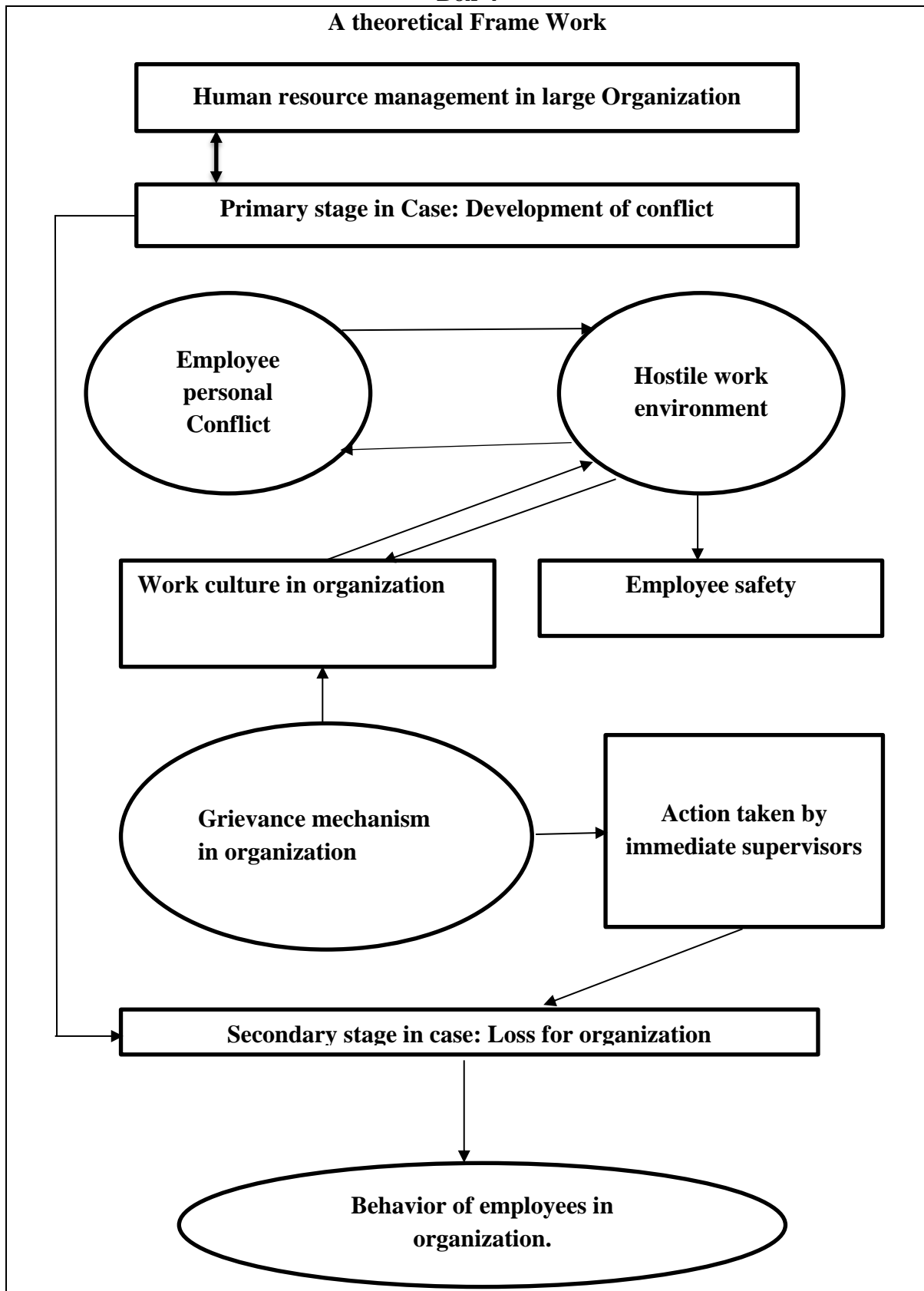
- Identify the key issues in the case.
- Cross-checking of available facts, submitted statements and evidences by Mr. Bryan.
- Status report of registered complaint could be asked from superiors that what action they both had taken on the complaint of Ms. Daisy.
- Complaint should be taken up and inquiry procedure should be conducted as per *Vishakha* guidelines by Supreme Court of India.

### **A Theoretical Frame Work**

Human behavior is very complex in nature. Different human beings reacts with different nature in different situation. This case tried to highlight the importance of early intervention on small conflicts between coworkers could prevent further major loss to the organization in terms of manpower and resources. Study (Abbas, Hussein & Khali 2017) showed that hostile work environment has significant impact on organizational alienation and managers had curial role in it. Employees working in this situation would not able to meet needs of organization like less participative approach, lack of commitment towards organization, unhelpful attitude among coworkers, conflicts among workers etc.

Another study (Anjum, Ming, Siddiqi, & Rasool, 2018) also empirically proved that toxic workplace directly link with the performance of the employees and also increases burnout among employees. Behavior of employees with each other in organization was directly and indirectly guided by managers that how they handle issues related to work environment.

Box-4



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