

MAYNARD LEIGH ASSOCIATES: CONSULTANTPRENEURS' DILEMMA OF PURPOSE OR PROFIT

Shweta Jaiswal and Dr. Jyotsna Bhatnagar wrote this case solely to provide material for class discussion. The authors do not intend to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a managerial situation. The authors may have disguised certain names and other identifying information to protect confidentiality.

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Maynard Leigh Associates (MLA) was a human resources (HR) consulting firm based in the United Kingdom and India. The firm's two co-founders, Vivek Arora and Steeve Gupta, found themselves in a quandary about a situation that had recently developed. Gupta walked swiftly towards Arora's cabin with two envelopes in his hands and knocked on the door. Arora was engrossed in his work but gestured for Gupta to come in. Tossing the envelopes onto the table, Gupta said, "Arora, we have experienced similar challenges in the past with our business, and now it looks like we are on the horns of a new dilemma: either we compromise on our values or lose current and potential business from our clients. Both could be detrimental for our future."

Gupta was referring to a workshop the firm had recently facilitated. The chief executive officer (CEO) of an information technology (IT) giant had hired them to run a strategy workshop to brainstorm solutions for fast-tracking the organization's growth. He wanted Gupta and Arora to eliminate any roadblocks to the organization's success. During the execution of this workshop, Gupta and Arora were caught off guard when they realized that the primary roadblock to the organization's success was none other than the CEO himself. Their dilemma: Should they report their findings to the client and the CEO or simply stay quiet on the matter and pocket their fee? Informing the client could potentially affect MLA's in-progress business and relationship with the client and could result in an acrimonious standoff with the CEO, who was MLA's chief business ally from the client's side.

In the course of conducting their consulting business, the duo faced several other unique and difficult situations. Vipul Malhotra, an MLA employee, had delivered a workshop on presentation skills to a client in the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector. His workshop had been well received and garnered rave reviews, both from the client and from the participants. As a result, the client booked 10 more sessions for the rest of its employees. Arora was happily preparing to share the client's e-mail of appreciation and explain the future business deal to all of MLA's employees when Malhotra requested a private conversation with Gupta and Arora, telling them that the workshop participants did not need the training and that the client had wasted its money.

This new revelation meant that Arora and Gupta faced a second dilemma concerning whether they should inform yet another client about MLA's findings. Why were they facing two similar challenges? Should they adopt different strategies to deal with these situations? How would their decision affect MLA's future? Given the current business challenges and growth, should the partners change the culture of the organization, their stand, and their positioning (see Exhibit 1)?

MAYNARD LEIGH STARTS IN INDIA

One weekend when Arora and his family were in a shopping mall and eating their lunch, a young man hesitantly walked up to them. He was one of the participants from a workshop that Arora had conducted in the past. The two men greeted each other, and the participant expressed his appreciation for the way the training had been conducted. The participant recalled a story that Arora had shared during the workshop.

For Arora, that incident was a major turning point in his life. He realized he did not want to be remembered merely as a good story teller and that he needed to make a change in his professional life. He wanted to do something that would really make a difference in the lives of the people he met. Soon afterwards, while reading a book entitled *Dramatic Success*, Arora realized that he had found what he was looking for. He connected with the authors of the book, who were also the cofounders of Maynard Leigh Associates in the United Kingdom, and thus began the journey of Maynard Leigh Associates in India and Gupta's journey of a consultant turned entrepreneur "consultantpreneur."

HOW ARORA BECAME PART OF THE MLA FAMILY AND THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

Auditions: Inspirational Workshops

MLA's recruitment process was very rigorous. The firm hired people only when the candidates exhibited the organization's values. MLA, United Kingdom, took nine months to bring Arora on board as a member of MLA and cofounder of MLA in India. All consultants at Maynard Leigh came with background experience in theatre, knowledge and understanding of psychology, and sound business acumen, all derived from their previous corporate experience or management degrees.

The recruitment process had multiple layers. Candidates with psychology and theatre backgrounds were eligible to apply. Shortlisted candidates were required to send a video about themselves, after which they may be called for auditions. All the potential candidates were called on the same day and were interviewed by everyone in the organization simultaneously. Candidates spent the entire day with the firm's current employees during the auditions. During formal and informal meetings, people evaluated each other and decided whether they would fit in MLA's culture. The candidates were judged by every team member on the basis of 21 parameters. After a week or two, all candidates received consolidated feedback to inform them about their strengths and weaknesses.

MLA employee Varun Gupta was selected after three years of interviewing. In the feedback stage, he was informed about some development areas that he would have to work on to be a part of MLA. The company connected with him again after three years, at which point he was taken on board.

Training on MLA's values was a crucial part of the on-boarding program. One full day was dedicated to familiarizing employees with the company's values and mission. The training and development process to make employees productive spanned from six to nine months. During this period, employees learned about MLA's unique training methodology and style.

The company had recently held its latest round of auditions for the consultant's position. Many candidates were shortlisted for the audition day. After many rounds of assessment, Kamaira Thakur, who was brilliant at what she did, was selected for the final discussion with Arora. After months of waiting and assessing, MLA was finally ready to hire a new employee.

Thakur was on her way to her meeting with Arora when she called him to get directions to the venue. Arora handed the phone over to his chauffeur, Prem Kumar, knowing that he would do a better job of giving directions. Kumar drove Arora to the office every day, so, while working on his laptop in the car, Arora could hear the conversation between Thakur and Kumar. Arora found that the way she had spoken to him versus the way she spoke to Kumar was very different. Her tone and choice of words had changed, although she did not use any offensive language nor was she rude to Kumar; nevertheless, her manner of speech changed from the way she had spoken with Arora or with others in the organization up to this point.

Arora had helped Kumar to rise within MLA from a gardener, to chauffeur, to now a stage manager. Kumar still drives Arora to the office. Arora had accommodating his progress in a variety of ways. Kumar dreamed of running his own business, but he also felt a significant degree of loyalty to Arora and to MLA. Thakur was still taking down Kumar's instructions over the phone, but Arora had already made up his mind about her: she was not hired.

ALIGNMENT OF ESPOUSED VALUES WITH OPERATIVE PRACTICES

All MLA employees were free to give feedback to anyone in the organization, even to the cofounders. On many occasions, employees offered open and honest feedback to the cofounders, who appreciated this degree of honesty as part of establishing a high level of openness within MLA's corporate culture.

Integrity was equally important to MLA. Although funds were very important for any start-up firm, at MLA, money did not come at the cost of values. Despite a very lucrative business proposal from a client, MLA turned down the offer because the client wanted a 10 per cent share of the revenue.

Every employee at MLA asked themselves, "Am I adding value to the organization? Am I providing vital services for my clients?" The company asked its clients whether they felt their interests were cared for. MLA looked after the interests of its employees, clients and all its stakeholders, including society at large. Employees of MLA were free to make decisions and take action without prior approval from the cofounders. They believed that all employees were leaders in their own right, and that each one had the ability to make decisions that would work in the interests of the organization.

Additionally, MLA encouraged a lot of corporate social responsibility activities. The company took an interest in its employee's hobbies. On one occasion, the logistics administrator travelled to Mumbai to shoot a video of a workshop because she enjoyed video production. MLA supported its employees in accomplishing their dreams and in their pursuit of living fulfilling lives.

PRACTICES AT MAYNARD LEIGH ASSOCIATES

Continuous and Never-Ending Improvement (CAN I)

At MLA, every employee was free to share any lessons learned from a mistake, which could help others to avoid the same pitfalls in the future. It took a lot of courage to write CAN I e-mails, but at MLA, the practice was viewed with the utmost respect (see Exhibit 2).

Team Outing: MLA Redefines the Definition of a Team

For MLA, the team did not solely consist of the office staff and the consultants; it also included the housekeeping staff and the chauffeur. The entire organization (see Exhibit 3), from the managing director to a member of the custodial staff, flew to Goa for a holiday. This trip was not a team bonding exercise that was executed with certain objectives in mind; rather, everyone went because they actually wanted to spend time with each other and enjoy themselves.

Staying Connected: WhatsApp Group

The company used a WhatsApp¹ group to remain connected 24/7, and their conversations ranged from professional to personal. There was a remarkable level of openness and camaraderie among the team members. Each member knew the other members, inside and out. All of them were mutually well informed about each other's respective hobbies, daily routines, financial health, emotional health — almost everything. To make things cozier, they further created subgroups on the app based on their geographic locations.

Let's Meet: Morning Huddles

The MLA employees held “morning huddles,” wherein, apart from business, they talked about their personal progress and achievements as well as other activities or hobbies they were keen to pursue. For instance, Varun Gupta was planning to participate in the national cycling competition.

During one morning huddle, his teammates asked many questions of Varun Gupta, such as whether he had cycled the previous day or not, or how much his speed had improved. They inspired and motivated each other by being genuinely interested in one another.

Varun Gupta said, “Remuneration is secondary; people are here out of passion for the work, the organizational culture, and the value system of the organization.”

HAPPY CLIENT, UNHAPPY CONSULTANT

Gupta and Arora were engrossed in a discussion when suddenly an e-mail popped up and caught Arora's attention. It was a message of gratitude from the FMCG client's Learning and Development Team, and it included feedback scores for the workshop on presentation skills. This client was new to MLA, and the show of appreciation meant further business. MLA had received positive feedback and encouraging comments from the participants. Both Gupta and Arora smiled, and Arora suggested forwarding the positive feedback to everyone in the organization as it would motivate the rest of the consultants, especially because the company had received confirmation for a few more workshops on presentation skills, all scheduled with the same FMCG client in the upcoming days.

Just when Arora was about to click the forward button on his cell phone, Vipul Malhotra, the consultant who had conducted the workshop that had just been so well reviewed, entered the cabin. With a

¹ *WhatsApp Messenger is a cross-platform mobile messaging application which allows you to exchange messages without having to pay for SMS. In addition to basic messaging WhatsApp users can create groups, send each other unlimited images and video and audio media messages. Source: “How it Works,” WhatsApp Inc., <https://www.whatsapp.com/>, accessed August 24, 2015.*

despondent expression on his face, Malhotra related to Arora and Gupta what he felt about the workshop. He confessed that he felt the client was wasting money because eight out of the 10 participants did not need a workshop on presentation skills in the first place.

MLA now faced a dilemma: There were more workshops lined up with the same client, and the client was evidently happy with the current results and looking forward to the future sessions, but, as the consultant, Malhotra did not believe the project was worthwhile. Although the participants themselves were very happy and enthusiastic, Malhotra could not give himself a pat on the back and did not feel fully convinced that he was helping the client's employees unlock their "people potential" (see Exhibit 4). His conclusions had been informed by his experience, his understanding of people and their body language, and a few questions that were asked in during the course of the workshop. As sharply sensitive to people's reflexes as he was, Malhotra found something amiss.

In order to reach a firm conclusion, Malhotra probed the participants a bit further. He asked them about their work profiles, career-related goals and aspirations. After receiving the answers to these questions, Malhotra realized that his initial observations had been accurate. Most of the participants were employed in front-end sales jobs and had spent most of their careers in that role, whereas the workshop had been designed for people who needed to learn how to deliver effective and impressive presentations to large audiences. After some quiet, solitary reflection, Malhotra knew what the problem was. He felt that, by accepting praise and remuneration for teaching a set of skills that the workshop participants did not need, he was betraying MLA's mission of treating its clients with openness and integrity, and that sense of betrayal did not sit well with Malhotra.

Like everyone else in the organization, Malhotra also identified with MLA's mission. He had once delivered a workshop in Shimla, a hill station with the top leaders of an Indian electronics giant. After the workshop, when the participants were already in their cars and heading back to the railway station, the chief financial officer of the electronics giant sought clarification from Malhotra on a concept about which he felt uncertain. When they reached the railway station, Malhotra asked the CFO to assemble his team members in one place. He took out a marker and a flip chart, pasted it on one of the pillars at the railway station and started his explanation.

WHICH ENVELOPE TO POST?

Gupta walked into Arora's cabin with two envelopes in his hands; both contained post-workshop reports from MLA that summarized the workshop and shared the company's views. The only difference between these two envelopes was that one included observations and recommendations about the client's CEO and the other did not. Gupta and Arora had to decide which envelope to post, but before making a final decision, they sat down to recall and discuss each signal they had noticed during the workshop and at prior meetings with the audience.

A Review of the Workshop Proceedings

Before scheduling the workshop, the MLA team had a few telephone conversations with the Learning and Development Team and with the CEO of the client company — an Indian IT giant — followed by a face-to-face meeting with the CEO. During the meeting, Gupta and Arora discussed the recommended areas of focus, and the CEO asserted that he wanted his company to be the best and desired for all roadblocks to be removed. Arora and Gupta completely understood and respected the CEO's goal. His zeal had stimulated both of them, and they were determined to provide all the support they could. They ran a

diagnostic process and consequently came up with a customized, two-day workshop for the client. This new workshop was called “Stepping Ahead.”

On the first day of the workshop, when Gupta and Arora entered the training room, the entire leadership team of the client organization was present, including the chairman of the company. The chairman commenced the session by setting the agenda, and although he was there simply to introduce the team members, he sat through the entire session. Everyone was enthusiastic and the session was interactive, with extensive discussion on strategy and goal orientation.

Once they had completed the first half of the session, Gupta and Arora turned their focus towards establishing a roadmap for future growth, and everybody gave their input. One of the leaders stated, “We should take more risks,” and almost everybody seconded that idea. Another participant remarked that they should all be given leadership roles and that the leadership team should be expanded from merely one or two managers. Better retention, more innovation and better planning were some of the other inputs that emerged from the participants, and all were backed by a resounding “yes!” from almost everyone in the room.

The CEO, however, seemed a bit aloof while such topics were being discussed. Except for a casual nod here and there, Arora and Gupta observed how the CEO did not seem fully engaged. They decided to have the group perform an interactive theatre exercise to see whether they could shed some light on this intangible behaviour. Several real-life organizational challenges were identified and their solutions were discussed. At that point, the workshop picked up momentum and, once again, everyone enthusiastically contributed their ideas.

On Day 2, Gupta and Arora went into detail concerning each input they had recorded on Day 1. The group identified that more support was required for learning interventions because the current organization lacked a knowledge-sharing platform; they needed to create a few. The suggestion was also made to have keynote speeches delivered as part of these forums. Gupta and Arora felt that the chairman’s presence was really making a difference as people were more interactive and seemed genuinely interested in the cause. The chairman’s heartfelt speech, delivered on Day 1, had made a deep impact and helped the group to effectively connect to the cause of finding ways to stimulate future growth for the company.

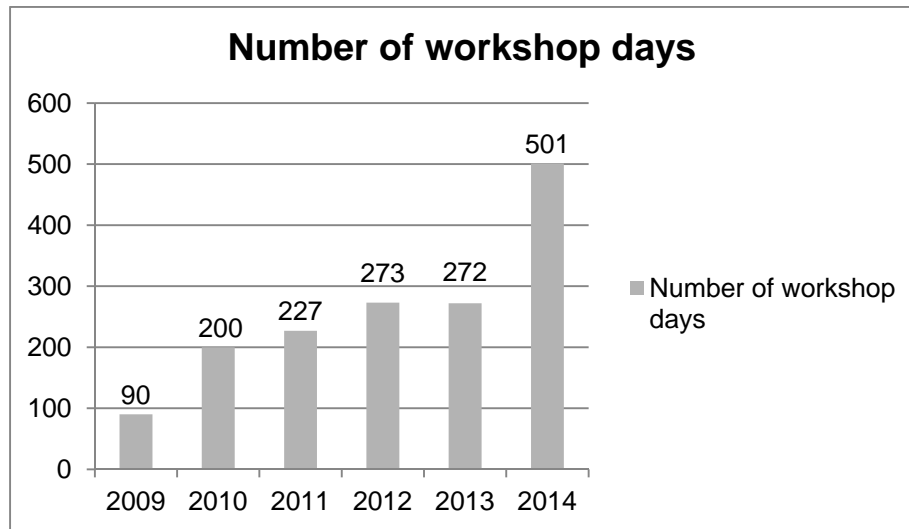
The participants continued to offer ideas about how they could work to achieve their new goals. Each input was discussed in greater detail in order to come up with an action plan. However, on most of the inputs, it was clear that the CEO remained unconvinced. He expressed his disagreement on the matter of taking more risks and being more innovative. He was of the opinion that the company was indeed already taking lots of risks and was being as innovative as it could.

Gupta and Arora sensed much more than what was merely being said out loud. They understood that the CEO was being defensive and that he was taking the inputs and ideas personally. As they moved on with the workshop and additional ideas were discussed, they made a point of observing the CEO’s expressions, his body language, and his spoken and unspoken words. Gupta and Arora realized the CEO felt that his authority was being challenged and that he was probably taking the ideas and input as criticism of his leadership style. On multiple occasions, the CEO talked about the excellent things he had done in all of the identified problem areas that were being discussed in the workshop. To Arora and Gupta, he seemed to be basking in the glory of past achievements, while also finding fault with everyone but himself. The workshop eventually came to an end; everyone applauded and took some time to chat with one another.

THE DECISION

The time had come to decide which envelope to post. Gupta and Arora sat together to summarize their observations and were not surprised to see that they had both noticed the same things and shared the same perception about the entire episode. They recalled how the CEO had asked them to remove any roadblocks that were keeping the organization from reaching the top. To Gupta and Arora, it was clear that the obstacle to the organization's success was none other than the CEO himself.

Sitting in the cabin together, both Gupta and Arora struggled to understand why were they facing two similar challenges? Which envelope to post: the one with the standard report or the one that contained some suggestions that may challenge the corporate stance of the client's CEO — a man who had given MLA a lot of business. A plethora of questions ran through their minds. Should they inform the FMCG client about Malhotra's observation and risk losing their business or hush the matter and deliver the workshop? Should they send the standard report to their client and reap the benefits of boosting their business without concern for the client's need for change? Or should they submit their suggestions for change, thereby upholding MLA's corporate value system and fulfilling their responsibility to the client, even when doing so meant running the risk of alienating the client's CEO and losing future business? Gupta and Arora needed to come up with a viable solution to the volatile situation in which they found themselves while at the same time taking a stand for MLA's future.

EXHIBIT 1: MLA'S GROWTH JOURNEY, 2009-2014

Source: Compiled by case authors with information provided by the organization.

EXHIBIT 2: EXAMPLES OF CONTINUOUS AND NEVER ENDING IMPROVEMENT (CAN I) E-MAILS

Hi Team,

My one small mistake has cost INR8,000 to the company. I took a backup of my system in hard disc and deleted the original data from the system. And the disc crashed. I lost my complete data. To recover the same company has to spend INR8,000/-. My learning I will keep the copies of important data in different systems as to avoid this situation next time.

Thank you!

Hi team,

We lost 4 potential days of training for the clients Leadership team. The suspected culprit for this is my inability to offer a solution that was more relevant to their needs. I did not really hear the client properly. I did not actively change my "pitch." I will be less stuck & admittedly less lazy in my response to client needs. I will also look & ask for help if I feel unable to provide solutions.

Regards

Team,

I just wanted to write a CAN I because I really am in shock about how a day can be spent without achieving anything. I believe, that today, barring one meeting, I did not do anything value added or constructive to the company. I did not manage my time, well today. Going forward I will ensure that I am more incisive about the usage of my time.

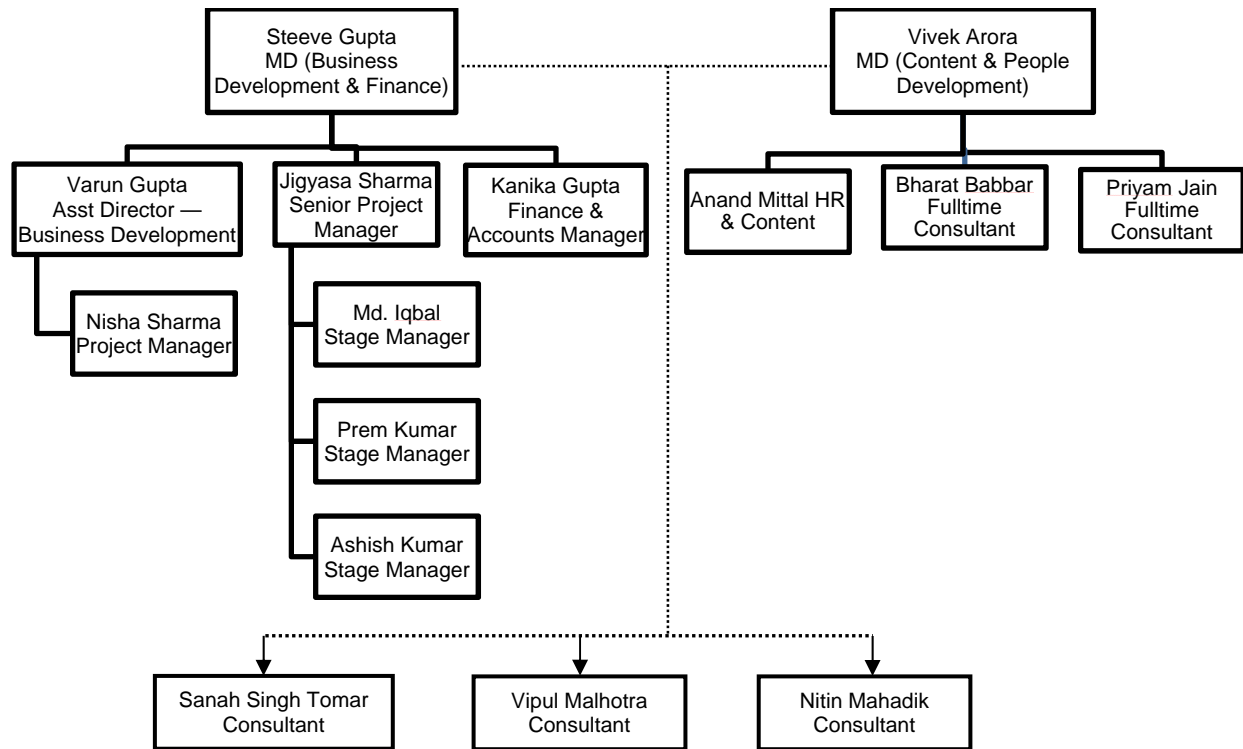
Regards

Hi,

I don't have the attendance sheet for the workshop I did for a client last week, despite knowing that the office needs it. I know I can still mark the attendance on the participant profile sheet, but I feel that she shouldn't need to check with me if I've sent it, and I need to do it more proactively. I will make sure that I communicate attendance details right after the workshop gets over. I'm calling this my first CAN I for the day as there are some program related CAN Is too for today that I will send in the leader's report.

Source: Company documents.

EXHIBIT 3: ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



..... Dual Reporting

Source: Compiled by case authors with information provided by the organization.

EXHIBIT 4: MISSION AND VALUES

Our core mission sums us up. We exist to Unlock People’s Potential.

As a company, we have higher purpose than just to make a profit or pay the rent! Maynard Leigh exists to promote humanity, vitality and meaning in the workplace. That’s what drives us, and we all feel passionately it’s what organizations around the world should aspire to. It gives our work meaning, inspires us and, we hope, our clients too.

Our Company Values

Our five core values have underpinned our ethos and culture for over 20 years.



There’s a danger these could simply be empty words. For us, they have to be lived by everyone in the company and in everything we do. Here is what they mean to us:

Vitality

We mean the energy and aliveness that people convey by their actions and words. Vitality shows through enthusiasm, passion, creativity, alertness and a sense of well-being. But it isn’t simply about being upbeat — it’s there in quiet or calm behaviour too. We aim to bring vitality and spirit to all our encounters with each other and our clients.

Openness

We are committed to regular and honest communication, both amongst ourselves and with our clients. Everyone in Maynard Leigh endeavours to treat each other, our clients and others with respect.

Integrity

We strive for truth and wholeness - aiming to be consistent in saying what we mean and meaning what we say. We hold client information in confidence, never disclosing it to a third party without our client's permission. Similarly, we encourage and support our clients in their pursuit of integrity in all that they do.

Care

We set high standards for all aspects of our work, and how we behave towards each other and our clients. We approach our activities and our relationships with care and attention. Care involves bringing love and a sense of quality to our activity. We seek excellence in all that we do.

Creativity

We promote a creative approach across our company and in our service to clients. People are encouraged to experiment and question everything we do and why "we've always done it that way," and to seek new or better ways of working. It also means constantly adding value to our clients through innovation in the service we deliver and in our relationships with them. We seek new and innovative solutions to problems.

Source: Maynard Leigh Associates India, www.maynardleigh.in/missio-values.htm, accessed April 16, 2014.