

Amol's Canteen

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The Dean, Department of Management, Blue Valley University is tensed today because of the refusal by the Amol to run the canteen. The Dean is thinking for ways and means of running the canteen smoothly like early days. He is also thinking of options other than Amol who can run the canteen successfully. Amol has created sufficient infrastructure and logistics over the years to run the canteen and his departure would mean a great loss to the infrastructural requirements of the canteen as well.

Blue Valley University was established in 1994 in a small town in India. Initially it did not have a proper campus and was functioning in the different buildings scattered over the town. Later on in 1997 it shifted to some transit accommodation in its permanent campus, at a place called Durga Nagar about 20 kilometers away from the main town. Gradually, the construction of permanent buildings started in the university campus and the departments started to shift to their new houses allotted to them from their transit sheds. Of the different departments, the first to be shifted was the Department of Management of the university. The department was allotted a two storied building with an additional floor at the basement in a picturesque serene setting at the southern most part of the university campus in 2002. The building was adjacent to the central library in its right. Soon construction of the other buildings started, but in the left side of the library and eventually housed the different science departments by the year 2006 and 2007. The science departments were a bit away from the department of management, which stood in isolation from the crowd of students except those of its own. The classes in the

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said department used to start at 10 A.M. in the morning and extended up to 2.30 P.M. in the afternoon during those days.

When the department shifted to its permanent building there was no stall providing necessary food/light refreshment to the students and faculty. Soon a local boy, called Amol started to offer his services in this regard. He convinced the authorities of the department that he would supply tea and snacks. He constructed a small bamboo hut near the department. From there he used to supply tea and some light refreshment to the teachers and the students. At that time, he had one kerosene stove and some utensils to prepare and serve snacks. His customers consist of basically the teachers and students of the department of management. The teachers as well as the students were satisfied with the services provided by him. It was also because they did not have any other choice then to depend upon Amol for the snacks and refreshments.

In the year 2004, the department got its new Dean and Head. Also a few other youngsters joined the department as faculty members. The new team decided to increase the number of papers taught in the Masters of Business Administration course. This was to be done as per the requirement of new guidelines issued by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE). Accordingly, the number of papers for the MBA course was increased from 20 to 32. To accommodate the additional number of papers, the timings of the department had to be changed. It was decided to start the classes from 8 a.m. early in the morning and to run it upto 4.30 p.m. in the evening.

As the classes started from 8 a.m. in the morning, the students and the teachers had to leave their home at 7 a.m. everyday, as most of them use to stay in the town. Similarly, after finishing the last class at 4.30 p.m. it took about an hour or more for the teachers and students to reach home. Due to the long travelling hours from the town to the university and the class hours, it became almost mandatory for the students of the department and faculty members to take their breakfast, lunch and afternoon tea in the campus. But the existing infrastructure of

the Amol was not sufficient to serve food to almost 70 numbers¹ of people. He had the infrastructure to serve only light refreshments and tea. Though a readymade customer segment was available to him, but his existing financial condition did not allow him to invest in creation of infrastructure to serve food to the students. This made most of the students and teachers to suffer.

The then Dean of the Department of Management realized the problem. He was of the view that if the students had to concentrate on their study they must be provided with quality food during the class hours. Otherwise, the attention and time of the students as well as the teachers would be diverted to search for the food and this would result into the loss of significant learning hours for the students. He started to think seriously over the issue.

One day he went to the basement of the department. He found that there was ample space available at the basement. During the same time the department was also suffering for want of a departmental library. He decided to allocate half of the basement for the library and half of the basement for the departmental canteen. Since Amol was already serving the department from his temporary bamboo shed. He had been asked to run the canteen. Amol happily accepted the offer. A student committee was formed to help Amol in running the canteen. The students committee basically deals with the menu and price of the items. The focus of the department was on the quality food with a reasonable price. For doing so, the electricity charges, water supply charges and even the rent of the canteen was waived of so that he can provide better service at reasonable price.

With the help of the students and teachers the canteen became functional. It was very well maintained and clean. Once revenue was generated, Amol purchased some other necessary equipments, utensils and LPG fuel connection to serve his customers. Later he also assembled equipments even to serve some of the big occasions like students' fest, seminar, conferences

¹ The intake of the MBA programme was 30 at that time. So, the total number of students for the two batches becomes 60 and 10 other teachers, which makes the total customer for the canteen 70.

and workshops organized in the department. Gradually, he kept on acquiring as much asset as possible to serve the students. The details of his assets are given in exhibit 1.

When the canteen started, it was considered as the best canteen in the university. Whenever any guests use to come to the other departments of the university, the officials of those departments used to bring the guests for lunch to the said canteen. Soon the canteen became one of the reasons for which the department can take pride. In making this happen, the Dean along with his team had left no stone unturned.

Amol ran this canteen with the help of his family members and some employees. Occasionally, the students, faculty members and staff had a few issues and minor incidents of displeasure in the way the canteen was managed. But, the price of the food items seemed to be reasonable and the service providers were decent and mannered. Amol with the help of his employees serve the food to the teachers in their respective rooms as well. Some of the teachers as well as the students use to maintain their account with Amol for the food. Normally they consume food regularly and used to settle their account at the end of the month. Sometimes some of the teachers and students had found that their account was not properly maintained and was over billed. Thus, several of them stopped taking credit from Amol and started to pay cash for the items on consumption.

In the year 2007-08, the intake of the MBA course had been increased from 30 to 60 and in the next year upto 92. So, suddenly the number of customers standing in the canteen became three fold in two years time. The students now had to wait for longer time to get the food. Sometimes they had to remain empty stomach either because the food was finished or they were not served before the commencement of their classes. Although the number of students had increased, yet Amol did not increase his employee strength. So, the man power available with Amol was not sufficient to serve the increasing number of customers. Both the faculty members and students did not have any other choice as the other canteens were not nearby and required about 15-20 minutes of walking at normal pace.

But things started to turn around at the beginning of year 2010 when several other buildings which were under construction around the management department were completed. Several departments, which were earlier stationed at the transit accommodation, now permanently settled in the buildings around the management department. Quite a few canteens of various sizes started to operate in those buildings and the monopoly of the said canteen was at stake. Several students and faculty members of the department who were pondering over a better option started to shift to some of those canteens. The shift was either permanent or were experimental for better quality and prompt services. The said canteen soon started to lose many of its prime customers. However, the canteen gained some customers, who were basically students of other departments, experimenting around in search of a better canteen than that in their own department. But such customers were not regular, and the crowd in the canteen, which was still significant, demanded a larger waiting time from the customers compared to other canteens during busy period. Thus, the experimental visitors did not seem to convert their visits to a habit and hence lacked in the potential to become a prime customer in near future. This displeased the owner of the canteen, as he was taken aback by abruptly losing several of his prime customers. He became emotional not only because of his monetary losses but also since customers whom he was serving for long suddenly started queuing before other canteens. However, after few months, the situation showed some improvement as some of his customers returned as he promised a better and prompt service. However, this may also be due to the fact that the other newly developed canteens were not better than the said one and they were not as equipped as this canteen was. This is because the canteen operators in those departments had just started the canteen and their financial condition was like that of Amol during the initial days in 2002.

But still the major numbers of customers were not satisfied either with his service or his quality. There were instances of not serving food and snacks to the teachers, in their respective rooms, in spite of several reminders. Sometimes he did not open the canteen if the students were out for any industrial visit, although the teachers and staff were present in their office. This made

most of the teachers angry. He was given several warnings from the department to improve the quality of his service. But all went in vein.

In one of the meetings of the teachers, he was asked to defend his side as some of the teachers brought to the notice of the Dean, the activities of Amol. The Dean gave him an ultimatum. He was asked either to improve his service quality or leave the canteen. He as usual, promised to adhere to the quality standards. At that time he became very emotional also. He said that he had never thought of leaving the departmental canteen. He went on... that his family runs because of this canteen only. Apart from being a source of livelihood he also feels proud to be associated with this canteen. The incident happened just before the autumn break of 2010.

When the classes re-open after the autumn break, it was found that Amol did not open his canteen. People thought that, he might be available the next day, as he might be in a vacation hang over. But he was absent the subsequent day as well. The Dean called for Amol in his office. When he came a departmental meeting was going on. He was called in the meeting before all the teachers. He was asked, to explain why the canteen remained closed for the last two days. He told the meeting that he had decided to leave the canteen, as the teachers and students both were not satisfied with his services. He also told that apart from this, he also found it difficult to run the canteen because during the summer and autumn breaks he does not have any income but has to pay salary to his employees. Because of this, he was facing some financial difficulties. He was not in any means ready to run the canteen. He also expressed the view that there are certain teachers in the department who abused him and misbehaved with him several times.

This incident made the Dean very serious. He was thinking over the issue. He knows that Amol was with the department since its inception and therefore, he has some kind of attachment with the department. So, he was sympathetic with Amol. But at the same time he understood that asking Amol to continue meant compromising with the quality of food and service of the canteen which was consistently deteriorating and he never wanted to do so. Some of the teachers who were very close to the Dean were of the opinion that, if he (the Dean) would give

Amol a second chance it would be difficult to get the desired service from Amol. Amol would also become more conceited this time. He shall feel that he was invited by the Dean to continue his operations in the canteen though he was ready to leave. But some of the senior teachers in the department were of a different view. They were in favour of retaining Amol in the canteen. They argued that the person who would be coming in place of Amol might be even worse than Amol. These issues were worrying the Dean and he was pondering very seriously to resolve this issue and make some sustainable arrangement in this respect.

Case Review Questions

1. What is the business of Amol? Do the department and students need the services of Amol?
2. Are the facilities and services provided by Amol were adequate and meeting the expectations of different stakeholders?
3. Do you think there is any room for further improvement in Amol's business?
4. Discuss the problems faced by both Amol and the department and suggest suitable solutions to the problems encountered.

EXHIBIT 1 - Details of the Assets of Amol and His Canteen

S. No	Particulars	Numbers
1	Plates	150 pieces
2	Crockery Cups and plates for tea	25 sets
3	Tea glasses	150 pieces
4	Water glasses	150 pieces
5	Refrigerator	1 set
6	Mixer grinder	1 set
7	Buffet set	1 set
8	Cooking stove and gas	1 set
9	Cooking utensils	2 set

EXHIBIT 2 - Geographical Location of the University

The university is located in a serene setting on a hill top at around 22 kilometer from the main town. The road conditions from the main town to the university are not in a good condition. Therefore, it is very difficult for any person from the town to take charge of the canteen and operate it smoothly. On certain occasions some other canteens in other department have tried it and failed miserably.

Exhibit 3 - Socio-Economic Profile of the People around the University

The university is located in a village called DuraaNagar and it is surrounded by the tea gardens. The people living near the university area are basically from the tea tribe community. They are working in the tea gardens as labourers since last two hundred years. Their economic condition is not very sound and still most of them are living on hand to mouth basis. After opening of the university, their living conditions have not improved much other than some of them are getting some low profile job in the university. Although there are ample opportunity available around the university to develop small enterprises keeping the students and teachers in the centre but their financial condition is always coming in the way for doing this.