



Perils of Collaboration (A)¹

The Centre for Leadership Studies (CLS), established in 2006 was a management research centre located in a leading business school in Bangalore, India. Its vision was to be an internationally top-ranked research centre in management that created and disseminated research-based knowledge. It had a flat organizational structure with the Director leading a team of three faculty members, two senior researchers, three researchers and one research-fellow (Exhibit 1). CLS produced empirical research, case studies, and books.

In early May, Professor Hari, a faculty member with CLS, proposed a new book—an edited volume titled *Leadership and Organizational Transformation*—with the objective of conveying how leaders successfully transformed their organizations. Any new project at CLS required approval from the Director, Dr. Unni, especially as it related to output, resource allocation and timelines. Professor Hari mentioned to Dr. Unni, that he would want Neerja to assist him with the book. He said, “If my work is given to Neerja, I can sleep peacefully. Though she is soft-hearted and emotional, I have always found her extremely professional, knowledgeable and efficient.” Professor Hari received the go-ahead for his project from Dr. Unni and promptly set up a meeting with Neerja to discuss.

Neerja, a part-time Doctoral student in organizational behavior, had been working as a Researcher with Professor Hari since CLS’s inception. He was also her co-guide for her PhD in “Capability Building for Organizational Transformation”. Neerja was in the data collection phase of her study during this time.

Later that week, Neerja met with Professor Hari to discuss the proposed book where she learned that the deadline for the manuscript to reach the publishers was November 30th. The Professor went over the details of her role, which involved coordinating with various authors, conducting interviews, and editing the chapters. She thought that this project would give her

¹ This case was prepared by Neha Gupta and Rekha K.N at Indian School of Business under the guidance of Prof Ranjini Swamy. This case was inspired by observations of actual experiences but names and other situational details have been disguised for confidentiality and teaching purposes.

an opportunity to interact with various high level leaders in organizations that had undergone successful transformation. The thought that this project might help in collecting data for her PhD added to her excitement.

Neerja started working hard on the book. She interviewed eight leaders and submitted the write-up to Professor Hari at the end of the first week of October and she was anxious for his feedback. After a week, Professor Hari called Neerja to give his comments and mentioned that he was impressed.

Little did she know that there was another surprise waiting for her.

During the meeting, Professor Hari invited her to author a book chapter on the turnaround of a leading IT firm: BLM Ltd. She was thrilled as it would help her meet the publication requirement for her PhD programme and begin fulfilling her long cherished dream of being a published author.

On October 25th, more than a month before the deadline, she was ready to submit the first draft of the BLM Ltd. chapter to Professor Hari.

On the same day, during a team meeting, Dr. Unni introduced Rahul as the new Research fellow at CLS. Rahul, was an aspiring doctoral student with two decades of experience in applied research in the IT field. Before joining CLS, he was the Associate Director of Research at BLM Ltd. In addition, Rahul had earned his B.Tech and M.Tech in Computer Science from one of the top engineering colleges in India. He was a BLM Ltd. “life-timer” who had also earned three patents in database and network management.

During the announcement, Dr. Unni mentioned, “I’m proud to have been associated with Rahul in the earlier part of my career. Rahul has been instrumental in the flawless execution of several key projects at BLM Ltd. and was even personally involved in the widely acclaimed turnaround of the organization.”

In his introduction, Rahul shared that he felt privileged to be a part of CLS. He expressed keen interest in his assignment at CLS related to “commercialization of research.” He mentioned that he aimed to have a few publications before applying for a PhD programme abroad. All of the faculty members welcomed Rahul and praised Dr. Unni for bringing an excellent researcher home. One of the faculty members, aware of Rahul’s past achievements, went on to say, “Rahul will serve as a role model for young researchers.”

In the meeting, it struck Neerja that Rahul’s experiences at BLM Ltd. would enrich the chapter and she asked Professor Hari for his opinion. He liked the idea. On October 28th, Neerja emailed the first draft of the chapter to Rahul requesting his inputs. Rahul suggested that she refer to a book written by the CEO of BLM Ltd. Neerja went through the book and found the narrative of the initiatives at BLM Ltd. very insightful. She incorporated those narratives into the chapter. She shared the revised draft with Professor Hari and informed him of Rahul’s recommendation. Professor Hari said: “Find out if Rahul would like to co-author

the chapter. With his involvement in the BLM Ltd. turnaround, it would be like listening to the story from the horse's mouth."

On November 3rd, Neerja e-mailed Rahul to ascertain his interest in co-authoring the chapter. He happily agreed and asked Neerja to schedule a meeting with Professor Hari.

In the meeting held on November 5th, Neerja briefed Professor Hari and her new co-author Rahul on the storyline. Professor Hari then asked Rahul to share his experiences from the turnaround of BLM Ltd. Rahul's insights into the transformation journey impressed Professor Hari and Neerja. Professor Hari spelled out his expectations for the chapter which included adding some of Rahul's personal experiences and set November 20th as the deadline. Before leaving, Rahul thanked Professor Hari for this opportunity as the publication would help him in applying for his PhD. He asked Neerja to send him the draft.

Neerja happily emailed the chapter to Rahul as soon as she left the meeting. After three days, Neerja called Rahul to enquire about his progress and he promised to respond by November 10th. When she didn't hear from him, she sent a reminder on November 12th but it was to no avail. Finally, she received Rahul's version on November 14th.

She opened the chapter with excitement, but it quickly fizzled as she read on. There were barely any changes. The only new element was an overview of BLM Ltd. which was copied from the company website. Everything shared by Rahul so far had begun to seem like a tall tale. Moreover, she was surprised to notice that he added "Rahul Kumar" as the second author in the revised draft.

On November 15th, Neerja again called Rahul to ask that he add his experiences to the chapter to which Rahul sternly replied, "I'm busy with multiple assignments. Kindly go ahead with it."

In order to complete the chapter, she had to collaborate with Rahul, but she didn't know how. She even scheduled a face-to-face meeting, but he never showed up. Time was running out and the chapter was still in the same state. At this juncture, Neerja mentioned her experience with Rahul to Professor Hari. Professor Hari asked her to submit the current draft without waiting for Rahul's input anymore. He told Neerja that he would go through the chapter and give feedback the next day.

The final verdict by Professor Hari would decide the chapter's fate: in the book or the bin. On the morning of November 19th, Professor Hari praised Neerja for an insightful chapter. She was overjoyed to have written her first ever book chapter! But, she was surprised to see Rahul's name struck off from the top. When she pointed it out, Professor Hari remarked, "It's your call. I am fine with either including or excluding Rahul's name."

Neerja decided to discuss the issue with her colleagues.

Neerja approached a few researchers and was surprised to receive similar feedback about Rahul. One colleague mentioned how during a joint project, he had calmly requested Rahul's

help on something to which Rahul had screamed in response that he was “not his assistant and would not just do whatever he wanted.” His unwillingness to collaborate had eventually led to the shelving of the project.

Neerja was in a dilemma. If she excluded Rahul’s name from the chapter, he might cry foul. Neerja had enjoyed a cordial relationship with her peers and superiors; but this incident could result in animosity with Rahul and damage the congenial environment at CLS. He could also spoil her reputation by bad-mouthing her with faculty members who were his lunch partners. Moreover, Rahul himself had added his name as a co-author and was very keen to have his first publication before applying to PhD programs.

On the other hand, adding Rahul as co-author would send the wrong signal to the CLS team. They would think that free-riding was acceptable at the centre. Neerja’s decision would set a precedent at CLS that a low level of dedication and effort was enough to claim authorship in research outputs. She also wanted to adhere to CLS’s policy about intellectual property and academic honesty (See Exhibit 2). Furthermore, giving undue credit for work was against the norms of academia in general and CLS in particular. Moreover, Neerja was an honest researcher who had never claimed undue credit.

The clock was ticking and Neerja had to make her decision before the November 20th deadline. Neerja’s heart directed her to exclude Rahul from co-authorship of the chapter. But it was a matter of balancing between heart and mind. She wanted to act on her values but in a way that she could maintain a positive relationship with Rahul and his networks, as well.

What can Neerja say, to Rahul and Professor Hari, about the co-authorship? When and how?

Revised: 12/10/13

Exhibit 1: Organization Structure of CLS

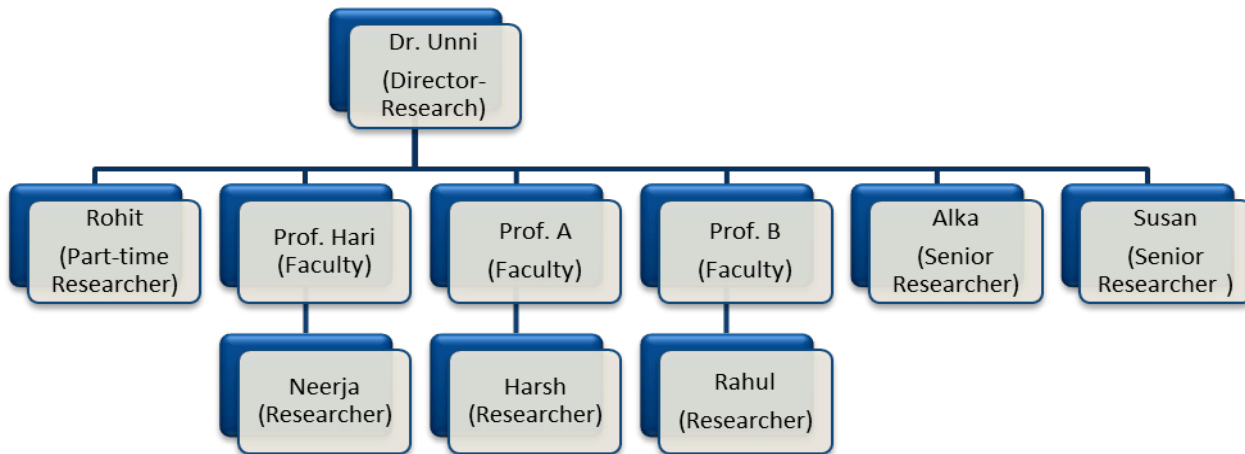


Exhibit 2: IP Policy of CLS

References: You should conform to the APA guidelines for citations and references. Non-citation of other’s work would be construed as plagiarism and will attract warning followed by disciplinary action. The following examples are provided for clarity. Ultimately, authors should follow the guidelines set forth in the most recent edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA).

Articles: Habron, G., & Dann, S. (2002). Breathing life into the case study approach: Active learning in an introductory natural resource management class. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*, 13(2/3), 41-58.

Books: Bruner, J. (1990). *Acts of meaning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Chapters: Butcher-Powell, L. M. (2004). Teaching, learning, and multimedia. In S. Mishra & R. C. Sharma (Eds.), *Interactive multimedia in education and training* (pp. 60-72). Hershey, PA: Idea Group.

Web Pages: Anderson, J. R., Reder, L. M., & Simon, H. A. (1995). *Applications and misapplications of cognitive psychology to mathematics education*. Retrieved June 29, 2002, from <http://act.psy.cmu.edu/personal/ja/misapplied.html>

Copyright: You should take written permission from the concerned authority/author/publishing house before using any copyrighted material. If you are reproducing an already published work, it is mandatory to obtain the ‘Author Approval Form’ signed by all the authors.

Authorship: You are entitled to claim authorship only if you have contributed significantly to the manuscript in terms of coining an idea, data collection, analysis, and writing/editing the manuscript. For very limited contribution, the person may be acknowledged and not added as another co-author.

Acknowledgements: Any persons, institutions, or granting agencies should be duly acknowledged. The acknowledgement can be brief.