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Muhammad Zia-ur-Rehman, Majid Rashid,

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# Role of “*haraam*” practices on behavior and performance of employees: a case study of business organization

Muhammad Zia-ur-Rehman and Majid Rashid

Muhammad Zia-ur-Rehman is a Lecturer, NUML, Islamabad, Pakistan. Majid Rashid is a Professor at AIOU, Islamabad, Pakistan.

## Introduction

This case study is about a working lady, Maryam Qureshi, whose performance report was outstanding at the start of her job. She always arrives on time, does her job efficiently and gives timely results. All the management was very satisfied with her but suddenly some negative changes in Maryam’s attitude were observed. She started to be late, she used to take long lunch breaks and her performance graph fell very speedily. All the management was surprised by her attitude. She was warned three times but every time she had an excuse regarding her family problems. Finally after keen observation it was found that she had a habit of drinking and due to this habit her performance had been affected seriously. Then she was struck off from her job.

## Company background

People’s Services Inc is an organization with a good reputation and a large market share. It never compromises upon its quality which is based upon efficiency of the employees. All the employees are regular, loyal and hard working. Maryam Qureshi is also one of the efficient workers with high level performance graph. Maryam Qureshi recently completed her fourth year with People’s Services Inc. In her position as customer support specialist, she consistently received high performance evaluations until recently. Indeed, her most recent evaluation, completed three weeks ago, rated her as “less than satisfactory.” Her supervisor, Haleema, wondered why this previously strong employee had fallen so quickly.

About six months ago, around Christmas time, Maryam started taking longer lunch breaks. Given the cramped quarters in which Haleema’s Customer Support Department worked and the demanding routines they had to follow, it was easy to notice her stretching her regular lunch period by 10 or 15 min. Once she even stretched it for a full 25 min. Since it was the holiday season, Haleema took no specific action.

## Company’s dilemma

Haleema had just returned from a meeting with her boss, Nikhat, when again the subject of Maryam came up. Nikhat suggested that Haleema look through Mary’s past work-records to try to find some clues about what happened and what they should do now. Haleema closed the door to her office, sat at her desk, and pulled Mary’s personnel folder from her desk drawer. As she flipped through the materials in the folder, Mary’s story came into better focus. However, her occasional remarks reminding Maryam of the lunch break schedules would produce an uncharacteristically evasive, defensive response from Mary. On at least two occasions, she nodded off to sleep at her desk after returning from lunch. In January and February, she was 10-20 min late for work on six different days and called in sick on four other days. It was during this time that Mary’s dealings with her co-workers deteriorated.

Disclaimer. This case is written solely for educational purposes and is not intended to represent successful or unsuccessful managerial decision making. The author/s may have disguised names; financial and other recognizable information to protect confidentiality.

Normally quiet yet sociable, Maryam became increasingly short-tempered and given to periodic outbursts of anger and belligerence. Since Mary, 36, was a single mother of two teenage girls, almost everyone in the office assumed there was something going on at home.

On February 23, though, things took a disturbing turn. Maryam left for lunch at her usual time, but did not return. She called in three hours later to say she had gone home because she had suddenly become ill. Her speech seemed slurred, somehow not quite right. She returned to work two days later, with a doctor's note explaining she had been sick with stomach flu. Nonetheless, the pattern of lateness continued. Two weeks later, Haleema gave Maryam her first written disciplinary notice regarding her attendance and punctuality. During the discussion, Maryam confessed to Haleema: "I know I've been a little different recently. I'm just having some problems at home with my children." She did not elaborate, and Haleema did not probe. For the next few weeks, Maryam was on time every day and rarely left her desk during working hours. Her level of performance improved, as did her interaction with co-workers. By April, however, Haleema noticed Maryam slipping back into her negative habits of lateness and irritability. Haleema began to notice something else in Mary's after-lunch behavior: she seemed to have real difficulty completing her work, making decisions, and solving problems. On one occasion, there was a big argument between her and several co-workers.

Mary went home, claiming she was "too upset to work." She continued coming in late to work and was absent on two successive Mondays. However, after each absence, she produced a doctor's note. In early May, Haleema issued a second written warning, this one concerning not only Mary's punctuality and attendance, but also her deteriorating work performance. At this time, Haleema made it clear that Mary's continued employment was on the line:

I don't know what's going on, but you're in danger of losing your job. I've tried to be understanding, but I'm losing my patience. You need to get straightened up and soon, or I'll have no choice but to let you go.

During the following weeks, Maryam again improved her productivity and performance. She was obviously concerned about losing her job. By mid-July, it was time for her formal performance evaluation. Although her evaluation was "less than satisfactory," Haleema did note that there had been some improvement in all areas recently. Then, last week, the bottom fell out. On July 23, Maryam returned from lunch 45 min late, glassy-eyed and weaving slightly, fumbling with things, and smelling strongly of peppermint. She sat at her desk for a full 20 min, rummaging through drawers, moving paper, nodding, spilling things, and creating quite a distraction among the other employees.

Haleema came to her desk: "Mary, what's the matter here? Something's wrong, and you don't seem able to work at all. Are you ill? Can you work? Are you drunk? Tell me right now!" Maryam, slowly looked up, taking awhile to focus on Haleema. After what seemed like a minute or so, during which time she appeared to be again listening to Haleema's remarks, Maryam burst into tears. She grabbed her purse, pushed and stumbled past Haleema, and left. The next day, one of Mary's children called in, saying she could not work because she was "in bed sick." Haleema checked and Maryam had only three days of accrued sick leave left available to her. During the following weeks, Maryam again improved her productivity and performance. She was obviously concerned about losing her job. By mid-July, it was time for her formal performance evaluation. Although her evaluation was "less than satisfactory," Haleema did note that there had been some improvement in all areas recently.

She did not return to work until today. She went to the ladies room for an hour. When she emerged, she went into Haleema's office and asked for an immediate transfer to another department "where the pressure isn't so great." She seemed very agitated and would not look Haleema in the eye. Haleema told her to return to her desk and resume her work as well as she could until Haleema could look into things more closely.

It was then that Haleema met with her boss, Nikhat. They were trying to decide what to do. In thinking about where things stood now, Haleema knew that Mary's presence in the unit was becoming a source of contention and disgruntlement. Everyone knew that she had some kind of problem, and most people thought it was due to drugs or alcohol, or both,

although no one had ever personally seen her use or abuse either. Since her work was now so erratic, the other employees in the unit had to regularly back up her work by either finishing it or correcting it. She seemed to have no remorse about her conduct and could not presently be counted on to make an effort to correct it.

Haleema wanted to fire her. As she explained to Nikhat:

When she's here, she fights with everyone, and I'm never sure when she's coming to work or how long she'll stay. She's hopeless. I hate to do this, but she has screwed up just too much.

Mary's boss and all the management decided to fire her due to her behavior because they had seen that whenever she is at work she fights with everyone, she shouts at others, she is not regular, she is not interested in her tasks and assignments, so they should fire her. But before firing her they should contact the employee assistance programme (EAP). This programme is to assist employees with any job problems. This is a very beneficial programme for employees as well as for organizations.

**Keywords:**

Compulsive drunkard,  
Workplace,  
Islamic practices,  
Individual behaviour,  
Employees,  
Beliefs,  
Pakistan

**Case study questions**

1. Can Haleema terminate Maryam without running into legal problems?
2. What should Haleema do now regarding the EAP?
3. Should Haleema have acted sooner? If so how?