

CASE STUDY

WAS IT WORTH RISKING ?

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Sreedharan Iyengar (Sreedharan) turned on his laptop at his desk and saw the date, it was his Seventh work anniversary. Little did he imagine, he would receive a mail regarding the position of junior software engineer at Coimbatore.

This evening in Germany was more painful than the first time he had scored below nineties in Maths.

Shreedharam was a brilliant student. Being a topper throughout his educational life, it was no surprise that he was placed on the zero day of placement with Ika Technology, one of the top 500 fortune companies.

His schooling was from one of the best schools in Chennai followed by engineering from the prestigious IIT, Chennai which felt like a natural course for him.

Shreedharan belonged to a very humble family of bankers. Both his parents were clerks at a nationalised banks in Chennai. They had worked very hard towards his right upbringing. Right from his studies to the values that were inculcated, they were very proud of their son. Infact none of them ever sat for a promotion to propel their career, as this would lead to a transfer and they felt Chennai was the right place for imbibing the right mix of education, religious values and culture in their son. They belonged to a strong Iyengar family. There was nothing that Shreedharan did, which was disapproved by his parents. It was not that he didn't have his say, but his choices matched identically with his parents. He went for college and office parties, infact his was known for his rather hilarious dance moves, but was a teetotaler. Even when it came to marriage, his parents asked him if he would want to get married to anyone of his choice, but his answer was as simple as Shreedran, I dint realize time would fly by so quickly and I was busy in my studies and college.

His parents gladly found him a very qualified Iyenger Girl, Sudha. She was also a banker and shared the same philosophies as Shreedharan and his family. For everyone around it seemed like Shreedharan and Sudha to be made for each other.

Shreedharan had great respect for Sudha. She was raised by a single parent, her father and had strong inclination towards academics. Infact Sudha had joined as a Probationary officer at the same Bank that her father retired from.

The five years in India before Shreedharan moved to Germany were blissful for the married couple who were blessed with a girl during the third year of their marriage. They both relished a simple and easy life style. They enjoyed their work, loved spending time with their family and took out time from their daily lives towards religious duties too.

Shreedharan contributed in every possible way at his organization, he had been working with Ika technology from the past 5 years. In the last 5 years Ika technology had rapidly expanded all over the globe, with it's headquarter in Düsseldorf, Germany. As he was one of the sought out employee from the southern belt in India, he at several occasions was offered prominent projects at headquarter.

He knew that working at the headquarter would add incredibly to his profile, plus being an engineer one has to opt for onsite projects , as global exposure contributed towards building up networks, understanding the global markets and gaining expertise in the latest technology.

He had already decline the offers seven times in the last five years due to which he himself felt how others who were less experienced than him were moving ahead in their career. He had spent all his life focussing on his studies for a bright future and now when the time was right he felt that he himself was restraining from coming out of his comfort zone and exploring the new possibilities.

There were many complexities that he was going through. He knew his parents would not agree to move with him, Sudha had a government job which was too risky to leave and to add to it they were planning for their second child. But then to his comfort the project was for a period for two years and he was ready to take that risk in life.

Upon discussing with his family they agreed to the idea, as they knew he had worked really hard towards his career. Sudha also willingly supported his decision.

He was tad nervous while travelling to Germany. This was his very first trip outside India. But he had done his math and was positive about his decision.

Phase I: Exploring the unexplored

Landing at 2.00 am in a freezing temperature of -2 Celsius was not the best start , but the beautiful and warm house made up for a comfortable stay.

This first fifteen days of work was a mixed experience for him. Putting family pictures on his desk, waiting for a common lunch hour, and giving surprised looks at people having beers in the office changed quicker than the weather of London. But the good part was the training he received, the autonomy associated with his project, experiential learning and the perks and allowances received for an onsite project.

Although weekends were extremely challenging for him, getting work home was not appreciated, he was not very fond of travelling and the weekend was rather long, which started right from Friday noon. Thankfully technology was a friend which he best utilised to learn new vegetarian recipes from internet and taking hours to Sudha and his parents. He always use to calculate the remaining months in Düsseldorf and kept himself involved in work which kept him motivated at the work place.

Even after the end of one year he could not adapt to the German way of functioning. Everything was too methodical, there was a particular way for every process, interactions and meeting were seldom which was accompanied with extreme straight forward conversation, direct approach, which he found uncomfortable and unable to practise it himself.

But, he gained his energy back when he had to travel back to Chennai. On returning back it became all the more difficult for time to pass by. Shreedharan was just waiting for his tenure to end, which was just three months away.

Two months prior to the completion of the project a meeting was called, which was unusual for everyone. The meeting was conducted to congratulate on the successful completion of the last phase of the project and also the news for a next project by the same client.

Fritz Muller (Fritz), the manager asked Shreedharan to stay back after everyone left the meeting. Shreedharan though that this would be a good opportunity to discuss his return to India. But he was taken aback when Fritz said that the new project would involve him in the key position roles. He didn't know what to say , he in his polite manner said it would be difficult and was here only for a single project, Fritz however asked him to evaluate the impact of this decision on his Professional and personal life. The raise offered to him was almost 80 percent along with visa, travel, vehicle and a bigger housing facility for the family.

The very same day when he reached home, he wanted to share the information with Sudha and his parents. He called her and he could hear a lot of people taking in the background, he asked her who had come home. Sudha said everyone is home to congratulate us, we are expecting our second child. He was ecstatic and jumped with joy. She said she would call him later as there were many people at home. Shreedharan left nothing could be better than this, now he was sure he wanted to go back.

Shreedharan later through his Human Resource Department in the Chennai office tried to find out new openings, but as the appraisal month had just gone by all the project were running with full capacity. It would have been a major step down in his career if he would have resigned at this stage. He spoke to Fritz again, telling him about his second child, Fritz still said that the opportunity was not one to miss, plus the medical facility in Germany was an additional benefit.

Shreedharan was waiting for the weekend so that he could speak to his family and seek advice. His parents and his wife were very disappointed listening to the news. Two months had passed by but the final decision was still pending. The parents out rightly rejected the idea of moving to a different country at their age. Here Sudha had to make a choice. Finally she made up her mind to move to Düsseldorf with Shreedharan. He came to pick his daughter and pregnant wife but was disappointed leaving his parents and his home.

Phase II: FAMILY ADJUSTMENT

The cold weather, lifestyle, food everything was strange for her, but she knew she had taken a decision and had to stick by it. Shreedharan had taken three day break so that he could make his wife more comfortable in the daily rituals. She was amazed to see the automation even at the supermarket, the discipline on the roads where the best cars in the world are driven and thanks to the advancement of technology, now entertainment and communication back home wasn't even an issue. He joined his office back and Sudha got busy in the domesticated life, she was blown by the first challenge of sorting garbage. The yellow, blue, black and brown *Mülltonnen* (dustbins) that stand outside every home is a testimony to the sorting that is stipulated. This left Sudha feeling like a kinder garden rookie who was unable to sort the things according to colour. She had never missed her maid so much in life. Blue for paper, yellow for non- paper products packaging, black for residual waste and brown for food waste. It doesn't stop with these four colour bins, it goes much further. Plastic bottles with the recycle symbol go back to the supermarket, glass bottles and containers are again colour sorted in bins that are placed in the neighbourhood. She always felt tensed on the thought of sorting the garbage. But he was always very supportive of her and tried his level best to keep his pregnant wife to be happy and comfortable.

The scenic beauty was astounding and never failed to mesmerize them during their short getaways in the weekends. He also quickly introduced her to the other Indian couple who were of their same age. Sudha was aggressively searching for a gynaecologist as she was in her first trimester as she wanted to have a good rapport with the doctor which could help her in the delivery. Upon speaking to her Indian friend she came to know that gynaecologist with whom you meet for nine months is not the same person who delivers the baby, she found this very discomfoting as there was so much emphasis on doc-patient rapport in the Indian culture. Although there was information sharing between the doctor and the hospital, but she failed to understand the concept of distinction between doctors who have a Practice (*Praxis*) and those who work in hospitals.

Some how time also passed by and they got more and more comfortable with the place.

But Düsseldorf had its own share of struggles and Sudha left that she was unable to comply with everything. They could hardly go out for dinners as taking out children after 8 p: m. was not appreciated. It was looked down upon and parents were judged as irresponsible. Hiring nanny¹ was extremely expensive so that directly ruled out the option of go out in the evenings. All of these things along with her condition, inability to work added to the stress and which lead to conflicts and negativity at home too.

Phase III: work productivity at a toss

The negativity didn't stay only at home Shreedharan who was known as the most calm and patient employee now often got into arguments and started missing deadlines. He was unable to concentrate, infact he gradually started feeling that he had taken a wrong decision to take over the new project.

¹a person, typically a woman, employed to look after a child in its own home.

That night when he was at his dining table with his wife , there was more silence than being alone. There was a mail pop up sound. He read the subject which said support engineer vacancy in Coimbatore.

QUESTIONS

1. Should Shreedharan accept the position offered to his in Coimbatore, India and return home?
2. If Shreedharan accepts the position what should his career plan be?
3. What can the organization do to avoid these kinds of problems illustrated in the case? From an HR perspective, what could be a more systematic approach Planning an international career development?