

# “Founder’s Curse”: The Case of Ashneer Grover

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**Abstract.** This case study outlines the dilemma of the Co-founder of BharatPe, Ashneer Grover from his perspective of standing his ground as the founder or accepting the allegations of the Board on controversial financial irregularities attributed to his tenure at BharatPe; eloquently termed by Grover as the “Founder’s Curse”. The case looks at the situation from the context of certain aspects of Organizational Behaviour – leader personality and effect on start-up; perception issues and errors; leader communication across levels; organizational trust and commitment; and ethical leadership. The case highlights situations of conflict between founders and the board, and the impact of culture on the start-up ecosystem including the investors’ and founders’ leadership styles.

**Keywords:** start up, ethical leadership, personality, culture, conflict.

## 1. Introduction

It was midnight on March 1, 2022, as Ashneer Grover, Co-Founder of BharatPe, hovered over his laptop at his home in New Delhi. He peered into the screen, reading and re-reading his resignation letter to the Board of BharatPe. Ashneer felt a tightening in his chest as he fondly remembered his journey - setting up one of India’s most preferred financial transaction platforms, the challenges, endless nights of struggle, and the bittersweet memories of hard-earned success.

He was feeling frustrated and upset over how the entire controversy had panned out over the last few months, starting from a phone call in January 2022 with a Kotak Mahindra Bank employee - an alleged abusive call by Grover that was leaked online as a SoundCloud audio clip. As Grover was mulling over the timeline of how the controversy erupted and the subsequent chain of events, he could not get his head around what was really happening.

How could he be thrown out of a company that he had nurtured with such perseverance? Why was the world painting such an aggressive image of him? He felt he was being “vilified” by the BharatPe Board and being “unjustly” and

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“disrespectfully” treated by them. (The sequence of events as it happened is displayed in Exhibit 1). Questions abounded in his mind: What would be his next steps? Would he be able to salvage his reputation, or should he just quit and move on? How would BharatPe fare now?

“I write this with a heavy heart as today I am being forced to bid adieu to a company... Since the beginning of 2022, unfortunately, I’ve been embroiled in baseless and targeted attacks on me and my family by a few individuals who are ready not only to harm me and my reputation but also harm the reputation of the company, which they are ostensibly trying to protect.” - Ashneer Grover in his resignation letter, dated March 01, 2022. (Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 1: Controversy Timeline



Source: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/tech/technology/bharatpe-cofounder-ashneer-grover-resigns-from-company-board-says-hes-been-vilified/articleshow/89908414.cms?from=mdr>  
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