

Human Capital

REALISING BUSINESS STRATEGY THROUGH PEOPLE

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LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

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Chapters....**

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An Engaging Insight

Dr. Jallavi Panchamia
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From The Publisher's Desk



One school of thought believes that the role of leaders and managers are vastly different. While leaders are thought-off as visionaries with long-term goals in mind, the managers are the doers who work with their teams to achieve the leader's vision. The COVID-19 pandemic surely proved this otherwise. It showed the world of work that managers need to be leaders too. While they required to ensure that the end goals are met, they also need to motivate and inspire their team members. This implies that the managers must go through periodic leadership development programmes given the changing dynamics in today's corporate landscape. In its February 2021 edition, Human Capital explores the strategic topic of Leadership Development with an intent to cover every aspect of developing leaders in the post-pandemic era. Vikas Dua

writes that leaders need to be groomed to emerge as the corporate style Terminators as depicted by Arnold Schwarzenegger in the Terminator movie series! Rohit Shenoy and Neha Rohit Shenoy write that Technology alone cannot build leaders and requires true-blood Leaders to build more leaders.

The interview features Lou Adler, CEO of The Adler Group and best-selling author. Lou mentions that traditional job descriptions are ineffective at finding the best talent, and advises the corporate world to make use of "performance-based hiring" approach to meet their ends. Persona covers S V Nathan, Partner and Chief Talent Officer, Deloitte India. Nathan believes that talent, persistence and perseverance are the three mantras to scale newer heights in the corporate ladder. In another exclusive conversation, Satish Kumar, Senior Director – Talent and Culture, India & South Asia, Accor, spoke about the hospitality industry's outlook and how HR leaders can help organisations emerge on the other side stronger than before. Case Study mentions how the COVID19 pandemic has brought forth a different set of challenges and responsibilities for the employees and the organisation and the greater need for them to blend with each other and rise to the occasion.

Leadership Development forms the basis of how organisations can transition to the world of work of tomorrow. With the hybrid working model as the backdrop, leaders need to be developed like the fictional terminators – a technology endoskeleton with a human thought-process!

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The Low Road To Business Alignment

HR managers are told to think like CEOs and not focus too narrowly on the specific tasks that form a part of their function. And such exhortations leave many conscientious managers confused and inadequate.

BY GAUTAM BRAHMA

HR managers are often asked to align themselves to the business of the company they work for. And this 'strategic alignment' is supposed to be their ticket to the high table in the C-Suite. They are told to think like CEOs and not focus too narrowly on the specific tasks that form a part of their function. And such exhortations leave many conscientious managers confused and inadequate. They feel that they should be doing something they are not currently doing, but are unsure what it exactly is.

Some of them resign themselves to live with this inadequacy, while others start recommending cost cuts and headcount reduction under every head. The latter reason that since the business exists to make profits, they must continually add to that by reducing every expense they control. There are others who believe that the way to align with the business is to express all their achievements in the language of money. This can go to strange lengths:

- The cost of the entire HR function expressed as a percentage of the sales revenue
- The cost of hiring a new employee
- The cost of every hour of training organised and so on

One has seen a new performance appraisal system being championed by highlighting the notional savings

to the company, arrived at by multiplying man-day reduction with the average salary of supervisors.

The limited value of these efforts at alignment is obvious. Relentless cost reduction in the HR function may repel talent and also reduce the quality of vendor-provided services. Similarly, using money-based metrics may create a false sense of monetary benefits. In the case of the performance appraisal method cited above, the real problem lay with the seniormost echelons of management who did not do performance appraisal of, or provide feedback to, the people reporting to them. So, implementing the new ITbased solution was like rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic!

The problem of business alignment

In large companies, the problem of business alignment is not confined to HR alone. Boards fret about aligning the C-suite to the goals of the shareholders and the top management struggles to translate those into goals for their respective teams. In some ways, this problem is as old as the concept of the large corporation itself. The first reference to the Principal-Agent problem, where the shareholders (or Principals) have to ensure that their interests are served fully by the managers (or Agents), goes at least as far back as 1976 when

Michael C. Jensen and William H. Meckling published their seminal paper on the theory of firms in the *Journal of Financial Economics*. There is a huge body of research on this vexatious subject. This is not the place to summarise all of it. One can respectfully refer to that as the high road to business alignment.

The low road

Instead, let us talk of the low road to alignment with the business. One pragmatic way of doing that is to meet one's job requirements. This may seem like a silly thing to say, but usually, one's job description is not what one was told or what exists as a written document. As Peter Drucker has mentioned emphatically, each manager has to actually discover his or her real job description, and then decide what needs to be done to become better at that job. Drucker recommended keeping a detailed work diary for a few weeks to see what exactly one is expected to do, however small and unrelated. Once all that is classified and compiled one has one's real job direction. One can choose to negotiate an alternate job, but if that is not possible one has to find ways of effectively meeting these real job requirements by building the right team, acquiring the right skills, and negotiating the acceptable transfer of certain responsibilities. When done



diligently, this exercise always generates surprising insights. An HR manager who meets the real, albeit undocumented, expectations of her job is in effect better aligned with the company at large.

“As Peter Drucker has mentioned emphatically, each manager has to actually discover his or her real job description, and then decide what needs to be done to become better at that job.”

Review to cement alignment


The other, equally lowbrow, way to cement alignment is to carefully note what matters - directly or indirectly - within the control of HR are discussed during business reviews, and use this compilation to prioritise action. In one such review, for instance, one came across the mention of unreplaced exits, unapproved expenses for

travel and stay in new geographies, and poor performance from new recruits. The improvement actions suggest themselves: proactive hiring, creating partner agencies for short-term resource augmentation, analysis of the sales plan to fill gaps in travel and stay rules and beefing up of orientation and make-up training initiatives. Communication of actions, as they are taken up and completed, to the right business managers is an equally important part of the actions themselves, so that these issues do not figure in a negative sense in later reviews. In a nutshell, the success of HR here is to become invisible in business reviews.

The final recommendation in ensuring that the alignment is more delicate and can be carried out only after credibility is established by some success in the two initiatives mentioned above. This has to do with the gradual push of more of the so-called HR work to line managers. If they can be persuaded to take pride in taking care of their staff through participation in hiring, training, goal-setting, appraisal, feedback, recognition and team bonding, alignment is assured at the source.

Usually, there are some managers more open to this than others, and that is where this change has to be initiated. Once a critical mass is converted, the change takes on a momentum of its own. This cannot be seen as abdication and must be accompanied by preparing and nudging the managers and also supporting them with the right policy frameworks.

As mentioned earlier, very often, the lack of alignment springs from a false understanding of one's real job, coupled with a reluctance to offload the tasks one controls. There is the added burden of the desire to look good within the HR community by doing all that the other HR managers are supposedly doing. All these are, luckily, matters of choice and can be managed by the individual manager.

In the end, alignment involves two parties. One has discussed what HR managers could do but there is also a lot and even more foundational set of actions for CEOs. That discussion will have to wait for a later occasion. 

About the Author

Gautam Brahma is a management consultant who advises start-ups and SMEs on strategy & operations including sales, HR and IT. He carries an experience of over four decades in the public, private and non-profit sectors in telecommunications and IT industries. He has been an invited speaker on multiple industry forums and a monthly columnist on HR issues for nearly two decades. Gautam is based out of Gurgaon and can be reached at gautam.brahma@bizmentor.in.

Updating The Chapters....

Today, the focus is to groom leaders with an approach that makes them the corporate equivalent of the 'Terminator', the hybrid man-machine brought alive by Arnold Schwarzenegger in the 'Terminator' movie series.

BY VIKAS DUA



In the year 1981, at just 10 years of age, a boy in Pretoria, South Africa, was introduced to the Commodore VIC-20 Personal Computer. Fascinated by the machine, he proceeded to learn coding and in only two years, earned his first revenue check of \$500, selling a game named *Blastar* to Spectravideo. He went on to study and work in Canada and the United States, building his

knowledge and skills, one academic qualification at a time. Over the last decade, the same boy (now man, of course!) has become the poster boy of innovation, gumption and bravado. At the end of the muchderided 2020, he has placed himself at the No. 2 spot on the 'Forbes Richest List'. If you have not yet guessed who I am referring to – it is none other than Elon Musk, famous for his 18-hour workdays as much as for launching rocket ships. All this information is detailed out in his biography, penned by Ashlee Vance, which has inspired millions, including me.

Yes, biographies of accomplished achievers and leaders have always been a very favoured purchase category in bookstores catalogued under the 'Management Books' inventory. Many amongst us have grown up reading biographies of leaders as varied as Mahatma Gandhi, Lee Iacocca and Jack Ma. Many would have also read and underlined passages from management tomes like *'Good To Great'*, *'The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People'*, *'In Search of Excellence'* and the like. It seems that learning from the granular experiences of hallowed business leaders and percipience of thought leaders is a muchcoveted aspiration for many amongst us.

For those in the corporate world, it is ingrained from an early stage in their growth, to pick up guidance and learnings from those that have charted the path before them and planted their stakes firmly in the ground. In fact, in B-schools across the globe, 'recommended book' lists are handed out by the faculty to

help students connect some of the theory taught in the classroom to the real-life applications that the latter are supposed to effect later in their professional lives.

Alas, if only reading from books could suffice our requirements to grow our skills as managers into leaders! Such an expectation is no different than assuming that after watching the dashing Tom Cruise scale up the glistening glass façade of the Burj Khalifa in the movie, *'Mission Impossible: Ghost Protocol'*, one could do the same. Needless to say, attempting to replicate an observation or learning without the guiding hand of a mentor or trainer, would be a challenge partaken at one's own peril. In the competitive world we live in, it could preclude corporate death.

Thankfully, progressive and enlightened organisations realise this. And it is for this precise reason that most of them have a well-directed 'Leadership Development Team' embedded within. Ranging from coaching programmes to align leadership thought to the corporate strategy to driving an innovation mindset, this team carries a broad charter to fulfil its objective of raising the leadership potential of its management. It aims to create a leadership pipeline that can not only support, but also define, the organisation's future growth.

The pandemic that has engulfed us for almost an entire year now has instigated change across many business dimensions. Leadership development or training is also one such impacted area. For teams owning the leadership development agenda, it is therefore, a time of intense reinvention. Incorporating changes in the content and delivery of its programmes, is not quite different from changing the tyre of a car which (hold your breath!) is in motion. After all, the current times, do not allow the luxury of a 'trial-and-error' approach. Rapid transformation and immediate results are expected across the

board. To effect the same, the leadership training team must focus on the below areas:

Stratification

More now than ever, we need to absorb the fact that leadership development strategies will need to change depending upon each employee's individual position and role in the corporate pyramid. Interventions required are quite different for various groups – individuals beginning the leadership journey, those that desire to take their already robust experience to the next level, and finally, those that already occupy senior positions that need to drive, and possibly reinvent, the organisation's direction. Similarly, developmental goals are also closely inter-twined



with the leader's role, both, current and aspirational. With shorter tenures, global deployments and parttime/contract employment models coming into the play, stratification of this sort will need further thought in order to ensure that the measures adopted bring in the desired results over time.

Predictive Analytics

The current times necessitate the adoption of an analytical approach to help define and refine the leadership development approach. As per a research conducted by Development Dimensions International (DDI) in 2016, less

than 20 percent of organisations were deploying analytics well in this direction. Today, however, our internal interconnected data systems provide a plethora of data points which can be end-to-end. They can be utilised to set priorities for the Training team, gather required data, analyse the same, take appropriate action and assess impact. In essence, analytics need to give a fillip to both, performance and capability development. Such an approach will support the development of business specific 'scorecards' that can combine metrics across multiple dimensions – critical competencies, performance, cognitive ability, potential and so on. On viewing these scorecards, senior leadership can gauge

'Individual Talent Health' – a metric that aids tremendously towards exercises such as succession planning, which is a critical output of any leadership development programme.

Digital Dependence

Clearly, we are looking at hybrid workplaces in 2021 and beyond. While dependence on digital platforms or technology has been discussed and observed in parts, the time is now ripe for a deeper adoption. To be fair, in some cases, the old school 'classroom approach' is difficult to replicate, given the intense advantage that

peer learning provides. However, as things stand, organisational leaders realise that standing by the side-lines, and waiting for the situation to 'normalise' so that classrooms can be occupied is not an option that even merits consideration. Therefore, in the current climate, one is seeing a higher usage of video conferencing to bridge this gap, to whatever extent possible. Innovative learning proponents are also trying out AR/VR (Augmented Reality/ Virtual Reality) technologies, that in many ways, represent the new frontier of man-machine interaction.

Specialist Delivery

The current era is one of 'mass customisation' – a marketing and manufacturing technique that combines the flexibility and personalisation of custom-made products with the low unit costs



NANDINI ROY

Human Resources Head, Aavishkaar Group

“2020 will go down in history as a year which changed the way we work, socialise and of course 'learn'. I assess that the flexibility of virtual training will provide those leaders who put self-development on the back burner an immediate boost as you get to invest time at your own pace. Further, leaders should be self-motivated and encourage their team to act and not be fearful of the outcome. I believe involving leaders to design programmes for their own consumption is a very effective way. Lastly, do not recreate a programme, look within various departments, business units, group companies, professional network and tweak to deliver to different audience from time to time.”

associated with mass production. This concept is not alien to the world of leadership too. This is where specialist delivery of coaching or mentoring comes in. One of the mechanisms in this area is related to the transmission of leadership lessons from the experiences of great leaders that we noted in the initial portion of this article. Bengaluru-based K Rajeev Narayan is the Founder & CEO of *The Leadership Elements (TLE India)*, India's only book-based leadership consulting house. In a novel (pun, fully intended) approach, his organisation becomes the medium that helps distil the infinite wisdom from management books including biographies, to enable upcoming leaders to hone their craft. In his words, “*Books have always been the source of knowledge and learning across generations. The same needs to be demystified for leaders across organisations and communities.*” Such interventions allow for a fully accurate leadership development approach to be executed, that creates customised tracks to fuel high performance.

Go Ahead! Update your Leadership Development Chapters

Today, the focus is to groom leaders with an approach that makes them the corporate equivalent of the 'Terminator', the hybrid man-machine brought alive by Arnold Schwarzenegger in the 'Terminator movie series. A leader needs to be someone who can step into the battle and vanquish the competition. And that too, not just once, but many times over. The only way to create such an invincible avatar of your leaders would be to combine the developmental leadership theories of the past and integrate the above-mentioned focus areas. Done so with strategic intent and sound execution, there is a high likelihood that your leadership development efforts will bear fruit that will make your organisation



AMRIT JAIDKA ARORA

Head-Human Resource, Digit Insurance

“Leadership development is fostered with positive reinforcements, creation of fluid structures and a culture which promotes open and honest conversations. All this aided with technology and AI helps leaders deliver better results. Empowering managers with the right tools for performance and feedback management, recruitment etc can greatly help in building better leaders. It's important for leaders to instil confidence & dispel fears. When it comes to bridging the leadership gap, its critical to start early. First time managers must be trained and guided and frequently assessed. In time, succession planning is the key to maintaining a steady line of future leaders”

sustainable, even in the onslaught of increased volatility in the global environment. Clearly, the chapters in the leadership journey as far as 'Leadership Development' is concerned, need to be updated along these lines, if not re-written altogether! **H C**

About the Author

Vikas Dua is an accomplished HR and recruitment professional, a TEDx speaker, and a Vlogger and Blogger on HR practices. With over 15 years of high-quality experience in the field of IT and ITES, he has worked with both start-ups and large corporations like Wipro and Concentrix. Currently, he is Chief HR Mentor at Attayn, an HR-tech platform focused on democratising knowledge in the academic space. He is also an Advisor to the BRICS Chamber of Commerce and Industry's Young Leaders Program.

Developing Leaders Amidst The Pandemic

Technology cannot build leaders; Leaders build more leaders. However, technology can help us connect people in a manner that is simple, seamless and meaningful.

BY ROHIT SHENOY AND NEHA SAXENA SHENOY



Today was not a typical day. Meghana, the COO of *Tele Signal Works* and her husband Suresh, the HR Head of *Somethingsup India* had a holiday and were working in the kitchen, while Parth, their 7-year-old son, was attending online classes.

As he was doing the dishes, Suresh said, *"It's been a while since we are working in the remote mode now. If, sometime in the future, we are asked about what the Pandemic meant for Leadership in companies and what was the best way to develop leaders in 2020-21, what would we say?"*

Meghana thought for a while, and said, *"Let's reflect on what*

we've experienced and heard from our friends. I'm sure we'll find out what Leaders went through during this time."

Some COVID-driven situations leaders were required to overcome:

- Provide the team with the confidence that while there had been several job losses in the recent past, they are committed to provide a better financial future
- Change both their target customers and identify alternate Supply chains for raw material
- Convince the entire top management to take a 50% pay cut and ensure no job losses
- One CEO had to attend to his wife and his parents since they were COVIDinfected and also manage the company through the crisis
- One CEO was known to be highly task-oriented and non-empathetic. However, when he saw that people were vulnerable and what they were going through, he became empathetic and caring towards them.
- One leadership team had to focus on creating and reinforcing a larger purpose for the company so that people remain connected to a larger cause and not lose their *mojo* to work, and even more so during exceptionally tough circumstances.
- Encourage employees to return back to completely sanitised and redesigned factories so that expensive production lines do not shut down.
- A CEO in the hospitality sector which witnessed a 70% shrinkage in the topline had to pivot to smaller, remotely


located independent guest houses as revenue sources

Thereafter, they went on to classify organisations based on their three key business priorities:

- Customer obsession/intimacy
- Technological edge
- Cost Control

Thus, they derived that Leaders had to sharpen their skills on all vectors, with situations often asking them to display more clarity and confidence than what they were feeling.

“It’s been an extraordinarily tough year for leaders,” said Suresh as he wiped another plate dry. “Leadership is contextual and different aspects of Leadership are required in each of those scenarios. Are there any common



S J RAJ
Senior Vice President, HR Operations, Newgen Software

“Hybrid workplaces will be the norm in 2021. In this new, hybrid model, organisations will likely juggle with making everyone feel valued while ensuring they remain accountable for their output. The current stack of leaders may not suffice and nurturing the new ones is challenging in these times. Technology can act as a game changer here. Creating bite-sized, capsule programmes can be certainly effective. Leaders need to embrace disagreement and continue to increase engagement with employees to ensure their emotional and professional well-being. Empathy and listening are two important traits that every leader should exhibit during this pandemic.”

leadership capabilities that leaders needed to accomplish during the pandemic in the Virtual Faces and Squares world?”

“I like the term ‘Virtual faces and Squares!’ Come to think of it, our life has been revolving around Zoom and MS Teams,” said Meghana.


They finished their kitchen work and sat down to discuss this interesting topic further, and Meghana took out her note-book and wrote, *“From my experience as the COO and listening to the scenarios we discussed, I think leaders need to display 7 Cs during this year.”* They discussed this for a while and came up with the below list:

| 7 Cs of Leadership during the Pandemic | |
|--|---------------|
| 1. | Calm |
| 2. | Confidence |
| 3. | Communication |
| 4. | Compassion |
| 5. | Collaboration |
| 6. | Community |
| 7. | Cash |

“Interesting!” said Suresh. “Did you notice that a lot of these have to do with collective, creative and care energies which are feminine? I think there is a sure shift happening in leadership expectations towards the feminine.”

Meghana said, *“It’s important to remember that we are talking about energy and not gender. Men and women possess both energies and tend to use one energy more than the other in leadership. So, if there is a definite shift in leadership expectations, what implications does this have on Leadership development?”*

“Our budgets were significantly slashed, so cost is definitely an aspect,” said Suresh. “We could not travel for any leadership



DEBASHREE LAD
Chief People Officer, CredAble

“It is crucial to bridge the gap between knowing and doing in leadership stating that strategy without execution is just fantasy. To fulfil strategy, people must be able to align and effectively work together, while creating a source of shared learning alongside that improves future efforts too. The evolving technology is the key that can promote shared understanding and alignment around strategic goals, providing new ways to sustain and leverage the skills of the entire workforce. It allows new approaches to take a great leadership workshop and amplify it, for real and immediate business results via particularly task-based systems, collaborative and social enterprise tools, providing information, guidance and expertise to support effective outcomes. Such systems enable leadership to connect and align up, down and across the organization, and to frame missions the organisation can pursue.”

programmes. We could not afford international travel, university programmes or expensive consultants. More importantly, given how tough business has been in 2020, leaders were insecure and had lesser bandwidth to learn.”

“That’s quite a lot of constraints,” said Meghana.

“And we still were very effective in developing leaders,” said Suresh excitedly. “Here is what we did...”

“1. Identify critical leadership priorities using a decision-making tool. Classify Leadership development programmes and new requests into- Mission Critical, Important and Not

Critical. Select requests from the Mission Critical list, map online programmes for important but not critical and discontinue ones that were not important and not critical.

2. Develop customised learning journeys spread over time to work on mission critical development programmes. For instance, we wanted the entire sales team to change direction and sell our digital solutions to a different client segment remotely. We developed a learning journey spread over 6 weeks. The programme was kicked off by the CEO, we recorded videos of other leaders and showed them to the participants during the kickoff. We divided the learning journey into



DIVYA VENKATAVARAGHAVAN
Principal, Education/Skilling and Human Capital initiatives, LGT Aspada

“Across the world, large companies had to orchestrate transformational pivots, execute tough calls, radically alter ways of working, support staff and engage with customers & vendors in distress. Inspired leadership at various companies have led by example, amplified engagement and, re-designed KPIs for a distributed workforce. They have continually emphasised on concern, empathy and support for their teams; and focused on transparent communication. Many global organisations have demonstrated that technology has tremendous potential to scale leadership attributes because it offers three points of leverage: People analytics to understand a "great" leader, training scaled and executed with rigour and, measurement of post-training behavioural changes.”

Reflect>Assimilate->Contribute. We got mentors to guide through the journey and buddies to serve as accountability partners. We also enrolled some of the role model participants to champion the programme and be peer coaches to other participants.

“The learning journey for Leadership can be broken into Reflect>Assimilate->Contribute. Mentors are needed to guide through the journey, buddies to serve as accountability partners and role model participants to be peer coaches and champion the programme.”

3. Magical Classrooms: *The initial classroom sessions were taken by experienced facilitators who were experts at group process facilitation. This ensured that while the programme content was structured, there was high engagement, zero cognitive overload and good peer learning. Because of the high psychological safety built into these sessions, participants from across the world were able to participate through voice, video, chat etc. We also included some simple and practical aspects, E.g. we found that we need to give a quick stretch break every 30 minutes and ensure that no session is longer than 2 hours.*

The real magic was in the way we planned every aspect and yet left room for spontaneity. Every highly interactive virtual classroom session was preceded by individual reflection and



ANIRBAN DAS
Chief People Officer, Lakshmikumaran and Sridharan Attorneys

“Leadership’ is undoubtedly one of the most heavily tested skills during this pandemic. Demonstrating Emotional Intelligence and sharing personal impact stories with the workforce by the Leaders is the need of the hour to create an environment of empathy and resilience. The other important trait is to trust your second line of leaders and empowering them to take a few time-critical decisions locally. Also, the leaders should develop the habit of recognising susceptibility to decision fatigue else they may experience a growing difficulty in assessing the risks and gains associated with a different course of action.”

followed by group and individual assignments. We leveraged technology to create a space for people to share their experiences – of work and home. The classrooms also had plenty of simulations and skill practice sessions so participants practised their learning in a safe space. We avoided death by power-point, ensured authentic connections, memorable stories, included music, unexpected surprises and made the experience unforgettable. The collaboration this initiative gave rise to is helping us in many ways.

4. Innovative Methods: *We unleashed our learning and business leader’s creativity and experimented with various methods. Here is what worked:*

- *Use of Improv Theatre, Psychodrama, Content neutral*

facilitation processes and Liberating Structures bring in not just novelty but the human connection required for learning and mindset shifts to happen.

- Application of Indic methods in Leadership development e.g. constructs from the Yoga Sutra and Puranas e.g. Mahabharata in the modern context has been very effective in changing mindsets. I'll talk about this exciting topic another day.
- Use of really rapid instructional design mindset and tools to quickly create content and continuously test the effectiveness of the content throughout the process.

5. Leaders and Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) as Facilitators: We also got other Leaders and Subject matter experts go through well designed Internal facilitator training so they could facilitate other sessions for other employee populations. This also kept our cost to a minimum and built internal

capability towards creating a learning-driven organisation.

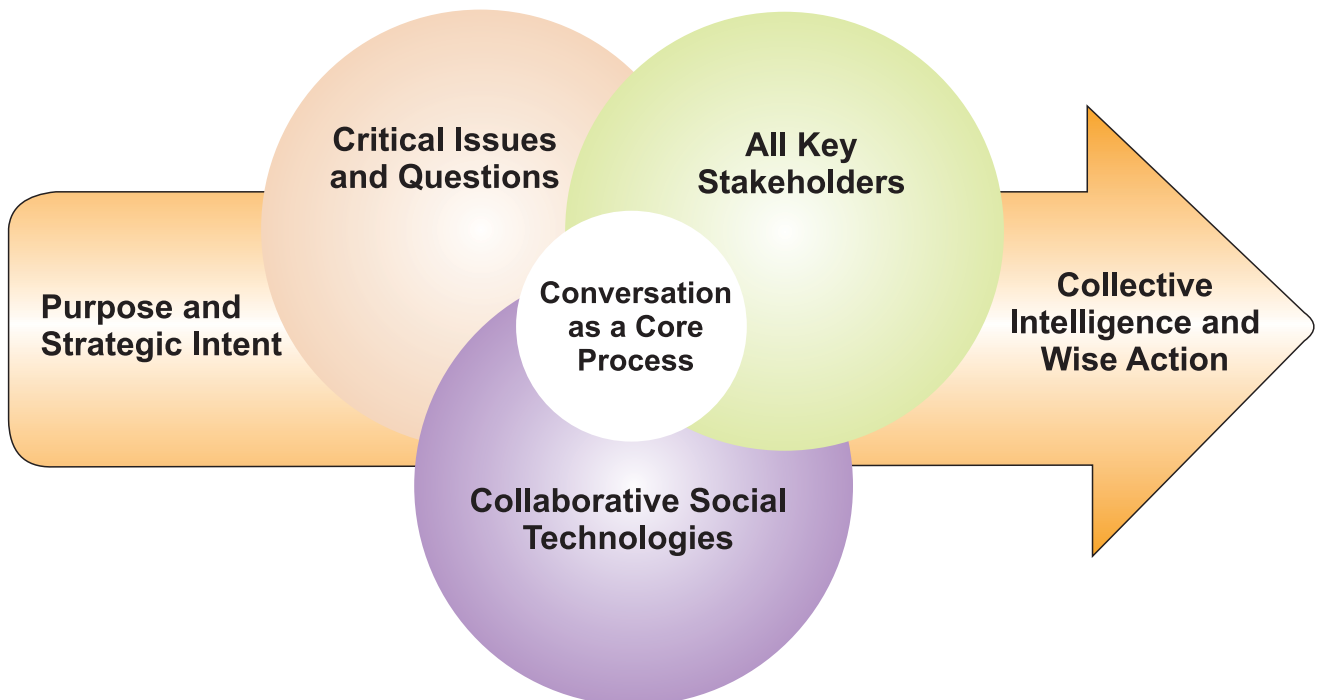
6. Application opportunities: Since the programmes are spread over time and participants are given specific learning application prompts and opportunities, we literally saw people implementing their learning. With the practice field adjacent to the playing field, learners envisioned how new behaviours would look like in their daily work and experimented with the new behaviours.

7. Create follow-up structures: We set-up buddies within the cohort of participants and allocated mentors to the participants. We got senior leaders to speak to the mentors to ensure greater commitment and skin in the game. Each of the participant managers was given an overview of the programme and a short coaching guide on how they can support the learners through simple 20 mins check-ins each week. Just the act of the manager asking a simple question

like – ‘How are you applying what you learnt’, makes a big difference. We also ensured that all participants teach others. Teaching is the best form of learning and we heard some great stories about how it reinforced their learning.

8. Leverage Technology: Technology cannot build leaders, leaders can build more leaders. However, technology can help us connect people in a manner that is simple, seamless and meaningful. It also helps us track how people are doing and create space for collaboration. Apart from MS Teams, we used online tools like Miro, Mentimeter, Mural, Kahoot etc. to bring in interactivity. It helps people to bookmark, revise, track their learning and share it with others.

9. Sharp Focus on Outcomes: While we did everything else, our sharp focus was on outcomes - What we finally want the participants to think and do differently after the programme. Every session and activity was



———— Innovative Leadership and Capacity Development ————➔



ASHISH KOLVALKER
Head HR, Amagi Corporation

“Leaders are evaluated on 'Thinking Big' and 'Thinking Different' constantly. A lot of emphasis is on 'Trying and Failing Fast' - to encourage failures and trying new things. For a remote workforce, senior leaders need to constantly 'stay connected' - primarily with new folks who are onboarded virtually. Learning to work virtually, understanding emotional wellness, removing unconscious biases - are some of things that are increasingly building upon to build a strong culture of inclusion. The focus in Leadership Development is training managers on 'Future Skills' to make them future-ready, as well as designing focused individual development plans for key leaders in the organisation.”

based on this. The measure of success was our ability to quickly execute learnings and deliver monetary or time saved impact. Another measure was how they applied the learning to develop their next level team members.”

“Wow!” said Meghana. “I can see how this approach also bridges the learning-doing gap in Leadership Development. That is quite a cool design and something you can continue post-pandemic as well. On another note, I love the passion when you speak about Leadership Development! I'm also going to talk to my HR team and implement some of these elements for my team's Area Manager's leadership programme”

With a beaming smile, Suresh said, “We are proud of what we

accomplished and want to scale this up for other levels of people leaders as well.”

“I have a few unusual practices in our org that I am proud of as well which indirectly helps us in leadership development.” Said Meghana and went on to list them:

- **Reverse Induction:**

Whenever a senior joins the org or moves into a new role, they need to conduct learning sessions for others. This helps them connect with the organisation and we benefit from spreading their expertise.

- **Prepare Strategy as a**

Competitor: When we create company Strategy, we create one group which wears our competitors' hat and creates the company strategy. This team explores how to kill our flagship products, services and solutions and give birth to new ones.

- **Create a cadre of SMHs (Subject Matter Hobbyists)** and create function/process and business hobby clubs. Expertise is good when life is predictable but can be a liability when the environment changes fundamentally. Disruptive ideas come from the hobbyists.

“That is super cool! I think everyone can learn from this experience!” remarked Suresh.

What are the unexplored questions about leadership development for

2021? They discussed and arrived at the below questions:

- How to create a culture of continuous self-driven learning?
- How do we build resilience, empathy, growth mindset in leaders at scale?
- How to create and foster human connections in an increasingly remote working world?
- How to create a learning infrastructure which leverages technology without losing the human touch?

Just as they wrapped up their discussion, Parth, who had just completed his online school came running in. He said excitedly, “I got a star from Ma'am today, she told me that I am a good online class leader.” Suresh and Meghana looked at each other and smiled.



This is a fictional conversation and has no resemblance to any living or dead characters.

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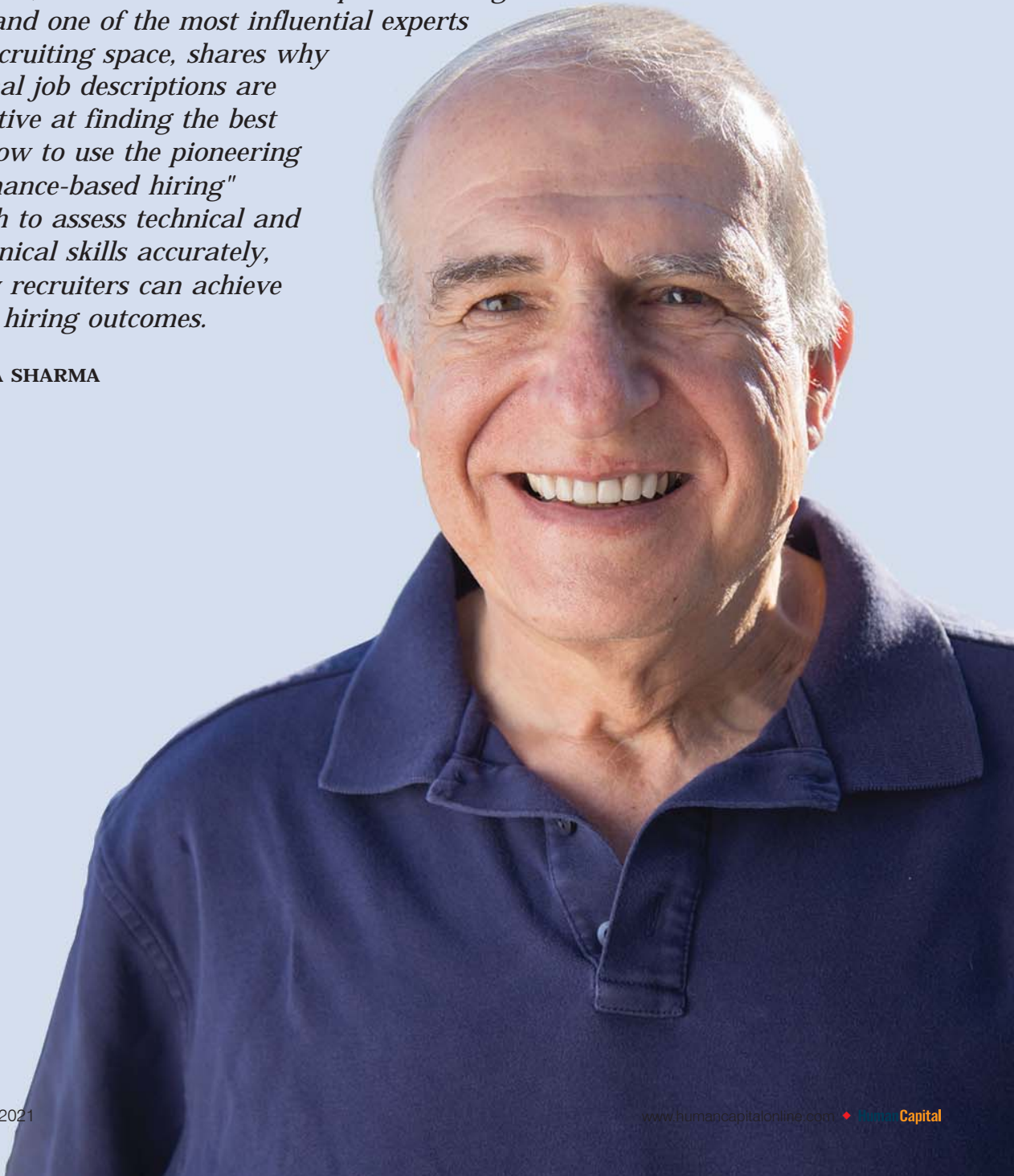
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Getting Hiring Right

*In an exclusive interaction with Human Capital, **Lou Adler**, CEO of The Adler Group, best-selling author, and one of the most influential experts in the recruiting space, shares why traditional job descriptions are not effective at finding the best talent, how to use the pioneering "performance-based hiring" approach to assess technical and non-technical skills accurately, and how recruiters can achieve win-win hiring outcomes.*

BY ANKITA SHARMA



Q Most people recruit by writing job descriptions that list the skills, experience, credentials, and personality traits they're looking for.

Why, according to you, is that an ineffective method to bring in the best hires? What alternative approach do you recommend?

A My first search project was for a plant manager in a company that made automotive components. The job description mentioned ten years of this, five years of that, and so on. That's when I said to the president of the organisation, *'That's not a job description. That's a person description. A job doesn't have an academic background, skills, or experience.'*

I then asked him to put the person description in the parking lot, walk through the manufacturing plant with me, and determine the work the person needs to do to be considered successful.

We toured the plant for an hour and saw that the raw material was all scattered about. There were a lot of bad parts. We found several maintenance issues. Some people were working hard, but some weren't working at all. We identified six to seven things in the plant that needed to be fixed. I then said, *'I'll find someone who can fix those things.'*

Since that day 42 years ago, I have never used a skills-based job description. I use a **performance-based job description**. It's what people do with what they have that makes them successful, not what they have.

A skill-based JD eliminates those who can do the work exceptionally well but have a different mix of skills and experience than what's listed, falling short of attracting the right talent and, worse, creating diversity-related hiring challenges. A performance-based JD opens the door to a diverse talent pool.

A job description should boil down to five or six performance

objectives that ultimately measure success for the role. Define the job before the person.

“It's what people do with what they have that makes them successful, not what they have.”

Q What kind of questions should a recruiter ask the hiring manager to prepare a performance-based job description?

A Let's assume you are hiring for a job in engineering. I would simply ask: *What kind of projects is the person going to work on?*

When hiring managers demand people with X years of experience doing Y, I ask them, *'What will the people with X years of experience (in skill Y) be doing on the job that indicates they're really good at it? What do they do in the first 30, 60, and 90 days of the job that'll make them successful?'*

When hiring managers ask for specific skills or competencies, I ask them: *What does this skill or competency look like on the job?* For instance, 'strong communication skills' could be demonstrated by 'leading the presentation of sales department's monthly performance results to the executive team.'

Another way to define a job is to make a pie chart of the kinds of work people are going to do. For instance, they might spend some time interfacing with people, some of their time doing individual contributor work, and so on. If, for example, they will spend most of their time doing creative work, I'll ask the hiring manager: *Give me an example of a creative project for this role.*

I remember when I was at an insurance company that was hiring many people for their big call centre. The HR people wanted me,

but the hiring manager said, *'No, we don't need your help. We hire good people.'* I asked him if there was a difference between the top third and the bottom third of the people who stayed. He replied, *'Absolutely!'* So we set out to find what the top third did differently. It turned out that they could handle three to four calls at a time. They could ask a series of questions to quickly make out what the problem was, and within two to three minutes figure out what to do next and put the call in another queue, etc. So that's another question you could ask: *What do the best people do differently than the average ones?* When the work was properly defined, the company hired exceptional people, not just those who had the exact skills initially listed.

“Define the job before the person.”

Q Many a time, the requirements of hiring managers are such that recruiters find themselves seeking purple squirrels. Too often, the result is disappointing because a candidate with a perfect mix of skills, education, and experience hardly materialises. What advice do you have for recruiters and hiring managers on this front?

A I was once called by a mid-sized company in San Jose that was looking for a senior executive. I knew somebody on the board of directors who said to me, *'Lou, you got to talk to our company's president. He's hiring a VP of marketing. He has no idea what he wants. He's looking for a purple squirrel.'*

The president of the company wanted somebody with an engineering degree from a prestigious Ivy League school. He also said the person should have a master's degree in engineering

from a top-tier school. He wanted the person to have a minimum of 10 years of experience, among other criteria. When we met, he said to me, *'Why am I even talking to you? You don't know anything about this. You've never done a search like that.'* He was aggravated that I was there.

I asked him to calm down and told him that I was there to help him define the job. I then gave him a hypothetical scenario: *Imagine it's a year from now. You've found a great VP of marketing. You want to give this person a big bonus. You're in front of the board, and you're justifying giving a big bonus to this person.* One of the board members asks, *'What did this person do that was so great that you want to give him a bonus?'* After a few moments of stone silence, this president said to me, *'Adler, you finally asked a good question.'*

He then talked about how he wanted the VP of marketing to develop a three-year product roadmap with the engineering team to understand the technology evolution in Silicon Valley. He wanted this person to figure out how to optimise their engineering resources, build state-of-the-art products, lead product design effort, and so on. I then asked

him, *'If I could find someone who can do that kind of work exceptionally well but didn't have that pedigree stuff and the exact years of experience you said a half-hour ago, would you at least see that person?'* He said that he would, of course.

I only compromised on one thing: I told him we're going to look for a **performance-qualified purple squirrel instead of a degree-qualified purple squirrel** — and that was a difference-maker. We placed several senior executives in that company over the next five years, and he became a good friend of mine.

“People usually get hired for their technical skills, but often, they underperform because of the lack of soft skills.”

Q **Could you talk about what you call the “Sherlock Holmes’ deductive interviewing technique”? What does this investigative technique entail, and how can it accurately predict technical ability?**

A I spoke with a VP of a technology company a few weeks back. His company had adopted performance-based hiring. I asked him how many people he had hired in his organisation, and he replied that he had hired about 60 people in the last two years.

I then asked him if he agreed with me on this: *When you hire somebody who looks pretty good, you give them a project you think they can handle. If you find they're really good, the next assignment you give them is a stretch project or a more important project, and you put them on bigger teams. Whereas for the people who are not as good, you don't give them hard projects. You give them assignments that are a little bit easier for them to work out.* He said that, of course, he did. He had seven people on his 70-person team who always got the toughest and biggest projects. He knew they would get it done. Every manager does that.

Typically, good people are assigned to bigger and more important projects on a continuing basis. **Sherlock Holmes’ Technique** is about seeking **deductive evidence** in the interview to infer if the candidate is a strong technical person or not.

Ask the candidate during the interview to describe the significant technical projects he/she was assigned within two to four months after starting any new job. And then dig deep: How did you get the project? Who was on the team? What were the technical challenges you faced? What was your role?

I also ask candidates what projects they were assigned as a result of their performance on the first project. If they were given stretch jobs, exposure to important people and cross-functional teams, or critical tasks multiple times at different companies, you've got a good technical person.

This technique reveals to the interviewer what the candidate's supervisor thinks of him or her. The projects one regularly works



on is an accurate assessment of their competency because it's made by those who work with and manage the person.

Q Employers now look for a mix of left-brain/right-brain talent, rather than just excellent techies. When it comes to interviewing for non-technical abilities, how can interviewers accurately assess soft skills?

A Several years ago, a senior engineering executive at a well-known organisation wanted me to put together a two-hour program on soft skills interviewing. He told me that they would spend almost a full day assessing their final candidates' technical skills and about 45 minutes at the end of the day evaluating soft skills.

I told the executive that there's no way soft skills can be measured in 45 minutes. They're too important. I then asked him if he considered the following items to be soft skills: getting high-quality work done consistently on time; collaborating with cross-functional teams on critical projects and working towards deadlines; making presentations to company executives, customers, and other stakeholders; taking directions from different project managers in a matrix setting; and persuading others to take into account different points of view. These are only a few questions – I asked many more.

The response to every question was a resounding 'yes'.

Finally, I said that the program needed to be four hours long instead of two hours. I also suggested that hiring managers spend at least two hours measuring essential non-technical skills (soft skills are too important to be called 'soft') instead of just 45 minutes.

A few days later, though the senior executive did not agree to conduct a longer duration course, he did increase the time spent assessing non-technical skills to 1 hour 15 minutes. In my mind, it showed that I was not very good at

persuading people with my soft skills, but he thought I was great at it.

People usually get hired for their technical skills, but often, they underperform because of the lack of soft skills. During an interview, ask the candidate to describe a few of his/her major technical accomplishments. For each accomplishment described, ask for examples of how the person used non-technical skills like consistency, collaboration, project management, reliability, etc., to accomplish the task.

Another good technique is to use the Sherlock Holmes' deductive approach, which we talked about earlier. Ask people how and why they got assigned to different teams and roles. People with strong non-technical skills regularly get assigned to important teams.

“Recruiters who are value-added partners to their hiring managers and trusted career advisors to their candidates will be in high demand.”

Q I was intrigued by the title of your recent article, which said that the future of recruiting might not have any recruiters. Will the role of recruiters be minimised or made irrelevant in the coming days?

A Before the 1980s, it took three or four years for a car company to develop a new car. The marketing people said what product they wanted, the engineering team then figured it out and turned it over to the manufacturing department, which then grouped prototypes that went back and forth. That was a long, linear process. In the '80s, companies started adopting the concept of concurrent engineering, in which different departments worked on different stages of product

development simultaneously. The parallel execution of tasks saved time, reduced costs, and increased productivity.

The modern-day recruitment process needs to resemble the concurrent engineering approach. Say a sourcer identifies 100 candidates and then turns them over to the recruiter, who tries contacting the candidates and takes a week's time to give the shortlist to the hiring manager, who then dilly-dallies around and says they aren't any good. Then the process starts over. That is a long, linear, ineffective process.

How do we make this terrible process more effective? The sourcer and recruiter need to be combined. For instance, if I find your name this afternoon, I have to call you right away and take the process forward. If you separate the two roles, the process takes weeks.

Moreover, now that technology is there, hiring managers can easily do their own recruiting. It doesn't take much effort or training to find talented prospects by using LinkedIn in combination with basic Boolean. Hiring managers don't need recruiters if it's just going to be an administrative job.

However, a recruiter can add value by helping the hiring manager create performance-based JDs, describing the significant performance objectives and the importance of the role to the candidate, converting a strong prospect to move forward in the process, presenting the job opening as the best career opportunity even if the organisation can't offer the biggest compensation package, partnering with the hiring manager to interview better and remove bias from the decision-making process, leveraging their own integrated network, etc. Such recruiter competencies achieve win-win hiring outcomes.

Recruiters who are value-added partners to their hiring managers and trusted career advisors to their candidates will be in high demand. **HC**



Bang For The Learning Buck

It is all about money, honey; so goes the corporate adage about the bottom line of all that we do. So, how does Learning justify its existence in this lucre-laced world?

BY DIPANKAR DAS

The Learning department in a large outsourcing company had to deliver regular Learning sessions and meet the delivery and headcount coverage target. It had to address the Learning gaps at an organisational level. This was similar to what L&D departments do worldwide. But there was another task that it was expected to fulfil, which had been left largely unaddressed. The department was asked by a wise business leader to justify its existence from a monetary perspective. Cost centres, perennially under pressure, were under even more pressure in this rather aggressive organisation.

The L&D Head, a genial gentleman, was a doctorate in Organisational Development practices, but tabulating costing sheets was not his forte. Hence, he had been avoiding this ask from the senior management for some time. However, now the time had come to address this festering issue.

Origins of Training Evaluation

Evaluating the impact of Training is never easy. Legend has it that sometime in 1954, a researcher at the University of Wisconsin, USA, wrote a thesis on the ways of evaluating the impact of Training. Later, the Researcher, Donald Kirkpatrick, converted his thesis into an article. This article referred to four levels of training evaluation. Gradually, many practitioners who



had not read the article also began to talk about the 'four levels'. Finally, Donald Kirkpatrick was persuaded to write a book on ways to evaluate Training, and this - now famous - book saw the light of day in 1994.

Levels of Evaluation

The four levels begin with the ubiquitous feedback forms handed out after the Training sessions. Generally, feedback after the conclusion of the training session tends to be sufficiently positive and draw a smile on the faces of the

Trainer and the other stakeholders. If we want to see whether the participants have learned anything from the session, it is better to conduct tests before and after the Training to see the improvement in understanding.

Certain departments and organisations are more ambitious and want to know if there has been a more lasting impact on the behaviour of the participants. Gauging behaviour, of course, is notoriously difficult, and also, the required data must be captured over a certain time-span. Ideally,

before seeking to track the impact over a large number of participants or over a longer time-span, it is advisable to experiment with smaller pilots and once positive correlations emerge, it can be explored on a larger database.

Conventionally, the fourth level of impact capturing is the impact the abovediscussed behaviour change has on operational metrics, which are closely related with cost mitigation or revenue growth, levels of customer experience, and other key business metrics.

Applying the Model

It is one thing to device a model in the rarefied confines of a university and quite another to deploy it among the twists and turns of the corporate corridors. While models are good, they come out as truly powerful basis the kind of customisation that you do. Context, remember, is the king. While evaluation pundits may snigger at Level I evaluation, come to think of it, it gives you valuable insights into the Trainer's performance, feedback on the logistics and infra and the overall satisfaction level of participants. And if done immediately, the survey return rate tends to be 100%.

“It is one thing to device a model in the rarefied confines of a university and quite another to deploy it among the twists and turns of the corporate corridors.”

The second level is often taken too literally. It would be a creative thing to do if we used scenario-based questions or attitudinal surveys, which would provide good insights into changes of attitude if not its application.

The third level is perhaps the trickiest. Specific behaviours need

to be tied to the Training, and for level four, those behaviours need to be aligned to some business goal. For example, people managers are expected to encourage a high level of employee engagement. If a control group is taken through behavioural training on topics related to Team Development, then the engagement of their team is tracked over a certain period of time; that will be a good indicator of the impact of the Training if the engagement levels improve. And if the engagement level increases or at least remains constant, there would be a positive or static impact on productivity.


An improvement in productivity would always be beneficial for the business. And from the benefit thus enumerated, one could deduct the cost of Training, including Trainer cost, props, physical location and also the opportunity cost of the participants being away from their production responsibility. This will then deliver the final return on the Investment made. There are challenges in identifying if the improvement has taken place only due to Training or perhaps other reasons.

When the impact is positive, there could be other claimants who would like to be associated with the success. As they say, success has many fathers, while failure is an orphan. However, if the initial alignment to the metric had been done well and had been tracked properly then it is not difficult to brush off such claimants.

Meanwhile, back in the large outsourcing company, the quest for justification of the Training department evolved into a Green Belt project. It was decided to create a control group of Supervisors who had undergone three or more days of Training during the previous year. Then they were evaluated on multiple parameters. What came out as a clear correlation was that their Employee Engagement scores and their Employee retention scores were significantly better than those who had not undergone behavioural

training or had done so for a lesser duration. Lower attrition levels meant a saving of more than a million dollars, as each early attrition of an employee was pegged at a loss of approximately INR 70K to the business. When these cost saving numbers were verified by Finance and shown to the wise leader at the top, there was a surprise. After that exercise, the L&D department never had to justify its existence, instead, their scope widened and they were helped more assiduously by the line HR and Operations.

“Many years ago, a venerable philosopher had said there are some things which are measurable and some things which are not. Wisdom lies in knowing the difference between the two.”

Many years ago, a venerable philosopher had said there are some things which are measurable and some things which are not. Wisdom lies in knowing the difference between the two. There are certain cost heads, which will remain a cost and their returns are quite abstract. Till that insight rests with senior leaders in the industry, you would do well to become an expert in tracking the return on investment of the buck invested in Training. 

About the Author

Dipankar Das is the author of *Cracking the CSAT Code at the Call Centre*. He has worked in diverse organisations, including Genpact, Concentrix and for the Tatas. He is currently Vice President and Global Head of Skill Development at iSON Experiences.



The Bonfire Of Vanities

Culture has witnessed an evolution owing to the influx of young talent at the Founder/CXO level. This has transformed into a 'culture of collaboration' where individuals thriving on belittling subordinates, need to rethink their ways of working.

BY MRINMOY MAJUMDER

It is always good to complement one another occasionally as a gesture of kindness. It is essential to compliment fellow humans since such appreciation encourages them to work harder. However, superfluous compliments appear to be overtly courteous and hollow. Therefore, it is essential that organisations make a structured effort to train employees with the art of giving feedback. Although the concept of feedback appears as simple, it requires to be delivered tactfully.

Among organisations, feedback exists in extremities-either through overt praises or blatant criticism. And both of them do not enable the creation of a 'performance culture'. The notion of praise is linked to a feudal culture; one with a strict social hierarchy that streams from unrelenting followership and social validation. When feedback to subordinates are often grilling, rude, and less humble, it reinforces a 'ruthless culture'- synonymous with the corporate world. And until today, it was something that organisations prided themselves in. However, with the influx of young talent at the Founder/CXO level who disregard the rudiments of vanity, culture has witnessed an evolution. This, in turn, has transformed into a 'culture of collaboration' where individuals thriving on belittling juniors and subordinates, need to rethink their conduct and ways of working.

Future of work is 'collaboration'

The collaborative setup works on the principle of openness. Here,

goals are clearly defined sans any hierarchy, and individuals are expected to provide detailed and constructive feedback to their team members as part of their critical task. People who worked in a traditional hierarchical setup might find such a collaborative culture a bit overwhelming and ambiguous. However, there is a method to the madness. Collaborations are fruitful when everyone is amenable to the terms, and therefore, works in a flat and Holacratic structure.


Feedback is not Criticism

Criticism and critique are starkly different. Criticism is merely pointing someone's shortcomings without the substance of an argument, whereas, critique is all about finding the way forward to progress further. Thus, Feedback needs to be critical and constructive. Feedback should improve one's performance, or at least should allow one to introspect on their abilities. Therefore, good feedback requires that the provider don the hat of a coach. A coach's job is not to merely advice, but to engage with the client (feedback receiver) and encourage her/him to deliver smart actions. These smart actions are a result of immersive sessions with peers and juniors revolving around key objectives and deliverables. It mainly works in a transparent environment, where individual progress and team goals are apparent.

Coaching & Collaboration

The days of pushing the blame of a failed target onto the juniors or

peers are disappearing. The future of performance management is collaboration, where individual performance is directly linked to the team's performance and strategic goals of the organisation. Hence, organisations that put the team ahead of individuals can anticipate inculcating such a culture among its employees. It is not surprising that even a fresher entering an organisation in a few months down the line would be expected to mentor his juniors as part of her KRA.

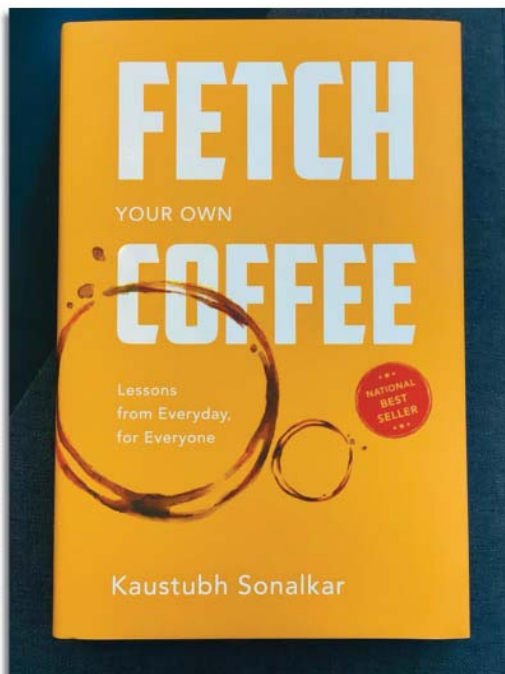
In all these, HR would be playing a vital role in creating a culture which thrives on collaboration, where being critical to each other's tasks without getting pushy and personal is considered normal. Irrespective of seniority and experience, employees must complement each other's work. While it sounds simple, it is difficult to execute and maintain in the longer haul. However, when such a culture unsettles the organisation, it would at least bring about transparency and teamwork at the forefront. More importantly, it will acknowledge the fact that 'organisations are bigger than individuals!' 

About the Author

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A Unique Brew


In the movie *Airlift*, out of the 169,000 odd Indians stranded in Kuwait, Ranjit Katyal had the vision to see the way out of the situation. In his book, *“Bring Your Own Coffee”*, Kaustubh Sonalkar uses Katyal as an inspiration for the mid-managers since they are lulled into the drone of everyday delegation, leaving the ‘leading’ to the top-management to often ring the death knell for an organisation’s nimbleness. *Airlift* has illustrated that pre-planned heroism is not required to become successful leaders.



The book then draws a parallel with T20 cricket, which, introduced in 2003, altered the very rules of the game. The author uses this example to indicate that should relook the age-old template of questions meant for the candidates. The author has made use of the T20 cricket to show that no qualification can beat experience coupled with adaptability. He cites the examples of the 39-year-old Tillakaratne Dilshan and the 37-year-old Ashish Nehra who still sparkle with their performances in the T20 format. Likewise, a candidate having ample years of experience should also have the ability to adapt to the new set of goals. Just like Dhoni, the ability to think big under pressure and follow it up with action is what sets successful talent apart in the future. Experience should be considered, but always in the light of adaptability.

Further, the book captures the ancient wisdom of Hindu Vedic knowledge that defines the third gender or third nature as *‘tritiya prakruti’*. There were times when there was a special place for the ‘hijra’ in the Mughal kingdoms as a special counsellor for their different thinking. With gender as their strength, it is their characteristics, nature, and everything else which runs in their DNA, that can help win wars in the corporate world. Businesses today have realised that innovation is the surest way to stay relevant, and the third gender has an edge in this respect.

Kaustubh feels that transgenders have a lot to teach us in innovation, creativity, agility, speed and many more. It is scientifically proven that transgenders are wired to think differently and more creatively.

They are the epitome of multi-tasking, there will be an end to gender discrimination if they join the corporate world, moving towards a more holistic work culture will become a reality. The fact that they would be transported to a workplace where they can bring about a different work culture that can change the world to make it fascinating, exciting, and empowering. 



About the Author

Kaustubh Sonalkar is Group Director - Human Capital Management (HCM), General Affairs, CSR and Corporate Communication at Welspun Group. He comes with a corporate experience of more than 25 years of experience, and is currently overseeing HR strategies along with CSR and General Affairs for the Group.



Redefining Talent Management

Post-Pandemic Talent Management will see a sharper focus on employee experience. With less talent and the same work to be done, employers will have to find ways and means to enhance superior employee experience in all aspects of the HR function.

BY SUBIR SINHA

We will remember the year 2020 for life when the Global Pandemic taught us lessons which we never learnt in B Schools. Among other facets of Human Resources, Talent Management too will have to be re-thought and re-defined in the post-pandemic era.

Wikipedia defines Talent Management as anticipating requisite human capital and planning to fulfil those requirements for a company. *Everything done to recruit, retain, develop, reward and make people perform forms a part of talent management as well as strategic workforce planning. Talent management is an organisation's ability to recruit, retain, and produce the most talented employees available in the job market.*

Talent Management is an enviable skill to possess, and though it may not be an arduous uphill climb to scout out new and good talent, it is a challenge to retain them. The crux of the matter is that no one wants to lose talented and hardworking employees.

However, most of those people are either satisfied with the job they have, or they go out and look for better opportunities.

We will always remember the year 2020 as the Global Pandemic taught us lessons which we never learnt in B Schools. And among

several aspects, Talent Management too will have to be re-thought and re-defined in the post-pandemic era.

Let's take a look at how Talent Management will recast itself in the post-pandemic era.

Recruit: The Pandemic has created a borderless world. Organisations were forced to allow employees to work from home, a prerogative earlier restricted to the IT Sector. Today, many organisations are allowing employees to work from home. The only requirements being basic IT facilities, WIFI / Internet connection, a corner to work and technology to aid and facilitate work.

“Retaining Employees will be more challenging. Managers will have to hone their humane skills. Empathy and passion will have to be practised and demonstrated by Managers in the post-pandemic era.”

Recruitment will undergo a sea change. Apart from virtual interviews organisations have now an opportunity to tap manpower from different locations which

earlier had to be restricted to a particular city or would call for relocation of people to different areas/cities in search of jobs. We now hear people being hired from far-flung areas and working for organisations in metros.

Time zones may be one bit of consideration but companies are hiring people from different areas and I have even heard some companies talking about “Work from Mountains”. This, I see as a positive side of the pandemic wherein people from Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities can also get an opportunity to work for big corporates without shifting their base and meeting their organisational aspirations. It has been a win-win for both employers and employees. Employers are getting to tap cheap and talented resources and employees getting a chance to work for their dream companies.

Interviews have gone virtual - Technology has played an important role in business continuity post-pandemic era. Microsoft Teams / Google Meet and Zoom are the interview joints. Hiring has been at an all-time low but still, companies have hired tech and necessary employees virtually. Online Assessment has also seen a surge.

Look at the Cost factor - It is to the advantage of the Employers. Onboarding employees have been cost-effective. No more incurring



joining expenses, lodging and boarding expenses at the time of joining, office space creation and other costs associated with joining are minimised. Only technology-related expenses which were there earlier have to be incurred.

Virtual onboarding of employees is now a common phenomenon. Organisations are seamlessly onboarding employees with the help of technology from different locations. Virtual induction, training, meetings are new facets of Talent Management in the post-pandemic era.

Retain: Manpower rationalisation will be a top agenda for the managers. We have seen lots of layoffs happening during the pandemic with a sharper focus on performers and non-performing employees facing the brunt of layoffs. Organisations will be cutting cost and creating a runway for their success with key and performing employees. Employers will take the pandemic to their advantage by weeding out non-performers.

Post-Pandemic Talent Management will see a sharper focus on employee experience. With less talent and the same work to be done, employers will have to find ways and means to enhance

superior employee experience in all aspects of the HR function.

Performance Management which was an annual phenomenon will now, in the post-pandemic era, is going to be short-termed and focused. Objective and Key Results (OKR) will be much in practice.


Work from Home has brought in advantages and disadvantages together. While, on one hand, employees are getting a chance to work at their own pace and complete the assigned tasks, on the other, the feeling of isolation and loneliness is creeping up amongst them. Performance Management along with TRUST is an area which is getting difficult for Managers to manage.

Additionally, Talent Management post-pandemic has become more data-driven and Managers are struggling to find ways and means to capture and track employee performance. New spreadsheets with different metrics are being created and asked to be filled by employees causing TRUST issues between employees and their managers.

Training and Induction - Training and Induction will be capsuled to catch employee attention span. They will be full of practical examples with an emphasis

to emotionally connect with the remote employees. Company anecdotes and history will have to be captured and shared in bite-sized modules with old and new employees. Vision and Values of the organisation will have to be reinforced and reiterated. Human Resource Content Developers will be in demand. This will be a new role played by HR professionals. Digitising of existing policies and practices, training material etc. and making them available online for employees is going to be the call of the day and will be a necessity

Reward and Recognition will have to be emphasised in the virtual workspace. Engaging employees will be another key aspect of Talent Management in the post-pandemic era. The entire purpose and existence of the organisation will have to be explained to employees and they will have to be bound together. This will call for extra efforts by managers. Virtually appreciating work accomplishments of employees and celebrating success virtually will be a key part of the so-called new norm. Retaining Employees will be more challenging. Managers will have to hone their humane skills. Empathy and passion will have to be practised and demonstrated by managers in the post-pandemic era.

Thus, to say that for Talent Management in the post-pandemic era Managers will have to unlearn and relearn managing employees, will not be an exaggeration in any which way. 

About the Author

Subir Sinha is an accomplished Human Resource Professional with over three decades of experience. Subir has worked with Reliance Retail, ITC, HSBC, RSPL and NetCom Learning in Senior HR roles. He is passionate to work with SMEs/MSMEs and Startups and help them build robust HR processes. He can be reached on subir@subirsinha1811.com.

MSDE Collaborates With Microsoft And NASSCOM For Digital Skilling Program

BY ANUSHRUTI SINGH



The Directorate General of Training (DGT), under the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE), has collaborated with Microsoft and NASSCOM Foundation to provide digital learning content for students at Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and also a future-ready employability skilling program for upskilling and reskilling.

The partnership is expected to benefit nearly 1,20,000 students of 3,000 such institutes across India via the Bharatskills portal.

A blended learning curriculum will be created for students pursuing the 'computer operating and programming assistant' (COPA) trade.

Students will gain insight into Microsoft technologies, beginning from the primary level from Office Productivity Suite to introducing advanced concepts of programming, networking and cybersecurity.

DGT is responsible for implementing long term institutional training to the nation's youth through its extensive network of about 15,000 training institutes (ITIs) and 33 National Skill Training Institutes (NSTIs). ■

Daimler India Aims To Increase Female Factory Workers Ratio To 20% By 2022

BY ANUSHRUTI SINGH

DAIMLER

Daimler India Commercial Vehicles (DICV) has planned to increase the women employee base at its factory to 20 per cent by 2022 under its 'DiveIN' (Diversity & Inclusive) initiative to increase diversity for a more inclusive workforce.

Recently, DICV has onboarded 46 women for shop floor operations at its manufacturing unit in Tamil Nadu. With this the company has completed the first stage of its 'DiveIN' initiative.

The new women employees have been deployed across key function

areas such as engine and transmission, cab trim, quality management, cabin-in-white and paint shop.

Satyakam Arya, Managing Director and CEO, Daimler India Commercial Vehicles said, "Diversity is critical to the long-term success of any organisation; How can you meet the expectations of a diverse market without a diverse workforce? At DICV, we're promoting inclusivity by welcoming women to our factory with a supportive, professional working environment."

Yeshwanth Kumar Kini, Head of HR, said, "Diversity and inclusion are some of our fundamental principles at DICV. To ensure new employees settle comfortably into their new roles, we provide a comprehensive onboarding process including training on safety, health and hygiene, communication skills, firefighting and basic tool handling. We hope this initiative encourages more women to join a company that understands their value." ■

upGrad Announces ESOPs, Flexi Leave Policy For Employees

BY ANUSHRUTI SINGH

Online education firm upGrad has announced the grant of employee stock ownership plan (ESOP) to 600 employees, who have completed more than a year with the firm.

The company has also introduced a flexible paid-time-off or leave policy and a spate of work-friendly policies for its 2,500 team members, which will allow the employees to design their own paid-leaves calendar themselves, thus enabling flexible work culture across the board.

upGrad President – HR, Preeti Kaul said, "We want our employees to share our success, hence the ESOPs. Also, we want to meet the



personal needs, hence the flexibility to carve better work-life balance. This is just the beginning of the series of progressive policy changes that will be implemented over the year, our effort to create better employee experience and a happier workforce." ■

A Manager Can Make It or Break It



PRABIR JHA

Some years ago, I was trying to hire a high potential leader from a marquee brand for my organisation, which was in another industry. I needed someone like him to bring in the perspective that we desperately needed. I had a great breakfast meeting with him. He was equally excited about the value he could add. I quickly set up his conversation with the CEO that evening. (I've always valued speed when moving on an exciting candidate, which is something I don't see as much with many companies.) They hit it off well.

My CEO and I then discussed the specific landing role for such a person. We agreed to align on the need for a role and get someone like the talent we had met. The manager agreed to the idea and was quick to meet up with the candidate.

It all looked great until I got a message from the candidate just after he had finished the last meeting. I called him back. I was disappointed to hear from him that he may not want the hiring possibility to progress. Perplexed, I asked him what had happened after two super conversations he had admitted to having. He said he did not find his manager to be inspiring enough to want to work with him!

This is the talent reality. It's not just about the company or the role. The manager can be a big reason behind an 'aye' or a 'nay'. Many managers still think they are giving someone a job. How do we become a magnet for great talent and not one that repels? Honest introspection can reveal a lot.

Prabir Jha is the Founder and CEO of Prabir Jha People Advisory. He has been the CHRO of two Fortune 500s and two NYSE-listed Indian majors.

Leadership Is About Always Keeping the Glass Half-Empty



ADIL MALIA

The vision is to have a full glass, but the glass has always got to be half empty . . . and you, dear leader, must strive hard to manage this dynamic balance.

You have to build your team's happiness agenda around a half-full glass, where cooperation, sharing and caring . . . these positive group values get animated in real-time. All that the team has currently is just about enough, but there is a desire for more!

The half-full glass keeps people happy, bonded, and engaged. The half-empty part builds your team's PHE factors (passion, hope and energy) to fire their enthusiasm. That is the paradoxical magical formula for success that a leader always has to manage.

A full glass takes away the fight, the strive, and hope. There is no longer a dream – nothing more to look forward to. It makes people believe in their superiority, pushing ambition into a state of comatose.

If a man comes to a point where he is so fulfilled and content that he says, '*I do not want to know any more, do any more, learn any more or be any more*', he is in a state in which he ought to be changed into a mummy!

An inspiring leader knows this wisdom. He, therefore, quickly gets a bigger glass and pours out the content of the earlier glass into it. Now the full glass is half-empty, striving for action all over again.

Ambition is about enthusiasm with a purpose, the spirit that drives enterprise energy and seeks camaraderie. The half-empty glass symbolises that strife.

When adversity strikes and the citadels crumble under tectonic shifts, the organisation needs energy, passion, enthusiasm, and drive to rebuild themselves. A half-empty glass keeps the team always sharpening its sword and striving for a marketplace war. That is what balanced leadership is all about.

Adil Malia is the Chief Executive at 'The Firm'. He has worked in senior leadership and board roles in diverse companies like Godrej, GE, Coca-Cola, and Essar in India and overseas.

Hospitality: The Now and the Next

Satish Kumar, Senior Director - Talent and Culture, India & South Asia, Accor, spoke to Human Capital about the hospitality industry's outlook. He also shared how Accor is upping its talent game to support employees and business stay ahead of the curve, and how HR leaders can help organisations emerge on the other side stronger than before.

BY ANKITA SHARMA



Q *Uncertain. Struggling. Downbeat.* These are a few words we've heard time and again about the hospitality industry since the pandemic struck. As grim as all that might sound, we've heard a lot of other words, too. *Transformation. Reset. Opportunity.* How has COVID-19 been a catalyst for change in the hospitality industry?

A The ongoing pandemic has impacted almost every industry adversely. The hospitality industry is no exception. It has suffered a massive setback in both short- and long-term views. However, coping with the pandemic and experiencing how unprepared most businesses were to sail through such a crisis has paved the way for an all-new world that is much more equipped, capable, agile, and experimental than before.

COVID-19 has played the role of a catalyst, necessitating rapid business and workplace transformations. The hospitality industry is constantly reinventing and meeting the requirements of today while preparing for the future. Who would have thought of contactless check-ins and check-outs a year ago in the pre-COVID era?

Our transformation has been well received by guests. We have elevated our hygiene and cleanliness standards by launching the 'ALLSAFE' program and introducing new ways of engaging and collaborating with guests. The changes in the ways we operate will continue to meet the ever-changing business requirements.

Q *With several million people unemployed, there will be more competition for jobs. Moreover, the pandemic has dried up some roles while making others sough-after.* What will be the top job drivers in the hospitality industry — now and after COVID-19 abates?

A Until very recently, the hospitality industry had a very conventional talent strategy. However, the pandemic has brought many age-old practices and methods under critical scrutiny, leading us to consider new ways of collaborating with business needs.

The people strategy required today is much more experimental and out-of-the-box. At Accor, **reskilling and capability enhancement** of existing talent is in tune with emerging new-age hospitality roles. We have reintroduced roles into **skill clusters**. A **combination of build and buy strategies** are being explored in line with current and future business needs while differentiating between roles and skills.

“The hospitality industry had a very conventional talent strategy. However, the pandemic has brought many age-old practices and methods under critical scrutiny.”

Revamping the entire talent strategy includes but is not limited to part-timers, professionals entering the second inning of their career, fixed-term contracts, a diverse workforce operating in changing roles aligned with evolving business requirements, and others, as the key drivers.

The available qualified talent pool that matches the requirement of the revamped talent strategy is limited. Therefore, getting the right people will be more difficult than ever before.

There will be increased emphasis on hiring for potential, attitude, humility, agility, and character, rather than primarily for domain knowledge. Culture alignment will

be a game-changer when it comes to ensuring the right fit for any organisation.

Some capabilities and prominent factors for talent to be relevant in the employment market are **constant reskilling, learning and unlearning, knowledge of industry changes**, gathering competitive insight, **networking**, and **collaboration**.

Q *What are some of the top strategies being employed at Accor to support employees and business through this difficult time?*

A As a leading hospitality player, Accor has always aimed to provide an unparalleled guest experience. Our promise to our guests and customers is to deliver experiences so they can 'Live Limitless'.

Employees are at the heart of every strategic initiative, project, action and decision. In this world of the unknown, our focus on enhanced employee relations has been much stronger, giving special attention to:

i. Making a conscious choice of building the right company culture: The energy, support, and trust within our teams while responding to uncertainty became possible because we are intentionally aligned to shared mission and values. Honest communication, empowerment, and discipline have been the most important enablers, steering the right company culture for us.

ii. Holistic talent wellbeing:

- **Physical Environment** – Communicating daily with our employees, ensuring their safety, providing masks, sanitiser, PPE kits, social distancing guidelines, and changing the design of workplaces are important considerations for us in securing the physical wellbeing of employees across hotels.

Through COVID-19 care support, we are housing employees in our hotels where necessary, providing them with nutritious packed meals



and supplying groceries, among other things.

- **Emotional wellbeing** – We introduced several initiatives intended to keep our employees motivated, including the launch of 24*7 Employee Wellness Assistance Plan, which enables them and their family members to seek professional help from practising psychological counsellors.

We have also created interactive virtual programs suited to better manage the ongoing crisis, such as ‘Happiness in Times of Uncertainty’ and ‘Mission 2021’, among others.

- **Financial wellbeing** – Accor launched the ‘ALL Heartist Fund’, a €70 million COVID-19 special-purpose vehicle, which has been assisting employees, pledging to pay COVID-19-related hospital expenses for those who do not have social security or medical insurance, and on a case-by-case basis, to furloughed employees suffering financial distress.

iii. Capability enhancement:

We provide free online learning opportunities for employees to acquire new skills.

iv. Finding a broader purpose in life: Our virtual volunteering program provides an opportunity

for employees who are passionate about making a difference to society but are currently restricted due to the ongoing pandemic and social distancing norms. Through this project, our talents have been able to reach out to communities from their homes and contribute to the greater good.

“COVID-19 has played the role of a catalyst, necessitating rapid business and workplace transformations. The hospitality industry is constantly reinventing and meeting the requirements of today while preparing for the future.”

Q While the pandemic has put many work trends on fast-forward, it has altered the direction of others and initiated some future trends. Which HR trends do you believe will persist in the hospitality industry post-COVID-19?

A COVID-19 has changed the way HR, as a function, is being practised. In the face of unprecedented challenges, the HR function has become the guardian of the health, safety, and wellbeing of the workforce.

We play a critical role on several fronts, such as ensuring employees’ safety, leading the communication between leadership and talent, developing policies, preserving as many jobs as possible while navigating through uncharted territories, and executing out-of-the-box plans to support the business and managing cash flows.

HR now has joined hands with the business in its truest sense. The trend of supporting business sustainability and the overall health of the workforce will continue going forward. Moreover, linking people strategy to business strategy, reskilling talent, monitoring and driving talent productivity and efficiency, leading a performance-driven culture, having robust recruitment techniques, exploring varied sources of hiring and employment types, and investing in people development will be of paramount importance for this function. **HC**

Hiring Trends Outlook in 2021

Unpredictable changes, unprecedented challenges, unthought-of decisions — the year 2020 will go down in the annals of history as the most disruptive year in the world of work. With operational activity stalled, businesses affected adversely and work culture in a tumult, the year also threw opportunities to leaders to adapt to changes

and make way for a smoother transition to keep up the work continuity.

Managers made several innovative shifts to policies and undoubtedly, more such upgrades in the workplace are to come. The Human Capital Hiring Trends February 2021 focuses on the shifts that hiring activity will see in the New Year.

Expected Hiring Trends in 2021



FOCUS ON DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION (DEI)

- A Monster report showed that four in five (86%) candidates across the world feel that DEI in the workplace is important.
- Another Monster survey found that 62% of people may even consider turning down a job offer if the workplace is not inclusive.
- In a Kantar, 2020 Inclusion Index report, 52% of people said their company was working on inclusion and diversity and 61% said that they feel a sense of belonging within their company with these changes.
- According to a LinkedIn survey, 77% of the respondents said that diversity will be the most important aspect of future hiring.



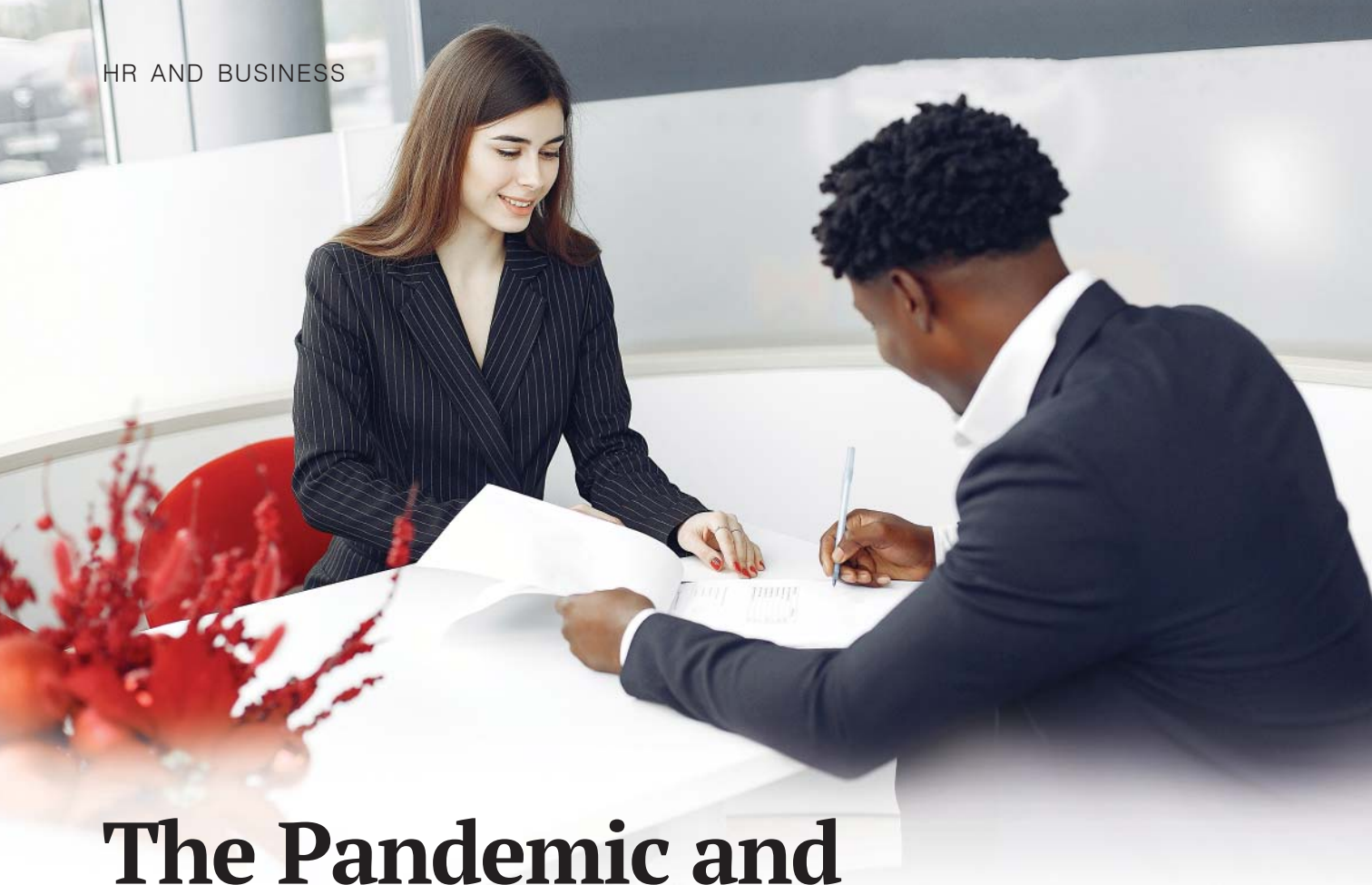
REMOTE WORKING TO CONTINUE

- In a Monster survey, 75% professionals said that the best thing their company could do to support parents is work schedule flexibility.
- In a LinkedIn survey, 81% of the respondents said that virtual recruiting will continue post-COVID-19.
- A Naukri.com survey of over 4,000 jobseekers found that 59% working professionals prefer a hybrid model of working.



NEED TO UPSKILL

- In a Monster poll, 87% of employers said that they were struggling to fill positions as a result of skills.
- In the 2021 Talent Technology Outlook study by SCIENCE too, 87% of leaders said that there will be a race to reskill and upskill.
- A LinkedIn survey showed that one of the fastest growing skills will be personal development (44%) where jobseekers will want to upskill and improve their potential.



The Pandemic and Employment Contracts

With the constant ebbing of employee protection given the changes in the workplace due to the pandemic, the linearity and stability of employment contracts are under a cloud.

BY AMARPREET BHAMRA



Let us take a look at this scenario - You are currently employed with your enterprise and have an existing employment contract in your drawer. It has the standard references to employment tenure, place of posting, retirement age, compensation, allowances and perks etc. Now amidst this pandemic, you are grasping the changes in your workplace with policies being revised, colleagues being handed extra leaves, changes in insurance coverage and a few more on the anvil. A thought lingers in your mind on whether the employment contract handed by your current enterprise needs to be revised. Against this backdrop, the existing

pandemic has raised a question mark on existing employment contracts and placed HR professionals in a quandary.

Aspects to consider

From furloughs to reduced working hours to reduced pay, enterprises across the world have implemented these measures mostly taking the employees by surprise. While HR policies and employment contracts have been framed to cater to normal working conditions, most enterprises have ringed in unilateral changes to adjust to the new normal of flexible and blended workplace model. This has amplified the underlying need to amend existing employment contracts

and assure the employees that their rights would be safeguarded in the event of a pandemic.

“While HR policies and employment contracts have been framed to cater to normal working conditions, most enterprises have ringed in unilateral changes to adjust to the new normal of flexible and blended workplace model.”

For HR professionals and enterprises, there are a couple of considerations which need to be incorporated in the employment contracts. To begin with, employers need to draft rules and provisions for scenarios related to quarantine and lock-down in the contract. It should clearly spell out the dos and don'ts for the employees to navigate through these situations. The next consideration should be reserved for scenarios when employees fall sick due to the pandemic. The contracts must be transparent on the rules and categories that pertain to leaves and any additional allowances to be provided for the employees.

The detail is in the data

Given the Work-from-Home model, many enterprises have been striving to fetch realtime data on whether employees are putting in the required hours. Furthermore, safeguarding the enterprise and customer data while operating from home is paramount. There could be situations when other family members may be privy to confidential information or any matters related to the enterprise. Hence, from a goforward perspective, employment contracts

must mention the policy for handling these scenarios. Also, future employment contracts must clearly state the rules for furloughs and any reduction in salaries, keeping in mind the local and government regulations issued during the pandemic.


The need for attention

Enterprises need to pay attention and highlight any proposed revisions in working hours, job roles and contractual obligations. The employment contracts in the coming months must address any modifications in the salary structure and incorporate a detailed reference for layoffs. For example, there is no legal rule in India which states that employees need to be paid during lock-down. As per the Advisory by the Ministry of Labour & Employment, employers are advised against termination of employment in the event of a lock-down. The advisory also mentions that if any establishment is non-operational, it must deem its employees on-duty. There is also a provision that if an employee is tested positive for COVID-19 after returning from an official trip, the organisation is obliged to provide 28 days of paid leave for quarantine and full recovery. In terms of meeting the statutory and labour laws in respective countries, the contracts need to clearly indicate any proposed changes to bonus pay-outs, incentives or discretionary allowances for the employees.

With the pandemic showing signs of having a longer run, enterprises need to revise employment contracts for full-time, contingent, contractual and teleworking employees. A key element in the contract would be the Office Policy which should mention whether employees with symptoms of the virus or contracting the same in the workplace be relieved of duty till they recover fully. Similarly, contracts need to introduce Work-from-Home policy as well as address matters related

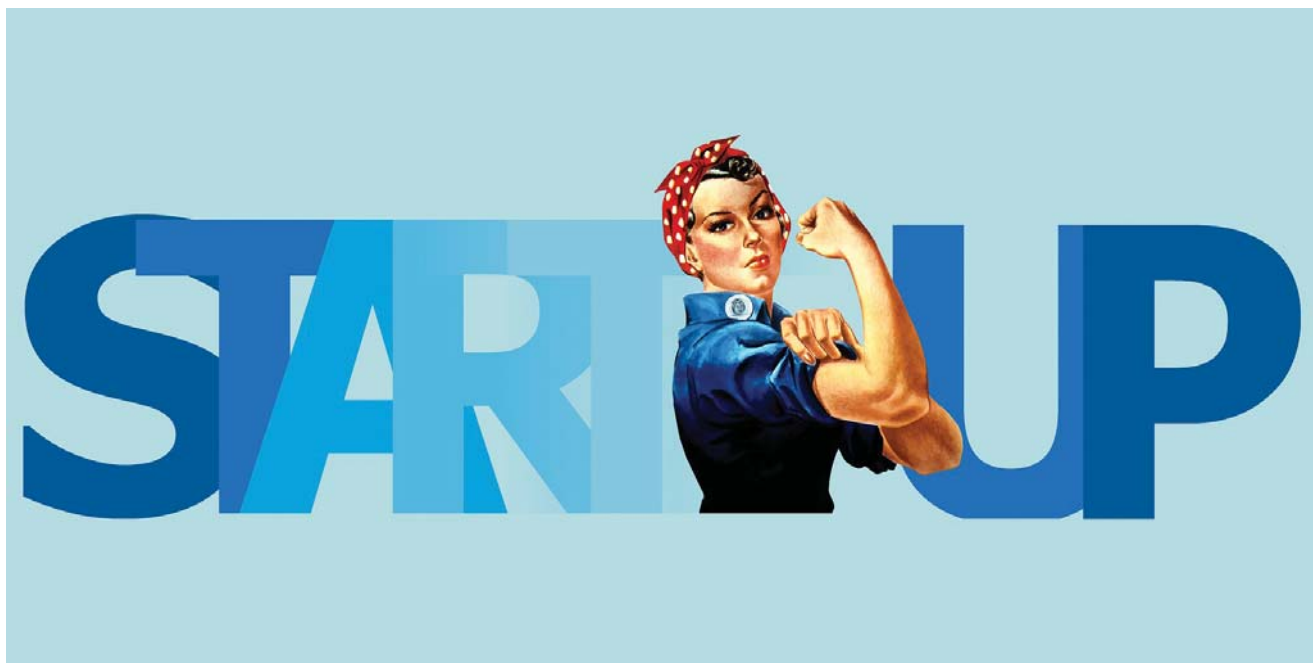
to child care, elderly care, maternity, paternity, adoption and wellness with crisp guidelines. A consideration in the employment contracts must be reserved for return to work guidelines along with the mandated safety provisions like usage of masks, social distancing, maintaining personal hygiene etc.

As remote work morphs into the mainstream workforce management model, the contracts should incorporate clauses and policy related to disciplinary, harassment, code of conduct and performance management procedures. With many enterprises buying medical insurance for employees to ward off the pandemic, the contracts need to add a section on insurance with detailed guidelines for usage. Moreover, contracts need to be modified and customised keeping in mind the business needs and nature of jobs spanning across diverse sectors like Information Technology, manufacturing, automotive, financial, governmental etc.

With the constant ebbing of employee protection given the changes in the workplace due to the pandemic, the linearity and stability of employment contracts are under a cloud. For the employees who toil day in and out to sustain businesses against the pandemic the reinvented employment contracts would be much-needed succour. 

About the Author

Amarpreet Bhamra is a business process management professional with 20 years of work experience in organisations such as Ernst Young, AP Moller Maersk, Tech Mahindra Business Services, Synchrony Financial, TATA Business Support Services and GE Capital International Services. Amarpreet holds a double post graduate in Communications and English respectively. He has an Advanced Diploma in Financial Management from Indian School of Business Management and Administration.



From Hustling To Leading

BY SUNITHA LAL



If you look at how startups approach product development, you'll find that they are comfortable with the ambiguity that it entails; however, when it comes to one's own leadership journey, that's not the case. Mistakes are remembered, and ambiguity makes people uncomfortable. What if we approached leadership development the way we would approach product development - openness to not knowing, willingness to experiment, acceptance of ambiguity, focus on design thinking, and iteratively executing on this?

Idea to a Possibility

Let's back up a bit and look at what a startup is: an idea being brought to life by a group of enthusiastic and passionate people. There is no structure; 15-20 people work together,

picking up whatever lands on the table and rolling with the punches. Bringing the idea to life is the only focus, and any capability-building that happens in the team is a happy coincidence. Once the idea turns into a saleable product or service and tastes success, the organisation begins to grow - in terms of goals and people.

The Pains of Growing

At this point, for every startup, remaining a flat organisation ceases to be a viable option. It will need structure and org design (the organisation being around 200+ people by now) to solve for complexity as the vision moves from - an idea to a possibility to an offering, and then to an organisation. These complexities come not only in the deliverables but also in our willingness to upskill,

“While startups are all about innovation and disruption, there is so much information out there on how to become better leaders and on the different leadership philosophies. The problem is that we just don't have people engaging with the information deeply enough to reap the benefits.”

cross-skill, let go, let in; this is called growth. This phase can upend things for the organisation if its people don't or can't grow in tandem.

Team members are expected to not just deliver but also to start thinking of the future and start playing the role of leaders. They have to move from the “just fix it” approach to leading a team in solving problems. There is also the problem of letting go – where earlier they owned every problem brought to the table, they now have to let go to new lateral hires, newly carved out functions and leaders, and a newly designed process and workflow - this is perceived as the introduction of hierarchy. At this point, there can be a flux as the early joiners start questioning their relevance and new joiners jostle to find their footing in the organisation.

The Road to Leadership

While startups are all about innovation and disruption, there is *so much* information out there on how to become better leaders and on the different leadership philosophies. The problem is that we just don't have people engaging with the information deeply enough to reap the benefits.

What helps is going back to the basics, looking at your own personality as an organisation, picking up what inspires you, and testing it out over a period of time.


This is what is working for Ather Energy:

- A blend of conventional wisdom and technology. We rely on established methods, and use the data we obtain from them to develop our leadership training content. For example, we use psychometric assessments during hiring to assess role and culture fit. This data then feeds into the org-wide competency and leadership development frameworks.
- We also design programs keeping not just classroom experiences in mind but also curate learning experiences offering Socratic discussions, reflective sessions, mentorship, coaching, and hands-on projects.

- In our leadership development framework, team members are organised into leadership cohorts based on their leadership requirements. We strongly believe it is essential to weave leadership capability into our DNA, whether it is managing self or leading others. A lot of cross-functional teams lead large projects at Ather, so most of our leadership interventions are around Transactional Analysis, Group Dynamics, Systems Theory, and Design Thinking. We also have a thin managerial layer - we believe self-motivated members need less managerial supervision. This also encourages high ownership among our teams. The drive *to do* and the ownership *to deliver* are very intrinsic in a structure like ours.

- We believe in self-paced learning and as a startup, we are cognizant of our budgets. This is where new-age learning platforms such as Coursera and LinkedIn Learning are helpful.

Have we done something out-of-the-ordinary? Well, no. What we use are from standard HR, Organisational Behaviour, and Leadership textbooks. What is different is the depth at which we engage with these concepts. If we dive deeper we realise these concepts are tied together - the focus, thus, is to bring out the interconnectedness.

Capability-building isn't pushed on the individual by their manager or the org; it is a commitment they make to themselves. This approach requires context-setting and explaining the 'why' and arriving at our True North. 

About the Author

Sunitha Lal is the CHRO at Ather Energy. She is passionate about exploring and curating organisational culture and is a strong proponent of the oral tradition of storytelling. She is the author of *Dotting the Blemish and Other Stories*, a collection of short stories about women that reflect and comment on the inherent prejudices we have as a society.



Leadership Development: Think Like There Is No Box

Talent development teams have a lot to offer. Those that remain boxed by past ideologies and practices will quickly be left right there, in the past. Those who seize the moment to change will catapult their organisations into a brighter future.

BY SWARNA SUDHA SELVARAJ

A recent Gartner survey done with more than 800 HR leaders revealed the top three HR priorities in organisations. What's interesting is that two of the top three relate to talent development — one, building critical skills and competencies in the workforce, and two, developing a bench of future leaders.

Programmes are Boxes

Leadership development programmes are often operated within a proverbial 'box', such as through a six-month curriculum.

During planning sessions, HR teams are tasked with finding innovative solutions to new leadership challenges by 'thinking outside the box'.

What's ironic is that the people who tell others this done-to-death cliché have themselves not thought outside the box. But let's face it — what they're really suggesting is that we've virtually confined our thinking to a limiting box. We need to break out from operating in the same pattern, from the limits of a fixed mindset, and challenge our assumptions.

If necessity is the mother of invention, a crisis is the

mother of leadership development. A crisis gives birth to new leaders. My view is not that we need to have crises to have leaders emerging but that we need to constantly create opportunities for employees to develop themselves as leaders rather than just have boxed programmes.

Let's make a new assumption: *there is no box.*

The 4E Experiential Leadership Development Model

Organisations must build a culture for their employees to **Emerge**, **Enhance** and **Evol** while being constantly supported through the

connecting E, i.e., **Educate** (*refer to the figure*). Erstwhile leadership development programmes could be revamped and integrated with this model.

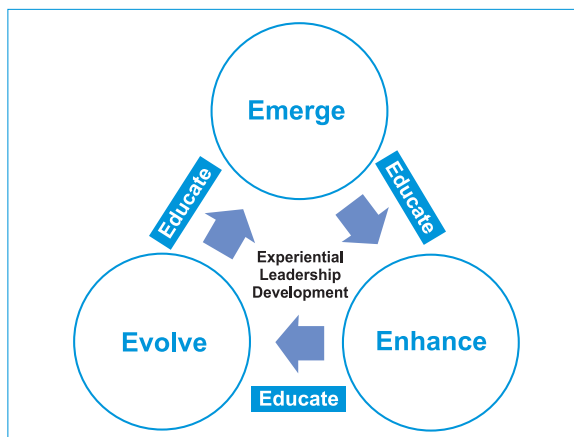
EMERGE

Gunjan Saxena became the first female Air Force pilot to fly in a combat zone during the Kargil War. However, she suffered hardships right from her childhood when she said she wanted to fly. She was told of every reason why she shouldn't or couldn't, despite her obvious talents. But she developed her skills patiently.

Apart from Gunjan's father, who chose to focus on her ability and not her gender, the Air Force commanding officer recognised her potential and trained her to accelerate her development by bringing out her strengths and talents.

Gunjan was eventually called upon to unleash her powers in a battle and emerged as the most efficient pilot during the Kargil War. She emerged as a leader through her expertise.

The lesson from this story is to keep an open mind in identifying emerging leaders and go beyond stereotypical



The 4E Model

choices like what the commanding officer did with Gunjan. For instance, consider what a typical caricature of a leader looks like — a classic extrovert. Introverts often get overlooked for leadership roles, even though ultra-successful people like Warren Buffet and Bill Gates are well-known examples of introverts. Moreover, study after study has shown that more introverted people come equipped with critical leadership advantages.

It's not always the more extroverted person on the team who is the most logical choice for developing as a leader. **Identify people with diverse sets and capabilities**, help them become aware of their unique skills, and develop their expertise to help them emerge as future leaders.

ENHANCE

The Indian Men's Cricket team recently scored a historic victory against Australia. The unique premise was that the Indian team did not have most of its best players, with the Captain on paternity leave and many of the key players injured. The team primarily comprised a young, emerging squad of Cricketers who took on the world-beating Aussies and pulled off a miracle win.

Emerging leaders often get opportunities to **enhance** themselves when leadership above them is not there. For instance, when someone senior is on vacation or leave, emerging leaders will step up to fill the vacuum.

An emerging leader can also shadow a more senior person by getting opportunities to, say, become manager for a day or even a week. **Job shadowing** allows an employee to get a real sense of what the role entails and apply expertise firsthand. Moreover, the senior can gauge the depth of an emerging leader's expertise and recommend what needs to be learned and improved.

Provide emerging leaders the opportunities to apply and enhance their expertise in different scenarios. Both the employees and the organisation must be willing to take risks and provide multiple opportunities for employees to gain exposure to diverse teams and complex challenges. One way to do that is job rotation. **Job rotation** provides challenging, hands-on learning opportunities to employees where they can apply their expertise into different teams, functions or geographies while building cross-functional knowledge and getting greater exposure to the business at large.

EVOLVE

From San Francisco to Bengaluru, an all-women air pilot team flew over the North Pole on the world's longest air route, completing the longest non-stop commercial flight ever operated by an airline in India. We wouldn't have known this was even possible if it hadn't been tried.

Leadership development reaches its full potential when emerged, and enhanced leaders get transformative opportunities to spread their wings and **evolve**. Do not protect them in a bubble wrap. Let them think like an owner.

Start with giving promising leaders the authority to make certain decisions. Give them full ownership of some projects, wherein they are not required to run every idea by you. Let them take more responsibilities. Make sure they also have some 'dabble time' set aside to work on new ideas. When they take smart risks yet fail, don't beat them up. Encourage them to learn from their failure and put safeguards in place to not repeat the same mistake.

EDUCATE


A leader accumulates a wealth of knowledge over the years. That's what the connecting 'E' of the

leadership development model is all about: educate others with what you have learned so they can develop into leaders themselves. Share your expertise and tacit knowledge through formal and informal learning programmes, mentoring and coaching, enabling budding leaders to emerge, enhance, and evolve.

Get ready for the future of work

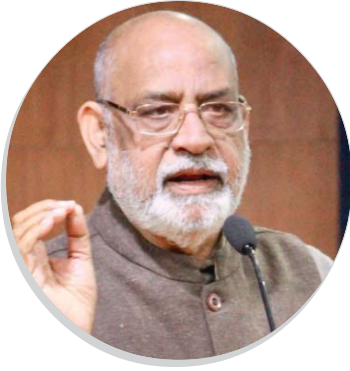
The World Economic Forum estimates that 50% of employees will need to be reskilled by 2025. Gartner research recently showed that only 44% of employees trust their leaders and managers to navigate any crisis well.

Talent Development teams have a lot to offer. Those that remain boxed by past ideologies and practices will quickly be left right there, in the past. Those who seize the moment to change will catapult their organisations into a brighter future.

The 4E Experiential Model could help you revamp your leadership development approach during this critical time of intense change and uncertainty. 

About the Author

Swarna Sudha Selvaraj is the Head of Talent Development for TCS Europe, UK & Ireland. She is a vibrant HR leader with over 18 years of work experience gained from association with TCS and Murugappa Group of Companies.



What Anchors Agile Leaders

Most of us have had multiple boards of directors throughout our career. Each one of us had a role model, a hero, a coach or a mentor at different points of our lifetime. However one rarely systematically utilised this veritable goldmine.

BY DR VIRENDRA P SINGH

Leadership is not a lone walk in the woods

The onslaught of coronavirus in early 2020 highlighted, in a big way, the role and power of three leadership attributes: agility, resilience and compassion. “An unstoppable revolution is underway and it is Agile”. That’s what Agility Guru Stephen Denning said in his marquee book, *The Age of Agile* (Denning 2018). Agility is not about doing more work in less time; it is about generating more value from less work. It is about becoming nimble leveraging three laws: i) Law of the small teams, ii) Law of the customer and iii) Law of the Network.

Prof Linda Hill (Harvard Business School) dribbles this agility ball forward to suggest that agile leadership is about leveraging, and not reacting, to the turbulence around you. She also recommended in the October 20 article in MIT Sloan Management Review that an agile leader should manage three constituencies: team, network and self. (Hill, 2020) As far as managing self is concerned, Hill urges agile leaders to a continued commitment of their well-being and development.

Being an agile leader in times of crisis requires a continued commitment to self-development and holistic well-being. Prof Hill cautions that leaders always run



the risk of a burnout. She exhorts agile leaders to surround themselves with people who could really operate as a PBoD (Personal Board of Directors) advising, course-correcting and anchoring them. PBoD is admittedly not a novel concept; however, it assumes substantial significance in these tumultuous times.

Leaders in the age group of 30-55 years, we reckon, need a PBoD more than ever to not only fathom turbulent waters but to navigate the life and career ship to the next port of call, safely, optimally and profitably.

PBoD: Axe Sharpeners

Sharpen your axe. That’s Stephen Covey’s seventh habit of highly effective people. In these highly

complex and ambiguous times, a leader can’t sharpen his cognitive and affective axe effectively on his own. He needs support: physical, mental, emotional and existential (spiritual). The PBoD fulfils this need.

Chandragupta had Chanakya. Alexander had Aristotle. Arjun had Krishna. Gandhi had Gokhale. Dhritrashtra had Vidur. Almost everybody with any semblance of greatness or otherwise had a mentor. These mentors were persons of rich accomplishments. Gandhi described his mentor Gokhale as “*pure as crystal, gentle as a lamb, brave as a lion and chivalrous to a fault and the most perfect man in the political field*”. (Talwalkar 2015) Aristotle taught Alexander a whole range of

medicine, philosophy, morals, religion, logic, and art.

Gandhi's description of Gokhale encapsulates the attributes of a PBoD. Personal virtues (honesty, transparency, deftness and dexterity, vision, courage, chivalry) combined and mellowed with professional competencies (subject matter expertise, worldview) paint a picture of PBoD members.

PBoD: Rationale & DNA

PBoD connotes a group of individuals one assembles, gives it some semblance of structure and shape, to navigate one's career and life in general. Most of us have had multiple boards of directors throughout our career. Each one of us had a role model, a hero, a coach or a mentor at different points of our lifetime. However one rarely systematically utilised this veritable goldmine.

Insightful research carried out at Olivet Nazarene University, Illinois, USA suggests that (only) 44 per cent respondents out of a sample size of 3000 ever had a mentor. It is a fairly impressive data even for a matured economy


like the USA. (Olivet Nazarene University, 2019). We could not access reliable corresponding data for India. Prof Hills exhorts us to make use of this collective body of professionals who can advise, guide, and assist us as and when challenges and opportunities visit us in our 40-50 years of work life.

One may wonder if one coach or mentor is not good enough. Why does one need a PBoD? Whilst a coach or a mentor gives a certain worldview or counsel, PBoD gives you a variety of choices and possibly handholds you when you are traversing the hills and mountains of life challenges. As you change roles, occupations, industries or organisations, or relocate to different countries, you need to build and leverage a diverse "personal board of advisors" that fits with your career aspirations and stressed lives.

PBoD is a dynamic entity. You shall have to decide its terms of references including a time frame, meeting cadence, code of conduct, and relationship matrix. Check out the PBoD Matrix below. Ideally, PBoD members should feel valued,

recognised and gratified, emotionally and financially as well, in this journey. An agile leader should be continuously alert to extract best out of this small network of well-wishers & advisors. This is both an opportunity and challenge.

Agility, as conceived by researchers at IMD Business School, Lausanne, Switzerland and metaBeratung, GMBH Germany, has four cognitive attributes - Humility, Adaptability, Vision, Engagement. Agility demands humility (accepting one's vulnerability & inadequacies and openness to learning from others), adaptability (flexibility and non-dependence on one school of wisdom), vision (where one seeks to go) and engagement (bonding with all, listening than talking).

PBoD helps one to build these attributes to make a difference in one's life constituencies. 

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About the Author

Dr Virendra P Singh is a distinguished professor with Jaipuria Institute of Management. Earlier, he had been Advisor Organisation Development, Patanjali Ayurved Ltd & Executive Director HR with RJ Corp Pepsi FOGO, Pizza Hut & KFC.

| PBoD Matrix | | |
|--|---|---|
| Pillars | Focus | Actions |
| Purpose (What & Why) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal & professional wellbeing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing status review. Acquisition of new capabilities Unlearning outdated knowledge and skills Capability renewal and fortification |
| Process & Platform (When & Where) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustained goal pursuit Flexible | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fortnightly sharing updates (including urgent matters) Monthly/ formal review (face to face if possible) Coaching, Mentoring, Counseling, Training & Facilitating |
| People(PBoD Member) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sparring partners Advisors Emotional support & affirmations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Idea facilitation Critical analysis Ruthless compassionate review Selfless co travelling Pure, gentle, brave, chivalrous |
| Payout | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seamless Cognitive & Affective Expansion Recognition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flow & Flourishing Engagement Multifaceted Value Add |



Engaging Employees In 2021

Never has the entire workforce been remote at the same time before 2020. And thus, communication is the bedrock of employee experience at this time. The more it is, the better!

BY JITENDRA PANIHAR

It's almost been a year since we started working remotely and, if the signs are to be read correctly, then remote is here to stay for long. And engaging the most valuable assets for the organisation – its people – will still be a challenge in 2021. No one would have forecasted what 2020 would be like, however, the learnings we had can help us make 2021 a better year for all of us. While a new year brings hope, 2021 will also see a plethora of challenges and opportunities for organisations, when it comes to managing employees. While the recent development of the vaccines is positive news, corporates around the world will still be remote till we feel comfortable going back to the office. And employee engagement in the coming year will be a summation of what experiences you provide to your team members during this virtual or hybrid phase.

Here is a list of themes I feel would be crucial to focus on when it comes to employee engagement in 2021:

Onboarding

We do miss the day one of our joining a new office, the team banter during the first meet, lunch with the assigned buddy, fun interactive induction games, getting our queries resolved in-person real-time, and everything related to an office set-up during the first few days of onboarding. The year 2020 also needed onboarding to go



'virtual' for all organisations working remotely and needed fine-tuning the existing processes.

Since remote working is here to stay for longer, onboarding experience in 2021 would also be crucial when it comes to engagement from the beginning of the employee life cycle. And this experience must be personalised to have a larger impact. Planning logistics (sending IT assets, tech support, and download on communication tools, onboarding resources, quizzes, and other training repositories) ahead of onboarding schedules is critical.

An onboarding kit (maybe even with a message from the Co-founders) would do wonders. A deck

run-through along with some fun virtual ice-breakers and short videos would make the first interactions engaging. It is important to consider the 'what's and the how's' to communicate. Also, get the team involved, assign a buddy, and get the Hiring Manager to be actively involved to curate the best experience.

Curating culture interventions for new joiners is crucial at this point in the absence of in-person presence. With the absence of in-person togetherness, inducting a new person into your organisation's culture is tricky yet important. Make sure they know about your core values and decision support

process from day one; reinforce it in regular intervals too. Ask for feedback and work on things that can be bettered.

A planned, personalised, value-driven immersive experience is the key to get a team member engaged from day one.

Communication

Never has the entire workforce been remote at the same time before 2020. And thus, communication is the bedrock of employee experience at this time. The more it is, the better! Frequent and transparent communication will be extremely crucial in making sure the trust remains. Accepting and embracing uncertainty with constant communication will be the key in 2021. Also, communication is a 2-way street - so listening is an important aspect! Keeping a pulse check with surveys and polls on the well-being and remote work life and routine would be important to understand the challenges people face during the remote.

The feedback will help you understand and analyse issues like burn-out, virtual fatigue, work-life imbalance and even performance issues. One-on-one conversations with the HR folks can be a great breather for all.

Anonymous feedback has merit as it allows team members to speak their minds as freely as possible. They are also comfortable voicing their complaints and this allows measuring the collective sentiments of your team. Continuous interactions with the larger teams especially during town halls, celebrations, festivals and work anniversaries should be now calendarised in 2021 to ensure you do not miss an opportunity to bring people together - even virtually!

Recognition

Spot awards in offices can be a great hit! Even a verbal appreciation on the floor in front of your team

is huge when people were working from offices. With things changing drastically in the way we work, it has become a challenge to effectively use recognition as an employee engagement tool. Therefore, it needs an overhaul. We need to look at a more personalised and a structured approach where recognitions are constant, beyond work and meaningful. This is needed to keep people motivated and instil pride in what they do.


“The year 2021 will surely see a surge in organisation-wellness budgets and initiatives to support employees. Associations with corporate wellness partners could be an ideal way to approach this issue since they have structured programs and initiatives to address wellness concerns.”

Health and Wellness

The rise of remote work and the blurred lines between life and work has caused concerns around burn-out and fatigues. People are feeling overstressed and burdened due to work and no connectivity with the peer group. Isolation due to lockdowns has been a huge blow to mental health as well. Employers must address this. The year 2021 will surely see a surge in organisation-wellness budgets and initiatives to support employees. Associations with corporate wellness partners could be an ideal way to approach this issue since they have structured programs and initiatives to address wellness concerns.

Culture and Values

Organisation culture not only helps attract and retain talent, but it also impacts performance. Culture is not how you work but also your decision-making process. Culture for a lot of organisations would have taken a hit in 2020 due to lack of physical togetherness making it difficult to cement your shared beliefs with the larger section. And thus adaptability is crucial. Cultures which hire resilient and adaptable folks would go a long way. Storytelling has been an important part of culture and value sharing. And curating those stories and exhibits will help you propagate the desired culture. A culture of feedback and development through various channels and interventions would likely to grow in 2021. Keeping your people in the heart of all decisions you make.

As technology grows in importance, adopting tech in all things “engagement” will be a plus. The rise of soft skills - adaptability, resilience and responsiveness to change will define key decisions. Empathy and flexibility will be the key components in creating great employee experiences and in turn, keep them engaged through thick and thin. 

About the Author

Jitender Panihar is the Chief People Officer at MoEngage Inc., Bengaluru. He comes with a rich experience of around 13 years of delivering change and transformations across Indian & APAC geographies. His specialities include - HR Strategy, Organisation Design and Restructuring, Leadership Development and Alignment, and Talent Management. Before MoEngage, Jitender has worked with major companies like- Healthkart.com, PwC, and Deloitte.



Quantum Shift To Employee Experience

Gone are the days when employees could be satisfied with once-a-year health checkups at the workplace. Today, providing holistic wellness has taken up space as a hygiene need, a necessary service that organisations should provide for employee welfare.

BY KOUSHALYA RAGHAVACHARI



A year ago, if someone had told us that organisations would encourage, even mandate employees to work from home for months on end, it could have only been a lead up to a punchline. Fast-forward to today and the workforce expects nothing less than disruptive talent practices – like permanent telecommuting and Flexi-working options or on-demand access to wellbeing solutions – to keep them engaged.

The neoteric changes of a rapidly transforming global economy have led to a corresponding focus shift in the HR psyche from Employee

Engagement (EE) to Employee Experience (EX). Before we delve deeper, let us pause for a moment to recap how EE and EX differ from each other.

The Changing Playbook

Employee engagement is a simple cause and effect mechanism – it allows for the organisation to create, shape, and essentially MACD (move, add, change, delete) an employee's perception of the various value propositions that the organisation has to offer. As a response to measures management takes employees tell us how committed they are, how

charged they are to bring their best performance to the table, and how likely they are to continue being part of the organisation.

Primarily focused on stickiness and satisfaction, employee engagement has traditionally been measured through surveys – earlier annual, half-yearly, and more recently through weekly / monthly pulse surveys. These surveys provide a fair insight into the morale (in the case of less frequent) and the mood (in the case of frequent surveying) of employees.

However, gauging and altering the level to which employees are engaged is only one of the steps in the ongoing journey of their experience of the culture, values, purpose, and brand that their organisation stands for. EX goes beyond this, by seeing the world from the perspective of an employee, shifting the core of power from policies and processes to the people for whom they are created. Organisations that successfully manage EX have done so by changing their approach from influencing transactions and processes, to the overall adventure that the organisation and employee embark together on.

The Dotted Line between EX & CX

So why is EX the talk of the town? Both data and common sense tell us the irrefutable influence employee experience has on customer experience. Employees who have been touched by great experiences become evangelists, narrators of credible brand propositions about their organisation to the customers they come in touch with. Creating great employee experiences sets the tone and leads the way on desirable attitudes and behaviours towards all stakeholders, pulling focus back to emotions over bottom-line.

The core leadership of an organisation that I was associated with constantly encouraged all

employees to communicate and ideate with customers directly, and to break hierarchies and step outside typical centres of power. The outcome has been a resounding increase in viable solution prototypes, which incidentally have a positive impact on top or bottom-line too.

“Employees who have been touched by great experiences become evangelists, narrators of credible brand propositions about their organisation to the customers they come in touch with.”

Creating Moments that Matter in a VUCA World

As cubicles give way to home offices and the lines between working and personal hours blur, the challenge of engaging a virtual workforce emerges – how do we influence employees who aren't in the same room with us, do not experience our multi-million-dollar infrastructure, and when everyone can have their corner-office right at home?

This decade has thrust us into a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environment. As technology is changing the velocity, momentum, and trajectory of the stakeholder's wants and needs, the essential DNA of the worker is also shifting. The time is ripe to set the tone of employee experience. Envisioning, creating, and sustaining a great EX in a VUCA world is a multi-faceted approach. Principal among these are:

Go Forth & be Agile

Agility is not a framework or an SOP document; it is a mindset, the core of which is a fire in the belly

to stay ahead of the curve. In an organisation that truly embraces agility, hierarchies and authority disappear and ideas and initiative become the core of every action.

Agile behaviour thrives where ideation is encouraged without fear of ridicule or retribution, empowering HR practitioners to explore beyond frameworks towards creating moments that matter to stakeholders. Thus, agility in human capital functions should start at the top, and be part of the culture, not just the scorecard.

The offshore technology development wing of a leading insurance provider I was associated with, created a pathbreaking approach, moving away from prescriptive, top-down diversity targets, to empowering representative employees to choose the pace and modality through which diversity was created. Shifting the narrative from a corporate mandate to individual ownership shifted the loci of power, transforming employees into sponsors of D&I.

Shift from Enabler to Visionary

To have a seat at the table, people operations should transform from being business enablers to visionaries. HR practitioners must add rapid change management to their toolbox, moving with the speed of business to identify future goals and create an ecosystem for employees to reach that future in the present.

As trusted advisors, HR should focus on leading the drivers of EX, the key of which include:

- **Fostering an inclusive culture** that is accepting of diverse and daring viewpoints and creating a sense of belonging, while allowing employees to maintain their individuality;
- **Creating meaningful goals** that not just align with business imperatives but also factor

individual capabilities and leverage on them, helping employees realise the impact of their work on the larger objectives of their teams and organisation to bring meaning to everyday work;

- **Interdependent teams** that derive value from shared wins, creating alliances for success;
- **Leadership integrity**, demonstrating a commitment to actionable strategy and dependability, underscoring the vitality of an engaged ecosystem.

Celebrate Learning & Autonomy

Remember those good old days when we could all band together in a classroom for training programs? Yes, that is not going to happen anytime soon now. A multitude of factors has culminated into an undeniable change in the learning landscape. Be it the era of OTT providers changing experience benchmarks, an appetite for on-demand learning, or simply the ineffectiveness of traditional offerings, L&D functions just cannot be the same anymore.

Content consumption trends indicate a shift from role-based

learning to self-directed learning that hybridize work, life and play skills. Leverage on this to create employee development journeys that allow the individual to have ownership over the what, when and how.

One of the organisations that I worked for developed an extensive digital learning academy that provides content from a variety of industry-leading vendors, enabling not just micro-and app-based learning, but allowing sandboxed environments, cloud labs, one-on-one mentor- and peer-led content, and lifestyle masterclasses, creating immersive learning environments that resulted in higher rates of consumption, completion, and stickiness.


Focus on Holistic Wellness

It has taken a 'blue ocean event' like the current global pandemic to get organisations to focus on employee wellness. The undeniable truth is that an employee's mental, physical & spiritual wellness influence what they bring to work. Gone are the days when employees could be satisfied with once-a-year health checkups at the workplace. Today, providing holistic wellness

has taken up space as a hygiene need, a necessary service that organisations should provide for employee welfare. This becomes even more important in the virtual work environs, where employees are isolated, and watercooler conversations and (in-person) team lunches have turned sporadic.

As workers were thrown into a remote working model early last year, one of the organisations I worked at moved with agility, setting up a SWAT team for virtual engagement. The team, consisting of a cross-section of experts, created capsule-sized programs tailored for various employee groups, including awareness on ergonomics, hacks for leveraging technology for deeper team connect, and expert-led programs on developing resilience, among others.

EX: An Iterative Journey

Engagement and experience are ever-changing and ever-evolving. It is imperative to acknowledge that there is a multitude of factors that impact an experiential journey, and not all of them can be influenced by people practices. Human interactions are dynamic and fluid, and it's well to accept that not all experiences are going to turn out good. The key is to constantly, consciously, curate touchpoints focused on and tailored to individual needs, creating micro-environments that nurture a lasting relationship between the employee and the organisation. 



About the Author

Koushalya Raghavachari is an HR professional with a career span of 13+ years in HR Business Partnering, Compensation Management, Organisational Development & Employee Engagement. Currently, she is Senior Manager and Business Partner at Tata Communication.



An Enhanced Working Arrangement

In a collaborative tech-based work environment, leadership will have to ensure that employee voices are heard and performances recognised by organising more frequent on-the-spot recognition initiatives.

BY PRASHANT UTREJA



Owing to the turmoil brought in by the COVID-19, most businesses are in reset mode. With the government unlocking services in a phased manner, businesses have started opening offices. As per the guidelines, minimum employee attendance can be maintained during regular work timings. While allaying fears and uncertainties among employees is of paramount importance, organisations have more or less adjusted to the new ways of working. For example, organisations have hit the ground

running and accommodated the work-from-home format for many of its employees – and in some cases, on a permanent basis.

However, given the unprecedented situation, companies are faced with two great dichotomies:

- The certainty and stability of the job role for employees
- Continued relevance and clarity of the business environment for organisations

In the past few months, a strong and inspiring leadership to help



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teams navigate through these turbulent and unpredictable times remained essential. For instance, every business leader had to adopt a more humane approach than ever as the line between work and personal life blurred. Apart from working remotely, employees were also simultaneously attending to exigences at home such as online schooling of children or supporting a senior citizen, not to mention the emotional battle unleashed by the COVID-19, which was at a more personal level.

5 Key Principles” shaping an effective course of action

Understand this as a defining leadership moment

Adopt an agile and continuous learning mindset

Understand the perspectives of all and engage all stakeholders

Promote employee and company well-being

Balance medium-term needs and longer-term business objectives

In such a scenario, quick coordination among the IT, human resources, administration and business teams helped provide the necessary tech support and equipment for adjusting to the workfromhome format without compromising on the IT security guidelines. Due to these accommodations, attitudes and habits have changed, and for various organisations, things will never be the same again.

Most companies have been able to sustainably manage business and customer engagements through flexible and remote working arrangements. They have engaged with the leadership team and driven flexibility as a part of organisational culture. As a result, organisations have re-examined the work processes, tasks and job roles. After continuous engagement with the leadership team, companies have introduced comprehensive policies and programmes to support flexible work processes.

For most lending organisations, the announcement by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on moratorium led to changes at both the IT

systems and work processes level. The company had to ensure that its operations and collections resources serving the customer at the frontline are well-equipped in terms of system, training and leadership guidance.

“Addressing employees’ challenges and providing due assistance to help them settle will improve productivity. Honest communication is very vital in a remote working arrangement for better talent engagement and productivity.”

Readjusting to the new normal

In the new normal, leadership must look at recognition and feedback with a new lens. In a

collaborative tech-based work environment, the leadership will have to ensure that employee voices are heard, and performance is recognised immediately, by organising more frequent on-the-spot recognition initiatives.

Moreover, re-engaging employees in the office will remain a challenge. Given the huge amount of fear and anxiety among employees, leaders and managers will have to empathise with team members and understand where they are coming from. And listening to their views on how to integrate work processes will be vastly beneficial. Addressing employees' challenges on the personal front and commuting and providing due assistance to help them settle will improve productivity. Honest communication is very vital in a remote working arrangement for better talent engagement and productivity.

The other area is building growth and a resilient mindset, which essentially implies that employees should be able to deliver optimally, even in ambiguous situations. This is worth a great deal more than any financial or business training. Leaders cutting across departments and functions must continuously engage with their team members. On this basis, the leadership engagement framework will have to integrate diversity and inclusion goals. Committed leadership will help achieve business goals and harness people initiatives when the going gets tough.

The other area where engagement plays a critical role is job enrichment and strategic compensation. For example, companies can adopt a practice of recruiting internally for replacement hire. Business leaders can be tasked with the responsibility to align job roles with an organisation's strategy.

Strategic compensation practices like pay for performance

and flexible benefits are effective levers for employee engagement and productivity. This practice has been very effective in a remote working environment wherein organisations will have to respond with agility by redeploying team members from one function to support another function.

Employee well-being is inextricably linked to engagement and productivity. In the new normal, organisations must ensure that people practices supporting employee well-being are communicated to the last mile.

Considering that the present scenario is not a one-off situation, companies will have to ensure that in employees are provided with optimum support during medical exigencies. Companies need to work towards extending medical insurance benefits to all employees, and the leadership must come forward and support the initiative. Cross-functional teams need to work together to ensure business continuity.


“Employee well-being is inextricably linked to engagement and productivity. In the new normal, organisations must ensure that people practices supporting employee well-being are communicated to the last mile.”

The Roadmap Ahead

The World Economic Forum estimates that by 2022, 42% of core skills required to perform existing jobs are expected to change, with over 133 million new jobs created in major economies—and India will be one of the major economies.

Given the future predictions, talent engagement will be critical for organisations to have relevance in the marketplace. Strategic talent engagement will support employees in developing new skills and new networks.

Most organisations will have to view upskilling and reskilling as a long-term agenda, human resources (HR) and business teams must identify the skills that talent in various roles should acquire to stay relevant and ensure they have access to the digital resources that can help them develop the required skill-set. Conducting learning programmes keeping in mind the rapid deployment of resources within different parts of the business is now a continuous exercise.

Employee engagement and wellness will take centre-stage in the business world. For a long time, they have been viewed as the HR department's responsibility and not an integral part of business strategy. However, it is increasingly clear that unhealthy and unengaged employees are a drag on productivity, innovation, and the bottom line. Going forward, work flexibility will be the hallmark of the new normal and future promise will be on relevance over security. 

About the Author

Prashant Utreja is Chief Human Resources Officer, Reliance Capital. He has a diverse experience of over 21 years ranging from Plant HR, Business HR, Practice Lead HR to HR Leadership in businesses like Manufacturing, IT distribution, Banking, General Insurance, Non-Banking Finance Company (NBFC) and Home Finance Company (HFC). Prashant is a Senior Certified Professional (SCP) from SHRM Institute.

Don't Let Disappointments Get To You



RAJGOPAL NIDAMBOOR

Picture this. When something goes wrong somewhere, or when someone does not meet, or live up to our belief and/or fails to fulfil our trust and confidence. The parallels have one common thread running through — disappointment.

Disappointments can occur at any point in time — age, or maturity, being no bar. Not getting a bicycle as a kid to being turned down for a promotion, or pay hike, at the workplace, can lead to disappointment — with equal intensity.

Understand the Crux

A disagreeable reaction and loss of hope at varying stages of our lives

is what disappointment is all about, although the dictionary generalises and 'plays down' the idea. All the same, disappointments differ from one person to the other — of how you take it, or how others take and handle it, in a given, or not given, situation.

In our frenzied, hugely competitive world, where winning is everything, an ounce or pound of disappointment is a commonplace occurrence. It is also reality. It not only leads to cynicism, acrimony and low self-worth, but also anguish, harangue, rant and despondency.

It is not difficult to understand the elementary context of disappointment. Disappointment happens with regularity because

we are extremely obsessed with results. Remember — results, however well-planned and executed, are, by nature, variable. Not only that — once we get ourselves into such a ‘result-oriented mode’ we have done ourselves a bad turn. We have invited disappointment. The complexity also gets worse compounded because we often ‘deposit’ our hope on something that may not necessarily be accomplished in the manner and form we would have visualised, or envisaged.

This does not mean that disappointment should not occur, or even if it does it should not affect as much as it usually does. We are now not talking in terms of philosophy.

Well, the best thing to do, any which way you look at it, is to put on your thinking cap of reality and look at the cause as to why a certain disappointment occurred in a given situation.

When we dig into or analyse, the whole idea, we will not only begin to ‘find’ ourselves yet again but also understand our sensibilities, aside from our susceptibilities. This will strengthen our resolve to finding peace within ourselves — not outside — while accepting things and doing well the next time around.

Things to Do

When you experience or face disappointment, try to remain composed and in control of the situation. There is no point in flinging venom, tantrums or clenching your fists. Tempers don't bring peace.

Try to relax a bit, practice meditation, or yoga. If you, for any reason, cannot bring calm, look at yourself in the mirror — and, tell yourself that it's all part of life.

You will notice the difference — you will also feel a sense of positive respite emerging in your emotional state.

Now, bring into your focus positive statements. When you practice positive affirmations you will feel composed. The idea works because you will not curb, or cutback, your emotional state you were in earlier. You are immediately lifted to a higher level of consciousness and inner calm.

The following affirmations would be useful when you find yourself amid disappointment — the gloomy song of one's burden:

- This has happened; so, what? Maybe, I'm in for better days
- Any disappointment is not permanent. This too shall pass
- Let me release myself from the cause of disappointment. This can be a person or thing
- Maybe, better things or opportunities are waiting for me
- Everything happens for a reason — so, better things will happen for a reason too.

“Remember — results, however well- planned and executed, are, by nature, variable. Not only that — once we get ourselves into such a ‘result-oriented mode’ we have done ourselves a bad turn.”

Handy Ideas

There is a brace of handy ideas you'd use to come to grips with yourself too. Write a few lines for yourself over what happened — not about what you think went wrong.


- Recall everything you had significantly ‘invested’ in, or rather spent your time on a thing, or person, who did not live up to your ‘expectations.’

The age-old tenet is: expectations are misnomers; they are, at best, illusory. They don't do anyone any good

- Give full scope to detailing your feelings by ‘sculpting’ a letter to yourself. Include any other element that triggered the disappointment
- Read, re-read, and assimilate the entire content of the letter for 2-3 days in private. Once you have finished with it, just purge, or burn the letter.

Purging, or burning, the letter represents a spiritual element — it is linked to symbolic cleansing and liberation from the ‘polluted’ effects of disappointment or disenchantment. It is an effective practice that has been in vogue in a host of cultures for ages.

Most important — all our disappointments are not permanent. They are temporary set-backs. Think also of them as a way of freedom from your relationships with people, places, things and results.

The outcome is predictable. A new-fangled sense of tranquillity will begin to permeate your life and also being. You will move on and only be happier for it and, in the process, in harmonious control of yourself. 

About the Author

Rajgopal Nidamboor, PhD, is a wellness physician-writer-editor, independent researcher, critic, columnist, author and publisher. His published work includes hundreds of newspaper, magazine and web articles, as also essays, meditations, columns, and critiques on a host of subjects, aside from eight books on natural health, two coffee table tomes and an encyclopaedic treatise on Indian philosophy.

Purposefully Persistent

*Where does excellence come from? For many, the answer hinges, in large part, upon how talented one is. **SV Nathan**, Partner and Chief Talent Officer, Deloitte India, believes in one trait even more: persistence — a small word that makes a huge difference. That isn't to say talent does not matter, but it only goes so far without perseverance. Nathan was an outstanding student growing up, including being the batch topper at XLRI. However, for him, success lies beyond academic accomplishments. It's much more about what one overcomes and how. While perseverance does not always bring wins, it certainly brings a spirit of resilience, compassion, hope and gratefulness.*

BY ANKITA SHARMA



Q While early job experiences may not be the most challenging or monetarily rewarding, they certainly are formative. Could you give us an account of an unforgettable experience at your first job?

A My first job was with ICI India, and I've been influenced greatly by it. When I first started working, my job was to look after administration.

One wouldn't expect a topper from a leading business school to get into administration. That was the ego in me thinking aloud. It was not a job that I particularly liked being thrown into. But the rule was to go through different departments to understand the workings of the organisation.

Of my many responsibilities, transport administration was a difficult one. There were a limited number of cars, a couple of fire engines, and just one ambulance. One day, a gentleman came up to me and said he needed a car to go to the district headquarters. I replied that there were no cars available. He insisted he needed one urgently. One thing led to another, and he told me that he would complain if I did not assign him a car.

Eventually, he spoke to the general manager, who called me to his imposing office and gave me a dressing-down. He kept raising his voice and would not listen to my pleas. Whenever I wanted to say something, he would say, *'Don't speak! Just listen to me!'*

Suddenly, the door opened, and a gentleman rushed into the room and stood between the general manager and me. He looked at the general manager, and said, 'While the boy may be responsible, I am accountable.' He then looked at me and said, 'Nathan, you can go back to your desk.' I had no idea what happened. I quickly ran back to my desk. This gentleman was my manager, my first boss, Captain Arvind Nautiyal.

I learnt my **first leadership lesson** that day. **You have to stand up for your people.** That was a defining moment of my career, and I still remember it as if it happened yesterday.

Another impactful experience I had was with the same general manager I talked about earlier. He called me into his office one day and said he was having a problem with his sprained back, which the company-provided spring bed worsened. He needed me to arrange for a carpenter to go to his house and get a piece of plywood affixed to his bed to make it a flatbed instead of a spring bed.

When I reported to him saying that the job was done, he asked, 'Is there anything you've forgotten, Nathan?' I had no idea what he was talking about. I told him that I had completed the task, which he could check. He then asked for the invoice to pay for the work done. Surprised at being asked for such a trivial matter, I told him the bed belonged to the company, and the organisation bears the cost of all maintenance of the bed. His response staggered me: 'The spring bed provided by the company is a standard-issue, and what I asked for was customisation. Now, tell me, who should pay for it?' That day, I learned a lesson in **integrity**.

Such lessons are not apparent. They're not written on walls. Leaders don't speak about them, and they're not a part of the induction when people join an organisation.

Q Company culture has been typically built around in-person experiences in an office, with most people co-located. How are you nurturing culture from afar and preserving the "special sauce" at Deloitte?

A Fostering inclusion is a big part of our culture. Being inclusive demands a lot of one's time and awareness, especially in a virtual setting. When having a meeting in a conference room of an office, it's easy to see who has spoken, who has not, and how to bring everyone into the conversation. But in a remote world, we have to make a lot more of an effort to make out who has and hasn't made their voice heard. We must be able to hear one smile. We have become hypersensitive of including everyone, which is not easy but can be done. I know of many who keep a list of people on the call and keep a tab of those who have not spoken and bring them into the conversation.

Standing up for one another is also a core part of our culture. During these difficult times, we have been spending a lot of time and effort in staying in touch with our people. All our executive assistants devote the majority of their time staying in touch with people. Additionally, managers and the HR team are proactive and thoughtful about connecting with colleagues and understanding their individual needs. With such forethought and effort, we ensure that distance doesn't become a barrier to our culture.

Q How do leaders at Deloitte exemplify a wellbeing-oriented culture and support employees in integrating their personal and work lives?

A There are several ways leaders lead the way and set the tone for everyone else at Deloitte. For instance, I would never send a meeting request to someone at 6:30 in the evening because I understand it infringes on somebody else's

Rapid Fire

- **Favourite quote:** *Water cuts rock.*
- **A movie title that best describes you:** *The Gladiator*
- **Describe the year 2020 in 3 words:** Tumultuous. Heartbreaking. Learning
- **Describe yourself in 3 words:** Authentic. Friendly. Teacher.
- **Complete these sentences:**
 - If not an HR, I would have been... a teacher.
 - I strongly believe in... giving more than what I get.
- **What comes to your mind when you hear these words?**
 - Resilience: Rock
 - Curiosity: Necessary
 - Setback: Temporary

time. I might start my day at 8 a.m. and end it at 8 p.m. However, I don't ask anyone to come in on a call at, say, 7 in the evening, because people have their own lives and work schedules. We encourage people to keep normal hours between 9 a.m and 6 p.m each day. Moreover, every day between 1:00 and 2:00 in the afternoon, we strictly do not schedule any meetings or calls because it's lunchtime!

Moreover, while empathy is always crucial, it is even more vital in difficult times. Here's an example. During the early days of the pandemic, there was an employee who went missing. Nobody knew where she was. In the evening, her parents called the police and tried everything else to trace her but to no avail. A group of our employees quickly took their cars, scooters, or whatever they had, and went out in a radius of around 10 km trying to find out if she was in any restaurant or other hangout. At around 1 a.m., they found her sitting somewhere all alone at a coffee shop.

I remember this particular incident because one of our managers spent the rest of the

night talking to the girl and gently persuaded her to get home and escorted her. The manager demonstrated what empathetic leadership is all about. This and many such instances exemplify how leaders (and everyone, really) go the extra mile to take care of people.

We've also introduced several programs to support employees' holistic wellbeing — emotional, mental, physical, and financial.

Q Year after year, Deloitte's Global Human Capital Trends report has shown that developing future-ready leaders is a pressing concern among organisations. Moreover, with companies becoming flatter and more agile, many young professionals become leaders

in their 20s and 30s. A popular study has also revealed that while the average age of first-time managers is 30, the average age of those in leadership development programs is 42. How can organisations invest in developing first-time managers even if they don't have much budget?

A Organisations can't merely toss someone into a leadership role and leave that person in the dark. A suitable programme must be in place to prepare employees for their new roles and cultivate the behaviours and mindsets they need to succeed. At Deloitte, leadership development is pervasive at every level. However, your question is about developing leaders on a low budget.

Several years ago, I was working with Sterling Holiday Resorts. A lot of people that we brought from the market were not those who had education from top universities. We got people with outstanding attitudes, with the will and hunger to succeed in the organisation. We wanted to start a programme on helping them develop core management skills, something like a six-month MBA with a difference. Now, my previous company was a multinational, which had enough money to invest in training programmes. Here, however, the budget was a constraint.

From training managers to business leaders, many people put their heads together to figure out the elements of the programme. Most of those who delivered the programme were average in terms of academic accomplishments but among the finest in their mindset and attitude. The programme was a huge success, and the before-after difference in participants was spectacular.

You can achieve terrific results even with limited resources if you have the right vision and business support. The place where we did these training programmes was unlike where multi-nationals would organise such events. There were no great venues, fancy arrangements, or big-name faculty. However, today, if you ask those people, they don't remember the place or the food. But they still remember the transformational experience. Incidentally, each one who went through this program is doing outstanding in their lives.

Another big learning for me was that a can-do attitude trumps academic excellence hands down. Academically, I have always been among the top students. Therefore, my idea of a bright person was related to academic excellence. However, academic accomplishments are just one part; the way you apply what you've learned and having the right attitude are far more critical. **HC**

Up-Close and Personal

Q Has there been a moment when you felt overwhelmed as an HR leader since the pandemic?

A Being overwhelmed is an understatement. We lost two of our people to the pandemic. A few of our employees' family members passed away, too. I starkly remember a young employee who lost her husband, father, mother, and aunt in a span of just 14 days due to COVID-19. They were joint family who, because they stayed together, contracted the virus. We went out of our way to support her with medical coverage.

Much later, she called me and said, *'I want to thank you because you supported me through this. More than what the firm did for me financially, everyone stood by me saying: We are here for you. That, for me, is the biggest support I can ever get. I've lost my family, but I have my Deloitte Family'*. How does one respond to that? I had tears in my eyes.

Q Are you planning to do something new in 2021 that you've never done before?

A I plan to write a book this year.

Q What would we be surprised to learn about you?

A You might be surprised to know that I am a good cook. I can also do handwriting and signature analysis — also known as graphology.

Q What's your most significant learning from the pandemic experience?

A Life is transient. Care, connectedness, and empathy have assumed greater importance for me. For instance, when on calls, we tend to multitask, checking emails, being preoccupied with our to-do list, and getting sidetracked by our thoughts. The crazy, demanding world we live in has become crazier. Now is a great time to think about what it means to truly 'be here now'.

I try to be utterly mindful of what I am doing by working on one thing at a time and doing it wholeheartedly. When I am talking to someone on the phone, I strive to attend to that person as if he/she were the most important individual in the world.

HUL Rolls Out Policy To Help Staff Combat Domestic Abuse

BY ANUSHRUTI SINGH

Hindustan Unilever Ltd (HUL), a FMCG (fast-moving consumer goods) major, has rolled out a policy to help employees combat domestic abuse.

The company has taken this major step towards protecting its employees at a time when a number of its workforce is working remotely.

The new policy aims to protect and provide relief to employees who are subject to, or are survivors of, acts of emotional and

physical abuse beyond the workplace.

Under the policy, employees who are survivor of domestic violence, can access urgent medical care and psychological counselling and paid leave of up to 10 days.



The policy is gender neutral and will cover more than 20,000 HUL employees, including white-collar and blue-collar workers. ■

Flipkart Sets Up Excellence Centre In Bengaluru To Train Workforce

BY ANUSHRUTI SINGH



Walmart-owned Flipkart, an e-commerce platform, has signed an agreement with the Logistics Skill Sector Council (LSC) and Karnataka Skill Development Centre (KSDC) to set up a Centre of Excellence (CoE) in Bengaluru.

Spread across 1,500 sq ft, the centre is equipped with new-age classrooms equipped with computers and offers projector-based learning to train aspirants interested in working in the logistics industry across sectors such as storage and distribution, customer management, and material handling.

Extensive training modules have been developed by Flipkart in collaboration with LSC and KSDC, to train candidates on the various nuances of storage and distribution, customer management, and material handling.

The training also covers the necessary soft skills required to interact with customers and knowledge on local transportation laws and regulations and giving students holistic knowledge of the end-to-end supply chain.

In addition to the training, selected candidates will also get an opportunity to join a 60-day apprenticeship programme with Flipkart under the National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme to work on various aspects of a supply chain and expand their employment prospects in the e-commerce sector.

Upon completion of the training, candidates will be awarded certification under the National Skill Qualification Framework (NSFQ), which is equivalent to an undergraduate degree. ■

EY To Hire 9000 Professionals In 2021

BY ANUSHRUTI SINGH

Global Consultancy firm Ernst & Young (EY) would induct about 9000 new hires in India in various technology roles across various technology roles in the calendar year 2021.

These hires will be from the STEM background and in areas including artificial intelligence, machine learning, cyber security, analytics and other emerging technologies.

EY has more than 50,000 employees in India across all member firms including global delivery centers, of which 36 per cent are from the STEM background.

Rohan Sachdev, Partner and Consulting Practice Leader, EY India said "We are making bold investments in our organization particularly in technology, data and through strategic acquisitions while continuing to expand our alliance and ecosystem relationships".



"Today, our clients, both in government and private businesses, are embarking on technology-led transformation and we are supporting them in this journey. With the pace of digital adoption accelerating exponentially, we are strengthening capabilities in emerging technology roles and significantly intensifying our hiring efforts in the coming year", he added. ■



The Heuristics In HR

Heuristics is a problem-solving approach that helps in quick decision making. It never guarantees the best solution, but it offers a quick practical solution.

BY HARJEET KHANDUJA

A recruiter remarked, “*You have no experience of the job and you are asking for such a high salary.*”

The candidate replied, “*The job is much harder when you have to learn it.*”

This is a popular HR joke and we generally laugh about it. Why do we laugh it out? The reason is simple. It is the universal thumb rule that compensation increases with experience. When someone asks for more money for not having the relevant experience, it seems like a joke. Thumb rules are an example of heuristics.

A. Heuristics

Heuristics is a problem-solving approach that helps in quick decision making. It never guarantees the best solution, but it offers a quick practical solution. In simple words, when the brain is presented with a large amount of information, the brain creates mental strategies to simplify things for faster decision making.

B. Applications of Heuristics

1. Routine Decision Making:

Researchers at Cornell University estimate that an adult makes 35,000 remote decisions every day. Even a child makes 3000 decisions per day. If we start thinking about each and every decision, then it will be a seemingly agonising task. Heuristics help us in making these decisions like clockwork. In



Business, most of the routine decisions are made using the same clockwork of Heuristics.

2. Dealing with Ambiguity:

You would have seen bomb diffusing situations in movies, where time is running out and the person on the job urgently wants to know which wire needs to be cut. And there is simply no time to analyse the bomb. The decision has to be taken. The person on the phone recalls his past experiences and says, “*cut the red wire.*” The red wire is cut and the timer stops. Everyone breathes a sigh of relief. Heuristics diffuses a lot of such ambiguous situations by offering good enough practical solutions.

3. Complex Problem Solving:

Heuristics saves a lot of effort and energy by simplifying complex problems. A company had a plant

20 kilometres outside the city. The management had to decide whether it should use its own bus service to bring 1000+ employees to work or give conveyance allowance to employees and let employees make their own arrangement. The Business Head decided that they will use the bus service. The Finance Head suggested that they carry out a costbenefit analysis before coming to a decision. The Business Head replied, “*There are so many variables which you will not be able to account for. These may include late coming, absenteeism, team bonding, dissatisfaction, and loss of life due to accidents. So, there is no point in doing this analysis. This is the cost of doing business.*”

4. Time and Timing: This is an inverted example of heuristics. A

company decided to introduce a sales incentive to boost sales on the occasion of the new year. The Management kept working on the incentive plan to make it lucrative. They lost track of time. By the time communication reached the last level, the holiday season was over. Had the Management settled for an acceptable incentive plan rather than perfecting it, the outcome would have been much better. Like in comedy, timing is key for business too.

C. Heuristics and HR

Heuristics and HR have a crazy relationship. Here are the two popular HR taunts which exist because of heuristics.

1. Anyone can do HR: You would have heard statements like anyone can do an HR job. Some people feel that way because they have been interacting with human beings around them since childhood. They have their own set of heuristics ready which makes them believe that they know how to manage the HR job. These heuristics are like “*Nani ke Nuskhe* (Grandmother’s secret remedy)”. Like quacks find it hard to believe that medical science does any good, these guys see HR in the same light.

2. HR and Return on Investment: Another important aspect is that most of the HR decisions are ambiguous. Decisions are to be made on partial data. They are generally not in black and white. Even if a wrong decision is made, consequences surface after some time. Hence, people’s decisions made on the basis of heuristics are acceptable.

Since the quality of the decisions cannot be judged with certainty, they are taken fairly quickly. Take a guess how much time interviewers take to make a hiring decision as compared to buying a vehicle of the same value. A research paper from the *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* states that 35% of interviewers make

their decision within 5 minutes and 52% of interviewers take between 5 to 15 minutes.

That is what makes HR Return on Investment a question of debate.

Interestingly, HR has evolved as a specialist function because of Heuristics. Modern HR emphasises less on heuristics and more on a data-driven approach for people processes.

“Companies hire experienced people for heuristics, at the same time, they hire freshers or people from different industries to challenge the heuristics. The idea is to find the balance with this H in HR.”

D. How HR beats Heuristics

Companies have been making a concerted effort to bring rationality into HR decision making, by making it data and evidence driven with the help of HR professionals. Some of the prominent areas are as mentioned:-

1. Selection: Introduction of screening and assessments brings objectivity into the selection process. The new trend is to review the work of people like GitHub, Kaggle, Behance before even calling for interviews. Many HR professionals are experimenting with curtain interviews to eliminate the effects of stereotypes and gender bias.

2. Compensation: If you believe that compensation is directly linked with experience, think again. Why do people get offered significantly lower compensation for the same job after retirement? Their experience does not fly away overnight. In another example of the


IT industry, experience actually flies away with the change in technology.

As per modern HR, compensation is decided based on the job value. The techniques of job evaluation and compensation benchmarking make the decision making on compensation more objective rather than anchoring it against the last salary drawn by the individual.

3. Performance and

Development: The practices of regular review and feedback bring objectivity to the performance evaluation process by eliminating availability heuristics or the halo effect. These are taken to the next level by introducing talent councils. Business leaders in talent councils evaluate the talent jointly based on the employee presentation and recommend projects, growth as well as development plans.

4. Compliance: Compliance has been the stronghold of HR professionals. However, the approach has changed. Instead of binding businesses to laws, HR professionals are now developing compliant business solutions.

Companies value experience (heuristics). At the same time, they want to be rational. That has given rise to big data analytics. Companies hire experienced people for heuristics, at the same time, they hire freshers or people from different industries to challenge the heuristics. Idea is to find the balance with this H in HR. 

About the Author

Harjeet Khanduja is an international speaker, author, poet, influencer, inventor and an HR leader. He is currently working as the Vice President HR at Reliance Jio. He has 2 published patents and has authored "Nothing About Business". Harjeet has been a LinkedIn Power Profile, TEDx speaker, Guest Faculty at IIM Ahmedabad, Board Member of Federation of World Academics, Member of CII HR IR committee and Co-chair of Nasscom Diversity Committee.

Workplace Culture 2021

As organisations evolve in the new times, there will be newer challenges, and more innovative practices will be required. For an organisation, culture is not a journey taken alone and will require people and leaders to come together.

BY TAPAS ACHARYA



We have spent a year in lockdown and now looking back at 2020, it all looks like a distant past. Time has changed and changed so fast, and though we know things will return to normal, it will not be the same again. The swanky offices and lounges, *chai pe charcha*, chats in the corridor, team huddles, and cafeteria meetings are registered in our memories. Enough and more has been written on what has changed so far, and a lot is being written on how things will continue to change.

As I reflect on all that we have gone through in the past one year, I think of all the years of building people relationships. I am still connected with people whom I have

known for three decades of professional work. These relationships were built on emotions and trust and continue strong today. The workplace and people continue to be a family where we have spent most of our lives. The finest organisations have the best people practices, a culture which attracts people helping them build a great brand for themselves.

It is an undeniable fact that people together build organisations and their culture. With changing times and the evolving digital environment, the reshaping of the culture is a question that most HR practitioners are working upon. So what are the immediate priorities? How much time will it take? Putting in the new practices will be gradual

as people and leaders will have to work together in these changing times. Undoubtedly, mature and established organisations will find the process of transition much easier than others.

What My Peers Had To Say

As I started working on this write-up, I reached out to corporate and industry leaders, HR practitioners, and professional colleagues. I asked them to share their thoughts on the changing workplace culture and what they believed was important in the changing times. I also asked them how this will change the way we have worked so far. I also referred to the papers published by the consulting and knowledge firms, as well as articles written/ shared by corporate leaders on workplace culture.

As per Robert Ordever, Managing Director of O. C. Tanner, "Inclusive, connected and purpose-driven workplaces must be prioritised, time to drive technological advancements to bring people together. 2021 needs to be a year of deliberate and positive transformation." He further said, "Leaders will need to find ways to bring people back together, even if it means doing this remotely, and some leaders may even need to strip everything back and re-build a more positive, connected, and purpose-driven culture from the ground-up."

Furthermore, as per a research published by O.C Tanner Institute, 77 per cent of employees say their workplace culture will never return to pre-COVID-19, suggesting that the way we work has changed forever. Many employees have proven that work that can be conducted from home is likely to remain in place for the foreseeable.

Employees are more concerned about social issues than any other generation. As such, businesses need to think about how best to attract these individuals and how

the purpose is integrated into a business strategy. We will continue to see more technological developments this year, focus on bringing people together despite many employees still working apart as per O.C. Tanner.

One of the leading management firms stressed the changing digital landscape and the need for a digital mindset as one of the important changes that organisations will be required to do. They also mentioned that workplace insights and analytics, enabling technologies, new skills, new roles, and an outside-in model of approach will be needed for organisations to succeed. The employee experience will matter more than ever for the success of an organisation.

“Employees are more concerned about social issues than any other generation. As such, businesses need to think about how best to attract these individuals and how the purpose is integrated into a business strategy.”

The following areas will impact the workplace culture-

1. A compelling company mission addressing a bigger cause and purpose will connect with talent and society. People will join more for the tangible purpose that they would drive for their personal and professional life. Company values will bind people together.
2. Leaders will become conflict-resolution champions. Their roles will focus more on bringing things

together, and not being just functional champions. They have to be more transparent and empathetic. Workplace leaders now have greater responsibility and say in business sustainability.

3. New age technology and innovations are happening faster than was expected. This puts stress on the requirement of having a digital mindset and focus on transformation. We will need to troubleshoot our current and future needs and be agile. Innovation will either make or break organisations. The quick changer will continue to be ahead of others. Using evidence-based predictive analytics will be required more to validate decisions. Organisations will have to know how to use employee sentiment data to create a business case. Creating an adaptable and sustainable business model is possible only when all the above come together.

4. Hybrid workplace is the future. 2020 taught many organisations, who never had the practices of flexible work schedules, remote working. Building new processes and practices that can support the Hybrid workplace is the need of the hour. We will need a change of mindset of both people and leaders. Managers who believed one-on-one physical connect will have to change faster since work relationships will now be built on virtual mode. The design, look and feel of big corporate headquarters will have less attraction and the people will attract people.

5. Workforce gets decentralised. A global workforce and a larger talent footprint is now common. A binding culture is crucial, and we will have to find our own ways of building and connecting. Organisations will have leaner central resources and more feet on the ground. The talents being hired for locations will have to be sharper as they will need to create their own support systems. We are now in a time of culture with less or no offices.



6. Communication will continue to be a crucial element of culture. Transparency and simplicity will be important. Reiterating the messages and regularity will bring more clarity. Communication champions will have to be identified who will check, cross-check and validate the messages. Technology will play an important role in designing various modes through which people connect in real-time.

7. Well-defined career opportunities and growth will be a source of attraction and retention. Long service and loyalty are passe. People will focus on training and upskilling that will define their market value and existence. Workplace capability and performance has to be the focus of every organisation.

8. Employee health and well-being are more important in the digitally connected workspace. Acknowledging the personal and professional time-space is so crucial now. Managing the new way of work and personal life puts pressure on people, the managers have to be more observant and need to respect this change. Thus, connecting at a deeper level will help both.

9. Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) is crucial in creating a successful workplace culture. With many changes, the focus on D&I will build the cohesiveness that will make organisations successful.

“Employee health and well-being are more important in the digitally connected workspace. Acknowledging the personal and professional time-space is so crucial now.”

As organisations evolve in the new times, I am sure there will be newer challenges, and more innovative practices will be required. Culture is not an alone journey for an organisation and will require people and leaders to come together. Culture is represented by the values and

practices that people imbibe in their day-to-day work. Organisations will attract more for their people experiences. Suddenly the focus has shifted on managers and leaders.

I am leaving you with a question – It is said that people leave managers. Has the time come that people will work for the Managers/ Leaders? Will manager and leader now be the source of attraction for people in the future? Has the Brand ‘Manager/ Leader’ finally arrived? It is said that Leaders are made – so what are you doing to build your next generation of leaders?

Here, I would like to share with you the thoughts shared by Rishad Premji, Chairman, Wipro, on culture. He said, “Changing culture and habits is like competing in marathons. Without forming the habits that build stamina, speed, and resilience, one can keep changing the strategy and tactics – but will never do well in these races. There is no doubt that any such effort required broad and consistent communications across the organisation. Far more critical is leadership demonstrating all this in its behavior. So, relevant leadership must live these habits and leadership starts at CEO-MD”.



About the Author

Tapas Acharya has three decades of experience in HRM across domains such as Strategic & tactical planning, Organisation Design, Channel Management, Talent Management & PMS, Leadership Development, Change Management, Employer Branding, Talent Acquisition, Industrial Relations, and Team Management. He is the Founder of 'The Acharya'.



Feedback Review Discussion

Performance Appraisal Feedback is an uncomfortable interaction between the persons receiving and giving feedback. Most of us do not cognise this, and in the process, approach it from a unidimensional perspective.

BY ASHISH PRADHAN

It was “that time” of the year. “Let me give you some feedback,” said my manager during my performance appraisal conversation. I felt a knot in my stomach – the anticipation, and apprehension of what was to follow also put my nerves on the edge. Strangely, after the discussion, it was my manager who looked relieved. Later, he informed me that he was nervous about this interaction since he had no

idea over the kind of feedback to be given to me without upsetting or demotivating me. This drove home the basic truth about Performance Appraisal Feedback – it is an uncomfortable interaction between the persons receiving and giving feedback. This is something that most of us do not cognise of, and in the process, approach it from a unidimensional perspective – either as a feedback giver or receiver.

“Feedback is essential for continuous improvement – improvement in individual performance which collectively contributes to organisational performance. Seeking and offering Feedback form the core practices among high performing organisations.”

The need for Feedback

Feedback is essential for continuous improvement – improvement in individual performance which collectively contributes to organisational performance. Seeking and offering Feedback form the core practices among high performing organisations. According to the Harvard Business Review, 72% of employees felt that their performance would improve if their managers provided constructive corrective feedback. Another study says that 40% of employees are actively disengaged when they receive little or no feedback. Evidently, this is an aspect of organisational functioning that needs focus and managers must develop the skill to provide and receive effective feedback.

- Why does the process of providing and receiving feedback inspire uncomfortable emotions within most of us?
- What is it that makes the feedback provider uncomfortable even though he or she comes from a position of authority?
- What is it that the feedback receiver is apprehensive about?

One has attempted to derive solutions to these questions through a psychological construct – Transactional Analysis. Transactional Analysis is a theory postulated by the famous psychologist Eric Berne to explain mutual interactions among humans and how such interactions can be made open and constructive. The theory states that all of us have three ego states within us – parent, adult, and child – from which we operate during any social transaction.

- The parent ego state represents nurturing and controlling energies
- The adult ego state deals with data and rational thinking
- The child ego state exhibits compliance, rebelliousness, and, also, happy, creative energies

The transition of ego states

We adopt one of these ego states in every interaction with another human

being. Also, during our interactions, we actively move from one ego state to another. One may start from a parent ego state, and during the conversation, swiftly change position to an adult ego state. Finally, we should remember that the parent ego state interacts naturally with a parent or a child, while an adult interacts effectively only with another’s adult ego state.

Let us use this construct to understand what transpires in a performance feedback conversation between the manager and the employee. The very nature of this relationship places the manager in a superior position, and hence assumes the parent ego state, while the employee typically assumes the child ego state at the time of discussion. Depending on the natural leadership style of the manager, he/she assumes either a

A) Nurturing position: Where he/she is trying to comfort or support the employee

or a

B) Controlling position: Where he/she is directive and critical

If the review is intended to provide corrective feedback to the employee, a manager with a naturally nurturing style will experience discomfort as the content and objective of the interaction go against his/her predominant ego state. At the same time, a manager with a predominant controlling ego state may find it difficult to provide positive feedback without being unnecessarily critical, thereby, compromising the impact of a potentially motivational opportunity. In the employee’s case, he/she naturally assumes a child ego state, where he/she can come into the meeting either with a submissive mindset or a rebellious one basis the anticipated feedback which could hamper the open reception of the feedback.

It all begins with **rapport building**. Here, the manager’s understanding of his/her emotional makeup and that of the employee is essential. A certain degree of

“Transactional Analysis is a theory postulated by the famous psychologist Eric Berne to explain mutual interactions among humans and how such interactions can be made open and constructive.”


self-awareness is a pre-requisite to ascertain an authentic relationship with the employee. A nurturing parent ego state is a useful place to begin rapport building. Putting an employee at ease with a few innocuous yet genuinely interesting questions about how he/she is feeling or personal topics could lead to effective rapport building which is a sound investment to draw upon during the tough discussion to follow. It is pertinent to add here that one's genuine curiosity should be the motivation behind rapport building as inauthentic efforts could actually have an opposite impact. A keen eye on the employee's body language, while being aware of one's non-verbal signals, gives real-time feedback on his/her feelings. Grounding in Natural Language Processing (NLP) techniques is also effective for rapport building. Typically, one needs to invest at least 15 minutes in this foundation process.

The three states

The next step, as one himself moves into an adult ego state, is to **move the employee to an adult state**. The adult ego state deals with facts, figures, data analysis, rational thinking, and deductive logic. This is where the manager talks results, examples of behaviour – positive and negative, and asks open-ended questions. This is a great way to cajole the employee to his/her adult ego state which prevents emotions from overriding the interaction, thus ensuring that the employee remains open-minded. The discussion then revolves around the behaviour of the person and not about the person himself. The focus remains on data and its interpretation rather than subjective statements about 'good or bad results'. At this point, the manager should provide any improvement feedback. It is important for the manager to maintain an open, non-threatening body language and an even tonal quality that matches with the adult ego state, and keeps his/her emotions in check.

Finally, the manager should **revert to the nurturing ego state**

to end the conversation on a positive note. This will ensure that the employee walks out of the discussion feeling exuberant that he/she can draw upon to work on the feedback he/she has just received. Finishing the discussion in an adult ego state could rob the interaction of the key emotional connect that is needed to charge up the employee while a controlling parent ego state ending could be demotivating and de-energising leading to disengagement.

Conducting a tough yet motivating feedback conversation is a rare skill that successful managers possess. This skill can be acquired through deep self-awareness and developing the quality of mindfulness which will help the manager to remain in the moment to connect with the employee. Once adept at this, a manager and his employees look forward to a feedback session as a means of communication that strengthens the bonds of trust between the two and increasing the engagement of the employee manifold. As Frank Clark says, *“Feedback (criticism), like rain, should be gentle enough to nourish a man's growth without destroying his roots.”* 

About the Author

Ashish Pradhan is President, Siegwerk Asia. He comes with over 25 years of experience in the Packaging industry and has worked in Huhtamaki, Positive packaging, Henkel, and International Paper. Ashish is a Mechanical Engineer with a Management Degree and holds a Diploma in International Trade from the Indian Institute of Materials Management and a Diploma in Packaging from the Institute of Packaging, UK.

An Engaging Insight

Frederick Herzberg's book, "One More Time, How Do You Motivate Employees?" is indeed significant. Herzberg has stressed that addressing concerns that make employees' unhappy at the workplace are not sufficient to make them happy. This is clearly evident today since organisations are focused on enhancing salaries and remuneration, while employees are motivated by work challenges, recognition and responsibilities. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought forth a different set of challenges and responsibilities for the employees and the organisation. However, the biggest challenge is how both of them blend together and rise to the occasion.

BY DR. JALLAVI PANCHAMIA AND DR. MAHAVEER GOLECHHA

Rahul is the Manager at Lotus Consulting Pvt. Ltd (Lotus), a company that deals in recruitment and training solutions for the health care sector. He is presently in a fix over the ways of engaging his employees to ensure optimum performance. The current pandemic-driven crisis had triggered fatigue and work alienation within the organisation. And he needed to rethink the employee engagement strategy to keep the workforce engaged. He was aware that as per the KPMG 2020 report, 75 per cent of the organisations had redefined their employee engagement and organisation communication strategies to cope with COVID-19.

Like everyone else, Rahul too was caught off guard by the disruption. He studied the action plan being carried out by other companies and came across a recent survey on old age homes by a public health institute which had also listed their accomplishments in keeping the elderly safe and healthy during the pandemic. This proved to be enlightening since a vulnerable group living in a particular shelter home group was observed to be more secure than all the other safe homes. The employees of this care home group were seen to be better engaged and motivated to ensure the safety of the inmates. They took utmost care to adhere to government guidelines



and had also shifted to the care home to prevent the transmission from outside. In order to reduce the boredom and loneliness among the elderly inmates, the employees helped them to connect with their loved ones through video calls and kept them engaged through activities such as yoga and laughter sessions to boost their morale. When Rahul read this, he recalled his services as a volunteer in various public, private, and trust-based old age homes as a part of his company's CSR efforts to give back to the society. For a greater insight on how the care homes had achieved this, he approached Mrs. Shanti, who has been an inmate at one of the old age homes for the last six years.

Rahul: Hello Shanti Ma'am. How are you doing? How is the

COVID-19 situation at your end?

Shanti: Hello Rahul. By the grace of God, everything is OK so far. However, I am not liking the present situation. Earlier, I used to venture out, was able to meet my family members and friends, but now, I am confined to this place. The uncertainty of the future is frightening. Life has become monotonous and black and white, and we go through the same routine every day. It has become hard to pass time and watching television has also become stressful. Throughout the day, they show death figures, and the stories of old and co-morbid people dying makes me feel as though my death is also fast approaching. Hence, I have stopped watching television. I am glad that the staff here are

treating us like their family members and go two steps further to save us from transmission by using all possible means.”

As Rahul listened to Mrs. Shanti, he imagined similar feelings of fear, anxiety, and confusion among his own employees. Owing to the economic uncertainty, the employees were very low on morale and worried about their future. Although, as a leader, Rahul tried hard to maintain transparent and persistent communication with his subordinates, he was curious to know the differing people management strategy at the old age home.

He contacted Sahil who managed the administration to understand how the care givers had kept themselves and the inmates safe.


Quoting the WHO report on mortality and rate of infection in inmates which was significantly high in old age care homes in western countries as compared to those in India, Sahil stated, *“In India, jobs are not high paying in NGOs when compared to the corporate, and hence, employees in the NGOs are not motivated merely through monetary benefits. We recruit individuals who are compassionate, demonstrate a sense of responsibility and believe in reciprocity. We need people with core values who are aligned with the vision and philosophy of our organisation. We ensure that there is a close rapport among all our elderly occupants. We see them as a part of our family, and this has made us do all things possible. We socialise our new employees to practice and believe the elderly inmates as their own family members.”*

“Absolutely, I have seen the commitment and compassion that they exude at work. Even your inmates have spoken very highly about the care givers.” Rahul observed.

Sahil continued, *“During the lockdown, we announced a mandatory twenty-four hour stay within the old age home and none of the employees complained since*

they understood that if they go in and out, they will put the inmates at risk. Their self-motivation to ensure that their inmates are safe, as also the concern over their wellness super sanctioned everything else. Further, we consider ourselves as a trust-based organisation. Our vision is ‘to make a remarkable difference for the elderly’. We hold this as the sanctum sanctorum when decisions like these are to be considered and assert it as well. Even the senior management who weren’t required to do so, came and stayed with us to boost our morale and communicate the need for urgency to ensure the safety of the inmates. The old age home had to be made totally non-porous for anyone and everyone.”

Going back to Lotus, Rahul immediately decided to implement the insightful learnings in his organisation. In the last year, they had only managed to break even and had finished the existing projects. He realised that he needed to spend time with his staff to build trust, and communicate with them with a personal touch. Also, the first step that was required to be taken by him was holding informal meetings. He understood that

meaningfulness and a sense of accomplishment at work led to a higher level of concordance, which was evident among the staff at the old age homes. But the problem lay in ensuring a higher level of concordance among the employees working for a corporate organisation. It is a myth that people only work for money in the corporate, and not for the company’s vision. Individuals are driven by their self-interest, values, and intrinsic motivation. And hence, it is essential to make them realise their competence and relatedness towards the work they do. They should be working not because they have to, but because they want to. Hence, the key is to convert the ‘have to’ into a ‘want to’ attitude among the employees. As rightly mentioned by Prof. Sumantra Ghoshal over creating a context around the employees by giving them a larger purpose to pursue, providing the necessary support, building trust in the value system, and nurturing self-discipline will lead to a higher level of concordance among engaged employees. Rahul said to himself, *“Now, the time has come to ignite concordance!”* 



Dr. Jallavi Panchamia is associated with Indian Institute of Public Health, Gandhinagar. She has researched and published papers in journals of repute in the domains of organisation culture, prosocial behaviour and mental health. She has been conducting MDPs and training sessions in the area of HR analytics and Interpersonal effectiveness.



Dr. Mahaveer Golechha is Associate Professor, Indian Institute of Public Health, Gandhinagar. His areas of expertise are Human Resources for Health and Healthcare Management. He has a Master’s degree in Health Policy Planning and Financing from The London School of Economics and Political science (LSE) and Diploma degree from LSHTM, UK. Dr. Mahaveer also has a Masters and PhD from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi.

Analysis By **Ravi Mishra**



Rahul is in a dilemma over the right ways to enhance his company's performance in the wake of the poor morale of the employees owing to the fear psychosis. His thoughts are shifted between balancing the pain and fear of employees and infusing positivity to enhance employee participation and contribution towards the sustenance of business performance. Research has proven that employee engagement is hugely responsible for optimum performance. Rahul intends to understand the impact of the pandemic on employee morale in other organisations, and thereby, impart some learnings and implement the same in his company.

It is a fact that employees can consistently perform at their best when they are fully engaged. However, the fast-changing dynamics in large organisations render it difficult to engage them. Also, every organisation is different in terms of life cycle, business, sector, the economic and social background of people, their expectations etc. Also, people have different levels of motivation basis their position and hierarchy in the organisational structure as propounded by Maslow's theory of Motivation.

Professor Sumantra Ghoshal's viewpoints about setting the context to pursue the people to align with a purpose are highly relevant. However, they remain subjective to the individual's personal and professional journey. And more so among people who are at the mid-level of the socio-economic pyramid. Though people hailing from different levels in the pyramid reflect varied tangential viewpoints, they can be always persuaded to implement the given agenda.

Shanti has expressed extreme satisfaction with the service and the care and commitment from the employees at the shelter home. However, Rahul failed to understand the level of stress on the caregivers since they were unable to provide physical and emotional support to their own family members amidst the pandemic. While a company may be good for its customers and stakeholders, it may wield a different approach for its own employees. While employees join an Old Age Home owing to their aptitude in social services, one cannot ignore their basic instinct toward their personal and family fulfilments. Sahil has presented Rahul with the larger picture, but it is equally important to learn how Sahil is getting along and addressing the engagement needs of the caregivers.

Every organisation is different. Hence, Lotus needs to ascertain the most common cluster of dots to design the strategy for employee engagement. It would be relevant to conduct an employee survey with a mix of closed and open-ended questions to understand the issues in the heart and mind of people. Rahul should share the outcome of a survey in a town hall meeting, and subsequently, arrange a focused group discussion to decide

the priority, time-bound action plan with measurement of success and periodic communication to share the success.

Another dimension to the true success of this model is measuring the impact on the other side of the index - the tangibles and intangibles that shall prove the relationship between the level of employee engagement and its impact on the organisation indices.

We should not forget that employee expectations are highly dynamic in nature which organisations need to constantly review and continue to scale, since older interventions are institutionalised and bear limited impact. Like the S curve – which begins with a downward approach before curving upward - work should be initiated to draw another set of interventions. At times, due to external or unprecedented threats like the COVID-19 Pandemic, organisations must be prepared for an immediate course correction in plans.

While Rahul's intentions of intervention are spot-on, its success depends upon the quality of the plan, its execution, and periodic reviews. **HC**

About the Author

Ravi Mishra is Senior Vice President-HR for Global Epoxy Business, Aditya Birla Group. He is associated with the Group since 2005, and has worked in different businesses i.e. Grasim Chemical, UltraTech Cement, and Birla Carbon. Prior to joining the Aditya Birla Group, Ravi was associated with diversified organisations such as, Nicholas Piramal Group, Mardia Group of Industries, and Nova Petrochemicals Ltd.

Analysis By Rohit Hasteer



Rahul wants to rethink the employee engagement strategy at Lotus Consulting and is clueless on the ways of engaging his employees, and more so amidst the pandemic that has further triggered fatigue and work alienation. His approach appears to be in the right direction where he is trying to engage his people by aligning them with a higher purpose. When employees are intrinsically motivated they become psychological 'owners' of the organisation and drive performance and innovation through ownership.

One of the best ways to engage employees to ensure optimum performance is by helping them understand the purpose of their role, its linkage to the overall business strategy, and the impact of a job not-well-done. If people do not see what their job is translating to, they may not find their job meaningful and hence may be unwilling to put in the required effort. Communication is the most powerful tool that Rahul can leverage here to ensure people are motivated; especially in an uncertain environment. This can be achieved through all-hands meetings, company newsletters, townhalls, etc. Likewise, while approaching any project, leaders

can underline the importance and objective it aims to achieve. For instance, Lotus Consulting works primarily for the healthcare sector and is directly or indirectly working for a noble cause; especially in today's time when healthcare professionals are seen as superheroes. Do employees understand this? Do they know how they are contributing to the society? Rahul should definitely look at focusing on these aspects.

He also needs to understand that every individual is different and has different motivators. Extrinsic rewards like money, incentives do motivate, but may not be enough to keep an individual committed for a long time. Hence, Rahul should look at tapping the intrinsic motivators which can range from a good work environment and the Long-Term-Incentive-Plans (LTIPs) for greater autonomy at work & job enrichment.

Rahul has also observed that the COVID-19 triggered crisis has triggered fatigue and work alienation among employees at Lotus Consulting. This could be due to the looming uncertainty and ambiguity looming. Employees may also be stressed about the safety and well-being of themselves and their families. He should therefore try to dispel some of these fears by giving an empathetic hearing to the people and look at ways in which the organisation can help the employees during these times. Say, for instance, an insurance cover which bears the medical expenses of employees and their family members may provide tremendous respite in such times and can help employees focus on work without having to fret about the treatment cost. Leaders should connect with people and reassure them that the

organisation cares for them and keeps its people informed about the business strategy and how it plans to mitigate risks during pandemic. At the same time, it may be a good idea to cheer the mood of people through small celebrations or fun activities/games as these can help relax the environment and engage people in such sullen and restrictive times.

Lastly, Rahul should definitely look at recognising people who display the right behaviour and values and are willing to work for the larger organisational objective. This can come through a simple pat on the back or appreciating the person in front of everyone. Not only does this go a long way in making the person feel valued, but also inspires others to emulate these behaviours. Boosting workplace motivation to build an engaged workforce is not a mean feat. However, the journey becomes easy if organisations are able to connect the employees with their vision, mission, and values. **HC**

About the Author

Rohit Hasteer is the Group CHRO for Housing.com, Prop Tiger.com and Makaan.com. He has an experience of more than 20 years in the domain on Compensation Benefits, Talent Acquisition and Talent Management, Training & Development. He has worked with companies like CITIBANK, Make My Trip, Aviva Life Insurance and UT WorldWide. He takes keen interest in building Organisation culture and People Development. He is an MBA from IMT, Ghaziabad.

Customary & Puja Bonus Under The Payment Of Bonus Act, 1965

BY ANSHUL PRAKASH, ABHISEK CHOUDHURY & KRUTHI N MURTHY

Incentivising employees and giving them a share of the profits of the establishment has been a longstanding practice in India, established and continued since the First World War. Over the years, such gestures of goodwill and discretionary payments have been formalised in respect of certain category of employees vide the Payment of Bonus Act, 1965 (Bonus Act), which is applicable to every factory and every other establishment in India, where 20 or more persons have been employed in an accounting year. However, only those employees who are earning a salary not exceeding INR 21,000 per month and having worked for at least 30 working days in an accounting year are entitled to statutory bonus prescribed under the Bonus Act.

The Bonus Act requires every employer to mandatorily pay to every eligible employee a minimum annual bonus, and it also prescribes the maximum bonus that may be paid to employees. However, as per Section 17 of the Bonus Act, the employer shall be entitled to deduct any customary/ puja bonus or interim bonus paid to an employee in an accounting year from the amount of bonus payable to such employee in the relevant accounting year.

Customary/Puja Bonus Under The Bonus Act

The sense of social justice has led to the recognition in law of the



right of the workmen to get other kinds of bonus not necessarily connected with the earnings/profits of an establishment. One such kind of bonus is that which is paid on the occasion of festivals celebrated in the respective parts of the country, such as puja bonus in Bengal and Diwali bonus in Western India.

While the expressions 'customary bonus' or 'puja bonus' have not been defined in the Bonus Act, 'customary bonus' refers to bonus which is being paid by an employer

by way of a tradition or custom at a uniform rate, and 'puja bonus' refers to a bonus which is typically paid on the occasion of a festival or religious celebration. Such bonuses are paid over several years and are unconnected with the profits of the organisation, and employees may demand such bonuses as a statutory right and as an implied term of employment. However, the definition and entitlement to such bonuses have been the subject matter of judicial interpretation over the years.

The determination of whether a payment is to be construed as customary / puja bonus would be subject to certain terms that have been laid down by various courts in India as follows:

- Whether such payment of bonus has been made over an unbroken series of years;
- Whether the payment has been made for a sufficiently long period (though the length of the period might depend upon the circumstances of each case);
- Whether the payment does not depend upon the earning of profits and has been paid even in years of loss; and
- Whether the payment has been made at a uniform rate throughout to justify an inference that the payment at such rate had become customary and traditional in the particular concern.

Therefore, the judicial chorus of legally claimable customary bonus brings to the fore that all of the above tests are required to be answered in the affirmative for a payment to be termed as 'customary bonus'. The fact that a particular


continuous payment was labelled as 'ex-gratia' by the employer would not have an adverse effect on such payment qualifying as 'customary bonus'. In other words, identification of a payment as 'customary bonus' would not be materially affected by unilateral declarations of one party when the said declarations are inconsistent with the course of conduct adopted by it.

Indian courts have further observed that it is not the festival which would establish customary/ puja bonus as an implied term of employment, but the unbroken flow of annual payments as a custom or practice. Omission to associate a bonus payment with a festival does not detract from the claim of customary bonus. Therefore, continuous payment of bonuses/ex-gratia amounts on account of the Republic Day, the Independence Day or the establishment's Founder's Day would also amount to a customary bonus under the Bonus Act, and employees are well within their rights to claim such bonus upon non-payment by the employer.

Judicial precedents in the context of the Bonus Act have

conclusively held that bonus is not inflexible and solely pegged to the profit made by an establishment in a particular accounting year. While profit-based bonus is the most common form of bonus, there may be customary or traditional bonus which emerge from long and continued usage leading to a reasonable expectation materialising in a right.

Other commonly provided bonuses are attendance bonus and performance bonus. However, such bonuses are not uniform across all employees and may vary from one accounting year to another. Payment of such bonuses are contractually governed and may not be claimed as a matter of right under the Bonus Act.

In order to avoid such ambiguities, and to claim the benefit of Section 17 of the Bonus Act and deduct the customary/puja bonus from the annual bonus payable to the employees, it is always advisable for the employer to clarify that any incentives paid shall form part of the customary bonus and are to be deducted from the bonus payable under the Bonus Act. 



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Q In order to avoid claims of permanency of employment with the principal employer, is it required to provide a break in service for contract labour after engaging them for a period of 240 days?

A As per the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970 (CLRA), there is no time period prescribed for engagement of contract labour beyond which they may be considered as permanent / regular employees of the principal employer. Therefore, there is no requirement to provide a break in services of the contract labour as the length of service is not a condition for regularisation of the services of the contract labour.

Q Can contract labour be engaged perennially or for carrying out core activities of the establishment?

A CLRA prohibits engagement of contract labour in certain core activities of an establishment if the same has been specifically prohibited through a notification of the Central or the state government. For instance, the Andhra Pradesh government has amended the CLRA to state that a core activity is one for which an establishment is set up and includes any activity which is essential or necessary to the core activity, but activities related to canteen and catering services, sanitation works, loading and unloading operations, etc. do not come under the ambit of core activities unless these activities themselves are the core activities of such establishment.

Therefore, contract labour may be engaged perennially or for carrying out core activities of the establishment so long as there is no prohibition through a notification by the appropriate government

under the CLRA. That said, it is advisable that the service contracts between the principal employer and the contractor are renewed on a periodic basis and with a break of few days in between so as to counter any permanency claims of contract workers.

Q Who will be deemed liable for timely payment of wages to the contract labour?

A Wages to the contract labour employed by the contractor shall be disbursed to them by the contractor himself or his nominee, and the principal employer has to only depute its representative to be present and to sign the payment register in token of having disbursed the salary in his presence by the contractor. If wages are paid online or through other electronic means, the principal employer may require the contractor to submit bank statements and appropriate undertakings to prove the same. However, the principal employer shall be obligated to pay wages to the workmen employed by contractor only in case the contractor fails to do so (although the principal employer can recover any payment made towards meeting such liability from the contractor). Accordingly, while the onus to pay wages shall be that of the contractor, the principal employer shall also ensure that the same is being duly paid by the contractor at the right time. **HC**

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Crossing The Boundaries Of Boundaryless Careers

The concept of 'boundaryless career' is about a boundary crossing career. Boundaries such as those of domain (Finance) or sector (Oil & Gas) are often the important means of defining and interpreting career movement.

BY KALPANA BANSAL

“Organisations find it difficult to promise a traditional career path to their employees, leaving them with fewer options, apart from constantly re-inventing it on their own.”

The largely uncertain and unpredictable nature of economic growth and a competitive environment has led to a monumental shift in the way organisations contract with their employees. Given the constant shift in skills, organisations find themselves frequently pivoting their business models and talent requirements. This is an indicator to the fact that organisations find it difficult to promise a traditional career path to their employees, leaving them with fewer options, apart from constantly reinventing it on their own. (Arthur, 1994).

As organisations shift towards leaner and more evolving models for sustainable growth, they have begun to signal the end of traditional careers for employees, in which individuals follow a progressive hierarchical path towards the top. This is being replaced by independent career paths, driven by the employee (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996). In this new model of careers, the key principles are flexibility, networking, marketable skills, and continuous learning. Employees enhance and leverage their performance in a single career or multiple careers, in different work contexts across organisational boundaries (Sullivan and Arthur, 2006). This concept of free movement is termed “Boundaryless Career”.

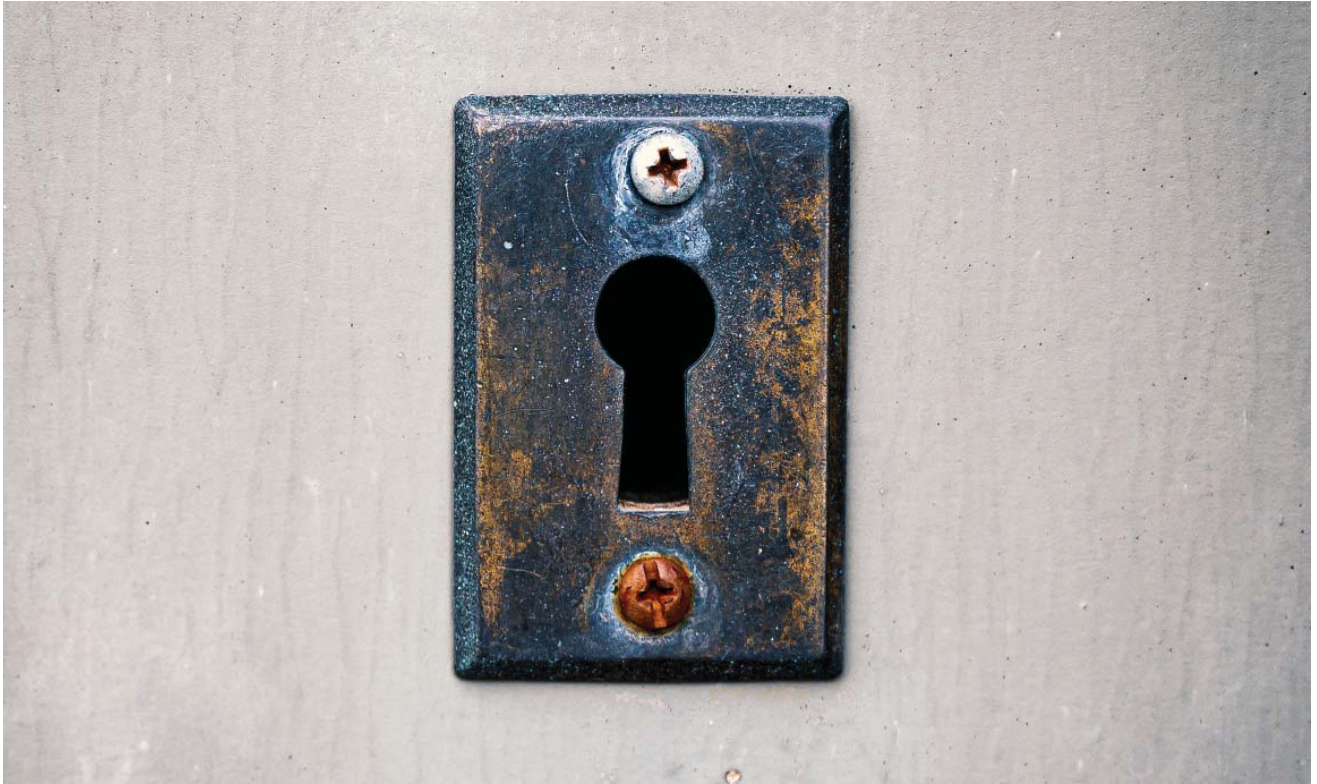
Shifting responsibilities

A key outcome of this “boundaryless” (Arthur, 1994) or “protean” (Hall,

1976) career concept is the shift in the responsibility of career management from the organisation to the employee. Increasingly, employees are developing their identities independent of their organisational settings and taking ownership of their careers by developing marketable skills (Arthur, Khapova, and Wilderom, 2005). This could lead to independent career aspirations of employees, fuelling lateral movements across the organisation as well as mobility across organisations, rendering a truly boundaryless career trajectory.

The concept of boundaryless career has been further elaborated upon for multiple interpretations (Arthur, 1994: 296) as below:

- Employee moves across the boundaries of organisations
- Specific instances of careers such as academicians or carpenters that draw their marketability and credibility from external reference points rather than the present employer
- Careers such as that of headhunting or real-estate agency that are fuelled through extra-organisational networks or information
- The shift in the traditional organisational career perspective towards lateral movements rather than hierarchical advancement principles
- The employee at the centre of the career trajectory, who may perceive a boundaryless future outside of the structure he is currently in



“Employees with protean and boundaryless career attitudes are more likely to proactively craft their jobs to fit their aspirations, leading to career commitment and career satisfaction.”

Interpreting Career movements

In real life, this concept of ‘boundaryless career’ is not as much about boundary-less, but about a boundarycrossing career. Boundaries, such as those of domain (Finance) or sector (Oil & Gas) are often the important means of defining and interpreting career movement. More significantly, individuals tend to locate themselves in the social order by referring to opportunities they cannot attain due to constraints. Employees could be constantly trying to make themselves marketable and may be less committed to achieving Organisational outcomes that come in the way of their personal career aspirations.

Sometimes, functional boundaries associated with an organisational career tie employee to specific occupations. Geographical constraints could also impose restrictions on true ‘boundarylessness’, as could other demographic barriers such as nationality, education levels etc. An employee who wishes to be a part of the pool needs to constantly re-invent

himself and remain flexible in the job market. At times, this could create conflicts within the individual with respect to subjective career determinants such as the meaning and purpose of their vocation and objective career determinants, such as remaining employable. The bigger obstacle for individuals, which is the very premise on which the theory of boundaryless career is created is the sustainability of a career choice in the light of changing market forces. Very often, the choices made by individuals to be employable in a market demand situation might counter their personal preferences.

The boundaryless career concept could even be viewed as the privilege of an elitist few due to the demands made for constant investment of time, effort, and resources into re-invention, and might still be restricted to those who are well-educated or geographically mobile. At the same time, it could pose challenges in the extent of depth of expertise an individual could gain in a particular area if he is constantly moving across different skillsets and capabilities.


More significantly, employees need to feel a sense of coherence with their evolution in the career, while achieving a sense of stability within their work identity. Employees with protean and boundaryless career attitudes are more likely to proactively craft their jobs to fit their aspirations, leading to career commitment and career satisfaction.

A double-edged sword

However, this could be a double-edged sword for the organisation that is seeking to develop and retain highly valued employees. The war for talent has emphasised the significance of addressing concerns such as these through interventions. Organisations might find that they are constantly losing out on the more “marketable” or “adaptable” talent while being left with those who are not as driven or marketable, presenting a new set of challenges to succession planning and leadership pipelines. Within the organisation, the concept of ‘boundaryless career’ could be pushed through the Talent marketplace, enabling the deployment of employees across cross-functional projects.

While the democratisation of careers can create opportunities in the market and help constant re-invention of talent, there is a danger of a negative association between a protean career orientation and organisational citizenship behaviours. Employees would prioritise their personal aspirations over the organisational requirement which could undermine team performance. Likewise, a constant exodus of high calibre talent would affect the leadership pipeline readiness and succession planning for key positions. Project-based organisations might propagate boundaryless careers, but it might cause confusion and lead to substandard performance. Besides, while employees might navigate towards skill consolidation and lateral growth, they might continue to expect traditional hierarchical growth out of the organisation.

While the concept of boundaryless and constant movement to stay in a

place is a new age remedy for the impermanence of organisations and economies, it could pose several new challenges in terms of new boundaries. The advent of technology in itself creates boundaries in one’s career, leading to possible displacement of entire career paths. In real life, an employee often deals with the simultaneous effect of multiple boundaries while carving his career. A lot about this is uncharted terrain, and the notion of the multiplicity of careers might itself undergo a sea-change as we ride into the future. At present, organisations could do well to take cognizance of the true boundarylessness of the employees that they have and modify or enhance their talent propositions to achieve a balanced and more nuanced approach to continuity of talent pipelines for the organisations. 

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About the Author

Kalpna Bansal is Head - Competency Assessment and Development, Reliance Industries Ltd. She comes with an experience of more than 20 years and has worked in organisations such as Tata Unisys, Star TV, IMRB, Mudra Communication and Watson Wyatt (I) Pvt. Ltd and the RPG Group. Kalpna has an MBA and has completed her Executive Masters in Consulting & Coaching for Change from Said Business School, Oxford University.

“While the concept of boundaryless and constant movement to stay in a place is a new age remedy for the impermanence of organisations and economies, it could pose several new challenges in terms of new boundaries.”



Changing Work Culture

From youth mentoring and job training to women's leadership initiatives, organisations are more committed than ever to unlock the potential of their people, clients, and communities

BY GANESH IYER



In every organisation, the feeling of being valued at work is the key to sustaining a great work culture. There will always be waves of changes; from traditional full-time employees to the rapidly growing gig-workers or service-on-demand providers, we have witnessed the evolving needs and demands of employees.

Due to the growing nature of the talent market and the dynamics of the market, employers have been taking an aggressive approach to offer unmatched expertise in leading their market space. Broadly speaking, employees are seeking the best for themselves and employers are going all out to provide their best.

Take a dive into what the best of the breed has been doing:

Socially Responsible:

Employers realise that being the best means making contributions count responsibly and effectively. Individuals in this era see great value in the value that companies are adding to the communities that they work in. Over the years, many large and small organisations have embedded this feature in their mission: to power organisations with insightful solutions that drive business success.

Top management realises that providing the best support to their clients' growth enables them to invest well and positively influence their communities. From youth mentoring and job training to women's leadership initiatives, organisations are more committed than ever to unlock the potential of their people,

clients, and communities; it has become foundational to everything they do.

Courageously Agile

Businesses have adopted agile practices because they allowed them to be nimble and responsive in real-time, in today's dynamic market. Using agile frameworks, organisations continue to deliver customer engagement and satisfaction through small teams, working in short cycles.

Earlier, aspects like research, innovation and nimbleness were the focus of only a few teams or functions. In this setup, HR teams seldom saw the need to get creative with their practices for several years as it enabled them to sustain focus on the core of their job – managing their people.

But agile people practices are evidence-based. Hence, leaders needed the courage to directly address those affected: their people. Organisations would identify something that could work, test it, and quickly seek feedback to check if it works. If it works, they would move to the next stage confidently. If it doesn't, they can switch to something else. It's about making decisions on the go and using data and technology to help the decision making.

Such culture continues to help build an organisation where people can make fast decisions to design solutions that meet customer needs; theirs in this case.

Teams in Need


Organisations are adopting a scientific approach to employee engagement and performance. Leaders have been witnessing the importance of leveraging data and research to drive team management practices for the progress of the organisation and the employees.

Leaders have shifted their focus on enhancing engagement and increasing performance in teams by building a culture of delivering great work using an individual's strengths rather than gauging their performance against annual goals.

The world has moved on from plug-n-play performance management tools. The culture of reimagining process of capturing an individual's data and using it to get the best out of them and enhance team management is in vogue.

When there is a system that tells leaders what each employee is good at – his/her strengths, 1/3rd of the task for leaders is done. Add to that, the culture of encouraging weekly check-ins to track priorities and using them to positively influence calibration meetings, talent discussions, and assignments, and we have leaders efficiently aligning priorities to strengths of each individual and boost their sprint into the next assignment consistently.

In the history of business, we have witnessed several top companies vanishing because they couldn't keep up with changing trends and culture. Change is the essence of being in the business. Equally important is the need to gently tell employees that change will happen gradually and, for sure, will give them the time to adapt.

For any change, organisations need to find those who are eager for improvement, involve them wherever possible and reward those who positively contribute to the changes. When leaders can do this, every organisation will have the potential to make big waves in their field of expertise. 

“Change is the essence of being in the business. Equally important is the need to gently tell employees that change will happen gradually and, for sure, will give them the time to adapt.”

About the Author

Ganesh Iyer is an HR professional with 14 years+ of international HR experience. He's a Talent Engagement Champion with expertise in balancing strategic intent with operational excellence. He has lead various facets of HR as COE, Business Partner and Shared Services with an integrated business-centric approach. His forte has been in leading large scale transformation initiatives with passion across the organisation through traditional as well as new-age social and digital engagement tools.

Appointments



KPMG Appoints Sunit Sinha As Partner & Head – People, Performance And Culture

KPMG has appointed Sunit Sinha as its Partner and Head – People, Performance and Culture. Prior to this, Sinha was Managing Director, Strategy & Consulting – Talent & Organization of Accenture India. He has more than two decades of consulting and HR experience across multiple industries working in areas like M&A, organisation design, leadership, learning transformation, and organisation effectiveness. Sinha holds a master's degree in human resources from XLRI Jamshedpur.



STMicro Appoints Rajita D'Souza As President & CHRO

STMicroelectronics has appointed Rajita D'Souza as its President, Human Resources and Corporate Social Responsibility (CHRO). Previously, D'Souza was CHRO of Bekaert. She has more than 25 years of wide experience. D'Souza has earned master's degree in Law from the University of Mumbai and bachelor's in Business Management.



ASRC Federal Appoints Shaveta Joshi As CHRO

ASRC Federal has appointed Shaveta Joshi as its Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO). Prior to ASRC, Joshi served leadership positions at outsourcing company Serco. She has pursued bachelor's degree in Finance from George Mason University before earning a Master of Business Administration degree from Georgetown University.



Nykaa Appoints Surender Mehta As CHRO

Nykaa has appointed Surender Mehta as its Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO). He has more than two decades of experience in human resources. Mehta has pursued MBA from IMT, Ghaziabad and he went on to do an advanced management programme from Harvard Business School in 2014.



Yes Bank Appoints Anurag Adlakha As CHRO

Yes Bank has appointed Anurag Adlakha as its Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO). Adlakha is a seasoned banker and has been associated with reputed banks for more than two decades. He has also had a ring-side view of developments at Yes Bank over the past year-and-a-half.

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